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Senior Honors Project

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Souls and Soldiers:
A Writer's War

For me, the screenplay is not a finished product. A novel, short story, or poem is a whole work, living within itself. The author intends to stay within the text and within the mind and imagination. Even imagistic poetry relies on text to illustrate an image, holding reality back, keeping it relative to the author and reader's imagination. A play, and especially a screenplay, however, is a stepping stone, the narrative out of which springs some sort of visual and dimensional reality. A playwright or a screenplay writer is someone who writes for the stage or screen, and who writes primarily to create something that eventually becomes as close to real as art can get. It is the creation of this reality that lures me to screenplay writing. For the most part, a screenplay is actually quite bare and lackluster. Showing emotion becomes a simple decision – does the protagonist cry, or walk away with his head hanging? – instead of a complex passage of inner thoughts or an abstract poetic device. In a screenplay, description aims for efficiency, and specific words become less important than in other mediums, unless they are written inside dialogue. Even the length of a screenplay restricts the writer. An average screenplay runs between 90 and 120 pages – not very much room to stretch. But when I decided to write *Souls and Soldiers*, my primary, and perhaps only, intrigue was the creation of reality, not a textual illustration, but an actuality of sorts, one as true in vision as words are in text, and one that exemplifies the ultimate truth of fiction better than other mediums of art.

It is an idea that, as a writer, I've fought with and around, literarily and mentally, over and over again: is there truth in fiction, and if so, how much? Over the past four years, I have come to the conclusion that truth is relative to writer and reader; it is not true in the literal sense so much as it is true in the philosophical sense. A particular action or situation, while it never actually happened in real life, illustrates a certain poignancy of real life, which then reveals a truth and meaning that bridges fiction with reality. This higher, deeper truth gives fiction its ultimate meaning and its writer an ultimate purpose. And the screenplay medium allows me to expand that definition, to write in an art form that, after full production, showcases this higher truth in a context that more directly reflects reality through a sense that we use in both reading and writing. It functions beyond the text to illustrate the visual setting, context, and reality that a text leaves unaddressed. I began my screenplay writing with this overarching concept in mind, and even at the end, I still support it as the main reason for my choosing to write a screenplay. There are so many dynamics when working with film, and as a writer, I have a larger pallet of sensual devices. Yet, because this is my intention, to create a work that would eventually be produced, acted, cinematographically edited, and projected onto a screen, I have to accept that my part in the process is simply that, a segment of the finished product, and not a finished work.

That said, even this segment of *Souls and Soldiers* is not as finished as I would like. The idea behind the screenplay began last semester as an exploration of my generation, the Millenials, and how they project universal issues and themes, like religion, death, career, love, etc., onto a new context, the Twenty-first Century. It was going to be glorious, a true testament to my skills as a writer and a thinker, and the *Fear and Loathing* of Generation Y. Then tragedy struck in multiple ways. First off, I realized that my skills were not yet on par with Hunter S. Thompson's or any other professional writer's. In fact, I was not quite sure where or how to start

a work of any great length. Second, even after reading books on my generation, I felt I was not connected enough with the culture to tackle it with any legitimacy. My own development as a member of Generation Y has been isolated from my friends', geographically and thus socially. Then, actual tragedy struck within my own and another of my friend's families. Three weeks into the semester, I began to seriously rethink where *Souls and Soldiers*, which at the time was unoriginally titled *The Millenials*, was going. Being as how I had already written a few pages and sketched out my two main characters, I was hesitant to turn my back on them, so I incorporated these same two people into a new narrative. Sam and Simon were originally my Kevin Dolenz and Leslie Hunter (from *St. Elmo's Fire*) of today, but after I shifted the story, they took on whole new personalities and complexities; they became characters I had never seen before. That is when I knew, after Sam and Simon were reborn, that I had been thinking about and writing the wrong screenplay for weeks, and that I needed to recreate my narrative arch. I decided to keep a few setting characteristics, like the war in Iraq, but I changed them to fit a new model, one driven by grief and the characters' inability to deal with it.

As soon as I transitioned from one screenplay to another, however, I was faced with a new set of problems, one of which was my extremely cliché choice of narrative catalyst: death and funerals. It was around this time, I started reading Robert Haas and his *Sun Under Wood* for my Introduction to Writing Poetry class. I could pick out a host of his poems that inspired me this semester, but the one in particular that really caught my attention was the very last poem of the book, *Interrupted Meditation*. I will not try to summarize or analyze this incredible poem, but I will say that after reading it, I was overcome with a feeling of uselessness as a writer, for a few days at least. For me, the poem dealt with, among other things, the relative value of art. How valuable is my writing, here in an enclosed, overprotective, collegiate, carefree environment,

compared to Kurt Vonnegut's war torn, disjointed narratives? Even if I had the talent, how could I write as poignantly as Oliver Stone did in *Platoon*? This judgment and definition of value forced me to consider why I even wanted to write, and eventually led me to form my own ideas about the value of art, which I intentionally projected into *Souls and Soldiers*. My first reaction was to change the situation, but I had my heart set on Tommy dying at the beginning. So I decided to explore the value of writing and art in the character of Simon. Because Tommy dies, Simon hits a literary and emotional wall. He cannot write because he does not think it will mean anything compared to what has already been written. It was my own predicament, so I decided to work it out in my writing itself. The conclusion I came to, although I do not consider it a resolution, is that the experience of art gives art its value. For example, if a poem presents an image, many times the poet lets that image stand alone, inherently generating meaning from the image and not through any philosophical explanation. The image's value is inherent and is interpreted differently by whoever sees it. In this screenplay, I used the photo in the art gallery, Hadley's room, and Benji's living room to illustrate this point. Of course, to clarify, I actually explained the image with Simon's voice-over, which might have sucked the life out of an already teetering idea, but I wanted the idea of experience determining an art's value to shine through the work, so as to dodge the bullet of genre fiction.

Another piece of poetry that influenced my writing was Frank O'Hara's "Why I am Not a Painter." It is a piece that I found at the very end of the semester and that I thought clarified the entire writing process. For me, I began with one idea, as Mike Goldberg and Frank do in the poem: my generation. I put all the pieces together, mapped out where I was going, and made sure everything fit. I had sardines and orange both, in the form of the Millennials and Simon's choice of trade – a cook. But like I explained above, I found myself misguided and tangentially skewed

off the original course. Soon there were pages, “not of orange, but words, of how terrible orange is and life.” For me those pages were not of my generation but of life, of how terrible it is to live and how great at the same time. Nevertheless, I also strayed from the ending of the poem itself. Frank names his poems “Oranges,” Mike names his painting “Sardines,” but I do not have any desire to confront the Millennial generation with this work, and so have found a title I believe better characterizes the work as a whole. I chose the title *Souls and Soldiers* because of how the two words interact together, describing different things and similar things simultaneously. On one hand, souls refers to the common man, a soul or poor soul, which a soldier is supposed to protect. However, the relationship between a soldier and a common citizen more complicated when we consider how soldiers treat common citizens protected by their opposing soldiers. So, within even the most apparent relationship between these words, there is a nice dichotomy to keep things on edge. On the other hand, generally speaking, a soul is inherently part of a soldier, and protecting himself and his soul, like a soldier, is part of every common man, so here, when the focus is on the term “soul,” these two words become necessary conditions for each other. Of course, in my screenplay, I investigate how souls and soldiers interact. There are many souls in the screenplay, and perhaps a few soulless soldiers (Axel). There are also a handful of soulful soldiers that masquerade as simple poor, common souls (Harding). But the title isn’t necessarily supposed to explain the story; instead, I want this dichotomy between souls and soldiers to be the first thing an audience thinks about in order to prepare them for the film, not vice versa.

While poetry and photography served me well during the process of writing the screenplay, films influenced me more than other art. I have to immediately credit Spike Lee both for his influence on *Souls and Soldiers* and for the reference I make to one of his films within the screenplay: *Mo’ Better Blues*. I began my college career as a jazz and studio music major on the

saxophone. Even when I switched my major to English, my love for jazz never left. When I saw *Mo' Better Blues* for the first time over last winter break, I was astounded at how well the trumpet player, Bleek Gilliam, played by Denzel Washington, embodied the jazzman persona. Bleek's playing became so visceral and so entwined in his sexual and social nature as a person that I could hardly keep myself from watching it over and over. Lee had such an incredible way of merging external pressures with internal ones that I could not resist. My own screenplay was built on external and internal wars between characters and within themselves, and Bleek's fall as a musician conveniently bridged the generational gap between today's inner struggles and those of the late 1960s. His fall culminates in a scene where Bleek returns to Shadow's night club and tries to play his trumpet, after being beat up in a previous scene. Yet, he is unable to even blow a coherent melody and walks out. Like Bleek, Simon is undergoing a sexual reversal. He has been emotionally beaten and cannot perform sexually with Benji. At the same time, the movie theater he works at is showing *Mo' Better Blues*, and specifically the scene where Bleek can no longer perform on his trumpet, which for Bleek also translates into a visceral failure.

Probably the biggest influence on my character development, however, came from Wes Anderson. Most all of Anderson's films helped me realize my own characters. Anderson is a fantastical writer, who sculpts these beautiful settings and eccentric characters to go with them. Yet, what I found so interesting about his characters is that, being sort of secondary to his setting, he let them run free; they became some of the most interesting, exaggerated, and astounding characters I have ever seen, especially in the sense that they always became emotionally, and many times intimately, involved in relationships within their family or between two people with a large age discrepancy or between two different social classes, etc. Anderson is not afraid to push the relationship envelope, and it's something that, if executed well, can be extremely

entertaining and revealing. In *Bottle Rocket*, one of his protagonists falls in love with a hotel maid. In *Rushmore*, Max Fischer falls in love with his teacher, as does Max's much older, industrialist cohort. In *The Life Aquatic*, Steve Zissou and his son fall in love with the same woman. In *The Royal Tennenbaums*, one of the genius brothers falls in love with his adopted, genius sister. And in the newly released *Darjeeling Limited*, four brothers fill up what's left of the screen, after the scenery of India of course, with the shreds of their relationship. All of these relationships lent themselves nicely to the Simon, Sam, Pam, Benji, and Steve love pentagon in my own screenplay, and Anderson helped me gain the confidence to step out of the relationship box.

There were many other films that influenced my writing as well. Alan Ball's *American Beauty* helped me with both the digital scenes in my screenplay as well as the dueling plot lines. Edward Burns' *She's the One* helped bring my screenplay back to reality. For a week at the very beginning of the semester, while I was studying Anderson, my main characters were actually Hadley and Harding – genius twins who were in love with each other at the age of nine. Burns brought me back down to Earth. His simple but effective story telling methods helped me realize an eccentric narrative in a realistic style. And as much as I hate to admit it, even Diablo Cody's *Juno*, which has since spawned a commercialized “Junoverse,” significantly helped shape my screenplay. While I am better crafting drama than comedy, I have always been more interested in writing comedy, especially black comedy, than traditional drama. After seeing *Juno* upwards of six or seven times, I realized that if Cody could deal with a serious issue like teenage pregnancy in such an ironically lighthearted way, and still reveal that amazing fictional truth, I could at least try it with death. My final product, however, is not as lighthearted as I originally intended it to be. Grief is by no means funny, but sometimes all we can do is laugh, and it is this idea that kept

my screenplay dabbling with semi-comedic moments. Numerous other films, including *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Junebug*, *You Can Count On Me*, *The Squid and the Whale*, and all of Charlie Kaufman, Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, and the Coen brothers' works have helped shape me as a screenplay writer. Even the hit television show *The Office* forced me to rethink certain areas of dialogue and other situations. Whether I have edited them out or not, I have used a cinematic technique from almost every film I have seen the last semester in a draft of *Souls and Soldiers*. And because I am constantly learning and reshaping my opinions about screenplay writing, I can honestly say this work is not yet finished, even in its screenplay form.

The structure of *Souls and Soldiers* stems from Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* method. Snyder outlines 15 sections of a screenplay and their average, prospective page numbers, to guide novice screenwriters such as myself. Looking back on the writing process, I stayed loyal to Snyder's guide until the last few weeks. The timing of my screenplay, however, with the majority of it taking place in the days immediately following Tommy's funeral, forced me to actually skip a few sections of Snyder's guide, such as the Fun and Games, Midpoint, and Bad Guys Close In sections. Other sections, like the Break into Two, or commencement of the protagonists' journeys, come out of order in Snyder's original process. The beginning of my characters' journeys starts immediately on page one after Tommy dies. However, a second journey develops when Simon moves in with Sam, around page 45, which is much farther than Snyder predicted the average Break into Two to start. Yet, by parting ways with the original outline, I feel *Souls and Soldiers* has come into its own space, and played out at its own pace, not defined by a blueprint but rather by a more natural development of its narrative. Had I stuck specifically to Snyder's blueprint, I feel the story would be inefficient or even convoluted. I would have had to progress farther temporally, which might have not allowed me the space to

fully develop the characters together, which would have been a significant detriment to my character-driven narrative.

I would also like to emphasize that, despite the long hours I have put into creating and writing this screenplay, it would hardly be worth a first read without my project director, who taught me the inner workings of screenplay writing, my second reader, who gave me more professional attention and feedback than I deserved on such short notice, and my many fellow colleagues, who gave me their unceasing attention, and opinions, about where this story should go whenever and wherever I asked. They say it takes an entire village to raise a child, and similarly, I say it takes an entire department to write a script. Of course, as I have said before, I will keep working and editing this screenplay, so as to hopefully submit it for actual publication and production.

As for the ending of the screenplay: I realize it plummets on the final pages further into the depths of grief than most stories even dare to go. But having experienced a similar, although less intense, process of grief while writing it, I felt that a story about real grief had to end as such. I chose to focus on the very beginning of grief, where small changes lay the foundation to affect bigger ones later on in life, and in doing so, I felt it best to end with the first signs of what is traditionally considered dealing with and accepting grief. Most stories occur after the shock period, when characters have had distance from these life-altering situations. But here we see characters who don't yet have their bearings. My characters are forced into this horrible situation, emotionally exposed and mentally jarred, and because of their immediate fall, they reveal the fundamental emotions, personality characteristics, and decision-making processes that grief, and generally all of life, warrants on a daily basis, but that is normally hidden beneath the surface. It is the ultimate truth of my fiction, that while these exact circumstances haven't

actually happened, the situations these characters are forced into incite very truthful responses and reactions, which in turn gives rise to a deeper truth, one we all must come to grips with during times of real grief. And, in short, that is what *Souls and Soldiers* is all about.

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Christopher Akel

"SOULS AND SOLDIERS"

by

Chris Akel

FADE IN:

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

(JULY 9, 2008)

On COMPUTER SCREEN: Title of a video blog: "Good Morning."

At a desk, SIMON TROUSDALE, 28, ties oxfords with his leg up in the air. He looks younger than his age with shaggy black hair and a sharp jaw. He also has a broken, padded nose. He smokes a cigarette.

Simon falls backward in the chair and THUDS into the closed window behind him. His foot knocks the desk, pitching the camera sideways.

The room is a mess with books, papers, and CDs strewn everywhere. Simon grunts, exasperated.

After repositioning the camera back on top of the computer, he brushes himself off and dresses into a tuxedo.

SIMON

I'm in a rut. A big, fat,
twentysomething, good for nothing,
collegeburnout, muddy fucking trench.
The walls are sinking.

Simon takes a smoke and buttons his shirt.

SIMON (CONT'D)

My friend comes up the other day with
this saying by Miles Davis. I doubt
Davis ever said it. Apparently, he was
talking about poetry and art that it
boils down to five things, plain and
simple.

He smokes.

SIMON (CONT'D)

(counting on his
hands)

Good morning, I'm here, I'm hungry,
fuck me, good evening.

He smokes and ties his tie.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I don't think it's real. But it's
burning a hole in my brain.

He holds the cigarette in his mouth and puts on the tuxedo jacket.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I can't write. Not one word. Not a noun, nothing. Not even a friggin article. "A" or "the." I can't write the word thu. It's like, how does my life even compare to some dude remembering his war days or some shit like that, huh? Just pathetic.

He looks up, fully dressed.

SIMON (CONT'D)

God, what the hell? Who cares right? You don't. Why even watch this? I've only gotten two responses over the past . . . four months. I could do anything right now.

He leans up to the camera.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I will pay you ten bucks if you post on this vlog. Anyone. Ten, brand new, purple Lincolns.

He leans back, rolls up his sleeves, and smokes.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Okay, that's bullshit. I'm not giving you a damn thing. Besides, if this doesn't go over—

(putting out the
cigarette)

—fuck it.

Simon brings out some gorilla tape from a drawer and tears off a piece. He tapes his mouth closed.

He pulls out a Ziplock bag and fits it over his head. Too small. He tries a bigger one. Still not big enough.

He un-tapes his mouth and digs around for a grocery bag under the desk. He finds one, tapes his mouth back up, throws the bag over his head and ties it tight under his neck.

He sits. The bag CRACKLES a little with his breath. Then the bag suctions over his whole face.

He tears at it, trying to untie the knot. He stumbles and falls, with a THUD.

SHOUTING (o.s.) tumbles into the room. His mother GLORIA TROUSDALE, 50, rushes to the desk. She drops down on her knees. Simon GASPS (o.s.) for air. They stand up. Gloria hugs him.

Then she looks up at him, SLAPS him across the face, and leaves.

Simon picks up the bag. Then he blows it up with air, ties it tight, and POPS it with a fistful pen.

MATCH CUT:
(JULY 4, 2008)

FLASHBACK - EXT. GAS STATION

Fireworks from within the suburbs EXPLODE over a big neon sign that flickers over the interstate. A gas station rests underneath it.

Four young TEENAGERS in hoodies loiter around the ice bin, POPPING small firecrackers on the ground.

AXEL HOLMAN, a 40-year-old ex-marine in hunting camouflage, steps out of his truck. Fireworks EXPLODE. He ducks at nothing, but quickly recovers.

He walks towards the teenagers who throw firecrackers in his direction. One POPS close to his foot, and Axel jumps.

Axel strides over and kicks the box of firecrackers beside the teenagers into the street.

TEENAGER 1
Hey screw you Elmer Fudd.

The teenager laughs with his friends.

AXEL
What did you say?

The teenager shrugs and turns around.

AXEL (CONT'D)
Go home, before I beat your asses.

Fuming, Axel whips around and walks inside. The doorbell RINGS.

Another car drives up and parks. TOMMY TROUSDALE, 33, a young family man in scrubs, gets out and walks briskly past the teenagers.

INT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

Tommy takes beer from the refrigerated section. Axel ambles over next to him. More fireworks EXPLODE (o.s.). He flinches. Tommy looks over.

TOMMY

You okay, sir?

Axel nods and walks down the aisle to the cashier. He checks out and leaves. Tommy steps up to the cashier.

EXT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

Axel scuffles past the teenagers. Tommy follows in the same direction. Firecrackers POP close to the men.

Axel stops, turns, and doubles back, passing Tommy and pushing him to the side. Tommy stumbles but retains his balance. He watches Axel.

Axel grabs a box of poppers out of the nearest teenager's hand.

AXEL

Fuckin' told you to stop. Damn kids.

TEENAGER 1

Hey, step off old man.

AXEL

Son, you give me any fucking lip, and I'll make it so fat you won't talk for a year.

Tommy steps over to intervene.

TOMMY

Gentlemen, we got a problem here?

AXEL

We won't in a second, as soon as I straighten out these kids.

TOMMY

Sir, I'm not sure that's entirely appropriate. But if there's a problem, I'm sure we can notify the neighborhood associat-

The ex-marine pulls an AK-47 from under his jacket.

AXEL

Listen, family man, I'm going to teach these boys a goddamn lesson. Go away before someone gets hurt.

The CONVENIENCE CLERK, 30, peeks out the window and picks up the phone.

TOMMY

Sir, what the hell are you doing?

TEENAGER 1

(to Axel)

Dude we were just-

TOMMY

(to the Teenagers)

Boys, inside.

Tommy points to the gas station, and the teenagers hurry inside. Axel points the gun at Tommy.

AXEL

Fucking idiot, doc. Them boys need a good scaring. What're you going to do? Send them to time out? Think you're all high'n mighty?

TOMMY

I think I just saw you pull a gun on some kids for no reason.

Fireworks EXPLODE. Axel flinches. The barrel of the gun quivers.

AXEL

No reason? I told 'em something and they didn't listen. I'm their elder.

TOMMY

You're supposed to set an example. What are they supposed to think when you're threatening to shoot them?

AXEL

Oh, so now you're the hero? That what you do for a livin, doc? Save lives? I went to Iraq for nine months. Twice. I saved fucking lives. You saved shit.

Axel waves the gun at him. Tommy drops his bags and raises his hands.

TOMMY

Look all I know is that I walk out here, and you're pointing a gun at some kids. So, maybe they're being dumb. They're just kids.

AXEL

Just kids? Who grow up to be just adults like you, people who can't raise their own children. This is what I risked my neck for? You're the goddamn terrorist.

TOMMY

But you have the gun.

Axel steps closer.

AXEL

You calling me a terrorist boy?

He points the gun directly at Tommy's face.

TOMMY

Look, you're in control here. I just want everyone to get home safely.

AXEL

Yeah, you'd better-

A police siren SOUNDS (o.s.) in the distance. Axel glances behind him and tightens his grip. Tommy moves closer, raising a hand to grab the gun. Another firework EXPLODES. Axel flinches and pulls the trigger. The shot is drowned by fireworks.

Tommy drops, bullet in the head.

Axel runs to his truck, gets in, and slams the door. The truck PEELS out.

The convenience clerk tears out the door and leans over Tommy, yelling MOS. The neon sign flickers above.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

(JULY 9, 2008)

A long, empty highway curves around the gentle hills of rural Tennessee. A black hearse leads a funeral procession down it.

A single car passes the funeral, speeding in the opposite direction.

A HITCHHIKER, 55, stands on the shoulder. He holds a cardboard sign and wears aviators under long, frizzy brown hair. His stomach bulges under a B-52s t-shirt. He listens to earphones, and bobs his head.

INSERT - SIGN, which reads:

TO ANYWHERE

SERIES OF SHOTS - PROCESSION - CONTINUOUS

Music PLAYS (o.s.).

- SAMANTHA TROUSDALE, 33, brushes her hair, talking MOS to her father, ERROLL ABRAMS, 61, who drives and points at the hitchhiker. Her mother, JOAN, 57, sits in the back staring out the window.
- Gloria sneezes, then sobs into a handkerchief as her husband WILL DAILEY, 56, drives. He rolls up the window as they pass the hitchhiker.
- ROGER ABRAMS, 36, drives and pats his crying niece, HADLEY TROUSDALE, 12, who wears her a tie-dye t-shirt and sweat pants. Her twin brother, HARDING TROUSDALE, sits in the back in a tuxedo. He stares at the hitchhiker, pressing his nose to the glass.
- JENNIFER KEYES, a stocky 22 year-old girl, and her brother JACK, 20 with a black eye, talk MOS as Jack drives. He says something to Jen and points out the window. She turns and looks at the hitchhiker, then breaks into laughter MOS.
- In the car ZOOMING in the opposite direction, Axel and his brother RICHIE HOLMAN, 55, argue MOS. Axel catches Sam's eye when their cars pass.
- NEWMAN TROUSDALE, 76, drives solemnly, shaking his head, as THURMAN ABRAMS, 84, solemnly nods his head. They wear identical bowler hats.
- LINDA BOGARD, the normal 46-year-old president of the neighborhood association, TALKS on a cell phone as SCOTT BOGARD, 49, drives and ARGUES with their three children, SARAH, 19, ZACH, 12, and BEN, 10.

LINDA

Yes, and little Hadley and Harding won't be there either, Pam. Thanks for understanding.

(MORE)

Linda hangs up and joins the argument. They stop when they see the hitchhiker. After passing him, they EXPLODE into argument.

-- Simon, driving in last, smacks the radio with his open palm, as BENJI JAMES, 24, yells MOS at him.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

When Simon hits the radio, the music stops.

Benji shakes his head, disapprovingly. He's a carefree, skinny guy, with his rolled sleeves, wavy brown hair, and '70s style square glasses. He smokes a joint.

BENJI

Now look, you broke it.

Simon motions for a hit. Benji gives the joint to him.

BENJI (CONT'D)

Chillax, hon. You're too uptight.

Simon exhales.

SIMON

No friggin way. And I just had a Twix.

BENJI

You need to talk about anything?

SIMON

No.

Benji shakes his head, and digs in his pocket. He pulls a VIBRATING cell phone out.

INSERT - CELL PHONE LCD, which reads:

STEVE

SIMON

glances at the phone, then back at the road.

BENJI

puts the phone away and looks out the window.

BENJI

Look at this thumb-bum. What is it about hippies? They're like generational mold.

They drive past the hitchhiker.

SIMON

Give 'em some slack. He's just a little lost.

BENJI

Don't be such a twinkie.

Simon looks at Benji and slams on the breaks. The car SQUEALS. Simon jabs Benji in the side.

BENJI

Ouch. Geez.

SIMON

I'm not a friggin twinkie.

BENJI

What are you doing?

Simon puts the car in reverse and drives back to the hitchhiker. He rolls down the window and leans over.

SIMON

(to the hitchhiker)

Hey, how's it going?

The hitchhiker shrugs.

SIMON

Well, I was wondering something: do I look like a twinkie to you?

Simon finger-quotes the word "twinkie."

HITCHHIKER

What's a twinkie, man?

BENJI

Well, technically it's a sponge cake—

SIMON

(to Benji)

Shut it.

(to the hitchhiker)

It's a term my friend here uses to describe my sensitivity to things

(to Benji)

as a gay man.

BENJI

That's not fair. Twinkie has nothing to do with homosexuality. I'm gay too, remember?

SIMON

Hold up there, Webster. I believe you specifically said that-

Benji turns to face Simon.

BENJI

You're joking right? This is no big de-

As Simon and Benji argue, the hitchhiker starts ambling down the road.

SIMON

You're a real trip you know that? Say one thing, then another when you're in front of people. And you smoke too much.

BENJI

(incredulously)

I smoke too much?

Simon backs up to where the hitchhiker is. He thrusts the joint out the window.

SIMON

(to the hitchhiker)

Here, take this. We're pretty much done with it.

Benji objects with an open mouth and a blank stare that follows the joint out the window.

HITCHIKER

Hey man, awesome. Thanks.

The hitchhiker takes the roach and absentmindedly pushes the sign into Benji's lap. He starts down the road.

BENJI

What the-

Benji peers over the cardboard sign AT Simon.

SIMON

Hope you find your way

HITCHIKER
 (over his shoulder)
 You too.

BENJI
 (to Simon)
 Twinkie.

SIMON
 (to Benji)
 Faggot.

They drive off to catch up with the rest of the procession.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - TOMMY'S VIEWING - LATER

Will, with his arms gripping around Gloria's huge shoulder pads, stands in front of a closed, deep-mahogany coffin surrounded by huge ferns and gaudy wreaths.

Benji and Simon stand next to them.

Six photos rest on stilts above the coffin, all displaying Tommy. The last one is Tommy's portrait.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

In his portrait, behind sleek glasses, Tommy smiles underneath brown, curly hair.

SIMON
 frowns and the bandage on his nose wrinkles.

CUT TO:

INT. FUNERAL HOME - TOMMY'S FUNERAL CEREMONY - LATER

In front of a large crowd, PASTOR LOU, 50s, wearing an obvious toupee, stands at a podium and recites his elegy MOS.

Simon and Benji sit in the back. Every now and then a sob ESCAPES (o.s.) into the chapel.

Sarah sits behind Simon and to the right. Simon looks back at her. She smiles and winks. Simon quickly turns around.

PASTOR LOU
 And may god welcome him through the
 pearly gates, with a heart full of
 love. Let us pray.

Everyone bows their head. Simon checks his watch.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

A bowl full of punch and lots of uneaten pies sit on a table along the side of the funeral home's large kitchen. People shake hands, pat shoulders, and hug.

The Abrams and Trousdale families stand in two lines and greet MOS everyone as they enter the kitchen.

Linda approaches Sam.

LINDA

Doing okay honey?

SAM

Oh yes, thank you. Well, I'm-
(holding a cup)
-would you like some punch?

She holds up a cup. Linda takes it.

LINDA

I called Pamela in the car. She understands completely. I told her the twins will be back in school Monday.

SAM

Oh well that's . . . thank you.

LINDA

Nope, that's what neighbors do. Now-
Sam stops Linda with a raised finger.

SAM

Sorry, but I have to use the little lady's room. Excuse me.

Sam leaves.

She and Simon meet at the door to the bathroom hallway, and Simon holds it open.

INT. MEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Three urinals hang on the wall side-by-side. Simon uses the middle one. He looks up from the urinal as Will walks in. Will uses a urinal next to him. They stand in silence.

WILL

So, I was talking to Gloria. She thinks now might be a good time to, you know, to start looking around.

SIMON

For?

WILL

Well, for an apartment.

SIMON

Tired of me already, Willy? Guess I'm a little old for boarding school.

Will shakes his head and stares up at the ceiling.

WILL

Now look, your mother and I thought maybe it's a good time. Aren't you still with that boy? Benjamin?

SIMON

So suddenly you're all down with it? Yesterday I was bent as a nine bob, and today it's a purple haze.

Benji walks in and sidles up on the other side of Simon.

SIMON

(to Benji)

Hey, cupcake.

Simon slaps Benji on the butt, nods at Will, zips up, and leaves.

INT. BATHROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sam hunches half-in the women's bathroom door. She VOMITS into the trashcan.

Simon walks out of the men's and sees her. He rotates her bottom half into the women's bathroom. The door swings closed.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon helps Sam down to the ground, swipes some paper towels, and hands them to her.

SIMON

You alright?

SAM

God why do people keep asking me that?

(wiping her mouth)

Yeah. Just hormones. My dead husband.

She wipes her arms, shirt, shoes, hair, everything. She takes out her makeup, walks to the mirror, and primps.

Simon nods and eyes her up and down, watching her pick lint out of a clean shirt. She gets up and trashes the paper towel.

SIMON

Okay then. Cool. In that case, I'll be on my way.

Simon heads for the door. She watches him through the mirror.

SAM

(quickly)

Simon I'm pregnant.

Simon freezes, then turns slowly around.

SIMON

When?

SAM

When Tommy was shot. The day of.

SIMON

Jesus Sam.

Simon combs his hair with his fingers.

SAM

Wow, I don't know why I just told you that. Don't tell anyone, yeah? Not even Benji.

SIMON

Of course not. Benji.

SAM

I just need some time. A little bit, you know.

SIMON

Yeah, yeah.

He leaves her as she brushes off her pants.

INT. - RECEPTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

At a table, Roger, Erroll, and Scott talk MOS. Their conversation fades as Simon approaches.

ERROLL

Simon.

SIMON

Erroll.

Scott leans over to Erroll.

SCOTT

You still play golf Erroll? We should hit the course sometime.

ROGER

(to Simon)

Doing alright?

SIMON

Fine.

ROGER

Goin for broke-in-nose, eh?

ERROLL

(to Simon)

More like brokeback. Nasty bruise, twinkie.

Simon clenches his teeth.

FLASHBACK - ERROLL'S BEDROOM

Simon bursts through the door and stops. Erroll looks at him through a mirror, dressed in his wife's panties. They stare at each other.

SIMON

Holy shit. Are you a two-way Johnny?

Erroll turns to face him.

ERROLL

Simon, please don't tell.

Both men stare at each other.

SIMON

Just stop calling me twinkie, okay?

ERROLL

It's a deal.

Simon heads out the door.

SIMON

(over his shoulder)

Ass queen.

ERROLL

smirks at Simon.

ERROLL

Always grabbing our attention.

Simon glares. The other men look away.

At another table, Hadley and Harding sit between Newman and Thurman.

Hadley whispers into Harding's ear. He squeezes her hand and gets up for a drink. He comes back and hands it to Hadley.

Benji comes up behind Simon.

BENJI

Hey, what was that all about in bathroom?

SIMON

Nothing. Let's bounce.

BENJI

Already?

Simon turns and leaves.

On his way out, he catches Sarah's eye. She smiles, raising a hand to motion him over. He turns and leaves. Benji follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - LATER

The afternoon sun shines on a tall, unlit sign for LUKE'S DOLLAR THEATER. The theater sits in between a washed out night club and a furniture outlet store.

INT. THEATER PROJECTION ROOM - LATER

Two people sit in the audience.

A projector hurls a film onto a theater screen. It's Spike Lee's "Mo' Better Blues." Denzel Washington tries to play his trumpet again for the first time after he was beaten.

A single, dim light bulb reveals Simon and Benji having sex in the corner. They BREATHE heavily and GRUNT. They don't kiss.

Suddenly Simon stops and walks away.

BENJI
(whispering)
What's wrong?

Simon shakes his head, and puts his pants on. He walks away, buttoning his shirt.

INT. THEATER HALLWAY - LATER

Simon and Benji lean against the wall in suits. Jen and Jack lean against the other wall in red vests. They each hold a broom with a dust pan attached. Simon stares at the ground and Benji watches him.

JEN
(to Simon)
Sorry we left late.

SIMON
No biggie. Someone had to open. You got my keys?

Jen nods and pulls some keys out of her pocket. She hands them to Simon. Simon grabs them and slouches back against the wall.

People amble out of the theaters. A cell phone RINGS. Everyone but Benji walks into a theater. Benji pulls out his cell phone and ANSWERS.

BENJI
Hello?
(shaking his head)
Steve, stop calling me. What?. . . No,
not tonight. Maybe tomorrow. We'll see.
Bye.

He flips the phone closed and walks into a theater.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMON'S CAR - LATER

Simon and Benji drive down a city road at dusk, passed small shops and restaurants. Night clubs light up their signs. They drive passed street musicians playing country music.

Simon rolls up the windows and presses a button on the dash. Jazz plays MOS.

BENJI

Coming over later?

SIMON

Yeah, maybe. I don't know.

BENJI

I'm having some people over for dinner.

Simon slows down and stops next to a shabby, five story apartment building. Benji unbuckles his seat belt.

BENJI (CONT'D)

You could come, or we could hang out later.

Simon nods and turns up the music.

BENJI (CONT'D)

Okay, well ring me if you're coming over. We've-

As Benji talks MOS, Simon stares out the window.

A MIDDLE AGED MAN and WOMAN pass, walking their dog. A KID skates down the street. A YOUNG MAN washes his car.

SIMON'S DAYDREAM - CONTINUOUS

SIMON'S P.O.V.

With one arm draped over the woman and the other holding the dog's leash, Tommy grins. He nods at Simon.

SIMON

Holy mother.

BENJI

stops talking and follows Simon's stare. He gets out of the car.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

The kid skates by the car. It's Tommy too. The young man washing the car turns and waves. It's Tommy again under a Titans football cap.

A car passes, and Tommy sticks his smiling head out the window of the driver's side window.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Simon opens the door and stands in the middle of the street, surrounded by Tommies all waving and smiling. He's awestruck.

One Tommy walks up to the passenger side of Simon's car.

TOMMY

Hey Simon, sup? You don't look so good
little bro?

SIMON

blinks and swallows.

BACK TO SCENE

Benji stares back at Simon over the hood.

BENJI

You want to come in and lie down?

SIMON

Oh. . .yeah, no. I've got. Home.

BENJI

Right. Now I hope you know you're
acting really crazy.

SIMON

I'm fine.

Simon climbs back into the driver seat.

Benji leans down to talk through the passenger window.

BENJI

But you just -

SIMON

Peace out, boy scout.

Simon throws Benji a peace sign and drives off. Benji watches him turn the corner and walks inside.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - AN HOUR LATER

Simon drives through the dark suburbs.

He pulls up to a red light, rubs his head, and takes a big breath, exhaling slowly. He flips on his lights.

A HIGH SCHOOL CHEERLEADER, 17, walks in front of his car. She holds up her hands to her eyes. Simon flips off the lights.

The cheerleader stops, frowns, and squints.

Simon watches her. She smiles and walks across the road.

On the other side, she turns and looks back. Their eyes meet. She smiles and waves. Simon returns the greeting.

The light turns. He flips on his lights and drives off.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

In the rear view mirror, the girl stands and watches Simon's car drive away.

EXT. THE TROUSDALE HOUSE - LATER

Driving down a suburban street lined with Bradford pears and streetlights, Simon pulls into the garage of two-story, ranch style house. A few other cars line the street next to it.

INT. THE TROUSDALE HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Simon enters a crowded kitchen. Most of both families, plus the Bogards watch television.

ON TELEVISION

A reporter stands in front of the gas station where Tommy was shot.

REPORTER

Where just days ago Tommy Trousdale was
gunned down. Police say the murderer is
this man -

Axel's photo flashes on the screen.

BACK TO SCENE

Sam blinks.

REPORTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Axel Holman, an ex-marine -

FLASHBACK - FUNERAL PROCESSION

Sam catches eyes with Axel as they pass in slow motion SPFX.

REPORTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
- who fought in the Iraq War.

BACK TO SCENE

Sam blinks again. She steps away from the group.

ON TELEVISION

The reporter's face reappears.

REPORTER (CONT'D)
Officials also say Mr. Holman may
suffer from post-traumatic stress
disorder. Back to you, Bruce.

SIMON

pushes his way through the kitchen. Gloria stops him. She's
holding a plate of stuffed mushrooms.

GLORIA
Try these stuffed mushrooms. Linda made
them. You know, Sam's neighbor. She
also made those fried frog legs.

Gloria points at a plate of frog legs on the table. Hadley is
standing over it.

HADLEY

stares at the frog legs. She leaves without taking any.

GLORIA

holds up a plate of stuffed mushrooms.

SIMON

Not now, Mom. They look great.

She corners him.

GLORIA
I know, I should have told you -

SIMON

Jeepers, mom. Forget it. It's what you
want.

GLORIA
Cut me some slack, dammit.

Everyone looks up.

Gloria smiles and drags Simon into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gloria gently holds Simon's forearms and looks into his eyes. Her brown hair dye is wearing off.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

She lets go of him and picks up the tray. He takes a mushroom from the tray and sloppily stuffs his face. Sam passes by them and smiles.

GLORIA

She's gonna stay here tonight, with the kids. Tomorrow, she's going back after the burial. It's going to be hard.

Sarah passes by Simon. They look at each other. He turns away and grabs more mushrooms to stuff his face.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

So the burial is 2 p.m. tomorrow.
You'll be there, yes?

Simon RESPONDS in jibberish with a full mouth. He walks away down the hall.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Simon?

Simon shrugs and continues down the hall.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon closes the door and sits on the bed. He takes out a DVD. Puts it in, turns on the TV. Regular porn MUSIC and hard male BREATHING wafts into the room. Simon unbuckles his belt. He stares at the television.

Then, he shakes his head and zips back up.

The door opens quickly. Harding walks in, not quite far enough to see the TV. A man YELLS in pleasure (o.s.).

Simon freaks out. The remote and DVD box crash to the floor. He fumbles for it, turns the sound up louder by accident, and

finally just hits the power button on the TV. Then he grabs up the box.

Harding just stands in the doorway and stares at him. Then he leaves.

Simon pushes the door closed and leans against it.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sam is moving into the bedroom next to Simon's. Simon opens his bedroom door and steps into the hallway.

SIMON

So you're shacking up here tonight?

SAM

You don't mind?

SIMON

No no. It's okay Jose.

She smiles and turns to leave. He turns as well.

SAM

Simon.

SIMON

Yeah?

He turns into her hug.

SAM

Thanks.

He awkwardly hugs her back. Then they exchange polite smiles. The twins file in, and Sam grabs for their suitcases.

CUT TO:

INT. TROUSDALE LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

The Abrams and Trousdale's sprawl across the sofa and chairs watching a movie MOS. The Bogards have left. Uncle Roger YAWNS and gets up. He pats Hadley, who sleeps in her mother's lap, on the head, and walks toward the back porch.

EXT. TROUSDALE'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Simon sits on the stoop with a pencil in his ear. He leans on the wood siding smoking a joint. A blank pad lays at his feet.

He holds the joint away when the door opens. Roger steps out and sits next to him.

ROGER
Hey. You got another?

SIMON
Uh, another cigarette? Yeah.

Simon digs in his shirt pocket, still holding the joint away. A pack of cigarettes falls out. Roger picks it up and pulls one out.

ROGER
Got a light?

Simon pulls out some matches.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Wow, going old school. Sweet.

He smokes.

ROGER (CONT'D)
You mind me hitting that too?

Roger points at Simon's other hand. Simon exhales and raises an eyebrow. They both laugh and exchange smokes.

SIMON
If Will ever caught me, I'd be put out in a microwave minute.

ROGER
Bet your jimmies you would. This shit'll ruin you.

Roger exhales.

ROGER (CONT'D)
So, sorry about my father this afternoon. He's a piece of work for sure.

Simon shrugs.

ROGER (CONT'D)
But what happened to your nose there? You alright? Not getting into too many bar fights I hope.

SIMON

No, no. I fell into some bushes. Face-planted actually.

ROGER

Oh.

Summer insects FILL the air. The men smoke.

SIMON

I'm fine, you know.

ROGER

No, you're not. But you don't know it yet. You don't want to know it yet.

SIMON

Bull. That's the type everybody is tired of, the jaded, cynical juvenile, whose only tragedy is a fake-suicide, broken-heart embodied in two minutes of whiny emo.

ROGER

I never said your generation wasn't lame as hell.

They laugh.

ROGER (CONT'D)

But everyone has to deal.

Simon holds up the joint.

SIMON

I'm dealing.

Roger accepts with pursed lips and a nod. He gets up.

SIMON

You okay to drive?

ROGER

Better'n most of these wisecracks.

Roger rounds the corner of the house. A cell phone VIBRATES (o.s.).

Simon takes out his cell phone.

INSERT - CELL PHONE LCD, which reads:

5 missed calls from Benji.

BACK TO SCENE

Simon takes a long drag, sprays some air freshener around him, and flicks the roach over the backyard fence. A full moon showers the backyard in a glow. He goes inside.

MATCH CUT:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Under the full moon, a truck speeds down an empty highway. It passes under an overpass. A police car bursts out of the shadows, and its strobe lights carve a path through the darkness behind the truck.

INT. RICHIE'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Richie drives, looking into the rear view mirror. Axel looks through the back window.

AXEL'S P.O.V.

The cop car races up behind them.

RICHIE

Shitlins. I'll talk. You sit.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls over, and the police car pulls behind it. A COP, 50s, climbs out and walks over to the truck with a flashlight.

He shines it on the back window and into the truck bed. Lots of grocery bags CRACKLE in the wind.

The cop steps up to the window. The window rolls down, and Richie looks out.

COP

License and registration. Going a little fast?

Richie pulls out his license and registration and gives them to the cop.

RICHIE

Yessir. Sorry about that.

COP

Been drinking a little tonight, boys?

RICHIE

Nope. Just on our way back from the grocery store.

COP

Uh huh.

The cop shines the light onto Axel, who stares at the floor.

COP (CONT'D)

Sir, can I see your license as well?

Axel looks up at Richie, then at the cop.

AXEL

Forgot it at home.

The cop stares at him.

COP

Gentlemen, please step out of the vehicle.

Richie looks back at Axel, wide-eyed. Axel opens the door. Richie does the same. The step over to the front of the truck.

COP

Hands on the hood.

Richie and Axel cautiously place their hands on the hood. The cop pants them both down. He digs in Axel's back pocket, and finds his wallet.

RICHIE

Is that legal?

COP

Sir, hands on the hood. And be quiet.

The cop opens the wallet and flips through it. He flips through it a second time.

COP (CONT'D)

Alright then. Get back in, both of you.
(to Axel)

I better not see you driving without no license, sir. You'd better find it soon.

The cop walks to his vehicle.

Axel walks back around. He glances at Richie, who throws his hands up in the air and shakes his head. They get back inside the truck.

CUT TO:

EXT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Off a country road, an old, one-story house with peeling wood siding sits on a hill surrounded by wire fence. Cattle graze in the dark for a couple acres all around the property.

A truck pulls up into the gravel driveway. It parks in a stand-alone garage. Richie and Axel climb out.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Peeling, yellow wallpaper lines the kitchen. A gas stove and small refrigerator sit in the corner. Axel and Richie sit at a wood table. They're smoking and WHISPERING. They EXHALE out the open windows.

RICHIE

You can stay at my mother's old place in Colorado. No one ever catches people in Colorado.

AXEL

Richie, it wasn't my fault-

RICHIE

Yes it was. We aint in the dunes anymore, Axe. Get outta here. Few years, you can come back, maybe.

AXEL

Years? Rich, what about my family? My job? What about us? And the guys, and my country?

Richie comes in close.

RICHIE

Stop it. Christ. Fuck the guys. You're holding a full metal jacket in Chuck-E-Cheese's, Axe. You got two options: hit it or slam it.

Richie flicks his butt out the window and leaves Axel at the table. Eventually, Axel flicks his butt and flips the light off.

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

CUT TO:
(JULY 2, 2008)

On COMPUTER: Title of a video blog: "I'm here."

Simon sits at his desk, in a t-shirt and jeans. He adjusts the camera. Then he lights a joint. He opens the window behind him and takes out the screen. A lawn mower HUMS.

SIMON

Alright, so this whole college dropout thing is working out all too well. I've decided to write a screenplay. Don't know much about film, but hey how hard can it be, right?

He flips open a pad of paper sitting on his desk.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Think "Annie Hall" meets "American Beauty." I'll play on our contemporary, commercial values as a suburban culture.

He takes a hit.

SIMON (CONT'D)

It's not fully developed yet, but I'm looking for some inspiration.

He pulls out a box from under the desk. Out of the box he takes a cookbook.

SIMON (CONT'D)

For instance, my grandmother's cookbook. One character could be a cook. A gay cook. A gay baker. A gay college dropout who wants to go to culinary school to learn how to bake.

He looks at the book, then chucks it over his shoulder. He takes another hit.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Forget that.

He digs in the box again. He pulls out a black scrub cap with lightening bolts down the side.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Now, here's something radtastic.
Yesterday I stole my big bro's lucky
surgeon's cap.

He moves closer, whispering.

SIMON (CONT'D)

He's downstairs right this second, so I
gotta be careful. But this may in fact
be the ultimate secret to my
inspiration.

Simon steps back, and pulls the cap over his head. He turns to
the wall, looking at himself. The cap mats his hair to his head.
He stifles a laugh.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Okay, folks. This is as lame as it
gets. God, there's even a skull and
crossbones on the back.

He turns around, revealing the skull and crossbones.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Okay, now think "Rambo" meets "Grey's
Anatomy." Okay, so-

The door BANGS (o.s.) open.

Simon turns. He snatches the scrub cap off his head and holds it
behind his back.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Dammit, Simon. I've been looking for
that all week.

Simon backs away. He takes a hit and holds out the joint.

SIMON

Huh? What're you . . . what are you
talking about? Dude, simmer down and
take a hit.

TOMMY (O.S.)

I don't have time for this man. It's
been a rough day.

SIMON

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

Tommy walks over as Simon backs up. Tommy corners him. He reaches around Simon. No luck. Simon pushes him back.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Step off, step off. Now I say we make a trade-

Tommy lunges for the cap, but Simon dodges him. Tommy trips and falls.

Simon puts out the joint in an ash tray on the desk and runs off in the other direction.

Tommy gets up, red in the face.

TOMMY

I fucking hate you right now.

Tommy runs off in Simon's direction. They SCUFFLE (o.s.).

Simon makes it back to the desk and opens the drawer. He closes it and opens another. Closes it. Finally he tries to stuff the cap into a hole on the side.

Tommy runs up behind him and grabs the back of his shirt. He pulls hard.

Simon falls backward. He trips over the window sill behind Tommy and falls backward out the window.

Tommy grabs the cap. Simon YELLS (o.s.).

Tommy turns around and rushes to the window. He leans over the window sill.

Tommy runs off. The lawn mower stops (o.s.).

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Oh my god. He just fell out of a window. Someone call an ambulance.

An alarm clock BUZZES (o.s.).

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

CUT TO:
(JULY 10, 2008)

Simon opens his eyes. He turns and hits the clock on the nightstand next to his bed. He rubs the bandage on his nose and yawns. He looks at the clock.

SIMON

Crap it.

He jumps out of bed.

INT. HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Simon steps out of his room in a button down shirt and dress pants. He closes the door behind him.

INSERT - DO NOT DISTURB SIGN, which reads:

HOMOPHOBIA IS GAY

CUT TO:

INT. DOLLAR THEATER - BREAK ROOM - HALF HOUR LATER

Simon bursts into the break room with his tie hanging loose. Jen and Benji sit at the table eating lunch. Simon hurries to the mirror and straightens his tie.

SIMON

Sorry I'm late.

Benji and Jen exchange confused looks.

JEN

Simon, isn't the burial today?

SIMON

Hey Big Ben, gotta light?

Simon pats his pockets and shrugs. Ben gives him a lighter.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Thanks.

He steps out, leaving Benji and Jen in the break room, food hanging out of their mouths.

EXT. BACK OF THEATER - LATER

Simon stands against the wall and smokes a joint. A car pulls up into the parking lot. He flicks the roach and steps inside.

INT. THEATER - HOURS LATER

The bright neon lights of the concession stand clash with the fading afternoon sun that wanes through the windows. Two long lines of moviegoers stem from two cash registers behind the concessions during a rush.

Jack and Jen furiously empty a BUBBLING popcorn popper and work the two cash registers in their red vests. Some hot popcorn oil stings Jack, and he jumps back with an angry SHOUT.

EXT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Behind the glass-enclosed box office, Benji and Simon work two ticket lines side by side.

INT. BOX OFFICE -CONTINUOUS

Simon closes the register and slides a customer's change under the glass.

SIMON

Enjoy the movie, sir. Can I help the next person?

JAIME, 25 and STACEY, 24, step up to the glass. Jaime almost trips. She LAUGHS and leans on Stacey, obviously drunk. They're pretty and smile at Simon.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hello, ladies. What movie are we seeing tonight?

JAIME

I don't know what's good? Don't you have any new releases or anything?

SIMON

I'm sorry ma'am. This is a dollar theater. And it's classics month. But may I suggest The Graduate? Dustin Hoffman was a hottie back then.

JAIME

You're a hottie back then.

She winks at him. Simon looks over at Benji who just shakes his head and turns back to his customer.

STACEY

Uh, yeah, thanks. That sounds good. I'll pay. Girls' night out.

Stacey fumbles through her purse.

SIMON

Sounds good. That'll be four dollars.

She stops and looks up.

STACEY

I thought this was a dollar theater?

SIMON

Oh, it's double on the weekends. Gotta make something right?

STACEY

Yeah I guess.

JAIME

Try whoring yourself out. You'll make mo-

Stacey cups a hand over her friend's mouth. She stifles a laugh.

She slips the money under the glass. As Simon takes it, she brushes her hand next to his. He looks up, and she smiles.

They leave.

Simon shakes his head with a smile and SLAMS the register shut. Benji glances over at him.

SIMON

Next.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Jack and Jen work the registers. A LARGE MAN bumps up against the counter next to Jack, skipping line.

LARGE MAN

Hey kid, I just need a large popcorn.

JACK

Sir, the line starts back there.

Jack points to the back of the line.

LARGE MAN

I just need a-

JACK

Back of the line, sir.

The man throws his arms in the air and leaves. Jack shakes his head at Jen and wipes sweat from his forehead.

INT. BOX OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benji finishes his transaction. He looks up with the drawer still open.

BENJI'S P.O.V.

STEVEN WHITMAN, 24, stands behind the glass. He is tall with perfectly parted hair and a polo tucked into some khaki shorts. He has a soft voice and calm demeanor.

SIMON

looks over at him.

STEVEN

One for "Annie Hall."

BENJI

sighs and closes the drawer. He motions for Steven to follow him and steps out of the booth.

Simon watches them go. He turns back to his customer and smiles.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Benji steps out of the back door to the box office booth, and Steven steps in the door. Jack and Jen work the concessions behind them.

BENJI

Okay what's going on Steve? Why are you here?

STEVEN

I just . . . came to see a film.

Stacey and Jaime step up the Jack's register.

BENJI

C'mon, Steve, you gotta let this go. Just leave.

Jack sets a tub of popcorn on the counter. Jaime starts throwing kernels at him.

STEVEN

Was that him, in there?

BENJI

No, that was . . . yes that was him, now just go see the movie.

STEVEN

I can see why you're attracted to him.
He's very sexy. A hunk, really.

BENJI

Yep, that's right. Now please just—

Jack sets a drink down in front of Jaime. Stacey hands him money and he puts it in the register.

STEVEN

But he doesn't love you like I do,
Benji. Don't fight this—

BENJI

Look. I'm trying to work here—

Simon's head peeks out the door to the booth.

SIMON

Hey, Big Ben, we gotta line out here.
Wanna stop chattermagging and help a
brotha out?

Suddenly, Jaime spills the drink all over Jack's pants. He backs away, astonished, his hands in the air.

Jaime LAUGHS wildly.

Jack looks up. He picks up the tub of popcorn and turns it over on her head. Jaime SCREAMS through the tub. Jack climbs halfway over the counter, lunging for Jaime's head, but Jen grabs his leg.

Steven and Benji watch with dropped jaws. Simon runs passed them and pushes Jack back to the other side of the counter.

Stacey takes the tub off Jaime's head, but then Jaime falls on her butt. She LAUGHS and wallows on the ground.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - LATER

Simon leans against the desk, sleeves rolled up, and Jack sits slumped over in the chair. Jack is soaked in soda.

Simon presses a finger to his lips, and then inhales slowly.

SIMON

A couple days. Take a couple days.

Jack looks up.

JACK
So am I fired or not?

Simon taps a finger to his lips.

SIMON
Not yet.

Jack nods, gets up, and leaves. Simon shakes his head.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

In a booth, Sam leans over the table to wipe Harding's shirt off. Hadley reads the menu, dressed in a different tie-dye shirt and sweat pants.

Simon walks in the door, spies them, and hurries over.

SIMON
Hiya, folks. Boy, did I need this. Work was a bitch.

Sam looks up and smiles politely. Hadley and Harding stare at him, motionless.

SAM
Hi there. Glad you could make it, with your busy schedule and all.

SIMON
No sweat. Have you been waiting long?

SAM
Ten minutes.

SIMON
Great. Man I need a drink. What about a couple beers, yeah?

Sam frowns at him.

SAM
(to the twins)
Why don't you go wash your hands? Go together.

They leave, holding hands. Simon sits.

SIMON
Sorry, I forgot. Do they know?

SAM

Who knows what they've picked up on.
I'm going on my fourth pissathon this
week. But I think it's still a secret.

She rummages in her purse.

SIMON

You haven't you told anyone? Jesus Sam,
this is hard shit. You need some help.

SAM

Fuck you.

She keeps rummaging in her purse as Simon stares at her, his
eyebrows furrowed.

SIMON

(long)

Okay.

She stops and looks up.

SAM

Why didn't you come?

SIMON

Come? Where?

SAM

Oh, I don't know. Let's see, this
morning we ate breakfast at Denny's,
went to the florist, and then—
(scratches her chin)
—oh yeah, we buried your brother.

Simon leans back in his chair and crosses his arms.

SIMON

Well, I didn't see any point.

SAM

No point? Seriously? Simon, he needed
you there.

He sits up.

SIMON

Give me a break. It's just a show.

He taps the table. Sam shakes her head and pushes her purse to the side.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Me? What about you? Why haven't you told anyone about the baby? What happens when Erroll's skinny, little girl swells up like a blueberry? You don't have any Oompaloompas to fall back on.

SAM

Always with the sarcasm. Wake up. You have to deal with this.

SIMON

Oh, and I guess the pregnant widow's doing just fine.

SAM

Shut up. You're an asshole.

She looks down at the menu. Simon shakes his head and takes out a cigarette. He lights it and smokes.

SIMON

What am I supposed to do?

She looks him dead in the eye.

SAM

I needed you there, okay? I needed someone . . . who . . . someone, just someone. And I'm sorry, but that's you. I don't know why. But now -

SIMON

Now I'm your grief counselor?

SAM

(correcting him)

My go-to. I don't know. Whatever.

She grabs his cigarette and puts it out in an ash tray. Simon holds out his hands in disbelief.

SIMON

Okay, you're obviously feeling pressured with things. Look, why don't I come over this week. We can talk. You can get a handle on-

SAM
(immediately)
Why don't you move in?

He's struck.

SIMON
What?

SAM (CONT'D)
I talked to your mom. You don't have a place. Just while you look. I don't, I can't tell anyone, yet. I need some help.

SIMON
Gee whiz.
(to an imaginary person)
Why, yes, Trabek, can I have sudden, inappropriate questions from Samantha for two hundred, please?

Sam leans over.

SAM
Stop. I'm completely serious here.

SIMON
Sam, have you thought this through?

SAM
Think what through? You'll live with me until you find a place.

SIMON
I don't know. Just let me just come over first.

SAM
Fine, don't. Sorry, I'm just . . . you know what? Just forget about it.

They both look down at their menus as the twins return. A WAITRESS, 25, walks up to their table.

WAITRESS

Well, now that the whole family is here, are we ready to order? Our specials today are prime rib and rainbow trout.

(to the twins)

And we also have our special chicken strips kids meal.

Simon glances over his menu at Sam. She looks down at hers. Hadley looks at the waitress.

HADLEY

I'm a vegetarian.

Everyone stares at her.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

What?

SAM

When did this happen?

HADLEY

Yesterday.

Sam shakes her head. Simon sinks down in his seat.

WAITRESS

I'll give you all a few minutes.

She looks curiously around the table, then leaves.

EXT. RESTAURANT - AFTER DINNER

Sam, Hadley, and Harding walk out the door. Simon follows behind.

They walk to their cars, parked side by side. Sam helps the twins into the back seat and opens the driver door.

SAM

Glad you could stop by.

SIMON

Yeah me too.

SAM

Bye.

She climbs in and turns the key.

SIMON

See 'ya.

Simon gets in his own car and turns it on. He looks through the window at Sam. She looks behind her, ready to pull out.

Simon turns off his car and gets out. He chases after Sam's car as it pulls out. He runs up to Sam's window and taps on it. She lowers it.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Okay, I don't know what's going on here.

She tilts her head, waiting.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Look I'm sorry about today. I just--

She shrugs and rolls up the window.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Fine, fine. When do I move in?

The window stops.

She smiles. In the back seat, Hadley smacks her forehead.

CUT TO:

INT. TROUSDALE'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Gloria and Will sit on a couch in the living room. They look at each other. Then Will nods and puts his hands on his knees.

WILL

No.

Simon sits across from them in a chair.

SIMON

Yeah, so, I didn't ask a question. And I wasn't talking to you, Willy Nilly.

GLORIA

Honey, we just don't think this is the best move for you. When we, when Will asked you to move out--

WILL

Hon, we talked about this.

GLORIA

Yeah, well, I was just a bystander.

WILL

Gloria? I thought you-

GLORIA

Look where we are. Obviously it wasn't the right move.

She motions toward Simon.

SIMON

Okay then. I'll let you two have some privacy. I'm actually already packed. Just gonna load up and head on over there this afternoon.

He gets up.

WILL

I just want him to stand up on his own two feet.

GLORIA

Oh, and where were you at his age? Shooting people in the face, that's where.

WILL

Okay, this is not fair. It was war. And the first Gulf War was different.

GLORIA

And now you sell tires for a living. And run my children out of the house. My knight in shining armor.

WILL

Gloria. Come on.

Simon shakes his head and leaves.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Simon pulls into the drive way of a suburban house. His car is packed full.

Across the street, Sarah does yoga in her front yard wearing spandex.

Simon parks the car and climbs out. He looks at Sarah, and she waves, doing the splits.

Sam opens the front door and steps out.

SAM

I just want to thank you.

He holds up a hand.

SIMON

No.

SAM

No what?

SIMON

I don't really know what's going on here. So I don't want the responsibility of any unfulfilled thank yous. Just thank me later.

SAM

Okay.

SIMON

I've got work most of the week.

SAM

Okay.

SIMON

Gonna need my space.

SAM

Yeah. Me too.

He smiles and walks up the front steps. From behind a window curtain, Hadley watches.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A large, modern kitchen, complete with brand-name appliances and hanging pots and pans, is littered with cleaning supplies. Windex bottles, mold and mildew remover, carpet cleaner, everything.

The kitchen opens into a living room with a couch, chairs, end tables, and an entertainment center. There's cleaning supplies here too, a vacuum, duster. A mop sits leans against the threshold of both rooms.

Hadley runs away from the window as Sam and Simon enter, hauling Simon's stuff.

She sits back down at a table where she helps Harding, who wears a polo tucked into pleated shorts, build a tower of cards.

Simon looks around, and Sam clears a path.

SIMON

Wow, clean enough?

SAM

Sorry about the mess. Haven't had the time. So I guess you'll stay in the bedroom passed the twins'. Harding, show him?

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Harding leads Simon down the hall. They pass the twins' room. Simon stops and looks in.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

Half of the room is messy with an unmade bed, an aquarium full of frogs, lots of potted flowers and colorful clothes strewn about. Many different copies of the same poster, a photo of an endless pier going out to sea, line the wall on this side. The other side is very tidy and bare.

HARDING

stops and points into Simon's room.

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon walks in and looks around. It's large, with a bed, desk, lamp. He sits on the bed.

SIMON

Perfecto. Thank you, señor.

Harding steps inside and closes the door. He approaches Simon.

HARDING

Here are the rules.

Harding hands Simon a piece of paper.

INSERT, RULES, which read:

1. Don't touch the frogs.
2. Mom is the boss.
3. Don't talk to Hadley.
4. Only use YOUR toothbrush.
5. Knock on all doors before entering.
6. Do not talk about dad.
7. No noise after 10 p.m.
8. Hadley is allergic to NUTS, CINNAMON,
and MILK.
9. Hang up the towels.
10. Don't touch the frogs.

SIMON

reads the list. He looks up at Harding.

HARDING

Any questions?

SIMON

Allergic to nuts, cinnamon, and milk.
Pretty normal stuff.

HARDING

Yes.

SIMON

So, why can't I talk to her?

HARDING

Because she thinks that you're just
running from your own emotional
insecurities, and you should really
just deal with losing your brother on
your own like we have to. And she
thinks you smell bad.

Simon's jaw drops. He sniffs the inside of his shirt.

SIMON

Well . . . what do you think?

HARDING

I think mom wants you here and my
sister doesn't. So we're walking a very
thin line.

Simon takes it all in, the tiny, articulate little boy's honesty
and bluntness.

Harding takes the rules over to the desk. He pulls out some tape and tapes up the rules above the lamp. He turns.

SIMON

Anything else I need to know?

HARDING

Please, don't sleep with my mother.

SIMON

Okay, you're just full of surprises.
Um, well you don't have to worry about
that one.

Harding raises a brow.

HARDING

Anyway, that's that.

Harding leaves Simon sitting on the bed.

SIMON

(long)

Here we go.

CUT TO:

INT. BENJI'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Benji enters his dark flat with some bags. A single foyer light splashes on to hardwood and white walls. He flips on the lights and SCREAMS. Steven stands in the hallway, draped in darkness.

BENJI

Holy shit.

STEVEN

Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I
just . . . your neighbor, Lacy, let me
in.

BENJI

Oh my god.

STEVEN

I know it's weird. Here just come
inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Benji moves inside and flips on the rest of the lights. His apartment is bare, with white walls, one couch, and the same poster Hadley had in her bedroom hanging over the couch. A small television sits across from the couch.

Benji walks into the kitchen. Steve stays in the living room.

BENJI

What are you doing here?

STEVEN

Well, at the theater, I just felt like we didn't have time to really talk.

Benji sits down the bags and unloads them.

BENJI

Well, I don't really have anything else to say.

STEVEN

We never officially . . . you know.

BENJI

No, Steve. You never officially you knowed. I officially you knowed a year ago.

Benji finishes and walks into the living room.

STEVEN

I know. I mean, I realize how this looks.

BENJI

How this looks? To who?

STEVEN

To you. To us.

BENJI

Us? Where was us that night with Mr. Ass-less chaps?

Benji flops down on the couch, grabs the remote, and flips on the television.

STEVEN

I miss you Benjamin.

Steven sits down next to him. Benji moves away.

BENJI

Fuck you Steve. You left. And now you regret it. Sucks. Now leave.

Benji points toward the door. Steve turns to him.

STEVEN

I know I left. But the question is, did you?

BENJI

Oh what is that? Some lame philosophical pickup line?

Steven throws his arms in the air.

STEVEN

No. I don't know. Look I've apologized a bazillion times. I thought we were friends again.

BENJI

Friends? You broke up with me for that asshole. Then he broke your heart, and you came back.

STEVEN

No that's not what happened. Look, I came here to-

BENJI

To what? To talk things over? Get back together? Fuck?

STEVEN

(immediately)

Yes.

Benji looks up.

CUT TO:

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Hiding his eyes under a camouflage hat, Axel grabs his groceries. He takes soup, 2 liters of Coke, candy and chips up to the counter.

Without looking up, he gives the CLERK, 35, a wad of bills.

AXEL

Got any Camels? Pink pack.

The clerk throws down some cigarettes.

CLERK

It's twenty, thirty-nine. A lot of stuff. Preparin' up for a stakeout?

AXEL

Something like that.

CLERK

You a cop?

Axel shakes his head.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Oh. Just that there's so many round here nowadays. After all the commotion a few weeks ago. That young man who was shot right outside the gas station up on the north side of town. Damn shame.

Axel nods.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Getting more dangerous everyday. The terrorist level is red you know. Damn politicians. Can't even pick up a few beers for the weekend without getting shot. Need a bag for this?

Axel nods again. The clerk hands him his bags.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Here you go. Take care on this fine summer evening.

Axel leaves.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Axel walks to a truck. He fumbles with his keys. Sam passes him going the other way. She rummages through her purse.

Axel throws the bags in the trunk. He gets in, closes the door, and beats MOS on the steering wheel and the dash. After a moment, he looks through the driver side window.

AXEL'S P.O.V.

In the backseat of the car next to him, Harding and Hadley stare back.

AXEL
drives off.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Simon's car pulls into the garage. It's late and all the lights are off.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Simon carries his last things down the dark hall into the only lit room.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon pushes a tack into the wall next to the rules. Then he hangs the hitchhiker's cardboard sign on it. He steps back to look at it. Then he gets in bed. He flips off the light.

CUT TO:

INT. TOMMY'S DORM ROOM - DAY

(MAY 1, 2000)

On COMPUTER: Title of a video blog: "I'm Hungry."

Medical student Tommy pours over books at a desk off to the side.

Twenty-year-old Simon lies on the bed in the middle of the room. He tosses a ball up and down.

Tommy looks over his shoulder at Simon, then at the camera.

TOMMY

Simon, the red dot is on. Turn the camera off if you're not going to use it. You're wasting electricity.

Simon sits up.

SIMON

Well, I thought it was going to be more fun than this. Thought we could do something together.

TOMMY

I told you I had finals before you came.

SIMON

Finals are gay.

Tommy turns around in his chair.

TOMMY

That's a little insensitive, don't you think. I've got lots of gay friends who wouldn't appreciate it.

SIMON

Yeah, yeah.

Tommy turns back around and writes. Simon turns the ball over in his hands.

SIMON

So, do you think people can be both?

TOMMY

(without looking up)

Both what?

SIMON

Both gay and straight.

TOMMY

You mean that they like both men and women? Sure. Happens all the time.

SIMON

That's cool.

TOMMY

Why?

SIMON

No reason. Just asking.

Simon turns the ball in his hands. He looks up at the camera, then down again.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Actually, I think I'm gay.

Tommy stops writing and looks up.

TOMMY

Well, I think you would know by now. People tend to figure those things out when they're young.

SIMON

Oh yeah?

TOMMY

Yeah. I mean, everybody thinks about it sometime. But that doesn't mean you're gay. It's natural.

SIMON

Well, it's not just that. I mean, people always tell me I act gay. And I mean, I dress nicely, don't really like sports, all that manly stuff.

Tommy laughs.

TOMMY

Dude, that doesn't mean you are gay. Just because other people tell you that. They're just pulling you're strings. I don't think you have anything to be worried about.

Tommy turns back around.

SIMON

So, if I was gay, I should be worried?

Tommy stops again. He sighs and turns in his seat.

TOMMY

That's not what I meant. Look, if you're gay, you'd still be my little bro. That's not gonna change. Straight, gay, stupid, whatever. But you're not gay. Get over it.

SIMON

I kissed my roommate this morning. We were hung over, but still. Actually, he kissed me. Then, I hit him in the face. Then we did it again. Then I left.

He turns around to face Tommy's open-mouthed stare.

SIMON (CONT'D)

And now I'm here.

Tommy nods slowly, trying to find the right words.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Okay, we'll talk later. I'm going out for lunch. Want anything?

Tommy shakes his head. Simon leaves. Tommy watches him go. Then he turns and starts reading again. But he can't, and he stares out the window.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM - MORNING (JULY 11, 2008)

Simon rolls over in bed and squints his eyes. He hits the alarm clock.

SIMON

Crap it.

INT. SAM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Through the wall, Sam hears Simon's ALARM. She wakes up, and walks up to the mirror in the master bathroom.

INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS

SIMON
walks down the hall in boxers with his towel and toiletries.

INTERCUT - SIMON'S BATHROOM/SAM'S BATHROOM

They each look into the mirror with only a wall separating them.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MORNING PREPARATIONS

- They pee.
- Simon takes a shower and Sam brushes her teeth.
- Simon shaves as Sam flosses.
- Simon buttons his shirt while Sam tests the bath water.
- Simon fixes his hair. Sam shaves her legs in the bath tub with a toothbrush in her mouth.
- Simon practices his smile, a cool pose, and a sexy pose. In a towel, Sam uses a water-pick for her gums.
- Simon retroactively applies deodorant, going up through his shirt. Sam sticks a white strip onto her front teeth.
- Simon and Sam look in the mirror, satisfied. They both leave. After a few seconds, Sam scrambles back into her bathroom, and brushes her teeth again.

INT. THEATER BREAK ROOM - HALF HOUR LATER

Simon BURSTS in the door, flustered.

JENNIFER

Hot damn, late again. At least you're consistent.

SIMON

That's why I get paid the big bucks.

BENJI

Hey hon. Haven't seen you in a few days. You didn't answer my calls.

Benji moves over to him, but Simon rushes past him.

SIMON

Yeah, no. I've had stuff, you know.

Benji turns around and fixes his tie in the mirror.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I need the money, anyways.

Jack walks in, buttoning his vest.

JACK

Concessions open yet?

SIMON

Well now, our little Jackie's really growing up. No food fights today.

JENNIFER

(to Jack)

No.

SIMON

C'mon rookie, let's break this sucker loose.

INT. THEATER HALL - CONTINUOUS

Simon glances at Jack's eye as they walk down the hall. It's still slightly bruised.

SIMON

That eye is healing nicely.

JACK

Yeah.

SIMON

What happened? Did you throw popcorn at Jen?

JACK

I broke this guy's nose, so he tried to break mine.

SIMON

Seriously?

JACK

Worked him over pretty bad.

SIMON

Fuckin A. You're my kind of guy.

Jack laughs.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I didn't mean it like that. It's cool to know you can pull your own.

JACK

I know.

Jack stops, and moves closer.

JACK (CONT'D)

(deadpan)

I love it. Love the bloody knuckles. Love the smell right before laying a smackdown on some poor, frightened fuck.

SIMON

Huh?

JACK

But you know what the best part is? Getting your own ass pounded. That's where you get your strength, where you find out what you're really made of.

Simon laughs nervously.

SIMON

That's freaking me out man. Get real. What, are you in a karate class or something?

Jack walks down the hall ahead of Simon.

JACK
(laughing)
It's not a stupid karate class. I don't
have a Sensai. Don't cheapen it like
that. I just like to fight.

Jack leaves.

SIMON
Wow, he's crazy. Wacky Jacky.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - THAT NIGHT

Benji, Simon, Jen, and Jack all walk to their cars. Jen and Jack
ride together while Benji and Simon walk to their own.

JEN
So you guys coming to our little
shindig tomorrow night?

SIMON
Actually, I told Sam I'd . . . come
over for dinner, so probably not.

Jack looks up.

JEN
Oh c'mon. Come over after. You can
crash in our living room. Everybody's
coming.

SIMON
Everybody? Wow, Jen, everybody? You've
really outdone yourself.

JENNIFER
Yeah, it's going to be the bomb
diggity.

SIMON
We'll see what happens.

Jen shakes her head and climbs into the passenger seat. Benji
waves. Jen and Jack drive away. Benji ambles over to Simon.

BENJI
Hey, let's talk.

SIMON
About?

BENJI

Anything. Us, your brother, whatever.

SIMON

Not right now. Let's do this later.

BENJI

Simo-

Simon kisses him hard right on the mouth.

Benji pushes away from him, surprised.

They look at each other; then Simon ducks into his car.

SIMON

I'll see you this weekend, maybe.

He drives off, and Benji hurries to his vehicle.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

A cell phone RINGS. Simon ANSWERS.

SIMON

Hello?

INTERCUT - BENJI'S CAR/SIMON'S CAR

BENJI

What's wrong?

SIMON

What? Benji why are you -

BENJI

Why aren't you answering my calls or talking to me anymore?

SIMON

Benji, I'm not-

BENJI

Is it because of Steve?

They pull up to a stop light, side-by-side.

SIMON

Steve your old boyfriend?

BENJI

Yeah. He's been coming around lately.

SIMON

Around? I mean I saw him at the theater
a few days ago.

BENJI

Yeah, that, and he's been dropping by
my place sometimes.

SIMON

Well, um, that's great.

BENJI

He just showed up. We had -
 (looking over at
 Simon)
- dinner.

The light turns green and they drive.

SIMON

Sounds serious. What are you saying?

BENJI

Nothing. I just thought you'd want to
know.

SIMON

Know what? That you're having dinner?
Are you seeing him?

BENJI

No no. I'm, we're -

SIMON

I mean you guys never really lost
touch, so I guess I can understand a
little friendly dinner.

BENJI

Well I mean. . . look, let's just stop
and talk about this.

SIMON

You wanna talk? Let's talk. This isn't
about me, man.

BENJI

Steve and I-

SIMON

I mean don't you think that's sort of shitty. Telling me this right now. It hasn't been a week since Tommy.

BENJI

And that's why I wanted to talk.

They pull up to another stop light.

SIMON

So, what do you want to talk about Benji?

BENJI

I don't know. It's all confusing. I don't know what to do. And I don't know what you're feeling.

SIMON

You want to know what I'm fucking feeling?

Benji looks over and nods.

BENJI

That's why I called.

SIMON

(provoking)

Really? Yeah? Fo shizz?

Benji nods harder.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Simon and Benji's cars sit side by side at the red light. Simon screams MOS into his cell phone. His veins bulge and afterwards, his chest heaves. They sit still a second, Simon staring at the road and Benji at Simon.

Then, Simon hangs up. He veers off to the right.

Benji rolls slowly forward, fighting the urge to follow. He drives away.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Harding, Hadley, and Sam stumble through the front door carrying grocery bags. Sam is out of breath. Harding takes the bags into the kitchen.

Sam, Harding, and Hadley unload the bags onto the counter. Sam stops.

SAM
Shit. Forgot the pasta.

She turns to the twins.

SAM
I'm sorry honeys. Um, mommy needs to run back to the grocery. You okay alone? Just for a few minutes. Yes?

Sam turns without waiting for an answer. Harding nods and slips his hand over Hadley's shoulder.

Sam leaves. Hadley shakes her head and walks away. Harding follows.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - HALF HOUR LATER

Harding and Hadley play chess. "Dr. Strangelove" plays on the television behind them. The doorbell rings; it's a long, annoying melody. Hadley rolls her eyes. Harding gets up and looks through the window.

HARDING'S P.O.V.

Simon stands on the front step with grocery bags, fumbling for keys.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - FRONT STEP - CONTINUOUS

Simon stands on the step. Harding opens the door.

SIMON
Oh, hi, señor. How's it going?

Harding walks back to the living room leaving the door open.

Simon hauls the bags into the kitchen, maneuvering around all the cleaning supplies.

SIMON (CONT'D)
So, you guys already went out I see. I told Sam not worry about it, I'd take care of it. Is she around?

Harding shakes his head.

SIMON (CONT'D)
So, what are you crackerjacks up to?

Simon walks over to their table in the living room.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Chess?

He looks at the television.

SIMON (CONT'D)

And Dr. Strangelove. Good movie.

Hadley moves her queen.

HADLEY

Check.

Harding moves his knight in front of her queen.

HARDING

Check mate.

Hadley frowns and shoves the game at Harding. The pieces fly everywhere. She stomps out of the room.

SIMON

Whoa now. Hold on a second.

(to Harding)

Where is she going?

HARDING

Probably putting crickets in my bed.

SIMON

Seriously?

HARDING

I hate bugs, and she hates losing.

Simon laughs.

SIMON

Harsh.

HARDING

Women.

They laugh, and Simon sits.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Sam strolls down the cookie aisle. Her cart is full - second time today. She grabs five or six boxes of Oreos, Keeblers, vanilla wafers, and cupcakes.

She walks an aisle over. Lasagna is on the top of the shelf. She can't reach.

She looks around; she's alone. She stands on the bottom shelf and reaches up to the top. She can almost touch the box when the bottom shelf gives way.

She stumbles to the floor as the whole shelf CRASHES down next to her. Two other shelves CRASH down after it.

Sam stands, red in the face, and grabs a box at her feet. She stands up. Another woman, PAMELA GREEN, 30, stares back at her in disbelief. She's in her exercise clothes.

Surprised, Sam throws the noodles in her cart and smiles at her.

SAM

Oh, hi Pam. I never got a chance to thank you for excusing the kids from school last week. That was a big help, you know, with Tommy and all.

Pamela nods slowly, eyeing the mess in the aisle.

SAM

Well, good to see you. Bye.

Sam smiles, wipes away a tear, and strolls away like nothing happened.

Pamela opens and closes her mouth. She looks down at the huge mess, and then around her. She motions at someone.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Simon and Harding play chess. The doorbell rings. Harding runs to the window as usual. Simon stands, but Harding beats him to the door.

Sam falls inside the door with too many bags in her arms. She's red in the face. She BREATHEs heavily.

SIMON

Whoa there. Hey now. Here we go.

Simon runs over and helps her to her knees.

Harding takes the bags.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Hey, you alright?

Sam blinks and comes to her senses.

SAM
When did you get here?

SIMON
A little while ago.

She gets up, pushes Simon away, and walks into the kitchen.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Anything happen?

SAM
No I'm just out of breath, that's all.
The sound of crickets CHIRPING (o.s.) wafts into the room.
Harding takes the cue and leaves.

SIMON
Well then. Time for a lasagna.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

At a long dining table, Sam and Hadley sit across from Simon and Harding. Everyone eats lasagna, except for Hadley, who stares at her food. No one looks up or talks for a long time. Finally, Simon clears his throat.

SIMON
Everything taste alright?

Harding and Sam look up, feigning pleasantries. Hadley picks up her breadstick and stares at it.

HARDING
It's great.

SAM
Fantastic.

SIMON
It's the pine nuts.

SAM

Mmm.

Sam glances at Simon, but he doesn't notice.

SIMON

It's sort of an Italian cop out, but so what, right?

SAM

Oh yeah, of course.

SIMON

I once wrote a poem about pine nuts.
Actually I was trying to emulate this
poet, Frank O'Hara. He wrote this poem
about writing poetry, and—
 (swallowing a bite)
—well he talks about writing about the
color orange, and this painter painting
something about sardines.

Hadley chews her bread stick in long, annoyed bites.

SIMON (CONT'D)

It just goes from there. Of course, my
poem didn't really go anywhere, but
whatever.

HARDING

(to Sam)

Those pine nuts. Mmm.

Simon stares down at his plate. Harding gives Sam an evil look and hands Hadley his breadstick.

Sam mouths MOS "what am I supposed to do?" and shrugs back at him. She hands Hadley her breadstick.

Simon looks up, and they all turn down to their plates, except for Hadley. She looks Simon dead in the face and smacks on her breadstick.

SAM

(without looking up)

So Tommy said something about you maybe
writing a play or something.

SIMON

Yep. I'm writing a screenplay. Or at least, I'm trying. It's not really fully developed, yet.

SAM

Well, that sounds really exciting.

SIMON

Actually, I haven't even started.

Harding looks up at Hadley.

HARDING

(to Hadley)

Hey, want some dessert? I think we got some leftover cake.

Simon looks at Hadley's plate. It's untouched.

Hadley stares at all three of them. The she pushes herself away from the table, and SCRAPES her chair on the floor.

SAM

Where are you going young lady?

HADLEY

My room.

SAM

Huh? I don't think so.

HADLEY

I do. You guys are killing me.

She walks away, but stops just before rounding the corner. She turns to Simon.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

I'm allergic to nuts, which obviously includes pine nuts -

(to Harding)

- but I guess no one told you.

She leaves. Harding gives Simon the evil eye and follows Hadley. Sam and Simon sit in an awkward silence.

They get up and clean off the table. Sam stops.

SAM (CONT'D)

I should've told you. I'm so sorry.

SIMON

No, no. I think this one was all me.

INT. THEATER - MANAGER'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

At the desk, Simon fills out paper work. The desk phone RINGS, and Simon picks it up.

SIMON

Luke's Dollar Theater. Simon here.

Jack sticks his head in the door.

JACK

Hey, I'm off. You're coming tonight, right?

Listening to the phone, Simon nods and waves him off. Jack leaves.

SIMON

Whoa, slow down.

(writing)

Yeah, I get off in a half hour. I'll come right after.

INT. SCHOOL - PAMELA'S OFFICE - HALF HOUR LATER

Behind a desk, Pamela sits with her arms crossed. Her red hair falls easily on her shoulders, and she wears glasses. She's a cool, young elementary teacher with lots of professional spunk.

On the other side of the desk, Simon, Sam, Hadley, and Harding sit. Hadley and Harding are looking at their feet.

PAMELA

In fact, I hadn't heard a word from you or your children until we met in the grocery store the other night.

Sam blushes and looks away.

SIMON

Well, they're very quiet. Maybe you just didn't notice or something.

PAMELA

Mr. Trousdale, I don't take kindly to that kind of insult.

(tapping her fingers)

Chronic absences aren't taken lightly here, especially since we're on a year-round schedule. Many students don't want to come to school during the summer months.

She takes out a slip of paper from her desk.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

The office received this note a couple days ago.

Simon takes the note.

INSERT - NOTE, which reads:

To whom it may concern,

Please excuse Hadley and Harding from school. They are victims of a gun shooting, and need time to recover from their injuries. Thanks for understanding!

Signed,
Dr. Strangelove

SIMON

stifles a laugh with his hand.

He passes the note to Sam. She looks at it.

PAMELA

Mr. Trousdale, this isn't funny.

(to Sam)

Does he really need to be here?

SAM

Well, there's no one else. So, yes.

Simon smiles at Pamela. Pamela clenches her teeth.

INT. HALLWAY - AFTER THE MEETING

They all walk out of Pamela's office. Simon is last. Pamela grabs his arm to hold him behind the rest.

PAMELA

Mr. Trousdale. It seems, you're filling a role here. And as much as I'd rather see someone, perhaps a little more mature in this role, she's obviously picked you for the time being.

SIMON

Wow. Where did you learn how to talk like that?

PAMELA

Okay, cut the crap. Simon, I'm not sure you understand the situation you're in here. How about we set up a meeting aside from Sam and the kids?

SIMON

Oh geez, are you coming onto me? Because I've had a lot of that lately.

PAMELA

This is strictly a parent, well, surrogate parent-teacher conference.

SIMON

When?

PAMELA

Whenever is good for you.

Simon scratches his head.

SIMON

Okay, fine. Tomorrow. Lunch time, around noon. Let's do coffee at that shop over across from the mall. I work just down from there.

PAMELA

That's fine. See you then.

Simon leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LATER

Sam cleans the kitchen with latex gloves and a sponge. The cleaning supplies now stretch into the hallway.

Harding sits at a table constructing a tower of cards. Hadley, in a different tie-dye and sweat pants, eats carrots and watches him.

They WHISPER to each other so that Sam doesn't hear.

HADLEY

I told you it wouldn't work.

HARDING

You wanted to use Dr. Strangelove.

HADLEY

Yeah, because he's a doctor, stupid.

HARDING

Well, maybe it was your handwriting.

Hadley juts out her bottom lip and squints her eyes. Then she hits the tower of cards. It falls into a pile in front of Harding. His hands quiver, holding the last two cards.

Hadley leaves. Harding stares at the pile of cards. Then, he goes outside.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On the back step, Simon smokes a joint. He looks down at a blank pad between his feet on the bottom step. He takes a hit. Exhales. Then another.

The door opens behind him. He flicks the roach into the bushes, exhales, and COUGHS.

Harding steps out and sits next to Simon.

SIMON

Hey, what's going on?

HARDING

Nothing.

They sit and stare into the backyard.

HARDING (CONT'D)

That was a pretty stupid absent note,
wasn't it?

Simon CHUCKLES and looks over at Harding, who rests his head on crossed arms.

SIMON

You know, it's not your job, to protect everyone. To make sure everybody is happy and okay.

Harding rocks back and forth, thinking about it.

HARDING

Well, then whose job is it?

SIMON

No one's. Your mom and sister, they aren't going to be happy for a while. It's going to take a long time.

HARDING

I think you're wrong.
Simon shrugs. Harding looks down at the blank pad.

HARDING (CONT'D)

What's that smell?

Simon shrugs again.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Sam and Simon sit on the couch and watch television. Simon taps a pen on the blank pad as he watches. Sam eats ice cream.

SAM

I'm glad you came to stay with us.

SIMON

Yeah, me too.

He taps on the paper.

SIMON (CONT'D)

So, Harding and Hadley are doing okay?

SAM

Doing the best they know how.

Simon looks over at Sam.

SIMON

You don't think maybe Harding has a lot of pressure on him to be the man of the house now?

SAM

Well, I think he knows that his sister
and his mother need him.

Simon nods.

SIMON

Just seems like he's putting himself
under a lot of extra pressure. But
whatever.

Sam nods. They watch television.

SAM

I'm going over to Linda's tomorrow. She
wants to have everyone over again. She
thinks it's good to have the families
together.

Simon looks over. Sam stares at the television. He turns back to
the television.

SIMON

Who is she related to?

SAM

No one. She's just a nice neighbor.

SIMON

Oh. Right.

Simon gets up and stretches.

SIMON

Well, I'm gonna hit the ol' dusty
trail. Night, señorita.

SAM

Good night. Love you.

Simon walks behind her chair and peers down at her as she watches
television. Then he leaves.

MATCH CUT:

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On a loveseat close to the television, Axel watches the same
television show. He eats fried chicken.

Richie comes in the door behind him, greasy in a mechanic's uniform, and closes the door. He wipes off his hands, takes his shoes off, and sits down in a chair next to Axel.

AXEL

I saw Angela today. She says her and the kids miss me. Todd, my youngest, he just said his first words yesterday.

RICHIE

Oh yeah? What'd he say?

AXEL

She says he's pointing to an apple and said, "Thu apple."

Richie picks up the remote and changes the channel. Axel takes out a cigarette and gives Richie one.

RICHIE

That all she said?

AXEL

Well, no. She also said that some police come around and interrogated her the other day. Said she gave them your name.

Richie turns slowly to Axel.

RICHIE

Goddammit—

AXEL

Now wait a minute, Richie—

RICHIE

Goddammit. I knew they was coming after you. And now it's me too. Just get up and leave.

AXEL

Now? But Rich—

Richie stands up and towers over Axel.

RICHIE

Yeah, now. Now Axe. You been here long enough. Put my family in danger's way.

In trying to stand up, Axel falls over the arm of his chair. He scrambles away from Richie.

AXEL

But Rich-

RICHIE

Dammit Axe. Why'd you go off an shoot that poor soul, huh?

Richie drunkenly stumbles forward, but catches his balance. He walks over to the wall and takes a rifle off a rack. He loads it.

AXEL

Richie, Are you drunk?

Richie cocks the gun and points it at Axel.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Richie, Richie. No no. Don't do this. You aren't of sound mind, Richie. Look I'm leaving. I'm leaving.

Axel holds his hands up and gets up. He steps toward the door.

AXEL (CONT'D)

I'm gone. Just need my bag upstairs, and I'm gone.

RICHIE

jerks the gun toward the stairs.

Axel runs upstairs. He CLOMPS down with two duffel bags. He opens the door and goes out.

He looks back at Richie. Richie jerks the gun toward him.

Axel leaves. Richie lowers the gun from the open door.

RICHIE'S WIFE, 50, flicks on the light and climbs downstairs in her ragged night clothes. She closes the door.

RICHIE'S WIFE

Richie, what's going on?

Richie waves her away and turns back into the living room.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

CUT TO:
(APRIL 4, 1996)

On COMPUTER: Title of a video blog: "Fuck Me."

At a desk, Undergraduate Tommy and HASHPIPE HARRY, 19, sit in a dark room. Their faces are lit up with a large black light. Tommy moves up close, his teeth glowing in the dark. His eyes are half-closed.

TOMMY

Alright, peeps. Tommy Gun here along with Hashpipe Harry. And guess what? We're smoking my little bro out.

HASHPIPE

That's right, muthafuckas. Tommy Jr. is about to get his green cherry popped.

They laugh and make room for Simon. High school Simon steps up between them. He's skinnier with acne.

Tommy picks up a large blunt. He holds it between his lips and lights it. It glows as he puffs. He hands it to Hashpipe, who takes a few puffs.

TOMMY

(coughing)

That's damn good dank.

Hashpipe hands Simon the blunt.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Alright little bro, your turn. Suck it straight down, and hold it in for as long as you fucking can.

Simon takes a long puff and holds it.

HASHPIPE

Holy shit, Tommy, I think we have a new record. Is your faggot brother going to outdo you man?

Simon passes the blunt, still holding his breath.

TOMMY

Watch it, hash. My little bro is no faggot. He's like me, man, just with style.

HASHPIPE

Yeah, and a fucking pussy.

Simon exhales and doubles over with a COUGH.

TOMMY

Hey, fuck you, man. This little man's got more spunk. . . than you're face, bitch.

Simon WHEEZES.

HASHPIPE

And I think we have a new winner of the best worst comebacks of all time.

Tommy and Hashpipe laugh together, as Simon falls in between their chairs, COUGHING. Tommy throws a fist in the air, and Hashpipe copies him.

TOMMY

To the ultimate weed whackers.

HASHPIPE

Hell, yeah. And ruining you're little brother.

Tommy LAUGHS and holds Simon's hand up for him. Simon COUGHS.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CUT TO:
(JULY 12, 2008)

Only three cars are parked outside the small shop. It's squashed in a strip mall that borders a main road.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

At a two-person table by the window, Simon and Pamela sit together, drinking coffee. They're both dressed in their work attire.

PAMELA

I'm just not sure if you understand the gravity of this situation, Simon.

SIMON

Look, Pam. May I call you Pam?
Everything is fine.

PAMELA

Simon, Sam is in a very vulnerable state. She doesn't know what she's going to do next.

SIMON

We're in the shitter, I agree. But Sam is doing fine. It's just going to take some time.

PAMELA

I still think-

Simon holds up a hand to stop her.

SIMON

Nope, no more. Change of subject. So, you're an English teacher? I'm actually a writer myself, and I was wondering if I could get some feedback about a screenplay I'm writing.

Pamela looks down at her coffee.

PAMELA

Simon, I didn't come here for anything else. I'm not sure that would be appropriate. Besides, I haven't edited decent work since college.

Simon takes a drink and nods.

SIMON

Okay, okay. Too soon, I guess. Well I've got to get back to work.

They get up.

PAMELA

Simon, just pay attention okay? She needs you in some ways but not in others. Just think.

Simon nods on his way out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LINDA'S HOUSE - THAT AFTERNOON

In a well-made living room, Scott, Ben, and Harry play Guitar Hero. Harding and Hadley sit on the couch, watching them play.

EXT. LINDA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the front yard, Sarah does yoga in pink and black spandex. Her hair is tied back. She is not very good and jerks the moves every now and then.

She jerks again, loses her balance, and falls on her stomach. She stands up, GRUNTS, and kicks the wall.

INT. LINDA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Standing behind the sink, Linda washes dishes and watches Sarah do yoga. Sam sits at the table and looks through magazines.

LINDA

It's just not safe for anyone anymore,
even in the best places, like this
neighborhood.

SAM

Well, I don't think we have anything to
worry about.

Linda spins around.

LINDA

Oh, honey. You haven't been watching
the news have you. Just the other day
an officer arrested a thief trying to
pick the lock Steed's front door, right
down the street.

Sam looks up.

SAM

Really?

LINDA

Yes, hon. You've got to protect your
children. You know, the terror alert is
on red.

Sam CHUCKLES.

SAM

But Linda, that doesn't have anything
to do with-

LINDA

I don't make excuses for the safety of
my family, Samantha.

Sam's smile fades. She nods. Linda turns back around to the sink.

LINDA

How's Simon? Is he strong?

Sam looks up.

SAM

I don't know. Strong enough, I guess.
Yeah, now that I think of it, he's
actually pretty built.

LINDA

That's good. But I would still consider
investing in a fire arm.

Sam frowns.

SAM

Linda, you've got to be kidding.

Linda turns and walks to the table.

LINDA

Samantha, darling, you've got to have
protection. You can handle a gun. It's
just a matter of gaining the
confidence.

SAM

What about my children? What happens if
they find it?

LINDA

(tapping her purse)
That's why I keep mine right here under
my own lock and key.

Sam stares at the purse on the table.

Linda goes back to washing dishes. After a while she turns
around.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Don't take this the wrong way, honey,
but are you gaining weight?

Sam jerks her eyes up, but keeps her cool and shrugs. She looks
back down at the magazines.

LINDA (CONT'D)

It's all that fried food I've been
sending over there, isn't it? Well,
I'll make us a delicious salad for our
family get together.

She turns back around. Sam looks down at her belly. She rubs it.
Linda looks out the window.

LINDA (CONT'D)
(looking up)
Looks like Simon is home.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A car pulls into the garage. Simon gets out and walks to the mailbox. He checks it and reads a piece. Then he looks over into the Bogards' yard where Sarah is doing yoga.

SIMON'S P.O.V.
Sarah's body bends perfectly in a half moon shape in slow motion SPFX. She pushes off the ground and twists to face the ground. Then she pushes up, revealing her cleavage under the spandex.

SIMON
stares at her.

SARAH
stares back. She smiles and wiggles.

SIMON
smiles back. Then he turns and walks up the driveway.

Sarah falls on her stomach with a GROAN.

CUT TO:

EXT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Simon parallel parks in the middle of a long line of cars, the spillover from Jen's house at the end of the cul-de-sac. He gets out and walks toward the house. Party music THUMPS.

INT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Simon steps inside the front door, into a living room swarming with people and booze. A half-naked FRAT GUY, 20, runs past him in a drunken frenzy.

FRAT GUY
Getting shlammered, whoo.

SIMON
That's enough to straighten any gay.

SIMON'S P.O.V.
Benji walks through the kitchen, followed by Steven.
JENNIFER

runs up to Simon.

JENNIFER

Didn't think you were going to make it.

SIMON

Hey, well how could I miss this? It's really something. You're more popular than you let on.

JENNIFER

You want something to drink? There's a keg out back.

SIMON

Hmm, a big vat of water-diluted piss. Sounds lovely.

JENNIFER

Here. I got just the thing.

(beckoning with a
finger)

Follow.

Simon follows her into the kitchen and out the back door.

INT. JENNIFER'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The basement is dusty, with just one light bulb. A large wine rack sits against a wall.

Jennifer pulls a wine bottle out of a shelf.

JENNIFER

My dad hates wine. But he has to keep these to be cool and classy.

SIMON

Wow. Won't he notice?

JENNIFER

Prolly not. And what if he does? Worst case, I pay him back.

SIMON

For a fifty dollar bottle?

JENNIFER

(sarcastically)

Oh, that much? Give it back then.

She reaches for it. He holds it away from her.

SIMON

No, it's fine. I'm willing to sacrifice
your relationship with your father for
this.

He pops the bottle, and Jennifer hands him a red, plastic cup.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Now that's class.

They toast.

SIMON (CONT'D)

So, Steve's here with Benji?

Jennifer coughs.

JENNIFER

Uh, well. It's just, he came, Steve
came unexpectedly. I thought BJ told
you.

SIMON

Nope.

JENNIFER

He wasn't sure if you were coming.

SIMON

(sarcastically)
Well, that makes it better.

She looks down at her shoes and sways back and forth.

SIMON (CONT'D)

So, Sam asked me to move in with her.

JENNIFER

Oh?

SIMON

Yeah. Actually I already did.

JENNIFER

Wow, sort of drastic don't you think?

SIMON

Well it's free rent. And Will was kicking me out anyway. Besides, she needs the help with-

He shrugs, catching himself.

SIMON (CONT'D)

-you know. Things.

JENNIFER

Yeah, I hear ya.

Something hangs in the air between them. Jen nods and looks around.

JENNIFER

Well, I better bow out. By the way, Jack's been looking for you.

They step out of the basement.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Next to a lamp, Sam sits and reads an instruction manual. An opened box lays on the ground next to her.

INSERT - INSTRUCTION MANUAL, which reads:

"To release safety, push the red knob inward. The latch should click close."

There is a photo illustration next to the instructions.

SAM

flips through the manual.

At her feet, a hand gun sits on top of the box.

CUT TO:

INT. JENNIFER'S PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Simon walks through the kitchen. He bumps into Steven without realizing.

SIMON

Sorry about that.

STEVEN

Oh, Simon. Hi.

SIMON

Oh, hi Steve.

STEVEN

Haven't seen you in a while. I heard about your brother. Really sorry about that.

SIMON

Thanks. It's alright. How are you? Do you know Jen?

STEVEN

Oh, yeah, we met when Benji and I . . .

Steven looks down. They stand together for a minute. People push passed them through the kitchen.

SIMON

Okay, well it's good to see you. Tell Big Ben hey for me.

STEVEN

Sure. Yeah.

They both turn. Steven leaves. Simon turns into Sarah.

They bump and back away from each other.

SIMON

Hi.

SARAH

Hi.

He extends his hand.

SIMON

You're Spandex Sarah, I always see doing yoga across the street from my sister-in-law's house.

Sarah LAUGHS and shakes his hand.

SARAH

Yes, I am the infamous Spandex Sarah. I like that.

SIMON

I'm glad. I just made it up.

SARAH

No you didn't. You've been working on
that one for weeks.

They LAUGH.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Still at the couch, Sam looks at photos. Tears stream down her
face. She takes out another photo.

INSERT - PHOTO

In front of the Washington Monument, Tommy and Simon stand
together with their arms around each other, smiling.

SAM'S HAND

touches Simon's face.

CUT TO:

INT. JEN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the bedroom, Sarah lays on top of Simon in the bed. They're
kissing.

Suddenly, Simon throws Sarah off the bed. She YELLS.

He sits on the side of the bed. She walks up to him and touches
his face. He pulls her hands down to her sides.

SIMON

Sarah, stop.

She touches his face again.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Sarah. Sarah, look, you're really
intoxicated.

She GIGGLES.

SARAH

So what? This is how I roll.

She kisses his face. He peels her off of him.

SIMON

Sarah, wait. I'm gay.

She stops and focuses. She shakes her head.

SARAH

What?

SIMON

Yeah, I'm sort of gay.

She moves away from him.

SARAH

No, no. You're not gay.

SIMON

Well, you'd think I'd know by now.

SARAH

Then why. . .why did you kiss me?

SIMON

I didn't really kiss you, really. I just. I know this is weird, but I just want to be upfront before we get too carried away.

SARAH

Hey, you know what? Screw you, buddy.

Sarah walks out, leaving Simon on the bed.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Simon gets in the driver seat. He starts the car, but Jack slides across the hood and jumps in the passenger seat before he can pull out.

Simon looks up, dismayed.

SIMON

Holy hooters, what's going on?

JACK

(slurring his words)

Hey Si-my-man. Let's go.

SIMON

Where?

JACK

Wherever you were going.

SIMON

Home.

JACK

That's lame. Let's go get some grub.

He looks at Simon.

JACK'S P.O.V.

Simon stares back, unable to fully process what is going on.

JACK

pushes the radio, buckles up, and rolls down the window. Jazz plays MOS.

Simon pulls out.

SIMON

You're nuts.

CUT TO:

EXT. BURRITO BILL'S PARKING LOT - LATER

Around the back of the fast food restaurant, Simon and Jack sit on a ledge, eating.

SIMON

So what's your story?

JACK

I'm in school, engineering. That's it.

SIMON

You say it like it's nothing.

JACK

It is. Dude, I'm still young. Not much to tell.

SIMON

Sort of underrating your life thus far isn't it?

JACK

Not quite as much as trying suffocate yourself with a plastic bag and masking tape on the worldwide web.

SIMON

(shocked)

Well, at least, uh, it's creative right?

Jack shakes his head.

SIMON (CONT'D)

It was a joke anyways. My mom just happened to come in and, you know.

JACK

Don't get your panties in a wad.

SIMON

Oh, fuck you. You're so hip, Mr. Fratastic?

JACK

No, I just didn't know that pretending you're gay is the new trend.

Simon throws his hands up, angry.

SIMON

You think you know something about me, Nancy Drew?

Jack throws down his burrito, accepting the challenge.

JACK

Oh what, you win a gold medal in the pussylympics?

Simon throws a hard punch into Jack's lower jaw. Jack sways, shaking it off, smiling.

SIMON

Got something else to say, Jackoff?

JACK

A clever fudgepacker. Who would've thunk it?

Simon throws another punch, wider than the first. Jack easily dodges and knees him in the crotch. Simon doubles over.

JACK (CONT'D)

Looks like I mined your manscape,
(in a fake French
accent)
Simone.

Jack lays a fist into Simon's gut.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

Jack smiles with a clenched fist raised.

SIMON (O.S.)

Please, Jack.

JACK

Dude, just relax. You'll feel better in the morning.

He grins and hits Simon (o.s.).

BLACKSCREEN

SIMON (V.O.)

Someone's been here before. Here in the dark. So why isn't there some sort of pathway cut out? Why didn't they leave us a light, or a line of breadcrumbs or something? They were here, so didn't they know we'd be here? Maybe it's just not worth it to make the journey anymore, and they knew it. You only take Route 66 once nowadays, and you never write about it. At least, no one important does. After that, you take the highway, the faster route. Or an airplane. Or you bike across the nation. Or you just send emails and chat. Use the white noise. It's like that image where the pier stretches into the sea.

INT. ART MUSEUM - NEXT DAY

PHOTO

hangs huge on a perfectly white wall. It's the same photo that Hadley has in her room, and that Benji has hanging over his couch.

The image depicts a wooden pier stretching out to sea. The pier doesn't end. It just keeps going with the sea until the sea and the sky meet. The blue of the ocean blends with the blue of the clouds in twilight. An orange sun blinks behind all the blue.

SIMON

sits on a bench in front of the painting, wearing his work clothes. He has a black eye and a new bandage for his broken nose. It's ugly and purple. He eats a sandwich.

SIMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This is what I want to write. And this
is why I can't.

A cell phone RINGS. It ECHOS through the museum. People turn and
stare, as Simon opens his phone.

SIMON

(with a full mouth)

I'm on my way back.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - AFTERNOON

Simon walks out of the theater and to his car. He gets in. Benji
walks out of the theater. He KNOCKS on Simon's window. Simon
rolls it down.

BENJI

Can we talk for a minute?

Simon looks at him with his black eye.

SIMON

Yeah, okay.

Benji opens the passenger door, sits, and closes the door.

BENJI

Look, you have every right to be mad
here. I totally understand.

Simon nods.

BENJI (CONT'D)

I know you're going through a lot and
it's a shitty time for you. But the
thing with Steve started me thinking.
We had dinner. Twice actually.

(looking down)

And yeah, he was nice. Or nicer than
you are sometimes. But I'm not in love
with him, Simon. Steve is just a
temptation thing. He always was. I love
you. It's the dynamic between us. We
complement each other so well, and I
just-

(shrugging)

-I just don't want to throw that away
because of something silly. I'm sorry.
I'm so, so sorry.

Simon nods.

BENJI (CONT'D)

Say something.

Simon takes a deep breath and looks at Benji.

SIMON

I'm not gay.

Benji stares blankly back at him.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I know, it's weird. I mean how can you have gay sex and not be gay, right? I guess it was just a phase. But I'm not gay.

Benji turns and stares out the window, slowly nodding. A tear rolls down his cheek.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Sorry.

Benji opens the door and slowly climbs out. Simon drives away.

In the empty parking lot, Benji stands and watches him. He walks back inside the theater.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Simon walks in the front door. Sam peers around the bathroom door with messy hair.

SAM

Simon, Pam, Harding's teacher just called. I need you to go over there. I'm not feeling so well.

She disappears back into the bathroom and VOMITS (o.s.)

SIMON

Okay. Guess I'll be back.

Sam throws a hand out the door way and waves him on. He leaves.

INT. PAMELA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Behind her desk, Pamela rubs her temples. Simon, with a black eye and broken nose, sits next to Harding, who has bloody scrapes on his face and a black eye, across from Pamela. Harding's clothes are smeared with dirt and blood.

PAMELA

I guess I just don't understand how you
don't see what's happening here.

SIMON

What is happening here?

Pamela looks up.

PAMELA

You and your-
(waving her hands)
-family are falling apart.

Simon looks over at Harding, then back at Pamela.

SIMON

I agree.

PAMELA

You do?

SIMON

Absolutely.

Pamela sits up and SHUFFLES through papers.

PAMELA

Well. . .good. What do you plan on
doing about it?

SIMON

Nothing.

PAMELA

What?

SIMON

Nothing.

PAMELA

I don't understand.

SIMON

It's okay.

Pamela rubs her head again and points to the door.

PAMELA

Okay, it's time for you to leave.
Harding, don't forget detention
tomorrow.

Harding and Simon stand up and walk out. Pamela checks her watch.

Simon walks back in.

SIMON

So do you want to go get a bite to eat
sometime?

PAMELA

Out.

She her finger shakes at the door. Simon shrugs and leaves.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Simon drives and turns into a gas station. Harding rides in the
passenger's seat.

Simon fills the car up with gas.

Then, they pull up to the car wash next to the station. Simon
deposits money into the car wash vending box. He rolls up the
windows and drives in.

The wash starts. The car SHAKES under the pressure of war jets.

Harding turns to him.

HARDING

Why do you smoke so much pot?

SIMON

What?

A sheet of soap sprays over the front windshield.

SIMON

Do you even know what pot is?

HARDING

I know you smoke it. And I know that it makes you act dumb.

SIMON

I don't smoke that much, and it doesn't make everyone act dumb.

HARDING

It makes you act dumb.

Simon turns, pressing his back against the door. Two columns of mops SLOSH the soap around.

SIMON

Now wait—

HARDING

And why are you gay?

SIMON

What's that supposed to mean?

HARDING

You're always looking at Sarah across the street when she's doing yoga.

SIMON

Harding, we're just friends.

HARDING

And why did you even move in with us? We were doing so much better when you weren't here.

Simon hits the steering wheel and YELLS back.

SIMON

That's because—

(shaking)

—because your dad was alive.

Harding looks at him. A mop SLOSHES across it.

SIMON (CONT'D)

God what is this? I didn't ask for this, okay?

Harding unlocks the door and opens it. He gets out and SLAMS it shut.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hey, señor, what are you doing?

Harding walks out through the front of the car wash, getting soaked by the rinse cycle.

EXT. CAR WASH - CONTINUOUS

Harding stands outside the car wash, soaked. Simon's car rolls out of the wash right next to Harding.

Simon rolls down the passenger window. Harding opens the door and climbs in. His feet SQUISH on the floor mats.

HARDING

Why didn't you come when dad was being buried?

SIMON

I don't know.

Harding shakes his head and looks down at his feet.

HARDING

I told Granny Gloria that Mom is having a baby.

Simon turns his head slowly around to Harding. His cell phone RINGS. He digs for it and flips it open.

SIMON

Hello?

EXT. TROUSDALE HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Simon's car pulls into the Trousdale's driveway.

INT. SIMON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Simon turns off the ignition. Through the windshield, Will and Gloria stand on the front step with their arms crossed.

Simon and Harding look at each other.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Sam, Simon, Hadley, and Harding walk inside the door.

SIMON

Well, it could have been worse, right?

SAM

They were pretty surprised, but yes it could have been worse.

HADLEY

Maybe, if Harding hadn't told on you.

She sticks out her tongue at Harding and walks ahead down the hall.

SAM

Okay, well, I'm beat. Let's call it a night.

They all walk down the hall.

MONTAGE - SAM GETS PREGNANT

- Sam runs out of her bedroom and through the hall to the bathroom. She VOMITS (o.s.)
- Hadley and Harding walk down the hall and out the door with their backpacks. Then, Simon runs out his room and down the hall after them with his keys still in his pajamas.
- Sam ambles down the hall eating a candy bar. Her stomach is bigger.
- Simon vacuums the hallway.
- Hadley, Harding, and Simon walk down the hall dressed as the three musketeers. Sam eats candy behind them.
- Sam sits on the sofa. Her stomach is bigger. Simon comes in the front door with a Christmas tree.
- In the living room, and down the hallway, the Bogards, Trousdale, and Abrams talk and drink eggnog. Linda touches Sam's bulging belly.
- On his knees, Simon scrubs the edge of the bathroom. Sam waddles out of her bedroom, into the bathroom and closes the door in his face. It hits his nose. He doubles over in pain.
- An alarm RINGS (o.s.). Simon runs out of his bedroom and out the door, his tie hanging loose.
- Simon returns at night, his tie hanging loose. He walks down the hall, into his bedroom, and closes the door. Harding knocks on his door.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Simon looks in the refrigerator. Sam, Harding and Hadley sit at the table.

Simon closes the refrigerator door.

SIMON

We don't have much. I'll have to go to the grocery tomorrow.

SAM

Well looks like we're going out.

SIMON

Actually, if you wouldn't mind, I'd just as soon hit the sack. I'm exhausted.

Sam smiles.

SAM

That's fine.

(to the twins)

Where's something close? How about Waffle House?

CUT TO:

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - LATER

At a booth, Sam and the twins order MOS. The WAITER, 23, leaves. Sam heaves herself out of the chair and gets up.

EXT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam waits outside of the women's bathroom. A dirty, unshaven, drunk Axel walks out of the men's bathroom. He bumps into her and MUMBLES an apology.

Sam's jaw drops and she watches him walk back to his table. A WOMAN, 33, walks out of the women's bathroom.

Sam rushes into the bathroom.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam digs in her purse and takes out some vitamin pills. She takes them and looks into the mirror. She takes long breaths. Then she digs in her purse again.

She brings out the gun and some bullets. She awkwardly loads the bullets in the gun. Then she puts it back in her purse and studies herself in the mirror. She brushes messy hair out of her eyes with her hand.

INT. DINING FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Sam steps nervously out of the bathroom. She walks slowly over to Axel's table. He has his back to her and talks MOS with Richie. Richie LAUGHS.

She moves closer and closer until she's right above him. Then she takes out the gun and presses it to Axel's head. Richie's smile fades.

Axel stops talking and turns around slowly. He looks up at her, with the gun right in his face.

The Waiter YELLS. Everybody in the restaurant stops. A woman SCREAMS (o.s.). Hadley watches, scared. Harding stands up.

Axel slowly stands up with his hands in the air. Sam's hands are shaking. She cocks the gun.

AXEL

Hold on now, hold on. You don't have to do this.

Sam breathes fast and heavily. A tear slides down her cheek.

SAM

Why?

AXEL

Ma'am, I can't answer that.

Sam shakes her head, restraining the tears, and presses the gun to his forehead.

Harding walks slowly over to Sam.

HARDING

Mom.

SAM

(yelling)

Harding, sit down.

Harding doesn't move. Sam pushes Axel with the gun.

SAM (CONT'D)

Why did you shoot my husband?

Axel, wide-eyed, shakes his head.

AXEL

It was an accident. I didn't mean to shoot. I was just trying to teach some kids-

SAM

An accident? An accident?

Her lip trembles as the tears flow.

SAM

Fuck you.

HARDING

Mom.

SAM

Harding, I told you to-

HARDING

Mom, your pants.

He points at her pants where Sam's water has just broke. Sam freaks out. She hyperventilates.

SAM

Oh my god, the baby is coming. It's coming now.

She sits down. Harding rushes over. She points the gun at Richie.

SAM (CONT'D)

Take me to the fucking hospital.

Richie and Axel just stare back at her.

SAM

Now, goddammit. Now.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Axel and Richie rush Sam to Richie's truck. The twins follow behind.

Axel jumps into the truck bed. Richie takes the gun away from Sam and helps her up. The twins climb in back with Axel and Sam.

Richie jumps into the driver seat.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The truck HONKS and speeds its way down the road. Sam MOANS in pain. She clenches Axel's hand. Holding hands, the twins watch from a distance.

EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls up to the emergency entrance. Richie runs inside, YELLING. Axel helps Sam scoot out.

DOCTORS and NURSES come running out of the hospital. They help her into a wheelchair and wheel her away. Hadley follows them.

Harding, Axel, and Richie watch them go.

Harding turns to Axel and hits him in the gut. Axel pushes him back, but Harding advances again. He kicks him in the crotch. Axel CRIES in pain.

Richie YELLS for Axel. Axel runs to the passenger door and climbs in. Harding beats on the door.

The truck drives off.

Axel looks in the side mirror. Harding stops running and watches the truck. Then, he walks back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DESK - LATER

A SECRETARY, 30s, sits behind the desk. Simon runs in.

SIMON

Hi, I'm looking for Samantha Trousdale.
She just had a baby.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon rushes into the room.

In a bed, Sam rests. Hadley and Harding sit on either side of her bed.

SIMON

Where's the baby?

SAM
In the nursery.

He moves over and holds her hand.

SAM (CONT'D)
(wiping away tears)
He was right there. I touched him. I
could've finished it. Now he's free.

SIMON
Sam, he's right downstairs.

She shakes her head, and CRIES into Simon's chest. He rubs her head.

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

The Trousdale and Abrams fill the waiting room. Linda rushes in. Simon stands up.

LINDA
(pointing to a door)
Is she in here?

SIMON
Yeah. She might be sleeping, but go on in.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Linda sits by Sam's bed. They TALK.

LINDA
Well, I'm glad everything went well.
Will you be going home tomorrow?

SAM
Yes, we should be.

LINDA
Anything I can do?

SAM
No. But thanks Linda.

Linda smiles and walks over to the door.

LINDA

Oh, by the way, I was under the impression that, well this might be silly. But I thought Simon was gay.

SAM

He is. Why?

LINDA

Oh, well Sarah told me that-
(smiling)
-well, it's nothing. I'll drop the twins off tomorrow.

Sam watches her curiously as she leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMON'S CAR - NEXT DAY.

Simon drives Sam and the newborn, TOMMY JR. He sits in a car seat in the back seat.

SIMON

Tommy Jr., huh? The girls better be careful. He's gonna be a heartthrob if he's anything like Tommy.

Sam smiles.

SAM

So, I was talking to Linda, and she told me that you and Sarah were having a little fling.

SIMON

Oh, well, yeah. That's really complicated.

SAM

Oh. I thought you were gay.

Simon laughs.

SIMON

That's complicated too. I don't know. Something just happened. I guess I'm not.

SAM

Oh. Well that's great.

Simon looks over at her.

SIMON

That I'm not gay anymore?

SAM

No, no I mean you and Sarah. She must be nice.

SIMON

Oh. That was nothing really. Actually, I'm thinking of asking Harding's teacher, you know Pam, out on a date.

Sam forces a LAUGH.

SAM

Wow. Sure. She's really nice. And attractive. Of course, you've been around this fat cow for nine months, so anything probably looks good right now, huh?

Simon frowns, confused.

SIMON

Uh, yeah. Sure. Are you alright?

SAM

No, I'm fine.

SIMON

Okay. Well, anyway, so I've asked off night shifts for the next few weeks. I'll take Hadley and Harding to school on my way into work. Then I'll pick them up on my way home. Sound good?

SAM

Sounds great. But it doesn't leave a lot of room for dating.

SIMON

Oh, well, I'm just playing that by ear.

Sam looks out the window. Simon glances at her, concerned.

MONTAGE - SAM'S POST PARTUM DEPRESSION

-- In the living room, Sam sleeps next to the crib. Simon nudges her awake, and he, Hadley and Harding leave.

(MORE)

- Sam watches television and feeds Tommy Jr. He COUGHS, but she doesn't look down.
- Simon, Harding, Hadley, and Sam all eat at the table. Tommy Jr. CRIES (o.s.). Simon looks at Sam, who eats without looking up. Then he gets up and picks up Tommy Jr.
- On her bed, Sam lays next to a sleeping Tommy Jr. A tear rolls down her cheek.
- In the living room, Linda talks MOS to Sam. She waves her hands excitedly and laughs MOS. Sam stares into space.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - AFTERNOON

Behind the concessions, Jack and Simon prepare the popper and registers.

JACK

So, wait a second. You're going out with a teacher? Isn't that sort of weird? You know, like fulfilling your childhood fantasies or something?

SIMON

I don't really think of it that way.

JACK

Well maybe you should.

They laugh.

JACK (CONT'D)

Well, at least you're not posing anymore.

SIMON

You know, I've been meaning to ask you about that. How did you know I wasn't gay?

Jack walks up and lays a hand on his shoulder.

JACK

Gay men know when they see other gay men. Obviously, you aren't a gay man.

He winks at Simon and walks off.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

On the couch, Sam sits, feeding Tommy Jr. milk and watching television.

Simon walks in, dressed up.

SIMON

How do I look?

SAM

Like you're ready for a date.

SIMON

Great. Well, Harding and Hadley are going to bed. I'll be back sometime. Call me if you need anything.

Sam smiles. Simon leaves. Sam drops the smile and stares at the television.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

At a table, Simon and Pamela sit across from each other.

SIMON

So, I'm curious. Do teachers really like apples?

PAMELA

You mean as presents?

Simon nods.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

God no. They're so lame. C'mon, the least you can do for someone who babysits your child for seven hours a day is get them a nice gift certificate.

SIMON

At the least.

PAMELA

At the least.

They CHUCKLE together

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On the couch, Sam watches television. She gets up and goes into the kitchen. She grabs a bottle of wine, pops it, and pours a glass.

She sits back down on the couch with the bottle and glass.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Simon and Pamela eat.

PAMELA

I also hate getting those annoying spam emails. You wouldn't believe how much spam teachers send each other. They have no lives.

SIMON

Sounds about right.

PAMELA

It's so aggravating. I always delete them before opening. Unless it's a virus. Then I send it to everyone.

Simon LAUGHS.

SIMON

Seriously? You're evil. Evil Pam with her evil Pam spam.

Simon GIGGLES.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sam stumbles over to the kitchen table and turns on the light. She sets the empty wine bottle against the table. It almost falls but she grabs it.

She sets her purse on the table next to the bottle and fumbles through it.

She pulls out the photo of Tommy and Simon. She studies it. Then she cries MOS.

After a little bit, she digs in her purse and pulls out the gun.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Simon and Pamela share a dessert.

PAMELA

So, how are you and Sam working out?

SIMON

Pretty well.

They finish and sit back in their chairs.

SIMON

She's not coming on to me, if that's what you mean.

PAMELA

Well, I just wanted you to be careful.
How is she holding up?

SIMON

Under the circumstances, she's doing pretty well.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is dark. Suddenly, there's a flash and a loud POP.

A dog BARKS. Eventually, neighbors begin coming out on their front porches.

Linda walks over to the house and KNOCKS on the front door.

LINDA

Samantha?

Other neighbors walk out on their front porch. Linda KNOCKS again.

LINDA

Simon? Samantha?

The Harding opens the door and she walks in. The light flips on. Linda SCREAMS.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Simon digs for his phone as it RINGS.

PAMELA

Well that's good. These things are hard, especially for a single mother.

Simon holds up a finger and answers the phone.

SIMON

Hello?

(coughing)

What?

He stands up.

PAMELA

What's wrong?

SIMON

(into the phone)

I'll be right there.

Simon hangs up and pushes his chair under.

SIMON

Sam's been shot. I'm sorry, but have to go.

Pamela GASPS with a hand over her mouth and Simon runs out.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING ROOM - HOURS LATER

Simon, Hadley, and Harding sit side-by-side. Simon feeds Tommy Jr. a bottle.

The doctor comes around the corner. He talks MOS to them.

Hadley covers her face and runs down the hall. Harding runs after her. He catches her and she drops to her knees, SOBBING. Simon sits in his chair, a hand over his mouth. Tommy Jr. CRIES.

The doctor leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAYS LATER

In a crowded chapel, Pastor Lou talks MOS on a podium. A coffin lies behind him, and Sam's portrait sits on stilts above it.

INT. RECEPTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A table with full bowl of punch and lots of uneaten pies sits along the wall. People talk MOS and hug.

Simon greets MOS everyone. Hadley and Harding sit in between Thurman and Newman.

Gloria holds Tommy Jr.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Simon, Hadley, Harding, and Roger all walk inside the house. Simon flips on a light.

They all walk into the kitchen. Simon puts some trays of food into the refrigerator.

They all sit down at the table. There's a reddish stain on the wall paper ride behind Roger.

ROGER

Okay. So, here's the game plan for now. We'll take baby steps. Simon and I will stay here. Tommy Jr. will live with Gloria. And I guess we'll try to sell this house.

They all nod.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Okay, well, I'm going back home to pick up some things. I'll be back in an hour.

They all nod again.

Roger gets up and leaves.

Simon looks up at Hadley and Harding.

SIMON

I can't say anything right now that would do anything for any of us. But I just want you both to know that I'm here for-

Hadley gets up and goes to the refrigerator. She closes the door and comes back.

She drops a tray of frog legs on the table and sits back down. She eats one. Then another.

Simon takes one and eats it. Harding gets up and comes back with a deck of cards. Hadley moves over to Harding's side, and they sit, eat, and build a tower.

INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

CUT TO:
(MAY 23, 1993)

On **COMPUTER**: Title of a video blog: "Good Evening."

Teenage Tommy sits at a desk, in his graduation robes. He adjusts the camera. Then he sits back down.

TOMMY

Hey Simon, come over here. Look at this.

Thirteen-year-old Simon walks over and looks into the camera.

SIMON

Cool. Where'd you get this?

TOMMY

It was a graduation present from Uncle Roger.

SIMON

Sweet.

TOMMY

Yeah. I can send you posts online and everything from college.

Simon looks down on the desk. He picks up a CD.

SIMON

What's this?

TOMMY

Oh, that's Miles Davis. "Somethin' Else." It's a groovy album. I'll burn you a copy.

SIMON

Awesome.

Simon pulls out the liner notes.

TOMMY

Hey, I got something you might like. So I was talking to one of my friends about Miles Davis, and he told me this really screwed up thing he said one time. I'm not sure it's true, but whatev.

SIMON

What was it?

TOMMY

Well, apparently, he was high or something. He said there are five major components to life, "Good morning, I'm here, I'm hungry, fuck me, good evening."

Simon LAUGHS.

TOMMY

Right? It's crazy. Some fucked up shit. But he was a cool cat.

Tommy starts typing on his computer.

SIMON

That's a really cool saying, man.

Simon puts down the CD.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hey, bro. I wanted to tell you, before graduation, that I'm gonna miss you. When you're at college and everything. That I love you and everything.

TOMMY

Uh, thanks little bro. That's awfully nice. I guess you left your dress downstairs.

SIMON

Hey, shut up, fag. Just trying to be nice.

They LAUGH.

TOMMY

I appreciate it.

Gloria CALLS (o.s.) for them. Tommy gets up and turns off the camera.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING AFTER THE FUNERAL

CUT TO:
(MAY 23, 2008)

Simon wakes up and sits at his desk. He feels around the bandage on his nose. Then he peels it off.

An ugly scar scabs across his enflamed bridge.

He sighs and pulls out the blank pad and pencil. He looks up at the hitchhiker's sign. Then he moves it and reads the list of rules.

He turns to the pad and flips into the middle of it.

He gets up and looks out the window. Then he sits down again and writes. He stops

INSERT - PAPER, which reads:

"Good morning, I'm here, I'm hungry, fuck me, good evening."

SIMON

inhales then lets it out. He shivers. A tear rides down his cheek

THE END.