

Nothing Happens in Idaho

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Not Reported
FOR IDAHO

Scene 1: Idaho Anomaly

INT. DUSTY ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

The Roadhouse is sparsely populated. A single, flickering neon sign buzzes intermittently. DALE 30s, unshaven, wearing a stained band t-shirt and jeans that have seen better days stands on a makeshift stage – a wobbly crate – holding a microphone. He's radiating nervous energy.

DALE

So, I was at the DMV the other day... you know, that place where dreams go to die, slower than a glacier moving uphill?

He pauses, looking around at the three patrons a bored bartender polishing glasses, a lone trucker nursing a beer, and a woman intensely focused on her phone. He clears his throat.

DALE

And this lady, right? She's got this... hairstyle. Like a startled poodle had a fight with a lawnmower.

A weak chuckle from the trucker.

DALE

Anyway, she's complaining about the wait time. Which, let's be honest, is the only thing the DMV is reliably good at.

DALE

She says, "This is unacceptable! I've been waiting for an hour!" And I said... leans into the mic conspiratorially

DALE

"Honey, you're in Idaho. Unacceptable is what we *do* here."

Silence. Dale waits, a pained smile on his face.

DALE

...I'm working on a new bit about the existential dread of potato farming.

The woman looks up from her phone, briefly, then returns to it.

DALE

It's... uh... profound. And possibly concerning. He shrugs, puts down the mic, and walks off the crate, looking defeated but strangely satisfied.

DALE

Thanks for the... uh... enthusiastic response.

FADE OUT.

Scene 2: The Open Mic Disaster

INT. DUSTY ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

A dimly lit bar, sparsely populated. A single spotlight illuminates a small stage. Dale, mid-thirties, wearing a slightly too-tight band t-shirt and jeans, stands awkwardly behind a microphone on a rickety crate. He clutches a crumpled piece of paper.

DALE

(nervously)

So, uh... I wrote a poem. About a squirrel. He clears his throat, then launches into a rambling, surreal poem about a squirrel with existential angst. The audience, consisting of three bored-looking patrons and a bartender polishing glasses, shows little reaction.

DALE

...and the squirrel, contemplating the futility of it all, ate a particularly crunchy acorn. The end.

Silence. A lone cough from the bartender.

DALE

(forcing a smile)

So... yeah. Questions?

More silence. One patron subtly checks their watch.

DALE

Okay, okay, I get it. It's... experimental. He shuffles his feet. He glances at his crumpled paper again.

DALE

I also have a joke about a badger and a mime. But I feel like I've already pushed the boundaries of acceptable entertainment for this establishment.

He looks around the room, defeated.

DALE

It involves a surprisingly high level of mime-related violence. Perhaps not for tonight. Maybe another time. When you're all feeling a bit more... open minded.

He drops the mic with a thud, and exits the stage, avoiding eye contact. The bartender sighs dramatically and resumes polishing glasses.

FADE OUT.

Scene 3: Unexpected Local Success

INT. IDAHO FALLS VFW HALL - NIGHT

The VFW hall is dimly lit, smelling faintly of stale beer and regret. Empty beer cans litter the tables. Dale, a lanky man with a perpetually unimpressed expression, stands on a makeshift stage – a wobbly card table draped with a stained tablecloth. He wipes sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. The audience, a scattering of bewildered locals, clap weakly.

DALE

So, I told the badger...

He pauses for effect, leaning into the microphone.

DALE

"Look, buddy, I appreciate the... uh... *enthusiasm*. But my prize-winning squash is NOT a suitable nesting ground."

A few scattered chuckles ripple through the audience. Dale grins, a predatory glint in his eye.

DALE

He just stared at me. Like, REALLY stared. You know that intense, judgmental stare only a badger can muster?

He mimics the badger's stare, contorting his face into a hilarious parody of intense scrutiny. The audience laughs, a bit louder this time.

DALE

Then he...

He whispers conspiratorially.

DALE

whispering

... he farted. A badger fart, folks. Let me tell you, it's an experience.

The laughter erupts, genuine and hearty this time. Dale basks in the applause, a smug smile spreading across his face.

DALE

So yeah, that's how I lost my squash, and gained a newfound respect for the... uh... olfactory capabilities of the common badger.

He bows deeply, almost falling off the card table. The applause intensifies. A woman throws a crumpled dollar bill onto the stage.

DALE

to himself

A dollar? For that masterpiece? The audacity!

He picks up the dollar, examines it carefully, then dramatically pockets it. He winks at the audience.

DALE

Thanks, folks! You've been a... surprisingly tolerant... audience.

He exits the stage, leaving the lingering smell of stale beer and triumph.

FADE OUT.

Scene 4: The Barfly's Ballad

INT. DUSTY'S ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

Dale sits alone at a sticky table, nursing a lukewarm beer. He stares intently at a half-eaten plate of greasy fries, occasionally picking at them with a forlorn expression. The bar is dimly lit, populated by a handful of regulars.

DALE

So, she orders the lobster thermidor. Lobster thermidor! On a Tuesday. Like some kind of... culinary conquistador.

He takes a long swig of his beer.

DALE

I told her I preferred the "Idaho Spud Surprise," a culinary masterpiece involving a potato, some butter, and the sheer audacity of simplicity.

He chuckles to himself, a dry, brittle sound.

DALE

She didn't laugh.

He sighs dramatically, pushing the plate away.

DALE

Apparently, my sophisticated wit was lost on her. Lost, I tell you! Like a sock in a dryer full of rabid hamsters.

A grizzled barfly, **BARNEY**, with a missing tooth and a permanent squint, shuffles over to Dale's table.

BARNEY

Rough night, huh, kid?

DALE

with a theatrical sigh

Tragic. An absolute Shakespearean tragedy of epic proportions. Involving overpriced seafood and a complete lack of appreciation for my comedic genius.

BARNEY

Women, eh?

DALE

A fickle mistress, my friend. A capricious temptress who demands caviar and laughs at your potato-based humor. The nerve!

Barney nods slowly, understanding dawning in his squinted eyes.

BARNEY

Tell me about it. My wife left me for a guy who plays the banjo. A banjo!

DALE

I'd say you dodged a bullet, but considering the instrument... perhaps not.

Dale and Barney share a bitter chuckle, the sound echoing in the quiet bar. The unspoken understanding hangs between them - the shared pain of romantic failure, washed down with lukewarm beer and the bitter taste of defeat.

FADE OUT.

Scene 5: The Nemesis Emerges

INT. THE COMEDY CAVE - NIGHT

Smoke hangs heavy in the air of The Comedy Cave, a dimly lit basement club. Dale, in a slightly too-tight shirt, nervously sips water backstage. He fidgets with a crumpled napkin, his eyes darting around. A polished, sharply dressed comedian, REX, strides past, radiating confidence. He's impeccably groomed, a stark contrast to Dale's rumpled appearance.

REX

You're Dale, right? Heard you were... interesting. Rex smirks, a condescending glint in his eye. He gestures dismissively with a manicured hand.

DALE

(defensively)
Interesting how?

REX

Oh, you know... the "unique" style. The... unconventional approach. Rex takes a long sip from a bottle of water, his expression unchanging. A beat of silence.

DALE

So, you're saying I'm not funny?

REX

I'm saying you're... different. The crowds here expect... well, jokes. Actual jokes, with punchlines. Not... existential crises disguised as stand-up.

Dale's eyes narrow. He sets down his water cup with a thud.

DALE

So you're the polished pro, are you? All smooth lines and predictable punchlines?

REX

I'm a professional comedian, yes. I'm paid to make people laugh, not to ponder the meaninglessness of existence while they're trying to enjoy their beer.

Rex pats Dale's shoulder, a patronizing gesture.

REX

Stick to the potatoes, kid. Some people are just better off with simple things.

Rex turns and walks away, leaving Dale seething. Dale clenches his fists, muttering to himself.

DALE

Potatoes, huh?

He looks at his crumpled napkin with newfound determination.

DALE

Maybe potatoes **are** underrated.

SCENE START

Scene 6: Small-Town Gig

INT. THE DUSTY MUG - NIGHT

The Dusty Mug is a dimly lit, sparsely populated bar. A single spotlight illuminates a small, makeshift stage. Dale, wearing the same slightly-too-tight shirt, stands nervously center stage. Four people are scattered at tables, nursing drinks and looking vaguely unimpressed.

DALE

So, I was at the grocery store the other day... you know, the one with the perpetually flickering fluorescent lights that make you feel like you're in a low-budget horror film?

He pauses, looking around expectantly. Crickets.

DALE

Anyway, I'm reaching for a bag of potatoes... Idaho potatoes, ironically...

He chuckles, a nervous sound. A woman takes a sip of her drink, avoiding eye contact.

DALE

And this guy, right? This guy with a handlebar mustache that could rival a walrus... he's just staring at me. Staring.

He mimics the staring, his eyes widening comically.

DALE

I swear, the silence was so thick, you could spread it on toast. And then, he whispers... "Are those... organic?"

Dale leans into the microphone, dropping his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

DALE

Organic potatoes. Like, what's the difference?
They're potatoes. They grow in the ground.
Unless...

He pauses for dramatic effect, but the only reaction is the bartender polishing a glass.

DALE

...unless there's a secret society of potato farmers controlling the world's spud supply. Think about it.

He shrugs, a half-smile playing on his lips. Silence. Then, a single, weak chuckle from a man in a baseball cap.

DALE

Yeah, I didn't think so. Moving on.
He clears his throat, looking slightly deflated.

DALE

So, my cat... he's got this thing about chewing on my socks...
Dale gestures wildly, then stops abruptly. The man in the baseball cap starts to doze off.

DALE

...Anyway, thanks for coming out.
He shuffles off the stage, defeated.

SCENE END

Scene 7: A Chance Encounter

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND THE DUSTY MUG -
NIGHT

Dale, dejected, fumbles with a crumpled napkin, cigarette dangling from his lips. He kicks a discarded beer can down the alley. A beat-up Cadillac pulls up beside him, its headlights illuminating the grimy brick walls. VERONICA 50s, sharp eyes, perpetually unimpressed expression, leans out the window.

VERONICA

You're the potato guy, right?

DALE

Uh... yeah?

Dale squints, momentarily surprised.

VERONICA

The conspiracy theorist with the sock-chewing cat. I saw your act. Or, I tried to. Half the audience was asleep.

DALE

(defensively)

They weren't asleep. They were... meditating. On the profound mysteries of the potato.

VERONICA

Sure. Meditating. Look, I'm Veronica. I scout talent. Mostly failed talent. You're... uniquely terrible.

Veronica smirks, a hint of amusement in her eyes.

DALE

(taken aback)

Uniquely terrible? That's... a new one.

VERONICA

But in a good way. A strangely compelling, train-wreck-you-can't-look-away kind of terrible. Think train wreck meets absurdist theater meets... well, a slightly unhinged Idahoan.

DALE

So, you're saying there's hope?

VERONICA

Hope? No. But there's... potential. For a very specific brand of mayhem. Got a car?

DALE

A beat-up Honda Civic. Needs a new muffler. Sounds like a dying walrus.

VERONICA

Perfect. Get in. We're going to Los Angeles. Veronica gestures towards the Cadillac. Dale hesitates, then grins, a flicker of excitement in his eyes.

SCENE END

Scene 8: First Rejection

INT. SLEAZY HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

A cramped office, overflowing with crumpled papers and half-eaten takeout containers. VERONICA sits behind a desk cluttered with photos of bizarre acts. DALE sits opposite her, nervously adjusting his already-rumpled shirt. He holds a rejection letter, his face a mask of barely contained anger.

VERONICA

So, the big city ate you alive, huh?
Veronica leans back in her chair, a smug look on her face.

DALE

(mutters)

More like regurgitated me and then stamped "inadequate" on my forehead.
Dale throws the rejection letter on the desk. It lands with a pathetic thud.

VERONICA

What'd they say?

DALE

They said my act was "too niche." Too niche! The entire premise is a sentient potato leading a rebellion against the tyranny of sweet potatoes!
Dale slams his fist on the desk, scattering papers. Veronica barely flinches.

VERONICA

And?

DALE

And they said the audience was "unresponsive."
Unresponsive! They were in a state of existential

dread, grappling with the sheer absurdity of it all! It was art, Veronica! Avant-garde performance art!

Dale paces the small office, his frustration bubbling over.

VERONICA

Look, Dale, they're paying for laughs, not existential dread. They want jokes, not philosophical treatises on root vegetables.

DALE

But the potato... it represents so much! The underdog, the oppressed, the...

VERONICA

(interrupting)

The audience throwing tomatoes? Yes, I saw that part.

Veronica sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose.

DALE

They didn't understand the subtext! The deeply layered metaphor of the potato's struggle for... for... starch supremacy!

VERONICA

Maybe we need to work on the "starch supremacy" part.

Veronica gestures towards the door, a hint of resignation in her eyes.

SCENE END

Scene 9: The Reluctant Mentor

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Veronica's apartment is a chaotic mix of vintage furniture and overflowing ashtrays. Empty pizza boxes and discarded scripts litter the floor. Veronica, in a stained bathrobe, sips wine from a chipped mug. Dale sits opposite her, looking apprehensive.

VERONICA

So, the potato rebellion fizzled.

DALE

(defensively)

It was misunderstood! A masterpiece ahead of its time!

Veronica takes a long sip of wine, unimpressed.

VERONICA

Right. Look, I've seen worse. I've seen acts involving interpretive dance with a ferret. That was... traumatic. But yours... it had potential, buried under a mountain of starch.

DALE

So, what do I do?

Dale leans forward, eager for any advice.

VERONICA

I'll mentor you. But don't expect hand-holding. Or compliments. Or even basic human decency.

DALE

You'll... mentor me?

Dale's eyes widen in surprise. A flicker of hope crosses his face.

VERONICA

Think of it as a form of torture. For both of us. I'll teach you the basics timing, delivery, how to avoid accidentally offending the entire audience.

DALE

Offending the audience was intentional! It's part of the experience!

VERONICA

No, it wasn't. It was just bad. And also, stop talking about the potato. We need a new act. One without the existential dread and the thrown vegetables.

Veronica gestures wildly, nearly knocking over a stack of scripts.

DALE

But the potato... it had such depth!

VERONICA

(sighs)

We'll discuss the lack of depth later. Now, let's talk about your material. Or, rather, the lack of it.

Veronica pulls out a crumpled napkin and scribbles something on it, tossing it to Dale. He unfolds it to find a list of topics, mostly involving disastrous personal experiences.

VERONICA

Start here. If you can't make these funny, you're doomed. Now get to work. And for God's sake, ditch the potato.

SCENE END

Scene 10: The Reluctant Pupil

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Veronica's apartment is still a disaster. Dale sits hunched over a chipped coffee table, staring at the crumpled napkin. Veronica paces, a half-empty wine bottle in hand.

DALE

So, "Near-death experience involving a runaway lawnmower"? That's it? That's my big break?

VERONICA

It's a start. Humor comes from the unexpected. From the mundane. From near-death experiences involving runaway lawnmowers.

Veronica takes a swig of wine.

DALE

But it wasn't funny! It was terrifying! I almost lost a foot! And my dignity. Both are equally important to me, believe it or not.

Dale gestures wildly with the napkin.

VERONICA

(deadpan)

That's the point. The juxtaposition of trauma and triviality. See? Already improving.

DALE

Improving? I'm still traumatized! I'm reliving the horror of that damn lawnmower every time I close my eyes! It was a John Deere, you know. A particularly aggressive model.

Dale shivers dramatically.

VERONICA

Details, details. Focus on the comedic potential. The absurdity. The sheer, unadulterated terror of a rogue John Deere. Think about the audience. What's the punchline?

DALE

The punchline? There isn't one! There was no triumphant comeback! It was a near-miss, a brush with mortality!

VERONICA

Then make one up! Comedians make things up all the time. It's what we do. Fake it till you make it, or in your case, fake it till you don't almost lose a foot to a piece of farm equipment. Veronica throws another crumpled napkin at Dale.

VERONICA

Try this. "The time I accidentally joined a nudist colony." See if that inspires you. And try to avoid mentioning the lawnmower for at least five minutes.

DALE

(muttering)

Nudist colony... at least that doesn't involve the existential dread of a homicidal garden tool. Dale picks up the new napkin, a glimmer of reluctant interest in his eyes.

SCENE END

Scene 11: Refining the Act

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Veronica sits on the sofa, nursing her wine. Dale paces, muttering to himself, occasionally gesturing wildly. Empty pizza boxes and crumpled napkins litter the coffee table. A half-eaten bag of chips sits precariously on the edge.

DALE

Okay, so... "The time I accidentally joined a nudist colony..." No, that's too... wholesome. Too many happy hippies.

DALE

Wait, what if I start with the lawnmower. Then segue into the nudist colony... as a bizarre escape from the existential dread of mechanized death? Dale stops pacing and stares intensely at a pizza box.

DALE

Yeah, that's a solid start, but there's no climax. There's no pay off. No resolution. Just a man running from a lawnmower and naked people. The only resolution is a whole lot of therapy bills.

VERONICA

(dryly)

You're missing the comedic timing, darling. The punchline isn't necessarily the end; it's the unexpected twist.

Veronica takes another sip of wine, unimpressed.

DALE

Unexpected twist? Like... I accidentally tripped and landed in a vat of vegan chili?

VERONICA

Closer. Something that subverts expectations.

Something... absurd.

DALE

Okay, okay. "The time I accidentally joined a nudist colony... and won their annual chili cook-off using only ingredients I found on the lawnmower."

Dale beams, convinced he's cracked the code.

VERONICA

(sighs)

That's... something.

DALE

Right? It's got lawnmowers, nudity, and chili!
It's a comedic trifecta! A dark comedic trifecta!
A darkly comedic trifecta in a truly bizarre way!

Dale throws his arms up in the air,
nearly knocking over a lamp.

VERONICA

We'll work on it.

Veronica rubs her temples, clearly
overwhelmed.

SCENE END

Scene 12: A Comedy of Errors

INT. IDAHO TOWN HALL - NIGHT

The stage is poorly lit, the backdrop a faded American flag. A handful of people occupy the sparsely populated hall. Dale, in a slightly-too-tight suit, stands center stage, microphone in hand. He nervously adjusts his tie.

DALE

So, uh... hi. I'm Dale.

A single, polite cough from the audience.

DALE

I... uh... I do comedy.

He attempts a confident smile, but it falters.

DALE

(muttering)

Mostly to myself, but... you guys are here.

A chair leg creaks ominously behind him. Dale whirls around.

DALE

Who's doing... that?

A lone, elderly woman in the front row shrugs innocently. She's surrounded by a mountain of knitted items, one of which has clearly toppled over.

DALE

(forcing a chuckle)

Right. Comedy. Very funny. My... uh... my set is about... lawnmowers.

He begins his routine, but mid-sentence, a rogue spotlight malfunctions, blinding

him. He stumbles, knocking over his water bottle.

DALE

(wincing)

And... uh... existential dread.

The elderly woman coughs again, loudly this time, causing a cascade of knitted items to fall. Dale, covered in yarn, somehow keeps going.

DALE

...and then, the lawnmower... it... it had tiny wheels... like a... a miniature, terrifying doom-bringer.

Despite the chaos, he finds his rhythm, his comedic timing impeccable amidst the disaster.

DALE

So, the moral of the story is Never trust a lawnmower with tiny wheels. Or... old ladies with mountains of yarn. They're both surprisingly dangerous.

The audience unexpectedly erupts into laughter. Dale, soaked in water and yarn, manages a triumphant grin.

FADE OUT

Scene 13: Breakthrough Moment

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale sits hunched over his laptop, surrounded by empty pizza boxes and crumpled napkins. He's staring at the screen with a mixture of disbelief and growing horror. The room is a mess, reflecting the chaotic energy of the night before.

DALE

No... no, no, no, no...

He frantically refreshes the page. The numbers keep climbing.

DALE

This can't be real. This... this is a glitch, right?

He clicks on a comment section, scrolling through hundreds of messages, a mix of praise, mockery, and stunned disbelief. He spots a comment "Tiny wheels of doom! I'm dead!"

DALE

(muttering to himself)

Tiny wheels of doom...

A slow grin spreads across his face. He rereads the comments, his expression changing from disbelief to a smug satisfaction.

DALE

Holy crap... I'm viral.

He leans back in his chair, letting out a whoop of pure, unadulterated joy. The pizza boxes tremble.

DALE

Turns out, being soaked in water and yarn is surprisingly good for my career.

He checks his phone. More notifications flood the screen. The numbers continue to increase exponentially.

DALE

Maybe those tiny wheels weren't so terrifying after all.

Maybe... maybe this is my big break.

He grabs his phone and starts dialing. A manic glint appears in his eyes. He's already planning his next disastrously hilarious performance.

FADE OUT

Scene 14: The Manager Arrives

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's tiny apartment is a chaotic mess of yarn, half-eaten takeout containers, and discarded scripts. He paces excitedly, phone pressed to his ear. Suddenly, the door bursts open, revealing BARRY, a man in a too-tight suit, slicked-back hair, and a smile that seems permanently glued to his face. He's radiating a barely-contained energy that suggests an excess of caffeine and questionable business practices.

BARRY

Dale! My man! You wouldn't BELIEVE the numbers! Barry strides into the apartment, seemingly oblivious to the disarray. He gestures wildly, nearly knocking over a precarious stack of books.

DALE

Barry? What are you doing here?

BARRY

I saw your... uh... *unique* performance online. Viral, my friend! Absolutely viral! Millions of views!

Dale stares, dumbfounded, at Barry's unbridled enthusiasm.

DALE

(confused)
Millions? You're sure?

BARRY

Millions! And I'm here to make you a star!

Barry pulls a crumpled contract from his overly-large briefcase. He thrusts it at Dale.

BARRY

Sign here, baby! We're talking stadiums, Dale! Stadiums! Think of the merchandising! The Dale-themed yarn!

DALE

(skeptical)

Dale-themed yarn? Is that even a thing?

BARRY

It will be! Think of the possibilities, Dale! We'll build an empire on your... uh... *unique* brand of comedy. The world needs you, Dale. The world NEEDS your yarn-soaked, tiny-wheel-based humor.

Barry beams, his smile even more intense. Dale stares at the contract, a mixture of disbelief and dawning horror on his face. He looks around his messy apartment. Then he looks back at Barry, a slow, thoughtful smile spreading across his face.

DALE

Okay, Barry. Let's do this.

FADE OUT

Scene 15: Initial Success

INT. DUSTY ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

A dimly lit, smoky roadhouse. The air smells faintly of stale beer and desperation. A small, but surprisingly enthusiastic crowd watches DALE, a man in his late thirties with a perpetually unimpressed expression, on a makeshift stage. He's wearing a slightly too-tight denim shirt and jeans.

DALE

So, I'm at the DMV, right? And this lady, this...
monument to bad hair and even worse judgment,
asks me if I want to donate to the organ donor
program.

Dale pauses for effect, his eyes scanning the audience with a mixture of disdain and amusement.

DALE

I said, "Lady, the only organ I'm donating is my
spleen, and only if you promise to take it and
use it as a doorstep."

A few scattered laughs ripple through the crowd. Dale smirks, barely perceptible.

DALE

Then she started crying. I mean, really,
wailing. Like a wounded walrus. I swear, I
could hear the seals laughing from the parking
lot.

The laughter is louder this time, more confident. Dale leans into the microphone.

DALE

The best part? She was crying over a parking
ticket. A PARKING TICKET!

The crowd erupts in laughter. Dale takes a bow, but his expression remains unchanged. He's not particularly pleased, but he's acknowledging the audience's reaction.

DALE

Thanks, folks. You're alright. For a bunch of... well, you know.

He gestures vaguely at the audience with a sardonic smile.

DALE

Next week, I'll be telling more stories about the profoundly disappointing people I encounter on a daily basis. And if you aren't there, well, frankly, that's your loss.

He steps off the stage and walks off, not looking back. A few people clap enthusiastically, others murmur to their friends. A lone, half-empty bottle of beer rolls across the stage.

FADE OUT

Scene 16: First Taste of Fame

INT. DIVE BAR BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Dale, mid-thirties, unshaven, wearing a slightly-too-tight t-shirt that reads "I <3 Idaho," stands amidst a chaotic backstage area. Empty beer bottles litter the floor. A lone roadie frantically wipes down a sticky countertop.

DALE

So, that was... something.

He takes a swig from a lukewarm beer, grimacing.

DALE

They actually laughed. At my jokes. Can you believe it?

He stares at his reflection in a dusty mirror, a flicker of something resembling vulnerability crossing his face, quickly replaced by a smirk.

DALE

Although, "laughed" might be a strong word. More like a series of confused grunts and stifled coughs.

The roadie, a young man with perpetually tired eyes, glances at Dale nervously.

ROADIE

(timidly)

They... they seemed to enjoy it, sir.

DALE

Enjoyment is subjective, my friend. Subjective. Like the quality of this beer. Which is, to put it mildly, piss-poor.

Dale throws the beer bottle into a nearby trash can, missing spectacularly. It bounces off the wall and lands with a dull thud.

DALE

Still, it's a start, right? A tiny, pathetic, slightly damp start. But a start nonetheless. A woman approaches, holding a crumpled napkin. She's attractive, but looks exhausted. She avoids eye contact.

WOMAN

Someone named Brenda wants you to call her. Says it's about a gig in Boise.

DALE

(eyes widening)

Boise? Brenda? Are you serious? Is this... is this actually happening?

He grabs the napkin, smoothing it out with reverence. He beams, then immediately scowls.

DALE

Right, gotta call Brenda. Fame awaits... or at least, a slightly less dive-y bar in Boise. He pulls out his phone, a cheap flip phone, and dials, a small, almost imperceptible smile playing on his lips.

FADE OUT

Scene 17: The Price of Fame

INT. BOISE COMEDY CLUB - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Dale, now sporting a slightly less-stained "I <3 Idaho" shirt, sits alone in a cramped green room. Empty pizza boxes and half-eaten bags of chips litter the small space. He stares intensely at a half-eaten pickle spear.

DALE

Pickles. The culinary cornerstone of comedic genius.

He meticulously examines the pickle, turning it slowly in his fingers.

DALE

Or maybe that's just my excuse for eating this many. Damn, my breath smells like a brine factory exploded.

A nervous-looking young comedian, CHLOE, enters. She's clutching a half-finished glass of water.

CHLOE

Hi... uh... Dale? Big fan.

DALE

(without looking up)

Is that so? Which one of my patented observational routines struck you as particularly profound?

CHLOE

The one about the squirrels..

DALE

Ah, yes. My magnum opus. The one that cemented my place as a comedic titan. Although, "squirrel" is perhaps a bit harsh. More like... highly aggressive, territorial rodents.

Chloe shrinks back, looking increasingly uncomfortable. Dale finally looks up, pickle forgotten.

DALE

Look, kid, I'm not saying you're not funny, but the air conditioning in this room seems to be on the fritz. And the stench of mediocrity is overwhelming.

He gestures vaguely towards Chloe with the pickle spear.

CHLOE

(stammering)

Right. Well, uh... good luck with your set.

Chloe quickly exits, leaving Dale alone once again, staring at the pickle spear.

DALE

Mediocrity. Such a strong word. It almost tastes like pickle brine.

He takes a large bite of the pickle.

DALE

Actually, now that I think about it, the squirrels were more like... sociopathic, kleptomaniac ninjas.

SCENE START

Scene 18: The Crossroads

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - IDAHO - NIGHT

A lone figure, DALE, stands at a crossroads. A battered signpost points in two directions one marked "BITTER JEST," the other, "GENTLE HUMOR." A lone tumbleweed rolls past, mocking his indecision.

DALE

Gentle humor? Sounds... weak. Like a kitten trying to wrestle a badger. And yet...

He kicks a loose rock down the road.

DALE

The badger's probably got a pretty good insurance plan. Maybe gentle humor means less existential dread?

He stares intensely at the signpost, then at his reflection in the cracked windshield of his beat-up car.

DALE

Years of honing my arsenal of insults. My perfectly crafted, lacerating wit... Years of perfecting the art of the perfectly timed, gut-wrenching burn. To throw it all away for... niceness?

A coyote howls in the distance, a sound that Dale interprets as uproarious laughter.

DALE

That damned coyote is laughing at me! The nerve! He pulls out a half-eaten bag of chips, crunching loudly. He throws the bag on the ground. The bag immediately rips and the chips scatter on the ground.

DALE

Fine. Gentle humor it is. But if I don't sell out Madison Square Garden within the year, I'm blaming the damned coyote.

He takes a deep breath and walks towards the "GENTLE HUMOR" sign. A single, almost imperceptible smile plays on his lips.

DALE

Although... maybe I'll work in a few well-placed barbs about territorial rodents.

He winks at the camera.

FADE OUT

Scene 1: National Recognition

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Empty pizza boxes and crumpled scripts litter the floor of Dale's surprisingly spacious apartment. A half-empty bottle of whiskey sits on a coffee table next to a stack of fan mail - mostly hate mail, judging by the scrawled obscenities.

DALE

Another sold-out arena. Another screaming mob demanding an encore. Another existential crisis fueled by lukewarm takeout.

Dale downs the rest of his whiskey. He stares at a framed photo of his family; it's slightly askew.

DALE

Funny how it all worked out, huh? National recognition. International acclaim. And I'm more alone than a mime at a deaf convention.

His phone rings; he ignores it. A text message notification buzzes. He snatches the phone.

DALE

Oh, look. Another death threat. At least they're creative with their insults this time. "May your next joke be your last" is pretty good, even if it's a cliché. Points for effort.

He throws the phone onto the pile of mail. He sighs, running a hand through his greasy hair.

DALE

Remember that time I wanted to be famous? Man, I really nailed that one. I'm practically a household name; a household name synonymous with "insufferable prick," apparently.

He picks up a discarded script, flipping through it listlessly.

DALE

Maybe I should've worked on my material a bit more. Or maybe... just maybe... I'm not meant for this. Maybe I should stick to small-town gigs. Or, you know, just give up comedy and become a... taxidermist? At least the animals wouldn't judge me for my terrible puns.

He stares blankly at the ceiling, the silence broken only by the distant wail of a siren.

DALE

Nah, taxidermy's too much work.

FADE OUT.

Scene 2: The Hype Train

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

A chaotic scene unfolds. Dale, wearing a slightly too-tight suit, sits amidst a whirlwind of flashing cameras and shouting reporters. Empty takeout containers and crumpled papers litter the room. He sips lukewarm coffee from a chipped mug.

DALE

So, the secret to my success? It's simple, really. I'm just... incredibly, unbelievably... charming.

He winks, a gesture that somehow manages to be both self-assured and pathetic.

REPORTER 1

But Mr. Henderson, your act is... unconventional. Some might even say offensive.

DALE

Offensive? Darling, I'm a comedian, not a therapist. If you're offended, you're clearly not paying attention to the jokes.

He smirks, taking another sip of coffee.

REPORTER 2

Your fans are absolutely wild. We've seen the videos.

DALE

Oh, they're lovely. A little... enthusiastic, perhaps. But I wouldn't trade them for the world. Well, maybe for a lifetime supply of artisanal coffee and a personal masseuse. And maybe a small island... somewhere sunny.

He sighs dramatically.

REPORTER 3

What's next for you, Dale? Another world tour?

DALE

(with a theatrical pause)

Let's just say... the world isn't big enough for my comedic genius. I'm thinking... intergalactic tour? I'll need a bigger spaceship though.

A phone rings loudly, cutting through the chaos. He ignores it, continuing to bask in the attention.

DALE

Yes, the hype is real. I've always said, there's nothing funnier than people who think they are funny.

He gestures vaguely towards the reporters, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

DALE

And believe me, they are.

He laughs, a sound that's simultaneously arrogant and slightly manic.

CUT TO

Scene 3: The Fall From Grace

INT. DALE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dale, in a silk robe, sips champagne. Empty pizza boxes and scattered clothing litter the room. A television blares news coverage.

DALE

Another award-winning performance. He takes another swig of champagne, eyes glued to the screen. The news anchor is reporting on the fallout from his latest stand-up routine.

NEWS ANCHOR V.O.

...and Mr. Dubois' comments about... well, let's just say they were insensitive, to put it mildly. Social media is ablaze with outrage. Dale chuckles, swirling the champagne in his glass.

DALE

Outrage? My favorite flavor. It's the spice of life, baby! He throws his head back and laughs. The sound is sharp and brittle.

DALE

They just don't get my genius. It's too edgy, too... raw. Too real. His phone buzzes incessantly; he ignores it.

DALE

Besides, all publicity is good publicity, right? He glances at the TV again; the news anchor is showing a montage of angry tweets and comments. A particularly scathing one flashes across the screen.

DALE

reading aloud

"Dale Dubois is a talentless hack whose humor is less funny and more offensive." Ouch. That one stung... a little.

He smiles, a thin, almost cruel smile.

DALE

Okay, maybe a lot.

He throws the empty champagne glass at the television, shattering the screen. He stares at the explosion of glass, a sudden quiet falling over the room. His expression is no longer amused, it's stunned.

DALE

Well, crap. Looks like I'll have to find a new way to self-destruct... and I really did need to watch that show about ferret racing.

FADE OUT.

Scene 4: Damage Control

INT. DALE'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The room is a disaster. Shattered glass from the TV is everywhere. Dale, wearing a bathrobe and looking slightly worse for wear, is attempting to clean up the mess with a dustpan and brush, clearly not used to such tasks.

DALE

Right, right. Damage control. Like a surgeon, but with less... sterility.

He sweeps a pile of glass into the dustpan with a theatrical flourish, then nearly drops it, cursing under his breath.

DALE

Damn it, these shards are like tiny, malicious ninjas. Always getting in the way of my... artistic expression.

His phone rings again; this time, he answers it, holding the receiver away from his ear.

DALE

Yeah, yeah, it's me. The comedic genius. The one who just accidentally launched a glass projectile at a perfectly good television.

He winces as he hears the voice on the other end, then holds the phone at arms length again.

DALE

Look, I know, I know. I'm sorry... Okay, maybe not sorry, but... mildly inconvenienced? My ferret racing is ruined.

He sighs dramatically, tossing the dustpan carelessly onto a pile of dirty

laundry. The phone's volume is increased to maximum.

DALE

Yes, the internet is full of my glorious, inflammatory remarks. I'm a trendsetter, darling. A trendsetter for apologies.

He rubs his temples, clearly stressed.

DALE

Okay, okay, I'll release a statement. A carefully crafted masterpiece of insincere regret. But please, can you send over some more champagne? And pizza. My nerves need soothing... and fuel.

He hangs up, then stares at the mess. A slow smile spreads across his face.

DALE

Well, at least this is good material for my next act. "The accidental television demolition derby." It'll be a smash.

He chuckles, then starts to hum, picking up the dustpan again with a renewed, albeit slightly manic, energy.

FADE OUT.

Scene 5: Facing Criticism

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale sits hunched over a laptop, surrounded by empty pizza boxes and champagne bottles. Dark circles under his eyes hint at a sleepless night. The laptop screen displays a barrage of negative news articles and social media comments.

DALE

Oh, the humanity. Or rather, the lack thereof. They're calling me a menace to society.

He scrolls through the comments, a pained expression twisting his face. He picks up a bottle of champagne, takes a long swig, and then slams it down.

DALE

"Unfunny," they say. "Talentless hack." Well, excuuuuuse me for not catering to their painfully average sense of humor.

He laughs, a bitter, hollow sound. He grabs a half-eaten slice of pizza and shoves it in his mouth.

DALE

I'd say I'm misunderstood, but that implies a level of depth I simply don't possess. I'm just... gloriously, unapologetically myself.

He types furiously on his laptop, composing a response. His typing is erratic, punctuated by frustrated sighs and mumbled curses.

DALE

"My actions... were... regrettable? No, not regrettable. A bold artistic statement! A

performance piece! An... interpretive dance with glass projectiles."

He pauses, then deletes the entire message.

DALE

Nope, too much. Too much explanation. They wouldn't understand. They lack the... intellectual capacity.

He closes the laptop with a snap, burying his face in his hands.

DALE

Maybe I should just retire. Become a hermit. Live in a cave and train ferrets to perform Shakespeare. That would be... far less controversial.

He looks up, a mischievous glint in his eye.

DALE

Unless... I could somehow incorporate the ferret Shakespeare into a new act. "Hamlet The Ferret Edition." Boom! Instant sell-out.

He starts to chuckle, the dark humor slowly creeping back into his demeanor.

DALE

(grinning)

Now that's what I call damage control.

FADE OUT.

Scene 6: Alienation

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams weakly through dusty blinds, illuminating the mess from the previous night. Empty pizza boxes are piled high like fallen dominos. Dale sits on the sofa, staring blankly at the TV, which displays static. He's wearing the same clothes from last night. A single, wilted rose sits forlornly on the coffee table.

DALE

So, this is it, huh?

He picks up the rose, examining it with a detached air.

DALE

Peak Dale. Alone, surrounded by the detritus of my own spectacularly self-destructive choices.

He tosses the rose into a nearby overflowing trash can.

DALE

My agent hasn't called. My mother hasn't called. Nobody's called, except that guy from the ferret training academy. Turns out, Shakespearean ferrets are surprisingly difficult to manage.

He sighs, a long, mournful sound. He grabs a remote and flips through channels, pausing briefly at a cooking show.

DALE

At least somebody's finding success. Even a perfectly julienned zucchini seems to have more friends than me.

He switches the TV off with a frustrated grunt, then picks up his phone,

hesitates, and puts it back down.

DALE

Who am I going to call? Brenda from accounting?
She'll just tell me to stick to spreadsheets.

He stares at the ceiling, then his gaze falls on a framed photo of him accepting an award. He lets out a hollow laugh.

DALE

"Comedian of the Year." More like "Comedian of the Year... until his career imploded like a badly-made soufflé."

He picks up a half-eaten pizza slice from the coffee table and takes a bite, chewing thoughtfully.

DALE

Maybe I'll start a podcast. "Alone in Idaho with Dale." It'll be...existentially bleak. Catchy, right?

He smirks, a flicker of his usual dark humor returning.

DALE

(to himself)

Yeah, I could definitely work with that.

FADE OUT.

Scene 7: Lost in the Spotlight

INT. LAS VEGAS CASINO - NIGHT

A dazzling, chaotic scene. The casino floor is a kaleidoscope of flashing lights, slot machine sounds, and the murmur of a thousand conversations. Dale, in a ridiculously oversized tuxedo, stands alone near a roulette wheel, looking utterly lost and out of place. He holds a half-empty glass of something suspiciously orange.

DALE

This is it. The pinnacle of my career. Or maybe the nadir. It's hard to tell when you're surrounded by this much... polyester.

He takes a large gulp of his drink. A nearby cocktail waitress eyes him with a mixture of pity and amusement.

DALE

You know, for a comedian, I'm remarkably bad at reading a room. Or maybe this room is just exceptionally bad at reading me.

He gestures vaguely at the bustling casino floor.

DALE

I sold out this place. Apparently, people find existential dread hilarious. Who knew?

He chuckles dryly, then stares into his drink.

DALE

The irony isn't lost on me. I'm a comedian in a casino, surrounded by people gambling their lives away, and I'm the one feeling like I've already lost.

A group of boisterous gamblers stumble past, nearly knocking him over. Dale barely flinches.

DALE

At least my jokes are better than their life choices. Though, maybe not by much.
He sighs, a dramatic, almost theatrical sigh.

DALE

Fame. Fortune. A crippling sense of isolation.
It's a trifecta. A comedic trifecta.
He raises his glass in a mock toast to no one in particular.

DALE

To oblivion! May it be swift and surprisingly lucrative.
He finishes his drink, then stares blankly at the roulette wheel as the ball spins.

DALE

Red or black? I think I've lost interest in the outcome.
He throws a crumpled napkin onto the table and wanders off, lost in the crowd, his oversized tuxedo swallowed by the casino's gaudy opulence.

FADE OUT.

Scene 8: Second Guessing

INT. LAS VEGAS HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dale sits on a plush, yet somehow uncomfortable, hotel room bed. Empty takeout containers and crumpled napkins litter the room. He stares blankly at the ceiling, the faint glow of the Las Vegas strip visible through the window.

DALE

So, this is it. The big time.
He sighs, a sound like air leaking from a punctured tire.

DALE

Sold-out show. Thousands of people laughing at my jokes. Millions of dollars in the bank.
He picks up a remote control and flips through channels, pausing briefly on a news report featuring himself - a blurry, oddly flattering image.

DALE

And yet...
He throws the remote down. It bounces harmlessly on the pile of trash.

DALE

I feel like I traded my soul for a lifetime supply of lukewarm room service.
He runs a hand through his hair, leaving it even more disheveled than before.

DALE

Remember that gig in Boise? The one where the microphone kept cutting out? The audience was five people, three of whom were my mom.
He chuckles, a slightly bitter sound.

DALE

Those were simpler times. Simpler, and significantly less lucrative.

He stares at a half-eaten plate of something that vaguely resembles a burger.

DALE

This burger is probably more fulfilling than anything I've felt in the last year.

He picks up the burger and takes a large, unenthusiastic bite.

DALE

Maybe fame isn't all it's cracked up to be. Maybe it's just... cracked. Like this burger.

He throws the burger into the ever-growing pile of refuse.

DALE

(to himself)

Or maybe I'm just a massive idiot.

He slumps back onto the bed, staring at the ceiling again, the bright lights of Vegas a mocking reminder of his predicament.

DALE

Nah. Definitely the fame thing.

FADE OUT.

Scene 9: Reconciliation Attempt

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A bustling coffee shop. Dale sits nervously opposite DEBORAH, his ex-girlfriend. He fidgets with a sugar packet, his usual cocky swagger replaced by a hesitant shuffle. Deborah sips her latte, her expression carefully neutral.

DALE

(nervously)
So... uh... hey.

He offers a weak smile, more resembling a grimace.

DEBORAH

Hi, Dale.

She takes another sip of her latte, her eyes betraying a hint of amusement.

DALE

Look, I know things... weren't great. Actually, 'weren't great' is a gross understatement. They were a spectacular train wreck. A comedic train wreck, admittedly, but a train wreck nonetheless. He laughs, a slightly forced, self-deprecating chuckle.

DEBORAH

You're still using humor as a shield, are you?

DALE

It's a bad habit. Like biting my nails. Or eating entire jars of pickles in one sitting. Deborah raises an eyebrow.

DEBORAH

Right. Pickles.

DALE

I'm... I'm trying to change. I've been thinking a lot. About us, about... everything.
He looks down at his hands, avoiding her gaze.

DEBORAH

And what have you concluded, Dale?

DALE

That I was a colossal jerk. A self-absorbed, joke-telling, pickle-devouring... well, you know.
He looks up, a flicker of his usual humor in his eyes.

DALE

But I miss you. And I'm sorry. For everything.
He waits, his face a mixture of hope and apprehension.

DEBORAH

This is... unexpected.
She takes another sip of her latte. A small, almost imperceptible smile plays on her lips.

DEBORAH

Maybe... maybe we can talk more later?
A glimmer of hope lights up Dale's face.
The sugar packet crumples in his hand.

SCENE END

Scene 10: A Heartfelt Apology

INT. DEBORAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Deborah's apartment is cozy and well-lit. Candles flicker softly. Dale sits on the edge of a plush armchair, looking uncomfortable. Deborah sits opposite him on a small sofa, a mug of tea warming her hands.

DALE

(seriously)

So, about that colossal jerk thing... I wasn't kidding.

He runs a hand through his hair, a gesture betraying his nervousness.

DEBORAH

I figured.

DALE

I know a simple "I'm sorry" doesn't cut it. It's like trying to stop a runaway train with a sugar packet. Ineffective. And potentially sticky.

He offers a small, rueful smile.

DEBORAH

You've always been good with metaphors, even when they involve runaway trains and sticky sugar packets.

DALE

Yeah, well, metaphors are my forte. Self-awareness, not so much. Until recently. It's a work in progress. Like sculpting a masterpiece out of a particularly stubborn block of cheddar cheese.

He pauses, taking a deep breath.

DALE

I hurt you. And I didn't realize it at the time. I was too busy being... Dale. Self-centered,

oblivious Dale. The comedic genius with the emotional range of a teaspoon.
He looks at her, his eyes sincere.

DALE

But I'm trying. I really am. Therapy helps. And less pickle consumption.
Deborah smiles, a genuine smile this time.

DEBORAH

I appreciate the effort, Dale.

DALE

Effort? This is more like a full-blown existential crisis disguised as a heartfelt apology. And possibly involving a mild obsession with dairy products.
He chuckles, a genuine, relaxed chuckle this time.

DEBORAH

Well, the dairy product part is new and intriguing.

DALE

(smiling)
So, about that second date...
He leans forward expectantly.

FADE OUT

Scene 11: The Comeback Tour

INT. SMALL TOWN THEATER - NIGHT

A sparsely populated theater. A single spotlight illuminates a microphone stand center stage. Dale, wearing a slightly too-tight tuxedo, nervously adjusts his bow tie. He looks thinner, somehow.

DALE

(to himself)

This is it. The comeback. Or the complete and utter implosion. Either way, there's going to be a lot of awkward silence.

He takes a deep breath, then another, hyperventilating slightly.

DALE

(muttering)

Think happy thoughts. Think... cheese.

He pats his pockets, checking for a stray cheddar crumb.

DALE

Good evening, Boise! Or... uh... whoever's here. I see three people. That's more than my last gig, so, points for progress, I guess.

A few scattered chuckles from the audience.

DALE

Now, I know what you're thinking. "Dale's back? The guy who insulted half the population of Idaho in a single poorly-timed tweet? The same Dale who once tried to make a 'joke' about the local potato festival?"

He pauses for dramatic effect, then winces.

DALE

Yeah, that was a low point. For everyone involved, including the potatoes. They felt

personally attacked.
He shrugs, a self-deprecating smile
playing on his lips.

DALE

Look, I messed up. Okay? Big time. I was... a
colossal jerk. An insensitive, tone-deaf,
emotionally stunted... well, you get the picture.
He looks at the audience, his expression
earnest.

DALE

But I'm trying. I'm actually trying to be a
better person. And a funnier one. Although,
honestly, the 'better person' part is a work in
progress. Still working on the whole empathy
thing.
A woman in the audience coughs, then
whispers something to her companion.

DALE

Did someone say... cheese?
He grins, the nervous energy replaced by
a familiar spark of comedic confidence.

DALE

Well, that's all the time we have tonight. Thank
you... uh... three people! You've been a wonderfully
forgiving audience. I'll try to be better next
time.

FADE OUT

Scene 12: Redemption Arc

INT. SMALL TOWN THEATER - NIGHT LATER

The small audience, initially sparse, has grown slightly. Dale, energized by a surprisingly receptive crowd, leans into the microphone. He's loosened his tie considerably.

DALE

So, I was talking about being a better person... which, let's be honest, is about as likely as finding a decent cup of coffee in this town. He pauses, grinning mischievously.

DALE

But the good news is, even I'm surprised at how much better my jokes are now that I've stopped insulting everything within a 100-mile radius. Turns out, it's harder to be funny when you're also making everyone hate you. Who knew? A few people laugh, genuinely this time.

DALE

I mean, I still have my moments. Like that time I accidentally wore my wife's underwear to a family gathering. Turns out, leopard print isn't exactly my colour. He winces, then shrugs, a sheepish grin on his face.

DALE

And then there was the incident with the llama. Let's just say, it involved a trampoline and a questionable amount of tequila. The audience erupts in laughter.

DALE

But the point is, even colossal jerks can learn. I hope. And honestly, if you guys haven't completely soured on me yet, I'm considering this a minor miracle. A starchy, slightly lumpy miracle, served with a side of regret.

He pauses for effect, then takes a bow, a genuine smile spreading across his face.

DALE

(warmly)

Thank you. Seriously, thank you. This means more than you know.

A smattering of applause, followed by a few hesitant cheers.

DALE

And if anyone has any more stories about my past idiocy, please, share. I'm practically begging for material at this point.

The audience laughs, a warmer, more accepting laughter than before. He's truly connecting with them.

DALE

Now, who wants to hear about the time I tried to wrestle a badger...?

FADE OUT

Scene 13: Public Confession

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

A small crowd has gathered. Dale stands on a makeshift stage, a single spotlight illuminating him. He looks... surprisingly sincere. He's wearing the same slightly-too-tight suit from the previous night, but the tie is now completely loosened, hanging precariously.

DALE

Look, I know what you're all thinking. "That guy? He's the guy who set the town square on fire with a potato cannon."

He chuckles, a self-deprecating chuckle.

DALE

And you're right. I did.

He pauses, looking down at his shoes, then back at the crowd.

DALE

I've done a lot of things I regret. Things I'd pay good money to erase from the annals of Idaho history. Things that involve llamas, questionable amounts of tequila, and a truly unfortunate incident with a taxidermied badger.

He gestures vaguely, a wry smile playing on his lips.

DALE

I've been a jerk. A monumental, colossal, earth-shattering jerk. The kind of jerk that makes other jerks feel inadequate. I'm currently working on a memoir, tentatively titled "How to Be a Complete and Utter Asshole A Step-by-Step Guide." But honestly, it's more of a cautionary tale.

A few people in the audience laugh nervously.

DALE

But... I'm trying to change. I really am. I'm attending anger management, which mostly involves me trying to not interrupt the instructor with witty but ultimately irrelevant comments about his choice of sweater.

He shakes his head, a grin spreading across his face.

DALE

This whole "being a better person" thing is hard work. It's like trying to assemble IKEA furniture while simultaneously juggling chainsaws. But, I'm getting there. Slowly.

He pauses for a moment, taking a deep breath.

DALE

(sincerely)

Thank you for giving me a second chance. Really. A wave of genuine applause washes over him. He beams.

DALE

Now, about that badger...

FADE OUT

Scene 14: The Power of Vulnerability

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is a chaotic mess of half-eaten takeout containers, crumpled scripts, and oddly specific taxidermy supplies. He sits on a wobbly stool, addressing a webcam perched precariously on a stack of books. He's wearing a bathrobe and has a single, slightly singed eyebrow.

DALE

Hey internet... people? Or, uh, person. Probably just one person. Hey, lonely person.

He adjusts the webcam, accidentally knocking over a small ceramic badger.

DALE

Right, so. Vulnerability. Turns out it's a thing. Who knew?

He shrugs dramatically, the bathrobe swaying slightly.

DALE

Apparently, it's the key to unlocking some sort of... emotional... thing. Like a really complicated lockbox filled with feelings. Mostly bad ones, I suspect.

He sighs, picking up the badger and examining it.

DALE

I've spent my entire life building walls. Brick by brick, joke by joke, incredibly poorly aimed potato cannon shot by poorly aimed potato cannon shot. It's been a really impressive fortress, honestly. Impenetrable. Except for the part where I accidentally set the town square on fire. That was a bit of a crack in the foundation, metaphorically speaking.

He stares intensely at the badger for a moment, then abruptly throws it back on the pile of clutter.

DALE

The point is, I'm not good at this whole "being human" thing. Being vulnerable feels like walking across a tightrope made of rusty razor blades while simultaneously juggling chainsaws. Pause Yes, I'm still working on the chainsaw thing. But I figure, if a guy who set a town square on fire can show a little... uh... gumption, then anyone can.

He leans closer to the camera, a rare, almost hesitant sincerity in his eyes.

DALE

So yeah. It's okay to mess up. It's okay to be a bit of a... a total disaster. Because even disasters, occasionally, can be kind of funny. And, well... that's all I really got. Until next time... where I'll probably talk about taxidermy. Or chainsaws.

He waves awkwardly, then cuts the video feed abruptly.

FADE OUT

Scene 15: The Mentor's Return

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams into Dale's still-messy apartment, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. Dale is sprawled on the floor amongst the wreckage, attempting to assemble a particularly complicated-looking badger from a pile of its disassembled parts.

DALE

No, no, no! The left whisker goes... here? Or... there?

He sighs dramatically, throwing a tiny badger paw across the room. The door creaks open.

STANLEY

Looks like someone's having a bit of a... taxidermic meltdown.

Stanley, Dale's former mentor, a wizened man with kind eyes and a mischievous grin, leans against the doorframe, holding a large, slightly battered suitcase.

DALE

Stunned

Stanley? What... what are you doing here?

STANLEY

Came to see my favorite arsonist. How's the badger population holding up?

DALE

It's... complicated. Mostly dead.

STANLEY

Figuratively or literally?

DALE

Both.

Stanley chuckles, setting down the suitcase. He opens it to reveal a collection of meticulously crafted puppets and a small, hand-written note.

STANLEY

I brought you some... inspiration. And a few reminders of what's actually funny.

DALE

Puppets? Seriously?

STANLEY

(smiling)

Remember that time we built that puppet show about the taxidermied squirrel who ran for mayor? Pure genius, that was.

DALE

That squirrel was a sociopath.

STANLEY

Exactly. And that's the key, Dale. Find the sociopath in the joke.

He pats Dale on the shoulder, a genuine warmth in his eyes.

STANLEY

Look, kid, I know you've been... struggling. But you've got something special. Don't let the badgers get you down.

CONTINUED

Scene 16: Inner Demons

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is dark, lit only by the flickering glow of a single lamp. Empty beer bottles litter the floor. Dale sits hunched over, staring at a half-finished sketch of a particularly grotesque badger. He picks at a loose thread on his worn-out sweater.

DALE

So, this is it, huh? Peak Dale.
He lets out a self-deprecating chuckle.

DALE

Badger-obsessed, joke-deficient, and socially inept.
He throws the sketch onto the pile of others, each more disturbing than the last. He runs a hand through his messy hair.

DALE

Maybe Stanley's right. Maybe I need to find the sociopath in the joke.
He pauses, a flicker of something resembling hope in his eyes.

DALE

(whispering)
But which one?
He gestures wildly, encompassing the entire messy room.

DALE

The badger? Me? Or the existential dread that fuels my entire comedic persona?
He laughs, a harsh, unsettling sound.

DALE

That last one's got legs.
He grabs a bottle of whiskey, staring at it contemplatively. He takes a long swig.

DALE

Okay, existential dread, let's talk business.
He pours himself another generous amount.

DALE

What's the punchline?
He dramatically swirls the whiskey in the glass, looking at its amber depths with intense focus.

DALE

Because, honestly, this whole "tragic comedian" thing is getting old.
He slams the glass down, a determined glint in his eye.

DALE

Time for a new act.
He begins to sketch furiously in a new notebook, a strange smile spreading across his face.

FADE OUT.

Scene 17: New Perspective

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Sunlight streams into a bustling coffee shop. Dale sits at a small table, nursing a lukewarm latte. He's sketching in a notebook, but his focus seems elsewhere. He occasionally glances around the room, observing the other patrons with an almost anthropological curiosity. A young couple laughs over a shared pastry; an elderly woman reads a book; a student frantically types on a laptop.

DALE

So, the badger was a metaphor.
He takes a sip of his latte, making a face.

DALE

For the existential dread, obviously. But the joke...the joke was me.
He chuckles, a softer sound than before, less manic.

DALE

All that angst, the self-loathing, the whiskey-fueled nights...it was all fuel.
He flips a page in his notebook, revealing a new sketch – a surprisingly sweet drawing of a family enjoying a picnic.

DALE

Turns out, the tragedy wasn't the lack of laughter. It was the lack of...perspective.
He gestures vaguely around the coffee shop.

DALE

This place. These people. They're not all waiting for my next punchline.

He smiles, a genuine, almost shy smile.

DALE

They're just...living. And it's kind of beautiful.

He closes his notebook, a newfound calmness in his demeanor.

DALE

Maybe fame isn't the answer. Maybe it's just...being a slightly less awful person.

He looks at his latte with renewed interest.

DALE

Although, this latte is still pretty terrible. He sighs good-naturedly, then grabs his notebook and heads towards the door, a spring in his step.

DALE

Maybe I can write a joke about that.

He exits, leaving behind the half-finished latte.

SCENE END

Scene 18: The Turning Point

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is a mess, but a slightly *organized* mess. Empty pizza boxes and crumpled scripts litter the floor, but they're arranged in neat piles. Dale sits at his desk, illuminated by the glow of his laptop. He types furiously, occasionally pausing to chuckle darkly.

DALE

Okay, so the badger is still in, but instead of existential dread, it's about the plight of the honeybee.

He types some more, then stops, frowning.

DALE

No, too preachy. People don't want to be lectured by a comedian who once joked about taxidermied squirrels.

He sighs, rubbing his temples. He looks at a framed photo on his desk - a picture of him performing, a huge smile on his face. He's holding a microphone; a sea of cheering faces blur in the background.

DALE

This is... different.

He glances at his laptop again. The screen displays a draft of a new stand-up routine; the title "Saving the Bees, One Joke at a Time."

DALE

Yeah, this is way different from my usual material. More... wholesome?

He laughs, a dry, self-deprecating sound.

DALE

Wholesome Dale. Sounds terrifying. He pauses, then a thoughtful expression crosses his face. He starts typing again, but this time with a renewed sense of purpose.

DALE

But... maybe terrifying is good. Maybe terrifying is...necessary. He types rapidly, a determined glint in his eye. He's found a new comedic voice, one that's still darkly funny, but with a surprisingly sharp undercurrent of social commentary.

DALE

They'll laugh. And then maybe...just maybe...they'll care. He leans back in his chair, a small, satisfied smile playing on his lips. He's not sure where this path will lead him, but he's finally ready to walk it.

DALE

(to himself)
Time to save the world, one poorly-timed punchline at a time.

SCENE END

Scene 1: The Big Show

INT. STADIUM BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The air crackles with nervous energy. Cables snake across the floor, a labyrinth of wires leading to a massive stage bathed in shadow. DALE 30s, perpetually ruffled, a nervous energy barely contained beneath a veneer of sarcastic nonchalance paces back and forth, a half-eaten sandwich dangling from his hand. He's dressed in a slightly too-tight suit, looking like he raided a thrift store for a last-minute costume.

DALE

This is it. The big one. The mother of all gigs. The... uh... the... thing.

He takes a large bite of his sandwich, crumbs scattering across his already stained shirt.

DALE

Fifty thousand people. Fifty thousand potential hecklers. Fifty thousand opportunities for catastrophic failure.

He throws the sandwich into a nearby trash can, missing spectacularly. He sighs dramatically.

DALE

I should have stuck to open mic nights. At least there, the only thing at stake was my dignity. His manager, BARRY 40s, slicked-back hair, a man whose enthusiasm far outweighs his talent, bursts in, radiating manic energy.

BARRY

Dale! Champ! Legend in the making! You're about to slay! The crowd is ELECTRIC!

DALE

sarcastically Oh, fantastic. Electric. Just what I needed. Another reason to spontaneously combust on stage.

BARRY

Relax, man! You've got this! You're a natural! A comedic... a comedic... What's that word again? ... Oh yeah, GENIUS!

DALE

Genius? More like a dumpster fire with a microphone.

Barry pats Dale on the back, almost knocking him over. Dale stares at the stage, a flicker of fear in his eyes, quickly masked by a forced smirk.

DALE

Alright, Barry. Let's do this thing. Before I spontaneously combust.

Dale adjusts his tie, takes a deep breath, and walks towards the stage, his gait a mixture of confidence and impending doom.

FADE OUT.

Scene 2: Pre-Show Jitters

BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The air backstage is thick with the smell of stale beer and nervous sweat. Dale paces a cramped space barely larger than a walk-in closet, clutching a crumpled water bottle. He runs a hand through his already disheveled hair, muttering to himself. A half-eaten sandwich lies abandoned on a nearby table.

DALE

This is it. The big one. The culmination of a lifetime of... questionable decisions.

He stops pacing, staring at his reflection in a dusty mirror. He looks less like a comedic genius and more like a nervous chihuahua.

DALE

They're expecting genius. They're expecting... Dale.

He grimaces, the 'Dale' sounding less like a confident declaration and more like a disgusted cough.

DALE

(to himself)

You got this. You're hilarious. Remember that time you made that mime cry? Yeah, that was gold.

He tries to muster a confident smile, but it quickly fades into a grimace.

DALE

No, that was just cruel. And possibly illegal. He starts pacing again, faster this time, his movements erratic and filled

with barely suppressed anxiety. He bumps into a stack of chairs, sending them clattering to the floor.

DALE

(muttering)

I should just run. Run far, far away. To a place with no microphones, no expectations, just... silence.

He pauses, listening. The faint roar of the crowd from the other side of the curtain is growing louder.

DALE

(a whisper)

Or... maybe just one more joke about the existential dread of being a human in the 21st century. That always goes over well.

He takes a deep breath, grabs his microphone, and smooths down his clothes one last time. A look of grim determination sets upon his face. He's ready, or as ready as he'll ever be.

FADE OUT.

Scene 3: Confronting the Past

BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The roar of the crowd is deafening. Dale stands rigid, microphone in hand, when a familiar figure emerges from the shadows. It's BARRY, Dale's longtime comedic rival, a man whose act consists primarily of juggling chainsaws and making unsettling eye contact.

BARRY

Well, well, well. Look what the cat dragged in.

The king of... uh... mildly amusing anecdotes.

Barry smirks, a truly unsettling sight given the chainsaws in his hands.

DALE

And you, the sultan of... questionable safety regulations.

Dale tries to project confidence, but his voice wavers slightly.

BARRY

Oh, I'm always safe. Statistically speaking.

Besides, at least my act involves actual risk.

Yours? It's like watching paint dry, except the paint is slightly less interesting.

Barry throws a juggling pin in the air, casually catching it behind his back. The pin whizzes dangerously close to Dale's head.

DALE

At least I don't rely on loud noises and the potential for grievous bodily harm to get a laugh.

BARRY

(chuckling)

Oh, the irony. Coming from the guy whose jokes

are so predictable, I could write your next five years of material on a napkin during a commercial break.

Barry winks, a terrifyingly wide gesture.

DALE

And at least my audience doesn't leave with PTSD.

BARRY

They leave disappointed, yes. But PTSD? That's a bit dramatic, isn't it? Unless... you were talking about yourself?

Barry lets out a hearty laugh, the sound echoing in the cramped space. Dale glares at him, then a slow grin spreads across his face.

DALE

(grinning)

You know, for a chainsaw juggler, you're surprisingly good at stand-up.

Dale playfully shoves Barry, who staggers slightly, nearly dropping one of his chainsaws. The sound of the crowd roaring reaches a fever pitch. Dale glances at the curtain, a newfound resolve in his eyes.

TO SCENE 4

Scene 4: The Unexpected Twist

ONSTAGE - NIGHT

Spotlights blaze. Dale stands center stage, microphone in hand, the crowd a roaring sea of faces. He begins his set, but halfway through a joke, a spotlight flickers, then dies. A collective gasp ripples through the audience.

DALE

Well, this is awkward.

The house lights come up, revealing a chaotic scene. Stagehands scramble, wires sparking, and a palpable sense of panic hangs in the air. Dale stares at the darkness, then shrugs.

DALE

Okay, so, uh... impromptu dark comedy?

He pauses, letting the silence hang for a beat, then grins mischievously.

DALE

Anyone got a lighter? I was thinking of doing a bit about the existential dread of a sudden power outage, but I'm open to suggestions. Maybe a dramatic reading of the safety regulations?

He winks at the audience, a few scattered laughs breaking the tension. A stagehand rushes to the microphone.

STAGEHAND

Mr. Griffith, we're working on it! Should be back in a few minutes!

DALE

A few minutes? That's like, a lifetime in show-biz, pal. Tell you what, I'll tell you a joke, and if the lights don't come back on by the time

I finish, I'll do a interpretive dance of a badger escaping a tax audit.

The audience roars with laughter. Dale launches into a rapid-fire series of one-liners, his comedic timing impeccable, even in the unexpected darkness. He seamlessly weaves in self-deprecating jokes about his career and the absurdity of the situation.

DALE

So, a priest, a rabbi, and a badger walk into a bar... and the lights go out! I'm telling you, the punchline is killer! You're gonna have to use your imagination though. I'll give you a hint it involves a really sparkly tax form!

He pauses for effect, then continues, his voice rising and falling with the rhythm of a seasoned comedian.

DALE

This whole situation is a metaphor for my career, you know? Lots of build-up, some very high expectations... and then BAM! Total darkness. But hey, at least the badger got away.

The lights flicker back on, catching him mid-sentence. The audience erupts in thunderous applause. Dale bows, grinning from ear to ear.

FADE OUT

Scene 5: Improvisation

ONSTAGE - NIGHT

The lights are back on, but Dale, still basking in the afterglow of his impromptu dark comedy routine, decides to keep the momentum going. He leans into the mic, a mischievous glint in his eye.

DALE

So, the badger escapes the tax audit, right? Turns out, he had a really good accountant. A *really* good accountant who was also a surprisingly good ventriloquist. The badger, naturally, had a whole repertoire of jokes about filing extensions.

He pauses for laughter, then continues in a conspiratorial whisper.

DALE

I know what you're thinking. "Dale, that's a terrible segue. It makes no sense." And you're right. It's brilliant in its utter lack of sense. He shrugs, grinning. The audience roars with appreciation.

DALE

Speaking of sense... or rather, the complete lack thereof, I once tried to explain quantum physics to a chihuahua. Let's just say, Schrödinger's cat had nothing on that little guy. He was both entertained and utterly confused, simultaneously. It was a profound existential experience for both of us, you know? Actually, mostly for me, the chihuahua was just mostly trying to eat my microphone.

He mimes a chihuahua attempting to eat a microphone, his face contorting in a hilarious exaggeration of the struggle.

DALE

Anyway... I think that concludes my totally unplanned, entirely improvised, and possibly nonsensical stand-up routine for tonight. You've been a great audience, even when I was describing a badger's tax problems. Thank you, Idaho! You've been... something.

He takes a bow, the applause thunderous, a mixture of relief and genuine appreciation for his unexpected comedic triumph. He grins, a sly look on his face.

DALE

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to find that chihuahua and discuss the finer points of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Unless, of course, he's still trying to eat my microphone.

He winks at the audience, then exits the stage, leaving the audience in stitches.

FADE OUT

Scene 6: Triumph Over Adversity

BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Dale sits alone, sweat clinging to his forehead. Empty water bottles litter the table. He stares at a half-eaten sandwich, untouched.

DALE

That... actually wasn't so bad. He chuckles, a surprised, slightly self-deprecating sound.

DALE

Seriously, though. I thought I was going to spontaneously combust from sheer terror. Turns out, terror fuels the comedic engine. Who knew? A stagehand, BERNICE 50s, weary but kind, enters, carrying a bouquet of slightly wilted lilies.

BERNICE

Someone left these for you. Said they were from "a fan who appreciates the badger's tax woes." Don't ask.

DALE

(smiling)

They get me. They really, really get me. He takes the flowers, his expression softening. He smells them, then sniffs again, suspiciously.

DALE

Are these... slightly off? Like, are they trying to subtly communicate something existential through their floral arrangement? Are they coded messages?

BERNICE

They're lilies, Dale. They smell like lilies. Probably just a bit old.

DALE

Right, of course. Lilies. The symbolism...
profound. Death, rebirth, the cyclical nature of
existence... and slightly wilted.

He chuckles again, a warmer sound this
time. He looks around the near-empty
backstage area.

DALE

So, uh... what now? Do I get a medal? A lifetime
supply of slightly wilted lilies? A chihuahua?

BERNICE

You get to go home. And maybe try not to scare
the audience into needing therapy tomorrow night.

DALE

(grinning)

Challenge accepted.

He takes another look at the lilies, a
thoughtful expression on his face. He
takes a bite out of his sandwich.

FADE OUT

Scene 7: A Moment of Clarity

DALE'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Sunlight streams through the grimy window of Dale's sparsely furnished apartment. Empty pizza boxes and crumpled scripts litter the floor. Dale sits on his couch, staring blankly at the wilted lilies in a chipped vase. He's wearing the same clothes from his performance.

DALE

Lilies. Symbolism. Existential dread... slightly wilted.

He sighs, running a hand through his messy hair. He picks up a script, then throws it back down.

DALE

All that work. All that sweat. All that near-death experience from sheer stage fright.

He picks up a half-eaten, now stale, sandwich from the coffee table.

DALE

And for what? A slightly better sandwich tomorrow?

He takes a large, almost desperate bite.

DALE

No, wait... that wasn't bad.

He pauses, chewing thoughtfully. A slow smile spreads across his face.

DALE

It was actually... pretty good.

He leans back, a genuine, relaxed smile gracing his features. He looks at the

lilies again, then at the mess surrounding him.

DALE

So, the badger's tax woes resonated, huh? I mean, I know it's dark humor but... who knew so many people would get it?

He bursts out laughing, a deep, hearty sound that shakes his whole body.

DALE

Maybe I'm not just a comedic genius. Maybe I'm... relatable. Or maybe people just really hate paying taxes.

He gets up, stretches, and walks towards the window. He looks out at the rising sun.

DALE

Okay, Idaho. You may be a potato-filled wasteland, but I've conquered you. And with slightly wilted lilies, no less.

He throws his arms up in the air, letting out a triumphant yell. He's still a mess, but this time, it's a happy, slightly crazy mess.

DALE

Now, about that chihuahua...

FADE OUT

Scene 8: Overwhelming Success

DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Dale's apartment is now surprisingly tidy. Empty pizza boxes are replaced with neatly stacked scripts. The wilted lilies are gone, replaced by a ridiculously large bouquet of fresh orchids. Dale, in a clean shirt a miracle!, is surrounded by a mountain of mail, mostly fan mail, which is spilling onto the floor.

DALE

Orchids. Subtle. Sophisticated. And way less existential dread than those lilies. He picks up a letter, scans it, and bursts out laughing.

DALE

"Your badger tax routine changed my life! I'm now an accountant specializing in badger tax evasion!" He throws his head back, roaring with laughter. He pulls out another letter, this one fancier, with a very official-looking seal.

DALE

"An offer to open for... Jerry Seinfeld?" No way. That's not even funny. That's just... impressive. He throws the letter in the air, it floats gently down onto the pile of others.

DALE

Suddenly, I feel the urge to actually shower. And maybe invest in a decent suit. He glances at his phone, which is constantly buzzing with notifications.

He smirks.

DALE

Looks like my agent's having a heart attack, in a good way.

He checks his bank account on his phone, his jaw drops.

DALE

(incredulous)

Holy... mother of potatoes. I can finally afford that lifetime supply of slightly above-average sandwiches!

He grabs a handful of the mail, and throws them into the air, creating a confetti-like shower of praise. He lets out a triumphant whoop.

DALE

Idaho, you beautiful, potato-filled wasteland! You've given birth to a comedic... something! A force to be reckoned with, maybe?

He stumbles, nearly falling over the ever-growing pile of fan mail.

DALE

Okay, maybe not a force, but certainly... well-compensated.

He looks out the window, a thoughtful expression on his face. The sun is setting.

DALE

Now, about that chihuahua...and a slightly bigger apartment.

FADE OUT

Scene 9: The Aftermath

DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The confetti of fan mail has settled, a chaotic yet strangely beautiful landscape. Dale sits amidst it all, a half-eaten sandwich in one hand, a glass of suspiciously brown liquid in the other. The celebratory glow has faded, replaced by a quiet contemplation.

DALE

So, this is it, huh?

He takes a long sip of his drink, grimaces, and sets the glass down.

DALE

National success. Opening for Seinfeld. Enough money to buy a small island made entirely of slightly above-average sandwiches.

He gestures vaguely at the mountain of mail.

DALE

And yet...

He stares out the window at the city lights, a far cry from the potato fields of Idaho.

DALE

It's all a bit... anticlimactic.

He picks up a crumpled napkin, unfolds it, and reads a hastily scribbled note "You're a funny guy, Dale, but you're still a jerk."

DALE

(chuckles)

Yeah, well, someone had to say it.

He crumples the napkin again and throws it onto the ever-growing pile of mail. He takes another bite of his sandwich.

DALE

Maybe the chihuahua can wait. A lifetime supply of slightly above-average sandwiches needs proper refrigeration.

He sighs, a mixture of contentment and existential dread in his eyes. He looks back at the city lights, a flicker of something akin to hope in his gaze.

DALE

Maybe I'll write a routine about that. The anticlimactic triumph of a comedic... whatever I am.

He grins, a mischievous glint returning to his eyes. He picks up his phone and starts typing.

DALE

Working title "Slightly Above-Average Success."
It's got a ring to it, right?

He chuckles to himself, the sound a blend of self-deprecation and hard-won confidence.

FADE OUT

Scene 10: Facing the Consequences

DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams through the still-messy apartment, illuminating the lingering remnants of the previous night's celebration. Empty pizza boxes and crumpled napkins litter the floor, a testament to Dale's triumphant, yet somewhat underwhelming, success. Dale sits at his desk, staring blankly at his laptop. He looks haggard.

DALE

Slightly Above-Average Success... Sounds like the name of a mediocre sandwich shop. He sighs, rubbing his temples. His phone buzzes; he ignores it.

DALE

Okay, new plan. Less "national sensation," more "mildly amusing regional quirk." He types furiously for a few minutes, then slams his laptop shut in frustration.

DALE

No, that's worse. It's like a rejected tagline for a discount airline. He picks up a half-eaten sandwich from a nearby plate. It looks sad.

DALE

Even my sandwiches are reflecting my underwhelming career trajectory. His phone buzzes again, this time more insistently. He reluctantly picks it up.

DALE

(grumbling)

What now?

He reads the text message, his face shifting from annoyance to a dawning look of horror.

DALE

(whispering)

Oh, God.

He frantically searches the apartment, tossing aside clothes and papers. Panic is etched on his face.

DALE

Where is it? Where is it?!

He finally spots it under a pile of fan mail - a small, intricately carved wooden chihuahua, his prized possession, now sporting a rather large, lipstick-red bite mark.

DALE

(dazed)

Seinfeld's chihuahua...

He stares at the damaged chihuahua, then back at the mountain of mail, a mixture of despair and dark humor creeping into his eyes.

DALE

(to himself)

At least the joke about slightly above-average sandwiches still works.

FADE OUT

Scene 11: New Challenges

DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is now a chaotic mess. Not the charming, bohemian mess of a struggling artist, but the frantic, hyper-organized mess of someone desperately trying to control the uncontrollable. Fan mail overflows from boxes, newspapers with articles about him are strewn everywhere, and various half-eaten takeout containers are precariously stacked. Dale paces, phone pressed to his ear.

DALE

(stressed)

Yes, I understand it's a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Brenda. But a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to endorse hemorrhoid cream? Really? He throws his hands up in exasperation, nearly knocking over a stack of awards.

DALE

I'm a comedian, not a spokesperson for anal fissures!

He hangs up, rubbing his temples. Another phone rings - a landline, shockingly.

DALE

Hello?

BERNICE

(gravelly voice, excited)

Dale honey, it's Bernice! Remember me? From the Idaho County Fair? You did that bit about the badger...

DALE

Bernice, I... I'm kinda swamped right now.

BERNICE

Oh, honey, I know you're a big star now, but I need to know... did you actually *get* that badger? The one you said you'd get?

Dale stares blankly into the middle distance, his face slowly contorting into a grimace.

DALE

Look, Bernice, about that badger...

BERNICE

Because my prize-winning petunias are still missing...

Dale groans, slumping onto a chair. He stares at the chewed-up chihuahua. A single tear rolls down his cheek.

DALE

(to himself)

Maybe the hemorrhoid cream gig isn't so bad after all.

He picks up the phone and dials Brenda's number back, a small, defeated smile playing on his lips.

FADE OUT

Scene 12: The Cost of Success

DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams into Dale's apartment, illuminating the lingering chaos. Empty pizza boxes and crumpled scripts are scattered amongst the fan mail. Dale sits slumped on his couch, a half-empty bottle of expensive whiskey within reach. He stares blankly at a framed photo of himself shaking hands with the mayor of Boise, a forced smile plastered on his face. His chihuahua, now sporting a stylish and expensive sweater, is asleep on a pile of cash.

DALE

(to himself, weary)

This is it. The big time.

He takes a long swig of whiskey.

DALE

Sold-out arenas, private jets, endorsements... even the hemorrhoid cream gig is looking better every day.

He chuckles darkly, then sighs.

DALE

But who am I kidding? I'm surrounded by sycophants, my phone never stops ringing, and the only person who seems to actually like me is my pampered, sweater-wearing chihuahua.

He picks up the photo, examining it closely.

DALE

Remember when I used to tell jokes in a dingy bar to three people and a grumpy bartender? Those were the days. No agents, no publicists, no pressure... just jokes.

He throws the photo onto the coffee table with a frustrated grunt.

DALE

Now, every joke is dissected, scrutinized, analyzed. My comedy isn't comedy anymore; it's a product, a brand, a... a marketable commodity.

He gestures wildly at the room.

DALE

And for what? This? This gilded cage of fame and fortune?

He stares at the chihuahua, who blinks sleepily at him.

DALE

At least you're still genuinely happy to see me. He scratches the dog behind the ears.

DALE

Maybe... maybe I should just retire to a small town and become a badger wrangler.

He smiles, a genuine smile this time, though tinged with melancholy.

DALE

Nah, the hemorrhoid cream money's too good. Besides, I hear they're expanding their line to include a new badger-themed ointment.

FADE OUT

Scene 13: A Difficult Decision

DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is even messier than before. Empty champagne bottles replace the pizza boxes. Dale paces, phone clutched in his hand, a manic energy replacing his earlier melancholic slump. His chihuahua, now sporting a tiny tuxedo, watches from atop a stack of platinum records.

DALE

(frantically)

Another sold-out show in Vegas. Then Madison Square Garden. Then... London? Tokyo? The sheer scale of it all...

He throws his phone onto the sofa, the impact muffled by the pile of cash.

DALE

But what's the point? I'm a joke machine churning out pre-packaged punchlines for an audience that doesn't even know my real name, only the brand.

He kicks a discarded script across the room.

DALE

They clap, they laugh, they buy the merch... but do they actually *get* me?

He stares out the window at the glittering city lights, a stark contrast to the chaotic mess within.

DALE

Remember those dingy bars? The genuine connection, the shared experience of laughter born from absurdity? Now it's all manufactured hype and carefully crafted personas.

He walks over to the chihuahua, stroking its tiny tuxedo.

DALE

At least you don't care about my celebrity status. You just want belly rubs and tiny, overpriced sausages.

He sighs, picks up his phone again, and scrolls through a series of texts - one from his agent, one from a publicist, and several from various sponsors.

DALE

Three-million-dollar endorsement deal for a line of artisanal dog treats? Tempting...

He looks at the chihuahua, then back at the phone. He hesitates, a small, almost imperceptible smile playing on his lips.

DALE

Screw it. Let's do this. But I'm adding a clause all the sausages I can eat.

He types furiously on his phone, a mischievous glint in his eye.

DALE

Let the games begin.

FADE OUT

Scene 14: Acceptance

DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams into Dale's still-messy apartment, illuminating the scattered remnants of last night's celebratory chaos. Empty champagne bottles and crumpled cash litter the floor. Dale sits at his kitchen table, a half-eaten plate of something suspiciously resembling dog food in front of him. His chihuahua, now wearing a tiny tiara, sits patiently beside him.

DALE

(to himself)

Three million dollars for dog treats. Who knew? He takes a large bite of the dog food, chews thoughtfully.

DALE

Turns out, being a world-famous comedian is just like being a nobody, only with more expensive sausages.

He gestures vaguely around the room.

DALE

Still got the same existential dread, same crippling self-doubt, just a bigger bank account to cushion the fall.

He scratches the chihuahua behind the ears.

DALE

You know, you're a better judge of character than most of my fans. At least you're honest about your desire for belly rubs and delicious, high-end meat products.

He picks up his phone, scrolls through emails. He chuckles.

DALE

Apparently, my acceptance speech needs a rewrite. They're not keen on the bit where I blame my mother.

He shrugs, throws his phone back on the table.

DALE

Screw the speech, screw the expectations, screw the carefully curated image. I'm just Dale, the guy who made millions telling jokes about his own inadequacies.

He grins, a genuine, unguarded smile. He picks up his plate of dog food.

DALE

And if that's not authentic, I don't know what is.

He scoops up another large helping of dog food, happily sharing it with his chihuahua.

DALE

Besides, who needs artisanal dog treats when you have the real thing?

He winks at the camera.

FADE OUT

Scene 15: Learning from Mistakes

DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is cleaner now, though still haphazardly so. Empty champagne bottles have been replaced with half-empty coffee cups. Dale sits on the floor, surrounded by scattered papers - notes, reviews, and a crumpled rejection letter from a prestigious comedy festival.

DALE

(somberly)

So, the "I blame my mother" bit didn't quite land.

He sighs, rubbing his temples. His chihuahua, tiara askew, looks on with an air of weary amusement.

DALE

Turns out, insulting your maternal unit on a global stage isn't the best career move.

He picks up a particularly scathing review, crinkling it in his hand.

DALE

"Unfunny, unoriginal, and utterly lacking in self-awareness." Ouch.

He throws the review across the room. It lands near the chihuahua, who sniffs it disinterestedly.

DALE

Maybe I'm not as clever as I think I am.

He stares at the ceiling, lost in thought. A slow smile spreads across his face.

DALE

Or maybe... maybe I'm just being an idiot. A very, very successful idiot.

He laughs, a genuine, self-deprecating chuckle.

DALE

Three million dollars for being an idiot. Not a bad gig.

He picks up the crumpled rejection letter. He unfolds it carefully.

DALE

But maybe... maybe this rejection is a blessing in disguise.

He stares at the letter, a thoughtful expression on his face.

DALE

A chance to hone my craft, refine my act, maybe actually try to be a little less of a... you know... jerk.

He looks at his chihuahua, who is now chewing on the crumpled review.

DALE

Besides, Mom always said I needed to learn from my mistakes. She was right, as usual.

He shakes his head, a wry grin on his face. He picks up a pen and starts writing on a fresh sheet of paper.

DALE

New material. Let's see... "My therapist says I need to embrace my inner child..."

FADE OUT

Scene 16: The Final Decision

DALE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight streams through the window, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. Dale sits at his desk, a half-eaten bowl of cereal beside a laptop displaying a flight booking website. He looks exhausted but strangely serene.

DALE

Round-trip to Reykjavik. Business class. Because I deserve it.

He taps a few keys, finalizing the booking. A small, almost imperceptible smile plays on his lips.

DALE

No more arena tours. No more screaming fans. No more... well, no more of that particular brand of obnoxiousness.

He pushes his chair back, stands, and stretches, cracking his back with a satisfying pop.

DALE

Iceland. Land of fire and ice. Perfect for someone needing to cool their heels, and possibly their ego.

He walks to the window, gazing out at the city. A thoughtful expression crosses his face.

DALE

Three million dollars. Enough to fund a lifetime of quietly observing humanity's follies from afar. Or at least, until the money runs out.

He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest. He grabs his phone.

DALE

Time to call Mom. Apologize for the "mother" bit.
And maybe ask for her Icelandic knitting
patterns.

He dials a number, a genuine smile
replacing the weary exhaustion. His
chihuahua, now sporting a tiny, knitted
Icelandic sweater, looks on with what
might be interpreted as approval.

DALE

(into phone)

Hi Mom... Listen, about that whole "blame my
mother" routine...

He sighs contentedly.

DALE

(into phone)

Yeah, about that... I might need a few pointers on
creating a truly groundbreaking "My therapist
says..." bit.

He laughs, the sound echoing in the
quiet apartment. A new chapter begins,
and it's surprisingly less loud than the
last.

FADE OUT

Scene 17: Embracing Change

REYKJAVIK AIRPORT - DAY

Dale, looking remarkably less stressed than his usual self, emerges from the arrival gate. He's wearing a surprisingly tasteful, albeit slightly oversized, Icelandic sweater. He carries only a small backpack.

DALE

Freedom.

He takes a deep breath of crisp Icelandic air, a genuine smile spreading across his face. He pulls out his phone and snaps a picture of a nearby puffing volcano in the distance.

DALE

Instagram gold. Caption "Traded arena crowds for geological wonders. My therapist approves."

He scrolls through his phone, clearly pleased with his perfectly curated image and caption.

DALE

No more screaming fans demanding encore after encore of the same tired material. No more pressure to churn out joke after joke. The pressure to be funny is crippling, you know? Like being a clown in an asylum.

He gestures vaguely towards the volcanic landscape.

DALE

This? This is less stressful.

He spots a rental car booth and heads towards it with a renewed spring in his step. He chats cheerfully with the

attendant, his usual sardonic wit softened with a newfound calm.

DALE

So, this is a Jeep, right? Not an Icelandic pony car? Because I'm a bit claustrophobic... in cars, that is. Not in volcano craters. That would be stupid.

He chuckles at his own joke, a softer, more self-deprecating chuckle. He leans back against the rental car, gazing at the sky. The world feels smaller, yet somehow more vast.

DALE

New material. I'll write jokes about Iceland. About the absurdity of existence. About the strange comfort of being utterly alone with your thoughts. Or even about my therapist. That's a goldmine, honestly.

He pulls out a small notebook and pen, a determined glint in his eye. He begins to scribble notes.

DALE

Chapter two. The Icelandic interlude. It's got a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

He smiles, a genuine, contented smile. He's embracing the quiet revolution of a life less ordinary.

FADE OUT

Scene 18: Looking Ahead

ICELANDIC HIGHLAND - SUNSET

DALE sits atop a rocky outcrop, overlooking a breathtaking panorama of volcanic landscapes bathed in the golden hues of sunset. He's sketching in his notebook, a half-eaten bag of Icelandic licorice nearby. The wind whips through his hair, but he doesn't seem to notice.

DALE

So, yeah, the whole "world famous comedian" thing? Turns out, it's less fulfilling than a lukewarm hot dog.

He takes a large bite of licorice, then grimaces.

DALE

Though, to be fair, that hot dog metaphor is way more relatable than my last special. Which was, admittedly, about the existential dread of mayonnaise.

He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest.

DALE

Turns out, people don't want to ponder the societal implications of condiment choices. Who knew?

He flips a page in his notebook, revealing more sketches - bizarre, abstract drawings that seem to capture the desolate beauty of the landscape.

DALE

Maybe I'll do a show about this. "Dale's Icelandic Existential Crisis." Catchy, right? Guaranteed to sell out... maybe one tiny theater in Boise.

He pauses, gazing at the sunset. A rare moment of introspection settles upon his

face.

DALE

Or maybe... I'll just keep sketching. Keep writing.
Keep trying to make sense of this ridiculous,
beautiful mess we call life.

He smiles, a genuine, albeit slightly
crooked, smile.

DALE

(to himself)

Yeah, that sounds about right.

He takes another bite of licorice, this
time without the grimace. He continues
to sketch, the setting sun casting long
shadows across the landscape, and his
face.

DALE

Maybe I'll even write a joke about that hot dog.
He laughs, a hearty, self-satisfied
sound. The wind whispers through the
rocks.

DALE

Yeah. A *really* good joke.

FADE OUT

Scene 1: Post-Climax Reflection

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Empty pizza boxes and crumpled scripts litter the floor. DALE, 30s, sits on a threadbare couch, staring blankly at a flickering television screen showing a late-night infomercial for a self-cleaning toilet brush. He's wearing a stained band t-shirt and sweatpants.

DALE

So, that's it, huh?

He sighs, picking up a half-eaten slice of cold pizza and taking a bite. He winces.

DALE

Even the pizza's disappointed in me. He channelsurfs, landing on a news report featuring a blurry image of himself accepting some award. He looks away quickly.

DALE

Fame. It's like a really expensive, uncomfortable pair of shoes. You look great in them, but after a while, you just want to take them off and stick your feet in a bucket of lukewarm beer. He stares at his reflection in the darkened television screen. A faint smile plays on his lips.

DALE

I guess I'm not as much of an asshole as I thought I was. Or maybe I just became a *successful* asshole. Semantics, right? He grabs a crumpled script, throws it in the air, and watches it float lazily to the floor.

DALE

Still got the material. Still got the attitude.
Just... less of the existential dread, I guess. Or
maybe I'm just too numb to feel it anymore.
Either way, it's a win.

He grabs the remote and turns off the
TV, leaving only the faint glow of the
city lights illuminating his face. A
small, almost imperceptible, flicker of
contentment crosses his features.

DALE

(to himself)
Time for another pizza.

FADE OUT.

Scene 2: Rebuilding Relationships

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Empty pizza boxes litter the coffee table. Dale, in sweatpants and a stained t-shirt, sits hunched over a laptop, a half-eaten slice of pizza precariously balanced on the keyboard. He types furiously, occasionally pausing to groan.

DALE

Okay, okay, "Dear Brenda, I know I called your poodle a 'hairy meatloaf' at your wedding, but it was a moment of extreme stress-induced comedic genius..."

He deletes the sentence with a frustrated swipe.

DALE

No, too aggressive. Too much "genius."
He types again, then reads aloud to himself, a slight tremor in his voice.

DALE

(mumbling)

"Brenda, I deeply regret my insensitive comments concerning your canine companion during your special day. My humor, while often... unconventional, is no excuse for causing you offense."

He sighs, pushing the pizza away. He picks up his phone and scrolls through his contacts.

DALE

Right, next. Gary. Gary, the guy whose existential crisis I inadvertently triggered with a badly timed fart joke. This one's gonna be tricky.

He starts a new email, his typing slowing down as he struggles to find the right words.

DALE

Subject Regarding the incident involving the existential crisis and the... unfortunate flatulence.

He pauses, then adds a smiley face emoji with a hesitant click.

DALE

Okay, maybe not. Too much.

He deletes the smiley face. He types for a while, his brow furrowed in concentration.

DALE

"Gary, I owe you a sincere apology for the... digestive disruption that preceded your philosophical descent into the abyss. I hope you've found your way back to the surface, and if not, I'll bring you an extra-large pizza as a peace offering."

Dale leans back, a weary smile playing on his lips. He saves the email.

DALE

Well, that's a start. Now, to tackle the angry mob outside my apartment building who are still upset about the time I accidentally set off the fire alarm with a potato cannon...

FADE OUT.

Scene 3: Repairing the Damage

EXT. DALE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A small, disgruntled crowd, armed with various protest signs most illegible, surrounds Dale's apartment building. Dale emerges, wearing a brightly colored Hawaiian shirt and holding a megaphone.

DALE

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your... ears!
And maybe some of that delicious-looking potato
salad I see over there.

He grins, a mischievous glint in his
eye. A few people chuckle nervously.

DALE

I know, I know. I've made some... questionable
comedic choices. The exploding potato incident?
Let's just say the fire marshal has a new
favorite comedian. The interpretive dance routine
involving a mime and a lawnmower? Poor taste,
I'll grant you that.

He winks, then adopts a more serious
tone.

DALE

But I'm here to make amends. To apologize for the
poorly timed jokes, the off-color remarks, and
the general mayhem I've inflicted upon this fair
city. I've learned my lesson. Mostly.

He holds up a large box of donuts.

DALE

Consider these donuts a token of my sincere... and
slightly greasy... remorse. They're sprinkled with
a generous helping of humility and powdered
sugar.

He throws a donut into the crowd; it's
caught with surprising agility.

DALE

And to prove my commitment to change, I've enrolled in a sensitivity training course. It involves interpretive dance...with interpretive squirrels. Wish me luck.

He chuckles, then notices a young girl holding a sign that reads "You made me laugh!" He smiles warmly.

DALE

(softer)

Thank you. That means a lot. Now, about those donuts... anyone want a second helping?

The crowd slowly starts to disperse, some grumbling, others chuckling, many clutching donuts.

FADE OUT.

Scene 4: Forgiveness

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Dale sits at a small table, nursing a lukewarm coffee. He nervously fidgets with a sugar packet. Across from him sits BERNICE 60s, a stern-looking woman with a surprisingly mischievous twinkle in her eye. She holds a half-eaten muffin.

BERNICE

So, the exploding potato incident. Let's just say my prize-winning begonias didn't appreciate the pyrotechnics.

DALE

(sheepishly)

I... I deeply regret the collateral damage to your floral arrangements. They were... vibrant.

He winces, then forces a smile.

BERNICE

Vibrant, indeed. Almost as vibrant as your... let's call it 'unique' brand of humor.

DALE

I've been working on it. The squirrels, for instance... not my proudest moment.

He shudders dramatically.

BERNICE

The squirrels were... memorable. Though I still have nightmares about that interpretive dance. It involved a tiny top hat, didn't it?

DALE

It did. It was... a thematic choice.
Bernice chuckles, a genuine laugh that crinkles the corners of her eyes.

BERNICE

Look, Dale. You're a... character. A walking, talking, slightly-explosive character. But beneath all the chaos, there's something... funny. Truly funny.

DALE

(surprised)

You... you mean it?

BERNICE

I do. And besides, those donuts you brought were exceptional. The humility sprinkle was a nice touch.

She smiles warmly. Dale visibly relaxes, a huge grin spreading across his face.

DALE

So... we're good then? No more angry mobs? No more interpretive squirrel-based trauma?

BERNICE

As long as you promise to keep the interpretive dancing to a minimum, and the potatoes away from fireworks. And maybe steer clear of mime artists. They're... complicated.

They both laugh, a shared understanding passing between them.

FADE OUT.

Scene 5: Accepting Imperfection

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is a chaotic mess. Empty pizza boxes, discarded scripts, and half-finished sketches litter every surface. Dale himself is sprawled on the couch, staring at the ceiling. He's wearing a stained bathrobe.

DALE

Exploding potatoes. Interpretive squirrel dance. The mime incident... I'm a walking disaster. He sighs dramatically, then sits up, grabbing a half-eaten bag of chips.

DALE

But... maybe that's the point. He munches on a chip thoughtfully.

DALE

Maybe the whole "flawed genius" thing isn't just a convenient excuse. Maybe it's... authentically me. He throws the empty chip bag onto the ever-growing pile of junk.

DALE

I'm not going to become some polished, predictable comedian. No more carefully crafted jokes, no more sanitized persona. He grins, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

DALE

I'll embrace the chaos. I'll be the exploding potato, the interpretive squirrel dancer, the mime-provoking menace... but funnier. He grabs a crumpled script, a manic energy now buzzing around him.

DALE

Time to rewrite the act. More squirrels.
Definitely more squirrels. And maybe some actual
explosives. But only for the finale.

He starts scribbling furiously on the
script, his earlier despair replaced
with a manic focus. He laughs, a
genuine, unfiltered sound.

DALE

This is going to be... legendary. Or at least,
incredibly memorable. And possibly slightly
illegal.

He pauses, considers something, then
adds a quick note to his script with a
flourish.

DALE

Oh, and a tiny top hat. Gotta have a tiny top
hat.

He resumes his frantic scribbling, a
happy smile plastered on his face. The
mess around him seems less chaotic, and
more like a testament to his unique
brand of creative genius. Or possibly
just a really, really messy apartment.

FADE OUT.

Scene 6: Moving Forward

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Sunlight streams into a bustling coffee shop. Dale sits at a small table, nursing a latte. He's wearing a clean shirt – a stark contrast to his usual attire. He looks... almost content. A half-finished sketch lies beside his laptop.

DALE

Exploding potatoes are so last season. He takes a sip of his latte, a small, almost shy smile playing on his lips.

DALE

Turns out, self-acceptance doesn't require pyrotechnics. Or interpretive squirrel dances. He opens his laptop, showing a revised script. It's cleaner, more focused, less... explosive.

DALE

This new material is about... me. The real me. The slightly less chaotic me. He pauses, tapping a finger thoughtfully on the table.

DALE

Well, "slightly" is relative. I still plan on incorporating at least one rogue goose. And maybe a tuba solo. He chuckles, a genuine, warm sound. A woman at a nearby table glances over, intrigued.

DALE

But mostly, it's about finding the humor in the everyday. The absurdity of life. The existential

dread masked by caffeine and slightly
questionable life choices.

He gestures around the coffee shop,
taking in the scene with a bemused
expression.

DALE

Like, look at this place. People furiously
tapping on their tiny glowing rectangles,
oblivious to the utter chaos unfolding around
them. It's comedy gold!

He laughs, a hearty, full-bodied sound
that fills the small space. He's not
just laughing at the people, but with
them, connecting on a level that wasn't
possible before.

DALE

I mean, sure, there'll be a few carefully placed
explosions. And possibly a trained ferret. But
it'll be about authenticity. About being
comfortable in my own slightly-chaotic skin.

He closes his laptop, a confident
expression replacing his earlier
contemplative look.

DALE

(to himself)

Maybe I'll even ditch the tiny top hat.

He smiles, a genuine expression of
contentment. He sips his latte, a new
chapter dawning in his life.

FADE OUT.

Scene 7: Emotional Growth

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is surprisingly tidy. Empty pizza boxes are neatly stacked, not strewn across the floor as usual. He sits at his desk, a single lamp illuminating his face. He's surrounded by scripts, but instead of frantic scribbling, he's calmly reviewing them with a mug of something suspiciously herbal next to him.

DALE

Okay, "Existential Dread and the Perils of Overripe Avocados" - maybe a tad on the nose. He crumples the script gently and places it in a recycle bin. A small, almost imperceptible sigh escapes him.

DALE

The ferret's out. Good ferret. He smiles, a genuine, non-manic smile. He picks up another script, this one titled "Finding Funny in the Mundane with a Side of Slightly Exploding Vegetables."

DALE

Much better. Subtlety. It's a thing I'm... exploring. He chuckles softly, then his face takes on a more serious expression. He runs a hand through his hair.

DALE

Turns out, being funny doesn't require constant chaos. Who knew?

He leans back in his chair, a thoughtful look on his face. He takes a sip from his mug.

DALE

Although, a well-placed goose still has its merits.

He grins, a mischievous glint in his eyes. He opens his laptop and begins typing, a calm rhythm to his work.

DALE

Maybe I'll bring back the tiny top hat after all. For ironic effect.

He types furiously for a moment, then pauses to read the screen, a contented smile playing on his lips. He glances at the neatly stacked pizza boxes.

DALE

(to himself)

Maybe tomorrow I'll even do the dishes.

He shrugs, a small smile on his face, then resumes typing, lost in his creative process. The glow of the laptop screen illuminates his now-peaceful demeanor.

DALE

Or maybe not.

FADE OUT.

Scene 8: Redefining Success

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams through the window, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. Dale, surprisingly, is still tidy. He's wearing a surprisingly clean t-shirt and is meticulously arranging his spice rack.

DALE

Alphabetical order. It's the only way to truly live.

He adjusts a jar of turmeric with the precision of a brain surgeon.

DALE

Used to think success meant sold-out stadiums, screaming fans, and enough money to buy a small island populated solely by trained squirrels.

He pauses, taps a finger against his chin.

DALE

Turns out, trained squirrels are surprisingly high-maintenance.

He sighs contentedly.

DALE

And screaming fans? Mostly just want autographs. And pictures of me with their cats.

He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest. He picks up a framed photo; it shows him onstage, looking slightly bewildered amidst a sea of cheering people.

DALE

All that chaos... for what? A fleeting moment of validation?

He sets the photo down, gently. He surveys his apartment, a quiet sense of satisfaction on his face.

DALE

No, I think real success is... this. He gestures around his apartment, encompassing the organized spice rack, the neatly stacked books, the general absence of pizza boxes.

DALE

A well-organized life. A functional spice rack. The faint, lingering scent of slightly burnt but ultimately edible toast. He smiles, a peaceful smile this time. He grabs a mug.

DALE

And a decent cup of herbal tea. Maybe I'll even write a bit today, something about the existential dread of imperfectly aligned teabags. He heads to his desk, a contented smile playing on his lips. A faint, but definite, sound of him whistling can be heard.

DALE

(to himself)
It's surprisingly fulfilling.

FADE OUT.

Scene 9: Finding Balance

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Dale sits at his desk, a half-written comedic essay titled "The Existential Dread of Imperfectly Aligned Teabags" open on his laptop. A mug of suspiciously green tea sits beside him. He stares intently at the screen, a furrow in his brow. A pile of rejection letters rests neatly beside the laptop - surprisingly organized.

DALE

Hmm, "...the inherent absurdity of striving for perfect symmetry in a universe governed by chaotic entropy..." Nah, too pretentious.

He deletes a sentence. He sighs, rubbing his temples.

DALE

Maybe I should just write about squirrels. Everyone loves squirrels.

He types furiously for a few moments, then stops, staring at the screen with a look of disgust.

DALE

No, too fluffy. Needs more... existential dread. He grabs his phone, scrolling through a series of pictures. It's mostly pictures of poorly-aligned tea bags and, oddly, a lot of close-ups of squirrels.

DALE

Right, back to the teabags. He taps away at his keyboard. The sound of typing is punctuated by the occasional frustrated grunt.

DALE

...the agonizing realization that even perfectly aligned teabags eventually succumb to the inevitable...steep... of...disappointment...

He pauses, considering his work. A slow smile spreads across his face.

DALE

Not bad. Not bad at all. Maybe I'll submit this to a literary journal. One that appreciates the finer points of existential teabag angst.

He leans back, a satisfied smirk playing on his lips. He takes a sip of his tea, closing his eyes in contentment.

DALE

Perfect balance. Perfectly organized spice rack, perfectly aligned or not teabags, and a perfectly mediocre career in comedic writing. Who needs screaming fans when you've got this?

He gestures around his apartment, a genuine smile replacing the smirk. He takes another sip of his tea.

DALE

(to himself, quietly)

Now, where did I put that perfectly mediocre book on the existential dread of squirrels?

FADE OUT.

Scene 10: Giving Back

INT. LOCAL COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Dale, wearing a slightly-too-tight "I ♥ Idaho" t-shirt, stands awkwardly on a small stage. A handful of bored-looking children sit scattered in the chairs. A banner reading "Dale's Comedy Workshop for Underprivileged Youth Mostly" hangs crookedly behind him. He holds a half-eaten bag of chips.

DALE

Alright, kids! Let's talk about the art of the perfectly timed pause...or, you know, just screaming into a pillow until you feel better. He crunches loudly on a chip.

DALE

Comedy, see, it's all about... observation. Observe the absurdity of existence. Observe the squirrel meticulously burying its acorn, then forgetting where it buried it five seconds later. The inherent comedy of... of... well, of squirrels. A single child raises a hand hesitantly.

CHILD

Mr. Dale, what's existential dread?

DALE

(grinning)

Existential dread, my young friend, is the feeling you get when you realize you've spent the last hour meticulously aligning your teabags, only to discover they're still going to end up soggy and sad.

He pauses for effect, then throws another chip in his mouth.

DALE

It's like... the universe is a giant, poorly-organized joke. And you're the punchline. But a

funny punchline! A very, very funny punchline, if you have the right perspective. And maybe some really good tea.

He looks around the room. The children stare back, mostly uncomprehending. One child is quietly drawing a picture of a squirrel fighting a teabag.

DALE

Okay, who wants to tell me a joke? A really, really bad joke. The worse, the better.

A small hand shoots up. A shy girl raises her hand.

GIRL

Why don't scientists trust atoms?

DALE

(intrigued)

Oh, I like where this is going..

GIRL

Because they make up everything!

Dale bursts into laughter, the kids exchange bewildered glances. The sound of his laughter fills the small room.

DALE

That's... that's surprisingly good. For a kid. He pats his pocket, retrieving another handful of chips.

CUT TO

Scene 11: Mentoring Others

INT. DALE'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Dale's garage is a chaotic mess of discarded props, half-written jokes scrawled on napkins, and empty chip bags. Four nervous-looking teenagers sit in a semi-circle, clutching crumpled pieces of paper. Dale, wearing a stained bathrobe and mismatched slippers, paces before them, a half-eaten sandwich in one hand.

DALE

Alright, comedy cadets! Let's dissect your... uh... material.

He gestures vaguely with the sandwich.

TEENAGER 1

I wrote a joke about a talking dog.

DALE

Original. Brave. But... did it make you laugh?

TEENAGER 1

(hesitantly)
A little?

DALE

A little isn't enough, kid. Comedy is like a punch to the gut. It should leave 'em gasping for air, not politely nodding.

He takes a large bite of his sandwich.

TEENAGER 2

Mine's about a guy who walks into a bar...

DALE

(groans)

Oh, for the love of... another one? Seriously?
We're living in the golden age of observational

humor! The universe is a freaking clown show!
Find your own damn bar joke!
He throws his hands up in exasperation.

TEENAGER 3

I did one about... taxes.

DALE

(eyes widening)

Taxes? That's... unexpectedly dark. I like it. But dark isn't always funny. It's got to be... dark *and* funny. Like a clown funeral. Or a tax audit during a clown funeral. See?

He grins, revealing a missing molar.

TEENAGER 4

I wrote a poem. About a potato.

DALE

A poem? About a potato? That's... that's... surprisingly specific. I'm intrigued. Let's hear it.

The teenager nervously recites their poem. Dale listens, occasionally chuckling, offering insightful critiques peppered with his own brand of abrasive charm.

DALE

You've got something there, kid. Something... spud-tacular.

He winks. The teenagers exchange relieved smiles.

FADE OUT.

Scene 12: Lasting Impact

**INT. LAS VEGAS ARENA - BACKSTAGE -
NIGHT**

Chaos reigns backstage. Roadies scramble, makeup artists frantically touch up performers, and nervous comedians pace. Dale sits alone, calmly sipping lukewarm coffee. He's in a sharp suit, a stark contrast to his usual attire. A single spotlight illuminates him.

DALE

So, this is it, huh?

He takes another sip, a slight smirk playing on his lips.

YOUNG COMEDIAN

Mr. Peterson? I... I'm a huge fan. I mean, your roast of the Idaho Potato Festival... legendary. A young, wide-eyed comedian approaches, clutching a worn-out notebook. He nervously adjusts his glasses.

DALE

(dryly)

Legendary? They still haven't forgiven me for that one.

YOUNG COMEDIAN

No, seriously! It changed everything. I started writing more... uh... *observational* material. I mean, I really got your whole... "find the dark humor" thing.

He flips open his notebook, revealing a page covered in frantic scribbles.

DALE

(raising an eyebrow)

Observational? Kid, observational humor is the

art of finding the funny in the mundane. It's not about making fun of people; it's about making people laugh *at* themselves. But never at their expense, unless they deserve it.

YOUNG COMEDIAN

Exactly! That's what I realized after seeing your performance. You made people laugh, but you also... you made them *think*.

DALE

Thinking is optional, kid. Laughing is mandatory. He chuckles, a rare genuine smile touching his face. He gestures towards a nearby door.

DALE

Go get 'em, kid. Remember the potato. It's all about the potato.

The young comedian beams, a newfound confidence radiating from him. He exits, head held high, notebook clutched tightly.

DALE

The potato... I might need a new act.

FADE OUT.

Scene 13: New Beginnings

EXT. IDAHO POTATO FIELD - SUNRISE

A vast field of potatoes stretches to the horizon, bathed in the golden light of sunrise. Dale, dressed in casual clothes, stands amidst the rows, a half-eaten donut in one hand, a small shovel in the other. He looks...content.

DALE

So, this is it. Back to my roots. He takes a bite of the donut, crumbs scattering on his shirt. He smiles, a genuine, unforced smile that hasn't been seen much lately.

DALE

No more screaming crowds, no more flashing lights, no more... well, no more *anything* that involved wearing a suit. He gently digs into the soil, unearthing a small, perfectly formed potato. He holds it up, admiring its shape.

DALE

Maybe I peaked with the potato festival roast. Maybe it was all downhill from there. Or maybe... maybe it was all a necessary prelude to this. He tosses the potato gently into the air and catches it. He then plants it carefully back in the earth.

DALE

Funny thing is, I never actually *liked* potatoes all that much. It was the comedic potential, you see. The irony. The absurdity of a man making a living off of mocking the sacred potato of Idaho. Poetic, really.

He looks out at the vast field, a contemplative expression on his face.

DALE

But you know what? I'm okay with that. I've got my health, my sanity mostly, and this here... magnificent spud field. Who needs Vegas when you've got this?

He chuckles, a low, rumbling sound that speaks of contentment and a newfound peace. He takes another bite of his donut.

DALE

(to himself)

Maybe I'll write a book. "The Idaho Potato A comedic memoir". Nah, too on the nose. I could write about a talking potato, though. "Potato The untold story". Sounds promising.

He continues working, the rising sun warming his back. The tranquility of the morning is a stark contrast to the frenetic energy of his recent past.

DALE

New beginnings. They don't always come with flashing lights and screaming fans. Sometimes... sometimes, they come with a shovel, a donut, and a whole lot of potatoes.

FADE OUT.

Scene 14: Reflection on the Past

INT. DALE'S SHED - NIGHT

Dale sits in his cluttered shed, surrounded by farming tools, half-finished projects, and empty donut boxes. A single bare bulb hangs overhead, casting long shadows. He's nursing a beer, staring at a faded photograph.

DALE

Remember that time I wore a potato costume to a high school talent show? Thought I was so clever. He chuckles, a dry, self-deprecating sound.

DALE

Turns out, not everyone appreciates a man in a spud suit performing interpretive dance to "Bohemian Rhapsody". Live and learn, right? He takes a long swig of beer, then sighs, staring at the photo. It's a picture of him on stage, bathed in the bright lights of a large arena, thousands of people cheering.

DALE

Funny how things change. One minute you're a potato-obsessed nobody, the next you're selling out stadiums. And then... poof. Back to the potatoes. The circle of life, or something. He runs a hand through his hair, a gesture of weary acceptance.

DALE

The fame thing... it wasn't all it's cracked up to be. The constant pressure, the sycophants, the endless demands... it got old fast. Like eating nothing but donuts for a month.

He gestures vaguely at the pile of empty donut boxes.

DALE

But you know what? I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. I mean, who else can say they've made millions of dollars making fun of root vegetables?

He grins, a hint of mischief in his eyes.

DALE

Maybe I'll write that book after all. "From Spud to Superstar...and Back to Spud". Catchy, right?

He laughs, a genuine laugh this time, full of self-awareness and contentment. He takes another sip of his beer, the photo in his hand.

DALE

Yeah, I think I'm okay with the way things are. It might not be glamorous, but it's... peaceful. And there's always more potatoes to be planted.

He sets the photo down gently, a look of quiet satisfaction on his face. The shed feels strangely cozy, bathed in the soft glow of the single bulb.

DALE

(to himself, softly)

Maybe tomorrow I'll try interpretive dance with a turnip.

FADE OUT.

Scene 15: Understanding of Humour

INT. DALE'S SHED - DAY

Sunlight streams through a crack in the shed's wall, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. Dale sits at a rickety table, sketching in a worn notebook. Empty coffee cups and crumpled paper surround him.

DALE

It's not about the punchline, you see. It's about the... the setup. The anticipation.

He taps his pencil against his teeth, a thoughtful frown creasing his brow.

DALE

The best jokes are like perfectly ripe tomatoes. You gotta let them sit in the sun a while, let the flavor develop. You can't just shove a green tomato in someone's face and expect them to appreciate the nuanced tartness.

He flips a page in his notebook, revealing a series of stick figures in increasingly absurd situations.

DALE

Timing is everything. A beat here, a pause there. It's like conducting a symphony of awkwardness. You build the tension, create the expectation, and then... BAM! The sweet release of laughter.

He leans back, a satisfied grin spreading across his face.

DALE

But it's more than just technical skill. It's about understanding the human condition. The absurdity of it all. The little foibles, the everyday struggles, the inherent ridiculousness of existence. That's the real comedy.

He picks up a particularly crude drawing of a man tripping over a cat.

DALE

Take this, for instance. On the surface, it's just a man falling over a cat. But it speaks to something deeper, doesn't it? The inherent clumsiness of life, the unexpected nature of chaos, the utter ridiculousness of the feline overlord.

He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest.

DALE

Yeah, I think I'm finally starting to get it. Humor... it's not just about making people laugh. It's about connecting with them. Sharing a moment of shared absurdity. It's about finding the humanity in the chaos.

He closes his notebook, a look of quiet contemplation on his face. The sunlight catches the dust motes, illuminating the newfound depth in his eyes.

DALE

Maybe I'll write that book after all. But this time it will be a bit more... nuanced.

FADE OUT.

Scene 16: Self-Acceptance

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is surprisingly tidy. Empty pizza boxes are neatly stacked, not a single dirty sock in sight. He stands before a mirror, wearing a surprisingly well-fitting suit. He nervously adjusts his tie.

DALE

Okay, Dale. You got this. Remember the principles of comedic timing, remember the nuance.

He practices a few facial expressions in the mirror – a raised eyebrow, a slight smirk, a look of bewildered innocence.

DALE

No, too much. Subtlety, Dale, subtlety. Think... a slightly deflated balloon.

He sighs, running a hand through his hair.

DALE

This whole "self-acceptance" thing is harder than I thought. Turns out, being comfortable in your own skin doesn't mean ditching the jokes. It just means...finding better material.

He glances at a framed photograph on his desk – a picture of him performing stand-up, a wide grin plastered across his face. He smiles, a genuine smile this time.

DALE

Maybe the jokes were never the problem. Maybe the problem was... me. The self-absorbed, cynical, pizza-fueled jerk hiding behind the funny.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a crumpled napkin. On it, a single

sentence is scrawled in messy handwriting.

DALE

"I'm working on it."

He chuckles softly, a sound devoid of self-deprecation. He folds the napkin carefully and places it in his wallet.

DALE

(to himself)

Yeah, I'm working on it. One joke, one self-deprecating observation, one slightly less obnoxious interaction at a time.

He grabs his coat, a newfound confidence in his posture.

DALE

Tonight, I'm not just telling jokes. I'm sharing a part of myself. The slightly less-obnoxious part.

He opens the door, ready to face the world, or at least, the slightly less-judgmental parts of it. He gives one last look at his reflection, a smirk playing on his lips.

DALE

Let's do this.

FADE OUT.

Scene 17: Embracing the Future

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - BACKSTAGE
- NIGHT

The roar of the crowd is a muffled thunder behind a heavy, soundproof door. Dale, in a sharp, new suit a significant upgrade from his previous attire, paces nervously. He's holding a crumpled piece of paper – the napkin from his apartment.

DALE

Okay, Dale. Don't screw this up. He smooths the napkin, the single sentence still visible "I'm working on it."

DALE

Madison Square Garden. Who would've thought? Little old Idaho, eh? He chuckles, a genuine laugh this time, not the strained, cynical one he used to favor.

DALE

Remember the greasy spoon, the hecklers, the lukewarm coffee? Good times. Mostly. He looks at the napkin again, a small, almost imperceptible smile playing on his lips.

DALE

I still suck at small talk. My dating life is a wasteland. And I still haven't quite mastered the art of ordering pizza without sounding like a deranged badger. He pauses, then adds with a self-aware grin.

DALE

But hey, I'm working on it.

He crumples the napkin again, this time with a finality that suggests a certain closure. He tosses it into a nearby trash can, not looking back.

DALE

Tonight, the jokes are about me, sure. But they're not *just* about me. They're about all the... well, the slightly less-obnoxious parts of all of us.

He takes a deep breath, adjusting his jacket. His shoulders are relaxed, his posture confident.

DALE

It's about connection. About finding the funny in the mess. About... maybe even a little bit of self-acceptance. Or at least tolerating myself long enough to make people laugh.

He grins, a wide, genuine smile that reaches his eyes. He opens the door, the roar of the crowd now a wave of anticipation.

DALE

(confidently)

Let's do this thing.

FADE OUT.

Scene 18: Finding Peace

INT. PRIVATE JET - DAY

Dale sits alone, gazing out the window at the sprawling cityscape below. He's no longer in the sharp suit; he's in comfortable jeans and a worn-out band t-shirt. He sips from a plastic cup that holds what looks suspiciously like lukewarm coffee.

DALE

Madison Square Garden. Sold out.
He chuckles softly to himself.

DALE

Who knew a guy who couldn't order pizza without sounding like a badger could fill a stadium?
He takes another sip of coffee, a small, almost wistful smile on his face.

DALE

Turns out, people like hearing jokes about slightly-less-obnoxious versions of themselves. Go figure.
He leans back in his seat, closing his eyes. The hum of the jet engines is a low, comforting drone.

DALE

Funny how things work out. I thought I needed to fix everything, to become some polished, perfect comedian. Like some kind of human-shaped stand-up routine. Turns out, the jokes write themselves when you just... are.
He opens his eyes, a thoughtful expression on his face.

DALE

I'm still a bit of a mess. My apartment looks like a badger threw a party and invited a pack of

raccoons. I still haven't learned to parallel park.

He shrugs, a genuine laugh escaping him.

DALE

But hey, at least the jokes are getting better. And maybe, just maybe, I'm getting slightly less... terrible.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a crumpled napkin, identical to the one from the previous scene, though pristine now. He unfolds it slowly, revealing a single, scrawled word "Content."

DALE

(to himself)

Yeah, content. That's a good word.

He smiles, a peaceful, contented smile that suggests he's finally found something more valuable than perfection - acceptance.

DALE

Next stop World tour. I think I'll stick with lukewarm coffee, though.

FADE OUT.

Scene 1: A Quiet Life

INT. DALE'S IDAHO CABIN - DAY

Sunlight streams through a dusty window, illuminating a cozy, if slightly cluttered, cabin. DALE 40s, weathered face, still sporting a hint of his abrasive charm but softened around the edges sits on a worn armchair, sipping coffee. He's surrounded by books, a half-finished jigsaw puzzle depicting a remarkably bland Idaho landscape, and a surprisingly well-maintained collection of vinyl records. He chuckles softly to himself.

DALE

Remember when I thought selling out stadiums was the pinnacle of human achievement?

He shakes his head, a wry smile playing on his lips. He puts down his coffee cup and picks up a well-worn record.

DALE

Turns out, the real high is not needing to yell into a microphone to feel heard.

He carefully places the record on the turntable, a gentle scratch echoing in the quiet cabin.

DALE

Though, I still get a decent laugh out of the occasional heckler. You know, the ones that think they're funnier than you. Those idiots still exist.

He leans back, a comfortable sigh escaping his lips. He stares out the window, the faint sound of country music filling the air.

DALE

Idaho's still...Idaho. But now, I actually appreciate it. The silence. The lack of screaming fans. The complete absence of my manager.

He winces slightly, a memory apparently causing some mild discomfort. He gestures towards the jigsaw puzzle.

DALE

And this stupid puzzle...it's like my life now. Slowly coming together, one bland piece at a time.

DALE

But hey, at least the pieces fit. Mostly. He chuckles, the sound warm and genuine this time, a far cry from the cynical laughter of his past. He reaches for his coffee, taking another sip.

DALE

Not bad for an asshole from Idaho.

FADE OUT.

Scene 2: The Legacy

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale, now older, sits at a cluttered desk, surrounded by awards, photographs, and half-empty coffee cups. He's meticulously crafting a joke, a slight furrow in his brow. He sips from a mug that reads "World's Okayest Dad".

DALE

So, I'm at this open mic night... and this kid, fresh out of college, walks up...

He pauses, considering his words, a rare moment of genuine contemplation. He taps a pencil against his teeth.

DALE

...and he starts with this whole "woke" bit, right? But it's not funny. It's just... preachy. Like a bad TED Talk.

DALE

Then, this other one gets up... and tries to do my schtick. You know, that deadpan, cynical thing? But it falls completely flat. It's like watching a mime try to explain quantum physics.

Dale laughs, a low rumble in his chest. He gestures towards a framed photo of a younger version of himself, performing on stage.

DALE

They all try to imitate, but they can't capture the essence. The... Idaho-ness of it all.

DALE

Turns out, originality isn't just about the jokes. It's about the whole damn package. The years of honing your craft, the complete lack of self-awareness, the ability to insult strangers with a smirk.

He smiles, a rare, genuine smile, then shrugs.

DALE

I guess that's my legacy. A generation of wannabe assholes who just couldn't quite pull it off.

He chuckles, a sound laced with unexpected warmth. He picks up his mug and takes a long sip. He looks around his cluttered apartment. The awards gleam softly. He seems oddly content.

DALE

(to himself)

Not bad for an asshole from Idaho.

FADE OUT.

Scene 3: A Final Performance

LAS VEGAS ARENA - NIGHT

A sea of faces, a roaring crowd. Spotlights blaze on DALE, center stage, microphone in hand. He's wearing a sequined jumpsuit that clashes spectacularly with his weary expression.

DALE

So, this is it, folks. The final curtain. The last laugh. Or maybe just the last fart. You never know with me.

He pauses, letting the laughter wash over him. He takes a sip of water, his hand shaking slightly.

DALE

I started out in a bar so dive-y, the cockroaches held their own comedy nights. And look at me now. Selling out Vegas. Who'd have thunk it? Certainly not my high school guidance counselor.

A wave of laughter crashes through the arena. He grins, a flash of his old, devilish charm.

DALE

I've insulted presidents, offended grandmothers, and made a small fortune from the tears of the easily triggered. And I wouldn't trade it for the world... well, maybe for a private island with a staff of therapists.

He leans into the microphone, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper.

DALE

But seriously, thanks. Thanks for letting a grumpy, cynical, potato-farming son of a bitch from Idaho make you laugh for a few years. It's been... surprisingly fulfilling. In a darkly comedic, emotionally stunted kind of way.

He pauses, a genuine warmth in his eyes. He looks out at the crowd, each face a blurred testament to his career.

DALE

I'm going to miss this. The roar of the crowd, the smell of cheap beer, the sheer terror of forgetting a punchline... I'm going to miss it all. He winks, then throws his hands up in the air.

DALE

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a private island to purchase. And a therapist. The crowd erupts into thunderous applause, a standing ovation that shakes the very foundations of the arena. Confetti rains down, a kaleidoscope of colors swirling around him. Dale smiles, a genuine, unguarded smile that reaches his eyes. For the first time, he seems truly happy.

FADE OUT.

Scene 4: Acceptance and Closure

DALE'S CABIN - IDAHO - SUNSET

The cabin is rustic, cozy, bathed in the warm glow of the setting sun. Empty beer bottles litter a small table. Dale sits on the porch, a worn guitar in his lap. He strums a simple, melancholic tune.

DALE

So, the big time. Sold-out arenas. Private islands. Turns out, it's... underwhelming. He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest. He takes a long swig from a beer bottle.

DALE

The applause was nice, I guess. But it's quieter here. More... genuine. He looks out at the Idaho landscape, a vast expanse of rolling hills. A peaceful expression settles on his face, a stark contrast to his usual manic energy.

DALE

Funny thing is, I thought the jokes were the point. The laughs, the fame... But it was always about the honesty, wasn't it? He strums the guitar again, this time with more feeling.

DALE

Being myself, even if 'myself' is a sarcastic, beer-swilling, slightly self-destructive... well, you get the picture. He smiles, a wry grin playing on his lips. He tosses the empty bottle into a nearby fire pit.

DALE

(to himself)

Maybe I'll write a song about that.

He starts humming, a tune slowly forming. The sky blazes with vibrant hues of orange and purple.

DALE

Turns out, the best gigs are the ones where you don't have to pretend. And the best audience? Yourself. And maybe a couple of deer. They're good listeners.

He laughs, a genuine, heartfelt laugh that echoes across the quiet landscape. The sun dips below the horizon.

FADE OUT.

Scene 5: Lasting Impact

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Years later. Dale's apartment is surprisingly tidy, though cluttered with comedy memorabilia. Awards gleam under the dim lighting. Empty pizza boxes are strategically placed near a half-written joke book. Dale, older but still sharp, sits at his desk, a weary but satisfied expression on his face.

DALE

They say success changes you. He sighs, picks up a framed photo of himself performing to a roaring crowd. He smiles wryly.

DALE

Mostly, it just means more pizza boxes. He opens a drawer revealing dozens of fan letters. He picks one up, a shaky handwriting barely legible.

DALE

"Your jokes saved my life." Ah, the pressure. The weight of a nation's... mildly amused chuckles. He chuckles, then leans back, eyes distant. A younger Dale, vibrant and sharp-tongued, flashes across his mind.

DALE

That kid from Idaho... never thought I'd make it this far. Or even this... moderately successful. He picks up a newspaper clipping detailing his recent sold-out stadium show. A small, almost imperceptible grin spreads across his face.

DALE

I still don't really know what I'm doing. But I'm good at pretending.

He looks around the room, a mixture of pride and cynicism in his eyes. He picks up his half-written joke book, a spark of creative energy igniting within him.

DALE

Time for some new material. I've got a whole new generation of therapy patients to entertain. And maybe, just maybe, a few more deer.

He grins, that genuine laugh surfacing again. He begins to tap out a rhythm on his desk, a new joke forming in his mind.

FADE OUT.

Scene 6: A New Chapter

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight streams into Dale's apartment, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. The pizza box count has increased significantly. Dale, in sweatpants and a faded band t-shirt, is meticulously organizing his joke book. He hums a jaunty, off-key tune.

DALE

Right, where were we? Ah yes, the existential dread of lukewarm coffee.

He scribbles furiously in the book, occasionally pausing to chuckle at his own wit.

DALE

"My therapist says I need to embrace my inner child... so I stole a bouncy castle." Gold, Jerry, pure gold.

He takes a large bite of a pizza slice, crumbs raining down his shirt.

DALE

I mean, the therapy bills are basically funding this whole operation.

He flips through the pages, a thoughtful expression on his face.

DALE

Okay, maybe a few more jokes about the crippling weight of fame. People seem to like that.

He pulls out a crumpled napkin from his pocket, unfolds it carefully.

DALE

"Why don't scientists trust atoms? Because they make up everything!" Classic. Needs work.

He adds some notes in the margin;
rewrites the punchline.

DALE

Right, next joke... the one about the time a
llama tried to steal my Emmy...

He grins, remembering the incident. He
resumes writing, a happy smile on his
face, a low chuckle escaping him. The
phone rings, startling him.

DALE

Hello? Oh, it's you... Yeah, the tour dates are
locked in... Yes, I am fully aware of the
implications of performing in front of fifty
thousand people who bought tickets based on my
jokes about the struggles of having a pet
squirrel... Yeah, no pressure at all. I'll call you
back.

He hangs up, a slight tremor in his
hand. He takes another bite of pizza.

DALE

(to himself)

Fifty thousand people. And I still haven't quite
figured out this whole adulting thing. But hey,
at least the pizza's good.

He returns to his writing, a determined
glint in his eyes. The sun sets, casting
long shadows across the room.

FADE OUT.

Scene 7: Inner Peace

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Sunlight streams through the gap in the curtains. Empty pizza boxes are stacked like tiny, greasy skyscrapers. Dale sits cross-legged on the floor, amidst the chaos, a serene smile playing on his lips. He's wearing the same clothes as yesterday, but somehow, they look... different. Less rumpled. More... enlightened.

DALE

So, that's it, huh?

He gestures vaguely around the room, encompassing the pizza boxes, the half-written joke book, and the general air of controlled pandemonium.

DALE

Years of therapy, crippling self-doubt, a pet squirrel with a penchant for arson... all culminating in this... this... zen-like acceptance of my inherent awfulness.

He laughs, a genuine, unforced sound.

DALE

Turns out, inner peace isn't about achieving some flawless, idealized version of yourself. It's about accepting that you're a walking, talking, pizza-eating disaster and being perfectly okay with it.

He picks up a discarded pizza crust and examines it thoughtfully.

DALE

Even this greasy relic holds a certain... charm. He takes a bite of the crust, savoring the experience.

DALE

Maybe I'll write a joke about that. "What's the difference between a pizza and a lie? A pizza can feed a family." Nah, too obvious.

He throws the crust into a nearby box, then stands, stretching luxuriously.

DALE

Fifty thousand people. Fifty thousand potential targets for my perfectly honed brand of self-deprecating humor. Bring it on.

He grabs his joke book, a renewed sense of purpose in his eyes. He smiles, a mischievous glint in his eye.

DALE

Time to conquer the world, one slightly offensive joke at a time.

He walks confidently towards the door, leaving the trail of pizza boxes undisturbed. A faint scent of pepperoni hangs in the air.

FADE OUT.

Scene 8: Full Circle

EXT. IDAHO TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A small-town Idaho square, bustling with a Saturday market. A banner proclaims "Welcome Home, Dale! The Comedian Who Conquered...Well, a Lot of Stuff." Dale, wearing a ridiculously oversized sequined jacket, stands on a makeshift stage - a slightly wobbly picnic table. He's holding a microphone, slightly sweaty but beaming.

DALE

Howdy, folks! Remember me?

The crowd cheers wildly. A few throw slightly wilted tomatoes.

DALE

grinning

I'm Dale! The guy who used to tell jokes so bad, they'd make a badger weep. And, uh... now tells jokes that make badgers... well, I'm not sure what they do when they laugh, but they're *definitely* reacting.

He pauses for laughter, which comes readily.

DALE

So, I spent a while chasing fame and fortune, you know? Filled stadiums, even got to open for a moderately successful... *cough*... polka band once. Turns out, nothing beats the thrill of performing for... gestures to the crowd ...a slightly judgmental audience that knows your mom.

More laughter. A woman yells "Your mom still makes those terrible potato cakes, Dale!"

DALE

wry smile

Yeah, those are... legendary. In the worst possible way. You know, I learned a lot on my travels. I learned that expensive champagne tastes suspiciously like the cheap stuff. I learned that fame is fleeting. And I learned that no matter how far you run, you can't escape your family's terrible casserole recipes.

He takes a sip of water, seemingly to compose himself but really just to check if it is also the cheap stuff.

DALE

But most importantly, I learned... that it's good to be home.

He beams, truly happy. He looks out at the audience, taking in their smiling faces. He takes another sip of water. It tastes... familiar.

DALE

Now, who wants to hear a joke about a badger and a potato cake?

The crowd roars with laughter, the sound echoing through the quiet town square. The sun shines brightly.

FADE OUT.

Scene 9: The Unfinished Business

INT. DALE'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dale's childhood bedroom. Posters of obscure 80s bands adorn the walls. A half-eaten bag of chips sits on a dusty desk. Dale, still in his sequined jacket, stands awkwardly before a small, battered suitcase.

DALE

Right, unfinished business.

He opens the suitcase. Inside, nestled amongst faded photos and yearbooks, is a worn, leather-bound journal.

DALE

Ah, yes. My teenage angst, meticulously documented.

He flips through the journal, a mixture of cringe and amusement on his face. He finds a page filled with angsty poetry.

DALE

reading aloud, in a dramatic whisper

"Oh, cruel world, why do you scorn my emo haircut? Why does my crush only talk to Chad?"

He chuckles, then sighs.

DALE

Chad. Still haunts my dreams.

He pulls out a smaller, unmarked box from the suitcase. He carefully opens it. Inside, he finds a small, tarnished silver locket.

DALE

to himself
Sarah...

He holds the locket, remembering. A flicker of something akin to genuine emotion crosses his face, quickly masked by a wry smile.

DALE

Probably best not to stir that pot. Unless...
He pulls out his phone, dials a number, and hesitates.

DALE

nervously

Hey Sarah? It's Dale. Listen, I know it's been... a while. About that locket... and maybe... coffee?

He winces slightly, anticipating rejection but also holding out a sliver of hope. He listens to the other end of the phone call. A small, genuine smile crosses his face.

DALE

smiling

Really? Fantastic! Same place? Great! See you then. Don't wear that... awful... sweater again.

He hangs up, a genuine smile finally settling on his face. He closes the box and the suitcase gently, a sense of closure washing over him. The sequined jacket suddenly feels a little less ridiculous.

FADE OUT.

Scene 10: Unexpected Reunion

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A bustling coffee shop. Sunlight streams through the large windows. Dale sits at a small table, nervously fiddling with a sugar packet. He's wearing the same sequined jacket, but it somehow looks less out of place now. He looks up as the door opens.

SARAH

Dale?

Sarah enters, looking even more stunning than he remembers. She smiles, a touch hesitant, but genuine.

DALE

(grinning)

My God, you haven't aged a day. Except maybe... slightly more fabulous?

SARAH

You're still wearing that jacket.

DALE

It's a classic. A timeless testament to... well, questionable fashion choices. I'm glad you remember.

He gestures to the empty chair opposite him. Sarah sits down, looking amused.

SARAH

So, coffee? After all these years?

DALE

More like a full-blown therapy session, disguised as a casual coffee catch-up.

A beat. He laughs, self-deprecatingly.

DALE

Though, mostly I just wanted to return the
locket.

He reaches into his pocket and produces
the small silver locket from the
previous scene.

SARAH

Oh. That's...sweet, I guess. Although, I never
thought I'd see it again. Or you, for that
matter. You seemed to vanish after graduation.

DALE

Vanished? I was... perfecting my craft. honing my
comedic genius in the backrooms of countless dive
bars. Let's just say it involved several bad wigs
and an unfortunate incident involving a heckler
and a rubber chicken.

SARAH

laughing

I can believe it.

Suddenly, a familiar voice cuts through
their conversation.

CHAD

from behind

Dale? Is that really you?

Chad, slightly balder but still
recognizable, approaches their table, a
look of surprised recognition on his
face. Dale stares at him, speechless for
a moment, then bursts into laughter.

CONTINUED

Scene 11: Personal Growth

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dale's apartment is surprisingly tidy. Empty pizza boxes are neatly stacked, not strewn about. He sits at his desk, a half-written joke on a notepad. He's wearing a plain t-shirt, no sequined jacket in sight. He stares out the window, a pensive look on his face.

DALE

So, the rubber chicken incident... that was really the low point, wasn't it?

He chuckles softly to himself.

DALE

Although, the heckler did have a point. My material was...juvenile. Desperately trying too hard to be shocking.

He picks up a framed photo; it's a picture of him, younger, looking much less put together, onstage with a rather deflated-looking rubber chicken.

DALE

I used to think being offensive was the key to being funny. Turns out, being offensive just makes you offensive.

He puts the photo down, a small smile playing on his lips.

DALE

Turns out, people connect with honesty, even if it's honest about being a complete and utter buffoon.

He picks up his pen, begins to write in his notebook again.

DALE

Maybe my act should be less about shock value and

more about... well, me. The ridiculous, flawed,
slightly less offensive me.

He pauses, then adds a line to the joke.
He reads it aloud.

DALE

(to himself)

"My therapist says I have commitment issues...but
at least I'm committed to therapy." Not bad.

He laughs, a genuine, hearty laugh, not
the forced, edgy laughter of his earlier
routines. He scribbles down a few more
lines, a determined look on his face.

DALE

Yeah. Maybe I'm actually... growing up.

He leans back, a peaceful expression
settling over his features. The sequined
jacket hangs forgotten in the closet.

DALE

Who knew personal growth could be so...
unexpectedly funny?

FADE OUT

Scene 12: Acceptance of Fame

INT. LUXURY HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Sunlight streams into a lavish hotel suite. Empty champagne bottles and scattered rose petals litter the floor. DALE, now sporting a surprisingly tasteful suit no sequins!, sits on a plush chaise lounge, flipping through a magazine featuring himself on the cover. He looks... almost content.

DALE

So, this is it, huh?

He gestures around the suite with a bemused expression.

DALE

Sold-out arenas, screaming fans, enough money to buy a small island... populated entirely by rubber chickens.

He chuckles, a genuine, self-deprecating laugh. He flips to another page, showing a picture of him accepting an award.

DALE

And an award! Who knew I'd get an award for making jokes about my crippling fear of mime?

He sets the magazine down. A thoughtful expression crosses his face.

DALE

Funny how things work out. Spent years trying to be shocking, edgy... only to find out the funniest thing about me is... well, me.

He looks out the window at the sprawling cityscape below. A distant siren wails faintly.

DALE

Still haven't figured out the whole "healthy relationship" thing though.

He sighs, then grins. He picks up the phone and dials a number.

DALE

Hey, Brenda? It's Dale. Listen, I know we said no more rubber chickens... but I've got a new idea. A giant, inflatable one. For my next tour...

He winks at the phone, a mischievous gleam in his eye. The faint sound of laughter can be heard from the other end of the line.

DALE

Yeah, I know. It's... ambitious.

He leans back on the chaise lounge, a comfortable silence hanging in the air. The sunlight catches the glint of a small, almost unnoticeable sequined detail on his otherwise tasteful suit. A tiny, almost invisible rubber chicken.

DALE

But hey, at least I'm committed to my brand of crazy.

FADE OUT

Scene 13: The Final Laugh

INT. DALE'S PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

Dale, looking remarkably relaxed in sweatpants and a ridiculously oversized novelty sweater depicting a flock of rubber chickens, sips champagne. The jet is in flight, the city lights a glittering blur below. He stares out the window, a small, almost imperceptible smirk playing on his lips.

DALE

You know, for a guy who peaked in high school, I've got a pretty impressive collection of tiny, sequined rubber chickens.

He pauses, letting the silence hang for a beat before delivering the punchline.

DALE

(with a wry grin)

Turns out, there's a surprisingly large market for that kind of thing.

He takes another sip of champagne, then throws his head back and lets out a hearty laugh, the sound echoing in the luxurious cabin. The camera focuses on a single, slightly out-of-focus rubber chicken adorning his sweater; it seems to wink.

DALE

Who knew?

He sighs contentedly, a satisfied smile on his face. The distant hum of the jet engines forms a subtle counterpoint to the quiet joy in his eyes.

DALE

Maybe there's hope for me after all.
He looks out the window again, a pensive
expression crossing his face, only to
break out in laughter again, the sound
quickly fading as the jet continues its
journey.

DALE

Or maybe not.

He shrugs, picks up another mini bottle
of champagne and pops the cork, the
sound sharp and unexpected, before
taking a long sip and smiling to
himself.

DALE

Either way, it's been a hell of a ride.

FADE OUT

Scene 14: A Lasting Impression

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The roar of the crowd is deafening. Confetti rains down from the ceiling. Dale, in a sequined jumpsuit that somehow manages to be both dazzling and deeply unsettling, takes a final bow. He's bathed in the spotlight, his face a mask of weary triumph.

DALE

And that, my friends, is how I accidentally became the king of rubber chicken comedy. He pauses, a mischievous glint in his eye. He throws a rubber chicken into the crowd, which is immediately snatched up by a screaming fan.

DALE

Don't worry, I have plenty more where that came from. Actually, no I don't. My assistant stole most of them. He shrugs, a grin spreading across his face. The crowd laughs, a wave of sound that washes over him.

DALE

But seriously, thanks. Seriously. For real. This means more to me than...than...well, more than a lifetime supply of tiny rubber chickens. Almost. He wipes a tear from his eye, or maybe it's just sweat. It's hard to tell at this point.

DALE

(sincerely, almost)
I never thought I'd make it out of Idaho, let alone sell out Madison Square Garden.

He gestures wildly, nearly knocking over a microphone stand. The crowd cheers louder.

DALE

So, yeah. That's my story. Probably won't be in any history books. Unless they dedicate one entirely to rubber chickens. Which, let's be honest, is a long shot.

He pauses, then leans into the microphone, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper.

DALE

(winking)

But hey, at least I have a good story to tell my therapist.

He winks again, then throws another slightly less sequined rubber chicken into the crowd. The audience erupts in laughter and applause. The lights fade.

DALE

Goodnight, everybody!

The crowd roars its approval. Confetti continues to fall like a bizarre, colorful snow.

FADE OUT

Scene 15: The Epilogue

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT - DAY YEARS LATER

Dale's apartment is surprisingly tidy, though still decorated with a healthy dose of kitsch. A wall is covered in platinum records, alongside framed newspaper clippings proclaiming him "The Rubber Chicken King" and "Comedy's Most Unlikely Success Story." He's wearing a bathrobe that looks suspiciously like a giant chicken.

DALE

So, yeah. Turns out, accidentally becoming a globally-renowned comedic genius has its perks. He gestures vaguely around the apartment. He picks up a golden statuette, examining it with a bored expression.

DALE

Another award. Who needs 'em? He tosses it onto a pile of similar awards. He then opens a fridge packed with gourmet food, and pulls out a bottle of expensive champagne.

DALE

But the champagne? I'll take it. He pours himself a glass and takes a long sip. He takes a moment, staring out of the window.

DALE

Still can't believe I made it out of that godforsaken town. Idaho's never seen a comedian like me, and hopefully it never will again.

He chuckles, a dry, self-deprecating sound.

DALE

Though, I did inspire a whole new generation of rubber chicken enthusiasts, so there's that. He smiles, a rare genuine smile that reaches his eyes.

DALE

Who knew a man with questionable fashion sense and a love for poultry could take over the world? Not me, that's for sure. He raises his glass in a toast to himself.

DALE

To me. To my questionable choices. And to the glorious absurdity of it all. He drains the glass, a contented sigh escaping his lips.

DALE

Now, where did I put that new rubber chicken collection? I hear there's a limited edition one made of solid gold...and that, my friends, is a story for another time. He winks at the camera. A mischievous glint returns to his eye.

FADE OUT

Scene 16: A Peaceful Ending

EXT. IDAHO COUNTRYSIDE - SUNSET

Years later. The Idaho countryside stretches out, vast and peaceful under a fiery sunset. Dale, now older but still sporting a touch of his signature quirky style, sits on a porch swing. He's sipping iced tea, a far cry from the expensive champagne of his apartment.

DALE

Turns out, the most hilarious joke of all was leaving.

He chuckles, a low rumble in his chest.

DALE

All that fame, all those awards...felt like a really long, expensive therapy session.

He gazes at the sky, a thoughtful expression on his face.

DALE

But this...this is peace.

A gentle breeze rustles the leaves of nearby trees. He takes another sip of his tea.

DALE

Not bad for a guy who thought rubber chickens were the pinnacle of comedic achievement.

A small, almost imperceptible smile plays on his lips.

DALE

Though, I did always wonder if they'd ever make a solid-gold one that was actually comfortable to hold.

He shakes his head, a wry grin spreading across his face.

DALE

Maybe that's the next chapter. Or maybe not.
Sometimes, a quiet sunset is all you need.

He leans back in the swing, closing his eyes as the sun dips below the horizon, painting the sky in vibrant hues of orange and purple. A contented sigh escapes him.

DALE

Idaho. Who knew?

He opens his eyes, a twinkle in them.

DALE

Turns out, even an asshole can find a little bit of peace and quiet. Just don't tell anyone I said that.

He winks at the camera, a final mischievous glint in his eye before the scene fades to black.

FADE TO BLACK

Scene 17: A New Generation

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

A packed comedy club, buzzing with energy. The stage is bathed in a single spotlight. A young comedian, CHLOE, stands center stage, microphone in hand. She's got Dale's same mischievous glint in her eye, but with a modern edge.

CHLOE

So, I was at the DMV the other day...
Chloe pauses for effect, her timing impeccable.

CHLOE

And I swear, the only thing slower than the line was the Wi-Fi.
The audience roars with laughter. Chloe grins, a confident smirk on her face.

CHLOE

I tried to tell a joke to pass the time, you know, something about the existential dread of waiting for your license renewal...
She shrugs playfully.

CHLOE

But honestly? Even *I* couldn't make *that* funny.
More laughter erupts. Chloe leans into the microphone.

CHLOE

They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, right? Well, let me tell you, trying to imitate Dale "The Idaho Destroyer" Henderson's comedic genius...that's just masochism.
She winks, a playful nod to the audience.

CHLOE

But hey, at least I inherited his impeccable timing. And his questionable taste in novelty rubber chickens.

Chloe holds up a small, slightly battered rubber chicken. The audience laughs even harder.

CHLOE

I'm working on a solid gold one. Wish me luck. It's gonna take more than just a few DMV visits to afford it.

She gestures to the audience. They cheer wildly, appreciative of the nod to Dale's legacy and Chloe's fresh take.

CHLOE

So thanks for coming out tonight. I hope you all had a good laugh.

CHLOE

Because let's face it, life's too short for bad jokes and slow internet.

Chloe takes a bow as the applause continues, a new generation carrying the torch of Idaho's finest comedic legacy.

FADE OUT

Scene 18: The Final Fade Out

EXT. IDAHO COUNTRYSIDE - SUNSET

A vast, sprawling landscape. The sun dips below the horizon, painting the sky in fiery hues of orange and purple. A lone tumbleweed rolls across the empty road.

A weathered, slightly battered, gold-colored rubber chicken sits perched on a fence post, glinting in the fading light.

The camera slowly pans out, moving further and further away from the chicken, until the Idaho landscape consumes it entirely.

The only sound is the whisper of the wind.

The screen slowly fades to black. Then, a single, faint chuckle echoes before the final fade.

FADE TO BLACK