

TRIGGER

Written by

Jordan Ramp

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? Why--
(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)
We mostly see kamikaze drones.
This comes back, where's your
profit margin?

BEN

Well, to us, 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

(whistles)

Beautiful, ain't it? But, see, here's the 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 guy? He 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
 Someone just needed to harness his
 ingenuity. Look, this is the
 preeminent tech on the market, and
 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)
 Alright? That work?

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

GENERAL HOUSTON (CONT'D)
 Good deal. 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 antelope with a couple guides down there. But how y'all been?

BEN
Uh, yeah. You know, 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 smiles, then 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. You watch my stuff?

She stands and exits toward the bathroom.

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

SAWYER
So, 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)
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? Hey!

Ben recognizes her boots under a stall door. And, like an
action hero, he 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 rail a line?! My mom's,
like, an incredibly serious person,
and there's gonna be important
people there, and...

ADDISON

I know! No, I know. It's just--
my social battery's on E, so I
thought...

Recalling his brother's words, Ben shifts to an easygoing
demeanor--

BEN

Fuck. No, you're right. I'm
sorry, you're right.

ADDISON

Yeah?

BEN

Yeah, I get it, it's cool. We
should-- actually, yeah, 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 guy's the editor-in-chief at
Garden and Gun. I'll introduce you
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 the
truth is, we're a few years away
from joining Winchester and Colt,
you know? Getting bought out by
foreign capital and having our
stuff 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 that
killed the families crossing the
border in Arizona?

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, here to develop weapon systems as we shift our focus toward aeronautics. This is how we survive -- 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 trees, 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 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

(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 your path, it's breakdowns, it's burying me in guilt! I left basic training because you said it was shattering your mental health.

CAROLYN

I was in therapy, 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. And I'm sorry -- I know your father bestowed you with this role -- but if you don't drop this nonsense, I may have to speak with the Board about considering other options.

BEN

Yeah, well, the Board's already spoken.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

(beat, then)

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.