

The Star Killers

a play
by Aaron Ricciardi

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Starring:

- JACQUI DAWN SMITH: 30s, female. A perennially unemployed actor who lives in Los Angeles, California, and works as a cater waiter. Her given name was something else, but she changed it (not legally) to “have more star quality.” Her looks are remarkably unremarkable. She’s lived in L.A. since she graduated with a B.A. in Theatre Arts from a private, conservative Christian college, where she mainly did musicals. At college, there were only around twenty other Theatre Arts majors, and nearly all of them were hobbyists. Jacqui stuck out because of how seriously she took her craft. Her talent as a performer is painfully mediocre, and she has no business pursuing acting as a career, but she has ambition in spades. Plays Woman in the scenes from the movie *The Star Killers*.
- DONNY CAINE: 60s, male. A B-list—actually, now more like C-list—film actor. He is married to S.E. His goofy looks pigeon-holed him as a “character actor,” but he possesses a bona fide virtuosic talent. Donny was once clean-shaven and rather adorable, but, today, he is slovenly and off-putting, with baggy, dirty clothes and a baggy, dirty beard. Donny’s career began at nineteen years old, when, during his sophomore year of college at a state university in Texas, he was discovered by a respected independent film director. Donny’s deepest desire has always been to be taken more seriously as an actor. He has started teaching acting workshops for the dough. Plays The Star in the scenes from the movie *The Star Killers*.
- S.E. CAINE: 50s, female. A perennially unemployed former model and actor, who never truly pursued either career. She is married to Donny. Her name is pronounced “Essie,” short for the first and middle names given to her by her parents, whom she abhors. Her beauty could stop traffic, but this is hard to tell these days, since she dresses like she’s in some kind of punk rock militia and since she somewhere along the road became bug-eyed. Though she has never actually made a film, she fancies herself “an auteur.” She is extremely untalented and has poor taste.
- MANNY KANTOR: 50s-70s, male. If you didn’t know this gruff, slovenly Jewish man was responsible for multiple award-winning films, television shows, and productions on Broadway and in the West End, you would never guess it. He’s the guy at the bagel place whose orders begin with the word “Gimme.” Since people fear him and like his work, he gets away with abhorrent, vicious crimes like physical and emotional abuse and rape.

Setting:

Los Angeles, California.
Obama's second term.

Production Design:

Perhaps the play takes place in a low-budget, bare acting studio, with basic furniture and blocks, the kind of space where Jacqui attends acting class.

Perhaps cameras and projections of their live feeds are utilized in spots, such as when we're in the movie and during the play's final moment.

Visual Effects:

When we move from reality to movie, there should be a distinct tonal shift.

Editing:

Most every scene change should feel like a jump cut.

Music:

Perhaps a composer might underscore this entire play with a bona fide film score.

Script Supervisor:

Scenes in reality are in this font.

Scenes from the movie are in this font.

Italics denote *emphasis*.

CAPS denote EMPHASIS and VOLUME.

There are few pauses/silences indicated in the script. Actors and directors can (and should!) put more in where they feel right.

Casting:

These characters should be played by actors of any race. Keep in mind that Jacqui, S.E., and Donny are not so much conservative as they are libertarian, not so much ignorant as they are selfish. They feel they've been maligned, so they distrust everything. This kind of right-wing victimhood is of course often linked with whiteness, but recent history has shown that this ideology is tempting to all.

“Suppose you throw a party. Early on, you're busy greeting people, fetching drinks, making sure the sound system works. Everyone seems to be having a good time. You could stand outside the front door with a flashlight, interviewing each potential guest, but instead you decide to leave the gates open. You don't think about what might go wrong. On the whole, people are basically trustworthy. Why would someone want to ruin the party?”

Inevitably, things go wrong. You play an obscene song. Someone complains. You play an unobjectionable song. Everyone stops dancing. One person sneaks into the bathroom for a cigarette, and you decide to look the other way—you sort of like the idea of hosting a raucous party, the kind with a trace of illicit smoke in the air. But then people start smoking in the hallway, and on the dance floor, and someone has an asthma attack. Sleazy men start making aggressive passes at women; word gets around, and many women decide to leave. Someone spreads a rumor that the bartender is poisoning the drinks. Another person makes a racist joke, and several people laugh; before you can confront them, they scatter into the crowd.

What can you do? You don't want to let things get out of hand. You consider pausing the music, turning on all the lights, maybe identifying a few of the troublemakers and dragging them out by the collar. That would set an example, but could also spoil the mood, and the party might never recover.

By far the easiest solution, and the only one that will set you up to be perfectly consistent in the future, is to do nothing, or almost nothing. You can't spend all your time policing everyone. Instead, you establish a clear, simple policy: as long as none of your guests do anything violent or illegal, they can say whatever they want. After all, you believe in free speech.”

— Andrew Marantz, *Antisocial*

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“It's a very tough period of time. There's never been a time like this where such a thing happened where they could take it away from all of us. From me, from you, from our country. This was a fraudulent election, but we can't play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So, go home. We love you. You're very special.”

—President Donald John Trump, 1/6/2021

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“RADIO REPORTER (V.O.):

Reports are unclear as to the extent of the devastation, but from all accounts Los Angeles, Washington, and New York have been left in ruins.

RUSSELL CASSE:

Good God! I've been sayin' it. I've been sayin' it for ten damn years. Ain't I been sayin' it, Miguel? Yeah, I've been sayin' it.”

— Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, *Independence Day*

EXT. PARK – DAY

We're transported to a movie.
Woman is talking to someone unseen.
The acting is not very good.

WOMAN

This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like. Even this conversation feels like a movie. What if this was a movie? Or should it be were a movie? I never know the right word there: were or was. In a movie I'd know the right word. In a movie I'd know the right everything. Do you...? Do you...? Sorry, I'm being all awkward. Do you have a place to stay tonight? I don't have much, but I have a small cot. Times like these, we've got to stick together.

Donny
Cut.

We're transported to reality.

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INT. ACTING STUDIO – NIGHT

Jacqui is on a stage.
Donny and S.E. are in the audience.

Donny
Okayyy. You did it. You did the monologue.

Jacqui
I did!

Donny
Mission accomplished. Cool. Cool. How'd it feel?

Jacqui
Good!

Donny
Cool. What's your name again?

Jacqui
Jacqui!

Donny
Jacqui, right. Jacqui.

Jacqui
That's me!

Donny
Cool. It's nice to meet you.

Jacqui
You too, Mr. Caine!

Donny
Call me Donny.

Jacqui
Donny. I'm a big fan!

Donny
It's a pleasure to have you in the workshop.

Jacqui
It's a pleasure to be here!

S.E.
Jesus, Donny, are you gonna work with the kid or not?

Donny
'Course I am! We're getting acquainted.

S.E.
You're wasting time.

Donny
She keeps me on my toes, this one. So. There's a lot going on in this monologue.

Jacqui
It's a great monologue!

S.E.
It's not a monologue; it's a speech. A monologue is when a character is alone.

Donny
My wife is brilliant. That's why her script has so many layers. Let's uncover them, okay?

Jacqui

Sounds good!

Donny

Now, I'm not one of those actors who thinks there's some kind of method. No matter who I'm playing, I'm me. So are you. It's not hypnosis.

S.E.

Wrong. It's another sphere of consciousness. It's spiritual.

Donny

We agree there, babe—it is spiritual. In my—I don't want to say method, but—in my method, I like to go from my own life, because that's what matters most to me. It's all about me.

S.E.

Ain't that that truth.

Donny

Me me me me me. You have to know yourself. That's the difference between us and the pedestrians. We go deeper. I'm gonna ask you to go deep now, okay?

Jacqui

I'm ready.

Donny

Really personal. Okay. When did you move to L.A.?

Jacqui

I moved here right after college.

Donny

When was that?

Jacqui

About ten years ago.

Donny

How'd that feel?

Jacqui

I felt so free. And then basically right when I moved here I booked a national commercial.

Donny

That must've felt great.

Jacqui

It felt incredible. It felt like everything was working out. I made so much money.

Donny

How'd you spend it?

Jacqui

I bought a car. I felt like a queen. My family always leased cars.

Donny

You still have it?

Jacqui

It broke down recently.

Donny

Can't you get it fixed?

Jacqui

I took it to a place, but it's really expensive, and cater waitering isn't exactly lucrative.

Donny

How are you getting around?

Jacqui

The bus.

Donny

The bus in L.A. That sucks. Can't your folks help?

Jacqui

Yeah right.

Donny

What do they think of all this?

Jacqui

Acting? They think I should give up.

Donny

Do you think they're right?

Jacqui

No!

Donny

What if it doesn't work out for you?

Jacqui
It will.

Donny
It will?

Jacqui
It will.

Donny
It will?

Jacqui
It will.

Donny
Okay.

Jacqui
Okay.

Donny
Okay.

Jacqui
Okay.

Donny
Okay.

Jacqui
Okay?

Silence.

S.E.
He wants you to start the speech again.

Jacqui
Oh!

Donny
I want her to get there herself, S.E.! I want her to feel it!

S.E.
As I have repeatedly told you, that bizarre technique doesn't work.

Jacqui

No, this is great! “This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies—”

Donny

Cut. You messed her up, S.E. She was in the zone. She was right there and you distracted her.

S.E.

Real actors don’t get distracted.

Donny

Okay. This character is at a real low point. It’s the end of the world. She hasn’t been fucked in a long time. You know what that feels like?

Jacqui

Um—

Donny

You know what, don’t answer, don’t answer—just think. Think about a low point from your own life. When you felt, that’s it, I can’t go on any longer. You have it?

Jacqui

Yeah.

Silence.

Donny

Well what is it?!

Jacqui

You want me to answer?

Donny

Yeah! Otherwise, what are we doing here?!

Jacqui

Okay, I’d have to say when my boyfriend and me broke up.

Donny

Tell us all about it.

Jacqui

Well, he was doing a play in the Berkshires, and I traveled to see him, and while I was there we made the painful decision to break up. So on my last day, we had lunch at this pizza place. It was like a last supper. Except it was lunch. And then he took me to the train station, I kissed him goodbye, I was sobbing, I got on the train with a soaking wet face, and that was that.

Donny

How was the pizza?

Jacqui

Oh, um, that place was really good.

Donny

But that day?

Jacqui

I mean, I didn't have much of an appetite. I was about to say goodbye to him forever.

Donny

Good. And when you got on that train with your wet-ass face, how did you feel?

Jacqui

I was devastated. I thought I was gonna marry him, but he turned out to be gay. I felt like my life was over.

Donny

It felt like the end of the world?

Jacqui

Kinda, yeah.

Donny

Yeah.

Jacqui

Yeah.

Donny

Okay.

Jacqui

Okay.

Donny

Okay.

Jacqui, *playing Woman*

"This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like. Even this conversation feels like a movie. What if this *was* a movie? Or should it be *were* a movie—?"

Donny

Cut. You're smiling too much. Life has beaten the shit out of this woman.

Jacqui

I was, like, flirting.

Donny

Less flirting, more sex.

S.E.

You're like an animal. You're like an animal in heat.

Donny

Yeah.

Jacqui

What kind of animal?

Donny

Whatever you want.

Jacqui

Okay.

Donny

Okay—

S.E.

You know what—May I?

S.E. goes to Jacqui.

S.E.

You. Are a gorilla. Go.

Jacqui gets down on her haunches and acts like a gorilla. She does whatever S.E. tells her to.

S.E.

Now move. Move around the space. Go to some bushes and pick off some berries. Oh, Mama Gorilla! This is your baby. Protect your baby, Mama Gorilla. There are lions coming. You have to stand guard. Beat your chest and roar. That's it. Bigger! BIGGER! MORE!!! Now take all that, put it inside you, and zip it up. Feel that rage. Feel that pain. But don't express it. You're not a gorilla anymore. You're a woman. But you're also a gorilla. Start the speech.

Jacqui, *playing Woman*

“This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like. Even this conversation feels like a movie. What if this *was* a movie? Or should it be *were* a movie? I never know the right word there: were or was. In a movie I'd know the right word. In a movie I'd know the right everything. Do you...? Do you...? Sorry, I'm being all awkward. Do you have a

Jacqui, *playing Woman*

place to stay tonight? I don't have much, but I have a small cot. Times like these, we've got to stick together."

S.E.

Cut. That was better.

It actually was.

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EXT. PACIFIC PALISADES MANSION – NIGHT

Donny stands, uncomfortable.

Manny appears and approaches Donny.

Jacqui wanders with a tray with shrimp summer rolls, a bowl of sauce, and napkins.

Manny

You better give me a hug, you son of a bitch.

Donny

Manny. Been a while.

Manny

I didn't think you'd come. Nobody's seen you in a hundred years.

Donny

I've been taking it easy.

Manny

Enough of that. Everybody misses you.

Jacqui approaches Donny and Manny.

Jacqui

Shrimp summer roll?

Manny, *to Donny*

You take. I can't have.

Jacqui

Are you sure, Mr. Kantor? They're really good!

Manny

I'm kosher.

Jacqui

I think these are kosher!

Manny

Shrimp is very much not kosher.

Jacqui

I never met a Jewish person until I moved to L.A.

Manny

Hey. We're talking. You're being rude.

Jacqui moves away from them.

Manny

Guess who I had in my office today.

Donny

Who now.

Manny

No no no—Whitney!

Donny

Oh?

Manny

You raised a talented girl, Don. You know about her movie.

Donny

What movie?

Manny

Her movie! She's gonna write and direct. I'm producing. She's a genius. Just like her father.

Donny

She's a special kid.

Manny

Not a kid anymore! I'm sitting across from her and I can't get over this knockout woman, gorgeous, great body—this is little Whitney all grown up.

Donny

Uh huh.

Manny

Listen, I gotta mingle. Find me later. I got something I wanna run past you.

Donny

I got something to run past you too.

Manny, to Jacqui

Shalom, girly girl.

Manny leaves.

Donny

I'll take another one of those.

Jacqui comes back over to Donny.

Donny eats a few shrimp summer rolls as they talk.

Jacqui

Hi Donny.

Donny

Scumbag.

Jacqui

What?

Donny

He's a scumbag. The way he talked to you, like you didn't matter.

Jacqui

Oh, I'm used to that.

Donny

Well it's wrong! You matter! Everybody matters! This is America, ain't it?

Jacqui

Absolutely!

Donny

You look familiar.

Jacqui

Yeah, we've met!

Donny

I never forget a pretty face—

S.E. joins them.

S.E.

Would you believe they're only letting us use one bathroom in this *mansion*?! I took a noisy dump. They're gonna have to fumigate.

Jacqui

Hey, S.E.!

S.E.

Gorilla girl!

Jacqui

Jacqui!

Donny

Ohhh.

S.E.

Jacqui, right!

Donny

Jacqui! Good to see ya!

S.E.

How are ya?

Jacqui

Better now that I'm running into you two! I loved your workshop so much. I felt on fire. I love animal work. Like, we are animals.

S.E.

Exactly. We are savage, wounded animals, all of us. Stick in this business long enough, and that's what you'll see: the viciousness. But also, the pain.

Jacqui

That makes so much sense. I'm a gorilla, you know? I am a gorilla.

S.E.

What were you two talking about? You weren't trying to steal my man, were ya?

Jacqui

No!

Donny

She's kidding.

S.E.

I don't kid.

Silence.

S.E.

I'm kidding.

Donny

We were talking about how everyone here is an asshole.

S.E.

Especially our esteemed host, Manny CAN'T-er.

Donny

You just missed him.

S.E.

And?!

Donny

We talked.

S.E.

AND?!

Donny

Nothing yet.

S.E.

Don!

Donny

He said to come find him later.

S.E.

You better grow a pair.

Donny

These things take time. He spoke to, uh...

Jacqui and S.E.

Jacqui.

Donny

He spoke to Jacqui here like a servant.

Jacqui

He wasn't that bad.

S.E.

You can speak your mind with us. We've known these people forever. They're pretentious, self-righteous star-fuckers. They're vermin.

Donny

They're vultures. Who's been the biggest asshole tonight?

Jacqui

People really haven't been that bad.

Donny

Come on. We all know that's not true. If you knew you could murder one of these lickspittles and get away with it, who would it be?

S.E., *loving this*

Oh my god, Donny—you're so bad.

Donny

I'm not leaving you alone until you pick. Any one of 'em. Dead. For retribution.

Jacqui

I'd probably have to say that woman and also that woman over there, 'cause when I brought them my tray they were having this whole conversation about how their cleaning ladies don't look poor, because in America we have all these clothing stores that are cheap but look expensive, and then that woman said to the other one, "We dress our poor very well in this country." And the whole time both of them were stuffing their faces with the food from my tray, and neither of them thanked me.

S.E. mimes cocking and aiming a gun.

S.E.

A fine choice.

Donny

A most excellent decision.

Jacqui

Shrimp summer roll?

S.E.

We're allergic to shrimp.

Donny

Have one, Ess. They're good.

Donny goes to take a roll from Jacqui's tray.

S.E.

I said we're allergic to shrimp!

S.E. pushes Jacqui away, which causes Jacqui to drop the tray, the napkins, the sauce, and all that shrimp.

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EXT. CHAIN RESTAURANT PATIO – NIGHT

Jacqui and the Caines sit at a table.
The Caines stuff their faces with shrimp.

Donny

Here, have some of my shrimp.

Jacqui

I'm really okay. I thought you were allergic.

Donny

She just says that.

S.E.

It's easier than telling the truth.

Donny

We hardly even eat out anymore. I can't remember the last time.

S.E.

And if we do we always go to a place like this. At a chain restaurant all the food comes pre-packaged so it's highly unlikely anyone can mess with your food. Unlike that catering company.

Donny

She doesn't mean she suspects you of foul play.

S.E.

Not at all! You're just scraping for a buck! Working for The Man! But anyone can lace anything with anything. Obviously.

Donny

And we always eat outside, so we don't have to worry about being overheard or bugged.

S.E.

You don't have to worry *as much*. Mitigated risks. Aren't you hungry?

Jacqui

I'm full.

Donny

Come on. It's our treat after everything that happened. We're really sorry.

S.E.

It wasn't even your fault! It wasn't anybody's fault.

Jacqui

He'd been wanting to fire me for a long time. He's this uptight, snooty gay guy.

S.E.

Gag me with a spoon. They essentially have a mafia.

Donny

Speaking of, let's flag down the waiter. What do you want?

Jacqui

You're so sweet. I actually don't eat anything after eight p.m. It's a diet.

S.E.

See? This is why I gave it up. The unrealistic beauty standards they place on actresses in this business is frankly criminal. And I mean that literally. They call themselves liberals, progressives, feminists, they fight for their right to breastfeed in the town square, the casting couch is tantamount to Vietnam, but all they actually care about is perky tits and a waist the size of a tic tac, because they think that's what sells tickets, and, like everything, it's all about money, so go see any movie and none of the women look like normal human beings. They can eat my shit.

Donny

Not to mention, she's beautiful.

S.E.

I expound upon Hollywood's unrealistic beauty standards and your response is to focus on her looks?

Donny

It was a compliment!

S.E.

Pig!

Donny

I'm saying she's beautiful just the way she is.

S.E.

Correct. Pure, simple beauty.

Donny

Where you from?

Jacqui

Indiana.

Donny

What do I always say, S.E.?

S.E.

He always says it.

Donny

I always say, these places everyone forgets about, in the middle of nowhere—Indiana, Texas—I'm from Texas—the places none of these jackoffs ever go, unless they're shooting something there and taking advantage of that place's native people—that's where the true beauty is in this country.

S.E.

It's not to be found in the cities! It's not to be found in L.A., that's for sure! It's not to be found in those ostentatious scumbags you served at that party! I should know, okay? I came from that world. I played golf, I was on the sailing team, the whole nine yards. I can see right through them.

Jacqui

They all seem, like, so conceited and just, like, not nice. I'm a Christian, and I—

S.E.

We're Christians too but we also incorporate other beliefs.

Jacqui

How beautiful. Yeah, I'm a Christian, and I believe strongly in the importance of—

S.E.

Holy war.

Jacqui

I was going to say, like, service, but holy war too, totally.

S.E.

Totally, you get it. This is what my script is all about—the toxicity of Hollywood culture and how if it keeps going the way it's going, it's all gonna be over.

Jacqui

You are really speaking my language. So where are things with your film?

S.E.

We're shopping around for a producer.

Jacqui

I'll produce it. I have tons of producorial experience. Is that crazy?!

S.E.

It is. We're looking for someone with clout.

Donny

She means someone at a studio.

S.E.

No offense.

Jacqui

None taken!

Donny

That's kind of why we were at that party.

S.E.

Yeah, Donny and Manny Kantor go way back.

Jacqui

He's a big-deal producer! He has Oscars! I mean, if you can get him to produce it, that would be amazing.

S.E.

Too bad *this* guy chickened out.

Donny

I didn't chicken out. You have to finesse these things.

Jacqui

Have you sent him the script?

S.E.

Yeah, *that'll* happen!

Donny

S.E. thinks he won't read it.

S.E.

S.E. *knows* he won't read it.

Jacqui

Why? It's such an amazing script!

S.E.

Amazing is too weak a word for what my script is.

Donny

He and S.E. don't get along. It's a long story.

S.E.

I'm not afraid to tell it! And it isn't even long. When we were all much younger, he wanted to fuck me and I wasn't having it, but he's never gotten over that, so now he has no respect for my work. It's an open secret the guy's a pig. His office is essentially a rape factory. I'm just lucky he didn't violate me.

Jacqui

Still, it would be great to get him on board.

S.E.

Of course!

Donny

I'll figure something out.

Jacqui

I did this reading of my neighbor's script recently, and it was super fun! We did it at her apartment over beers. You should do something like that and invite Manny!

Donny

I don't think he'd ever come to that.

S.E.

You're missing the point. He's a misogynist who doesn't respect my work.

Jacqui

You don't have to tell him he's coming to a reading. Just arrange a meeting with him—at your office, not his—

Donny

We don't have an office.

Jacqui

At your house then. Just tell him you want to get together to catch up and while he's there we just read the script.

Donny

Like we trap him there?

Jacqui

Not at all—it's guerrilla theatre.

S.E.

That's rad.

Donny

I don't think he'll sit through a whole script if we spring it on him.

Jacqui

I've only read a few scenes from this script, but I know it's so good that once he hears the first few pages, there's no way he won't be glued to his chair until the end.

S.E.

I like the way her mind works.

Jacqui

And, like I said, I have tons of producorial experience. I can handle copying the scripts and getting the beer—and I'll read in it, too, if you need another actor.

S.E.

Well there's only one other actor in the script besides Donny. He plays The Star, and the way I see it is every other role in the film would be played by one actress.

Jacqui

This is fate then! I'll do it.

Donny

When you get the beer, make sure it's not Hiller Lite.

Jacqui

Totally—I'll make sure I get, like, locally-sourced, organic—

Donny

We don't give a shit about that.

S.E.

We specifically don't permit Hiller Lite in our home.

Donny

Can't be near it.

S.E.

Donny was the face of Hiller Lite.

Donny

For a few years, a long time ago. Let's just say they did us wrong.

Jacqui

I guess you could say I was the face of Mylexa.

S.E.

Who?

Jacqui

Mylexa. That's the product I did that national commercial for. It's an antidepressant. I played a young woman who was struggling. It was a great role. And it really touched people. I got a bunch of emails from fans through my website.

S.E.

The pharmaceutical industry—

Donny

It's okay, sweetheart.

Jacqui

Did I say something wrong?

Donny

No no no. She just—

S.E.

You worked for the pharmaceutical industry.

Jacqui

Not exactly.

S.E.

They bought you a car!

Donny

Calm down, babe.

S.E.

Working for the pharmaceutical industry is basically ritualized murder.

Donny

It's not not true.

S.E.

I mean, you essentially made a deal with the devil, so who knows if we can even trust you now?

Jacqui

But it was a long time ago! I just moved to L.A. and I needed a job! I was working for The Man! Would I take that job now? Absolutely not! I'm much much much more careful about the work I'm saying yes to. I want to do work that makes a positive impact on the world! Like your movie!

Donny

She's sorry.

S.E.

Now you're taking her side?!

Donny

There's no side. (*To Jacqui.*) She gets all worked up.

S.E.

I don't get all worked up! The world works me up!

Jacqui

Everybody has their things they're passionate about. Mine is littering.

Donny, to S.E.

She didn't know.

S.E.

Then she should inform herself! She should educate herself instead of coasting through life like some sort of blind shopping cart! You don't litter and you think your hands are clean? You're complicit!

Jacqui

I always want to educate myself! Please! What do I need to know?

Donny

You don't need to know.

S.E.

That's not up to you. It's up to Jacqui. Do you want to know?

Jacqui

I do.

S.E.

Then I'll tell you. Jacqui, we have come to learn about a menace in this town that is working bit by bit to eat the powerful from the inside out. We call that menace The Star Killers.

Donny

The *Hollywood* Star Killers.

S.E.

Can you stop interrupting me and let me talk? The Hollywood Star Killers. More commonly referred to as The Star Killers. They kill stars. We started getting suspicious when Jackson Michaels died. Remember all those drugs? And that doctor?

Donny

Shady shit.

S.E.

Shay. Dee. Shit. If you look deep into it, the doctor was getting paid off by the pharmaceutical companies—and you don't have to look that deep into it, by the way—it's all right there for you to see, clear as day—it's so obvious it's stupid. You're alone in a room with one other person and you hear a toot and it starts to smell like turds and you know you didn't do it so lemme guess who farted? Hmm hmm hmm who would it be? It's not rocket science.

Donny

So the doctor was getting paid by the pharma people.

S.E.

Right. They're paying him to give these drugs to Jackson, and the doctor doesn't take insurance or anything—don't get me started on medical insurance in this country—so the doctor's charging Jackson a couple thousand dollars a pop and he visits every day, so it *behooves* him to make Jackson sick. It *behooves* him to get Jackson addicted. That's why we don't take any medicine. We don't take any medicine for anything.

Donny

We take supplements. Lots of supplements.

S.E.

All natural, from the earth. But no drugs. And no doctors.

Donny

We haven't taken any drugs in probably six years.

S.E.

At least. There's no way of knowing who's behind what. Could be poison. And it's not just the doctors. It's the doctors but it's also the masseuses, it's the agents, it's the publicists, the cleaning people, okay, because they need the stars to need them—sometimes it's their own family! Don't you think for a second Jackson's family isn't rolling in it now.

Donny

He had a lot of money in a lot of places. And they got all of it.

S.E.

He put the doctor in the will.

Donny

Jackson Michaels was the greatest entertainer in the history of time. The talent?

S.E.

The Star Killers are jealous people, because they themselves have no talent, so they leech off the talented, suck them dry, and toss them out when there's nothing left.

Donny

Have you ever seen anyone who could do what that man could do? I haven't.

S.E.

That's because there wasn't anybody, isn't anybody, never will be anybody who could do what that man could do. Same as you, Donny.

Donny

Babe.

The Caines kiss with tongue.

Jacqui

I agree.

S.E.

And don't you for a second believe all that garbage about Jackson diddling those boys. That's just the Star Killers trying to distract you from their crimes, which are *murder*. So Jackson dies, and that sets me on this path of doing all this research. So I know how they make these drugs, okay?

Jacqui

Okay.

S.E.

I could essentially cook them up myself and be in on all this with them, but I have better things to do with my time. I have my career. I have a very rigorous, almost monk-like artistic practice at this point. But on the side I've become a kind of savant about the Star Killers. I can back it all up. Because of course it didn't stop with Jackson. Oh no. Then there was Keith Ledger, Philip Seymour Kaufman.

Donny

I knew them all. There are times we're sitting at home and, out of nowhere, I weep. It's too much. These are my friends we're talking about. All lost to—let me put this in quotes—“overdoses.”

S.E.

Right, you're gonna hear they “overdosed.”

Donny

Air quotes.

S.E.

'Cause that's what they want you to believe. The media's in on it too. Don't think the media isn't paying off the Star Killers. They need juicy stories and they manufacture those stories by paying off the Star Killers who in turn take the stars they work for and murder them. They murder them until they are dead. And what the media pays the Star Killers, it's chump change compared to what they're raking in from all the

S.E.

advertising they get when the braindead sheeple in the great American, prototypical herd of lemmings all tune in to watch the next great celebrity death. And who's buying all that ad space? That's right: the pharma companies. It's all connected. It's capitalism. It's so obvious it's stupid. Stars are worth more dead than alive, but the sheeple can't smell the rancid, putrid, lethal coffee that's infecting our society. We, as a society, are asleep. Meanwhile, the Star Killers have crept past our sleeping bodies and turned the world we once knew into a dystopian hellscape, and pretty soon we won't recognize it anymore.

Donny

That's what's coming.

S.E.

Cue our movie. It's so obvious who the Star Killers have on their radar. They look for artists who've been shoved up on a shelf someplace and can't get arrested in this town. Stars the sheeple won't be surprised to hear are dead 'cause the sheeple already view them as a joke. All that to say: Academy Award-nominee Donny Caine is next on their list.

Donny

I'm next.

S.E.

He's next.

The Caines nod, proud.

Jacqui is rapt.

Suddenly, an object falls heavy from the sky and lands on their table with a bang.

Jacqui

SWEET JESUS!

S.E.

I'LL RIP YOUR NUTS OFF!

Donny

Alright, take it easy, you two.

S.E.

THIS IS NOT HOW THIS IS GONNA GO!

Donny

S.E. take it easy!

S.E. pulls out and aims a pistol in different directions.

S.E.
YOU WILL ANSWER TO ME!

Donny
PUT THAT AWAY!

S.E. puts the pistol away.

Donny
Sweetheart, come look. It's a crow.

S.E.
It could be an explosive, Donny! Or a listening device!

Donny
It's not. It's a crow. It's still breathing. It's a sign. It's a God-given sign.

S.E.
Oh my god. It is. It is a crow. It's my bird. It's our bird.

Donny
Its wings're moving, but barely. It's dying. There's a crow in our screenplay.

Jacqui
Wow. That's so beautiful.

Jacqui takes out her phone and records a video.
She points the camera at Donny.

Jacqui
Say something.

Donny
My daddy taught me about crows. When I was a tyke, my daddy'd take us hunting and he'd show off by shooting birds, because they were the smallest, and hardest to hit. He hit a lot of crows. And he'd tell us tales about 'em—folklore, legends. He'd say, it's not a coincidence that in Welsh and Cornish mythology, crows signify death. To the Chinese, crows spell barren crops. The Hindus tell us that crows are a vessel for ghosts. In Aboriginal legends, the crow is a murderer. Maybe that's why we say a murder of crows. My daddy taught me there's no coincidences. What is this crow telling us? Look at his little lungs moving. How'd you find us, little fella? Are you my daddy's ghost? Is death around the corner, Pops? Destruction? End times? It takes a fool to not see we're ass-backward in this country, that we need an exorcism. Like this crow, we are at our last gasp.

S.E.
And, cut. That was brilliant. That was fucking brilliant.

Jacqui

I agree. It was fucking brilliant, and I never swear.

*

INT. LIQUOR STORE – DAY

S.E. and Jacqui stand in line, conversing.

S.E. holds a pack of beer.

S.E.

I swear to God: every store, every tollbooth, every shitter, I choose the wrong line.

Jacqui

Ugh, same! I'm cursed!

S.E.

Well, Donny and I *are* cursed—that's a fact, it's a constant theme of our lives. And it all started with Hiller Lite. Those commercials were a dream job for Donny. He was making a shit-ton of movies then—he was one of the most in-demand actors in the business—but it's expensive to be an actor—

Jacqui

Tell me about it.

S.E.

You know—you've got to pay your agent, your manager, your publicist, your lawyer—which—this is what my script is all about.

Jacqui

Exactly! By the way, I am so glad I finally got to read the whole script. It's brilliant.

S.E.

But nobody is willing to admit that.

Jacqui

Well I really admit it. It's the best script I've read in a really long time—maybe ever. You're an amazing writer. It's just so unfair you haven't been given your due.

S.E.

It's disgusting is what it is. Anyway, we needed more cash, to, you know, afford our life! Whitney was spending about a thousand dollars a week at the smoothie store and her cunt of a mother wouldn't pay for shit. I digress. Hiller Lite was going well, but then they start balking at our completely reasonable demands. We want approval over wardrobe—denied. We want approval over scripts—denied. We want—and

S.E.

this was a no-brainer—a chunk of the grosses from the products Donny was selling for them.

Jacqui

'That's only fair!

S.E.

They owed all that business to him! Denied. And then, one day, we're watching T.V., and on comes a Hiller Lite commercial, starring *Peter Heller*.

Jacqui

I don't even know who that is.

S.E.

Exactly. They replaced Donny Caine with a nobody. So I work the phones. His agent, his manager, nobody's got a straight answer, and I'm like, this is fishy.

Jacqui

That's not right.

S.E.

It is *not right*. So I do some research. His reps were in on it. They were sabotaging us.

Jacqui

How awful!

S.E.

Oh this is the oldest story in the book. All reps are leeches. Even if they pride themselves on not being a leech—especially then—they're a leech. So since then, I'm Donny's only representation, because nobody's gonna protect Donny like me.

Jacqui

I wish you could be *my* agent!

S.E.

Do you have one?

Jacqui

Yeah, but—

S.E.

Here we go! Yeah but what?

Jacqui

They don't do anything. I never hear from them.

S.E.

So fire them. They work for you.

Jacqui

Then I won't have anybody.

S.E.

You don't need anybody! You made this happen all by yourself. You met us, we liked you, you followed up. Now look. You're powerful. You don't accept how special you are. You're so comfortable in your shell, you refuse to even go there. But you're bold. And gutsy. And brilliant.

Jacqui tears up. (Is she faking?)

S.E.

You remind me of me at your age. You're afraid, but I think you're afraid of what's inside you. You're afraid if you unleash that fire, you won't be able to control it.

Jacqui

Oh yes.

S.E. embraces Jacqui as she sobs and heaves.

S.E.

Come to Mama. There you go. Get it out.

Jacqui

I'm sorry.

S.E.

You have nothing to be sorry for.

Jacqui

It's just been thing after thing after thing lately.

S.E.

Tell me.

Jacqui

Well, I lost my catering job. My agent sucks. And I go to these auditions where they don't respect me for *me*, you know?

S.E.

I do know. Quite well. They get high off the fumes of their own brutality, yet they profess to be enlightened. The world's upside-down right now. Open is closed; closed is open. Love is hate; hate is love. It's all senseless. It's all unfair. Now. All you can do, is take everything you're feeling, and *put it in your work*. That's the one thing no one can control. So fuck them.

Jacqui

I want to say something, but I don't know how to say it.

S.E.

Just say it.

Jacqui

Would you be my mentor?

S.E.

It would be my honor to be your mentor.

They hug and laugh!

Jacqui

I can't tell you the last time I made a new friend. Everyone in L.A. is so focused on themselves they'd never think of calling someone up and suggesting they go buy beer together. And this is extra special because this is what my mom and I love to do when I'm home—we go shopping. We could wander around a store talking and not realize that hours have passed—

S.E.

Honey I didn't meet you here just to hang out. You could be a plant for a Star Killer for all we know, and you could bring over some beer you laced with poison and then sealed in a bottle or a can so it looks legit. We have to be very careful who we trust and what we put in our bodies.

Jacqui

You can trust me. I'm your friend.

*

INT. THE CAINES' HOUSE – EVENING

Jacqui and the Caines hold beer.

Donny

To new friends.

Jacqui and S.E.

New friends.

The clink and sip.

S.E.

He's late.

Donny

He's not late yet.

S.E.

It's disrespectful.

Donny

It's not disrespectful to arrive on time.

S.E.

Ten minutes early is on-time in show business.

Jacqui

People have no respect for other people's time.

Donny

He'll be here.

S.E.

I would bet every dollar I have to my name that in your inbox right now is an email from the assistant he's fucking that says, "So sorry, Manny's held up in a meeting and won't be able to make it." This is how someone like him treats someone like us? I don't know how he sleeps at night.

The doorbell rings.

Donny goes to get the door.

Silence between Jacqui and S.E.

Jacqui

It's gonna go great!

S.E., *annoyed*

I'm aware.

Donny brings in Manny.

Manny

I just got off the phone with your little girl.

S.E.

What little girl?

Manny

Oh. Hello, S.E.

S.E.

What little girl do you have, Manny?

Donny

He means Whitney.

S.E.

What on earth were you doing on the phone with my stepdaughter?

Manny

I'm producing her film.

S.E.

What are you talking about?

Manny

I'm talking about what I'm talking about. I'm producing Whitney's film.

S.E.

Her film?

Manny

Whitney's writing and directing a movie and I'm producing it.

S.E.

This is a joke.

Donny

Whitney's directing her own script.

Manny

She's a real talent.

S.E.

She's a real sneak. Did you know about this?

Donny

Not really.

S.E.

Another sneak!

Donny

It's exciting.

S.E.

It's ridiculous.

Donny

Want a beer?

Manny

I'm alright.

Donny

Come on, I've never known you to turn down a drink. S.E. grab the man a beer!

S.E.

Do I look like your handmaiden?

Jacqui

Coming right up!

Jacqui grabs Manny a beer.

S.E.

You're late.

Donny

No big deal. She's just anxious to get started. This is Jacqui, by the way.

Jacqui

Hi! Nice to meet you!

Manny

Let's go somewhere and talk.

Jacqui hands out scripts.

Donny

Ta-da! We've written a script!

S.E.

I've written a script.

Donny

We're gonna read it for you.

Manny

Oh, I don't have time for this. Let's you and I go talk.

Donny

It won't take long! We've been dying to share this with you.

S.E.

Alright. (*Reading.*) *The Star Killers*. Screenplay by S.E. Caine. Story by S.E. Caine and Donny Caine. Original concept by S.E. Caine. To be directed by S.E. Caine. Starring Donny Caine as The Star and—what's your full name?

Jacqui

Jacqui Dawn Smith.

Donny

Good name.

Jacqui

I changed it.

Donny

Smart.

S.E., *reading action*

And Jacqui Dawn Smith as All Other Roles. The Star Killers. Fade in—

Manny

Donny. I don't have time to hear this entire script.

Donny

Alright. Babe?

S.E.

Don't look at me. This wasn't my crap idea.

Jacqui

Why don't we skip to the ending?

S.E.

He's not going to understand what's happening out of context!

Jacqui

It'll be great! Let's go to the second-to-last page? Start with "Say it"?

S.E.

I mean, there's no point but whatever.

Donny

Let's do it!

Jacqui

Okay, so at this point, this guy and this girl—

S.E.

I'll set it up, Jack. I'm the director. So at this point, The Star thinks the world has ended. Well—it has, but he's still there. He thinks he's the only person alive—until he meets this woman at an abandoned pharmacy, but she turns out to be evil.

Action.

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
Say it.

Donny, *reading The Star*
Say what?

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
Don't play dumb with me. You know what.

Donny, *reading The Star*
Can't say I do.

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
The line. Say the line.

Donny, *reading The Star*
Over my dead body.

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
Interesting choice of words there.

Donny, *reading The Star*
You think I'm gonna give you what you want? Not without a fight!

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
We both know you live for it! The recognition! People on the street begging you to say that recognizable catchphrase. What a sad existence. Dance, monkey dance!

Donny, *reading The Star*
HERE I AAAAAMMMMM!

S.E., *reading action*
Woman shoots The Star and he falls off the edge of the cliff. Woman watches him fall. She looks up at the sky and smiles.

Jacqui, *reading Woman*
And so, it is done.

S.E., *reading action*
Woman leaps into the air and turns into a crow. The crow flies through the canyon. For the first time in the film: freedom. Exterior. Base of the canyon. Dusk. The Star lies on the ground—not dead yet, but just about. He watches The Crow with a shy, vague grin on his mouth. Voiceover:

Donny, *reading The Star*
She was flying above me all along. She's the crow I saw. She's the people who crossed my path. I don't know how they did it, but they found their way inside. The Star Killers did. The...Star...Killers...

S.E., *reading action*

The Crow lands on The Star's chest, ready to consume his flesh. Fade out. The end.

Jacqui bursts into riotous applause.
The Caines nod.

S.E.

We believe this to be the best thing either of us has ever done.

Manny

You told me we'd be meeting alone. I told you explicitly I didn't want to meet with her here.

S.E.

I am Donny's representation.

Manny

We're old friends, Don. Don't dick me around. I came to talk about the Holiday project.

S.E.

We read the script.

Manny, *to Donny*

Great, right?

Donny

It's alright.

S.E.

The script is trash.

Manny

It's a great premise. And you'd be the star. It's a Donny Caine vehicle.

Donny

I'm sick of being associated with this part. All I want is to be taken seriously. But I take this role when I'm a kid and the rest of my career I'm trailer trash.

Manny

I'm right there with you, Don. That's why, in this movie, we want to give you the opportunity to humanize this character. It's a Holiday spinoff, yeah, but we want this one to be grittier. We want this guy to be a real person.

Donny

Good. People who live in trailer parks have gotten the short end of the stick for too long, and I refuse to make them the butt of the joke any longer. They matter.

Manny

I agree!

S.E.

We're currently weighing a few other offers.

Manny

We're all passionate about this project, but we can't do it without you. You *are* this guy, Don. We go back a long time.

Donny

I'll say.

Manny

I count you as one of the greats. You're an actor's actor.

S.E.

Finally he says something smart.

Manny

But you've fallen off the map.

Donny

Yeah.

S.E.

Not our fault!

Manny

Fault shmault. Doesn't matter. What matters is John Doe thinks you're dead. John Doe is a fish. He doesn't remember anything that's not directly in front of him. And you're not in front of him anymore. He forgets, he swims away, he grazes on seaweed. And that's what's ninety-nine percent of the shlemiels I put in my movies are: seaweed. John Doe forgets that seaweed is dreck. But John Doe still eats it. Because John Doe doesn't know what's good for him. Until he stumbles upon some grade A meat. That's you, my friend. You are a bloodied corpse that's fit for a shark to feast on. So when John Doe stumbles on as fine an artist as you, he thinks, "I didn't know it could taste this good." In this role, in this project, John Doe, after all that seaweed, will devour you. John Doe will give you awards.

Donny

What awards?

Manny

Golden Globe Comedy, easy. I could make a push for an Oscar.

Jacqui

What about The Star Killers?

Manny

Nobody's talking to you.

S.E.

Don't you dare talk to her like that! What would you like to add, Jacqui?

Jacqui

I mean, this sounds like a cool project, Manny, but Donny has demands that must be met. He'll do this movie with you if you produce *The Star Killers*.

Donny

Yes! That's a great idea!

Manny

Not a chance.

Jacqui

It's a brilliant script.

Manny

It's not.

S.E.

What the hell do you know? You only heard about a page of it!

Jacqui

Then help us make it brilliant.

S.E.

I don't need help!

Manny

I don't have time for this, Don.

Jacqui

It won't take that much of your time. Come to set, give us your input, help us with our movie, and Donny will do yours.

Donny

I can get behind that. Yes.

Manny

You'll do it?

Donny

You'll do it?

Manny

Sounds like we've got ourselves a deal.

Manny and Donny hug, like kids.

Manny grabs Donny's face in his hands.

Manny

The dynamic duo is back together again!

Donny

Ow.

Manny

What's wrong?

S.E.

You hurt him!

Donny

I got a little headache.

Manny

You want an aspirin?

S.E.

GET OUT!

Manny

I'm going, I'm going. My brother.

Donny

My brother.

Manny almost dances out.

Donny

Where did you come from?!

Jacqui

Crown Point, Indiana!

S.E.

You think my script isn't brilliant?

Donny

Lay off her, Ess. She was just working the room! Talk about brilliant! This is exactly right! I feel it in my bones! A, Manny knows what he's doing, especially when it

Donny

comes to the apocalypse genre. And B, if we do what he suggests, if he feels like he's a part of it, he'll produce and distribute it no question. He's always been like that.

Jacqui

That's exactly what I was thinking.

Donny

He's gotta fall in love, and, once he's in love, he's all in. Now let's let him fall in love with our movie, baby.

Jacqui

The whole world's gonna fall in love with this movie. It does what great art does best. It informs. It calls to action. It inspires.

S.E.

Why can't she run a movie studio? She gets it, she fucking gets it.

Jacqui

I fucking do. It will be the honor of my life to make this movie with you both.

S.E.

The thing is we can't really afford to pay you right now.

Jacqui

I could care less! This would be a passion project for me!

Donny

Mother Creator has chosen us, because she knows we're strong enough for the headwinds. We're Noah, preparing the world for the flood. And this town needs a flood.

S.E.

This town needs to be blown up.

Jacqui

Let's blow it up!

We're transported to a movie.

*

EXT. PARK - DAY

The Star and Woman are mid-conversation.

THE STAR

When it first blew up, when everyone started dying, it all seemed fishy to me. That's when I realized it was poison. They were force-feeding us poison.

WOMAN

Who's they?

THE STAR

The studio executives, the agents, the government—they're all the same! This is evil we're talking about here! This is poison!

WOMAN

Whoa whoa whoa, you don't have to get all worked up with me. We're the only two people left on Earth, it seems. I'm all you've got.

THE STAR

Sorry. I'm so sorry.

WOMAN

It's alright. I know you're a good man.

THE STAR

How do you know?

WOMAN

I'm a reader. I can read people. You wouldn't hurt a soul. Not even a flea.

THE STAR

Unlike the Star Killers. They take down anything in their path. They're demons in people clothes.

THE WOMAN

What were those words you just said? Star Killers?

THE STAR

That's just what I've been calling 'em in my head. Funny, that was the first time I've ever said The Star Killers out loud. That's the second.

WOMAN

The Star Killers. That's the third time anyone's ever uttered that aloud in all of human history.

THE STAR

The Star Killers! That's the fourth!

WOMAN

THE STAR KILLERS!

THE STAR AND WOMAN

THE STAR KILLERS! THE STAR KILLERS!

They make eye contact. Their chemistry stops them in their tracks.

WOMAN

This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like. Even this conversation feels like a movie. What if this was a movie? Or should it be were a movie? I never know the right word there: were or was. In a movie I'd know the right word. In a movie I'd know the right everything. Do you...? Do you...? Sorry, I'm being all awkward. Do you have a place to stay tonight? I don't have much, but I have a small cot. Times like these, we've got to stick together.

S.E.

Cut.

We're transported to reality.

*

EXT. PARK – DAY

The trio is filming their movie.

S.E. is a one-woman operation:

she holds a script, a boom, and a large, heavy, outdated camera.

Sound equipment is slung across her body.

She looks silly.

S.E.

Okay, that's a wrap on that.

Donny

I think we could use another take.

S.E.

I think we got it.

Donny

I'd like another take.

S.E.

Well I'm your director and I'm telling you no.

Donny

Well I'm your star who will be a box-office draw, and I'm telling you I know I have more in me and I don't think you want to settle for shit when you can have Shinola.

Jacqui

I'm fine to do another take.

S.E.

I can't work with this kind of insubordination!

Donny

What do you care about? Making a good movie, or your ego?

S.E.

Talk about ego!

Donny

I'm all craft, baby!

S.E. puts down all her equipment and stretches.

Donny

You alright?

S.E.

I'm fine. This shit's just heavy.

Donny

Why don't we call it a day?

S.E.

I thought you wanted another take!

Donny

Why don't we go buy you a new camera?

S.E.

Because we don't need one?

Donny

I don't want you to get hurt.

S.E.

You don't want your dainty lady director to get hurt by the camera? Nice, Don.

Donny

I'm just saying we could get a higher quality camera.

S.E.

This camera is state-of-the-art!

Donny

I know, but maybe something lighter, and digital.

Jacqui

It'll be easier to edit if it's digital.

S.E.

Why do I feel like you're ganging up on me? Oh, right—because you're ganging up on me!

Jacqui

We're so not! You're our fearless leader!

Donny

We're not.

S.E.

Let's just shoot the damn scene again!

Donny

Have it your way.

Jacqui

Sorry, real quick—any notes for me?

S.E.

No.

Jacqui

I just want to make sure, like, the gorilla's still there.

S.E.

Still there.

Jacqui

Okay, I just, like, wasn't sure so I wanted to check.

Donny

You could put more sex into it.

S.E.

That's the director's job!

Donny

Well, the director isn't doing it! Animal in heat.

Jacqui

Okay.

S.E.

Jacqui, don't listen to him!

Jacqui

Okay.

Donny

Like, when you say, "Who's they?" make it more like, "Daddy, who's they?"

S.E.

You know what? You don't deserve another take.

Donny

Well I'm about to go again so you better turn on that camera, or you're gonna miss the magic, baby. Places.

S.E.

Fuckin' asshole.

Donny

Animal in heat. And...action.

We're transported to the movie.

*

EXT. PARK – DAY

Woman is like an anxious, sexy, not sexy, constipated gorilla.

THE STAR

When it first blew up, when everyone started dying, it all seemed fishy to me. That's when I realized it was poison. They were force-feeding us poison.

WOMAN

Who's they?

THE STAR

Them! The studio executives, the agents, the government—they're all the same!

Something crashes to the ground.

S.E.

CUT!

We're transported back to reality.

*

EXT. PARK – DAY

S.E. has dropped the camera and it is now broken.

S.E.

FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT!

Donny

Unbelievable.

Jacqui

Are you okay?

S.E.

Of course I'm not okay! I dropped our only fucking camera! Jacqui, help!

Jacqui runs to the camera and tries to repair it.

Donny

Told you.

S.E.

You didn't tell me shit.

Donny

I told you that hunk o' metal wasn't gonna cut it!

S.E.

More like I wasn't gonna cut it!

Donny

You said it, not me!

Jacqui

I don't know if this is fixable. It's really old.

S.E.

Well, we're really old. You're collaborating with some ancient, decrepit geriatrics, so maybe you should look for other work.

Donny, to Jacqui

She's just mad.

S.E.

'Course I'm mad!

Donny

What do you think we should do, Jack?

Jacqui

I mean, buy a new camera—?

S.E.

Out of the question!

Jacqui

And probably find a cameraperson and also a sound person. This is a lot for one person, S.E.

S.E.

Okay, first of all, I don't know how many times I have to say the same thing to you two: we are not spending money on a new camera. That is not happening. This is a state-of-the-art heirloom that might be from what seems like the paleolithic era to you, but it'll give our film a specific look that is the exact aesthetic I'm going for.

Jacqui

I know lots of people with cameras who'd be happy to help out.

S.E.

Whom we would have to pay. I don't know if you've noticed, but we're not made of money, princess! Dom Cruise Donny is not!

Donny

But we're gonna have that Holiday money comin' in as soon as we sign the contract.

S.E.

I don't want to do this with Manny Kantor's blood money! Then the movie'll be his! It won't be ours!

Donny

It'll be ours.

S.E.

Okay maybe I was mistaken that we're on the same team here, but I believe that money has forcefields.

Donny

We're on the same team.

S.E.

I refuse to be shackled to these studios, these corporations, these essentially governments whose only goal is to completely control our actions and our careers and our art and therefore our minds! You know what, I'm over it. Let's pack it all up. This whole thing was an asinine idea. We're fuckin' invisible.

Donny

They'll see us. They'll all see us someday.

S.E.

The clock is running out. We're a laughingstock.

Jacqui

You're not a laughingstock to me. You're the most inspiring people I've ever met in my whole life. You make me want to read every book ever written so I can be a fraction as smart as you. When I was in college, I had this dance teacher named Joél and one time at this faculty concert Joél did a tap dance that took my breath away, and I was like, "Why isn't this guy the most famous dancer in the world?" And it's because he gave up. He couldn't stomach the viciousness, the brutality—because he was weak. I used to be obsessed with Joél, but now Joél makes me want to fucking kill myself. I think Joél is fucking pathetic. Joél might as well be dead. Because Joél is dead. The Star Killers want us to give up. They want us to believe that we're invisible, when in fact, what we are, are supernovas. Did you guys happen to see this movie that was just at Sundance—?

S.E.

We don't see movies. They're all trash.

Jacqui

Right. Well this one movie Nectarine was all shot on a phone, and people love it. So, like, can't we just make this movie on a phone? It would be super easy for you to operate and it wouldn't cost anything.

A moment.

Donny

Not a bad idea, S.E.

S.E.

You really don't want me to direct this movie, do you?

Donny

I'm just sharing my opinion.

S.E.

You really don't want me to call the shots.

Donny

I'm sorry. You're our captain.

S.E.

It's a good idea.

Donny

SHOULD WE TRY IT?!

Jacqui

I THINK SO!

S.E.

Fine.

S.E. takes out her phone.

Donny

Hoowee! We're makin' a movie, ladies!

Jacqui

So you can just go into your camera like normal—

S.E.

I know how to work my phone. Let me be clear: if this doesn't work or it looks like shit I'm putting my foot down.

Donny

More like putting your phone down.

S.E.

Donald. We are not amused.

Donny

You're the boss.

S.E.

Okay, places. And...action.

We're transported to the movie.

*

EXT. PARK - DAY

Woman continues to seem confused.

The Star starts to breathe heavily and look unwell.

THE STAR

When it first blew up, when everyone started dying, it all seemed fishy to me. That's when I realized it was poison. They were force-feeding us poison.

WOMAN

Who's they?

No response.

WOMAN

Who's they?

Silence.

We're transported back to reality.

*

EXT. PARK - DAY

S.E.

There's no pause there, Donny!

Donny collapses.

S.E.

Donny!

S.E. runs to him.

S.E.

Jacqui, get him some water!

Jacqui grabs a water bottle and brings it to them.

S.E.

Go get his supplements out of my purse!

Jacqui runs to S.E.'s purse and fishes through it.

S.E.

Drink up, baby. Drink up.

Donny

I'm alright.

S.E.

You'll be alright when I tell you you're alright! Jacqui, quit dicking around and bring us the supplements!

Jacqui

I can't find them.

S.E.

Bring me the bag!

Jacqui does.

S.E. dumps out the overwhelming contents of her purse.

She finds multiple bottles of pills and takes out quite a few of each.

Donny

I'm alright.

S.E.

You men are all the same. Never want to take your medicine.

S.E. goes to feed Donny the pills.

S.E.

Open up.

Donny

I'm good.

S.E.

DO WHAT I SAY!

Donny does.

S.E.

Swallow. That's a good boy. Are you a good boy for Mama?

Donny

I'm a good boy. Mama's a good Mama.

S.E.

You're a good girl, Jack.

Jacqui

Thanks, Mama.

S.E.

Rub his head. Work your fingers through his hair and his scalp. I'll do the rest.

Jacqui rubs Donny's head and scalp.

S.E. does reiki on Donny's body.

Donny

Why do we always pick the shortest straw?

S.E.

Quiet.

S.E. works silently for a while.

It borders on sexual.

S.E.

How do you feel?

Donny

Better. I don't know what happened.

Jacqui

It's hot.

S.E.

Don't be ridiculous. The human body can handle heat. What it can't handle is an energy imbalance, and our energies have been out of whack. Our bodies respond to that. The supplements work fast. They're a miracle.

Donny

You're a miracle.

Donny and S.E. kiss with tongue.

Donny

And let's not forget Jack!

Donny pulls Jacqui to him and kisses her on the lips.

S.E. does the same.

Jacqui wasn't expecting that.

Donny

I know today didn't go perfect, but I'm never happier than when I'm working.

*

INT. THE CAINES' HOUSE – NIGHT

They have snacks.

S.E.

I think they're workiiiiing!

Jacqui

I can't believe I'm doing drugs! I feel funny!

Donny

"Doing drugs."

S.E.

Eating an edible hardly qualifies as doing drugs. Try molly. Now that's a drug.

Donny

I would argue this isn't even a drug. It's no different from a beer.

S.E.

Anything can be a drug. Anything can be weaponized.

Donny

You alright, Jack?

Jacqui

I feel. I feel. I feel so much. I feel my skin. I feel my hair follicles. I feel my vagina. I feel my asshole. Tight, loose. Tight, loose.

Donny and S.E. are cracking up.

Jacqui

I'm hungry.

Donny

I'll say.

Jacqui

My mouth is watering.

S.E.

Sounds like other orifices are watering too.

Jacqui

Wait. What'd I just tell you?

Donny

That your mouth is watering.

Jacqui

What about before that?

S.E.

That you're hungry.

Jacqui

Wait, did I—did I say something about my private parts?

S.E.

You did. It was quite graphic.

Donny

And specific. Tight, loose.

S.E.

Tight, loose.

Jacqui

Wait, I said that out loud?! I thought that was in my head! I'm freaking out I'm freaking out!

The Caines are cracking up.

Donny

It's okay, baby.

Jacqui

I didn't mean to say that out loud. You think I'm disgusting.

Donny

Not at all.

S.E.

This is hilarious.

Jacqui

I'm a good Christian girl. I don't talk like that. I don't curse or—talk about my vagina! Or my—ew—my *butthole!*

S.E.

Say butthole again.

Jacqui

No.

S.E.

Do it. I dare you.

Jacqui

Butthole.

S.E.

Again.

Jacqui

Butthole.

S.E.

Say butthole eleven times.

Jacqui

Butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole butthole.

They're laughing so hard they can't breathe.

They've become enmeshed in each other, limbs tangled.

Jacqui

You're gonna kick me out!

Donny

What?

Jacqui

You're gonna kick me out and you're gonna fire me from the movie.

S.E.

Whoa, lady, you are *gone*.

Jacqui

And Manny Kantor's gonna come to set and he's gonna hate me.

Donny

He's not gonna hate you.

S.E.

Fuckin' asshole. Who cares what he thinks.

Jacqui

I care! He's a big deal!

Donny

Manny's gonna love you. And then you'll have one more person in your corner. That's how this works. You collect people. You get this person in your corner, and this person in your corner, and soon you have a community. It's a beautiful thing. And some people, like him, are more valuable to have in your corner than others.

Jacqui

Because he's an Academy Award-winner?

S.E.

Because he's a Jew.

Jacqui

Ohhh. All I want is people in my corner. My corner has been so empty for so long.

Donny

You need that corner filled.

Jacqui

You promise you're not gonna fire me?

S.E.

We're not gonna fire you. You're really special to us.

Jacqui

I am?

Donny

We wouldn't be doing any of this without you.

S.E.

I wouldn't say *that*.

Donny

You lit a fire in us.

Jacqui

Is this really happening? I don't know if this is really happening or this is in my head.

Donny

It's happening.

Jacqui

But what if it isn't really happening and then everything I've ever done was also not really happening and then I don't exist.

S.E.

I love where this is going.

Jacqui takes one of each of their hands
and places one on each of her breasts.

Jacqui

Squeeze. Okay. I felt that.

S.E.

The only thing in life that's real, truly real, is death.

Jacqui

And death will be here so soon.

Donny

Amen. It's a quick ride. It's a short stay.

Jacqui

There's so much I want to do, and it's all going by so fast.

Donny

What do you want to do right now?

Jacqui

This very moment?

Donny

This very moment.

Jacqui

I want to kiss you.

Donny

So kiss me.

Jacqui kisses Donny.

S.E.

Where's my kiss?

Jacqui kisses S.E.

Jacqui

What if I die right now?

S.E.

You're not gonna die right now.

Jacqui

But if I did. If I died right now, I'd be happy.

S.E.

We'll never die.

Jacqui

How?

S.E.

Our work will be our vessel. We will crawl inside our work and there we will live forever.

*

INT. CAR – DUSK

Donny is driving.

Jacqui is the passenger.

Donny

This can't take forever. She'll suspect something's up.

Jacqui

It won't. You worry about the groceries; I'll just grab it. Are you angry I'm doing this?

Donny

Why would I be?

Jacqui

Pharmaceuticals.

Donny

Oh, that.

Jacqui

Ordinarily I would never take anything at all because like you've said, the pharmaceutical industry is a dumpster fire, and I totally regret ever working for them, but no one's ever—you know—the condom's never broken before. I don't really do what we did very often, so I just want to be safe. Not that I don't like you, Donny. I like you so much.

Donny

It's okay, baby. I want you to take it.

Jacqui

You do. Okay well this'll just be one exception, but ordinarily I'll try to avoid taking any pills.

A moment.

Donny

That's kinda more S.E.'s thing than mine anyway. The medicine stuff. I mean, sure I think she's on to something. But she, uh...she's smarter than me.

Jacqui

That's not true.

Donny

But it is. She's on a different plane. She sees these dots, and she connects them. That's not to say she's perfect. I mean, she thinks this movie's gonna win Best Picture or something.

Jacqui

The Star Killers?

Donny

It's good, don't get me wrong, but she's still got a lot to learn. So do you. I mean that as a good thing! You've both got so much ahead of you. Not me. I'm used up. I can take a hint. The first time they knock on my door in over a decade, it's to reprise some beat-up old role in some reboot that'll probably go straight to video? I'm no dummy. S.E. could be a great filmmaker. Is she now? No. You could be a great actress. Are you now? No. But you only get great if you work. And you only work if somebody gives you a chance. That's what happened with me. Somebody gave me a chance. People don't give enough chances. But my wife? Hoo boy, has she given me chances. And then some. She has fought for me. And protected me. We've gotten a lot of attacks over the years. From directors, producers, other actors, from the union—from our own family even. All I ever wanted was to work. But people had it out for me, for whatever reason. We had a hard time with my daughter, Whitney. Years ago, she started accusing S.E. of squandering our money—not true, of course. Her mother, my first wife, coached her. That's ancient history, but the point is that's when S.E. really started getting protective of me. And of herself. That's life though. You gotta live in this protective crouch. The joke is you can stay in that crouch every

Donny

minute of every day and still get fucked. That's the logline of the Donny and S.E. Caine story. I know she's unusual. And she says kooky stuff. But she's everything to me. And if I didn't have her, I'd be dead.

Jacqui

Do you believe in the Star Killers?

Donny

Of course!

Jacqui

Totally, me too.

Donny

But do I believe it exactly the way S.E. explains it? Not exactly. I mean, I think crazy stuff is going on, but—like I said, she's smarter than me.

Jacqui

Me too. She's amazing.

Donny

You got that right. Hey, would you get me some aspirin? And could you keep 'em in your purse or something? I don't want her to find 'em. It'll be a whole thing.

We're transported to a movie.

*

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The Star and Woman stand at the edge of a cliff, looking out at a vast expanse.

WOMAN

So. You figured out the whole thing. I'm impressed. And "The Star Killers." Catchy name you came up with.

Quickly, Woman pulls out a gun and points it at The Star. The Star pulls out a knife.

WOMAN

This world is too dark and ugly for you. I can put you out of your misery.

THE STAR

I don't want to be put out of my misery.

WOMAN

Guess you don't have a say in that though, do you?

THE STAR

I don't want to be gone from this world. Sure it's dark and ugly, but it's also bright and wondrous. And you have no right to rob me of it.

WOMAN

You don't get it. You work for me. You work for all of us. You don't get to have your fame and acclaim and recognizable name without owing something to us. And that thing you owe us? That thing is your life.

THE STAR

I should've known you were a Star Killer.

WOMAN

In a way, everybody is. It's a consumer culture, babe. Say it.

THE STAR

Say what?

WOMAN

Don't play dumb with me. You know what.

THE STAR

Can't say I do.

WOMAN

The line. Say the line.

THE STAR

Over my dead body.

WOMAN

Interesting choice of words there.

THE STAR

You think I'm gonna give you what you want? Not without a fight!

WOMAN

We both know you live for it! The recognition! People on the street begging you to say that recognizable catchphrase. What a sad existence. Dance, monkey, dance!

THE STAR

HERE I—

S.E.
CUT! FUCK!

We're transported to reality.

*

EXT. DESERT – DAY

The trio is filming their movie, and Manny observes, seated in one of a few chairs. S.E. is operating the camera/phone.

Donny
Are you out of your mind?! That was on fire!

S.E.
The fucking phone ran out of memory!

Donny takes a seat next to Manny.

S.E.
Come on, you piece of shit! That was a great take! God damn it!

Jacqui
Maybe switch to cloud storage?

S.E.
What the fuck is cloud storage?

Jacqui
It stores your files in the cloud so they don't take up room on your phone.

S.E.
But it won't be on my phone anymore.

Jacqui
Not, like, physically.

S.E.

Then how will I still have ownership.

Jacqui

You will. It'll just share the cloud with other people's files.

S.E.

Hold up—*share?* *Other people?* So—what? I put my movie, my intellectual property, on this so-called cloud and—what? Someone'll be able to get a hold of it and wipe it or claim it as their own and then all my work gets credited to some pirates in Israel or China and it was all for naught? No thanks.

Jacqui

We could put it on the cloud now and then the minute we get home we could take it off the cloud and save it to a hard drive.

S.E.

But they'd still be able to steal it between now and the time I get home! They're not idiots!

Manny

Well, would you rather risk wasting everyone's time right now or risk someone thousands of miles away at some point in the next four hours maybe somehow if the stars align finding a video you sent up into the cloud from the middle of the desert?

Donny

He's got a point.

S.E.

THIS IS HORSESHIT!

Donny

IT IS HORESHIT! AND IT'S YOUR OWN DAMN FAULT! YOU TWO SHOULDA THOUGHT ABOUT THIS! I AM AN ACADEMY AWARD-NOMINATED MOVIE STAR AND I'M SICK AND TIRED OF WORKING ON AN UNPROFESSIONAL SET!

S.E.

SHOVE IT UP YOUR ASS!

Donny

GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER! DIRECT THIS MOVIE! GET TO WORK!

S.E.

Well, come on, Jack, you heard the man—get to work!

Jacqui gets to work. S.E. hovers and micromanages.

Manny

Why isn't she using a camera?

Donny

The short answer is Jacqui saw this movie out of Sundance that got all this buzz—

Manny

They shot it on a phone.

Jacqui

So you know!

Manny

Nectarine. I met with the kid who made it. He spent like hundreds of thousands of dollars on additional equipment and this whole suite of editing software.

S.E.

I'm gonna get the software.

Manny

Did you check out the new script?

Donny

I did.

Manny

Were you gonna tell me? Good changes, right?

Donny

We were talking, and like you said, we want this to be about serious issues, so we were thinking: what if he's addicted to oxy?

Manny

Interesting.

Donny

Yeah, he had some surgery or back pain or something—whatever it is, he's got hooked on oxy and he goes through withdrawal or something. Goes to rehab.

Manny

I worry that might be a bit too much for what we're going for here.

Donny

Guys like him are going through stuff like that as we speak!

Manny

But this still needs to be lighthearted.

Donny

I didn't say it wasn't gonna be lighthearted! I've seen withdrawal first-hand! That shit can be funny! I just—I really want this to say something.

Manny

I'm right there with you.

Donny

I owe these people more than I've given 'em the last thirty years. They're not a punchline. And it's, uh.

S.E.

And it's clear to us that your movies are exploitative and this script is no exception and we refuse to take part in trailer parkism.

Manny, *laughing*

Oh come on.

Donny

Yeah, so we were thinking, you could let S.E. take a pass at the script—

Manny

She's not touching that script.

Donny

Well then I won't do it.

Manny

Donny. Don't be daft.

S.E.

It's not polite to talk about one project on the set of another. I'm not superstitious, but it's bad luck. Especially when one movie is an indie that three struggling artists are putting together with their blood, sweat, and tears, while the other is a multi-million-dollar major studio affair that has oil and gas money behind it.

Manny

Oil and gas money?

S.E.

I did my research.

Donny

Will you shut up? I've got a headache.

S.E.

I'm your director! Show me a little respect!

Manny

You get a lot of headaches.

Donny

I'm alright.

Manny

You want an aspirin?

S.E.

He does not. Take a supplement if your head hurts.

Donny

Why don't you mind your own damn business?

S.E.

I command you not to take that from him!

Donny, *kind of scary*

Stop me, woman, I dare you!

S.E.

Fine, take it, see if I care.

Donny

Gimme one.

Manny gives Donny some aspirin.

S.E.

I'm not the one killing myself.

Donny makes a whole show of taking the pills:

places them gingerly on his tongue, gulps, smacks his tongue and goes "Ah!" after downs them.

A moment.

Jacqui

Oh great. It looks like all you have to do is agree to the cloud fee and then the files will all upload.

S.E.

The *cloud fee*? These people are unbelievable. They would charge a dead baby to get into heaven. Wait—it says it's gonna take a half-an-hour!

Jacqui

It always says that but it never does.

Manny

Have you heard from Whitney?

Donny

Don't make me laugh.

S.E.

My wicked stepdaughter? Please. That bitch hasn't called her father—or called her father back—in about fifteen years.

Donny

I gave up trying.

S.E.

And she has said some pretty unforgivable things to me, I might add.

Manny

Her movie's got awards contender written all over it.

S.E.

What did I just say about talking about one project on the set of another!

Manny

But she's been having a tough time, Don. A really tough time.

S.E.

You'd think if she was having such a tough time she'd call her stepmother who literally makes movies!

Donny

Or her father.

Manny

You didn't hear it from me, but I get the sense she needs you.

Donny

She wouldn't even take my call.

S.E.

It's not your fault! You've tried!

Manny

Go see her. Write her an e-mail. Send flowers. You're both adults now. Water under the bridge. What matters is the bridge. You're both artists working at the top of your game, and you're both coming out with movies around the same time. It could be mutually beneficial. Father and daughter heal old wounds. Donny Caine and Whitney Caine: old Hollywood and new Hollywood.

S.E.

You're disgusting. It's like no one's a person to you. Everyone's a cover story.

Manny

Donny. Your daughter needs help.

S.E.

A daughter who accuses her father of doing the things she accused him of—that's unforgivable. And long ago, mind you! Those things were long, long ago! We don't need that in our life and we sure as hell don't need it in the papers.

Donny

I'll think about it.

S.E.

You'll do no such thing. Let her in even one inch and she'll destroy you. Who knows what she'll say to the papers. She robbed us once. And then she pinned it on me! She coulda just asked for the money! Or gotten a job! She's never worked for anything a day in her life! So I wouldn't be too sure this movie of hers is gonna happen if I were you! She's gonna tell you she's depressed and can't get out of bed, but really she's just a deadbeat—not like us: we're the real deal—

Donny

WILL YOU QUIT JABBERING?! I TOLD YOU I HAVE A HEADACHE!

S.E.

TRY ANOTHER ASPIRIN!

Donny

S.E. For the love of everything holy. Please, will you once and for all, for all of our sakes, for the sake of this movie—will you please, I'm begging you, shut the fuck up.

S.E.

You're just like the rest of them.

Donny

SHUT UP!

S.E.

Afraid of the truth.

Donny

SHUT THE FUCK UP! JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP! JUST SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

Silence.

S.E.

I've said my piece. Are you done, Donald?

Donny

Yes. I'm gonna close my eyes. Wake me when we're ready.

S.E.

I will not allow you to just go to sleep. We're in the middle of shooting a scene.

Donny

We're in the middle of nothin'! If you two weren't dickin' around, we'd be shooting this movie. But we're not shooting this movie. We're not doin' nothin'. And while we're not doin' nothin', I, a professional, am going to take a nap. My own daughter is making a movie produced by the biggest studio in all of Hollywood while I'm shooting a movie in the middle of the desert on a cell phone that doesn't work. God, it all started out so good for me, baby. So good. I was discovered at nineteen, and it was all so good. I don't know what went wrong, but here I am. By all accounts, I am, in this final act of my life, a failure. But I am also a pro. And I, a pro, will be ready to go when you're ready to go. Roger that? I've been doing this a long time, Ess. I'm always ready to go.

Donny closes his eyes.

Silence.

Jacqui, *to Manny*

I think we're almost done. I'm Jacqui, by the way.

Manny

Yeah I remember.

Jacqui

Oh okay, I wasn't sure, so I figured I'd introduce myself. Or, like, re-introduce myself again. You want to hear something so funny?

Manny

Sure.

Jacqui

I used to cater waiter and I worked that party at your house. It was actually me who dropped that tray of shrimp summer rolls. It was so embarrassing. But now here we are on a film set together! You never know what's gonna happen in this business, right?! So what's your favorite project you're working on now?

Manny

Couldn't pick.

Jacqui

Anything you're super jazzed about?

Manny

Yes.

Jacqui

Cool. I'm just working on this. But hopefully this'll lead to something else which'll lead to something else. You know how it goes. It's such a hard life, but it's easy when it's your dream.

Donny convulses slightly, falls out of his chair and onto the ground, and remains unconscious.
A moment.

Manny

Donny?

Jacqui

Donny? You okay?

Manny

Donny? Has he been drinking?

S.E.

No he has not been drinking. He's a deep sleeper. He says he's gonna take a cat nap and then he's in a coma.

Jacqui

She's right. He *is* a deep sleeper. We've been having a lot of trouble waking him up lately.

Manny

Donny, you okay?

S.E.

Leave him. It was his idea to take a nap while the two women are working our asses off on something he considers a failure. He can stay where he is.

Manny goes to touch Donny.

S.E.

If you lay one finger on my husband I will kick in both of your testicles.

Manny retreats.

Jacqui

Well thanks for coming to work with us. It's an honor to get to learn from you.

S.E.

Learn from him? He's sitting in a chair.

Jacqui

I'm just saying. I'd love to know if you have any notes for me.

S.E.

Jacqui, might I recommend getting a hotel room? That's usually where this thing goes down, not in public like this.

Manny

That's enough, S.E.

S.E.

I'm just saying. He doesn't do it with an audience.

Manny

That's *ENOUGH!*

S.E.

Basically, if you want something from the guy, you don't need to blow smoke up his ass—you just need to blow him.

Jacqui

I'm not trying to blow smoke—!

Manny

You're being a bully!

S.E. cracks up.

S.E.

Now that's funny! *I'm* the bully! That's a good one. You should be in front of the camera. Alright. It's done. The internet thieves are downloading my film as we speak. You really saved the day, Jack. Sorry I got all worked up, baby.

Jacqui

That's okay, Mama.

S.E. kisses Jacqui on the lips.

S.E.

Alright, let's get this shot before we lose the sun completely. Wake up, Donny. Donny. Donny, get up. Donny. Donny. Donny, get your ass up! Donny! DONNY! I know you can hear me! STOP MESSING AROUND—WE'RE GONNA LOSE THE SUN! WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?! ENOUGH WITH THE GAMES, DONNY! He really is obnoxious.

Manny goes to Donny and feels his pulse.

S.E.

Don't touch him!

Jacqui

Donny?

Manny

I'm not feeling a pulse.

S.E.

What are you talking about?

Manny

I'm talking about I'm not feeling a pulse on him.

Jacqui

Sweet Jesus.

S.E.

Will you knock it off with the Jesus shit! DONNY! WAKE UP!

Manny

I don't think he's gonna wake up, S.E. I think we need to get him to a hospital.

S.E.

Nice try. We don't go to doctors.

Manny

I think today might need to be an exception.

S.E.

Oh my God. Oh my God. What did you give him.

Jacqui

Me?

S.E., to Manny

You. What did you give him before?

Manny

What are you talking about?

S.E.

Right before he fell asleep. You slipped him a mickey. Oh my god. It happened. It happened right before my eyes and I didn't stop it.

Manny

What is she talking about?

S.E.

What was the pill you gave him before?!

Manny

I gave him an aspirin! He had a headache!

S.E.

We know it wasn't an aspirin! You think we're idiots?!

Manny

S.E. We have to take your husband to the hospital. Jacqui, come help me.

Jacqui and Manny pick up Donny,
one on his armpits, one on his legs.
They start to carry him away.
S.E. pulls out her pistol and shoots Manny.
He falls to the ground.
There's a lot of blood.
Jacqui holds on to Donny and wails.

Jacqui

WHY?!?!

S.E.

Get yourself together.

Jacqui

HE WAS JUST TRYING TO HELP!

S.E.

Put Donny down.

Jacqui

NOW WE NEED TO TAKE THEM *BOTH* TO THE HOSPITAL!

S.E. aims her pistol at Jacqui.

S.E.

I said put him down.

Jacqui puts Donny's body on the ground.

S.E.

You're in on this.

Jacqui

What?

S.E.

It's okay. Stop pretending. I know you are.

Jacqui

I'm not though!

S.E.

It was your idea from the beginning that this bastard, this monster come to my set. And this all started because you were working at his party.

Jacqui

S.E., you know me.

S.E.

No I don't. I don't know anything about you. I know your church girl routine, but you could be anybody. What I realize now, and what I'm furious at myself for only realizing now, months too late, is that you are—

Jacqui

No.

S.E.

You are—

Jacqui

Please don't say it.

S.E.

You are a Star Killer.

Jacqui breaks down, trapped.

Jacqui

No! Please! Please!

S.E.

Calm down.

Jacqui

I promise! I'm not!

S.E.

You are.

Jacqui

I swear to god I'm not a Star Killer! I swear on my mom's life I'm not! I didn't know he was planning on drugging him! Just now was the most I ever talked to that man in my whole life! I could never do something like this! I love you and I love Donny!

S.E.

Loved Donny. He's dead. The love of my life is dead.

Jacqui

He might not be! That's why we have to get him to the hospital!

S.E. trains her pistol on Jacqui.

S.E.

Hey, Donny. You're probably with Keith and Philip and Jackson by now. I hope you're having fun up there, boys. Because it sucks down here. The Star Killers are picking you off one by one. Genius by genius. Dream by dream. But I got 'em this time. They're not gonna get away with this one.

S.E. has a realization.

S.E.

Hey.

Jacqui

...Hi.

S.E.

Gimme your purse.

Jacqui

Why?

S.E. lunges for Jacqui's purse, with Jacqui at her heels.

S.E. gets to it first and dumps all its contents out on the floor.

S.E. finds what she was looking for: the bottle of aspirin.

S.E.

Oh, you stupid girl.

Jacqui

S.E., it's not what it looks like.

S.E.

It's not? Because it looks pretty bad.

Jacqui

I know. I can explain.

S.E.

No explanation necessary. Manny paid you to be his backup.

Jacqui

I bought those myself.

S.E.

Oh my. You really are committed to the cause.

Jacqui

No, it's not like that! Okay, I was with Donny the other night and he asked me to buy aspirin for him, for his headaches. I'm telling you the truth. When you were working and we went to the market, he asked me to buy him some aspirin and hide them from you. I'm sorry! It was a mistake!

S.E. trains her pistol on Jacqui and cocks it.

Jacqui

Please, S.E. Please don't. Please. Have mercy on me.

S.E.

Did I ever tell you the story of how Donny and I met?

Jacqui

No. Please put the gun down.

S.E.

I'll tell you. I was a P.A. on this piece of shit movie he was making. I was so young. At the time I was mostly modeling. Some would call it porn, but it was fine art. All I'd ever wanted was to work in the movies. So my dad's friend got me this gig and my first day my job was to pick up Donny and drive him to set. He got in the car, and it was like...Adam meeting Eve. We talked and it was like we were inventing language. I got lost. I couldn't find the set. We drove around for like two hours. Eventually we gave up and got Chinese food. We went back to his hotel, fucked until the next morning, and came up with this whole plan. We were gonna be a team. We were gonna be stars. I'd make films and he'd be my muse. But you took that away from me. And I'll never get it back.

Suddenly, a crow falls heavy from the sky and knocks S.E. in the head.

Jacqui runs at S.E. and they tussle for the gun.

In the melee, the gun goes off.

S.E. drops to the ground.

Jacqui wails over S.E.'s bloody, lifeless body.

Jacqui

SWEET JESUS! I'M SORRY! JESUS HAVE MERCY ON MY SOUL! JESUS
HAVE MERCY ON MY SOUL!

Jacqui crawls to the body of the crow.

Jacqui, *to the crow*

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

It feels as if Jacqui thanks the crow forever,
and it segues into...

*

INT. MANNY'S OFFICE – DAY

Jacqui is sitting with Manny, who is no longer bloody.
The bloody, lifeless bodies of Donny and S.E. remain on the ground.

Jacqui

Thank you so much for making time to see me.

Manny

You saved my life, kid.

Jacqui

Well, me and the crow.

Manny

What crow?

Jacqui

No one told you?! S.E. was about to shoot me. I was as good as dead. Then, at that exact moment, a crow fell from the sky and hit S.E. on the head. It was a miracle.

Manny

It was climate change.

Jacqui

Huh?

Manny

It's been happening a lot lately, birds falling from the sky. It's got something to do with pollution or something.

Jacqui

Well everything happens for a reason.

Manny

No.

Jacqui

You don't think?

Manny

We got lucky. Donny not so much. The poor guy was prisoner to a madwoman who wouldn't let him see a cardiologist. Listen Jacqui, I unfortunately have to let you go. I have a pretty serious crisis on my hands.

Jacqui

Oh okay. I can wait in the lobby until you have a free moment.

Manny

Not gonna happen.

Jacqui

I'll schedule a time to come back.

Manny

This is all the time I have for you. But I'm glad I got to thank you face-to-face.

Jacqui

Just one more thing—real quick—I was thinking you and I could team up and make something out of this whole mess—turn lemons into lemonade! I was thinking you could do a movie or a miniseries or even a reality show about Donny and S.E. and I could play myself and even write and direct. S.E. was mentoring me, and I'm ready to go. Or we could get Whitney Caine on board!

Manny

No.

Jacqui

To which part?

Manny

Every part.

Jacqui

Okay. How about, are there any agents or managers you might be able to connect me with?

Manny

No.

Jacqui

Just, as a favor, after everything that happened?

Manny

No.

Jacqui

Um, okay. May I ask why not?

Manny

Because you're not good. I run the most respected studio in the business. I can't pull strings for someone who doesn't have what it takes.

Jacqui

But I do have what it takes.

Manny

Jacqui, I really have to let you go.

Jacqui

I can act—I can sing—I can dance! I've been doing this since I was a little girl and I'm not gonna give up. If somebody would just give me a chance, I could be a great actress. I'll make you proud. If you would just give me a chance, I have it in me, I know I do—!

Manny

You don't. I've seen you act. More than I ever need to. You're not good. You try too hard. You're not authentic.

Jacqui

I disagree.

Manny

That's fine.

Jacqui

I wholeheartedly disagree.

Manny

You said everything happens for a reason. Take everything that's happened as a sign. Start a new chapter.

Jacqui

But this is my dream.

Manny

Dreams change.

Jacqui

Could you at least put me in touch with Whitney Caine?

Manny

No.

Jacqui

Well I'm gonna figure out how to get in touch with her and she's gonna put me in her next movie!

Manny

You're not gonna be able to get in touch with Whitney Caine.

Jacqui

I know you think you're some kind of god, but you can't stop me.

Manny

You're not gonna be able to get in touch with Whitney Caine, because Whitney Caine is dead. This is why I've gotta let you go. This is the emergency I've been dealing with all morning.

Jacqui

You're lying.

Manny

I wish I was, but Whitney Caine is dead. Her assistant found her this morning. Looks like it was an overdose.

Jacqui, *with a chuckle*

Of course.

Manny

I know. Her dad isn't medicated enough, she's too medicated. These people have health problems—physical, mental—and they don't deal with them. Listen, let me put you in touch with a shrink, help you through all this. On me.

Jacqui

What kind of idiot do you think I am?

Manny

Excuse me?

Jacqui

This is all very convenient. First Donny, then his daughter. I wonder who's next.

Manny

I know. It's terrible. It's like a curse.

Jacqui, *snickering*

A curse. No, you're the curse! You people are the curse! You killed her! You drugged her up! Just like you drugged her father! I'M NOT STUPID!

Manny

Alright, I think we're done here.

Jacqui

Fool me once, shame on you, but fool me twice? Uhn uhn. You think I'm gonna let you send me to someone to medicate me? Are you gonna slip me an "aspirin" too?

Manny

Whitney was an addict.

Jacqui

Don't you dare blame this on her! This isn't about addiction! You're force-feeding us poison! STAR KILLER! STAR KILLER!

Manny

SOMEBODY GET THIS WHACKO OUTTA HERE!

Jacqui

Because stars are worth more dead than alive!

Manny grabs Jacqui's arm.

Manny

Time to go now, crazy girl.

Jacqui snatches her arm away.

Jacqui

Get your hands off me, RAPIST!
You're gonna make a fortune off
Whitney's death: the news coverage, the
box office, her will! And you count on
the braindead sheeple not realizing this.
You think nobody sees the forest for
the trees, because nobody does. Well,
some of us do. *We do*. Because you
don't have to look that deep into it—
it's all right there for you to see, clear as
day—it's SO OBVIOUS IT'S STUPID!

Manny

I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot
pole, you backwoods freak. WILL
SOMEBODY GET THIS LUNATIC
OUT OF MY OFFICE?! I HAVE
WORK TO DO. HELLO!? WHAT
DO I PAY YOU PEOPLE FOR?
THE INMATES HAVE ESCAPED
THE ASYLUM AND THEY'RE
BREAKING DOWN THE DOOR!

Manny flees to find help, leaving Jacqui alone.

Jacqui, a steam train, soldiers on, speaking directly to the audience, to the entire world.

By the end of her monologue, Jacqui is somehow gigantic, like a monstrous eternal flame.

Jacqui

I've done my research and I can tell you that the system was built to leech off us, so even if you don't think someone's a leech, they're a leech, you're a leech too, everyone's a leech because everyone's a part of the system and the goal of the system is to suck dry, because in capitalism money has forcefields, so we are all shackled to studios and corporations and governments whose only goal is to completely control our actions and our careers and our art and therefore our minds, but the sheeple can't smell the rancid putrid lethal coffee that's affecting our society, because we as a society are asleep, meanwhile the Star Killers have crept past our sleeping bodies and turned the world we once knew into a dystopian hellscape and pretty soon we won't recognize it anymore, so it's time to get the truth out there and know what you're complicit in so we can honor the memories of the dead and change the world because the clock is running out and before we know it the system will eat us all.

Blackout.

The End.