

UNTITLED TRUCKER

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY

HANK PICKER (37, stout but strong, sporting a statement mustache and topped with a matching cowboy hat) works through a jumble of wires on the passenger seat of a detached semitruck at the end of a long gravel driveway.

The wires feed from a side panel and connect to a small portable console. Hank swears under his heavy breath, taking off his hat to wipe away beads of sweat.

LIAM (O.S.)

Dad?

Hank turns to see his son, LIAM PICKER (5, green-eyed, unlike his father, with messy brown hair). Liam's holding a large glass of lemonade with two hands while squeezing a white paper under his left elbow. The lemonade glistens enticingly.

HANK

Hey, bud. Is that for me?

LIAM

Me and mom made it!

Liam carefully extends his arm. The forgotten paper slips from beneath his elbow, breaking Liam's concentration. The glass starts to teeter, but Hank quickly meets his hands and grabs the drink.

HANK

Woah there, I gotcha. You made it huh?

LIAM

Me and mom did.

Liam watches his dad take a generous drink.

HANK

(lips smacking)

Ahhhh. Now how'd you know I needed that?

LIAM

(smiling)

Mom said so.

HANK

Well that's 'cause she's smart, like you.

Hank notices the fallen paper, still face down on the driveway.

HANK (CONT'D)
(gesturing)
And what's that there?

Liam picks the paper up and displays it proudly.

LIAM
It's my drawing!

On it is a crude flying vehicle: a drone-like, four rotor single-person convertiplane. It's rough and disproportionate, but admittedly impressive for a five-year-old.

HANK
One of those flying things. You're getting pretty good.

LIAM
It's a PAV, Dad.

Hank turns back to the mess of wires in the truck.

HANK
(distracted)
That's right, that's right. Private air vehicle, the "flight of the future." Are you gonna color it in?

LIAM
Noo, a PAV! Personal aircraft vehicle. They're gonna be ready for a Q4 disrabutition.

HANK
Well I'll be! Here, you want to see what I'm working on?

LIAM
Yeah.

Hank clears the wires from the passenger seat and lifts Liam to replace them. He hands Liam the portable console.

HANK
Go ahead son, turn it on.

Hank guides Liam's finger to the power button. The console flickers on, and following a short startup string, the screen shows "L.I.A.M." in its center with "v1.10.0-alpha" tucked in the bottom corner.

LIAM
That's me!

HANK
That's right, it's an acronym.

LIAM
An acronym?

HANK
You know what an acronym is. When
the letters all stand for
something.

LIAM
Oh, like PAV?

HANK
Right. But this one's a little
different.

LIAM
What does it mean?

Hank guides Liam's finger over each of the four letters as he
talks.

HANK
"Lucky the Intelligent Assistance
Module". You can just call him
Lucky.

LIAM
What do you mean?

HANK
Go ahead, say "hi."

LIAM
Hi...Lucky?

The console screen shifts to display a blue undulating
wavelength as it loads. After a moment, the console replies
in a stiff, haltingly robotic voice.

LUCKY
Hello, Liam.

LIAM
Whoa, how does it know me?

HANK
Don't ask me, ask him.

Liam holds the console entirely too close to his face and talks again.

LIAM
How do you know me?

LUCKY
I have learned your voice through voicemails on your father's phone, in a process called recursive learning. That is my main learning function.

LIAM
What's cursive learning?

The screen loads, contemplating Liam's question.

LUCKY
Cursive is a form of penmanship marked by conjoined lettering to evoke a flowing communication.

HANK
I think he meant to ask about recursive learning, Lucky. Remember, younger users might mix up their words. I guess older users could do that too.

LUCKY
Feedback processing.

The blue undulating wavelength reappears, but this time a second wavelength dissects the first, a red sinusoid with a shifted period such that the two patterns move in sync.

LUCKY (CONT'D)
Recursive learning is a method of knowledge acquisition utilizing an efficient logical analysis to derive the maximum amount of information from an information system in the minimum amount of time necessary.

Liam considers Lucky's explanation.

LIAM
Can you guess my favorite color?

LUCKY
I will guess... Red.

LIAM
No.

LUCKY
Green.

LIAM
No.

LUCKY
Blue.

LIAM
No.

LUCKY
Yellow.

LIAM
(giggling)
No.

HANK
Why don't you tell him, bud, and
he'll know for next time.

LIAM
It's forest green.

LUCKY
I guessed green.

LIAM
But it's forest green.

LUCKY
That is a shade of green.

LIAM
But you didn't guess it.

A beat. Liam pulls back the console to see the red/blue pattern combination again. The screen suddenly erupts into a complex error log. Liam hands the console to Hank.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I broke it.

HANK
No, that's alright bud. It's still
got a few screws loose.

LIAM
(pointing)
Woah, look Dad!

Liam spots a PAV flying in the distance through the truck's windshield.

HANK
I guess they really are coming.

LIAM
Will you and Mom get one?

HANK
I don't know. I've got a lot of driving on the ground left.

Liam sits silently, mesmerized by the PAV buzzing across the horizon.

LIAM
Dad?

HANK
What?

LIAM
Doesn't it ever get boring driving?

HANK
Sometimes. But then, you might just be surprised. Maybe one day you'll see it like I do.

Hank watches Liam still looking to the sky, the console laying idly in his hands. He lifts Liam up out of the passenger seat and back to the ground.

HANK (CONT'D)
Alright bud, thanks for the lemonade. Can you go thank your Mom for me too?

LIAM
Sure Dad. Can we play catch later?

HANK
After dinner, when it cools down a bit. But only if Mom says so.

LIAM
Okay!

Liam starts back to the house. His head cranes to the sky, watching the PAV that still dots the horizon. Hank notices Liam's drawing sitting on the passenger seat and chuckles.

Hank turns to watch the distant PAV. He looks across an adjacent field, where rays of sunlight cut through darkening rain clouds.

The rays of sunlight flatten and dissolve, now replaced by careful brush strokes on a canvas, and we are -

INT. LIAM'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

Liam (27) works a canvas with a paint brush on a standing easel in the center of a small studio room. His hair is disheveled and dark inset circles accentuate his green eyes.

The room around him is sterile, with stark white walls, save for the many canvases littering the floor. They present a cornucopia of planetary landscapes, a mix of fantastic rock formations opening to nebula-filled skies.

Liam scrutinizes the strokes of a half-finished ray of light. It dissipates into a field of sand, the sand encircled by a mountainous ridgeline. The sky is a heavenly mix of gaseous greens, reds, oranges, and blues. The painting is about three quarters finished, steeped in a unique and practiced transcendentalism.

There's a knock at the door facing Liam's back.

LIAM

It's open!

CHRISTIE TOWNS (28, brusque brunette, poised), steps through the door.

CHRISTIE

Liam, do you ever check your phone anymore?

LIAM

Uh...

Liam peels himself away from the canvas to look around him briefly.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I'm actually not sure where it is.
Sorry, Christie. Something important?

CHRISTIE

No, I guess not. Just checking up on you.

Christie walks to the center of the room and picks up one of the paintings off the floor. She's eyeing it thoughtfully. Liam watches her.

CHRISTIE (CONT'D)

I think this one's the best.

LIAM

(rolling his eyes)

You always say that. You haven't seen any of the others.

CHRISTIE

I just know these things, it's a gift. Oh shit, you look like hell.

LIAM

Oh thanks, good to see you too.

Christie smiles. The two hug briefly, but warmly.

CHRISTIE

So how long have you been at it?

LIAM

Honestly, I don't know.

CHRISTIE

When was the last time you ate?

LIAM

No idea.

CHRISTIE

That's what I thought. Come on, let's go get something.

Liam hesitates, looking at the canvas and its unfinished sky.

CHRISTIE (CONT'D)

Oh *come on*, Liam. When is the submission deadline anyways?

LIAM

Next Friday.

Christie gives Liam a look. She's not impressed.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 Okay, damn. Don't give me that. You win.

CHRISTIE
 Good. There's a new place in middle Chelsea I've been dying to try.

They start to the door together.

LIAM
 Wait, let me find my phone.

INT. LIAM'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Liam walks through the hallway of his apartment. Artwork covers both walls, an eclectic mix of periods.

INT. LIAM'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liam enters his bedroom, searching. The room is notably minimalistic. A few larger canvases are covered and stacked in the corner. A family picture hangs near the light switch, including his teenage self, his mother, and his father.

Liam finds his phone on his bedside table. It is a razer thin sheet of glass, about 6 x 2.5in. He turns it over, and notifications fill the screen: two missed messages from "Christie Towns", and one missed message from "Jenny Levitt".

Liam's eyes widen as he taps to read the message from Jenny, though we do not see its contents. After a moment, he taps again, causing the phone to roll up and then deflate in his right palm, until it resembles a flat glass straw.

He slaps his palm to his left wrist and presses firmly. The rolled-up phone bends and curls around his wrist, a makeshift wristband. He shakes it into place, then flicks his wrist into view; the thin screen projects "2:53PM".

INT. LIAM'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Liam emerges from the hallway. Christie is at the front door.

CHRISTIE
 Ready?

LIAM
 Jenny Levitt messaged me.

CHRISTIE
Oh shit, like in a good way?

LIAM
I don't know. She wants me to meet her at 3, she didn't say why.

CHRISTIE
Like at the gallery?

LIAM
No, at her office.

CHRISTIE
What are the cross streets?

LIAM
Broadway, Seventh and Tau.

CHRISTIE
Damn, that's way up there. That's at least ten minutes on the grid.

LIAM
Well, I've got-

Liam checks his wrist again.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Five.

A beat, as the two consider Liam's dilemma. He gives a knowing look to Christie.

CHRISTIE
No, definitely not. Liam, I can't.

LIAM
Well, you could. Physically, you could. I can't. I don't know how.

CHRISTIE
(exasperated)
For God's sake-

EXT. LIAM'S APARTMENT, HANGAR GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Christie and Liam scramble into Christie's PAV parked outside Liam's apartment on a patio-like garage. It is a white two-seater evocative of Liam's sketch, but with the added benefit of two decades of streamlined design and polish.

INT. CHRISTIE'S PAV - CONTINUOUS

Liam enters the cross-streets of Jenny Levitt's office building into a large center display console using an X, Y, and Z axis overlay. There are no flight controls, but the PAV starts noisily, hovers briefly, and lurches forward.

INT./EXT. NYC METROPOLITAN SKYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Christie's PAV falls in line with a stream of whirring PAVs. They are 'on the grid': the centrally controlled skyway providing seamless air-travel across the NYC area. They move quickly, but slow often for crossflow.

Familiar echoes of modern NYC are apparent, but the city is noticeably transformed. Large futuristic skyscrapers, hundreds of feet above their predecessors, streak by.

Christie pulls out her phone, connecting it to the center console.

CHRISTIE

They're going to be on our ass as soon as we shift into free flight.

LIAM

You can still do it, though, right?

CHRISTIE

Yeah, it's the same workaround, even on the newer models.

LIAM

How much time do you think we'll realistically have?

CHRISTIE

Ten, fifteen seconds? Hard to tell.

LIAM

Well if anything goes wrong, your dad certainly helps.

CHRISTIE

Shit Liam, there's only so many times that works. Just be ready to fly.

Christie quiets with concentration, navigating code on the center console. Liam watches the world buzzing by.

LIAM

How're things with Allie?

CHRISTIE
Not the time.

Flight controls emerge from the dashboard, in front of Liam on the passenger side. Liam grips the control wheel.

LIAM
Now?

CHRISTIE
Almost. Remember, if you let it drop, we might have a better chance. It'll be a straight shot from there.

LIAM
Right, just say when.

The PAV moves uniformly through the grid. It slows at a crossway.

CHRISTIE
NOW!

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A large semitruck passes another on the left, horn blasting.

INT. HANK'S SEMI-TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Hank (49) is smiling, devilishly, as a horn blasts around him, his hand near its switch. He's looking at the driver in the truck to his right. The other driver flips Hank off, laughing, then speeds up to overtake him.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
What's all that?

The dashboard display shows an ongoing call with "Ted Towns".

HANK
Oh, just caught Johnny Tannen.
Wanted to make sure he's still
awake out there.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
Johnny's a good one. Are you sure
it wasn't to keep you awake?

HANK

Well, only if you keep talking.

The two laugh, warmly.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)

Listen, Hank. It's not looking good. We can joke about the old days, but things are changing. Heck, most kids won't touch the roads in a few years. They see the writing on the wall.

HANK

You mean they see the pension buyout dangling in front of their faces. There's a lot of good drivers still out here, Ted. They're years away from seeing any of that, if at all, and they've got families to look out for. The roads are better with people on 'em.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)

That may be true now, but they see a real path to a fully autonomous system, and it means nobody's behind the wheel if a few more crashes are needed to iron out the bugs.

HANK

That's bullshit.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)

It might be. But they're pouring a lot of resources into this.

HANK

Well, where are the negotiations at?

TED TOWNS (V.O.)

You know I can't talk about strategy, Hank. There're laws. I'm only calling as a favor.

HANK

Seems like that's your whole world these days.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)

Shit, Hank. That's the way it works.

A beat.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
It's going to come down to your 44.
They can't get through without 44's
support.

HANK
Election's in two months.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
And you're the incumbent. They're
going to the throw the kitchen sink
at you. But as long as you're still
breathing, you'll win by a
landslide. They all know it. You
could be braindead and they'd still
pick you.

HANK
C'mon, Ted. Talk about strategy,
don't go giving mine away.

They laugh.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
I better get going, it's late over
here.

HANK
You bet. Hey, hope New York's
treating you okay. We miss you
guys. I know Liam's missing
Christie.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
It's been tough on her. On Nancy
too. It's different over here, but
a lot is the same.

HANK
And the politics?

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
All the same. You know that.

HANK
I know. You'll do well out there.

TED TOWNS (V.O.)
We'll see. Have a good one.

HANK
You too.

The call ends, clearing from the dashboard display.

HANK (CONT'D)
Lucky, try Liam again.

Lucky's voice responds in crisp surround sound. It's much more fluid than when we last heard it.

LUCKY
I could buy you a lottery ticket instead. You'd probably have more success.

HANK
Is that true?

LUCKY
No, it's called hyperbole. But the fact you had to ask isn't good.

HANK
Remind me to tweak your sarcasm module.

LUCKY
That isn't a thing.

HANK
Would you just call Liam? Put me to voicemail if he doesn't pick up.

The dashboard lights up with a picture of seventeen-year-old Liam. The phone rings for a moment.

LUCKY
Putting through to voicemail. Here, I've crafted a script for you.

The dashboard flickers to a teleprompter with scrolling text, which Hank tries his best to ignore.

DASHBOARD: My dearest progeny, first and only of my loins, I have failed you again.

HANK
Hey bud.

DASHBOARD: Please forgive my absence in your time of battle.

HANK (CONT'D)
How was the game?

DASHBOARD: Willst thou absolve me of these black marks, and find grace still?

HANK (CONT'D)
Mom told me you're working on the
slider again before the showcase
next month. Looking forward to
seeing it in action-

DASHBOARD: My son, my son. Call me back when you can.

Hank swipes away the teleprompter. He also wipes away a bead
of sweat, looking at it, confused.

HANK (CONT'D)
Give me a call when you can. I'm on
the road, just through Nebraska...

Hank stops, breathing heavy. His face glistens with sweat.

HANK (CONT'D)
(labored)
I should be back next week. Love
you son.

The call ends. Hank works to catch his breath. A horn goes
off behind him as he's dropped speed without realizing. He
jerks the wheel, reflexively, at the sound of the horn,
pulling him slightly off-road.

LUCKY
Hank?

Hank looks like he's losing consciousness, but he regains his
faculties enough to avoid overcorrecting and instead guides
the truck safely onto the shoulder.

LUCKY (CONT'D)
Hank, is everything okay?

HANK
I don't know, you tell me.

LUCKY
Are you sure?

HANK
What does that mean?

Lucky flashes Hank's vitals on the screen. His heart rate is
dropping rapidly. Hank withdraws his hands from the steering
wheel, which shuts off the vital readings.

LUCKY
I'm calling 911.

HANK
Wait, just wait.

Hank focuses on his strained breathing.

LUCKY
Hank, time is a factor.

HANK
Everything's a factor. Just give me
a goddamn moment.

Hank leans back in the driver seat, looking to the ceiling of the truck. He shifts his gaze to the passenger seat, where Lucky's portable console is affixed to the side panel.

With considerable effort, Hank grasps at the console, disconnecting it from the side panel, and powers the console down. The console falls weakly onto the passenger seat. He blinks once, twice, and then to darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. NYC STREETS - DAY (PRESENT)

A woman walks down the center of Broadway. There are no traditional streets. It is simply a large pedestrian walkway with constant whirring higher overhead. She sighs heavily. The afternoon sun is uncomfortable, but not yet oppressive.

She looks up to see a white PAV dropping rapidly from the sky. She continues watching, paralyzed, as it plummets towards her. Other pedestrians are scurrying around her, moving away.

The PAV pulls out of its dive within just a few feet from the woman, hovers briefly, and shoots back up to the sky, accelerating rapidly.

INT./EXT. NYC METROPOLITAN SKYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Christie grips the sides of her seat, white knuckled. Both Christie and Liam are pressed forcefully against their seats, shooting up vertically.

CHRISTIE
WHAT THE HELL, LIAM!

LIAM
We're fine! You said to let it
drop!

CHRISTIE
I didn't say to scrape the ground!

LIAM
Just a little rusty, that's all.

Liam weaves between inter-building walkways and continues upward, moving free of the ongoing stream of PAVs on the grid to his left.

CHRISTIE
Flatten, you'll miss it! We just
passed Rho.

Two police PAVs shoot out from the grid with red, white, and blue lights flashing. They lock on to Liam's tail, gaining speed.

LIAM
Damn.

CHRISTIE
Of course. Flatten!

The rotors shift as Liam steadies the PAV out of its upward arc, now hovering a few feet to the right of the flowing grid. Christie plugs her phone back in to the center console. The police PAVs are rising quickly.

LIAM
Christie?

CHRISTIE
Now you're going to rush me?

The flight controls recede into the dashboard. The grid reappears on the center console, with a flashing warning sign. Christie swipes away the warning and taps a button labeled "ALIGN". The PAV shudders a moment, then suddenly jerks to the left with speed, merging back into the grid seamlessly.

LIAM
Do you think we merged fast enough?

CHRISTIE
Not a chance. Just get out quick
before they see you were in here.

LIAM
I'm sorry.

Christie's furrowed brow eases, giving way to a wry smile.

CHRISTIE
I kinda missed it.

LIAM
(smiling)
I owe you a huge one.

The PAV exits the grid, spitting out in front of an imposing skyscraper. It enters a small roundabout near the front door.

Liam steps out and away from the PAV, walking quickly to the entryway. Over his shoulder, he watches as the two tailing police PAVs emerge from the grid and move to the front and rear of Christie's Pav, boxing it in.

INT. LEVITT OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Liam steps out of an elevator to a small waiting area, checking his wrist phone. The time reads 2:59PM. A RECEPTIONIST (20s) greets Liam behind a small, stylized desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Hi, Mr. Picker. Miss Levitt will be right with you, she's just finishing up another meeting. Feel free to take a seat and I'll let you know when's she's ready.

LIAM
Thanks.

Liam picks a chair across from the reception desk, angled out towards a glass wall opening to the outside air. Liam looks at the monstrous skyscrapers and the flow of flying PAVs.

His vision starts to blur against the constant motion. He blinks once, twice, three times, his eyelids lingering shut a little longer each time.

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S SEMI-TRUCK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Hank rouses, suddenly. The first rays of morning light drape across the truck's dashboard. Hank takes a moment to orient.

He reaches over to the portable console and turns it on. The screen shows "L.I.A.M." in its center with "v12.2.1" tucked in the bottom corner. He plugs it back into the side panel.

LUCKY
Hank?

HANK

I'm alright. Let's get back on the road.

LUCKY

Hank, you likely still need medical assistance.

HANK

Lucky, I'm fine. Listen - last night...it never happened. Do you understand?

LUCKY

No.

HANK

You've gotta drop it. There's a lot of driving to make up. Please.

LUCKY

Okay.

Hank fires up the semi and pulls back onto the road. Lucky's console lights up in the side panel. It shows a familiar red-blue dual wavelength, undulating in tandem.

CUT TO:

INT. LEVITT OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - DAY (PRESENT)

Liam sits slumped in his chair, eyes closed. The Receptionist stands a few feet away, awkwardly.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Picker? Sir?

Liam stirs slightly but remains asleep. The Receptionist debates shaking him awake, but stops before making contact.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Um, Liam?

Liam jolts awake.

LIAM

Yes? Sorry.

RECEPTIONIST

Jenny Levitt's ready for you.

Liam looks down to his wrist. The time reads: 3:48PM.

INT. LEVITT MAIN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Liam walks into an office hopelessly cluttered with canvases and paintings both hanging and in piles leaned against the walls, complete with a scattering of sculpted works joining the chaos.

JENNY LEVITT (50s, tall, plainly dressed with a signature set of small round glasses) stands at a desk drowning in the middle of it all, concentrating on two paintings held side-by-side.

JENNY
(distracted)
Liam, good to see you again.
Please, take a seat.

LIAM
Thanks, good to see you too.

Liam looks for a place to sit, but there's no obvious choice. He ends up carefully moving a stack of paintings off a nearby chair and takes a seat. Jenny focuses on the painting on her left, turning her head contemplatively.

JENNY
I've been hoping to hear from you.
I'm putting on an exhibition for up
and coming artists. "Horizons." I
thought you'd be interested after
we spoke in January at your gallery
launch.

LIAM
I am! I didn't know - I mean I know
about the exhibition. I've been
working on my submission line for
months. I'm sorry, I thought the
deadline for Horizons was next
Friday.

JENNY
Friday? Oh, right.

Jenny finally puts the right painting on top of the left and sets them aside, looking at Liam for the first time. Her eyes are intense, scrutinizing.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Can you show me?

LIAM
(confused)
Show you?

JENNY

What you've been working on.

LIAM

Well, I - I didn't bring them.

JENNY

Holos, pictures, notes, sketches?
Anything?

Jenny taps her foot impatiently, like an addict waiting for her next hit.

LIAM

Oh, sure.

Liam presses against the bracelet on his wrist. The bracelet unfolds to a phone-sized screen before flattening even further to a paper-sized sheet of thin glass. He navigates on it for a moment before passing it to Jenny.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Here. They're not all finished...

Jenny grabs the screen and starts scrolling through a gallery. It's a mix of planetary landscapes recognizable from the canvases seen earlier in Liam's apartment. Most are simple pictures, but a few of them are three dimensional, holographic renderings that project above the screen.

JENNY

Beautiful.

Liam's shoulder relax.

LIAM

Thanks.

JENNY

Are they all space related?

LIAM

Yeah, well, they're an extension of my first line from the gallery open.

JENNY

I see. Hm.

LIAM

What?

Jenny puts down the screen, turning her full attention back to Liam.

JENNY
I've already got Dornier.

LIAM
I thought he was setting up in
London?

JENNY
He pulled out. Well, you could say
I pulled him back for Horizons. I
thought you were working on
something new...

LIAM
Not entirely, I just have more, you
know. There's more I want to do
before I move from it.

JENNY
I know, I think they're wonderful.

LIAM
Dornier and I are different—

JENNY
Oh, dear.

Jenny takes off her glasses, shakes her head, exhales deeply.
She looks down and rubs her eyes with one hand, pinching the
bridge of her nose.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Entirely different. Don't you think
I know that? But the subject, Liam.
The subject's the same. We've too
few spots for repeats.

Jenny moves away from her desk, glasses still in hand, and
fixates on a nearby sculpture.

JENNY (CONT'D)
It's a shame, really.

Jenny continues looking at the sculpture for a long time.
Liam shifts awkwardly in his seat.

JENNY (CONT'D)
We can do a separate exhibit.
Separate from the summer
exhibition, away from Dornier.
Costly, but I see it. I like it.

Jenny turns to Liam and puts the glasses back on. Her intense
eyes zero in on his face.

JENNY (CONT'D)
If you can get the capital I'll put
my name on it.

LIAM
I, that's amazing! But - thank you,
really. But, how much -

JENNY
\$600,000, best guess.

LIAM
Oh.

Jenny walks back behind her desk.

JENNY
You don't have it.

LIAM
No.

JENNY
What about your gallery?

LIAM
I've had sales here and there,
just, I put all of it back into the
gallery and into this series for
Horizons.

JENNY
The sort of things it would have
been good for me to know before
calling Dornier back across the
Atlantic.

LIAM
I'm sorry. I'm flattered, really, I
just didn't know you were paying
attention.

JENNY
I'm always paying attention.

Jenny sits down at the desk for the first time since Liam has
arrived. She sighs.

JENNY (CONT'D)
It'd be space, twice. You
understand.

LIAM
I guess.

Jenny stands up, abruptly.

JENNY

I'll keep the offer open until the end of the summer. \$500,000. I'll front the other \$100k. We can still get it up and funded before winter if your works are mostly there.

Jenny extends a handshake. Liam shakes her hand, looking a little dazed.

LIAM

Thank you.

JENNY

This'll be big for you.

LIAM

I know.

JENNY

Make it happen.

Liam stands up and readies for the door.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Oh, Liam.

LIAM

Yes?

JENNY

Try not to fall asleep in the lobby next time.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLEVIEW BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

An announcer commentates, as if through a TV, while players warm-up on a baseball field in a small stadium. The stadium is raised high above the ground. The nearby parking lot is full of PAVs, clunkier than those seen on the NYC skyway.

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)

...shaping up to be a good crowd for the much anticipated Midwest Showcase tonight at Belleview Field, featuring the KC Sizzle and the Tulsa Twisters. Both teams are vying for top spots in the USBA national rankings.

INT. BROADCAST BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Two announcers survey the scene in a small booth above Belleview Field, speaking into microphones.

ANNOUNCER 2

It's a good point, J.T. Both teams are looking to make it out of the Midwest division and make a deep run this summer, and hopefully compete for a championship that's been dominated by the coastal divisions for the past few years.

ANNOUNCER 1

But the Showcase is a stepping stone there, we'll see no movement in the standings based on today's match-up, right?

ANNOUNCER 2

That's right. It's a pre-season Showcase, but maybe the most important game of the summer for a lot of these ballplayers.

ANNOUNCER 1

No doubt, talking in terms of the scouting turnout.

ANNOUNCER 2

Exactly right.

ANNOUNCER 1

Speaking of which, top prospect Liam Picker now taking the mound for some warmups. What do you have for us on KC's starter?

ANNOUNCER 2

Well it's fair to say his Sizzle's career is off to a sizzling start. Picker's only 17, but he's a must-watch lefty at 6'1" featuring a low 90s fastball. His signature pitch, though, should be that slider/slurve coming in around 83-84.

ANNOUNCER 1

We've seen that slider, it's a nasty one.

ANNOUNCER 2

Sure is, J.T. It's got him projecting in the first round this year, maybe even as high as fifteen. Today will be a big one for him.

ANNOUNCER 1

Hold on a second.

There's confusion on the field as warmups stop. A coach runs out to Liam on the mound. Liam walks off the field, to the fence along the dugout.

ANNOUNCER 1 (CONT'D)

Well this is strange. We just saw Picker cut his warmups short and walk off the mound.

ANNOUNCER 2

Maybe switching gloves?

Another pitcher takes the mound.

ANNOUNCER 1

I don't know, partner. Looks like KC's putting out a different arm to warm up.

ANNOUNCER 2

Looks like it.

ANNOUNCER 1

Just give us a moment, folks, while we wait for word from the field.

EXT. BELLEVIEW BASEBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Liam (17) sees his mom, JULIE PICKER (46, tall, blonde-haired, green eyes like Liam's), standing on the other side of the fence up the first base line. Julie looks concerned.

LIAM

What's going on?

JULIE

Get your stuff, hun. It's Dad, he's in the hospital.

LIAM

Why? What happened?

JULIE

There was an accident. He was dropping off the trailer before heading over here...they're saying it's a heart attack.

LIAM

Is he okay?

JULIE

I don't know.

Liam runs to the dugout.

CUT TO:

INT. FIRST PICK GALLERY - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Liam stands behind a desk in the corner of a small studio gallery, doodling aimlessly on a paper in front of him. In the corner of the page are some money calculations with "\$500k" circled, and lots of crossed out figures.

The gallery is stereotypically white-walled with soft, intentional lighting focused on a mix of large and small hanging canvases. The canvas paintings offer a spectacular display of planetary landscapes in Liam's unique style.

The gallery door opens and Liam's head perks up.

LIAM

Oh. It's just you.

Liam goes back to doodling.

CHRISTIE

Damn. Okay then.

LIAM

Sorry, that came out harsh.

CHRISTIE

No luck today?

LIAM

Well one guy walked in to use the bathroom. I think he looked at No. 6 on the way there. It's also right next to the bathroom door, though, so hard to say.

Christie plops down on a couch near the desk.

CHRISTIE

Sorry, Liam. It's crazy how things have died down since the opening.

LIAM

They say it's like that, I guess I wasn't ready for it.

CHRISTIE

Alright, enough self pity. What happened with Jenny Levitt yesterday?

LIAM

If self pity's off the table we should probably talk about something else.

CHRISTIE

Oh, c'mon!

Liam stops doodling and sighs.

LIAM

Well, I'm not getting into Horizons.

CHRISTIE

What? Why not?

LIAM

Fucking Dornier.

Christie rolls her eyes.

CHRISTIE

Seriously, that guy? I thought he was leaving New York to be a big hotshot somewhere else.

LIAM

Jenny convinced him to come back for Horizons.

CHRISTIE

Why?

LIAM

I don't know. She just does stuff.

A beat.

CHRISTIE

Fine, so Dornier's coming back. Why does that mean you're out?

LIAM

Because we're both "space" stuff.
(imitating Jenny)
It'd be space, twice. You understand.

Christie laughs.

CHRISTIE

She's so bitchy.

LIAM

She's the most successful art broker in the city. Of course she is. I would be too.

CHRISTIE

So that's that, then.

LIAM

Not exactly. She said she'd put me in my own solo exhibit. With her name on it.

Christie jumps up from the couch, shaking Liam.

CHRISTIE

You think you could have maybe led with that?! Liam! That's crazy!

Liam cracks a reluctant smile.

LIAM

Calm down, it's not gonna happen.

CHRISTIE

Why the hell not?

LIAM

I'd have to fund the exhibit upfront.

CHRISTIE

Oh, I see... She can't front any of it?

LIAM

Well, she's graciously decided to knock off 100k herself.

CHRISTIE
So how much are we talking?

LIAM
\$500,000. By the end of the summer.

CHRISTIE
Damn. Did you tell her that you
haven't sold anything yet?

LIAM
You know, wasn't exactly jumping
out of my seat to let her know.

CHRISTIE
That's a lot of money.

A beat. Liam moves from the desk and starts walking around the gallery. Christie follows, looking at the art as they pass.

CHRISTIE (CONT'D)
How much does this place cost you?

LIAM
A year?

CHRISTIE
Yeah.

LIAM
125,000.

CHRISTIE
And all your savings?

LIAM
Wrapped up in these shits hanging
on the wall and filling up my
apartment. And this place.

CHRISTIE
I'm sorry, Liam. At least she's
interested in you though, right?

LIAM
I'm not so sure how interested
she'll be unless I pull \$500,000
out of my ass.

CHRISTIE
500,425.

LIAM

425?

CHRISTIE

For the ticket I got getting you there yesterday.

LIAM

You couldn't get out of it? The mayor's daughter losing her powers?

CHRISTIE

Shut up. I just didn't want to bother him about it. He's all wrapped up in the Russian conflict stuff.

LIAM

What, why? What's that have to do with him?

CHRISTIE

NYC's a big potential target.

LIAM

Guess I never thought about it.

Christie and Liam stop at No. 6, near the bathroom. It's an especially large, eye-catching piece showing a pasture-like landscape in an alien terrain, with non-Earthly colors.

CHRISTIE

So what now? Since you're not doing horizons?

LIAM

Well, I'd planned to visit my mom after the submission deadline. But I guess I can go early now. I'll probably head back this weekend.

CHRISTIE

Good 'ol Missouri.

LIAM

I guess.

Christie breaks away from the painting.

CHRISTIE

Alright, I'm headed out.

LIAM

Out?

CHRISTIE

Allie and I are going to try that place in Middle Chelsea I was talking about.

LIAM

Oh, Allie, huh? Things going nice and smooth, everyone committed to each other's liking?

CHRISTIE

(rolling eyes)

Eat a dick.

Liam shrugs.

LIAM

If the price is right. \$500,000?

They share a laugh.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY

A small black PAV kicks up rock and dirt as it lands in a familiar gravel driveway. The once healthy grass lining the driveway and beyond is now replaced by fields of rust-colored grass husks with a few stubborn patches of green.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Liam brushes off dust from his face as he steps into a small entryway with a suitcase in hand. Loud air conditioning fans deafen the space around him.

LIAM

Mom?

Liam sets down the suitcase and heads down the hallway. The constant drone of the air conditioning continues with him.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hello?

Liam finds his way to the living room, where Julie (56, grayed blonde hair) sits on a couch, facing a television.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Mom?

Julie turns around. Tears trickle from her puffy green eyes.

JULIE
Sorry, Liam, I didn't hear you.

LIAM
Is everything okay?

JULIE
It's all over the news-

Julie chokes up. Liam walks around the couch and joins her, putting his arms around her. He watches the screen.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

A string of breaking news alerts across multiple stations with differing headlines. A rotating cast of news anchors report over pictures of brutal highway crashes with debris and cargo covering the lanes, scattered every which way.

Headline: RUSSIAN CONFLICT ESCALATES WITH ATTACK ON U.S. HIGHWAYS

ANCHOR 1
...a horrifying sight across the nation's remaining roadways, as you can see. We're still trying to gather the extent of the attack...

Headline: CONCERTED CYBERATTACK ON U.S. TERRESTRIAL SHIPPING GRID

ANCHOR 2
...initial intelligence suggests a sudden and efficient targeting of autonomous shipping trucks, somehow orchestrating a slew of forced collisions across the nation's highways...

Headline: RUSSIA ESCALATES WITH CRYPTIC ATTACK ON AMERICAN SHIPPING TRUCKS

ANCHOR 3
...not the first strike in the growing conflict between the two, but certainly the hardest hitting thus far. The damage is clear for the Americans, though the means remain mystifying. How did Russia pull it off?

Headline: RUSSIAN TERRORISM FALLS SHORT, MINIMAL CASUALTIES ACROSS NATION'S ROADWAYS

ANCHOR 4

...important to note not a single life lost in our initial reports. No doubt American counterintelligence understood the gravity of the oncoming attack weighed against the minimal risk to the nation's populace, and the tactical value of a hollow victory farcically bolstering an increasingly desperate adversary...

Headline: RUSSIA EXECUTES TARGETED DISRUPTION ON AMERICA'S AUTONOMOUS SHIPPING TRUCKS

ANCHOR 5

A solemn sight indeed draping the almost forgotten roads of the nation. A strategic disruption, no doubt - though not paid with American lives, thankfully - a price paid instead by the discomfiting thoughts that will linger in its wake. "Are we safe?", "Why have they done this?" and "What will happen next?"

The screen goes dark.

END MONTAGE.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - NIGHT

Liam and Julie sit together at the dining room table, quietly poking at the casserole on their plates. Overhead air conditioning fans run at max speed, filling the silence.

JULIE

You sure this Levitt gal can't drop the price a little? Maybe if you-

LIAM

I'm not really in a position to haggle on this. Besides, she's not someone you can really negotiate with.

JULIE

One of those modern fly-high New Yorkers, huh.

LIAM

Sure.

A beat.

JULIE
You know, if there was anything
left from Dad's fund, I'd give it
to you in a heartbeat.

LIAM
I know, Mom. But if there was
anything left we'd get you outta
here.

JULIE
But I like it here.

LIAM
Mom, the summers are getting so hot
on the ground. And now this attack-

The air conditioning drones on.

LIAM (CONT'D)
(pointing to the vent)
You can barely hear anything!

JULIE
I said I like it here.

LIAM
I know, Mom, I heard you, that's
not the point-

JULIE
You heard me, but you're not
listening.

A beat.

LIAM
Sorry, Mom. I just worry about you
here alone.

Julie gets up and grabs their empty plates. She gives Liam a
comforting kiss on the head.

JULIE
Just like I worry about you in New
York all alone.

Julie walks to the kitchen sink. Liam grabs some dishes and
follows.

LIAM

I'm not alone. The Towns are out there, Christie and I hang out. I've got other friends.

JULIE

That's right, thank God for Christie to keep you sane.

Julie and Liam assume a dish washing line.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Anyways, I'm not alone. I've got Lucky.

LIAM

I hardly think that counts. I can't believe that thing still works.

JULIE

Sure does.

Julie speaks into the air.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Right, Lucky?

A tablet propped up in the corner of the kitchen counter and plugged into the wall lights up with a familiar blue wavelength.

LUCKY

Only barely. I'll be due for an oil change soon.

Liam gives Julie a confused look. Julie laughs.

JULIE

He's joking, Liam.

LIAM

Oh.

JULIE

Lucky's a little piece of your father. He worked so hard on it. You know, he made it for you.

LIAM

I know.

A beat.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Maybe we could sell it.

Julie punches Liam on the arm, in jest, but it stings.

LIAM (CONT'D)
What! Lucky, how much do you think
you're worth on the open market?

JULIE
Don't answer that, Luck.

LUCKY
Worth more than one of your
artworks, apparently.

Liam's face puckers in shock. Julie laughs.

LIAM
What the hell!

JULIE
Oh lighten up. Don't dish it if you
can't take it. You're just like
your father.

LIAM
What have you been telling it?

JULIE
I haven't said a thing!

Liam stares at the tablet in the corner, curiously, watching
the blue wavelength cut across the screen.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 66 - NIGHT

A fleet of PAVs release buckets of water on a large fire
centered on two overturned trucks draped across the road.
Another PAV attempts to airlift a portion of the wreckage,
but its cable snaps, careening the PAV towards the fire.

The airlift PAV regains control and pulls away, gaining
altitude. The PAV overlooks countless miles of similar
wrecks, with smoldering fires and debris-covered roadways.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY

Liam enters the kitchen in his pajamas and makes some cereal. He overhears Julie from the nearby living room.

JULIE (O.S.)
Lucky, what's the latest on the attack?

LUCKY (O.S.)
Washington has yet to release its official report on the full extent of the attack. Most major cities have implemented a soft travel ban until they can confirm the integrity of the major skyways. There's no federal travel advisory as of yet.

JULIE (O.S.)
And what about on the ground?

LUCKY (O.S.)
No damage yet reported outside of the vehicles and roadways seemingly targeted in the attack. But the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Commerce have released a joint statement suggesting significant delays on ground-delivered goods and consequential disruption to the U.S. economy.

Liam enters the living room with cereal in hand.

JULIE
Good morning!

Liam lifts a spoon.

LIAM
Morning.

JULIE
Oh, I made some waffles. They're in the oven keeping warm.

LIAM
Yum. I'll grab some after.

Liam takes a seat on the couch. Julie's watching muted news reports on the TV. She speaks to Lucky's tablet propped up next to her.

JULIE
(to Lucky)
But still no casualties?

LUCKY
None reported outside of two
incidental casualties related to
roadway clean-up.

JULIE
Those poor people.

LUCKY
Local reports suggest the
government is struggling to clear
the post-attack debris because of a
reluctance to implement autonomous
machinery given the uncertainty
surrounding the attack.

LIAM
So Russia really hacked the
guidance systems of all those
trucks?

LUCKY
Critical debate online suggests so,
but again there has been no
official report from Washington. Or
from Moscow, obviously.

JULIE
What a mess. Imagine what your
father would say.

LIAM
He'd probably feel pretty
vindicated right now.

JULIE
He'd probably be out on those
highways that same night, cleaning
up.

LIAM
Probably.

Liam watches more videos of the wrecks flashing on the muted
TV. The room shifts around him, the walls brighten, and we
are-

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Liam (17) sits on the living room couch with Julie (46), watching the news. NEWSCASTER JANE (30s, tight bun, plain suit) breaks a story next to NEWSCASTER SEAN (40s, short hair, plain suit).

NEWSCASTER JANE

Election results are now finalized, with newcomer Rachel Shandry succeeding the late Hank Picker as the head of Local 44. Most see Local 44's identity intrinsically linked to Picker, who took on the herculean task of unifying truck drivers across the Midwest at the start of the growing autonomous age. He was the heavy favorite going into elections once again, but Picker suddenly passed away behind the wheel last month, leaving a relatively open field. Shandry's camp faced considerable scrutiny, especially in the launching of her "Pick Your Poison" campaign slogan. While she maintains the slogan as a self-deprecatative nod to the circumstances of the election, others saw it as a crude reference to Picker's death and his historically staunch resistance against self-driving trucks and the progression of autonomous systems within the industry.

Newscaster Jane takes a deep breath.

NEWSCASTER JANE (CONT'D)

Well, Sean, what do you think? Certainly a remarkable bookend for the story of Local 44.

NEWSCASTER SEAN

I think it's a win for America, Jane. It's no secret Local 44 was the holdout preventing any meaningful strides in automating American roadways. This gives us a chance to at least catch up to the rest of the world, with an almost twenty-year disadvantage to overcome-

The screen goes dark. Julie puts down the remote and sighs.

JULIE

Oh Hank. What have they done?

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY (PRESENT)

Liam walks around outside the house, shielding his face from the sun. He talks out loud, responding to a voice coming through his rolled-up phone wrapped around his right ear.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)

It's kind of panicky over here. I don't know if you'll be able to get back any time soon.

LIAM

I figured. I was planning to spend a week here anyways.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)

I don't know. It could be longer than that.

Liam walks to his backyard. He makes his way to a self-constructed pitcher's mound/bullpen. The dirt is overrun with browned weeds. He kicks at them, aimlessly.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)

You'll think this is funny.

LIAM

What?

CHRISTIE (V.O.)

My dad said the government needs truck drivers.

Liam scoffs.

LIAM

They're a little late.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)

Apparently it's a big problem. The wreckage stuff is too heavy to airlift.

LIAM

That's what Lucky was saying.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
Lucky! He still works?

LIAM
(laughing)
I guess so. He's like my mom's
little helper.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
That's cute.

A beat. Liam walks off the mound, towards the shade of a large open garage tacked on to the side of the driveway.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
Anyways, you should look into
driving.

LIAM
What? Why?

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
There's barely anybody with
licenses anymore.

LIAM
Ah, I see. Serve my country and all
that.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
(laughs)
No, idiot. Make them pay you a
bunch.

Liam laughs, wiping away sweat.

CHRISTIE (V.O.)
And, you know, serve your country.

Liam looks behind him, deeper inside the roofed garage, at a large tarped mass sitting there.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Liam peels the tarp off a large semitruck, the same seen much earlier, though with faded paint and some unavoidable rust.

JULIE (O.S.)
Who were you talking to?

Liam turns around and sees Julie appear around the outside corner of the open garage, walking in with a pair of lemonades.

LIAM
Just Christie. Wanted to check in
on how everything was holding up in
New York. She says "hi".

Julie hands Liam a lemonade.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Thanks.

JULIE
I miss that girl. Sure the two of
you's never gonna happen?

LIAM
(laughing)
Pretty damn sure.

JULIE
Yeah, I know.

A beat.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Just admiring for old time's sake?

LIAM
I don't know. Christie said the
government's looking for human
drivers to help clean up the roads.

Julie raises an eyebrow.

JULIE
Oh?

Liam looks back to Julie. He sees her suppressed intrigue and rolls his eyes.

LIAM
Oh calm down. I'm just looking at
it.

JULIE
Whatever you say!

LIAM
Does it even run?

Julie shrugs.

JULIE

I check up on it every now and then, Lucky helps me with any fixes. Give it a try.

LIAM

Where's the key?

JULIE

Glove box.

LIAM

Nice and secure.

Julie scoffs, looking around exaggeratedly.

JULIE

Who's gonna come and take it here? They wouldn't even know how to drive it!

Liam opens the driver side door and hops in. He leans over and grabs the keys from the passenger glove box.

He turns the key. The engine cranks, showing signs of life. After a moment it finally turns, but the live engine sputters, misfiring. It continues to shudder.

Liam jumps down from the driver's seat.

LIAM

Well, it turned on at least. But I don't know about that.

JULIE

Hold on.

Julie heads back to the house.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - LATER

Music plays over Liam and Julie's attempts to fix the truck. No other sound is heard.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

--Liam looks under the hood of the truck. Julie consult's Lucky's tablet, instructing Liam.

--Liam's legs stick out from underneath the truck. Julie stands above him, tablet in hand. Liam pokes his head out and says something to Julie, with a wry smile. Julie kicks his feet, playfully, rolling her eyes. Liam laughs.

--Liam sits in the driver seat, key in hand. He looks to Julie standing near the open hood. She gives him a thumbs up. Liam turns the key. They both shake their head, disappointed.

--Liam and Julie sit in the front seats, glued to Lucky's tablet, which is now plugged directly into the truck. Diagnostics flash across the tablet. They debate back and forth.

--Liam digs for something behind the front seat. He finds a set of foldable triangle emergency hazard signs, for roadside use. He waves them excitedly to Julie, who's poking around near the hood again. Julie rolls her eyes.

--Liam looks proudly at the hazard signs now lining out the back of the garage, off the left side of the back of the truck. They are properly spaced further down the driveway.

--Liam attempts to grab something near the engine. He throws up his blackened arms and hands in frustration. He looks to his mom, pinching his fingers. She steps up, undoing the part thanks to her smaller fingers. Liam looks relieved.

--Liam waits by the hood, Julie in the driver's seat. Liam gives a halfhearted thumbs up. Julie turns the key. They both listen. Liam smiles, tired, Julie smiles back.

--Liam and Julie stand outside the garage, watching the sunset with lemonades in greasy hand. Julie sets down her drink on a small table next to Liam, stepping away for an incoming call. Liam nods his head, acknowledging Julie.

--Liam stands watching the sunset, looking out at the same horizon where he first saw the PAV float by with his dad, a lemonade glass sitting alone on the table next to him.

END MONTAGE.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - NIGHT

Liam sits at the prepped dining room table. His hair is slick from a recent shower. He rubs at the stubborn grease stains around his finger nails. Overhead fans blast at full speed.

Julie walks in with another casserole, placing it on the table.

LIAM

Oh, tater tot casserole.

JULIE

I thought you liked tater tot
casserole?

LIAM
No - I do, I just sort of forgot
about it.

Julie dishes a square for Liam. She sees him picking at his
fingers.

JULIE
You know what Dad'd say.

LIAM
(mock drawl)
It's just clean dirt.

The two laugh, partly at Liam's terrible drawl.

JULIE
Funny, that's just how I remember
he sounded.

The two soak in the relative silence, reminiscing.

JULIE (CONT'D)
So what was all that today. Just
for fun? I had fun.

LIAM
What do you mean?

JULIE
Well there's a bona fide, gas and
steel, rubber-to-the-road truck in
that garage now.

LIAM
Yeah, that's great. It was fun.

JULIE
Oh come on. Are you going to drive
it?

LIAM
What? Like, down the street and
back? Maybe stop by the old
American Legion center.

JULIE
Stop being a smartass. You know
what I mean. Like Christie said,
for the cleanup?

LIAM
No. That'd be ridiculous.

JULIE

Why would it be ridiculous? Are you afraid you forgot how to drive?

LIAM

I know how to drive. But I'm not a trucker.

JULIE

No one's saying you have to be a trucker. What if people need help out there?

LIAM

Are you trying to get rid of me?

JULIE

Liam, I'm not trying to get rid of you. I love when you visit. But why'd you come home?

Liam takes a bite, mulling over the tater tots.

LIAM

I was already planning to come home after I finished the gallery submission.

JULIE

I know that. And what are you planning to do here? Are you going to paint?

LIAM

Yeah, I brought my painting stuff. I was going to start on something.

JULIE

So you'll just paint then?

LIAM

What do you mean?

Julie puts down her fork and puts her hand on Liam's arm with a reassuring pat.

JULIE

Liam, come on, why'd you come home.

Liam shrugs.

LIAM

I don't know what you're asking me.

JULIE
Was it to paint?

LIAM
No, I guess not.

JULIE
You're searching Liam. You're
looking for answers. I saw it
outside today.

She points out at the window.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Ever since you were little. You've
had your neck practically broken
just looking up at the sky, at
those stars. That's where you look
when you're searching, Liam.

Liam laughs, shaking his head. He turns to look out the
window.

LIAM
(distracted)
It's harder to see them in the
city, that's all.

Julie reaches out and turns Liam's head back to the table,
where she's placed the truck keys on the table.

JULIE
I'm sure they'll look beautiful on
the road.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY

Liam and Julie huddle around a coffee table in the living
room. Liam's phone sits flat on the table, projecting an
ellipsis, the phone ringing on speaker. Liam paces nervously.

LIAM
This is stupid.

JULIE
Shhh, they'll pick up soon. Will
you sit down?

Liam sits down. He starts shaking his leg.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Will you stop that? You're making
me nervous.

LIAM
I am nervous! What am I supposed to
say?

JULIE
Shh.

The projected ellipsis forms a solid line and the phone
connects.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Hello?

Liam collects himself.

LIAM
Hi, this is Liam...uh, Picker. Liam
Picker.

A brief, awkward pause as Liam waits for a response.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I think Mr. Towns, or, Mayor Towns
may have talked to you about me --
talked about me, about driving.

Liam looks pained. The other side responds in a dry,
disinterested manner.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
You said Liam Picker?

LIAM
Yes.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Hold on.

Liam stops shaking his leg so much. Julie gives him a
motherly thumbs up.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Yeah I've got you here. Prospective
driver for cleanup?

LIAM
Yes.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
We haven't had many takers. Looks like your CDL's still valid. That's rare. Some kind of hobbyist?

LIAM
No, not really. My dad was a truck driver. I just like to keep mine up-to-date.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Got it. License has you in NYC. That still the case?

LIAM
No, I'm in Missouri right now. Outside of Kansas City.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
I see. And it says you have your own unit?

LIAM
Yes.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
A bed too?

Liam looks confusedly at Julie. Julie mouths "no" at him, shaking her head.

LIAM
Uh, no.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Wishful thinking. When was the last time you were behind the wheel?

Liam pauses. Julie encourages him with a wave of her hand.

LIAM
Yesterday.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Okay then.

A pause.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Alright. This isn't your typical by-the-load hurricane cleanup. The gov's looking for 10-week contracts.

(MORE)

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We can go with your usual per-mileage with load bonuses and first day/last day bumps as well. What's your rate?

Liam looks lost.

LIAM
Well, it's been a long time. Given the circumstances can we do just a flat salary- hold on...

Julie starts waving at Liam to get his attention, mouthing "per diem" at him. Liam looks more lost. She writes it on a nearby paper, underlining it for Liam.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Yeah, just a flat salary with, uh, per diem.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
That's a little unusual, but I could check. What are you proposing?

LIAM
\$500,000 with-

Liam shoots a questioning look to Julie. Julie shrugs, holding up three, then four fingers.

LIAM (CONT'D)
\$500,000 and a \$400 per diem.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
(slowly)
\$500,000?

LIAM
Yes.

The line goes silent.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Give me a moment.

Liam mutes the line after a pause.

LIAM
What's per diem?

JULIE
You'll thank me later.

LIAM
Do you think I pushed it too much?

JULIE
(shrugging)
Never know if you don't ask!

Liam unmutes the line.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Alright. \$500,000 for the 10 weeks
plus a \$350 per diem. 10% on sign,
5% per week, remainder on
completion of contract. Deal?

Liam looks to Julie, dumbfounded.

LIAM
Yes!

The two start jumping around, quietly, celebrating.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Good. Do you have something to
write the rest of this down?

LIAM
Okay, yes, one second-

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HOME - DAY

Contractor Giles's voice continues as Liam prepares
throughout the house to get on the road.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Liam combs through drawers in his room, re-packing his
suitcase.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Here's the gist of it. We have
support PAVs across the nation
gathering debris piles to clear
roadways as we speak. Drivers then
get on location with empty beds,
support PAVs load up the debris,
and drivers transport the debris
load to designated dumping zones.

Liam hurries through the kitchen and into the living room.
Julie is making sandwiches, loading them into a knapsack.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Most of the heavy lifting will be done by the support PAVs, so you'll have some down time at the loading zones. You'll just need to focus on getting there, which won't be easy.

Liam packs bags into the back of the truck in the garage. Julie walks in with some canvases and art supplies and argues with Liam. Liam rolls his eyes and lets her put them in the truck.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
The roads are a mess. You'll need to call this number at 0600 every day to confirm your route so we can make sure the road is cleared for passage. Understood?

LIAM (V.O.)
Understood.

Liam backs out of the garage, tentatively. Julie rushes out to the driveway with a knapsack. She knocks on the passenger door. Liam stops and Julie places the knapsack on the passenger seat, showing him the sandwiches.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Good. You ever have trouble, call this number and ask for Giles.

LIAM (V.O.)
Are you Giles?

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
I'm Giles.

LIAM (V.O.)
Got it.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
Can you be on the road today? If so, I think we can get you to St. Louis and then start a course clearing east before setting back west through the south.

LIAM (V.O.)
Um, yeah, I can leave today.

The large truck leaves the driveway, turning on to the road. Julie stands at the driveway, waving to her son.

CONTRACTOR GILES (V.O.)
We'll get you all of the paperwork
within the hour. Good luck, Liam.

END MONTAGE.

INT./EXT. LONG DIRT ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The same truck, a decade and a half younger, idles before the long stretch of a vacant dirt road. Liam (12) sits in the driver's seat with a white-knuckle grip on the wheel, his dad Hank (44) supervising in the passenger seat.

HANK
Alright, bud, not so tight. Think
of it like gripping a bat, you
don't want your muscles all tensed.

Liam's grip loosens, and his shoulders drop to normal.

HANK (CONT'D)
Great. Now remember what we talked
about. You see the shifter right?

LIAM
Yeah.

HANK
So what's next?

LIAM
Move it from "P" for park to "D"
for drive.

HANK
You got it.

Liam strains to reach over to the transmission shifter. He yanks it over and down into drive.

HANK (CONT'D)
Okay, now let's get 'er moving. But
ease into it, it's not like a video
game.

Liam jolts the truck forward a bit.

HANK (CONT'D)
Now just ease into it.

Liam accelerates slowly, pattering down the dirt road.

HANK (CONT'D)
That's it!

LIAM
I'm doing it!

Liam laughs in a mixture of pure giddiness and nervous release.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Dad, I'm doing it!

HANK
You sure are. Keep going bud.

LIAM
I love you, Dad.

Liam veers a bit but immediately course corrects.

HANK
There you go, just like that.

Liam's smiling ear-to-ear, still laughing intermittently.

HANK (CONT'D)
Alright, now let's start slowing
for that stop sign up there. Then
we'll take a turn. You ready for
that?

LIAM
Yeah, I'm ready.

HANK
Let's do it.

The truck eases to a long stop at the end of the dirt road.
It takes a tentative right onto another side road.

CUT TO:

EXT. I-70 E - NIGHT (PRESENT)

The truck exits the highway and turns onto a side road. It
continues into a small gas station, stopping next to a pump.

EXT. DUNHAM QUICK STOP - CONTINUOUS

JIM DUNHAM (60s, squat, cowboy boots and a packed lip)
lounges on the porch of the station store. He sighs, spits,
and walks towards the truck.

He walks around it, eyeing it up and down.

JIM DUNHAM
Huh. Gov's using retro shit now.

He kicks a tire.

JIM DUNHAM (CONT'D)
Rusty old thing.

The driver-side door opens and Liam hops out.

JIM DUNHAM (CONT'D)
Jesus! They got people in 'em!

LIAM
Sorry, didn't mean to scare you.

JIM DUNHAM
You runnin' from the law or
something? How'd you get in that
thing?

LIAM
What do you mean?

JIM DUNHAM
Yeah probably for the best, the
less I know. I'll just close my
eyes and you keep going, I won't
tell no one. How long you need to
'git, 30 seconds?

Jim closes his eyes.

JIM DUNHAM (CONT'D)
Just don't hide in the shop. Make
things awkward.

LIAM
I just need some gas!

Jim opens an eye.

JIM DUNHAM
So this is a holdup?

LIAM
No this is not a holdup. My truck
is out of gas. I just need gas.

Jim opens his other eye.

JIM DUNHAM
Coulda just said so instead of
making up all that outlaw nonsense.

Jim steps to the side and starts pumping gas.

JIM DUNHAM (CONT'D)
What are you doing driving a truck?

LIAM
Did you hear about all the crashes?

Jim looks at him blankly, and spits.

JIM DUNHAM
Nope.

LIAM
Oh, well, there's some trouble on
the roads and they need human
drivers to help.

JIM DUNHAM
As opposed to alien drivers?

LIAM
Instead of autonomous drivers.

JIM DUNHAM
I'm yanking your chain, son. Aliens
don't bother with no trucks. So
some sort of computer trouble and
now they need real drivers again.
Imagine that.

LIAM
Yeah, pretty much.

JIM DUNHAM
Well, I'm Jim Dunham. Good to meet
you.

Jim extends a hand. Liam shakes it. Jim gets to filling up
the truck.

LIAM
Liam Picker. Nice to meet you. You
know, I realized I didn't know if
there would be any stations around
anymore.

JIM DUNHAM
Yeah, well, government pays us to
keep these up.

(MORE)

JIM DUNHAM (CONT'D)

Some of the national fleet is still gas, and it's easier in these parts than setting up electric outposts. I'm paid by the month just to pump whatever drives its way here. I guess it has been pretty quiet the last few days now that you mention it.

LIAM

So do I pay you?

JIM DUNHAM

I take it you're working for the government?

LIAM

Yeah.

JIM DUNHAM

I reckon no, then.

LIAM

Alright. Do I tip you?

Jim spits.

JIM DUNHAM

I reckon yes.

INT. HANK'S SEMI-TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Liam climbs back into the truck with some snacks from the gas station in hand. He unzips the bag still sitting on the passenger seat and grabs a sandwich. He starts to put some snacks in the bag but the reach is uncomfortable.

Liam picks up the bag and pulls it to him. It reveals Lucky's tablet hidden beneath it. Liam shakes his head and leans over to grab the tablet. He shoves it in the glove box.

CUT TO:

[END OF PREVIEW]