

START UP

"Pilot"

by Matt Tarses

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COLD OPENING

OVER BLACK, WE HEAR

BRETT FOSTER (V.O.)
So... why should I invest in your
podcast company?

FADE IN:

INT. FOSTER ENTERPRISES, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

ALEX SCHUMAN, 38, handsome in a nerdy way, sits across from
BRETT FOSTER, 29, a young billionaire in flip flops.

ALEX
Well, first of all, it's not just
any podcast company. It's the
Cadillac of podcast companies. Do
people still use Cadillac as a
reference? It's the Maybach, the
Leonardo DiCaprio of...

BRETT FOSTER
I get it man. You can cut to the
chase: just tell me how I make
money.

Suddenly Alex looks nervous.

ALEX
The financials. Yes. Of course...
you want to know... all that...
(shuffling through notes)
So... the problem is, listeners
are... when discussing monetization
one ...um... there's a movement by
listeners away...

BRETT FOSTER
Wow.
(turning)
Is your Dad always this nervous?

CAMERA PANS TO REVEAL a little girl, 5, SORAYA, with her feet
up on the desk playing on an iPhone.

SORAYA
It's probably 'cause you're rich.

ALEX
Soraya!
(to Foster)
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
Sorry, again, about her. We had a
little child care dilemma --

Alex wakes up his computer which is plugged into a projector.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Okay... maybe I could explain the
money part better if I fire up the
pitch deck. Um, here's a graph of -

He hits a key. A graph is projected onto Brett's face.

BRETT FOSTER
(wincing)
Ow.

ALEX
Whoops! Sorry about that.

Alex tries to raise the image by balancing the front of the
projector on a big accordion file.

ALEX (CONT'D)
...maybe this will...

But now it's ON THE CEILING. Alex starts wrestling with the
cords like they're alive as the IMAGE BOUNCES all over the
room (WALLS, CHAIRS, FOSTER'S FACE AGAIN, back to CEILING)

ALEX (CONT'D)
What if I try a different -

He hits a button. We don't see the picture (we never will)
but we see Alex's face REACT IN HORROR.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Oh, my God!

He starts FRANTICALLY PUSHING BUTTONS trying to change it.

BRETT FOSTER
(staring at the ceiling)
Dude, is that a --

ALEX
A bloody baby's head coming out of
my wife's...?!
(banging on keys)
Why yes, it is! And I specifically
said, 'We don't need a picture of
that' but my wife said, 'we'll be
so glad we have it -

SORAYA

Is that me, Daddy?

ALEX

Nope, it's your brother. Back to your game.

Alex pulls the cords out of the wall! The image dies. A BEAT. Alex turns back to Foster, trying to be nonchalant:

ALEX (CONT'D)

Let's see if I have a printout of that graph. It was the pie kind.

BRETT FOSTER

Alex...listen, I don't need the decks, or the graphs or the intimate shots of your wife. Just keep it simple. If I were calling an Uber and it said it's gonna be here in two minutes and that was all the time you had... Who are you and what are you doing? Go.

Alex takes a deep breath and as the camera starts to PUSH IN:

ALEX (V.O.)

One month ago, I had a good job, the kind of job most people would kill for, but for some reason I decided, at 38, with a wife and two kids, I decided now would be a good time to quit that job and start my own business. Who am I and what am I doing?

THE IMAGES FREEZES ON ALEX'S FACE:

ALEX (V.O.)

My name's Alex Schuman and I'm ruining my life.

SMASH CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: START UP

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Alex, dressed for work, talks on his cell, pours coffee...

CHYRON: ONE MONTH AGO

...His two kids, BEN, 11 and Soraya are making a racket as they eat breakfast.

Alex's wife, NOUSH, 36, (smart, pretty, Persian-American, doesn't take any bullshit) is multi-tasking, reading over a report, refilling glasses, etc.

ALEX

(into cell)

He said what? I didn't catch that.

NOUSH

(to kids, with a wink)

Come on, kids, be quiet, your dad's trying to hear.

BEN

(for Alex's benefit)

Did I tell you I was thinking of getting a lightning bolt tattoo on my forehead?

ALEX

(into phone)

Well, that's kinda promising --

(to Ben)

What'd you say?

(into phone)

No, I was talking to Ben, go on --

BEN

Also, I met this girl on the internet - at least I think she's a girl - her name's Tom and she wants to meet in a van in the woods.

ALEX

(to Ben)

Ha, Ha, I hear you!

(into phone)

Look they want me off the phone.

I'll see you in a bit.

He hangs up.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Sorry. There's this story I've been chasing about this alleged murderer Wesley Harman and I'm this close --

(off Noush's eyeroll)

But you know what? Enough work talk. This is "morning family time." As of this moment, I'm totally, 100 percent present.

(off his phone buzzing)

See, that's a work call, that I am ignoring. Look: Ignore Button. Bam.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
(he sits)
So, what's new?

BEN
Want to see a new illusion I've
been working on?

ALEX
(tentative)
Sure...

BEN
Awesome. Lemme get Todd.

Ben runs off.

NOUSH
I'm worried about that hamster.
He's losing his hair.

ALEX
You're worried about Todd? I'm
worried about Ben. Is he really
serious about all this magic stuff?

NOUSH
Oh, I think it's sweet.

ALEX
Sweet, sure. But, cool? I mean,
middle school kids are so mean. And
magic...

Ben RUNS back in with a shoebox and a HAMSTER. As he starts
setting up, Alex's phone BUZZES again. He IGNORES it.

BEN
Now...pay careful attention because
I'm doing a much more elaborate
version of this for the school
talent show.

ALEX
(wincing)
Really? Are you sure you wanna --

Ben does a VERY SILLY MAGICIAN'S GESTURE.

ALEX (CONT'D)
...whoa! What is that hand gesture?

BEN
Look in the box. I think you'll
find that Todd's gone.

Alex and Noush look.

ALEX	NOUSH	*
Todd's not gone.	He's still there, sweetie.	*

BEN (CONT'D)
Really? What the heck?

NOUSH
Although he's very still. He might
be, you know, actually gone.

ALEX
No, I can hear him breathing.
Wait, are you supposed to be able
to hear hamsters breathe?

As Ben starts to adjust the trick, Alex's phone BUZZES AGAIN.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I just need to see why
they keep calling. It'll be quick.
(into phone)
Hello....What?... When?! Yes!
(then)
Harman's in!
(kissing everyone goodbye)
I gotta go. Ben, see if you can
get Todd to disappear tonight. You
know, assuming he survives the day.

INT. CHEER UP! OFFICES, HALLWAY - LATER

Modern. Cool. Amidst *Cheer Up!* signage, Alex hurries down a busy hallway, shouting "I got him; I got him!" under:

ALEX (V.O.)
"Cheer Up!" was the radio show
where I'd worked the past 16 years.
And as much as I loved it, we'd
been doing the same stories my
whole career - and lately I'd been
yearning to do something different,
something that mattered.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Under the v.o., Alex pitches his idea to a large group of RADIO EXECS and we see his passion and intensity...

ALEX (V.O.)

And so I walked into that pitch meeting ready to nudge us into the future with what I knew would be a game-changing story.

ALEX

(passionate)

...and in the end it's a portrait - and a reprimand - not just of the justice system, but society itself.

We hear raucous APPLAUSE from one person and REVEAL a tiny, bookish woman, DEIRDRE RIORDAN, 32, CLAPPING LOUDLY. She mouths "Nailed it." Then, self-conscious, STOPS CLAPPING.

ALEX (V.O.)

...but except for my producer, Deirdre, nobody else liked it.

We REVEAL the EDITORIAL BOARD looking underwhelmed. Finally, the BOSS, a woman in her 50s, clears her throat.

BOSS

I appreciate your passion, Alex. But the show's called "*Cheer Up!*," not "*I Wanna Hang Myself.*"

Alex nods, bows his head, starts to EXIT.

ALEX (V.O.)

...and I don't know why, but something inside me snapped...

He's almost out the door, but he TURNS AROUND.

ALEX

I can't do this anymore. I can't do one more feel-good piece about child prodigy pianists or gorillas who know sign language! How many gorillas know sign language at this point?! It feels like all, frankly! All gorillas! I don't wanna Cheer people Up! I want to engage their brains; I want them driving around the block because my story's not quite over yet. And I know I'm not the only one who feels this way, so I say, if this show's not going to escort radio and storytelling into the future, then I will! Now who's with me!?

He turns triumphantly and starts walking out, expecting many followers, but... nobody moves. Even Deirdre can only offer a low, secretive thumbs up. As Alex sees he's on his own, he EXITS. A NERDY INTERN was filming Alex on his phone.

NERDY INTERN
(to himself)
And I win Snapchat today.

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alex has just told Noush:

NOUSH
You quit your job because they
didn't like your idea?!?!

ALEX
No! I mean, yes, but -- it was
more than just one idea. I realized
I don't need them anymore!

NOUSH
You don't?

ALEX
Not if I - hold onto your hat -
start my own podcast company!

NOUSH
What!? We have two kids and a
mortgage and you're 38 years old!

ALEX
When I practiced this in my mind
you hugged me and yelled "Yes!"

NOUSH
Honey, I love you and you're an
amazing storyteller. But - please
don't take this the wrong way -
you're not good at anything else.

ALEX
Okay, impossible not to take that
the wrong way.

NOUSH
You've never used a Power Point, or
Excel or sold ads or hired or fired
people. You won't even let me fire
our 900 year old baby-sitter cause
you're afraid she's gonna cry.

ALEX

You can crush Rosalba's spirit, but I will not be a part of it.

(off her smile)

Look, I hear you. That's why I was gonna ask Eddie to be my partner.

NOUSH

Eddie?! Now you're making it worse!

ALEX

He went to business school. He's a math wiz. And he can sell anything.

NOUSH

I know. At our wedding, he sold all my bridesmaids magazine subscriptions. I'm still getting Ebony!

ALEX

I think we'd be a good yin/yang for each other. He could yang me.

NOUSH

Okay, fine, but he's not a details guy. And you're the most disorganized person I've ever met. I bought you that tracker thing to find your keys, you lost the tracker thing.

ALEX

I have a hunch it's in the dryer. But as far as organization goes...

Alex looks away, suddenly not wanting to make eye contact.

NOUSH

(beat, then getting it)

No! Not Deirdre.

ALEX

I've worked with like 50 producers, she's the best by a mile.

NOUSH

Alex, she's in love with you.

ALEX

See, you say that, I don't see it.

NOUSH

She has a shrine devoted to you in her apartment.

ALEX

It's a very tasteful "memory collage."

NOUSH

What about money, Al? It costs a lot to start up a company.

ALEX

Don't worry, I know what you're gonna say and I'm not gonna touch the 401k.

NOUSH

It would never occur to me you would even think of touching our 401k.

ALEX

Again, not planning to.

(then)

Noush, I could go get a job at another show, but it would be the same thing - being told 'no' by someone who doesn't see what I see. I see it! And I know I can make other people see it.

It's hard for her to be swayed by this.

NOUSH

Fine.

Overjoyed, Alex hugs her. She smiles, then:

NOUSH (CONT'D)

Just out of curiosity, how are you planning to pay for this?

ALEX

Baby. Sweetheart. We're gonna get investors. I'm gonna *Shark Tank* this bitch.

INT. DINER - DAY

Alex sits next to Deirdre (from old job) and across from his friend EDDIE RAMOS (Vince Vaughn type), 38, Latino, slick.

ALEX (V.O.)

So like Jobs and Zuckerberg before me, I got my brand new dream team together to talk about how to change the world.

ALEX

Uh... Deirdre, do you think maybe you could sit across from me?

She's sitting REALLY CLOSE to him.

DEIRDRE

Oh, God, I didn't even realize we were next to each other. Hey, did you switch up your shampoo? I like it. I mean I like the old one, too. They're both great.

EDDIE

(to Alex)

So what, you hired a groupie?

Deirdre glares at Eddie as she sits next to him.

ALEX

Okay, so, lemme make the formal introductions. Deirdre Riordan, meet my friend Eddie Ramos, the most in-demand salesman in town.

DEIRDRE

If he's so in demand, why is he in a diner at 3 o'clock on a Tuesday?

EDDIE

Because in my world, sometimes you go all in on a sure thing and it turns out to be a dud.

ALEX

Eddie made a bad bet on some protein powder.

DEIRDRE

What was wrong with it?

EDDIE

Turns out it was 98% sand. I've been using it to melt ice on my driveway.

(then, to Deirdre)

What about you? No work for elves in the off-season?

DEIRDRE

No, I quit my job to support Alex in whatever he chooses to do. He's not only a mentor to me, he's a titan in the industry.

EDDIE

Titan? In high school we used to hang your titan from his underwear 'cause he was the treasurer of the AV club.

ALEX

I was vice president and now's a good time to segue to our budget.

EDDIE

So I ran some preliminary numbers and the good news is it seems all we need is a solid mic and some chairs. Now I have some chairs...

DEIRDRE

(appalled)

You obviously don't know what Alex does. He makes highly produced, highly researched pieces. They require staff, equipment, software, a travel budget and a lil bit of Alex's special sauce.

Beat. Eddie deadpans to Alex.

EDDIE

So how the hell are we gonna afford your special sauce, Al?

ALEX

We could start by making a list of every rich person we know.

INSERT OF A NAPKIN WITH ONE NAME ON IT: BRETT FOSTER.

ALEX (V.O.)

Turns out we could only come up with one. It was a guy I'd interviewed at my old job for a story on instant billionaires.

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S GARAGE - DAY

The door opens. Alex and Eddie enter with a bunch of building supplies. Alex looks skeptical.

ALEX (V.O.)

By a miracle, Foster agreed to meet with me. So the plan was to produce a two minute sample of that show I'd tried to do at *Cheer Up!*, about the accused killer, Wesley Harman.

(MORE)

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Eddie said we could save money if we built our own sound booth.

ALEX

You sure you know what you're doing?

EDDIE

You don't need to know much if you've got Gator Glue. I used to sell this stuff door to door; made a fortune before they got sued.

ALEX

Sued? What's wrong with it?

EDDIE

Let's just say, don't lick it.

Just then Ben GLIDES in on a hoverboard that's hidden by his long WIZARD'S ROBE.

BEN

Good Morrow, if you guys have any leftover lumber, can I borrow it for my magical illusion box?

EDDIE

Magical illusion box? What's the matter? Don't you like girls?

BEN

(cocky)

Oh, Uncle Eddie, I'm pretty sure a young wizard named Harry Potter did just fine with the ladies at a little school called Hogwarts.

EDDIE

I feel like that's a "no."

ALEX

Ben, if we have any extra, you got it.

BEN

Thanks!

Ben HOVERS away. The guys watch him go, frozen smiles.

EDDIE

That kid needs a football asap.

ALEX

Shut up. Let's get to work.

Clock says 1:30.

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S GARAGE - LATER

Clock says 1:56.

The booth is done. Eddie nods, satisfied.

ALEX

Ed, I feel like that was too easy.

EDDIE

Carly Rae Jepsen wrote "Call Me Maybe" in 12 minutes.

ALEX

What the hell does that mean?

EDDIE

It means good work doesn't have to be hard work.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREETS - DAY

Alex, Eddie, Deirdre and Noush walk toward an old building.

ALEX (V.O.)

So we had a sound booth, but we still needed a legit office space. When we finally found one in our price range, I wanted Noush to see it before we signed the lease.

INT. GIANT LOFT SPACE - CONTINUOUS

A big space where groups of young people work at mismatched tables. MARION MILLER (Tracy Morgan-type) greets them.

MARION

Podcasters! Glad you're back. Lot of interest in your desks.

ALEX

(to Noush)

This is our maybe future landlord.

MARION

Marion Miller. And yes, I know Marion is an unusual name.

NOUSH

I'm Farnoush.

MARION

You win.

He walks off. Noush takes in the space.

ALEX

It's an incubator. Everyone's got ideas. Those kids are designing a robot that rocks a baby to sleep --

NOUSH

Oh that's cool.

ALEX

It will be, so far it just throws the baby across the room.

We see the PROTOTYPE HURL A DOLL ACROSS THE ROOM.

EDDIE

Those lesbians made a jacket you can put on cats to make them hypoallergenic --

A CAT in a weird futuristic looking jacket SCAMPERS by.

DEIRDRE

Those guys are trying to create a professional beer pong league.

NOUSH

(to Deirdre with a wink)
They're kinda cute.

DEIRDRE

I prefer my men more intellectual with larger noses.

Noush rolls her eyes as Alex takes her aside.

ALEX

Cool, right?

NOUSH

Perfect. It's exciting, honey. I'm proud of you. I've got to run to court. See you tonight.

She kisses him goodbye and EXITS. Alex turns to Eddie, who's just come back from talking to Marion.

EDDIE

We got a little problem. Marion wants three months in advance.

As Alex reacts:

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie has pulled Alex out into the hall.

ALEX

I don't have ten thousand dollars!

EDDIE

Then maybe we dip into that 401k.

ALEX

No! I promised Noush I wouldn't. I mean, she's barely on board as is.

EDDIE

Bro, we can't keep working at Starbucks. They're onto us. They changed the bathroom code.

(off Alex's look)

What if there was a world where you didn't tell Noush?

ALEX

I tell Noush everything.

EDDIE

Yeah, in this world. Let's go to that other world.

(then)

The second that financier writes us a check, we'll put it all back.

ALEX is torn, which is when Marion pokes his head in:

MARION

Another crew's coming up the elevator now. Which means I'm gonna need a decision in the next five seconds. Unless the elevator breaks. Which it often does.

Alex looks to Marion, then to Eddie, then back to Marion.

ALEX

We're in.

The camera DOLLIES IN on Alex's tormented face, we:

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOFADE IN:INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alex and Noush are making dinner. Ben's doing homework as Soraya plays on her phone.

ALEX (V.O.)

A week had gone by and I hadn't told Noush I'd dipped into our 401k. The guilt was so bad I was starting to wonder why I'd done this in the first place.

Alex is furiously pounding a chicken with a mallet. He looks insane. He notices everyone watching him and STOPS.

ALEX

(smiles)

Sorry. Just trying to make sure it's nice and lean.

NOUSH

Guys, be nice to Dad. He's nervous about his big interview tomorrow.

BEN

With the guy who maybe killed someone?

SORAYA

Is it gonna be on the radio? TV's better. I need pictures.

ALEX

(hand to his heart)

Uch. My own daughter. You don't need pictures. Here.... close your eyes. You too, Ben.

(they do)

Closed? Okay, imagine hearing a really creepy old guy's voice.

(Old man voice)

My name is Wesley Harman and I didn't do it.

SORAYA

Didn't do what?

ALEX

(back to normal voice)

Aha! See, now you're listening...

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

And now a woman's voice says she's Harman's neighbor.

(woman's voice)

Something was off with him. Always alone on his family's estate. And when kids would steal apples he'd chase 'em off with a shovel.

NOUSH

Al, is this a good story for kids?

ALEX

Now we hear a policeman's voice on a CB radio.

(cop voice on CB)

Dispatch, we got two deceased minors on the Harman property.

NOUSH

So apparently, no.

SORAYA

I like it!

ALEX

Then a local news anchor: the children both had a rare poison in their stomachs and... apples.

Alex CRUNCHES an apple. He SPITS it out.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Now we're in a courtroom. A juror tells you they wanted to convict Harman but they couldn't connect him to the poison. Now flashbulbs POOF! - a press conference. Harman's own brother, Max, says regardless of the verdict, the family's cutting ties with Wesley.

Alex BLOWS BUBBLES with his straw.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Now we're in a lab and a scientist, tells us about this rare poison --

BEN

The one Harman put on the apples?

ALEX

The one someone put on the apples. The scientist tells us...

(scientist voice)

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

...it's very hard to make. You need seeds from a Croatian Rhine Poppy, virtually nonexistent in the U.S.

(normal voice)

And then we hear - Make this noise.

He makes the sound of WIND. The kids, entranced, do the same.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The wind blowing through a field.

(knocks on the table)

A knock on a heavy door. And then a voice we know: "Can I help you?"

SORAYA

(SO into this!)

Who is it?

ALEX

Harman's brother, Max, from the press conference. We've come to see him because we know something no one else knows. The wind we're hearing is blowing through a giant field of Croatian Rhine poppies -- the biggest field in the U.S., right in Max Harman's backyard.

BEN

Whoa! So Wesley Harman's innocent?

ALEX

I believe Max framed Wesley to cut him out of the family fortune. And I want to tell the world his story. And lots of other stories, too. That's why I'm starting my company, Soraya. By the way, thanks for reminding me.

Noush smiles at him. After a beat, he turns and puts Soraya in a playful head-lock.

ALEX (CONT'D)

See? You don't need pictures. Now go watch TV while we finish making dinner.

The kids RUN OUT. As Noush puts her arms around Alex:

NOUSH

You have nothing to worry about. You're gonna do great tomorrow.

INT. INCUBATOR - THE NEXT DAY

Alex, Eddie and Deirdre are at their desks. Alex is making last-minute preparations for Harman's arrival. Eddie's checking out the pretty Cat-Jacket lesbians.

DEIRDRE

(re: Lesbians)

You're wasting your time, they're not interested in you.

EDDIE

Listen to me, Tiny Dancer; with the correct series of words strung together and a cool look, everyone's interested in everyone.

DEIRDRE

Really? Could you teach me how to look cool?

A FLYING BABY DOLL COMES HURLING THROUGH THE AIR NAILING Deirdre IN HER HEAD AND KNOCKING HER DOWN.

EDDIE

Not today.

Alex notices Deirdre on the ground, clutching the doll.

ALEX

Dee, now is not the time for resting. You know how skittish Harman is. We have to make sure everything's perfect before he gets here.

As Deirdre gets up, she POINTS to the door:

DEIRDRE

I think he just got here...

ANGLE ON HARMAN (Martin Short-type) as he gingerly ENTERS, clearly not comfortable.

HARMAN

Well, isn't this quaint?

ALEX

Mr. Harman, hi, I'm Alex Schuman. Nice to finally meet you in person.

HARMAN

This doesn't feel quite right. Perhaps we should reschedule...

ALEX

Mr. Harman, I promise you're in good hands. If there's anything I can do to make you more comfortable -

HARMAN

(terrified)

Is that a cat?! I'm quite allergic.

MELISSA

Well then you, sir, are in luck.

One of the Cat Jacket Founders, MELISSA, (24, Very Pretty) has stepped forward.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

The "Sneeze Jacket" uses revolutionary technology to make all felines completely 100% hypoallergenic.

HARMAN

Really? I love cats, but I haven't been able to touch one since I was a little boy.

MELISSA

(moved)

Awww. People like you are why I've dedicated my life to this start-up. Meet "Mr. Tender-Puss." Would you like to pet him?

Harman sits. Melissa places the cat on his lap. Harman transforms into a thrilled little boy and begins to nuzzle his face into the cat.

ANGLE ON Alex and Eddie.

ALEX

This couldn't be more perfect. That cat's totally calming him down. It's kismet.

EDDIE

This is it, bro. Your dream's about to come true.

ALEX

Should we hug? I feel like we should hug.

ALEX

Vision quest? And I assume even with the 401k money, we --

EDDIE

401k'll be long gone.

ALEX

God, Noush is gonna kill me.

EDDIE

It's okay. We're gonna Beyonce this bitch and make some Lemonade. You don't need Harman for the Foster meeting. I made a deck.
(off Alex's confused look)
A PowerPoint presentation --

ALEX

No. No decks. That's not my thing. Business models, projected revenues, annual whatever.

DEIRDRE

(to Eddie)

That's like asking Michelangelo to order his own chisels.

EDDIE

Listen, I wish I could go in your place, bro, but you're the CEO. You just plug your computer into a projector. I'll walk you through the numbers. You can do this.

ALEX

(beat, resolved)

Okay, show me.

And as Eddie begins explaining, THE MUSIC RISES and we PUSH IN TIGHT on a stressed Alex AND LOCK OFF THE CAMERA as everything speeds up in the background...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S TOWNHOUSE, HALLWAY/BEN'S ROOM - LATER

An exhausted Alex walks down the hall, past Ben's room, where he notices Ben flashing colored scarves through the air.

ALEX

Hey, buddy. Whatcha doing?

BEN

A little silk work. Getting ready
for the talent show. Wanna see?

He does some flamboyant hand moves as the SCARVES FLY AROUND.

ALEX

(yikes)

That's great.

(then)

Did I ever tell you in high school,
I was in the AV club? We'd go
around setting up VCRs. I thought
I was so cool at the time, but --

With a flourish, Ben pulls a red ball from behind Alex's ear.

BEN

What's a VCR?

ALEX

Look, Ben, I love that you love
magic but sometimes the "trick" in
junior high is to not be noticed.

BEN

Good one, Dad.

ALEX

I just mean, with the talent show,
maybe...maybe think about flying
under the radar a little... that's
what I did. Got pretty good at it.

BEN

(nods, taking it in)

You know what, that's a good idea.
Maybe I'll go a different way.

ALEX

Really? Great.

(then)

You're not just telling me that
because it's what I want to hear?

BEN

Dad, we are totally on the same page.

As Ben begins to pull scarves out of his mouth, Alex winces.

INT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM

Alex comes in and collapses on the bed next to Noush who's
writing on a legal pad. He sighs dramatically.

NOUSH

Alex, I know your dramatic sighs are supposed to make me say "what's wrong?", and I will, but just lemme finish this first.

Alex sighs again; longer.

NOUSH (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Oh no, you're pulling out your "sad whale" noises? Is it that bad?

She moves to cuddle him.

NOUSH (CONT'D)

Babe you don't need Harman to sell this idea. Just be your charming, genuine, honest self. No one can resist that guy.

Alex feels like SUCH a hypocrite. He JUMPS up off the bed.

NOUSH (CONT'D)

What's the matter?! What did I say?

ALEX

Okay, I'm gonna tell you something right now, because I'm honest and all that other stuff you said, but I don't want you to freak out.

She sits back, concerned.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I spent the 401k.

She sits there a beat, her face tight with anger.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Noush, don't make that face. I'm gonna get it all back tomorrow.

She stands up, and as she talks, gathers her work.

NOUSH

Do you have any idea how hard this has been for me? I've been picking up cases to make more money, racing home for the kids because Rosalba claims "Only the devil is up after 7;"

(MORE)

NOUSH (CONT'D)

I've been dragging the kids with me wherever I go - all because I thought, this is the deal - Alex deserves a real shot at his dream. And I have tried hard not to complain about it. But you know what would have been nice in return?

ALEX

Not spending our 401k?

NOUSH

No! I mean, yes. But even nicer than that? Not lying to the person who's supposed to be your best friend.

(then)

I need to be at court early in the morning. Good luck tomorrow. Looks like we're all gonna need it.

She EXITS as Alex makes the SADDEST OF SAD WHALE SOUNDS and buries his head in the pillow.

INT. ELEVATOR, FOSTER ENTERPRISES - DAY

CLOSE ON Alex, in a coat and tie, stands there nervously.

ALEX (V.O.)

Well, if the night before wasn't bad enough, the morning of the biggest day of my life wasn't great either.

POP WIDE to reveal he's with Soraya.

ALEX

(livid)

Rosalba is dead to me.

SORAYA

She has a tummy ache.

ALEX

No, she didn't call in sick, she called in "old." Which I didn't even know you were allowed to do!

(beat)

Ok, this is a really big meeting for me. I need it to go well so I can afford to buy you food. So you need to play on my phone and be perfectly behaved, promise?

Soraya HITS ALL 40 FLOORS worth of buttons, then SMILES slyly.

SORAYA

Promise.

Alex puts his hand to his forehead.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - PRESENT

And now we're back where we were in the Cold Open:

BRETT FOSTER

...if I were calling an Uber and it said it's gonna be here in two minutes... Who are you and what are you doing? Go.

As Alex takes a second to gather his thoughts:

BRETT FOSTER (CONT'D)

Seriously, bro, I got a plane waiting for me at Teterboro. This quest ain't gonna vision itself.

ALEX

Ok... here it is. Nice and simple -
- I'm making a network of digital podcasts...that we will monetize
...uh, that is gonna meet... sorry.

BRETT FOSTER

All right, how 'bout I tell you what I would say:

(beat)

There's a hunger for quality audio content. It's a whole new button in the latest iOS. We know we can get to break even on advertising alone. But as we do more integration we think we'll ultimately scale to a network of 15 podcasts across multiple platforms and before long we're looking at a 100x company.

ALEX

Holy crap! You get it!

BRETT FOSTER

But... I could also come at it from the other side.

ALEX

Are you sure you need to? I mean, you are late for your plane.

BRETT FOSTER

In a world where everyone else is moving toward sound bytes, your deal's longform. Not to mention platform risk, competition, piracy.

ALEX

(oh shit)

But let's not forget the first stuff you said. Which was great.

BRETT FOSTER

So what I like to do when I'm on the fence is ask one question: Why will you succeed where others won't? I call it a company's 'unfair advantage.' What's yours?

ALEX (V.O.)

This was when I would have dramatically started playing my Harman story if Mr. Tender-Puss hadn't turned him into a parade balloon.

ALEX

Okay, what's our unfair advantage? (going through papers)
Well, I can show you projections which are like pretty great or... you know, really good, and... um...

Unable to think of anything, Alex makes THE SAME HAND GESTURE we saw Ben make with the hamster. Foster looks confused:

BRETT FOSTER

Well, I have no idea what that was. (standing)

I gotta run. In twelve hours I'm gonna be on iowaska riding an ostrich. Least that's what it said in the brochure. Until next time.

(to Soraya, as he EXITS)

Goodbye, tiny friend.

SORAYA

Peace out!

As Alex hangs his head, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREEINT. SCHOOL/AUDITORIUM - LATER

CLOSE UP of a BOY singing "Jellicles Can" from the musical CATS. It's horrible. Alex ENTERS with Soraya. They cross to the seats Noush has saved. Alex collapses into his, sighing.

NOUSH

Oh, no.

ALEX

It was awful. You were right. I never should have done this.

(off someone's look)

Oh, please. He's terrible. None of those are the notes. Not one.

NOUSH

What about pitching to someone else?

ALEX

There is no one else. You know how many people said 'no' to us? This was our one shot. I failed. And you don't have to say you told me so --

She shakes her head. She's not going to do that.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Actually, you can if you want. There's nothing that could possibly make this moment any worse.

P.A.

Next up, Ben Schuman's Magical World of Illusion.

ALEX

And it just got worse.

Because down on stage, Ben glides out on a hidden hoverboard under his cape and top hat, pulling a large cabinet.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wait a second, he told me he wasn't gonna do this.

Alex notices some TOUGH KIDS glaring at Ben.

BEN

Greetings, mortals!

ALEX

Oh, God.

BEN

Prepare to be transported to a magical land of wonder and illusion.

Kids laugh, not with but at Ben.

ALEX

We're gonna have to move.

NOUSH

Yeah, 'cuz we won't be able to pay our mortgage.

BEN

I need a volunteer. Someone who could fit in this box.
(looking out)
What about you?

Light hits a CUTE GIRL in the audience. She mouths "No way."

BEN (CONT'D)

Let's give her some encouragement.

The GIRL'S friends push her but she clearly doesn't want to go. Finally, she relents and walks reluctantly on stage.

BEN (CONT'D)

There we go. Big round of applause for ... sorry, what's your name?

GIRL (CHLOE)

Chloe.

BEN

Chloe, everyone! Now, before she climbs in I want everyone to see it's an ordinary cabinet. Just an empty box. So in you go, Chloe.

Chloe rolls her eyes for the benefit of her friends and CLIMBS in. Ben shuts the door and locks its many locks.

BEN (CONT'D)

Okay, now comes the fun part.

From out of a bag, he removes TWO SWORDS, and BANGS them together.

BEN (CONT'D)
Real steal swords.

ALEX
Where the hell did he get swords?

BEN
And now, dear Chloe, I am about to transport you to a land of wonder.

ALEX
I really wish he'd stop saying "land of wonder."

And with that Ben pushes the first sword through a slot in the cabinet. A blood-curdling SCREAM! The audience REACTS.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Oh, God, no, what did he do?!

As we hear Chloe screaming "No!, Why?!", Ben starts fumbling with the locks. A TEACHER rushes on stage to help. The audience is standing now. Alex is shielding his eyes.

BEN
Oh, no, no, I'm so sorry, Chloe. That wasn't supposed to happen.

And he finally gets the box open but... CHLOE'S NOT IN THERE! Ben turns to the audience, smiling.

BEN (CONT'D)
Well, that's strange. Chloe?

Alex peeks from between his fingers as Ben points to the side of the stage and now Chloe COMES RUNNING OUT with a big smile. She waves. Even her super-cool friends can't believe it. After a beat, THE CROWD GOES WILD. Alex hugs Noush.

ALEX
Oh my God! That was amazing!
(turning to other parents)
That's my son! Land of Wonder, bitches!

INT. BACKSTAGE - LATER

Kids are congratulating Ben, even the TOUGH ONES, when Alex, Soraya and Noush ENTER. Alex hugs Ben, then:

ALEX
You said you'd go a different way.

BEN

I did. Until today, Chloe was my assistant. When you said, "Fly under the radar," I figured you meant I should plant her in the audience as a reluctant volunteer.

ALEX

(beat)

Yeah, that's what I meant.

(then)

I saw some mean looks. But you kept going. It was pretty brave, Ben.

BEN

I know people who think magic is lame just haven't seen the right person do it. I know how to make magic cool. It's like you. Nobody thinks radio is cool, but when you do it, it's amazing.

Alex looks up. Oh my God! That's it! Ben's confused.

BEN (CONT'D)

What? What did I say?

ALEX

What I needed to hear! Everybody in the van. We gotta go!

EXT. TETERBORO AIRPORT - DAY - A LITTLE LATER

From A LONG SHOT, we see a mini-van speed out onto the tarmac. The van skids to a stop 20 yards from a Gulfstream. Brett Foster is walking up the stairway when he looks behind him to see the commotion. Alex jumps out and runs toward him.

ALEX (V.O.)

Ben made me see that a tape of Harman isn't my secret weapon...

ALEX

(shouting)

I AM!

BRETT FOSTER

Hey! How'd you get out here?

ALEX

I may have driven through a security gate or two. But I had to tell you something.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

You asked me earlier, What's my company's unfair advantage? Well, it's me.

(off Foster's look)

What I do is hard. And no one does it better than I do. Someone is gonna make a lot of money doing the kinds of shows I do but they're gonna need me to do it. So if you don't want in, I'll find somebody who does.

(then, quieter)

And that's what I wanted to say. Sounded better in my head.

BRETT FOSTER

No, man, that's exactly what I wanted to see from you. Some balls. Driving out here, bashing through a gate -- which those guys are definitely gonna arrest you for --

Two security vehicles, sirens blaring, are approaching.

BRETT FOSTER (CONT'D)

-- that's ballsy. And that's what it takes to start a company.

(then)

Before I go all in, though... You haven't told me what the actual shows are gonna be. Like, what're you thinking for the first one?

A beat. With Harman out, Alex isn't sure. Then he hears:

NOUSH (O.S.)

It should be this.

Alex looks back to see Noush, holding Soraya, with Ben, still in his magician's outfit, standing next to her. Noush takes a step forward:

NOUSH (CONT'D)

This is his first show. A guy like Alex, with a family like us - a guy who probably has no business starting a business but he's going for it anyway. And his family will get in his way - and sometimes they'll prop him up. And he'll make mistakes, he'll fall on his face, he'll lie to his wife - but she'll forgive him - because she knows how badly he wants this.

Alex smiles at her, she smiles back, then continues:

NOUSH (CONT'D)

And we don't know how it'll turn out, but win or lose I think people are gonna love to watch him try.

BRETT FOSTER

(a beat, then nods)

Love that! Yeah, the American dream. I could sell that. I'm in.

(walking off, then stopping)

Call it Start Up.

And with that, Foster turns and heads onto his plane. MUSIC CUE as Alex hugs Noush and then the rest of his family beings to celebrate and his family joins him.

ALEX (V.O.)

And just like that we were on our way and suddenly none of it felt like a mistake. I was a small businessman now and I knew nothing could stop me.

Just then, TWO SECURITY GUYS SLAM Alex against the side of their car and slap handcuffs on him.

ALEX

You're wasting your time, boys. My son's a magician!

(re: cuffs)

Ben, get these off me.

Ben does the FUNNY MAGIC GESTURE. Nothing happens.

BEN

I guess I don't know that one yet.

And as security leads a very happy Alex away, the camera PULLS BACK and we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

TAGINT. ALEX AND NOUSH'S APARTMENT, GARAGE - DAY

Alex has gathered his family, Eddie and Deirdre to witness him lay down the first track for their first show.

ALEX

This is it, everyone. It all comes down to this moment. Everything we worked for, everything we've risked, everything we've sacri --

SORAYA

Come on, Dad, I'm bored.

NOUSH

Yeah, Al, speed it up --

DEIRDRE

Amazing speech --

*
*

BEN

I actually need to go meet my friend Chloe for frozen yogurt.

EDDIE

(with a wink)

Check out Dumbledore with the moves.

ALEX

All right, without further adieu...

He gets into the booth, puts on his headphones, flips on the record button and begins to speak into the mic:

ALEX (CONT'D)

This is the first recording for episode 1 of Start Up. Here goes.
(from the opening)
One month ago, I had a good job, the kind of job most people would kill for..

Alex puts his legal pad down on the console and instantly we HEAR a weird tearing sound and suddenly, all four walls of the booth fall outward, leaving Alex standing exposed in an empty space with a microphone hanging above...

ALEX (CONT'D)

(bleeped)

Fuck Carly Rae Jepsen.

BLACK OUT.

END OF SHOW