

Pink Slip Party

By

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FADE IN:

ROLL CREDITS:

INT. CONDO - MORNING

An alarm clock buzzes monotonously in ZACH'S meticulous bedroom. His eyes open, blinking in time with the beeping.

ZACH is in his late-20s. He's a dapper man who's fastidious about his appearance. He has warm eyes and a contagious laugh.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

A radio alarm BLARES Indie rock in JAKE'S slovenly bedroom. JAKE is a prototypical, early-30s Gen-X slacker.

The dilapidated look of the room is juxtaposed with the appearance of expensive musical instruments and sophisticated recording equipment.

JAKE'S hand reaches out the blanket - SLAPS the snooze button.

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

Telephone rings in BARBARA'S apartment. She pulls blanket back from her face, reaches down on the floor... picks-up a phone.

BARBARA

Mornin' Dad. Uh-Huh. Okay. Love you too.

Barbara puts the phone down, rolls out of bed, stares out the window, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

The floor is covered with books, including, THE CRUCIBLE, by Arthur Miller, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: PLAYS, 1937 to 1955 and THE GODFATHER by Mario Puzo.

BARBARA is pretty in an impish way. Her demeanor is delicate and affable. However, her eyes burn with animal intensity.

In the bathroom, her boyfriend, GABE is urinating.

GABE (OS)

Has he ever missed a day?

Barbara smiles fondly to herself, and shakes her head.

BARBARA

Only once in a blue moon.

INT. CONDO - SAME

ZACH pulls on an expensive shirt. Hands emerge behind him, KNEADING his chest. A man KISSES his neck.

The man reaches down his pants. Zach BRUSHES his hand away.

ZACH

Can I call you a cab... (draws a blank)

ROBERT

Robert.

ZACH

Robert... right.

Zach flips open his cell phone.

ROBERT

Don't bother. (kisses Zach's forehead)
It was nice not quite knowing you.

Robert walks away leaving Zach standing alone in front of the mirror. For the briefest of moments Zach looks... ashamed.

INT. HOUSE - SAME

JAKE's alarm BUZZES again. He pulls the duvet down. SLAPS the snooze button again. Lights a half-smoked cigarette.

On his bedside table is a small wad of cash. Jake picks it up, quickly flicks through it, and then places it into a jar underneath his bed.

A masking-tape label on the jar reads: "DEMO CD"

INT. APARTMENT - SAME

Barbara tries to brush her hair in the bathroom, but can't seem to get a look-in, as her boyfriend GABE is hogging the mirror going through a set of comical, physical poses.

Gabe's tall, handsome and athletic in a gruff kind of way. He's also a semi-professional, semi-funny comedian.

BARBARA

Do you have a show tonight?

GABE

It's a last minute thing. There's gonna be agents there.

BARBARA

Hey. I got a joke for ya...
(readies herself)
What's brown and has holes in it?

Gabe shakes his head impassively.

GABE

I give up... what?

BARBARA

(laughing)
Swiss shit. Get it? Swiss shit?

Gabe smiles politely while Barbara chuckles at her joke. Gabe gives Barbara a condescending kiss on the forehead.

GABE

Stick to your day job, Baby.

Gabe gently nudges Barbara out of the way to get a better look at himself. Barbara easily acquiesces.

Barbara takes out compact and tries her best to smarten herself despite the limited scope of her mirror.

EXT. CONDO BUILDING - SAME

A shiny BMW pulls out of an apartment block garage. Zach, smirks behind the wheel. He glances at his gold, diamond-encrusted watch. Drives on.

EXT. SMALL APARTMENT BLOCK - SAME

Barbara leaves her apartment wearing conservative black trousers and a brown polo-neck sweater. She starts walking.

INT. HOUSE - SAME

JAKE'S radio alarm goes off again. This time he depresses the snooze button with a cigarette butt.

As he pulls the duvet back over his head, the bleeping of a muted-alarm gets his attention. He NOTICES IT'S HIS CELL PHONE on his nightstand. Reluctantly pulls the duvet down.

Jake sits up. He's clothed like a VICAR - dog collar and all. His face is coated in gothic-styled make-up.

The door to his room BURSTS open. A pale man in his underwear holding a bowl of cereal hunkers in his doorway. He is GAVIN, Jake's housemate.

GAVIN

Padre! How'd your first Sid-less show go?

JAKE

Didn't miss a beat. We rocked so hard I can still hear the angels ringing in my ears.

GAVIN

That'd be Tinnitus. And you better hope those angels are real, 'cos it gonna take a miracle for you not be late again.

JAKE looks at his clock. Mouths the words, "Oh Shit" and quickly hurries out of bed.

END CREDITS

INT. DOWNTOWN OFFICE, SHETLAND'S OPERATION CENTER - MORNING

Overhead fluorescent lights illuminate like cascading dominoes. Barbara smiles warmly as she FLIPS the switches on.

Barbara heads over to her front desk and starts organizing as people slowly file in. She's a FLURRY of merry motion.

On her desk is a corporate gift plaque celebrating 10 YEARS OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE... as a receptionist. The plaque itself is barely the size of a CD case. Nevertheless, Barbara proudly maneuvers it to face all the people pouring past her desk.

An older man in a dark blue suit - wearing a somber expression - brushes through the reception area.

BARBARA

Morning Mr. Jenkins... how's the wife and kids...? (no response) If you have a moment later on, I was wondering if we c-

MR. JENKINS

Barbara we need coffee and muffins in the conference room ASAP. Hold all calls, okay?

Before Barbara can respond, Mr. Jenkins has walked away, still shrouded by a gloomy cloud of disquiet.

BOBBY, a maintenance guy, stands at the front of Barbara's desk flashing a toothy grin.

BOBBY

Looks like the boss has a bee in his bonnet
- wouldn't ya say, B?

BARBARA

Yeah I guess. I wonder what gives.

BOBBY

Looks like some of the head honchos from
corporate are also here. My guess is that
something's going down.

The phone rings. Barbara answers.

BARBARA

Good morning, Shetland's. (listens) 3rd
quarter results? You'll need to speak to
someone in corporate for that. Yes. Our
headquarters are on 1st avenue and we have
retail stores throughout the Northwest.
This is the operation center... customer
service, mail order fulfillment, that kind
of stuff. (listens) I'll put you through.

Barbara looks over to the conference room, where a lot of
somber men in suits are now sitting. A small look of concern
passes across her face.

INT. SHETLAND'S HQ, TECH DIVISION - SAME

The quintessential dotcom workplace.

Converted industrial building with high-tech decor. Eager young
workers BUZZ BUSILY around on foot, SEGWAY, and on SCOOTER.

The office has all sorts of decadent amenities, including a
pool table, pin-ball machines, arcade games, espresso maker,
and a couple of large, flat screen TVs on the wall flashing
stock tickers

ZACH'S OFFICE

ZACH's greeted by DEBBIE his personal assistant -- coffee in
one hand and a small brown bag in the other.

ZACH

Morning, Deb. What does the ticker say?

DEBBIE

We're down another 4 points.

Zach pauses for a moment.

ZACH

No problemo... once the boys on Wall Street get wind of our 3rd quarter results we'll be on the up and up.

Debbie is now standing next to Zach as he sits.

DEBBIE

Ryan called about racquetball. And Don Shetland wants to meet you in his office at 2.

Zach can barely contain his chuffed grin. He's pleased that the big boss wants to meet.

As Debbie turns to leave

DEBBIE

Oh yeah... a Paul stopped by to drop-off your shirt... said you left it at his place the other night.

ZACH

(Face burns red. Fumbles his words.)
Uh, yeah... Paul... he's a racquetball partner of mine.

Debbie reaches into the bag, pulls out a fancy dress shirt.

DEBBIE

Do you normally wear Kenneth Cole to play... racquetball?

They both stand and smile uncomfortably for a moment. Zach grabs the shirt... a little too aggressively.

ZACH

He must've packed it in his gym bag by mistake. (gathers himself) Okay... I'll call you if I need anything else. Thanks.

As Debbie walks out of his office her face cracks into a small, contemptuous smirk.

INT. SHETLANDS CAMPING/OUTDOORS ADVENTURE STORE - MORNING

JAKE stands by a locker changing into climbing gear.

His haughty, holier-than thou manager Theresa walks in, not giving a damn whether he's naked or not. Jake uses a climbing helmet to cover his genitals.

THERESA

Does time have any meaning to you?

JAKE

My car's been acting up.
(Looks at clock on his CELL PHONE)
I'm only ten minutes late.

THERESA

You're always ten minutes late.

JAKE shrugs, turns, pulls-away his helmet revealing his bare ass to Theresa. She pauses for a moment, a little SHOCKED.

THERESA

Seeing as you're in such a playful mood,
I'd like you to spend the morning session
with the Kiddie Climbers.

Jake turns to protest vehemently, but Theresa's gone.

INT. SHETLAND'S CAMPING/OUTDOORS ADVENTURE STORE - SAME
CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA

Young kids from four to ten play in an indoor playroom.

Jake's supervising with another employee. Jake's apparent ambivalence to the children is strikingly contrasted by his fellow employee's willingness to have fun.

JAKE, from the corner of his eye sees a precious 7-year-old girl approaching. He does his best NOT to make eye contact.

GIRL

Wanna play Checkers?

JAKE

Sorry. I don't know that game.

GIRL

Wanna play hide and seek?

JAKE

I don't know that one either.

The girl seems a little confused, until...

GIRL

I can teach you!

MRS HOFFMAN, a striking woman in her late thirties approaches Jake from behind.

MRS. HOFFMAN

You a trainer?

Jake notices her, leers at her curvaceous body. He nods.

MRS. HOFFMAN

I need training.

Jake practically falls off his seat to help her. The precious girl's disappointed Jake's leaving.

GIRL

Maybe we can play later, mister.

JAKE

Sure.

As JAKE and MRS. HOFFMAN leave the play area one of the kids runs into Mrs. Hoffman... and she scurries away. She laughs.

MRS. HOFFMAN

They're such a handful at this age. You have kids?

JAKE looks back at the cute little girl, noticeably hesitates.

JAKE

Did you say you're an intermediate... or beginner?

INT. SHETLAND'S HQ, TECH DIVISION - LATE MORNING

ZACH'S sitting in his office supposedly reading his e-mail. Crass rap music is playing from his CD player.

CLOSER IN

We see that ZACH'S actually reading a book, 'The Age of Reason' by Jean-Paul Satre.

As DEBBIE saunters into the room, ZACH promptly STUFFS the book into his desk drawer and turns the music down.

DEBBIE

Your broker's on line one, and
(inquisitively) Rainbow's on line 2?

Zach frowns... shakes his head, seemingly annoyed by this.

ZACH

Rainbow's my mother. Tell her I'm out of the office and you don't know when I'll return.

DEBBIE

Sure. (goes to leave, stops) Uh, I thought your Mother's name is Marissa?

ZACH

It is... it... (bites his lip) Just put my broker through, okay?

INT. CAMPING/OUTDOORS ADVENTURE STORE - SAME

Jake's spotting Mrs. Hoffman, as she's learning to climb on a less-than-dangerous 25ft rock wall. Jake's a little too pre-occupied with her rear end.

MRS HOFFMAN

How does it look?

JAKE

Good. Good form.

MRS. HOFFMAN'S lips rise into a lascivious grin. Jake lowers her down.

JAKE

You have a lotta stamina, Mrs. Hoffman.

MRS HOFFMAN

I run marathons. Do you like to run?

Jake fumbles with the gear he's carrying... nods.

MRS HOFFMAN

Do you have plans for lunch?

Jake looks around. Sees that the kids in the KIDDIE CLIMBER area seem to be okay.

JAKE

I could eat.

INT. OPERATION CENTER - NOON

Close-up on Barbara's face. She appears to be having a very, very serious conversation with someone.

BARBARA

Mr. Jenkins, I've been an employee of Shetland's ever since I left school. Being a receptionist-slash-admin may sound restrictive to some, but you'd be surprised just how much I've learnt from greeting people on the phone, filling and organizing mail. Nearly every communication that involves this department, passes through me at some stage or the other.

Barbara takes a deep breath.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Barbara standing in front of the bathroom mirror.

BARBARA

With that said, I think it's about time I broadened my horizons... (holds her chin high) I'd like to officially apply for a position in our call center.

A flushing toilet silences Barbara.

A well-dressed, corporate-looking woman emerges from one of the stalls. She smiles and then scurries out the bathroom...

INT. SHETLAND'S HQ, TECH DIVISION - AFTERNOON

ZACH, speaking on his phone.

ZACH

Diversify? Please. I'm not some 60-year old geezer, angling for retirement. I'm the Z-Man... a 50% margin means nothing to me. Besides, the market's gonna experience an uptick soon. (listens) Just put everything I've got on the sock puppet company, okay?

Debbie walks into the office. Zach cups a hand over the phone.

DEBBIE

Mr. Shetland's expecting you.

ZACH

(on phone)

Okay, everything, I'm sure... we can always ditch 'em tomorrow. Uh-huh, money talks bullshit walks, kimo sabe.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MID-AFTERNOON

Clothes and climbing gear are sprinkled throughout. Jake's head emerges from under a sheet.

MRS HOFFMAN

Now, that's my kind of lunch.

Jake smiles. He SCRUTINIZES her diamond wedding ring. Mrs. Hoffman notices this.

MRS HOFFMAN

I've been divorced for eight-months... old habits die-hard.

JAKE

I'm curious... is this the first time since...

MRS. HOFFMAN

Yeah. But don't worry stud... no strings is just what I'm in the market for. In fact you're doing me a favor... I owe you one!

Jake moves in closer.

JAKE

I don't believe in outstanding debts, so how about we settle the score right now!

As they begin to kiss, Jake looks over Mrs. Hoffman's shoulder, notices the clock on the bedside table BLINKING: 2.30pm.

A PANICKED EXPRESSION whisks across Jake's face.

JAKE

Omigod. I gotta go.

Like a Jack Rabbit, Jake HOPS out of the bed.

INT. OPERATION CENTER - AFTERNOON

Barbara's frowns at the computer screen on her desk. She rigorously TAPS the keyboard, frowns again.

Bobby walks past her desk.

BARBARA

Bobby, is the network down?

BOBBY

Nope, not that I know of.

BARBARA

Weird. I can't access anything. It's like my computer's completely frozen.

INT. SHETLAND'S HQ - LARGE OFFICE - SAME

Zach is sitting quietly in the office of DON SHETLAND - the CEO of SHETLANDS.

Shetland is browsing through a large printed report... his expression is impassive. He flicks the report across the desk to Zach.

DON

Our 3rd quarter results.

Zach begins to flip through the pages.

DON

Don't bother. It's a gruesome read.
(Puts an unlit cigar in his mouth)
Bottom line: We lost 58 million dollars this quarter... the majority of which can attributed to the dot-com division... the one you supposedly manage.

Zach begins to squirm. Don nods to the report.

DON

200k on travel, 2 million on new hires, 80k on our summer party... and... I love this... 7,000 smackeros on... soft drinks. How long do you expect me to support this?

ZACH

We'll be profitable soon... trust me.

DON

How soon?

ZACH

(Wavers) By my calculations... 2008.

Don takes a deep breath, eyeing Zach earnestly.

DON

I'm a patient man, Zach. But enough is enough. We need to compensate for these losses by downsizing... comprende?

DEBBIE enters the room, unannounced. She leans over the table and lights Don's cigar. Zach's a little surprised.

DON

A lot of fine, loyal people are gonna lose their jobs today. And I need someone who's good at damage control... a straight shooter... not someone who spends half their day - and my money - on the phone with their stockbroker.

ZACH

What? Whatever she...

DON

I want your resignation on my desk by the end of the day. Got it?

Zach's face turns as white as the driven snow.

INT. OPERATION CENTER - LATE AFTERNOON

Barbara's sitting in an office opposite Mr. Jenkins.

BARBARA

...with that said, I think it's about time I broadened my horizons... I'd like to app-

JENKINS

Barbara. The reason I invited you here... is because... well, the boys from corporate have asked that we slash 30% of our staff... and... well, I'm sorry but...

The corporate-looking woman from the bathroom enters the room. SHE STANDS OVER BARBARA HOLDING A CARDBOARD BOX.

Barbara says nothing. Her expression does not change.

JENKINS

Uh, the good news is, we're offering a very competitive severance package, with cobr-

BARBARA

I don't get it, what'll you do without a receptionist?

JENKINS

We're going with an automated phone tree.

Barbara places her hand over her mouth, horrified.

JENKINS

Janice from HR is going to escort you from the building. You have 15 minutes to clear your desk out. For what it's worth... it's been a pleasure working with you... and if you ever need a reference...

Mr. Jenkins' insincere smile does nothing to soothe Barbara.

EXT. CAMPING/OUTDOORS ADVENTURE STORE - AFTERNOON

Jake SCAMPERS through the front door of the store. A group of people are gathered in the KIDDIE CLIMBER area.

When Jake reaches the crowd he sees that they - along with two medics - are gathered around the same precious, 7-year old girl who asked to play with him earlier.

Before Jake can say anything, Theresa grabs his arm and forcefully drags him over to one of the climbing walls.

THERESA

Where have you been?

JAKE

I was... is she-

THERESA

Her arm is broken.

JAKE

Look, I had-

THERESA

Please... go tell it to the mountain.

Jake's startled by Theresa's abrasiveness. Theresa seems a little unsure of herself, but continues on.

THERESA

We've been asked to make lay-offs at the store... and... with this latest 'incident' you've made my decision a lot easier.

JAKE

Me? What about Richie...

Both Theresa and Jake look over to the other side of the room, where a slightly dim-witted man, (RICHIE) appears to have tied his own hands together while practicing how to tie a slip-knot.

THERESA

What he lacks in smarts he makes up for with enthusiasm.

JAKE

In other words, a goose-stepping drone.

THERESA

Whatever helps you sleep at night, Jake.

OUTSIDE THE STORE.

Jake gets into his car, still ignoring Theresa. He starts firing the ignition but the car won't start. Theresa sniggers.

Car SPUTTERS, starts.

JAKE

What annoys you more? That you did it with me, or that I didn't call?

Theresa scornfully smirks at Jake. Jake winks, and speeds off.

INT. BARBARA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Barbara's standing over her kitchen table admiring some items she stole from work: A laptop, printing paper, stapler, and an unusual amount of pens.

Barbara takes the last item out of the box... her 10-YEAR PLAQUE. She looks at it with barely concealed disgust, lips gently quivering, tears of frustration well-up in her eyes.

She picks it up and THROWS it against the wall. The plaque does not SMASH, but it does leave a HUGE DENT in the wall.

Barbara looks upward.

BARBARA

God... whatever I did to piss you off... I'm sorry.

Another, larger piece of plaster FALLS TO THE GROUND. Barbara frowns.

INT. CONDO - NIGHT

Zach sits on his sofa sipping from a bottle of brandy, listening to classical music.

TV lights FLICKER in his deadened eyes.

Zach puts down the glass, picks up the bottle, and take a very long swig.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake's lounging on his sofa, smoking a bong with his friend LIONEL. LIONEL is a wannabe Rastafarian, with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Gavin sits rigidly in his chair. On the TV is a surfing video.

LIONEL

I once met this guy in San Diego, he hadn't worked for years, and like, he just goes wherever the waves are. That's what you should do, Jake. Screw working.

GAVIN

Yeah, but even a surf bum needs money.

Lionel takes a long hit on the bong.

LIONEL

I dunno... maybe he robbed banks?

JAKE

Been watching 'Point Break' again?

GAVIN

Overrated movie.

LIONEL

It's more than a movie - it's a metaphor, a doctorate.

GAVIN

Doctrine?

LIONEL

That too. It's about living for thrills,
carpel tunnel... and all that.

GAVIN

Carpe diem. As in seize the day.

Lionel grabs his crotch.

LIONEL

Seize this. Besides what do ya know about
surfing, being all Arachnophobic 'n shit?

GAVIN

I'm agoraphobic, you Trustafarian twit. If
I had Arachnophobia I... never mind

LIONEL

What you got is full-O-Shit-O-phobia. You
write a newspaper column based on crap
you've never experienced. Without Jake
you'd be foooked!

Gavin holds up the middle finger of his right hand.

GAVIN

Is 'foooked' spelt with one 'O' (puts up
middle finger of LEFT hand) or two?

Jake rolls his eyes.

JAKE

You chicks wanna knit or play Diablo?

Lionel turns on a computer console. Gavin turns to Jake.

GAVIN

When are you gonna start looking for work?

JAKE

Don't sweat it... between unemployment, gigs
and studio sessions I'll have enough dough
to cover the rent and save some money for
my demo CD.

GAVIN

And child support?

An eerie, somber silence fills the room.

JAKE

Yeah... that too.

Jake sighs... picks up the bong and takes a HUGE hit.

JAKE'S ROOM - LATER

Jake sits on his bed looking at a picture of a little girl (not the same one from the store). He picks up the phone.

JAKE

Theresa? It's Jake. (listens) No, I'm not calling to beg for my job back. How's that girl doing? None of my...? Hey... look, I, I... I have daughter that age, I just wanted to make sure, you know- (He smiles) Good. She is? Good. Yeah... thanks.

Puts phone down, breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. RAQUETBALL COURT - AFTERNOON

Zach's playing doubles with business friends/associates, (RYAN, DREW, ANTHONY). They're young, brash, and conceited. Ryan, in particular, is smug and remorseless.

Ryan is preparing to serve.

ZACH

An MBA like me won't be on the market long, so, if there are openings where you work let me know A.S.A.P.

ANTHONY

That's just what we need Yo, some fired dot-gonner to ride our profits to bankruptcy-ville.

Anthony playfully slaps Zach on the back.

ZACH

You're misinformed. I resigned.

RYAN

You say tomato, I say tomato.

ZACH

I'm not tracking.

Ryan BOUNCES the ball a couple of times. The guys snigger.

RYAN

What you call 'resigned'... some call... forced voluntary redundancy.

ZACH

Who told you that?

RYAN, is just about to serve

RYAN

Debbie... she just loves pillow talk.

Ryan SERVES the ball at Zach, who in turn MISSES IT COMPLETELY.

RYAN

Game. Let's hit the bar. Losers buy.

Drew, Zach's teammate, shakes his head in disgust at Zach. Zach looks like he's just been kicked in the stomach.

INT. TRENDY DOWNTOWN BAR - NIGHT

ZACH, walks out of the bathroom, bumps into a stylish, very handsome man. They make strong eye contact. The handsome man holds out his hand.

HANDSOME MAN

Sam Wilson.

ZACH

Zach...

Zach shakes Sam's hand... the handshake lingers.

From over Sam's shoulder Zach sees DREW, ANTHONY and RYAN standing by a table near the bar. The sight of them drags Zach back to reality. He drops Sam's hand like a hot piece of coal and then scurries back to the table.

DREW'S hitting on a pretty girl standing too close to them.

DREW

(Awful Austin Powers impression)
My God you've got a wonderful body. I bet
you shag like a minx!

Pretty girl SLAPS Drew, walks away. The guys all laugh.

RYAN

Hey, Liberace... how long have you been a
switch-hitter?

They all sneer wickedly at Zach.

ZACH

Switch-hitter?

Zach follows Ryan's line-of-sight to see SAM. Zach nervously loosens his tie.

RYAN

So... did you get Romeo's phone number?

Ryan's beady eyes bore into Zach, awaiting his explanation.

ZACH

No. But, I gave him yours. What was it again? 1-800-BLOW ME!

For a moment all is silent, until the guys all LAUGH at Zach's joke. Ryan smiles, but his eyes still look upon Zach suspiciously. Zach meets his glare, then meekly looks away.

EXT. TRENDY DOWNTOWN BAR - SAME

The guys are hopping into a cab. Zach stops short.

ZACH

Guys, I'm beat. I'm gonna head home.

RYAN

Yeah, you need your beauty sleep, 'cos you gotta long day of doing nothin' ahead of ya!

Zach flips-off Ryan.

ANTHONY

See ya on the flip side, Yo.

Anthony slams the door shut, the cab speeds off.

As soon as Zach sees that the cab is out of sight, he creeps back into the bar.

INT. ZACH'S CONDO - MORNING

Zach's grooming himself in front of the hallway mirror, preparing himself as normal for his workday.

From the corner of his eye he sees a man (SAM FROM THE BAR) standing by the kitchen doorway holding a mug.

SAM

How do you take your coffee?

ZACH

(annoyed) Why are you still here?

SAM

I'm making breakfast. (notices the tie) Why the suit? I thought you're unemployed.

ZACH

(meek) I... I am. I...(Focuses on Sam)
You need to leave.

SAM

So, that's it? Wham, bam, thank you Sam?

ZACH

For pity's sake, what do you want? A ring?
I'm not looking for "life partner"... just a...

SAM

A fuck?

Zach says nothing. Looks away.

SAM

Ah... so, black then with two spoon fulls of
shame?

Sam testily puts the coffee down and then hastily barges out of the front door.

Zach looks at his face in the mirror.

He tightens his tie, tighter and tighter until his face is burning red. He eventually loosens the tie and takes a deep breath... self-loathing seething in his eyes.

EXT. ZACH'S CAR - DAY

Zach is driving around in his BMW, talking on his cell phone. He hasn't shaved in three days. His eyes are red. There's a FOR SALE sign stuck on the rear window of the car.

ZACH

How bad is it?
(Smacks the wheel of his car)
Margin calls? How much do I have left, 15K?
(listens) Oh... 15 dollars?

Zach pulls the car over. Listens - puts phone down - Zach's face TURNS PALE. He gets out of the car and VOMITS

INT. COMMUNITY THEATRE - DAY

Actors sit in a semi-circle on a stage. Barbara is handing out scripts to them. BARBARA, sits down. On her left is (SAMMI). Sammi is Barbara's closest friend.

Sitting on her right is BORIS, a short, bespectacled man with an eastern European accent. He is the producer/director.

Some of the actors appear confused by the script.

SAMMI

The Godfather? On stage? In drag? Why?

BORIS

Because this saga is to America what Ulysees was to Greece. What Tartuffe was to France. What Macbeth was to Scotland.

The actors still seem perplexed.

SAMMI

That was clear as mud. Barb?

Barbara noticeably hesitates before answering.

BARBARA

Uh, I think Boris sees the 'Godfather' as THE classic American story, and... its, its cultural appeal transcends dramatic and... I guess, sexual conventions...?

Most of the group nod in unison, understanding Barbara's explanation. However, Boris seems irritated.

BORIS

This is not what I say.

SAMMI

You're right, it wasn't. It actually made just a little bit of sense.

Barbara tries to contain a giggle. BORIS, angrily turns on her.

BORIS

'Ha-ha-ha'. Get my schedule and then start marking out the stage... giggling schoolgirl!

Barbara sheepishly DARTS away to find Boris' stuff.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

BARBARA and SAMMI getting coffee.

SAMMI

Last year was "Paradise Lost", the year before that was "War and Peace". What's next? "Star Wars: Return of the Interpretive Dance?"

BARBARA

I did voice a protest.

Sammi raises her eyebrows, in a disbelieving gesture.

BARBARA

Okay, so, I didn't exactly whisper... I mumbled... incoherently.

The girls sit down at a table.

BARBARA

I feel your pain! I'd much rather do one of the classics: Miller, Williams, Pinter.

SAMMI

As long as the little dictator's in charge that's never gonna happen. Then again... (furtively) now that you're vocationally challenged... you could get more involved..

BARBARA

Now that I'm 'Vocationally challenged' I should be looking for work, not conspiring with a harlot.

SAMMI

I'm just saying... if a single Mom like me can hold down a job and act on the side, Lord only knows what you're capable of.

BARBARA

Speaking of which, Mommy Dearest... isn't school up for the day?

Sammi looks at her watch. Her eyes widen in dread.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Barbara walks through front door. Her father, FRANK, is unpacking groceries in her kitchen.

FRANK

Princess.

Barbara walks over, kisses Frank. Frank continues to unpack groceries (including Macaroni & Cheese, microwaveable dinners, donuts... etc).

BARBARA

Dad, you didn't have to-

FRANK

Just 'cos you're unemployed, doesn't mean you gotta starve. You're thin enough as is.

Frank removes food from the cupboard... mostly macrobiotic stuff.

FRANK

What's up with the organic chow? Gabe's?

Barbara hesitates before answering. Then nods. She walks over to the dinning table, where there is a newspaper lying out. Jobs have been CIRCLED in the HELP WANTED section.

FRANK

There's some good stuff in there. You shouldn't have a problem finding work.

BARBARA

I'm really not sure whether I wanna go back to another admin job... maybe-

FRANK

In case you hadn't noticed the economy's in the toilet. It's best to hunker-down and be safe. Stick to doing what you do best.

BARBARA

Yeah... you're right.

Frank winks, kisses Barbara on the forehead.

BARBARA'S TV ROOM - LATER

Barbara's lounging on the couch with Gabe. They're watching a baseball game. Barbara's feet are on his chest.

Barbara rubs her toes tantalizingly against his shoulder.

GABE

Back off, Flipper.

Gabe chuckles at his own joke. Barbara smirks.

GABE

Hey, my humor's like a fine wine; it's -

BARBARA

(teasing) Rancid vinegar?

GABE

Hey, one of these days, this funny-man is gonna buy us our dream house.

BARBARA

(hopeful) In Paris... ?

GABE

Baby, please! Why would you wanna live in a place you can't speak the language? I was thinking more like a farm in Iowa.

BARBARA

You do know that 'Field of Dreams' is a work of fiction, right?

Gabe, kisses Barbara on the forehead, rolls off the couch and heads toward the kitchen. Barbara switches the channel.

BARBARA

Once I find a job we should celebrate by going to NY... take a carriage ride.

GABE (OS)

Why?

BARBARA

Because it's romantic.

GABE (OS)

Doesn't your mom still live in NY?

Barbara FROWNS.

BARBARA

Maybe San Fran would be better.

Gabe walks into the room holding a phone and a box of donuts.

GABE

How long have you been on the Fatkins diet?

BARBARA

Dad.

GABE

This stuff'll kill ya. (points to phone)
Let's order from that Veganeze restaurant.

BARBARA

The one that does Vegan Chinese food? Sure.
Get whatever you want.

Gabe flips back to the game. Barbara's mood has darkened.

INT/EXT. HOMES OF BARBARA, ZACH AND JAKE - MORNING/DAY/NIGHT
MONTAGE

During this time-lapse sequence, Barbara and Zach are looking for work, applying for jobs. Meanwhile, Jake's enjoying his 'paid vacation'.

- BARBARA highlighting jobs in the newspaper. All of the jobs she's highlighted are menial office positions.

- Barbara typing on her computer.

BARBARA (VO)

I believe embryonic cloning will play a fundamental roll in our future. As your admin I hope to play my small part by producing a stress-free work environment for your exceptional scientists.

Barbara looks at what she wrote, and then sticks her finger down her throat pretending to vomit.

- ZACH hammering away on his computer.

ZACH (VO)

In addition, I have extensive experience in asset allocation, product management, and marketing. I also have experience...

- JAKE scribbling a note on a ragged piece of paper

JAKE (VO)

Dear Penthouse, while recently on a plane I had the most erotic experience of my life...

- BARBARA stuffs countless envelopes with resumes and letters.

Behind her on the wall is an elaborate chart of all the places she's applied to.

- BARBARA leans over a mailbox, kisses the letters, posts them.
- ZACH eagerly opens his mailbox, scanning for responses.
- JAKE walks through his front door reading a letter and looking pleased with himself.

FEMALE VOICE (VO)

"Thank you for your scintillating,
scandalous contribution to Penthouse..."

- BARBARA'S on the phone while making an elaborate dinner of baked beans on toast.

BARBARA

I'm running out of ideas. (listens)
Monster.com? Who are they? Really? Cool.

- JAKE playing games on his computer with LIONEL.
- BARBARA stares intently at her phone, waiting for it to ring. The silence is deafening.

That chart on her wall has nearly every job crossed off.

- ZACH, dials a number on his CELL... the home phone in his kitchen RINGS. He picks it up, looks relieved.
- JAKE reads a book. Gavin walks into his room.

GAVIN

Hey, I need to pay the mortgage today.. ?

Jake sheepishly shakes his head.

GAVIN

Dude, it's been three months. What happened to all those unemployment checks?

JAKE

Child support. Look, I have a gig tonight...
once I get paid, I'll write you a check.

Gavin looks less than convinced.

INT. THE TAVERN - NIGHT

After hours. The bar is being cleaned. Jake is chatting with the owner of The Tavern (Oscar), by the bar. Oscar, hands over money to Jake. Jake looks less than impressed.

JAKE

This it?

OSCAR

'fraid so, kid. Things haven't been the same since Sid left the band. Didn't you see the crowd tonight... it was half empty.

JAKE

Yeah. Sid. Fucking... babies.

OSCAR

What's on your mind?

JAKE

The Almighty Dollar. I need rent money, and I'm still trying to save for that demo CD.

OSCAR

Listen, I know this guy who's looking for a session guitarist. Can you play classical?

Jake visibly hesitates.

JAKE

Yeah... sure. Hook me up.

INT. BARBARA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Barbara's in bed with Gabe, having sex. She's on top. Phone rings. She picks it up.

BARBARA

Hi, this is Barbara. Yes...

(she smiles)

Sure. Definitely, I'd be interested in a PR position.

GABE

How about a missionary position?

Barbara cuffs Gabe's mouth with her hand. Gabe reacts to this by continuing to make love to her. Barbara's having a hard time concentrating. She listens.

BARBARA

I'm open to that! Yes... I can come... I mean, yes, I can fit it in... that is to say, I can make it... Sounds... amazing!

Barbara slams phone down, gets back to business with Gabe. Her face is flush with joy.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - MORNING

SUPER ON SCREEN - 7.50AM

Jake, in the bathroom, vainly preens himself.

Jake's hair is neatly parted giving him a studious look. He SNARLS at this appearance and proceeds to RUFFLE his hair to make it look messy again.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - MORNING

SUPER ON SCREEN - 9.58AM

Jake's car sputters, and dies. Jake keeps on turning the key, but the car won't start. Jake SLAMS the wheel with his fist.

EXT. STREET - SAME

SUPER ON SCREEN - 10.07AM

Jake SPRINTS down the road (CARRYING A GUITAR CASE) trying to hail a cab.

The cab STOPS AT A LIGHT. For a moment, Jake is relieved, he slows to a jog. When he's thirty feet from the cab, a man (ZACH), comes from out of nowhere - oblivious of Jake - and takes the cab for himself.

Jake's stunned. He catches up to the cab, SMACKS on the window. Zach looks up as the cab pulls away. JAKE FLIPS HIM OFF.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

SUPER ON SCREEN - 10.26AM

Jake stands, TAPPING his fingers against the bus stop. He looks at the schedule, looks up for a bus... but sees nothing's coming. Standing next to him is a mother and her young child. Jake's eyes dart around wildly, he's SWEATING PROFUSELY.

The woman backs away... wary of this strange, sweaty man.

The bus arrives. Jake climbs aboard. He addresses the driver in a seething tone.

JAKE

Why have schedules, if you're gonna drive like Miss Daisy?

The bus driver angrily stares at Jake. Jake shakes his head, reaches into his pocket for change but finds NOTHING.

The passengers are getting annoyed. Jake makes a silent appeal to a woman (BARBARA) sitting closest to the driver. She, shrugs as if to say, 'sorry, can't help ya'.

JAKE

Does anyone have a dollar?

BACK TO THE BUS STOP

Jake SLOUCHING alone as the bus pulls away.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

SUPER ON SCREEN - 10.54AM

Jake frantically DASHING through downtown, DODGING between pedestrian bystanders.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO- MORNING

SUPER ON SCREEN - 10.59AM

Jake rushes into an EDITING SUITE. Inside waiting for him is a producer, Marc Suggs.

MARC

Jake? Marc. Just in time. You ready?

Jake wipes sweat from his brow.

JAKE

Sure. Let's get to it.

RECORDING BOOTH

Jake opens a guitar case. Inside is an old classical guitar. Jake pulls it out and BLOWS THE DUST OFF IT. From the EDITING SUITE he can hear Marc on his earphones.

MARC

Okay, Jake, we're looking for something that's both baroque in tone yet gossamer in emotion... can you do that?

JAKE

Whatever you need, chief.

Jake flexes his fingers, eyes the songsheet in front of him. Takes a deep breath.

Jake begins to PLAY, yet what comes out is anything but classically classical... instead it's a morbid mixture of rock and something incomprehensible.

MARC

Jake... can I have a word with you outside... bring your guitar.

FOYER

Marc and Jake begin to walk through the maze of offices in the building.

MARCUS

I heard you want to put together a demo.

JAKE

You heard correctly, my good man.

MARCUS

This demo's important to you, right?

JAKE

Of course.

MARCUS

You could have fooled me. Jake... the recording industry's a close-knit community. The last thing you want is a bad reputation.

JAKE

Whoa, hold your horses Nellie... whaddya mean?

MARCUS

What you played in there was more Eddie Van Halen than Ludwig Van Beethoven. You wanna be a serious musician. Get serious.

JAKE

Okay, so I exaggerated my skills but that shouldn't tarnish my rep, right? Right?

Marcus has walked Jake to THE ELEVATORS. Jake takes the hint.

MARCUS

Next time, don't let your ego write checks your dignity can't cash.

INT. CORPORATE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Zach sits quietly. He watches (through glass doors) GEORGE VICKERS, an elderly, stately man of 65 approaching the room. He's talking on his cell phone... he's ANGRY. Very, very angry.

VICKERS

You tell that bitch she can keep all the silver and china, but the dog stays. Oh? A mutt-ternity suit? What the fuck is that? Really? Hello? Hello? Fuck.

Vickers throws the phone over his shoulder, into the hands of his vigilant PA, DAWN. Vickers does not say 'hello' to Zach. He sits down and gets straight to business.

VICKERS

How would you improve our market research...
(Dawn whispers something in his ear)
...Zach?

ZACH

I would build an ecommerce-enabled web site. You see, an interactive web presence can optimize your customer analysis by generating 'real time' quantitative data. It's not cost-prohibitive and-

VICKERS

Techno-babble, double-talk doesn't impress me, Sonny. Want to impress me? Explain to me why the NASDAQ tanked?

Zach SHUFFLES uncomfortably in his seat.

ZACH

Things were inflated. But the market corrected itself and now the dotcom revolution is back on track again.

VICKERS

Corrected? Young pups like you crippled the market with your insatiable greed and fiscal incompetence. (Anger increases)
You're the reason why devoted husbands are being cuckolded by their gold-digging whore of a wife, why their children have to go to community college instead of Stanford or Yale. You're the reason why someone goes to Vegas to make up for their losses, only to come away with a debt akin to the national deficit!

Vickers takes a deep breath, gathers himself, stands-up.

VICKERS

Dotcom revolution my ASS! There's better chance of Betamax making a comeback.

With that, Vickers leaves the room. Zach's sits, STUNNED.

INT/EXT. PUBLISHING COMPANY - DAY

Sitting at an ostentatious desk is ANNABEL CORBEL, the most powerful and ruthless publisher in the Northwest.

Opposite her sits Barbara in a chair two sizes too small, with her knees practically sandwiching her ears.

ANNABEL

When my grandfather founded Claremont Publishing he had no idea it would evolve from a two-bit operation into an award-winning, Fortune 500 corporation.

Annabel boastfully gestures to a swank, glimmering gold statuette on the desk in front of Barbara.

ANNABEL

Neither him nor my Father did. Instead, it took a woman to drag this place into the 21st century. All we needed was a little female bravado.

Annabel looks Barbara up and down with unconcealed distaste.

ANNABEL

To be our PR officer, you must be presentable, vigilant, and... precognitive. Do you know what that means?

Barbara sits up straight and confidently in her chair.

BARBARA

Precognitive means knowledge of something in advance of its occurrence, especially by extrasensory perception. Ergo clairvoyance.

ANNABEL

Are you mocking me?

Barbara shifts uncomfortably - wondering how to respond. She shakes her head.

ANNABEL

This isn't a spelling B, honey.
 (lights a cigarette)
 At least tell me you can fetch coffee?

BARBARA

Of course I can.

Annabel continues to stare at Barbara . . . waiting.

BARBARA

Now?

ANNABEL

Black with no sugar.

Annabel picks up the phone, DIALS. She points to the side of the room where a coffee pot sits with cups around it.

Barbara gets up pours the coffee. She returns to Annabel's desk, as she continues to wait on the phone. Annabel takes the coffee, sips it and then grimaces. She cups her hand over the phone.

ANNABEL

Sweetner?

BARBARA

You didn't ask-

ANNABEL

Perhaps you should try using some of that
 ESP your so fond of.

Annabel goes back to the phone.

ANNABEL

Hello? Career Solutions? I'd like to go
 with the Asian girl. The other one's too...
 uncouth.

Annabel swivels her chair to face the window. Barbara nods dejectedly to herself and gets up to leave.

When Annabel turns around she notices that Barbara's gone. She also notices that her GOLD STATUETTE HAS DISAPPEARED TOO.

OUTSIDE

Barbara walks out of CLAREMONT PUBLISHING office building and crosses the street. When she reaches the other side she takes out the gold statuette and GIVES IT TO A GRATEFUL BUM.

SUPER ON BLACK SCREEN

Two months... the search continues

INT. BOARDROOM - MORNING

Zach is sitting in an undecorated office boardroom. He's being interviewed by CLIVE and GEORGE - two pallid guys, with pale skin and a dizzying degree of nervous habits, including itching, sniffing, hand-ringing and stuttering.

CLIVE

Technically speaking you're Croft-esque.

Zach seems confused.

GEORGE

As in Laura Croft. As in... p... p... perfect.

Zach tries to make eye contact with Clive but he nervously looks away.

GEORGE

We could really use someone, who's uh, comfortable with the p... public. Someone who can handle the press and, like... investors.

ZACH

I've had lots of experience in PR. So...

The door to the room EXPLODES open. They're abruptly interrupted by a scantily clad vixen.

VIXEN

Clive, the goddam web cam is down again, and Bud can't get it up. We got any Viagra?

Clive peevishly gets out of his seat.

CLIVE

(Laughing foolishly)
The life of a cyber pimp...

Zach's jaw drops open, completely perplexed.

CLIVE

You did know that we're...

GEORGE

An adult s... s... service...?

ZACH

I... well... not... what... not really.

Clive sighs, straightens up.

CLIVE

What did you think we do at
Cyberpimpin.com? Retro wear?

Zach shrugs, holds his hands out and nods bashfully.

INT. WHO-BA-JA TELECENTER - AFTERNOON

Barbara's in an office that overlooks a field of cubicles.

TEDDY, a slick, semi-literate, high-fivin' white guy, is sitting on a desk. Barbara sits in a seat by a phone. Teddy's wearing khaki shorts with a gaudy short-sleeved Hawaiian shirt.

TEDDY

'Who-Ba-Ja' sunglasses are the bomb.
Tinted, sv, lenses, cased in a Magnite
galvanized frame. Pilots wear these babies.
And we're selling them for a half the price
of Ray Bans. It's like selling water to the
starving.

Teddy pauses, aware of his incongruent analogy.

BARBARA

All sales are over the phone?

TEDDY

That's right, and don't forget my ABC
motto: Always Be Selling.

BARBARA

Do you mean, Always Be Closing?

TEDDY

When I started here, I was like you... a
little beware, right?
(Snaps his fingers, points at her).
But I went from making \$7.50 an hour to \$75
a day.

Barbara does the math in her head, something doesn't compute.
Before Teddy can continue

A BELL RINGS AND RED SIREN FLASHES over a caller's cubicle.

TEDDY

Bingo! Our first sale of the day.

Barbara looks at the clock on the wall, it reads 1PM. People surround the cubicle forming a semi-circle. They chant...

PEOPLE

Who-Ba-Ja, RA-RA-RA! Who-Ba-Ja, RA-RA-RA!

Teddy turns to Barbara and points to her phone.

TEDDY

Let's see whatcha got. The computer will dial for ya. And remember... use the script.

Barbara picks up the piece of paper. Glances over it again. Her shaking hand hovers over the phone. The PHONE RINGS

BARBARA

I don't think I'm ready. In all honesty, I didn't know this was a telesales position.

Teddy lifts his left leg on to the table. Barbara eyes widen in shock when she notices TEDDY'S WEARING NO UNDERWEAR.

TEDDY

Just be pleasantly insistent. Now, go on.

Barbara picks up the Phone. Waits. Smiles.

BARBARA

Hi. Mr. Cock... I mean Locke? My name's Bal..
Bal.. Barbara I'm calling from..
(Stops. Looks up at Teddy)
He put the phone down. Sorry.

TEDDY

Try again.

BARBARA

Maybe I need more ti-

TEDDY

Now!

Barbara shrinks back, startled. The phone rings again... she fumbles, and then eventually picks it up. Teddy continues to grin idiotically at her. Barbara's eyes sharpen.

BARBARA

Hello?
(Hands phone to Teddy. Earnest)
It's Tom Thumb... he wants his ding-a-ling back.

Teddy's idiotic smile slowly evaporates into a scowl... when he sees that Barbara is staring directly at his crotch.

INT. DANCE HALL - NIGHT

Jake stands nervously at the center of a stage, silhouetted by a spotlight.

He faces an empty auditorium apart from three figures shrouded by shadows in the middle rows. He's auditioning for something.

PRODUCER (OS)

Name?

JAKE

Urm, Uh, Jake --

PRODUCER (OS)

Speak up.

JAKE

Sorry... Jake, Jake Hargreaves.

PRODUCER (OS)

Occupation?

JAKE

Freelancer?

PRODUCER (OS)

Training?

JAKE

I took tap for a couple of months . . .
when I was ten.

A deafening silence fills the room.

PRODUCER (OS)

Cue music.

HOT CHOCLATE, 'I Believe In Miracles' comes on.

Jake starts moving nervously at first, unsure of himself. He soon breaks into a striptease that's a cross between THE FULL MONTY AND RIVERDANCE.

The music stops... followed by BARELY CONCEALED SNIGGERING.

PRODUCER (OS)

Thank you, we'll be in touch.

Half naked... Jake just stands there, slowly, dejectedly picks up his clothes and exits the stage.

SUPER ON BLACK SCREEN

Six Months Later...

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Zach enters the foyer dressed immaculately in a suit - (he's been wearing the same suit since he was fired). His sophisticated style is an extreme contrast to the myriad of disparate characters in the room.

The main reception area is a typical governmental interior - devoid of any personality. The oppressive environment is complimented by the ubiquitous sound of Muzak.

Zach fidgets with his tie, trying to loosen it. He begins a slow walk to the end of the hall.

Zach enters a room, at the end of the hallway. The room looks like a classroom. 12 sets of eyes stare at Zach as he walks in.

A cherubic, heavy-set woman, with a massive bouffant standing by a chalkboard glares in Zach's direction. Her nametag reads, DEIDRE.

Zach fumbles around, trying to find a seat.

Sitting at the front of the room is BARBARA. In the back is JAKE. ZACH, eventually finds a seat in the middle.

DEIDRE

Okay, let's get down to brass tacks: As you all know, your benefits will run out at the end of the month. We can't consider you for an extension until we check your job logs.

Deidre reads Barbara's job log. Addresses the class...

DEIDRE

On average, most people go through four or five careers. So, being out of work isn't all doom and gloom: It's actually a great opportunity to reconsider your career goals.

DEIDRE walks over to where Zach is sitting, looks at his job log -- again addresses the class.

DEIDRE

Some of you need to accept that your industry is downsizing. And if that's the case, be open to changing your vocation... and your lifestyle.

DEIDRE is now next to Jake, reading his job log, while she continues to address the class.

DEIDRE

As for the easy come, easy go among us... the only way you'll get an extension is if you do volunteer work or claim a disability.

Deidre walks to the front of the classroom and turns to write something on the BLACKBOARD

BARBARA

You said it's not all doom and gloom, but like, the only way you can get a job is through luck or someone you know.

ZACH

This hardly seems like an optimum time to be reinventing oneself.

DEIDRE

Pish-posh. Fate brought you here, and for some, fate will land you a job. But only those with self-belief and guts will discover their true calling -- and when that happens, boom... everything will come together... but on your terms.

Deidre turns back to the whiteboard again, while the rest of the class contemplate her words of wisdom.

DEIDRE'S OFFICE

Deidre is sitting behind a desk. There's a KNOCK at her door. Jake enters looking fairly cagey.

DEIDRE

What can I do for ya...?

JAKE

About those volunteer programs?

DEIDRE

Have you got your resume?

Jake hands his resume to Deidre. She glances over it. She opens up her desk drawer and pull out a pamphlet.

DEIDRE

Ever considered being a Big Brother?

JAKE

(frowning) Me and kids we're like chalk and cheese-

DEIDRE

No offense, but that's the only program you're qualified for... besides, you seem like the kind of guy kids relate to.

JAKE

How so?

DEIDRE

Takes one to know one, right? (winks)

Deidre holds the pamphlet out to Jake. He reluctantly takes it.

INT. HOME OFFICE - MORNING

Zach is sitting in a comfortable chair, in front of an antique wooden desk. Sitting opposite him, pen and pad in hand, is NERO, a thirty-something, vocational counselor. His demeanor is gentle and his smile is deeply compassionate.

On the walls are PSYCHOLOGY CERTIFICATIONS.

Nero is flipping through some papers.

On Zach's lap is a book of COLLECTED POEMS BY TS ELIOT, half hidden under a newspaper.

NERO

Where do you visualize your career going?

ZACH

The next level.

NERO

What if the next level doesn't exist?

ZACH

There's always a next level.

NERO

Not always. Not when you work in an industry that's gone by way of the Dodo.

ZACH

So where does that leave me?

NERO

At the beginning.

ZACH

That's not an option. In my heart of hearts I know the tech industry will come back stronger than ever, and when it-

NERO

You know what? The state of the industry you used to work in is not the point. The point is, - and forgive me for saying - but... I know a career businessman when I see one, and I think you're like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole.

ZACH

How can you say that? You barely know me.

NERO

The facts don't lie... your MBA transcripts prove you were a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. But your school records reveal a penchant for painting and writing.

ZACH

That doesn't make me Andy Warhole.

NERO

But clearly you have creative potential.

Zach looks away, a little irritated. Nero, then notices the T.S. ELIOT BOOK inside of the newspaper.

NERO

Lets take a stroll.

INT. BANK - DAY

Zach and Nero are standing in line at a bank. Zach's carrying his newspaper under his arm. Nero points to the clerk at the front of the line.

NERO

What do you see?

ZACH

(Confused) A bank teller?

NERO

Who is he?

ZACH

I dunno. I see a young guy, maybe in his early-twenties. He leases a car. He lives alone. (Annoyed) Nero, I'm not clairvoyant.

NERO

Anything else?

ZACH

He's a bank teller, how much more is there?

NERO

A lot more.

Nero takes the newspaper out of Zach's hand, spills out his copy of the T.S. Eliot book.

NERO

Did you know that T.S. Eliot was a bank clerk?

Zach shakes his head.

NERO

Did you also know Cezanne was a lawyer? And that Klimt, was as an architect? You know what I think they and other artists have in common?

ZACH

No.

NERO

They refused to be defined by the ordinary.

ZACH

How is that supposed to help me find work?

NERO

Before we meet next week... I want you to write a short-story about your professional career: Where it's been, where it is, and where you want it to go.

ZACH

Are you kidding?

NERO

No.

ZACH

What if I refuse?

NERO

If you rebuff my counsel, I can't help you.

ZACH

If that's the way it is, that's the way it is.

Zach thunders away and out of the front door.

STREET OUTSIDE BANK

Zach's face is burning red. He's clearly flustered. He takes a deep breath and starts to watch the many, many faceless drones walk past him, all hustling to and fro from work. They're feckless and clearly devoid of happiness.

Something about this gives Zach pause. He turns and walks back into the bank.

BANK

Zach awkwardly pats Nero on the shoulder.

ZACH

Would 500 words be okay?

Nero smiles, nods.

NERO

Have fun with it. Have fun in general. Go to the park, take in a gallery. 'Adore simple pleasures. For they're the last refuge of the complex.'

ZACH

Oscar Wilde.

NERO

One of my favorites.

ZACH

(Grins) Mine too.

Nero smiles warmly. In turn, Zach smiles back. And for a brief moment something passes between them -- a flirtation of sorts. This time, it's Nero's turn to look a little bewildered.

NERO

Now, believe it or not, I actually need to cash a check.

INT. COMMUNITY THEATER - DAY

MONTAGE - REHEARSALS

-From the back of the theater Barbara gestures with her hands where the actors should be standing on the stage.

-Barbara handing out coffee to everyone

-Barbara setting up lights

-Barbara setting a table on a stage with props

-Barbara painting a backdrop

-Barbara hangs black curtains at the back of the stage.

-Boris directs Barbara to move heavy flats from one end of the stage to the other.

-Barbara serves sandwiches to the actors

END MONTAGE

Barbara silently squats in the wings, taking a break. On stage Boris is remonstrating with one the actors, Robert and his pet favorite, DIANE, a contemptuous, snooty actress.

BORIS

Don't you see? I need more POW, more ZAP.
Give me extra, WHAM, BANG, WALLOP. Yes?
Like, Diane.

Boris angrily shakes his head walks away, leaving Robert a little confused by their exchange. He squats next to Barbara in the wings, flushed with frustration.

ROBERT

Holy microdirector! (whispers) I don't know about you, but I don't see much "POW" in Kay's character. She seems meek and indecisive. How would you play her?

Barbara looks around, hesitates before saying anything. As she opens her mouth to say something, Diane comes between them.

DIANE

You're asking for advice from the help. My dear, Robert, you must be desperate.

Diane brushes past Barbara, barely hiding her disdain. Robert shakes his head disapprovingly at Diane. He silently implores Barbara to carry-on. Again, Barbara hesitates.

BARBARA

Urm... I reckon Kay kinda starts off as an acorn. (deprecating) And, as you know, great oaks from little acorns grow. So, be delicate yet tough.

Sammi pops her head into the conversation.

SAMMI

What's your two-cents on Sonny?

BARBARA

Sonny... uh... I think with Sonny you gotta deliver your lines like Pizza; quick, greasy and cheesy.

SAMMI

(smiling) That works!

BORIS (OS)

I think NO! That is a no, no, no.

They turn to see BORIS, fuming.

BARBARA

Sorry, Boris, I didn't mean to-

BORIS

You assistant. You do not speak. You do not opinion. You do not direct.

SAMMI

Relax. She's only offering adv-

BORIS

But I am zee director... actor take direction from me only!

Boris walks away. Barbara shakes her head in disbelief. Robert winks at Barbara apologetically.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake's in his room mixing together some music. Gavin stands, arms folded, in the doorway holding up a Dictaphone and smiling DEVILISHLY.

GAVIN

So you volunteered as a Big Brother... to extend your benefits? Even that's a little lowbrow for you.

JAKE

Lowbrow, highbrow, eyebrow, who cares?

GAVIN

Tell me Mother Theresa, why do you think you can do this? It can't be 'cos of your stunning parental record.

Jake bristles.

JAKE

That's different.

GAVIN

Perhaps you should try being a father first, before being a Big Brother.

JAKE

Some things can't be changed. And that's all that's fit to print, got it?

Gavin bites his lip, and says no more.

EXT. ST. BART'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND ORPHANAGE - AFTERNOON

Jake approaches the stairs outside the school.

Standing at the bottom of the stairs is DUNCAN, an UNKEMPT looking boy of 14, with tousled brown hair. He's wearing an army jacket about two sizes too big.

Jake watches Duncan coyly approach two teenage girls - about his age - standing on the stairs. Clearly, he's shy. Jake silently witnesses Duncan's boyish overtures met with disdainful indifference by the teenage girls.

As they walk away, they pass Jake laughing and sniggering. Jake looks back to where Duncan was standing. He's now sitting down, looking a little sorry for himself.

Jake takes a seat next to Duncan.

JAKE

Nice jacket.

Duncan continues to stare ahead.

DUNCAN

It was my Dad's. Are you Jake?

JAKE

(nods) Duncan, right?

DUNCAN

You're late.

JAKE

Punctuality isn't my strong suit, kiddo.
(tries to make eye contact with Duncan)
Is... was your Dad in the Army?

DUNCAN

Marines.

JAKE

Ah... Semper Fi, right?

Duncan stares in the direction of where THE GIRLS HAD WALKED AWAY. Jake notices the embarrassment in Duncan's eyes.

JAKE

(Fumbling his words) I reckon there's three ways to deal with hoity-toity girls: tell 'em to go to hell, crawl under a rock or do something so colossally cool they'll worship the ground you walk on.

DUNCAN

I'm Catholic and I'm a kind of a geek. So, I guess that leaves me with the rock.

JAKE

Okay. So, have you done this kind of thing before?

DUNCAN

You're my fifth 'big brother'.

JAKE

Okay good... so you probably know the drill... We're supposed to just like, hang-out, right? I don't have to help with homework do I? School was never really my bag.

Duncan nods, as though he was expecting this.

DUNCAN

You're more of a talker than a thinker, aren't you?

Jake grins.

JAKE

No one likes a smartass... except me.

INT. COMMUNITY THEATRE - NIGHT

The actors on stage are rehearsing. Barbara is nowhere to be seen.

DIANE, sits behind a desk in the middle of the stage. She is in drag to look like 'The Don'.

DIANE

What have I ever done to make you treat me so disrespectfully? If you'd... If you'd...
(frowns) Line. (screaming) LINE!

Barbara suddenly emerges in the wings, out of breath. Sammi throws her a script. Barbara quickly flips through it.

BARBARA

"If you'd come to me in friendship, then this scum that ruined your daughter would be suffering this very day." (Looks at a fuming Boris). Sorry, I had an interview.

BORIS

What does interview have to do with my production?

BARBARA

Nothing... it's just that-

BORIS

If your work hunting interrupts again, you'll also be looking for new theater. You get? (under his breath) Why can't you be like your mother?

A pregnant silence fills the room. Barbara's face reddens.

BARBARA

If I was anything like my Mother, do you think I'd put up with this insignificant-
(takes a deep calming breath)
Never mind. Sorry. I won't be late again.

BORIS

Okay, fine, let us continue.

INT. THEATER CHANGING ROOMS- NIGHT

Sammi and Barbara are getting changed after rehearsals.

SAMMI

For a moment I really thought you were gonna let Boris have it. Maybe next time.

Barbara's bag FALLS out of her locker. Its contents SPILL out onto the floor. Amongst the contents is a brochure for FILM SCHOOL. Sammi flips through the brochure.

SAMMI

Film studies? Great idea.

BARBARA

Thanks for your seal of approval.

SAMMI

Touchy enough?

BARBARA

Sorry. (Sighs) My life feels like a spaghetti junction these days... but without the cryptic road signs. Know what I mean?

SAMMI

(Smiles, hands Barbara the brochure)
Hey... at least you have a map. That's a start.

Barbara looks at the brochure... silently contemplating.

INT. THEATER - SAME

When Barbara enters the auditorium - again she is flustered, in a rush. Before she can belch out an excuse she notices the actors are sitting around quietly. The mood is apprehensive.

Barbara finds Sammi talking in hushed tones with ROBERT.

BARBARA

What's going on?

ROBERT

Boris was deported.

SAMMI

Apparently he didn't know the difference between a Blockbuster card and a green card.

BARBARA

Insane. What are we going to do?

Both Robert and Sammi look at Barbara seriously.

ROBERT

We want you to direct the play.

Barbara continues to stare, mouth agape at Robert.

BARBARA

And the punch-line is...?

SAMMI

Seriously... you're adept at everything; set design, script edits, topping and tailing... you're the cream that's kept this Oreo together... not Boris. It's a no-brainer.

ROBERT

Besides, weren't you the one who said, 'great oaks from little acorns grow'?

BARBARA

That was a bargain-basement proverb. Hardly grounds for foisting this on me.

Diane levels AN UNSETTLING, MENACING GLARE at Barbara. In turn, Barbara literally flinches.

BARBARA

I hate to sound wishy-washy, but give me some time to think it through... okay?

Sammi and Robert reluctantly nod their heads - but they are not convinced.

Meanwhile, Diane smiles contemptuously - feeling somehow, that she got her way.

INT. ZACH'S CONDO - NIGHT

Zach's sitting at his desk in front of a blank piece of paper. He recalls NERO'S request to write an essay.

NERO (VO)

Before we meet next week... I want you to write a short-story about your professional career: Where it's been, where it is, and where you want it to go.

He tries to write something down, but gets frustrated, and rips the paper up, throws it into a trash can FILLED WITH CRUMPLED PIECES OF PAPER.

He places another blank sheet on his desk, lights a cigarette, takes a deep breath and tries again.

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

WEIGHTS ROOM

Zach lifts weights, with his back turned to the mirror. Meanwhile, two guys are lifting a little too vigorously, admiring their muscular torsos. One of those men is RYAN. He spots Zach, approaches him.

Sorry sir, but I'm gonna have to ask you to leave. Your membership has expired... three months ago.

RYAN

What's up slacker? Sorry I haven't returned your calls. Been busy working, you know? Oh that's right, you wouldn't know, would ya?

ZACH

Nice to see you too, Ryan.

RYAN

Just kiddin', Bro. Seriously... any luck with the 'ol job search?

ZACH

I have a few leads.

RYAN

Must be horrible -- especially for a guy with a community college MBA. Certain doors only open for the old boys club, right? I admire you for holding it together. If I was outta work for nine months it'd really fuck with my dignity. Make me feel impotent... worthless.

ZACH

Lucky I'm not you.

Both men stare intensely into each other's eyes. The friction is obvious. They are interrupted by an employee of the club.

CLUB EMPLOYEE

(to Zach) Sir... my apologies but, I'm going to need to ask you to leave.

ZACH

Leave? Why?

CLUB EMPLOYEE

Uh, we haven't received any membership fees from you for over four months.

Zach can barely contain his embarrassment.

RYAN

Sounds like your busy, bro. Call me... that is, if you still have a phone.

Ryan goes back to lifting weights. Zach, visibly rattled begins to leave the room. In the doorway, he bumps into NERO. Both Nero and Zach look genuinely pleased to see one another.

NERO

Hey, I didn't know you come here.

ZACH

I did, I mean, I just cancelled my membership...

NERO

Why?

ZACH

I'm on a running kick right now... so, why bother paying for something you don't use?

NERO

Very zen. How's the story coming along?

ZACH

Slow and not so steady. There's always too many distractions.

NERO

Distractions or procrastination? I always find the best way to concentrate is to just drown out the din and focus on the sounds that give me pleasure.

ZACH

Easier said than done.

NERO

Don't knock it till ya try it. Anyway, I have a date with a treadmill... enjoy your running.

From the corner of the room, RYAN witnesses this exchange with a sense of suspicion and hostility.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Zach's running. He focuses on breathing and nothing else. He doesn't even seem to notice what beautiful day it is. As Zach turns a corner he sees a man sitting under a tree, painting. Zach slows... fully absorbing the pastel picture.

The picture is a real-life depiction of the park's lake with the sun beating down upon it. Zach admires it.

Zach allows his face to be basked in the sun then closes his eyes. He drowns out the din and focuses on the sounds of the park... the birds, the wind in the trees, children laughing.

ZACH SMILES.

THE PARK - LATER

Zach's sitting on a picnic table TYPING ON HIS LAPTOP. Everything's flowing smoothly. He's completely transfixed on manifesting his thoughts on to paper. For the first time in years... ZACH'S WRITING AGAIN.

INT. BARBARA'S DAD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Barbara's setting a vase on the dining room table. She fondly runs her hands over the antique tablecloth. In the background her father, FRANK is fussing around in the kitchen.

BARBARA

Can you believe they actually asked me to direct the play?

Frank does not respond. This unsettles Barbara.

BARBARA

It's flattering and all, but I haven't made my mind up yet. You know?

FRANK (OS)

Princess? Turn the game on, would ya?

BARBARA

Sure, Dad.

Barbara notices a videocassette on top of the video player. She looks at the label and smiles. She inserts it, PRESSES PLAY.

The video is a transfer from an old 8MM HOME VIDEO.

INSERT - VIDEO FOOTAGE

Barbara - aged 6 - is staging an amateur magic show for her parents. For the finale she runs up to A SET DINNER TABLE, covered in plates, glasses and food...

FRANK (ON TV)

Hold on there, Princess, that's not...

Young Barbara ignores her Dad and proceeds to YANK the tablecloth out from under the settings.

EVERYTHING GOES FLYING. Not a single item is left standing. Young Barbara's face reddens with shame. She might cry.

In the background the sound of elegant laughter breaks the ominous silence. THE LAUGHTER IS FROM HER MOTHER, NICOLE. Young Barbara smiles, validated by her Mom's approval.

FRANK (ON TV)

Quit cacklin'. You'll only egg her on.

NICOLE (ON TV)

Don't be such a grump Frankie. It's just stuff... it can be replaced. (kisses Barbara)
That's right sweetie... you do whatever you
wanna do. Be whoever you wanna be.

The younger Barbara giggles.

BACK TO SCENE

The older Barbara watching the screen smiles, but tears well-up in her eyes.

The TV screen FLIPS-OVER to a Football game.

FRANK (OS)

It started with that damnable magic book
yer Ma bought ya for Christmas. You were a
holy terror!

Barbara turns to see her Dad approaching with food on trays.

BARBARA

I thought you were gonna hit the ceiling.
But Mom...

FRANK

(rueful)... was a bad influence with that
devil-may-care attitude of hers.

Barbara takes her tray and sits down on the couch. Frank sits
next to her. Barbara carefully changes the subject.

BARBARA

Did you know the Washington State
subsidizes worker-retraining?

FRANK

Is that so?

BARBARA

(hesitates) Yeah, so, I was thinking about
taking some part-time classes at the
Northwest Film Academy.

FRANK

Lemme tell you, that liberal arts clap-trap
won't put food on the table.

BARBARA

Dad, there's worse things than a showbiz
career . . . not everyone turns out like-

FRANK

That two-faced industry is for phonies like
your Mother. And I sure as hell didn't
raise you to be the sort of woman who bails
out on her husband and 6-year old daughter.

BARBARA

She was just following her heart.

Frank testily drops down his fork.

FRANK

Don't. Don't you ever justify that woman's
actions to me. I don't want to hear it.

Barbara stares at her Father sympathetically.

BARBARA

Daddy, I'm sorry. I'm just saying... I'm not
like that, I can follow my heart, without,
without being... being like her.

FRANK

Fools gold. That's all it is. Fools gold.

Barbara takes a deep breath and looks down into her plate in silence. Frank's nods emphatically, signifying the end of their discussion. He turns up the TV's volume.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Jake is chatting with Gavin in his bedroom while Duncan's in their TV room playing computer games. They can see him from Jake's doorway.

GAVIN

His Dad was a Marine?

Jake shakes his head. Holds up a file.

JAKE

His Mom died giving birth and his Dad was killed in Somalia, in '93. He's been bumped around foster homes ever since.

Gavin takes the file and leafs through it... he sighs sympathetically and then looks at Jake concernedly.

GAVIN

This file should come with a warning:
"Handle with care."

JAKE

It's tough. We've got nothing in common.

GAVIN

Yeah, right, you're the most infantile person I know.

JAKE

And that's the problem, the kid's smart... real smart.

GAVIN

Once you find a common ground to break the ice everything will be hunky dory.

Hands Jake the file. Jake reads it. HIS EYEBROWS PERK-UP.

TV ROOM

Jake sits next to Duncan on the floor. Duncan's doing homework. He seems very frustrated.

JAKE

Dude, I used to hate homework.

DUNCAN

That's a surprise.

JAKE

No seriously. I have dyslexia. So, homework or any kind of work involving books is a pain in the ass.

DUNCAN

How'd you deal with it?

Jake hands Duncan an A4 sheet of AQUA-COLORED film.

JAKE

I use this whenever I read something. You see, dyslexics have a problem seeing black on white... everything jumps around. The color helps steady it out. Which helps with concentration... that kind of thing.

DUNCAN

It works?

JAKE

For real.

DUNCAN

Uh, could I borrow it? I... I'm dyslexic too.

JAKE

No shit? Yeah, help yourself.

INT/EXT. THE CITY - DAY, MORNING, NIGHT

PLAYTIME MONTAGE

Jake taking Duncan on numerous excursions through the city.

-In the zoo, Jake's admiring an exotic bird. While behind him, Duncan's feeding a common pigeon.

-Playing soccer. Jake kicks balls past Duncan, who stands as still as a tree in the middle of the goal... disinterested. One ball strikes him in the head.

-Movie theatre. Jake's engrossed in the film, while Duncan snoozes beside him.

-Dingy ride on a park lake. Jake's setting the sails, getting into being the ship's captain. Duncan reads a book.

-Walking through Seattle Art Museum. Duncan's eyes never look up from his Gameboy.

-Indoor climbing store. Jake is teaching Duncan to climb. But Duncan's on tenterhooks. He's also mindful of the other teenagers in the room who are SNIGGERING at his efforts.

Duncan feels a SLIGHT TUG on his safety rope. The tug elevates him effortlessly upward. Like Spiderman he climbs up the wall AT GREAT SPEED. The other teenagers are agog. They do not know that Jake is slyly pulling Duncan upwards.

Duncan clearly enjoys the reverie. Jake notices this.

EXT. ST. BART'S - DAY

Duncan waits for Jake to pick him up.

Some kids outside - the IN-CROWD - stand at the bottom of the steps making snide remarks in hushed tones about Duncan.

The kids stop laughing when a stretch limo pulls-up in front of the school. The door opens, and a beautiful woman - roughly 30 years old - steps out.

She's wearing shades, her clothes are sexy and her attitude is even sexier. She ignores all of the cooler-than-thou boys and girls at the bottom of the steps, making a b-line to Duncan.

She puts her arms around him, and kisses his neck.

SEXY WOMAN

Sorry I was late, Lover. I hope I can make it up to you.

Duncan's unsure of what's going on... but enjoys the impression it's leaving upon the IN-CROWD. Duncan follows the woman down the stairs and into the limo.

The door shuts and the tinted windows roll-up as the sexy woman demonstratively kisses Duncan on the cheek, and then WINKS at the small crowd... who in turn, have been stunned into silence.

INT. CAR - SAME

The sexy woman pulls off her shades. It's MRS. HOFFMAN (from the adventure camping store). She emits a good-natured laugh as the limo pulls away.

Sitting in the driver's seat is JAKE. He turns around and smiles at Duncan.

JAKE

Was that colossally cool enough for ya kiddo?

Jake and Mrs. Hoffman laugh. Duncan GRINS from ear-to-ear.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Duncan walks back into Jake's room and enthusiastically listens as Jake plays his guitar. Jake notices this.

JAKE

Can you play?

Duncan shakes his head, still enthralled.

JAKE

Wanna learn a few chords?

Duncan's eyes light-up as he admires the guitar. But then a look of worry sweeps across him.

JAKE

Learning guitar comes down to mind over matter... you gotta not mind, no matter how hard it seems.

Duncan and Jake laugh at Jake's goofy analogy.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Gabe is driving Barbara to the theater. Both look perturbed.

BARBARA

Eugene. As in, Eugene, Oregon?

GABE

'Eugene' you make it sound like a venereal disease. C'mon Baby, it's a headlining gig. I gotta make my bones somewhere, ya know?

BARBARA

I can't just pick up and go. I have commitments here.

GABE

Do you mean directing this play? No offense baby, but you're more of a yes gal, than a bark orders type-of-gal.

BARBARA

That's not true.

GABE

Yes it is.

BARBARA

Well, I guess so... but, hey, that's not fair... I'm... I'm an Oreo.

GABE

A, what?

BARBARA

Never mind. You had to be there.

GABE

The timing's terrific. You're unemployed, my career's taking off...

BARBARA

I need time to think.

GABE

Are you worried about your Dad?

BARBARA

Kind of.

GABE

These opportunities come along once in a lifetime baby... and sometimes you just gotta grab the bull by the horns and ride her all the way back to the-

BARBARA

Honey, you had me at, 'opportunities come along once in a lifetime...'

Barbara kisses Gabe on the cheek. Her mood has brightened... clearly, she wants to take the bull by the horns.

INT. BARBARA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Late at night, Barbara sits on her couch typing on her laptop.

Gabe walks into the room, half-asleep. He's only wearing boxer shorts and FURRY RABBIT SLIPPERS.

GABE

Baby, you burnin' the midnight oil?

BARBARA

I have a meeting with the cast this Sunday.

GABE

So you're gonna direct the play?

BARBARA

Something like that.

GABE

How does this effect going to Eugene?

BARBARA

It doesn't change anything, and as far as I know, no decision was made.

Gabe is taken aback - his feelings hurt. Barbara notices this. She smiles sweetly, apologetically.

BARBARA

Oh baby, you know what I mean? Of course, I still I want to go. I think. I just-

GABE

Need more time. I know.

Barbara gets back to work... while Gabe walks slowly back to their room.

INT. COMMUNITY THEATER - AFTERNOON

Barbara stands with trepidation behind a stage door holding a cardboard box full of paper. SHE TAKES A DEEP BREATH, calming herself.

Barbara opens the door, walks on to the stage. The actors and actresses are scattered around. She licks her lips.

The actors slowly congregate. Diane takes her time.

DIANE

Is there a reason you needed to spoil my relaxing Sunday afternoon?

BARBARA

Yes. I mean, no I didn't mean to.

(regains her composure)

Okay, thank you all for coming in. I decided we need to 86 this whole Transvestra Nostra thing and go with something more... old school.

Barbara takes out scripts from her box and hands them out to the actors. They browse through the scripts.

INSERT

Front page of the script reads: "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, by Tennessee Williams."

END INSERT

DIANE

So, who am I playing, Stella or Blanche?

BARBARA

(very hesitant) I was thinking about Sammi as Stella and Ruth as Blanche.

Diane contemptuously drops the script on the floor.

DIANE

Excuse me? Who do you think you are, coming in here and changing things? You're a scrub for crying out loud.

ROBERT

Diane... give it a rest.

DIANE

I've been in an Off-Broadway play . . . what's she ever done?

SAMMI

Off-Broadway? How far off... Staten Island?

Diane glares angrily at Sammi

BARBARA

I respect your experiences Diane, but neither of these roles suit you.

DIANE

And that just goes to prove how wet behind the ears you are. (to the other cast)
Either she rethinks this decision or I go.

The actors all look at Barbara waiting for her decision.

BARBARA

Fine. You can play Stella.

DIANE

I'd prefer Blanche.

BARBARA

Fine.

Sammi looks over to see how flattened Barbara feels. Sammi, in turn, is disappointed that her friend acquiesced so easily.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Duncan is sitting with Gavin in the kitchen. Duncan is practicing some chords.

GAVIN

So basically, my stories are vicarious interpretations of Jake's social life.

DUNCAN

And the paper pays you for this?

GAVIN

His cavalier lifestyle generates a lot of colorful material.

DUNCAN

And you won an award? That's way cool!

Duncan looks at the fridge, sees a picture of a young girl.

DUNCAN

Who is she?

GAVIN

That's Marie. Jake's daughter.

DUNCAN

I didn't know he had... Are they close?

GAVIN

Not really, no.

DUNCAN

Why?

GAVIN

Marie's mom and Jake don't get along. She won't let... it's a long story.

The front door swings open, and IN WALKS JAKE holding a brand new basketball. Jake claps his hands.

Phone rings. Gavin answers it.

GAVIN

It's Gordo... about band practice.

JAKE

Shit, I forgot. (looks at Duncan) Tell him it's cancelled.

GAVIN

Well, that's a first.

Jake throws Duncan the basketball.

JAKE

Okay kiddo, ready to learn some hoops?

Duncan nods... he compassionately looks back at the picture of Marie and then at Jake before getting up to go.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - MORNING

Duncan shoots jumpers (WITH HIS LEFT HAND), while Jake retrieves the ball. Duncan misses every shot.

DUNCAN

Jake... why can't you hang with your daughter? Is it, like a legal thing?

JAKE

No, it's more of a respect thing. Marie's mom wants me at arms length. So...

DUNCAN

So...

JAKE

So, as my Pops would say, I'm hardly a reliable role model.

DUNCAN

You're a little late sometimes. But once you're here... it's fun. We go places and you teach me things... like computer games, poker, ...guitar.

Jake pauses, suspiciously surveys Duncan.

JAKE

Are you trying to butter-me-up, kiddo?

Duncan carefully considers his words.

DUNCAN

You said the other day you're unemployment benefits are about to end - which means we'll probably have to stop hangin' out, right? 'Cos you gotta find a job, right?

JAKE

Dunc, I haven't thought that far-

DUNCAN

You can get a job at the orphanage. The music department's looking for a part-time music teacher - you're looking for work.

JAKE

Just 'cos I taught you a few chords, doesn't make me a poster boy for the PTA.

DUNCAN

I'll tell ya what... if I make this basket, will you at least talk to the Reverend Scott...?

JAKE

(scoffs) Okay MJ... give it yer best shot.

Duncan takes a deep breath, CHANGES FROM HIS LEFT HAND TO HIS RIGHT HAND, and easily makes the jumper... like a pro. He spins on his heels and cheekily winks at Jake.

INT. ST. BART'S - MORNING

Jake's sitting in the REVEREND SCOTT'S office.

Sitting opposite him is the Reverend, an elderly yet, gentle man. Jake's trying his best to remain composed.

REVEREND SCOTT

Tell me Jake, where'd you learn to play music?

JAKE

My Dad. He taught me guitar and piano. He was good too. When he was my age he was a minor celebrity in the LA jazz clubs.

REVEREND

What happened?

JAKE

He knocked up a waitress, married her and became an accountant.

REVEREND

By that, do you mean he was unfulfilled?

JAKE

He was happy. But, when he died a few years back, I remember thinking... no way will I end like that... I mean to come that close to your dreams, and then watch 'em sail away that'd kill... Sorry, I don't mean to turn this into a confessional...

REVEREND

Not at all. Sounds like your father was noble, family man.

JAKE

You could say that.

The Reverend can tell Jake is uncomfortable.

REVEREND

Well Jake... when can you start?

JAKE

Just like that?

REVEREND

Were you expecting a sign from God?

Jake smiles genuinely, shakes the Reverend's hand.

Reverend opens the door to his office. They walk out into the hallway.

REVEREND

Duncan's quite fond of you.

JAKE

He is?

REVEREND

I've never seen him this... engaged. The boy has a lot of faith in you.

At the end of the hallway Duncan is waiting. He looks eager and pleased. Jake on the other hand seems a little distant.

REVEREND

Duncan my boy... you were right about Jake,
he's a virtuous individual.

DUNCAN

Did he tell you he's also a really good
singer?

REVEREND

(to Jake) Sing? For whom?

JAKE

I sing and play guitar in a band.

REVEREND

Where do you play?

JAKE

We have a standing gig at The Tavern on the
last Thursday of every month.

REVEREND

Lovely. (puts out his hand) It's a
privilege to have such a musical
renaissance man join our family.

Jake smiles and shakes the Reverend's hand. He then glances
over at Duncan with a slightly furrowed brow.

EXT/INT. THE TAVERN - NIGHT

The Reverend and one of the nuns from the orphanage silently
approach 'The Tavern', a trendy nightclub for rockers and
Goths.

Outside young guys and girls dressed in dark, cyber punk
garments line up to get in. They nod lasciviously at the
Reverend and the Nun.

CUT TO

Inside SMOKE FILLS THE STAGE as the sound of a heavy, sinister
base line reverberates through the room.

CUT TO

The Reverend and the Nun squeeze their way inside past the
throngs of cyber punk-dressed kids.

CUT TO

On the stage the guitars start THRASHING DEATH METAL.

CUT TO

The Reverend and the Nun find themselves being pushed to the front to the stage. One kid with purple, spikey hair grabs the nun and kisses her passionately.

The Nun - in shock - pushes the young man away. He sticks his pierced tongue out. The Nun recoils again. The kid holds up his two hands, making horns with his index and pinky fingers.

The Reverend and the Nun turn toward the stage, where the smoke is now clearing away. The music is getting harder and harder.

A poster on the wall reads: "DEVIOUS DEACONS" -- the band's name.

As the band plays SATANIC, THRASH METAL the Reverend finally notices Jake... who's wearing A SPANDEX LEATHER MINISTERIAL ROBE.

The Reverend grabs the Nun turns on his heels and abruptly exits 'The Tavern'.

EXT. DUNCAN'S SCHOOL - DAY

Jake sits despondently on the front steps of the school, waiting for Duncan. Duncan walks out and looks furiously in Jake's direction. Jake shrugs, apologetically.

JAKE

Apparently I don't even get severance.

Duncan doesn't bite.

JAKE

He was worried that my band could tarnish St. Bart's rep.

DUNCAN

And...?

JAKE

And, he gave me an ultimatum: To work here I have to give-up the band. And now that I've saved enough money for the demo, that's ain't gonna fly.

Duncan's countenance darkens.

DUNCAN

So, you're just gonna throw in the towel?

JAKE

Be realistic. Do you really think I'm gonna dump my band for a teaching gig? Where's the glory in that?

Jake sees how forlorn Duncan looks.

JAKE

I didn't mean-

DUNCAN

I thought we were friends.

JAKE

We are.

DUNCAN

Yeah, well I guess you don't see any glory in that either.

Duncan gets up and briskly walks off. Never looks back.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Zach's sitting with Nero in a café. Nero holds up some sheets of typed paper.

NERO

Splendid essay.
(Sips some water)
How does it feel to be writing again?

ZACH

Cathartic.

Nero looks over Zach's shoulder as a MAN ENTERS THE RESTAURANT.

NERO

How would you feel about working in a more creative environment... like a magazine?

ZACH

I don't know. Does it pay well?

NERO

(smiling) We're gonna have to try some hypno-therapy on you, aren't we?

ZACH

I'm kidding! Seriously, it sounds promising. I appreciate your help... in fact, I appreciate . . . you.

For a moment both make STRONG eye contact.

QUINN (OS)
Nero? Hey man, sorry I'm late.

Zach turns to see a burly, brusque man towering over him.

NERO
Zach, this is Quinn Marks, the Editor-in-chief of The Seattle Metro.

Zach holds out his hand. Quinn grabs it heartily.

QUINN
Zach? Your not Zacharia from Sanoma are ya?

Zach nods -- somewhat uncomfortably. Zach turns to Nero.

ZACH
Quinn was the class president of Sonoma County High, when I was a freshman.

QUINN
Well, I'll be kid... where's your mocasins?
(grabs Nero's shoulder)
Boy, you should have seen him and that sister of his. (to Zach) Your parents still living on the commune? What were their names again, Moondancer and Rainbow?

Nero looks at Zach, who in turn looks as though he wants to burrow under a stone.

LATER

They're still eating lunch, while Quinn continues to recount stories of Zach's childhood. Quinn doesn't mean to be a jerk, he thinks that Zach also recalls his childhood with a sense of humor.

QUINN
Oh, and they were dirt-poor too. His parents were 'artists'... they made sculptures out of recyclable materials. Shit, did they ever sell anything? That was probably why you never had any shoes, right? (chuckles) Damn, all this laughing makes me gotta drain the main vain. 'scuse me gents.

Quinn gets up from the table. Nero looks over the Zach.

NERO

Zach, I'm sorry..

Zach gets up. Leafs through his wallet, finds no cash.

ZACH

Will an IOU suffice?

NERO

Of course. Zach?

Zach leaves the restaurant.

INT. CONDO - DAY

Zach is walking toward his front door. Opens it. Standing in the doorway, is Nero. Both men stand in silence.

NERO

Mea culpa.

ZACH

What's the apology for?

NERO

C'mon, let's stop playing this game.

ZACH

What game?

NERO

This. This... carefully choreographed dance around your Ivory Tower. I'm not here to cast the first stone.

ZACH

Why are you here? Do you see me as some sort of damsel in distress?

NERO

Damsel...? No. A friend in need? Perhaps.

Zach grabs his coat.

ZACH

Let's take a walk.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - SAME

Nero and Zach are walking down the street. A smorgasbord of people pass them by.

ZACH

What do you see?

NERO

Urban survivalists. What do you see?

From Zach's point of view, he looks at A YOUNG BUSINESS WOMAN, AN OLD WOMAN, A MAN OF COLOR, A TEENAGE BOY, A MAN DRESSED IN A SUIT.

ZACH

I see subjugation. Necrophobia. Oppression. Distrust. A charlatan.

(Zach looks at a hippie playing guitar)

I see a kid who went to school who was different, a kid who didn't get invited to the cool parties. Who didn't get new books because his parents were tree huggers. Who couldn't play sports 'cos his parents were shoe loathing masochists. I see a kid who was different and because he was different everyone of his so-called peers let him know it. I see a social pariah... who'll spend the rest of his life just trying to fit in.

NERO

(looking at Zach)

I see a diamond in the rough. I see a man who won't let the child in him go.

ZACH

A leopard can't change its spots.

NERO

Spoken like a true pussy.

Both men fall silent. Nero grins. Zach grins. They both laugh.

NERO

Okay, I confess, change isn't easy.

(Nero stops walking)

But... a leopard can change his coat.

Zach doesn't follow Nero's logic. However, he sees that they've stopped in front of a clothing store. Nero drags him in.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - SAME

Zach and Nero walk out of a clothes store. Zach is wearing a pair of black jeans and a fitted brown turtle-neck sweater.

Zach looks at his reflection in the shop window.

NERO

A new look, a newish you.

ZACH

Career counseling and fashion tips.

NERO

Nothing beats shopping therapy.

Nero adjusts Zach's turtleneck collar. For a moment Zach is rigid, but when Nero offers a reassuring smile, this seems to put Zach at ease.

NERO

Did you tell your parents how you felt?

ZACH

I know this may be hard to believe, but I wasn't the most chatty kid on the block. Fact is, I've barely talked to them since I left home...

NERO

If you're serious about turning your life around, that's a good place to start.

Zach thoughtfully nods, considering Nero's advice.

Nero and Zach stop OUTSIDE OF A LOCAL MUSIC STORE. Nero holds eye contact with Zach. Zach nods, understanding Nero's selfless offer of friendship.

Nero turns around, to see JAKE standing outside the shop door behind a small stall. On a boombox he's playing catchy dance music. Nero and Zach walk over.

NERO

(to Jake) Who is it?

JAKE

It's my stuff.

Zach picks up a CD.

ZACH

How much?

JAKE

6 bucks.

ZACH

I'll take two. One for me and... one for my friend.

Zach hands money to Jake and then walks away with Nero. As they leave, the record store manager, LIONEL walks out.

LIONEL

How's it going?

JAKE

Okay. Thanks for letting me set-up out here. Once I get the band's demo CD together... you can carry my stuff inside.

LIONEL

Nothing for nothin' but, in a way, I kinda prefer these tunes... they're more... real.

JAKE

You think? It's just computer hoo-ha... nothing much to it really.

LIONEL

What do I know... I only run a music store.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake walks into his kitchen, as Gavin gets off the phone. He carries a concerned expression.

GAVIN

That was Marie's mother. She-

JAKE

...wants to know where the check is.

Gavin looks at Jake for an explanation.

JAKE

Yeah, well, I wanna know why the job market is dryer than the Sahara desert.

GAVIN

What about the cash for the demo?

JAKE

That's sacred.

GAVIN

You could try looking for work here.

Gavin hands Jake a big PINK 4" by 5" card. Jake's reads it.

JAKE

A Pink Slip Party?

GAVIN

It's an anti-establishment job fair of sorts... but set in a laid-back environment.

JAKE

Your editor wants you to cover this, doesn't she?

GAVIN

I'll let the rent slide for a month.

JAKE

All right... but no Dictaphone this time.
(turns to leave, hesitates)
Any other messages?

GAVIN

No. You could call him, you know.

JAKE

I've tried. No dice.

GAVIN

I hate to be cornball, but action really does speak louder than words.

INT. COMMUNITY THEATER - NIGHT

The group's rehearsing on stage, while Barbara watches. Diane is wearing a peroxide blonde wig.

DIANE

"I know I bullshit a bunch. But let's face it, a woman's charm is 50% smoke and mirrors."

BARBARA

Cut. Cut. Diane? What are you doing? That's not the line, this line is; "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is 50% illusion."

DIANE

I'm adding some spice.

BARBARA

It's a classic line.

DIANE

Do I look like a Charleston dancer? This needs a contemporary spin.

BARBARA

No it-

DIANE

I'm beat. Let's call it a night.

Diane exits the stage, much to Barbara's chagrin.

THEATER BATHROOM

Barbara walks out of one of the stalls. It's obvious she's been crying.

SAMMI

Things are going pretty smooth, aren't they?

BARBARA

As smooth as sandpaper. Maybe Diane, Gabe, and my Dad are right, I'm not-

SAMMI

Stop listening to the birdbrains from the peanut gallery. Get off the ropes and start fighting back.

Sammi notices Barbara trying to hide her tears.

SAMMI

My company's hosting this unemployment shin-dig tomorrow. Come along... you never know... it could lead to something special!

BARBARA

A Pink Slip Party?

SAMMI

(sympathetic smile)
It's better than a pity party...

INT. NERO'S CAR - EVENING

Zach is with Nero in his car. On the radio is the song, "I'M GONNA BE", BY THE PROCLAIMERS.

ZACH

Is this unconventional?

NERO

What you're wearing is perfect.

ZACH

No, I mean, going out on the town... like this? Not on the clock.

NERO

Does it feel weird?

ZACH

It should. But... it doesn't.

NERO

If it begins to feel weird, just say 'when'. Besides, a Pink Slip Party is relevant to our professional relationship.

Zach grins. Nero leans over, turns up the volume.

NERO

Don't hate me... but this is one of my favorite songs.

ZACH

Really?

NERO

It's the ultimate 'leap into the void' song.

ZACH

Leap into the void?

NERO

It's the point of no return. It strips you of your pride, your fears and past... it's a new beginning where anything's possible. It's a joyride into the sublime. It's... love.

ZACH

If this vocational therapy thing doesn't work out... you should try being a poet.

INT. BAR/CLUB - NIGHT

The club is full of young twenty-to-thirty somethings. A large banner hanging from the ceiling reads: PINK SLIP PARTY - get hooked up!

All around the club are SMALL BOOTHS being run by companies that are there to NETWORK AND MAKE CONNECTIONS.

Jake is in front of a booth being run by a company called, SONGSHEET.COM. He looks engaged and very pleased while he talks to a young man, CORY.

CORY

We need someone like you at Songsheet. We only have one other person who's been involved in the music industry... she's our director of PR. I think she used to manage a band... what was their name again?

SAMMI (OS)

The Devious Deacons.

Sammi emerges from behind Cory.

JAKE

Sammi?

CORY

You two know each other?

SAMMI

Cory, this is Jake, my ex.

CORY

Does he come with a recommendation?

SAMMI

Sure. He's a great catch. Completely reliable too. In fact, when I was in labor-

JAKE

Sammi, don't-

SAMMI

When I was in labor for 18-hours, giving birth to HIS little girl, Jake was wasted, in some bar in Tacoma, foolin' around with a 17 year-old groupie.

JAKE

She was 18 and we'd broken-up.

SAMMI

All you had to do was be there.

JAKE

I screwed up once, and you've had me locked in the dog house ever since.

SAMMI

Oh please. You hold the key. Not me.

JAKE

Uh, sorry, but when you said, "Stay the fuck away from us..." I got a sneaking suspicion I wasn't welcome.

SAMMI

That's a convenient excuse.

Jake looks defeated. He turns to walk away, BUMPS shoulders with BARBARA who's walking back from the bathroom.

SAMMI

That's right do what you go best... skid-addle.

BARBARA

(to Sammi) Who was that?

SAMMI

Nobody.

Barbara studies Sammi's eyes, noticing how sad she looks

GABE (OS)

Hey Baby, surprise!

Barbara turns to see GABE STANDING BEHIND HER.

GABE

(to Sammi) Do you mind if I borrow my girlfriend for a moment?

SAMMI

By all means.

Gabe, SWEEPS Barbara into the middle of the dance floor. Gabe's bubbling with nervous energy.

BARBARA

Don't you have a gig tonight?

GABE

I do. I needed to give you something.

Gabe opens-up Barbara's hand and places a RING in it.

GABE

I got permission from your Dad...

BARBARA

Nuptials?

GABE

Your Dad says you deserve a commitment if I expect you to follow me around the country.

BARBARA

How did we go from moving State to a state of marriage?

GABE

This is our big ticket. I wanna experience it together... for better or worse.

Barbara's too stunned to say anything. Gabe kisses her.

GABE

Babe, I gotta get to gettin. I don't need an answer right now... just think about it.

Gabe kisses Barbara again. He dashes away, leaving Barbara, standing alone, FLABBERGASTED in the middle of the dance floor.

CUT TO

Nero and Zach dancing together.

Zach appears rigid. But Nero's encouraging smiles and goofy GYRATIONS seem to loosen Zach up. However, Zach's eyes continue to dart around suspiciously... painfully aware of prying eyes.

Nero notices this. He tries to hold Zach's hand.

ZACH

I don't do public displays of affection.

NERO

Just for tonight, fly your freak flag. Be proud of it.

Zach lets Nero take his hand... they move closer.

RYAN (OS)

Yeah Baby... yeah!

Zach turns to see RYAN hitting on a woman. Anthony and Drew are just behind him. They haven't yet noticed Zach. Zach abruptly distances himself from Nero.

Anthony finally sees Zach. Zach smiles, half-heartedly waves.

NERO
Friends of yours?

ZACH
Vaguely.

NERO
Let's say 'hi'.

They walk over to where Anthony, Ryan and Drew are sitting.

DREW
Looke here, the prodigal bitch returns.

ZACH
What's up guys?

ANTHONY
Where the fuck have you been, Dog?

ZACH
Been preoccupied.

RYAN
You're outta work, how busy can you be?

The guys laugh callously. Zach's face reddens.

NERO
Hi... I'm Nero.

ZACH
God, yeah, sorry... yeah... this is my, uh, my friend Nero.

They all nod at Nero. Zach turns to leave. Ryan grabs his arm.

RYAN
(antagonistic)
What's the rush? Stay for a drink.

ZACH
I'd love to, but...

NERO
Sounds great. Can I get you guys a round?

They all nod. Nero walks off to the bar. Zach and the other guys sit in silence for a moment.

ZACH

What exactly are you doing here?

RYAN

Our company's looking for fresh meat. Good thing you bumped into me; we may have an opening at the office. You interested?

ZACH

Yeah. Why not?

RYAN

I see you got yourself a sugar-daddy.

ZACH

What was that?

RYAN

Your 'friend'. You both seem very cozy.

Zach DOES NOT NOTICE Nero's just behind him, holding drinks.

ANTHONY

Yeah Z-man... how long have you been riding the chocolate speedway?

ZACH

Firstly, I don't ride the-whatever-you-call it. And secondly, he a vocational counselor... our relationship is purely professional. If he's some... homo who's hot to trot for me, that's his trip. Okay?

The guys all pause, to look over Zach's shoulder at Nero.

RYAN

Uh oh, I think you hurt its feelings.

Zach turns sees Nero behind him. Zach's face turns pale.

NERO

Your right, a leopard can't change its spots.

Nero storms away. Zach's feet remain stuck in the ground, he doesn't know what to do. Ryan pats him on the shoulder.

RYAN

You had me worried. For a second there, I thought you'd gone to the brown side.

The guys chuckle callously again. Zach notices all there sneering faces and something in him breaks.

ZACH

Ryan... shut the fuck up.

The guys STOP LAUGHING. Zach stares MENACINGLY at Ryan.

RYAN

What the hell is this?

ZACH

Gay pride asshole.

RYAN

I knew it. I knew you were a fa-

Zach THROWS a right hook at Ryan, knocking him to the floor.

Ryan grabs his bleeding nose. The other guys stand-up but cower beneath the sheer anger emanating from Zach.

Zach walks away... satisfied, yet still saddened.

INT. ZACH'S CONDO - EVENING

MONTAGE

Zach phoning Nero from different phones in his condo.

-Squatting by the front door

ZACH

Nero... I know you don't want to talk to me

-In kitchen

ZACH

Those guys... they're dicks. They're hyenas...
Which, God knows what that makes me.

-In his bathroom

ZACH

I'm a stupid asshole. A heel... But most of
all...

-On his bed

ZACH

...I'm sorry. Just call me back. Gimme a
chance to explain.

-On the couch

ZACH

I got scared... and... I don't expect any sympathy... actually...

-At his desk... in front of his computer.

ZACH

You're a good guy. I'm... I'm a parasite.

A couple of tears well-up in his eyes. Emphatically puts phone down. Slams computer shut.

Gets up from desk... he's back WEARING HIS ARMANI SUIT. He walks out of the door with purpose.

The phone rings, Zach runs back, eagerly SNAPS it up.

ZACH

Nero?

(Disappointed)

Hey Mom... Look, I'm a little busy... I'm okay. I'm fine. I'll call you soon.

Zach puts the phone down. He hesitates, and then picks the phone up again. DIALS A NUMBER.

ZACH

Rainbow? (voice cracks) I'm not okay. I really screwed things up.

ZACH STARTS SOBBING... his voice trails off into the phone.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - MORNING

Jake and his band are preparing to record.

Gavin walks recording room... Jake's mouth drops open. Gavin is carrying Jake's guitar case. Gavin is literally shaking in his boots.

GAVIN

You forgot this.

JAKE

Are you okay? I mean... are you gonna-

GAVIN

I'm fine. I smoked a pack of cancer sticks on the way here and chugged-down a bottle of cold medicine... with codeine.

JAKE

Dude, you could have called me.

GAVIN

We all have to deal with our fears at some stage... and sometimes the best way is to jump in feet first.

JAKE

Should I have the paramedics on standby?

GAVIN

I also needed to ask you a question... and it needed to be in person.

JAKE

Well, for your sake I hope this is a meaning-of-life type of question.

GAVIN

Do the ends justify the means?

Jake is slightly confused by the question. Gavin shoves Jake's guitar case at him.

GAVIN

Gotta go... the codeine's running out.

Gavin scampers out of the room.

Jake doesn't know what to make of all this. He opens his guitar case. On top of his guitar is a picture of him and Duncan. He sits down on a chair, stares, contemplatively at the picture.

INT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Sammi and Barbara are chatting, while Marie plays on the swings.

SAMMI

And you're okay with this?

BARBARA

Gabe's a sweet and he's reliable. I could do worse.

SAMMI

If you want reliable, buy a Chevy.

BARBARA

It's for the best. The whole film school idea was just a pipe dream. And look at how well the play has gone. If, for no other reason, at least it'll make my Dad happy.

SAMMI

Do you know what an actor's worst nightmare is?

BARBARA

Me as their director?

SAMMI

Being typecast. Playing the same role over and over again, just 'cos that's what everyone around them expects.

BARBARA

I'm not typecast.

SAMMI

Prove it to me. Show the world that you can play something other than Daddy's little girl... Jake?

Barbara glances over her shoulder to see JAKE standing behind her. Jake looks repentant.

JAKE

Give me a chance to fix things.

SAMMI

What? Oh, are you high again?

JAKE

I'm serious.

SAMMI

Marie doesn't deserve a fair weather father.

JAKE

I agree. She deserves an all-weather father.

SAMMI

We've been down this road before. I can't go through it again. I won't. I-

BARBARA

Godammit Sammi, he's trying to make things right. Don't cut-off Marie just to spite Jake. It's not fair on her. For fuck sake, at least he wants to be in her life.

Barbara storm away. Marie comes up to Sammi and Jake, who appear to be holding a silent stand-off.

Marie takes Jake's hand.

MARIE

Daddy... swing me.

Jake stares at Sammi. Sammi reluctantly nods. Jake takes Marie over to the swings.

INT. BARBARA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Barbara is surrounded by packed boxes in her lounge. Her front door opens, and in walks her Father.

FRANK

Everything okay, Princess? I called this morning, but you didn't answer.

BARBARA

Everything's wonderful. I'm still unemployed, I'm broke, but... I'm getting hitched, moving town, and preparing for a life of subservient bliss.

Barbara starts unpacking food-stuff from the kitchen cupboards.

FRANK

Isn't this what you want?

BARBARA

No. This is what you want. It's never what I want.

FRANK

What do you want?

BARBARA

I don't want cookies, I don't want tofu... I like sushi... I like sorbet.

FRANK

What's your diet got to do with-

BARBARA

I want to eat the food that I want to eat.

FRANK

Okay, I won't pick up groceries for you.

Barbara studies her Father's face.

BARBARA

If you can't let me live my life, you can't be in my life. Yes, I have her heart but I also have your sense of honor. And my honor tells me that I need to think for myself before I do something I might regret... something that would hurt the people I love. Understand?

Frank nods and mumbles something incoherent to himself, and then walks out of the front door, leaving Barbara standing alone... yet, her demeanor is stoic.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

The group's rehearsing. One woman, RUTH, is wearing a peroxide blonde wig, filling-in for Diane.

Diane enters the theater with dramatic gusto. The group seems a touch agitated by Diane's attitude.

DIANE

Sorry I'm late. Car troubles.
(puts down bag, takes wig off of Ruth)
How about today we start at scene 12, I need some work-

BARBARA

No.

Barbara takes wig out of Diane's hands

DIANE

No, what?

BARBARA

No more of this. (takes a deep breath)
Ruth, I want you to take over for Diane.
(Faces Diane with a look of determination)
Sorry, but this is my production, and I need performers, not performances.

DIANE

You can't do this, I'll quit.

BARBARA

Okay...

(addresses the group)

Those in favor of Diane staying... and me
quitting... raise your hand.

No one in the group raises their hand. Diane's eyes burn with anger. SHE SWEEPS-UP HER BAG AND STORMS OUT OF THE THEATER.

Sammi looks at Barbara. Smiles and then winks at her.

SAMMI

That's my girl... putting the unity back into
community theater!

Barbara DOES NOT smile back. She seems driven and focused.

BARBARA

People... we have a production to put on in
two weeks. I won't tolerate anymore
distractions. Got it?

The players all nod back in unison.

INT. ADVERTISING AGENCY - MORNING

Zach is sitting at a desk in a cubicle. The nametag on the side of his cube reads: ZACHARIA MILLER, COPYWRITER.

A polished, SLICK-LOOKING EXECUTIVE lurks up to his desk.

SLICK EXECUTIVE

Hey man... what's cookin'...?

ZACH

Not much, just getting my-

SLICK EXECUTIVE

About the copy you wrote. I need you to
rewrite it... but this time, lead with the
benefits, and then unpack the features.

Zach nods back. THE SLICK MAN THEN HANDS ZACH A PICTURE.

SLICK EXECUTIVE

We'll be using this image for the magazine
spread. Thought it might inspire you. It's
called, "Leap into the void".

INSERT PICTURE

LEAP INTO THE VOID, BY YVES KLEIN.

This is a renowned picture of a man leaping out the window of a two-story building on to a cobble street. However, it is clear that there is no one to catch his fall.

END INSERT

Slick Executive leaves the room. Leaving Zach to contemplate the picture. SOMETHING IN HIM CLICKS.

He takes off his jacket and loosens his tie. After staring at the picture a little longer, he then takes off his tie.

Zach gets up from his desk and walks over to the elevator. Once inside the elevator, he begins to remove his shoes, his socks, his pants, his shirt... etc, until he's down to his boxers.

The whole time, he's smiling.

Zach exits the elevator upon reaching the ground floor. He confidently STRIDES PAST A FOREST OF CUBICLES AND GAWKING FACES. At the front door is the Slick Executive.

SLICK EXECUTIVE

What are you doing?

ZACH

I'm leaping into the void.

Zach TOSSES THE PICTURE at the Slick Executive and exits the building wearing nothing more than his under garments.

INT. BARBARA'S APARTMENT - SAME

Barbara is in bed with Gabe. Packed boxes are all around her.

The PHONE starts to ring. Her Dad's morning wake-up call. Barbara reaches over to grab it... but she stops and LETS THE PHONE RING until it goes dead.

Barbara gets out of bed, walks over the one of her boxes and starts unpacking it.

She takes out an old picture of her Mom and Dad. Her mother is wearing a RED SILK SCARF, and her father is wearing a YANKEES BASEBALL CAP.

Barbara removes the same red scarf and cap from the box. She puts them both on.

Barbara hears Gabe stir. He sits-up in bed. He sees that Barbara's unpacking. This clearly CONCERNS HIM.

Barbara walks over the bed, sits next to Gabe. She holds her hand out. The RING sits in the middle of her palm.

GABE

Baby?

Barbara hugs Gabe, SHAKES HER HEAD and hands the RING back to him. Gabe nods, solemnly accepting her decision.

INT. JAKE'S HOME - SAME

Jake's in his bathroom, preening himself.

Today, however, Jake's not going for the quintessential slacker/punker look. Today, he's well groomed in a suit.

He looks positively somber.

INT. ST. BART'S - LATE MORNING

Jake slowly, deliberately walks down the hallway of St. Bart's school, heading toward the REVEREND'S OFFICE.

He arrives at the REVEREND'S door. The morning sun filters through the glazed glass. The shadow of a cross is projected on to Jake's chest.

Jake takes a deep breath, knocks on the door.

The door SWINGS open. Spectacular, bright morning light BURSTS from the room, dousing Jake.

EXT. ZACH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Zach's outside getting into his new set of wheels... an old BEAT-UP, HONDA CIVIC. He's wearing sweats.

INT. GYM - EARLY AFTERNOON

Nero is lifting weights. In the mirror, he sees Zach standing coyly behind him.

Surrounding them both are lots of people working out.

Zach starts singing, I'M GONNA BE, by the Proclaimers.

ZACH

When I wake up, I know I'm gonna be,
I'm gonna be the man who wakes up next to
you. When I go out, I know I'm gonna be,
I'm gonna be the man who goes along with
you. When I'm working, I know I'm gonna be,
I'm gonna be the man who's working hard for
you. I would walk 500 miles. And I would
walk 500 more. Just to be the man who
walked 1,000 miles to fall down at your
door...

Nero grins. Zach stops singing.

ZACH

I guess I'm just a damsel in distress after
all.

Nero breaks into a full, forgiving smile and embraces Zach.
They then kiss... boldly, in front of everyone.

INT. CATHOLIC SCHOOL - MORNING

Duncan's sitting alone, cross-legged in a music room. He's
struggling to strum chords on the guitar.

JAKE (OS)

You've been practicing; what sounded like a
dying cat now sounds like a cat with a
cough.

Duncan refuses to turn around to face Jake. Yet, HIS LIPS CURL
UP INTO A GRIN.

JAKE

You can ignore me if you like... but it'll
just mean detention in the long run.

DUNCAN

On who's authority?

JAKE

On the authority of St. Bart's new part-
time music teacher... me. (mock whisper) It's
true what you said about them priests... they
live for repentance and forgiveness.

Duncan's now listening.

JAKE

The band thing wasn't working for me. I'm looking for more of a duet thing.

Duncan turns to Jake. He sees Jake is holding one of his bags.

DUNCAN

Are we going somewhere?

JAKE

My place.

DUNCAN

For how long?

JAKE

Until you've mastered the entire Led Zeppelin repertoire.

Duncan hesitates for a moment, eyes Jake somewhat suspiciously.

DUNCAN

Foster care is very exp-

JAKE

I used the money I saved for the demo.

Duncan gets up, takes his bag.

DUNCAN

Guitar's pretty hard. It might be a while before I'm any good.

JAKE

You know what they say about learning guitar... it's mind over matter. You gotta-

DUNCAN

...not mind, no matter how hard it seems.

Jake reciprocates Duncan's wry smile. They begin to walk out of the room.

DUNCAN

You know... it's kind of a lame motto.

JAKE

Yeah... we're gonna have to work on that.

As the two of them head out the door, Jake puts his arm around Duncan.

INT. COMMUNITY THEATER - NIGHT

It's opening night, and the play has come to an end. On the stage the actors take their first bow.

The crowd stares silently for one painful moment. They then suddenly EXPLODE into a RAUCOUS APPLAUSE. The curtain FALLS.

Barbara comes out from behind the curtain, takes her bow. Followed by the rest of the troupe. Barbara looks proud and satisfied.

Her eyes peel through the small audience, but she cannot seem to find who she's looking for. Meanwhile in the back row of the audience is JAKE, DUNCAN AND... MARIE.

LATER - BACKSTAGE

Barbara and the rest of the troupe are standing in a circle holding champagne glasses. They toast each other.

ALL

To Barbara!

Barbara notices Jake, Duncan and Marie standing in the doorway, she looks over to Sammi. Sammi shrugs.

SAMMI

Weather permitting... every kid should have a Mom and Dad, right?

BARBARA

No ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Barbara gives Sammi a small hug.

Barbara notices an older man standing by the doorway. It's her father, FRANK. Barbara goes over to him.

BARBARA

I didn't see you out there. What-

FRANK

You didn't answer the phone the last couple of days I was worried. I... I talked to Gabe, he told me about your decision.

Barbara nods gravely. Frank takes a step closer to Barbara. From behind his back he pulls out over a dozen red roses.

FRANK

I don't know what the protocol is here, but is the director supposed to get flowers or something on opening night?

Barbara warmly accepts the flowers.

BARBARA

Thanks Daddy...

FRANK

You make me proud. You know that, right?

Barbara embraces her Father. He kisses her head.

FRANK

You're right. You're the best of us
Princess. The best... and that's okay by me.

INT. CAFÉ - MORNING

Nero buys two coffees. As he leaves the shop he passes a woman (BARBARA) at a table with a folded-up newspaper beside her.

She appears to be studying from a textbook.

NERO

(pointing to the paper)
Are you finished with that?

BARBARA

Sure. Go for it.

Nero nods a 'thank you', takes the newspaper, exits the café.

INT. ZACH'S CONDO - MORNING

Nero walks into the kitchen holding the coffees and the newspaper. Zach's putting together a breakfast of eggs, pancakes and bacon.

ZACH

Come with me to the coast this weekend. I'd
like to stop by my parents place for
Tellabration.

NERO

The storytelling festival? Wonderful. And I
get to meet the parents? My dear Zacharia,
are we going steady?

Zach holds up a frying pan and points to the apron he's wearing. He places plates, upon plates of food on the table.

ZACH

What do you think?

NERO

I think I could get used to being a kept man!

They both laugh. Nero holds up a section from the newspaper he procured from Barbara in the café.

NERO

Speaking of which... there's a job in here under 'writer'... it's for a local production company.

Zach reads the ad.

ZACH

Looks interesting. I'll give 'em a call.

NERO

Good idea... and while you're at it...
(Eyeing all the food)
...ask them if they have any plans for
breakfast.

SUPER ON BLACK SCREEN

One month later...

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Zach sits, facing a computer screen in a spacious, well-lit office.

He's listening to the music he bought from JAKE outside of the music store.

A man enters. WE NEVER SEE HIS FACE.

MAN

Settled in?

ZACH

Just about.

MAN

(noticing the music) Who's this?

ZACH

He's a local artist. Does mostly trip-hop and ambient stuff -- it's good.

MAN

Mind if I borrow it? We're looking for a new music guy. You never know, he might fit the bill.

ZACH

Help yourself.

Zach hands the man the CD, he leaves the room.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A man (CIARAN), dressed in trendy attire sits behind a desk interviewing Barbara. The office is prosaic, save for piles of papers, a computer, and a few digital cameras.

CIARAN'S has a flashy but sincere smile, yet his demeanor seems standoffish. He's carefully scrutinizing Barbara's resume.

CIARAN

I like your enthusiasm - and the guy who recommended you said the play you directed was top-notch. It's also good that you're taking some film classes. However... I'm concerned that you have no on-the-job experience.

BARBARA

True, but I have the talent to do this.

CIARAN

So does everyone that comes through that door. What makes you different?

Ciaran turns to his computer, practically ignoring Barbara. This frustrates her.

BARBARA

Did you know an interviewer will make his mind up about an interviewee in the first twenty seconds, based on hand shake, appearance and demeanor? Because of the onus on first impression you forget about being yourself. Everything you say and do becomes a programmed response. Heaven forbid you'd do anything unique. It's just a game you see. A superficial system, tailored for sycophants and cronies. And when you've been through as many of these as I have, you begin to read the signs.
(Sighs - Leans forward)

So, 'why should you take a chance on me'?
'cause I have the balls to be real. To be
daring. Pity is... you'll never know that.

Ciaran still hasn't looked up from this computer. Apparently he
didn't hear a thing.

CIARAN

Daring, eh? What's the most daring thing
you've ever done?

Barbara shakes her head - not caring either way.

BARBARA

This.

Barbara grabs her bag, and WALKS OUT OF THE ROOM into the
hallway. She walks with pace and resolve. Truly confident,
every step of the way.

By the time Barbara reaches the reception desk... CIARAN CATCHES
UP WITH HER.

His attitude has changed. He seems open, and very pleased.
Barbara actively ignores him.

CIARAN

Barbara? (smiles) When can you start?

Barbara drops her bag, in utter astonishment.

CIARAN

In our industry, talent goes a long way,
but a tigerish personality can take it even
further.

BARBARA

I don't know what to say.

CIARAN

That's a surprise!
(firmly shakes Barbara's hand)
Can you spare a moment?

Barbara nods.

CIARAN

I want you to meet some of the new hires in
our film division. They're kinda like you...
talented... but raw.

INT. OFFICE - SAME

Barbara walks with Ciaran down a hallway.

Ciaran opens the door. Sunlight SPILLS into the impressively-sized office from two large windows.

Sitting at two desks (with their backs turned to the door) are two men. One has on a set of headphones and is tinkering with a synthesizer hooked up to the computer. The other is simply typing.

CIARAN

(To the men)

Guys, I'd like to introduce you to Barbara...
our new associate producer-slash-director.

The guys turn around... they're JAKE and ZACH. A vague sense of recognition passes between all three characters. Jake winks, flashes Barbara a rogue-like grin.

Ciaran senses the familiarity between them.

CIARAN

You all know each other?

All three crack a smile -- slightly stupefied by the fatalistic events that have brought them together.

ROLL CREDITS