

Urban Folktale
(Working title)

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Crates are stacked up along grimy brick walls. At the end of the alley is an overfilled dumpster, slimy wads of shredded paper making a desperate attempt to escape their prison, some of them flitting away with the breeze. In the middle of the alley is a dim circle of light, cast by a yellow, flickering streetlight. Into this light walks a figure. NIKON. He is a young man, in his mid-twenties. He walks slowly with his head down, never glancing up to see where he is going. Approaching a fire escape, he pulls the ladder down and begins to climb.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Reaching the roof of the building, Nikon wipes his dirtied hands off on his coat with a slight sigh that is visible in the night chill.

Across the rooftop, at the edge, sits another young man, silhouetted against the bright streetlights in front of the building. Nikon slowly walks over to where the young man is sitting. As he gets closer, it becomes apparent that the sitting man, NORMAN, is busily writing in a worn composition notebook. Nikon sits next to him without a word.

Norman doesn't look up at Nikon at all, fully concentrating on his writing. This doesn't seem to bother Nikon, who looks out at the street, watching cars go by.

Finally, Norman closes the book and looks up.

NORMAN
You're late.

Nikon shrugs.

NIKON
I had stuff to do.

NORMAN
Oh? Someone to see, maybe?

NIKON
I don't want to talk about it.

NORMAN
I see.

The two sit and look at the scenery from the rooftop for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

So what the hell are we doing here?

Nikon looks at him quizzically.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Well, we come up here to talk, right?
You obviously made your big move and,
judging by your face, it didn't go well.

NIKON

It went as well as could be expected.
Condescending pity-smile and all.

NORMAN

The 'don't want to ruin our friendship'
talk?

NIKON

Nope. The 'I just don't think of you
that way' talk. Well, it's over. Let's
talk about you. What did you do today?

NORMAN

I worked at the restaurant for a while,
filled my do-nothing quota and then got
hungry waiting for you to show up.

Nikon indicates Norman's notebook.

NIKON

What were you writing?

NORMAN

Something I came up with today. A theory
I call "the cord." It's like...well,
where do emotions come from? Everything
has to come from somewhere, right? Well,
the way I see it, emotions run through us
like electricity through a cord.
Especially pain. I mean, you can be
happy and never even realize it. But
pain. You always feel that. So the cord
runs from the outside world, sucking in
all the pain and whatnot that people
throw at you and it plugs right into your
head. Boom. Without warning.

Nikon turns that over in his head a couple times.

NIKON

Do you think I have a cord?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

My friend, right now I can practically hear the current running through it. Let's get some food, take your mind off your girl troubles. Who knows? Maybe Sterling will come around. Then you, her, Kristen and I can go on a double date.

NIKON

(under his breath)

A night with Kristen. Fun.

They start to walk O.S.

NIKON (CONT'D)

You know, it's a lot more likely that I'd starve to death waiting by the phone for her to "come around."

NORMAN (O.S.)

Yes, you definitely have a cord.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"The cord is in me. Varicose. Very Close."

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL - NIGHT

The small restaurant is occupied by only two people. HOWIE, who is stacking chairs on top of tables and the owner, RANDALL, who is sweeping the floor. As he sweeps, Randall bumps into a table, knocking one of the chairs off. Without missing a beat, Howie catches the chair with one hand, righting it, while he wipes down another table with the other hand. Randall doesn't even notice.

The door opens to admit Norman and Nikon. The distinctive JINGLE of several small brass bells at the door announces them. Randall looks at them for a moment before turning to Howie.

RANDALL

Howie, I thought I told you to lock the door. Look at the riff-raff that wanders in when you leave it unlocked.

NORMAN

Randall, you're such a gentleman.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RANDALL

Your food's getting cold.

Norman points to his watch and gives an accusatory look to Nikon, who just shrugs.

HOWIE

Have a seat guys, I'll get your food.

Norman gives a nod of thanks as Howie disappears into the kitchen. They then sit down at a table with no chairs stacked on it.

Propping his broom up in a corner, Randall joins them.

RANDALL

Oh, Nikon, your girl stopped by.

NIKON

What? Who, Sterling?

Randall gives Norman a confused look

NORMAN

Blonde?

RANDALL

Brunette.

NORMAN

Michelle.

RANDALL

Right. That one.

Nikon slumps a little.

NIKON

Oh. Thanks.

Howie comes out with two plates.

HOWIE

Gentlemen, your paydirt.

NORMAN

There's an accurate description of the food here.

RANDALL

You're pretty picky for someone whose sole source of sustenance is my restaurant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

Randall, we're so fucking hungry, we could eat real dirt. Besides, it's not like we don't work for it.

RANDALL

Just eat.

Norman and Nikon dig in as Howie seats himself. Norman practically stuffs his face. Nikon, on the other hand, merely pushes his food around with a fork, preoccupied.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Hey, I thought you were hungry. What's the matter?

NIKON

Food's fine. It's just...
(shrugs)
You know...stuff.

Norman interjects, talking around the food in his mouth.

NORMAN

Girl troubles.

RANDALL

Ah. The Brunette?

NORMAN

The Blonde.

RANDALL

Michelle.

NORMAN

Sterling.

RANDALL

Shit, I can't keep up with all this.

HOWIE

It's only two names...

Randall shrugs and goes back to sweeping.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANDALL'S GRILL/NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - LATER

Establishing Shot. A small structure on the roof of Randall's Grill, whose walls look as if the paint might have been fresh somewhere around the time Napoleon rose to power. The rest of the structure doesn't look quite that good.

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The inside of the apartment compliments the outside quite nicely. The drywall has no shortage of coffee-colored stains and on the ceiling there are a few places where wooden slats show through holes in the stucco.

The apartment consists of one room with an unfinished bar that indicates the border where the living room ends and the kitchen begins. Against one wall are three doors, the middle one bearing a sign featuring a silhouette of a person wearing a dress. The international sign for "Ladies' Room."

Nikon is sitting on what passes for their couch, a bus stop bench with some pillows and a ratty blanket to give the illusion of comfort. He is watching an old, black-and-white cabinet-style TV.

Norman is in the kitchen, dialing a phone number. Norman finishes dialing and puts the phone to his ear, peeking into the living room. The sound of the phone RINGING on the other end of the line can be heard throughout.

NORMAN

Hey, Nikon...can you try to look a little more dejected? I'm not quite ready to kill myself yet.

Still RINGING.

NIKON

I'm allowed to be depressed, aren't I?

RING.

NORMAN

I'm allowed to walk around the house naked, but I've got better things to do.

RING.

NIKON

Well, I don't.

RING.

NORMAN

Nikey, you're watching a documentary about ants on a black and white TV with more snow than show.

RING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON
It's really interesting.

RING.

NORMAN
Why don't you call Michelle and do something with her?

RING.

NIKON
Because you're on the phone, genius.

RIN-- Norman hangs up the phone.

NORMAN
Kristen wasn't home anyway. Now are you going to call Michelle?

NIKON
At the next commercial.

Norman sighs and dials another number.

NORMAN
(on phone)
Sarah! Hey, it's Norman. Is Kristen there perchance?.....The beach? It's like one in the morning!.....Did she say who she was going with?.....Oh, well. Thanks.....You, too. Bye.

He hangs up the phone and grabs his coat.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Guess I'm going to the beach.

He leaves. As the door closes, Nikon shakes his head ruefully.

NIKON
(under his breath)
Don't do anyone I wouldn't do. Like your fuckin' girlfriend.

The door opens and Norman's head pokes through.

NORMAN
And call Michelle! You need to get out!

With that, he's gone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nikon watches the ants for a few more seconds then, with a sigh, gets up and picks up the phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Norman is walking along the shore, the same tattered notebook under his arm. He looks down the beach ahead of him as he walks. As he passes a lifeguard tower, he hears an exclamation of pain followed by a girlish giggle. Walking around to take a look, he sees someone in the area under the tower. As he gets closer, he notices a woman's bare back, partially obscured by blonde hair. The woman in question seems to be sitting atop a man and rocking back and forth.

The muscles in his jaw suddenly become very prominent and his hands curl into tight fists, the knuckles going white. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, holding it. After several seconds he releases his breath, opens his eyes and makes a deliberate effort to unclench his fists. He walks over.

So involved in their activities is this couple that they don't notice Norman about two feet from them, leaning on one of the tower's support beams. He kneels down to their level.

NORMAN

If she calls you 'Norman' don't be upset.
That's me.

The woman emits a YELP and falls over into the sand, covering herself with a towel. The man immediately takes the closest equivalent to a fight stance he can manage while lying down and feeling a bit exposed.

MAN

What the fuck!?

The woman sits up.

WOMAN

Norman!? What the fuck are you doing here?

NORMAN

Well, for starters, watching my girlfriend fuck some guy I don't know who, by the look of things...
(looks down at the man)
...doesn't quite "measure up."

MAN

Kristen, who the fuck--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN (KRISTEN)

(interrupting)

Hank, just shut the fuck up for a second.

Hank does so, taking a moment to tuck himself back into his swim trunks.

NORMAN

Yeah, Hank, we're trying to have a discussion here. As a matter of fact, you might want to just scurry back into whatever damp corner you came from.

KRISTEN

Okay, Norman, you made your point.

(to Hank)

You better go.

Hank puts a hand on Kristen's shoulder in a protective manner.

MAN (HANK)

Fuck that. I'm gonna kick this pussy's ass.

Norman's sarcasm is gone in a flash. His eyes turn stone cold and his voice more so.

NORMAN

You're going to want to remove your hand from my girlfriend right now.

HANK

Or what?

KRISTEN

Hank. Leave. I'll explain later, okay?

Hank seems to think it over for a second. Eventually he stands. He tries to give Kristen a goodbye kiss but she slightly-yet-urgently shakes her head no. Hank gives Norman a glare as he walks past but Norman's too busy glaring at Kristen to notice. A few feet away, Hank stops.

HANK

When can I see you again?

Norman replies without taking his eyes from Kristen.

NORMAN

Check every morning for winged pigs. When you see them, you'll know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

Fuck you, you jealous bitch.

Hank leaves, glancing back every so often as he goes. Finally he is gone and Kristen breaks the silence.

KRISTEN

Norman, I--

NORMAN

(interrupting)

Save it.

He stands and starts to walk away.

Kristen begins crying and he stops.

KRISTEN (O.S.)

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

Norman turns around and stands over her.

NORMAN

Jesus. Put on some fucking clothes.

Kristen, still sobbing, does so, muttering and crying all the while.

KRISTEN

I....I didn't....I mean....You, You.....I
just....

She breaks down into incomprehensible sob-speak. Norman kneels down beside her. His voice is much more comforting than before.

NORMAN

Hey. Stop crying, okay? Do you want to
tell me what that was?

KRISTEN

I--we--

NORMAN

Yeah, I saw that part. You want to tell
me why?

KRISTEN

(regaining control of herself)

I--I've just been so lonely lately. I
never get to see you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

I mean, that's no reason to cheat on you but...you know, it gets hard being all alone and then some fresh blood comes along...

NORMAN

Fresh blood? I think the phrase you're looking for is "fresh semen."

KRISTEN

That's not fair! I know what I did was wrong, but it's your fault, too! What am I supposed to do when my boyfriend's too busy sleeping to see me? Hank was there for me, he was nice to me.

NORMAN

Let me get this straight; it's my fault that you fucked that piece of shit -- what was his name? Hank? What, three times?

Kristen nods slightly.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

So you're going to cheat on me and then tell me how nice the piece of shit is? And you cheat because...? Because I work and when I'm not working I -GASP!- get tired and sleep. Is that right?

KRISTEN

Norman, it's not just that you sleep. When you're not sleeping you're at Perk or working or on some stupid roof with Nikon or god knows where! Anywhere but with me! How do you think that makes me feel?

NORMAN

There's no reason you can't come to those places with me. None. If you really cared about spending time with me you would. Period.

KRISTEN

No. The places you go are shitholes. And when you go there, Nikon is with you. And guess what? Nikon hates me. So, I'll pass, thanks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NORMAN

Nikon does not hate you. Even if he did, I don't see how it relates to the fact that you're fucking that piece of shit.

KRISTEN

Stop calling him a piece of shit! You don't even know him.

NORMAN

Oh, now you're standing up for his honor? How noble.

KRISTEN

You don't have to call him a piece of shit.

NORMAN

Well, I caught him with his dick inside my girlfriend, first. Secondly, he tried to kiss you goodbye in front of your boyfriend! That's what I'd call a piece of shit.

KRISTEN

Look, I said I was sorry.

NORMAN

This is the third time you've cheated on me. With Hank. I mean, at least now I know the piece of...the guy's name. I don't know what to do.

KRISTEN

I don't want to lose you, Norman.

NORMAN

I don't want to lose you either. So, I guess you get one more chance. I'll spend more time with you and you'll never see that guy again or I'll leave you on the spot. I'm serious.

KRISTEN

Okay. But I need you around more. I really do.

NORMAN

Then let's start now. Let me treat you to a hot chocolate at Denny's.

KRISTEN

Remember what I just said about shitholes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

NORMAN

Fine, find another place that's open at quarter til two in the morning.

KRISTEN

Good point.

CUT TO:

INT. DENNY'S - NIGHT

There aren't many people in the restaurant at this hour. Those that are there carry the look of people to whom the idea of sleeping is a thing to be reminisced about. Unshaven, their eyes droop and one hand is always curled around a coffee mug, a cigarette dangling from nearly every lip.

In contrast, the few members of the staff that are present are apparently accustomed to this late hour, always ready with a coffee refill as their shift grinds on.

Also unaffected by the cloud of sleep that this hour brings are Kristen and Norman, who are just walking through the door. Not waiting to be seated, Norman grabs two menus and goes to seat himself. The Hostess looks up from where she is having her cigarette at the bar and, seeing who it is, nods a greeting.

HOSTESS

Hey, Norm.

NORMAN

Hey Paddy. Chuck working?

HOSTESS (PADDY)

He's upstairs, hon.

Norman nods and heads to the slightly-raised smoking section. Kristen follows just behind him. They slide in on either side of a worn booth, some foam coming out of a hole in the seat on Norman's side. Kristen promptly lights a cigarette and looks at her menu. Norman opens his but doesn't actually look at it. Their waiter, CHUCK arrives and immediately sets a hot chocolate down in front of Norman.

CHUCK

Hey guys, how are you doing tonight?

NORMAN

Chuck, it's always a better night when you're around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHUCK

You stop! Kristen, what can I get you, hon?

KRISTEN

Just a coke, I guess.

CHUCK

You guys going to be eating tonight?

Norman turns around and looks toward the service window. Then he leans conspiratorially over to Chuck.

NORMAN

Who's in the kitchen?

Chuck responds just as conspiratorially.

CHUCK

Don't worry about it.

NORMAN

Well, I just ate so...how about we split a sampler?

Chuck looks to Kristen for her approval. She nods and he takes their menus.

CHUCK

I'll be back in a few minutes.

Chuck goes off to fulfill his duties.

Norman and Kristen sit in silence for a moment. Then Norman lets out a sigh.

KRISTEN

Norman, I'm sorry about earlier. I really am. I just miss you.

She begins to run her foot up his leg to his crotch.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

I need you around more, baby.

Norman stiffens and forcefully-but-gently moves her foot, shaking his head, no.

NORMAN

Now, if you can just stop that for a second, I'll tell you something. I can't promise that I'll get any more free time. I do have certain obligations.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I can promise that any and all free time will be spent with you. Fair?

KRISTEN

I think that's fair enough. I'll have my lawyers draw up the papers in the morning.

They have a brief laugh.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

Anyway, dear, I'm going to go powder my nose.

NORMAN

(indicating cigarette)

Can you put that thing out before you go? I can only stand so much cancer in one night.

Kristen rolls her eyes and puts out the cigarette.

KRISTEN

Happy?

NORMAN

You've no idea.

She gives him a quick kiss on the lips as she goes to the restroom.

Norman begins looking at the desert menu for lack of anything better to do. He is interrupted by a feminine voice.

VOICE (O.S.)

Interesting reading?

NORMAN

(not looking up)

It says here that states, defined as a social structure in which hierarchial and centralized decision making affected a substantial population, evolved around 3500 BC in greater Mesopotamia, judging by evidence from the early Uruk period in which some fifty settlements all seem to have fit into three groups in terms of size, indicating differing levels of political administration.

The owner of the voice, MICHELLE, is now standing at his side as he finally looks up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She's a beautiful young woman with dark hair and nice curves. She is dressed conservatively but suffers from no shortage of sexiness. If Norman notices it, he makes no indication.

MICHELLE

All that on your desert menu?

NORMAN

Yeah, right here under the picture of the key-lime pie.

MICHELLE

(laughs)

Hi, Norman.

Norman smirks

NORMAN

Hey, Michelle. Did Nikon never call you?

MICHELLE

No, he called. Mind if I sit?

Norman gestures to the seat across from him.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I was actually just going to meet up with him but I thought I'd come over and say hi. How are you doing?

NORMAN

Pretty good, I guess. I mean, for someone who just caught his girlfriend impaled on some jock's dick.

MICHELLE

What? Oh, I'm sorry. Are you okay?

Norman shrugs.

NORMAN

We've kind of patched things up, I guess.

Chuck comes back with a sampler and a coke. He looks at Michelle and back to Norman.

CHUCK

You changed girls on me.

NORMAN

Kristen's in the restroom. This is Michelle. Michelle, Chuck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CHUCK

Nice to meet you. Anything I can get you?

MICHELLE

No, thanks. I was here with some friends, just came over to say hi.

CHUCK

Well let me know if you change your mind. Anything else I can get for you, Norm?

NORMAN

I'm good Chuck, thanks.

Chuck takes his leave.

MICHELLE

So, you two are doing okay? What happened?

INT. DENNY'S RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Kristen walks out of a stall and looks at herself in the mirror. She begins applying some lipstick and, in the mirror, notices a condom machine on the wall behind her. She grins as she finishes applying the lipstick and, on her way out, throws some coins into the machine, extracting a condom.

INT. DENNY'S (NORMAN & MICHELLE) - SAME

Michelle listens as Norman finishes his tale. She has a sympathetic, saddened look.

NORMAN

...I mean, I can see her point. I really should spend more time with her. So, in a way, it is partially my fault.

MICHELLE

But hasn't she done this to you before? A couple of times?

NORMAN

Yeah. Yeah, I know. But I think now we're really starting to go somewhere, know what I mean? If I want the relationship to go anywhere, I need to put in the time. And if I do, then she won't need to...have distractions.

Michelle leans across the table a bit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

Norm, listen to me. You deserve better.
I don't mean to pry, but--

NORMAN

(interrupting)
Then don't.

MICHELLE

Look, I'm sorry. It's just that...

Michelle sees Kristen walk out of the restroom.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'll talk to you later, okay?
I really need to meet up with Nikon.

NORMAN

Sure. Bye.

Michelle has vacated the spot just in time to escape
Kristen's notice.

Kristen sits back down, giving Norman a kiss.

KRISTEN

Miss me?

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT (NIKON'S ROOM) - LATER

Nikon is reclined on his bed, a single mattress sitting
directly on the floor, with his back against an undecorated
wall. Michelle is sitting at the foot of the bed, piles of
clothes and scraps of paper all around. The only other
furniture in the room is a bookcase, completely filled, and a
roughly chair-shaped lump of clothing. Sitting next to Nikon
on the bed is a copy of *Catcher in the Rye*, laid flat open to
keep the place.

MICHELLE

I really don't get it, Nikey. Half an
hour ago, she's screwing some guy on the
beach and ten minutes ago, Norman's
getting defensive because I told him that
he deserves better.

NIKON

"Love can give you wings and you'll soar
through the clouds; but it will take your
eyes, so that you can't see where you're
going."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

Who said that?

NIKON

My dad. That's the advice he gave me when I had my first crush. I was six.

MICHELLE

Well, it fits here, too. Do you know why she cheated on him? Because he's never around. She got lonely. What really bothers me is that he falls for it.

NIKON

They've been together a long time. He wants to fall for it because, really, who wants to have wasted all that time?

MICHELLE

But she won't stop, Nikon. She's going to keep hurting him and he's going to keep falling for her excuses. He really deserves better.

Michelle slumps down, elbows on knees, head in hands. Nikon scoots to the end of the bed and sits with her, putting an arm around her shoulders.

NIKON

Got it pretty bad, huh?

Michelle smiles a sad smile and, with a nod, lets Nikon engulf her in a hug.

MICHELLE

Why do we always love the ones we can't have?

NIKON

Not even dad knew that one.

CUT TO:

INT. DENNY'S - SAME

Norman and Kristen are picking at their sampler, not saying much. Kristen looks up at Norman and grins.

KRISTEN

All this food is making me hungry.

Norman looks up, confusion apparent on his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Then eat it.

KRISTEN

No, silly. I mean it makes me hungry for your dick.

Norman chokes a bit then, with a cough, swallows his food and regains his composure.

NORMAN

Oh, really?

Norman grabs his hot chocolate and moves over to be on the same side of the table as Kristen. He sits down and, with two fingers on her chin, guides Kristen in for a kiss.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

You know, I couldn't help but notice that you weren't wearing matching panties with that skirt.

KRISTEN

I love a man with an eye for detail.

Norman puts his hand on her thigh and begins rubbing. Grabbing his hand, she pushes it higher. Much higher.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - LATER

Nikon and Michelle walk out of Nikon's room, Nikon carrying Catcher In The Rye. They head to the kitchen.

MICHELLE

What do you think I can do to get Norman to notice me?

NIKON

Hell, I don't know. Maybe you should come visit when I'm not here. Then he wouldn't assume you're here to see me.

Nikon opens up the fridge and gets out a couple beers, handing one to Michelle.

MICHELLE

I wish Kristen didn't have him so whipped.

They go into the living room and sit on the couch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

Seriously, what do you see in him,
anyway?

MICHELLE

Actually, when the three of us used to
hang out in high school, I thought he was
an asshole. He was always too involved
in getting stoned to actually associate
with people.

NIKON

We both were.

MICHELLE

At least you talked to me when I was
there.

Nikon shrugs.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

But when you guys started working with
Randall and quit all the drugs, there was
just something there. He had this inner
light. It's weird, I get giddy every
time he smiles. I feel like I'm in
middle school.

NIKON

So tell him.

MICHELLE

I can't.

NIKON

Why not?

MICHELLE

Because I'm a coward.

NIKON

Chelle, even cowards can confess their
love. Trust me.

Michelle straightens noticeably.

MICHELLE

You talked to Sterling?

Nikon nods less-than-enthusiastically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Well?

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nikon is standing in a nice, clean apartment talking to an attractive blonde woman who is sitting on a couch in front of him. Their voices cannot be heard but their body language makes up for that. Nikon shifts his feet, head down, arms unsure where they should be. STERLING looks almost sad, leaning forward with her head tilted to one side as she speaks.

NIKON (V.O.)

Well, I went to her place and we just hung out for a little bit. I tried to be poetic, like dad would have been, telling her how the sun shines brighter when she's there or something but I'm no good at talking. So finally, I just said it.

Nikon, speaking to Sterling, pauses. He draws in a breath, looks up at her and sets his jaw.

NIKON

I'm in love with you.

Sterling's eyes go wide with surprise.

BACK TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michelle's eyes are wide with anticipation. Nikon takes a swig of his beer. Michelle leans forward more. He doesn't get the clue.

MICHELLE

Well, what did she say?

NIKON

Hm? Oh, the usual.

BACK TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

STERLING

Nikon, we're great friends and you know I love you. But not in that way, hon.

Nikon just stands there, blinking a few times.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STERLING (CONT'D)
Sit down, okay?

NIKON
You don't understand.

STERLING
Please?

Nikon sits next to her on the couch.

STERLING (CONT'D)
We've known each other for a long time
and you're one of my best friends. The
truth is, you're much more like a brother
to me.

NIKON
But...when I think about you, I--

He makes an odd gesture with his hands, as if trying to form
the words out of the air in front of him.

NIKON (CONT'D)
I'm just so happy when I'm with you.

Tears begin to roll down Nikon's face. Sterling takes him
into her arms.

STERLING
I'm sorry, Nikey...

BACK TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michelle now has an arm around Nikon.

MICHELLE
Looks like we're both sinking on the same
boat.

NIKON
I'm sinking. You won't even set sail.

Michelle looks down at her lap, biting her bottom lip. Then
she sits up and nods with a smile as she puts her beer down
on the table.

MICHELLE
You're right. How can I whine that I
can't have him if he doesn't even know
how I feel? The next time I see him --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Before Michelle can finish her sentence, Norman and Kristen burst through the door, joined at the mouth, arms darting all over as they try to undress each other.

KRISTEN
(muffled by kisses)
God, I want you to fuck me so bad.

They continue, oblivious to the shocked stares of Nikon and Michelle, undressing each other as they make their way to Norman's room. Shoes are kicked off, one flying to the small table where Nikon and Michelle's beers are, knocking them over with a CRASH.

Nikon and Michelle watch all this in shock.

Not noticing the stares or even that anyone else is in the room, Kristen pulls her tiny belly shirt over her head and Norman kicks off his pants while one hand remains firmly up Kristen's skirt. By the time they reach the door, Norman is wearing one sock and boxers and Kristen is wearing only a short skirt.

The door shuts with a SLAM.

There is a long moment of silence as Nikon and Michelle stare at the door, bewildered. Then Nikon looks down at the spilt beer and broken glass.

NIKON
God damn it.

Nikon goes into the kitchen as Michelle plops onto the couch, burying her face in her hands. Nikon comes back with a broom and dustpan, muttering to himself.

NIKON (CONT'D)
(muttering)
...bastard. Just because you never get laid...got to be a dick...make me clean this shit up...

He holds the dustpan out to Michelle.

NIKON (CONT'D)
Chelle, can you hold this for a sec?

He finally looks up and sees her crying. Putting the broom and dustpan down, he sits next to her on the couch and hugs her close. She melts into him, crying onto his shoulder.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TITLE CARD:

"Then you wipe your mouth from kissing her pussy lips. Fucking her while she fucks you...one of life's little quips."

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - AFTERNOON

Norman and Nikon are wearing soiled aprons, doing dishes. Norman holds up a plate with a good amount of spaghetti left on it. Nikon looks at it, unimpressed. Until Norman turns it upside down and gravity completely fails to do its job. Nikon chuckles slightly but goes back into his silent revelry.

Randall comes in from up front.

RANDALL

Alright, it's two, get the hell out of here.

Nikon immediately dries his hands and goes to hang up his apron. Norman just looks down at the sink in front of him.

NORMAN

I'm not finished.

RANDALL

You put in your two hours during the lunch rush, I think Howie can handle it from here.

Norman shrugs, dries his hands and goes to hang up his apron. Meanwhile, Howie enters, already slipping an apron over his head.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Hey, the wife's going to her sister's, you guys want to do something tonight?

NORMAN

Yeah. I want to sleep.

RANDALL

Nikon?

NIKON

Sorry. Got to talk to a girl.

Norman leans over to Randall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

The blonde.

Randall nods his understanding but Norman and Nikon are already heading out the door. He leans against the edge of the sink where Howie is finishing the dishes.

RANDALL

I never did credit them on their people skills. What are you doing tonight?

HOWIE

Tupperware party.

Randall sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sterling is talking on the phone while she does some tidying up around the apartment. She isn't cleaning, so much as organizing and straightening, being that the apartment is already very clean.

STERLING

Okay, so we'll meet at...how's three thirty? Great! I heard this movie's really good.

She looks up as the doorbell rings.

STERLING (CONT'D)

Hey, I have to let you go, there's someone at the door. Yeah, see you in a bit. Bye.

Sterling hangs up and answers the door, finding Nikon on the other side. She smiles.

STERLING (CONT'D)

Hey, Nikon! Come on in! I just put on some coffee.

Nikon, grinning slightly, accepts her invitation.

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT (KITCHEN) - MOMENTS LATER

Nikon and Sterling sit on either side of the small dining table that resides in the middle of the kitchen, each with a steaming coffee mug in hand.

STERLING

So what's up, sweetie?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

Not too much. Just kinda wanted to talk to you about some stuff.

STERLING

What's on your mind?

NIKON

Well, I don't want you to get upset or anything...

STERLING

Nikon, sweetie... You know I'm always here if you need someone to talk to about anything.

She places a hand on Nikon's hand. He nods slightly.

NIKON

Yeah...I know. It's just...

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts.

NIKON (CONT'D)

Well, when I came by the other day... It didn't exactly turn out like I thought it would.

STERLING

Hon, things like that never turn out the way people think they will. You know I love you. But it's just not that way.

NIKON

I just thought that if maybe --

STERLING

Nikey, please. I really don't feel like talking about this. I know it's just going to hurt your feelings and I don't want to do that.

NIKON

But --

STERLING

Please?

She gives him an imploring look and he puts his head down.

STERLING (CONT'D)

Let's just talk about something else, okay? How's Catcher in the Rye coming along?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nikon shrugs, staring into his coffee.

They sit in silence for a couple moments. Eventually, Sterling goes over and hugs him.

STERLING (CONT'D)
Look, I need to get ready. Me and a friend are going to see a movie and we're supposed to meet in half an hour.

He nods and she walks him to the door.

STERLING (CONT'D)
Cheer up, okay? I don't like seeing you sad.

NIKON
I'll try.

She smiles and kisses him on the cheek.

STERLING
Come see me soon, okay?

NIKON
Sure.

He leaves and Sterling closes the door, letting out a sad kind of sigh.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Norman and Nikon are sitting at the edge of the roof, looking down at the street as they talk. Under Norman's arm is his journal. As he speaks, he absentmindedly twirls a pen between his fingers.

NORMAN
So she wouldn't even let you talk to her about it?

Nikon just shakes his head.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, man. That's really shitty.

Nikon shrugs.

NIKON
Yeah, well... what can you do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

That's the problem with women. You never can tell. I mean, the last woman I knew who's mind I could understand was Mary Singer.

Nikon, apparently thrown off by this, laughs.

NIKON

She had Down's Syndrome!

NORMAN

Exactly! Her motivations were easily apparent. Candy? Sure! Discussion on metaphysics? Pass, thanks. Always an easy one to figure out, that Mary.

Nikon begins laughing nearly uncontrollably and Norman soon falls prey to the giggles himself.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Look, man. It isn't that big a deal. Just give her some time to come around.

NIKON

Yeah. You keep saying that.

NORMAN

Have a little faith. No, wait...what was it? How can you expect other people to believe in you if you don't believe in yourself? That's how it goes, right?

NIKON

You're going to quote my dad at me now?

NORMAN

Seems like he was a smart guy.

NIKON

Yeah. I'll just talk to her again. Catch her in a better mood or something.

NORMAN

If that's what you think is best. Now come on, the sun's going to be up soon and I want to sleep.

Nikon nods and they stand, heading off the roof.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman is standing in the kitchen, the phone to his ear. He is still wearing his wet, dirty apron from work. The phone can be heard RINGING.

KRISTEN (O.S.)
(filtered)
Hello?

NORMAN
Hey, sweetheart. How's things?

KRISTEN (O.S.)
(filtered)
Hey honey. You done with work?

NORMAN
Yeah. Listen, did I wake you?

KRISTEN (O.S.)
(filtered)
Not really, I was just dozing while reading a little, that's all.

NORMAN
Well, I just got off work and had nothing to do, so I was thinking --

KRISTEN (O.S.)
(filtered)
Can you hold on just a sec?

NORMAN
Um, yeah. Sure.

Norman looks around at the dishes piled up in the sink and the overflowing trash can. He groans, sneering at them with contempt. Then, noticing that he still has his apron on, he takes it off, pulling the phone cord as far as it will go to journey into the living room to find a place for it. He eventually puts it on top of the television.

KRISTEN (O.S.)
(filtered)
Sorry, you there?

NORMAN
Yeah. So, listen...I was thinking we could spend some time together, rent a couple movies or something.

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - DAY

Nikon is finishing up the last of the dishes. Drying the last one, he puts it on its stack and dries his hands. He goes over to the row of pegs where the aprons hang, the first two pegs with the words "his" and "hers" written above in marker. Randall comes in behind him as he hangs his apron under "hers." As Nikon looks quizzically at the empty "his" peg, Randall comes up right behind him.

RANDALL

He fuckin' left with his apron on.

Nikon jumps.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman is still on the phone, pacing around.

KRISTEN (O.S.)

(filtered)

Turning over a new leaf, are we?

NORMAN

I promised I would. It'll be nice to see more of you anyway. So, let's say...your place, about forty-five minutes?

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - SAME

Kristen is sitting up in bed, wearing an oversized football jersey. She is still on the phone. Next to her, still asleep, is a naked, well built man. His name is STEVE.

KRISTEN

Sounds good. See you in a little bit.
Bye.

She hangs up the phone and rolls over to the man. She leans down by his ear and gently bites his earlobe.

KRISTEN

Steve, wake up.

He rolls over and puts his arm around her.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

Be quick, okay?

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Nikon is walking down the street reading *Catcher in the Rye*. Flashes of red light occasionally illuminate the wall beside him. The lights go unnoticed until he gets close enough that the light directly catches his eye. He looks up to discover several police cars, an ambulance and a forensics truck in a cordoned off area directly in his path. Looking between two of the cars, he sees a red-stained white sheet covering what can only be a human body. Some police are taking photos and a suspect is being shoved by two cops into the back of a cruiser.

SUSPECT

Get your motherfucking hands off me! I didn't do nothing! I got AIDS, motherfucker! I'll bite you, you want AIDS?! Take your goddamn hands off me!

A police officer steps into Nikon's line of sight.

OFFICER

Take it on down the road, this isn't a peepshow.

NIKON

I live right over--

OFFICER

(interrupting)
Well, you'll have to go around.

NIKON

But--

OFFICER

Around.

Nikon nods and starts off down a side alley.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Nikon continues down the alley looking less-than-pleased with the police. He glances over his shoulder at the blue and red lights that are still dancing behind him and trips over something, falling face-first to the ground.

NIKON

Ow. Fuck.

He gets into a sitting position and brushes off his hands, noticing that he skinned his palms. As he looks at his hands, he sees, just past them, what he tripped over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A beat up old record player. He crawls over to it, a huge smile on his face.

NIKON

Holy shit! Look at you!

He looks around and, noticing that it was part of a pile of old newspapers and broken shelving, picks it up. He stands and, looking over the record player one more time, sprints off toward home.

CUT TO:

INT NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman walks out of the bathroom brushing his teeth. He goes to the coffee table and picks up his wallet and puts it in his pocket before continuing his brushing. On his way to his room, the front door flies open, nearly knocking the toothbrush down his throat. As he is about to punch whoever just burst through the door, he notices that it's Nikon and stops himself.

NORMAN

Nikko, whf th ffu--

He goes in the bathroom and spits out the toothpaste.

NORMAN

Nikon, what the fuck are you doing, man?
You almost killed me.

NIKON

Dude, check this out.

Nikon goes over to the stereo and begins to hook the record player in.

Norman, toothbrush still in hand, peers over Nikon's shoulder.

NORMAN

Is that what I think it is?

NIKON

It is if you think it's a record player.

NORMAN

Can I ask you a serious question?

NIKON

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

What do we need with a record player? We have tapes and CDs.

NIKON

We have seven CDs and one tape.

NORMAN

And zero records.

Nikon runs into his room, returning a moment later with a copy of John Lennon / Plastic Ono band. He runs one finger over the record player's needle. It emits a SCRATCH. He turns to Norman and, with a haughty air, pulls the record from its sleeve.

NIKON

Correction. Seven CDs, one tape and one record. Now sit down and listen to this one song.

NORMAN

I can't. I'm meeting Kristen. Where did you get the record, anyway?

Nikon puts the record on the turntable, turns around and looks Norman directly in the eye.

NIKON

It was the last thing my dad gave me before he died.

Norman immediately sits down.

NORMAN

What am I listening to?

NIKON

John Lennon.

NORMAN

That fucking peace-freak-hippie-granola-bastard?

Nikon finds the track and puts it on. It fades in slowly, as per its nature.

NIKON

It's a song called "Love."

Nikon sits on the floor and, closing his eyes, soundlessly mouths every word to the song. Norman, meanwhile, listens to the song with rapt attention.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The song finally ends and Nikon removes the needle from the record. When he looks over at Norman, the latter's eyes are wide, staring off into nothing.

NIKON
Norman, you okay?

Norman looks up at Nikon, snapping out of his daze.

NORMAN
Your dad gave that to you?

NIKON
I was twelve and my first girlfriend, Sarah, had just broken up with me. So of course, I went to my dad and asked him how you knew you were in love.

NORMAN
We all think we're in love with the first one.

NIKON
Exactly. Dad said that men far greater than him had come up short on words when it came to love. He said there was someone who could explain it in simple, universal terms. He gave me the record and told me to listen to the track called love. It changed my life.

NORMAN
(to himself)
I think it just changed mine.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"I have taken life by the hand. It's fragile like the hourglass sand."

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kristen's front door opens and Norman steps out. Behind him in only a tee shirt is Kristen with a big smile on her face and mussed hair.

KRISTEN
Baby, do you have to go?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

I told Nikey I'd go to Perk with him.
He's been having some girl troubles
lately and he needs a friend.

Kristen gently rubs Norman's crotch and leans in close.

KRISTEN

I need a friend, too.

She licks his lips.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

Be my friend?

Norman puts a finger to her lips and takes a small step back.

NORMAN

The friend you want is a bit sore right
now.

KRISTEN

Damn it, Norman! You spend so much time
with that moron, why can't you just stay
a little longer?

NORMAN

I told you. He's a bit depressed right
now and he needs a friend.

KRISTEN

He's always depressed. He's like a
walking buzzkill.

NORMAN

Okay, that's enough, sweetie.

He gives her a nice, passionate kiss.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to my friend now, but maybe
I'll stop back later, okay?

KRISTEN

I guess that's fair.

NORMAN

Good. See you later. I love you.

KRISTEN

See ya.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Kristen goes in and closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT. PERK - NIGHT

Norman and Nikon are sitting at a small, round table near the serving counter of Perk, which is toward the back. By the look of the place, an honest health inspector has never set foot through its doors.

The patrons have a general inclination toward either black clothes or the billowy skirts and blouses of the modern hippie. Nearer the door, looking more than a little out of place in this environment, is a table of four young men dressed in polo shirts and button-up sweaters.

A small Jewish man, DOMINIC, approaches Norman and Nikon's table, setting a cup of coffee in front of each of them.

DOMINIC

Norman, Nikon. How you fellas doing tonight?

NORMAN

I'd say we're doing pretty good right now, Dom.

DOMINIC

Good to hear.

Dominic turns at the sound of loud laughter erupting from the table with the frat boys.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Listen, you fellas know those guys over there?

Norman and Nikon both look over at the table then at each other, shaking their heads.

NORMAN

Never seen them. They causing trouble?

DOMINIC

No... They're just not the type I usually get in here. Oh, well. Money's money, right?

With that, Dom goes back behind the counter. Norman and Nikon, both glancing again at the frat boy table, look back at each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

They are kinda polluting the atmosphere here.

NORMAN

At least we can't hear them from here. Probably sports talk made up of more numbers than words. Fucking morons.

INT. PERK - FAVORING FRAT BOYS

Sitting at this table are JARED, MATT, KYLE and Kristen's new paramour, Steve. They are all laughing and drinking beers and, as Norman surmised, talking sports.

JARED

What are you talking about? They're 15 and 2!

MATT

Yeah, and Dallas is 17 and 0 and their new runningback already has over a thousand yards under his belt so far this season alone!

STEVE

Will both of you shut the fuck up?

MATT

What's your problem?

Steve motions to the table where Norman and Nikon are sitting.

STEVE

Check out who it is.

KYLE

Uh-oh. It's the vampires!

Laughter erupts from the group.

Steve quiets them with a wave of his hand.

STEVE

No, no. Look, the one on the right. That's the sorry piece of shit that Kristen's fucking.

JARED

I thought you were the sorry piece of shit that Kristen's fucking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The group once again erupts into a fit of laughter. Steve smiles.

STEVE
Bitch, I'm the God that Kristen's
fucking.

Still more laughter at this and Steve high-fives Kyle.

STEVE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna go tell him how lucky he is to
get my sloppy seconds.

Standing, he goes through a round of reverent frat boy handshakes and high-fives before walking toward Norman and Nikon's table.

INT. PERK - FAVORING NORMAN AND NIKON

NORMAN
So what did you do while I was at
Kristen's?

NIKON
Well, John Lennon inspired me.

NORMAN
So you went to Sterling's?

NIKON
No, it was too far to walk just to get
shot down, so I called her.

Steve walks up to their table, but the duo never even glances up at him.

NORMAN
And what's going on there?

NIKON
We didn't really talk about....you know.
But she promised we could get together
and talk soon.

NORMAN
Well, that's a start.

STEVE
Hi.

NORMAN
Hi, maybe you didn't notice me ignoring
you? What the fuck do you want?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nikon busies himself doodling on a napkin.

STEVE

You're Norman, right? You went to Township of Hayden?

NORMAN

What are you, a fan?

STEVE

Man, you are so fucking sad.

NORMAN

You're right, my fan club used to have a higher quality of people.

STEVE

I got a fan club too, you know.

NORMAN

Congratulations. Goodbye.

STEVE

The president of my fan club is your girlfriend.

Nikon looks up from his doodle to Norman, who just stares coldly at Steve.

STEVE (CONT'D)

About the time you were walking to her place today, she was wrapped around my cock, telling me she wished her boyfriend was half as good as me. So if she calls you Steve, it's just wishful thinking.

NORMAN

Wishful thinking? Wishful thinking is the thought that she'll ever want to see you again. She said you were good in bed to make you think your infant-dick is more than it is. She's real charitable that way. But she's done her good deed for this year so I don't think your phone will be ringing. Me, she keeps around because I've got a huge fucking dick. Now, you want me to whip it out and smack you around a little with it, or are you gonna go sit back down with your closeted girlfriends over there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STEVE

Damn, you are one clueless bitch. Just remember when she screams my name, how pathetic you are.

He goes back to the frat pack.

Norman is seething. Veins stand out on his forehead. His jaw clenches and unclenches noticeably. Nikon looks concerned.

NIKON

Uh....you okay?

NORMAN

Sure. Why wouldn't I be?

From across the shop, the Frat Pack all start chanting in mock-orgasm:

FRAT PACK

Steve! Oh, Steve!! HARDER!

Norman stands, fists clenched at his sides, but before he can advance, Dom is standing halfway between him and the jocks.

DOMINIC

Get the fuck out. Your business isn't welcome here.

JARED

And if we want to finish our coffee?

KYLE

Yeah, you gonna call the cops?

DOMINIC

If I do, it'll be to report a shooting.

Dominic opens his vest to reveal a .38 in a shoulder holster.

STEVE

Let's go. This guy's coffee sucks anyway.

With that, the frat pack leaves. Norman glares after them, jaw and fists clenched, knuckles white.

NIKON

Norman. Let's go home, man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NORMAN

Sure. Sure. I just have to do one thing first.

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

KRISTEN'S DOOR. A hand comes into frame and POUNDS on the door. After a moment, Kristen opens it, dressed in a tee shirt and boxers. When she sees Norman, who was the owner of the pounding hand, she smiles.

KRISTEN

Back already? I knew you couldn't resist me.

NORMAN

Sure. Who's Steve?

KRISTEN

What?

NORMAN

You heard me. Steve. Tell me a story.

He walks right past her on into the apartment and has a seat on the couch.

KRISTEN

What kind of story do you want?

NORMAN

I want a story about a guy named Steve.

KRISTEN

I don't know any Steve.

Norman stands up, glaring at her.

NORMAN

Don't fuck with me Kristen! Who the fuck is Steve!

She says nothing.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Let me help; Tall guy, dark hair, fucked my girlfriend this afternoon! Sound familiar?

KRISTEN

Norman--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

What the fuck do I have to do? What can make you be a good girlfriend? Anything? Is there anything at all, or is this just always going to happen?

KRISTEN

I--

NORMAN

Shut the fuck up! Just shut up! I don't want to hear any of your goddamned excuses! I'm a good guy and I'm a good boyfriend. You're just a dick-craving slut.

Kristen starts crying.

KRISTEN

Norman, please...

NORMAN

Please what? You want my dick now?

He goes over to her and sandwiches her between him and the wall.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

You want me to fuck you? I'll fuck your goddamn brains out! Come on, you want that? You want me to fuck you so hard that no other dick will ever do? Will that make you faithful? Will that teach you some fucking fidelity?!

Kristen is now bawling uncontrollably. Norman releases her and she drops to her knees.

KRISTEN

I -- I just...

Norman looks down at her, rage in his eyes. Kristen looks up at him, tears streaming down her face.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)

Norman, you're scaring me.

Norman's face immediately lightens and he drops to her side.

NORMAN

I--I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She embraces him tightly, crying.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Nikon is walking down the street, his nose in a book.

A CAR creeps up slowly behind him and HONKS its horn loudly.

Nikon jumps and whirls around.

MICHELLE

Hey, sweetie.

NIKON

Jesus. You scared the hell out of me.

MICHELLE

You seemed too absorbed in your book. I thought I'd bring you back to the real world.

NIKON

Thanks. You have now reminded me that heart attacks exist.

MICHELLE

Drama queen. Get in.

NIKON

Where are we going?

MICHELLE

It's a surprise.

NIKON

Like that last one?

MICHELLE

Just get in.

Nikon gets in and they drive off.

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - SAME

Norman is still on his knees on the floor. He has a blank expression on his face and Kristen is still wrapped around him, though he does not return the embrace.

After a moment, Kristen slowly disengages and looks sullenly at the floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN
Why, Kristen?

KRISTEN
I don't know.

NORMAN
Yes you do. You do.

KRISTEN
It's hard, Norman. It's so hard to be good when all these guys are always hitting on me. They make me feel good for a little while. You always seem too busy.

NORMAN
Did I seem too busy when I was on the way over here to see you? I mean, that's when you fucked Steve, right?

KRISTEN
He came over last night and...

NORMAN
(interrupting)
And you fucked him last night, let him sleep over, then fucked him again right before I came over?

Kristen remains silent, fidgeting with the carpet.

NORMAN
Jesus Christ. Why do you even bother having me around? I obviously mean nothing to you.

KRISTEN
That isn't true. Look, just give me one more chance, please. I'll be good to you. You've been trying to be good to me, and I need to do the same.

She touches his face gently. He flinches slightly as if to pull away, but allows it in the end.

KRISTEN (CONT'D)
I just... When these guys come over and hang out, they start off just flirting but it gets to be more than flirting and before I know it...

She casts a glance at the doorway to the bedroom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN
...You fuck them.

KRISTEN
God, that sounds so bad.

NORMAN
It is bad. I love you, Kristen. When you fuck these guys, it crushes me. You're my girlfriend. Two and a half years we've been together. How am I supposed to trust you?

KRISTEN
Please try. One more time, that's all. I don't deserve it, but I'm asking. I don't want to throw away those two and a half years.

Norman sighs.

NORMAN
Neither do I.

He takes her into his arms. They stay embraced like that for a moment, and then she creeps up slowly to whisper in his ear.

KRISTEN
(whispering)
Love me.

She moves his hand to her breast as they begin to kiss.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Nikon and Michelle enter a large studio space that is splattered with paint of all colors. Canvases of varying sizes are leaned in groups against walls, a few on easels.

NIKON
This is the surprise? I've been here. I thought you were taking me to Disney World or something.

MICHELLE
No, I want to show you something.

Nikon looks around at the immediate area.

NIKON
What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

Are you in a rush? Why don't you sit down and have a cup of coffee first?

NIKON

I just left the coffee shop. And I've got like eight pages left in Catcher in the Rye. I want to finish it.

Michelle looks slightly apprehensive, chewing on her lower lip.

MICHELLE

Okay. I'm just not sure if you'll like it.

NIKON

What is it?

MICHELLE

It's my latest piece. It'll be going in my next show.

NIKON

Okay. Let's see it.

Michelle goes to one of the easels and takes the canvas off, carrying it to Nikon so that the painted side faces away from him. She turns it around to reveal a painting of a figure in black and grey sitting in a chair and reading a book whose cover is in bright reds and yellows. The figure is surrounded by a lot of white canvas.

NIKON

Is that me?

MICHELLE

It's called "The Quiet Type."

NIKON

Is it me?

Michelle nods.

MICHELLE

Well, it's supposed to be, anyway.

NIKON

It's great! Do I look like that?

MICHELLE

I tried to paint your personality more than anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nikon looks at the painting in a contemplative way.

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman and Kristen are having sex in Kristen's bed. Drenched in sweat, Norman doesn't look to be enjoying a moment of it. His face is snarled into a grimace of contempt and there's nothing sensual about the way he performs. It is pure, raw, angry sex. He thrusts into her as if trying to abuse her from the inside out.

Kristen loves it. She SCREAMS in delight. Norman gets all the rougher for it, his teeth clenching as he thrusts ever harder, sweat now running down his face. This is the face that Jack the Ripper wore when he killed.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Nikon and Michelle are sitting on the couch, listening to jazz and sipping on hot chocolate.

MICHELLE

Do you think Norman and Kristen ever just sit around like this and hang out like friends?

NIKON

Well, friends that are perpetually joined at the genitals.

MICHELLE

That's kind of sad. I mean, what's the point of being with someone if you can't just enjoy their company? I wouldn't like a boyfriend who I wouldn't be comfortable just sitting around and doing nothing with.

NIKON

Kristen's not the type to do nothing. If she's not doing something, she's having someone do something to her.

MICHELLE

That's repulsive. Norman can do so much better.

NIKON

With any luck, he's dumping that bitch as we speak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

What happened?

NIKON

He got a couple wake up calls today.

MICHELLE

She cheated on him again?!

NIKON

That was wake up number two. Before that, he had something of an epiphany. He's probably dumping her right now and then maybe he'll come knocking on your door.

MICHELLE

That's not as important as just getting away from her. He's obviously not happy.

NIKON

Holy shit.

MICHELLE

What?

NIKON

You really love him.

MICHELLE

Yeah. I really do. And it really sucks.

Nikon lies down on the couch, putting his feet up on Michelle's lap.

NIKON

Well, I think tonight is the beginning of a new page for Norman.

Nikon YAWNS loudly.

MICHELLE

Go to sleep, Nikey.

NIKON

Uh-huh.

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman tiptoes out of the bedroom wearing only a pair of pants and carrying his journal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He walks into the kitchen, grabbing a pen off the breakfast bar and sitting down at the small dining room table.

He opens the journal, turns to the last entry and begins writing. The contents of the journal entry are expressed through half-transparent overlays of Norman's hand writing and a slightly ECHOED VOICE-OVER.

NORMAN (V.O.)

Why? Why the hell do I love her so much? Sometimes I think she isn't any good at all. But do I see love in her eyes when I'm not looking? Or am I looking for love in her eyes and not seeing it? She cheats, she sleeps with other men. Why? Why the hell does she do this? I see her in my dreams, the keeper of the cord. With every man she fucks, the thickness of his dick is added to the thickness of the cord. She plugs it in and the current of pain hits that much harder. Will she ever stop? I just need someone to unplug the cord, throw it away, cut it up. How can I make her that girl? How can I make her stop cheating? When will she realize that I love her and I'm serious about being with her? How can I show her? Van Gough cut off his earlobe. Hinkley shot Reagan. That's a bit extreme. All my dad had to do was propose. ...Propose. Marriage. What could be more serious than marriage? For better or worse, till death do us part, a wedding band to stop the current of pain through the ever-thickening cord. At the altar, she'll unplug the cord when she says "I do."

Norman stops writing and looks at the page for a few moments. Finally, he grins and closes the journal and walks back into the room, where he climbs back into bed with Kristen.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Michelle finishes up washing the hot chocolate mugs, goes over to the turntable and takes the needle off the jazz record, and goes to turn off the light next to the couch where Nikon is still asleep. She stops with her hand still on the pull-chain and looks at Nikon, a small smile playing on her face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

So sweet.

She covers him up with a blanket and kisses him on the forehead.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Goodnight, Moon.

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Kristen is sleeping alone in the bed while Norman finishes dressing in the background. He leans down and kisses her on the cheek and heads out the door, a small smile on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL - DAY

Norman walks in, and goes to the bar, behind which Randall is calling an order through to Howie in the kitchen. As Randall turns around, Norman greets him loudly.

NORMAN

Hi!

Randall jumps slightly, inciting laughter from Norman.

RANDALL

How many times do I have to tell you not to do that?

NORMAN

Just a few more, I think.

RANDALL

Yeah, you've been saying that for six months.

NORMAN

I'm no good with numbers.

Randall points to the clock.

RANDALL

How about those numbers? You were supposed to be here two hours ago.

NORMAN

Well, I would have been here two hours ago if this weren't my day off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Randall looks confused for a moment before turning and yelling into the kitchen.

RANDALL
Howie! Is it Norman and Nikon's day off?

HOWIE
Yeah, just like seven days ago.

NORMAN
And fourteen days ago.

HOWIE
And twenty-one days ago.

NORMAN
And twenty-ei

RANDALL
(interrupting)
I thought you were no good with numbers.

NORMAN
It comes and goes. Where's my sandwich?

RANDALL
Aren't we pushy? Hey Howie, --

As he turns to the kitchen window, Howie sets a plate with a sandwich on it down and inclines his head to Norman.

RANDALL (CONT'D)
Thanks.

He gives Norman his food.

RANDALL (CONT'D)
Here's your damn sandwich. Where the hell were you guys this morning, I came by to drop some breakfast off with you guys.

NORMAN
I was at my girl's. Wait, Nikon wasn't there?

RANDALL
If he was, he didn't answer the door.

NORMAN
That's odd. Wait! I think he said something about going to see Sterling!

Howie pops his head through the order window.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWIE

The blonde.

He disappears.

RANDALL

I know!

NORMAN

Maybe he got hooked up! I'm going to run over there and see if he closed the deal.

He grabs the sandwich off the plate and shoves as much as he can into his mouth as he disappears out the door, carrying the rest with him.

Randall just stares, dumbfounded, after him until a customer rouses him.

CUSTOMER

Excuse me, you can stop now.

RANDALL

What?

Randall notices he's been pouring coffee into a mug until it overflowed all over the counter.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Oh. Sorry.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sterling opens the door to find Norman there.

STERLING

Norman! Hi. Come on in.

Norman walks in, looking around.

NORMAN

Is Nikon here?

STERLING

No, I haven't seen him.

NORMAN

Oh. I thought you guys were supposed to hang out.

STERLING

Yeah, but in a couple days.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Oh. Well I wonder where he is then.

STERLING

While you're here, you think I could talk to you for a minute?

NORMAN

Sure.

He sits down on the couch.

STERLING

Can I get you anything? Coke, coffee?

NORMAN

I'm good, thanks. What's up?

She sits beside him.

STERLING

Well, it's Nikon.

NORMAN

Uh-oh.

STERLING

No, there's no "uh-oh," it's just that he really wants to go out with me, but I'd really rather just be friends.

NORMAN

I thought you guys were going to talk over that stuff when you hang out. How do you know that he won't show you some side of himself that you've never seen before?

STERLING

Well, let's consider that a possibility. But let's also consider the greater possibility that my mind won't be changed and I have to break that news to him. Again. How do I do it? I don't want to hurt him, I really don't.

NORMAN

I don't know.

STERLING

Come on, you know him better than anyone. I really like him a lot, Norman but he's always been a friend.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STERLING (CONT'D)

He's about the only good friend I've ever had that stuck through the bad times, but somehow we still never got all that close.

Norman runs his fingers through his hair with a sigh.

NORMAN

Look, try this: instead of telling him how you don't feel about him as a lover, tell him how you do feel about him as a friend.

STERLING

Positive reinforcement.

NORMAN

Exactly. You have to keep with the positive with Nikon, because he really broods on negative things. So if you have something negative to tell him, do it in a positive way.

STERLING

Thanks Norman. I think that's the best advice I've had yet.

NORMAN

But it's going to cost you a favor.

STERLING

What's that?

NORMAN

Hear him out. And really think over what he says. He's a good guy.

STERLING

I know. I know he is.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nikon comes in, staggering slightly and looking bleary-eyed. He walks into his room and puts Catcher in the Rye on a shelf and picks out Gravity's Rainbow. He looks at his bed as if he's in love with it, looks down at his book, back to the bed then back to his book. He nods and heads into the living room, sits on the couch and opens the book.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - DAY

Michelle is in boxers and a paint-splattered white tee shirt. She is painting on a large canvas, though what she is painting can't be seen. She makes large brush strokes, while "Jackie" by the Dollyrots blasts on the radio. She steps aside, revealing the painting. It is the small figure of a man, floating naked in a sea of flame which is erupting from a gaping vagina below him. She observes the painting for a moment before dipping her brush in paint and signing the painting in the corner.

MICHELLE

There you go, Norman. You're immortal.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman and Sterling are sitting on the couch, looking much more at ease than before.

STERLING

It's really been forever since you and I hung out at all.

NORMAN

I know. It has to have been since high school.

STERLING

It hasn't been that long.

NORMAN

Last time I remember really hanging out with you was right before Nikon and I dropped out. We went over to your house and your friend was there.

STERLING

What friend?

NORMAN

Um, black hair. Green eyes...

Norman makes the international hand gesture that means "big boobs."

STERLING

Danielle!

NORMAN

Yeah!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STERLING

I remember! You kept trying to fool her into grabbing your crotch.

STERLING AND NORMAN

(in unison)

"Help me brush these crumbs off."

They fall into laughter.

STERLING

We have hung out since then, though.

NORMAN

When?

STERLING

You, Nikon and I all went to the county fair and you decided that the big prize pig was a ride and you got us all kicked out.

NORMAN

That was you that was hanging out with us?! I've been trying to figure that out forever!

STERLING

Oh, thanks.

NORMAN

No, you don't understand, I was so fucked up that for about six months I was convinced that Nikon and I had been hanging out with R.E.M. that day!

STERLING

The whole band?

NORMAN

Yeah.

Sterling puts her head in her hands and laughs. Norman checks his watch.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Well, on that note, I think I'd better try to find Nikon.

STERLING

Okay. Have fun. And stop by again, okay?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

Will do.

They hug and Norman leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nikon is still on the couch, his head tilted back and his mouth open in a quiet snore. Gravity's Rainbow is in his lap, one limp hand on top of it keeping it open. The record player is emitting a rhythmic scratching noise as the needle goes around the blank space before the label.

The door opens and Norman enters.

NORMAN

Punk! Where have you been?

Nikon jumps and drops his book.

NIKON

What? I'm just reading.

NORMAN

You reading porn?

NIKON

No. Pynchon. Why?

NORMAN

You're drooling.

Nikon hastily wipes his mouth. Norman goes and takes the record off the turntable, puts it in it's sleeve and puts it on the coffee table.

NIKON

Guess I fell asleep.

NORMAN

You think? Let's get some food. I spent all afternoon looking for your ass. I'm hungry.

NIKON

Food.

Nikon stands up and they head to the door.

NORMAN

Yes, food. And what's that thing by the door called?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

Fuck you.

NORMAN

No, I'm afraid it's called a "pic-true."

They leave.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - LATE AFTERNOON

Michelle is stacking paintings of various sizes against walls while talking on the phone.

MICHELLE

Well, I've got about thirty pieces that we can put out this time.

She stops as she comes across her painting of Nikon. She moves it to the side and puts a "Not For Sale" card on it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Most of them are new. I didn't do too bad at the last show. There is one I'd like to be just for show, though. It's a gift for a friend... Great, thanks. Hey, I have to go. I'll send you a list of the pieces and prices tomorrow... Okay, bye.

She grabs her keys and heads out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Michelle is driving and singing along to "This Crush" by the Dollyrots. She pulls up and parks at Randall's Grill.

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Michelle knocks on the door. When there is no answer she knocks again. When there is still no answer, she tries the knob and opens the door.

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Michelle pokes her head in the door.

MICHELLE

Nikey?

She walks in and closes the door behind her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Norman? I swear if you guys jump out and scare me, I'm going to kill you.

She sighs and sits on the couch. She then notices the John Lennon / Plastic Ono Band album sitting on the coffee table.

She picks it up and looks at the track listing, not noticing Norman and Nikon walk in behind her.

NORMAN

Nikon, someone broke in to see you.

Michelle jumps.

MICHELLE

Christ. Hey guys. The door was...

NORMAN

It always is. Don't worry about it.

Nikon gives Michelle a hug.

NIKON

Hey Chele.

MICHELLE

Hey. I saw this on the table...would it be okay if I put it on?

NIKON

Sure.

NORMAN

Not too loud, okay? I'm going to take a nap for a while.

MICHELLE

No problem.

Michelle goes to the record player and cues up a song as Norman heads to his room. Just as he's getting ready to close his door, he notices that the song is "Love" and he goes back out to the living room.

Michelle is sitting on the floor, a huge smile on her face. As John starts singing, she sings along. A smile creeps on Norman's face and he watches her sing along.

Nikon sees how Norman is looking at Michelle and retreats into his room, unnoticed by the others.

Michelle opens her eyes and looks up. Seeing Norman standing there, she smiles a little nervously.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MICHELLE

I love this song.

NORMAN

Yeah, you know all the words.

MICHELLE

I do. It's probably one of the best love songs ever written.

Norman sits down next to her. His eyes move over her as if seeing her for the first time.

NORMAN

I think I'd have to agree.

Their eyes meet as "love" gently fades out. They just look at one another like that, small smiles on their face until "Well Well Well" starts, the record skipping the first chord over and over again. This breaks the spell.

NORMAN

Well, I guess I'd better take that nap.

Norman stands and helps Michelle up.

MICHELLE

Now where did Nikon get to?

NORMAN

(yelling)

Nikon! Get out here and stop being rude. You have company.

Nikon comes out, peeking around the corner for a second first.

MICHELLE

What were you doing in there?

NIKON

I was, um--

NORMAN

Jacking off.

The group erupts into brief laughter.

NIKON

Norman, you know I can't jack off anymore.

NORMAN

Oh? Why not?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NIKON

Because we threw away all the good pictures of your mom.

After another burst of laughter, Norman flips Nikon the bird and goes to his room.

NORMAN

Nikon, are we still going to Perk later?

NIKON

I don't see why not.

NORMAN

Good. Bring your friend.

MICHELLE

Why, Norman; an official invite to a public place? You are too gracious, M'lord.

She bows low. Norman smiles.

NORMAN

Yes. Definitely bring her. I'm going to sleep.

He closes the door. Michelle turns to Nikon.

MICHELLE

Let's go.

NIKON

Where?

MICHELLE

I was thinking the park.

Nikon shrugs. They leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Nikon and Michelle are sitting on a bench beside a lake, a small brown paper bag between them. They take bread crumbs out of the bag and toss them to the ducks as they talk.

MICHELLE

So it looks like everything's set for my show next week. Are you going to be there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

If you want me to be, I guess.

MICHELLE

You'd better be there with bells on. I'm going to need you for emotional support, so no disappearing halfway through the show.

NIKON

Okay.

MICHELLE

And what's the deal with disappearing and leaving me all alone with Norman? That was uncomfortable.

Nikon smiles widely.

NIKON

You loved it.

MICHELLE

Whatever. Why did you hide in your room?

NIKON

You should have seen the way he looked at you when you started singing that song.

MICHELLE

What do you mean?

NIKON

There was just something in his eyes. He doesn't look at girls like that. I'm not saying he suddenly fell in love or anything, but there was something there.

MICHELLE

He was probably tired and trying to focus his eyes.

Nikon rolls his eyes.

NIKON

You never know. Your time could be coming.

MICHELLE

You know, I really thought it would come when Kristen first cheated on him.

NIKON

It should have.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MICHELLE

I fantasized the whole scenario. I'd go over to see him and he'd be depressed because bitch-whore doesn't know what she has and we'd talk and I'd make him laugh. And then he'd kiss me. And the story unfolds from there.

NIKON

You only fantasize up to the first kiss?

MICHELLE

It's the best point. It's the hardest part of any relationship to reach. If you have one of those classic first kisses where both people look into each other's eyes and the kiss is a mutual thing that serendipitously happens at that moment, then you know the rest of the story. People don't have a kiss like that and not end up together.

NIKON

I guess we're just fantasizing for different reasons.

She laughs and hits his arm.

NIKON (CONT'D)

Besides, that time may be here. I still don't know if he's dumped Kristen, but he sure as hell seems happy today. Can I ask you a question?

Michelle nods.

NIKON (CONT'D)

Why Norman?

Michelle thinks for a moment.

MICHELLE

Why Yoko Ono? Why Eva Braun or Juliet or even Sterling? I don't know. There are just some things we can't control. If we could control them, do you think the two of us would be sitting here, each in love with someone who doesn't feel the same, when it would really make sense just to love each other?

NIKON

Okay... But what is there about him that you love?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MICHELLE

Well, he's funny, he's smart, he's kinda cute. And he doesn't seem to really care what anyone thinks about him. He just is who he is and screw you if you don't like it. You're a bit like that, too; sitting there, quietly judging the world.

NIKON

What do you mean?

MICHELLE

Sometimes I like to just watch you and try to figure out what you're thinking. Most of the time I figure that you're looking at everyone that walks by and judging them in some small way. And I see you listening to people's conversations for no reason other than the fact that they can't keep their voices down. And every so often, your lip will twist into a little sneer because you can't bear to be on the same planet with people so insipid. And then the sneer turns into a little impish smile because you're thinking about how they have no idea how goddamn stupid they are.

Nikon just stares at her for a second.

NIKON

No one's ever read me so perfectly before. I think I like it.

Michelle smiles and Nikon leans in and kisses her. She is surprised at first, but returns the kiss. The kiss is short lived and they back up, and look at one another.

NIKON

You know those serendipitous kisses you were talking about a minute ago?

MICHELLE

Yeah.

NIKON

I don't think that was one of them.

MICHELLE

No.

She puts her hand on his.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

You and I would be a convenient couple,
but not a real one.

NIKON

It's like a sick practical joke. Two
lonely single people who would be perfect
together but have no feelings for one
another.

MICHELLE

That's us, victims of a joke made by a
God neither of us believes in.

NIKON

Amen.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"Someone infiltrated my path of electrical pain."

CUT TO:

EXT. PERK - NIGHT

Norman, Nikon and Michelle are sitting at an outside table.
Dominic comes out carrying a drink for each of them and sets
them around the table. The trio are already in conversation.

NORMAN

Oh, here's the man! Dominic "Dirty
Harry" Goldberg!

DOMINIC

Stop, you'll make me blush.

NORMAN

Tell Michelle about your tough-guy
antics.

DOMINIC

Oh, come off it.

MICHELLE

Please?

DOMINIC

Okay. Hold on, I have to get in
character.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He turns around and does the readjusting that comic impersonators seem to find necessary before turning into Jack Nicholson.

NIKON

Dom tells the best stories.

Dominic turns around, his brow low and mouth turned down, looking as much like an australopithecus as humanly possible. He switches between this and a haughty face as he impersonates both Steve and Norman, the latter in a snobbish, British accent.

DOMINIC

(Steve)

You Norman?

DOMINIC

(Norman)

Why no, dear sir, I am but a humble coffee patron attempting to enjoy my evening.

DOMINIC

(Steve)

Me am Thag!

DOMINIC

(Norman)

Congratulations! You win a cruise for two back to your table.

DOMINIC

(Steve)

Thag fuck girl!

DOMINIC

(Norman)

And I'm sure we can all see your exploits on the nature channel. Now please leave as your noxious breath is taking away from my enjoyment of this fine coffee as prepared by world renowned coffee aficionado Dominic Goldberg.

DOMINIC

(Steve)

Thag fuck Norman's girl!

DOMINIC

(Norman)

This is an outrage sir! I demand satisfaction on the field of honour!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dominic acts as if he is jumping into the scene anew as he introduces a new character, a dashing hero-type.

DOMINIC

BOM BA-DAAAAAM!!!! Hold! Sir Norman, I shall away with this vile excuse for humanity! But Lo! His friends come to his aid! No matter, I shall vanquish them all with my golden coffee spoon of righteousness! Away, vile fiends! Back to the pits of darkness from whence ye came!

DOMINIC

(Norman)

Lord Dominic, thou art the savior of the realm and in reward, maybe I'll pay off my tab before thou art withered with age and can no longer spend such a bounty!

Dominic becomes his normal self once again.

DOMINIC

And the day was saved. The end.

Norman, Nikon and Michelle applaud, accompanied by a few people from other tables. Dominic bows low.

DOMINIC

Now, uh, about that last part of the story...

NORMAN

Good luck, I'm broke.

DOMINIC

Oh, well, we can't all get the happy ending.

He goes back inside.

MICHELLE

Wow, no wonder you guys love this place. So how accurate was that rendition?

NIKON

I felt like it was happening all over again, I really did.

NORMAN

Oh, yeah. Dom has an amazing memory for detail.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

If there was anything I remembered differently, it was due to my flawed memory. That was exactly how it went down.

MICHELLE

Right. I guess I'll have to take your word for it.

They just sit and sip their coffee for a moment.

NIKON

Golden coffee spoon of righteousness.

They fall into a fit of the giggles. Norman even chokes on his coffee.

EXT. PERK - LATER

Norman, Nikon and Michelle are sitting around the same table as before, except that it's barely visible beneath a stack of coffee mugs and pastry plates. There are only a few other patrons left by this time, most of the tables now abandoned for beds.

NORMAN

No, no, no. Gone With the Wind should win an award for being the most overrated film of all time.

MICHELLE

What are you smoking? It's a classic!

NORMAN

It's a classicly long example of how boring a film can be. The only thing that redeems it at all is the art direction. It's just beautifully composed, visually.

MICHELLE

You just hate it because everyone loves it.

NORMAN

Not true. Anyone worth the oxygen they breathe loves Citizen Kane.

MICHELLE

And you agree?

NIKON

Don't get him started.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Of course I agree. Not only does it have a great, engaging story, but it's just as beautifully filmed as *Gone With the Wind* even though it's not in color. In addition to that, it's probably the ballsiest film ever made.

MICHELLE

Ballsiest.

NORMAN

Oh, yeah. It was blatantly based on William Randolph Hearst.

MICHELLE

I have no idea who that is.

NIKON

Newspaper magnate. At the time, he was just about the most powerful non-government man in the country.

NORMAN

And at that time, the most powerful guy in the U.S. was essentially, by default, the most powerful in the world.

NIKON

He owned almost 75% of the newspapers in the country.

MICHELLE

Control the media, control the public.

NORMAN

Exactly. So Orson Welles barely disguised his name, didn't even try to disguise his occupation, and painted him as this power hungry newspaper despot who may as well have been trying for world domination. Needless to say, it probably never saw a positive review in any American newspaper.

NIKON

And it bombed. Orson Welles spent the rest of his career whoring himself out to commercials and shit just to fund his films.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

He always said "God, how they'll love me when I'm dead." Must be nice to be so right.

MICHELLE

You know, it's really nice out. Why don't we go for a walk?

NORMAN

Sounds nice.

NIKON

You guys go. I'm going to stay and get some reading done.

NORMAN

That's a book? Christ, I thought you were hauling around a piece of the Berlin Wall! You better start reading right now if you plan on finishing before your eyesight goes.

NIKON

That's the idea.

Norman turns to Michelle.

NORMAN

Shall we?

MICHELLE

Lead the way.

They walk off.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAYDEN STREET - NIGHT

Norman and Michelle are walking down the middle of the street, which is completely free of cars at this hour. Behind them, receding in the distance, is the coffee shop.

MICHELLE

So where does this well of film knowledge come from?

NORMAN

When you lead a lifestyle like mine, you get a lot of time for watching movies. And getting free rentals helps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

You know, I've always wondered how you do that. How do you get people to give you stuff for free all the time?

NORMAN

I don't. They just do. It's not like I ask or anything. I'm just personable.

MICHELLE

No you're not! You're an asshole. And I mean that in the sweetest possible way.

NORMAN

No, I'm not an asshole at all. I'm an elitist snob. Huge difference.

MICHELLE

Oh? Enlighten me.

NORMAN

An asshole is an asshole to just anyone. An elitist snob is an asshole only to those who don't live up to his expectations of taste in a certain field of interest.

MICHELLE

And this gets you free stuff how...?

NORMAN

Elitist snobs are bound by our good taste and our hatred for the uncultured swine who's ludicrous comments we have to suffer every day. You'd be surprised how much a hatred for the phrase "Travolta deserved an Oscar for Face/Off" can bring people together. The elitist snob becomes part of a borderless community of other elitist snobs, within a common field of interest, such as movies. As a member of this community, the elitist snob is privy to favoritism and favors from his brethren.

MICHELLE

And this is how you get free food at Denny's? Some sort of Denny's Elitism?

NORMAN

Oh, god no. Chuck wants my ass.

Michelle is still laughing at that comment when they come to the gates of a small graveyard. They walk in.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

The graveyard is small, a place where each tombstone has some personality, rather than a bunch of tombstones that are identical save for the engraved stats. Norman and Michelle walk through, looking at ease.

NORMAN

I love this place. You can come here and be sure no one's going to bother you. Most people get scared of graveyards at night.

MICHELLE

I can't think of a safer place in town. When was the last time you heard of a mugging in a graveyard?

NORMAN

Never. It just proves that Batman was right.

MICHELLE

"With great power comes great responsibility"?

NORMAN

No, that's Spider-Man. Batman was; "Criminals are a cowardly and superstitious lot."

MICHELLE

I guess that would make more sense. Plus, this place has angels watching over it.

She points to an angel statue.

NORMAN

I feel safer already. Let's find a place to sit.

They walk over and sit on a marble platform.

The graveyard is picturesque. The light of the full moon shines down through the trees, casting lunar spotlights on various spots and leaving a large amount of the graveyard shrouded in darkness.

MICHELLE

God, look at this. It's so beautiful out here at night. I think graveyards are more sad during the day. Know what I mean?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

It seems too bright to really be able to rest, even if you are six feet underground.

NORMAN

I can definitely relate. I have three sets of drapes on my windows.

MICHELLE

Ever think of sleeping at night?

NORMAN

People actually do that?

MICHELLE

In remote regions of the world I hear they do, yes.

Michelle casually looks up and notices the moon. It's full.

MICHELLE

Wow, look!

She grabs Norman by his shirt collar and pulls him backward with her, tumbling to rest on their backs, looking up, on the marble platform.

NORMAN

Oof. What am I looking at?

MICHELLE

The moon, the sky, the clouds.

She puts her hands behind her head as a pillow substitute. Norman follows her lead. They look up at the sky as they talk.

NORMAN

Are you very much into John Lennon?

MICHELLE

I wanted to give him my virginity when I was ten.

NORMAN

Really?

MICHELLE

Oh, completely. Then my mom informed me that he had been dead since the day before my second birthday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

I can see how that might make a relationship a little difficult.

MICHELLE

Yeah. Otherwise a fifty year old and a ten year old could be perfectly happy together.

NORMAN

So you've always been a fan?

MICHELLE

As long as I can remember. It started as a Beatles thing. I don't think I heard any of his solo stuff until at least high school, but when I did there was no going back to A Hard Day's Night for me.

NORMAN

That's really cool. I never really listened to any before the other day. But that song "Love." Wow.

MICHELLE

It's one of his best as far as I'm concerned.

They turn and look at one another as they speak.

NORMAN

I couldn't believe how simple it was. Songs are so full of metaphors that try to convey what love is and how it feels, but John just came right out and said it. He put it in such simple terms, yet explained it all perfectly.

MICHELLE

I wouldn't say perfectly. He was singing as someone completely content with his lover. So it's perfect in that respect, but there's a lot more than that. Like, what about what love feels like when it's not mutual? Or when it is mutual but you still can't be together? Or when the one you love dies?

NORMAN

Love isn't about those things. Even unrequited love makes you feel alive, when you just focus on the love.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MICHELLE

I'm not following you.

NORMAN

It sucks loving someone who doesn't love you. But that hurt isn't caused by love. Think about the last guy you were in love with who didn't feel the same. When you thought about him, just him and how you felt about him, didn't it make you smile? Picturing his face?

She begins to smile now, her eyes closing for a moment. When she opens them, her and Norman are looking directly into each other's eyes, mere inches apart.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

It makes you happy, being in love. What sucks is when your head gets involved. Then disappointment at what can't be seeps in and maybe it's disguised as a by-product of love, but it's not. It's just disappointment. If you only think about the love itself or the object of that love, then the song is right.

Michelle smiles. It's contagious and Norman is smiling slightly also as he looks into Michelle's eyes. Their noses touch ever so slightly and, as their noses begin to slowly slide along side one another, Norman abruptly looks back up to the moon.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(Nervous)

I, um, that's how I think about me and Kristen. We have our problems, but when I think about how I feel about her, just my feelings, that's when she makes me happy and I know that things will work themselves out. In the end.

Michelle looks back up to the sky as well and a single tear rolls down her cheek, unnoticed by Norman.

MICHELLE

I'm glad.

CUT TO:

EXT. PERK - NIGHT

Nikon is sitting and reading his book, using Norman's old chair as a footrest. There are even more empty tables surrounding him than before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The SCRAPE of a chair being pulled out announces the appearance of Randall. Nikon looks up.

NIKON
Isn't it past your bedtime?

RANDALL
Yeah. Nightmare kept me up.

NIKON
You're joking, right?

RANDALL
No. I've had the same recurring nightmare for years. I don't have it much anymore, but I guess I'm just lucky tonight.

NIKON
Monsters?

RANDALL
No. Monsters don't scare me. Real life can be a lot scarier than any monster.

Randall motions for Dominic to come over.

DOMINIC
What can I get for you?

RANDALL
Just a regular coffee.

Dominic nods and goes to fill the order.

RANDALL
Is this what you guys do every night?

NIKON
Pretty much.

RANDALL
Exciting.

Dominic comes back out and sets Randall's coffee down.

Randall takes a sip of his coffee, looking around.

RANDALL
I take it Norman's with his girl?

NIKON
He's with the one who should be his girl. Hopefully he'll take the upgrade.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Norman and Michelle are sitting upright once again.

NORMAN

And so all that pain and disappointment
and all that negative bullshit that we
feel every day is carried through this
cord, which is plugged right into your
head.

MICHELLE

I would think it would plug into your
heart.

NORMAN

No, because the head is where all our
pain is. It's intellectual.

MICHELLE

But our heart is where our love is.
That's really all the cord is about isn't
it? The pain of love?

NORMAN

There's only one thing linking the cord
to love; unplugging it. When you love
someone enough, and when you're loved in
return, all that pain goes away. The
cord gets unplugged and the pain stops
polluting the love.

MICHELLE

That's a nice fantasy.

Norman looks taken-aback by this sudden condescension.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Look; you love Kristen, right?

Norman nods.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

And she loves you in return?

NORMAN

Yes, of course.

MICHELLE

So your cord's all unplugged, is it?

NORMAN

I--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Norman struggles there for a moment.

MICHELLE

Look, it's late, I need to get some sleep. I'll see you later, okay?

She stands and starts to walk away.

NORMAN

Michelle, wait.

She stops and turns around.

MICHELLE

Yes?

NORMAN

Why don't we hang out tomorrow? We'll go to Denny's and talk some more.

MICHELLE

Norman, you won't want to hear a lot of what I have to say.

NORMAN

That's why I want to hear it. You challenge my perceptions. No one does that. I'm kind of set in my viewpoints.

MICHELLE

Will you be up around three?

NORMAN

Yeah.

MICHELLE

I'll pick you up then. Bye.

She walks out of the graveyard, leaving behind a rather dumbfounded Norman.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman and Nikon are at their sink doing dishes. There are a lot of them.

NIKON

Do we have to do this now? Was washing dishes downstairs for two hours not good enough for you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Our apartment smells like cheese.

NIKON

I like cheese.

NORMAN

We don't have any cheese.

NIKON

Then why does the apartment smell like cheese?

NORMAN

That's the point. Besides, you want to bring Michelle into a smelly-ass moldy-kitchen-sink rat hole?

NIKON

It's not like she's my girlfriend.

NORMAN

Okay, would you want to bring Sterling in here?

NIKON

Pass the soap.

NORMAN

That's what I thought. What are you doing today?

NIKON

Going over to Sterling's. You?

NORMAN

Going to Denny's with 'Chele.

Nikon arches a brow but goes back to doing the dishes without comment.

Nikon holds up a plate with a big section of mold on it.

NIKON

You can't seriously expect me to wash this.

NORMAN

Toss it.

Nikon throws the dish away and there is a knock at the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN
That'll be 'Chele. You mind finishing
up?

NIKON
Yes.

NORMAN
Do it anyway.

Norman goes to open the door. As expected, it's Michelle.

MICHELLE
You ready to go?

NORMAN
Yeah.

Michelle leans in and yells to Nikon.

MICHELLE
Hi, Nikey. You want to hang out later?

NIKON
Maybe. I'll have to see how things go
with Sterling. You guys have fun.

MICHELLE
(to Norman)
Shall we?

NORMAN
We shall.

Norman and Michelle leave.

CUT TO:

INT. DENNY'S - DAY

Norman and Michelle walk into Denny's. Norman grabs a couple
of menus and they seat themselves.

Almost instantly, there is a hot cocoa in front of Norman,
heaped with whipped cream. Chuck is standing beside their
table.

NORMAN
Hey, Chuck. You remember Michelle?

CHUCK
Of course. How are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

I'm great, thanks.

CHUCK

Can I get you something to drink?

MICHELLE

I think I'd like a hot cocoa as well,
please.

CHUCK

Uh-oh, he's contagious.

NORMAN

Yeah, you'd better watch out, Chuck. My
good taste is spreading. I'd hate for
you to catch it.

Chuck leans down to Norman conspiratorially.

CHUCK

If you think I'd be caught dead wearing a
shirt like this outside of work, you'd
better think again.

NORMAN

Yeah, aren't you people supposed to have
good fashion sense?

CHUCK

"You people?" Michelle, you better curb
your dog before he gets put down. I'll
be right back with your cocoa.

Chuck is gone.

MICHELLE

So, you think you'll want to borrow some
Lennon? See what other gems you may have
been missing?

NORMAN

I think that would be really cool. I
hate that feeling that I've gone all my
life not knowing how cool something was
when everyone else did.

MICHELLE

It's better than going through your whole
life not knowing how lame something was
when everyone else did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

You mean like if I were an Abba fan or something?

MICHELLE

Exactly.

NORMAN

I shudder to think. But Lennon. Yes, I would definitely like to borrow some. It's a bit soft for my taste, but there's a lot to be said for content.

MICHELLE

Well, not all his stuff is as soft as "Love."

Chuck puts a cocoa in front of Chele.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

And some stuff is really raw and painful, like "Mother."

CHUCK

John Lennon?

MICHELLE

Yeah.

CHUCK

You know, I cried when he died.

MICHELLE

So did I.

CHUCK

Really?

MICHELLE

Yeah, I was two. I was always crying about something.

Norman and Chuck chuckle at that.

CHUCK

What can I get you guys to eat?

NORMAN

Patty melt.

MICHELLE

Grilled Chicken with mashed potatoes, please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CHUCK

Okay, that'll be up in a few minutes,
kids.

Norman and Michelle sip their cocoa in silence for a moment.

Norman is the one to break the silence.

NORMAN

You seemed kind of upset last night.

MICHELLE

Well, that's because I was.

NORMAN

Um, okay. Why?

MICHELLE

Because you're a moron.

NORMAN

And you mean that in the sweetest
possible way, right?

MICHELLE

No, in the bluntest possible way. You're
a moron.

NORMAN

Because of the cord thing? It's just a
metaphor. I never said it was a perfect
metaphor.

MICHELLE

No, not because of your cord theory.
Because you're too stupid to see how you
really need to unplug it. I mean,
Kristen cheats on you all the time. And
despite whatever she may tell you, she
doesn't care. She'll keep doing it.

NORMAN

So you're saying that to unplug the cord,
I need a girl who won't cheat on me?

MICHELLE

Exactly.

NORMAN

Good, then we see eye-to-eye after all.

MICHELLE

We do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NORMAN

Yes. Michelle, I've never taken anything seriously in my life. I used to have a lot but I took it for granted and flushed it all down the toilet or snorted it up my nose or smoked it. But now I'm serious.

Michelle looks thrilled and terrified all at the same moment. Norman is looking intently into her eyes. Intensity is the only emotion on his face.

MICHELLE

Serious about what?

NORMAN

About unplugging this fucking cord. Kristen knows I've never taken anything seriously, so she doesn't think I'm serious about her.

Michelle's face goes blank. Her shoulders slouch ever-so-slightly.

MICHELLE

Kristen?

NORMAN

Yes. That's why she cheats. She doesn't think I'm serious. To get her to stop cheating, I need to show her how serious I am. I'm going to ask her to marry me.

Michelle closes her eyes and sits up straight, raising her chin. When her eyes open, all emotion is gone from them.

MICHELLE

Norman. Listen to me. That girl is poison. She'll never be faithful. Not to you or to anyone. If you were to marry her, she would still fuck everything with a dick in town. The only way to unplug your cord is to leave her.

NORMAN

Where the fuck did all this come from?

MICHELLE

I told you that you wouldn't want to hear what I had to say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

NORMAN

I didn't think you were going to talk
shit about my girlfriend. I don't even
let Nikon talk shit about her around me.

MICHELLE

Look, I'm not trying to offend you or
piss you off. I'm trying to help you.
You deserve so much better than her.

Michelle reaches across the table and takes his hand.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Let's consider this advice from a friend
and leave it at that. Leave her and get
on with your life. Cord free.

NORMAN

I appreciate your concern. I really do.
But I can handle myself. I'm sure this
will work out.

MICHELLE

Norman--

NORMAN

Listen. Everyone thinks they know
Kristen, but they don't. We've been
together almost three years. I know her
better than probably anyone.

Michelle sighs.

MICHELLE

Okay. I'm not going to change your mind,
so I guess I'll have to trust your
judgement and hope it turns out for the
best.

She leans across the table and kisses him on the cheek.

KRISTEN (O.S.)

She good in bed, Norman?

Norman and Michelle look up, shocked, to see Kristen standing
next to their table.

NORMAN

Kristen, hey!

KRISTEN

What the fuck are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

NORMAN

Having lunch.

KRISTEN

Looks more like you're feeding your sexual appetite.

MICHELLE

I kissed him on the cheek.

KRISTEN

What's the matter honey? Afraid to suck his cock at Denny's?

NORMAN

That's enough Kristen! We're just talking.

KRISTEN

You and I are going to be talking outside in a minute, you fucking hypocrite. Yelling at me about fidelity and here I find you all over Nikon's special olympics partner. I'm going outside. If you're not out there before the door swings shut, it's over.

She turns and walks away. Just then, Chuck comes up with Norman and Michelle's food. Michelle looks up at Norman.

NORMAN

I'm sorry.

He takes off after Kristen. He yells back to Chuck as he takes off.

NORMAN

Chuck, I'm sorry. Had an emergency. Please don't charge her.

And he's out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sterling and Nikon are sitting in the kitchen. Nikon fidgets with a pen as they talk.

NIKON

Well, you know how I feel about you...

STERLING

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

I just think that it's silly, really, to rule something out completely before giving it at least a try.

STERLING

Nikon, I've thought about it, I really have. Look at it like this; I think you're a really good person and you've always been a good friend to me. I don't have any friends but you left over from when I was in High School. And because of that, I don't want to ever become the ex-girlfriend.

NIKON

Who says we'd break up?

STERLING

Think it could lead to marriage? Maybe, who knows? But hon, two thirds of all marriages end in divorce, too. Then I'd be the ex-wife and we'd both have lost an old friend. You're lucky though. You have Norman and Michelle both to fall back on. I have a few friends from work. And you. That's it. I don't want to take the chance of losing you to a spoiled romance.

NIKON

It might not turn out that way, though.

STERLING

Nikey, I'm not saying that it definitely would. I'm saying the chance is too much for me to risk. I'm not a gambler, and if I were, I'd only bet money, not friendships. I really wish we could just have some fun together, like you and Michelle. When you hang out with her, it's just hanging out, right? There's not some desire for more?

NIKON

No.

STERLING

I want us to be like that. Friends. Real friends, like we used to be. Can we try that?

Nikon nods, a small smile on his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STERLING

Good. Now let's go rent a movie.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Norman and Nikon are sitting at their normal spot on the roof, talking.

NORMAN

Christ, I barely managed to talk her out of dumping me. This sets all my plans back.

NIKON

Because you had lunch with a friend?

NORMAN

I was practically cheating on her. She's right. It was a hypocritical thing to do.

NIKON

You said Michelle kissed you?

NORMAN

Yeah, on the cheek.

NIKON

On the cheek.

NORMAN

Yeah.

NIKON

Last week you found Kristen with a guy balls-deep in her, and you're freaking out over a kiss on the cheek?

NORMAN

It's not the scale of the offence that matters, it's the principal. I screamed at her about fidelity and monogamy and here I am with another girl.

NIKON

So you're not allowed to have any friends?

NORMAN

I can have friends. But hanging out alone with a girl... I mean, I can see where she's coming from.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

So you can hang out with whoever you want
as long as you have a chaperone?

NORMAN

Don't be condescending. But,
essentially, yes.

NIKON

Norman, let me ask you a question. If
Kristen were suddenly under the
impression that you might be bi-sexual,
would you stop hanging out with me?

NORMAN

That's ridiculous.

NIKON

I know. That's my point. The whole
thing's ridiculous. I'm going to bed.

Nikon stands and leaves. Norman stares out over the street
for a moment.

NORMAN

Shit. I hate it when he's right.

He takes out his journal and starts writing.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"Why'd you create this emptiness, my soul is dead, my brain
is piss"

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman is standing in the kitchen eating a bowl of oatmeal.
He is in night clothes and looks as if he has just woken up.
He puts down his oatmeal and goes to the phone and dials a
number. Kristen is intercut with Norman for the duration of
the conversation.

NORMAN

Hey. I need to talk to you.

KRISTEN

What's up?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

I've been thinking about what happened last night. Or, rather, what didn't happen.

KRISTEN

You can't expect to make me come every time, Norman.

NORMAN

No, not that. Christ. I mean with Michelle.

KRISTEN

What, are you in love?

NORMAN

Yes, with you. You know that. Which is why I can't figure out what's wrong with me having a friend who happens to be a woman.

KRISTEN

Come off it, Norman. I saw her, she was all over you.

NORMAN

She kissed me on the cheek. Friends do that. It's not like I was fucking her on the beach or anything.

KRISTEN

That's cold.

NORMAN

Life's hard. Look, I'm not going to cheat on you, but I'm not going to bow down and let you tell me who I can and can't associate with either.

KRISTEN

Is that right?

NORMAN

Yes, I'm a big boy and I'll be friends with whoever I want.

KRISTEN

Norman, you want a piece of Michelle Gordon's candy-ass, you can have it. I don't need this shit and I don't need to be with some asshole who won't even respect me. Go to hell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She hangs up the phone and Norman is left talking to himself.

NORMAN
Hello? Kristen? Fuck!

He slams the receiver down with a rather dissatisfactory CLACK of plastic on plastic. After a beat, he picks up the phone and hurls it across the room with a rather heartier CRASH. He punches the wall and, fuming, walks toward his room. Before he gets there however, he is stopped by a rather dishevelled-looking Nikon poking his head out of his bedroom door.

NIKON
What the fuck is all the noise?

NORMAN
Got dumped.

NIKON
What happened?

NORMAN
I listened to you. Thanks.

Norman disappears into his room, slamming the door. Nikon stares blankly at the door for a minute and then walks into the bathroom and begins dispensing some toothpaste onto his toothbrush.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nikon knocks on the front door, which is flung wide open by Sterling, coat in hand.

STERLING
Well, aren't we Mr. Punctual? Let's go.

NIKON
Where?

STERLING
Out.

NIKON
Been there today.

Sterling laughs lightly and grabs him by the hand, pulling him down the hall after her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STERLING
Come on, joker.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Nikon and Sterling walk around the corner to discover an exceedingly long line of people at the box office. They step to the end.

STERLING
This is why you're supposed to get here early.

NIKON
Hey, I'm Mr. Punctual, remember?

STERLING
Okay, my fault.

NIKON
Sterling, you know...I don't have any money for a movie ticket.

STERLING
I guess it's a good thing I do.

NIKON
I don't want you to--

STERLING
Don't want me to have to sit through a movie all alone? Good. In return for taking the time to keep me company, I'll pay for your ticket. You are doing me a favor, after all.

NIKON
You're stubborn, you know that?

STERLING
That's what they tell me.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Norman is slumped on the couch watching a staticy TV show. He looks dishevelled and is still wearing his sleeping clothes. There is a knock at the door and Norman grudgingly gets up to answer it. He opens the door to see Michelle standing there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Hi! Um, come on in.

She walks in.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Wow, you look nice.

MICHELLE

Thanks. Hey, is Nikon here?

NORMAN

I think he's sleeping, I'll go wake him up.

MICHELLE

You don't have to--

NORMAN

Don't worry about it. He doesn't mind waking for some people.

Norman get's to Nikon's door and begins knocking.

NORMAN

Nikon! You have--

He then spots a note taped to the door.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Norman, went to Sterling's. Back later.
Nikon. P.S. I farted on this note."

MICHELLE

He left a note, how responsible.

As Michelle turns around, Norman takes a small, curious sniff of the note before throwing it in the trash.

NORMAN

Why don't you stay a few minutes?

MICHELLE

Are you sure Kristen will be okay with that?

NORMAN

Oh, look, I'm really sorry about that.
Please, sit down.

MICHELLE

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She sits on the couch and Norman sits next to her.

NORMAN

As a matter of fact, I called Kristen this morning and told her that I can associate with whoever I want and that she was just going to have to trust me.

MICHELLE

And she actually accepted that?

NORMAN

Well, no. She dumped me, actually.

MICHELLE

I'm sorry.

NORMAN

It's not your fault.

MICHELLE

Wait. I'm sorry that you're feeling down now. I think you'll be much happier without her, though.

Norman shrugs and looks at a random point on the floor. Michelle watches him for a moment and then takes his hand in hers.

MICHELLE

You okay?

NORMAN

Yeah. I guess. Almost three years, though.

MICHELLE

I know, it's hard.

Norman looks up at her.

NORMAN

You're really a sweet girl, you know that?

MICHELLE

I'd just like to think I'm a decent person.

NORMAN

Well, decent people are just as rare.

Norman very subtly squeezes Michelle's hand affectionately.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MICHELLE

Norman, are you really okay?

NORMAN

Yes. No. I'm not so sure.

MICHELLE

You're a really good guy. And you really are better off without her. You deserve better.

She leans in and hugs him. He buries his face in her hair and hugs her tight. The hug breaks and she looks at him, smiling a small smile. He touches her face and smiles his own small smile. When he kisses her, she melts into his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

Nikon and Michelle walk out of the theater with a small group of other movie-goers.

NIKON

That would have been great if it weren't for the little shits in front of us with their running commentary on the film.

STERLING

And they weren't too fond of the subtitles.

NIKON

Yeah. If you can't read, don't see a movie that's in French. Morons.

STERLING

But did you like the movie?

NIKON

Yeah. Junet's one of my favorite directors. Thanks for taking me.

STERLING

It was my pleasure. And now I want to take you somewhere else.

NIKON

Where?

STERLING

Somewhere special. It's a surprise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nikon Shrugs.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman and Michelle are lying on the couch together, fully clothed, kissing very passionately. They stop for a moment and Norman looks at Michelle.

NORMAN

You know, you have the prettiest eyes.
It's hard to stop looking at them.

MICHELLE

Then don't.

He looks into her eyes for a bit longer, until she closes them and leans in to continue the kiss. She interrupts it again a moment later.

MICHELLE

Norman, I've dreamt of this moment.

Norman gently kisses her neck and she sits up, pulling her shirt off over her head, revealing a black bra. She lies back down and starts kissing his neck, her hands moving all over him.

Norman suddenly tenses up.

NORMAN

Michelle, wait. Stop, please.

She stops and sits up.

MICHELLE

What's wrong?

NORMAN

I'm enjoying this. I am. I haven't felt this good in a long time but...well, this morning I was planning on marrying Kristen and just a few hours after our break-up--

MICHELLE

Maybe it's because you've wanted this for a while.

NORMAN

I think you're right. Part of me has wanted this. And that's why we have to stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

I'm confused.

NORMAN

Kristen was justified. I was interested in you. At the graveyard. At Denny's. Kristen was right.

Michelle just stares at him for a long time.

MICHELLE

She doesn't love you, Norman.

NORMAN

I hurt her, Michelle. When she gets hurt, she acts angry. I should have seen it. I'm sorry.

MICHELLE

So now what? We never hang out again?

NORMAN

Give me some credit. I do have my integrity. Come here.

He opens his arms and she accept the hug gratefully, collapsing into him.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKEFRONT - NIGHT

The headlights of a car illuminate the night in the distance. As they approach, they light the landscape, revealing it to be a lightly wooded area that seems fairly secluded surrounding a large lake. The car pulls right up to the edge of the lake, its headlights revealing an old, small dock directly in front of the car. The headlights turn off, the engine stops, and Nikon and Sterling get out of the car. The moon is reflected as a band of silver across the surface of the lake.

NIKON

Wow. I didn't know there was anything this pretty so close to Hayden.

She holds out her hand and he takes it. She walks him over to the dock and they sit at the end, their feet dangling just over the water.

STERLING

So what do you think?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

It's very nice.

STERLING

You're the first person I've ever brought here.

NIKON

Have you known about this place long?

STERLING

Yeah. Since I was about seventeen. I used to have a boyfriend who liked to hit me. I was young and dumb and I thought I loved him so I stayed with him. One night he hit me so hard my eye swelled shut. I got in my car and just started driving. I just kind of ended up here. I almost drove right into the lake. So I got out of my car and just sat here on the dock for hours. It was a night almost just like this. It was so calming. I was almost in hysterics when I got here and by the time I left I felt so...clean. Ever since, whenever I need a place just to sit and think or especially when I need to sit and not think, this is where I come.

NIKON

So why bring me here?

STERLING

Nikon, there are so few people in this world that we can trust our secrets to. Most people only have one or two. Some people don't have any. You're the only one I have. It seemed appropriate to share this place with you.

NIKON

I'm flattered. I have a special place, too. Only Norman knows about it. Well, him and all the pigeons in Hayden.

STERLING

I just want you to know how special you are to me.

NIKON

Thanks. I do have to go soon, though.

She puts an arm around him and hugs him close to her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STERLING

Okay. Let's just sit for a few more minutes.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Norman is sitting on the edge writing in his journal. His pen starts to go out and, unable to revive it, he tosses it off the roof, pulls another from his back pocket and continues writing. After a minute, Nikon comes and sits next to him. Neither says anything as Norman continues writing. After a short moment, Norman finally finishes writing.

NORMAN

Where the hell have you been?

NIKON

With Sterling, didn't you get my note?

NORMAN

Yeah, but you were gone a lot longer than usual.

NIKON

It was a unique evening. I think we may be going new places.

NORMAN

Really?

NIKON

We'll see.

Norman nods and looks off into the street, looking contemplative. Suddenly:

NORMAN

I kissed Michelle.

NIKON

Really?

NORMAN

A lot.

NIKON

It's about time you realized who you should be with.

NORMAN

Kristen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

What?

NORMAN

I need to be with Kristen. See, she was right. I didn't ask Michelle to go with me to Denny's because she was my friend. I asked because I wanted to be near her. I really fucked up.

NIKON

You're right about that.

NORMAN

Strange. You're the last person I expected to agree with me.

NIKON

I agree completely. Letting Michelle get away was a total fuck up. Excuse me.

He gets up and walks away without another word.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Nikon knocks on the door to Michelle's studio. When she opens the door and sees him there, she immediately throws her arms around him. He returns the embrace.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman walks out of his room scratching his balls. Nikon is sitting on the couch writing in a note pad.

NORMAN

What are you writing?

NIKON

A story.

NORMAN

'Bout what?

NIKON

You.

NORMAN

Me?

Nikon nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

What do I do in it?

NIKON

You fuck an ant.

NORMAN

I fuck an ant?

NIKON

You fuck an ant.

NORMAN

Why do I fuck an ant?

NIKON

You meet a nice an ant. Her name's Cynthia. You have dinner over a rotting carcass with her and her friends and then you fuck her.

NORMAN

O-kayyy.

Norman goes over to the phone, which is apparently being held together by duct tape, and dials a number. After waiting a few beats, he gets a reply.

NORMAN

Hey, Kristen. It's Norman. I wanted to talk to you. I think I kinda fucked up. Anyway, call me, okay? Bye.

He hangs up the phone to find Nikon leering at him.

NORMAN

Don't, okay? Just don't.

Nikon goes back to writing his epic.

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - DAY

Norman is at the phone in the kitchen, soap suds on his hands.

NORMAN

Hey, it's me again. I'm working right now, but give me a call at the restaurant when you get this, okay? Love you. Bye.

He hangs up the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Shit.

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - LATER

Norman is back at the phone, a plate in his hand.

NORMAN

Hey. Me again. Call me.

He hangs up the phone a little harder than is necessary.

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - LATER

Norman has the phone cradled between his shoulder and his ear as he hangs up his apron and dries his hands.

NORMAN

Pick up pick up pick up pick the fuck up.

The answering machine can be heard on the other end. Norman slams down the phone.

NORMAN

Fuck!

He storms out the door, past a very confused-looking Randall.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman walks in, not quite slamming the door. He flops down on the couch next to Nikon, who is again writing in his little note pad.

NORMAN

You still writing about me and the ant?

NIKON

Yes. You and she are living quite nicely in Nantucket and she's pregnant with your brood.

Norman shrugs and turns on the TV. As he does, there is a knock at the door. He rushes over to answer it.

It's Randall.

Norman looks like he was most likely expecting someone else.

RANDALL

Can I come in?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Sure.

RANDALL

Listen, are you okay? I mean, you seemed to have been pretty pissed off at my phone.

NORMAN

It's nothing important.

RANDALL

Norm, I'm not stupid. I am your friend, you know. That's why you're here. Room and board for two in exchange for two hours of work a day isn't exactly profitable for me. If you need someone to talk to, I'm here. Okay?

NORMAN

I was having lunch with Michelle and Kristen saw us. She wasn't happy at all. Anyway, I told her that I could associate with whoever I wanted and she'd have to live with it.

RANDALL

And..?

NORMAN

She made it clear that she didn't have to live with it; she dumped me.

RANDALL

Shit.

NORMAN

Yeah; shit.

RANDALL

But you and Michelle were just having lunch, right?

NORMAN

Well, yes and no. I rationalized that it was just lunch but I was there with her because...

NIKON

...Because he has feelings for her.

RANDALL

So what's that mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKON

That he has the potential to be intelligent.

NORMAN

Can it, ant-boy.

(to Randall)

It means that Kristen was right. It wasn't a friendly lunch, it was a liaison and I'm a dick.

RANDALL

So why did you try to smash the phone?

NORMAN

Because she hasn't returned my calls all day.

RANDALL

And why did you call Nikon 'ant-boy'?

NORMAN

He's writing a story about me fucking an ant.

NIKON

It's finished.

RANDALL

So now you want to get back together with Kristen because you realize that she was justified?

NORMAN

Yeah. And what's worse is I was planning on asking her to marry me. Now that'll have to wait.

RANDALL

Why? I can't think of a more romantic thing to do to get back in a girl's good graces. Why don't you set up something really romantic? Explain everything over a romantic dinner and propose right then. Tell her she's the only girl for you and that you're ready to commit to her for life.

NORMAN

Randall, I can't afford a romantic dinner and, no offence, but your joint isn't the ideal atmosphere for a marriage proposal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RANDALL

Maybe not, but I have the raw materials for a romantic dinner, you just need the right place to put them.

NORMAN

Like where?

RANDALL

You ever notice how pretty the sky is from your rooftop here?

NORMAN

Randall, you're brilliant. But how're we going to pull that off?

RANDALL

You bring the girl, me and Nikon will take care of the rest.

NIKON

I'd rethink that if I were you.

RANDALL

What's the matter?

NIKON

I am not going to contribute to the stupidest thing Norman's ever done in his life. That whore is nothing but a succubus and she'll do nothing but ruin his life and I won't help that happen.

RANDALL

Nikon, what about--

NIKON

(interrupting)

No. Save it. He'll have to fuck up his life on his own. I've got things to do.

Nikon grabs his coat and heads out the door without another word.

RANDALL

Want me to go talk to him?

NORMAN

Fuck him. Let's work out a game plan.

RANDALL

Well, first we need the girl...

CUT TO:

INT. KRISTEN'S HALLWAY - DAY

Norman KNOCKS on an apartment door. Kristen opens it.

KRISTEN

What are you doing here, Norman?

NORMAN

Well, you weren't returning my calls, so I thought I'd stop by and talk to you.

KRISTEN

Well, there's some logic for you.

NORMAN

Can I come in? Please?

KRISTEN

Fine. Just make it quick.

INT. KRISTEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Kristen walks to the couch and sits down, Norman following behind but not sitting.

KRISTEN

Talk.

NORMAN

Kristen, I know what I did was wrong. I'd just like one chance to make it up to you. One dinner.

KRISTEN

You're going to woo me with Denny's?

NORMAN

No. I have something very nice planned. Just give me an hour and I'm sure that things can be good between us again.

KRISTEN

You want me back that bad? You came over here to beg for a chance to beg?

NORMAN

I wouldn't put it that way, but I suppose it's accurate enough.

KRISTEN

When?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Tomorrow night at nine. Meet at my place. Dress nice.

KRISTEN

Okay. I'll see you there.

NORMAN

Really?

KRISTEN

Yeah. Now if you don't mind, I have stuff to do.

NORMAN

Yeah. Well, I'll see you tomorrow night, then.

KRISTEN

Bye.

NORMAN

Bye.

He leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - DAY

Nikon and Michelle are sitting on the couch talking. Nikon has a cup of coffee and Michelle is drawing in a sketchbook.

NIKON

I'm sorry about Norman.

MICHELLE

It's not your fault. Some people just can't help but make the wrong decisions.

NIKON

Well, I'll have nothing to do with his bad decision. While he's trying to win back his dick vacuum, I'll be hanging out with Sterling.

MICHELLE

That's good.

NIKON

We had so much fun the other night. And I think I finally figured out where I stand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

That's good.

NIKON

I love her so much. I can't imagine not being there for her.

MICHELLE

You're a good guy.

NIKON

I want her to know that. I want her to know that I'll always be there for her, no matter what.

MICHELLE

That's good.

NIKON

Once she knows she has my friendship for life, who knows what doors that can open for us?

MICHELLE

I'm happy for you, hon.

NIKON

Chele, are you okay? You seem a bit distant.

MICHELLE

Oh, yeah. I'm fine. Just thinking.

NIKON

Well, I'll let you be then. Have a good day, okay?

MICHELLE

Yeah. You too.

Nikon leaves. Michelle continues drawing in her sketchbook for a little while and then throws it across the room and sulks.

CUT TO:

TITLE. CARD:

"Quicker than lightning the viper attacked me and all I want is to be happy."

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman is in boxers, brushing his teeth. Nikon, also in boxers with a tee shirt, comes out of his room wearily. He goes to the living room and sits on the couch.

As Norman gets dressed, Nikon stays on the couch reading more Pynchon.

Norman, now fully clothed, walks past Nikon on his way to the door.

NIKON

Where are you going?

NORMAN

I've got a lot of stuff to do today. I'm going downstairs to go over what we'll be serving tonight and start moving stuff up.

NIKON

Well, have fun.

NORMAN

Could you try to be happy for me?

NIKON

I was happy for you for about three seconds when you told me you'd kissed Michelle. Then you ruined it.

NORMAN

Jesus.

Norman leaves and Nikon goes in the bathroom and starts a shower.

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S ROOF - EVENING

Norman and Randall come up the fire escape with a round table. Howie follows behind them with the tablecloth and some other accoutrements.

RANDALL

Okay, so filet mignon is good. What kind of salad does she like?

NORMAN

I can't believe you went and bought filet mignon for this.

RANDALL

You're welcome. Salad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

Small chef's salad. Bleu cheese.

They find a good place for the table and set it down. Howie starts setting up the table.

RANDALL

Howie, we can get that. You should probably start on dinner.

HOWIE

No problem.

Howie heads back downstairs.

NORMAN

Howie's a good guy.

RANDALL

Yeah. I couldn't run this place without him.

NORMAN

Rand, why are you doing all this?

RANDALL

Because I want to help you get your girl back.

NORMAN

No, I mean all of it. Letting us stay here, feeding us, the whole thing.

RANDALL

Sit down

They both sit.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

When I first met you guys, you were pathetic.

NORMAN

Thanks.

RANDALL

Shut up. You guys were crashing on a different person's floor every night and dealing drugs for Jo-Jo Salozar. I know I barely knew you, but you seemed like nice enough guys and, unlike you, I had seen the end of the road you were on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORMAN

What do you mean?

RANDALL

Norman, I've been in bad places in my life. After high school, I couldn't get a job, I couldn't afford college, and my parents more or less kicked me out. So I did the rounds of all my friends' living room floors for a while. It fuckin' sucked.

NORMAN

Tell me about it.

RANDALL

Well, that's why I accepted when a friend came to me with an idea for making money pretty easily.

NORMAN

You dealt, too?

RANDALL

No, I never dealt. But what I got into was a lot more fucked up.

NORMAN

What was it?

RANDALL

Look, it's not important. What is important was that when I hit rock bottom, suddenly there was someone there that helped me live through it.

NORMAN

Barbara?

RANDALL

That's right. She didn't know what I had been doing, but she saw that I was in a bad place and that I needed some help. Norman, I can never pay her back for what she did for me. But I sure as hell can try to pass on the favor. I saw you and Nikon in a bad place and I just didn't want you to go through what I did. Now, the way Barbara helped me isn't the way I've helped you, but I do what I can.

NORMAN

Well, me and Nikon will find someone to pass the favor on to one day.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RANDALL

Then it's been worth it. Now let's get this shit set up.

They continue setting up the table.

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Nikon is now dressed and talking on the phone.

NIKON

Well then I'll see you in a few? Cool.
Bye.

He hangs up, checks himself in the mirror and heads out the door.

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S ROOF - EVENING

Nikon starts down the fire escape. He pauses and looks over his shoulder at Norman and Randall, who are still setting up for the big dinner. With a sneer and a roll of his eyes, he continues down the fire escape.

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nikon is sitting on the couch and Sterling is just walking into the living room from the kitchen with a big bowl of popcorn.

STERLING

Okay, Nikey, what's this movie you brought?

NIKON

Harold and Maude.

STERLING

Never heard of it.

NIKON

The fact that you've lived a quarter of a century without seeing this film boggles my mind. It's criminal.

STERLING

Well, I'm ready to see it whenever you're ready to start it. Now move over.

He scoots over and she sits next to him on the couch, setting the popcorn on the table in front of them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nikon starts the movie and leans back, putting an arm around Sterling, who snuggles up to him. Nikon smiles to himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S ROOF - NIGHT

Norman and Randall stand triumphantly over a fully set romantic rooftop dinner setting for two.

NORMAN

Looks great.

RANDALL

I knew we could pull this off. How long until the girl gets here?

NORMAN

About two hours.

RANDALL

Well, I think we had better get downstairs. With Howie cooking your dinner, the guys are going to need some help for the rush.

Norman nods his assent and they head for the fire escape.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nikon and Sterling look cozy on the couch. She wipes tears from her face and sits up as Nikon grabs the remote and stops the movie.

STERLING

That was probably the sweetest movie I've ever seen.

NIKON

It's one of a kind. There will probably never be another movie quite like that one.

STERLING

If you told me we were going to watch a movie about an eighteen year old guy falling in love with an eighty year old woman, I wouldn't have wanted to see it, but that was amazing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

It's the perfect example of true love.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman makes some last-minute adjustments in the bathroom mirror; brushing his teeth, shaving, trimming his goatee. He's wearing a black turtleneck and black jeans. He heads out the front door, grabbing his coat as he goes.

INT. RANDALL'S GRILL (KITCHEN) - NIGHT

Norman rushes into the kitchen, slow now that the rush is over, there are dishes piled up with no one to wash them and Howie is putting the final touches on Norman and Kristen's meal.

NORMAN

Howie! How do I look? She'll be here any minute.

HOWIE

Calm down. Stand back and let me see you.

Norman takes a step back and stands up straight.

HOWIE

As my grandpa would say, "You look sharp!"

NORMAN

Thanks. Okay, now I have to go wait for her. Thanks for everything, Howie.

He runs back upstairs.

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman comes back in and sits on the couch, looking fidgety. After some fidgeting, he stands and starts to pace, quietly practicing what he's going to say.

NORMAN

(under his breath)

Kristen, I want you to know that I am completely dedicated to you. I don't ever want mistrust between us again....no. Kristen, I love you more than...too cheesy. Kristen,--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A KNOCK at the door jolts Norman from his rehearsal. He goes to answer it. On the other side, of course, is Kristen.

NORMAN

Wow. You look great.

Kristen smiles.

KRISTEN

You look pretty good yourself.

Norman puts his arm out.

NORMAN

Shall we?

She takes his arm and lets him lead her to the back, where the table is set up, candles alight and Howie and Randall standing stoically to one side like waiters at any upscale restaurant.

Norman disengages himself from Kristen and goes to pull out her chair. She sits graciously and Norman takes the chair opposite her. Almost as soon as they are seated, small chef's salads are placed in front of them. Randall comes up and places a small silver bell on the table in front of them.

RANDALL

When you're ready for the main course,
just ring the bell. We'll leave you for
now.

NORMAN

Thank you.

Randall leaves the roof with Howie just behind him.

Kristen smiles and looks at Norman.

KRISTEN

Norman, this is actually very romantic.

She leans across the table and kisses him on the cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. STERLING'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nikon and Sterling are sitting on the couch. Nikon has his little notebook and is reading aloud from it between bouts of laughter from Sterling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

(reading)

And so Cynthia the Ant, Norman the Human and their kids Johnny, Dexter, Carl, Dot, Deedee, Daphne, Arturo, Marvin, Bubbles, Fred, Ralph, Rita, Bruce, Jack, Blossom, Bugs, Sam, Myrna, Billy, Pepe, Buttercup, Velma, Penelope, Alfred, Lois and all the rest went to live in the splendor of the Nantucket city dump. And if you go there, just past the industrial waste section, where they dump the residential trash, if you look real close, you may still see them there to this day, a human and an ant, living together in harmony with all their little mutant man-ant children. The End.

STERLING

Oh my god, Nikon. That is so funny. You really should try to do something with that!

NIKON

You really think so? But who would publish fucked up shit like that?

STERLING

Anyone with the vision to realize that you're brilliant.

NIKON

Thanks.

Sterling leans in and hugs Nikon. When the hug breaks, he kisses her. She tries to pull out of the kiss immediately, but he holds her for a second before letting it break.

NIKON

What's wrong?

STERLING

Nikon! I thought we settled all this!

NIKON

What?

STERLING

Nikon, we're friends. Nothing else. I don't have those feelings for you and you really need to stop all this bullshit. We were having a good time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKON
It's not bullshit. It's meant to be.

STERLING
What are you talking about?

NIKON
Sterling, people don't feel this way over people who don't feel the same. Where's the balance in that?

STERLING
It may not be balanced, but it happens.

NIKON
I don't believe that. Don't you see? We're soulmates.

STERLING
Nikon, just stop it. We are not soulmates.

NIKON
We are! You just have to open yourself up to your feelings and you'll see it. You said it yourself, you said I was the only person you had to confide your secrets to. If that's not a soulmate, what is?

STERLING
Stop it. You're really freaking me out.

NIKON
Stop what? Fighting for something I believe in?

STERLING
How about you stop believing in what is never going to happen? You're not my soulmate. I don't even know if such a thing exists.

NIKON
That's why you can't feel it.

STERLING
I can't feel it because it isn't there! There is nothing to feel.

Nikon leans in and tries to kiss her again.

STERLING (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NIKON

Just one kiss, you'll see. It'll feel right. Just give it the chance.

STERLING

Get out. Just go. This is all really creepy and I really don't think it would be a good idea for you to call me again.

NIKON

Sterling--

STERLING

You really need to leave before I call the police.

Nikon looks about to say something but instead just picks up his things and walks out.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S ROOF - NIGHT

Norman and Kristen are sitting at the table, same as before. Only now their main dish has been served and is sitting on their respective plates, half eaten.

KRISTEN

Norman, this is so sweet, I don't see how I could refuse to take you back.

NORMAN

Really?

KRISTEN

Of course. You think anyone else has done anything like this for me?

NORMAN

Well, I guess not. But I want you to know something else...

KRISTEN

What?

NORMAN

Well, I don't want you to think that I'm ever going to do anything to jeopardize our relationship again. I want you to know that I'm serious about being with you. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. You and only you. Um, well, I'd like...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTEN

Just spit it out Norman.

NORMAN

Will you marry me?

For a moment, Kristen simply stares at Norman. Then, without warning, she bursts into a fit of guffawing laughter.

KRISTEN

My god, you can't possibly be serious!

NORMAN

I've never been more serious.

KRISTEN

I'm going to marry you? What the fuck are you thinking? You live on top of a restaurant. You wash dishes in exchange for food. The only thing that makes you even half a real man is your cock.

NORMAN

Is that what love is to you? A cock?

KRISTEN

No, honey. That's what men are. A cock, a car and a decent career. And one out of three is pretty sad.

NORMAN

You can't believe that. I want to spend the rest of my life making you happy.

KRISTEN

Look, I thought Michelle wasn't giving up that cotton candy pussy and you needed someone who was a reliable fuck. I didn't know you were going to spring this crazy forever shit on me. I'm going to go now.

NORMAN

Wait. What about...?

KRISTEN

What about what? Norman, I have no interest in getting married and if I did you wouldn't make my backup list. Fuck, man. You're insane and I can find a cock who can buy me things every once in a while.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Norman stands, dumbfounded as Kristen walks away and down the fire escape.

Once she has vanished from sight, Norman knocks the table over and starts smashing it with a chair, which he throws off the roof once he's satisfactorily smashed everything to hell.

EXT. RANDALL'S GRILL - NIGHT

Randall walks out the back door with a bag of garbage. Halfway to the dumpster, he narrowly avoids being hit by a falling chair. He drops the garbage bag and runs for the stairs.

EXT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Randall rushes up to find the destruction of the dinner and, standing amidst it all, a fuming Norman.

RANDALL
What happened?

NORMAN
The cord overloaded.

RANDALL
What?

NORMAN
I'll clean this up later.

Norman walks over into his apartment and slams the door behind him.

Randall stares from the door to the mess and back a couple times before going over and starting to clean up.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHELLE'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Michelle opens the door on Nikon, who looks miserable.

MICHELLE
Nikey? Are you okay?

NIKON
No.

MICHELLE
What happened?

NIKON
Sterling never wants to talk to me again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

Why?

NIKON

I told her we were soulmates and we're destined to be together.

MICHELLE

Why did you do that?

NIKON

Because I love her.

MICHELLE

Nikon, she doesn't feel that way about you. You know that.

NIKON

I thought she was wrong.

MICHELLE

Is there anything I can do for you?

NIKON

Tell me what's wrong with me.

MICHELLE

Nothing's wrong with you. You just need to learn to accept that not all feelings are mutual and you can't learn all there is to know about love from some song.

NIKON

Obviously something's wrong with me.

MICHELLE

Nikon, I'm sorry you had a falling out, but I can't do a pity party right now. Try loving someone who has feelings in return but still wants to chase after some horrible, cheating bitch. I think that's even worse than unrequited love.

NIKON

Well, I won't bother you anymore then.

Nikon turns and walks out.

MICHELLE

Nikon, I didn't mean--

NIKON

Fuck what you meant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He's gone. Michelle sits down and buries her face in her hands.

CUT TO:

INT. NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Norman is sitting on the couch writing in his journal. He looks very rough. His eyes are red and puffy, his face is pale and there are several broken items around him.

A short time later Nikon comes in and sits next to Norman. He doesn't look any better.

Norman puts away his journal and he and Nikon just stare forward.

NIKON

I think I fucked up.

NORMAN

That makes two of us.

NIKON

I couldn't leave well enough alone. I thought Sterling loved me because I had some picture of the universe balanced on a scale. Love begets love, hate begets hate, it all balances. That's what the song says, right? Love is real, real is love. It balances. That's what my dad always taught me, too. Treat people with respect and they will respect you. Love conquers all, he said. He had about a million sayings that made me feel like the world was a fair place, or had the potential to be. And for all his stupid sayings, where am I now? On the couch, not only without a woman, but having lost a friend. Dad tried to teach me about love by playing me a fuckin' song. I should have known it was bullshit when all the love I had couldn't save him from dying. I poured all the love I had into him to try to save him. He just got weaker. Eventually the medications had to be so strong he didn't recognize me half the time. But when he did, he told me, "remember the song." I remember the song. Love is you, you and me. Love is knowing we can be. Well, I knew that there could be a he and I again if I only loved him enough, but he still died.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON (CONT'D)

I knew that Sterling and I could be together if only I loved her enough. And she threatened to call the police tonight. So much for remembering the song. I feel like he lied to me. Fed me a fairy tale so I didn't have to face reality and now that reality's here, I'm not prepared. He lied and told me that a song could serve as some kind of guide for your life. Well it's the right map in the wrong fuckin' town. He fuckin' lied to me and you know what the worst part is? Right now, there's nothing I want more than to see him one more time. Like if he told me in person, even now, that everything would be okay, I would believe him. I would play the song and live my life by the song if I could just see him one more time.

NORMAN

Jesus fucking Christ! Would you shut up already? It's really sad that your dad died, I know. But seriously, that was like fifteen fuckin years ago! No offence, but get over it! Right now I've got a big empty spot where my heart should be and you're lamenting over shit that happened a decade and a half ago. No wonder you can't deal with a girl rejecting you, you're too busy mourning some memory that's been built up in your mind to some kind of legend to try living in reality for a little while.

Nikon looks disbelievingly at Norman for what seems like forever.

NIKON

Sorry. Got a little carried away.

NORMAN

Yeah.

NIKON

I need to take a piss.

NORMAN

Have fun.

Nikon disappears into the bathroom and as soon as he is gone, Norman picks up his journal and continues writing.

After a minute there is a FLUSH from the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Norman continues to write.

Nikon still hasn't come out of the bathroom.

NORMAN
Nikon, come on, I have to piss.

Norman starts to write again but stops almost immediately.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Nikon?

Putting his journal down, Norman goes to the bathroom door.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Did you flush just to watch the water go
down the drain or what?

There is a muted THUNK from the bathroom.

Norman goes in.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Come on man, seriou--

As Norman fully opens the door he sees Nikon. He is lying between the toilet and the bathtub, blood completely covering one arm, which is on the edge of the toilet bowl. In the trembling fingers of his other hand is a razor blade. Nikon's eyes are wide with terror and his cheeks wet with tears.

Norman is momentarily frozen with shock.

NORMAN
NIKON!

Norman rushes over and raises the blood-drenched hand over Nikon's head, grabbing a hand towel and wrapping it around the wrist.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Holy shit. Holy shit.

NIKON
I wanted to sleep forever.

NORMAN
Help! Someone fuckin' help! Randall!!

Norman continues calling for help and starts banging on a pipe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NIKON

It's okay. I'm going to sleep now. When I wake up, I'll be dead.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"The scars on my arms show that I am dead, how did you get inside my fucking head?"

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Norman is standing outside an operating room. Through the window in the door, he is watching silhouettes on the curtain move about in a surgical ballet.

Norman is shaking visibly and cannot stop looking.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Norman!

Norman turns and sees Michelle running in looking as if she were just stirred from bed. She runs up and hugs him tight.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Is he going to be okay?

NORMAN

I don't know. They're still working on him.

Michelle takes a look into the window.

MICHELLE

Oh, my god. Nikon. Norman, let's go sit in the waiting room. If he doesn't make it, I don't want to watch him die.

Norman nods and lets Michelle lead him to the waiting room.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Norman and Michelle are sitting in the waiting room. Norman is holding Michelle for support. She seems to be asleep and Norman's head is starting to drop.

Finally, he is asleep.

A doctor walks up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR
Are you Norman?

Norman wakes up.

NORMAN
Huh?

DOCTOR
Are you Norman?

NORMAN
Yeah. Is he--?

DOCTOR
He's asking for you.

NORMAN
I'll be right there.

DOCTOR
Room 233.

NORMAN
Thanks.

The doctor leaves and Norman gently shakes Michelle.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Chele, wake up.

MICHELLE
What's happening?

NORMAN
Nikon's okay. He's asking for us.

Michelle smiles a big, broad smile of relief.

MICHELLE
Thank god.

They stand and walk down the hall.

INT. NIKON'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Nikon is lying in bed, a huge bandage on his wrist. He looks very pale, but otherwise okay.

Norman and Michelle walk in.

NORMAN
How are you feeling?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKON

Like I was attacked by a vampire.

Michelle's eyes are filled with tears.

MICHELLE

Why did you do it?

NIKON

I don't want to talk about that right now.

NORMAN

Nikon, I'm sorry.

NIKON

Time enough for all that shit later. I'm just glad you're here.

NORMAN

Randall brought you here but he said he had to go home and let Barbara know what was happening. He'll be back.

He puts a hand on Nikon's shoulder.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Nikon, I have been so fucking stupid. I can't apologize enough. I should have been there for you.

NIKON

Well, you're here for me now.

Nikon dozes off quite suddenly.

NORMAN

Nikon?

Michelle shushes him and points out a Morphine drip attached to an IV.

MICHELLE

Morphine.

NORMAN

That'll do it.

Norman puts a hand to the side of Michelle's face.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

What the fuck was I thinking?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MICHELLE

What?

NORMAN

I can't believe I blew my chance with you
like that.

Michelle kisses him long and deep. When the kiss breaks,
Norman looks very confused.

MICHELLE

What? Nikon gets a second chance at
life, we should get a second chance at
love, right?

Norman smiles and kisses her.

NIKON

Fuck, get your own room.

They stop kissing and look at Nikon.

MICHELLE

Sorry. We'll let you get some sleep.

She leads Norman out of the room, but before Norman is out
the door, Nikon calls him.

NIKON

Norman.

Norman turns around and Nikon grins and gives him a big
thumbs-up.

Norman returns the smile and follows Michelle out.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANDALL'S GRILL/NORMAN AND NIKON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Norman, Nikon, Michelle and Randall are standing in front of
a moving van in the restaurant parking lot.

RANDALL

You know, you can stay in the apartment
if you want.

NORMAN

Thanks, Randall, but we need to do this.
Me and Nikon have sat around for long
enough waiting for some life-altering
thing to happen to us.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

We appreciate everything you've done for us, but we need to start making things happen for ourselves. Me and Nikon might even try to write a book.

RANDALL

You have jobs set up?

NORMAN

Yeah. Michelle found us jobs at the Gallery up in Ascot. It's just down the road from the new place.

RANDALL

And you three are going to be able to live together without driving each other nuts?

MICHELLE

Half the fun is driving each other nuts.

RANDALL

Well, you'd better visit.

NIKON

Hell yeah we'll visit. None of us can cook.

NORMAN

Yeah. And we're only like ten miles away.

RANDALL

Well, I guess you'd better get going then.

They all hug Randall and pile into the moving van. The Van pulls away from the restaurant and the derelict apartment and disappears into the distance.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE UP:

A power plug in an electrical outlet. A hand reaches into frame and yanks it out.

CUT TO BLACK.