

DARKNESS AND MEN'S EYES

By

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SMITH

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - CONNECTICUT - AUTUMN OF 1985 - DAY

An average-looking, well-maintained home in an average-looking, well-maintained middle-class suburban neighborhood.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

A vacant-eyed, almost catatonic FATHER -- with a shotgun at his side -- walks down the darkened hallway. He stops at a bedroom door.

INT. TRAVELLING POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

MITCH, a policeman driving the car, is in his late thirties, and despite his profession, is quiet and sensitive.

He quickly picks up the hand receiver, responding to a "Gunshots Fired" dispatch.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET

Mitch, gun drawn, jumps out of the car, his face pale with recognition.

MITCH
-- Jesus, no --

INT. LIVING ROOM - SUBURBAN HOME

The front door is wide open. Mitch stares down behind the couch. MARTY, a second officer, runs in. Both stop.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - CONNECTICUT - LATER

Surrounding the house are a half dozen police cars, two ambulances, several unmarked cars, and several press vans. Police, paramedics, press people and plain-clothed detectives doing their jobs.

Two portable gurneys are carried from the house to the awaiting ambulances, sealed body bags on top.

Mitch is standing off by himself, watching the scene.

IN FLASHBACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM - SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT - A WEEK EARLIER

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mitch, dressed in his uniform, pushes a YOUNG BOY out of the way and intercedes with the BOY'S angry FATHER (from the first scene), grabbing the father's raised hand and twisting it behind the father's back, holding the father in an arm lock.

FLASHBACK OUT.

INT. A POLICEMAN'S BAR - CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Mitch is seated away from the crowd. EDDIE, a slovenly detective in his fifties, sees Mitch.

EDDIE

Mitch! Hey, Mitch! Missed you at Paulie's kid's wedding.

MITCH

How was it?

EDDIE

Nice. Great kid. Beautiful bride. Paulie sang! Oh God, it was terrible! You should have seen it! Hell, if I had a kid getting married, I'd get drunk and sing too. Everybody was asking for you.

MITCH

Things came up. I dropped a gift off. Suzanne was a good friend of Marie's so I signed the gift from both of us.

EDDIE

You doing okay about all that yet?

MITCH

Let me buy you a drink.

EDDIE

Shit yes!

Eddie pounds his glass to the bar, signalling to the bartender.

EDDIE (cont'd)

Three years next month for my split. She still won't return my calls. Still's trying to poison the kids against me.

The bartender sets a new drink in front of Eddie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDDIE (cont'd)

What about your kid?

MITCH

With her. We're trying to work it out.
Trying to keep him out of it.

EDDIE

That's good. That's good. Kids shouldn't
have to suffer 'cause of our screw-ups.
Hell, it'll all work out. Drink enough
and everything will work itself out.

Mitch stands, places money on the bar and pats Eddie on the
shoulder.

MITCH

Hang in there, Eddie.

EDDIE

Yeah! You too! You too!

Mitch slips through the crowd.

EXT. BAR

Mitch exits the bar. Several off-duty cops are standing about
in groups of two or three, talking, leaning against the wall
or against their cars. Several wave to Mitch who gestures
back. He takes another step away when a MAN'S VOICE calls out
O.S.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mitch --

ROSCOE, a fellow cop in his fifties, comes up to him.

MITCH

Roscoe.

ROSCOE

Leaving?

MITCH

Yeah. Going home.

ROSCOE

You've looked liked warmed-over shit
lately.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Thanks.

ROSCOE

You ain't handling this right, walking out of the Captain's de-briefing like that. You knew the kid, didn't you?

Mitch doesn't answer.

ROSCOE (cont'd)

I just wanted to say I'm sorry. Real sorry. That it should have happened. But you've got to get the right handle on it.

MITCH

I got to go.

ROSCOE

Don't let it get under you. Shake it off. You've been through the ringer these last months.

MITCH

I was there, before. I could have taken the father in.

Mitch exits.

EXT. ROCKRIDGE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND ATHLETIC FIELD - MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

A high school-size track and field area. The field is smaller than normal, the surrounding oval track lined with unusual lane-dividing ropes. Two opposing soccer teams compete on the interior grass field.

A large, tough student named GRIFF, 18, kicks the ball onto the field. Within the ball is a loudly BEEPING transmitter.

MICHAEL, a student of slight but strong build, on the opposing team, is in his early twenties, good-looking and extremely smart. There is also an anger burning deep within him.

Both students are blind, as are all their teammates.

Michael kicks the ball away and runs after it, Griff running after Michael and roughly plowing his shoulder into Michael's stomach, both tumbling to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A whistle blows. The teams close in on COACH THOMPSON, who is sighted.

COACH THOMPSON
Michael? You all right?

Michael nods.

COACH THOMPSON
(cont'd)
Griff. What the hell was that all about?
You want to stay on the team, you play by
the rules.

GRIFF
Yeah, yeah.

COACH THOMPSON
(to the others)
All right. That's enough. Take a jog.

ANGLE

Michael runs past a stone-carved monument outside the athletic field which reads "ROCKRIDGE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND", various students of mixed ages passing in front.

INT. CLASS ROOM

An average-sized class room with a dozen students seated at desks, Braille typewriters for note-taking. The new TEACHER, a sighted woman, is speaking much too loud, students occasionally snickering.

TEACHER
You probably remember the spectacle of
the South African police -- I mean, some
of you may have. Others may have heard --
or read. About it.

Students laugh.

TEACHER (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I --

A MALE STUDENT raises his hand.

TEACHER (cont'd)
Yes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALE STUDENT

You don't have to speak quite so loud.
Ears we got.

Laughter erupts from the class.

EXT. ROCKRIDGE SCHOOL FRONT LAWN - LATE AFTERNOON

A massive, Gothic stone building surrounded by manicured lawns and enormous trees. Rope railings traverse the campus to help guide the newer students.

FRONT STEPS

Michael, books under arm, exits the school. Walking with him is SHANNON, in her early twenties, pretty and equally smart. Both are using guide ropes.

TRAVELLING SHOT

SHANNON

What did you think of the new History teacher?

MICHAEL

Scared.

SHANNON

Yeah.

MICHAEL

I wonder what college she got kicked out of? I mean, aren't they supposed to prepare the sighted teachers or something?

SHANNON

Can we work on the English paper together? You're the only one in class who's actually read the book.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow after lunch. Meet you in the library, by the magazine rack, table three or four.

SHANNON

Michael...

She kisses him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHANNON (cont'd)

Bye.

She exits.

EXT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - MASSACHUSETTS - LATE AFTERNOON

A small, modest two-story house sets back from the main road at the end of a dirt path leading into a thick grove of maple trees.

Michael exits from the grove and continues down the path to the house.

On the front yard, near the porch, is Michael's father, PHIL ROBERTS, who is on his knees, bent over a small flower garden. He is in his sixties, healthy and well-built.

PHIL

Michael.

MICHAEL

Dad.

PHIL

How'd it go?

MICHAEL

Okay. What're you doing?

PHIL

Putting some topsoil over some geranium seeds, protect 'em from the frost.

MICHAEL

Sounds like you didn't get to the leaves yet. I can do it.

PHIL

I'll do it. One thing at a time. Got to spread out all the day's activities.

MICHAEL

Don't catch cold.

Michael enters the house.

INT. KITCHEN - SUZANNE'S HOME - PENNSYLVANIA - NIGHT

SUZANNE, Mitch's wife, is an attractive, strong woman in her late thirties. She hesitates by the wall phone, then picks up the receiver.

INT. MITCH'S KITCHEN - CONNECTICUT - SAME TIME

The phone on a table is RINGING. Mitch is seated nearby, a beer in front of him. He doesn't answer the phone.

INT. KITCHEN - SUZANNE'S HOME - PENNSYLVANIA - NIGHT

She hangs up the phone, staring off.

EXT. SUZANNE'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

BEN, dressed warmly, is seated in a motionless swing, watching his feet kick at the ground. Ben is thirteen, quiet and troubled.

ANGLE

On a worried Suzanne watching Ben through the kitchen window.

INT. TENEMENT HALLWAY - CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

A dark and dingy hallway, trash scattered everywhere.

ANGLE

On Mitch, pressed against a hallway wall for protection, both hands clenched tightly around his service revolver. Perspiration is dripping from his forehead and running down his face.

POV

On another policeman, DIGGS, pressed against the opposite hallway wall, hands also clenched around his revolver.

HALLWAY

Mitch gestures to the floor, Diggs looking down.

FLOOR

A trail of blood drops from an apartment door vanishes around a dark corner.

HALLWAY

Mitch nods to Diggs, who nods back, Mitch inching his way forward along the wall toward the oncoming darkened corner.

CLOSE

On Mitch moving along the wall, struggling to contain his growing fear.

CORNER

As they slowly approach.

HALLWAY

Mitch stopping at the edge of the corner, Diggs stopping a few feet behind and opposite. Mitch nods.

ANGLE

Diggs dashes to the opposite corner of the hallway, gun aimed directly down the bisecting hallway. Mitch reels around the edge of the corner, gun straight-armed ahead.

ECU

On Mitch, suddenly 'frozen', his face distraught.

HALLWAY

Diggs looks at Mitch.

DIGGS

Mitch -- Mitch -- you all right?

An apartment door ahead flies open and the killer, shotgun drawn, CRASHES against the opposite hallway wall. He FIRES, Mitch and Diggs hitting the floor, Diggs and Mitch both FIRING several rounds, the killer dashing down the hallway, shot, collapsing at the far end.

DIGGS (cont'd)

(to Mitch)

You all right?

Mitch nods his head. Diggs stands and cautiously walks toward the killer, revolver pointed at him. He kicks the killer with his boot.

EXT. TENEMENT - NIGHT

Several police cars are out front, police milling about.

POLICE CAR

Mitch is leaning against the side of the car. Diggs ENTERS THE SCENE.

MITCH

Sorry.

DIGGS

Screw it. Ain't no big thing.

MITCH

...I don't know what happened...

DIGGS

It went down fine.

Diggs walks off.

INT. ROCKRIDGE LITERATURE CLASS - MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

Students sit at desks in neat rows facing the front of the classroom, a teacher's desk and a podium. At each desk is a Braille keyboard. MR.ALLEN, the teacher (non-sighted), forties, is seated in a chair near his desk as Michael stands at the podium.

MICHAEL

(continuing)

Melville's whale, Conrad's Kurtz, Fitzgerald's green light, Poe's raven; the obvious symbols of a literature written with the intent to teach as well as entertain; with a belief that literature like all art should also have a moral imperative. When the tribal story tellers were replaced by the printing press, as life became more and more secular, as the family became nuclear, where were the lessons to be learned? How do we learn to be human? Through our stories.

Michael steps from the podium and goes to his desk, Mr. Allen standing and going to the podium.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. ALLEN

Thank you, Michael.

(to the class)

Don't forget three chapters from Steinbeck for Thursday and the exam on Faulkner next Friday. Class dismissed.

The students pack up their things and exit the classroom.

MR. ALLEN

(cont'd)

Michael. Could you come up?

Michael zips up his backpack and walks to Mr. Allen.

MR. ALLEN

(cont'd)

Good work. As usual.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

Mr. Allen hands Michael a stack of bound papers.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

I'm afraid the writing's not very good.

MR. ALLEN

Self-effacement is too obvious on you, Michael. Because the writing is quite the opposite.

MICHAEL

...Really? I mean, it's pretty presumptuous --

MR. ALLEN

A non-sighted person describing his perceptions of the world?

MICHAEL

Something like that.

MR. ALLEN

What about Beethoven? He was deaf?

MICHAEL

He'd heard music before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. ALLEN

Most writers never get beyond the physical; the great ones write about the spirit.

MICHAEL

I appreciate your taking time to read them. I keep it pretty much to myself.

Michael unzips his pack and puts them inside.

MR. ALLEN

If you're going to write about the human spirit though, you must examine it in yourself.

MICHAEL

...What do you mean?

MR. ALLEN

The writing's cold, analytical. The Roman playwright Terrance wrote, "I am a man, nothing human is alien to me." You're going to have to find out who you are before you can wonder about the rest of us.

(beat)

I spoke with Mr. Hudson and Mrs. Monty and they both very much like the idea of you taking the tests early and coming on board. We lose Peterson next semester and I'll need all the help I can get. What do you think?

MICHAEL

...I don't know exactly what to say...I don't know...I figured they'd say no to your idea.

MR. ALLEN

I could tutor you and have you ready for the exams by next month. You could probably pass them today.

MICHAEL

...It's...I...I've got to think about it...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. ALLEN

You think about it. We'd love to have you. I'd love to have you. But let me know soon. By next week. Before we start hunting for someone else.

MICHAEL

Sure. Thank you. Thanks a lot.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Michael is seated on a bench, backpack at his side. Shannon is seated next to him, a book in Braille open on her lap, her finger moving gracefully down the page. She's chewing bubble gum.

SHANNON

Why so quiet?

MICHAEL

No reason.

SHANNON

How'd the English paper go?

MICHAEL

Good.

SHANNON

I'm horny, how about you?

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

SHANNON

Just testing if you were listening.

MICHAEL

They offered me a teaching job.

SHANNON

What? Where?

MICHAEL

Here.

SHANNON

Here?! But you're a student.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

You're good. They say I can take the exams and start next semester. It's got to be more complicated than that, but they don't seem concerned about it.

SHANNON

A teacher? Do you want to be a teacher? Here? I can't wait to get the hell away from this place.

MICHAEL

I don't know. No one ever asked me before.

SHANNON

Man. A teacher. What a drag. What would you teach?

MICHAEL

Lit., I guess.

SHANNON

Wow. A teacher.

MICHAEL

Yeah. A teacher.

Shannon blows a large bubble and pops it.

EXT. BACKYARD - PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

A large area leading into nearby woods. A wooden picnic table, benches and several lawn chairs set about. Toward the back of the yard is a large, thirteen foot high, unfinished gazebo, half-covered by a dirty tarp.

Phil is seated in one of the chairs, an empty beer can and a half-full one at his feet, a book of crossword puzzles in his lap.

The back door opens and Michael steps out.

MICHAEL

Dinner'll be ready soon. How'd it go today?

PHIL

New doctor. Young guy. Put us in with Viet Nam vets for the first time. Post-
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL(cont'd)

Viet Nam Syndrome they're calling it.
Guess they figure we got the same thing.

MICHAEL

What's that mean?

PHIL

New doctor wants to cut back on the
drugs. We'll see how the V.A. feels about
that; I figure they get a kickback from
the drug companies, as much pill-popping
goes on at that place. Anyway, I stay in
the program and I get a disability
increase.

Phil looks up.

PHIL (cont'd)

Jesus H. Christ.

MICHAEL

What?

ANGLE

On Mitch standing at the corner of the house, a duffel bag at
his feet.

PHIL

Damn! Michael, it's Mitch!

Phil goes up to Mitch, they embrace.

MICHAEL

Mitch?

MITCH

Hey, Mike.

Michael and Mitch embrace.

PHIL

What the hell are you doing here?! Why
didn't you call?!

MITCH

Thought I'd surprise you.

PHIL

The bag means you can stay a few days?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Got some time off unexpectedly, so I figured, what the hell, I'll head on down.

MICHAEL

That's great!

MITCH

Place is looking good.

PHIL

Come on in and get out of the cold!
Michael's just about to put dinner on.

Phil enters the house, Mitch picking up his bag and walking with Michael, both putting their arms around each other.

MICHAEL

It's good to have you back for a few days.

MITCH

Like old times.

INT. KITCHEN

Phil takes three beers from the refrigerator, Mitch placing his bag down. Phil hands a beer to each.

PHIL

You look good. Some bags under the eyes;
must have you working long hours?

MITCH

Yeah.

MICHAEL

Didn't hear the car.

MITCH

Parked down front, walked a little bit.

PHIL

Why'd you do that?

MITCH

Just wanted to walk, get some air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

I figured you'd get plenty of walking on a beat.

MICHAEL

They don't have beats anymore, Dad, right, Mitch?

MITCH

Pretty much. A little more nuts out there than when James Cagney was Public Enemy Number One.

PHIL

How's Marty and the guys?

MITCH

Fine.

PHIL

You should call more.

MITCH

I know.

PHIL

Or come down. It's not like you live in Canada.

MICHAEL

How long can you stay?

MITCH

A little bit. A few days.

PHIL

Get some time off? Or is this vacation?

MITCH

Time off.

PHIL

Lost some weight.

MITCH

Bachelor cooking.

PHIL

I spoke to Suzanne last week. Sounded good. Ben was out, I guess.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mitch looks out the window to the backyard.

MITCH

Are you ever going to finish that gazebo?

MICHAEL

Ben called a week or so ago. Needed help on an algebra test. I told him we should all go up to the quarry again sometime soon.

MITCH

If not, you should tear it down. It's been over a year.

PHIL

Suzanne likes her job, I guess. Asked about you.

MITCH

It's good you keep in touch. For Ben.

PHIL

Hell, he's my only grandkid!

MITCH

Why don't I help you finish that thing, finally?

MICHAEL

We're having meatloaf and mashed potatoes; sound alright?

MITCH

Sorry for coming at dinnertime.

MICHAEL

There's plenty.

PHIL

Hell, I'll be eating meatloaf sandwiches for two weeks.

MICHAEL

You're complaining?

PHIL

Not me. Not me. If we had to eat my cooking there'd be a stomach pump in the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL(cont'd)

closet. Damn. It's good to have you two
in the house. Damn.

EXT. BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Mitch is seated on the top step. Michael steps onto the
porch.

MICHAEL

Can smell fireplace smoke. Love that
smell. So, what do think about the quarry
idea? Just you, me and Ben? Sleep out.
Like we used to?

MITCH

Pretty cold. Been down to the clearing
lately?

MICHAEL

No. Been pretty busy at school.

MITCH

How's it going?

MICHAEL

Good.

MITCH

Graduate this semester, don't you?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Maybe sooner.

MITCH

Sooner? You're already on the accelerated
track.

MICHAEL

They asked me to be a teacher.

MITCH

A teacher? A teacher?! That's great!

MICHAEL

Yeah.

MITCH

How come Dad didn't say anything?

MICHAEL

I haven't told him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

And we're not excited about this?

MICHAEL

It came at me a little unexpectedly, a little sooner than I thought.

MITCH

Haven't you wanted to be a teacher?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I guess. Architect. Astronaut. First blind guy to fall off Everest. Teacher.

MITCH

Is the offer either/or?

MICHAEL

They've got to hire someone in the next few weeks for next semester.

MITCH

Take it.

MICHAEL

I guess they've got Dad in some new program at the V.A. Talk therapy, I guess. Trying to cut back on the drugs.

MITCH

He looks okay. How's the drinking?

MICHAEL

Like the eternal sea, it ebbs and flows.

MITCH

It's good you're here.

MICHAEL

He knows my routines and I know his.

MITCH

I miss this place. The clearing. The quarry. Just lately I miss it a lot.

MICHAEL

That why you're here? Re-connect with the good ol' days?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Where else am I going to go?

Mitch stands and enters the house.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

TRAVELLING SHOT of PHIL as he walks briskly down a footpath through the woods for morning exercise. He's breathing heavily, every so often mumbling to himself.

OVER, we hear the calm VOICE of a YOUNG DOCTOR speaking to Phil, and Phil answering, also OVER:

YOUNG DOCTOR

(V.O. throughout)

Are you afraid of your stories?

PHIL

(V.O. throughout)

What the hell's that mean? You mean nightmares? Yeah, I got nightmares.

YOUNG DOCTOR

Telling them. Do you think that will make it worse, or better?

PHIL

Doesn't change anything.

YOUNG DOCTOR

It might.

PHIL

I got a choice?

YOUNG DOCTOR

Yes.

PHIL

Wrong. I got no choice at all.

Phil continues his walk, disappearing into the woods.

INT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

ECU

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On Mitch, his face tense with concentration as he sketches with a charcoal pencil on a large art pad supported on an easel.

IN FLASHBACK:

To a child's arm and hand laying against floorboards, behind a couch, the arm extending OFFSCREEN. The fingers are curled upward, speckled with blood. The VOICE of the Twelve Year Old Boy pleading is heard:

TWELVE YEAR OLD
BOY

-- Please don't let him stay -- Please!

FLASHBACK OUT.

LIVING ROOM

Michael enters from the upstairs stairway.

MICHAEL

Mitch?

MITCH

Yeah.

MICHAEL

Were you drawing?

MITCH

Trying to get the hang of it again.

MICHAEL

There's pop art, why not cop art?

MITCH

Trying to remember the last time.

MICHAEL

College, maybe? Gee, on scholarship, as I remember.

MITCH

I was going to be a neo-post-lateral-quasi-semi-realistic-expressionist and my medium would be black velvet. Too bad I was terrible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

That's the problem with scholarships, they only give them to the absolute worst students. Instead you became a cop, as have so many artists before you.

MITCH

Somebody had to make the world safe.

MICHAEL

Right.

Phil enters through the front door.

PHIL

Morning.

MITCH

Morning.

PHIL

Pulled out the old art stuff, I see. Kept meaning to clean out the basement and get rid of all that junk. What're you drawing?

MITCH

Nothing. Just a face.

PHIL

Whose?

MITCH

No one's.

PHIL

Good thing you got a real job.

MICHAEL

Have a good walk?

PHIL

Art's okay for a hobby, unless you've got some special, one-in-a-million talent, otherwise, you got to get a real job like the rest of us.

MICHAEL

You were an artist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

A contractor?

MICHAEL

A builder. A craftsman. And a craftsman
is just like an artist.

MITCH

Did you have breakfast?

PHIL

I was no artist.

MICHAEL

The way you talked about the buildings
and the houses you'd built.

MITCH

I can fix something to eat.

PHIL

You don't know what you're talking about.

MITCH

Mike. Anything to eat?

MICHAEL

I'll pick up something at school. See ya.

Michael exits. The phone RINGS, Mitch jumping a bit at the
sound. Phil picks up the receiver.

PHIL

Hello? Hi, Marty --

Mitch quickly gestures to Phil that he doesn't want to speak.

PHIL (cont'd)

-- Fine. Good. Really? I don't know. No,
no he's not here right now. Sure I will.
You take care. Bye.

Phil hangs up the phone.

PHIL (cont'd)

Marty wanted to know how you were --

MITCH

I'll call him later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

Said the Watch Commander didn't know you'd taken time off. Wants you to call him.

MITCH

Yeah.

PHIL

You left without telling the Watch Commander?

MITCH

It's not that big of a deal.

PHIL

There's not something wrong, is there?

MITCH

I'll call. All right?

PHIL

...Sure.

PHIL (cont'd)

Think I'll lay down for a few minutes.

He walks up the stairs, exiting. Mitch pulls the cover over the unfinished sketch.

INT. ROCKRIDGE SCHOOL - WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

A half-dozen male students, dressed in gym clothes, are working out at various weight machines. Michael lying on the bench press, straining under an impressive weight. JEFF, a close friend, is spotting Michael.

JEFF

Come on, buddy-boy, hot shot, big man on campus, come on, push -- push!

Michael pushes the weights to his outer reach, lowering them quickly, the weights slamming back in place.

JEFF (cont'd)

All right! That's the ticket!

Michael sits up.

MICHAEL

You're a big help.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEFF

You're the one making-it with Shannon;
you need all the strength you can get.

MICHAEL

I have no idea what you're talking about.

JEFF

Yeah, right.

MICHAEL

How's it with you and Monica?

JEFF

I think her dad's hoping a rich guy with
twenty-twenty will carry her to some
castle. They're still hoping for the
operation. That's what I get for falling
for an amateur.

MICHAEL

"Amateur"?

JEFF

Us blind-from-births are pros; everyone
else is an amateur.

MICHAEL

You tell her that?

JEFF

You think I'm an asshole? Don't answer
that.

MICHAEL

And if the operation works?

JEFF

You know the story: Bye-bye. Hear you
might graduate early?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

JEFF

This place needs a graduate course called
"Shit Hitting The Fan". How to succeed
beyond the hallowed halls the Rockyroad
School for the Visually Inept.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

I'm outta here.

JEFF

Give Shannon a wet one for me!

Michael is about to exit into the locker room when Griff comes up to him.

GRIFF

Mike. Sorry about that hit the other day.

MICHAEL

No big deal.

GRIFF

Coach is wrong. Playing by the rules like that. Around here, you gotta be the toughest, meanest son-of-a-bitch on the block. So, you better look out, 'cause I ain't never backing off.

INT. BURGER JOINT - EARLY EVENING

A crowded teen hang-out filled with mostly sighted teenagers and two or three who are visually disabled.

BOOTH

Michael and Shannon, both wearing sunglasses, are seated across from each other.

MICHAEL

You talk to Monica lately?

SHANNON

Today.

MICHAEL

I was talking to Jeff; he thinks she's going to get the operation, see again and take off.

SHANNON

She never stops talking about him; what they'll do together if the operation works. She really loves him.

MICHAEL

I wouldn't bet money on it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHANNON

I would.

MICHAEL

Love conquers all?

SHANNON

No. But...when two people like -- love each other...you find ways to make things work out. She knew plenty of guys when she was sighted and she says none of them made her feel the way Jeff does.

MICHAEL

Maybe.

SHANNON

You're such a cynic. You're saying if you could see tomorrow, you'd dump all your friends?

MICHAEL

That ain't gonna happen.

SHANNON

I wouldn't.

He takes one of her hands and holds it in his. He reaches up and touches her mouth, slowly feeling her smile, then the rest of her face.

SECOND BOOTH

Four sighted teenagers, CHRISSY, JENIFER, ROBBIE and BOWMAN are seated. Bowman gestures for the others to turn and look.

POV

On Michael touching Shannon's face.

BACK TO SCENE

BOWMAN

Look at that. How can they do that shit in public? Gives me the creeps.

ROBBIE

Should be a separate place for them.

CHRISSY

I think it's major sexy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JENIFER

It's got to be so weird, them doing it,
you know?

ROBBIE

Bumping around, trying to find
everything.

CHRISSY

Just like you, Robbie.

BOWMAN

They should all stay on their own campus.

MICHAEL AND SHANNON

They stand, taking their canes with them, Michael putting his
arm around Shannon as they walk out.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Mitch is seated on a stool at the bar, a glass of scotch
before him. He hears a glass hitting the floor.

POV

On a man and woman in a booth, both drunk, the woman crying
as the man bends over to pick up her glass from the floor.

BOOTH

The man retrieves the glass, slamming it down on the table in
front of her. He sweeps the spilled alcohol off the table and
onto her dress.

MAN

See there!? Look at the mess you made!
Don't drink if ya can't hold it! Stop it!
Stop crying!

ANGLE

Mitch turning from the bar, watching the couple in the booth;
the man grabbing the woman and shaking her.

MAN

Stop it! Damn-it!

BOOTH

The man strikes the woman hard across the cheek, the woman SCREAMING OUT -- as Mitch suddenly ENTERS THE SCENE and grabs the man by his jacket lapels, pulling him over the booth table and onto the floor. The woman SCREAMS again, the customers in the bar watching as Mitch pulls the man up.

MITCH

Stop hitting her, you damned, son-of-bitch! Hit me, you want to hit someone!

The bartender runs from behind the bar.

BARTENDER

Stop it!

WOMAN

Stop it! Stop it! Don't hurt him!

Mitch lets the man drop. He turns and walks from the bar.

INT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - LATE THAT NIGHT

Michael is seated in a chair reading from a long Braille magazine article, when the front door unlocks and Mitch enters.

MICHAEL

Lock it.

MITCH

Waiting up?

MICHAEL

It's two-thirty. In the morning. Go to bed.

MITCH

Screw you.

MICHAEL

You're such a hero, Mitch.

Michael stands.

MITCH

No, Mike, you're the hero.

MICHAEL

Suzanne called.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

And what did she want?

MICHAEL

She wanted to know how you were. Couldn't reach you at home. Evidently no one knew you were down here. She was worried.

MITCH

She should be the poster girl for half-assed sentiments.

MICHAEL

Just call her.

MITCH

If she's so worried, you ask her why she left with my son without the slightest of 'worries'?

MICHAEL

She's says you never let her in.

MITCH

Must have been some conversation you two had. She didn't want to know -- what went on out there -- what goes on out there. I had to protect her from what goes on -- she and Ben -- I had to leave it out there.

MICHAEL

Did you ever ask her?

MITCH

When did you learn so much about women? From all the ones I've never seen going in and out of your room?

MICHAEL

You don't know anything about me.

MITCH

And you don't know anything about me!

MICHAEL

You're sounding more and more like Dad all the time. My guess is you even look like him, standing by the bar, drink in hand, blaming the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

What are you going to teach anybody? What do you know about anything -- anything real? About the real world? All you know is how to look normal and stay outta people's way and not bang into tables -- What're you going to do when you come up against that first blind kid that can't make the grade? Shove him out in front of a car?

MICHAEL

I wouldn't have to, they stumble into them on their own all the time.

Michael starts up the steps.

MITCH

..I never shot anyone. Never beaten anyone up before and some do that, some beat them up just for the hell of it. I've watched 'em do it...I don't drink much... Some could open a liquor store out of their lockers...And I've even liked the job, understood things, saw everything in its place...I've been one of the good guys, little brother, one of the good guys...

Michael exits.

MITCH'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Mitch is asleep in bed.

ECU

On Mitch, perspiration gathered on his forehead, the skin on his face pulled taut, his breathing rapid.

IN FLASHBACK NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE:

MITCH

Seated in a grade school auditorium facing a stage.

STAGE

A TWELVE YEAR OLD BOY is seated on a chair, a music stand obscuring his face, playing a flute.

MITCH

An expression of fear and discomfort coming over his face as the red and blue revolving light of a police siren FLASHES across him.

STAGE

The red and blue light sweeping over the stage and the boy --

MITCH

Screaming out in silent horror, unable to move from his seat.

NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE OUT.

BACK TO SCENE

Mitch opens his eyes, glancing about the dark room in a panic, his heart pounding.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Phil is seated on the edge of the bed as he slowly turns the pages of a thick photo album.

PHOTO ALBUM MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

(1) A teenage Phil is in front of the Lyceum movie house in 1930's Kansas. He is dressed in dirty overalls. He's grinning.

(2) A cutout newspaper headline reads: "STOCK MARKET COLLAPSES: Nation In Shock."

(3) A nineteen year old Phil, dressed in an ill-fitting suit, is standing with his arm around his sixteen year old bride-to-be, Mirrium. From their clothes and attitude, it is apparent that they come from opposite sides of the 'tracks.'

(4) A series of celebratory wedding photos are SEEN.

(5) Phil, nineteen, is dressed in an Army uniform and seated at a desk in the Malinta communications tunnel, Corregidor, Philippines. He is not smiling.

(6) A headline reads: "CORREGIDOR FORTRESS FALLS TO JAPANESE."

(7) Another headline reads: "BATAAN DEATH MARCH VERIFIED BY WITNESSES: Hell On Earth."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

(8) Phil is in a Japanese prison camp, standing with three dozen other prisoners, all dressed in worn uniforms, their gaunt skin stretched over bone, all appearing near-death.

(9) A series of ink cartoon drawings of daily life in the prison camp; a caricatured horror show of starvation, beatings, humiliations, and murder.

(10) A newspaper front page is devoted solely to the words: "JAPAN SURRENDERS! Two Atom Bombs Detonated!"

(11) A terribly thin, twenty-three year old Phil is in civilian clothes, grinning, his arm around a laughing Mirrium.

(12) Mirrium is holding Mitch, as a baby, in her arms.

(13) A photo Phil, Mirrium, eight year old Mitch and Michael as a baby.

(14) On various photos of a seemingly happy family life, stopping on the most recent photo of the whole family gathered in front of the skeleton-like wood framework of the gazebo.

INT. KITCHEN - SUZANNE'S HOUSE - PENNSYLVANIA - DAY

Suzanne is setting a plate of sandwiches on a table for Ben.

SUZANNE

How was the field trip?

BEN

Okay.

SUZANNE

Anything exciting happen?

BEN

No.

SUZANNE

Have you decided if you wanted to try out for the swim team?

BEN

The coach is a jerk.

SUZANNE

Seems everyone's a jerk these days.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The phone RINGS, Suzanne answering it.

SUZANNE (cont'd)
Hello?

INT. BAR - MASSACHUSETTS - SAME TIME

Mitch is in the back of a bar, talking on a pay phone.

MITCH
Suz?

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

SUZANNE
Hi.

ALTERNATING SCENES:

MITCH
Hi. I got your call. Sorry I missed you.

SUZANNE
No one knew where you were.

MITCH
I just took some time off. How're you?

SUZANNE
Fine.

MITCH
And Ben?

Ben pushes the plate away and stands, leaving the kitchen, Suzanne watching him go.

SUZANNE
Okay.

MITCH
Doing good in school?

SUZANNE
His grades have gone down a little bit.
He's having some trouble adjusting to the
new school.

MITCH
Maybe you should get a tutor? Is he
there? Can I say hi?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE

No. He didn't come home for lunch.

MITCH

Oh...Look, sorry for not...
calling...it's been --

SUZANNE

What's going on, Mitch?

MITCH

...I meant to call...I...it's
just...right now -- I think I'd better
go, maybe call later.

SUZANNE

Are you all right?

INT. BAR - SAME TIME

MITCH

Somebody's waiting for the phone. I've
got to go. I'll call later -- tomorrow --

He hangs up, his heart pounding.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Suzanne looks at the receiver and hangs it up.

EXT. CITY PARK - MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

Michael, Shannon, Jeff and MONICA are on two large blankets
spread out on the grass. All are wearing sunglasses. The
remnants of a picnic are scattered before them. Jeff is lying
back against Monica, who is stroking his hair. Monica is a
pretty seventeen year old, and a bit flighty.

MONICA

Jeff thinks he knows everything.

JEFF

I do know everything. Everything that's
important, that is.

MICHAEL

Like what?

JEFF

Like...Mr. Randolph has a bad hair piece.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHANNON

And just how do you know that?

JEFF

Well, we know he's a slob because of his bad breath and his office is always a major mess, and I found an embossed package on his desk from the Hair Club For Men. So, he's got a hair piece and it's probably always slightly off-center, like he was wearing roadkill.

MONICA

Jeff!

JEFF

What'd I do? What I'd do?

MONICA

Well, I for one can't wait to get out of Randolph's class. I don't have one single teacher this semester I like. Where are they digging up these people?

SHANNON

Be careful what you say, you may be in the presence of one of Rockyroad's finest.

JEFF

What's that mean?

MICHAEL

Nothing. Shannon's just making trouble.

SHANNON

They want him to be a teacher.

JEFF

What?!

MONICA

A teacher?!

SHANNON

That would make me teacher's pet.

She kisses him.

JEFF

Would you do it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

I don't know. I can't picture myself as a teacher. It's all pretty weird.

MONICA

I thought Michael was going to be a writer?

MICHAEL

Yeah, right.

SHANNON

I think he'd make a great teacher.

MICHAEL

I'd actually thought about maybe getting the hell away from here.

MONICA

Let's all go on a trip together!

SHANNON

Where?

MONICA

Anywhere! A road trip! To Las Vegas and out west! Mexico!

JEFF

Mexico?!

MONICA

I'll drive! It'll be great! Once I'm healed up from the operation, I'll be your tour guide -- ...

Monica realizes what she's just said.

SHANNON

A trip together would be fun.

JEFF

Who'd want to be a teacher at this dump?

MONICA

...I'm sorry, I didn't mean...

SHANNON

It's all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEFF

Sometimes I really hate this place. All the damned townies acting so nice and diplomatic around us, all the time thanking God they're not one of us.

SHANNON

Jeff.

MONICA

Come on, Jeff, let's take a walk --

JEFF

And what? Get hit by a damned Frizbee or accidentally stumble into a couple screwing under a tree?

MICHAEL

Jeff. Come on. Lighten up.

Jeff stands, taking up his cane.

JEFF

Have fun in Mexico. Be sure and send a postcard.

He starts off, Monica quickly standing, grabbing her cane and starting after him.

MONICA

Jeff! Wait! Please.

Michael starts cleaning up the picnic, Shannon helping, when Bowman and Robbie ENTER THE SCENE.

BOWMAN

Why the hell don't you all stay over at your school?

Michael and Shannon quickly stand, facing them.

BOWMAN (cont'd)

We're the ones always have to watch out for you; can't even run around our own parks without watching where we step.

SHANNON

We're not bothering you.

BOWMAN

Yes, you are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

Why don't you get lost?

SHANNON

Michael.

BOWMAN

What are you going to do about it?

Robbie starts laughing -- when Michael instantly grabs up his cane and starts FEROCIOUSLY STRIKING Bowman hard on the head and shoulders, a stunned Bowman never having a chance to fight back.

BOWMAN (cont'd)

-- Jesus!

SHANNON

Michael -- !

Bowman stumbles backwards covering his head with his arms.

BOWMAN

Stop it! -- Stop it! -- You're crazy!

ROBBIE

Let's get outta here --

He and Bowman run off. Michael, cane still raised, is breathing hard as he slowly lowers his arm. Shannon moves to him and holds his arm, stunned by the ferocity of Michael's attack.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

A small open area surrounded by thick woods, a dirt path leading to Michael and Phil's house. A large rock outcropping is to one side, children's initials carved into the rock's face.

Mitch is seated on a portable stool before the easel, the sketchpad supported on it, a box of charcoal pencils in its tray. Mitch is sketching, when Michael enters from the path.

MITCH

I've been caught.

MICHAEL

I knew you'd be down here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Where we came to escape.

MICHAEL

Is that what we're doing?

MITCH

Speak for yourself.

MICHAEL

What're you drawing?

MITCH

Landscape.

MICHAEL

Charcoal or chalk?

MITCH

Charcoal.

MICHAEL

Not very colorful.

MITCH

Colors are just words to describe variations between light and dark.

MICHAEL

And if a color falls in the forest and no ones there to see it, is the world any prettier?

MICHAEL (cont'd)

You smiled.

MITCH

How do you know?

MICHAEL

I wanted to see it.

MITCH

Is it that easy?

MICHAEL

Mom always said you had a great smile.

MITCH

She had a way of bringing it out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

Do you miss her?

MITCH

I used to love painting. I don't know why I stopped. I miss a lot of things.

MICHAEL

Didn't Dad have something to do with that?

MITCH

No.

MICHAEL

Something about a real job, a "man's job", I think was how he would put it.

MITCH

I made my own decisions...Come Career Day at high school, I was joking around with the guys and we ended up at the "Careers In Law Enforcement" booth. There was this cop, the uniform, the gun, the badge, polished boots. Powerful-looking. Total control...He looked proud and defiant and...like a man. Like what I thought a man was supposed to look like...I'm sorry about last night, what I said.

MICHAEL

What's going on with you, Mitch? I heard you last night.

MITCH

...Just a nightmare. The job, the separation. Little tense. Did you see Dad?

MICHAEL

He's at the V.A.

MITCH

How's he doing?

MICHAEL

Hang around more often and you'd know. I don't have the energy to feel sorry for him anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

I doubt he's asking you to feel sorry for him.

MICHAEL

He was never there for me growing up --

MITCH

Now who's feeling sorry for himself?

MICHAEL

He's been embarrassed of me from the beginning.

MITCH

That's bullshit.

MICHAEL

Do you know that he's never been to any of the functions at the school? Even when I made Honor Roll? I guess it must be a pretty strange sight, all of us blind folks in one room. It really doesn't bother me anymore.

MITCH

Michael.

MICHAEL

I'll start dinner.

MITCH

Michael.

Michael exits into the woods.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC FIELD - PENNSYLVANIA - DAY

It's recess, thirteen, fourteen and fifteen year olds, dressed warmly, sitting and/or hanging around the area in groups of twos and threes or more.

PICNIC TABLE

Ben is seated by himself, when he hears a commotion nearby. He turns.

POV

Near the corner of the school building, two THIRTEEN YEAR OLDS pushing another STUDENT around, the student quite frightened.

ANGLE

Ben quickly gets up from the table and runs to the fight.

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

#1

Running and telling the teacher like a little girl!

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

#2

You little shit! Who the hell do you think you are!?

STUDENT

-- Leave me alone! I didn't tell! I didn't! --

Ben suddenly pushes the battered student away. He faces the two others, ready to fight -- and it looks like he can handle himself.

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

#1

-- What the hell are you doing?!

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

2

Get outta here, Ben -- No one asked you --

Ben doesn't say anything but stands his ground. The two exchange nervous glances.

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

#2

He thinks he's his dad, the big cop!

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD

#1

Only his dad ain't around anymore!

BEN

Come on! Fight me, you assholes!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The two look at each other and laugh, one slapping the other on the shoulder, gesturing to leave. They turn away, still laughing. Ben lunges onto the backs of both, all three tumbling to the dirt and a serious fight ensues, Ben starting to lose.

Two MALE TEACHERS run up and separate them, Ben struggling to free himself and continue the fight.

TEACHER #1
Break it up!

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD
#1
He started it!

THIRTEEN YEAR OLD
#2
He started it! Jumped us from behind!
Coward!

TEACHER #2
Everyone to the office!

And all three head toward the building, being held apart by the two teachers.

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - MASSACHUSETTS - LATE
AFTERNOON

Behind a counter running the length of one wall is an inner office and reception area staffed with a few nurses and secretaries; the area itself is filled with old, plastic chairs arranged in haphazard rows filled with a dozen or so veterans of World War II, Korea and Viet Nam. Some are reading magazines, some smoking as they stare off, some asleep.

PHIL

Seated in a chair in the last row, wearily thumbing through a worn issue of "American Legion Magazine".

POV

On a large clock reading four-fifteen.

PHIL

Shaking his head.

ANGLE

As ANDREW RIDER, a W.W.II Vet. with white hair, limps over to Phil and sits beside him.

ANDREW

Phil. Been here that long, huh?

PHIL

Since two-thirty.

ANDREW

I'm just here to get a new prescription, shouldn't be too long.

PHIL

Good luck.

ANDREW

You?

PHIL

I'm getting out of the new program, see if I can't change to something else. Takes up too much of my time. But I don't want to lose my increase.

ANDREW

And you and me are so busy these days. How's your kid -- the one in that school?

PHIL

Good. Got my other one here for a visit.

ANDREW

Let me see...the cop, right?

PHIL

Yeah.

ANDREW

Must be hard being a cop these days. People getting shot for no reason.

PHIL

Unlike all these guys.

ANDREW

Right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
How's the leg?

ANDREW
Throbbing like a son-of-a-bitch.

PHIL
Look at these men.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Of veterans, all ages, slumped over or back in their chairs, boredom, frustration, anxiety, anger evident in their individual hardened expressions; lifetimes of pain, regret, betrayal and loss can be seen in their eyes.

PHIL AND ANDREW

PHIL
I hate this place.

WAITING ROOM

A young doctor, DR. WILLIAMS, enters from a hallway. He calls out Phil's name:

DR. WILLIAMS
Phil Roberts?

INT. DR. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Phil enters the small room and sits in a chair in front of Williams' cluttered desk. Williams enters behind, closing the door. He walks to his desk and sits, opening Phil's file in front of him.

DR. WILLIAMS
How're you doing?

Phil shrugs his shoulders.

DR. WILLIAMS
(cont'd)
Any problems with the medication cutbacks?

PHIL
Mouth's dry all the time. Muscle aches.

DR. WILLIAMS
Are you sleeping?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

Yeah.

DR. WILLIAMS

The drinking?

PHIL

Working on it -- Look, I wanted to talk about this new program. I don't think it's going to work out for me.

DR. WILLIAMS

We just started.

PHIL

I know, but we've all heard it before; it's not news. You agreed with everyone else that my nervous system's shot from the malnutrition and diseases. The pills help enough.

DR. WILLIAMS

You told me you've never talked about it, after forty some years.

PHIL

With my wife. Kids figured out the rest. So what was the use? They wouldn't believe it anyway.

DR. WILLIAMS

Why wouldn't they?

PHIL

Because nobody wants to know about...that. Nobody wants to hear what those guys out there have to say, not really, because it will burst their little bubbles.

DR. WILLIAMS

What about the breakdown?

PHIL

It wasn't a breakdown.

DR. WILLIAMS

That's how the other doctors described it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

And that's supposed to mean something to me? I was under a lot of pressure. Contracts were overdue, bills were outstanding, the housing market was in the toilet, banks were closing right and left. My wife died. My son's...The drugs weren't working like they were supposed to -- It was the V.A. that forced me to retire, either that or they stop my disability.

DR. WILLIAMS

No one forced you -

PHIL

The damned U.S. government forced me!

DR. WILLIAMS

The pressure had been building for forty years. You drank, you worked seventy hours a week to get away from what happened to you. It finally boiled over. You couldn't work anymore.

PHIL

All the damned V.A. did was throw drugs at us!

DR. WILLIAMS

I'm trying to change that.

PHIL

It was only when the Viet Nam vets showed up that anyone started paying attention!

DR. WILLIAMS

I know.

PHIL

They whined about not getting their parades well I sure as hell didn't get mine either -- none of us ex-P.O.W.'s got shit! They snuck us back home and left us. So don't tell me that now the V.A.'s suddenly interested in what I have to say! What happened to us!

Phil stands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL (cont'd)

Nobody gives a shit and neither do I.

Phil exits. Dr. Williams stares after him, then closes his file.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EARLY EVENING

BED

FOLLOW SHOT of Michael's index finger as it slowly, gently, gracefully follows the smooth, shadowed contours of Shannon's naked body: lovemaking not as fevered movement but as the delicate serenity of human touch; features outlined; eyes, nose, mouth carefully reassured. Michael's finger tip pauses at her lips, Shannon kissing it.

BED - LATER

Shannon is curled-up against Michael.

SHANNON

I feel badly for Jeff and Monica. It must be so scary for both of them. Does it ever scare you? Outside of here? I know we're not supposed to talk about it because we're supposed to be 'best and the brightest'. But it scares me. I want to get away so badly but...If I was Monica...And what about us?

MICHAEL

Uh oh.

SHANNON

What about us?

MICHAEL

We're a team.

SHANNON

Are we? You scare me too, sometimes. You're always hiding something from me. You know, when we make love, you never say you love me.

MICHAEL

It's just a guy thing. Don't take it personally.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHANNON

"A guy thing?"

MICHAEL

A guy thing.

SHANNON

What happened? At the park?

MICHAEL

I defended myself, that's what happened.

SHANNON

You could have really hurt him.

MICHAEL

I could not. Don't exaggerate.

SHANNON

I never felt that from you before. You can be the most gentle person, and then it's like there's this other side --

MICHAEL

I'm not some ticking time bomb -- angry at the world for being what I am so don't try amateur analysis out on me.

SHANNON

Michael --

Michael climbs out of the bed and pulls on his pants and shirt.

MICHAEL

Just drop it.

SHANNON

...Are you leaving?

He pulls on his shoes and grabs up his jacket.

MICHAEL

I've got to get home. It's getting late.

He puts some money on the table.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

There's some money on the desk, for the cab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shannon sits up, the blanket around her.

SHANNON

Jesus, Michael -- You're just leaving and dropping money on the desk? Like I was some...hooker?

Michael stops at the door.

MICHAEL

That's crazy. I do not want you walking back by yourself. I've got to go. I'll call you tomorrow.

He opens the door and exits.

SHANNON

She faces the closed door in stunned silence.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SUZANNE'S HOUSE - PENNSYLVANIA - NIGHT

Ben is lying in bed, eyes open, staring upward at a slowly turning mobile of paper spaceships. The door opens and Suzanne steps in.

SUZANNE

How many fights do you plan to get into this semester? You never used to fight. Did someone say something?

BEN

No.

SUZANNE

You know you can talk to me, don't you?

He nods a bit.

SUZANNE (cont'd)

...Is all this about me and your dad?

BEN

No. He's gone. I don't care.

SUZANNE

Of course you care. He's still your father.

Ben rolls over and closes his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE (cont'd)

Your father loves you very much.

She leaves the room.

EXT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S BACKYARD - MASSACHUSETTS - LATER THAT NIGHT

The area is lighted by the back porch light. Phil has pulled the tarp off the unfinished gazebo and is standing on a ladder leaning against it.

Dressed in a winter coat, Phil is forcefully sawing a newly attached roof piece of lumber with a hand saw. A bottle of scotch is on the gazebo step, a glass on top of a nearby roof beam. He stops sawing and grabs the glass, drinking, as he's been doing for some time. He replaces the glass and begins again. Michael steps out.

MICHAEL

Dad? That you? Dad?

PHIL

Yeah! What?

MICHAEL

What are you doing?! It's almost midnight!

PHIL

What's it sound like I'm doing?

MICHAEL

Can't you do that in the morning?

PHIL

I got an urge.

MICHAEL

And the neighbors?

PHIL

I'm usin' the damned hand saw; that should be enough for 'em.

MICHAEL

Where's Mitch?

PHIL

Out. Didn't say where. Wasn't here to eat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

How long have you been out here?

PHIL

No idea.

MICHAEL

Dad. Come inside. It's late. You'll catch cold.

PHIL

I'm finishing what I started. Your mother wanted this damn thing built -- God knows why -- and I'm going to finish it. Least thing I could have done was finish this thing for her.

The end of the cut lumber falls off, Phil laying the saw on top of the beam and catching his breath. He finishes the scotch in the glass and climbs down the ladder, glass in hand. He picks up the bottle from the step and re-fills the glass. He places the bottle on the railing top. He drinks.

PHIL (cont'd)

Went down to the Guild Hall for a little bit. Arnie was there. Got a contract to re-build the city pool. Big job. Thought about putting myself back out there. Tough. Have to re-establish contacts, bank loans and credit, catch up on licensing, set up a whole new business. Lazy is good.

MICHAEL

You planning to be out here all night?

Phil sets the glass down, picks up a two-by-four and climbs back up the ladder. He lays the piece of lumber between two others, takes a hammer and nails from the pouch around his waist and starts positioning the lumber.

PHIL

I'm sorry I wasn't there for you and your brother more.

MICHAEL

...What? What are you talking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

I couldn't be Santa Claus all the time. I had to pay the bills.

MICHAEL

Dad.

PHIL

Hell, your mother was the one knew how to look after you two.

MICHAEL

Dad. Stop. All right? Let's go in.

PHIL

She only ever wanted what was best for you, Michael.

MICHAEL

You're going to fall and hurt yourself.

PHIL

And if she was too hard on you, it's only because she wanted you to be like everybody else.

MICHAEL

No. She wanted me to be exactly who I am.

PHIL

I heard him last night. He was drunk.

MICHAEL

He's on vacation.

PHIL

Didn't tell anyone at work he was leaving. Something's wrong. He's tense. Nervous. Never been tense and nervous before.

MICHAEL

He's gone through a lot lately, with the separation.

PHIL

You get nervous on that kind of job and you get killed or somebody else gets killed, or before that they let you go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

He's one of the best cops out there, no one's going to --

PHIL

He loses his job, what's going to happen to him? I can't support both of you.

MICHAEL

I pay my way here! I always have!

PHIL

Scholarships don't last forever.

MICHAEL

Dad --

PHIL

I may lose my disability, then what'll happen?

MICHAEL

You're not going to lose --

Phil climbs down the ladder -- slipping -- and quickly regaining his balance.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Are you all right?!

PHIL

They said I can't work anymore and that's all I've done, all my life; they said I can't take the pressure anymore --

MICHAEL

Dad, stop it --

PHIL

All the fault of the damned V.A. and the city requirements and the banks -- one day you're building on a cleared lot, next thing they tell you is it was a toxic dump thirty years ago and you're screwed!

MICHAEL

Dad --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

I won't be like all those guys down in that waiting room -- they make me out to be a damned cripple!

MICHAEL

You're not a cripple! I'm the cripple, Dad! You can't borrow it! You're drunk.

PHIL

There was a time, Michael, when your mother and I had to carry you.

Phil grabs the bottle and walks past Michael, up the steps and into the house. There is a moment then Michael lowers to the gazebo step.

INT. SECOND MOTEL - NIGHT

Mitch, shirt off, is standing in front of mirrored dresser, finishing off a glass of scotch. He stares at himself in the mirror, when the bathroom door opens and a prostitute named CARRIE enters, naked, dropping her clothes onto a chair. She sits on the edge of the bed.

MITCH

I'm a cop.

CARRIE

That's great. Thanks. You know, you guys must really get off on this shit because I can't believe I'm the worst shit going down on the street tonight. This is how I pay my bills, damn-it. This is how I eat.

She gets up and starts to put on her clothes.

MITCH

I'm off duty.

CARRIE

What's the deal? You need more evidence? Or are you going to screw me first and then arrest me?

MITCH

I'm not going to arrest you.

CARRIE

Why are you doing this to me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She pulls on jeans and a blouse. She takes some money from her pocket and tosses it to him.

CARRIE (cont'd)
You can take your money back.

He pours her a drink.

MITCH
Take it. And the money.

CARRIE
Are you for real?

MITCH
You need to eat, don't you?

CARRIE
You're not going to bust me?

MITCH
No.

CARRIE
Then why'd you tell me you were a cop?

MITCH
Do you have any kids?

CARRIE
Look, you still want to get it on, or not?

He nods his head. She kneels in front of his legs. She unbuckles his belt.

CARRIE (cont'd)
I've actually done a lot of cops. It's always a crap shoot whether they're going to bust you, or not. If you don't do what they want, they always bust you. 'Course, no one ever questions the cop. You guys must really think you own the world.

He stops her.

CARRIE (cont'd)
Did I say something?

She picks up the rest of her things.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIE (cont'd)

I don't need this shit, not tonight. Your money's all there.

She opens the door and slams it shut.

MIRROR

Mitch staring at his reflection.

EXT. CAR TRAVELLING DOWN HIGHWAY - PENNSYLVANIA - LATE NIGHT

A lone car driving down a two lane highway through a rural area, headlights illuminating the night.

INT. CAR - LATE NIGHT

Mitch is driving, his hands clenched around the steering wheel, his eyes intently focused ahead. He removes one hand and adjusts the radio through static and various types of music, the dial passing a classical station. He returns the dial, gentle CHAMBER MUSIC HEARD, the sound of a FLUTE quite audible.

ECU

On Mitch, listening to the music.

EXT. CAR TRAVELLING DOWN HIGHWAY - LATE NIGHT

As the car continues on.

INT. CAR - PENNSYLVANIA - MORNING

The car is parked on the side of a street. Mitch asleep, his head leaning against the driver's window. O.S. can be HEARD the playful screams and laughter of twelve and thirteen year olds. Mitch looks out the window.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MORNING

Hundreds of students run and walk toward the school entrance, entering. In the mass, it is almost impossible to pick out an individual child.

EXT. CAR - MORNING

Mitch opens the door and steps out, scanning the crowd. The school bell RINGS, the students run indoors.

MITCH

A look of frustration and disappointment coming over him.

ATHLETIC FIELD - NOON

The noon bell rings, doors opening and students running out into the fenced playground.

FENCE

Mitch walks up to it and leans against it, holding on, his eyes scanning the crowd.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Of various students at play and/or just hanging around and talking.

PICNIC TABLE

A group of students are seated, talking and eating lunch, Ben to one side. He hears something. He turns, looking about. He sees his father.

ATHLETIC FIELD

Ben runs to the fence.

FENCE

Ben runs up to the fence, Mitch extending his arms over the top and rubbing the top of his head.

BEN

Dad!

MITCH

Hey, Ben! You look great! Come on!

ANGLE

Mitch runs down the fence to an entrance by the school building, Ben following.

ENTRANCE

Ben running around the corner and into Mitch's arms. Mitch lowering and hugging Ben tightly. Mitch kisses Ben then holds him back to look at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH
You look great!

BEN
You didn't tell me you were coming!?

MALE VOICE speaks from behind:

VOICE
(O.S.)
Excuse me?

ANGLE

A TEACHER stands over Mitch.

TEACHER
I'm sorry, but you can't --

BEN
He's my dad! He's a policeman!

Mitch takes out his wallet, opening it for the teacher who looks at it.

TEACHER
Sorry.

MITCH
It's all right.

TEACHER
Can't be careful enough these days. You understand.

MITCH
Yes. And thanks. I'll just be a little bit.

TEACHER
No hurry.

The teacher walks off.

BEN
That's just the gym teacher. He's a jerk.

MITCH
A jerk, huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEN

Yeah. He picks his nose when he doesn't think anybody's looking.

MITCH

How are you?

BEN

Are you staying? Mike said we could go up to the quarry and camp.

MITCH

I can't really stay this time. I'm sorry, but I --

BEN

Forget it.

MITCH

I wanted to see you.

Ben watches some students play kickball nearby.

MITCH (cont'd)

Your mom and me are still working things out, but I'll be seeing you more and we can go camping and go to some baseball games. How would that be?

BEN

Okay.

MITCH

Don't be mad at your dad, okay? 'Cause I miss you, and I love you very much.

BEN

I gotta go.

MITCH

Do you need anything?

Mitch reaches into a pocket and pulls out some money. He puts it into Ben's hand.

MITCH (cont'd)

Just some money for you that you don't have to tell mom about, okay?

Ben shrugs his shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH (cont'd)
I'm sorry about all this, Ben.

BEN
Are you ever coming back?

MITCH
I want to, but first your mom and me have
to work some things out.

BEN
I gotta go.

MITCH
...Sure.

Mitch pulls him close and hugs him, Ben turning away. Mitch releases him and stands. Ben walks back to the others.

MITCH (cont'd)
Take care of yourself.

INT. DINER - PENNSYLVANIA - THAT NIGHT

Several customers are seated at the counter and at tables.

BOOTH

Mitch is seated in the booth, a cup of coffee before him. With a pencil, he is sketching on an open napkin. He looks up, turning the napkin over as Suzanne ENTERS THE SCENE. Mitch makes a move to stand as she slips into the booth, opposite.

MITCH
Hi.

SUZANNE
Hi.

MITCH
You look good.

SUZANNE
Ben told me you'd seen him today.

MITCH
At lunch. Did you find a sitter?

She nods her head as the WAITRESS ENTERS THE SCENE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE

A cup of coffee.

MITCH

I'll have a re-fill.

The waitress leaves.

SUZANNE

You should have asked me.

MITCH

Sorry. It was a spur of the moment --

SUZANNE

He's confused enough. It makes things more complicated than they already are. He's having a hard enough time.

MITCH

I know.

SHANNON

Do you?

The waitress returns with a cup of coffee for Suzanne and a re-fill for Mitch.

SUZANNE

How are Phil and Michael?

MITCH

Fine. Mike's been offered a teaching job at the school.

SUZANNE

That would be great for him.

MITCH

I'm not sure if he wants it.

SUZANNE

Why not?

MITCH

I don't know. He's got to know there aren't many jobs out there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE

I always thought he was the most amazing person, never feeling sorry for himself, taking everything in stride.

MITCH

He's quite a guy. So, how are you?

SUZANNE

Good. The job's okay. It's hard, juggling everything. When I called, no one at the station knew you'd left town. Marty said you'd been pretty upset about things. I assume me meant us. He'd never tell me if it was anything else. The Blue Silence.

MITCH

I just...I don't know. I just needed to move, go forward.

SUZANNE

Back home?

MITCH

Yeah. Back home.

SUZANNE

What's this about?

MITCH

...I don't know.

SUZANNE

Are you expecting something?

MITCH

No.

Mitch drinks, his hand shaking. He replaces the cup on the table.

SUZANNE

Is something wrong? We used to talk. Back in college. Remember?

She reaches to the napkin and turns it over.

NAPKIN

And a beautiful sketch of an old man and his wife seated in a booth, one reading a paper, the other a book.

BOOTH

Suzanne turns around, looking.

POV

On a nearby booth, an old man and old woman seated, one reading a paper, the other a book.

BOOTH

Suzanne looks at the napkin.

SUZANNE

Back in college, when you were going to be a painter and we were going to live in Barcelona because Paris was old hat. And we'd spend every Sunday in museums. And your favorites were the Dutch Masters. Why'd those days ever have to stop?

MITCH

The real world came in. Believe me, you would haven gotten tired of the starving artist routine once the romance wore off and the bills came in.

SUZANNE

Damn-it, Mitch. I'm not talking about becoming a cop. I'm talking about shutting yourself down, closing off.

MITCH

...On the street, starting out, I had no idea, no idea what it could be like, was like, but you get used to it and you toughen yourself and you close ranks because no one else will understand. You tell yourself that. I couldn't bring that into our house, don't you understand?

SUZANNE

I was married to you. We had a child together. I loved you and you didn't even consider giving me the credit of maybe understanding, maybe wanting to help. Do you really think you're the only one -- you and your cop friends -- that go through pain and blood and...mess? You're all so damned self-righteous. I was not

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE (cont'd)

your child to protect, Mitch, I was your wife.

MITCH

I don't know what to say anymore. I don't know what to say to you.

SUZANNE

No you don't. If you did, we might have a place to start from.

She stands.

SUZANNE (cont'd)

I told the sitter I'd only be a little bit.

Mitch stands.

MITCH

Suzanne...

SUZANNE

May I have that?

She points toward the napkin. Mitch hands it to her. She looks at it, holding it carefully.

SUZANNE (cont'd)

Bye, Mitch.

She leaves. Mitch slowly sits back down. He drinks his glass of water, his hand shaking badly.

EXT. ROCKRIDGE PLAYING FIELD BLEACHERS - MASSACHUSETTS - MORNING

Michael is seated by himself mid-way up the bleachers. The field is empty. Jeff's VOICE is heard O.S.:

JEFF

(O.S.)

Michael!

MICHAEL

Up here!

BLEACHERS

Jeff climbs up, sitting beside him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEFF
How's tricks?

MICHAEL
Same.

JEFF
Where's Shannon?

MICHAEL
I don't know.

JEFF
Have a spat?

Michael doesn't answer.

JEFF (cont'd)
Decide on the teacher thing yet?

Michael shrugs his shoulder's.

JEFF (cont'd)
Guess what I'm thinking of doing?

MICHAEL
Gigolo?

JEFF
That was last week. This is like a real adult thing, major decision, responsible shit. I've applied to this hard core foreign language school where they train interpreters for the U.N. and stuff. My Spanish isn't half shitty and I can give French a try.

MICHAEL
Probably a lot of competition in those areas.

JEFF
Hell, I'll try Afganistani or Sudanese.

MICHAEL
Hard job.

JEFF
It's just an idea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

I didn't mean --

JEFF

There's always pencils on street corners.

MICHAEL

I think it's a great idea.

JEFF

Probably won't even get in.

MICHAEL

How's Monica feel about it?

JEFF

She's gone.

MICHAEL

...What?

JEFF

Left school yesterday.

MICHAEL

What? We were just --

JEFF

It'd been coming. The operation and all,
I guess. Can't say I blame her.

MICHAEL

I can't believe that. Monica? But it
doesn't --

JEFF

We were on the outs. Had a major fight
the other night. For the best, right?

MICHAEL

Did she say anything?

JEFF

"Bye."

MICHAEL

Seriously.

JEFF

She left a note. A Dear Jeff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

What did it say?

JEFF

I started it, I didn't finish it.

MICHAEL

Shannon didn't say anything?

JEFF

She wasn't that good in the sack anyway.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, Jeff. Man, I can't believe it. She'll call -- She'll be back -- What if the operation doesn't --

JEFF

No. Don't say it. It'll work. It's got to work.

Jeff stands and starts down the steps, walking off, Michael listening to him go.

EXT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S BACKYARD - MORNING

Mitch runs in from the woods with a football in his hands. The back door opens and Phil steps out.

PHIL

Where've you been? Your Captain called.

MITCH

Playing some pick-up in the park.

PHIL

And yesterday?

MITCH

Around. Driving. Went over to see Ben.

PHIL

Ben? You drove all the way to --

MITCH

Spur of the moment.

PHIL

Did you see --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

Didn't see Suzanne. Just drove there and back.

PHIL

You should have said something; we'd all have gone with you.

MITCH

Catch!

Phil holds up his hands for protection.

PHIL

I'm an old man!

MITCH

Ready? Here comes!

Mitch gently tosses the ball to Phil, Phil reaching up and catching it.

PHIL

You don't forget!

Mitch runs back.

MITCH

A long one!

Phil stands and tosses the ball, Mitch catching it.

MITCH (cont'd)

All right! Good one!

PHIL

Not bad!

MITCH

Ready?

PHIL

The life insurance is in the metal box in the closet!

Mitch throws the ball, Phil catching it.

PHIL (cont'd)

Son-of-a-bitch!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH
In the numbers!

Phil throws again, Mitch catching it.

NEARBY WOODS

Michael, backpack slung over a shoulder, has stopped in the woods near his house. He is listening.

POV

On Mitch and Phil as they toss the ball back and forth, both laughing.

ECU

On Michael, listening to their laughter and conversation.

BACKYARD

Phil tosses the ball to Mitch then hold up his hands in defeat.

PHIL
Enough! Let an old man rest!

Mitch tosses the ball into the air above him, catching it.

MITCH
He's at the twenty, the ten, the five --
Touchdown! And the fans go crazy! The
cheerleaders tight little pom-poms
bouncing gaily in the cold afternoon air!
Remember Homecoming weekends? The floats,
the parties, the big game, the drinking
of godawful, cheap beer you got somebody
older to buy at the liquor store.

PHIL
My days it was hooch. Rot gut. Earl's
Cat.

MITCH
"Earl's Cat?"

PHIL
Don't ask.

NEARBY WOODS

Michael turns and walks away from the house.

BACKYARD

Mitch tosses the ball in the air and catches it.

PHIL

Matter of fact, Earl's Cat was made by Sally Ann Krupp's dad, moonshiner in Missouri, then a bootlegger during the Depression. Went on to become a Baptist Minister. Sally Ann Krupp...

MITCH

Sally Ann Krupp...

PHIL

Two of the biggest...eyes you ever saw. Red hair. Freckles, braces, glasses.

MITCH

Was this a charity case?

PHIL

Hell, who was I? Skinny kid running the projector down at the movie house, sleeping in the back seats of cars in the car lot.

MITCH

Mom know about Sally Ann?

PHIL

They knew each other -- didn't know about each other.

MITCH

You hound dog!

PHIL

Look, Mitch, your Captain called --

MITCH

Let's take the rest of the day off -- yank Michael out of school and the three of us -- we'll have our own Homecoming!

PHIL

Homecoming?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

We'll do everything we've ever wanted but never had the time -- We can go up to the lake and fish!

PHIL

Fish? What are you talking about?

MITCH

Get drunk! Go to a movie -- a drive-in! Like we used to when we were kids -- buy that lousy pizza and watered-down beer!

PHIL

Mitch.

Mitch's movement is becoming more frantic.

MITCH

Remember how I used to describe movies to Michael, making things up as I went along -- "I swear to God, Mike, she's got a frog in her hair, don't ask me how it got there!"

PHIL

Your Captain --

MITCH

Then -- then we'll stay up late and tell ghost stories!

PHIL

Ghost stories?

MITCH

Sure! And dirty jokes!

PHIL

Ring doorbells too?

MITCH

Great idea!

PHIL

Are you serious?

MITCH

I've never been more serious in my whole life!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL

I think maybe you should go in and rest.

MITCH

And then we'll talk, just talk, about everything, about anything, about, about what it was like growing up, about our worst friends and best enemies --

PHIL

Mitch.

MITCH

About what it was like when we were all together and nothing was wrong.

PHIL

Stop it, Mitch.

MITCH

There was a time, I know it, I remember it!

PHIL

Stop.

MITCH

It was before Suzanne left, before Mom died, before --

PHIL

Stop it! Why aren't you calling in to work? When are you going back?

MITCH

I've seen wonderful things, Dad -- people saving other people's lives -- risking their own life. Beautiful things. Dad. I've seen people helping each other for no reason. It's out there. It's real. I've seen it. I've helped people, Dad.

PHIL

I've seen a few things too. But you don't hear me crying about it.

Phil exits leaving Mitch.

Michael, backpack still slung over his shoulder, walks around the corner of the house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

Are you going back to work?

Mitch doesn't respond.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Then maybe you can watch Dad for a while. I've been thinking about taking a vacation myself. Actually, I was thinking about just taking off, going someplace, anyplace.

MITCH

Your circle of existence has been very small, little brother, and you have no idea --

MICHAEL

I've never been frightened of anything.

MITCH

Frightened? Like in a fun house? I'm not talking about being frightened -- I'm talking about spitting up your own blood you're so damned scared! I'm talking about what people do to each other, what it's really like out there!

MICHAEL

My brother Mitch, the man who's seen it all!

MITCH

I've seen more than you ever will!

MICHAEL

Tell me something I don't know!

MITCH

What I meant --

MICHAEL

Let's see, you quit at painting, you quit being a husband and father and now you're quitting being a cop. Can you make out a pattern here?

Michael enters the house.

MITCH

Michael.

INT. BOSTON MUSEUM OF ART - MASSACHUSETTS - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON

A collection of Dutch Masters paintings: the dark, melancholy, and beautifully serene oils of Reubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyke and others; fishing villages and fields of grain against glowing golden suns or brooding deep purple storms; ancient faces of gently smiling workers and solemn aristocrats lit by the warm radiance of candlelight.

MITCH

Seated on a bench in the middle of the near-empty gallery. He is looking at the paintings. He stands and walks to one painting.

ECU

On a painting of a young aristocratic boy standing beside his father, who is seated.

ECU

On the young boy's enigmatic face.

IN FLASHBACK:

To the brief image of a Twelve Year Old Boy, lying still on a hardwood floor behind a couch.

FLASHBACK OUT.

BACK TO SCENE

Mitch is still staring at the painting as a Twelve Year Old Boy's pleas for help are HEARD deep within Mitch's memory:

TWELVE YEAR OLD
BOY

(V.O.)

-- Please don't let him stay! Please
don't let him stay! Please take him away
before he hurts my mom -- please!

The voice fades out, Mitch closing his eyes.

EXT. CARNIVAL - MASSACHUSETTS - NIGHT

A county carnival on a fairgrounds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE

On Griff helping Shannon into the two-person basket of a parachute jump. Both are laughing as they are locked in by an attendant. The basket rises thirty feet into the air, hangs there for a moment then plummets down, slowed by the parachute, both screaming out.

BASKET

Griff and Shannon holding onto each other for support, laughing, as the basket is opened and they step out, legs wobbling. Shannon releases herself from Griff's embrace and they walk on, canes guiding the way.

SHOOTING GALLERY BOOTH

Michael and Jeff are standing across from the booth.

JEFF AND MICHAEL

JEFF

Let's go, or stay, or do something. The chance of Shannon just bumping into you is a little high.

MICHAEL

I can't believe she actually went out with that piece of...beef.

JEFF

I know, I'm going to spook some people --

SHOOTING GALLERY

Jeff walks up to the booth, puts some tickets on the table and comically fumbles for one of the mounted rifles, the attendant and several 'hunters' watching, not sure how to react. Jeff finds one of the rifles and begins shooting every direction except at the moving targets. He stops.

JEFF (cont'd)

How'm I doing?

No one knows how to answer, when he takes the rifle once more, aims the rifle directly ahead, pauses then fires, easily knocking over the hardest of the moving targets. He steps back, taking up his cane. He turns and casually walks off, everyone staring.

JEFF AND MICHAEL

MICHAEL

Show-off.

JEFF

That was for Monica.

And he walks away.

EXT. SHANNON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Griff walks Shannon to her front porch, both stopping. He kisses her on the cheek, turns then walks off.

FRONT PORCH

Shannon puts her key in the lock, when Michael speaks O.S.

MICHAEL

(O.S.)

Hi, Shannon.

Michael is standing at the edge of the porch.

SHANNON

Michael?! You scared me to death!
What are you doing out here?

MICHAEL

I heard you were at the carnival. Thought
we might run into each other.

SHANNON

I was with Griff.

MICHAEL

I know. I just wanted to say hi, that's
all.

SHANNON

What are we doing? What is this all
about? Where are we going, Michael?

MICHAEL

Shannon. Look. I'm sorry.

SHANNON

I want you to tell me right now just
exactly what our relationship is?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

It's what it's always been.

SHANNON

Is this just college screwing around?
Because I want something more in my life.

MICHAEL

Shannon.

SHANNON

I will not be alone and with someone.
It's hard enough.

MICHAEL

Shannon.

SHANNON

I won't be left like Jeff was. I won't.

MICHAEL

What do you want me to say?! I wish
everyone would just get off my back! I
don't know what in the hell people expect
me to do! You all should hand out a list
of rules so I'll know what you want me to
do and how you expect me to behave
because I really have no idea!

He starts to move away.

SHANNON

That's right, run away!

Michael reels back on her.

MICHAEL

I have never run away! Never!

He turns and takes several steps away, then stops.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

...My mother. When I was little she would
get down on her hands and knees with me
and crawl over every square inch of our
house and the yard, and I mean every
square inch. Our knees and palms would be
bleeding and I'd be crying but we'd keep
on going, every day until I knew every
inch by heart. She'd say to me that there
was going to be one place in the entire

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL(cont'd)

world where I was absolutely safe. And I hated her for it. I don't know who I'm supposed to be.

He turns and leaves, Shannon embracing herself tightly.

EXT. BUS STATION - PENNSYLVANIA - LATE AFTERNOON

Ben, dressed warmly with a small backpack on, locks his bicycle to a post and enters the bus station.

INT. BUS STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

Ben stops, alone in the crowd of strangers, not sure which way to go.

INT. DR. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - V.A. HOSPITAL - MASSACHUSETTS - LATE AFTERNOON

Phil looks out of a window. Dr. Williams is seated at his desk, watching.

DR. WILLIAMS

I didn't expect you back.

PHIL

...I came to get a prescription renewed.

DR. WILLIAMS

Which one?

There is a moment, and then:

PHIL

...When my oldest was in high school his teacher asked me to speak to the history class. I said no. They wanted to hear John Wayne stories. They wouldn't believe. What people do to each other...Sign of Original Sin, this chaplain said when we were captured; only God can redeem Man, he said. Only problem is, God's got to be around to do the redeeming and I didn't see a lot of Him around, on the Death March, in the prison ships, in the prison camps...I mean, you'd think He'd be around somewhere when it's your turn to dig that day's graves only they've got you up in Manchuria where the ground's frozen so you've got to stack the bodies in warehouses,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL(cont'd)

hundreds and hundreds of bodies, only bodies don't die flat like you need and they freeze up pretty fast so you've got to be sensible, use your building skills-- see, I was a contractor, a builder, "craftsman"; so you take out the ax and saw and you...saw and chop and you stack them like cords of woods, rows and rows and stacks and stacks of men like so much lumber. Redemption's a funny thing, I guess.

Phil continues to stare out the window, Dr. Williams looking down at his desk.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - PENNSYLVANIA - EVENING

Suzanne -- panicked -- runs into his room, looking about.

SUZANNE

Ben?! Are you in here?!

She looks in the closet and under the bed then runs out of the room.

EXT. SIDE ROAD - MASSACHUSETTS - NIGHT

A long tractor trailer driving up the highway slows and turns into the lot of a small rural grocery store.

INT. TRACTOR TRAILER CAB - NIGHT

The DRIVER, a tough-looking man in his fifties, glances at Ben, seated beside him, then looks out.

DRIVER

You sure this is the place?

BEN

My dad's cabin is just up that road. I can walk the rest.

The driver hesitates then reaches over and opens the door for Ben.

BEN (cont'd)

Thanks.

Ben climbs down, the driver closing the door. He watches Ben.

POV

As Ben walks past the grocery store and up a dirt road.

CAB

The driver takes up the receiver of his radio.

DRIVER

This is D.C. Just dropped a hitch-hiker --
young kid -- at the quarry grocery on I-
15. Could you give the highway patrol a
call and have them check the kid out?

DISPATCHER'S

VOICE

Got it. Will do. Out.

The driver replaces the receiver and pulls out of the lot.

EXT GAZEBO - PHIL'S & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Phil is on the ladder gently applying a coat of
weatherproofing to the finished roof. The night sky is low
with snow-filled clouds.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Michael is dressed, sitting up on his bed, leaning back
against the headboard. He is reading a book when his phone
RINGS. He reaches over and picks it up.

MICHAEL

Hello?

INT. SUZANNE'S KITCHEN - PENNSYLVANIA - SAME TIME

SUZANNE

Michael --

ALTERNATING SCENES:

MICHAEL

Suzanne?

SUZANNE

Is Ben there?!

MICHAEL

Here? No, not that I know of --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE

He's gone -- Ben. I called the police --

MICHAEL

The police?!

SUZANNE

They found his bike at the bus station --
he got a ticket for Hartford --

MICHAEL

What?! The bus?! But why Hartford? He
knows the bus comes closer, down to -

SUZANNE

They called the police there. He's
already gotten off. An hour ago.

MICHAEL

An hour?!

SUZANNE

Is Mitch there?

MICHAEL

No -- I don't know where he is --

SUZANNE

I'm leaving now. Please find Mitch --

MICHAEL

We'll find Ben, Suzanne. He'll be fine. I
promise. I'll have Dad stay here, for
when Ben gets here -- all right -- yes --

Michael hangs up the phone, then dashes out of the room.

INT. MITCH'S CAR - MASSACHUSETTS - NIGHT

The car is parked on the shoulder of a two lane road. Mitch
is seated behind the wheel, both hands clenched tightly
around it. He removes a hand from the steering wheel and
takes up a pint bottle of scotch, drinking.

IN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE:

INT. POLICE PRECINCT HALL - CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Filled with police and families, everyone dressed nicely,
obviously having a good time. Mitch is standing in the front
of the room with six other policemen and policewomen, each

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

with a young girl or boy beside them. Above them is a painted banner which reads: "6th Precinct Big Brothers And Big Sisters". Mitch's hand is on the shoulder of a grinning Twelve Year Old Boy named JIMMY CLARK, the boy behind the couch.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - CONNECTICUT - DAY

Mitch is kneeling as he places toys and games in a cardboard box, closing the box and writing on the side in black marker: "BEN'S STUFF". He glances around the near-empty room.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - CONNECTICUT - DAY

Mitch is tossing a softball to Jimmy Clark, both having a great time.

INT. GRADE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Mitch is seated on a metal folding chair, The gymnasium filled with students and parents listening to the school band, band members seated on chairs in front of the audience. Jimmy Clark is to one side, playing the flute.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Mitch races -- panicked -- from his hurriedly parked police car toward a suburban house, rushing in through the open front door, as in the first scene.

SEQUENCE OUT.

INT. MITCH'S CAR - MASSACHUSETTS - NIGHT

Mitch opens his eyes, wide in silent horror. He blinks several times as if to erase what he's seeing then shuts his eyes tightly, lowering his head. The Twelve Year Old's VOICE is heard with Mitch's memory.

TWELVE YEAR OLD
BOY

(V.O.)

-- Take him away -- Don't let him hurt
us...

The voice fades out.

EXT. MITCH'S CAR - NIGHT

Alone in the darkness as bits of snow begin to fall.

EXT. PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - LATER

Mitch's car pulls into the driveway and stops.

INT. MITCH'S CAR

Mitch stares ahead, numbed, when he sees something.

POV

On Phil running out from the house and up to the car.

EXT. CAR

Mitch starts to open the door, Phil grabbing it.

PHIL

It's Ben -- he took a bus to Hartford --
the police are out looking for him --
Suzanne's on her way -- Michael went with
his coach to the quarry -- said Ben had
hitched a ride --

MITCH

The quarry?!

Before Phil can say anything, Mitch pulls the door shut,
starts the engine and races the car out of the drive, tires
skidding as the car speeds down the street.

EXT. QUARRY - MASSACHUSETTS - NIGHT

An abandoned marble quarry long since overtaken by trees and
overgrowth. Illuminated by reflected moonlight off the low
clouds, the quarry itself is a massive outcropping of jagged,
cut rock towering over and surrounding an enormous man-made
swimming hole filled with cold, black, mountain water.

QUARRY BASE

Michael and Coach Thompson move quickly from Thompson's car
up a dirt path toward the quarry.

COACH THOMPSON

Mike, I can't see a damned thing.

Michael moves ahead, easily scaling the crooked path from
memory.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COACH THOMPSON
(cont'd)

Wait up!

INT. MITCH'S TRAVELLING CAR - NIGHT

As a panicked Mitch drives the car down a two lane road as fast as he can.

EXT. QUARRY LEDGE - SAME TIME

A despondent Ben is sitting on the very edge of a narrow rock ledge over the water some thirty feet below. He is dropping small rocks down into the water. Michael's VOICE is heard O.S.

MICHAEL

(O.S.)

-- Ben --

Ben quickly stands, looking about nervously.

ROCK LEDGE

Michael climbs up and stands.

MICHAEL

Ben?

Ben doesn't know what to do; he turns about then stops, looking down into the water. Coach Thompson climbs onto the ledge, Michael holding him back.

BEN

Mike?

COACH THOMPSON

I'll get him --

Michael stops him.

MICHAEL

Ben? Are you okay? We had great times here, you me and your dad. We were worried about you. Ben.

BEN

...I didn't want anyone to know. I just...just was never scared here, that's all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Michael advances, his feet inches from the rock edge. Coach Thompson looks at Michael's feet fearfully.

MICHAEL

Ben. Look at me. Are you looking at me?

BEN

Yes. Be careful, Mike --

Michael continues advancing toward Ben, his feet at the very edge, pieces of rock falling away, his arms outstretched for balance.

MICHAEL

There's nothing to be scared of, Ben.
See? I'm not scared. We'll all help you
to not be scared. I'll help you. What do
you say?

Michael stops and extends his hand to Ben.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Ben. I need your help too. Ben. I need
help too.

Ben suddenly turns and runs to Michael, embracing him. Michael puts his arms around Ben and turns him toward Coach Thompson, Thompson moving toward them and taking Michael's arm, Michael pushing it off.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

We'll be okay.

Michael walks Ben toward the path, stopping. Michael lets Ben take his hand and show him the way down as they pass Coach Thompson.

QUARRY BASE

Michael and Ben are about to climb into Thompson's car when Mitch's car spins into the area and skids to a stop, Mitch pushing open the car door and running to Ben, embracing him tightly.

MITCH

Thank God, you're alright. I was so
worried.

BEN

I'm sorry, Dad -- I'm sorry -- I didn't
mean to -- Don't be mad --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

It's all right. It's all right.

They hug each other tightly. Michael takes Ben from Mitch.

MICHAEL

Ben. Go sit in the car and get warm.

BEN

Don't be mad at me, Mike?

MICHAEL

I'm not. Promise.

MITCH

(to Ben)

Go sit in the car. We'll take you home.

Ben goes to Mitch's car and climbs in the front seat, closing the door. Michael reels on Mitch.

MICHAEL

Your son could have fallen in up there!

MITCH

Michael --

MICHAEL

He hitched a ride with a truck driver,
for crissakes! We could be looking at his
body right now, you son-of-a-bitch!

MITCH

Michael, I'm sorry --

MICHAEL

You've got a son in that car! You better
stop feeling sorry for yourself and take
care of him!

Michael pushes by Mitch and goes to Coach Thompson's car, climbing in the front seat, Thompson following, the car driving off. Mitch goes to his car.

INT. MITCH'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Ben is asleep in Mitch's bed, Suzanne curled up in a cushioned chair beside the bed. She is also asleep.

ANGLE

On Mitch standing in the bedroom doorway, watching them both. His eyes are filled with pain and tears.

MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - LATER

Michael is seated at his desk, in the dark, illuminated by blue moonlight, as his fingers move over his personal writing. A Braille typewriter is beside him.

He hears footsteps in the hallway. He turns. He gets up from his seat and goes to the door. He opens it.

HALLWAY

He quietly feels his way along the face of several doors, all closed. He stops at one, which is open.

ANGLE

On Michael stepping into Mitch's darkened bedroom.

BEDROOM

Suzanne and Ben are still asleep. Michael hears the patio door opening downstairs.

STAIRWAY

As Michael slowly descends the stairway, listening carefully.

KITCHEN

Michael enters.

MICHAEL

Mitch?

EXT. PORCH AND BACKYARD - LATE NIGHT

The area is illuminated by a blue light from a full moon behind low, thin autumn clouds, and a haloed street lamp nearby. A fine layer of powder-white snow dusts the yard and porch and lawn furniture. Tiny flakes of snow are sparkling in the light as they gently fall.

ANGLE

On Mitch, standing at the edge of the yard near the woods, facing out, his service revolver in his hand.

PORCH

As the door opens and Michael steps out.

MICHAEL
...Mitch? Are you out here?

BACKYARD

Mitch doesn't respond.

PORCH

There is a moment then Michael turns to go back inside, when he stops, feeling something at his feet. Michael lowers to the porch, running his hand along the cement near his feet.

ECU

On a spilled box of bullets, Michael picking one up.

MICHAEL

MICHAEL
...Mitch? Are you out here?

MITCH

MITCH
Go back inside, Mike. Everything's fine.
Just go back inside. I'm going down to
the clearing.

BACKYARD AND PORCH

MICHAEL
You have your gun with you?

MITCH
I'm all right. Just go back to sleep.

MICHAEL
...Mitch, what's going on? What're you
doing out here with your gun? Mitch?

MITCH
Please. Mike. Please. Just go back in.
Please.

MICHAEL
I'm going to get Dad --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH

No! Don't.

Mitch begins walking about aimlessly.

MICHAEL

Mitch, you're scaring me. Come on.
Please. Your wife and son are asleep in
your bedroom, Mitch. Come back inside.

MITCH

No, no, no, no, no, no. I can't, I can't.
I can't. I've hurt too many people.

MICHAEL

Mitch. Please. Let me help --

MITCH

You can't, you can't, I'm sorry, but you
can't. I got to get this out of me I've
got to get this it hurts too much too
much got to get it out of me.

MICHAEL

Mitch. Talk to me. Slow down. Calm down.
Mitch. Please.

Mitch starts pacing faster and faster, his eyes shut tightly,
the gun embraced against his chest, his finger on the
trigger.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Mitch -- Mitch --

MITCH

-- Oh God, oh God, Mike, there was blood
everywhere I was the first one in, Mike,
and Marty came in behind me and I thought
what a nice room it was everything was in
place, nothing upset and I looked down
behind the couch-- oh God! There they
were!

Phil steps out, dressed in a robe.

PHIL

What's going on?

MITCH

There they were all of them oh God side
by side with their arms across their

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH(cont'd)

chests the mother and the little girl and
and Jimmy Clark and the brother and the
father all looking like they were asleep
except for the blood that was everywhere
walking in it and the shot gun barrel
with its butt on the top of the couch
aimed down where he shot himself after
killing the others --

PHIL

Mitch.

MITCH

He begged me -- Jimmy begged me to help --
and I just stared and thought they all
looked so peaceful like they wanted it
like it was meant to be like it was meant
to be and they had accepted without a
struggle and I wanted to say wake up
Jimmy you've got to practice the concert
is coming in two weeks remember all we've
talked about you can be whatever you want
you've got your whole life ahead Jimmy so
wake up now and play come on Jimmy get up
get up get up for God's sake! You lousy,
nogood, fucking loser you weak-willed
bastard get up get up! Get up! Get up!
Get up and play for me Ben it's not too
late!

Mitch crumbles to the ground, his stomach heaving as Michael
runs to him, stumbling, then crawling quickly across the yard
to Mitch and embracing him tightly, finding the gun in
Mitch's hand, prying it loose and pushing it away. Michael
embraces him with both arms, Mitch sobbing, Phil standing
still, stunned.

CLOSER

MICHAEL

It's all right, Mitch. We're here. We're
here. We're here. We're here. Dad!!!

PORCH AND BACKYARD

Phil moves towards his sons, slowly at first, then running,
bending down and embracing them both tightly.

CLOSE

On all three, Michael holding Mitch and rocking him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

We're here, Mitch. All of us. We're here.
All of us. You're safe, Mitch. You're
safe. You're safe.

HIGH ANGLE

On Michael, Mitch and Phil, holding onto each other, in the snowfall.

INT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - THE NEXT DAY

Warm sunshine fills the area and illuminates the surrounding trees, which are blazing in autumn's colors.

Mitch is seated before the easel and pad, sketching. Michael enters, his cane hitting the easel. He runs his hand along the edge of the easel and pad.

MICHAEL

This could become a habit.

MITCH

At least a hobby.

MICHAEL

How are you?

MITCH

...I spoke to the Precinct this morning.
I'm going to take a leave of absence.
There's this program out of the station
where they try and help you figure things
out.

MICHAEL

Are you sure you still want to be a cop?

MITCH

I don't know. I always thought it was
important.

MICHAEL

It is.

MITCH

I guess I wanted to try and make the
world safe.

(beat)

Thanks. For my son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Michael raises his hand and gently touches Mitch's face, feeling its contours, its lines and its age. Michael smiles as he withdraws his hand. Michael exits, Mitch watching him leave.

EXT. ROCKRIDGE CAMPUS - DAY

BENCH

Michael is seated on the bench, backpack at his side. Shannon walks up to him.

SHANNON

Hello.

He checks the face of his watch.

MICHAEL

Right on time.

SHANNON

What did you want to see me about?

MICHAEL

Sit?

She hesitates, then sits on the edge of the bench.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

...I thought it might be good for us to get...acquainted.

SHANNON

Acquainted?

MICHAEL

...See, there was this guy I thought I knew, and I thought we were friends but he left town. Anyway, I'm this new guy in town and don't seem to know anyone, and I was hoping, maybe, you'd show me around, you know: help?

Shannon breaks into a small smile.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

You smiled.

SHANNON

How do you know?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL

I wanted to see it.

CAMERA PULLS AWAY

As Michael and Shannon talk among themselves, on a park bench, on a school campus, on a bright autumn day.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - EARLY EVENING

The area is bathed in the calming blue-gold of dusk. Mitch is seated before the easel, sketching. He stops. He places the charcoal pencil in the easel tray. He looks at the picture.

CLOSE

On the finished charcoal portrait of twelve year old Jimmy Clark.

CLEARING

As Suzanne quietly enters the area from the woods. Mitch turns.

There is a moment as they look at each other. Suzanne hesitantly smiles. There is another moment then Mitch turns back to the pad. He looks at the portrait. He covers it with the pad front.

SUZANNE

What are you working on?

MITCH

A portrait. Jimmy Clark.

SUZANNE

Describe him to me.

Mitch turns to the pad and starts to uncover it.

SUZANNE (cont'd)

No. Describe him to me.

MITCH

Dark complexion. Round, dark eyes, clear, with a light inside them. Thin face and frame. Black hair. Small hands. Ben's size. Like the kind of boy I'd like Ben to be.

(beat)

I'm sorry, Suzanne.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZANNE

So where do we go from here?

There is a moment, and then:

MITCH

Home?

ANGLE

On the two of them, facing each other, at opposite ends of the clearing.

EXT. GAZEBO - PHIL & MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Phil is sitting in a lawn chair, an open beer can at his feet.

In the center of the beautifully finished gazebo.

He looks off.

FADE OUT.