

FADE IN:

EXT. SAN DIEGO DOWNTOWN -- NIGHT (PRESENT TIME)

A four-story mid-rise building looms over a quiet street, retail shops on the ground floor, condo's above. Gigantic "Close Out" signs scream a new project in financial distress.

INT. RETAIL STORE -- CONTINUOUS

Tenant improvements are underway. Sawhorses, drywall sheets, paint buckets -- construction materials abound. Windows are completely covered with construction paper.

A ladder protrudes through the drop ceiling. Gloved hands scrape away the foam fire protection on steel structural beams, exposing weld joints. A rust-colored powder is sprinkled lavishly on the weld. A light-colored liquid is applied with a stick leading to the powder. The stick is discarded.

INT. ANOTHER RETAIL STORE -- CONTINUOUS

Tenant improvements are further along. Shelves and cabinets are ready to receive clothing. Construction paper covers the windows.

A different pair of gloved hands are seen. The hands scrape away the foam fire protection.

EXT. MID-RISE BUILDING, ROOF -- CONTINUOUS

A man in dark clothing scuttles around the ventilation equipment. A third pair of different gloves are seen. A seam in the sheet metal roofing is pried apart, sheet metal pulled back, exposing a weld joint on a steel beam. A rust-colored powder is sprinkled on the weld.

INT. UTILITY AREA, MID-RISE BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

The first set of gloved hands opens a commercial grade electrical panel, adjusts the wiring expertly, clips two wires and crosses them. Sparks fly and paint thinner is sprayed at the sparks until a fire starts. A line of thinner is laid down leading to nearby wood members. The wood members are doused in thinner. Another can is opened and it, too, is emptied. The cans are tossed aside. The fire lights up the enclosed utility space.

INT. FINSTERWALD BEDROOM, MID-RISE BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

ROY FINSTERWALD (45), in Batman pajamas, stirs then awakens to the cacophony of birds inside his unit. The clock reads "3:16."

INT. FINSTERWALD STUDY, MID-RISE BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

The birds' noise is deafening. Roy switches on the light. Four large Macaws in gigantic separate cages squawk at max volume and flutter against the cages' bars. Roy is barely functioning.

Roy notices smoke coming from the wall register. He edges closer.

ROY
What the hell?

As he approaches the register it glows red hot and the wall bursts into flames. Roy rushes to the nearest cage and struggles to move it. Too big, too heavy. He opens the cage door and the Macaw flies out and collides into a wall. He opens the cage doors for the other three.

The room has filled with smoke. Roy drops to the floor and crawls to the door and yells through violent coughs,

ROY (CONT'D)
Follow me. Follow me.

Sirens mix with the Macaws' screeches.

INT. O'LEARY APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

CHLOE O'LEARY (27), blonde, energetic, athletic build, blends a morning smoothie while watching the morning news which features several fire trucks at the mid-rise building, which has tilted. The blender stops and we hear the TV.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
. . . Fire authorities state the
building is a total loss. The cause
of the fire is under investigation.

Chloe sips her smoothie while placing a bid through E-Bay on her laptop. She watches the bidding for a moment, shakes her head, closes the laptop, slides it in her briefcase, fusses her hair and heads for the door.

EXT. MID-RISE BUILDING -- DAY

A FEW FIREFIGHTERS pack their gear as a PRIVATE SECURITY guard positions yellow plastic "Keep Out" tape around the tilted building.

JOHNNY CHANG (Asian, 45), a touch pudgy, examines the tilting building and snaps quick photographs. He walks to another vantage point, takes a few more pictures. We see a broad smile when he takes the camera away from his face.

INT. FOSTER LAW FIRM, CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Roy Finsterwald meets with MARSHALL FOSTER (65), long grey hair, casually dressed. Roy is rail thin, hair every which way, and still soot-covered from the fire. Roy wipes tears.

ROY

They were great birds, Marshall.
Great birds.

(a beat)

Money-makers, too.

Marshall nods his sympathy.

ROY (CONT'D)

They died bravely. Bravely.

(a beat, a sniffle)

Kids loved 'em. Loved 'em.

FOSTER

I saw their act one time. Your Dad
took me.

ROY

What'd you think?

Foster phrases carefully.

FOSTER

They were interesting, Roy.

(a beat)

I miss your Dad. Three years?

ROY

Almost four.

FOSTER

Any others hurt?

ROY

I doubt it. I was the only owner.
I used to ride the elevators, nude,
just because I could.

(a beat)

Just workmen on the ground floor.

Foster sees through the glass conference room walls Chloe enter at the main door. He stands, gestures to her.

FOSTER

Here she is now.

Chloe enters.

FOSTER (CONT'D)

Chloe O'Leary. Meet Roy Finsterwald.
Long-time friend of the firm.