

ZIP

Pilot: "Stringer Theory"

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COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

INT. STRINGER APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY (D1)

Close shots of a man dressing for work - crisp suit, power tie with a perfect dimple, French cuffs - impeccable. The picture of breeding and power.

Pull back to reveal TRIP STRINGER (early 40's), in the bedroom of a very shabby apartment - wallpaper peeling, vertical blinds missing a slat or two.

On the dresser, an elegant little wooden box. Inside are his business cards that read simply, "William Stringer, III Textiles." He slides a small stack into his breast pocket, then picks up a note that is well-worn, much folded...

From the desk of Mrs. William Stringer, III

Dear Trip,

I'm leaving to be with Frank. He delivers the goods. You are all talk. I'm sorry.

*Sincerely,
Annette*

P.S. You can keep the rest of this stationery in case you remarry.

Trip carefully refolds the note, places it back in the box - a morning ritual. He looks into the mirror, and for the briefest of moments - if you blink, you'd miss it - he looks a bit tired. Then flashes a million dollar smile and says...

TRIP

Excellent.

INT. STRINGER APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY (D1)

Trip strides out of the bedroom to greet his children.

TRIP

Good morning, Team Stringer. Are we ready to take the world by storm?

Hardly. ELLIE STRINGER (15) flips through US Weekly, her face a mask of boredom. JP STRINGER (10), listens to an iPod while shovelling cereal into his mouth, lost in his own world. NELSON STRINGER (14) leans over the sink and peeks out the vertical blinds.

TRIP

Nelson, what are you looking at?

ELLIE

Rita's gardening.

Nelson's POV: Outside in the apartment complex common area, RITA (early 40's) a well-toned, buxom, former ingenue in tight jeans and a wife-beater, is tending to a small garden.

NELSON

She's planting mums.

TRIP

Nelson, what have I told you?

NELSON

You're not raising a pervert. But just let me watch her water them.

TRIP

Table. Now.

Nelson skulks to the table, starts to eat. Ellie flips a page. JP, still munching, hasn't even looked up. Silence.

TRIP

So, what's on tap for today?

Shrugs, grumbles, general disinterest. Trip surveys his family, then...

TRIP

I think we should go to the house.

Groans from the kids.

TRIP

No, no, we're going to the house. We're not focused. We need to be focused, get our eyes back on the prize. So let's hustle down to the car immediately because, before school, we are going to the house.

EXT. THE BEVERLY CHATEAUS - DAY (D1)

A classic dingbat - a concrete box on stilts hovering over a row of carports. "The Beverly Chateaus" is embossed in flowing script on the front. Trip and the kids descend the stairs.

ELLIE

This is stupid, I hate that we do this.

TRIP

Then it sounds to me like you need this trip more than anybody.

ELLIE

Dad, get real. That house is a fantasy. There's the hills, there's the flats, and there's...
(gestures to building)
...the Shats.

TRIP

The Chateaus, Ellie.

They get to the carport area and their space is empty.

NELSON

Somebody stole the Lincoln!

ELLIE

The Shats, Dad.

He shoots her a look.

TRIP

The Lincoln is parked across the street at the Layborn's. They're on vacation... unfortunately the repo man is not.

EXT. STREETS OF BEVERLY HILLS - DAY (D1)

The Stringers drive north in a late model Lincoln. You can feel the median income rising by the block.

EXT. "THE HOUSE" - DAY (D1)

The Stringers pull up in front of what can only be described as a mansion. It has a Sotheby's "For Sale" sign on the front lawn.

ELLIE

This is creepy. It's like we're stalking a house.

TRIP

Listen closely, but don't look at me. Look at the house. Eyes on the prize. This is our house.

ELLIE

Well, then why don't we live here?

TRIP

Because we're currently in socioeconomic exile.

ELLIE

You're in exile from reality. We're poor. We've always been poor.

TRIP

It's 2007 - reality is negotiable.

NELSON

(clearly repeating Trip)
The sizzle has replaced the steak!

TRIP

And no one sizzles like a Stringer!

ELLIE

I'm tired of pretending. Face it, Dad, we are poor.

TRIP

We are not poor. We're temporarily out of pocket. Stick to "The Plan." You work hard in school, I work hard building contacts...

ELLIE

You mean running scams.

TRIP

Tomato, to-mah-to. The point is, in three years we are in that house. Or one similar if this should sell. But make no mistake, kids - we belong here.

A Bel Air patrol car pulls up beside them.

TRIP

We should go.

Trip puts the car in gear and drives off. On Ellie, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. THE GENTLEMAN'S CLOSET - TORRANCE - DAY (D1)

A discount suit outlet in the key of The Men's Wearhouse. Racks and racks of suits, bad lighting, a muzak version of the Rocky theme plays. HUGO SUAREZ (40s), Venezuelan, a bowling ball of a man, wears an ill-fitting suit and name tag that says "Hugo Suarez, Assistant Manager." Trip strolls in with a newspaper tucked under his arm.

HUGO

Good morning, boss. You're late.

TRIP

I'll be sure to reprimand myself.
How's tricks, Hugo?

HUGO

Oh, Trips, we do this silly dance every day, you and me. It's Hugo. Oooooogo. The hache is silent.

TRIP

Hugo, have--

HUGO

(correcting him)

Ah. Oooooogo.

TRIP

Oooooogo--

HUGO

Oooooogo.

TRIP

--have you ever considered just removing the H from your name?

HUGO

Trips, if you remove the hache, that changes the pronunciation completely.

A beat of silence as we see that there is no one in the store. Trip pulls out the Beverly Hills Weekly and scans the front page as Hugo quietly sings along with the Rocky muzak.

HUGO

(barely audible)

Gonna fly now...

TRIP
 (re: paper)
 Hmm, interesting... Hugo, you've
 got the floor. I'm on break.

INT. THE GENTLEMAN'S CLOSET - MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY (D1)

Hugo enters and finds Trip at his desk with the Beverly Hills Weekly, staring at a computer and scribbling notes.

HUGO
 Trips, the new Hugo Boss is here.
 I need help with inventory.

TRIP
 Sorry Hugo, I'm very busy in here.

HUGO
 But you do nothing.

TRIP
 Does this look like nothing to you?

He hands Hugo the Beverly Hills Weekly.

TRIP
 Five hundred of the richest and
 most influential people in Beverly
 Hills will be under one roof on
 Saturday. That's a year's worth
 work in one day.

HUGO
 You are giving to charity?

TRIP
 No, but I am going to be at that
 event.

HUGO
 It say it cost a thousand dollars a
 ticket.

TRIP
 Oh, I won't be paying. I'm going
 to be someone's guest.

HUGO
 Whose?

TRIP
 (pointing to the paper)
 His.

Close shot on the paper. A photo of an older white man holding a cigar beneath an awning that reads "Robusto Room Cigar Club." The caption reads "Retired philanthropist Whitney Sander, chief organizer, is pictured here in front of his 'office'."

HUGO

Whitney Sander. You know this guy?

TRIP

Never met him. But I'm Googling him now, and by the end of the day I'm going to be his new best friend.

HUGO

Trips, I don't understand. It say this guy is retire, but he still goes to an office at cigar club?

TRIP

It's an idiom, Hugo. It means that he goes there every day, but he doesn't do any work.

HUGO

Oh, so he is like you. You will be good friends.

Trip tucks the paper under his arm and heads for the door.

TRIP

Mind the store, Hugo. I'm going for a smoke.

INT. BEVERLY HIGH - DAY (D1)

Ellie is at her locker with her best friend NATALIE (15). KIP MASTERS (15), tall, handsome and nice enough.

KIP

Trust me, the raffle committee is not a lot of work. Mostly we just hang out. You should totally join.

Ellie glances at Natalie who gives her a sly little smile that says, "Kip is sooo into you."

KIP

All you have to do is host one meeting a month at your house--

ELLIE

Sorry, Kip. We're in the middle of a big renovation at my house and it's impossible to host right now. Maybe next semester.

KIP

Oh, uh, okay, right on. Maybe I'll see you at lunch.

Kip walks away.

NATALIE

What is wrong with you? He's cute and obviously completely into you.

ELLIE

Natalie, you know my life. I can't host anything. I can't have people coming to my house. I don't even have a house.

NATALIE

So just do the committee part, blow off the hosting part. I'm sure Kip wouldn't mind.

ELLIE

I'm not getting involved with any Beverly boys.

NATALIE

Don't be so melodramatic. Don't you want a little excitement?

ELLIE

My family provides plenty of excitement. Trust me, a boy would only complicate matters.

INT. LINCOLN/EXT. THE ROBUSTO ROOM - DAY (D1)

Trip is parked in front of the cigar club. We see a CD case - "Fight Songs of the Ivy League" - lying on the seat next to him. Trip listens intently to one of the fight songs, committing it to memory. Satisfied, he turns off the car, places a handicapped parking placard on the rear view mirror, and hops out. Still humming, he opens the trunk.

It's like a traveling office, filled with various cases and file boxes. He unlocks a case and pulls out a baggy filled with expensive Cuban cigar rings. He selects two and places them on much cheaper cigars.

INT. THE ROBUSTO ROOM - DAY (D1)

Trip is scanning the lounge, lasers in on WHITNEY SANDER (50's) sitting on a comfy couch, puffing a stogie while reading the paper. Trip smiles, and starts to make his way over when he is intercepted by a Robusto Room EXECUTIVE.

EXECUTIVE

May I help you, sir?

TRIP

Yes, you can. I've recently been prohibited from smoking cigars in my own home. So, I'd like to move in. Or at least take a tour and fill out an application.

EXECUTIVE

Oh, I'm so sorry. We're closed to new membership at the moment. But you're welcome to check back again in a few months.

Trip notices Whitney set down his cigar and rise.

WHITNEY

Excuse me boys, I'm off to the pissoir.

Whitney heads down the hall. Trip turns back to the executive, and leans in conspiratorially.

TRIP

I understand perfectly, but I'm not sure my bladder will hold out for that long. Might I...?

EXECUTIVE

Oh, of course, please. It's just down the hall to your right.

TRIP

Thank you.

Trip heads briskly in Whitney's direction.

INT. ROBUSTO ROOM - BATHROOM - DAY (D1)

Whitney is at a urinal. Trip comes in humming the Yale fight song and takes the next urinal.

WHITNEY

Ah! A Yale man.

TRIP

Bulldog, bulldog, bow wow wow.

WHITNEY

Our team can never fail.

TRIP

Go Elis! William Stringer. My friends call me Trip.

WHITNEY

Whitney Sander.

TRIP

I'd shake your hand, Whitney, but I need two to hold on over here.

Whitney cracks up. He loves this one.

EXT. BEVERLY HIGH - DAY (D1)

Nelson is leering at a hot mom entering the school when Ellie comes up behind him.

ELLIE

What are you doing?

NELSON

PTA meeting. Scouting the talent.

ELLIE

You are so damaged. Look, I need you to go over to JP's school and walk him home.

NELSON

Why don't you do it?

ELLIE

Because I have to go to work.

NELSON

Why do I have to be punished because you have a job? Let him walk home with his friends like everybody else.

ELLIE

I don't think JP has any friends. Haven't you noticed? He's a hermit. He's either playing his PSP thing or surfing the web. He's totally checked out.

NELSON

I'll walk him later. But this is magic time.

(a hot mom walks past)

I'm gonna see if I can score a MILF.

ELLIE

Nelson, you are such a zit. Why don't you sexually harass girls your own age?

NELSON

Because I'm a realist, Ellie. Fact: I need to lose my virginity. Need. And we are living in the age of the Cougar.

ELLIE

Excuse me?

NELSON

Older women who want younger men. Can you believe it? I am someone's fetish. All I need to do is beat the bushes a bit, and my Cougar will emerge.

ELLIE

Nelson, you are more likely to be attacked by an actual cougar than you are to get any woman of any age to take your filthy virginity.

(then, threateningly)

And you are walking JP home.

Ellie stomps off. Nelson sighs in defeat.

INT. ROBUSTO ROOM - LOUNGE - DAY (D1)

Trip and Whitney are enjoying some cigars and drinks.

WHITNEY

Mmm, interesting, Trip. I've never smelled a Cohiba quite like that.

TRIP

It's the age, Whit. Fifty years will do that to a fine cigar.

WHITNEY

My god, is that pre-Castro? I've never had the pleasure.

Trip reaches into his jacket pocket, pulls out the other cigar and offers it to Whitney.

TRIP

By all means, pleasure yourself.

Whitney gratefully accepts the cigar and lights up.

WHITNEY

What line of work are you in, Trip?

TRIP

Textiles. And as a man who knows fabric, I couldn't help but notice that suit.

(stroking his lapel)

That's a nice piece of goods.

WHITNEY

My suit? Look at your rig. I should have pegged you for a rag man. That suit hangs like butter.

TRIP

It's like wearing a warm bath. I'll tell you what, if you really like this suit I'd be happy to get one for you wholesale.

WHITNEY

Wholesale is my favorite word.

TRIP

Funny, mine is "gratis."

They share a clubby, conspiratorial laugh.

TRIP

How do you like the Cohiba?

WHITNEY

Earthy. Surprising.

INT. STARBUCKS - DAY (D1)

Ellie is behind the counter in her barista uniform. She hands a customer a pastry and change.

ELLIE

I can help the next guest in line.

The next guest in line is PEP (15), uniquely stylish, wearing simple, worn, old-man clothes - decidedly not Beverly Hills.

PEP
Looks like I'm a lire short.

He reaches into Ellie's tip jar, pulls out a dollar and hands it to her with the rest of his money.

PEP
I'll get you back next time.

Pep saunters off and Ellie watches him go, shocked, amused... and hoping there will be a next time.

INT. ROBUSTO ROOM - LOUNGE - DAY (D1)

Trip and Whitney are exchanging cards.

TRIP
Thank you for your hospitality today, Whitney. I enjoyed myself.

WHITNEY
As did I. And thank you for popping my pre-Castro cherry.

TRIP
You never forget your first. So 'til tomorrow, my man will be by around ten. You'll love him, he's a brilliant Italian tailor.

WHITNEY
I like my wine French, my cars German and my tailors Italian.

They shake hands warmly. Trip smiles that smile of his.

TRIP
When we talk tomorrow, you can tell me how you like your women.

EXT. HAVANA ROOM CIGAR CLUB - CONTINUOUS (D1)

Trip exits on top of the world... just in time to see a tow-truck labeled "Grimm Repo" towing away his beloved Town Car. His smile fades. Back to reality.

TRIP
Excellent.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. TINA'S APARTMENT - DAY (D2)

Ellie and TINA RAREY (23) sit on vintage hair dryer chairs in Tina's kitsched-out studio apartment. Tina is artsy and is like a big sister to Ellie.

ELLIE

...and he reaches into my tip jar,
pulls out a dollar and says, "I'll
get you back next time."

Ellie and Tina both squeal.

TINA

Oh my god, that is so hot - a
mystery man! He is obviously so
into you.

ELLIE

Or maybe he's just broke. He's
clearly not a Beverly boy. He's
just... cool.

A knock at the door. It's Trip, with Nelson and JP in tow.

TRIP

Ah, there's my beautiful neighbor.

ELLIE

He wants you to take us to school.

TRIP

Thank you, Ellie, but I don't need
a translator.

(to Tina)

Little hiccup with the Lincoln.

ELLIE

Translation: repossessed.

TINA

Oh, no, I'm sorry. Sure, I'll take
them.

TRIP

Thank you, Tina. I'm off to secure
a new chariot.

ELLIE

Dad, please, just buy a used Honda this time.

NELSON

C'mon Ellie, what kind of textiles magnate drives a Honda?

ELLIE

The kind that manages a menswear outlet in Torrance.

NELSON

She's a liability, Dad.

EXT. VIKTOR'S LIMO LOT - DAY (D2)

Trip steps out of a yellow cab and is greeted by Viktor (50s), a hard looking Russian with a thick accent.

VIKTOR

Well if it isn't Trip Stringer. You must be desperate to show your face here. How much this time?

TRIP

No, Viktor. I don't need money. I need a car.

VIKTOR

We rent at \$50 an hour. For \$75 Viggo drives and does bodyguard.

We see an extremely large Russian man, Viggo (30s), who effortlessly unloads large boxes from a van labeled WalMart.

TRIP

Actually, I'd like to buy one.

VIKTOR

You want buy limo?

TRIP

Perhaps. I'm in the market for a late model, pre-owned Lincoln Town Car. And as you know, I've got an unusual credit situation.

VIKTOR

This I know. What the hell, all our clients are rappers now. Everyone wants stretch Hummer or Escalade. I can spare Lincoln.

TRIP

Excellent.

VIKTOR

Da. We do cash, 28K. Two thousand down, the rest on a monthly at twelve percent.

TRIP

Viktor, 12 percent would imply that we're not friends.

VIKTOR

Da.

(off Trip's look)

Fine. Eleven and a quarter.

Viktor extends his meaty hand... Trip shakes it, deal. Trip gestures to Viggo unloading the WalMart boxes.

TRIP

You're diversifying, Viktor.

VIKTOR

Now we buy and sell goods with unusual history like yours. But it's all the same. My business is build on the three pillars, Trip -- cash, trust and Viggo. If you do not pay me cash, you can trust you will get visit from Viggo.

INT. BEVERLY HIGH - DAY (D2)

Ellie and Natalie are walking down the hall. Ellie is in a bit of a fog, keeps bumping into people.

NATALIE

What is wrong with you today?
You're a total space cadet.

ELLIE

I've got a huge problem. I think I like a boy.

NATALIE

That's a problem? It's Kip, right?
You've regained your sanity!

ELLIE

No, I told you, Beverly boys are too complicated. It's this guy that came into work.

They round the corner of the hallway and there's Pep at a locker. Ellie audibly squeaks, pulls Natalie back around the corner, and peeks at Pep.

ELLIE

Oh, my god. Oh, my god. What's he doing here?

NATALIE

That's him?

Nelson appears beside them.

NELSON

Checking out the new kid? No one knows where he came from, so I'm handicapping the rumors.

ELLIE

Nelson, begone.

NATALIE

What do you know about him?

NELSON

The buzz is unprecedented. Some people are betting that he was kicked out of Crossroads for excessive insensitivity. Another theory is that he's a foster kid. And several juniors swear he was just released from juvie. Whatever he is, he's already infamous.

NATALIE

He is so fine.

NELSON

They call him Pep.

But Ellie hasn't heard a word. She walks right up to Pep without even being aware she's doing it. She taps him on the shoulder. He turns...

ELLIE

Hey Fernando, where's my buck?

Pep's face breaks out into a huge, mischievous grin. She matches it. It is on. And everyone's watching.

INT. THE GENTLEMAN'S CLOSET - DAY (D2)

A man in a suit, stands before a three-way mirror, as Trip chalks him up for alterations.

TRIP

It's like wearing a massage, isn't it? Do you dress to the left or the right?

The guy looks slightly confused. Trips cell starts to ring.

TRIP

You take a peek on that, and I'll be back in a minute.

Trip steps aside, picks up his cell phone.

TRIP

Hugo, are you in position?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. WHITNEY SANDER'S HOUSE - DAY (D2)

It's a mansion surrounded by tall gates. Hugo stands outside, a cell phone pressed to his ear.

HUGO

I'm standing outside the house. It's like a prison for angels.

TRIP

You take good care of this guy, and take your time. I'll call you back in about twenty minutes.

INT. BEVERLY HIGH - DAY (D2)

Ellie and Pep are in the cafeteria.

PEP

Just write it here.

Ellie writes her phone number on the cuff of Pep's threadbare white Oxford shirt.

ELLIE

Where's your cell?

PEP

I don't have one.

ELLIE

What, are you Amish?

PEP

Don't hate on my people.

(then)

So, riddle me this, what's a rich
Beverly girl doing working as a
cappuccino jockey after school?

For a brief second, Ellie considers coming clean, but...

ELLIE

It's my dad's idea. He thinks that
work builds character.

PEP

Old school. I love it. So what
time should I pick you up?

ELLIE

Are we going somewhere?

PEP

Saturday afternoon. We're going
out.

ELLIE

Did we have that conversation?

PEP

I like to cut to the chase.

ELLIE

You just cut past the chase. And
sorry, I don't date Beverly boys.

PEP

Neither do I. Two o'clock work for
you?

ELLIE

No.

(off his look)

Two thirty night. And I'll have to
meet you there. Where are we
going?

PEP

T.B.D.

Ellie just smiles.

INT. WHITNEY SANDER'S HOUSE - DAY (D2)

Hugo is taking Whitney's measurements.

WHITNEY
So, Giovanni--

HUGO
(correcting)
Giovanni.

WHITNEY
I'm sorry. Giovanni, what part of
Italy are you from?

HUGO
(stumped, then)
Boot heel.

Hugo's cell phone rings.

HUGO
Pardon. Hello, Mr. Trips?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE GENTLEMAN'S CLOSET - DAY (D2)

Trip is sitting in a dressing room surrounded by mirrors,
reflecting his image out into infinity.

TRIP
Listen carefully and just keep
saying "bella, bella."

HUGO
Bella, bella.

TRIP
Are things going well?

HUGO
Bella, bella.

Trip realizes his conundrum.

TRIP
Okay, one bella for yes, two bellas
for no. Are things going well?

HUGO
Bella.

WHITNEY

Can I say a quick hello to Trip?

HUGO

Mr. Sanders wants to say hello.

We stay on Hugo listening...

Bella, bella, bella, bella, bella,
bella, bella. Ciao.

Hugo hangs up.

HUGO

Mr. Trips say he is sorry, his
pilot yell at him to get on the
private plane. He will call you
later. But he say to tell you that
the suit is gratis.

WHITNEY

This guy is unbelievable.

HUGO

Bella.

INT. STRINGER APARTMENT - EVENING (N2)

Ellie does her homework at the kitchen table while Trip
prepares dinner. JP's on the laptop, wearing headphones.

ELLIE

Dad, I'm having trouble with this
math problem, maybe you can help...
if one Lincoln gets repossessed, we
can afford another one how?

TRIP

Your math always did lack
imagination, Ellie. Don't worry.
I'm working on a new revenue
stream.

Ellie looks over at JP, expressionlessly surfing the web.

ELLIE

Dad, I'm worried about JP.

TRIP

He has become a bit of an island.

ELLIE

In six months he kills his first cat.

TRIP

I've got my eye on it, Ellie. I do. Now where's Nelson? Dinner's almost ready.

ELLIE

He's busy playing pool boy.

EXT. THE SHATS POOL - EVENING (N2)

Nelson strides alongside the pool, dragging a skimmer, never taking his eyes off Rita, who is doing laps in a skimpy bikini.

NELSON

How's your backstroke these days, Rita?

RITA

Go away, Nelson.

NELSON

Have you had a chance to consider my indecent proposal?

RITA

Gotta say no, Nelson.

Rita emerges from the pool, wraps herself in towel. Nelson sidles up to her and leans in.

NELSON

You may want to reconsider. I can't say this with any degree of certainty, but I'm reasonably sure that I'm a very generous lover.

Rita shakes her head, walks away. Nelson gazes at her undeterred...

NELSON

Matter of time.

INT. STRINGER APARTMENT - EVENING (N2)

Nelson sets the table for dessert. JP waits patiently as Ellie cuts a cake.

NELSON

Dad, come on! Dessert.

Trip crosses through on the phone and holds a finger up to them to be quiet.

TRIP

Whitney! Trip Stringer.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WHITNEY SANDER'S HOUSE - EVENING (N2)

Whitney sits in his library.

WHITNEY

There you are! I've been wanting to talk to you all day.

TRIP

I just got back. Had to fly up to San Francisco for the day on business. Just wanted to touch base. How was my man? Everything go well?

WHITNEY

Your tailor is a genius. But I will not allow you to pay for my suit.

TRIP

It's too late, my friend.

WHITNEY

What am I going to do with you? At least let me take you out to dinner or something.

TRIP

Oh, at the very least. But I must warn you, I've got a fairly narrow window of availability.

(to imaginary assistant)

Jeannie, what have I got in the next month?

ELLIE

Tacos in Torrance, bowling in Mar Vista.

Trip shoots her a look as he covers the phone with his hand.

TRIP

That's it? No dinner avails?
Whitney, I'm sorry. I'm afraid
that all I've got is this Saturday
afternoon between two and five.
(calling out again to "Jeannie")
I've got who on Saturday?

ELLIE

The repo man.

TRIP

(not missing a beat)
No, he came yesterday. Oh, I've
got my kids on Saturday!

WHITNEY

Perfect. If you don't mind sharing
my company with 500 of my nearest
and dearest, I'm chairing a family
fund raiser at the Jonathan Club on
Saturday.

TRIP

Kismet, I'll write you a check.

WHITNEY

The hell you will. You'll be my
guests. It's going to be a great
party.

Trip smiles big. Victory.

TRIP

Excellent. Looking forward to it.

He hangs up.

TRIP

Kids, great news. We have a
tremendous opportunity in front of
us. We're going to a party at the
Jonathan Club on Saturday.

ELLIE

You're gonna have to party without
me. I've already got plans.

NELSON

Ooh... 2:30 with Pep, huh? I was
eavesdropping.

Ellie shoots Nelson a threatening look.

TRIP

What's a Pep?

NELSON

A sketchy kid of unknown origin.
Ellie's in love.

ELLIE

You're about to learn so much about
pain.

TRIP

Eleanor, you are too young to be
dating.

ELLIE

Who's dating?

TRIP

We didn't move to the 90210 for you
to date a... Pep.

ELLIE

No, we moved here so you wouldn't
have to commute very far to pretend
to be a rich guy.

TRIP

Watch your mouth, young lady. We
moved here for the schools, for
you. Everything I do is for you
kids, to give you the life that you
deserve. We just have to stick to
"The Plan."

ELLIE

You call this a life? I hate this
life! I'm tired of lying. And I'm
not going to be an extra in your
movie anymore.

Trip watches her storm out of the room, stung.

NELSON

Don't worry, Dad. I never get
tired of lying.

JP just reaches over and takes Ellie's untouched dessert.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. TINA'S APARTMENT - DAY (D3)

Ellie and Tina are back on the hair dryer chairs.

TINA

C'mon, Ellie. You should go. The Jonathan Club is really swank. It might be fun.

ELLIE

Why should I get dressed up to go to some stupid party and pretend to be something I'm not?

TINA

Because it'll make your dad happy.

ELLIE

He's delusional, Tina. We're never going to get into that house. This is who we are. And no amount of pretending is going to change that.

TINA

So you're gonna bail on him? 'Cuz from everything you've said about your dad, he's never bailed on you.

That lands. Ellie leans her head back, takes a big sigh...

ELLIE

Do you have a dress I can borrow?

TINA

Hon, I'm in wardrobe. I got tons.

Ellie's cell phone rings.

ELLIE

Yeah?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. BENITO'S TACOS - DAY (D3)

Pep is talking on a pay phone, slurping a fountain drink.

PEP

I'm in the mood for a caramel macchiato, do you deliver?

ELLIE

Taking a break from churning
butter, Ezekiel?

PEP

No, I'm fixing the buggy for Pa. I
just wanted to give you the T.B.D.
for today.

ELLIE

You're gonna kill me, but I can't
go. I've gotta do this thing at
the Jonathan Club with my family.

PEP

Not a problemo. That's where the
T.B.D. was anyway.

ELLIE

Oh yeah, right.

PEP

No, it sounds like fun. I might
just have to crash that party.

ELLIE

Oh, like you're just going to crash
the Jonathan Club?

PEP

Hey, I don't need an engraved
invitation. I go where I wanna go.

ELLIE

See you Monday at school, Zeke.

EXT. THE SHATS CARPORT - DAY (D3)

Trip, Nelson and JP are in the Lincoln. Trip pulls the car
out and stops, surprised to see Ellie in a nice dress.

TRIP

Nelson, in the back. The lady of
the house sits shotgun.

Nelson gets out of the car and Ellie gets in the front seat.
Trip smiles at Ellie, and wordlessly drives off.

INT. THE JONATHAN CLUB - DAY (D3)

An idyllic beach club teeming with the rich and the richer.
The Stringers arrive, dressed to the nines. Trip takes in
the scene.

TRIP

Ah, the mother of all loads.

(then)

Remember boys, don't get your suits
dirty - they're loaners. Ellie,
there should be plenty of non-
delinquents for you to mingle with.
Nelson - age appropriate, please.

Trip kneels down, looks JP in the eye and gently removes his
ear buds, speaks delicately...

TRIP

JP, this is a social event. Which
means you may be required to
occasionally speak and listen, if
only to be polite. It might even
be fun. Okay?

JP

Okay.

We see JP almost involuntarily reach up and take Ellie's
hand. He's naked without his headphones.

TRIP

Alright, team. Enjoy yourselves.
Daddy's off to work.

Trip launches himself into the crowd. Nelson scans the room.

NELSON

Cougar time.

And he's off, same spring in his step as Trip. Ellie looks
down at JP, who is nervously clutching her hand.

ELLIE

Wanna get something to eat?

JP just nods. They head for the food.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - DAY (D3)

Trip scans the crowd when a hand falls on his shoulder.

WHITNEY

Bulldog, bulldog...

He turns to find Whitney, who stands with another gentleman.

TRIP

Bow wow wow. Go Elis!

WHITNEY

Glad you could make it. Trip, I'd like you to meet some friends.

A MONTAGE: Whitney introduces Trip to a slew of his powerful friends. A flurry of handshakes, smiles and cards exchanged.

WHITNEY

Stringer's in textiles.

TRIP

But I've always been interested in branching out into--

(to each new person)

--real estate/medical supplies/game shows/government/rhinoplasty.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - BAR - DAY (D3)

Nelson stirs a Virgin Mary with the celery, and runs his world-weary patter on yet another attractive OLDER WOMAN.

NELSON

Powerful men like these, terrible listeners.

(leans in)

I want you to know that I'm an excellent listener. And I have absolutely no power whatsoever.

OLDER WOMAN

You're cute.

Nelson's whole world brightens.

OLDER WOMAN

Let me introduce you to my stepdaughter Noreen.

She pulls aside Noreen, a cute, shy girl Nelson's age. His face drops, he's terrified.

NELSON

Hi.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - DAY (D3)

Ellie stands by, miserable, as JP inhales hors d'oeuvres.

ELLIE

Having fun?

JP just shrugs, chewing.

ELLIE

Yeah, me too. This place is so lame.

PEP (O.S.)

Oh, I don't know. It has a certain je ne sais quois.

Ellie turns, stunned to find Pep there.

ELLIE

You're here.

PEP

Apparently. So why aren't we dancing?

He whisks Ellie onto the dance floor to her delight. Little JP suddenly finds himself on his own.

A server stops with a tray of mini burgers, but before JP can take the last one, another hand beats him to it. It belongs to DARWIN (10), a chubby little black kid with the most amazingly pinchable cheeks.

DARWIN

These suck anyways. Wanna go find dessert?

JP smiles and nods enthusiastically. He's found a friend.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - DAY (D3)

Trip chats with a group of well heeled men, including GEORGE.

GEORGE

Do you sail, Trip?

TRIP

Not for ages. We had a yare little boat back East, though.

GEORGE

Come to the Marina. I'll show you yare.

TRIP

I look forward to meeting her.

JP and Darwin are marched out by the head CATERER. They have chocolate mousse all over them.

CATERER

To whom do these boys belong?

Trip extracts himself, takes JP by the hand.

TRIP

He's mine.

JUDY GRANT (early 40s), attractive and elegant, but decidedly down to earth, steps forward to claim Darwin.

JUDY

And this one's mine. What happened, Darwin?

DARWIN

We wanted dessert.

JUDY

Looks like you got plenty.

DARWIN

We kinda got into a chocolate mousse fight.

JP

It was fun. Sorry about the suit.

TRIP

(beaming)

Don't be sorry. Go with your pal, JP. Have an excellent time. If it's possible, get dirtier.

JP

Okay.

The two boys run off, giggling.

JUDY

Looks like those two are thick as thieves already.

TRIP

We'll have to arrange a play date. For the boys. I'm Trip Stringer.

Trip offers his hand and Judy takes it.

JUDY

Textiles. Right. You've made quite a splash here today. I'm Judy Grant.

TRIP

A pleasure. So, is Darwin--

JUDY

Adopted. Yes. Are you on your own with JP too?

TRIP

And Nelson and Ellie. So rarely on my own.

She smiles... they both feel it... the briefest of pauses...

JUDY

So it was nice meeting you. Here's my card... for the play date.

She slips him her card and walks off... looking back over her shoulder, she gives Trip the smile he was hoping for.

TRIP

Excellent.

Whitney walks up with JAMES (40's).

WHITNEY

This is the guy I was telling you about, James. Trip, meet James Stanley, of the Morgan Stanleys.

TRIP

James. I like what you've done with my money.

WHITNEY

I just overheard James' wife complaining about his boring banker's wardrobe.

JAMES

I must meet this Giovanni.

WHITNEY

(correcting)

Giovanni.

TRIP

It would be my pleasure to set it up for you, James.

WHITNEY

I knew it. My man Trip delivers the goods.

Trip turns to Whitney and looks him square in the eye.

TRIP

Thank you, Whitney.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - DANCE FLOOR - DAY (D3)

Ellie's still dancing with Pep. He's fantastic and she struggles to keep up. Nelson dances awkwardly with Noreen.

ELLIE

Where did you learn to dance like this?

PEP

What can I say? I got the music in me.

He dips her in a wild flourish as the song ends. Ellie cracks up and gives him a hug. Noreen shyly walks over to the bar, leaving Nelson unsure what to do. Pep drapes his arm around Nelson's shoulder.

PEP

Look, from a romance standpoint, the dancing is not working for you. Walk her to the beach.

NELSON

Well I, uh, no, can't do that.

PEP

Trust me. She likes you. I can tell. Relax and let the beach do the work.

NELSON

Let the beach do the work. Okay.

Nelson takes a deep breath, crosses over to Noreen.

ELLIE

Did you just give my brother some game?

PEP

It's a charity event, isn't it? And now that I've done my good deed for the day, I should go.

(lingers a beat)

So, I'll, uh, see you Monday then?

Oh, the tension. They really want to kiss. They linger on the precipice of desire for a delectable moment and...

ELLIE

Yeah. See you Monday.

Pep takes off as Ellie tries to get her heart rate down. Trip approaches with JP and slyly flashes a stack of cards.

TRIP

I believe my work here is done for the day.

ELLIE

Mine too.

TRIP

Where's Nelson?

EXT. BEACH - DAY (D3)

Nelson is in the middle of his first kiss with Noreen.

TRIP (O.S.)

Nelson!

And the moment is over.

NELSON

Coming!

(to Noreen)

So, that was... okay?

NOREEN

How old are you?

NELSON

Fourteen. How old are you?

NOREEN

Fifteen.

NELSON

Mmm, cougarlette. Excellent.

INT. JONATHAN CLUB - DAY (D3)

People are leaving, picking up swag bags. Trip has the family gathered and ready to go.

TRIP

(sotto)

Grab a bag on your way out.

The kids do. Trip claims his bag and then grabs another. The clerk manning the swag table gives him a look.

TRIP

For my wife. She's in the car.

The clerk shrugs and the Stringers head out, laden with swag.

ANGLE ON: Whitney talking to yet another distinguished looking gentleman. Pep crosses and is corralled by Whitney.

WHITNEY

Peter Epstein! I haven't seen you in years. Your father here tells me you're back from boarding school. How was Switzerland?

PEP

Chocolate and clocks, Whitney, chocolate and clocks. What can I tell you?

MR. EPSTEIN

Having fun, Pep?

PEP

Scads. Good to be home, Pop.

INT. VIKTOR'S LIMO LOT OFFICE - DAY (D4)

Victor and Viggo take stock of Trip's swag bags. Viktor hands Trip a sizable pile of cash. Trip smiles. Viktor's hand stays out. Trip counts him off some money for the car.

INT. ROBUSTO ROOM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY (D4)

Trip stands with Whitney and the Robusto Room executive, admiring a cigar locker with a nameplate that reads "William Stringer, III" on it. Trip pats Whitney on the back in appreciation, slips another "pre-Castro" into Whitney's breast pocket. Whitney can't believe his luck.

EXT. THE BEVERLY CHATEAUS - DAY (D4)

Trip stands with Hugo, who wears a suit and a limo driver's cap. Trip hands him the keys to the new Lincoln, along with a passenger pickup placard with the name "INGOLD" written on it. Ellie watches from her window, shakes her head.

INT. FAMILY RESTAURANT - TORRANCE - NIGHT (N4)

The Stringers sit down for a Sunday dinner at a very modest family restaurant.

TRIP

Children, we're in business. We established a firm beachhead yesterday. I collected eighty-eight prime business cards and I'm gonna call every one of them.

NELSON

Noreen already called me.

TRIP

Let it sizzle for a couple of days.
(then)
Ellie, who was that boy I saw you dancing with?

ELLIE

(glance at Nelson, then)
Eh, just another Beverly boy.

WAITRESS

Welcome to Charney's, how're you doin' tonight?

TRIP

Excellent, thank you. I've got two of your 2-for-1 coupons here--

WAITRESS

Sorry. It's one coupon per table.

TRIP

Not a problem. Nelson, JP - next table. Separate checks.

Ellie shakes her head as he hands them a coupon as they hop to the next table. Trip turns to JP...

TRIP

What are you gonna get, son?

JP

I dunno. Not that hungry.

Trip and Ellie share a smile. Trip looks out at his family.

TRIP

You know what kids? After dinner, we should go up to the house.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE