

THE BOYS

Pilot

"The Name of the Game"

Teleplay by
Eric Kripke

Based on the Comic by
Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson

Directed by
Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg

NETWORK DRAFT 6
October 15, 2017

Copyright © 2017
SONY PICTURES TELEVISION INC.
All Rights Reserved

No portion of this script may be performed, or reproduced by
any means, or quoted, or published in any medium without prior
consent of SONY PICTURES TELEVISION INC. * 10202 West Washington
Boulevard * Culver City, CA 90232 *

THE BOYS
"The Name of the Game"

FADE IN...

OPEN on COMIC BOOK PICTURES WHIRRING PAST. Golden Age to Modern Age. Beloved heroes you all know and love -- like Soldier Boy, Lamplighter, and most of all, the Homelander. Until the images coalesce into a block of text:

VOUGHT STUDIOS PRESENTS:

Then -- A SNAP OF STATIC TAKES US TO --

YOUTUBE. Hand-held iPhone video of a statuesque warrior (QUEEN MAEVE) kicking the SHIT out of a robber.

Now Queen Maeve perp-walks the cuffed robber to the waiting NYPD. Most notable is the CROWD that's gathered around, cheering and chanting her name. A galaxy of phone FLASHES, as everyone else records it, too.

The CHRYON along the bottom: "EYEWITNESS FOOTAGE OF QUEEN MAEVE IN ACTION!"

Which LAUNCHES us into a fast-paced FIREHOSE RUSH of IMAGES. TV, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat. A multi-faceted, multi-media world -- but one thing unites us all:

WE LOVE SUPERHEROES.

E! CHANNEL. VIDEO FOOTAGE of the DEEP, a handsome-as-hell aquatic hero in a skin-tight suit, in Long Island, comforting a beached whale. Bystanders call out his name ("DEEP! DEEP!") as TWO E! NEWS ANCHORS dish about his granite abs.

SNAP! A moody, Michael Bay-style image of THE SEVEN, the world's most popular Superhero Team. Homelander, Queen Maeve, the Deep, the Lamplighter, others.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Seven. The greatest Superhero Team on the planet.

(then)

And now you can bring them home.
Collect all Seven commemorative glasses from McDonal--

SNAP! It's a Christian Channel. CAPTAIN FANTASTIC, on-stage in a MEGACHURCH. A big BANNER behind: "CAPES FOR CHRIST." Adoring CONGREGANTS clasp their hands in prayer.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

And it's just a few short weeks to our incredible "Believe" festival, where we give praise to the most powerful hero of them all, Je--

(CONTINUED)

SNAP! INSTAGRAM. Video taken from the middle of a rambunctious crowd that's WAY LARGER than the others we've seen. POLICE barely hold them back. SHRIEKING FOR --

HOMELANDER! Head of the Seven and the world's biggest Superhero. If Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise and John Wayne all gang-banged. He waves from the red carpet of a UNICEF benefit. People go FUCKING BANANAS, SHOVE against the cops. It's like Beatlemania.

'Likes' for this Instagram Post shoot into the stratosphere.

Finally -- a LOCAL NEWS INTERVIEW with a GIRL, 20. She's bawling her eyes out.

GIRL

...he just... Homelander does so much to protect us... and to be this close to him, it's... overwhelming. Homelander, if you see this, Adrian from Brooklyn loves you, loves you with all her heart...

We PULL BACK. Revealing we're watching a FLAT SCREEN --

INT. UPPER WEST SIDE APARTMENT - NIGHT

In an upscale living room. As we meet HUGHIE (20's, slight, kind). In a "BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL" shirt. Installing someone's new TV. As well as their Blu-Ray. Sonos. Programming their Universal Remote. Hughie does it all. We see his FINGERS, dexterous and deft. He's quite the tech virtuoso.

MOMENTS LATER. He presents the BILL on a clipboard -- to a WEST SIDE MOM in a New York Power Suit. She only half pays attention, as she returns work emails on her phone.

HUGHIE

You sure? We're running a special on Vimtag Security Cameras. HD. You can access 'em from your phone.

WEST SIDE MOM

Thanks but no. I don't think we really need 'em. My nanny's here all the time.

Hughie just has one of those sincere, earnest faces. He nods to the woman's 7-YEAR-OLD in a HOMELANDER COSTUME, playing with his Dominican NANNY.

HUGHIE

Course. And you got the Homelander watching over things.

(off the Mom's smile)

But, you know, the Homelander can't be everywhere at once. Neither can the cops.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUGHIE (CONT'D)

Or the nanny, for that matter. No,
if we wanna keep an eye on our kids?
That's up to us. Even if we're
working long hours and late nights.
Know what I mean?

Mom looks up from her phone. Clearly a long hour worker.

HUGHIE

Maybe you don't need the cameras,
but what about that one time you do?
Is there such a thing as too safe?

Off Hughie. Smiling warmly. Making the sale.

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - NIGHT

A Mom-and-Pop ELECTRONICS STORE. TV's and STEREO EQUIPMENT
on the shelves. Hughie behind the counter. As --

The bell over the door RINGS. ROBIN (20's, girl-next-door
cute) enters. She sidles up to Hughie, as if a customer --

ROBIN

Excuse me, sir? I want to schedule
an appointment. For you to come
over and --

(arches an eyebrow)

Lay some cable.

HUGHIE

(smiles)

Robin. That doesn't mean what you
think it means.

ROBIN

'Laying cable' means sex.

HUGHIE

'Laying pipe' means sex. 'Laying
cable' means you want me to come to
your house and take a shit.

ROBIN

(laughing)

That's disgusting.

HUGHIE

Hey, you said it.

ROBIN

You ready yet? Despite your best
efforts, I'm still hungry.

EXT. NEW YORK SIDE STREET - NIGHT

OPEN ON A BUS-STOP POSTER. A completely BLACK SUITED HERO in
a cologne ad. "BLACK NOIR for DRAKKAR NOIR."

(CONTINUED)

As Hughie and Robin, holding hands, walk down an empty SIDE-STREET. She CHUCKLES at a story he just told --

ROBIN
...so you got her from 'no thanks,'
to four cameras?

HUGHIE
What can I say? I'm a good fucking
salesman.
(off Robin's eye-roll)
Hey, I got you, didn't I?

ROBIN
Barely!
(beat)
Speaking of, Mr. Salesman. Did you
ask for the raise?

Hughie takes a half-beat. He knows Robin isn't going to like this, but plays it off, casually.

HUGHIE
Gary was totally supportive -- he
just says things are slow. Next
year, though, for sure.

ROBIN
Okay.

Hughie looks at her. Feels guilty.

HUGHIE
What do you want me to do? Go in
there and kick his ass?

ROBIN
I said 'okay.'

HUGHIE
But you didn't mean it. I see that
look. C'mon, let's hear it.

ROBIN
(sighs, alright)
You're the best guy there, by a long
shot -- and Gary's taking advantage
of you -- and yeah, you should get
in there and fight for it.

This is banter, not bickering. A sign of how much they love, and are comfortable with, each other.

HUGHIE
Jesus. I didn't realize you needed
a sugar daddy.

ROBIN

Blow me. This is about you getting what you deserve. Hell, I'm killing myself at school cause it's gonna pay off -- for both of us. I mean, if we're moving in together --

Robin takes one step off the curb into the street, about to cross. But Hughie stops on a dime.

HUGHIE

Wait. What'd you just say?

ROBIN

(breaks into a grin)
Well, we can't keep -- laying pipe -- at your parent's place. Trying to keep quiet, staring up at that dumb Zeppelin poster.

HUGHIE

(also grins)
Hey. Don't ever besmirch the Zeppelin poster.

He's still on the curb, she's still one step in the street. As he leans forward and kisses her. Like none he's ever had before -- or ever will again.

Hughie steps back, holding both of Robin's hands. They're so in love, then --

SMASH! Robin is suddenly, shockingly ATOMIZED before Hughie's eyes. Blood and gummy bits of viscera spatter against Hughie's face. Hughie still holds Robin's hands. But that's all he's holding. They're gory, detached.

It happens so fast, Hughie doesn't have time to react.

As fast-running hero A-TRAIN skids to a stop. Robin's insides all over his costumed outsides. He clutches a distinctive BLUE DUFFEL BAG tight to his chest. The motherfucker just ran right through Hughie's girlfriend.

A-Train is straight-up frightened. Jittery as hell. But not because of what he just did. Then why?

A-TRAIN

(sputtering)
Oh God, I'm -- I'm sorry. But I can't stop. I can't stop.

And with that, A-Train RACES away at supersonic speeds, leaving a blurred trail of motion in his wake.

And leaving Hughie. Alone. Holding two bloody hands. In shock, he can't let them go. Until some emotion -- some abject horror -- begins to seep in...

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE
(a whisper)
... R... Rob...

WIDE SHOT. Down the street. Hughie is small in the frame. His voice distant, ragged, wrenching, as finally:

HUGHIE
ROBIN! ROBIN!!

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DES MOINES, IOWA - DAY

A generic Nissan Altima pulls up before a generic office park. STARLIGHT (20's, blonde, sweet, in a reasonably modest superhero outfit) climbs out of the passenger seat. She clutches a HEADSHOT, looks nervous.

But not as nervous as her MOTHER. Who licks her finger, smooths out Starlight's eyebrow.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER
Whatever you do, don't chew your
thumbnail. And remember to smile.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - WAITING ROOM - DAY

All beige, all the time. Water cooler burps. A table with a sad, out of date PEOPLE magazine. Metal folding chairs occupied by a few exotically-garbed SUPERHEROINES. (Let's play the clash between the mundane and the superheroic).

Starlight enters, signs in. Nods at one of the other Superheroines, apparently no love lost.

STARLIGHT
Hey Countess.

COUNTESS
Starlight. Omigod. So good to see
you. Is that a new headshot?

STARLIGHT
No. Same one.

COUNTESS
It's so nice.

Countess gives a "I'm pretending to like you but I fucking hate your guts" grin. Starlight smiles back, self-conscious.

From there, we enter a MONTAGE of Starlight's bizarre AUDITION. INTERCUTTING:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - AUDITION ROOM - DAY

VIDEO CAMERA POV. It SNAPS to life. Focusing in on Starlight. Anxious.

(CONTINUED)

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Please slate for the camera.

STARLIGHT
Yeah, I'm, um, Starlight. 5 foot 8,
127 pounds.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Turn around please.

She rotates, an awkward 360 degree turn. Then --

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Okay, let's see it, dear.

STARLIGHT
You should look away --

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Sorry?

STARLIGHT
Turn away from camera and shut your
eyes. Or else I'll blind you.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Alright. Go ahead.

Starlight concentrates -- it starts with her eyes, which glow white hot -- then the OVERHEAD FLUORESCENTS FLICKER and FADE, as she draws energy from her nearby surroundings --

Until her EYES emit a J.J. Abrams-style, blazing LIGHT BURST that explodes into the room --

The camera FREEZES and FRITZES and RATTLES at the concussive blast. When it resumes, it's on its side, Starlight is crouching over someone just off camera, upset --

STARLIGHT
I'm so sorry, are you alright?

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Just fine, dear. Very impressive.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - BATHROOM - DAY

Starlight on the toilet. Clearly peeing. (You never see superheroes peeing!) Then she reaches beneath her, pulls out the plastic urine test cup. Begins to label it...

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Starlight sits at a POLYGRAPH. Wears sensors. A bland technician across from her, taking notes. (Fun fact: these are real questions from CIA employee interviews.)

(CONTINUED)

TECHNICIAN
Have you ever plotted to overthrow
the United States of America?

STARLIGHT
No.

The Technician inspects the answer. Mutters to himself.
Betrays nothing. Starlight starts chewing her thumbnail.

TECHNICIAN
How do you feel when you see a small
animal in distress?

STARLIGHT
Um. Bad.

TECHNICIAN
Did you ever feel sexual urges when
sitting in your parents' lap?

STARLIGHT
What? No. God. No.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - AUDITION ROOM - DAY

VIDEO CAMERA POV. Starlight in the midst of an interview.
She speaks with genuine heart.

STARLIGHT
...I was just... like most Super-
Abled, I was born like this. My Mom
was thrilled. She made me go to all
those little miss hero pageants. I
hated it, I can still smell the
hairspray. And at the Q and A, they
always asked me my wish. And I
always said, "to save the world."
The judges chuckled, like it was
cute. But it's not a joke to me.
Since when did 'hopeful' and 'naive'
become the same thing? Why get into
this business, if not to save the
world? It's all I've ever wanted.
And it's why all I've ever wanted
was to be in the Seven...

Off her pixelated video image...

INT. ROBIN'S PARENTS' APARTMENT - FEW DAYS LATER

PHOTOS of ROBIN. Surrounded by thick FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS.

A ROOMFUL of somber people in DARK SUITS, eating from small
plates. We notice a WOMAN crying into a MAN's shoulder.
Robin's PARENTS. This is the post-funeral reception.
Everyone stands close, united in grief. Except for --

(CONTINUED)

Hughie. Sits in the corner. Alone. In a suit and tie. He holds a plate with a square of ambrosia Jell-O salad on it.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. A maelstrom of heartbreak, pain and emotion, beneath a numb shell. He looks up, sees --

POV. Two CHILDREN in nice clothes, sprawled before the TV. Watching a "SEVEN" CARTOON. Even here, even now... most people are FANS...

INT. HUGHIE'S FAMILY APARTMENT - QUEENS - DAY

Hughie returns back to his FAMILY APARTMENT. Tie loosened. His zaftig MOM follows, along with his wheezing FATHER (sallow, skinny, rolling an oxygen tank beside him).

Dad thumps on the couch, flips on the TV.

HUGHIE'S MOM
Well, I thought it was a lovely service. Just lovely.

Hughie. What's he supposed to say? It was awesome?

HUGHIE'S MOM
Did you eat? Can I -- fix you some pizza rolls?

HUGHIE
...I'm not hungry.

HUGHIE'S MOM
(noticing the TV)
Oh, honey. Look.

ON THE SCREEN. Six o'clock news. A PRESS CONFERENCE. A-TRAIN. Beside VOUGHT VICE-PRESIDENT of HERO MANAGEMENT JULIA STILLWELL (40's).

Hughie noticeably flinches at this.

JULIA STILLWELL (ON TV)
...and as you know, A-Train was placed on standard administrative leave until the NYPD could conduct their investigation. Which they've now concluded -- and have ruled no wrong-doing. But that doesn't begin to convey the terrible regret we all feel at this awful, tragic loss...

A-TRAIN (ON TV)
My deepest condolences to Robin Ward's family. I was chasing those bank robbers... and she just... stepped into the middle of the street... and I couldn't...

A-Train trails off, choked up. Golden Globe-worthy.

(CONTINUED)

Hughie mutters to himself. Devastated.

HUGHIE
Middle of the --? She was a half-
step off the fucking curb.

DING DONG! The door.

Mom swings open the door, revealing a VOUGHT LAWYER -- DOUG
FRIEDMAN. All Clinton-esque, lip-biting sympathy.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
Does a Hugh Campbell live here?

INT. HUGHIE'S FAMILY APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

A small stack of LEGAL DOCUMENTS on a TABLE. Hughie sits in
front of the lawyer. Scans the papers.

Hughie's Mom observes. Dad still watches TV in the back,
seemingly catatonic, wheezing through his nose tube.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
...really, everyone at Vought is
just... wrecked about Robin...
(then, as a 'friend')
Now. You two weren't married and --
look, technically there's no legal
claim. But still, Vought wants to
do the right thing -- offer you 25
thousand in restitution.

HUGHIE'S MOM
(that's life-changing)
25 thousand!

DOUG FRIEDMAN
It's the least we could do, ma'am.
You just need to sign -- here -- and
I'll hand over the check --

HUGHIE
(reading, realizing)
But this -- is a confidentiality
agreement.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
It's a boiler plate NDA --

HUGHIE
I sign this, I can't talk about it?
Have to pretend it didn't happen?
That I wasn't holding Robin's arms
in my hands?

DOUG FRIEDMAN
I know you're upset, but we're just
trying to help --

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE
Then say you're sorry --

DOUG FRIEDMAN
Excuse me?

Hughie builds a head of steam --

HUGHIE
You people say 'condolences' and 'my
regrets' and 'our sympathies,' but
no one can look me in the fucking
eye and say "I'm sorry!" I'm not
signing anything! Now get out!

Doug Friedman pauses a beat, unsure. Hughie charges over to
him, ROUGHLY HAULS HIM OUT OF HIS SEAT!

HUGHIE
I said GET THE HELL OUT!

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Sitting quietly in his seat. That outburst
was just in his imagination. There's churning lava deep down
inside him. But he's not a fighter. Not yet.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
You okay? As I said, a boiler plate
NDA, really pretty standard.

HUGHIE
I'll think about it.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
Hughie --

HUGHIE
Let me think about it.

Beat. Doug Friedman gives a smile. Reads the room.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
I get it. I'll leave the document,
gimme a ring if you have questions.
(then)
You keep the pen, okay?

The LAWYER hands over a SILVER PEN labeled 'VOUGHT.'

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DES MOINES, IOWA - DAY

We soar over countless versions of the same middle class
house. Like some cloning experiment run horrifically amok.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

OPEN ON A BOOKCASE. Loaded with TROPHIES. RIBBONS. "LITTLE MISS SUPERSTAR - 1st PLACE." "SWEET CORN FESTIVAL & 5K RUN - BEST OVERALL POWERS." Etc. Along with a crowd of photos -- of a heavily made-up, Jon Benet-style Starlight, ages 4 thru 10, always jauntily posing, hands-on-hips, wearing a kid-sized, homemade version of her outfit.

A shrine to a Mother's pride in her daughter.

In the adjacent kitchen -- Starlight herself, in her grown-up Superhero outfit, pours some Kraft Shells and Cheese into a pot. Keeps one ear on a POLICE SCANNER, which babbles on about some local loitering and a nasty rash of graffiti.

Her Mother enters -- listens briefly to the scanner --

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER

Any maniacs out there?

STARLIGHT

Quiet night. Like every night.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER

Too bad. We could use the press right now.

(sees the pot, clucks)

Oh, Annie, could you pack any more carbs into that?

Apparently, Annie is her 'secret identity' name.

STARLIGHT

I'm hungry, Mother. And would you relax? I didn't get the job.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER

You don't know that, you're better than all of them.

When -- RING. RING. The phone. Mom goes to answer.

STARLIGHT

They're auditioning nation-wide. Besides, Countess probably got it, she's really good in a room.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER

If you're negative, negative things happen to you.

(picks up phone)

Hello? Um, I'm her Mother. Yes, yes, one moment.

Mom holds out the phone, on pins and needles. Mouths "it's them!" Starlight can't help but feel a stab of butterflies. Moves for the phone.

(CONTINUED)

STARLIGHT
Hello? Yes, this is she.
(then)
I -- got it? I GOT IT?!

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER
YOU GOT IT!! YOU GOT IT!!

Off this rambunctious, unbridled maternal ECSTASY --

INT. ROBIN'S PARENTS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

OPEN ON A FRAMED PHOTO in a much less happy home. ROBIN beaming beside her loving PARENTS.

WIDER. Hughie sits at their kitchen table. Awkwardly shuffles notes and papers.

In front of Robin's Mom and Dad. Mom, red-rimmed eyes, only stares down at her folded hands. Dad also averts eye contact, impatiently taps his wedding ring onto his beer bottle throughout. Clink. Clink.

HUGHIE
...so we can't file criminal charges against A-Train. Heroes are like cops, they can't be charged for collateral damage while in pursuit.

Robin's Mom wipes away a tear. This is all a painful subject. Hughie continues --

HUGHIE
But -- but -- we can still file a civil suit. I found a lawyer -- he'll work on percentage, won't even charge us unless we win --

ROBIN'S DAD
Hughie --

HUGHIE
I just need you to jump in -- I'm not family, I can't really sue by myself. But --

ROBIN'S DAD
Hughie. Stop. We're not suing anybody.

HUGHIE
What? Why not?

ROBIN'S DAD
There's no case. She was in the street. It's the same as if she jay-walked and a bus hit her.

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE
She was a half-step off the curb!

Then Hughie spots it. On the table, right in front of the parents: another SILVER 'VOUGHT' PEN. The truth falls on Hughie like a ton of bricks.

HUGHIE
Wait, were they -- did you sign?
(silence speaks volumes)
You took their money? Gene?

Dad stops clinking the beer bottle. Searches Hughie's face.

ROBIN'S DAD
How long have I known you, Hughie?

HUGHIE
Since -- Robin and me were in high school.

ROBIN'S DAD
Prom night, actually. We met you, in that tux two sizes too big -- and there are some kids who just have that go-getter spark in their eye.
(then)
You were not one of those kids.
(glancing at his wife)
I'd say to her all the time, didn't I? What's Robin see in him? Got no drive, no fire, no fight. Boy doesn't give a shit about anything.

HUGHIE
I cared about your daughter. I'm trying to fight now.

ROBIN'S DAD
(raw)
Too late. She's dead. And you wanna drag out some court case? So we can relive her death?
(hand on his wife)
Yeah, we took the fucking money. And now we wanna -- try to -- put it all behind us.

HUGHIE
So what? A-Train just gets away with this?

ROBIN'S DAD
There's no case, she was in the street! You let her step into the street. It's not A-Train we blame.

Off Hughie, as if absorbing a palpable body blow...

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Hughie. Walking down the street. Despondent. Listening to a MESSAGE on his CELL --

DOUG FRIEDMAN (ON PHONE)
Hugh, this is Doug Friedman from
Vought, just checking in. Look, I
know the money can never make up for
losing Robin. But we can make
things a little easier for your
family, if you'd --

Hughie CLICKS it off. Then strangely, we CUT TO --

A STILL CAMERA POV. From inside a car. SNAPPING PICS of
Hughie. Clickclickclickclick. As he enters a bodega.

Who's taking pictures? Off this mystery --

INT. NEW YORK BODEGA - NIGHT

A SIXER of BUD LIGHT. Pulled from the fridge case by Hughie.
He's on edge.

An edge he goes plummeting right over when --

He pivots in the cramped aisle. Coming face to face with A-
Train! Even worse, a DOZEN A-TRAINS! Side by side!

It's a magazine rack. A-Train on the cover of US WEEKLY. He
smiles, hugging a chirpy BALD CANCER KID beneath the headline
"MAKING WISHES COME TRUE."

Hughie, breathing shallow, backs away. Bumping against an
entire row of CEREAL. Box drops, Hughie looks.

Delicious FROSTED A-TRAINS. A whole fucking ROW of them.

WIDE ANGLE. Hughie. Spinning. Drowning. Now sees -- A-
Train on CANS of MONSTER ENERGY DRINK.

On a CARDBOARD CUT-OUT at the aisle's end, cerveza in hand --
'A-TRAIN CELEBRA CINCO DE MAYO.'

A-Train, A-Train, A-Train, A-Train.

The guy murdered the love of Hughie's life. And everyone
idolizes the asshole.

Hughie's chest is heaving now. He slides to the floor, back
against the wall. We leave him there -- in the throes of a
full blown PTSD PANIC ATTACK.

EXT. THE SEVEN TOWER - NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

PAN DOWN off the gleaming, sky-scraping, futuristic SEVEN
TOWER. To find --

(CONTINUED)

A LIMO PULLS UP. A 'Vought' PAGE opens the door for --
Starlight. Followed by her Mother. They gape up at the
Tower. At the CROWD of SCREAMING FANS behind the ropes. A
GROUP OF MEN and WOMEN APPROACH -- Starlight's ENTOURAGE --

ASHLEY
Hi. I'm Ashley, I'm your publicist.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER
(holy shit!)
A publicist.

STARLIGHT
Hi. Hello.

ASHLEY
This is Rachel, hair and make-up.
Luis is your stylist. Dan and Rich,
they're from your marketing and
social media teams. Amy's your PA,
you need anything, you ask her. You
two thirsty? Amy!

STARLIGHT
(to the group)
I'm -- hi. No, we're good.

ASHLEY
Well, Amy's gonna get your Mom to
her seat, but you, you're with me,
we're gonna be late!

Starlight is dizzy already. A heady whirlwind of glamor.
Waves happily at her Mother as she's whisked away.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Starlight's Mother, awed, takes her VIP front row seat among
a packed HOUSE of INVESTORS.

A SPOTLIGHT illuminates Vice-President of Hero Management
Julia Stillwell. Confident. Gregarious.

She pitches the crowd before a stage-wide video screen --
'VOUGHT INTERNATIONAL: 2017 ANNUAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS.'
Along with alternating images of their various projects.
Movie Posters. Theme Parks. Toys. Cartoons. Vought makes
Marvel look like a corn-studded piece of shit.

JULIA STILLWELL
...net income is up 14 percent,
our latest film "G-Men: World War"
grossed just shy of 1.7 billion
world-wide. This fall we break
ground on our newest theme park
outside of Paris. Our branding
opportunities are limitless.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JULIA STILLWELL (CONT'D)
It's a good time to be in the
Superhero Business.

The crowd applauds -- Julia holds up her hand, goes sincere --

JULIA STILLWELL
But as we all know, none of that
matters. Because job one? Is
managing, supporting, and advising
the brave heroes who put themselves
in harm's way each and every day.
For us. Take a look.

The spotlight snuffs out. Inspirational music swells, as a
slickly packaged P.R. video begins on the huge screen. TOMMY
LEE JONES got paid a shit-ton to narrate.

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
Vought International. Handling the
Business of Superheroes, so
Superheroes can handle their
Business...

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - ELEVATOR - DAY

Starlight. Flanked by her team. Crowded elevator going up,
up and away. Make-up artist primps Starlight on the fly.

ASHLEY
You know, you're doing really great
so far...

STARLIGHT
I haven't done anything yet.

ASHLEY
Exactly. And you're already up 2
and a half points with Midwesterners
and Conservative Christians in 18 to
49. I saw your audition, by the
way. The 'saving the world' thing.
Really brilliant.

STARLIGHT
I meant it.

ASHLEY
That's why we love you. So. You
ready for your life to change?

Starlight's overwhelmed but elated. Yeah. She thinks so.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - AUDITORIUM - DAY

The video continues. Classy Ken Burns style visuals. First,
we see black and white photos of a Captain America-like hero
named SOLDIER BOY.

(CONTINUED)

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
...1944. Soldier Boy. The first
Superpowered human. To be followed
by more. Dozens more. Men and
women born -- blessed -- with
extraordinary genetic abilities.
Jonas Salk famously called them 'a
leap forward in evolution.' No
one's quite sure why it happened,
but thank God it did.

Multiple IMAGES of HEROES flit past.

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
Until, of course, the apex. The
pinnacle. The formation of the most
popular Superhero Team the world's
ever seen. THE SEVEN.
(crowd goes wild)
Led by -- not just a hero -- but an
American institution. As powerful
as he is humble. Ladies and
gentlemen -- the HOMELANDER.

Now the crowd goes WILD. As a SPOTLIGHT appears in the
center of stage -- revealing the HOMELANDER. Live and in the
flesh! Giving an aw-shucks wave.

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
And please welcome the rest of the
Seven! QUEEN MAEVE. BLACK NOIR.
THE DEEP. A-TRAIN. TRANSLUCENT.

Spotlights BLAZE ON beside the Homelander. Introducing each
hero, in person. (Translucent is negative space in a suit --
an invisible man).

CLOSE ON STARLIGHT. Being shuffled out onto the stage by a
STAGE MANAGER. In shadow. Her moment's about to come...

IN THE CROWD. Her Mother's as nervous as she is.

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
And finally -- unless you live under
a rock, you've heard that after a
long, distinguished career with the
Seven, the Lamplighter has retired.
A grateful nation bids him a fond
farewell.

Adoring images of THE LAMPLIGHTER, along with Marines
saluting and children beaming their 'thank you's.'

TOMMY LEE JONES (V.O.)
But now -- as we turn towards the
future -- we introduce the newest
member of the Seven. Please welcome
-- STARLIGHT.

(CONTINUED)

The WHITE HOT SPOTLIGHT SNAPS onto Starlight. She smiles, jittery, waves. Drinks in the crashing waves of applause. Beside all of her idols. Locks eyes with --

IN THE CROWD. Her Mother. This is literally the single best moment of Mom's life.

JULIA STILLWELL
(stepping out)
The Seven, ladies and gentlemen!
How about 'em!?

The thunderous clapping continues, as well as a universe of iPhone flashbulbs. Starlight can't help but steal glances at the Homelander. The Deep leans over, whispers to her, charming, disarming.

DEEP
(re: Homelander)
I know. It's kinda like sharing a stage with God, right? But you wanna know something? He chews with his mouth open. Spits little bits of salad right at you.

Starlight smiles at the Deep. Grateful to have someone bring all this back down to earth.

STARLIGHT
I just -- I mean -- I can't believe I'm really here.

DEEP
Hey. You're here because you're meant to be here.

STARLIGHT
...thank you.

DEEP
(warm empathy)
Look, I remember my first day, it's a lot to take in. But we'll show you the ropes.

Starlight nods at him, grateful. Turns back to twinkling flashbulbs and raw, uncut adoration. This is all of her wildest, most secret dreams come true... off this...

EXT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - NIGHT

POV. From across the street. We see Hughie, through the window, downcast as he upsells some equipment.

REVEAL -- we're in a boat of a Cadillac. Behind the wheel --

A black-trench-coated MAN. This is BILLY BUTCHER (40).

(CONTINUED)

Enigmatic, he reaches into his GLOVE COMPARTMENT. Tugs out a CIGAR BOX. Opens it, revealing --

A PILE of FAKE IDENTIFICATION CARDS. All with his picture. NYPD, FDNY, NSA, DEA, ATF, DHS, some foreign CARDS. He shuffles through them, before choosing an FBI ID. Perfect.

Goes without saying -- who the HOLY FUCK is Butcher?

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - NIGHT

A TELEVISION SCREEN. ACCESS HOLLYWOOD. Some b-roll footage of Starlight, waving shy to the crowd at the Vought stockholder meeting.

NATALIE MORALES (V.O.)
...and how does newest Seven member
Starlight keep her beach-ready bod?
The answer might surprise you...

Hughie. Before a CUSTOMER. He doesn't notice the TV --

HUGHIE
...no, you want the carbon cables.
Cost more, but they conduct
electricity way better --

When the BELL over the door RINGS. Hughie jerks his head up, illogically hoping against hope that Robin walks through the door. Of course, she doesn't. Instead, he spots --

Butcher. Strolling in. He inspects a section of NANNY-CAMS. Hughie steps up --

HUGHIE
You interested in a nanny cam?
We're running a special on Vimtag...

Butcher looks up. He's got a blue collar BRITISH ACCENT. A lot like Michael Caine.

BUTCHER
Tell me. How many nannies go around
shakin' their babies, d'you reckon?

HUGHIE
Sorry?

BUTCHER
A good, hard shake. Like trynna get
ketchup out of a bottle. 1 percent?
Less?

HUGHIE
Uh, I -- I really don't know.

BUTCHER

But they sell a coupla billion
dollars worth of this shit
worldwide.

(smirks at Hughie)

Goes to show. The bollocks you can
make people swallow, if you get 'em
scared enough.

HUGHIE

(long beat)

Okay. Is there anything I can help
you with?

BUTCHER

I'm not gonna piss you about,
Hughie. I know what happened to
Robin. Fuckin' diabolical.

HUGHIE

I'm sorry, who are you?

BUTCHER

She wasn't in the street. She was
one step off the fuckin' curb. And
you didn't take the pay-off.
Respect that.

HUGHIE

(upset now)

I said who the hell are you? How do
you know that?

BUTCHER

Butcher's the name. People call me
Billy. I was thinkin' we could have
a bit of a chat?

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

OPEN ON: the FBI CARD. Hughie inspects it --

Hughie. Butcher. Pass more and more pedestrians, as they
near the neon atomic blast of Times Square...

HUGHIE

You're a Fed? You don't sound like
a Fed.

BUTCHER

I can't fuckin' immigrate? There's
a big green crumpet out in the
harbor that says different.

HUGHIE

You don't look like one, either.

BUTCHER

Oh? What do I look like?

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE
Like a Columbine shooter.

Butcher smirks. Hughie's got spark. He nods at the ID, which we know is fake --

BUTCHER
Well, it's right there in black an' white. But if you wanna give a looksie up me bum to be sure, you go right ahead.

HUGHIE
Um. So what, exactly, can I do for you?

BUTCHER
It's what I can do for you, my son. Help you get payback for yer girl.
(off Hughie)
You ain't alone, Hughie, happens a lot more than you think. Supes lose over a hundred people a year to collateral damage --

HUGHIE
That can't be true.
(off Butcher)
That's true?

BUTCHER
It's not that they ain't strong, it's that they don't care. We're just ants to them.

HUGHIE
C'mon. It'd be all over the news, people'd be screaming bloody murder.

BUTCHER
Might be the odd mention now an' again, like with Robin. But there's a lot more they don't tell you -- that gets swept under the rug --

HUGHIE
Why?

BUTCHER
It ain't obvious?

He holds his hand out.

WIDE SHOT. TIMES SQUARE. 50 foot high SCREENS: a shirtless, Wahlberg-esque HERO reclines in his Calvin Klein tighty-whiteys. A-Train in a NIKE SHOE spot. A MOVIE: "Tek-Knight Begins." The VOUGHT STORE. Tourists take their photos with cardboard hero cut-outs. Superheroes are inescapable -- pretty much like the actual Times Square.

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER

The movie tickets, an' the lobbyists, an' the fuckin' shoes. But mostly, people like that cozy feeling Supes give 'em. You got someone to swoop in and save the day for you, then you don't gotta do it yourself.

(then)

But you don't know half the shit they're up to. It'd curl your hair and straighten your curlies. But that's where I come in.

HUGHIE

Come in... to do what?

BUTCHER

Spank the bastards, they ever step too far outta line.

HUGHIE

How do you spank a Supe?

BUTCHER

Ways an' means. You don't need a fuckin' glowy green rock to find someone's weakness. C'mon.

HUGHIE

Where?

BUTCHER

You'll love it.

HUGHIE

Hold on.

(Butcher stops)

Thank you for an extremely... weird conversation. But I'm not sure what this is... and I think I should probably get back.

BUTCHER

Mate. Once I go, I'm gone. This is your one an' only. Besides, what've you got to lose, you ain't already lost?

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Thinking. Off this --

We PAN OFF Hughie and Butcher, to the GLEAMING SEVEN TOWER --

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - NIGHT

Starlight. Taking in the PANORAMIC VIEW from the SEVEN BOARDROOM. 99th floor. Floor to ceiling windows. City lights before her -- like her own private galaxy.

(CONTINUED)

She pivots to the SEVEN'S FAMOUS CONFERENCE TABLE. Runs her hand over HOMELANDER'S CHAIR. Tastefully embossed with his name. Like touching the President's chair.

Then... she sees... a CHAIR WITH HER NAME ON IT. Her eyes glisten with emotion.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - HALLWAY - NIGHT - LATER

CLOSE ON A SMALL FISHBOWL. With an exotic fish inside -- an electric blue ram cichlid, to be exact.

WIDER. Starlight carries the fishbowl down the sleek hallway. Reaches a DOOR. RINGS the bell.

No answer. She KNOCKS. The door drifts open. Unlocked.

STARLIGHT
Hello? Deep?

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - DEEP'S ROOM - NIGHT

Starlight steps in, tentative. Deep's apartment is MASSIVE. All blonde wood and trickling waterfalls and koi ponds and Chinese writing. Not just aquatic -- Zen aquatic.

STARLIGHT
Just wanted to thank you for being so ki...

She feels awkward. Certainly doesn't want to trespass. She's about to turn and leave when...

She hears an unmistakable GROANING. Sickly. Sounds like someone might be ill? Or in trouble?

STARLIGHT
Hello?

She cautiously moves to the sound source. Then steps around a thick tangle of bamboo trees to see --

THE DEEP. Bites a RUBBER TUBE wrapped tight around his arm.

As he SHOOTS a syringe of BRIGHT BLUE LIQUID into his vein. What the hell is that stuff?

A PRETTY GIRL in a PARTY DRESS sprawls next to him. Her eyes flutter, nearly unconscious. A SYRINGE JUTS from her arm.

Deep makes eye contact with Starlight. Who's horrified --

DEEP
What the FUCK?

STARLIGHT
Oh my God, sorry, I'm sorry --

(CONTINUED)

Deep stands. He's furious. Aggressive. And completely different than the charming hero Starlight met.

DEEP
You just walk in??

STARLIGHT
(sputtering)
I knocked... your door was... I was
just bringing you...

She lamely holds out the fishbowl.

DEEP
Turn around. Forget this ever
happened.

But Starlight notices the girl. A thick gob of spittle at the side of her mouth.

STARLIGHT
Is she... okay?

That sends Deep over the edge. SUDDENLY, with SUPER STRENGTH, he SHOVES Starlight against the wall!

She drops the FISHBOWL. CRASH!

Scary, Deep clamps his hand around Starlight's neck. His forehead veins are popping, he's so pissed. (It's a roid-like reaction to the mysterious blue drug).

DEEP
Who the HELL asked you??!!

STARLIGHT
(small, scared)
...I think she needs help...

DEEP
Oh, you're the fucking hero?
Please. You're here cause we needed
a few more points with Evangelicals.
There's a dozen blonde cunts that
fit the bill. You're nobody.
(then)
You breathe a word of this to
anyone? You're out. For good. The
fuck back to Iowa. We clear?

CLOSE ON STARLIGHT. Just staring at the dying exotic fish, FLOPPING ABOUT on the floor. Does she fight back? Make a stand? A long beat...

No. She doesn't. She does what she needs to do.

STARLIGHT
Of course. I won't tell anybody.

(CONTINUED)

A long beat. Frenzied face to frightened face. Until --
He lets her go. She beats a HASTY RETREAT --

EXT. THE SEVEN TOWER - HALLWAY

She scrambles out the door. Then stops. Presses her back against the wall, out of breath.

It takes every fiber of her being not to cry...

EXT. ALLEY - OLD MONEY BUILDING - NIGHT

Back alley. A SERVICE ENTRANCE behind a tall, ornate, old-money downtown building.

Butcher strides to the door, Hughie in tow. KNOCKS on it. Beat. A NERVOUS SECURITY GUARD answers (dark coat, tie, BADGE). Hughie watches this exchange, curious.

SECURITY GUARD

Fuck, man.

BUTCHER

This is the last time, Harry.

SECURITY GUARD

It's always the last time. This is fucking police brutality.

(nods inside)

You know what these people'll do to me, they catch me letting you in?

BUTCHER

(cool, even)

Not even half of what I'll do, if you don't.

Butcher smiles but never breaks eye contact. It's unsettling. Message received.

The Security Guard hands over two SECURITY BADGES. Butcher gives one to Hughie.

HUGHIE

Did he just say you're a cop?

BUTCHER

Cop, Fed, it's all the same to that cunt. Here, put this on.

HUGHIE

What the hell is this?

But Butcher just strides inside. Uneasy, and now a bit suspicious, Hughie follows --

INT. OLD MONEY BUILDING - PRIVATE CLUB - NIGHT

DING! CLOSE ON HUGHIE as the ELEVATOR DOOR OPENS. His jaw hits the floor. As he takes in --

A PRIVATE CLUB. Dark. Thumping music. Lots of SIDE ROOMS and various nooks and crannies.

AND SUPERHEROES. Male and female. All shapes and sizes and colors. PARTYING THEIR COSTUMED ASSES OFF. The female heroes are having as much rambunctious fun as the men. It's like Studio 54 -- multiplied by 54.

One FEMALE HERO with a tiara tightens her FLUORESCENT ROPE, S&M style, around a HOG-TIED NAKED MAN. He happily begs to be spanked, she happily obliges.

Two HEROES TELEKINETICALLY HURL a CHAIR over a ducking WAITER, SMASHING it through the window, as if they were Whitesnake on the Sunset Strip.

Hughie and Butcher step over a burly STEEL-SKINNED SUPERHERO, passed out on the floor in a pool of his own sick. WAITERS try to drag him away, but he's far too heavy.

Hughie is absolutely gobsmacked. Then spots --

HUGHIE

Hey, that's Captain Fantastic. The 'Capes for Christ' guy. Holds those anti-gay rallies.

POV. The stretchy Superhero we saw on TV in the opener is in ecstasy, wrapped around THREE MEN in G-STRINGS.

BUTCHER

And now he's the meat in the Manwich. Fuckin' hypocrite. Like Bill Cosby in spandex.

They pass a HERO, his hair a SHIMMERING WAVE of FIRE, quietly and desperately crying to himself. Who knows why.

HUGHIE

Okay. So this is more than I ever, ever wanted to see. I'm leaving now before one of them tries to have sex with me. Or kill me. Or both.

BUTCHER

Not yet.

Off Hughie -- he follows Butcher into a back room --

INT. SECURITY ROOM - NIGHT

The anxious Security Guard checks the coast is clear. Then lets Butcher and Hughie into the SECURITY ROOM. A wall full of monitors recording every room.

(CONTINUED)

SECURITY GUARD

Hurry up.

BUTCHER

Where's the vid you rang me about?

The Security Guard reluctantly hands Butcher a MEMORY STICK. Butcher plugs it into a COMPUTER.

BUTCHER

Oi. Hughie. Monitor 2.

Butcher fiddles a knob. Turning up the AUDIO.

THE MONITOR. Time-stamped security cam footage of a BACK ROOM. A-TRAIN. Throws back shots like it's his job.

HUGHIE

A-Train's -- here?

BUTCHER

Was. This is from last night.

THE MONITOR. Suddenly, A-Train looks O.S., as --

BIG GAME (O.S.)

A-Train. Your girlfriend's here. She's pissed.

A HERO -- BIG GAME -- enters. He carries two MANNEQUIN ARMS.

BIG GAME

She wants to know why you ran through her the other night. I mean, she just went to pieces.

HUGHIE. His jaw clenches. Butcher looks at him, sympathetic. Knows how hard this is for him.

A-TRAIN

Hey, I'm not the one that threw a Volvo at that carjacker, without realizing there was a fucking kid strapped inside.

BIG GAME

Screw you, man, that sucked.
(sucks back a shot)
I had to go fucking cry on Diane Sawyer.

Pointed, because A-Train just did the same --

A-TRAIN

Boy, can't imagine what that's like, asshole.

Big Game sticks the mannequin arms into A-Train's crotch.

(CONTINUED)

BIG GAME
Aw, look, she wants to make up.

A-TRAIN
Sorry, baby, but when I get inside a girl, I get inside a girl.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Quietly enraged --

HUGHIE
...they're laughing. Like she's a joke. They're fucking laughing.

BUTCHER
Question is, what are you gonna do about it?

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - NIGHT

Vought Vice-President Julia Stillwell skims down the Tower's hallway with the Vought Lawyer -- same guy from before -- he hurries to keep up. He's nervous -- she is miles above his paygrade. But she never loses her corporate geniality.

JULIA STILLWELL
I'm sorry. It's Doug?

DOUG FRIEDMAN
Yes. Doug. Friedman. Ma'am.

JULIA STILLWELL
Doug, I appreciate you trying to low-ball this Hugh Campbell, but can we settle out the A-Train thing? I mean, 25 thousand? I got a bigger shoe budget.

DOUG FRIEDMAN
I'm not sure it's about the money with this guy.

JULIA STILLWELL
If you quit nickel and diming him? It'll be about the money. Just get it off our plate, please.

Without breaking stride, Julia glides into the boardroom --

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - NIGHT

Where she grins at the MAYOR of BALTIMORE (50), sitting at the table. He nods to a GLOSSY PIC of the HOMELANDER. Autographed "To Mason: Reach for the Sky! Best, Homelander."

MAYOR
Thanks for this. My kid's gonna lose his mind.

(CONTINUED)

JULIA STILLWELL
Our pleasure, Mr. Mayor. Just don't
sell it on-line.

MAYOR
Alright. Tell me what you're
thinking.

JULIA STILLWELL
(into her presentation)
Steve, look. Baltimore's a
beautiful town. Those crab cakes at
Faidley's? Change your life. But
you've got a problem. Homicide
rates are up, what, 62%? Your
police aren't closing cases, you're
on the verge of needing a federal
life-line.

MAYOR
You don't need to salt my wounds.

JULIA STILLWELL
No disrespect. But you know police
tanks rolling down main street won't
play on the 6 o'clock news. How'd
it work out for Ferguson? Or Baton
Rouge?

MAYOR
Cut to the chase, Julia. Who are
you proposing?

She clicks a remote. On the flat-screen, PHOTOS of a
handsome, Will Smith-like BLACK SUPERHERO appear.

JULIA STILLWELL
Nubian Prince. Fits your
population's demo, but not too
militant -- Caucasians love him too,
approval's around 68 percent. We're
offering a 3 year exclusive
contract. Plus our full PR support.
And we'll throw in 9 and a half
points of the merchandising.

MAYOR
I thought he was in Detroit.

JULIA STILLWELL
We're thinking about making a move.
We've come to you first.

MAYOR
How much?

JULIA STILLWELL
300 million a year. I know it's a
tough swallow, but we both know your
city needs a hero.

MAYOR
(beat, contemplates)
Look. I have the City Council up my
ass on every fucking dime of the
budget. You make it 200 million, I
can sell it.

JULIA STILLWELL
I'm sorry. Can't do it. We have
Atlanta waiting in the wings.

MAYOR
(beat)
I think maybe you can.

JULIA STILLWELL
Oh? And why's that?

MAYOR
(leans forward)
Because I happen to know about
Compound V.

Stillwell betrays only the merest twitch.

JULIA STILLWELL
I'm sorry. What's 'Compound V?'

MAYOR
The kinda rumor that can really
tarnish those heroes of yours. And
no one wants that -- people need
heroes. Now. I can make sure it
stays a rumor. You know I'm a
friend. But friendship cuts both
ways.

What is he talking about? We're not sure. But Stillwell
only gives him the most pleasant of smiles.

JULIA STILLWELL
Sorry, Steve, I just don't know what
you're talking about. 300 million's
the price. Or we go to Atlanta.

Off Stillwell. She might not be a superhero, but she sure
knows how to wear a mask...

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BATHROOM - NIGHT

A row of toilet stalls. And Starlight. At a sink. Stares at
herself in the mirror. Her mascara runs. She's been crying.

(CONTINUED)

She inspects the NECK BRUISING from where the Deep grabbed her. It's already turning an angry purple.

When... QUEEN MAEVE enters. Heads to the sink beside Starlight to reapply some make-up from a small clutch.

Starlight sneaks glances at Queen Maeve. Humiliated to be meeting her idol in such circumstances. Subtly tries to cover her neck bruises with her hand.

When Queen Maeve pivots to Starlight. Long beat. Is Maeve going to say something? But then --

Queen Maeve gently pulls Starlight's hand away from her neck. Inspects the bruising.

Then... Maeve reaches into her clutch, pulls out a bottle of skin tone CONCEALER. Holds it up to Starlight's neck. With compassion --

QUEEN MAEVE
I think this is your color.

Implying that Starlight should cover up the bruise. Maybe even implying that Maeve's been there herself.

Then -- Queen Maeve pivots for the door. Calls out, without looking back.

QUEEN MAEVE
Translucent, you're such a fucking perv.

Queen Maeve exits. Beat. Then... Translucent the invisible man MATERIALIZES, naked, spying on Starlight from the corner.

TRANSLUCENT
Uh. I'll -- I'll just go.

He walks sheepishly out.

Off Starlight, painfully learning the old adage -- never, ever meet your heroes...

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

The dive bar of your dreams. All dark wood and character. Hughie sits at a private BOOTH, beer in front of him. Butcher across, nursing a soda water (he never drinks).

Hughie. Digesting what he just saw. Quiet. PISSED.

HUGHIE
They're -- all like that? All of 'em? Even the Homelander?

Butcher skips the tiniest half beat. Voice goes the tiniest bit flat. Something's going on here, but we don't dwell.

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER

Homelander's the exception. Doesn't drink, smoke. Fuckin' saint. But the rest? Yeah, pretty much.

(then)

Here, have a shufti at this --

From a MANILA FOLDER, Butcher removes some densely printed PAPERS, spreads them on the table.

HUGHIE

What are these?

BUTCHER

Police log, night of Robin's death. Couple bar fights, some cars got nicked. Know what's not in there? No banks triggering any alarms. No one charged with robbery at Central Booking. A-Train stopped two bank robbers, my arse. Someone's covering somethin' up.

HUGHIE

Covering up -- what?

We re-play FLASHES of Hughie, Robin and A-Train from the opening... to illustrate Butcher's case...

BUTCHER

Whatever A-Train was doing that night. You said he looked scared. But what's he got to be scared of? What did he mean, 'he can't stop?' And what was in that bag? All sounds bleedin' dodgy to me.

(off Hughie)

So the big question is: where was he runnin'?

HUGHIE

Or who was he running from?

Butcher regards Hughie. Impressed. Smart.

BUTCHER

Yeah. True. Good point.

(beat)

Figure that out, we'll have the fucker. Got a nose for this shit, and I'm tellin' you, I can smell it.

Hughie stares at the reports. Feels emboldened.

HUGHIE

Okay. How can I help?

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER
Ring Vought. Tell 'em you'll take the money, sign the NDA. But only if A-Train's there in person when you do.

HUGHIE
Wait, I don't... why would I...?

BUTCHER
I dunno. Say you gotta shake his hand. For closure. They'll invite you into the Seven Tower to meet him. Past their security. And then, my son, you are gonna stick a bug in the place. We'll have a listen, really see what's going on.

HUGHIE
So, sorry -- you want me to go into the Seven tower? By myself? And plant -- a bug? Like I'm fucking James Bond?

BUTCHER
Hughie. Why do you think I came to you in the first place? For the good of me health?

Again, Hughie's breathing grows shallow. He pales. Starting to have another PTSD attack.

HUGHIE
You gotta come with me.

BUTCHER
No way they give me a pass.

HUGHIE
What if something goes wrong?

BUTCHER
It won't.

HUGHIE
Oh. Okay. Really comforting. And easy for you to say, as you sit out here on your "arse." I mean, you're FBI, if you're fucking FBI, get a warrant, why do you need me --

BUTCHER
(a bald lie, of course)
I got a warrant. But that place is fire-walled and untappable and locked up tighter than a nun's clunge. I couldn't sneak in meself, not in a million years. But you can. Now calm down.

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE

Calm? You didn't see A-Train, covered in Robin's -- and I'm supposed to shake his hand and smile? These people kill fucking kids in fucking Volvos on, like, a random Tuesday, what do you think they'll do to me if they catch me?

BUTCHER

We've never had a go at the Seven before, not like this --

HUGHIE

I said NO!

BUTCHER

(beat)

You saw him on that video. You heard what he said about her.

HUGHIE

(quieter, sadder)

I just -- I can't. I'm just gonna fuck it up. You won't have your bug and I'll be dead. I'm not like you.

Hughie stands. Exits.

Off Butcher. He doesn't look upset. He smirks, confident, sips from his club soda. As if he expected this --

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Butcher. Emerging from the bar. Calmly strolling.

When -- far overhead -- A HERO SOARS through the night sky, lit by city lights. Followed by ANOTHER. It's that last one who's got Butcher's attention. He's pretty far away, but eagle eyed viewers might recognize him as the HOMELANDER.

WE CREEP IN ON BUTCHER. Stops. Just staring up. Wearing his own stoic mask. Until --

BUTCHER

I'm gonna fuckin' have you. You cunt.

WIDER. Butcher's just another New Yorker. When... a BLACK SUV cruises past.

INT. BLACK SUV - MOVING - NIGHT

The MAYOR of BALTIMORE. The one who mentioned 'Compound V,' whatever that is. He rides in the back. On his cell.

MAYOR

Ms. Stillwell. Wasn't sure I'd hear from you.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Stillwell's smile is tight. She doesn't like to acquiesce.

JULIA STILLWELL
Alright, Steve. This fucking
chafes, but we can go down to 230
million for Nubian Prince.

MAYOR
I think that's very reasonable,
Julia. Thank you.

JULIA STILLWELL
Well, like you said, friendship cuts
both ways.

MAYOR
Yes, it does. You have my word.

There are secrets and scandals between these lines. But we
don't know what they are. Yet.

Off the Mayor, seemingly winning the negotiation --

INT. HUGHIE'S FAMILY APARTMENT - QUEENS - NEXT DAY

ON THE TV. ELLEN. Eternally upbeat. She sits with a
VISIBLE (and clothed) TRANSLUCENT --

He rolls up his sleeve, lifts his bare arm. Which SHIMMERS
then seemingly DISAPPEARS.

TRANSLUCENT
...no, I don't actually vanish, my
skin turns into this -- carbon meta-
material -- that bends light. Like
an invisibility cloak.

ELLEN
But just to be clear -- you have to
be completely naked, right?

The audience OOHS and AAHS --

Hughie. Sits on the couch. Numb, listless, defeated. Next
to his wheezing Father. His Mom sets a plate of pizza rolls
on the coffee table.

HUGHIE'S MOM
Here you go, honey. Pizza rolls
with ketchup.

Hughie picks one up. Hesitates. Somehow, eating one means
acquiescing to his sad suburban life. When --

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE'S DAD
(finally speaks)
30 years at that One Hour
Martinizing. Cost me a lung, and
what'd I get for it? And you wanna
take on Vought? It's like trynna
take on a mountain. Take the money,
Hughie. We're lucky to get it.

PUSH IN ON HUGHIE. Holding that pizza roll. Looking at his
Dad. Is he really gonna give up? Give in?

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Starlight -- dressed for the first time in CIVILIAN CLOTHES.
As her secret identity: mild-mannered Annie. She strolls
through the park, phone to her ear. INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Starlight's Mother makes a bedazzled PRESS SCRAPBOOK of all
her daughter's recent newspaper clippings.

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER
...so. How amazing is it? What's
the Homelander like?

ANNIE/STARLIGHT
I... he's busy, I haven't really met
him yet. Look, Mom, I gotta tell
you what happened...

STARLIGHT'S MOTHER
Oh, I almost forgot. I was playing
Mahjong with Judy and Elaine, and
they were going on and on about how
wonderful Starlight is. Starlight
this and Starlight that. I know, I
know, I gotta protect your secret
identity, but I would love to see
the looks on their faces if I told
them it was you.

(beat)
Anyway, what were you gonna say?

ANNIE
(long beat)
Just that everything's great. Just
how I dreamed. Mom, I gotta go.

WITH ANNIE. She hangs up. Sits on a park bench. Stares up
at -- the radiant SEVEN TOWER. This isn't at all what she
thought it would be. Her dreams are dying on the vine.

HUGHIE (O.S.)
I'm sorry, but... are you okay?

HUGHIE. On a bench beside her.

(CONTINUED)

Both of them, watching the Tower. For very different reasons. She wipes a tear, embarrassed.

ANNIE
Yeah. I'm fine.

Hughie pulls a CLOTH HANDKERCHIEF out of his pocket. Crosses to Annie. Holds it out.

She gives him an odd look. After what she's been through, she's not ready to accept a kindness from a stranger.

ANNIE
No thanks.

HUGHIE
(self-conscious)
I know. Cloth handkerchief. I'm not really 90 years old, it's just my Dad was in dry cleaning, he insists I carry -- never mind. Sorry to bother you.

Hughie pivots away. Annie looks after him -- the guy's just trying to offer a little compassion in a cruel world.

ANNIE
No, wait. Actually, thank you, I'd... appreciate it.

Hughie hands her the handkerchief. She dries her eyes.

ANNIE
Just having a bad day, that's all.

HUGHIE
That makes two of us. Work thing or life thing?

Beat. No one's been willing or able to listen to Annie. Now, finally, this stranger is.

ANNIE
Work thing. You?

HUGHIE
Life thing.

They sit in silence. Another long beat. Then --

ANNIE
You know how you -- you have this image of yourself?

HUGHIE
Mine's not so hot...

(CONTINUED)

ANNIE

I'm sure that's not true.

(then)

I always thought I was... strong, you know? Like, made of steel. A fighter.

(then)

But then there I was... I needed to fight. Had to. But -- I didn't. Kept my eyes down, mouth shut, did what it took to keep my job. Turns out I'm not who I thought I was. And I think -- I think I just wanna go home.

Hughie gives her a long, serious look.

ANNIE

Sorry, I didn't mean to dump all that on --

HUGHIE

No, it's not that. It's just, I can relate, I'm -- long story.

(off Annie)

Listen. Do you like your job?

ANNIE

It's the only thing I ever wanted.

HUGHIE

And it's a good job? You don't get kids hooked on smokes or anything?

ANNIE

It's a great job. I could help a lot of people.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. A flash of vulnerability. Thinking of his fear of A-Train. Thinking of Robin.

HUGHIE

Thing is, I -- I knew this girl. Who'd just -- charge headfirst into everything. Me, I backed away from everything, I was... I dunno... scared of falling or failing. But she'd say 'just cause you fall on your ass, doesn't mean you gotta stay there.'

(then)

So I guess I'd say the same to you. Pardon my french, but fuck those fuckers. Don't give 'em the satisfaction. You can still be a fighter -- just get up and fight.

(CONTINUED)

She gives Hughie a long, thoughtful look. Whoever this guy is, he told her just what she needed to hear, just when she needed to hear it.

ANNIE
Sounds like a smart girl. You should take her advice, too.

Hughie glances at her. She's right.

HUGHIE
I'm Hughie.

ANNIE
Annie.

Off their handshake -- off a respite of tenderness amidst our usual madness...

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

BUTCHER. Sits at the bar. Stares into his soda. When --

A BEAUTIFUL REDHEAD, 30, approaches him. Egged on by her booth-full of friends.

REDHEAD
Hi. Hello. So I'm sure this is a terrible idea, but my friends have dared me -- to buy you a drink.

BUTCHER
You're right.
(then)
It is a terrible idea.

REDHEAD
(ouch)
Oh, uh, okay. Sorry.

Crash and burn. She goes. Who is this guy?

When Hughie ENTERS. Passing the Redhead. To Butcher --

HUGHIE
Hey. Hoping I'd find you here.

Butcher smiles to himself. It was only a matter of time before Hughie showed up.

BUTCHER
Boy, this is a shocker. Not expectin' to see you again.

HUGHIE
Okay. Let's get A-Train.

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER
(feigns reluctance)
I dunno, mate. How do I know you
ain't gonna leg it like last night?
How do I know you got the bottle?

HUGHIE
I've got the -- I don't know what
'bottle' means in that context, but
I'm in, man, I wanna do this.

BUTCHER
You gonna see this through? To the
end?

HUGHIE
Yes.

BUTCHER
Right, then.

INT. DIVE BAR - BY THE BATHROOM - LATER

Hughie, on his cell. Butcher, listening.

HUGHIE
...Mr. Friedman, got your message,
and wow, 75k is -- life changing.
I'll sign whatever you want. I just
-- I need one more thing. An
apology from A-Train.

DOUG FRIEDMAN (ON PHONE)
He already apologized.

HUGHIE
No. He gave his regrets. And his
sympathy. On TV. But I want him to
look me in the eye and say he's
sorry.

DOUG FRIEDMAN (ON PHONE)
Okay, I'll ask. But I'm telling
you, Hugh, the answer's gonna be no.

Click. Hughie hangs up. To Butcher --

HUGHIE
Don't think they're going for it.

BUTCHER
Oh yes, they will. And in the
Tower, too. They're not gonna wanna
air this shit in public.

Off Butcher's knowing smirk --

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - DAY

A-Train. With Julia Stillwell. Having a quiet side-bar in the corner as the other members of the Seven enter the BOARDROOM for their official meeting.

A-TRAIN

No. No way.

JULIA STILLWELL

We gotta put this behind us, it's five minutes out of your day.

A-TRAIN

So some dude can blubber all over me? I'm -- not good in situations like that. No.

Julia steps forward. Her genial smile never leaves her face.

JULIA STILLWELL

You know. The Blue Bolt shaved another point off his mile. He's almost as fast as you. Impressive, especially someone that young.

A-TRAIN

The hell is that supposed to mean?

JULIA STILLWELL

Look, I'm just trying to help. You know I love you, but I'm only one person in this company. You don't want the guys upstairs to start bitching that you're difficult. Like they did with the Lamplighter.

Off A-Train...

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Butcher. Hughie. At the bar. Waiting. When -- RING! Hughie's cell. He answers.

HUGHIE

Hello? Yes, Mr. Friedman...?

He gives Butcher a look. They're in. Butcher knew it.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BATHROOM - DAY

Starlight. Back in uniform. Alone at the sink.

She stares at herself in the mirror. Suppressing her fear and anger. Fuck 'em. She won't give 'em the satisfaction.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - DAY

Starlight enters. The Seven have gathered, a modern-day Knights of the Oblong Conference Table. Homelander at the head. Julia Stillwell observes in the corner.

HOMELANDER
(pure Costner)
Starlight. Don't wanna be late for your first official meeting. I had a whole welcome speech planned.

STARLIGHT
Sorry, Sir.

HOMELANDER
Homelander is fine.

DEEP
We were beginning to wonder if you'd even show up.

She glares at the Deep, defiant. She's literally got a look to kill and wants to use it. But she restrains herself.

STARLIGHT
(dry)
Oh, no, I'm excited to be here. I'm on pins and needles.

The Deep. Glares at her, surprised. Didn't expect this much grit from Starlight.

As a floating pair of reading glasses in the next chair peruses some paperwork --

TRANSLUCENT
...can we get back to this please, this is a serious crime.
(then)
Copyright infringement of our brands, individually and collectively, is costing Vought 1.2 billion per year. That's money out of our pockets. We've all got, what, four points each?

As they ramble on... Starlight. She acts calm, strong. But she's wearing a mask.

A-TRAIN
Fuck. You've got four points?

QUEEN MAEVE
And clearly, better lawyers.

HOMELANDER
Hey. C'mon. Stop.

(CONTINUED)

Everyone shuts up. Turns to the Homelander. He commands unwavering respect --

HOMELANDER
(pure Clooney)
What's Starlight gonna think,
listening to us haggle over nickels?
We're the Seven for God's sake. Now
what I want to hear -- is who you
saved this week. Black Noir, let's
start with you --

The guy really is an omnipotent Boy Scout. Off this --

EXT. THE SEVEN TOWER/INT. BUTCHER'S CAR - NIGHT

PAN DOWN off the SEVEN TOWER to reveal -- Butcher's car. The behemoth of a Caddy.

INSIDE THE CAR. Hughie, anxious as hell. Looks in the back seat -- notices some STRAY DOG TOYS. Bright, cutesy, squeaky rubber animals. Seems out of character for Butcher.

HUGHIE
You have a dog?

BUTCHER
No.

Butcher doesn't elaborate further. On Hughie -- umkay.

BUTCHER
Give us your phone.

Hughie complies. Butcher pops it out of its case. Then pulls out a BUG. As wide and thin as a silver dollar.

BUTCHER
Security won't find it, or the X-ray.

Butcher hides the bug in Hughie's phone case, clicks the phone back in place OVER it --

BUTCHER
Now, what they'll probably do is take you to the boardroom. Give it a minute, say you need a crap. Take out the bug when you're in the bog. Glue's there on one side, see? Go back, stick it under the boardroom table, that's that.

Hughie's heart is racing. Commencing another panic attack? He starts spluttering --

HUGHIE
That's that? Kinda seems like -- a lot, actually. What if --

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER

Hughie. Two choices. One: go an' whine to a shrink for the rest of your life, pop some Klonopin, maybe punch an A-Train doll. Two: stop bein' such a cunt. What do you say?

Off Hughie. He swallows nervously -- a major effort -- and climbs out of the car.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - LOBBY - NIGHT

Hughie. GRIPPING his phone. We hear his THUMPING HEART. As he enters the hypermodern lobby. Approaches Ashley the publicist, surgically attached to her Blackberry.

HUGHIE

Hi -- are you Ashley? I'm Hughie Campbell...?

Ashley smiles, thin. She's used to working with Gods. Not mere mortals.

ASHLEY

Follow me, Mr. Campbell.

Ashley leads Hughie through the SECURITY CHECKPOINT. He anxiously flits his eyes at --

POV's. HEAVY FUCKING HARDWARE. SECURITY GUARDS with semi-automatics. SURVEILLANCE CAMS mounted everywhere.

A stutter-step, as he drops his PHONE through the x-ray machine. Hughie walks through the metal detector, eyes on the X-RAY TECH. Who... shit, SQUINTS at the monitor...

X-RAY TECH

Sir, may I examine your phone?

HUGHIE

Uh -- sure.

Hughie's about to have a heart attack. As the X-Ray Tech carefully pores over the phone. Turns it around. Is he gonna pop it from its case? Find the bug? This seems to last FUCKING FOREVER. Hughie sweats bullets. Until --

X-RAY TECH

Have a "Super" day.

The Tech hands it over. Hughie collects his phone, follows Ashley to the elevators.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - NIGHT

Ashley opens the door to the boardroom.

(CONTINUED)

ASHLEY

Wait here, please. A-Train will be with you shortly.

She's already off before Hughie can say thanks.

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BOARDROOM - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Hughie. Alone. Sitting at the table in the imposing, cavernous room. Clenching his phone.

He stares at it, tries to will himself not to sweat. Is this his moment? Should he go to the bathroom now? While no one is here, no one is watching?

BEEP! The desk INTERCOM comes to life.

ASSISTANT ON PHONE

Won't be long, Mr. Campbell.

HUGHIE

I need to -- go to the bathroom.
Hello?

But the intercom has already clicked off.

Hughie. Takes a beat. Takes a breath. Grips his phone. Steels himself. He can do this. This is it.

Stands up. Heads to the door. Reaches for the knob --

The door suddenly swings open! And A-TRAIN enters, followed by Ashley, various HANDLERS, and Doug Friedman -- who begins to lay out the documents on the table.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Face-to-face with A-Train. Nose to nose. Tete-a-tete. The source of all his misery. Anger. Anxiety.

DOUG FRIEDMAN

Just to be clear, A-Train's apology isn't an admission of any sort of culpability whatsoever, do you understand?

Hughie manages a nod. The Lawyer gives A-Train the okay.

A-TRAIN

(a sullen 3rd grader)

Hey, man. I'm sorry what happened to your girlfriend. Alright?

A-Train reaches out his hand to shake.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Wide-angle, like in the bodega. Breathing shallow. Heart pounding. Eyes wide. He's about to plunge into another PTSD attack! He glances down at his PHONE, which he grips, white-knuckled.

(CONTINUED)

The Lawyer and the Publicist trade concerned looks. A-Train looks down at Hughie's phone, too.

A-TRAIN
Buddy. You okay?

Hughie's gonna blow it! A cringe-worthy beat. Another!

But then... he takes a deep breath. Pulls himself together. Into the AMAZING SALESMAN HE IS.

Firmly shakes hands. Cool as shit.

HUGHIE
Fine. I appreciate the apology.
But accidents happen, right? And
after all, you were saving the
world.

ASHLEY
(sighs with relief)
Okay, thank you, Mr. Campbell. Now
if you'll excuse us, a crime-
fighter's work is never done, but
Douglas here will stay behind, get
you those documents...

A-Train, Ashley, and the various handlers beat a hasty retreat. Leaving Doug Friedman behind, who holds out a pen.

HUGHIE
Where's your bathroom?

INT. THE SEVEN TOWER - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Hughie enters, heads into a stall.

INSIDE THE STALL. He sits on the toilet. Wrenches his phone from its case. But if your case is anything like mine, that's never, ever easy. He tugs a bit too hard --

The phone CLACKS to the floor! Even worse, so does the BUG! Which spins like a quarter before landing on the linoleum. It's still in the stall, but right beneath the door, in plain view if anyone was looking for it --

Hughie. Shit. Which escalates into FUCK when --

The door opens and SOMEONE ENTERS. Hughie freezes. He can't tell who it is, he only spots boots. But we can see --

It's STARLIGHT. She moves to the sink, stares in the mirror, gets her game face back on. If she saw Hughie, she'd recognize him!

But... she doesn't see him, and he never sees her. She exits. Hughie breathes a sigh of relief. Near miss. Snags the bug and the phone.

(CONTINUED)

He exits the stall. Exits the bathroom. But we hold a BEAT.

As TRANSLUCENT materializes in the bathroom corner. Naked.
He was just gonna perv out again, but instead, he saw the
whole damn thing. He frowns. What the hell? Off this --

EXT. THE SEVEN TOWER - NIGHT

Hughie exits the lobby. Flush with victory. Struts down the
street like fucking Travolta. Up to Butcher's car.

Butcher gives him a curious look. Well? Hughie breaks into
a wide grin. Nods. He did it. He actually did it!

EXT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL/INT. BUTCHER'S CAR - NIGHT

Butcher pulls up in front of Hughie's Electronics Store.
Quiet night. No one inside but GARY, the owner.

INSIDE THE CAR. Hughie, still pumped with adrenaline.

HUGHIE

That was awesome. Staring that
asshole down? I get why you dig
this job, man --

BUTCHER

Got its moments.

HUGHIE

But you're right -- fuck A-Train,
fuck --
(finally noticing)
What're we doing here?

BUTCHER

How d'you mean? You gotta go back
to work, yeah?

HUGHIE

I -- sorry?

BUTCHER

Hughie, you were brilliant. But
that's all I needed you for.

HUGHIE

What? But -- I don't -- I mean, I
can help you, let me help --

BUTCHER

You did help. I got it from here.
(a final)
Cheers.

Beat. Doesn't seem like Butcher is budging.

(CONTINUED)

HUGHIE
Um. Right. Okay.

Hughie climbs out, tries to hide his disappointment. He gives Butcher a 'goodbye' nod.

HUGHIE
Oh, hey, almost forgot -- ever see an asshole tear up 75k?

Hughie takes out the VOUGHT CHECK. RIPS it.

BUTCHER
You're a good lad, Hughie. Not all that common in my line of work.

Off Hughie, nodding back -- but feels oddly dissatisfied.

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - NIGHT - LATER

ON THE TV. MSNBC. CHRIS HAYES converses with a NATIONAL SECURITY EXPERT. Forever droning talking heads.

CHRIS HAYES (ON TV)
...policing cities is a thorny enough issue as it is, but allowing Superheroes into national defense? We'd be basically privatizing war...

EXPERT (ON TV)
Sooner or later, it's inevitable...

IN THE STORE. Gary throws on his jacket.

GARY
Alright, g'night, Hughie. You'll lock up?
(off Hughie's nod)
I'm still thinking about that raise, you know.

HUGHIE
Yeah, okay, thanks, Gary.

Gary exits. Hughie. Behind the counter. Stares at the TV. Returning to this shitty fucking job, after all that intrigue, feels anti-climactic, both for Hughie and for us.

But then...

ANGLE. Hughie's back to the door. So he doesn't see it OPEN. And CLOSE. By ITSELF. He only hears the bell JINGLE.

HUGHIE
(as he pivots)
Sorry. I'm closing up --
(room's empty)
Hello?

(CONTINUED)

A ghostly, disembodied VOICE --

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Who are you?

HUGHIE
(twirling)
The fuck? Where --

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Right in front of you.

That silver dollar BUG floats in the air before Hughie.

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
You think I wouldn't find this
thing?!

Hughie barely has time to register surprise, when -- WHACK!
His head SNAPS to the side from an INVISIBLE PUNCH. Blood
flings from the side of his mouth. Oh. Shit.

INT. BUTCHER'S CAR/EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Butcher. Parked in some abandoned back alley. Has a LAPTOP
open on the passenger seat. Listening to the BUG. Which
means he's listening to Hughie.

HUGHIE (O.S.)
Please! I don't know what you're
talking about!

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Don't give me that, I followed you
from the Tower!

BUTCHER
Fuckin' hell, Hughie, you got
yourself made.

CLOSE ON BUTCHER. Maybe there's a wisp of regret fluttering
over his face. Then again, maybe not. Guy's a mystery.

From the LAPTOP -- unmistakable sounds of CRASHING GLASS --

BUTCHER
Ah, well.

Butcher closes the laptop. Sound shuts off. Seemingly
washing his hands of the whole sordid business...

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - NIGHT

WHAM! Hughie is SHOVED BACK into a wall of TV's. Some CRASH
to the floor, LIVE WIRES SPARKING! As Hughie gets his ASS
KICKED by an invisible man.

(CONTINUED)

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Who was that guy you were with?! In
the car?

With admirable bravery, Hughie doesn't answer --
So he's THROWN again. CRASH! OUCH!

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Who was he?? He put you up to this?

HUGHIE
I don't know! He was just a fucking
Uber driver, okay?!

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Why'd you plant the bug??

HUGHIE
...please... please...

We can SEE -- HEAR -- the crunch of glass. As Translucent
stalks closer to Hughie. Closer.

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Think you can just fuck with us?
We're the Seven! Earth's Most
Mighty! Champions of the Innocent!

This is it. Curtains for Hughie. Fat Lady steps up to the
mike, clears her throat, and --

SMASH!!

BUTCHER'S CAR CAREENS THROUGH THE STORE'S FRONT WINDOW!
SHATTERING THE GLASS. DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF HUGHIE!

KNOCKING TRANSLUCENT CLEAR ACROSS THE ROOM. We can tell,
from the CRUNCH of his body on the windshield, from the THUD
against a collapsing shelf of ELECTRONICS.

Butcher climbs out of the car. For some reason, he holds a
sparking CATTLE PROD (stay tuned for why).

BUTCHER
Hughie, run.
(Hughie hesitates)
Fuckin' run!

Hughie scrambles for the back room of the store -- as Butcher
straightens up, pivots to Translucent --

BUTCHER
Let him be, you invisible cunt.

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
Who are you?

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER
I'll tell you who you are. A
fuckin' joke, mate.

TRANSLUCENT (O.S.)
That so?

BUTCHER
Translucent doesn't even mean
'invisible,' you silly twat. It
means 'semi-transparent.'

Butcher LUNGES with the CATTLE PROD. But he misses -- not so
easy to fight an invisible man.

Translucent RIPS the CATTLE PROD out of Butcher's HAND.
Hurls it out of reach. SHIT.

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON HUGHIE. Darting past boxes and equipment, about to
escape out the back. He opens the door --

And STOPS. Who is he gonna be? Someone who backs down? Or
someone who fights?

When he sees, on a rack in front of him -- some CARBON
COMPONENT CABLES. He looks at them. Thinking.

INT. BRYMAN AUDIO VISUAL - CONTINUOUS

WHACK! Translucent punches Butcher across the jaw. Then --
WHACK! Another hit. Butcher only grins, his teeth red.

Then ingeniously SPITS BLOOD in Translucent's FACE. We see
the spattered BLOOD FLOATING IN MID-AIR.

BUTCHER
There you are.

Butcher SWINGS -- CONNECTS! But then --

Translucent HITS BACK. Over and over. Harder and harder.

It doesn't look good for Butcher. Until --

Suddenly, Hughie is THERE! He PULLS the FIRE ALARM!

WATER SPRAYS from OVERHEAD SPRINKLERS --

Revealing TRANSLUCENT. WATER SPLASHES over his BODY!

HUGHIE
The TV!

Butcher glances -- spots a SMASHED TV on the ground, throwing
sparks into a growing PUDDLE.

(CONTINUED)

Butcher gets what Hughie's saying -- he nods -- UNLOADS a CRUSHING ROUNDHOUSE PUNCH on Translucent -- OOF -- sends the bastard flailing back into the sparking WATER --

Which immediately ELECTROCUTES HIM! SPARKS CLIMACTICALLY RIDE UP Translucent's body. Before he DROPS.

Dust-settling beat.

The sprinklers stop. Nothing on the floor but a puddle with the outline of an invisible body in it.

HUGHIE
(out of breath)
Is he dead?

Butcher gives a HARD KICK to Translucent. No noise out of him, no movement --

BUTCHER
Well, he ain't movin'.

HUGHIE
Shit. Shit.

BUTCHER
How'd you know electricity bollocksed the cunt? Took me forever to work that one out.

HUGHIE
Skin's carbon. Highly conductive. Saw it on 'Ellen.'

BUTCHER
Nice one, Hughie. Well, come on. We gotta get him in the trunk.

HUGHIE
Wait -- we what?

BUTCHER
Think you just offed a member of the Seven.

HUGHIE
Me? You hit him!

BUTCHER
Semantics, my son, we're both in a fucksight a' trouble.

Already, they can hear SIRENS in the distance --

HUGHIE
No, he attacked us! And you're -- you're a federal officer! Call the fucking FBI!

(CONTINUED)

BUTCHER
Yeah. I ain't really a fed.

Off Hughie -- FUCKING WHAT?

EXT. THE SEVEN TOWER - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

STARLIGHT. On the ROOF of the Seven Tower -- taking in the infinite constellation of the city below.

PUSH IN ON HER. Her anger, her frustration, boiling and churning inside. Rising up.

Her eyes begin to glow. Then FLARE.

WIDE. The tower's top floors -- really, all nearby lights -- FLICKER and BLACK OUT dramatically. Around Starlight. As she draws energy from them. As her eyes BLAZE like FIRE.

The other Supes might not see the defiant spark inside her. Not yet. But we sure do.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

A PRIVATE JET SOARS.

INT. PRIVATE JET/EXT. SKY - NIGHT

A PICTURE. The Homelander. "To Mason: Reach for the Sky! Best, Homelander." We've seen this photo before.

The Mayor of Baltimore's son MASON, 10. Draws at a desk in bit lip concentration, tries to replicate his beloved Homelander photo with a crayola-on-paper version.

His Dad (the Mayor) dozes in a leather chair. Various AIDES work or sleep.

When -- Mason happens to glance out the window. He brightens. His wildest dreams coming true --

POV. ON THE WING. THE HOMELANDER. Proud. Hands on hips. Cape swirling, Zack Snyder-style. He smiles at Mason.

MASON
Homelander! Dad, wake up! The Homelander's here!

The Mayor rouses -- what? He heads over to the window, along with the aides. They all grin -- major celeb sighting.

MAYOR
Look at that. What's he doing here?

MASON
Did he come to say goodbye? Are you guys friends??

(CONTINUED)

POV. ON THE WING. The Homelander. Without ever losing his smile, he looks down to the ENGINE --

And FIRES BLINDING RED BEAMS from his eyes! Flaring camera! Right at the turbine -- SLICING IT RIGHT OFF --

MAYOR

OH MY GOD!

Guess the Mayor lost the negotiation, after all. THE PLANE JOLTS. GOING DOWN.

Mason. Open-mouthed in shock and fear. Painfully learning the old adage -- never, ever meet your heroes.

Homelander, still genially smiling, gives them a friendly salute. Before FLYING OFF --

STAY WITH THE HOMELANDER. Watching, blank-faced. As the JET NOSE DIVES. Plummets down to the Atlantic.

Turns out, Homelander wears a mask, too. And what's behind it is psychopathic, unhinged. And all-powerful. Off this --

BLACKOUT!

TO BE CONTINUED...