

MANIPULATING LIFE

Original Screenplay

By

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"MANIPULATING LIFE"

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

A lone CAR speeds down a two-lane, tree lined road. A misty fog hangs in the air hiding the sun's intentions. A macabre setting.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

Two passengers. PROFESSOR THOMAS SPROUL(50's), with evidence of years of worry and serious intent in his look, maneuvers the speeding vehicle through the fog.

WILLIAM SPROUL(17), sits on the other end of the front, bench seat against the door. He rhythmically rocks back and forth like a child, unaware perhaps. He is fixated on the passing tree line out his window.

CLASSICAL MUSIC plays in the car stereo tape deck.

Professor Sproul continuously checks his rear-view. Searching.

The faint hint of headlights in the rear view. Too much fog to really tell.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(checking rear
-view; calm)
How's school? Miss Meyers says your
progressing well.
(looks at William)
Communicating more.

William doesn't respond. In his own world.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(continuing)
That's good. Says your proof's really
coming along. It's in there somewhere.
Just got to get it out of you.
(back to road)
Madness and genius. No different from
one another. Cut from the same mold. A
matter of perspective.

Suddenly, a bump in the road startles Professor Sproul. Reflexively, he looks down on the seat next to him and puts his hand on a large, aluminum briefcase keeping it from moving.

Professor Sproul looks at William. Gives an unconvincing smile to the side of his son's head. Checks the rear-view once more. The headlights have vanished.

The soothing classical MUSIC has suddenly become inaudible. A malfunctioning tape deck.

William turns his attention to the tape deck. The now smeared instrumental sounds cause William to smile. He enjoys this more than the music.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Darn.

Professor Sproul fumbles with the eject button. The tape is stuck.

William's smile gets bigger as he watches his father's attempt to get the tape out.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

C'mon.

(keeps trying)

Reluctantly, Professor Sproul gives up. Turns the stereo off.

William reaches down and turns the stereo on. The inaudible MUSIC plays again.

Professor Sproul looks at his son.

The two let it play for a moment. William reaches down and hits the eject button easily releasing the tape from the stereo.

A TALK SHOW HOST'S VOICE on the radio.

William's attention returns to the window. The rhythmic rocking continues.

Professor Sproul looks at his son. CHUCKLES. Back at the road.

TALK SHOW HOST(VO)

...you're telling us that reality isn't really...real?

(laughs)

So this microphone isn't real? You? Me? This glass of water? All of it is a matter of perspective? Hypotheticals? You're saying everything can be...and is...manipulated by everyone in some way?

(laughs)

Professor Sproul reaches down to turn the station. Stops.

TALK SHOW GUEST(VO)

I'm saying our minds manipulate everything all the time. We live in a world of descriptive reality. Descriptions of reality that have been created by people with interpetations...intentions...religious beliefs...imagination. These descriptions of of our everyday lives are created by people like you and me. Our realities.

Professor Sproul releases the radio knob. Sits back. Drives.

TALK SHOW HOST(VO)

(sarcastic)

Interpetations have been created by real scientists. Like Einstein and Darwin. Not by people like you and me. These guys have proven scientifically that there are universal laws that govern our everyday existence. Realities. Whether your reality believes them or not...they exist.

TALK SHOW GUEST(VO)

Well, there are many that...

TALK SHOW HOST(VO)

(interrupting)

...The speed of light, gravity on earth, the boiling point of this glass of water. These are all facts of reality. These facts can't be changed.

Sproul looks over at his son. Back to the radio.

William rocks. Stares out the window.

TALK SHOW GUEST(VO)

(laughs)

All these facts you just stated are just ideas. Figments of imaginations. Albeit imaginations of geniuses... still imaginations. Why couldn't the boiling point of that glass of water be manipulated? What if you were to stretch or squish those molecules of water in that glass? Do you know you could drastically change those dimensions such as boiling point or freezing point? Imagine having ice at room temperature or boiling ocean water in the summer. Your reality might be a little misinterpreted, huh?

TALK SHOW HOST(VO)

Well, there you have it...throw away your science books, kids...

Professor Sproul's easy demeanor turns heavy. Turns the radio off. Reminded of why he's there. Looks in the rear-view.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(looks at William)

My only confidant. Can't hear me. If you could only understand me...this.

William continues rocking. Not hearing.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

For the best, perhaps. Not knowing.

The sun begins to find it's way from behind the clouds and into the car.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(out windshield)
Heat's coming.

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

The Professor's vehicle pulls to the side of the wood lined road. Turns into the woods.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CLEARING - DAY

The Professor's vehicle manages into the wooded area off the road. Stops. Can't go any further.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

Professor Sproul puts the gear in park and turns the key off. Gets out.

William is left in the car with the Professor's aluminum briefcase. William's rocking stops suddenly. He inspects his surroundings with an eager eye.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CLEARING - DAY

Professor Sproul goes to the vehicle's trunk and opens it.

INT. VEHICLE - TRUNK

A SHOVEL, a spare and a plethora of books and papers.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CLEARING - DAY

Professor Sproul lifts the shovel out of the trunk. Stabs the shovel in the dirt, holding it up steady.

The Professor begins rummaging through the trunk looking for something.

It takes a little while but the Professor finds the gardener's gloves he was looking for. Takes them and throws them on the ground next to the shovel's head.

With the trunk contents in complete disarray, the Professor moves things around to allow the trunk to close.

Finally. He closes the trunk. Grabs the shovel and gloves and goes to the open, driver's side door.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

Empty. William and the briefcase nowhere to be seen.

Professor Sproul pokes his head in. Notices.

EXT. VEHICLE - DAY

Professor Sproul survey's the immediate area. Nothing except the greenery and fog.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
Darn it, William. WILLIAM!

The Professor's SCREAM echoes through the empty wilderness.

INT. VEHICLE - DAY

Professor Sproul ducks his head into the passenger compartment and goes to the glove box. Unlocks it with the car keys. Opens it.

A silver pistol in the compartment. Some papers and other common glove box items.

Quickly, Sproul grabs a roll of unopened cough drops. Closes the glove box quickly without locking it.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

A mosaic of greens and organic life throughout.

Professor Sproul slogs through the thick ground fauna. PANTING. Searching.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
C'mon William. Where are you, son?

Professor Sproul stops. Looks around. Nothing.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(continuing)
Nature's tenuous and fragile
construction...

Despite the previous desperation, the Professor stops and takes notice of the nurturing forest around him. Takes hold of a hanging tree leaf.

The Professor rubs the wet leaf between his thumb and forefinger. Pays close attention to the watery relationship.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(contemplating)
Millions of years undone...
(shakes head)
my persistent and selfish quest for
knowing.

In the distance, a hint of William's shirt through the leaves. Professor Sproul notices.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(to himself)
William.

The Professor immediately goes for his son. Drops the leaf.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

A small collection of pooled water on the ground. Left from the recent rain.

A brightly colored moth struggles in the clear water. Bursts of struggling movement create ripples in the water. The moth has found its fate.

Suddenly, a hand reaches out towards the moth's writhing body. Gets close to it. Almost touching it. The moth's salvation.

The silence broken suddenly.

PROFESSOR SPROUL(OS)
WILLIAM!

The hand pulls back suddenly. The hand's owner is revealed.

William, on both knees, hovers over the water puddle. Pulls his outstretched arm back, startled. Looks towards his father's voice.

The aluminum case lies on the ground next to him. Professor Sproul is soon with his son. He goes straight for the case. Checks its integrity.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

William, please don't do that. Worried sick.

William looks at his father. Turns back to his study.

Professor Sproul opens the briefcase to check its contents.

INT. BRIEFCASE

Several well-sealed, large test tubes surrounded by mostly Styrofoam padding. All intact.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

The now perspiring, Professor Sproul closes the briefcase, satisfied.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

C'mon, son.
(grabs sleeve)
Let's go.

Reflexively, William pulls his arm from his father's grasp.

The boy's father stops. Remembers. Gets in his pocket. Finds the roll of cough drops. Holds his open hand towards William.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

William, here.

William sees the offering. Smiles. Stands. Gets the roll of cough drops from his father's hand.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(softer)
We have to go, William...now.

William easily goes with his father. Unwraps the cough drops. Looks back at the near-dead moth. Back to his treat.

William and Sproul walk.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CLEARING - DAY

Professor Sproul leads William with one hand. Carries the briefcase in the other.

William savors another cough drop. Two or three gone from the pack now.

Father And son appear in the clearing.

Two vehicles now. The Professor's and one behind it, parked. Both the doors still open.

Noticing the new vehicle behind his own, Professor Sproul stops himself and his son. Surveys the area.

Two MEN sit in the professor's vehicle. Both immediately get out.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
(calm)
Yuri. Doctor Alton.

YURI YESHENKO(30's) and STEVEN ALTON(30's), erudite gentlemen, stand at the open, car doors.

Yuri holds Sproul's pistol in his hand, near his side. Stands near the passenger side, closest Professor Sproul.

Steven moves from the driver's side to the front of the vehicle to greet Sproul.

Both immediatly notice Sproul's briefcase. Leaving both men hesitant.

YURI
 (calm)
 Doctor Sproul.

Sproul notices Yuri's weapon near his side.

STEVEN
 (urgent)
 Doctor Sproul, don't do this. We've
 been colleagues since my graduate
 year...you know I want what's best for
 everyone.
 (looks at Yuri)
 It needs to be kept safe...at the
 laboratory...where it can be guarded.

Yuri looks at his partner. Not so sure about this.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
 Doctor Alton, you understand the
 seriousness of what I've created--

STEVEN
 --We created, Doctor Sproul. The
 Laboratory. The seriousness, yes. But,
 also the significance.

Steven inches towards Sproul.

STEVEN
 (continuing)
 Don't you see it? You will be the
 greatest living chemist of our time.
 The Nobel Prize is yours--

PROFESSOR SPROUL
 FUCK THE NOBEL PRIZE!

The outburst by Sproul stops Steven's advance.

STEVEN
 Think about it...you think those glass
 vials
 (to briefcase)
 and flimsy aluminum box will protect it
 forever? The summer's coming, Doctor
 Sproul. Bringing with it the heat.

Again, Steven inches towards Sproul.

Professor Sproul looks down at the briefcase.

STEVEN

(continuing)

If not this summer then the next...or
the one after that. Time is infinite,
Doctor Sproul.

(urgent)

You have a responsibility to all of us.

Yuri and Steven wait for Sproul's response.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Responsibility?

(laughs)

We've managed to destroy everything
nature's given us. For what? Prizes?
Notoriety?

Professor Sproul lets go of William's hand. Holds the
briefcase with both hands. More secure now.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

It'll be safer here with Nature. Out of
man's feeble hands and mind.

STEVEN

Doctor Sproul! Please! Listen to
yourself. Talking like a madman not a
scientist.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Tell me the difference...

(stearn)

Steven?

William, unaware of the tension building, turns his
attention to a fluttering butterfly. Peeling another
wrapper away from a cough drop.

Sneaks away from his father's side. Follows the
butterfly towards Yuri and Steven.

William manages to get a few feet away from the two
men.

Professor Sproul notices.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
WILLIAM!

Suddenly and out of desperation, Yuri manages to grab hold of the young autistic. He now has the pistol to the boy's head.

YURI
Give Doctor Alton what he wants, Doctor Sproul.

Professor Sproul assesses the situation. Not good.

PROFESSOR SPROUL
Let him go, Yuri. This isn't about him.

STEVEN
This is about everyone, Tom. Existence is at stake.

Yuri looks at his partner not sure of that last statement. Squints. Curious.

YURI
(to himself)
Existence?

Yuri exchanges glances between the two men.

Steven and Sproul are focused on one another.

STEVEN
(continuing)
If that manipulated water molecule is released into the environment and commingles with natural water...
(to surrounding forest)
This'll all be gone --

With that last statement, Yuri gives his partner another "not-so-sure" look. Mouthes the word "gone".

PROFESSOR SPROUL
-- Don't lecture me on my creation!

STEVEN

No one is trying to lecture you --

Yuri looks at Professor Sproul. Back to Steven. A little fear now apparent in his young eyes.

William begins to struggle a little. He doesn't enjoy being held. MOANS.

STEVEN

(continuing)

Give us the water, Doctor Sproul. We can all be on our way. No one gets hurt. It'll be safe. Everything back to normal.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Nothing will ever be normal again, Steven.

Again, Yuri looks towards Steven for assurance.

Steven returns the look. Both take their eyes off Sproul for just a moment.

A split second and Professor Sproul has removed a single vial from the case. The case lies open on the ground. The other vials exposed.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

Let him go.

As a last resort, Professor Sproul grabs the vial's sealed top. Twists.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

All I have to do is open this and expose it to the atmosphere...eventually, my molecule will reach the oceans.

STEVEN

You're better than that, Doctor Sproul.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Try me. I don't have a life without my son. You know that.

Silence. Each man stares at the other without flinching.

Finally, Steven can't hold his composure any longer...

STEVEN

You're washed up, Tom. A has-been. You'll never work at a university again. Not while I'm alive.

Sproul finds Steven's last attempt amusing. CHUCKLES.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(to Yuri)

What's he promising you, Yuri? A fellowship? Fame and fortune?

Yuri looks at Steven indicating the truth in Sproul's statement.

Steven gives a quick reassuring look to Yuri.

Yuri turns to Sproul.

YURI

The experiment is the property of the Laboratory, Doctor Sproul.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

Do you have any idea what this "experiment" can do, Yuri. You heard Doctor, Alton...

Professor Sproul motions his head up and around.

PROFESSOR SPROUL

(continuing)

All this will be gone. You want to be a part of that?

Yuri turns to Steven. Obviously shaken now.

Steven shakes his head slightly, reassuring Yuri. Face red with anger now. His card revealed reluctantly. Takes in a pissed-off breath through his nose.

Finally, Steven raises his hands in front of him. Defeated.

STEVEN

Fine.

Steven looks at Yuri. Nods signaling the boy's release.

Still not sure, Yuri hesitates.

STEVEN

Let him go, Yuri.

Finally, Yuri releases his grip on William and pushes him towards his father.

William stumbles forward. At middle distance between his father and the professors he stops.

Instinctively, Sproul focuses on William...the briefcase...the pistol.

Each object takes up Sproul's entire field of view. Trying to decide his next move.

Steven also deciding. Vial...briefcase. Each the center of the universe for that instant. Makes a slight move toward his priority...the briefcase.

William steps out of the line of fire. Closer towards his father.

Sproul senses Steven's movement. Reflexively, makes his own move towards the briefcase.

Both scientists see nothing else. Tunnel vision.

Sproul's sudden movement startles the spooked Yuri.

BANG! A single shot from Yuri's pistol hits Sproul in the chest.

Both the scientists and William jump reflexively at the unexpected noise.

YURI
Oh Jesus.

Startled, William turns towards the source of the noise. His hands over his ears. Sees Yuri's raised pistol.

With his hand, Professor Sproul covers the entrance wound on his chest. Pulls back. Sees the last of his life on his wet hands.

The Professor drops to his knees. Still clutching the vial. Protecting it. Falls face down in the damp ground. Arms outstretched.

The vial rests inches from the wet earth.

William makes his way to his father's fallen body.

Steven rushes to his waiting prize. Goes for the open briefcase a few feet from William and his father.

William kneels next to his father's side. Makes guttural MOANS as he tries to wake his father.

Yuri slowly approaches Professor Sproul's body from the opposite side. Gun still awkwardly pointed. Looks at William inspecting his father's body.

Back to task, Yuri reaches for the still intact vial. Pulls at it from the professor's hand. He finds it difficult removing it.

Yuri lays the pistol down to get a better, more careful grip on the vial.

STEVEN(OS)
Tell me it's intact.

Yuri finally gets the vial loose. Holds the intact vial up. Turns to answer his accomplice.

YURI
(smiles)
It's perfect--

Yuri turns back. He's face to face with the Professor's pistol now in William's hand.

YURI
(cautious)
William...

BANG!

Steven looks on in horror as William shoots Yuri in the face.

Blood splashes Steven's face a few feet away.

The noise and vibration of the gun startles William. Almost drops the thing.

Yuri's body drops lifeless next to Steven.

The vial falls on the wet earth next to Sproul's body.

William rocks back and forth. MOANS. Still holding the gun.

Steven wipes his face. Looks at the smeared blood on his hand. Looks at the intact vial on the ground next to Sproul.

Looks at William.

William continues to rock.

Steven looks at the vial. Hesitates.

Steven makes a slow move towards the vial. On his hands and knees. Keeps his eye on William.

William ignoring Steven. In his own world.

Steven continues towards the vial. Blindly reaches for it. Almost touching it. Takes his eyes off the boy for an instant to look at the vial. Its distance.

Suddenly, William's rocking stops. Turns the gun on the defenseless Steven.

STEVEN
William. No!

Steven raises his hand in defense.

William closes his eyes shut tight. Expecting the noise and vibration this time. Fires a determined shot into Steven.

Steven immediately slumps over Yuri's body.

William drops the gun. Rocks. MOANS.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CLEARING - DAY

Three dead bodies. One living.

William lies next to his father's corpse. No longer oblivious.

The colored moth floats by. Lands near William.

William smiles.

The aluminum box lies untouched.

The lone vial on the ground.

Summer's coming.

FADE OUT.

THE END

