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Whiskey Cup

written by

Shaun Hittle

E-mail: shaunhittle@gmail.com

WHISKEY CUP

EXT. COUNTRY BAR STAGE - NIGHT (OKLAHOMA, 1984)

The Rusty Spur blazes under humid Oklahoma night — neon sputtering. A sweaty crowd screams as STORM, RAY, and FRANKIE, 20s, tear through the final chorus of "Whiskey Cup."

STORM
(Into Mic)
Thank you, Kirksville! You've been
wild — we're The Hawks!

Feedback wails. Applause. Storm grins, wiping sweat with a towel.

A blonde slides him a folded napkin.

BLONDE GIRL
Map to the lake.

STORM
Wouldn't miss it.

She smirks, walks off with friends. Storm enjoys the view.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

STORM and FRANKIE load amps into a dented Astro van. Storm wipes forehead.

STORM
Where the hell's Ray?

FRANKIE
I've got a guess.

Bar door slams. RAY, shorter and wired, bursts out grinning.

RAY
Holy shit, we killed it! (sings
off-key) ♪ Take my whiskey cup and
fill it up, up, up—! ♪

He jumps on Storm's back, laughing.

STORM
You okay to drive, Rockstar?

RAY
I'm golden. Two beers, tops.

STORM

Not the beers I'm worried about.

Ray rubs his nose. Sniffs.

FRANKIE

We smell like death, man.

STORM

My place, showers, then we grab beer.

They shut the van doors, pile in, Ray at the wheel.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The van fishtails out of dirt lot, barely missing another car. Dust and music trail behind.

INT. VAN - MOVING

Storm rides shotgun. Ray drives, jittery. Frankie's wedged between amps in back.

STORM

Try keeping it on the road, huh?

Ray cackles, slaps steering wheel, singing along to an Allman Brothers cassette.

STORM (CONT'D)

Jake's is open. Cheapest 24-pack in the county.

Ray glances back at Frankie, grinning.

RAY

Beer run - the real encore. (to Storm) This has nothing to do with the cute girl behind the counter?

STORM

Donna? Got a boyfriend, I think.

FRANKIE

So did Kelly. And Leanne. And Tammy.

Storm smirks despite himself.

EXT. JAKE'S CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

JAKE'S sign flickers over the empty lot.

DONNA WORKMAN (22), pretty brunette, hauls trash bag to dumpster. Hears an engine whining in distance. On way back to store, notices extra piece of trash. Picks it up, walks back to dumpster.

Headlights approach - too fast.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Ray fumbles with the tape, laughing.

RAY
C'mon, don't eat my favorite-

He drops it, reaches down. Van veers, teeters toward store lot.

STORM
Eyes up, Ray-

CRASH. Metal screams. Silence - then dust and blood in the headlights.

EXT. JAKE'S PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Dust settles.

Donna crumpled by the wall, leg twisted, blood pooling.

Storm and Frankie spill out of van. Ray sits frozen behind wheel, shaking.

FRANKIE
Oh, fuck. Oh fuck.

Call an ambulance! There's a
payphone-

STORM
They'll take forever.

They lift Donna - careful, panicked - into the back of van.

INT. VAN - MOVING

Donna's unconscious, blood on Storm's shirt. He presses a rag to her wound.

STORM
Left on Apple, Ray. Valley View
Hospital. Left!

No answer.

STORM (CONT'D)
Ray—what the hell are you—

Donna's eyes snap open.

DONNA
(panicked)
Where are we? What— my leg!

She thrashes, screams. Storm tries to calm her. She scratches his neck.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Don't touch me!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Van jerks to stop. Dust settles.

Then -

GUNSHOT. Smokes wafts out van windows.

EXT. JAKE'S CONVENIENCE STORE - LATE NIGHT

The glow from Jake's sign flickers over dust and gravel.

Unmarked police car rolls in slow, lights flashing, no siren.

MARK SAMS (late 50s) — lean, sleepless eyes, old denim jacket — stands beside JAKE STICE (late 60s), heavier, sweat-stained, wiping his hands on a rag.

Detective JEFF CROSS (mid-30s) climbs out of car. Big frame, cheap suit.

DET. CROSS
Dispatch said the Workman girl's
missing? Dentist's kid, right?

MARK

Yeah. I stopped in for smokes.
Store was open, lights on... nobody
here. (pauses) Donna always works
Saturday nights.

DET. CROSS

You called Jake.

MARK

Names on the sign.

JAKE

Donna's steady. Never late, never
gone early. Nothing missing, door
unlocked. Whole place felt...
wrong.

Cross nods, sizing them up, heads for the door.

INT. JAKE'S STORE - CONTINUOUS

Bell chimes softly as Cross enters. Fluorescents overhead.
Shelves neat. Nothing obviously out of place.

Steps behind counter - opens register: cash intact. Purse
sits tucked beneath counter. Closed. Untouched.

Cross glances around once more, then grabs a soda from
cooler. cracks it open on edge of counter, takes long drink.

Leaves store. Bell chimes again - sound feels too loud.

EXT. JAKE'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cross lights cigarette, leans on car. Takes long drag.

DET. CROSS

Anybody ever give her trouble?
(beat) She is a sweet piece of-

He stops short, half-smile. Mark and Jake both look down,
uncomfortable.

JAKE

(nods)
Couple of creeper calls now and
then. Comes with the territory.
Been that way since I bought the
place, back in '80.

Silence.

JAKE (CONT'D)

There's that Harjo kid. Hangs around some. Told her I'd say something. She said he was harmless.

DET. CROSS

Indian kid, Grant Harjo?

JAKE

That's the one.

Cross flicks his cigarette, crushes it under his boot. Spits.

EXT. COUNTRY LAKE - LATE MORNING

The Oklahoma sun burns high. Empty beer cans glint in the grass. Pickup trucks, coolers, half-naked bodies lie scattered across lakeshore - wreckage of a long night.

Storm, shirtless, stirs on a blanket. Groggy. Squints against the light, looks at sleeping girl beside him.

Sits up, rubs neck. Dried blood. A flicker of memory hits - headlights, screaming, a gunshot.

He stumbles to a tree and vomits.

Nearby, Frankie hunched over by the water, throwing up too.

Storm wipes his mouth, staggers toward him.

STORM

(squinting)

You seen Ray? Or the van?

FRANKIE

Kinda fuzzy... He said he had to go. Took off 'round four.

Storm scans the shoreline - no van, no gear.

STORM

With our stuff.

FRANKIE

Yeah. That's the least of our problems, hoss.

They both drop down in the dirt, side by side.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
It's gotta be near noon. We should
get to the cops.

Storm stares at the ground, jaw tight.

STORM
(irritated)
And tell 'em what? That we helped
dump a body in the woods? Then came
here to party like nothin'
happened?

Frankie wipes his eyes, tears starting.

STORM (CONT'D)
Get it together. We think this
through. Ray's gone, he's not
talkin'. I'm not talkin'. You're
not talkin'. Nobody saw us.

Long pause.

STORM (CONT'D)
If we walk into that station, it's
over. The band, the gigs, any shot
at gettin' out of this place— gone.
We go to prison for somethin' we
didn't even start. He had the gun.
We didn't have a choice.

FRANKIE
We have a one now.

Frankie looks at him — pleading.

Before Storm can answer, the girl from last night stumbles
over, still half-drunk, bottle in hand.

She holds it out. Storm takes it, gulps deep. Passes to
Frankie.

Long pull. Burns.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DOWNTOWN EDNA - DAY (1984)

Fluorescent lights hum above cracked linoleum. Storm slumps
in the chair, eyes red, weekend's stubble creeping in.

The BARBER, 60s, white smock streaked with hair clippings,
works slow and steady.

A portable TV on the counter plays the local noon news, the volume low.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

...Sheriff's deputies this morning arrested 22-year-old Grant Harjo in connection with the shooting death of Donna Workman...

On screen: Grant Harjo's mugshot, terrified and uncomprehending.

Storm's gaze locks on it in the mirror. His throat tightens.

The barber snips, studies Storm in the mirror.

BARBER

Polite kid, quiet. Guess you never really know folks.

Storm's fingers grip the chair arms. A strand of hair falls onto the cape – trembling like it might give him away.

STORM

Yeah... guess you don't.

The BUZZ fills the shop.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Dim concrete cell. GRANT HARJO, 56, lies on bunk. His walls lined with neat sketches.

Another inmate leans in.

INMATE

Harjo – it's Monday, man. Tulsa Cops in five.

GRANT

(Dog ears the page)
Wouldn't wanna miss that.

Grant stands, slides on state-issued shoes, and steps into corridor.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights buzz. INMATES gather around old TV bolted to a steel bracket. Tulsa Cops theme blares – sirens, chases, flashing lights.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Tonight – on Tulsa Cops!

Room erupts with laughter and hoots.

Grant sits apart. Clock reads 8:00.

ON TV: Bodycam footage. Cops tackle a suspect. Lights, shouting – chaos.

Cut to commercial.

A movie trailer begins – a middle-aged Black man in a prison jumpsuit, speaking through a visiting-room phone.

MAN ON SCREEN
They gonna try to kill me for the
sixth time? (pauses) I thought this
was America.

He sets phone down, head bowed.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Now playing nationwide – Jamie
Lawson stars in Try Me Six Times,
inspired by the wrongful conviction
of Harold Crum..

Grant watches – something shifts. He looks up at clock again:
8:03 p.m.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM – ONE WEEK LATER

Same room. Same show.

Grant sits again – this time, a sheet of paper in front of
him, pencil tucked behind his ear.

Tulsa Cops intro blares. trailer reappears.

Grant begins drawing, fast and focused.

Cut between TV images – the actor's face, the visiting glass
– and Grant's hand, sketching each line with precision.

The clock hits 8:03.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM – ONE WEEK LATER

Another Monday.

Grant sits in same chair. No paper this time. Just watching.

The trailer appears again – same voice, same line: “They gonna try to kill me for the sixth time?”

Grant closes his eyes. Breathes deep. Opens them again – and smiles, faintly.

INT. PRISON CELL - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight creeps through the bars.

Grant sits at a small desk. The wall beside him is lined with drawings of movie scenes and actors – intricate, haunting portraits.

He picks one up – the sketch of Jamie Lawson from the trailer – folds it neatly into thirds, slides into envelope.

He writes something across the front – a name we can't see.

Grant looks at it for a long moment, places it gently on desk.

INT. POLICE STATION - 1984

Grant, 22, sobs quietly at a small metal desk in sterile police interrogation room. Swollen cheek. Det. Cross sits across from him. A typed-up piece of paper on desk between them next to a pen.

CROSS
(screaming)
...You raped her, you stabbed her,
you killed her -- and you're gonna
sign that goddam paper..

Cross slaps him hard. Grant nearly falls.

Cross looms, breathing hard. He steps out into station hallway to reveal CORY BREWER, 21, a uniformed officer, who's been watching through a two-way mirror. Brewer eyes Cross, look of shock.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Oh hey Cuz. Didn't know you were
there. You still on duty?

BREWER
Uh, ya, two more hours.

CROSS

Can you do me a favor, here's a five, can you get me a couple of burgers from Wendy's? Could be a long night.

Hands Brewer a bill, walks off before Brewer speaks.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

JAMIE LAWSON, black, stylish, fit, early forties, rides in back seat of SUV as it crawls through Chicago traffic. Late-summer light glints off glass towers.

The DRIVER, white, 50s, glances back.

DRIVER

Here it is, Mr. Lawson. (beat)
Never do this, but... selfie?

Jamie grins, the practiced warmth of a man who's done this a thousand times.

JAMIE

Absolutely.

The driver fumbles with phone, snapping several quick selfies. Jamie obliges, grinning.

The driver's head drops to his phone, already typing furiously.

EXT. BUSY CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Jamie steps out of SUV, squinting up at a sleek, glass skyscraper. Straightens jacket and strides toward revolving door.

INT. BUILDING ATRIUM - DAY

KELLY JONES, 40s, sharp-suited, waits in the lobby. Spots Jamie and breaks into wide grin.

KELLY

Chicago's own Jamie Lawson. Academy Award Nominee.

JAMIE

Thanks to your wife. Should've been "winner." Next time.

They hug – old friends.

KELLY

Nice to see you outside Louisiana.

JAMIE

Don't let the good people of Louisiana hear you say that. They can be mean. (beat) How's Tricia? Cooking something up for me?

KELLY

You know her – always writing. She's got a new one. Crime drama for FX.

JAMIE

Is the lead a handsome Black guy?

KELLY

Aren't you past TV now, Mr. Movie Star?

They share a laugh, approach elevators.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

They step inside. YOUNG BUSINESSWOMAN glances at Jamie, trying to place him.

JAMIE

This isn't exactly what I pictured. When I wrote that check, I thought you were still a fledgling non-profit.

KELLY

Wait till you see the bathroom in my office. Well, near my office. (beat) We lucked out – a civil firm upstairs leases us a floor for practically nothing.

Elevator dings. Doors open to sleek reception area.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

Receptionist LAURA, late 20s, beams when she sees Jamie.

KELLY

Laura, this is—

LAURA
(interrupting)
Mr. Lawson. Pleasure!

JAMIE
Just Jamie.

LAURA
Everyone's waiting in the
conference room.

On the short walk they pass a framed Try Me Six Times poster
— Jamie's face staring back

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Applause. BOARD MEMBERS stand. Jamie waves it off.

JAMIE
What would've happened if I gave
two million?

Laughter.

KELLY
We save the balloons for Academy
Award winners.

More laughter. The group settles.

JESSICA BEESON, late 60s, dignified, rises.

JESSICA
Lovely to have you here, Jamie.
We're big fans — of the film and of
your work in wrongful convictions.
And the donation...
(Smile)

Quick applause. Kelly nods to Jamie.

KELLY
I thought it'd be fun to start with
how you got involved with Try Me
Six Times.

JAMIE
Heard it on NPR. (beat) Yeah, we
listen too.

Laughter.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

I thought, man, they really wanted his Black ass. Tried six times for the same murder — didn't even know that was legal. Then I saw a photo of Harold Crum — could've been my brother. Same haircut, same gap, same build. I figured I wouldn't even have to act — just learn a Cajun accent.

(beat) A friend told me it was being developed for film, I called my agent that day.

JESSICA

That simple?

JAMIE

With this smile?

Laughter again.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

But Crum died before being cleared. That's what hooked me. That, and meeting Kelly in New Orleans. (beat). We can't let this keep happening. Not to our people. Not to anyone.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, let's hear what you've got going on.

Jessica clicks a remote. Charts and figures flash on a screen.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The meeting wraps. Handshakes, hugs, polite thanks. Kelly tugs Jamie by elbow.

KELLY

You have to see this.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie sits as Kelly slides him a sheet.

Jamie looks down.

KELLY

It's by a sort-of client.

Jamie lifts it — a pencil portrait of himself as Harold Crum. Haunting detail. He goes still.

JAMIE

(quiet)

How'd he—?

He turns the page in the light. The strokes are delicate, obsessive — every shadow, every wrinkle under the eyes.

KELLY

Grant Harjo. Inmate in Oklahoma.
Draws from movie trailers.

JAMIE

He drew this from the trailer?

KELLY

Mm-hm. Never seen the movie.

Jamie traces a finger near the lines of his own jaw — careful, reverent.

Silence. Jamie sets the sketch down gently, as if it's alive.

JAMIE

You said "sort of client?"

KELLY

We think he's innocent. Had a crush on a girl. Detective broke him — threats, lies, eight hours. He confessed to stabbing and burning her. They found her shot. Didn't matter.

JAMIE

No DNA?

KELLY

You're catching on. Evidence "lost." Maybe destroyed. We've searched for years.

JAMIE

So... can anything be done?

KELLY

Had an idea. You did say you wanted to do more than write checks.

JAMIE

I did.
(Hands up in mock
surrender)

KELLY

We want you to help with Grant's
upcoming parole hearing.

JAMIE

So — send a famous Black movie star
to Oklahoma to charm a bunch of
white folks? (grinning) And bring
my favorite Black lesbian sidekick?

KELLY

Here's the twist — the governor's a
law-and-order conservative. (beat)
But he's a fan of your movie.

Kelly shows him her phone — a photo of a smiling white man
with his wife outside a theater. The caption reads:

"Just saw Jamie Lawson's new movie. Incredible! Inspiring
example of how the power of Christ reaches us in unexpected
places."

Jamie raises an eyebrow. Kelly smiles.

INT. VEHICLE - CHICAGO - AFTERNOON

A black SUV winds through rough stretch of the South Side.
Jamie rides in back, dressed casually — hat low, hoodie up.

Outside car window: boarded-up stores, crumbling brick
houses, kids playing basketball on bent rim.

The driver, Eastern European, late 40s, glances at Jamie in
the mirror.

DRIVER

I never do this... but my wife —
she'll never believe me.

He raises his phone, awkward smile.

JAMIE

(laughs)
Sure.

They take a few selfies. Jamie flashes that million-dollar
grin.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
You do me a favor? Wait here — I
won't be long.

The driver glances around neighborhood, uneasy.

DRIVER
For you, Mr. Lawson... okay.

JAMIE
Just Jamie.

Jamie opens door, steps out.

EXT. SOUTH SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Hot summer air. Sirens echo in the distance.

Jamie takes long look around — beat-up cars, broken glass,
stoops with people watching. Takes a breath.

Walks up to three-story brick row house, knocks gently.

Door creaks open. MISS BROWN (late 70s) — heavysset Black
woman with kind eyes and cane — peers out, squinting.

MISS BROWN
Well now... my eyes ain't what they
used to be, but it sure looks like
movie star Jamie Lawson on my
porch.

JAMIE
(soft grin)
Still sharp as ever, Miss Brown.
It's me — more handsome than ever.
And richer.

They share a warm laugh. She pulls him into a hug, long and
genuine.

MISS BROWN
Nice Chicago summer day.

She nods toward two rickety chairs on the porch.

JAMIE
That'd be my choice.

They sit. A police siren wails past — both glance
instinctively down block.

MISS BROWN
Not much has changed. Glad you got out.

JAMIE
Thanks to basketball.

MISS BROWN
Mmhmm.

A long pause. Jamie looks down at hands.

JAMIE
But your boy didn't.

Miss Brown stares out toward street — eyes glassy, voice quiet.

MISS BROWN
Deon made his own choices.

JAMIE
Still...

MISS BROWN
Don't do that, Jamie. You've carried enough guilt. (beat) What you're doing now — helping those folks get a fair shot — that matters...Not a day goes by without some story around here about a crooked cop.

Jamie nods, eyes wet.

Across street, kids dribble basketballs, laughing as they pass. Jamie watches -- A small, aching smile.

EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

A hulking concrete building looms over a noisy crowd. Signs wave: "Grant Is Innocent." "Throw Away the Key."

Jamie steps out of black car beside Kelly. Reporters swarm.

REPORTER 1
Mr. Lawson! What did the governor say about Grant Harjo's innocence?

REPORTER 2
Jamie — what would you say to Donna Workman's family if Harjo walks free?

Jamie gives polite smile, says nothing, and shoulders past them.

INT. PAROLE BOARD ROOM - DAY

Windowless room. Bureaucrats in cheap suits.

Kelly sets stack of papers on folding table. Next to her: CAL HOBSON, late 60s, red-faced and self-satisfied. Behind them, rows of metal chairs hold onlookers — including the WORKMAN FAMILY and Jamie, standing in the back.

CHAIRMAN

We are here on the parole matter of inmate Grant Harjo, number 102567.
(pause) Ms. Jones, you may begin.

Kelly stands, nervous but steady.

KELLY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For twelve years I've represented Grant Harjo. Five years ago I stood here, reciting every certificate and letter of support. (beat) You've all read those. So I'll tell you what happened after that hearing.

She glances at Grant's image on monitor — grainy video from prison.

KELLY (CONT'D)

When I told him he was denied, he thanked me. Said tomorrow he'd wake up knowing he was innocent.
(softly) That's the man you're judging today.

Kelly pauses, emotion flickering but contained.

KELLY (CONT'D)

That's the man I know. That's who you're judging today.

She sits. A quiet weight settles over room.

CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Ms. Jones. Mr. Hobson.

Cal stands slowly, belly pressing against table. Turns toward the Workman family, gives a small, performative nod.

CAL
 (Smirks)
 GED, associate's degree, welding –
 model citizen, right?

Uncomfortable chuckles.

CAL (CONT'D)
 That's what your packets say. But
 let me tell you what those pages
 don't.

He leans forward, voice dropping.

CAL (CONT'D)
 April 28th, 1984. Edna, my
 hometown. Grant Harjo had a crush
 on a girl who worked the night
 shift at Jake's Store. Donna
 Workman. She smiled at him when he
 came in for beer and smokes. Said
 no when he asked her out. That was
 her mistake.

FLASH - INTERCUT: THE CRIME (1984)

– A beat-up Chevy idles under a buzzing streetlight. – A
 young man in flannel chugs beer, eyes wild. – A revolver
 glints on the seat. – Donna at the cash register, talking on
 the phone.

CAL (V.O.)
 He sat out there drinking, snorting
 God knows what, stewing because she
 said no.

– The man kicks open the store door. – Donna freezes. – A
 flash of hair, a scream.

CAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He dragged her into his truck. Out
 to some dark field. She begged for
 her life.

– A knife slices through denim. – Tears. Gunshots. Silence.

CAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Three shots to the head. When one
 would've done.

BACK TO PAROLE ROOM

Cal stands trembling, sweat pooling at his collar.

CAL
 Her own father — Dr. John Workman
 — had to dig out her dental records
 to identify what was left.

He glares at Kelly, then back at the board.

CAL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 But sure — inmate Harjo got a B+ in
 college accounting.

He slaps his papers down and collapses into his chair.

CHAIRMAN
 Thank you, Mr. Hobson.
 (beat)
 Mr. Harjo, can you hear us?

On screen: Grant, sitting stiffly in a gray jumpsuit.

GRANT
 (static)
 ...Yes... can you—

The feed crackles.

CHAIRMAN
 Barely. Try again.

GRANT
 (muffled, broken)
 I just want—

The monitor hisses with static.

CHAIRMAN
 Not the first time this has
 happened. (to the board) We have
 his written statement. We'll take
 it into consideration.

He straightens his papers.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)
 All opposed?

Four hands rise.
 All in favor?

One.
 Parole denied.

Kelly closes her eyes. Jamie's jaw tightens.

On screen, Grant speaks into static — unheard.

EXT. WHISKEY CUP SALOON - DAY

A lifted pickup rolls into the Whiskey Cup lot. Custom plate reads: "STORM1."

STORM, 57, weathered but magnetic, steps out. Boots polished, sunglasses mirrored. Looks up at sign: "Whiskey Cup Saloon."

INT. WHISKEY CUP SALOON - DAY

The restaurant hums with prep — staff setting up for lunch rush. Country music plays low.

Storm strolls in, grin wide, energy bright.

STORM

We figure out that fryer mess?

WORKER

Think so, boss. New one's on the way — be here tomorrow.

STORM

And I'll be fifteen grand poorer.

From behind bar, the MANAGER, mid-40s, playful, leans out with a smirk.

MANAGER

Judging by that truck outside, your TV show, the Grammy, and that movie-star girlfriend — I think you'll live.

STORM

Fair.

They bump fists.

The two mock-wrestle for a second, laughing like old friends. Storm slides onto bar stool.

Photos of Storm with country stars line the walls.

The BARTENDER sets a soda in front of him. Two TVs hang overhead — one on ESPN, the other tuned to local news. On the news screen, a photo of GRANT HARJO flashes up. Storm squints.

STORM (CONT'D)
Hey, turn that up, will ya?

The bartender grabs the remote, ups volume.

On TV — Grant Harjo's face. Storm freezes.

ON TV
Grant Harjo will remain in an
Oklahoma prison for at least five
more years, after the parole board
denied his release yesterday.

Cut to Cal outside the building, sweating under TV lights.

CAL HOBSON (ON TV)
We firmly believe Grant Harjo raped
and killed Donna Workman. In this
state, we don't let murderers walk
free — I don't care how many movie
stars come down here.

Back to the anchor.

ANCHOR (ON TV)
District Attorney Hobson was
referring to actor Jamie Lawson,
who lobbied the Governor on Harjo's
behalf. Lawson, a vocal wrongful-
conviction advocate, urged the
governor to grant clemency. The
board, however, voted four to one
to deny parole...

Storm stares at screen — jaw tight. A flicker of memory
behind his eyes. Pulls out vape pen, sneaks a drag.

Big exhale. A mist drifts through the bar.

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

Rain streaks the glass. Inside, soft indie music clashes with
the anxious chatter of lunch crowd.

Kelly stirs a margarita. Jamie nurses a beer, slouched in
chair.

Radar maps flash red across TV screens. A breathless
weatherman warns of "potential supercells."

JAMIE
'Fuck is a supercell?

KELLY
No idea. But that was a super
clusterfuck.

She takes a long sip.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Didn't even let Grant speak. Board
had their minds made up.

JAMIE
I thought we had it. The governor
was all in.

KELLY
He can't interfere.

Jamie looks up at screen – tornado warnings flashing red
across half the state.

JAMIE
You seeing this?

KELLY
Yeah. "High weather event day."
Locals barely notice.

Jamie glances around – everyone in the restaurant seems
indifferent, scrolling their phones, unfazed.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You still going? I'm out.

JAMIE
Nah. Feels wrong. (pauses) Getting
that kind of news and then sitting
courtside?

KELLY
Courtside, huh? Not bad for a kid
from Chicago.

JAMIE
(laughs softly)
I'll drink to that.

He raises his beer. They clink glasses.

Long silence, as they drink.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

How do you do this? Lose, over and over, and keep going?

Kelly looks down, thumb tracing rim of glass.

KELLY

You learn to celebrate the rare wins. I've been doing this twenty years. Maybe one victory every two. (smiles faintly) Been a minute though.

JAMIE

So what now?

KELLY

Now we wait. For a miracle. (beat) They happen sometimes. We've had a private investigator on it for years, so who knows.

Outside, thunder rumbles. The windows flicker with lightning.

They drink. The light outside turns heavy and green.

They hug by the door — weary, close, unspoken affection between them.

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY - DOWNTOWN - EVENING

Wind scatters litter. Jamie and Kelly walk in opposite directions.

Jamie pulls two basketball tickets from pocket. Stops outside the glowing Paycom Arena.

A man and his young son, both in Thunder gear, sit on a bench outside — one hot dog between them.

Jamie approaches with a smile.

JAMIE

Thunder Up.

MAN

Thunder Up.

The man squints — recognition dawning.

MAN (CONT'D)

Hey, you're—

Jamie presses a finger to his lips.

JAMIE

Shhh. You two got tickets?

MAN

Yeah, way up top. Loud City. Not the best view, but... it's the playoffs. The energy's nuts up there though. I bet you're courtside?

JAMIE

Not tonight. But you are.

Jamie smiles, hands the man the tickets.

The kid stares at the tickets — eyes wide.

Before the man can react, Jamie's already walking away, head down against the wind.

Thunder rolls.

SUPER: TWO YEARS LATER

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Phone buzzes. 4:08 A.M.

CORY BREWER (55), graying, thick around the middle but solid, blinks awake. He fumbles for glasses and phone. Screen reads: DISPATCH.

He sighs, answers.

BREWER

You got good news?

DISPATCH (O.S.)

Uh...What? No, Chief Brewer?

BREWER

Yeah. This is him.

DISPATCH (O.S.)

Sorry, sir — your cousin Jeff... he just— (beat) He shot himself. Called it in before he did it. Crews are on scene now.

Silence. Brewer stares into dark.

BREWER

On my way.

Woman beside him stirs, half-asleep.

WOMAN

Let me guess. Good news?

EXT. OLD COUNTRY HOUSE - PRE-DAWN

Farmhouse under flashing police lights.

Brewer's truck crunches over gravel. Steps out, expression unreadable.

Four officers hover near porch. Crime scene tape flaps in wind.

BREWER

Well?

Young female OFFICER fidgets, clipboard shaking in hands.

OFFICER

One shot, through the mouth. No
note. Looks like Cross.

Brewer nods grimly, ducks under tape, walks inside.

INT. CROSS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Single lamp flickers. Evidence markers dot room. JEFF Cross lies sprawled on floor — gun beside him, spray of blood on faded wallpaper.

Brewer stares at the body. Silent. Stands and exits.

EXT. CROSS HOUSE - NIGHT

BREWER

(to the officers)

Do it all by the book. Chain of
custody, every photo, every print.
(beat) We all know what this is —
but I want it clean. A lot of eyes
on Edna right now.

Outside, Brewer eyes an old shed — padlocked, tin roof sagging.

He stares at it a long time. Something shifts behind his eyes.

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Coffee steams in a paper cup. Brewer sits at his desk, staring at cardboard evidence box labeled:

WORKMAN - CF-1984-786

His fingers drum on the lid.

Older secretary, walks up and sets muffin on his desk.

SECRETARY
Pandora's box, Chief?

Brewer looks up, startled.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
Shit - that's actually something,
isn't it?

Brewer gives a small, knowing smirk.

BREWER
Things are about to get a lot more
interesting. (takes the muffin)
Thanks for breakfast.

He grabs box, his phone, and heads for door.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Morning light washes the station steps. Brewer stops on steps, pulls out phone, and dials.

Rings twice.

BREWER
(into phone)
Kelly. (beat) I've got some news.

He looks out across the quiet town.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Clank of doors. Kelly walks through, calm but tense. Female guard pats her down, waves her through.

Across room, Grant sits at a plastic table. He stands when he sees her.

GRANT

Been here too long to expect good news. (beat) But I figured you wouldn't come all this way if it ain't.

KELLY

(smiling slightly)
Best news we've had in a long time, Grant. You heard about Jeff Cross's suicide?

GRANT

Yeah. Saw it on TV. (sits back, shaking head) Guess his past finally caught up with him. Something about the feds?

KELLY

Yup. But that's just the start. Chief Brewer — Jeff's cousin — found something in Cross's shed. Something that belonged in your case file.

Grant frowns, confused.

GRANT

...Fingernail scrapings?
(Raises eyebrows)

KELLY

You got it.

Grant whistles, low and stunned.

INT. CAL HOBSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal sits at desk. The TV behind him plays breaking news report.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

A huge twist tonight in the Grant Harjo case — new DNA evidence has surfaced that could change everything—

Cal mutes TV. He picks up phone, dials.

CAL
Kelly, let's meet. And leave the
movie star out of it.

KELLY (O.S.)
I can fly down Wednesday.

INT. PRISON RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Kelly sits across from Grant, same room, new energy.

GRANT
Am I getting out of here?

KELLY
That's... sort of up to you now.
Here's the deal - the DNA from the
fingernails didn't match you, or
anyone in the system. But Hobson
still won't clear you outright. He
says you might've been "involved
somehow."
(beat) He's up for re-election,
though. Jamie's support has put a
lot of eyes on this case.

Grant listens, quiet. Waiting for the catch.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Hobson's offering time served - if
you plead no contest. You won't
admit guilt, exactly. It gets you
home.

Grant leans back, exhaling hard.

GRANT
So I get out?

KELLY
Yes. But-

GRANT
(chuckles)
Lawyers. Always a "but."

KELLY
Conviction stands. Registered
offender, probation, eyes on you
forever.

GRANT

No trick-or-treaters. My face on the internet. But I get to go home.

KELLY

Yes. Just... be careful. Those cops down there will be gunning for you.

GRANT

I can keep my nose clean. Done it in here for thirty years.
(quiet pause) What would you do?

Kelly sighs.

KELLY

We could fight. And I think we'd win. Full exoneration. But it could take years, maybe more. No guarantees.(soft smile) The Cowboys play the Bears Monday night. Jamie said he'll come watch at your brother's place if you take the deal.

A beat — then Grant cracks a grin.

GRANT

Let's do it. (smiles wider) And tell Jamie — no Bears gear.

They share a quiet, nervous laugh.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

TV crews swarm courthouse steps. Reporters shout questions, flashes burst. Mixed crowd: 'Free Grant' signs clash with 'Justice for Donna.'

A rideshare car pulls up. Kelly and Jamie step out, dressed sharp.

KELLY

So much for low key.

They exchange a look, then push through the chaos. Reporters surge forward.

REPORTER 1

Is Grant Harjo being released today?

REPORTER 2

Mr. Lawson, are you making a movie
about the case?

REPORTER 3

What would you say to Donna
Workman's family?

Kelly shields her face. Jamie keeps his head down. They slip
inside as the doors slam shut behind them.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Cal watches from his office window.

Down on the courthouse steps, Jamie and Kelly appear, moving
past microphones and shouted questions.

Cal watches them go inside. For a moment, his jaw sets.

He adjusts his cufflinks, checks his watch. Papers are neatly
stacked - the Workman file sitting square in the center.
He takes a breath.

A soft knock at the door that still startles him.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Sir?

Cal doesn't turn.

CAL

Yeah.

The door opens. A young ASSISTANT, hesitant, pokes her head
in.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Hobson... Donna Workman's brother
and sister are in the waiting room.
Hoping for a chat.

Cal closes his eyes briefly, jaw tightening. He sets his
coffee down.

INT. HALLWAY, CAL'S OFFICE

Cal enters a conference room. Seated are a man and woman, in
their 50s. Worried, painful looks on their faces. Cal takes a
deep breath, enters, and closes the door.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Whispers ripple through the room.

At one table — Kelly sets down her briefcase. Behind her — Jamie sits beside MIKE HARJO (62), Grant's brother. They whisper, hopeful.

Across the aisle — Cal smirks.

Grant enters, cuffs glinting, faint smile.

KELLY
(To deputy)
Is that really necessary?

DEPUTY
Sheriff's orders, ma'am.

Grant mouths to her — It's okay. Then sits, composed. Murmurs ripple through crowd.

At bench, JUDGE ROBERT JAMESON (72) adjusts glasses.

JAMESON
We're here for a status conference
in State of Oklahoma versus Grant
Harjo.

KELLY
Your honor, the parties have
reached an agreement with District
Attorney Hobson.

Jameson looks to Cal.

JAMESON
Is that so, Mr. Hobson?

CAL
Actually, your honor — after
further consultation with the
victim's family and reconsideration
of the facts, the State is not open
to further negotiation.

Kelly freezes. Jamie's jaw clenches. Grant looks back at him, confused.

KELLY
We had an agreement — in light of
new DNA.

JAMESON

Mr. Hobson?

CAL

We discussed it. Nothing formal.

Jameson sighs.

JAMESON

Ms. Jones?

Kelly turns to Grant. Whispers.

KELLY

(whispers)

Grant, I'm so sorry. Looks like the pressure got to Cal. Deal's off.

GRANT

What do we do?

KELLY

Continue with our motion to vacate the conviction.

GRANT

Am I going home?

Kelly looks down.

KELLY

Not today, Grant. I'm sorry.

JAMESON (O.S.)

Ms. Jones — do you have a motion?

Kelly stands. Smooths her jacket, takes a breath.

KELLY

Yes, your honor. (beat) The sign outside this courthouse says "Justice for All." Mr. Harjo was denied that justice 34 years ago — convicted through the work of Detective Jeff Cross, a man now tied to three other wrongful convictions. (beat) If it weren't for his death — and the evidence found in his own shed — this would have stayed buried forever. Fingernail scrapings from Donna Workman, containing blood, point to another, unidentified offender.

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)
We don't know who killed Donna. But
we know it wasn't my client. I
stand on our motion — and pray this
court upholds Justice for All.

Kelly exhales, hollow.

Jameson nods slightly. Turns to Cal.

JAMESON
Mr. Hobson?

Cal rises — smug, slow.

CAL
You have our opposition, your
honor. (beat) Inmate Harjo
confessed. He's guilty. DNA doesn't
prove innocence. You can shoot
without DNA.

He sits. Kelly stares straight ahead.

The room hums with tension.

JAMESON
Based on the evidence before me...
(beat — silence) I see insufficient
grounds to vacate.

The gavel falls. Grant doesn't flinch. Kelly whispers: We'll
keep fighting.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

SUPER: Two Years Later

Summer in Oklahoma City. Hip neighborhood. Cafés hum with
lunchtime chatter; thirty-somethings stroll between shops.

A dusty Ford Fusion sits behind a row of buildings. Inside,
SHANE BEALS (45) — scruffy, sharp-eyed, in a wrinkled polo —
watches the back door of a sushi restaurant.

He checks his watch. Then the door again.

Young red-haired cook steps out, lights cigarette, plops onto
crate.

SHANE
(to himself)
Okay, here we go.

Shane grabs phone, exits car, pretending to talk.

He positions himself twenty feet from the cook, still fake-talking.

Cook smokes cooly, checks phone, finishes. Walks over to a metal ash can and neatly places cigarette inside.

SHANE (CONT'D)
You gotta be kidding me...

Cook disappears inside. Shane stares, defeated, then dials.

SHANE (CONT'D)
(into phone)
No, I didn't get it. You won't believe this one. Spent a whole day out here...

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Shane sits at cluttered desk, screen glows. Behind him, a whiteboard of uncrossed names.

On screen -- Kelly and Jamie on video call.

SHANE
Wasted my day.

Kelly and Jamie laugh.

KELLY
Still get paid, though.

SHANE
At my nonprofit rate. Barely covers gas.(to Jamie) Think you can work that into a movie?

JAMIE
Already working on it -- a short film. Titled: The Courteous Smoker.

SHANE
Catchy. (smiles) Anyway, I got the DNA sample. Overnighted to the lab.

KELLY
Wait, how'd you manage that?

SHANE

Kid had traffic court the next day.
Smoked in his car beforehand,
tossed the butt in the street.
Guess he's only courteous on the
clock.

KELLY

(laughs)

Nice work. That's three suspects
down. Should be three weeks for
results. (beat) How many more?

Shane glances at whiteboard. Names scrawled in marker — only
three crossed out.

He sighs.

SHANE

Seventeen. And those first three
were my top picks. Took me a year
and a half to get their DNA.

KELLY

We'll all be retired before you get
through that list.

JAMIE

And Grant's got no shot unless we
match it — solve the case
ourselves?

KELLY

Pretty much. It shouldn't be our
job, but here we are. (pauses) I'll
keep pushing in court. Maybe the
next DA's less afraid of headlines.
The Times piece runs this weekend —
maybe that stirs something.

JAMIE

Keep at it, Shane.

SHANE

You know I will. (grins) Nonprofit
money's still green.

They all chuckle. Call ends.

Shane leans back in chair. Silence. Looks at whiteboard — so
many names left.

He grabs a marker, circles one name near the bottom.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Alright, next up.

Caps the pen, stares at board — his private battlefield.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - EARLY MORNING

Gray dawn. Storm steps from a Manhattan high-rise in flannel and a baseball cap.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Storm stands in line. Quiet morning crowd. Orders without making eye contact.

He grabs a paper, leaves.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Soft morning light filters through sheer curtains. Storm sits on edge of bed, newspaper spread open — front page headline visible: "Wrongfully Convicted Man Still Fights for Justice: The Grant Harjo Case"

Storm reads intensely. Coffee cup trembles slightly in hand.

In bed, COURTNEY CROWDER (32) — glamorous even half-asleep — stirs under sheets.

CROWDER
(groggy)
You okay? You left pretty early
last night.

Storm doesn't answer. Eyes fixed on article.

CROWDER (CONT'D)
Hey. (snapping fingers softly)
Where are you right now?

STORM
(startled)
Huh? Oh. I'm just— (pauses) I've
got a lot going on. The Grammys,
the show, your movie premieres...
it's a lot.

CROWDER
(smiling, but wounded)
Didn't know my career was a
stressor to you.

Crowder slips out of bed, pulls on silk robe, and walks toward bathroom — shutting door a little too hard.

Storm doesn't look up. Just breathes deeply. Eyes drop back to newspaper. A photo of Grant Harjo stares up.

A long beat.

Storm folds paper in half and tucks it in the nightstand.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

RAY, 58 — tattooed, wiry, hardened — cranks out pull-ups. Each rep slower, heavier. Sweat stings his eyes.

INMATE (O.S.)
Yo, Bones — lookin' ripped. They
cut your commissary or somethin'?

RAY
Nah. Gettin' cut for the parole
board. (beat) They don't wanna send
no fatties back out there.

Ray drops, gasping. Prison nickname follows him like a ghost.

Slips shirt back on and trudges toward cell block.

INT. PRISON CELL - LATER

Single bulb, bare cell. Ray climbs to top bunk, lifts pillow — retrieves a small plastic baggie of pills tucked inside the seam.

He shakes it — counts.

Eighteen.

His expression hardens.

Suddenly his stomach clenches. He doubles over, vomits, then stares at his reflection — haunted.

INT. PRISON REC ROOM - DAY

Rec room buzzes with noise — basketball on TV, cards slapping tables. Ray queues for the phone. Other inmates make way.

He takes receiver, dials. Waits.

RAY
(quietly, low)
Where we at with the house?

He listens. Silent.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

Golden light cuts through early haze. Storm, robe loose, coffee in hand, steps into too-quiet luxury.

At end of long gravel driveway, delivery truck pulls away. Storm squints.

He eyes his ATV, keys hanging in ignition. Thinks about it. Then sighs and starts long walk instead.

Reaches oversized mailbox, rips open the envelope. His face drops. (beat) He dials.

STORM
You in town? (pause) I need you to
come by. Today.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - LATER

Storm sits slouched on leather couch, large plastic cup in hand. Whiskey bottle visible on kitchen counter.

Across from him, DELLA JOHNSTON (42) — sharp, no-nonsense — balances tablet on her knee, mid-argument.

DELLA
So, let me get this straight. You
want me to knock on Dr. Barton's
door, ask him how much to buy his
family's house — and pay whatever
number he says? Then put it under a
woman's name I've never heard of?
And ask no more questions?

STORM
You trust me?

DELLA

No. You pay me to advise you on financial decisions. Not to hand out blank checks to strangers.

STORM

Think of it as... charitable giving.

DELLA

That you can't deduct.

STORM

Look, I need this done quick. Just... get it done.

Della studies him. Notices the cup. Then the whiskey bottle. Her expression softens.

DELLA

You okay, Storm? Courtney called me the other day. Said she's worried.

Storm rubs temples. Avoids her eyes.

DELLA (CONT'D)

(standing, frustrated)

You ever seen A Star Is Born? The Bradley Cooper one. That's where this is heading.

She grabs her bag, heads for door.

STORM

You done?

She slams door on way out. Storm sits still, staring into cup.

EXT. SMALL-TOWN OKLAHOMA - DAY

Storm's Jeep slides to the curb on a dead-quiet main street.

Storm steps out, sunglasses on, hasn't slept. Scans street, spots sign: "Jack Mack, Attorney-at-Law."

Exhales, pushes door open.

INT. JACK MACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Bell chimes. Time-capsule office: dusty law books, cold coffee.

JACK MACK (60s), barbecue sauce on his tie, emerges.

JACK
Well, hell. Storm Hudson.
(extends hand) You look rich and
miserable.

STORM
Been a minute.

JACK
How's your old man?

STORM
Retired and hates it.

JACK
(laughs)
Sounds about right. Come on back.

They move into a cramped back office. A crooked diploma hangs
on the wall.

JACK (CONT'D)
I assume this isn't a social call.

STORM
It is not.
Beat.

STORM (CONT'D)
So... how does this lawyer thing
work?

JACK
(confused)
What do you mean?

STORM
I hire you. Then you can't tell
anyone what I say.

JACK
Attorney-client privilege. Right.

He leans forward, more curious now.

JACK (CONT'D)
What are we talking about?

Storm pulls envelope from jacket, drops it on desk. \$10,000
in cash.

STORM
That make it official?

JACK
Sure does.

Jack reaches for notepad and pen, eyes not leaving envelope.

STORM
No notes.

Jack pauses, then quietly shuts office door.

JACK
(Turns back to Storm)
Drink?

LATER - SAME

Empty glasses between them. Cigarette smoke hangs in air. Storm's eyes red, distant. Jack leans back, absorbing the story.

JACK (CONT'D)
Ray drives, hits girl, shoots her,
Grant takes the fall.

Storm nods, barely breathing.

JACK (CONT'D)
Case closed. Fast forward 30 years,
Cross eats a bullet and they find
the fingernail DNA in his shed -
and you think that DNA is...yours.

STORM
When she scratched me. I remember
the blood. Didn't think much of it...
Newspaper mentioned blood under her
nails at the trial.

Jack exhales, rubs face.

JACK
Frankie's dead. That leaves you,
Ray, and now... me. And if Ray's
reaching out-

STORM
Made me buy his sister a house.
Said it'd make things right.
(MORE)

STORM (CONT'D)

He's sick, maybe dying. I don't trust what a dying man might say.

JACK

(sighs)

Legally? You're probably safe. You didn't pull the trigger. Ray's a career felon, junkie - nobody would believe him anyway.

(beat) But that DNA... that's the wild card.

STORM

Yeah. The DNA.

JACK

Corroborates your story, ties you to the scene. But your legal risk isn't the only problem.

STORM

Because I'm famous.

JACK

Because you're famous. (leans in)
You've got two options, Tell the truth, or drink until you can't.

Storm stares at the desk. Jack stubs out his cigarette.

STORM

Guess I'll need more whiskey.

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

Fluorescent lights hum. Plastic chairs. A vending machine buzzes in the corner. Shane sits across from empty seat, checking watch.

A GUARD leads in Ray - thin, gray, hollow-eyed. Orange jumpsuit hangs loose.

The guard unlocks the cuffs. Ray rubs wrists, sits with effort. Breathing ragged.

Long silence. Shane studies him.

SHANE

I'm Shane. Appreciate you meeting with me. From what I hear, you've got one hell of a story.

RAY
(chuckles weakly)
Call me Bones. Buckle up. Storm
Hudson has some skeletons in his
closet...

Shane leans in, presses record on a small audio device.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT - LATER

Shane exits prison, sunglasses on, expression unreadable.
Carries manila folder and handwritten statement folded in
hand.

Gets into car, shuts door, exhales. Dials.

SHANE
(into phone)
Kelly. I don't know if I believe
half of it--hell, even one percent--
but if any of it's true, we've got
something big. When we got the tip,
thought it was bogus, they usually
are. Usually.

(pause, listening)

SHANE (CONT'D)
You ever see The Secret Singer?

He hangs up. Sits there a moment, staring out windshield --
prison behind him, sunlight washing over his face.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - SECRET SINGER SET - DAY

Makeup lights glare on bottles and food trash.

Storm lies on couch, blanket tangled around him, dead asleep.
Door opens. Courtney steps in -- instantly hit by the smell.

COURTNEY
Jesus, Storm. They're waiting to
shoot.

Storm stirs, groans, pulls blanket over head.

STORM
Give me a few hours.

Courtney stares — disgust turning to disbelief.

COURTNEY

You said you'd been sober eight years. I went through this shit with Alex — I'm not doing it again.

Storm sits up halfway, eyes bloodshot.

STORM

I was. Three thousand days. I can handle a drink now and then.

COURTNEY

That's what Alex said. Right before he crashed his Lamborghini into a family. I won't be the actress who keeps dating trainwrecks.

Storm sits up, anger cutting through hangover.

STORM

Looks like you already are.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Kelly, Jamie, and Shane huddle around a table of case files.

SHANE

That's the place. Two gates, cameras on both, and a security team that looks like they just left the Secret Service.

JAMIE

Can't we just get him drunk somewhere, swipe a glass?

SHANE

He doesn't drink in public anymore. Or smoke. Doesn't jog. Doesn't litter. I've been outside that house three nights and a morning. Nothing.

Kelly leans back, thinking.

KELLY

Trash grab?

SHANE

Locked bins. Inside the gate.
Private pickup. I bet they even
shred the mail.

Jamie whistles low.

JAMIE

He's paranoid.

SHANE

Wouldn't you be?

Silence settles in. Kelly flips through notes.

KELLY

Okay... what if you can't get to
him — maybe he comes to you.

Jamie looks up.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You're Jamie Lawson. Movie star,
activist. Maybe you reach out. Say
you're studying for a new role

Jamie smirks, shaking head.

JAMIE

The Black Cowboy?

Everyone laughs.

SHANE

He'd smell it a mile away. Jamie's
been all over this since the failed
parole.

Jamie stands, pacing. Kelly sighs, rubbing temples.

KELLY

**We need his DNA. Without it, Grant
stays in prison.**

No one speaks. The only sound is rain and distant police
siren.

SHANE

Look, I'll keep eyes on him a few
more days. Maybe he slips.

He checks his watch, stands, and grabs jacket.

KELLY

Stay for dinner. I'm making shrimp
and grits. Jamie's coming.

SHANE

Tempting. But I'm hopping on the
next flight. Too much traffic, too
many people in this town.

Kelly walks him to door.

KELLY

You ever stop moving?

SHANE

Like a shark.

They share a look — mutual respect, weariness. Shane exits.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie stands by the window, looking out at the rain.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Come by around seven. Bring wine.

JAMIE

Red or white?

KELLY

Surprise me.

She gives a tired smile. Jamie returns it faintly.

INT. KELLY AND TRICIA'S APARTMENT - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Warm light, city glows outside. Kelly moves through sleek,
book-filled apartment, setting table. Jamie stands at counter
uncorking wine.

TRICIA JONES (51), sharp eyes, loose curls, all charm and
restless energy, stirs something on the stove. A cigarette
dangles unlit from her fingers.

TRICIA

You know what nobody ever gets
right? Backstories. That's where
the truth lives. Every line a
person says — every choice — it's
all backstory.

JAMIE

That's why your scripts make actors
look smarter than they are.

TRICIA

(laughs)

Flattery and wine — a dangerous
combo, Lawson.

Kelly sets down plates. Easy comfort between them feels
earned — old laughter, old grief.

KELLY

Tricia builds characters like she's
God on deadline.

TRICIA

(snickers)

God didn't have notes from a
producer.

Jamie pours wine into three glasses, hands one to Tricia, one
to Kelly.

JAMIE

To backstories, then.

They clink glasses.

CONTINUED:

They drink. A quiet settles in — rain whispering against the
glass, city lights shimmering below.

TRICIA

I had this professor who said
characters don't change — they just
show who they've always been.

JAMIE

Guess that makes me a slow reveal.

They all laugh. Tricia plates the shrimp and grits, carries
it to table.

TRICIA

So what's this mystery project you
two are cooking up in my kitchen?
Whispering like spies.

KELLY
It's... complicated.

TRICIA
Aren't they all?

Jamie hesitates, then sets his wine glass down.

Tricia studies them, sees something serious beneath the banter.

A beat. The warmth at table lingers, but something shifts – heavier, realer.

Tricia sits, picking up fork.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Well, if you're planning to take
down a devil, at least eat first.
God hates martyrs on empty
stomachs.

Jamie grins, raising his glass again.

JAMIE
To full stomachs and unfinished
business.

They drink. Outside, thunder rolls far away – like an omen.

INT. KELLY AND TRICIA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dinner's mostly eaten. The wine's low. Rain has stopped, leaving the windows fogged and glistening. Jamie lounges on couch, half-listening as Tricia talks – her energy still in full swing.

TRICIA
When I build a character, I always
ask – what's their tell? Everyone's
got one. A nervous tic, a favorite
word, something they do without
thinking. That's how you find the
truth.

Kelly watches her, glass of wine in hand.

KELLY
Storm doesn't seem like the kind of
guy who has tells.

TRICIA

Please. Everyone's human somewhere.
You just have to dig into their
backstory – find the crack.
Wait, Storm? Storm who?

KELLY

Oops. Well, cats out of the bag,
might as well tell her.

JAMIE

Settle in Tricia, even you couldn't
write one this good...

LATER in evening, after much talking.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

You're saying... if we knew what he
used to be, we could figure out how
to reach him now.

TRICIA

Exactly. What he misses, what he
regrets, what he can't resist.
That's how you get them to open the
door.

Kelly and Jamie exchange a long look – wheels turning.

KELLY

(quietly))

Maybe we've been thinking too
current. His habits now – what if
the key's who he was before he
became Storm?

JAMIE

Backstory.

They both look at Tricia. She blinks, realizing she's just
dropped something big.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Before the fame, he was what –
twenty-two? Guitarist in some
small-town bar band in Oklahoma?

JAMIE

Maybe someone from back then could
get close.

Kelly looks up.

KELLY

Or someone pretending to make a documentary about those days. A nostalgia hook. Artists love nostalgia — it feels safe.

Jamie nods slowly, a spark in his eye.

JAMIE

An actor visiting another performer to talk about art and truth. That I can sell.

Tricia grins, proud.

They share a laugh, but Kelly's expression darkens — the stakes settling in.

KELLY

It has to look real. One slip, and he'll shut it all down.

Jamie raises his glass.

JAMIE

Then let's make it the performance of a lifetime.

Thunder rumbles again, distant but steady — a rhythm that feels like momentum.

CHAPTER 23 EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Jamie exits Kelly and Tricia's building, collar up against the drizzle. Rain-slick streets blur past Jamie's window.

INT. RIDESHARE - MOVING - NIGHT

Jamie stares out the window. Streetlights flash across his face in rhythmic intervals. The driver hums softly to the radio.

TRICIA (V.O.)

Every line a person says — every choice — it's all backstory.

Jamie's reflection in the glass hardens.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY (YEARS AGO)

Sixteen-year-old JAMIE — lean, electric with promise — flies down the cracked asphalt court, sinks a jumper. His friends cheer. Music thumps from boombox.

Across the street, DEON (17), tough and twitchy, watches from a corner. He waves Jamie over.

DEON

Yo, superstar. You forget the rest
of us down here?

YOUNG JAMIE

Just tryna make it out, man. You
know how it is.

DEON

Yeah. We all tryin'. Some of us
just gotta use... different plays.

Young Jamie cautiously eyes a bulge under Deon's hoodie. They bump fists. Jamie jogs back to court.

CUT TO:

Jamie shooting hoops alone later — the sun dipping low. Distant GUNSHOTS echo. He freezes, ball rolling away.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT 2000

Young Jamie sits under buzzing lights, hoodie up. He's been there a long time. Two DETECTIVES loom over him, all fake sympathy and quiet menace.

DETECTIVE #1

We know you were there, Jamie. We
know you saw Deon.

YOUNG JAMIE

I didn't see nothin'.

DETECTIVE #2

C'mon. Help yourself out. You wanna
play ball, right? College scouts?
You think they take shooters? Or
liars?

Jamie's leg bounces. Sweat beads.

DETECTIVE #1
You sign the statement, you walk.
We'll make sure nobody digs around
your name.

Jamie looks at the paper. His hand trembles. He signs. The pen scratches loud.

CUT TO:

INT. RIDESHARE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Jamie's eyes glisten in passing light. The car slows at red light. He exhales, haunted.

TRICIA (V.O.)
That's where the truth lives.

Jamie stares out at the wet city - older, famous, but still that tired sixteen-year-old kid.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Morning sunlight filters through half-closed blinds. Coffee cups, laptops, and scribbled notes cover the table. Kelly leans forward, focused. Jamie sits beside her, still tired from the night before. Across from them, Tricia paces, alive with energy - a woman in full creative mode.

TRICIA
Okay, so picture this - "How I Got Here." A redemption docuseries. Artists who hit rock bottom, found faith, therapy, whatever - and came back stronger. Think Springsteen meets rehab confessional.

JAMIE
And Storm's the first subject?

TRICIA
Storm is the series. Big name. Messy story. America loves a comeback. Especially if the sinner cries on camera.

Jamie exchanges a look with Kelly - part admiration, part discomfort.

KELLY

You can make it look legit?

TRICIA

I am legit. I'll call in a favor — maybe my old cinematographer from Try Me Six Times, get a crew that's small, quiet, real documentary feel. Storm won't smell the setup.

Kelly leans back, skeptical but impressed.

KELLY

No one can know it's not a real doc. Not your producers, not your agent, not the damn caterer. This isn't a screenplay — it's a setup.

TRICIA

Right. No one knows but us.

She smiles, a little too brightly.

JAMIE

And what's my part in this?

TRICIA

You stay away.

Jamie laughs dryly.

JAMIE

You really missed your calling in espionage, Trish.

KELLY

(lowers voice))

We just need something — a glass, a cup, a cigarette, hairbrush — anything that can get tested.

Tricia's grin fades slightly.

Long silence. Jamie studies his hands.

Tricia nods, resolute now.

TRICIA

Okay. I'll draft the proposal, mock up a treatment. We'll make it look like Netflix already bit.

Kelly exhales — half victory, half dread.

KELLY
Welcome to the con.

The three sit in silence for a beat — the weight of the plan settling between them. Outside, the Chicago skyline gleams.

INT. TRICIA AND KELLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Tricia sits at her laptop, typing furiously. Empty coffee mugs, open notebooks, and half-eaten toast surround her. The screen glows with a document titled:

"HOW I GOT HERE — A DOCUMENTARY SERIES CREATED BY TRICIA JONES"

INSERT: The first line reads, "A raw exploration of resilience, fame, and the ghosts that chase us home."

Kelly steps out of the bedroom, still in her robe, nursing coffee.

KELLY
Been up all night?

TRICIA
You don't fake a pitch to Hollywood half-assed.

KELLY
We're not selling it. We're just—

TRICIA
Making it believable. I know. But believability takes craft.

She hits send on an email.

KELLY
Who'd you send it to?

TRICIA
Three producers I trust — enough to make it look real, not enough to ask questions.

Kelly sits across from her, scanning the screen.

KELLY
You really wrote Storm's name in the deck?

TRICIA
We need bait. Nobody bites at a
hook labeled "TBD."

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - CHICAGO - LATER

Jamie lounges in a corner booth, laptop open, earbuds
dangling. His phone buzzes - a text from Tricia:

"Pitch is out."

He exhales, leans back.

INT. TRICIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Tricia grabs call mid-ring.

TRICIA (INTO PHONE)
Tell me you love it.

INTERCUT WITH: INT. LOS ANGELES OFFICE - DAY

A slick PRODUCER (40s) speaks over speakerphone, framed by
movie posters.

PRODUCER
Love the title—*How I Got Here*.
Soulful. Unscripted?

TRICIA
Raw interviews. Redemption arcs.

PRODUCER
And you think you can get Storm
Hudson?

TRICIA
We're in early talks. He's looking
for a way back. We can give him
one.

PRODUCER
You get him - we'll talk
distribution.

Call ends. Tricia exhales. Kelly in doorway.

KELLY
They bought it.

TRICIA
They believed it.

KELLY
Now Storm has to.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - EVENING

Photos flash across the monitor: microphones, rehab beds, empty highways.

JAMIE
It's good. Too good.

KELLY
That's the idea.

JAMIE
If Storm signs on, he's basically walking into an ambush. And if he doesn't bite?

KELLY
Then we find another way. But right now, this is the only door left.

Jamie leans back, silent.

JAMIE
Time to knock.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

Storm Hudson sits at a long wooden table, scrolling through emails on a tablet. His hands tremble slightly. A mug of coffee sits nearby - black, untouched.

On the counter behind him: bottle of whiskey, half-hidden behind bag of coffee beans.

INT. STORM'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A perfect house that feels staged. Storm paces as he listens on speakerphone - his PUBLICIST, MARLA (40s, sharp, Hollywood-tough) rattles off details.

MARLA (O.S.)
You need this, Storm. People still like you, but they don't trust you. This series - , it's legacy stuff. "How I Got Here." Brilliant title. Raw. Honest.

Storm rubs his temple, weary.

STORM

Raw and honest. Huh.

MARLA (O.S.)

It's Tricia Jones. She's respected.
It's classy — awards-bait stuff.
Not a tabloid sob story. She wrote
that movie with Jamie Lawson.

STORM

The guy who tried to help out on
the Edna case?

MARLA

Yup, that's the one.

Storm exhales — conflicted.

STORM

You think they'll buy me as a
redemption arc?

MARLA (O.S.)

They already bought you as the
villain. Time to flip the script.

Storm chuckles bitterly.

STORM

And what's the first question
they'll ask? "How much did you
drink?" or "How many women sued you
before rehab?"

MARLA (O.S.)

No one wants the monster anymore,
Storm. They want the man who beat
him. You do this, you get back in
rooms that matter again.

Storm walks to counter, stares at the hidden bottle of
whiskey. Long pause.

STORM

What if I'm not that guy yet?

MARLA (O.S.)

Then fake it till you are.(beat)
Look, I'll set the call with
Tricia's team for Thursday. Don't
overthink it. Just smile. Be
humble. Say you're working on
yourself.

STORM

Sure. Working on myself.

He ends the call. Silence.

Storm opens cabinet — pulls out whiskey bottle. Turns it in his hand, studying it.

He pours a finger, trembles, drinks.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is dim, fire in the stone hearth burning low. Storm sits alone at kitchen counter, half-drunk coffee cooling beside notebook filled with scratched-out lyrics.

Phone on counter buzzes. "UNKNOWN CALLER." He hesitates, then answers.

STORM

Yeah?

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Hudson? Sorry to call late.
Name's Warden Reese, Statesville
Correctional. You know a Raymond
McAlister?

Storm's eyes flicker — a ghost passes behind them.

STORM

I know him.

WARDEN REESE (O.S.)

He passed this morning. Overdose,
had cancer though. Wasn't much
anyone could do. I found your name
listed on his approved contact
sheet. You were the only one.

Storm leans back, hand tightening around phone.

WARDEN REESE (CONT'D)

Left a note too. Uh, just Says,
Storm, you best take that whiskey
cup and fill it up. Cause this
ain't over.

Long pause

WARDEN REESE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Alright then. Sorry for your loss.

Line clicks dead.

He listens, hand white-knuckled. A laugh escapes—half sob.
He pours another.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Hours later. Whiskey bottle's half gone. He stares into the dark window—his own reflection stares back.

Fire's out. Only light comes from a muted TV — an old concert of himself, ten years younger, singing to a packed arena.

YOUNG STORM (ON TV)
(singing))
"...AND THE TRUTH DON'T HIDE WHERE
THE WHISKEY BURNS..."

Storm stares at screen, transfixed. Then he hurls the remote — it hits the fireplace, cracking open.

Storm looks out into the darkness — nothing but rain-slick trees and his own reflection. Still, he kills the light and grabs a pistol from a drawer.

He edges toward window, heart pounding. Motion light clicks off. Just silence now — and his breathing.

He backs away slowly, pistol trembling in his hand.

Pours another drink, hands shaking so badly half of it spills. He doesn't wipe it up.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

A knock rattles the door.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Storm? It's me — Taylor.

No answer.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

The front door creaks open. TAYLOR (30s, earnest, way overworked) and Marla (40s, Storm's publicist — polished, practiced) step inside. Both stop short.

MARLA
Jesus.

Empty glasses line the counter. A record spins, needle looping on static. The faint smell of burnt something.

TAYLOR

He was supposed to be at the studio
at nine.

Marla sighs, heels clicking as she moves deeper into the house.

MARLA

This is what "sober" looks like?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Storm slumps on couch in yesterday's clothes. TV flickers soundlessly — footage of his younger self at award show.

MARLA

Well, the king still lives.

Storm looks up, blinking. Tries to smile, doesn't make it.

STORM

Didn't hear you come in.

MARLA

That's because you were dead to the
world.

Taylor quietly gathers bottles off the table.

STORM

You two ever think about knocking?

MARLA

We did. Three times.

A tense silence. Marla softens, takes a seat across from him.

MARLA (CONT'D)

You okay? You missed a good PR window. That "How I Got Here" thing — they're waiting on your answer.

STORM

(snarling)

I said I'd think about it.

MARLA

People love a comeback. Play nice,
smile, maybe you get yours.

Storm rubs his temples, squinting through the light. Taylor brings him coffee. He waves it away.

STORM
Don't need saving. Not from you,
not from some documentary.

Marla stands, walks toward window, surveying the massive property.

STORM (CONT'D)
And if I don't?

MARLA
Then the only thing anyone
remembers about you is the mug
shots.

Silence.

Marla checks her watch.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Clean yourself up. I'll call them
back in two hours. (to Taylor) Make
sure he eats something.

She leaves, Taylor left behind. The door slams behind them.

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Kelly, Tricia, and Jamie sit around a battered table. Shane stands near the door, hood up, scanning the room like a man always ready to leave.

On the whiteboard: "HOW I GOT HERE - EPISODE 1: STORM HUDSON" scrawled in thick marker. Under it, a messy bullet list: "Pitch. Trailer. Interview. Evidence?"

TRICIA
(whispering, excited)
We need to give him back the thing
he misses - a sense of home.

JAMIE
If he's thinking "comeback," he'll
play along. This gives him a
controlled space.

SHANE
(arms folded)
He's guarded. He's got people
around him.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)

We can't just stroll a crew into his life and expect him to hand us a souvenir.

Jamie taps the whiteboard, thinking out loud.

JAMIE

What if we make the green room too good to pass up? Or a trailer, food he likes. Old records. A TV with his old concerts queued. Make him feel like he's back in the driver's seat.

Tricia lights up — she sees the scene.

TRICIA

Nice. Nostalgia bait.

Shane steps closer, practical, blunt.

SHANE

I've watched him long enough to know what he won't refuse. He drinks in private. He freshens up before an appearance.

Kelly studies him — she knows the direction this is going.

Tricia crosses to a small props box, pulls out a cheap toothbrush and tosses it on the table with a theatrical flourish. Everyone goes still for a beat — the object simple, absurd, and suddenly loaded.

Shane rubs his jaw, skeptical.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Leave a little whiskey in the trailer. We leave a toothbrush and mouthwash in bathroom. He'll use it to freshen up.

KELLY

But he's sober. Right?

Jamie looks at the toothbrush again, then at Shane.

JAMIE

I can live with the moral cost, if the payout is freedom for a Grant.

Shane's eyes narrow. He exhales. Tricia nods, suddenly solemn.

TRICIA

The trailer will be beautiful, the
ultimate green room.

Kelly writes the plan on the whiteboard.

They all look at each other – the quartet bound by purpose
and compromise.

Tricia smiles – half adrenaline, half fear.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

I'll call my crew. Small, discreet.
We make it feel like his private
sanctuary.

Kelly nods once.

They file out toward the chaos of the set – determined,
uneasy.

EXT. COUNTRY FARM - MORNING

Wide open fields under hazy sunrise. Dew clings to grass. A
van kicks up gravel as it winds down dirt road toward small
farm surrounded by trees and split-rail fencing.

Storm steps out – sunglasses, denim jacket, and the faint
posture of someone trying to look steady. He squints into the
morning light, exhales slowly.

A production assistant, LUCY (mid-20s, calm but nervous),
rushes up with a clipboard and headset.

LUCY

Morning, Mr. Hudson. We've got your
trailer set up just over here.

Storm nods, follows her past trucks and scattered crew.
Chickens cluck nearby, pecking at feed.

EXT. TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

A gleaming luxury trailer sits by the barn, gleaming silver
in the sun. Lucy opens the door.

LUCY

Everything you might need's inside.
We'll be ready for you in about
fifteen.

Storm peers inside – spotless, stocked fridge, a soft couch, ambient lighting. On a small table: a bottle of top-shelf whiskey and two crystal tumblers.

He lingers on it a beat too long.

STORM

Nice setup.

LUCY

We try to make everyone comfortable!

Storm smirks faintly – comfortable might be dangerous.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Storm, now mic'd up, strolls through the rustic set – a weathered barn with hay bales and cameras on sliders. The crew keeps their distance.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

So, Storm... what's it like starting over?

STORM

(chuckles softly)

Starting over's easy. It's stopping that's hard.

They keep walking. Chickens scatter in the background. A breeze rattles the tin roof.

EXT. FARM - LUNCHTIME

The crew breaks. Folding tables, paper plates, laughter. Storm sits off to the side, sunglasses back on. Lucy approaches with a tray.

LUCY

We've got lunch, sir. Chicken, salad, or vegetarian.

STORM

Thanks, but I'll pass.

He nods politely, then heads back toward his trailer.

INT. STORM'S TRAILER - DAY

Storm steps inside, closes the door behind him. Silence.

He glances at the whiskey again. The light hits the glass, amber and alive. He sits on the couch, exhales hard.

He pours a small splash — stares at it. His hand trembles. Then, with sudden resolve, he puts the cap back on.

Storm stretches out on the couch. Within seconds, exhaustion wins. He drifts into a restless nap.

EXT. FARM — LATER

Storm's back under the lights, mid-interview. The tone has shifted — deeper now. The questions probe closer.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

You've been open about your
sobriety. How do you keep balance,
especially in a world that—

STORM

(interrupting, faint edge)
Balance is for people who have
something to lose.

A long pause. A chicken cackles somewhere off-camera. Crew members exchange glances.

INT. STORM'S TRAILER — AFTERNOON

Storm enters again. Slower this time. He shuts the door, leans against it — breath heavy, heartbeat audible.

His eyes the whiskey bottle.

STORM

(to himself)
Just one. For the nerves.

He uncaps it, pours a glass, downs half in one go. The relief hits immediately — shoulders drop. Two more shots follow.

Storm wanders toward the small bathroom. Looks at himself in the mirror — eyes bloodshot, face older than he remembers.

Breath check. The toothbrush waits. He brushes, rinses, straightens.

STORM (CONT'D)

Showtime.

EXT. FARM - SUNSET

The crew resets cameras as the sky turns gold. Storm steps back out of the trailer, composure restored. To everyone else, he looks calm, ready.

Only Jamie, watching from a distance, catches the faint wobble in Storm's step.

INT. RENTED SUV - COUNTRY ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Golden light floods the windshield. Within sight distance from the farm, Jamie and Shane sit in a parked SUV, half-hidden behind a line of trees. The faint hum of insects fills the air. Shane has binoculars. Jamie scrolls his phone, nervous.

JAMIE

(quiet)

You sure this isn't... I don't know, entrapment or something?

SHANE

Entrapment's when you make a guy commit a crime. We're just... borrowing his spit.

Shane keeps scanning through binoculars. From their vantage point, the trailer gleams in the sun across the pasture.

A beat of silence.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Window's open. He's been in there awhile.

JAMIE

Think he took the bait?

SHANE

(smiles, dry)

He's got twelve-step slogans tattooed on his soul. But, put a bottle of whiskey in front of him long enough, he'll crack.

A pause. Jamie rubs his face - the weight pressing in.

JAMIE

You really think that DNA will tie him to Donna Workman?

SHANE

If Bones was telling the truth,
yeah. (pause) And if he wasn't,
we're all wasting our damn lives.

Jamie exhales, looks out the window at the farm — the crew wrapping up, Storm stepping out of the trailer, sunglasses on, a little too unsteady for someone sober.

JAMIE

He looks... different.

SHANE

Guilt'll do that. (grabs his phone)
Text from Kelly — she says the
lab's standing by. Soon as we have
it, overnight to Tulsa.

Jamie nods, still watching Storm in the distance — the country star smiling for the cameras, the very picture of redemption.

JAMIE

Man's about to be on every magazine
cover talking about second chances.
(beat) And we're about to bury him
with the truth.

Shane lowers the binoculars.

SHANE

Truth doesn't bury people. It just
shows where the bodies are.

They sit in silence, the sound of crickets rising as the sun sinks. Off in distance, the crew laughs — the day's shoot wrapping. Jamie closes his eyes.

INT. FORENSIC LAB - NIGHT

A low hum of refrigeration units. Fluorescent light washes everything in a pale, sleepless glow.

Rows of equipment line the counters — centrifuges, microscopes, sealed evidence bags. Kelly stands near the glass door, arms folded tight, watching a LAB TECH in scrubs move carefully between machines.

The LAB TECH, a focused woman in her forties, turns toward them, holding a sealed plastic bag containing the toothbrush.

LAB TECH

So this is the one?

KELLY

That's it. From the trailer, chain of custody intact. Shane grabbed it as soon as Storm left the set. Airtight.

The tech nods, labels the bag, cuts it open with practiced precision. Drops the toothbrush head into a small vial.

SHANE

How long you think?

LAB TECH

Depends. We've already got the Workman sample pulled up — the fingernail DNA. I can fast-track a comparison. (pauses) You folks must have friends in high places.

Kelly gives a tired smile.

The tech slides the vial into a machine — a soft whirl begins, lights flicker.

SHANE

If it matches, Storm Hudson's got more to worry about than a comeback tour.

Kelly doesn't look away from the machine.

KELLY

And Grant Harjo goes home.

A heavy silence. The hum of the analyzer grows louder.

LAB TECH

(machine beeping)

Preliminary's running. Shouldn't be long.

She steps away to the computer. The others hold their breath.

Close on: the monitor — digital bars and numbers scrolling. A MATCH column flickers.

LAB TECH (CONT'D)

There it is. Same donor profile. It's a match.

Kelly's hand flies to her mouth. She exhales shakily.

Shane just nods once, like a man who's seen this kind of truth before.

SHANE
(to himself)
Guess Bones wasn't lying.

KELLY
We'll need to confirm it
officially, double test it. But if
this holds... (beat) This changes
everything.

She looks out through the lab window — the city lights
blinking in the distance, cold and far away.

INT. STORM HUDSON'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Muted TV light flickers across room — an old performance of
The Secret Singer. Storm, unshaven, in sweatpants and a
designer robe, stares at his younger self belting out a song
with perfect control. The man on screen glows. The man on the
couch does not.

His PHONE BUZZES on the coffee table.

He hesitates, then answers.

STORM
Yeah?

MARLA (O.S.)
Hey, Storm. Just got off with the
producers from How I Got Here.
They're pushing the next shoot.
Couple of months at least.

Storm frowns, rubbing his temples.

STORM
Couple of months? We barely
started.

MARLA (O.S.)
Something about scheduling,
location issues — typical doc
stuff. Don't sweat it, we'll spin
it like they're "building
anticipation." Good for you,
actually.

Storm's eyes flick to the half-empty bottle of bourbon on the
table.

STORM

Right.

MARLA (O.S.)

You okay? You sound tired.

STORM

Yeah, I'm fine. Just... thought they liked what they saw.

MARLA (O.S.)

They did. You came off great, trust me. Just take it easy for a bit. Let people miss you.

Call ends.

Storm turns back to the TV — his old self mid-song, crowd screaming. He can't watch. Turns it off.

He pours himself another drink. Hesitates. Then — downs it.

He stares at his reflection in the dark TV screen — just a shadow of the man.

STORM

(quietly, to himself)

"Building anticipation," huh? Yeah. Sure.

He sets the glass down hard, cracks open another bottle.

The camera lingers on him sitting there — surrounded by trophies, gold records, and silence.

He pours again. And again.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - MORNING

A knock at the front door. Persistent. Sharp.

Inside, the house is a wreck — clothes draped over chairs, empty bottles on the counter, half-eaten food on the table.

Storm stirs awake on the couch, still dressed, face buried in a blanket. A faint TV infomercial drones in the background.

KNOCK KNOCK.

MARLA
Storm? You home?

Storm groans, rubs his face.

STORM
Yeah, yeah... hold on.

He stumbles to door, opens it. Marla, polished, clipboard in hand steps inside

Marla stops — taking in the smell of whiskey and stale air.

MARLA
Jesus, Storm. You living in here or surviving it?

Storm forces a grin.

STORM
Guess both.

Marla opens a window. The cold air rushes in.

MARLA
We've been calling for days. You didn't answer.

STORM
Phone died. Then I did.
Temporarily.

Marla moves toward the coffee table, eyes the empty bottles.

MARLA
You told me you were clean.

STORM
I was. Rehab worked fine — til life started up again.

Marla sighs, drops her clipboard on the table.

MARLA
You can't keep doing this. The doc delay isn't the end of the world. It's a blessing. Gives you time to clean up before cameras roll again.

Storm scoffs, moves toward the bar, starts pouring a drink.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Don't. Not in front of me.

He freezes for half a second. Then pours anyway.

STORM

Think anyone gives a shit? The world moved on. Show's dead. The label won't call me back. And that little rehab story? Didn't even trend a full day.

He downs the drink, steady hands, practiced.

MARLA

Should I... maybe call Dr. Feldman again?

Storm sends daggers her way.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Storm. You've still got fans. People who want to see you win. But if you keep hiding out here—

STORM (SNARLS)

I'm not hiding. I'm resting.

MARLA

You call this resting?

Storm slams the empty glass down. The sound echoes.

STORM (SOFTER)

You ever lose something you can't even name? You just wake up one day, and... whatever it was that made you you—it's gone.

Marla looks at him, pity edging into frustration.

MARLA

Then find it again. Before it kills you.

She gathers her things.

MARLA (CONT'D)

We'll check in next week. Get some air, Storm. Shower. Eat something that didn't come in a bottle.

Marla leaves.

Storm stands in doorway, watching car pull away down long drive. Looks at drink in hand — hesitates — then throws it against the wall.

The glass shatters. He breathes hard, alone again.

INT. NONPROFIT OFFICE - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Rain again. The same rhythm from earlier chapters - familiar, heavy, cleansing. A desk lamp burns low, casting long shadows over files, printouts, and half-empty coffee cups.

Kelly sits hunched over computer, scrolling through a forensic report. Shane stands near window, phone pressed to his ear, voice low.

SHANE (INTO PHONE)

Yeah. Chain of custody is clean.
Airtight.

He hangs up. Kelly looks up from report.

KELLY

That the lab again?

SHANE

They double-checked. The DNA under
Donna Workman's fingernails matches
Storm Hudson. (beat) There's no
question anymore.

Kelly exhales slowly. The weight of it fills the room.

KELLY

Thirty-four years. One man rotting
in prison, another living like a
king.

SHANE

Until now.

He tosses a thin manila folder onto the desk - Grant Harjo - Case File.

Kelly flips it open - photos of the original crime scene, Donna's yearbook photo, Grant's mugshot.

KELLY

If we bring this to Hobson, it's
gotta be air tight, or they'll bury
us.

SHANE

We've been buried before.
Difference is — this time, we've
got a shovel.

Kelly looks at him. Half smile, half fear.

KELLY

And Grant? You really think this
will get him out?

SHANE

It'll do more than that. It'll
rewrite the whole damn story.

Shane walks over, drops into the chair across from her. They
sit in silence a moment.

He leans back, exhales — then studies her.

SHANE (CONT'D)

You know what happens if this hits
the press. You'll be the one who
took down America's favorite
country star.

KELLY

Good. Maybe they'll finally listen.

Lightning flashes through the window — white light across
both of their faces.

Kelly closes the file. The choice is made.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Call Hobson. Tomorrow morning. If
he won't listen quietly — we go
loud.

Shane nods once.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Framed photos of Cal with sheriffs, politicians, and smiling
juries line the walls. A gold plaque on his desk gleams under
fluorescent light: CALVIN HOBSON - DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Kelly and Shane sit across from him, a manila folder between
them. Cal opens it, flipping slowly through the lab report,
photos, and signed affidavit from the forensic lab.

He stops at the DNA match report — Storm Hudson — Confirmed
Sample Match to Victim Fingernail Scrapings: Donna Workman.

CAL
(skeptical)
You're telling me the DNA matches
Storm fucking Hudson? Seriously?
And let me guess, Garth Brooks is
his accomplice?

KELLY
The sample from Donna's
fingernails, found in Crosby's
shed. The lab confirmed the
results...

CAL
And how'd you come by Mr. Hudson's
DNA? (beat) I assume you didn't
just ask him nicely for it.

Shane leans forward, calm but steady.

SHANE
We obtained it through an indirect
collection method. It's clean. Lab
stands by the results.

Cal chuckles under his breath.

CAL
Clean. That's what everyone says
right before the story blows up in
their face. You understand who this
man is? He's not some drifter from
Muskogee. He's Storm Hudson.
Nashville royalty. Half this state
sings his songs.

KELLY
Til they hear he killed a woman.

Cal studies her. There's a flicker of something — not
disbelief, but calculation.

CAL
You've got conviction, Ms. Jones.
I'll give you that. But do you have
admissibility?

He taps the file.

CAL (CONT'D)
I can't use illegally obtained DNA.

KELLY

Grant Harjo has spent his life in prison for something Storm did. You can run your own tests. Pull Storm's DNA yourself.

CAL (SLOWLY)

And if I do — and it comes back the same — this doesn't end in a courtroom. It ends on the evening news. Country star. Murder cover-up. DA's office complicit. Every case I've ever touched gets dragged through the mud.

Kelly doesn't blink.

KELLY

Then maybe that's the price.

Silence. The ticking of a clock fills the room. Cal leans back in his chair, steepling his fingers.

CAL

Let me be clear — I'm not reopening a thirty-four-year-old homicide on the word of two crusaders with a lab report. But... (pauses) If I were to request a quiet confirmation, just for my own peace of mind, no one would have to know. Yet.

Shane and Kelly exchange a look — cautious optimism.

SHANE

We'll take that. Quiet works fine for us.

Cal stands, closing the folder. He looks out the window — the small city below.

CAL

You've just stirred up some ghosts. Either way, Nashville, and Edna, will never forgive you.

He turns back, eyes narrowing.

CAL (CONT'D)

I'll be in touch.

Kelly and Shane rise.

KELLY
We'll hold you to that.

They exit. Cal watches them go, then looks down at the file again — his thumb tapping the photo of Storm Hudson, smiling under stage lights.

CAL
(quietly)
Damn.

INT. STORM HUDSON'S COUNTRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Quiet house, TV glows faintly in the background, looping an old music video of Storm in his prime. Storm slouches on the couch in a rumpled T-shirt and jeans, a bottle of whiskey between his knees.

The once-grand living room is dim, cluttered — empty glasses, scattered mail, an unopened guitar case in the corner.

He lifts the bottle, takes a long pull, then stares at the TV — at the smiling younger version of himself performing to a roaring crowd.

STORM
(to the screen, slurring)
You... had it all figured out,
didn't you?

He laughs bitterly, grabs his phone from the coffee table. Scrolls through contacts. Stops on "Court." Hesitates. Then presses call.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

INT. COURTNEY'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Courtney, in pajamas, hair tied up, sits at her kitchen counter, the phone buzzes — she frowns when she sees the name.

COURTNEY
Storm?

STORM
Hey, Court. Long time.

COURTNEY
It's late. Are you okay?

STORM
Define "okay."

He laughs, hollow . Takes another drink.

COURTNEY
You sound... (beat) Are you
drinking again?

STORM
That depends. Is it drinking if
it's the only thing keeping you
alive?

Courtney sighs, pinches the bridge of her nose.

COURTNEY
You shouldn't call me when you're
like this.

STORM
No, no. You're the only one I can
call when I'm like this. Always
were.

Silence. Only the faint hum of the refrigerator on her end
and the creak of Storm's rocking chair on his.

COURTNEY
What's going on, Storm?

STORM
You ever do something so bad... you
spend the rest of your life trying
to sing loud enough to drown it
out?

Courtney stiffens.

COURTNEY
Storm... what are you talking about?

He looks toward the darkened window — his reflection warped
in the glass.

STORM
Doesn't matter. (chokes up) Just...
if you see my name in the papers
again, don't believe the first
thing you read, okay?

COURTNEY

Storm—

He hangs up.

Courtney stares at her phone, unsettled.

INT. STORM'S COUNTRY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Storm drops the phone onto the couch.

He finishes the bottle, sets it down with care. Then picks up his old guitar. Strums a few chords — shaky, uneven.

A half-forgotten melody fills the room. His voice cracks.

He stops playing. Stares at his trembling hands.

STORM

(quietly))

You can't drink it away forever.

(sings it)

YOU CAN'T DRINK IT AWAY FOREVER...

The phone buzzes on the couch, it's Courtney.

Storm lets it ring. Grabs his keys.

EXT. RURAL OKLAHOMA HIGHWAY - DAWN

Fog rolls low over the desolate stretch of road.

The twisted wreck of Storm's Jeep lies half-buried in a ditch, steam rising from the crumpled hood. Broken glass glints.

A SHERIFF'S CRUISER idles nearby, lights flashing slow. Paramedics work quickly.

PARAMEDIC (O.S.)

Pulse is weak but steady!

They lift Storm — unconscious, blood on his temple, mud streaked across his face — onto a stretcher.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A soft beep... beep... fills the quiet. Pale morning light filters through the blinds.

Storm lies in a hospital bed, IV in his arm, a bandage over his forehead. His hand twitches as he stirs.

His eyes blink open - disoriented.

He scans the room: sterile walls, a plastic water cup, a vase of cheap flowers from "The Secret Singer" production team.

STORM
(hoarse)
Where...

A NURSE appears at the door, clipboard in hand.

NURSE
Morning, Mr. Hudson. Car rolled
twice. You're lucky.

Storm groans, touching his head.

STORM
What happened to the Jeep?

NURSE
Totaled. Blood alcohol of point
one-eight. You're being treated for
a concussion and dehydration.
Broken ankle to boot.

She checks his IV. Storm looks down at the tube in his arm, then away - shame creeping in.

NURSE (CONT'D)
We contacted your publicist, Marla?
She's on her way.

Storm nods faintly, lost in thought.

He turns toward the window - looks out at the empty Oklahoma sky.

STORM
(softly)
Should've stayed down there.

He closes his eyes, breathing shallow. The heart monitor keeps its slow, steady rhythm - the only sign he's still hanging on.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Fluorescent light hums over stacks of case files and coffee-stained legal pads. Cal, eyes weary, stands at his office window overlooking downtown Edna

His phone buzzes. He answers, distracted.

CAL

Cal

DEPUTY (V.O.)

Morning, sir. You might want to hear this - Storm Hudson. The singer. He crashed his Jeep out near County 17. Lucky to be alive. Looks like he was drinking.

Cal straightens.

CAL

Jesus. He's still at County?

DEPUTY (O.S.)

Yes, sir. Stable. They've got him under observation.

Cal pinches the bridge of his nose, thinking.

CAL

Alright. Thanks, Carl. Keep this quiet for now.

He hangs up, grabs his desk phone, and dials another number.

CAL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Mike.

MIKE (O.S.)

Morning, boss.

CAL

Storm Hudson just wrapped himself around a telephone pole. He's in the hospital - likely drunk. You know what that means.

MIKE (O.S.)

Blood draw.

CAL

Exactly. The hospital'll run it for alcohol, but we'll get a sample under evidentiary chain. Quietly. I want a copy sent to the state lab.

MIKE (O.S.)

For comparison to the Workman case?

CAL

You got it. This could finally break that wide open.

A pause.

MIKE (O.S.)

You want me to tell the hospital to hold the sample?

CAL

No. You get over there yourself. Sit on it. I don't want some intern leaking to TMZ before I've seen the report.

Cal looks out the window again – the morning sun rising over the courthouse.

CAL (CONT'D)

If we're right about him... the storm's just starting.

He hangs up. The phone sits heavy in his hand.

INT. KELLY'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Rain clouds hang low over the city again. Kelly sits at her desk, scrolling through her phone. Across from her, Shane nurses a cup of coffee, eyes on a cluttered whiteboard filled with photos – Storm Hudson, Grant Harjo, maps, timelines.

Kelly's phone buzzes. She reads a text. Her face goes pale.

SHANE

What?

KELLY

(quietly)

Storm Hudson crashed his Jeep last night. Drunk. He's in the hospital.

Shane leans back, processing.

SHANE

Shit.

KELLY

Yeah.

Shane sets his mug down.

SHANE

They'll draw blood. Standard for a
DUI accident.

A beat. Kelly looks up. Their eyes meet.

KELLY

Which means...

SHANE

They'll have his DNA.

Silence. Just the hum of the city below. Shane stands,
pacing.

SHANE (CONT'D)

If the DA's office runs that
sample, they'll match it to what we
already have.

Kelly exhales, trying to stay composed. Kelly turns toward
the window, watching raindrops streak the glass.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal, measured and weary, stands at his window staring out -
coffee growing cold on his desk.

His DEPUTY knocks, then steps in, holding a file.

DEPUTY

The lab report came in.

Cal doesn't turn right away. He already knows what it says.

CAL

(reading the air)
Storm Hudson.

The deputy nods and sets the file on the desk.

DEPUTY

It's a match. DNA from his hospital blood draw matches the sample from under Donna Workman's fingernails.

Cal lets out a long breath, rubs his temples.

CAL

Jesus.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

A closed-door meeting. Kelly, Shane, and Cal sit around a small table, the file open between them.

Kelly studies Cal, cautious but firm.

KELLY

So that's it. Grant Harjo didn't kill her.

CAL

No. He didn't.

SHANE

Then he walks.

Cal closes the file gently.

CAL

We'll file the motion to vacate by the end of the day. You'll get your hearing within forty-eight hours.

Kelly exhales - a small, quiet victory.

KELLY

Thank you, Cal.

Cal doesn't look at her. His jaw works tight.

CAL

I've still got a dead girl and a murderer who's been free for three decades. We have a lot of problems here. celebrity, decades after the fact, with a dead accomplice and half the evidence gone missing.

Kelly crosses her arms.

KELLY

Justice doesn't expire, Cal.

Cal looks up at her – frustrated, but not defensive.

CAL
Maybe not. But juries do. Memories
do. And the world loves a
redemption story more than a murder
trial.

He closes the folder with finality.

CAL (CONT'D)
Grant walks free. But Storm Hudson...
that's another question.

They sit in heavy silence.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A steady beep... beep... beep of a heart monitor. White
ceiling. Harsh fluorescent light.

Storm blinks awake – his face bruised, IV in his arm, oxygen
tube under his nose. His vision swims.

Turns his head. Through the half-open door, a POLICE OFFICER
murmurs something to a NURSE at the desk. The nurse glances
in, then looks away quickly.

Storm's breathing quickens. He knows.

STORM
(hoarse whisper)
...shit.

His eyes roll back for a moment – pain and panic mixing.

He forces himself upright, grimacing, every movement slow. He
sees his jeans and boots folded neatly on a chair. His phone
sits on the tray table beside a half-empty cup of water.

A shadow fills the doorway.

Jack Mack – slick suit, tie loose– steps inside.

JACK
Well... you look like hell, Storm.

Storm tries to focus, blinking through the haze.

STORM
You talked to 'em?

JACK (NODS)
Yeah. Cops are out there waiting
for the blood results. Don't have
to tell you what that means.

Storm lets out a dry, bitter laugh — instantly regrets it
from the pain.

STORM
They finally got me, huh?

Jack closes the door gently, walks to foot of bed.

JACK
Not yet. But it's coming. DNA
doesn't lie, and the DA's already
circling.

Storm stares up at ceiling. Tears well, but don't fall.

STORM
You remember what you told me at
your office. Don't pray, just
drink.

Jack doesn't answer.

STORM (CONT'D)
Didn't help much. And I even tried
praying.

Jack pulls up a chair, sits beside bed.

JACK
They're gonna want a statement. My
advice — you don't say a damn word.
Not one.

Storm nods weakly, still dazed.

STORM
What happens now?

JACK
Depends. They could hold off 'til
they've got lab confirmation. Or
they could arrest you right here,
while you're still pissing
morphine. The DUI is a given. The
murder...

Storm closes his eyes, takes a long, shuddering breath.

STORM

I'm so tired of running from that night.

Jack studies him — something almost like pity flickering across his face.

JACK

Then stop.

Outside, the police officer's radio crackles.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal stands at the window, coffee in hand. Across from him sits Jack, gray suit, cowboy boots.

Neither man speaks for a beat. Old friends. Different sides of the same line.

CAL

You picked one hell of a time to come calling, Jack. My phone hasn't stopped since that blood test hit the lab. Reporters sniffing around.

JACK

That's why I came. Before you start talking to cameras, talk to me.

Cal turns, sets his cup down, gestures for him to continue.

CAL

Alright. Let's hear it.

Jack leans forward, rests his forearms on the desk.

JACK

Storm didn't kill Donna. Ray McAlister did. You've got the files. You know the man's history. Hell, your office prosecuted him, twice, for manslaughter.

CAL

And yet, the DNA matches your boy. Explain that to me.

JACK

She scratched him. When he tried helping her. He was a kid, Cal.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
Scared out of his goddamn mind. He helped move the body because McAlister put a gun to his head.

CAL
And kept running from this for thirty-four years. Never really found his conscience, eh?

Jack sighs, nodding – conceding the point.

JACK
I'm not saying he's innocent. I'm saying he's not a murderer.

Cal circles the desk, standing over Jack now.

CAL
You know what this looks like to the public? The rich, washed-up country star gets a pass, while a poor Native kid rotted in a cell for half his life.

JACK
Grant Harjo's conviction is already vacated. Justice caught up – just took the long road.

CAL
And what about justice? You tellin' me I'm supposed to let Storm Hudson walk into the sunset?

Jack leans back, calm but firm.

JACK
Statute's run on anything you could charge him with. Accessory, obstruction, tampering – all dead by the clock. Unless you can prove murder, and you can't.

Cal paces. The frustration builds under his calm exterior.

CAL
So what, he goes back to Nashville, cuts another record, does the redemption tour? "From sinner to saint – Storm Hudson live"?

JACK

Maybe. Or maybe he drinks himself into the grave before the tour even starts. But you and I both know — you don't get to prosecute regret.

Cal stops pacing. His anger fades into something else — weariness.

CAL

You always were too damn good at your job, Jack.

Jack gives a thin smile.

They sit in silence for a long moment. The clock ticks.

CAL (CONT'D)

You tell him this isn't over.

JACK

It never is.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

The massive steel gates CLANK open.

Grant steps out carrying a small box — his life in a cardboard box.

Waiting for him: Kelly, Shane, and Jamie.

Kelly holding her breath. Shane gives a small nod. Jamie's hands jammed in his pockets, emotion simmering behind restraint.

Grant stops in front of them.

KELLY

You're free, Grant.

Grant studies their faces.

GRANT

I guess so.

Kelly smiles faintly, blinking back tears.

They start walking toward the parking lot.

A few cars idle nearby – but no press, no noise. Just quiet footsteps and the sound of gravel crunching.

Then – the sudden ROAR of ENGINES.

A caravan of TV trucks bursts through the gates like a second storm. REPORTERS spill out, microphones raised, cameras rolling.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Grant, how does it feel to be a
free man? Do you have anything to
say to Donna Workman's family?

Kelly and Shane exchange a tense look – this wasn't supposed to happen.

Grant, though, doesn't flinch. He stands still, eyes clear, calm. Then he steps forward.

GRANT

I pray for them.

The reporters go silent.

He looks to Kelly, Jamie, and Shane.

GRANT (CONT'D)

These people believed in me when
nobody else did. They gave me back
my name.

He takes a slow breath.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I don't know what comes next. I
just want to paint. In there, all I
had was pencil and paper. Out
here... (small smile)

Cameras CLICK.

Kelly wipes her eyes. Jamie stares at the horizon.

Grant turns to them.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Let's go home.

They walk toward the car – past the cameras, past the noise – into the open road beyond the fence.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Muted light filters through beige curtains. A heart monitor BEEPS steadily. The TV on the wall flickers – sound low, but enough to hear.

Storm lies in the bed, pale and bandaged. A hospital gown, IV in his arm. His eyes half-open, unfocused.

On the TV – Grant Harjo, stepping out of prison. Surrounded by reporters.

REPORTER (ON TV)
– after twenty years, Grant Harjo
walks free today, his conviction
vacated after new DNA evidence
cleared him of the murder of Donna
Workman.

Storm blinks. The words sink in like shrapnel.

Grant's calm voice fills the room.

GRANT (ON TV)
I pray for her family.

Storm's hand trembles. He reaches for the remote, turning up the volume.

REPORTER (ON TV)
Sources say the DNA came from a
hospital blood draw belonging to
musician Storm Hudson, though no
charges have been filed–

The words hit him. His breath catches.

STORM
Shit.

The nurse pokes her head in, startled.

NURSE
Mr. Hudson, are you alright?

He nods faintly – but his eyes are glassy, wild.

When she leaves, he looks back at the TV. Now it's showing Grant's face again – calm, free, clean.

He grabs the water cup on the tray and hurls it across the room. It crashes, plastic bouncing harmlessly.

He presses a hand over his face. The heart monitor speeds up
— BEEP-BEEP-BEEP.

A long silence.

Finally, Storm sinks back into the pillow, staring at the ceiling. The TV plays on — Grant thanking his legal team, smiling faintly.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS GYM - AFTERNOON (2002)

Squeak of shoes. Echo of bouncing balls. A sea of orange and white practice jerseys moving in rhythm.

Jamie, freshman guard — athletic, locked-in, sweat dripping from his chin — drives hard to the rim, lays it in.

Across the court, the ASSISTANT COACH, early 20s, nervous energy, whispers to COACH MILLER, 50s, a sturdy man with a whistle that commands the room.

Coach Miller's expression falls. He nods once, blows the whistle.

COACH MILLER

Lawson!

Jamie jogs over, breathing heavy, towel around his neck.

JAMIE

What's up, Coach? I was just—

COACH MILLER

Let's step inside.

Jamie blinks, confused. He looks back — teammates still shooting, half-watching.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The blinds are half-closed. A desk phone sits off the hook, coiled cord stretched tight.

Coach Miller gestures to the chair.

COACH MILLER (CONT'D)

It's your grandmother. Said it's important.

Jamie sits, grabs the phone.

JAMIE

Hey, Grandma?

Silence at first. Then a shaky voice.

GRANDMA (V.O.)
 Baby, I—I hate to tell you this
 way... It's Deon.
 He's gone.

JAMIE
 What do you mean, gone?

GRANDMA (V.O.)
 They said he got stabbed... last
 night. In county.

Jamie's body stiffens. The hum of the fluorescent light feels louder. He stares at the wall — team photo, smiling faces, trophies gleaming.

JAMIE
 No... no, that's—
 That's not—

His voice breaks. He presses the phone harder to his ear.

GRANDMA (V.O.)
 I'm so sorry, baby.

Jamie stands too fast, chair toppling behind him. The phone cord stretches taut, jerking from the base. He stumbles back, catches the edge of the desk.

Coach Miller takes a step forward, uncertain, helpless.

COACH MILLER
 Jamie—

Jamie sinks to his knees. The phone dangles from his hand, receiver thudding softly against the floor.

The gym sounds leak faintly through the wall — laughter, a whistle, sneakers squeaking — life moving on outside the moment.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

Strings hum from a live quartet. The room glows gold and glass. Champagne flutes sparkle. Laughter rises and fades.

Jamie, tailored black suit, stands near the balcony, nursing a bourbon.

Across the room, Tricia, in a backless black dress, waves him over.

He crosses to her.

TRICIA
Jamie Lawson, the man of the
moment.

They clink glasses. She laughs — the kind that ends in a sigh. They drift toward a quieter corner, the crowd blurring into light and noise.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - CORNER BAR - CONTINUOUS

The bartender polishes a glass but keeps his distance.

Tricia leans against the bar, half-lit, hair slightly out of place.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
So... the *Grant Harjo* doc.
Everyone says it's—what's the word—
"Career suicide"?

JAMIE
(dry)
Yeah, that one's been popular.

TRICIA
You passed on *Marvel*, Jamie.
Marvel.

JAMIE
I didn't need another costume. Plus
this thing will be a flop if we
can't get anything from Storm.

TRICIA
Jesus, Jamie.

Stares hard.

JAMIE
What?

Tricia's smile fades. She swirls what's left of her drink, eyes glassy but sharp.

TRICIA
You think that's the story? Him
talking? The answer's been staring
you in the face.

Jamie frowns.

JAMIE

What's that supposed to mean?

She sets down her glass with a soft clink.

TRICIA

You've become an advocate, written checks, made speeches. But you're holding back some chips.

Jamie looks puzzled, half defensive.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

You've given everything that's safe. The rest — the part that hurts — you've kept off camera.

A long silence. Somewhere, a champagne cork pops.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

It's not *Storm* that needs to tell his story, Jamie. It's you.

Jamie stares at her, caught between irritation and confusion.

JAMIE

Me?

TRICIA

(quiet now)

You've got a bigger backstory than you've been selling. And the minute you tell it — really tell it — He'll have no choice but to tell his.

Jamie swallows hard, eyes flicking away.

JAMIE

You don't know what you're talking about.

TRICIA

(smiles sadly)

I think I do.

She grabs her purse, straightens up, finds her balance again.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

You want to wake up ghosts, Jamie? Show him yours first.

She turns, weaving gracefully into the crowd, laughter and sequins swallowing her up.

Jamie stands still, the noise of the party flattening into a low hum. He glances at his drink – the amber light trembles inside the glass.

On a nearby TV at the bar, the sound off: A replay of *Grant Harjo's* exoneration footage. Jamie's reflection hovers faintly over it.

He stares, lost.

INT. NETFLIX CONFERENCE ROOM - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Modern glass walls. Minimalist decor. A skyline view that screams success.

Jamie sits at the head of the table – a touch older now. Three PRODUCERS in their 30s-40s sit around him, laptops open, the red Netflix logo glowing on a wall monitor.

A slide on the screen reads: "THE GRANT HARJO STORY - A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY."

PRODUCER #1

We've got clearance for the prison interviews, Kelly and Shane are both on board to consult. But if we want to make this pop – we need Storm Hudson.

PRODUCER #2

He's the white whale. Nobody's seen him in three years.

Slight smile from Jamie. The room goes still.

PRODUCER #3

You've heard something?

JAMIE

I heard Storm's holed up at his ranch outside Edna. Stopped drinking.

PRODUCER #1

So what's the play?

Jamie looks out the window – L.A. sunlight reflecting off glass towers.

EXT. EDNA ART FESTIVAL - DAY

Warm Oklahoma sunlight spills across rows of tents and hand-painted signs. A brass band plays softly from a gazebo. Children dart between booths clutching lemonade cups and balloons.

Grant, in overalls, steady and clear-eyed, stands behind a small display of canvases – stark, vibrant portraits of fields, storms, and faces half in shadow. A handwritten sign reads:

"Grant Harjo - Mixed Media / Acrylic."

Locals drift by, pausing, admiring. Grant smiles easily – not performing, just *present*.

Across the crowd, Kelly appears – sunglasses, simple blouse, hair pulled back. She spots Grant's booth and smiles.

KELLY

You changed your style.

GRANT

You changed your hair.

They share a small, knowing smile.

KELLY

How's freedom treating you?

GRANT

Like an old dog. Took a while to trust it wasn't gonna bite.

She laughs softly. He gestures to the paintings.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Sold two this morning. A couple from Tulsa said they saw my story on the news. Guess I'm famous now.

KELLY

Careful – fame's a dangerous habit.

GRANT

Doesn't end well for some folks.

Sly smiles for both.

KELLY

You keeping busy? Seems so?

GRANT

Got a small place outside town.
Fixing it up. Painting.
(Motions, smiles)

She nods — proud, relieved.

GRANT (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
I got a letter last week...From
him.

KELLY
Storm?

He nods. Wind rustles the tent. Kelly waits — curious but cautious.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Can I ask what it said?

Grant studies her for a long moment. Then he shakes his head — gently.

GRANT
You could. But I think some words
only belong to the person they're
meant for.

Kelly considers that.

KELLY
Fair enough.

They stand together, watching the breeze lift one of Grant's canvases. Silence. The brass band swells somewhere down the street.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - NIGHT

Folding chairs in a loose circle. A coffee urn hisses in corner. Paper cups. Bad fluorescent lighting.

The walls are lined with posters of hope — *"One Day at a Time," "Keep Coming Back."*

Storm sits halfway around the circle — older, leaner, clean-shaven but weathered. Swagger gone.

A small group of familiar faces occupy the chairs — actors, musicians, an ex-athlete.

The group leader, RITA (50s), a B-Level actress, soft-spoken but firm, nods toward him.

RITA
Storm, you wanna share?

Storm exhales, rubs his palms together. He glances at the Styrofoam cup in his hand – black coffee, trembling slightly.

STORM

Yeah. Name's Storm. I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP

Hi, Storm.

He half smiles – still not used to hearing it back.

EXT. LOS ANGELES AIRPORT – DAY

Jamie walks through the terminal, small carry-on in hand.

He pauses at the gate, staring out at the plane waiting on the tarmac – destination: Tulsa.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Flight 268 to Tulsa now boarding
all passengers.

Jamie exhales slowly, then boards.

EXT. OKLAHOMA COUNTRYSIDE – DUSK

A lone SUV hums down a narrow, empty road lined with bare trees. The sun bleeds out behind the hills.

A sign flashes by: EDNA CITY LIMITS. POP. 2,114.

Jamie grips the steering wheel tighter.

EXT. STORM HUDSON'S RANCH – EDNA, OKLAHOMA – LATE AFTERNOON

The sun droops low behind the hills. A long gravel road stretches toward a weathered farmhouse and a distant barn.

Jamie's SUV crunches over gravel, dust swirling. He slows as he approaches a steel security gate.

He idles. A weathered intercom box mounted beside the gate.

Jamie rolls down the window, presses the button.

BUZZ.

JAMIE
Hey, uh... Storm? It's Jamie Lawson.

Static. Nothing.

He presses again.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Just two minutes.

Jamie glances up at the ranch house — a distant speck through the trees.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Just talk. That's all.

Static again. Then the faint sound of a sigh — tired, resigned.

STORM (O.S.)
No cameras.

JAMIE
No cameras.

A low mechanical hum, gate creaks open, like a crypt.

Jamie exhales, rolls forward through the opening.

EXT. RANCH DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The SUV rolls up the long driveway, landscaping well manicured.

A lone dog barks somewhere in the distance.

Jamie parks, steps out. Wind whips his coat as he looks up at the house. Gets out, closes the door, and walks toward porch.

As he steps onto the creaking wood, the front door opens. Storm appears, looking fit and clean shaven in an Oklahoma Sooners t-shirt.

He studies Jamie in silence.

JAMIE
I'll tell you my secret, if you
tell me yours.

A flicker, maybe surprise. Storm opens the door wider, turns his back, and walks inside.

Jamie takes a breath, follows.

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE - OKLAHOMA - DAY

A corrugated-metal barn on the edge of nowhere, refitted with lights, cables, and a backdrop of wheat-gold plains.

Crew members whisper, adjusting mics and cameras. A faint wind hums through gaps in the walls.

The big monitor reads: **"THE INNOCENCE OF GRANT HARJO - A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY."**

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Two chairs sit beneath the lights. One occupied.

Storm, worn but sober-eyed, waits. His hands fidget around a chipped coffee cup - the same one from the Rusty Spur, now a dull gray relic.

A producer's voice off-screen:

PRODUCER (O.S.)
Two minutes. Just relax, Mr.
Hudson.

Storm nods faintly. The room hums with silence.

Beyond the lens, Jamie confers with crew. He watches Storm through the monitor, uneasy yet empathetic.

A nearby monitor freezes on an archival photo of Grant Harjo, age 22, mugshot eyes wide and scared. The image flickers. The light from it washes over Storm's face.

Storm exhales, steadying.

A door CREAKS open.

Footsteps echo.

Grant enters - dignified, cautious. He pauses at the threshold. Crew instinctively step back.

Storm looks up. For a long moment - silence.

Their eyes lock.

Storm's breath catches. The years collapse between them: the van headlights, the gun, the silence, the cells, the songs.

Grant walks to the empty chair beside him.

He sits.

Storm tries to speak, but his throat locks. His face trembles, then shatters – a raw, unguarded breakdown, decades of guilt finally unclenched.

Grant just watches – quiet, steady.

Jamie lowers his headset.

The crew freezes, realizing this is the ending they could never script.

A single camera flickers.

Storm's sobs fall into silence.

Grant glances toward the lens – not accusatory, not forgiving, just present.

The monitor catches the reflection of both men – side by side – framed by light.

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