

BARK

by
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WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ
IS INSPIRED BY TRUE ACCOUNTS.

JUST KIDDING

A dog BARKS.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

It's loud, grating.

Ggrrr. Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

And shows no signs of stopping, as we,

FADE IN:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR PHILADELPHIA -- SNOWY MORNING

On a residential street, awash in snow...

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

...deep within a blue-collar neighborhood...

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

...Stands a weatherworn, red-brick and wood, two-story duplex with two front doors greeting the street.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

INT. DUPLEX -- HOWARD JOHNSON'S HOME OFFICE -- 2ND FLOOR

HOWARD'S P.O.V.

Looking out window, down at a GREYHOUND DOG running amuck in the neighboring backyard. (NOTE: The yards are split by a rickety-looking privacy fence.) Dog stares back. It knows someone's up here, hunting it... plotting.

Pull back and reveal,

HOWARD JOHNSON,

Mid 30s, with everyday, middle-guy looks.

Howard leans stooped shoulder against the office wall, staring fixedly out the window with a slit-throat gaze.

He's draped in a frayed, hole-riddled bathrobe -- naked beneath it. His off-putting appearance, highlighted by a hideously swollen black eye.

He just stands there fixedly.

After a stoic beat,

He retreats for a pack of matches that lay like flotsam among a wreckage of tossed books and crumpled stationary.

The office is a total mess, ransacked.

Scribbled down on the back jacket of the matches, is a phone number:

215-556-5651

Howard ferrates through the wreckage -- there it is. Fishes his cell phone from out of a puddle of vomit. Wipes it clean using his bathrobe -- then dials the phone number.

Call connects.

He pops an earplug out of his ear out -- and then says...

HOWARD

(into phone)

Hey, it's me. That dandelion in my garden. I want it plucked.

SMASH TO:

TITLE OVER:

BARK

INT. DUPLEX -- HOWARD'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Howard lies asleep in bed -- sans previous black eye.

Nearby on a night stand, an alarm clock sits -- Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Then,

Er!Er!Er!Er!Er! It screams to life.

Howard snaps upright. Lips smack together, wetting his dry mouth.

Covers toss aside. And Howard peels himself off the mattress. Stretches into a reinvigorating yawn -- then shuffles across the bedroom, into the master bathroom.

As he pees:

Near the bathroom doorway, propped up on a dresser -- with a STICKY NOTE clinging to its face -- sits a PHOTOGRAPH...

...It's an 8 x 10 HEADSHOT of Howard sporting a childlike grin. He's wearing a flannel flatcap, some geek-chic eyewear, and a sporty blazer -- all in a look that suggests: intellectual -- yet hip.

The sticky note reads:

THIS ONE, SNUGGLE BUG! GOOD LUCK!

in purple, flowery handwriting.

INT. HOWARD'S KITCHEN -- SHORTLY AFTER

Recently renovated: new cabinets and marble countertops.

TV CHATTER wafts in from another room,

LOCAL NEWS REPORTER (O.S.)

...the burn marks appear to be consistent with those of a stun gun. So, as of now, it does seem to appear to be, the Dead End Killer is back.

Howard shuffles in, sleepy-headed, donning the hole-riddled bathrobe.

He rifles open a cupboard door. Pulls down a vacuum-sealed bag of coffee. Ugh. Cringes. Store brand. Slides the bag back on the shelf.

INT. DUPLEX -- HOWARD'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Howard sits at his desk, still dressed in the trusty bathrobe, staring blankly at the bright screen of his laptop for a beat, then finally types the words:

UNTITLED Y.A. PROJECT

He then resumes staring blankly at the glowing screen.

Finally, giving up, he closes the laptop.

EXT. DUPLEX -- HOWARD'S FRONT DOOR -- MORNING

Not a snowflake in sight.

The same sleek-bodied, lanky-legged GREYHOUND DOG from before takes a shit on Howard's side of the duplex's yellowing front lawn.

Dressed for the day, Howard bowls out the front door, shouldering a leather writers' satchel. He catches NiNim crapping on his lawn...

HOWARD

Scat! Shew! Get outta here!

A high-pitched whistle pierces through the frigid air. Howard cringes. Then spins around to see:

His duplex neighbor -- a shriveled, brackish-looking old woman by the name of **MS. PETERMEN**, 82. She sticks a lit cigar back in her mouth, sucks on it as she gestures to NiNim from atop her front stoop.

MS. PETERMEN

NiNim, come. Meds time.

HOWARD

G'mornin, Ms. P.

Ms. Petermen coughs -- it's a phlegmy, hacking sound.

HOWARD

You feelin' okay?

She fiddles with her hearing aid.

MS. PETERMEN

Whuh?

HOWARD

Nothing. He yours? He's a cutie.

Howard crosses for NiNim, his hands at the ready to deliver a friendly petting on the pet,

HOWARD

I'm more of a fish guy, myself.
You just get him--

--Howard stumbles forward. CRUNCH. NiNim howls in excruciating pain.

MS. PETERMEN

(livid)

Y'not see his paw there?

NiNim cowers beside Ms. Petermen, tail tucked and quaking fearfully.

HOWARD

It wasn't on purpose, Ms. P. I slipped--

MS. PETERMEN

I doubt that very much, Mr. Johnson. Now he'll need to be checked for broken toes.

HOWARD

Seems excessive for--

MS. PETERMEN

Crushing a dog's paw in retribution for defecating on your lawn is excessive.

HOWARD

Only that's not what happened--

MS. PETERMEN

I thought better of you, Mr. Johnson. I certainly did.

She turns to storm back inside. But then spins back around...

MS. PETERMEN

And so you know, Mr. Johnson, I do not hold an income that allows for frivolous expenditures at the vet, so do be expecting the bill.

(then)

Come NiNim. Inside. Mean man won't hurt you again.

Ms. Petermen and NiNim scamper back inside. Front door slams shut in anger.

INT. HOWARD'S SMART FORTWO (DRIVING) -- DAY

Cramped inside the tiny hybrid vehicle, Howard cruises along, caught up in mid-morning traffic.

His cell phone rings. He answers.

HOWARD

Hello?

A thin, quivering voice responds,

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Larry?

HOWARD

Sorry, buddy, but once again you've dialed the wrong number.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Larry?

HOWARD

No Larry. Only Howard. You dialed--

CLICK.

HOWARD

You just hang up on me?

(then, pocketing
phone)

Stop calling me, please, y'old
fart.

INT. MICHAEL'S DINER -- DAY (LITTLE LATER)

A folksy-looking kickback.

Airy acoustic guitar music plays softly overhead as a sweaty-looking DINER EMPLOYEE mops the post-breakfast lobby.

He dunks the mop head in the bucket. Slops it back down on the tile floor -- with no regard for customer safety.

This is **MURPHY COX**, late 20s, oafish, with a gummy bear-like quality about him. But currently, he looks disgruntled. Mumbling to himself softly as he mad-dogs some one standing across the way.

ACROSS THE WAY

Stands Howard. Patiently waiting to be notified his to-go order is ready -- oblivious to Murphy clocking him from across the diner.

Murphy seizes the opportunity and head down, beelines for Howard -- still mopping the floor as he crosses.

Then,

The soggy mop head slappity-slap-slaps over Howard's canvas sneakers, coating the fabric in a black, grimy liquid.

MURPHY

Oooops. First-day jitters, I
guess.

Howard scolds Murphy with a chiding glare -- then simply moves away to the sanctity of a booth, where he sits.

MURPHY
I bothering you?

HOWARD
Is kinda why I moved.

MURPHY
You got bushy eyebrows.

HOWARD
Your mopping is subpar.

MURPHY
Trisha sent you. Didn't she?

HOWARD
Who?

MURPHY
You tell that skank whore--but
don't tell 'er I said skank--you
tell 'er those were my steak
knives, and she's lucky I don't
sue her for giving me herpes.

COUNTER PERSON shouts from behind the service counter...

COUNTER PERSON
...HOWARD JOHNSON.

Howard answers -- never shifting narrowed eyes off
Murphy,

HOWARD
Yes.

COUNTER PERSON
Your to-go is ready, sugar.

HOWARD
Thank you.

MURPHY
Wait... Howard Johnson? Class of
2000, Howard Johnson?

HOWARD
Yes. I'm sorry, but do I know you?

MURPHY
We went to school together. Oh,
and I was just kidding about the
herpes, I don't really got 'em.

HOWARD

Congratulations.

MURPHY

So I hear you're like a celebrity now.

HOWARD

Celebrity? Really? Well I don't know about that. Well, I guess, yeah, maybe locally.

(then, light-bulb moment)

David?! David Ratley?!

MURPHY

Ahh. Okay.

HOWARD

Oh, man, wow, you look--so what's been going on? You work here? I've not seen you around. Not to sound crass, but I actually thought you'd died years ago.

MURPHY

Still alive. Haha. Heartbeat and everything. Just moved back a couple weeks ago. Needa get some shit de-shitted -- but you know how it goes.

HOWARD

Not really, but I guess. Sure.

Howard collects his to-go coffee and muffin. Slips two, one-dollar bills into the tip jar. But on second thought, he reclaims one -- exchanging it for a couple pennies.

HOWARD

Whelp. I've got this meeting that I can't be late for. Big day for me.

(then)

But was nice running into you, David.

MURPHY

Yeah. You too, Howard. Good luck with your meeting.

EXT. MICHAEL'S DINER -- PARKING LOT -- CONTINUING

Howard crosses the parking lot for his car.

HOWARD (PRE-LAP)

Nice place.

CHARLES (PRE-LAP)

Don't get too used to it, it's only temporary.

INT. CHARLES' STUFFY OFFICE -- DAY

Howard squirms in a rickety chair, struggling to get comfy -- as he trade looks with a scruffy-looking literary agent -- **CHARLES**, in his 40s.

HOWARD

You said she cleaned you out in the divorce, but not at this level of cleaning. Quite depressing.

Howard is hold up in a depressing cubbyhole of an office with four papery, faux wood-panel walls. A wobbly desk and dented file cabinet. Two portable heaters work on double overtime.

CHARLES

Told you. Now shut up so I can swing my hammer...

...dials a phone number. And then,

CHARLES

Hello? -- It's me. -- Yeah. --
What time? -- Six-thirty is fine. --
- Kay. -- Kay. -- No. Six-thirty
will work. -- Okay.

(to Howard)

Dude, knock it off. You're gonna break my chair.

(into phone)

-- Sure. -- What about--okay. --
Okay. -- No. -- No. -- Bye.

Charles hangs up. Mops sweat from his brow. Then speaks,

CHARLES

Tyler's bookstore. Six-thirty.
Don't be late. Bring snacks--
milk and cookies.

(then)

Sugar free. Make it kool aid.
 Cookies and kool aid. Sugar free.

HOWARD

So?

Searching the clutter suffocating the desktop,

CHARLES

She even got the fish.

HOWARD

Not, Clarence, too.

Charles accidentally uncovers a handgun -- swiftly covers it back over with Howard's HEADSHOT photo.

HOWARD

Screw her, man. She was the devil, anyway.

Charles tosses Howard the file. Howard opens it, expectantly.

HOWARD

(befuddled)
 This my contract?

CHARLES

More notes.

HOWARD

This meeting was for me to sign an agreement with them, Charles.

CHARLES

Circumstances changed.
 (off Howard's defiant look)
 C'mon, dude, she's the editor. Without her recommendation -- we've got no publisher. Like, dead in the water.

HOWARD

I can't keep changing my story to accommodate her fickled dithering. Does she even know my first two books went number one on A Nile Of Books dot com? Does she?

CHARLES

This is the majors, now. Not some farm ball league--self-publishing e-books, bullshit. Listen. As your agent, my advice is you give her what she wants and leave the prima donna act for the next book.

Howard begins thumbing through the notes halfheartedly.

HOWARD

Of course. Look. She's wants more sexual tension. Maybe they can go all the way--it's a book for middle schoolers, for godsakes, and now she wants more--what's this? Feels the mood needs more brooding? What does that even mean?

CHARLES

Kids want their sex and brooding -- even in middle school.

HOWARD

She's practically requesting an overhaul.

CHARLES

Look. You're on the cusp of something huge here, potentially franchise, don't let your ego block you from achieving something spectacular.

Howard takes another glance at the notes.

HOWARD

She wants me to copy and paste the waterfall moment back in.

CHARLES

Tell you what, finish the series -- modeled around how she wants it -- and I might happen to bring up your young adult story idea to her the next time we lunch.

HOWARD

Really? So you're onboard with me on that, then?

(then)

Well. Maybe the waterfall scene is missing a little sexual tension.

I'm gonna need at least a month to make the edits.

CHARLES

Y've got ten days. Wants to shop it as a package deal during next month's conference.

HOWARD

Ten days!

Charles mops trickles of sweat from his forehead.

HOWARD

You feel okay? Look like you don't.

CHARLES

Never better.

(then)

Now get outta here, you scamp. Go write. Make it sparkle.

Howard gathers his bag -- giving Charles enough time to make sure the handgun is still there. It is.

HOWARD

Things will get better. Just be patience. Kay? I'm here for you if you ever need to talk. Kay, buddy?

Mopping more sweat off his cheeks. Wait. No -- those are tears.

CHARLES

What are you talking about?

HOWARD

Never mind.

CHARLES

Go write. This one will be your finest, I can feel it.

Howard lifts up on a knob jutting from one of the faux wood-paneled walls.

EXT. U-HAUL SELF-STORAGE COMPLEX -- DAY

The overhead door of a self-storage shed clanks upward. Howard steps out into the narrow labyrinth of alleyway lining between the rows of storage sheds.

HOWARD

Before I forget, I got the blog up
and running -- looks amazing. And
I'm tweeting more. So.

CHARLES

Ten days, Howard.

INT. HOWARD'S SMART FORTWO (TRAVELING)-- DAY

With withered spirits, Howard cruises along, caught up in
the busy mid-day traffic.

HOWARD

Ten days. Why am I such a sucker?
Such bullshit.

Cell phone rings. He answers.

HOWARD

Hello?

OLD MAN

Larry?

INT. WAWA FOOD MART/GAS STATION -- NIGHT

Murphy -- fresh off work -- tromps over to the checkout
counter, juggling two 'the works' hotdogs. A donut. And
a Diet Sprite.

MURPHY

(to cashier)

Thought you got crushed by a
house.

A tatted-out, sassy, "I hate everyone" cashier, named
SHELLY, 23, snaps back,

SHELLY

O. M. G. Stop the presses --
fatty's come for more snacks.

Shelly starts scanning his purchase. While Murphy fishes
a crumpled dollar bill from his pocket.

MURPHY

S'cuse me. A number twenty-seven.
No. Twenty-two. The dollar one.
That one.

Shelly tears an INSTANT LOTTO SCRATCHER from its spool.
Flicks the ticket at Murphy.

Murphy scratches away: CRAZY CHERRY. CRAZY CHERRY. CRAZY CHERRY. WHA-WHA-WHA ORANGE.

MURPHY

(anguished)

What's a man gotta do to catch a break around here?!

(then, calmly)

As you were.

Shelly taps her finger on the total-price reader. And Murphy swipes his bank card.

Card reader BEEPS.

SHELLY

Oh, how embarrassing. Someone's got insufficient funds.

MURPHY

That's right. Silly me. I dropped a grand yesterday at this charity event. It's important we support our underprivileged youth -- or at least, I think so.

Murphy swipes his bank card. This time presses: CREDIT

Reader BEEPS.

MURPHY

Ruh-roh.

SHELLY

Such a loser.

MURPHY

Sparkling attitude, Shelly.

Murphy recedes to the door to leave,

SHELLY

You gonna put this shit back where you found it?

MURPHY

You always assume the worst from me...

...flees out the front door.

INT. MS. PETERMEN'S PLACE -- NIGHT

A poorly lit, unsettling place with antiques and cobwebs galore.

Stale stench of urine and mothballs wafts through the air. Ms. Petermen sits kicked back in an old Victorian armchair. She knits on a doggie sweater of many colors -- one bedazzled in JINGLY metal bells.

NiNim yawns himself awake. Then nails CLACK across the creaky hardwood floor, as NiNim wanders over to Ms. Petermen. And sits.

MS. PETERMEN

Baby need potty?

Dog's tail starts wagging.

INT. HOWARD'S HOME OFFICE -- NIGHT

Clean. Organized. Not even a pencil is out of place.

A kitty poster hangs posted on the wall, encouraging others to just: HANG IN THERE.

Howard sits behind a desk, draped in his trusty bathrobe. He's deep in thought -- face bathed in the blue glow of his laptop.

Editor's notes wait open, nearby.

It's peaceful in here. Quiescent. Only the rhythmic rapping of fingers on keyboard.

Words spill across the computer screen. Howard's in the zone. Unstoppable. That is until,

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

Rapes his concentration. Brows furrow in annoyance. He stops typing. Then, fingers tap on the desk, impatiently, as Howard waits for the barking to dissipate.

Moments later,

NiNim stops barking.

Howard gets back to the nitty-gritty.

Ggrrrr. Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

Irritated gasp. Howard stops typing. Reads what he wrote. Grimaces, unimpressed. Backspaces a few times.

Then waits for the barking to subside. Again.

Barking subsides. But just as quickly,

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Picks back up.

HOWARD

C'mon! You cannot be serious?!

Howard crosses to the window -- peels back the blind to look outside.

MS. PETERMEN'S BACKYARD -- SAME

NiNim barks murder.

While Howard leers down from the second-story window with a pestered scowl.

BACK TO,

Howard slides the window open.

HOWARD

Hey. Quite your crowing--

NiNim EXPLODES! -- Barking hysterically.

Window slams shut. Blind drops. And swivels closed.

Howard sits back down in his chair. Collects himself with a deep inhale. Exhale. Then gets back to work.

Buttons CLACK. Words roll across the laptop screen.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

Backspacing -- words deleted.

Ruff. Ruff. Backspace. Backspace. Clacking. *Ruff. Ruff.* Clacking. *Ruff.* Backspace. Backspace. *Ruff. Ruff.* Clacking. *Ruff.* Back-Ruff-space.

Howard throws his hands up, exasperated. Wrangles his laptop -- editor's notes -- and other necessities -- then storms out of the room in childlike protest.

INT. MICHAEL'S DINER -- NIGHT

Sparsely crowed with a CUSTOMER here. CUSTOMER there.

RANDOM GUY (O.S.)

Aah-Hahaha!

A RANDOM GUY sits, slurping a milkshake, loitering at the diner's bartop. He giggles boisterously, watching a movie on his smartphone.

RANDOM GUY

Ohh-ah-hahaha!

Settled in a booth, off by himself, is Howard, working feverishly on his laptop -- cup of coffee within reach.

RANDOM GUY

Nuh-uh! Ah-hahahaha!

Howard murders Random Guy with his eyes -- from across the diner.

Suddenly, the diner's front door kicks open.

Murphy blows in like a tremendous gust of wind.

Still wheezing from the brisk sprint to the door, he says,

MURPHY

Julie. You cool?

JULIE, 20s, crosses by...

JULIE

What do I care?

...on her trip over to top Howard's coffee off.

HOWARD

(preoccupied)

Thank you.

Murphy flinches -- Shit. Howard's back. He ducks back out the front door.

DINER KITCHEN AREA -- SAME

The pungent aroma of onion-ring grease weighs heavy in the air as two LINE-COOKS, 20s, work the grills, fryers, and every other workstation this apt, but confined space has to offer.

THIN LINE-COOK

Or lets say, maybe a new I-Phone
hits the market. We wait in line
to purchase the item for our
client, and they pay us for doing
it. That's it. That's the job.
Waiting in long lines for people.

TUBBY LINE-COOK

Can you say, GENIUS?!

Two chest bump.

Murphy ducks in through the kitchen's steel, delivery
door.

TUBBY LINE-COOK

I can finally use my camping gear.

THIN LINE-COOK

What that is -- they call it fate.

Chest bump.

Murphy slides a heaping plate of nachos under the heating
lamp. Then turns toward the two and says,

MURPHY

You guys hear about D.E.K?
Snatched some chick's tongue --
ripped it right outta her face.

Licking his fingertips,

MURPHY

Cops 're out looking for it right
now. Crazy, right? Y'know how
many places there are to stash a
human tongue? Hundreds I bet.

(then)

Pull my nachos when they're done,
kay? Gonna go chuck a rock at
some birds.

Murphy grabs a honey-bear waterbong from under the
counter and slips back through the waiters' door, into
the,

DINING ROOM

Murphy scuttles past and slips through the men's room
door -- while Howard looks the other way, talking on his
cell phone,

HOWARD

No. I did sign, but just wanna
make a few minor alterations
before it goes to publishing.

INT. LAVISH HOTEL SUITE -- SAME

Bethany sits kicked-back on a big, comfy couch, playing a
shoot 'em up -type video game.

BETHANY

Minor alterations. as in?

INTERCUT,

HOWARD

A tweak here and there. Nothing
major. But listen to this:
there's talk of a package deal.

BETHANY

That's wonderful, Snuggle Bug!

ON VIDEO GAME: Bethany creeps up behind an enemy soldier
(RED TEAM. She's BLUE TEAM.) hiding in a building with a
sniper rifle resting on a window sill.

She holster's her weapon, opting to snap the enemy
soldier's neck, instead -- SNAP.

BETHANY

GOTTCHA!!!
(then, to Howard)
I'll call Samantha and let her
know.

END INTERCUT

HOWARD

Let's hold off until the check
arrives, just incase. -- No. A
diner. -- The one down the street
from us. -- Pretentious and
cliche.

Howard motions to Julie: he'll be right back. Julie nods
back: so the fuck what?

DINER MEN'S ROOM

One stall. Two urinals. Green, paint-chipped walls.

Gurgling sound of a WATER-BONG, BUBBLING, lofts over the lip of the men's room stall.

Followed by. Silence. Then,

A lighter FLICKS. Flicks. Fli--more bubbling.

Restroom door kicks open. Howard swaggers in,

HOWARD

She just adopted one--smells like weed in here.

Howard steps to a urinal. Flushes. WHOOSH. Then goes about his business.

HOWARD

Huh? -- It won't stop barking at me. -- Using the bathroom. -- Yeah. Like someone smoked weed. -- I hate writing in public. I need quiescence. Perfect isolation. -- Music's a distraction, sweetie. -- I don't know, that's just my process; why I love having an kick butt office at home.

Surreptitiously, Murphy glimpses over the lip of the stall -- his face, smoke choked. His eyes flare wide at the sight of Howard. Quickly ducks back down for cover.

HOWARD

Did you not hear me? Ms. Petermen adopted a dog. -- No. Greyhound dog. Seriously?

Howard shakes off -- 3 times keeps it dry -- and flushes the urinal -- WHOOSH.

HOWARD

NumNum or something. -- Won't stop barking. Can you not hear me -- Then I'll call you back. -- No, when I'm on the--yeah. Okay? -- Kay. Bye. Lov--

--CLICK. She hangs up on him mid-sentence.

Howard pockets the phone. Washes hands. Then shuffles out the doorway, back into the dining room.

Door swings shut. HEAVY EXHALE. Lighter FLICKS. Flic-- bubbling of water.

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Howard gathers his belongings, preparing to leave.

When,

Murphy scrambles up -- his eyes glint like two glossy rubies under the harsh lighting of the diner.

MURPHY

Sounds like you got yourself a
pickle of a doozy.

Murphy COUGHS. Small puff of smoke escapes his lips.
Lingers in the air between the two. Oops. Fans it away.

HOWARD

David, what are you--

MURPHY

--Let me help. I know this bad ass
who deals with dandelions for a
living...

...Wink. Wink.

MURPHY

Y'know? Weeds. Plucks 'um from
gardens?...

...Wink. Wink.

HOWARD

Great. But I don't have a garden.
So...

MURPHY

Ha-ha.
(then)
No. I mean your: Ruff. Ruff. Errr.
Ruff. -- situation.

Murphy checks the coast is clear. It's not. But he
slips Howard a pack of matches anyway.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

We're talking Navy SEAL, black
market shit so keep it on the D.L.

Murphy crosses to go back through the waiters' door,

HOWARD

You've got the wrong impression.

MURPHY

Do I? Well, you've got my number.
Call it, I'll set this up. Don't,
then I won't. What do I care? I
don't have a book to write.

Murphy dips back into the kitchen area.

INT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM -- THAT NIGHT

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Howard tosses and turns in bed,
battling for sleep.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Wrestling with his blanket.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Punching his pillow, red with
irritation.

HOWARD

C'mon! Shut up!

Fed up, Howard leaps to the bedroom window.

HOWARD

Grrrrrrr.

Slides the window open. And yells out,

HOWARD

You mind? I'm trying--

NiNim explodes -- *Ruff.Ruff.Grrrr.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.*

HOWARD

Shut up!

Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.Grrrr.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.

HOWARD

Listen, I'm sorry I stepped on
your foot - okay?

Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.Ruff.

Window slams shut.

HOWARD

(stewing)
Keep barking, buddy. That's
right. Keep barking. Hahaha. What
goes around--

--Tears his blanket off the bed. Snatches his pillow.
And storms out of the room in childlike protest.

INT. HOWARD'S KITCHEN -- NEXT MORNING

Howard slugs lethargically up to a cabinet. Dark bags hang heavily under his eyes.

He pulls down a glass. Fumbles it -- SMASH -- glass shatters on the kitchen floor.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Punches him through the wall.

Howard erupts in a tantrum. Storms out the kitchen. In childlike protest.

EXT. MS. PETERMEN'S FRONT DOOR -- DAY

KNOCK. KNOCK. Howard KNOCK KNOCKS on the door, again.

Behind Howard, a HANDYMAN approaches, lugging a tool box, power saw and a doggie-door build. He brushes past Howard and through the front door -- into the duplex.

Howard seizes the opportunity, follows him in -- clutching a dog muzzle. Price tag still dangles from it.

Door shuts. Then is thrown back open. Spitting Howard out onto Ms. Petermen's front stoop.

Ms. Petermen charges out the doorway, after him.

MS. PETERMEN

A MUZZLE!! How dare you suggest torturing a dog to me. I thought better of you, Mr. Johnson. You are truly an evil, evil man.

NiNim rockets out the doorway like missile, lunging at Howard with intense furry. Howard juke-steps the attack. But NiNim is quick -- nimble-- whips back around and chases Howard across the lawn -- back to his front door.

Where,

Howard hurdles the steps and scrambles back inside.

Door slams shut with a CLAP.

AN EAR-PIERCINGLY LOUD WHISTLE.

NiNim retreats, tail wagging, as he trots back over to Ms. Petermen. He looks happy. Satiated.

So does Ms. Petermen.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS AFTER

Howard paces, upset.

Cell phone to his ear,

HOWARD

Well it isn't so much an emergency as I'm being harassed. -- Um. My neighbor's dog. -- Yeah. More of a grievance. It's just--it's behaving really mean toward me.

BEGIN SERIES

INT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Flopping around on the mattress, frustrated, fighting for sleep. Howard tries desperately to grapple against the *Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Ruffing*, leaking in from outside.

HOWARD (V.O.)

A greyhound. -- I understand. Only this one's not.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM -- DIFFERENT DAY

Different clothes. Same bathrobe on. He looks more diminished -- unkept-looking,

HOWARD

(into cell phone)
No. No. Hasn't attacked me yet.

INT. HOWARD'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Looking out window, down at a squirrel running across the lip of the shared, rickety privacy fence.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Animal Control? -- Well they referred me to you guys.

The happy little squirrel crosses onto Ms. Petermen's side. Is immediately picked off the fence line by a set of jaws.

Howard recoils in horror at the sight.

Then,

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. NiNim starts barking.

INT. HOWARD'S KITCHEN -- ANOTHER DAY

Even more bedraggled-looking,

 HOWARD
 (into cell phone)
 911 said I needed to call--no. I
 did that. -- Filing a complaint.

EXT. LOCAL SHOPPING CENTER -- DAY

Howard crosses to his car. Clutched in his hand, is a package of earplugs -- the bullet-looking, foamy kind.

 HOWARD (V.O.)
 Can I speak to your supervisor? --
 I get that, but I'd still like to
 speak with your supervisor.

INT. A BUSTLING COFFEE JOINT -- NIGHT

Howard. Anemic. Disheveled. Sits, hunkered down in a small table.

Fingers hammer feverishly on a keyboard.

 HOWARD (V.O.)
 Why do I--hold for what? -- But
 hold for--c'mon! Hello? Hello?

A clique of HIPSTER-GEEKS, 18-22, pick out a spot to sit. It's right next to Howard. They laugh. Shout in merriment -- just enjoying their beverages -- sharing youth.

Howard, flushed crimson by aggravation, scowls, crams the earplugs deeper into his ears. Then continues typing.

EXT. HOWARD'S PLACE -- MAILBOX -- DAY

Howard checks the mailbox.

Finds a VETERINARIAN'S BILL waiting for him inside the mailbox.

HOWARD

Ugh.

He turns to walk away and steps into a pile of dog poo.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Yes, but how many times do I need
to call before you send someone?

INT. HOWARD'S SMART FORTWO -- DAY

As Howard works on his book, a blizzard rages outside the car's windows.

Howard's laptop blinks off -- battery drained.

He starts punching the steering wheel, beyond livid.

HOWARD (V.O.)

...but you people refuse to do
anything about it. -- Then
(apoplectic)
WHY. IS. NOTHING. BEING. DONE.
THEN?

Howard's cell phone rings. He stops hitting the steering wheel to answer it,

HOWARD

(into phone)

Hello?

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Larry?

END SERIES

INT. HOWARD'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

More raucous BARKING streams in from off screen.

Howard, now plastered drunk, staggers in, phone still pressed to his ear.

He flails around a bottle of whisky, clutched in hand.

HOWARD
 No. Bullshit. That's incorrect,
 congressman!

Pulls a swig off the whisky bottle -- then,

HOWARD
 (SUPERNOVA)
 NO! CONGRESSMAN SHEPHERDS? HELLO?
 ARRRGH!

Whiskey bottle smashes against the office wall --
 shatters. HOWARD SMASH:

The 'Hang In There" kitty poster tears in half -- off the
 wall. Howard shreds it. Even eats a piece.

HOWARD SMASH! Flips the desk over. A WHITE BOARD snaps
 in half. He punches the wall. Screams. Etc. Etc.

Then finally,

Panting heavily, but calming, Howard crosses for the door
 to walk out...

...But his foot tangles on a loose cord. He

trips.

Slams face/eye first -- THWACK -- Into the corner of his
 tipped desk -- leaving him splayed across the office
 floor. He vomits on himself. Then lies motionless.

Nearby, flotsam on the wreckage:

A pack of matches.

INT. HOWARD'S HOME OFFICE -- MORNING (FROM OPENING SCENE)

He remembers the earplug in his ear -- pops it out --
 and then says,

HOWARD
 (into phone)
 Hey, it's me. That dandelion in
 my garden. I want it plucked.

MURPHY (V.O.)
 Then call a gardener.

HOWARD
 You compared my situation to a
 weed.

MURPHY (V.O.)

You called me for weed?

HOWARD

My neighbor's dog. You referred to it as a dandelion.

MURPHY (V.O.)

Ohhh. Y'know what? We'll need to run a pick six on this.

HOWARD

I don't know what that means.

MURPHY (V.O.)

Meet me tonight at...

EXT. ARBY'S PARKING LOT -- THAT NIGHT

Howard's Smart Fortwo veers off the busy city street and rolls into the Arby's parking lot.

ARBY'S DRIVE-THRU ORDER BOX -- CONTINUING

Fortwo inches up. Stops.

Drive-thru intercom CRACKLES to life,

ORDER TAKER (O.S.)

WELCOME TO ARBY'S -- AMERICA'S
ROAST BEEF. MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER?

Dressed incognito, with sunglasses and a baseball cap sank low on his forehead, Howard places his order.

HOWARD

A large curly fries. Two beef-n-cheddars. And a large Diet Sprite.

Drive-thru intercom CRACKLES to life,

ORDER TAKER

Out of Diet Sprite, sir.

HOWARD

No diet? Kay. Umm. Then I'll-that'll be all, then.

ARBY'S DRIVE-THRU WINDOW -- CONTINUING

Howard take the bag of Arby's and a soda from a WINDOW WORKER, 17-years-old and full of snark.

HOWARD
Little ketchup, please?

Window Worker points to the bag.

HOWARD
Ah, yeah. I just saw the some in the bag, and I'll just need a handful more. Pretty please.

WINDOW WORKER
Three packets per meal is policy, sir.

HOWARD
C'mon man. It's ketchup.

Her expression says it all: I ain't budging.

HOWARD
Seriously? Three packets? You're allowing me three packets? Thanks a lot. Jerk.

SMART FORTWO drives away. Reaches the street to turn out-
- REVERSE LIGHTS BLINK ON.

INT. ARBY'S LOBBY -- NIGHT

Howard bowls through the lobby door, hurriedly.

HOWARD
Excuse me, but I'm short a beef-n-cheddar. Ordered two. Got one.

WINDOW WORKER responds,

WINDOW WORKER
Got your receipt?

HOWARD
In my--seriously? You're actually gonna ask for my receipt?

WINDOW WORKER
Dude I get caught slipping you a free B.C. it's my ass on the line.

Next I know is, I'm wearing a stupid hat and sunglasses on a dark night, rattling off on a diatribe to some one about scoring free beef-n-cheddars.

HOWARD

This is about the ketchup, isn't it?

Howard darts out the front door. Moments later, returns. Waving his receipt in the air... in childlike protest.

EXT. WAWA PARKING LOT - SNOWY NIGHT

A flurry of snow.

Howard hustles out the front, glass door, clutching a 16oz. bottle of Diet Sprite.

EXT. RISKY WILD'S GENTLEMEN'S CLUB -- SNOWY NIGHT

An unbecoming, red brick gentleman's club -- a stone's throw from the ghetto. The parking lot is stacked with parked vehicles -- sheathed in snow.

INT. RISKY WILDS' -- MOMENTS LATER

A seedy hodgepodge of carnal delight.

Murky. With strobing lights. A perpetual smoky haze hangs stagnate in the air.

A BEAUTIFUL BETTY IN ANGEL WINGS, 19, works the pole, gyrating her body to the hypnotic melody thumping overhead. As,

Howard traipse through a thick, velvet curtain -- draping the club's entrance/exit. Arby's and Diet Sprite in tote, he slinks over to a booth, hunkers down in it.

A six-foot-tall BUNNY RABBIT crosses by. Then four more furry WOODLAND CREATURES scamper by. Private party? Definitely.

Howard tugs his hat down farther. Re-situate his sunglasses a little straighter. Yanks his coat collar up a little higher. Clearly doesn't want to be seen here.

He pecks out a text message to David: **I'M HERE.**

SEXY GIRL, 19 and delicious, sashays through the maze of tables on her way over to Howard.

Howard waves her away. But she's voracious. And wraps herself around him.

SEXY GIRLY
You always this meekish?

HOWARD
I'm happily married. Thank you much.

SEXY GIRLY
That's not what I asked.

Enticing him with a whisper,

SEXY GIRLY
What's your name? Or should I call you, stiffy?

Howard presses his lips to her ear -- whispers back,

HOWARD
Are you him?

SEXY GIRLY
Can be. But it'll cost more.

HOWARD
(feckleempt)
It's er. a. umm.

He nudges her off his lap.

SEXY GIRLY
Don't touch me, you mousy-looking dickhead. Wait. No shit. You're that fucker from town who writes children's book. Aren't you? What is it? Howard? Yeah, Howard Jackson or something. My kid loves your books. Wow, this is a little creepy.

Yelling to someone off screen,

SEXY GIRLY
Tim! Get my cell phone.

HOWARD
(shit!)
No. You're clearly mistaking.

I hate kids. I'm visiting from
China on a business trip. So...
(then)
Here...

...tosses her a five dollar bill...

HOWARD
...Sorry to disappoint you, but
unfortunately I'm not the guy you
seem to be mistaking me for.

She takes a quick snap pic of Howard using her cell
phone.

SEXY GIRLY
Bull shit you ain't. My kid's
gonna love this.

Sexy Girl melts back into the eclectic crowd.

Over PA,

MURPHY (AS D.J.)
Alright all you cocks and titties
out there in neverland, let me
hear you give it up for, Rebekkah.
I love your titties, titty.
(then)
Just in: Our new, hot and spicy
chicken wings are now on sale.
That's right. On sale. Half off.
Extra juicy. Get'um while they're
hot. Fo'sho. And now, let's get
it up for the dazzling, the
delicious, Jasmine....

...High octane hip-hop music thumps to life.

Howard checks his phone -- one new text is waiting. He
checks it, expectantly.

Message reads:

LARRY CALL ME.

Howard pockets the phone, dejected. Then looks around
the club, growing evermore impatient. As well as,
increasingly self-aware.

HOWARD
(re: Murphy)
C'mon. Where are you?

POOF! -- like magic -- Murphy appears.

Yelling over the thumping music,

MURPHY
Got the goods?

Howard nods. Brandishes the ARBY'S.

MURPHY
Will help grease the wheels.
Quick, flip me a dub.

HOWARD
Huh? What?

MURPHY
A twenty. Twenty dollars.
(re: sunglasses)
What's with the shades?

HOWARD
Don't worry about it.

Howard digs a twenty out of his wallet. Hands it over.

HOWARD
Is he here?

MURPHY
Stay here. I'll be back.

HOWARD
Wait!

Too late.

Murphy crosses for a BIG, BAD BOUNCER GUY, 30s, who stands arms crossed, guarding the entrance.

Howard watches the following unfold from a distance:

-- Murphy says something to the big, bad bouncer guy.

-- Big, Bad Bouncer nods. Crosses to the bartop -- Murphy follows behind him.

-- The duo speak to a NAUGHTY-LOOKING BARTENDER, 22. She nods. Lifts a telephone to her ear.

-- Naught Bartender says something to Big, Bad Bouncer.

-- Big, Bad Bouncer nods, intrigued. Turns to Murphy and says,

-- Don't know -- Howard can't hear them.

-- Murphy speaks to Naughty Bartender. Laughs. Bartender motions Murphy closer. Murphy steps to her. THWACK! She SLAPS his face off. Not literally. But almost.

-- Murphy whibble-wobbles backwards. Then shakes the stinger off his face. Scurries back over to Howard. And plops down in the booth next to Howard, to say,

MURPHY
(impish smile)
It's a go.

HOWARD
What happened--oh-my-god-you've-
set-me-up!

MURPHY
Relax, Howie. He's here. Just
chill for a second. And breath in
the view.

A COCKTAIL WAITRESS, 19, approaches, sits down two Jack and Cokes on the table.

MURPHY
Thanks, babe.

HOWARD
I don't drink.

MURPHY
(lighting cigarette)
That gonna be on the quiz?

Murphy gulps down the first Jack and Coke. Then nurses the second one.

MURPHY
Say, why don't you just get a
hotel room to finish your book in?
Or I've got a cabin I'll rent you.
It's out in God's country. Lake
front -- the works. Little old,
but gots everything you'd need.
Though the lake's frozen, so no
taking the boat out for a spin.

HOWARD
Why? I have an office.

MURPHY

Just seems like--whatever, dude.
I'm just here to do introductions.

A MENACING-LOOKING BIKER TYPE pushes through the thick curtain, draping the entrance, entering Howard's eyeline.

Howard watches, as,

Menacing Biker Guy exchanges words with Big, Bad Bouncer -
- who turns and points to Howard/Murphy's table.

Menacing Biker Guy stomps toward Howard. He's big.
Imposing. Drenched in tats. Most definitely a killer.

Howard's body puckers tight as Biker Guy closes in.

-- AND --

Walks past. Straight through the restroom door.

Howard deflates. Then -- light-bulb moment,

HOWARD

You're him, aren't you??

MURPHY

Hmmm?

HOWARD

You're--

Murphy lunges for the bag of Arby's, snatching it from Howard's grasp, but the soda, Howard wrangles back.

HOWARD

You grift me!

MURPHY

(mouth full)
I had to.
(then, re: food)
Tastes so good!

HOWARD

We could've handled this over the phone.

MURPHY

Forgive my mendacity, but I'm flat broke. And have had nothing to eat since lunch.

HOWARD

What was the twenty dollars for?

MURPHY

My tab. -- Wait! Don't go. Sit. Please. This place is like my third job. I'm looking to buy braces for my niece as a gift for her birthday. She wants them real bad -- but they're hardly affordable. So please, allow me to help you. I make some quick cash. You get your book written.

Howard turns to walk out.

MURPHY

At least patronize me. Give me five minutes. That's all.

Howard gives in. Sits down.

HOWARD

Fine. But can you hurry this up?
(re: club)
I've got a reputation to maintain.

MURPHY

(mouth full of food)
Of course. (Gulp) Three hundred. Three Franklins and I'll take the lil' bugger out. One shot. One kill. Sniper style.

Squinting his eyes to seem more intellectual, convincing,

MURPHY

You see, hire me -- and you'll not only get someone vetted -- Someone entwined in your past -- know you can trust -- but also some one who's got mad battle tactics. I should kill you for simply telling you this, but I'm special forces.

HOWARD

(with askance)
Special Forces?

MURPHY

You're looking at Master Commander on Commando Raiders.

HOWARD

So to you, Master Commander in a video game translates to special forces

MURPHY

It's not just any video game.

HOWARD

Noted.

MURPHY

Then look at it this way: you can hire me or three hundred can buy you a three nights stay at the local Ramanda Inn. Plus tax. It's your choice.

Howard chews on this for a beat and then says,

HOWARD

The deal is: you kidnap Rin-Tin and--

MURPHY

--Dognap.

HOWARD

Whatever. You'll hold it. Feed it. Keeping it safe until I finish these last chapters. Then you will drop the dog off at Morton Way Animal Shelter, and I'll handle it from then on.

Murphy chews on this for a moment -- as if details actually mattered. Then...

MURPHY

I accept your proposition, with one amendment: If I'm gonna be baby sitting this critter, then inevitably I'll accrue incidentals.

HOWARD

Accompanied by a receipt.

MURPHY

Deal. And first copy of your novel.

HOWARD

Novella.

MURPHY

Whatever -- signed by Leonardo
DiCaprio.

HOWARD

Signed by me.

MURPHY

You sir -- got yurself a deal.

Two shake hands to seal the deal. Howard throws his
checkbook down on the table -- pens out a check.

HOWARD

First half now. Second one fifty
upon safe return.

MURPHY

Fine. When?

HOWARD

Tomorrow...

EXT. HOWARD'S FRONT DOOR -- NIGHT

HOWARD (V.O.)

...I have a book signing over at
Tyler's bookstore for this P.R.
campaign I'm on...

Howard shuffles down the front steps, wearing his coat,
sweater jacket, bow tie and some "don't I look smart"
eyeglasses. His black eye -- dampened by makeup.

HOWARD (V.O.)

...that's when.

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK -- NIGHT

Murphy spins the steering wheel -- making a left turn
into a narrow, gravel alleyway -- the kind utility
vehicles frequently visit.

EXT. GRAVEL SERVICE ALLEYWAY BEHIND DUPLEX -- NIGHT

Tires CRUNCH across gravel. Headlights blink off.

The buick rambles to a brake-grinding stop.

Moments later,

Metal scrapes metal, as the driver door kicks open. Murphy hops out -- clad in camouflage. A canvas duffle bag, clasped in his hand. He looks very special forces, at least to him he does.

He plucks a BMX bicycle from the trunk -- then -- pedals off down the alleyway.

But just as quickly, he ditches the bike and scrambles for the cover of some decorative hedges lining the Johnson and Petermen property line/fence.

He opens the duffle bag and dips his hand in. Pulls out a bag of sunflower seeds. Pours a cheek full. Then,

Spitting shells, Murphy removes three tasty-looking TWINKIES from his camo bag of goodies.

INT. TYLER'S BOOKSTORE -- NIGHT

Intimate and independent, "we sell used books" type of place.

There's a modest display for Howard's first two children's books -- and a small lectern set up for Howard to preform the reading at.

A sparse crowd has gathered, consisting mostly of tween girls and their chaperons.

A hippy-type BOOKSTORE GUY, 20s, steps to the lectern.

HIPPY BOOKSTORE GUY

Before we begin -- a reminder that we will be having cookies and kool aid, afterwards. Compliments of Mr. Johnson. And now, without further delay -- I welcome Howard Johnson to center stage.

Howard manipulates the microphone more to his liking.

Then begins,

HOWARD

(reading from book)

"Never will there be a day, quite like the day -- today has turned out to be." -- Ridi whispered to the moon...

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND DUPLEX -- NIGHT

Murphy holds a bottle of BEST FRIEND SLEEPY-TIME AIDE.

Using a turkey baster, he injects Twinkies one by one with the dog approved sleep aide.

MURPHY

How much is that doggie in the
window / ruff ruff / the one with
the waggly tail...

Murphy booms to his feet. Toss the tainted pastries over the fence, as if they were grenades.

He promptly ducks for cover -- narrowly escaping the fantasy explosions.

BEGIN INTERCUT**BACK TO HOWARD**

The small gathering listens intently as Howard reads,

HOWARD

And as he turned away, she began to speak: "No matter the wrong done -- or misdeed committed -- there would be no greater wrong, then that committed against one's self..."

...Howard lets the words float for a beat, then continues,

HOWARD

"No!" -- Samuwella did exclaim to the Borracka leader -- "I will not allow your temptations to influence me, but stand steadfast in what's right, not only for me, for Ridi, but for all Mock-o-tockians alike...!"

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND HOWARD'S PLACE -- NIGHT

Murphy's face flushes to a blue-ish hue as he blowwwwws as hard as he can into a dog whistle.

MS. PETERMEN'S BACKYARD

NiNim rockets out the doggie door.

Ruff. Ruff. Ruff. Ruff.

He's wearing the bulky, kooky-looking sweater Ms. Petermen was working on earlier -- its tiny bells, JINGLING madly.

BACK TO MURPHY

He cracks a grin of crafty delight, I'm a genius, then hoists himself to peek over the lip of the six-foot tall fence and sees:

The three tainted Twinkies. But no NiNim.

MURPHY

What the...?

Murphy drops to his feet. Shuffles over few steps -- then peers over the fence again to see:

NiNim leap up, snapping his jaws at Murphy's face like a tripped mouse trap of teeth -- SNAP!

MURPHY

Bwah!

Murphy topples backwards. Crashes butt first to the ground,

MURPHY

Ooomph!
(then, foiled)
Titties.

Then, as Murphy struggles to hoist himself over the fence -- and into Howard's backyard,

BACK TO HOWARD

Reading.

HOWARD

And as the two soared through the marmalade clouds, Kum-ma-lawana began to cry -- giant tears, splashing down upon her new best friend.

"Don't cry..." said the Anna-walla-wellian. "A wrong for a wrong never makes right..."

EXT. MS. PETERMEN'S BACK YARD -- NIGHT

NiNim sniffs over to a Twinkie. Gobbles it down.

Sniffs to another Twinkie. Gobbles it down.

BACK TO HOWARD

Lost within the world of his book,

HOWARD

And in that moment, that moment of pure Mock-o-tockian magic, the Normanthrope became a beautiful Flag-ah-fry...!

Hoots and laughter as the kids clap with excitement.

EXT. HOWARD'S BACKYARD -- NIGHT

Murphy spies on NiNim through a knot-size hole in the fence -- his plan, back on track.

He then turns his attention to a fresh, bloody scrap-mark on his elbow -- one he got during our absence.

He touches it. Tsss, cringes in pain.

MURPHY

I can't do that, captain. Gun shot or not, I must complete the mission.

Murphy booms to his feet. Climbs over the fence, into,

MS. PETERMEN'S BACKYARD

...to find NiNim nowhere in sight.

Crane to see: doggie door flap closed.

MURPHY

(thwarted)
Titties.

BACK TO HOWARD

Takes a sip of water, then,

HOWARD

(scary voice)

"You may have crossed the
threshold, but will you make it
back out alive?"

INT. MS. PETERMEN'S SPOOKY LIVING ROOM -- SAME

The sound of RUNNING BATH WATER wafts down from upstairs.

On the opposite side of the living room -- an old-school
ANSWERING MACHINE kicks on to record an incoming message,

WALT PETERMEN (V.O.)

Hi Gammy. I'm finally back from
Tahiti. You've probably already
taken your bath by now so I tell
you all about it in the morning.
Love you. You too, lil' buddy.
Got a big juicy bone for ya.

ANSWERING MACHINE turns off -- as we move toward, and
into,

MS. PETERMEN'S KITCHEN -- BACK DOOR

Murphy's head pokes through the doggie door.

He scopes to see the coast is clear -- is pleased to find
that it is.

MURPHY

(stifled yell)

Psst. Hey, dog? Nickleback?

No response.

MURPHY

(little louder)

PSST! Here doggie, doggie?

No response.

His head retracts. Doggie door flaps shut.

Door knob turns one way.

Then another. But it's locked.

A THIN, FRAIL MOAN wafts down from somewhere upstairs -- someone hurt?

SMASH!! A tree branch crashes through the back door's decorative window pane.

A hand quickly threads through -- unlatches the deadbolt.

Door kicks open. And,

Murphy TIP-TOES in. Closes the door, careful not to make a sound -- as shattered glass CRUNCHES under his steel-toed boots.

BACK AT TYLER'S BOOKSTORE

Where Howard wipes away a single tear. Re-situates the eyeglasses on his nose.

Then continues reading...

HOWARD

He had. He had thanked Ridi -- with his life.

Howard's cell abruptly -- RINGS.

HOWARD

How embarrassing. Thought I turned this silly thing off.

It's Murphy. Howard powers off the phone.

HOWARD

(to kids/gatherers)
Sorry about that. Now where was I? Oh, yes -- She had come to this majestic place as a princess' assistant. But today -- she rides away -- a queen of her very own kingdom. And it -- was good.

(then)

The end.

Book snaps shut.

Sporadic applause.

HIPPY BOOKSTORE GUY

Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

CUT TO:

INT. TYLER'S BOOKSTORE -- LATER

Howard at a folding table -- signing books.

HOWARD
(to a KID)
Here you go...

...hands the kid an autographed book.

Murphy, face wrapped in bandages, pushes through the line.

KID
Hey! No cuts.

MURPHY
Fuck off, you lil' shit.

KID'S PARENT
(appalled)
What's wrong with you -- he's a child?

Murphy charges up to Howard.

HOWARD
Umm. What are you doing here, David?

MURPHY
You turned your phone off.

HOWARD
Therefore you felt it necessary to come and frighten these nice people?

MURPHY
Can we step outside? I need to speak with you, asap.

HOWARD
I'm in the middle of something. Now go away before someone calls the cops.

Murphy leans in. Whispers into Howard's ear.

Howard freezes. Horrified.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Howard waits with bated breath on the sofa as Murphy steels himself to say,

MURPHY

You're prolly gonna want some hot cocoa before I start. Nestles -- perhaps. Got any?

HOWARD

I don't want any hot cocoa, David.

MURPHY

But do you got any? I could really go for a cup about now.

HOWARD

No.

MURPHY

Bummer.

HOWARD

What's with the bandages?

MURPHY

What I'm about to tell you -- I need you to listen to fully before rushing to judgement.

HOWARD

YOU SET ME UP!!

MURPHY

Do I look like a cop? I have warrants out for my arrest, for gawdsakes. So shhhhhh. Zip it and listen...

BACK TO:

INT. MS. PETERMEN'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

With ninja-like stealth, Murphy prowls the living room. He beckons NiNim with a harsh whisper,

MURPHY

Here doggie, doggie.

But no sign of NiNim. So Murphy creeps over to,

MS. PETERMEN'S STAIRCASE

Where he ascends the CREAKY steps cautiously.

MURPHY

Nickleback?

TOP OF STAIRCASE -- SECOND FLOOR

Murphy approaches the bedroom door -- which is the first door to greet him at the top of the staircase.

MS. PETERMEN'S BEDROOM

Murphy peeks in from the doorway.

Room's murky with darkness. But he spots NiNim curled up asleep in a doggie bed.

Murphy rushes in, scoops him up and cradles him back out into,

THE HALLWAY

Just as Murphy is about to scramble down the stairs,

His attention is rapt by a room at the end of the small hallway -- opposite end as bedroom.

The door is cracked open, and the light is on, luring Murphy's curiosity. He redirects -- stepping toward it.

MS. PETERMEN'S UPSTAIRS BATHROOM

Bath water pours over the lip of the bathtub, pooling with BLOOD on the tile floor.

Door pushes open. Reveal,

Murphy stands bug-eyed, whopper-jawed with fright.

Ms. Petermen, in her birthday suit, lies crumpled on the tile floor in a pool of blood and water -- a nasty contusion on her forehead is bleeding profusely.

She isn't moving.

MURPHY

(horrified)

Titties!

Murphy ditches NiNim off to the side. Then rushes to Ms. Petermen's aide.

He searches feverishly for a pulse. Her wrist. Her ear. Her neck. Her thigh. But no signs of a pulse.

So he quickly cradles her delicate, flacid body in his arms. And bumbles her out into the,

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

MURPHY

Avoid the light, lady, I'm gonna
get you some help.

Ms. Petermen's eyes flare open. She's alive!

She screams -- horrified.

Murphy screams -- spooked.

Ms. Petermen claws at Murphy's face.

A nail snaps off -- embedded deep in Murphy's cheek.

Murphy screams -- in pain.

Ms. Petermen whoops -- in victory.

He drops her on the floor like a sack of rocks.

She lands with a THUMP.

Then scrambles off down the hallway, squatted on all fours, toward the staircase -- away from her intruder's clutches.

MURPHY

Damnit, lady! You need medical
intervention.

Ms. Petermen looks back at Murphy. Causing her to stumble on the top step.

She totters, then

tumbles

down

the stairs. Rolling to a rest at the base of the stairs in a knot of veiny, old-lady appendages.

Her neck -- snapped gruesomely to the side.

MURPHY (V.O.)

And she took a nose dive down the stairs.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL,

Howard stands over Ms. Petermen's twisted, tangled corpse. Murphy stands beside him -- pops an almond in his mouth. Crunches it. Meanwhile,

Howard projectile vomits -- sickened by the gruesome sight of Ms. Petermen's tangle corpse.

HOWARD

Ohmigawd, you've killed her!

Howard drops to his knees. Starts to search her wrinkly, nude body for a pulse.

MURPHY

Dude, no. I told you: I was gonna save her. Dude. C'mon. She's. She's gone, dude.

Howard looks up from giving Ms. Petermen mouth to mouth.

HOWARD

I've gotta try!

MURPHY

Pfft. Look at her, man. For fuck's sake -- that's the woman's spine jabbing out her neck.

(off Howard's look)

Why are you looking at me like that? You believe me right?

Howard pats his pockets for his cell phone.

MURPHY

What're you doing? I've got a pen. You need a pen?

Howard slips his phone out.

MURPHY

I didn't kill that woman. She killed herself.

HOWARD

Then you have nothing to worry about.

Murphy lunges for the phone, but catches a swift kick to the nuts instead. He crumbles to the floor.

MURPHY

Wait. Before you hang us both.
Look. Here. I found this...

...hands Howard a doctor's notice.

It's addressed to Ms. Petermen, informing her, her cancer has spread -- sadly, nothing more can be done.

MURPHY

She was gonna die, anyway. Of cancer. So -- and according to this, it should've happened some time ago. See? She was on borrowed time.

HOWARD

(light-bulb moment)
That's why she got the dog.

Murphy slips out a wrapped cheese singlet (slice of cheese) from his back pocket. Peels off the plastic coating.

MURPHY

(re: Ms. Petermen)
Looks peaceful. Peaceful repose.

HOWARD

Whuh? She looks like a human pretzel...

...Howard cranes to see -- Murphy cram the slice of processed cheese into his mouth.

HOWARD

Where'd you get that?

MURPHY

Ah? Where you think?

HOWARD

I have no idea, that is why I asked. From my fridge?

Murphy nods,

MURPHY

No.
(then)
What are you doing?

HOWARD

Whaddaya think? I'm calling the police--umm. Where are her fingers?

REVEAL,

Ms. Petermen is missing all fingertips on her right hand.

MURPHY

Nearby.

Howard smacks Murphy with a look of incredulity.

MURPHY

I had to. For frickity sakes, man, she has my D.N.A. caked under them--

HOWARD

(to 911)
Hi. Yes. I'd like to report --
It's not about the dog.

MURPHY

Make sure to tell 'em why we're here. That's right. You heard me.

HOWARD

(to 911)
You caught me. It's about the dog.

Howard hangs up.

HOWARD

I asked you to steal the dog, not murder my neighbor.

MURPHY

Not in the story I tell. In my story, you're the bad guy. You paid me to kill her.

Howard suddenly realizes Murphy holds the better cards and has no choice but to relent.

HOWARD

Fine. You win. Please feel free to enlighten me as to what it is you purpose we do.

MURPHY

It starts with you sticking that phone back in your pocket.

Then help me look for a blanket to wrap her up in. We'll go from there.

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND DUPLEX -- LATE NIGHT

Howard and Murphy cross for Murphy's Buick -- that is now idling in the alleyway.

They lug Ms. Petermen, rolled up in a blanket like a human burrito, to the trunk of the Buick.

MURPHY

You gotta trust me about this, owls are notorious for being dicks.

Trunk pops open.

They stuff Ms. Petermen inside -- wedging her beside a scuffed-up spare tire and Murphy's bike.

Trunk slams closed.

KLUNCK

Boings back open -- Ms. Petermen's ankle blocking it from closing.

Unenthusiastically, Howard nudges her ankle free. Shuts the trunk, then swivels to walk away.

MURPHY

Where you think you're going?

HOWARD

I've got a deadline in two days. Remember?

MURPHY

No. You've got a dead old bitty to deal with.

HOWARD

Shhh! Keep your voice down.

MURPHY

This wasn't part of my job description. Remember? Now get in. We'll be back in a snap.

Howard hesitates -- "Did Murphy just say: snap?" -- but finally relents. Hops inside the car.

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK (TRAVELING) -- LATER ON THAT NIGHT

Murphy drives. NiNim sleeps coiled up on the backseat.

Festering in the passenger seat, is,

HOWARD

What are you gonna do with the dog?

MURPHY

Dude, stop stressin'. I got this.

HOWARD

What's your plan, David?

MURPHY

Your aura -- it's all out of whack. Mottled. Has been since high school.

HOWARD

What?

MURPHY

Like water to rust, your energy is corrosive to humanity.

HOWARD

You have no plan, do you?

MURPHY

I've gotta rough outlook.

HOWARD

A rough outlook? Life in prison -- how's that for a rough outlook?

MURPHY

You should try yoga. Kava Kava. Switch to tea. I got off social media -- never been happier.

HOWARD

My aura is fine--

Over car radio: BREAKING NEWS interrupts,

BROADCASTER

JUST IN. Media outlets are reporting that the Dead End Killer may still be lurking in the vicinity.

According to reports, the police
have responded to an anonymous
phone call regarding--

MURPHY

--So boring. Geez. I need some
tunes.

Murphy changes the radio station.

MURPHY

Yeah, man. I love this song.

Cranks the volume to some GANGSTA REGGAE song about
murder. Something similar to,

MURPHY

(singing)
Out in the streets/ they call it
murder....

EXT. BACKWOODS -- NIGHT

Branches snap. Footsteps crunch across snow.

A flashlight dances in the darkness. As,

Murphy and Howard trudge through the naked trees and
thick, decayed underbrush, hoofing Ms. Petermen along
with them.

HOWARD

What are you going to do with
Nunchuck?

MURPHY

Less you know the better.

Murphy leads Howard to a fat, hollowed out tree stump.

MURPHY

Here we go.

HOWARD

Where?

Murphy shines his flashlight at the girthy, hollowed-out
tree stump.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Out in the open like this?

MURPHY

Dude, you've gotta start giving me more credit than that.

(then)

In it. What? It's big enough. Stop fretting, it's only 'til the lake thaws when I can dump her in it. Come. Hot coco afterwards. My treat.

HOWARD

David--

MURPHY

--Y'know. Call me Murphy. Kay? All my buddies call me Murphy.

HOWARD

They call you by a completely different first name?

MURPHY

Murphy's my middle name.

HOWARD

Murphy. A woman is dead. We are about to stuff her body in a log. That doesn't scream: hot coco to me.

MURPHY

Nonsense.

(wedging body in log)

Toldja! Perfect fit.

Murphy sprinkles some leaves and snow over the tops of Ms. Petermen's feet -- which protrude out the top of the stump.

MURPHY

Wah-Lah!

HOWARD

I don't know about this. I can still see her feet.

MURPHY

Only hunters come around to these parts. And hunting season's over.

The two start the trek back to Murphy's Buick -- its headlights barely visible in the murky distance.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

I hate talkin' business at a time like this, but we should discuss final payment.

HOWARD

Murphy, I--

MURPHY

No-no. Coco first.

INT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- LATE NIGHT

A forbidding one-bedroom hunter's shack straight out of a slasher flick -- with moldered timbers and creaky floors.

Murphy crosses balancing two mugs of steamy coco on a tray. Passes one mug to Howard, who sits apprehensively on the lumpy-looking, most likely curbed-rescued couch.

MURPHY

Thought I had marshmallow minis.

HOWARD

David. Murphy, we need to--

MURPHY

Howie. May I call you Howie?
Howie. Sip. Your coco's getting cold. I feel since this -- as you well know -- wasn't included in the initial job description, I feel, rightfully so, mind you, that I am financially entitled to a bit more than we previously spoke about.

HOWARD

You're kidding right?

MURPHY

Fifteen hundred. Covers clean up and maintenances in perpetuity.

Howard sits his coco down and stands.

HOWARD

I don't have time for this.

MURPHY

You've hardly touched your coco.

HOWARD

I'm not thirsty and I'm through with this conversation. Take me home.

MURPHY

Yeah. Sure. Little rude, but of course. Pay me the fifteen hundred and we'll leave.

Flustered... Howard fishes out his wallet.

HOWARD

I've got sixty dollars. If I give--

MURPHY

This isn't a gift, Howard. It's compensation -- you're not giving me anything. You're paying me for a service rendered...

...gestures for Howard to continue.

HOWARD

If I pay you sixty dollars, will you take me home?

MURPHY

Right. So you can cut and run?

HOWARD

Here...

...Howard slips out a credit card.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

As collateral. Kay? We good? Now take me home.

MURPHY

I don't want your stupid library card, dude. But I'm holding you to your word.

EXT. HOWARD'S PLACE -- LATE, LATE NIGHT

Murphy's Buick rambles up. Jerks to a stop.

Howard hops out.

Murphy calls to him through the open door,

MURPHY

Don't forget -- or I'll kill you.
Just joking. L.O.L.

INT. HOWARD'S PLACE -- SHOWER -- LATE NIGHT

Hovering under the steamy spray, Howard lifts a ZIMA bottle to his lips. Takes a manly swig -- a lost cowboy wrestling with regrets.

He begins scrubbing his body with an itsy-bitsy nugget of soap. Desperately trying to cleanse himself of the deed.

PLOP. Nugget slips from his grasp.

He tries to catch it in his toes -- but fails. Nugget eddies, drops down the drain -- lost forever.

INT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- NIGHT

Murphy loads a hunting rifle. Fumbles the bullet on the floor -- doesn't appear he knows what he's doing.

NiNim slowly arouses from sedation.

MURPHY

Well hello there, sleepy head.

NiNim yawns.

MURPHY

Can't play adorable with me,
little guy. I've got no place for
a doggie. Too much responsibility.
Don't look at me like that. Just
because you're some kind of race
dog. No longer needed. Wanted.
Cast aside like a gnawed on cob of
corn. Yeah, I know that feeling.
Know it well. Giving people what
they want only to be discarded me
like some popped party popper.

Murphy chambers the bullet,

MURPHY

Whelp, time to die.

Murphy reaches down to hook NiNim's collar to a leash.

Nim'Nim STRIKES.

Jaws lock around wrist.

Murphy screams in pain as he struggles to rid his wrist of the riled dog. He finally does and escapes out the front door.

EXT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- NIGHT

Now safely outside, Murphy calls to NiNim through the closed door,

MURPHY

Listen. I'd like to have you as my dog. Thought my shrink was right, but she ain't right. I'm responsible. And I'm ready to own a dog. Wanna be my dog?

INT. WAWA -- VERY LATE NIGHT

Murphy plops a box of Twinkies down on the counter. Smiles at Shelly.

SHELLY

What's with your face?

MURPHY

Saved a kittykat from a tree.
(then)
Where you keep the muzzles? Kind for dogs?

SHELLY

You're at a gas station.

MURPHY

I see.

SHELLY

Maybe, i.d.k, try a Petco.

MURPHY

Banished.

SHELLY

Exactly how the hell does one accomplish getting eight-six'd from a friggin' pet store?

MURPHY

Don't judge me. You're all out of Tastykakes.

SHELLY

How will you ever survive?

MURPHY

I heard a joke where this checker
laughed herself straight into an
ass kicking.

SHELLY

Are you threatening me?

MURPHY

I--

Shelly maces Murphy straight in the face.

Murphy flails about.

SHELLY

Take it like a man!

MURPHY

MY EYES!

INT. HOWARD'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Howard lies crumpled on the floor behind his desk.

The WHIRRING of police sirens stir him awake.

EXT. HOWARD'S PLACE -- MORNING

Crime scene tape shivers in the morning breeze.

Howard steps out the front door to investigate. Marches
down the steps.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

S'cuse me. Are you perhaps Howard
Johnson?

HOWARD

(steeling himself)
It's a possibility.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

Just need a moment of your time
then, sir.

Howard slowly cranes to see, a POLICE OFFICER, 40s and
bound to a wheelchair. It's a kick-ass looking
wheelchair, too. Crazy-mad souped up.

POLICE OFFICER
Be okay if we stepped inside to
escape this frigid weather?

HOWARD
Ahh. Yeah. Of course. But there's
umm... there's steps.

POLICE OFFICER
What was that? I didn't hear you.

Howard's cellphone BEEPS. New text message.

HOWARD
Steps. There are steps. I guess I
can lay some planks down.

POLICE OFFICER
Don't be silly. Just cart me up.

Howard follows the officer to the front steps.
Wheelchair's got some launch to it. The officer handles
it like a pro.

HOWARD
Okay, then.

Howard hunches over, entwining his arms around the
befuddled officer's chest. And lifts.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
C'mon MAN! Knock it OFF.

Howard shuffles back, befuddled.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Grab the fucking handles, man.
These things. And cart me up.

INT. HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

Police Officer readies a memo pad.

CLICK of a pen.

POLICE OFFICER
So we've established you're Howard
Johnson? Yes?

HOWARD
Correct. Umm. May I ask what this
is regarding?

POLICE OFFICER

Received a phone call this morning pertaining to your neighbor -- Ms. Petermen. She appears to have -- well -- vanished. Right into thin air, it would seem like, anyway. And for an eighty-two-year-old, that is quite an impressive feat.

Police Officer double checks his notes. As, Howard sneaks a look at the waiting text message.

It reads: LARRY?

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Appears the lady's -- your neighbor's -- grandson stopped by earlier in the morning to pick up a dog. His dog, I believe.

HOWARD

Wait. Her dog?

POLICE OFFICER

She was baby sitting. Felt it peculiar when he noticed she was no where to be found. Dog's missing, too. Very odd when you examine all the pieces.

HOWARD

Quite odd.

Drilling Howard with his eyes,

POLICE OFFICER

Did you happen to hear anything last night -- anything suspicious -- that didn't seem suspicious to you at the time, but enlightened by recent developments, now, does in fact -- might seem more appropriate or luminous to you now, Mr. Johnson, sir?

HOWARD

Nope.

POLICE OFFICER

Didn't think so.

HOWARD

Sorry I was of little help.

POLICE OFFICER

Win some. Lose some. Anyhoo. You seem like a guy who'd report a criminal act. Maybe it's nothing but a matter of coincidence, sir, but the glass pane covering her back door was broken. Shattered out. Found a dead owl right there on the kitchen floor. Crazy, isn't it? Musta been flyin' thirty, forty-five miles an hour to break through a thick pane of glass like that. Outstanding bird, though. Eats mice...

HOWARD

Some would argue: majestic.

MYSTERIOUS POLICE OFFICER

Indubitably. Well. You know. Old people. Probably heard the noise. Thought it was a burglary, got spooked and ran off into oblivion. Anyhoo, I'm just gathering statements for the boss. He may stop by later -- I will assume you'll be home?

HOWARD

Of course. Why? You think I'm like gonna try to flee the country. Please. That's just absurd. I've got no reason to.

POLICE OFFICER

Nope. Just wanna make sure you'll be around. Have yourself a great day, Mr. Johnson.

And with that -- Police officer peels rubber over to Howard's front door. Then waits by the closed door.

Light-bulb moment. Howard hustles over. Opens the door and helps the handicapped man outside.

HOWARD (O.S.)

Good luck. Send my best to her family...

...Howard pops back through the doorway. Quickly shuts the door. He dashes over to the window and cracks the blind to look outside.

But the police officer is nowhere in sight.

KNOCK!! KNOCK!! KNOCK!! on Howard's front door.

Howard leaps. Startled.

KNOCK!! KNOCK!!

Howard checks the peep hole. Then opens the door.

And is instantly greeted by a DIFFERENT POLICE OFFICER.

POLICE OFFICER #2

Hi. I'm Officer Proper. Not sure
if anyone has informed you yet,
sir, but your neighbor mighta gone
missing.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET -- DAY

A hydraulic arm -- jutting from a white SUV -- finishes
retracting back inside. Automated door closes. Then,

TIRES SQUEAAAAAL. And,

The PARKING ENFORCEMENT SUV rockets off down the street --
its blue and whites, swirling wildly.

POLICE OFFICER (PRE-LAP)

Car thirty-four to dispatch...

INT. PARKING-ENFORCEMENT SUV (TRAVELING) -- DAY

POLICE OFFICER

...I'm back on the clock.

This man isn't a police officer at all -- but a parking-
enforcement officer with a souped up wheelchair.

He is,

WALT PETERMEN, 42.

DISPATCH

Ten-four, car thirty-four. Stay
vigilant.

WALT PETERMEN

They don't call me Walt Petermen
for nuttin'.

INT. HOWARD'S FRONT DOOR -- DAY

Police Officer #2 exits. Howard swings the front door closed. Just as,

His cellphone rings. He answers it.

HOWARD

Hello?

INT. BETHANY AT AIRPORT -- DAY

BETHANY

I'll be there in four hours.

HOWARD

Then I'll leave here in three.

BETHANY

Leave where?

HOWARD

Home.

BETHANY

Why do you sound so funny? Are you crying?

HOWARD

I--umm--I don't sound funny. I sound perfectly normal. You kinda sound funny, though. Why do you sound so funny?

BETHANY (V.O.)

Cut the shit Howard and tell me what's going on.

HOWARD

Bethany, something very, very bad has happened. I-I

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Howard tip-toes over to the front door. Peeks out the peephole.

HOWARD

(whispers to Bethany)
I need to tell you in person.

MURPHY (O.S.)

C'mon, man open up. I'm freezing.

Murphy KNOCK, KNOCKS again.

MURPHY (O.S.)
I can hear you masturbating.

DING DONG. DING DONG.

HOWARD
(panicking)
Call you back.

BETHANY (V.O.)
You better be there--

CLICK. Howard peeps out the hole again:

Murphy loiters on the front stoop, shivering in the cold.

MURPHY
Hey, buddy? Open up. Open up.

Howard tip toes to the front window. Cracks open the blind, ever so slightly, and slips a peek outside...

...directly into the green eyes of Murphy Cox -- who is trying to steal a peek back inside.

Murphy SQUEALS like a frightened piglet.

HOWARD
GEEZUS!

MURPHY
Thank god it's you. For a moment I thought you were my refection.
(then)
Grab your coat and come outside, I need your help again.

HOWARD
I can't. I'm leaving for the airport soon.

MURPHY
You want out of this mess? Then you'll grab your coat and meet me at my car. Hurry up. Or we'll miss him.

INT. MICHAEL'S DINER -- PARKING LOT -- DAY

Murphy's Buick galumphs into the parking lot.

MURPHY (V.O.)
Toldja he'd be here. Fuck crime
when there's free coffee and
donuts to consume.

Buick jerks to a stop alongside a patrol car.

Doors crank open, and Howard and Murphy hop out. Scramble
inside the diner.

A PARKING-ENFORCEMENT SUV creeps by on the main street..

INT. SUV (TRAVELING) -- CONTINUING

WALT PETERMEN
Well. Well. Boys. Look who--

--Walt Petermen suddenly slams on the brakes, nearly
avoiding a collision with a stalled vehicle.

WALT PETERMEN
WHAT'RE YOU DOING, MORON! C'MON!
PAY ATTENTION.

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK (TRAVELING) -- LATER THAT DAY

MURPHY
Stop fretting or you' ll clue him
in. Just back me up. That's all
you do.

HOWARD
He's a trained professional. He
can detect bullshit. And the plans
bullshit.

MURPHY
I was black like you. My aura.
Now I'm white as a cloud. Know how
I did it? I did somethin' about
it -- no coffee and got off social
media. No FB.I.T. It changed my
life. You should consider it.
Maybe write a book about it. Maybe
with me as the main character.

HOWARD
(feigning)
What a great idea. I'll get right
on it.

INT. PATROL CAR (TRAVELING) -- SAME

Cruising behind Murphy's Buick is OFFICER DUBIOUS, 20s, He is JAMMING OUT to a ear-thumping rap beat. Eminem or his similar.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

Ain't no bitch gonna step to this -
- unless some bitch wanna step to
death...

EXT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- DAY

Buick and squad car sit parked in a clearing in front of the cabin -- abandoned.

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

Murphy leads Officer Dubious and Howard through the frigid cold and bald trees.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

You gonna tell me what this is all
about, Murph?

MURPHY

It's right up here. I didn't get
too close but I was out here
clearing some undergrowth...

HOWARD

I can vouch for that. He was.

From out of the naked branches appears THE TREE STUMP. A foot -- one foot not two -- protrudes out the top of it.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

That a foot?

MURPHY/HOWARD

What the...?

OFFICER DUBIOUS

Holy shit, there a body in that
stump?

MURPHY

Yup--that's exactly what I was
afraid of.

HOWARD

I can vouch for that.

Officer Dubious dashes to the stump. The base of the stump is splintered--like something was attempting to claw it open to get inside. Officer Dubious brushes snow out of the way revealing a hole and Ms. Petersen's face -- it's blue as ice. Eyes, bugged-out and staring forward blankly in a permanent look of surprise.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

Hey, this is Ms. Petersen.

MURPHY

I think the Dead End Killer came out her and stuffed her in it that stump. Maybe his profile is evolving.

HOWARD

Yeah. Wait. What?

MURPHY

Like he wants to be called the Deep Woods Killer. Thinks Dead Rnd Killer has become passe.

Officer Dubious scatters a few steps back from the stump. Howard's cell rings. He clicks ignore when he sees the caller is the old man, "Larry?" guy.

HOWARD

Those are all great possibilities.
D.E.K--

MURPHY

You mean D.W.K.

HOWARD

Depravity at its finest.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

(to Howard)
Why? Why do you keep doing that?
With your hand? That.

HOWARD

I have a scab.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

So you're one of those scab-pickers? Know how I know?

I should be solving crimes not
farting around on the streets
running beat. Settling neighbor
disputes. Know what else I know?
This ain't the work of Dead End
Killer, neither.

Howard shifts his footing. Officer Dubious draws his gun.
Aims it at the two.

OFFICER DUBIOUS (CONT'D)
You better steel up, quick-like.

HOWARD
What the hell, David. You said
this guy was cool.

OFFICER DUBIOUS
What's that supposed to mean?

MURPHY
My name is MURPHY. Not DAVID.
Where the hell you came up with
David I'll never know.

HOWARD
You said David. -- He killed her!
He's a murder!

OFFICER DUBIOUS
Quiet! Get that woman out the
stump.

Howard and Murphy cross to the stump.

HOWARD
What you do with her foot, you
sick pervert?

MURPHY
Nothing. Looks like something
gnawed it off.

OFFICER DUBIOUS
Hurry up.
(into walkie)
Come in, dispatch.

Howard grabs her foot. Tugs up. It snaps off in his hand.

OFFICER DUBIOUS
Stop defiling her.

HOWARD

I'm not trying to.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

Forget it. On the ground both of
you, now.

A GUNSHOT RINGS OUT IN THE DISTANCE.

MURPHY

Poachers.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

I said on the!

A branches CRACKLE THEN SNAP.

Officer DUBIOUS spins around to see a BLACK BEAR, blood
leaking out its shoulder, barreling down on him.

Officer Dubious turns his weapon on the attacking bear --
but it's too late. The black bear locks his teeth around
Officer Dubious' arm. THRASHES ABOUT. Tearing the arm
off at the shoulder--gun still clasped in hand.

OFFICER DUBIOUS

AHHHH! Help me!

Howard and Murphy turn tail and scatter, escaping into
the woods for their life.

INT. WALT PETERMEN'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Walt Petermen sits in his wheelchair--lodged between his
desk and the wall of this tiny office.

His eyes stay glued to the desktop's screen.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN,

MURPHY'S DMV RECORD showing all of his pertinent. Has
lots of infractions. Parking tickets. Other violations.

A CO-WORKER NAMED TOBY

(dipping head in from
hallway)

Hey Walt. She said she'll be
there 'til six p.m.

WALT PETERMEN

Thanks, Toby.

Toby dips back out the doorway.

'CONTROL P' and Murphy's information starts printing out.

WALT PETERMEN

Yes commissioner. Couldn't just stand by and let these bastards escape a twenty-five to life. What? Of course I'll accept your offer to become special agent. Valorous....?

EXT. DEEP IN THE WOOD'S -- DAY

The mangled corpse of Officer Dubious lays before us.

INT. CAR WITH HOWARD AND MURPHY -- LATER THAT DAY

Howard sits crinkle-faced with glum in the back seat. Murphy's at the wheel. Both are splotted in dry blood.

MURPHY

I mean: how long does it take to click your finger. I do it but just because I do it doesn't allow me to expect others to. But honestly, objectively, it's kinda rude. Whatever--I just don't mess with it, anymore. What do you think? Howie?

HOWARD

Huh?

MURPHY

When you always favorite someone's tweet, but they never reciprocate?

Howard's phone rings. Off his reluctance to answer...

MURPHY

Don't be shy on my behalf -- go on. Answer it.

HOWARD

(answers phone)
Hey, babe.

INTERCUT

Bethany, off by herself, at airport.

BETHANY

You outside?

HOWARD

Uh-huh.

MURPHY

(harsh whisper)
Put it on intercom.

Howard abides.

BETHANY

Cut the shit. You've got twenty minutes.

Howard ends the call.

MURPHY

She sounds lovely. Wonder, if maybe, I should go to her for my money.

HOWARD

Do and I'll dump you with the others. I get you the money.

EXT. ANIMAL CONTROL -- MEANWHILE

Walt Petermen wheels his chair up an access ramp.

INT. ANIMAL CONTROL -- RECEPTION AREA -- CONTINUING

A SPUNKY-LOOKING ATTENDANT, early 20s, greets Walt Petermen as he rolls in through the door...

SPUNKY ATTENDANT

Hey, Walt. How was the trip?

WALT PETERMEN

Hi. Paula. Good.

SPUNKY ATTENDANT

So when you gonna ask me for my hand in marriage?

WALT PETERMEN

Sorry, babe, I'm too much rock for one woman to roll.

(then)

Jamie around?

She points Walt Petermen to the back.

CAGES' ROOM/BACK AREA OF SHELTER -- CONTINUING

Walt Petermen wheels in to find JAMIE, mid 30s, inspecting metal cages.

JAMIE

Hi, Walt. Sorry about your loss.

WALT PETERMEN

Well it's been difficult to deal with. Don't believe I've ever cried more than I have last night. He was the perfect dog.

JAMIE

I was referring to your grandma.

WALT PETERMEN

Yes. A wonderful woman.
(then)
So what do you've got for me?

Jamie hands him a manila folder.

JAMIE

Called twenty-three times before we filed a harassment complaint.

WALT PETERMEN

Figures. My suspicions leads me to believe we're dealing with a psychopath. A real freak of nature--possibly with a fetish for the elderly.

JAMIE

Well he did seem pretty hostile.

WALT PETERMEN

Piece of friendly advice: watch your back.

JAMIE

You're not saying?

WALT PETERMEN

Cops got it wrong, Jamie. They got it all wro--ohmigawd what an adorable puppy!

He points to a puppy yawning sleepishly from its cage.

WALT PETERMEN

Sooooooo cute! Let me pet it.

INT. SMART FORTWO -- PARKED AT AIRPORT -- DAY

Unoccupied. Windows kissed in frost.

Car doors pop open. Howard and Bethany pack inside.

INT. SMART FORTWO -- DAY

Driving along, Bethany rambles to Howard -- who grips the steering wheel with a look of pending doom crinkling his face,

BETHANY

Told her it was fine, y'know, but she's gonna hafta check with the others to see, first, then get back to me--Howard are you even listening?

Steeling himself,

HOWARD

I need to tell you something that might be unsettling to hear. What I'm about to tell you -- I'll need you to listen to fully before responding. Okay? Snuggle Bug?

BETHANY

Why are you acting so creepy today? Why are you wearing sunglasses? There's no sun.

HOWARD

You remember how I told you Ms. Petermen rescued a dog? It was the day I toldja I got the deal?

BETHANY

Yeah.

HOWARD

Well I wasn't exactly being honest with you.

BETHANY

You lied to me about her rescuing a dog? Why would you do that?

HOWARD

No. I mean, I didn't actually get the deal.

BETHANY

What?!

HOWARD

It gets worse.

INT. WAWA -- DAY

A BELL DINGS.

Murphy tumbles in.

Scurries for the cover of a large candy display.

He sneaks a peek to see who's working the cash register.

It's NOT Shelly. But some other GEEKY-LOOKING DUDE, 40s.

Murphy slumps. Disappointed.

SHELLY (O.S.)

Tastykakes haven't arrived, dude.

Spirits buoyed,

MURPHY

Oh. Hey there. Funny. Thought I
smelt the bitter aroma of
Massengill.

SHELLY

You normally, like, stalk
convenient marts for pastry
deliveries?

BACK TO HOWARD AND BETHANY,

HOWARD

...But it was only supposed to be
until I finished the rewrite. And
then we'd return the dog, unharmed
and well fed to animal control--

Bethany's phone rings. She fishes for it in purse.

HOWARD

(taken aback)
You're taking calls at a time
like...?

With a petulant toss of her hand, she answers,

BETHANY
 (into phone)
 Hello --

Howard swallows the cold-shouldered response. And waits on tenterhooks for the call to end...

BETHANY
 -- Hi. -- Actually, I'm now thinking it'd be better off if we put the whole shindig on hold for awhile. -- Just that... no one knows what tomorrow will bring. -- Nothing's wrong. -- Kinda. -- I'll tell you later. -- Because: No. -- You, too.

Bethany purses her cell phone. Stares back out the window, emotionless. Unreadable.

Howard readies himself.

Then continues,

HOWARD
 I went to the book signing as planned, but he showed up at the bookstore. Forced me to go with him. Ms. Petermen -- she. I guess she was home...

MS. PETERMEN'S BACK YARD -- DAY

Near a bush, Walt Petermen motor-rolls up to some of Murphy's discarded sunflower seeds buried lightly under some snow.

Using tweezers from an evidence kit, he digs a couple shells from the snow. Bags them.

Wheels away -- continuing the inspection.

HOWARD AND BETHANY

Driving along.

Status: bleak.

HOWARD
 (tears trickle down)
 ...her spine was jabbing out her throat like a snapped chicken leg.

Now embedded in my mind, forever.
But it was when I saw her hand.
Her fingers. They were missing.
He said he had no choice. That
she had his D.N.A...

INT. MS. PETERMEN'S HOME -- BACK DOOR

Walt Petermen wheels through the back door -- the door's decorative window pane, now boarded over.

He wheels across the OWL-SHAPED CHALK OUTLINE on his way to the fridge.

Fridge door pops open. And Walt Petermen snatches himself a frosty bottle of BUD ICE.

He's about to close the door, when his eyes land on a PACKAGE OF SLICED CHEESE SINGLES. It's opened.

He picks it up. Examines it curiously. Then counts the slices. Then.

Wheels into,

MS. PETERMEN'S LIVING ROOM

A blood hound -- sniffing for a perp, Walt Petermen scours the room for clues, searching every nook and cranny for just one little tattle-tale sign of a crime.

Under cushions. Behind curtains. Up in lamp shades. Everywhere.

But ultimately, comes up empty handed.

He is just about to give up when he sees,

An ALMOND lays out-of-place on the floor.

Walt Petermen peels wheelchair-rubber back into,

MS. PETERMEN'S KITCHEN

Plunges his hand down in the trash can. Fishes out a crinkled cheese wrapper.

Walt Petermen studies the wrapper, curiously -- using a jeweler's loupe.

THEN,

WALT PETERMEN

(into cell phone)

It's me. Hey, you still have your connection with C.S.T.? -- Good. I need to call in a favor. -- Me too. A great dog. -- Oh! No-No. I'm sorry. No. She'll be missed, truly, too.

INT. HOWARD'S SMART FORTWO -- DAY

As Howard confesses, Bethany stares forward looking rather nonplussed toward what is being said to her.

HOWARD

...And we left her in the woods. But then he started asking questions. About you. I think he threatened me with your life. But I'm not one-hundred percent. Can't seem to get a bead on the guy. Wants me to call him Murphy for some reason. But his name is David. I thinks--I know I should've just paid him off--Oh shit! What's this?

Through front windshield, we see:

A POLICE CHECK POINT -- just up ahead.

Increasingly apprehensive,

HOWARD

Baby, whatcha thinking right now? Snuggle Bug? Are you going to talk to me? I love--

--TAP. TAP. On Howard's window. A gloved hand motions Howard to roll the window down.

EXT/INT. SMART FORTWO -- CONTINUING

Freezing his butt off, DALE THE COP leans in saying,

DALE THE COP

Whaz'up, bitches?

HOWARD

(feigning cool)
'Sup, hommie.

DALE THE COP

Has anyone approached the two of you this evening for a ride? Some one like a hitchhiker? Maybe had a spooky mask on?

HOWARD

We're just returning home from the airport, but I can honestly say there hasn't.

DALE THE COP

No seekers of directions?

HOWARD

Nada.

(to Bethany)

Sung bug?

She just sits there. Facing forward. Devoid of emotion.

Elbowing her with his eyes,

HOWARD

Anyone ask you for directions, Sung bug?

Not a word. Face forward. Fermenting.

HOWARD

She's sleepy. Just came back from a fun trip, and she's sleepy. Just wanna get her home. Put some dinner in her belly then tuck the tyke into bed.

DALE THE COP

We've got reason to believe there's a particular gentleman at large, running around, hunting those in the community who--

HOWARD

--Yeah, I believe I've heard something about that.

DALE THE COP

Please don't interrupt me again you got that, fuck face? I just asked you a question.

HOWARD

Yeah, okay. Geezus Dale, calm down.

DALE THE COP
Have you seen this man?

Dale the Cop holds up a composite sketch of the Dead End Killer: **A man with his face wrapped in some kind of fabric/duct tape.**

HOWARD
Nuh-uh. Sure haven't.
(to Bethany)
Have you?

Face forward. Stoic.

DALE THE COP
You okay, miss?

No response.

DALE THE COP
Ma'am? Does this man have you here against your will? Blink once if yes. Twice if no.

HOWARD
She my fiance, Dale, you know that.

DALE THE COP
Officer Grossman, Mr. Jerk face. Pop your trunk for me, please, sir?

Tiny trunk/hatchback pops open.

Dale the Cop inspects -- finds nothing but a leather muzzle.

DALE THE COP
Keep your doors locked 'til we get this reject off the streets. Oh, and love the new haircut, Bethany. You look great.

Shit. Howard looks: Shit. New haircut.

Howard drives off.

HOWARD
(re: hair cut)
I was saving my complement for when we got home.

Silence. Then after a beat,

HOWARD

So he convinced me -- so he
hatched this plan to pin it on
Dead End Killer...

CUT TO:

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK -- NEAR HOWARD'S -- NIGHT

We watch as Howard's Smart Fortwo rolls up the drive way
of the duplex -- jerks to a stop.

Howard and Bethany hop out. Then scurry inside.

INT. HOWARD'S FRONT DOOR -- NIGHT

Bethany and Howard scurry in from the cold.

HOWARD

...And I don't think he is going
to stop until he gets paid--can
you at least acknowledge that you
hear me? I need to know you hear--

Bethany whips around, and with every ounce of her being,
slams Howard's in the face with her fist -- throws her
hips into it and everything.

CRUNCH!

Blood sprays. on the wall. floor. Bethany's face.

Howard buckles in pain to his knees, clutching his face.

HOWARD

(anguished gasp)
MY FACE!

She feigns another punch. Howard winces. Then cowers
for pity.

BETHANY

Now go clean yourself up. Then
come back and sit the fuck down...

Pointing to exact spot,

BETHANY

...right there. We've got matters
to discuss.

INT. MS. PETERMEN'S LIVING ROOM -- MEANWHILE

A small, antique floor lamp vomits shadows across the wall.

Walt Petermen sits bunkered in his granny's 1930s -esque couch.

He clutches a beer. Several empty bottles -- litter out around him. As he weeps into a POLAROID of himself kneeling beside NiNim. Both younger. Enjoying happier times.

His cell phone rings. Quick like, he blots away tears and answers,

WALT PETERMEN

(sniffing)

Yo? -- Hey. -- Yeah? -- You're kidding. Really? -- Which one? -- What about the other one: Howard Johnson?

Walt Petermen's face melts into delight. Then,

WALT PETERMEN

-- Sorry, babe, but I'm too much rock and roll for one woman to handle.

He hangs up. THUD! Something just slammed into the wall. On Howard's side. Sounded dense. Painful.

WALT PETERMEN

What the eff?

INT. HOWARD'S PLACE -- CONTINUING

Bethany is full blown supernova,

BETHANY

You stupid, stupid dumbass stupid asshole!

HOWARD

(groveling)

I know. I'm sorry.

BETHANY

--Sit down. And SHUT THE FUCK up. Not a solitary word leaks out. Got me?

Cradling his shoulder in one hand -- broken nose in the other, Howard sits where he was told to.

HOWARD

Yes. Geezus, Bethany, calm down.

BETHANY

You're lucky I don't rear-naked choke you into a coffin.

Howard's cell phone rings.

HOWARD

(re: caller ID)
It's him.

BETHANY

Don't answer.

HOWARD

Kay.

He stuffs the phone under a couch pillow.

BETHANY

No. Answer.

Ferrates it back out.

HOWARD

Kay.

BETHANY

Wait. No. Tell 'em you've got the loot.

HOWARD

What loot? There is no loot.

BETHANY

Plan to met first thing in the morning. First light.

Too late, MURPHY'S PHONE CALL defaults to,

HOWARD

Went to voice mail.

BETHANY

You're exhaustive, Howard -- then call 'em back!

INT. MURPHY BUICK -- NIGHT

Shelly's phone number is scribbled over the back of hot dog receipt.

MURPHY

(to NiNim)

This guy's about to face the factor. Ignore me like I'm gonna ignore your cries for merc--

Cell phone rings,

MURPHY

Two can play this game.

Murphy lets the phone ring through to voice mail.

BACK TO HOWARD AND BETHANY

HOWARD

No answer.

Howard's cell phone rings. He answers.

HOWARD

Hello? Hello?

(to Bethany)

Why would he call then hang up?

BACK TO MURPHY

Laughing his butt off.

MURPHY

Never mess with the master.

Murphy's cell phone rings.

MURPHY

Hello?

BEGIN INTERCUT,

HOWARD

(re: NiNim)

How is he?

MURPHY

Well I've got quite a few
blessings to be grateful for,
Howie, so, I can't complain.

HOWARD

Not you, knuckle head. The dog?

MURPHY

Dog's fine, Howie. He's fine.
He's with me. Feel like we're
bonding.

HOWARD

Meet me at the cabin first thing
in the morning. You'll get your
money there.

MURPHY

Or I can just swing by and get it
from you now. Why wait? We can
grab a drink or something.

HOWARD

Tomorrow. Cabin. First light.

MURPHY

I feel like some bad blood has
brew-- hello? Ahh. You there?

BACK TO HOWARD AND BETHANY

BETHANY

Perfect.

HOWARD

I think you broke my nose.

His nose is torqued to the side. Bethany grabs it and
POPS it back into place.

BETHANY

Look at me Howard, I want you to
look at me. Go get me a coke.

Howard scurries from the living room -- to the kitchen.

BETHANY

(calling after)
And bring me my Lorazepam.

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK -- NIGHT

Giddy with excitement,

MURPHY

SHHEEE-YEEEEAAH!

(then)

Utah, here we come. You're gonna love it there, Kyle. Liquor and skanks as far as the eye can see. Will increase your life by 10 years, at least, I know because I'm pretty sure I read it somewhere--damn these fingers.

Murphy is trying to roll a joint. And failing miserably at it.

So he switches to a tiny bong.

MURPHY

And I wanted to tell you, you might have a mommy soon. She's really cool. Works at Wawa.

SMALL WONDER plays on a small portable tv (one from cabin) propped up for his viewing pleasure.

BEGIN SERIES:

-- Howard and Bethany lie in bed. Bethany runs her hand down Howard's face -- she's feeling frisky -- then along his shoulder. Down his arm and up under the covers. Howard deflects it away from his crotch and rolls over. Bethany gives a humph face. Rolls to her side.

BETHANY

When's it due?

HOWARD

Two days.

BETHANY

Good. Then we fuck.

-- Walt Peterman lies balled up on his gammy's bed, breathing her scent off the covers -- still crying to the photo of NiNim and him during happier times.

-- Murphy, happy as a June bug, pets NiNim. Removes the muzzle. NiNim attacks, immediately.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

On the sun as it peek-a-boos over the horizon.

EXT. HOWARD'S BEDROOM -- SUNRISE

Howard sits on the edge of the bed. Wistful.

Bethany skitters in, battlefield ready. Camouflaged -- Arctic-style. Face -- painted for war.

She looks wicked-sexy.

BETHANY

Go time--you're not dressed?!

HOWARD

Pretty sure if I arrive wearing
cammies, he'll what's up.

BETHANY

Whatever, Debbie Downer. I found
the cattle prod.

ZAP! ZAP!

BETHANY

Stills got some juice. We need to
bounce if we're gonna beat the
freak there.

HOWARD

What's that?

BETHANY

What's what?

HOWARD

That. In the case.

BETHANY

Oh. This. A crossbow.

Bethany unsheathes a purple-metallic crossbow -- with a
razor-sharp, broad-tipped arrow chambered and at the
ready.

BETHANY

(off Howard's look)
What? You said no guns in the
house. You've never ever said
crossbows -- so -- big difference.

INT. SMART FORTWO (TRAVELING) -- MORNING

Bethany inspects her face paint in the flip mirror.

Howard drives,

HOWARD

I was just asking. I just never knew you owned a cattle prod, that's all.

BETHANY

Stay focused. We should be concentrating on the plan at hand not revisiting my past.

HOWARD

Sordid past.

Howard fidgets his cell phone out of his pocket, resting it on top of his lap. For comfort reasons.

BETHANY

Focus! then we'll dispose of the dog. Your turn. Go on. Let me here it.

HOWARD

He gets there. I get him in the cabin. Pay him. On our way back out the door, I grab his arms from behind while you zap him with that fucking sex toy of yours. We drown him. Hack off his toe and drop off his body at that dead end.

BETHANY

And.

HOWARD

Dispose of the dog. I can't keep killing all these people--oh shit.

BETHANY

What?

Howard whips his cell phone up to his ear.

HOWARD

(into phone)
Hello? Larry Guy? -- Hello?
Anyone there?

(to Bethany)
I can't tell if he heard us.

BETHANY
What-hang up then.

Call disconnects.

BETHANY
Are you serious HOWARD!

HOWARD
I musta butt dialed--I don't know,
he didn't respond. Says the call
lasted six minutes.

BETHANY
Damn it, Howard. I...

INT. MURPHY'S BUICK -- CONTINUING

Following a few car lengths behind the Smart Fortwo.
Murphy watches as the Fortwo swerves from side to side.

MURPHY
What is he doing--

--BOOM! Buick blows a tire. A rear one...

MURPHY
Titties.

...forcing Murphy to veer off the road, onto the
shoulder.

EXT. DESERTED HIGHWAY -- MORNING

In the soft, honeydew glow of sunrise, Murphy cranks away
on a carjack. Busted tire rises off the ground.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Need some help there?

MURPHY
(w/o looking up)
I got it. But thank you, though.

Murphy tugs the busted tire off.

A shadow figure appear mere steps behind Murphy -- who's
now too busy fishing the grimy slush with his hands for a
dropped lugnut.

MAN

Looks like you're in denial.

MURPHY

(preoccupied)
I'd say more about twenty miles
outside West Chester.

MAN

Huh?

Murphy finally gives in and stands to address his roadside helper.

MURPHY

We're nowhere near Denial--
IT'S YOU!

The Dead End Killer. Mask on and everything.

Dead End Killer brandishes a stun gun and lashes at Murphy -- who stands paralyzed in fright -- with murderous intent... ZAP! ZAP!

But SLIPS.

Ramming head first into the buick's steel, rusty bumper - THUNK! Leaving him lights out. Crumpled on the roadside.

Murphy exhales his relief.

MURPHY

I just messed you up, fool! Made
you my bitch.

(then)

Sweet cheese sauce, I bet there's
reward money. Daddy's lucky day!

Murphy grabs his car keys and pops the trunk. Unpacks his spare tire, as we...

EXT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- MORNING

Cabin is slathered in snow and ice. Ice cycles hang from the overhang like jagged teeth.

Smart Fortwo sits. Parked. Alone in the wilderness.

Sunrise mixes with naked, leafless branches casting meandering shadows about.

Howard KNOCK KNOCKS on the rickety door.

No answer. But an ice cycle drops. Shattering to pieces mere steps from Howard.

He tries the doorknob. Door creaks open.

Howard hesitates, apprehensive to enter. Then vanishes through the doorway. Door closes.

INT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- CONTINUING

Howard yanks his cell phone out. Calls Bethany.

 HOWARD
 (into phone)
 All clear.

He slides open a curtain, draping the cabin's lonely window. Looks outside.

EXT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- SAME

Bethany hunkers down behind some undergrowth, perfectly blending into the ashen surrounding.

 BETHANY
 Stick to the plan. We get this
 over with and go put the kbosh on
 that old fart who keeps calling
 you.
 (then)
 Figured he be here by now. Should
 have ate that apple.

 HOWARD (O.S.)
 What?

 BETHANY
 Shouldn't he be here by now?

 HOWARD (O.S.)
 Ohmigawd he set us up!

Tires CRUNCH across snow, as Murphy pulls his Buick in behind the Smart Fortwo. Parks.

 BETHANY
 Relax. The owl just landed. I need
 you to stay focused.

She watches as Murphy pops from the car.

BETHANY

He's heading toward the door.
Text if things go south. Now lets
fuck some shit up. Silence
communications.

She hangs up.

Murphy stops. Looks around, quizzically, scanning the
area. Then enters the cabin. Door shuts.

Bethany's cell phone BEEPS. New message. She checks it:

"WHAT'S THE NAME OF THAT CHUBBY CAT ON THUNDER CATS? ONE
THAT ALWAYS SAYS: SNARF"

Bethany fires back with the answer: "SNARF."

She stands to push toward the cabin. BEEP. New message.
She checks it: "I know. But what's its name?"

INT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- CONTINUING

HOWARD

I don't want any coco, Murphy. I
want this over with and behind me.
That's all -- to finish my book.

MURPHY

Fine. You wanna be like that then
where's my cash?

Howard shows him the money.

MURPHY

Good. Well then I'm glad it's
finally all over with, too. F.Y.I,
you are a horrible boss.

HOWARD

I never was your boss.

MURPHY

The only reason I agreed to work
for you was because I had to.
When we were in middle school, I
was about to get beat up by some
bullies and you came and saved me
with selfless sacrifice. And never
once asked me for a thank you.
You saved my life on that dour
day.

And I vowed to return the favor.
And now I consider that vow
fulfilled.

Howard furrows his brow, perplexed.

HOWARD

Wait. All I remember was I was
walking to class. And then out of
the blue some eighth grades
pummeled me blind. But I was on
my way to class not intervening--

WALT PETERMEN (O.S.)

--Boo. hoo. hoo. hoo. Cry me a
frickin' river.

Murphy and Howard crane to see Walt Petermen roll out of
the small bedroom -- a shotgun pointed at them both.

Walt Petermen's wheelchair tires are fitted in snow-
chains.

MURPHY

Holy shit that is the coolest
fucking wheelchair I have ever
seen. How fast can you get that
beast up to?

WALT PETERMEN

Currently throttles out at twenty-
seven M.P.H., but once I open the
intake a little more, I'm hoping
to bump her up thirty. Now shut
up. And sit down.

Swings his sights to Howard.

WALT PETERMEN

You too, Dead End Killer.

HOWARD

Whuh?

WALT PETERMEN

You heard me. I know who you are -
-- who you really are.

The two sit down.

WALT PETERMEN

Bet you're wondering who I am?

HOWARD

You're that weird cop who came to my house.

WALT PETERMEN

No! You're weird! So shut up!

Tires screech. Walt Petermen shoots across the floor in his wheelchair -- kicks Howard in the face with the butt of the shotgun -- before screeching wheels in reverse back to his original starting point.

WALT PETERMEN

Now where was I? Bet the two of you are wondering who I am--well I'm the grandkid of the lady you murdered, and the rightful owner of the beautiful dog you stole.

HOWARD

This isn't what you think it looks like?

WALT PETERMEN

It isn't?

HOWARD

Nuh-uh. That's why I said it.

Walt Petermen retrieves a cheese wrapper from his fanny pack. Holds it up for the two to admire.

WALT PETERMEN

Look familiar?

MURPHY

This is all just one big misunderstanding, sir--

WALT PETERMEN

--Shut up! Both of you! I want my dog. Where is he?

MURPHY

He's in my car I-I can go get him real quick-like and be right back.

WALT PETERMEN

SHUT UP! Both of you. Now what did you do with my gammy?

Howard sneaks in a text message to Bethany: BIDHFMS (it's gibberish) While Murphy replies,

MURPHY

She's out back. Tucked safely in
a tree.

WALT PETERMEN

You thought you'd get away with it
didn't you? But weren't counting
on Walt Petermen coming along, now
didja?

MURPHY

Who?

WALT PETERMEN

Me. Walt Petermen. I'm Walt
Petermen. And I am placing you
both under arrest for the murder
and kidnapping of...

...Walt Petermen slowly lifts himself up out of the
wheelchair -- onto his feet.

WALT PETERMEN

Oh. GLORIOUS DAY! I did it! I got
my legs back, just like you said I
would Gammy! Just like you said I
would.

(then, to Murphy)

Take me to h--

Window shatters.

THWAAP! An arrow slices through Walt Petermen's throat.

Gurgling. Blood sprays.

Walt Petermen collapses into the wheelchair -- jarring it
into gear.

Wheelchair SPINS in circles. Then smashes into a wall.

Bethany kicks through the cabin door. Exhilarated.

BETHANY

Enjoy your visit to the graveyard,
bitch.

Then to Howard,

BETHANY

We did it, baby. We killed--wait.
Who's this guy?

MURPHY

I'm Murphy.

BETHANY

YOU'RE MURPHY. SHIT! Who's this?!

Points to Walt Petermen -- hunched over in the wheelchair -- head ramming over and over against wall.

MURPHY

(to Howard)

You sonuvabitch, you set me up!

HOWARD

SHOOT HIM!

Murphy launches off the couch for the shotgun -- but take a crossbow to the face in the process.

Bethany quickly flexes into a fighter's stance, daring Murphy with her eyes to go for the shogun.

Murphy spins to run out the door.

Bethany grabs the shotgun off the floor and swings the site on Murphy and -- BANG!

Murphy scrambles out the cabin door.

Leaving Howard behind, flailing. Buckshot swiss-cheesing his shoulder.

HOWARD

Arrrrggghhh!

BETHANY

Sorry, Snuggle Bug.

HOWARD

Stop him.

Bethany bolts out the cabin door -- a warrior to the battlefield.

EXT. CABIN DOORWAY -- CONTINUING

Bethany plows through the doorway. Murphy waits with a lump of wood. Throws it. Soars about a foot. Crashes to earth.

Bethany steps in to take aim. But slips on a patch of ice. BANG! Blows a hole out the porch -- jarring an ice cycle loose. It drops -- THWACK! Sinks deep in her neck.

MURPHY

Don't pull it out!

She does anyway. Blood squirts.

Bethany staggers. Then

collapses. Life -- ebbs from her eyes.

Howard barrels out the doorway. Knocking another ice cycle loose. It drops. Landing through his foot.

HOWARD

AAARGH!!!

Murphy scatters into the surrounding forest, while Howard sidles up to Bethany and checks for a pulse.

HOWARD

Snug bug? Nooooooo!

(then)

YOU'RE A DEAD MAN!

He pries the shotgun from Bethany's dead grasp and storms off after Murphy -- only, he sees NiNim barking madly inside the Buick. Howard redirects. Storms toward NiNim. Aims the shotgun. Pulls trigger.

CLICK.

Shoot! He cocks the weapon -- shell pops out. Another slides into chamber.

HOWARD

I wanna feel splatter.

HE opens the door. Lifts the gun -- NiNim pounces. Knocking Howard over. Attack ensues. Resulting in Howard's ear being bit off in the process. Before NiNim bolts off into the woods. Vanishing from sight.

Howard laughs, manic like.

HOWARD

Ahahahaha! I'll get you, yet! And then I'm gonna eat ya!!! Ahahaha!

He fishes his earlobe from snow. Stuffs it in his pocket. Then pockets a hand full of snow -- to keep it chilled.

He spins around. Murphy time. Howard trudges off.

DEEP IN WOODS WITH MURPHY

Branches snap. Sporadic panicked breathing.

Murphy runs for his life.

HOWARD

Trachles through the woods after Murphy, tracking the fresh shoe prints in the snow.

DEEP IN WOODS WITH MURPHY

Murphy crests a snowy/icy embankment. Stops dead in his tracks.

A small lake, frozen in ice, stretches out in front of him -- more woods lure him from other side. Nearby, a small rowboat rests, frozen in place.

DEEP IN WOODS WITH HOWARD

Howard barges through some branches. Catches a glimpse of Murphy struggling to keep pace, as he crosses the frozen lake.

Howard angles for a clean shot.

Pulls trigger.

K-POW.

Miss. Loads another shell. Fires.

K-POW!

Misses.

ATOP ICE WITH MURPHY

Murphy, slipping and sliding, cranes to see if Howard is still firing at him.

Nope. He's now chasing him across the ice.

Murphy runs faster. But trips. Topples to the ice.

Murphy throws his hands up, pleadingly.

MURPHY

TIME OUT!

But Howard is no where in sight -- as if vanished off the face of the earth.

Murphy staggers to his feet, perplexed. Takes a step toward Howard's last known location. The ice CRACKS and HISSES.

Screw it, Murphy spins back around. Keeps running for safety of solid ground.

INT. MURPHY'S RAMSHACKLE CABIN -- LATER THAT DAY

Murphy skitters over to the Buick, limping in exhaust.

He notices the passenger door is open.

MURPHY

Shit. Kyle?!

Scans for NiNim. NiNim is no where to be found. But then Murphy notices the backseat of his buick has been kicked loose.

Murphy staggers over to the trunk. Pops it. It's empty.

MURPHY

Shit.

ZAP! ZAP! Murphy crumbles.

A blade, serrated, slices across his neck. Murphy face plants in the snow. Dead.

SMASH TO BLACK:**FADE IN****EXT. RURAL, TWO LANE HIGHWAY -- BLIZZARD**

On a winding road, threading through a swath of Pennsylvanian wilderness. NiNim and his bulky, bell-bedazzled sweater, trot down the shoulder of the deserted roadway.

A Smart Fortwo pulls up alongside and stops. Passenger door swings open. NiNim climbs in. Door swings shut. Fortwo spins a u-turn. Then drives off. Disappearing through a curtain of snowy downpour. **THE END.**