

FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - CHELSEA NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Cast iron apartment buildings. CAMERA floats by open windows above Chelsea. Some rooms are dim, others brightly lighted. TITLES OVER.

Voyeurs, we peer inside. In humid summer, painters work, models pose.

The night trembles with anticipation.

INT. GRAHAM'S SMALL STUDIO NIGHT

A man's place. Half finished canvases and pristine painting supplies. Art history tomes, notebooks, auction catalogues, sheets of slides litter the room.

Phone RINGS. As CAMERA DRIFTS around, the machine picks up.

This guy's FATHER is a control freak. We can hear it.

FATHER (V.O.)

(brittle Southern accent)

Hey son. This's your daddy. I talked with mister Trickett and he said if you got home by the fifteenth, you can have that job we talked about. Now I know you don't want it, that you're pissed at me for even mentioning it, and what you're up there doing may turn you into the biggest thing since sliced bread, but I gotta tell you, you've been up there in that artsy fartsy world, with those artsy fartsy bunch a people two solid years plus and what? Maybe something'll happen tomorrow, and maybe something'll happen next spring. But what if never?

EXT. CHELSEA STREETS AND SIDEWALKS NIGHT

Throbbing with life.

FATHER (V.O.)

How can you put all your eggs into a line of work where you have to have talent and luck? Son, you can't live your life on hope.

EXT. MAGDA SCIOLARI GALLERY

Through huge windows: an ultra hip gallery. An opening. A vast space sprinkled with ART PATRONS exchanging *bons mots*.

FATHER (V.O.)

You told your mother that what you're doing right now is your first real shot and I pray that's right. But I've heard it before. "All the right people," and "It's so close for me," for two and a half fucking years and all you've ever done is be a waiter, and even that you couldn't hold down for three months.

EXT. FANELLI'S RESTAURANT - SOHO NIGHT

Cozy, old. Neighborhood place.

FATHER (V.O.)

You've never made dollar one from your so called "profession..." Anyway, I'm real worried about you, and your momma is too.

INT. FANELLI'S - BAR NIGHT

Crowded and LOUD.

FATHER (V.O.)

Let me know about what to tell mister Trickett. Unlike what you're up there doing, this is real... We love you very much. We just want you to be you. Come home. Don't get chewed up. Come home and figure out a way to get on with the rest of your life. Well, that's enough for now. Bye.

At the bar, we watch GRAHAM, 28. White tee shirt, black jeans. A calm man with a friendly face, he studies handwritten pages. Intent. Under pressure.

He grows more and more ill at ease. Drains his beer, signals DAVE THE BARTENDER for the check. Dave, 40, is an actor.

Graham pays. He's got \$3 left. He grabs his notes, hustles toward the door, gets bumped and rips his sleeve on the jamb. Damn! He checks the clock... no time...

GRAHAM

(to bartender)

Borrow your jacket?

Dave hates to lend his jacket, but relents. He reaches under the bar, tosses his black leather jacket to Graham.

It covers the hole. Grateful, he goes.

EXT. CROWDED SIDEWALKS NIGHT

Graham moves through the crowd, goes over his notes. Glittering New Yorkers don't notice him.

Two blocks ahead, Magda Sciolari Gallery.

Graham dumps the notes in a trashcan, hails a cab.

INT. TAXI - MOVING

Fingers tapping, he studies the mob scene out the window, attempts to collect himself.

The LAOTIAN CAB DRIVER offers a cigarette. Graham declines. Sees photo: driver and wife before a judge and American flag.

GRAHAM

You a citizen?

LAOTIAN DRIVER

American, yes! But Laotian still. In New York, difficulty to know difference.

GRAHAM
You got that right.

Outside, Magda Sciolari Gallery closes on him. People watch. Graham hyperventilates to calm down. Cab stops.

GRAHAM
Gimme a smoke.

Surprised, the driver does. Graham pays the fare with his last three bucks, SLAMS the door. Short cab ride...

EXT. MAGDA SCIOLARI GALLERY

Graham looks in. An outsider...

Deep drag on the cigarette. A transformation creeps across him. Slow, profound. As if he's psyching up for... a performance. His body tenses, radiates Attitude.

INT. MAGDA SCIOLARI GALLERY NIGHT

"Summer Group Show" on a wall. Thin crowd.

"L.J. Graham" scrawled beside five paintings: Huge, expressionist canvases of headless, nude women floating on road kill under a layer of sloppy calligraphic musings. The paint glows with otherworldly luminescence.

Graham blows in, exuding confidence. MAGDA, 30's, works the door. A beautiful woman of fierce intensity, Magda has close cropped hair and a calculating mind. This is her gallery.

MAGDA
(Italian accent)
Graham, Graham. It is so exciting you are coming.

Graham eyes the sparse crowd.

MAGDA

Good news. Good news. Helen Upton
Fisher may take one.

Graham hardly listens.

MAGDA

Is a beginning. No one else sold
nothing.

(pause)

For Magda, is not so funny.

GRAHAM

(Midwest accent)

And this concerns me, how?

MAGDA

Forget it. Go. Make nice with the
rich diesel dykes.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN CHELSEA - ULYSSES'S BUILDING NIGHT

GLIDE up a tile facade, LOOK in a ratty studio. We hear
OPERA.

INT. ULYSSES'S DECAYING LOFT

Tidy, run-down artist's quarters. A mute television plays a
Mexican detective movie. To one side, a neatly made bed.

Before a ten foot canvas, a powerful bearded man paints a
photorealist city scene. ULYSSES. Late 40's, strong,
brutish, passionate. Looks like a Montana hunting guide.

His assistant, JERRY, 25, peels masking tape from another
painting. Ulysses watches intently. Jerry screws up.

ULYSSES

This's your life's calling?!

JERRY

If Matthew Marks likes my slides.

ULYSSES

When I was Rauschenberg's assist--

JERRY

--You had your career ahead of you.

ULYSSES

Scotch. Without the palaver.

Jerry grumbles to the crate that serves as a bar. No Scotch.

JERRY

Don't forget the opening at Magda Sciolari. Even a washed up alcoholic has-been could scam a couple free drinks.

ULYSSES

(sarcastic)

My invitation got lost.

JERRY

Mine didn't.

Jerry SLAMS the door. Ulysses stares, takes a linoleum knife and hacks fresh canvas off a roll. MENACING.

INT. MAGDA SCIOLARI GALLERY - A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN NIGHT

CAMILLA WARREN. 30, blonde and edible. Strong willed, smart as hell. You hope she'll like you. She sips wine, notices Graham. Lucky Graham.

INT. GALLERY - GRAHAM'S SIX PAINTINGS

Graham poses with Magda and HER GIRLFRIEND, an elegant woman in her 40's. More photos. Magda spots a COLLECTOR, drives toward him like a barracuda. Her Girlfriend moves off.

Camilla approaches, appraises Graham.

CAMILLA

Sold anything?

GRAHAM

I will.

CAMILLA

If you do... find me.

And she's gone. Graham watches her go, amazed.

GRAHAM
(Southern accent, to self)
Well, yes ma'am.

EXT. FRONT OF GALLERY NIGHT

A chauffeured Town Car. Accompanied by an impeccable Aryan FEMALE ASSISTANT carrying a Prada duffel bag, ROLAND MORIZE moves to the gallery entrance. Roland, 50, is French and aristocratic as hell. A major collector. Major Anglophile.

INT. MAGDA AND ROLAND

Handing Roland a steaming cup of tea, Magda steers him around the floor. Old friends. She rubs his cashmere jacket.

MAGDA
Mmm. Roland, Roland. I have someone special.

ROLAND
(upper class French accent)
With you, sunshine, everyone is special. Is he or she painfully expensive?

MAGDA
Define pain.

EXT. GALLERY SIDEWALK

By jungle telegraph, Roland's arrival brings THE CROWD. STARS, PAPARAZZI, other COLLECTORS, CURATORS. The gallery fills.

GRAHAM'S PAINTINGS / ROLAND

Roland soaks up Graham's alarming paintings. Such is his stature, no one dares walk between him and the art. ANOTHER ARTIST hovers. Magda, nervous, keeps mum. Finally...

ROLAND

Right. I want to get to East Hampton before the hour becomes obscene.

MAGDA

(excited)

This Graham. He walked in with his slides, directly from the street. I have been to his studio and is the most incredible work. His confidence--

ROLAND

--Should I buy? Short answer.

MAGDA

In five years, this Graham, he is the best I have ever seen.

The other artist stalks off, furious.

Roland focuses on the paintings. Total concentration. At first, he's absorbed... then... impressed.

ROLAND

"This Graham." And that one.

Several GORGEOUS PEOPLE jet away, bearing NEWS. Magda is obviously relieved.

MAGDA

Wonderful choices. You have such wonderful taste.

ROLAND

You have wonderful things.

Her Girlfriend looks directly at Roland, caresses Magda.

MAGDA

Yes, don't I?

ANGLE ON WINE BAR

Jammed. Aging badly at 45, a vicious homosexual art critic, WALKER BANKS, drinks with Ulysses's assistant, Jerry. They are lovers.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Walker, Walker, Roland Morize just
bought two Graham's.

JERRY

F'real?

The Beautiful Woman smiles, goes. Walker Banks caresses
Jerry's face, then digs his fingernails in.

WALKER BANKS

(harsh)

Dearest Jerry. I had so hoped "well
endowed" also meant intellectually.
Never let them know you don't.

Jerry is outraged by the public flaying.

WALKER BANKS

(leads him away)

Do you suppose Matthew Marks has at
last made up his mind? Men.

FOLLOW MAGDA AND GRAHAM THROUGH CROWD

Graham radiates success. Magda's Girlfriend on her like
wet silk. A WEALTHY COUPLE stops them.

WEALTHY MAN

Is Graham's "Highway 96" still
available?

(Magda nods)

Exquisite. Isn't it, darling?

Magda gazes at the guy's wife. Wife gets a *frisson*. Magda
and her Girlfriend leave Graham chatting with the buyers.

MAGDA

(to Girlfriend)

Come si dice? "Lemmings." Roland, I
am thanking you.

EXT. SIDEWALK

Sporting a loud Hawaiian shirt and his paint spattered
pants, Ulysses swaggers up to the gallery. Smirks at
everyone.

INT. MAGDA SCIOLARI GALLERY

Ulysses bounces in. People notice. Not in a good way. He passes Walker Banks, his lover Jerry, and his court.

WALKER BANKS

(to sycophants)

I just spoke with Matthew Marks. He's asked Jerry if he can rep him. It's just so so thrilling... Magda's going to have a duck fit!

ULYSSES

Jerry? My Jerry? Do I still have an assistant?

Banks, LAUGHING, shakes his head. Vitriol. Ulysses can't hide his irritation and hurt.

AT THE BAR

Ulysses hammers back wine. Takes another. Magda cuts him from the herd. Ulysses points to the bargain Chardonnay.

ULYSSES

Didn't used to serve ditch water.

MAGDA

Leave. Leave now.

He makes a lewd pussy-eating gesture. Furious, Magda goes. Ulysses turns to one man, GROWLS. He pales, mortified.

GRAHAM'S PAINTINGS

Hit of the show. Steady flow of admirers.

ANGLE ON GALLERY FLOOR

Down an empty hallway, Graham spies Ulysses with Roland Morize. They radiate anger.

ROLAND

(fury)

...I was under the impression you had left the city, definitively.

ULYSSES

You were, as usual, misinformed...

The rest is lost. Approaching Graham, Camilla notices Ulysses and Roland.

ELEGANT WOMAN

I understand you find your subjects on the streets of New York?

GRAHAM

Gutter imagery does have its parallels in upper class society--

--Camilla moves Graham away. Graham flips a cigarette into his mouth, lights up, indicates his paintings.

GRAHAM

You should buy one, don't you think?

CAMILLA

That sort of risk doesn't appeal to me.

GRAHAM

What sort does?

He bops away. She is intrigued.

ANGLE ON GRAHAM'S PAINTINGS

Ulysses drinks, surveys PATRONS enjoying Graham's work.

ART PATRONS

...resplendent... too too incredible...
an awesome gift... imaginative
fusion...

It affects him. How, we're not sure.

Graham bumps Ulysses. Ulysses's drink drenches his Hawaiian shirt. Ulysses shoves him.

ULYSSES

Hey Bozo, you know how hard it is to clean Rayon!?

GRAHAM

Easy, big fella. You don't want this.

ULYSSES

What you want's some Goddamn manners
and some Goddamn talent.

Ulysses throws a vicious right, connects. Shocked, Graham slugs him four times. A blur. Ulysses flops over the bar. A PAPARAZZO catches it.

MAGDA

STOP THIS! YOU STOP!
Despite his bleeding cheek, Graham finds this highly entertaining. Everyone watches. Magda's Girlfriend. Roland. Camilla. Fascinated.

GRAHAM

When you got out of bed this morning, did you think, "What I really want is to go to Madga Sciolari's tonight and make a complete ass of myself?" Did you? Hmmm?

Ulysses leaps on Graham, SLAMMING him into one of Graham's paintings -- one that Roland bought -- RIPPING IT in half. The room goes deathly still. Roland is horrified.

HOWLING, Magda yanks Ulysses up and punches him savagely. Right hook. End of fight.

ULYSSES

(to Graham)
Enjoy it before it fades.

Ecstatic, Walker Banks scribbles notes.

ULYSSES

(to Graham)
The hell you think you are...!?

Quivering with hatred and rage, Ulysses spots Roland.

ULYSSES

And you...

Ulysses spits on Roland's face. White hot angry, Roland wipes his cheek with a handkerchief.