

TRIGGER

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS (V.O.)
You know there's still places in
Vietnam where trees can't grow
back?

EXT. FORT BLISS MISSILE TESTING SITE (EL PASO, TEXAS) - DAY

A mortar SHELL explodes, filling the screen with fire and smoke.

When it clears, we see THREE men, two in military camo, looking on from uprange.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS
This made me think of that.

BEN STRIDER (30s), the outlier in a sleek suit, launches into a sales pitch--

BEN
Thousand kilometer range, carries
up to fifty kilos. Our AI platform
allows for thousands of flight
inputs. This drone in particular's
fast enough to avoid counter UAVs,
but still packs a payload, like I
said.

GENERAL HOUSTON (60s) removes his Oakleys, rubs his temples.

GENERAL HOUSTON
Jesus, I'm hungover.

A drone BUZZES overhead, landing softly next to them.

GENERAL HOUSTON (CONT'D)
It comes back? The fuck does--
(coughs; collects self)
Lieutenant, you grab me -- I don't
know -- see if we got anything in
the cooler?

Lieutenant Williams heads for a nearby truck.

GENERAL HOUSTON (CONT'D)
So it comes back, where's your
profit margin?

BEN

Well, to us, it's not a matter of shareholders, it's a matter of advancing defense capability.

GENERAL HOUSTON

Right, no, of course. But, you know...

BEN

I'm serious, man. You want to buy sixty million dollar fighters from Lockheed and watch your stock grow, that's fine. But when I see...

Ben points to the American flag on Houston's sleeve.

BEN (CONT'D)

...When I see that, I get choked up, you know? I think about the GIs coming back from World War II, the Miracle on Ice, fucking George Bush popping the catcher's mitt. My family name's synonymous with American exceptionalism, and that's not just a slogan to me.

Lieutenant Williams hustles back with a Modelo.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS

(tossing Houston beer)

That work?

General Houston CRACKS the beer and takes a swing, then circles the drone, evaluating--

GENERAL HOUSTON

Well, it's recession-proof, I'll tell ya that. But see, here's the only problem: I hear Lucky Lawson's your chief engineer.

BEN

That's no problem. We acquired his company, so any sales'll be made under the Strider Rifle Company banner.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS

Lucky's that tech bro guy? Sold those torpedoes that blew up a coral reef or whatever?

GENERAL HOUSTON
 Blacklisted by the Pentagon.
 (sips beer)
 Even the world's biggest vendor
 won't line up to buy snake oil
 twice.

BEN
 (re: bomb strike)
 Did that look like snake oil to
 you? Someone just needed to
 harness his ingenuity. This is the
 preeminent tech on the market --
 it's gonna save millions of folded
 flags from being laid on coffins.
 I believe that. But if you want
 the People's Liberation Army to win
 the drone race, then by all means,
 don't invest.

Houston considers, then:

GENERAL HOUSTON
 And all the paperwork and shit's
 gonna say Strider on it? Nothing
 about Lucky?

BEN
 He's just another anonymous guy
 working on the Manhattan Project.

GENERAL HOUSTON
 Alright. Alright, on the condition
 we don't see or hear from him,
 we'll start with a small order, see
 how that goes.
 (offering handshake)
 Okay? Happy?

Ben nods, shakes his hand. As they head for the truck:

GENERAL HOUSTON (CONT'D)
 And hey, whaddya say we poke around
 on the other side of the border,
 huh? Little bordello social hour?

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS
 (clears throat)
 Ain't that uniform only?

GENERAL HOUSTON
 What, you didn't know? Ben here
 was an Army man.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS
No shit? You cut down some
insurgents in the desert?

BEN
No, I, uh-- I had an injury in
basic training.

Williams LAUGHS, but notices Ben doesn't join in--

LIEUTENANT WILLIAMS
Wait, you serious? What, are you
the first guy to get a Purple Heart
the same time as your haircut?

BEN
(to Houston)
Anyway, I can't, I gotta get back
to Austin. My mom's celebrating
her re-election.

GENERAL HOUSTON
Not a barrel-chested freedom
fighter after all then, are ya?

Beat, then, forlorn:

BEN
I could've been.

EXT./ESTAB. WHITE HORSE SALOON (AUSTIN, TX) - NIGHT

A rustic dance hall - country music, neon signs, Bachelorette
parties.

INT. WHITE HORSE SALOON - SAME

Ben, nursing a water, sits at a high top. ADDISON WALL
(early 20s), a former Ole Miss Delta Gamma, scrolls on her
phone beside him; they're both dressed in formal wear.

SAWYER STRIDER (late 20s, handsome), donning a Remington hat,
joins their table. Lone Star beer in one hand, he slides
Addison a White Claw with the other.

BEN
You don't have a Strider hat you
can wear?

SAWYER
I only shot our rifles in Africa,
it makes you feel better.

ADDISON

Oh, yeah, how was your trip?

SAWYER

It was a good time, yeah. Hunted bongos with a couple guides down there. But how y'all been?

BEN

Well, the ink just dried on the Lucky Lawson acquisition, so we brought over all their defense tech.

SAWYER

(to Addison)

And here I thought he was all business.

Addison eyes the drunk Bachelorettes stumbling around the dance floor, a sea of pink cowboy hats.

ADDISON

I fear cowboy core's on its way out. I'm going to the bathroom, you watch my stuff?

She stands, straightens her dress, exits.

A beat later, Addison's phone BUZZES inside her purse. Sawyer notices Raya notifications populating the screen.

SAWYER

So, what, uh-- what's the deal with Scarlett O'Hara here?

BEN

Oh, yeah, it's good. We've been dating a few months, and, you know -- she's excited to meet Mom, so if that's an indicator...

Another Raya notification pops up.

SAWYER

Uh-huh. And you're sure you're not getting taken for a ride here?

Sawyer digs her phone out, showing Ben the screen--

BEN

Dude, you can't--
(sees notifications)
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Oh. Well, she probably just forgot to delete the app.

Sawyer taps out a cigarette, lights it.

SAWYER

Long as you know what's what.

BEN

You're not supposed to smoke in here.

SAWYER

And maybe that's why she's still on the app.

Ben glances at the bathroom, insecurity brewing. Takes a swig of Sawyer's beer.

SAWYER (CONT'D)

'Atta boy.

Ben stands, affects a swagger as he approaches the women's restroom. But at the door, he reconsiders. Then, seeing his brother smoking a cigarette, evoking Jett Rink, Ben re-adopts an assertive demeanor. Storms into:

INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

BEN

Addison?

Ben recognizes her boots under a stall. Shoulders the door open... it WHACKS Addison in the back.

ADDISON

Jesus!

BEN (CONT'D)

Fuck, I'm sorry!

Addison faces him, a dusting of cocaine under her nose.

BEN (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing? We're about to go meet my mom!

ADDISON

You said it was like a Gatsby thing?

BEN

So you get high-- my Mom's, like, intense, and there's gonna be important people there, and...

ADDISON

I know! No, I know you said
there's gonna be media there. I
just-- my social battery's on E, so
I thought...

Ben catches himself. Recalling his brother's words, he
shifts to an easygoing demeanor--

BEN

No, you're right. You're right, I
get it, it's cool.
(smiles)
Now let me in here, let me get some
of that.

EXT./ESTAB. STRIDER ESTATE - NIGHT

Black SUVs are stacked up along a country road lined with
live oaks and dangling Spanish moss, leading to a Greek
revival estate.

INT. STRIDER ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben struts in, fueled with synthetic confidence, Addison on
his arm. Jazz music welcomes them into a gala like Truman
Capote's "Black and White Ball" - champagne towers, hors
d'oeuvres, TUXEDOED GUESTS.

BEN

(nodding at man)
That's the editor-in-chief at
Garden and Gun. I'll introduce you
guys later.

ADDISON

Oh, should I pitch him something?

BEN

And there's my mom, look at that.
Already an NRA wall around her, so
I'm sure she'll play nice.

Weaving through the foyer, they greet CAROLYN (60s).

CAROLYN

(hugging him)
Benjamin! Hi, I wasn't sure you'd
make it. And who's this?

BEN

Oh. This is my, uh...

ADDISON

(shaking her hand)

Addison. It's so nice to meet you, Congresswoman. And congrats on your victory -- I can see bits of the glass ceiling gathered around your feet.

CAROLYN

Oh, the manners. I love that! I love-- and now, have you corrected Benjamin's habit of stabbing food like a pitchfork?

ADDISON

We're working on it.

Carolyn clinks glasses with Addison. Ben smiles, overjoyed with their quickly-formed camaraderie.

But as Carolyn spies a newly-arrived guest, her expression sours. Ben follows her sightline to the door--

--where LUCKY LAWSON (30s) has just entered. He has a mullet and wears a Hawaiian shirt and flip flops.

CAROLYN

Who on earth is that?

BEN

Uh. Yeah, so that's-- that's kind of my gift for your win.

Lucky approaches the trio, flipping Ben off in transit.

LUCKY

(as he joins)

Hey, bud, look at this fuckin' place! I miss the Mandingo fights or what?

Carolyn's brows furrow, appalled.

BEN

Uh, hey, so why don't we head upstairs, Mom? I'll catch you up.

INT. STRIDER ESTATE - DRAWING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carolyn leads Ben and Lucky into a room adorned with antique weaponry, along with photos of American soldiers proudly brandishing Strider rifles.

LUCKY

Oh, fuck yeah. Place is like a Ken Burns' wet dream.

Lucky yanks a 19th century revolver off the wall.

CAROLYN

Oh, please don't touch, would you?
My grandfather fired that during
the Civil War.

LUCKY

(plopping gun on desk)
Oh, yeah, which side he fight on?
The one that was more, uh, let's
say lineage-based?

CAROLYN

What is this exactly?

BEN

Okay, Mom, so here's the thing: you
know that since Dad passed, I've
spent a lot of time reassessing the
state of the company. And I know
he did his best, but the truth is,
we're a few years away from joining
Winchester and Colt, you know?
Getting bought out by foreign
capital and sold on "Antiques
Roadshow." But I've found a
solution.

Over this, Lucky peers through an antique telescope.

CAROLYN

Wait, I recognize you. You're
Lucky Lawson. You designed those--
those sensors? The ones in Arizona
that killed the families crossing
the border?

LUCKY

(proud)
Among other things.

BEN

Mom, look, we either innovate or
die, and that's why I invited
Lucky. The preeminent engineer in
the world, he'll develop weapon
systems as we shift our focus
toward aeronautics.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

This is how we revitalize -- by acquiring Lucky's startup.

CAROLYN

I'm not sure I understand.

LUCKY

Basically, we use AI-- or, how do I say this in Boomer speak? Either of you got a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*--?

CAROLYN

-- Would you excuse us please? I'd like to speak to my son.

Lucky looks to Ben, who nods. As he leaves:

LUCKY

Alright, bet. Bet bet. And for the record, you ask me, everyone downstairs is a bit overdressed.

Ben turns to his mother, her eyes filled with contempt--

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

Addison wanders through the densely-packed forest, drawn to the SNAPS of a pistol.

She enters a clearing, coming upon Sawyer, SHOOTING at beer cans.

SAWYER

Addison, the influencer.

ADDISON

Creator, actually. And writer. I was actually just talking to someone inside about doing a piece for *Garden and Gun*.

SAWYER

So you come to me for advice on the garden.

Eyes locking on-target, he SHOOTs a can. Turns back--

SAWYER (CONT'D)

So, what's the story with you and my brother?

ADDISON

What do you mean? It's a, you know, whatever, a "situationship."

SAWYER

And that's what he thinks?

ADDISON

I don't know, we haven't, like... I'm just kind of a mess right now.

SAWYER

Well, look, my brother's a romantic. So the way I see it, you either gotta fish or cut bait here.

ADDISON

Well, maybe I'm someone who values my freedom, you know? And Ben doesn't-- Ben doesn't know how to have fun. Like that--
(nodding towards party)
That's not fun to me.

SAWYER

No? Not down for a little skull measuring and southern cocktails?

ADDISON

(laughs; re: beer cans)
Can I get one of those? Those would be better.

He takes a beat, wondering: *should I be doing this?* Then:

SAWYER

Got another case in the blind.

She trails him toward a hunting blind.

ADDISON

You know, I won the Greek life BP tournament at Ole Miss.

SAWYER

Yeah? Ever think the fine gentlemen of Sigma Chi just didn't wanna break from your side of the table?

ADDISON

(short beat, then,
venturing)
Would you?

SAWYER

You saw me shoot.

(then)

Watch your step here.

Sawyer leaps over a small trench. Addison doesn't see it in time and trips, stumbling forward. Sawyer turns back and catches her, like the famous shot from "Ivan's Childhood," her forehead tucked against his chest. They hold for a beat, saying nothing, then, subtly, she KISSES his chest.

INT. STRIDER ESTATE - DRAWING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ben sits, compulsively tapping his foot, unable to make eye contact with his mother.

BEN

I just think that... people used to talk about us like the DuPonts, you know? A great American family. And this is our ticket back -- a new frontier. This is the invention of the Gatling gun, the airplane, and we're on the ground floor. And I know Lucky can be a little grating.

CAROLYN

He's a fascist.

BEN

He's a patriot! God forbid a few of us still celebrate the 4th of July.

CAROLYN

What's-- what's happening? Will you sit still?

Ben stops his foot. Carolyn regards the pictures on the wall.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

It was our rifles that brought the Allied troops recourse, remember? On the beaches of Normandy, the Western Front. Our ammunition that halted evil in its tracks. And now you-- no. No, absolutely not. I don't like this. You've always ignored my input, not this time.

BEN

Ignored your input?! I've only
ever done what you've wanted!

CAROLYN

Ridiculous.

BEN

Anytime I deviate from the path you
envisioned, it's breakdowns, it's
burying me in guilt! I left basic
training because you said I was
ruining your mental health!

CAROLYN

I was in therapy about it, yes.
Forgive me for not wanting you
killed.

BEN

I only ever wanted to be a soldier.

CAROLYN

You think you know what's best --
you don't. And years from now,
you'll come back and say, "Mom, you
were right."

BEN

Look, I'm doing this, and it'd mean
a lot to have my family behind it.

Beat, then:

CAROLYN

No. No, I won't agree.

BEN

Mom--

CAROLYN

-- No, Benjamin, how can I make
this simple for you? Your father
conferred you with this role, yes,
but if I hear of this nonsense
again, then I'm sorry, but I may
have to speak with the Board about
considering other options.

BEN

Yeah, well, the Board's already
spoken.

(beat, then)

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

We acquired Lucky's company last week.

Off Carolyn's shock--

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Addison prowls toward Sawyer, who faces her, walking backwards.

ADDISON

I thought you were taking me to the hunting blind?

SAWYER

Taking the long way.

ADDISON

Why? You want to keep me out here?

Sawyer backs into a tree, Addison advancing.

SAWYER

Not at all. In fact, you should probably head back inside.

ADDISON

Is that what you want?

A foot away from him, she stops. Reaches for his belt, but her hand continues around and removes the pistol from his waistband. She steps back and slides the gun under her dress, rubbing it seductively against herself.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

Is this okay?

He nods. She closes her eyes, enraptured. And as the sexual tension builds, she steps forward...

The gun accidentally TRIGGERS. CUT TO BLACK.