

The Senior Senior

by

Douglas Pike (c) 2018

FADE IN:

EXT. ASBURY PARK, NJ - DAY

SEPTEMBER, 1990

The Asbury Park boardwalk is desolate. It is a dreary, post-Labor-Day morning.

EXT. BOARDWALK STOREFRONT

The exterior of a rundown storefront displays a weathered sign: Pugh's Cotton Candy, The Fluff of Dreams. Next door, a new sign over the window: Zera, The Fortune Teller - Know Your Future Today! A light is on inside Pugh's and in the apartments above the respective stores.

INT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY - 7 A.M.

PAUL PUGH, 28, fusses with a dilapidated cotton candy machine. His ill-fitting T-shirt and denim shorts are coated with multi-hued wisps of product.

The paunchy, bespectacled proprietor fumbles with containers of sugar, powdered egg and bacon bits, sloppily scooping each into the machine's rusted, center receptacle.

PAUL PUGH  
Bacon and egg flavored cotton  
candy -- I smell sweet and savory  
success.

He flips the power switch several times until the noisy contraption kicks in.

INT. COTTON CANDY MACHINE

Thin yellow wisps gradually emanate from a tiny hole near the bowl's center.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul grabs a paper cone, deftly spins it around the bowl's interior perimeter, gathers the accumulating fluff. He turns off the machine, inspects his creation. It's horribly lopsided. Cotton candy extends to his elbow. He holds the cone up triumphantly.

PAUL PUGH  
Perfect!

CUT TO:

INT. THE PUGHS' APARTMENT - SECONDS LATER

DIANE PUGH, Paul's wiry-built wife, also 28, nervously sits at the kitchen table in this cramped, shabby apartment. Stacks of unwashed dishes are interspersed with open food boxes and dirty small appliances.

Diane's pencil flies across a ledger, as she attempts to do the business' bookkeeping at the table. She pauses, picks up a cup of coffee. Spotting an error, she slams down the cup, soaking her paperwork. She throws the pencil, runs both hands through her red, curly hair and gives it a sharp tug.

DIANE PUGH

It' just a damned cotton candy shop! Why do debits have to exactly equal credits in such a pissant business? Can't they just be close?

She picks up the ledger, bolts to her feet, reveals she is pregnant.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)

We are not getting audited again this year!

Diane turns towards the sink.

SINK

The coffee-stained ledger hits the bottom of the sink, joining assorted unwashed glassware, utensils and plates. A spritz of dish soap and a stream of water hit the dirty page.

BACK TO SCENE

DIANE PUGH

Problem solved, our books are clean.

Paul rushes into the kitchen, presents his latest cotton candy creation to his wife. He pushes it within an inch of her scowling face.

PAUL PUGH

So, what do you think?

## KITCHEN COUNTER

Diane reaches back, grips the kitchen counter edge behind her, digs in her red, chipped, fake nails, breaking off two.

## BACK TO SCENE

Diane closes her eyes, inhales.

DIANE PUGH

It's awesome, Paul. Smells just like bacon and eggs... and strawberry cough medicine. Just what the public wants.

PAUL PUGH

You like it? You actually like it? Tell me you like it!

Diane releases her death grip of the counter. She gently takes the candy from Paul, sniffs it a second time. Paul beams.

DIANE PUGH

I love it! L-love it! In fact, I love it so much, I want you to line my coffin with it.

Diane inverts the the strange concoction over Paul's head, forces it down into his hair.

Paul cringes, winces.

PAUL PUGH

Aw, baby! What gives?

DIANE PUGH

My patience! My patience is giving way, Paul! We're running a business that has four good months a year. Those four months have to pay twelve months' worth of bills.

Paul pulls a strand of cotton candy from the inverted cone on his head, tastes it, approves, sticks it back in his hair.

PAUL PUGH

I'm aware of that -- we've been doing this for seven years.

DIANE PUGH  
But we're barely covering six  
months' worth of bills.

She points to her belly.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
And in case you've forgotten,  
there's going to be another mouth  
to feed in a few months, and it  
can't survive on cotton candy.

Paul slumps into a seat at the kitchen table. It wobbles terribly. He pays no attention; it's been that way for years. He blows dust out of an empty cereal bowl, fills it from an open box at hand.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
The milk went bad last week.

Paul pushes the bowl aside.

PAUL PUGH  
I can make this into a  
twelve-month-a-year business,  
Diane. I have ideas.

Diane leans over Paul's shoulder, speaks directly into his ear.

DIANE PUGH  
Oh, that's right; pardon me. I  
forgot I'm married to the Thomas  
Edison of cotton candy!

She stands up straight, steps away.

PAUL PUGH  
Cotton candy... it's, it's in my  
veins!

DIANE PUGH  
It's between your ears!

Paul sniffs, wipes his nose with his shirt sleeve.

PAUL PUGH  
Do we have any tissues?

Diane grabs a roll of toilet paper from next to the sink, tosses it to Paul.

DIANE PUGH

Some people aspire for a luxurious home. I aspire to someday have more than one kind of paper product. This is all we've got!

He unwinds a few sheets, wipes his nose, sniffs again.

PAUL PUGH

It's a new day. Let's try to be hopeful for a change, all right?

DIANE PUGH

Speaking of new days, did you remember to wake Kenny, before running down to the shop -- like I asked you! It's the first day of school for Christ's sake!

Paul slams his hand on the table top. It tips, sending much of its contents to the floor.

PAUL PUGH

Shit! Ken! Ken, get up! School today! Get your butt outta bed!

INT. KEN PUGH'S ROOM

The tiny, windowless bedroom is badly in need of a fresh coat of paint. Crumpled linens and pillows, on the bed, cover whomever lies beneath. The floor is strewn with clothes, towels, footwear and boxes of assorted junk.

In the far corner, a painter's easel supports a partially finished canvas. Several art posters adorn the walls.

DIANE PUGH (O.S.)

Ken! Ken, you'll miss the frikkin' bus! Get movin'!

A moan is heard, then stirring, but the bed linens remain still. A hand emerges from under the bed, followed by the back of a full head of gray hair.

PAUL PUGH (O.S.)

This is the year, Ken, right?

KEN PUGH, fully born from under his bed, stands, scratches his ear, hiccups. He's dressed in khakis and a light blue, buttoned-down shirt. Ken is sixty-four and looks it. Blue eyes and a slim physique, along with his ample hair, are his few saving graces.

KEN PUGH

Yep, this is the year I'll finally graduate. I always said forty-six was my lucky number.

Ken looks over his shoulder, at the work-in-progress painting perched on the easel.

EASEL

A half-finished landscape, rendered in an impressionistic style, shows considerable talent.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken takes a step towards the easel, pauses, looks at his watch, sighs. He sits on the bed, picks up a sock off the floor, followed by one shoe. After putting them on, he repeats the process with the other foot.

KITCHEN

Ken shuffles in, assesses the mess and the tension in the air.

KEN PUGH

Mornin', son... Diane... What's for breakfast?

Diane yanks the hair-encrusted cotton candy cone from Paul's head, hands it to Ken. Ken, disgusted, inspects it, pulls off a hair-free strand, tastes it.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Your latest experiment, Paul?

Paul shrugs.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Keep at it; there's quite a bit to be said for persistence.

Diane jeers.

DIANE PUGH

Where's persistence gotten you, Ken?

KEN PUGH

Twelfth grade.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - MINUTES LATER

A dozen high-school-age STUDENTS mill about at the bus stop. Ken is visible in the distance, walking as fast as someone his age can.

KEN/BUS STOP INTERCUTTING

Lunch box in hand, wearing an army-issued backpack, Ken huffs and puffs. His arthritic limp keeps him from attaining his desired pace. A speeding school bus passes by.

The bus stops at the assigned stop. Doors open, kids pile in, jabbering to one another.

Ken waves, hopes the bus driver will spot him and wait. Fifty yards to go.

KEN PUGH

Wait up, CHARLIE! Your dad always did! Your grandpa, too, occasionally.

Bus doors close, the vehicle departs.

Ken stops, kicks the pavement with his right toe. The sound of thunder is heard o.s.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Nuts!

Sweaty Ken pushes on. He hears running o.s., stops, looks over his shoulder.

KEN'S POV

A tall, athletic, upperclassman and acquaintance of Ken's, MATT CURTIS, approaches quickly, running at full speed. He stops upon catching up to Ken.

BACK TO SCENE

MATT CURTIS

You're never going to make it on time at the speed you're going, Ken. First day -- you don't want to be late.



KEN PUGH

Matt, at the pace I'm going, I'll be lucky to make it there by winter break. There's another bus stop four blocks from here, but no way I'm goin' to make it.

MATT CURTIS

Then you need to take the Curtis Express!

KEN PUGH

The what?

Matt steps in front of Ken, pats himself on the back.

MATT CURTIS

The Curtis Express -- quit talking and hop on!

Ken, stunned, snaps out of it, hops onto Matt's back. Matt takes off, sprinting for the next bus stop.

NEXT BUS STOP

Matt, not even winded, arrives at the stop as STUDENTS are boarding. Ken hops off Matt's back.

MATT CURTIS

A new record, with time to spare.

KEN PUGH

Let me know when the Curtis Express has flights to Detroit. I've got a sister there; you'll save me a bundle.

Matt boards the bus, followed by Ken.

INT. BUS

Matt and Ken work their way back towards, and take, the few open seats left. Students unfamiliar with Ken stare confusedly. TWO STUDENTS seated in front of Ken and Matt converse.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #1

Hey, did you see? Matt Curtis brought his grandfather!

Students in the immediate area laugh. Student-on-Bus #2 pokes Student-on-Bus #1 in the arm.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #2  
That's not his grandpa. Ain't you heard about Ken Pugh? He's like a hundred years old and still in high school. He's the only student at Woodrow Wilson High who voted for Woodrow Wilson.

Ken overhears, rolls his eyes, leans closer to the students in front of him.

KEN PUGH  
I'm only sixty-four.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #2  
Oh, you should be very proud of yourself, Kenny. Why can't you graduate?

Ken leans back.

KEN PUGH  
Long division, mostly. If it wasn't for long division I might have graduated at sixty.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #2  
Well, things may be different this year -- there's a new principal and I hear he's plenty tough.

Ken tries to swallow, cannot.

KEN PUGH  
New principal? What happened to Mr. Campbell?

STUDENT-ON-BUS #1  
He died. Don't you know anything?

Ken turns to Matt.

MATT CURTIS  
I heard Mr. Campbell gagged to death on a stale Twinkie.

KEN PUGH  
No... Just like my Uncle Albert.

CUT TO:

INT. HOME OF PRINCIPAL VINCENT CANNATOONA - 7:30 A.M.

## BATHROOM

Lean, meticulous VINCENT CANNATOONA, 38, the new principal of Woodrow Wilson High, stands before the mirror over the bathroom sink. Attired in a black suit, his brown hair slicked back, Vincent reaches into his breast pocket, pulls out wire-rimmed spectacles and puts them on. He brings his chiseled face to within an inch of the mirror and sneers.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Students of Woodrow Wilson High  
School, I am your new principal,  
Vincent Cannatoona. If you learn  
anything from this first meeting,  
let it be this--

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
What flavor Pop Tart do you want?!  
Vincent? Vincent Cannatoona!

Vincent lowers his gaze, shudders.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Vincent! I asked you a question!

Vincent slaps the side of the sink with his open hand.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Strawberry, Candace!

He indignantly sniffs, resumes his menacing expression.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
Let it be this--

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
Frosted, or unfrosted? We have  
both!

## KITCHEN

A runaway freight train, Vincent storms into the kitchen, comes to an abrupt halt inches from his wife.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Frosted! Two frosted strawberry  
Pop Tarts, if you please, Candy!

Angrily, silently, blonde, petite CANDACE 'CANDY' CANNATOONA shoves two Pop Tarts into the toaster, forces down the device's lever. She tosses the Pop Tart box into the pantry, slams its door shut. Candace adjusts her fashionable dress, untangles her coordinated necklace.

CANDACE'S POV

She peruses the kitchen's multitude of unopened and partially opened moving boxes. Disarray reigns.

BACK TO SCENE

CANDACE CANNATOONA

Bad enough this place looks like a Salvation Army warehouse -- I don't need you calling me Candy on top of it! After two years of marriage, you know I prefer being called Candace. Candy Cannatoona sounds like a novelty food product for cats, and a terrible one at that!

VINCENT CANNATOONA

It was a slip of the tongue... Candace. First-day-at-the-new-job tension, plus moving cross country at the last minute -- everything's happened so fast.

Vincent sits bolt upright at the kitchen table, drinks juice. He tenderly picks up the copy of Roget's Thesaurus next to his place setting, fondly looks at it, as if it was the Holy Bible, then gently sets it down.

Candace stares out the kitchen window, at the front lawn, her back towards Vincent.

CANDACE CANNATOONA

I'm going to need more money, Vincent -- a great deal more. The contractors want to start right away.

Vincent clears his throat, takes another drink.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Buying a house sight unseen was the worst decision you've made since I've known you.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Is it possible to have one day in ten where you fail to remind me of that?

Candace spins around, confronts her husband.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
No! Not until I've transformed  
this handyman's nightmare into a  
place I'm proud to show our  
family, friends and your new  
colleagues.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
You mean your mother.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
Well... yeah.

Vincent stands, takes in the disorderly surroundings, picks  
up his thesaurus.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
How much?

Candace waves her index finger at Vincent.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
Don't pin me down to a specific  
number! I know you, Vincent. As  
soon as I commit, you'll start  
grinding it down to pocket change.

TOASTER

The smoking appliance dings. Two smoldering Pop Tarts pop  
up.

BACK TO SCENE

They both stare at the charred pastries.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
It's going to take \$50,000, at  
least. And that's assuming  
nothing unexpected crops up, and  
you know something unexpected will  
crop up!

Vincent looks up to the ceiling.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
I'm surprised the smoke alarm  
didn't go off.

Using barbecue tongs, Candace plucks the Pop Tarts from the  
toaster, drops them on a plate. One slides off, hits the  
floor.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
I'm not, nothing in this dump  
works.

The smoke alarm blares. Vincent grabs the remaining Pop  
Tart, takes one bite, discards the remnant in the trash.  
Thesaurus in hand, he heads for the door.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
Like I said -- fifty thousand, at  
least!

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
High school principals don't get  
paid like investment bankers.

Vincent exits, slams the door. Candace picks up the Pop  
Tart from the floor, nearly takes a bite, discards it. The  
smoke alarm stops.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
Tell me something I don't know,  
Vincent.

The smoke alarm resumes.

CUT TO:

INT. WOODROW WILSON HIGH SCHOOL - DAY 8:15 A.M.

A narrow, dimly-lit hallway in this decrepit school is  
jammed with raucous STUDENTS seeking their respective home-  
rooms, while others congregate at open lockers.

TEACHERS stand in doorways to their rooms, answering  
student questions, giving directions MOS.

KEN

Ken amiably stumbles along in the crowd, occasionally waves  
to students or faculty he recognizes, none of whom wave  
back.

At room 405 he stops, greets the ancient, frowning TEACHER.

KEN PUGH  
Hello, Miss van Wart. Looks like  
I've got you for homeroom again.  
This makes seventeen years in a  
row.

MISS VAN WART, pencil stuck in her gray hair, takes a deep breath, coughs a smoker's cough. Her black dress is coated with dandruff.

MISS VAN WART  
To be punished like this, I must  
have done something truly horrible  
in a previous life. Just take a  
seat, Pugh.

KEN PUGH  
What did you do this summer?

She grabs the pencil from her hair, snaps it in two.

MISS VAN WART  
I prayed for death every day.

KEN PUGH  
But here you are!

MISS VAN WART  
I guess I just didn't pray hard  
enough.

Mr. Cannatoona's voice booms over the P.A.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)  
Attention, students of Woodrow  
Wilson High School! Attention and  
stand up straight!

HALLWAY

Everyone in the hallway stands tall, freezes, as if they'd just heard the voice of God.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)  
Student Ken Pugh! Report at once  
to my office!

HALLWAY

Students exhale, resume activity.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, thunderstruck, makes eye contact with Miss van Wart.

KEN'S POV

Miss van Wart breaks into an ear-to-ear smile, reveals horrible, tobacco-stained teeth.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken takes a deep breath, departs. Miss van Wart looks heavenward.

MISS VAN WART  
Even if it's only for twenty  
minutes, thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING AREA, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Shiny, varnished pine frames a door with brass fittings and cloudy glass, emblazoned with the new principal's name. Ken meekly approaches seated, middle-aged, MRS. KLATTER, the receptionist, who is engrossed in her paperwork.

Ken silently mouths the principal's name, on the door, chuckles.

KEN PUGH  
Cannatoona, funny. Hi, Mrs.  
Klatter.

The receptionist looks up towards Ken, disappointment in her eyes.

MRS. KLATTER  
Oh, God, it's you, again. I  
strongly advise you to get that  
smirk off your face, Pugh. Mr.  
Cannatoona doesn't see the humor  
in his name, or anything else for  
that matter.

Ken nods. Mrs. Klatter points to a seat with a ruler.

MRS. KLATTER (CONT'D)  
Park it, he'll be with you in a  
minute.

Ken complies. Seated, he crosses his leg, placing his left ankle on his right knee. He idly plays with his shoelace.

Mr. Cannatoona's office phone conversation, o.s., is audible in the waiting area.



VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
 Candy, I'm not paying for a  
 mahogany deck. Pick something  
 less exotic -- maple or plywood  
 will look just as good at one  
 third the price.

The conversation pauses. Ken unnecessarily unties and  
 reties his shoelace, looks up.

KEN'S POV

Mrs. Klatter, brow furrowed, stares at him, perplexed. She  
 rubs her left temple with her pencil's eraser.

MRS. KLATTER  
 What's your game, Pugh?

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, dumbfounded, shakes his head, uncrosses his leg.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
 That's too much, Candy. I'm not  
 happy with that, Candy... Why not  
 just make a big pile of money in  
 the street and set it on fire?!

O.s. the sound of Vincent's phone slamming down is heard.

Ken follows Cannatoona's indistinct shadow as it rises and  
 moves along the textured glass, nearing the office door.

KEN'S POV

Cannatoona's door flings open. Powerful hands set firmly  
 on narrow hips, he seems to occupy the entire door  
 frame.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 You Pugh?

Ken stands. Vincent grimaces, tugs an earlobe, sizes Ken  
 up.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
 Your posture -- it's dreadful,  
 man!

(MORE)

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Little wonder you're a loser.  
Straighten up, for God's sake.  
You can't go through life with  
posture like that.

Ken attempts to stand up straight, does not make an impression. Vincent wilts, steps to the side.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Get in here.

INT. CANNATOONA'S OFFICE

Obsessively tidy, the office is dominated by an ornate desk. Numerous framed photos highlight Vincent's time in a military academy and the army. A large bulletin board displays official documents and assorted cutouts from magazines.

Ken cautiously sits in the hard, straight-backed chair facing Vincent's desk. Vincent stands next to his executive desk chair. A vague sound o.s., outside his window, suddenly draws his attention. He separates the slats on the Venetian blinds, peers out, grunts, releases the slats and returns his attention to Ken.

Ken forces a wan smile. Vincent picks up his beloved thesaurus, holds it next to his own head.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Do you know what this is, Pugh?  
Wait, let me rephrase that for  
someone who has been left back  
forty-five times. Forty-five!

Vincent pauses, collects his thoughts, takes a deep breath.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

This is a thesaurus, Ken.  
Enlighten me with what you know  
about a thesaurus.

Ken widens his shirt collar, his eyebrows sail up.

KEN PUGH

Before you held up that book, I  
thought it might be the name of a  
Roman general... or, maybe a  
meat-eating dinosaur.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Stop talking, Pugh -- and s-s-sit  
up s-s-straight!

Ken jolts, sits up, nearly tips over his chair. Vincent places the book on his desk, paces behind it.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Typically, a fourth grader would know that a thesaurus is a book of synonyms -- and please, do not jump in and further embarrass yourself by saying you thought a synonym was something you sprinkle on toast! I've heard that one a thousand times and I do not find it funny in the least -- not one little bit!

Vincent stops pacing, rests his forearm on the headrest of the his chair.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

The value of the thesaurus is that it helps those who regularly use it expand their vocabulary, thereby improving their writing and speaking skills, as well as their overall intelligence.

KEN PUGH

Oh, that sounds nice.

An exhale of futility from Vincent.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

By not knowing what a thesaurus is, you have more than amply demonstrated your... disdain (Vincent taps the cover of the thesaurus) for higher learning. And, Pugh, in a larger sense you are an obstacle, an impediment... (taps the book again) to this institution's success and my career.

KEN PUGH

Principal Campbell never spoke to me this way. He was a nice man.

Vincent comes around his desk, goes nose-to-nose with Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

And now he's a rotting corpse. Get used to it. Become... inured.

Vincent grabs and holds up the book.

VINCENT'S POV

Ken sweats profusely.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent's phone rings. He immediately picks up, listens, then engages.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 A koi pond? No, Candy. No, Candy. Especially not in the laundry room. I don't care what celebrity has one. No, no, Candy. Goodbye.

Vincent hangs up.

KEN PUGH  
 You don't like Candy? I love candy. I even had cotton candy for breakfast today.

Vincent's mouth drops open; his face reddens.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 I was not referring to a confection. Candy is my wife's name, Pugh.

KEN PUGH  
 Oh, oh, I am very sorry, Mr. Cannatoona. I had no idea--

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 No, you haven't. If you did, you would know what the purpose of a comma is. There is a world of difference between "no candy" and "No, Candy!"

Ken recoils, cowers.

Vincent seizes a manila folder from his desktop, sits on a corner of the desk. From the folder he retrieves and inspects a document.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
 This is a very important document, Pugh. It deals with what's left of your future.  
 (MORE)

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

I'll save you the ordeal of reading it now, because at the rate you read it could take up the rest of the day and probably a good chunk of tomorrow. Succinctly, it says this is going to be your last year at Woodrow Wilson High.

KEN

Ken's eyes widen, tear up.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Either you graduate, or you will be expelled, without a diploma.

KEN PUGH

But--

Vincent jumps to his feet.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

But nothing, Pugh. You'll pass every class, or be out on your ass... which handily rhymes.

KEN PUGH

Woodrow Wilson High is my life.

Vincent stuffs the document into Ken's trembling hand.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Oh, and one more thing. Your old service credits have been ruled obsolete, by me.

KEN PUGH

Meaning?

Vincent snorts.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Meaning, in addition to your academics, you'll have to go out for a sport and earn new ones.

KEN PUGH

I'm sixty-four! I have varicose veins and a prostate the size of a Lender's bagel. I have to pee every thirty minutes. What sport could I possibly try out for?

Vincent opens the office door, escorts Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Too bad for you we don't have a pissing team. I haven't the slightest idea, Pugh. Try them all.

WAITING AREA

Ken exits, the door slams shut behind him. Vincent's phone rings o.s. Mrs. Klatter looks up from her paperwork.

KEN PUGH

What am I going to do, Mrs. Klatter?

MRS. KLATTER

You better get to your first class, Pugh. You're incredibly late.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOMS - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS

The following shows the remainder of Ken's academic classes for the day, leading up to gym.

A) Seated in a biology classroom, Ken is handed a massive text. He remains wide-eyed, stunned, from his earlier meeting. Ken is oblivious to the teacher's lecture o.s. Vincent's warning rings through his head non-stop.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)

Expelled!

B) Seated in math class, a second forbidding-looking text is dropped onto Ken's biology book. Ken remains stupefied.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(louder)

Expelled!!

C) The same scenario prevails in history class, with two over-sized texts added to the growing pile.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(louder still)  
Expelled!!

D) English class. The added books here hide shocked Ken from view.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(deafening)  
Expelled!!

CUT TO:

INT. GYM LOCKER ROOM - 2:45 P.M.

Students, including Ken, enter and moan over the state of the overused and under cleaned locker room. Steam clouds waft in from the nearby showers.

Athletic director, ED DAHRIA, short, fat and bald, oversees the commotion.

Surrounded by classmates, Ken rests his backpack on a wooden bench, hesitantly starts to unpack his gym clothes.

GYM STUDENT #1  
You're a friggin' old fossil. You  
can't undress with us, you  
wrinkled pervert.

Ken takes off his shirt.

KEN PUGH  
New year, same old complaints.  
I'm a student, too, and a widower  
with a son ten years older than  
you -- and I'm no pervert, so just  
relax.

Students hurriedly don gym uniforms.

GYM STUDENT #2  
Jesus Christ! He's got gray chest  
hair. Your pubes white, too, old  
dude?

Derisive laughter breaks out. Someone throws a roll of toilet paper. Ken ignores the theatrics, continues changing.

ED DAHRIA (O.S.)  
 C'mon ladies, we haven't got day!  
 Last one out on the gym floor  
 gives me fifty perfect push-ups!

KEN PUGH  
 (to GYM STUDENT #2)  
 Mr. Diarrhea hasn't lost his charm  
 since last year.

Ken secures his street clothes in a locker, locks up.

GYM STUDENT #2  
 Was that a joke? His name is  
 Dahria.

KEN PUGH  
 I'm quite sure it's pronounced  
 diarrhea.

GYM STUDENT #2  
 Whatever, it's your funeral,  
 Methuselah.

GYM

Ken's gym class pours through the locker room door. No one wants to suffer the consequences of being last.

The warm, poorly ventilated gymnasium has a twenty-foot ceiling and inadequate lighting. Chipped, green walls have large, frayed mats hanging on them. Climbing ropes and rings are secured well above the cracked gym floor. Horses, parallel bars and other apparatuses are pushed off to the sides.

Mr. Dahria blows his shrill whistle furiously. Ken is dead last out the door. Mr. Dahria approaches him, whistle blaring. Finally, he stops.

ED DAHRIA  
 I can't treat you any differently  
 than the rest, Pugh. It would set  
 a bad example.

KEN PUGH  
 I completely understand, Mr.  
 Diarrhea.

ED DAHRIA  
 Good! Good! Now give me fifty  
 perfect ones, Pugh!

Dahria turns to the rest of the class, blows his whistle.



ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
The rest of you, form three rows  
of ten and start--

He pivots back towards Ken, now on the floor, stiffly attempting to get into the push-up position.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
Pugh! How did you pronounce my  
last name?!

Ken, sweat-soaked, buries his face in the crook of his arm.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATE AFTERNOON

At day's end, Ken, exhausted mentally and physically, sits alone, slumped in the last row. As the half-empty bus grinds along, his eyelids flutter, then close.

KEN'S DREAM

Ken, age 18, is attired in a Woodrow Wilson High football uniform, minus his helmet. He stands in a vast, barren desert in midday heat. The sky above is cloudless. Exhausted, Ken pants, tries to catch his breath.

KEN'S POV

Numerous footprints in the sand, starting at his feet, lead to the crest of a nearby sand dune. His teammates, congregated there, wave to Ken, then resume running, until out of sight.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH  
Wait! Wait up, guys!

Ken forces himself to run, falters after a few yards, collapses to his knees.

Suddenly, Ken is 64, still in his uniform, now ill-fitting. Before him, a depression forms in the sand. It rapidly grows deeper and wider. The surrounding desert swirls with the menacing depression its focus.

Ken gets to his feet, tries to escape, but it is a losing proposition. He is swallowed by the void in the sand. All goes dark.

Still 64, in uniform, Ken finds himself standing in the canned goods aisle of a supermarket.

KEN'S POV

Save for Ken, the aisle is empty of customers. The store is well lit, silent. A quick perusal shows the entire aisle is stocked with cans of tuna.

He selects a can, draws it close. Principal Cannatoona's face adorns the label.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken tries to put the can back, but it won't release. Other cans, as if drawn to a magnet, fly off the shelves, adhere to Ken, who doubles over.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)  
Stand up straight, Pugh! Stand  
up! Stand up!

INT. SCHOOL BUS

The bus is empty, except for Ken and Charlie, its petulant driver, who stands in front of him with clenched fists.

CHARLIE  
Stand up, Pugh! Stand up!

Ken, startled, awakens.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
This is your stop, Pugh. Get off  
my bus! I have to get home to my  
equally crabby wife!

Outside, rain pours down.

CUT TO:

INT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY SHOP - MINUTES LATER

There are no customers. The sound of wind and rain o.s. fills the shop. Paul doesn't notice, he is focused on his latest cotton candy creation, as it develops. Concentric layers of the confection, each a different color form the petals of an over-sized flower supported on a paper cone. He skillfully uses a narrow, pointed wooden dowel to articulate each petal.

Ken rushes into the shop, drops his books. Startled, distracted, Paul applies too much pressure to the last layer of candy, deforming the entire piece.

PAUL PUGH

Shit! Look what you made me do!

Ken, not really aware of what he has done, picks up his books, deposits them on the counter. He takes off his soaking shirt, gives it a shake, wrings it out, squints in Paul's direction.

KEN PUGH

What's that, Paul? What are you working on?

Paul, disgusted, returns his attention to the flower, attempts repair.

PAUL PUGH

Until you came in, it was a cotton candy flower. Now I'm not exactly sure.

Ken puts his shirt back on, approaches Paul.

KEN PUGH

Paul... that's beautiful, simply beautiful.

Paul appreciates the compliment.

PAUL PUGH

I'm glad you approve. This could be a huge hit for us next season. I think I could get seven or eight bucks for one of these. Nobody else on the boardwalk has anything like it.

Ken reaches out, lightly touches a petal.

KEN PUGH

Pugh's pansy...

PAUL PUGH

Say what?

KEN PUGH

Pugh's pansy. You'll need a name for your flower. Pugh's pansy has a nice ring to it.

Paul considers the suggestion, smiles. He resumes fine tuning the creation with the dowel.

PAUL PUGH  
So, how was the first day of  
school, Dad?

Ken slouches.

KEN PUGH  
I don't really know where to  
begin, son.

PAUL PUGH  
Really? After forty-six years?

Ken gathers up his belongings, heads for the stairs that  
lead up to the apartment, exits.

KEN PUGH (O.S)  
I just don't know where to begin.

INT. THE PUGH APARTMENT

Diane, standing at the kitchen table, angrily mumbles to  
herself as she fusses with the whole chicken she's  
preparing for dinner.

DIANE PUGH  
Goddamned bird has to make into  
the oven before Paul comes back up  
here. He sees it, he'll want to  
stuff it with cotton candy as an  
experiment. Anything with a hole  
isn't safe in this goddamned  
apartment.

Ken enters, looks at Diane, then for a place to drop the  
textbooks he's barely holding onto.

KEN PUGH  
Hello, Diane; I made it back.

She stops fussing, punches the bird, brushes back hair that  
has fallen onto her face.

DIANE PUGH  
I see; the prodigal father  
returns.

Spotting nowhere to place the books, Ken, bushed, drops  
them on the floor.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
Ten second rule, Ken. If they  
stay there longer than that, they  
end up in the trash.

Ken forces a laugh, not sure if she means it, or not.

KEN PUGH

I've yet to see anything picked up off this floor before or after ten seconds. I'll take my chances.

Diane ignores the remark, flops the chicken into a roasting pan, then places it in the oven. She takes a seat, avoids eye contact.

DIANE PUGH

Listen, Ken. Paul and I have been talking about something and he can't seem to muster the nerve to tell you, so that leaves it up to me, no surprise.

Ken leans back against the fridge, knocks off magnets.

KEN PUGH

Oh?

DIANE PUGH

Yeah, it's a pretty big deal, for you.

KEN PUGH

I just saw Paul. He didn't even hint at--

DIANE PUGH

Well, he was in the middle of cotton candy R and D. You know, once he's in that mode nothing gets him out.

Diane mindlessly stirs the sugar in the sugar bowl.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)

Ken, you're going to have to find your own place.

Ken leans harder into the fridge, activates the ice cube dispenser, sends a stream of cubes onto the floor.

KEN PUGH

You can't be... You can't be serious.

DIANE PUGH

It's not just my idea. Both of us, Paul and me, talked it over, and not for the first time.

(MORE)

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
 With the baby coming, we'll need  
 your room. And we're tripping  
 over each other as it is, so the  
 only solution, the best solution,  
 is for you to get your own  
 place... and the sooner the  
 better.

KEN PUGH  
 The sooner the better?

Diane nods.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
 I have a right to be here. You're  
 my family. You can't make me go.

Diane stops stirring the sugar, licks the spoon.

DIANE PUGH  
 Yes I... we can. I've looked into  
 it. First of all, your name  
 doesn't appear anywhere on the  
 lease. And I spoke with a lawyer,  
 that JASON SKROTA, over on Church  
 Street.

KEN PUGH  
 Next to the Korean barbecue place?

DIANE PUGH  
 Yep, that's the one. Ever hear of  
 an eviction notice, Ken?

She stands, goes to the oven, opens the door, bastes the  
 bird. Ken ponders the term.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
 It means we can legally force you  
 to leave, if it comes to that.

Diane closes the oven door.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
 Find a place in the next few  
 weeks, okay?

CUT TO:

INT. KEN'S ROOM - LATE THAT EVENING

Ken lies on his book-strewn bed, idly flips through the pages of his history book. An illustration catches his eye; he pauses.

OPEN HISTORY BOOK

The page bears a color illustration that depicts the U.S. Cavalry forcing Native Americans from their tribal land at gunpoint.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken closes the book, sighs, looks over his shoulder at his unfinished painting.

He rolls off the bed, opens a folding chair, sits in front of the easel, smiles at his work. His index finger runs over raw portions of the canvas, explores possibilities. Ken sits back, looks for, finds and picks up his palette.

KEN'S POV

Meager amounts of paint are squeezed out of crumpled tubes, onto the encrusted palette.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul selects a brush from a glass jar containing many that are worn and dirty, begins blending colors on the palette.

Nighttime hours pass. The digital clock on the dresser reads five-thirty a.m.

Ken inspects the now-finished landscape. Satisfied, he puts down the palette, returns the brush to the jar.

He stands, stretches, picks up the painting by its sides. He carries it to the nearby lamp, views it at assorted angles, nods approvingly.

KEN PUGH

An inviting place, wish I was there.

Ken walks to the bedroom door, painting in hand. He opens it, listens.

## KITCHEN

Ken cautiously steps into the kitchen. The coast is clear. He heads for the stairs, descends.

## BEHIND THE COTTON CANDY STORE

The screen door at the back of the building opens. Ken emerges, with his painting, in the dimmest of morning light. A yellow cat, with numerous, small reddish patches on its coat, meows, startling Ken, then scampers off.

O.s., the sound of distant cars on the freeway is heard. Overhead, a single-engine plane, lights flashing, heads out to sea.

Ken takes a deep breath, shuffles over to a rusted dumpster, stops. He takes a final look at his latest creation, tosses it in, takes an unsteady step back.

The cat, named MEASLES, jumps onto the plastic lid covering one half of the open dumpster. It stares at Ken intently.

KEN PUGH

Hi there, Measles.

MEASLES

Another masterpiece bites the dust, aye, Kenny?

KEN PUGH

No place to hang 'em, no place to sell 'em. That leaves the city dump as my gallery.

Measles assumes a relaxed, curled position.

MEASLES

Gosh, you're an upbeat guy. Always a pleasure talking with you, Ken.

KEN PUGH

Some days I wish I was you, Measles.

MEASLES

I ate a dead mouse, with one eye missing, for breakfast. From the looks of it, it died three days ago. Still wish you were me?



KEN PUGH

Well, not as much as a minute ago,  
but you get the picture.

Measles laughs.

MEASLES

No, but the dumpster did.

KEN PUGH

Clever kitty.

Measles stands, stretches.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

My life is suddenly filled with  
more uncertainty than ever. I  
wish I knew what to do, Measles.

MEASLES

Sorry, but as a humble alley cat,  
your human problems are a bit  
beyond me. Well, gotta run, busy  
day ahead. So much licking to do,  
so little time. Good luck, Ken.

Measles leaps off the dumpster lid, dashes off, squeezes  
under a fence.

Ken goes back inside, shuts the screen door.

CUT TO:

INT. WOODROW WILSON HIGH - THE NEXT DAY

MISS CHMUT'S HISTORY CLASS

With much animated arm flapping from fortyish, pony-tailed  
MISS CHMUT, her class finally settles down. For its  
remaining minutes, Ken, in the back row, tries to hide  
behind the mountainous male student in front of him.

KEN'S POV

Smiling Miss Chmut, youthful for her age, stands on tiptoes  
in an attempt to spy Ken. Successful, she waves, as if her  
hand were on fire.

BACK TO SCENE

MISS CHMUT

Ken? Kenny Pugh? You can't hide from me forever, Ken. Do you remember you owe me a report on Ulysses S. Grant, from last year?

KEN PUGH

It was actually from three years ago, Miss Chmut. I'm close, but not completely ready.

Miss Chmut's smile evaporates. She takes a determined step closer.

MISS CHMUT

Principal Cannatoona spoke to me about you and your situation, Ken. There will be no more procrastinating. If you fail this class, you'll be expelled. In the remaining time, give your report, orally. Right now, Ken.

KEN

Ken silently mouths the word "orally."

BACK TO SCENE

All eyes in the classroom are on Ken. The STUDENT next to him pokes him in the arm.

HISTORY STUDENT #1

Go ahead, Pugh; it should be a breeze. You babysat for Grant, didn't you?

A second STUDENT leans towards Ken, whispers.

HISTORY STUDENT #2

Just be sure to say Grant was known as the father of our country.

Ken plods to the front of the class holding a wrinkled sheet of paper. Poorly-suppressed laughter, snickering abounds. Miss Chmut remains standing, leans back, uses the edge of her desk for support. Raising one hand, she silences the class.

KEN'S POV

Twenty-five pupils who could not care less. He turns his gaze to Miss Chmut.

KEN PUGH (O.S)  
One more day?

She shakes her head.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken clears his throat. Aware of his trembling free hand, he presses it against his side.

KEN PUGH  
U-Ulysses S. Grant was born in Ohio, in 1822... and died in 1885.

HISTORY STUDENT #1 (O.S.)  
Did anything happen in between?

The room erupts with laughter.

MISS CHMUT  
Mr. Wiseguy in the last row, see me after class. The rest of you, settle down. Continue, Ken, if you have anything to add.

KEN PUGH  
I do. People mostly know Grant as the victorious general in the Civil War, others just think of him as a drunkard; but there was much more to the man. After quitting the army in 1854, and rejoining in 1861, he quickly rose through the ranks by proving his abilities and by earning the respect of those he commanded. He had suffered greatly, financially, in the seven years he was out of the military, and was nearly destitute by the time he re-entered. After the war, he sought no political office, but saw the need to serve his country in the difficult period of reconstruction, so he did, but only at the request of others.

(MORE)

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Grant gets little credit for the fact that, during his eight years as president, he fought hard to get voting rights for freed slaves and Native Americans. Bad investments made after he was president threw him into poverty once again, but he came through for his family, to whom he was deeply devoted, by writing and selling his autobiography, in the face of the pain from terminal cancer, completing the project only days before dying. Grant was an honest, humble, kind, principled man, who deserved a better end. Hopefully, someday, he will be fully appreciated. That's all I have to say.

Dead silence in the classroom. Miss Chmut grabs a tissue from the box on her desktop, wipes her eye. The bell rings, ending the class. Everyone quietly exits.

CUT TO:

INT. GYM CLASS - MINUTES LATER

Mr. Dahria stands near the entrance to the locker room, at the conclusion of gym class, emphatically blowing his beloved whistle. Sweaty students stream by. As the last few approach, including Ken, Dahria finally relents.

ED DAHRIA

C'mon, hurry it up, ladies! We ran a little late. Change clothes and get to your next class -- no time for showers.

Dahria's nostrils flare when Ken gets close. He takes a step back.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)

I'm making an exception with you, Pugh. You got old man stink. Take a shower, or maybe two, no matter how late your are. I don't want to be held responsible for someone passin' out.

KEN PUGH

Yes, sir. May I--

ED DAHRIA  
And get that gym suit fumigated --  
or burn it! Smells like a zebra  
turd stuffed with blue cheese!  
Cripes!

Ken takes off his shirt, wraps it around his hand.

KEN PUGH  
Can I have a word with you, sir?

ED DAHRIA  
Yeah, sure, but keep your  
distance. I've got a department  
meeting in ten minutes and I don't  
want to come in smellin' like a  
hobo's ass.

KEN PUGH  
I understand completely. I need  
to get on a sports team this year,  
to get new service credits  
because--

Dahria blasts his whistle, silencing Ken.

ED DAHRIA  
Get to the point, man! The fumes!  
I'm succumbing!

KEN PUGH  
Sorry, sorry I didn't respond  
quickly enough. I admire people  
like yourself, Mr. Dahria, who  
answer right away, you know,  
without thinking.

Dahria growls.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
As I was about to say, I know  
tryouts for the football team are  
today, after school, and that  
you're the head coach. Can I...  
Can I try out?

Dahria laughs, doubles over, catches his breath.

ED DAHRIA  
Pugh, you're priceless!... You're  
not serious, are you?

KEN PUGH

Mr. Cannatoona says I need service credits to graduate. I don't want to go out for a sport, but I have to. It's either that, or be expelled.

ED DAHRIA

But football? You got some kind of death wish, Pugh?

Ken reflects for ten seconds.

KEN PUGH

Sure, almost every day, lately.

ED DAHRIA

Well, the team's going to be pretty pathetic, based on those returning from last year's exploding donkey of a season.

KEN PUGH

Exploding what?

Dahria becomes flustered.

ED DAHRIA

I'm not that good with metaphors. The point is, I don't need you dying on me, on top of all the other problems I've got with the team.

Dahria turns away from Ken, towards the locker room, checks his watch, blows his whistle.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)

I suggest you quit squeezin' each others' rear ends in there, ladies. You've now got two minutes to get to your next class!

KEN PUGH

Mr. Dia... Mr. Dahria? Sir?

Dahria, annoyed, quickly turns back to Ken.

ED DAHRIA

What, Pugh?

KEN PUGH

There must be some position. Let me try, please.

Dahria steps closer, waves away body odor fumes.

ED DAHRIA  
Do you even watch football?

Ken rolls his eyes, sheepishly raises his eyebrows.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
Name one current player in the  
NFL.

Ken thinks, thinks some more.

KEN PUGH  
Pop quizzes are not my strength,  
Mr. Dahria. Umm... Jeffrey...  
Unitas?

Dahria howls, holds his sides. Ken laughs, too, but is not sure why.

ED DAHRIA  
You mean Johnny Unitas?

Ken shakes his head, then nods in agreement.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
Unitas last played in '73.

Dahria pushes back the brim of his cap, scratches his forehead, sighs.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
I'll tell you what, Pugh; show up  
after school today and I'll see if  
I can find something that suits  
you, though I can't for the life  
of me imagine what that might be.

Ken beams, tosses his shirt in the air, tries to catch it and misses.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)  
South field -- on time!

Ken swipes the fallen shirt off the floor, stiffly runs toward the locker room, stops half way, catches his breath, continues.

Dahria observes, shakes his head in disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. MATH CLASS - LATER

Matt Curtis sits next to Ken, in the back row of MR. SHOPLIFSKY's trigonometry class. Matt tries to focus on what is being written on the blackboard, but Ken distracts him with whispered questions about football.

KEN PUGH  
Matt, Matt...

Matt waves Ken off.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
One more question, that's all:  
The player who throws the ball --  
what's he called?

Matt, disgusted, whispers from the corner of his mouth.

MATT CURTIS  
The quarterback, Ken.

Frustrated, Ken erases a previous notation he's made in his notebook.

KEN PUGH  
I thought you said the quarterback  
plays defense; that he defends  
against receivers and also assists  
in stopping the run.

Angered, Matt turns to Ken.

MATT CURTIS  
(whispering, but louder)  
That's the cornerback, for  
Christ's sake. There's a  
difference, a huge difference,  
between a quarterback and a  
cornerback, Ken.

BLACKBOARD

Mr. Shoplifskey, his back to the class, completes drawing a series of triangles on the blackboard, pauses, gently sets down the white chalk on the ledge. He smooths his fringe of gray hair with both hands, then clasps them behind his back.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY/BACK OF THE CLASSROOM INTERCUTTING



MR. SHOPLIFSKY

Matt Curtis is correct, Kenneth Pugh. There is an immeasurable difference between the roles of quarterback and cornerback, in the game of football.

Shoplifsky turns and faces the class.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY (CONT'D)

Just as there is an immeasurable difference between failing and passing my trigonometry class!

KEN PUGH

I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Shoplifsky. It's just that--

MR. SHOPLIFSKY

How many years have you been in my trigonometry class, in a row, Kenneth?

Ken silently counts on his fingers.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY (CONT'D)

Incredibly, it's more than you have fingers, Kenneth, unless you have eleven fingers. Eleven! Eleven consecutive years of your miserable excuses and absurdly wrong answers.

KEN PUGH

I'm pretty sure it's twelve years, Mr. Shoplifsky.

Mustachioed Mr. Shoplifsky tugs both ends of his paisley bow tie, grimaces.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY

Kenneth, stand.

Ken stiffly rises.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY (CONT'D)

Kenneth, name the three basic trigonometric functions.

Ken looks to Matt for help.

MATT CURTIS

You're on your own.

KEN PUGH  
S-sine...

MR. SHOPLIFSKY  
Continue.

Ken plays with a shirt button.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY (CONT'D)  
Ken? Ken!

KEN PUGH  
Co... sine.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY  
Impressive, there's hope, Pugh.  
Care to go for the trifecta?

KEN PUGH  
Tan... something. It starts with  
tan; I'm certain of that.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY  
I'm getting goosebumps, Pugh!

The class bell sounds. Ken heaves a sigh of relief.

BACK TO SCENE

The other students stand, gather their belongings, start exiting. Sounds of students in the hallway, o.s., are audible. Ken walks to the front of the classroom.

KEN PUGH  
Saved by the bell, Mr. Shoplifskey.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY  
Don't kid yourself, Pugh. You're  
hanging by gossamer.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - MINUTES LATER

The gray-and-yellow-painted, prison-like cafeteria is illuminated by hanging, single-bulb fixtures protected by dusty, wire grids. Groups of students rush to find tables where they can share their allotted time in the company of friends. Trays rattle and collide on the long, slick, metal tables.

Ken, lunch box in hand, wanders past crowded tables, in search of relative solitude at the back of the room.

KEN'S POV

A lone, Asian-looking man, named TUKK, wears orange coveralls, sits by himself, inspecting his plate of food. He is most unhappy. The man is of squarish build, has straight dark hair, combed forward, and a wispy mustache. He looks up, makes eye contact with Ken, looks back down at the plate.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken's wave is not seen, and if it was, it would not have been returned. Regardless, he approaches, smiles.

KEN PUGH

Hello, Tukk. I see you've decided to stay another year as Woodrow Wilson High's top janitor. Welcome back!

Tukk refuses to look up. Ken takes the seat next to Tukk, clunks down his battered lunch box.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Mind if I join you?

Tukk's sideways glance and sneer supplant a verbal reply. A chocolate cupcake whizzes between both men, strikes the wall behind them, bursts apart, leaving a stain.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

I thought you said last year was it for you. That you were fed up and headin' back to... where is it you're from again? Scoop-a-doop?

Tukk draws a deep breath, sits back in his folding chair. Strangely, Tukk speaks with a thick Australian accent.

TUKK

It's Shaktoolik, Alaska, sittin' on glorious Norton Sound, you twit. When the Asbury Park Department of Education offered me a half-a-million-dollar signin' bonus, for stayin' on one more year -- well, I just couldn't very well bring myself to say no to their generosity, now could I?

Ken opens his lunch box, pauses.

KEN PUGH

Half a million?! Tuk, you're rich! I had no idea janitorial work paid so well! I wish I knew that back in the fifties. Sure, you've got to clean poop out of urinals, and scrape two inches of hardened chewing gum and dried boogers off the bottoms of hundreds of chairs, but--

Tuk slams his formidable hand down on the table. The crash is unnoticed over the room's din.

TUKK

Oh, please shut your gob, Ken.  
Can't you see I'm upset?

Tuk lifts the edge of his plate a few inches, drops it.

TUKK (CONT'D)

You call these sardines? Crikey, they're not fit for a bloody dingo! In Shaktoolik, we'd grind these pups down into a mash to grease our snowmobile treads with! Bloody hell! Whadda you got for lunch, mate? Maybe we can work out a deal.

Agreeable, Ken rummages through his lunch box, pulls out a bottle of Ensure. Tuk grabs it, inspects the label.

TUKK (CONT'D)

What's this stuff?

KEN PUGH

Oh, that's Ensure; it's a liquid meal, for older folks like me.

Tuk tosses it back in the lunch box. Ken takes it back out, twists the cap with difficulty.

TUKK

That it, mate?

Ken removes a wad of pink cotton candy wrapped in cellophane.

TUKK (CONT'D)

I'm afraid to ask what that is?  
Is it a tuft of your granny's hair?

Ken unwraps it, yanks off a chunk, hands it to skeptical Tukk.

KEN PUGH

It's cotton candy, from my son's shop, on the boardwalk. You look like you've never seen it. Don't they have cotton candy in Skunk-a-doo?

Ken chuckles, takes a bite, followed by Tukk, who enjoys it.

TUKK

Kenny, 'ow long you been goin' to high school?

Ken washes down his mouthful of candy with a gulp of Ensure.

KEN PUGH

Seems like forever, but that's about to change, unfortunately.

Tukk grabs another piece of cotton candy, sniffs it, devours it.

TUKK

Why's that?

KEN PUGH

The new principal, Mr. Cannatoona.

Tukk harrumphs.

TUKK

Oh, that bugger.

KEN PUGH

He says, either I graduate this year, or I get expelled. Either way, I'm out.

Ken takes a final swig, recaps the empty bottle, tosses it back in the lunch box.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

Worse, I have to go out for a sport.

TUKK

You pullin' my tail, Kenny-boy?

Ken shakes his head.

KEN PUGH  
 I'm goin' to football tryouts  
 after school today. I have to say  
 I'm not optimistic.

Tukk wipes the corners of his mouth.

TUKK  
 My condolences, in advance, Kenny.

Ken stands, shrugs, gets hit in the chest with a doughnut,  
 ignores it.

KEN PUGH  
 Why? Who's gonna die?

TUKK  
 Most likely you, you twit.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTH ATHLETIC FIELD - 3:30 P.M.

Wearing a poorly-fitting uniform, Ken stands on the fifty  
 yard line. He holds his helmet in front of him, perplexed  
 as to the proper way to put it on.

In back of Ken, other PLAYERS engage in various exercises  
 and drills. An assistant coach, holding a clipboard, MR.  
 YERLAX, approaches Ken.

COACH YERLAX  
 Pugh!

Startled, Ken drops his helmet, accidentally kicks it a  
 foot away.

COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)  
 Pick up that helmet and put it on!  
 Now!

Ken picks it up, but isn't sure how to wear it. He starts  
 to put in on backwards. Yerlax throws down his clipboard,  
 grabs the helmet from Ken.

MR. CANNATOONA

Standing at the top of the stadium steps, Vincent observes  
 Ken's predicament through binoculars, softly laughs.  
 Winded Mrs. Klatter approaches, disturbs his amusement.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 What is it?

MRS. KLATTER

It's Mrs. Cannatoona, sir. She is on the phone and very upset. Something about tree roots in the master bathroom.

Vincent wilts, departs with Mrs. Klatter.

BACK TO SCENE

COACH YERLAX

The cage goes in the front -- to see out of, you numskull!

Ken tries to put it on, but the helmet is clearly too small for his cranium. He removes it, looks at it questioningly.

KEN PUGH

Are you sure? It would provide better ventilation for the back of my head, if it was the other way around.

When Ken tries to put it on backwards, Yerlax gives him the look of death. Ken notices, silently turns it around, manages to squeeze it on.

COACH YERLAX

And what's with your shoulder pads?! They're half way down your back! Pugh, you look like a camel mated with the Hunchback of Notre Dame!

Ken futilely reaches behind his back, attempts to raise the pads to the tops of his shoulders.

KEN PUGH

I thought they protect your shoulder blades. I have a little arthritis in my left one, you know.

Yerlax picks up his clipboard, pauses, slams it back down into the turf.

COACH YERLAX

Get your sorry, geriatric ass over to the sled, Pugh! I was told to find a position for you; one where you won't get broken in two on the first play, but I don't believe that is humanly possible!

(MORE)

COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)  
Good god! Where is the ghost of  
legendary coach George Halas when  
you need him?

Ken walks towards the sled.

COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)  
Run, damn it! This is football,  
not window shopping at the mall!

SLED

Ken and Yerlax watch as a group of players take a  
three-point stance, then hit the sled at a COACH's command.  
Ken looks at Coach Yerlax.

KEN PUGH  
You expect me to do that, Coach?

Impudent Coach Yerlax goes face-to-face with Ken, chest  
bumps him.

COACH YERLAX  
No, I want you to go bake me  
twelve dozen sugar cookies with  
sprinkles on top!

Ken takes off his helmet.

KEN PUGH  
I do know a good recipe, Coach  
Yerlax, but I don't see how that  
would help the team very much.

Mr. Dahria approaches, assesses the situation.

ED DAHRIA  
Well, Coach Yerlax, how is our new  
star quarterback progressing?

Ken is stunned.

KEN PUGH  
Star quarterback? Now, that's the  
one that throws the ball, right?

Coaches Yerlax and Dahria facetiously nod, hold back  
laughter, look at each other.

Ken, elated, pumps his fist.



COACH YERLAX  
That's right, Kenny. The  
quarterback throws the ball--

ED DAHRIA  
And sometimes he runs with the  
ball.

Ken frowns, scratches his butt.

KEN PUGH  
I don't think I'd much like to do  
that, if it is okay with you  
gentlemen. (whispers) I have a  
trick knee.

Coach Dahria rubs his chin, feigns giving serious thought  
to Ken's stated limitation.

ED DAHRIA  
Okay, then. But you know, Ken,  
there's a third thing that  
quarterbacks sometimes do, that I  
think you'd be perfect at.

KEN PUGH  
What would that be, Coach?  
Nothing too strenuous, I hope.

ED DAHRIA  
Rather than describe it in detail,  
why don't you go with Coach Yerlax  
here to the supply room?

KEN PUGH  
Certainly, Coach.

ED DAHRIA  
Coach Yerlax, please acquaint Ken  
with 'Old Blue.' Get him suited  
up and be back here in fifteen  
minutes.

Coach Yerlax nods, smiles, pats Ken on the back.

COACH YERLAX  
Let's go, Pugh.

Yerlax's smile transcends to a frown. He grabs Ken's  
jersey sleeve, leads him away.

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Coach Yerlax leads Ken back to Mr. Dahria. A dozen team members trail along, laughing hysterically, as Ken is now adorned in a cheaply made mascot outfit intended to represent a bluefish.

COACH YERLAX  
Here's our new mascot, Coach!

FOOTBALL PLAYER #1  
Is that bluefish I smell, or Pugh fish?

FOOTBALL PLAYER #2  
Hey, Pugh, nice bluefish uniform!  
Does that come with fries and cole slaw?

FOOTBALL PLAYER #3  
You look almost as good as the bluefish I saw washed up by the pier yesterday, Pugh, but you smell worse!

The coaches and players howl with laughter. Ken removes the headpiece.

KEN PUGH  
Will I at least earn my service credits, seein' as I'm still doin' one of the three things quarterbacks do?

The mocking laughter intensifies.

ED DAHRIA  
Not a chance in hell, Pugh! Not a popsicle's chance in hell!

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Ken, sound asleep, is the lone passenger, as Charlie grinds gears through Asbury Park streets.

KEN'S DREAM

Wearing the lower half of the bluefish mascot uniform and his helmet, Ken sits at his easel in the end zone of a football field. He holds a palette and brush, stares at the canvas.

CANVAS

Partially completed, the painting depicts a bottomless pit. O.s. a faint but intensifying rumbling is heard.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, now aware of the sound, looks upfield.

KEN'S POV

A cheering CROWD urges on Mr. Cannatoona, who sits atop an advancing steamroller. He is accompanied by Ed Dahria and Coach Yerlax. Out for blood, the trio angrily yell, make threatening gestures.

In huge letters, the rotating drum of the steamroller bears the word 'hope.'

BACK TO SCENE

Frozen in the face of impending doom, Ken glances at the depiction of the bottomless pit. With seconds remaining, he realizes the pit is his only salvation.

Ken dives into the pit, disappears, just as the steamroller crushes his easel and seat, ending the dream.

INT. BUS

Exasperated, Charlie the bus driver stands before Pugh.

CHARLIE

No bus boners on my bus, Pugh!

CHARLIE'S POV

Startled, Ken awakens from his nightmare.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

A man your age! And on a school bus, no less! If I wasn't runnin' late I'd call the vice squad -- so help me!

Looking down, Ken notices he does indeed have a bus boner. He clamps his legs together, gathers his possessions.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH  
 Sorry, Charlie. The last time  
 that happened I was ten years old.

EXT. BUS

The doors open, Ken stumbles out. The doors close.

CHARLIE (O.S.)  
 I'm switchin' to a paper route!

The school bus drives off. Ken starts the short walk home.  
 After two steps, a black sedan pulls up to the bus stop.  
 The passenger-side window descends, draws Ken's attention.

KEN'S POV

I gravelly voice from within the car calls out.

MAN IN CAR  
 Hey, you! I'm a little lost. Can  
 you help me out over here?

Ken cautiously approaches.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken looks in the open window.

VEHICLE INTERIOR/KEN INTERCUTTING

A paunchy, middle-aged man with a bad comb-over  
 extinguishes his half-smoked cigarette. He wears a cheap,  
 shiny, blue suit, pink dress shirt and a green necktie.

MAN IN CAR  
 Yeah, I'm not familiar with this  
 neighborhood. I'm lookin' for  
 someone.

The man lights another cigarette with a gold lighter,  
 farts.

KEN PUGH  
 Who?

MAN IN CAR  
 His name is--

KEN PUGH

Wait, wait, I've seen your face..  
Um, on a billboard, near Church  
Street. It's... Skrota, Jason  
Skrota, the lawyer.

Jason claps.

JASON SKROTA

Congratulations, you win a paper  
clip, Pops, or, should I say,  
Kenneth Pugh?

Ken inches back.

KEN PUGH

My daughter-in-law mentioned your  
name.

JASON SKROTA

Don't go runnin' anywhere just  
yet, Pugh. I've got somethin' for  
you.

He opens the center console, rummages through food wrappers  
and legal papers jammed together in a folder.

JASON SKROTA (CONT'D)

Ah, here's the baby.

Finding the sought-after document, he leans out the open  
passenger-side window, stuffs it into Ken's shirt. Aghast,  
Ken lunges back.

JASON SKROTA (CONT'D)

You have officially been served,  
Kenneth Pugh. That is an eviction  
notice. Do you know what that  
means?

Ken gulps.

KEN PUGH

It means my family doesn't care  
about me.

Skrota smirks.

JASON SKROTA

I forgot to bring my violin, so  
skip the melodrama. It says you  
have to be out of the apartment  
before Christmas. *Capisce?*

Holding the document in both hands, Ken lowers his head, nods. The car's window closes; the vehicle speeds off.

CUT TO:

INT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Beneath a flickering overhead light, a neighborhood INEBRIATE attempts to pay for the cotton candy he ordered with seashells collected off the beach.

PAUL PUGH

I agree, they really are very lovely shells, except for this one here that's got chewing gum wedged into it, but--

INEBRIATE

Then you'll take 'em?! Good!

Paul holds back, refuses to hand over the candy.

The shop door open, Ken enters, holding up the eviction notice, so Paul can see it. With Paul distracted, the drunk takes advantage of the situation, grabs the candy, runs out. Ken closes the door, slowly.

KEN PUGH

How's business?

PAUL PUGH

Oh, booming -- some day I may make enough to get the wiring fixed.

Paul taps the flickering light, gets it to stay on. He looks away when Ken steps to the counter, lays down the eviction notice. Ken observes the shells, moves them around.

KEN PUGH

These are some nice shells. You accepting them now, in addition to cash?

PAUL PUGH

Yeah, sure. Diane's idea.

They both chuckle. Ken stops first, turns serious.

KEN PUGH

Those were the homes of clams and snails. They got to stay in them until they reached their natural end.

Paul scoops them into a garbage pail.

PAUL PUGH

Human situations are a lot more complex than those of snails and clams.

KEN PUGH

Apparently so. Look, I know Diane pushed for this, but why'd you give in so easy? Did she threaten to leave?

PAUL PUGH

No, she threatened to stay.

They smirk.

PAUL PUGH (CONT'D)

I had to agree. She's very strong-willed. Look, I'll help you find--

Ken waves Paul off.

KEN PUGH

Don't. I'll find somethin'.

Ken turns, heads for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY - SECONDS LATER

Ken exits, closes the door behind him, without looking back. His attention is immediately drawn to a DELIVERY MAN depositing a coin-operated fortune telling machine in front of Zera's, the shop next door. The delivery man pays no attention to Ken, releases the machine from the wheeled dolly it's attached to, departs. Ken looks at Zera's front door.

DOOR

A hand-written sign on the door reads: enter and learn your future.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken looks at the machine again, notices its front pane of glass is cracked, lightly runs his finger along its length.

KEN PUGH

I should tell her about that.

Somewhat scared, Ken approaches the front door, hesitates, looks in to see if anyone is present.

KEN'S POV

Thick maroon drapes keep all but a few dust-filled rays of light from entering and illuminating a small parlor, overcrowded with dark, antique, carved furniture. A little, round table at its center is covered with a lace tablecloth and adorned with a crystal ball mounted on a short brass stand.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken's back is tapped by a thin, female fingernail painted black. Shocked, he jumps, turns around, grabs his chest.

KEN'S POV

ZERA, a petite, thin-faced woman wearing a purple shawl, forces a quick smile, reveals several gold teeth. Wisps of dyed, dark red hair straggle out, catching the sea breeze, from under the green silk scarf covering her head. She wears too much red lipstick and lavender eye shadow.

Zera clutches a paper shopping bag to her chest. It's barely holding in its contents. The same can be said for her low-cut blouse.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH

Can I help you with those -- I mean, with that... that bag.

ZERA

You can help me by getting out of the way.

Ken steps aside, allows Zera to get to the door. She fumbles with her keys.

KEN PUGH

Um, I, uh, wanted to stop in and tell you that they delivered your machine with a cracked pane of glass. I thought you'd want to know about it.



Zera pauses, looks over her shoulder, raises an eyebrow.

ZERA

I know.

ZERA'S POV

Ken is embarrassed.

KEN PUGH

Sorry, Zera, of course you do --  
you're a psychic.

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA

I know because I got it for fifty  
percent off. Damaged goods  
discount, you see.

Zera loses control of the bag of goods. A carton of  
cigarettes and a bottle of creme de menthe spill out, along  
with assorted incidentals. Ken moves to help, but she  
quickly gathers everything up on her own.

ZERA (CONT'D)

That's okay, thanks. Do you want  
to come in, Ken?

Ken's eyes widen at the sound of his name.

KEN PUGH

You know my name -- you really are  
psychic.

Zera smiles, looks around to make sure no one else is  
present. She steps closer to Ken.

ZERA

Confidentially, just between you  
and me, I know your name because  
the walls in this dump are thin  
enough to see through.

She opens the shop door, motions for Ken to enter.

INT. ZERA'S

Now inside, Zera quickly heads for an adjacent back room  
protected by a velvet curtain hung from a sawed-off broom  
handle. She partially slides it open, disappears behind  
it. The sound of tinkling glasses is heard o.s.

ZERA (O.S.)  
Have a seat at the table, Ken.

Ken points to the table.

KEN PUGH  
This one here, with the crystal  
ball on it?

He steps to the table, grabs the chair's carved wood  
headrest. Liquid being poured is audible o.s.

ZERA (O.S.)  
It's the only one, Ken.

He sits, facing the back room, descends into the poorly  
supported upholstery. The glass ball catches his eye.

GLASS BALL

Heavily chipped, the ball has seen better days, as has its  
tarnished brass base.

BACK TO SCENE

Zera pulls back the curtain a bit further, exits carrying  
two cordial glasses filled to the brim with green liquid.  
A lit cigarette dangles from her lower lip.

ZERA  
Fond of creme de menthe?

Ken's eyes are transfixed as she attempts to carefully set  
the glasses on the lace tablecloth. A tiny bit of Ken's  
spills, regardless. Annoyed, Zera takes the seat opposite  
Ken.

ZERA (CONT'D)  
Damn it! Hate to waste a drop,  
with what that thief at the deli  
charges for the stuff.

KEN PUGH  
I've never had creme de menthe. I  
like the color quite a bit.

Gingerly, he picks up his glass, sets it back down.

ZERA  
Not your cup of tea?

KEN PUGH  
Was never much of a drinker.

Zera downs hers in one gulp, takes a long drag from her cigarette, slides Ken's glass in front of her.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

So, tell me something about myself  
you couldn't have heard through  
the walls.

Zera downs the second glass's contents, deliberately sets it on the table, coyly smiles.

ZERA

You're subject to bus boners.

She casually flicks cigarette ash onto the floor. Ken cringes, hides his face with both hands.

KEN PUGH

No! No! How could you know!?  
Wait! It's not true! That's not  
true at all!

He starts to stand. Zera motions for him to stay put. She laughs, he sits back down.

ZERA

Ken, it's okay; I saw you get off  
the school bus. It's no big deal.  
My third husband got them all the  
time -- for him it was a major  
problem.

KEN PUGH

Why?

ZERA

He was a bus driver, drove ten  
hours a day. By the time he got  
home, he was exhausted, in every  
way imaginable, if you get my  
drift.

They both laugh.

KEN PUGH

That was funny, Zera. I really  
needed a good laugh. I could use  
a few hundred more.

ZERA

If you'd like, I could give you a  
quick reading, right now -- for  
half price. Just ten dollars; it  
would give you some peace of mind,  
Ken.

Ken takes a close look at the crystal ball, rubs its weathered surface, sits back. He reaches into his pocket, removes and opens his wallet. Ken plucks a five and five singles from it, sets the cash on the table, in front of Zera.

KEN PUGH

I'm in.

Zera scoops up the bills, stashes them inside her blouse. She extinguishes the cigarette on the table's side, stands, walks to the window, closes the curtains. In the darkened room she flicks a switch, activating a spot light that makes the crystal ball dazzle.

Zera retakes her seat, brings her face within inches of the glowing glass. The light and shadows cast on her face render her ghastly.

Her bony fingers mimic the kneading of dough, as they dance above and around the globe. After a minute she stops massaging the air, sits back, takes a deep breath, composes herself and closes her eyes.

ZERA

You are under assault on all sides, Ken Pugh. Besieged and put-upon by family, professionals, administrators... people much younger... students, I see. Students, immature, mocking students.

Ken gasps.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Despite this adversity you will be resilient. Though you fear the future, you should take heart and be hopeful.

Zera opens her eyes, leans forward, kneads the air above the crystal ball once more. A few seconds pass; she rests her hands on the table, closes her eyes.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Tidings from your late wife.

KEN PUGH

Kate, she was never on time. You hit that nail on the head.

ZERA

The future fades. Fog enshrouds the bridge between the two realms.

The crystal ball dims. Zera stands, goes to the window, opens the drapes, heads for the adjacent room.

KEN PUGH

You are a gifted woman, Zera. I wish I could have spoken with Kate -- it's been so long.

ZERA

Perhaps I can coax her to communicate during a future session.

Zera further pulls back the curtain to the small room off the parlor. She enters for an instant, returns with the bottle of creme de menthe, pours herself another drink.

Ken looks to the more-revealed side room, sees a portion of something familiar on the wall. He stands, points.

KEN PUGH

Zera, what's that you've got hangin' on the wall back there?

Ken walks towards the side room.

ZERA

Oh, that? Just a little something I rescued out of the dumpster the other day. You like it?

She turns, sees him enter the room.

SIDE ROOM

Ken slowly walks in, inspects his work, as if seeing it for the first time. Zera enters, stands next to him.

KEN PUGH

That's my work, Zera. That's my painting. I did that.

ZERA

I know, Ken. It deserved a better fate. Like I said, I rescued it.

Ken runs his finger along the painting's edge, straightens it.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You're very talented. Your work appears to be influenced by the Impressionists. Would you agree?

KEN PUGH  
Yeah, they are my favorites.

Zera taps Ken on the shoulder.

ZERA  
I look forward to seeing you again. Since we're neighbors, I'll extend the half-price offer, indefinitely.

KEN PUGH  
Why, thank you, Zera. I will certainly be back, but, just one thing...

He draws closer, looks about, though no one else is present, then whispers.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
That matter about the bus boners... You won't tell anyone else, will you?

Zera smiles, holds his hand.

ZERA  
Of course not, Ken. Don't worry, I'll keep your bus boner just between you and me.

Ken, perplexed at the double *entendre*, raises an eyebrow.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CANNATOONA'S HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

Seated in the living room, on an unopened packing crate, Candace studiously flips through a large book of carpet samples. Similar books containing samples of wall paper and tile are stacked around her and on the nearby coffee table, along with numerous invoices. The room is a shambles after the first day of remodeling.

O.s. a door slams, hard.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
Candace, I'm home. My god! Who set off a bomb here? What's happened to the place? Where are you?

Candace bookmarks the sample book with a pencil, closes it, removes her glasses.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
In here, Vincent, the living room.

Vincent enters, looks around, astounded.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
You mean what's left of the living  
room. The work crew inflicted  
this in one day?

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
Inflicted? I call it progress.  
They would have done more, but  
they got called away onto another  
job.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Thank goodness.

Flabbergasted, he sets down his briefcase, loosens his necktie. Vincent is drawn to the site of a former light switch that is now a large hole, from which a dozen tangled wires protrude. He flicks the end of one wire with his index finger.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
So, how was your day? Everything  
now running to your satisfaction  
at Greater Woodrow Wilson High?

As he replies, Vincent slowly walks around the devastated room.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
I would have to say, answering  
your question depends on one's  
personal definition of  
satisfactory. If the announced  
bankruptcy of the company that  
took deposits from 311 seniors,  
who expected to get graduation  
rings, and will now get nothing,  
is satisfactory, then yes,  
everything is running to my  
satisfaction.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
That doesn't sound very good to  
me.

Vincent, oblivious to her comment, continues pacing, ruminating.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

And! If a leaking roof above the music room, turning \$20,000 worth of sheet music into musical mush is satisfactory, then yes again, everything is running to my satisfaction.

He stops at the coffee table, rummages through the mound of bills, pauses, looks up. Candace inches away.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Lastly! If you consider county health inspectors discovering that the canned cheese sauce used to make mac-n'-cheese in the cafeteria expired during the Carter administration, to be satisfactory, then hell yes, every damn thing is running to my personal sat-iss-faction!

Vincent smiles maniacally. Candace, unfazed, picks up and opens the carpet sample book to where she marked it. She raises it so Vincent can see.

CANDACE CANNATOONA

Now that you got that out of your system, what do you think of the ultra-deep-pile Moroccan blue?

Vincent shakes his head, momentarily emerges from his madness.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Where is that going to go?

CANDACE CANNATOONA

The garage; the interior decorator told me that carpeted garages are all the rage.

Vincent flips the book shut, clutches a handful of invoices. His eyeballs bulge as he silently absorbs their details.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

A hand-carved, teak pergola with pink-marble, Corinthian columns? Twelve thousand dollars!

CANDACE CANNATOONA

Pergolas, too, are all the rage.

Vincent throws the bills in the air.



VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 All the rage! All the rage! You  
 want to see rage -- right here,  
 right now?!

Vincent jumps up and down on the fallen invoices.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
 I think I am, and I don't care for  
 it in the least, Vincent. Calm  
 yourself down!

Vincent heeds the advice, stumbles. Candace stands, begins  
 picking up the paper.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
 We deserve a home that reflects  
 your rank in the community and our  
 social status. Remember, if you  
 hadn't bought this dilapidated  
 cabana--

VINCENT AND CANDACE  
 (together)  
 Sight unseen--

Vincent folds his arms.

CANDACE CANNATOONA  
 We wouldn't be spending so much  
 money making it look presentable.

Vincent kicks the coffee table, storms out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE VINCENT'S OFFICE - DAY

LATE OCTOBER

The sitting area outside Principal Cannatoona's office is  
 occupied by Ken Pugh and a second student, CAROL NORTH,  
 blonde and eighteen, also a senior. Carol sits next to  
 Ken. They both mindlessly stare at the office's Halloween  
 decorations.

KEN'S POV

Commercial cutouts of a witch, ghost and pumpkin, all  
 grinning, are attached to the opposite wall with an  
 overabundance of wide masking tape.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH

Carol, look at that; they must have used a whole roll of tape.

CAROL NORTH

Yeah, it's more a celebration of masking tape than Halloween.

An awkward silence ensues. Mrs. Klatter exits Vincent's office, files paper in a nearby cabinet.

CAROL NORTH (CONT'D)

You all prepared for the big exam tomorrow, Ken?

KEN PUGH

Which big exam would that exactly be?

Shocked, Carol points to her history text.

CAROL NORTH

Miss Chmut, second period world history? It's all she's been talking about for over a week.

KEN PUGH

Sounds like it really is important.

She puts her palm to the top of her head, rolls her eyes.

CAROL NORTH

She said it counts for one third of the semester grade.

Ken straightens up.

KEN PUGH

I'm going to have to get right on it, but I'm not too good at preparing under stressful circumstances.

MRS. KLATTER (O.S.)

Or any other circumstances.

Ken wrings his hands, stresses. Carol notices, sympathizes.

CAROL NORTH

Look, Ken, I've heard about your situation, facing being expelled and all...

(MORE)

CAROL NORTH (CONT'D)  
I don't live far from you. Why  
don't you come over, after school,  
after you get off the bus? We can  
study together. It might help.

Ken's eyes widen.

KEN'S FLASHBACK

Ken steps off the bus with a bus boner.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken shudders. Carol takes out a piece of paper and pen,  
from her purse, starts writing.

CAROL NORTH  
Here's my address and phone  
number. Stop by, around four,  
okay?

She hands the note to Ken, stunned by the offer.

KEN PUGH  
In all the years I've attended  
Woodrow Wilson High, no one's ever  
offered to help.

Carol stands, smiles.

CAROL NORTH  
I'm not guaranteeing you'll get an  
A, but it might keep you from  
failing. See you later.

She waves, starts to exit.

KEN PUGH  
Don't you have an appointment with  
Mr. Cannatoona right after mine?

She continues on her way without replying. Ken looks at  
the piece of paper, ponders, folds it, sticks it in his  
shirt pocket.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
Pugh, get in here!

INT. VINCENT'S OFFICE

Ken, slumped in his seat, avoids making eye contact with Cannatoona, who stands by the window.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Pugh... S-s-sit up straight. Your  
posture makes me s-s-sick.

Ken complies.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
I've been keeping track of you  
this semester, close track -- and  
I don't like what I see.

Vincent picks up a sheet of paper from his desk, gives it a cursory glance, lays it down, making sure the paper's edges are parallel to the sides of the desk.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
You didn't make the football team.  
Hell, you couldn't even make  
mascot.

KEN PUGH  
Why dress up like a bluefish, if  
doesn't earn any service credits?

Vincent walks to the bulletin board, casually peruses various official postings. Eventually, he turns towards Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
I've recently spoken with the  
Superintendent of Schools, Doctor  
Pink, about your... situation.

Vincent presses his hands together, as if in prayer, brings fingertips to his chin.

KEN PUGH  
Oh?

Ken squirms in his chair.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Yes, I consulted with him to see  
if we could accelerate your  
deadline for improved performance.

KEN PUGH  
In September, you said I had until  
the end of the school year, in  
June.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

True enough, but you've not indicated, to me, in any way, shape or form, that you are on the right path, academically, this term.

KEN'S POV

Ken's attention is riveted on a picture, cut out from a magazine, that is pinned to the bulletin board behind Vincent.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA

As a result, I feel judgment can and should be rendered after fall exams.

VINCENT'S POV

Ken's facial expression belies his ability to pay attention to the conversation. Instead, he is focused on something posted on the bulletin board.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent turns, looks at the board, tries to detect what the object of interest is. Unsure, he turns back to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

What, what are you looking at, Pugh?

Ken stands, points, sits back down.

KEN PUGH

Behind you, pinned to the bulletin board... that picture.

Vincent turns to the board, confirms what Ken has spied, turns back to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

That is a painting by Cezanne, one of my favorite artists: Mount Saint Victoire. I nearly majored in art history when I was an undergraduate. Are you familiar with Cezanne?

Ken shrugs, is non-committal.

KEN PUGH  
It looks a bit familiar.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Familiar? In what way? What do  
you mean?

Vincent removes it from the board, approaches Ken. Holding the image between his thumb and index finger, he dangles it front of Ken.

KEN'S POV

The cutout depicts a landscape, in France. Hypnotically, it rocks back and forth in front of Ken.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH  
It's so much like the other.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
What other?

Ken shakes his head vigorously.

KEN PUGH  
An old painting, at home, in the  
attic. It's so similar -- the  
style, I mean.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Really? Whose is it?

KEN PUGH  
Don't know, originally. Been  
there since I was a kid. It was  
covered over with dirty burlap.  
It was there when my folks moved  
in, long, long ago.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)  
My god, what if it's a real  
Cezanne? Even Candy couldn't  
spend what it's worth.

As best he can, Vincent suppresses his joy at having possibly stumbled across something of extreme value. He re-pins the picture to the board, bites a knuckle, turns, devilishly smiles.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

I'd be very interested in seeing this painting of yours, Ken... uh, when the opportunity arises, of course. No rush.

KEN PUGH

No rush?

VINCENT CANNATOONA

In the next week, or two, perhaps sooner, if it comes to mind to bring it in.

KEN PUGH

Sure.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

As I am sure you've deduced from my phone conversations, my wife loves to spend money and is in the midst of redecorating our home. She will need a picture or two to hang, of that I am sure. Who knows? If the painting you bring in is any good, I might be interested in purchasing it from you.

KEN PUGH

For money?

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Yes, yes, for money. I am sure I could scrape together f-forty dollars, or so. You could save me from her expensive taste.

KEN PUGH

That would certainly be nice -- found money.

Vincent nods approvingly, catches himself being too enthusiastic. He resumes his poker face and professional demeanor, clears his throat, sits at his desk.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

That's it for today, Pugh. I have administrative matters to tend to.

KEN PUGH

What about what you said before-- about my deadline moving up? Y'know, from June to this December?

Vincent sucks in through his teeth, leans back.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 It's tentative, conditional.  
 We'll see. Work on those grades,  
 Pugh. I am watching. And sit up  
 straight.

Vincent points to the office door. Ken rises.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
 And start using a thesaurus.

Ken exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - LATE AFTERNOON

The sole passenger, Ken steps off the bus, which makes a hasty departure, expelling a cloud of black exhaust.

Ken retrieves Carol's note from his pocket, unfolds and reads it to himself, mouthing the words. He checks to make sure he is unseen, then quickly looks down at his crotch. He sighs, puts the note away, walks towards home.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Ken peers in through the shop's front door, sees no one, lightly knocks.

ZERA (O.S.)  
 It might be easier to just give  
 you your own key.

Ken turns, smiles.

KEN'S POV

Zera holds two large shopping bags.

KEN PUGH (O.S)  
 I think I have a customer for a  
 painting of mine.

ZERA  
 Wonderful, wonderful, Ken. Help  
 me bring these in; I want to hear  
 all about it.



INT. ZERA'S SHOP

Ken takes the bundles into the small room adjacent to the parlor. He exits and sits at the reading table, where Zera joins him, glass of creme de menthe in hand. She takes a sip.

KEN'S POV/ZERA' POV INTERCUTTING

ZERA

Let's hear. Who's the lucky buyer?

Excited, Ken taps the tabletop with both hands, then grabs the the armrests, lunges forward.

KEN PUGH

It's Principal Cannatoona! Can you believe it?

ZERA

Cannatoona's the nut job that's making your life miserable, giving you nightmares.

KEN PUGH

I know! That's what makes it so amazing!

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA

How did that happen?

Ken messes up his hair, blinks rapidly.

KEN PUGH

I don't know, I don't know what happened. All I know is, it happened fast! Something came over me!

Ken jumps to his feet, paces.

ZERA

What came over you?

KEN PUGH

I was in his office, for yet another brow beating, when I noticed a photo of a painting by Cezanne on his bulletin board.

Zera lights a cigarette.

ZERA

And?

Ken stops, collects his thoughts.

KEN PUGH

Out of nowhere, I came up with this crazy story, well... a lie, that I had a painting in a similar style in my attic. I said it had been up there since my folks bought the place.

ZERA

A total lie?

KEN PUGH

Oh, yeah! Hogwash! Pure hogwash!

ZERA

Then what happened?

Ken sits back down.

KEN PUGH

He said he wanted to see it; said he might actually pay me forty dollars for it. Forty!

Zera stands, crushes out the cigarette, raises both hands, as if motioning an oncoming car to stop.

ZERA

So you don't really have the painting, or any painting, and you don't have a deposit from the potential buyer, correct?

Ken cheers.

KEN PUGH

I know! Isn't it great?!

ZERA

I wish I could agree. Tell me, your intention is to... what? Paint a landscape or still life, in the style of Cezanne, bring it in and hope Cannatoona forks over forty bucks for it?

Ken nods. Zera observes, shakes her head, paces, thinks. She stops, picks up the crystal ball, strokes it, peers into it, sets it down.

ZERA (CONT'D)

The entire situation, Ken -- it's an opportunity for you to get out from under Cannatoona's thumb, for good.

KEN PUGH

I don't get it. How?

ZERA

Cannatoona thinks you may have an actual Cezanne and that you have have no idea what it's really worth.

Ken scratches his head, looks doubtful.

ZERA (CONT'D)

I know Cannatoona's game. He'll buy it from you for forty dollars and then shop it around to art dealers to see if any of them think it's real. If he succeeds, he could get hundreds of thousands for it -- I'll bet he's married.

KEN PUGH

Yes! And he says she likes to spend.

ZERA

I knew it!

Ken settles down, bites his lower lip.

KEN PUGH

Zera, I don't like where this is headed. It sounds like it could lead to something dishonest.

Zera walks up to Ken, firmly grabs the front of his shirt with both hands.

ZERA

Listen, Ken, you can't entirely leave your future up to fate. Sometimes you have to intervene and take action to get the outcome you want. And sometimes you have to sacrifice a principle.

Ken is astonished. She releases her grip.

KEN PUGH  
Sacrifice a principal?

KEN'S MUSING

Ken, dressed as an ancient Mayan priest, looms over bound-and-gagged Vincent Cannatoona, who writhes upon a massive, carved, stone altar. From his sleeve, Ken produces a long, jeweled dagger. The rising sun, behind Ken, illuminates both men in golden light. O.s., a chorus of one hundred voices is heard; it's volume crests as Ken looks skyward, raises the glistening blade overhead.

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA  
You know what I mean, by  
sacrificing a principle, right?

KEN PUGH  
I could use a short explanation.

ZERA  
It means, sometimes a basically  
good person, such as yourself,  
needs to do something slightly  
bad, to achieve a greater good.  
Got it?

KEN PUGH  
Oh, I see. I'm glad you explained  
that. I had something slightly  
different come to mind.

ZERA  
So here's my suggestion. Get to  
work on the painting. Don't sign  
it and make it look as much like a  
Cezanne as you can. Then take it  
in and see what Cannatoona says.  
If he buys it from you and unloads  
it, you could inform the  
authorities that it's your work.  
What he did would be considered  
fraud and the school board will  
force him to resign.

KEN PUGH  
Mercy.

CUT TO:

INT. PUGH APARTMENT - DINNER TIME

Ken glumly sits at the kitchen table, stares at his food.  
Diane hungrily eats from her plate.

KEN'S POV

An overcooked, frozen TV dinner. Ken's plastic fork  
aimlessly pushes around scorched peas, dried out potatoes,  
a blackened hunk of fatty mystery meat.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH  
Why did I get stuck with the lousy  
TV dinner?

Diane pauses, looks up, swallows, without emotion.

DIANE PUGH  
I found it in the back of the  
freezer, no expiration date on it.  
God only knows how long it was  
sittin' back there. The garbage  
pale was full, so I made it for  
you. Enjoy.

Ken stabs a potato, breaks a tine, releases the fork.

KEN PUGH  
How thoughtful of you, Diane.  
Where's Paul?

Diane burps, pours herself some soda.

DIANE PUGH  
The king of cotton candy is  
downstairs, in his palace, trying  
to fix an electrical problem, yet  
again. Something on your mind?

KEN PUGH  
Well, I was wondering if we could  
talk about the eviction--

Diane bolts to her feet, points to her protruding belly  
with her fork.

DIANE PUGH  
Pregnant! Even more pregnant than  
a month ago! See?

She drops the fork, turns in profile, accentuates the bulge by arching her back.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)  
Your situation hasn't changed,  
Ken. The baby will be coming into  
this trash heap and you're going  
out! Period!

Ken pushes away dinner, stands and walks to his room. He enters and quietly closes the door.

INT. KEN'S ROOM

Ken sits on the edge of his bed, a thick text book in hand.

KEN PUGH  
Did Carol say the big history test  
is tomorrow, or next week?

He flips through the book, closes it, sets it aside, looks around the room. Ken gets off the bed, onto his knees. From beneath it, he pulls out an old blank canvas, from which he blows ample dust. He stands, shuffles to the easel, secures the canvas to it. Ken turns on a lamp, opens his paint supply box, prepares to begin painting.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS CHMUT'S HISTORY CLASS - THE NEXT DAY

Silence prevails and the tension is palpable in Miss Chmut's class, as she methodically walks the aisles, individually handing out stapled test sheets from the stack resting in the crook of her arm. The sound of her square shoe heels striking the wooden floor creates an ominous beat.

MISS CHMUT  
Remember, no one is to start until  
all the tests are handed out and I  
say, "begin."

Carol, sitting next to Ken, furtively taps him on the arm, whispers.

CAROL NORTH  
Why didn't you come over to study?

KEN PUGH  
I really wanted to, but, uhh... I  
was on the bus and something came  
up.

CAROL NORTH  
I hope you're ready. Are you?

Ken shakes his head. Carol makes the sign of the cross in the air.

KEN PUGH  
What's that for?

CAROL NORTH  
It's the last rites.

Ken looks away. Miss Chmut has stopped next to his desk.

MISS CHMUT  
Should I even bother to give you one of these, Ken?

Ken extends his open hand.

KEN PUGH  
Sometimes miracles happen, Miss Chmut.

She shudders, hands Ken an exam, moves on. Ken inspects it, flips it over, lays his pen on it.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
I don't believe this is one of those times.

CUT TO:

INT. KEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

TWO WEEKS LATER

KEN'S POV

The brush makes a few light strokes, adds finishing touches to the completed still life. Not a copy of any known Cezanne, the painting of fruit in a bowl, resting on a table, is in the master's style.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken steps back, approvingly nods, then sighs.

KEN PUGH  
Not a copy of a known Cezanne, it's exactly what I wanted, in every way, but do I want this?

## BACKYARD

In the silence of the night, Ken stands in front of the dumpster, painting in hand, brushes in his back pocket. An overhead flood light casts long shadows.

KEN PUGH  
I wonder what Kate would have  
advised.

A meow is heard, o.s.

Measles leaps onto the closed portion of the dumpster, saunters about, stops.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
Good evening, Measles.

MEASLES  
Ken, Ken, Ken... another donation  
to the city dump?

KEN PUGH  
Maybe.

MEASLES  
Let's have a look first.

Ken angles the canvas towards the cat. It rocks its head from side to side, judging.

MEASLES (CONT'D)  
Even in this dreadful light I can  
tell you've outdone yourself.

Ken takes another look at his work.

MEASLES (CONT'D)  
You'd be a fool to discard it.  
You are holding, in your hands,  
your salvation from Vincent  
Cannatoona.

KEN PUGH  
How do you know about Vincent  
Cannatoona?

The cat stretches, takes a seated position.

MEASLES  
I have ears, and no qualms about  
listening in on private  
conversations.

Ken chuckles.



MEASLES (CONT'D)

Listen, Zera's awake; she's a regular night owl. Go see what she thinks. You'll do well to take her advice; she's a smart lady.

KEN PUGH

All right. Where are you headed?

MEASLES

Talking about Vincent Cannatoona has made me famished for a can of tuna.

Measles jumps off the dumpster, into the dark. Tin cans rattle o.s.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Ken, with his painting, stands at the front door. Before he knocks, it opens. Zera, in a bathrobe and without makeup looks far less mysterious. A pink bath towel is wrapped around her hair, in the fashion of a turban.

ZERA

A late-night visitor, how intriguing. Is that what I think it is?

KEN PUGH

It is. I finished it a little while ago and couldn't wait to show it to you.

ZERA

Come on in. I'll close the drapes and turn on a light.

INT. ZERA'S PARLOR

A dim light comes on, modestly lighting the room. Zera turns it down further.

KEN PUGH

Shouldn't you turn the light up, to get a better view?

ZERA

We don't want to draw any unnecessary attention, now do we?

Ken taps the side of his head.

KEN PUGH  
Of course, I didn't think. Got to think.

Ken holds up the work for Zera. She silently evaluates, smiles broadly.

ZERA  
Ken, you have outdone yourself.

KEN PUGH  
That's exactly what Measles said!

ZERA  
Sh-h-h. Measles? Who's Measles?

Ken, embarrassed, looks away, lowers the painting.

KEN PUGH  
It's that spotted cat that's always hangin' around. It saw me on my way over here.

Zera doubles over with laughter, contains it, lightly raps Ken with the back of her hand.

ZERA  
You are so funny, Ken. You actually had me believing you for a second.

Ken laughs halfheartedly.

KEN PUGH  
Yeah, silly old me.

ZERA  
When are you planning on taking it in to the mark?

KEN PUGH  
The mark?

Zera nervously fusses with her robe.

ZERA  
Uh, sorry, my cousin Mark came to mind for some reason. I meant Vincent.

Ken looks at the painting.

KEN PUGH  
I used fast-drying oils, so I  
think it should be ready to show  
tomorrow.

Zera has an idea, holds up one finger. She runs to the side room, comes back with a camera.

ZERA  
Let me take a picture or two. You  
should have some proof of your  
connection to the picture, Ken.

KEN PUGH  
You think ahead, Zera. I like  
that. I should think ahead, too,  
at least sometimes.

Ken takes the brushes out of his back pocket, holds them and the painting in front of himself, belt high. Zera snaps two flash shots.

ZERA  
Good luck, Ken; I'm rooting for  
you.

She gives Ken a quick kiss on the cheek.

KEN PUGH  
I'm kind of nervous about  
tomorrow. Maybe I shouldn't do  
this.

Zera gives him a second kiss, on the lips. She opens and drops her robe.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)  
I'm afraid I'm a little out of  
practice.

ZERA  
Just make believe you're riding on  
the bus.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING AREA OUTSIDE VINCENT'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Ken nervously sits in the waiting area. He taps the edge of the burlap-wrapped painting. Mrs. Klatter types away, stops, quizzically looks at Ken.

MRS. KLATTER

What's that you've got there,  
Pugh?

KEN PUGH

Something for Mr. Cannatoona -- a  
painting.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)

Is that Ken Pugh I hear out there?

Vincent comes to his office door, along with a student,  
WILLIAM, with whom he was conferring. The door opens.

WILLIAM

I really need that letter of  
recommendation today, Mr.  
Cannatoona, or I won't get that  
part-time job.

Vincent pats William on the head, patronizingly.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

I'm sure you do. Come back  
tomorrow, William, not before.

He guides William in the direction of the exit. William  
frowns, leaves. Vincent turns to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

Hello, Ken. Let's see what you've  
got. Mrs. Klatter, why don't you  
take a break?

INT. VINCENT'S OFFICE

Before Ken can take a seat, Vincent sets his hand on the  
wrapped canvas, takes possession. He picks up his reading  
glasses and proceeds to the window, where he opens the  
blinds.

KEN PUGH

It's been in the attic since my  
folks bought the house -- up in  
the attic, the rafters.

Vincent turns his attention to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Yes, I know, Ken. You told me  
that previously.

KEN PUGH

Sorry, I forgot.

Ken looks down, folds his hands. Vincent begins unwrapping. He grins as progressive layers come away, raising a cloud of dust. Finally revealed, he holds it up with his back to the window, blocking his view of Ken.

Ken looks up, notices he is out of view, takes in and quietly releases a deep breath, but remains restless.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Uh-huh... uh-huh... Mmm...

KEN PUGH

Mr. Cannatoona, sir, I need to be excused. I have to pee.

Vincent is oblivious to the request, looks very closely at the canvas, then extends his arms to view it at a greater distance.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Uh-huh... uh-huh!

KEN PUGH

So may I be excused?

Vincent lowers the painting, then gently rests it upon his desktop. He takes a step back, fixated on the work, then looks up at Ken. He takes off his reading glasses, twirls them.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

No, you may not.

KEN PUGH

But--

VINCENT CANNATOONA

No. I won't be but a minute, or two, so s-s-sit up straight and exercise some self control.

Ken sits up. Vincent looks at the painting intently.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)

It's not bad, not bad at all.

KEN PUGH

Thank you.

Vincent instantly stares at Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

What are you thanking me for?

VINCENT'S POV

Ken is stunned by the catastrophic question.

KEN PUGH (V.O.)  
What have I done?

Vincent steps closer to Ken.

KEN PUGH  
I'm just... I am very happy that  
you... like... it.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent pauses, looks back at the painting.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
I never said I liked it, never  
said that at all. I only said it  
wasn't bad.

KEN PUGH  
Would you like to buy it?

Vincent tugs on his shirt's French cuffs.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
I suppose. I mean, if my wife  
doesn't care for it, it might  
dress up the garage or tool shed a  
bit. I'll give you th-thirty  
bucks for it.

Vincent reaches for his wallet.

KEN PUGH  
I seem to remember you saying  
forty, forty dollars.

Vincent puts his wallet away, goes expressionless.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Thirty bucks, Pugh, take it or  
leave it.

KEN'S OPEN PALM

Three crumpled tens hit Ken's open hand.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
You can go now.

Ken stands, heads for the door.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
Oh, Pugh, before you go... I  
understand you miserably failed  
Miss Chmut's history exam.

Ken's back faces Vincent.

KEN PUGH  
That's true.

Vincent rocks on his heels.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Your deadline, Pugh -- it's  
December, not June, and that is  
non-negotiable.

Ken exits, closes the door behind him. Vincent waits until he can no longer see or hear Ken. He opens a desk drawer, pulls out a phone book, leafs through it.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)  
Fine art dealers, fine art  
dealers...

CUT TO:

EXT. FROMKIN'S FINE ART - AFTERNOON

LATER THAT DAY

A blue sedan pulls up in front of Fromkin's Fine Art Gallery, comes to an abrupt stop. Vincent emerges from the car wearing dark sunglasses. He looks around, hurriedly retrieves the burlap-wrapped painting from the car's back seat, runs to the front door.

INT. BACKROOM, FROMKIN'S FINE ART GALLERY

Tall, emaciated NORRIS FROMKIN, in his mid-70s, places the unwrapped painting on a massive easel in the back room of his gallery. The room contains floor-to-ceiling wooden racks designed to facilitate the storage of artists' canvases.

A foot away from the work-in-question, he lowers his reading glasses to the tip of his bulbous nose, bends at the waist, places hands on hips, and analyzes.

Vincent sits on a tall stool, accepts a glass of wine from a young, female ASSISTANT who subsequently exits.

Fromkin noisily inhales and exhales through his nose.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 What do you think? Is it a  
 Cezanne? A genuine Cezanne?

Stone-faced Fromkin turns to Vincent.

FROMKIN  
 I've been looking at it for thirty  
 seconds, sir. I spend more time  
 than that looking at a sandwich,  
 before taking a bite.

Fromkin turns his gaze back to the still life. Vincent guzzles his wine, loosens his tie.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)  
 Cezanne is frequently copied.  
 Many galleries, and even a museum  
 or two I know of, whose names I  
 will not mention, possess  
 forgeries.

He carefully picks up the painting, turns it around, peruses the back of the canvas, then holds it over head, utilizing the fluorescent light above.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)  
 I would say the raw canvas itself  
 is of the right period.

Vincent quickly stands.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 Really? That's fantastic!

Fromkin casually waves him off.

FROMKIN  
 Becalm yourself, sir. That  
 doesn't mean the pigment upon it  
 is, as well.

Vincent wilts, retakes his seat.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)  
 Clever forgers go to great lengths  
 to obtain old canvases they can  
 strip and paint on. It's all part  
 of the deception.



Fromkin picks up a small flashlight, shines it on the canvas. His nose nearly makes contact with the work.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)

The palette of colors is consistent with other works of Cezanne.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

That's what I thought.

Fromkin freezes, looks upward.

FROMKIN

What you thought? Perhaps I should tear up my certifications and ask you to make the determination.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

I... I... That's not what I... You're the expert, not me.

Fromkin steps away from the easel, turns off the flashlight, flattens his dyed-blond hair.

FROMKIN

You are a very impatient man, Mr. Cannatoona and that concerns me.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

It's just the excitement, the uncertainty. To think that this painting sat in my wife's aunt's attic for so many years and survived. And that it may be a genuine Cezanne -- it's somewhat overwhelming.

FROMKIN

As I said, you are a very impatient man -- and a very lucky one, in my professional opinion. You and your wife are in the possession of a--

Vincent whoops and hollers, pumps his fist, hops about.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)

Sir! A little decorum, if you please!

Vincent halts.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
But it's a genuine Cezanne!

FROMKIN  
No, it is not. I am certain of  
that.

Vincent collapses to the floor, curls up, whimpers.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)  
But it is a genuine Edouard Manet!  
And Manet, a contemporary of  
Cezanne, was a great artist in his  
own right. It is an early work,  
and clearly not one of his best.  
Would you take \$400,000?

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - LATE AFTERNOON

THE SAME DAY

Dragging his backpack down the bus' steps by one strap, Ken wearily steps off the bus. The doors close behind him and the bus departs with the backpack, which was on the last step. Ken discards the shredded strap, heads for home.

ALLEYWAY BETWEEN PUGH'S COTTON CANDY AND ZERA'S SHOP

Ken trudges down the narrow alleyway towards the back of the building, stops. Something isn't right; he picks up the pace.

BACK OF BUILDING

Ken, petrified, stands before stacks of cardboard boxes containing the contents of his bedroom. He approaches, looks over the top.

KEN'S POV

Furniture from his room sits behind the boxes.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul emerges from the back door carrying two dresser drawers overflowing with clothes. He spots Ken, diverts his gaze, sheepishly approaches.

KEN PUGH  
Paul, what on Earth are you doing?

Paul places the drawers on a chair, tucks in his shirt.

PAUL PUGH

It's Diane, Dad. Only a couple months before the baby's due and last night she threatens to walk out again, unless I do this. She packed a suitcase this time! What am I supposed to do?!

KEN PUGH

Where am I supposed to go? I haven't found a place yet. I haven't even started looking.

The sound of a raindrop hitting the top of a box is heard, followed by several more, in quick succession. Paul and Ken momentarily look skyward.

O.s., the sound of a window opening.

ZERA (O.S.)

You should be ashamed of yourself, Paul.

Both men are drawn to the voice.

KEN AND PAUL'S POV

Zera leans halfway out a second-story window.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL PUGH

I've been ashamed, for months.

ZERA (O.S.)

Then at least help your father get all his stuff in here. I'll come down and open the back door.

KEN PUGH

Sounds like I found a place.

PAUL PUGH

You okay with me helping?

KEN PUGH

I am most appreciative, son.

CUT TO:

INT. ZERA'S BEDROOM - MORNING                      THE NEXT DAY, SATURDAY

Zera's second-floor bedroom is crowded with a combination of her antique furniture and Ken's assorted possessions.

Ken lies on his back, comfortably snoring among ruffled linens. Zera, in her bathrobe, enters, folded newspaper in hand. From a foot above Ken's chest, she playfully drops it, awakening him. Ken coughs, sputters.

KEN PUGH  
What the heck? What's this?

ZERA  
Good morning to you, too. The early edition arrived an hour ago. Take a look at page twenty-four.

Ken sits up, flips through the paper.

KEN PUGH  
What am I supposed to be lookin' for?

ZERA  
You'll see.

Ken stops at the suggested page. The paper blocks Zera's view of his face. Seconds go by. Ken slowly lowers the paper to his waist.

KEN PUGH  
Do you think that's it?

Zera lights a cigarette.

ZERA  
Can't be anything but.

KEN PUGH  
But it doesn't say it's a Cezanne. It says it's a Manet.

She points to the article.

ZERA  
It happened yesterday. A local art dealer is presented with a previously unknown work, purchases it from an unnamed local who claimed it was found in an attic -- for \$400,000! Ken! What else could it be?!

Ken ponders, smiles.

ZERA (CONT'D)  
 Cannatoona not only took the bait,  
 he took the rod, the reel, the  
 anchor -- the whole friggin' boat!

O.s. a firm knock is heard at the downstairs parlor door.

Zera moves to the bedroom window, slightly parts the  
 drapes, peers down.

ZERA'S POV

No one can be seen at first, then a quick glimpse of a male  
 figure in a black raincoat, who heads back to the front  
 door, knocks again, harder.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)  
 Anyone in there? I'd like a  
 reading, right away. Cash  
 customer.

KEN PUGH  
 That's Mr. Cannatoona's voice!  
 He's going to kill me!

Zera quickly turns toward Ken.

ZERA  
 Sh-h-h.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S FRONT DOOR - SECONDS LATER

Zera opens the door a crack.

ZERA'S POV

Vincent, anxious, takes a step back.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
 I know this is outside your  
 regular business hours, but I  
 would like a reading, now, and I'm  
 willing to pay a premium for the  
 inconvenience.

Vincent fiddles with his dark glasses, wets his lips.

BACK TO SCENE

Zera fully opens the door.

ZERA  
I don't usually do this -- come  
in.

PARLOR

Zera points to a seat at the reading table; Vincent slinks into it. She turns on the spot light, illuminating the crystal ball. She sits opposite Vincent, sticks out her open hand.

ZERA  
Two hundred, up front.

Vincent delves into his coat pocket, produces a wad of bills, fills Zera's palm. The money disappears into her robe.

ZERA (CONT'D)  
You don't strike me as the type  
that runs to a fortune teller,  
especially at off hours.

Vincent sits back, grabs both armrests.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
Right you are about that.  
Normally, I'm a realist; someone  
who only believes in what he can  
see and touch, but...

ZERA  
But life has just thrown you a  
massive curve ball, so you seek  
advice from outside the  
mainstream, right?

Vincent nods.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
You are good.

Zera sticks out her open palm.

ZERA  
Another hundred.

VINCENT CANNATOONA  
More? I just paid--

ZERA

A hundred, or we're done.

Vincent produces a hundred-dollar bill, slaps it into her palm.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Let me see your left palm.

He extends his hand. She draws closely, runs her index finger along several lines, withdraws, sits back, closes her eyes.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You're facing a moral dilemma.  
You are a man who is torn apart on  
the inside.

When he pulls his hand away, she seizes it, takes another look, sits back.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You've experienced good fortune  
recently... money.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Yes, I have.

ZERA

But not cleanly. The money is  
tainted.

Vincent looks away.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Such newfound wealth can be a  
blessing, or a curse.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

And that's why I'm here! Which is  
it?!

KEN PUGH (O.S)

It's a curse.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Who said that?

Ken, using the folded newspaper, pulls back the curtain to the small side room, steps into the parlor. Zera stands, turns on the lights. Vincent starts to get up.

ZERA

You should stay seated.

Vincent slumps back into the seat. Ken lays the paper, open to page twenty-four, on the table.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You've committed fraud, Mr. Cannatoona, art fraud. People go to prison for that, for a long, long time.

Vincent swallows hard, breathes heavily.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

The painting was inspected by an expert, who asserts it's a Manet. He believed my story: it came from my wife's late aunt's attic. Anyone coming forth with a different story -- well, that's just hearsay.

Zera opens the reading table's drawer, pulls out the photos of Ken. She holds one up for Vincent to see. When Vincent leans forward, she pulls it back an equal distance.

ZERA

I'm sure you can see it just fine. That's Ken with the painting, the \$400,000 painting. You don't need to get within grabbing distance.

Vincent pulls back, wipes sweat from his brow.

KEN PUGH

And Mrs. Klatter saw me bring in a painting to your office. The one you gave me thirty dollars for.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

So, what are you going to do? Turn me in? Destroy my career, my life?

Ken and Zera knowingly look at each other.

ZERA

Not necessarily. All three of us have needs. You have a wife that likes to spend. Paying your bills... that's a need. Ken here needs to stay in school, indefinitely, and have a financially secure future -- that's his need.



VINCENT CANNATOONA

And yours?

Zera rocks her head, from side to side, purses her lips.

ZERA

Me? Well, I'm running low on  
creme de menthe.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

How much are you looking for?

KEN PUGH

Two-hundred-fifty thousand.

Indignant, Vincent puffs, folds his arms. Ken steps close.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)

It's non-negotiable, and s-s-sit  
up straight.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEHIND ZERA'S SHOP - SPRING

Ken and Zera, wearing sunglasses, lie on chaise lounges, enjoying the sun. On a small table, between them, sits a bottle of creme de menthe and two half-full glasses. Zera holds a folded newspaper. Ken yawns.

ZERA

So, how are your grades going for  
the spring term?

Ken smiles.

KEN PUGH

Doin' great, same as the fall  
term: all effs.

ZERA

Think you'll ever graduate?

Ken takes a sip from his glass, lies back.

KEN PUGH

God, I hope not.

Zera pats the newspaper.

ZERA

You know, Fromkin auctioned off  
your 'Manet.' He got \$1.4 million  
for it.

Ken removes his sunglasses.

KEN PUGH

Really?

Zera takes off hers.

ZERA

Yep. Don't you think you should  
get started on another one?

Ken puts his glasses back on.

KEN PUGH

I'm still working on the van Gogh.

Zera puts her glasses back on.

ZERA

Think you'll finish it up today?

KEN PUGH

You know I don't do homework on  
weekends.

They hold hands. Measles jumps onto Ken's lounge chair,  
sits, purrs.

FADE OUT:

THE END

(CONT'D)



