

THAT MANIC LIGHT

By

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FADE IN:

ON CAMCORDER SCREEN - DAY

MORRIS FELLER looks directly at the screen.

MORRIS

Hi. My name is Morris Feller. I'm 31 years old and I live in the Portland area. I work in the health care field and I'm looking for someone, above all, who is down to earth with a great sense of humor.

He lowers his head, and then looks back up with a goofy smile on his face.

MORRIS

I sound like an idiot.

NICK (V.O.)

(From behind the camera)

Relax. You sound like a stud. A real Casanova. Come on, where's your sense of adventure?

MORRIS

It's off climbing a mountain somewhere.

NICK (V.O.)

Keep going.

Morris takes a breath.

MORRIS

Ok, sorry. I just feel so frickin weird about this. You know, with the video and everything. I hate myself on camera. Ok, here goes.

Morris clears his throat.

MORRIS

You ready? Is it on?

NICK (V.O.)

Of course.

MORRIS

Ok. Umm, Hi. I'm Morris Feller. I'm a 31 year old Portlander. I... I like...

(Joking with British accent)

I like eating an occasional meal. My turn-ons are water polo and skinny-dipping with the Queen.

NICK (V.O.)

Feller! Damnit! Quit fucking around?

ON CAMCORDER SCREEN - SECONDS LATER

MORRIS

I work here in Portland as a Pediatrician. I suppose I've been in school so long I didn't realize that I hadn't yet met the girl of my dreams, so I guess that's why I'm placing this personal ad. Anyway, if you'd like to laugh at things that most people don't think are funny. And if you'd like to get to know a really sincere, nice guy, please send me an email.

(Laughing)

I'm a moron.

(British accent)

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Academy for this award. I'll treasure it forever. I'll put it right next to my last one. Thank you and good night.

NICK (V.O.)

You're a dickhead.

Screen goes blank.

EXT. PORTLAND - DAY

Music kicks in as we see scenes of Portland from a moving car. Downtown is straight ahead while we drive over the Fremont Bridge.

We drive down Broadway street downtown observing the sights along the way.

INT. CAR - CONT.

MORRIS is driving. NICK sits in the front passenger seat.

MORRIS

It's easy for you. You're already married.

NICK

Grass is always greener, my friend. You know what Jean Paul Sartre wrote?

MORRIS

Shit. I probably should've paid more attention to my one philosophy class back in college.

NICK

He wrote that 'we have been charged with dwelling on human degradation, with pointing up everywhere the sordid, shady, and slimy; and neglecting the gracious and beautiful, the bright side of human nature'.

MORRIS

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

NICK

It means we should look on the bright side.

MORRIS

That's too goddam positive and hopeful for an existentialist. Isn't it?

NICK

Hey, Sartre was misunderstood. Most people'd be surprised at what he actually had to say about humanism.

MORRIS

Don't try to sit there and deny that Sartre wasn't trying to get some sex.

NICK

Ah, shit.

MORRIS

No. I'm serious. Think about it. What existentialist in their right mind would go on about the bright side and

all that if he wasn't just trying to
get into some chick's pants.

NICK

Pull over.

MORRIS

What?

NICK

You heard me. Pull over.

By this time they are in the west hills at Council Crest,
a view-point over the city. Morris stops the car.

EXT. COUNCIL CREST - CONT.

Nick gets out and shuts the passenger door.

NICK

Get out of the car.

MORRIS

Why?

Nick walks over to the view-point.

NICK

Look at that. Wow.

Morris get's out of the car and shuts the door.

MORRIS

What's so goddam amazing up here
anyway?

(British accent)

I stand atop this summit and shout at
the world. A world of utter hatred
and obesity.

NICK

Shh. Come here.

MORRIS

You got problems, man. Serious
problems.

Morris reaches Nick and the view-point.

EXT. VIEW - CONT.

This is the view that they are beholding. The city of Portland looms below on a mostly clear day.

MORRIS

(Spoken like Charlie Bucket from Willy Wonka)

Hey Grandpa. There's our house.

NICK

(Like Willy Wonka)

Whatever happened to the child who suddenly got everything he always wanted?

TOGETHER

He lived happily ever after.

They laugh.

MORRIS

That movie changed my life.

NICK

I find it hard to believe that a movie can change a life.

MORRIS

I mean, when Grandpa Joe started walking after 20 years of being bedridden. It was at that point I made the decision that I was going to become a doctor. I wanted to help people feel as good as Grandpa Joe. The walking Grandpa Joe. Not the bedridden one.

NICK

How honorable.

MORRIS

Little did I know that medicine sucks. It was really the movie that I liked. I should have become an actor or director instead.

NICK

Or writer.

MORRIS

Yeah. That'd be a good life. The only problem is that you have to actually sell some of your writing.

NICK

There's snafu's everywhere in life.

MORRIS

Hey, I heard Bud's working on something new.

NICK

He's a great writer. He just needs an audience.

MORRIS

Well, his latest novel might be the one that gets picked up. His wife's so cool. For putting up with his constant writing and never selling.

NICK

Guys need cool wives.

MORRIS

That's easy for you to say. You got the coolest wife in all of eternity. How'd you trick her into marrying you anyway?

(Gay accent)

Hi Emily, I'm Nicholas, a poor philosophy student. Will you marry me?

NICK

Not exactly. Hey man, just remember that nobody's perfect.

MORRIS

What are you saying? That Emily isn't perfect? Of course she is.

Nick falls silent.

MORRIS

Hey, Nick. What are you saying?

NICK

I'm just saying that nobody's perfect. That's all.

MORRIS

Oh God. Here it comes. The floodgates
have opened. What possible
shortcoming could Emily possess?

NICK

I'm not saying she has any
shortcomings. I just think that-

Nick looks down out at the stunning city view.

MORRIS

You think what? What?

NICK

(Motioning to the view below)
Look out there.

MORRIS

Don't divert attention away from-

NICK

Down there we can see it all. Planned
neighborhoods lined up like prison
cells.

MORRIS

Oh God-

NICK

All taught that if we're smart enough
and we study real hard than one day
we can grow up to work our asses off
for someone else. But I expect
something more. Something beyond the
white picket fence and mocha-colored
half-decaf tall skinny vanilla
lattes.

MORRIS

Fuckin aye. What else is there?

NICK

We're almost all disillusioned with
life in a society that rewards
austerity and mediocrity.

MORRIS

I'm not.

NICK

Life and all of existence is meaningless.

MORRIS

I think you've been reading too many Woody Allen books.

NICK

Reading my books may be the only thing keeping me going sometimes.

MORRIS

Don't be silly. You seemed to enjoy that cheese cake after dinner last night?

NICK

Life is disgusting and nauseating.

MORRIS

Especially when suffering from a bout of salmonella.

NICK

Life is putrid.

MORRIS

Well, I'm not sure I'd go that far-

NICK

Man is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of infinite responsibilities.

MORRIS

Yeah, maybe so. But at least your wife's pretty hot.

NICK

But that's about it.

MORRIS

(Shocked)

Ah, I see what's going on now. You've got something going on the side. Is that it?

NICK

No way! I'd never do something like that to Emily. It's just that I sometimes long for earth-shattering

intellectual conversation. That's all.

MORRIS

(Amazed)

And Emily doesn't provide you with that? You're crazy. Most guys would kill for a chance to be with a girl like that.

NICK

I know. I know. But she majored in leisure studies.

MORRIS

Jesus Christ! You knew all this before you married her. What were you expecting?

NICK

(Slowing down)

I just need some sincere intellectualization at times. That's all.

MORRIS

That's what you have friends like me for.

Nick looks at Morris and smiles. He pats him on the shoulder.

NICK

Don't flatter yourself, big guy.

MORRIS

(Shocked)

You dick. You got even more problems now.

Morris walks back to the car.

NICK

Wait. Morris.

MORRIS

After ceremoniously offending everyone with your holier-than-thou attitude, you leave me with no other choice but to leave you on the top of Council Crest. Just be glad you're

wearing pants. A breeze is picking up
from the east.

Nick runs after Morris.

EXT. AT THE CAR - CONT.

They reach the car.

NICK

I apologize.

MORRIS

You can just be so damn self-
important sometimes.

NICK

Sorry.

They get in the car.

INT. CAR - CONT.

Morris turns the key and starts the engine. They buckle
up.

NICK

It's just that there's got to be
something more for me out there.

MORRIS

(Looks at Nick)

You listen to me and you listen to me
good.

Morris puts the car into drive but is still not yet
moving forward.

MORRIS

There's nothing more out there.
Nothing...

Morris punches the gas and the car speeds away.

EXT. COUNCIL CREST - CONT.

The car drives back down the hill.

EXT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

This is a fairly unkempt house in a quiet, residential
area.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

EARNEST "BUD" HAWKINS is a guy around the same age as Nick and Morris. He's much more cosmopolitan than them. He smokes. He's always well-dressed. He has both a cup of coffee and a glass of wine by his side at all times.

Bud is looking at himself in the bathroom mirror while yanking hairs out of his nose.

BUD

Ouch. Son of a bitch.

The squeak of the front door opening forces him to stop.

CELIA'S VOICE

(From the front room)

Honey?

BUD

(Holding his sore nose)

In the bathroom.

CELIA, Bud's wife, enters the bathroom.

BUD

(Cheerfully)

Sweetie.

CELIA

It's good to be home.

They kiss.

BUD

You're in for quite a treat, Celia.

CELIA

Is that so?

(Sniffing the air)

If my nose isn't tricking me, I bet I can guess what it is.

BUD

Ah ha. I bet you can't. I found this recipe in an old shoebox in the closet. I'd totally forgotten about... Roast Duck with Confit of Sour Cherries.

CELIA

(Excited)

Umm. Honey, that sounds superb.
You're an artist. I swear.

They walk into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT.

Bud opens the oven for a second. They sniff.

CELIA

Nice.

BUD

(Shutting the oven)
So how was your day?

CELIA

Over. That's all I can say. It's come
to a well-deserved end. How 'bout
you? You get any writing done.

BUD

Oh, a little bit. I mostly poured
into Dostoevsky. Oh, and I found this
old recipe.

He waves the piece of paper.

CELIA

Good for you.

BUD

But I'm getting close to starting the
next chapter. I just need a slightly
more askew perspective before
committing to writing, ya know.

CELIA

Yeah, I guess.

BUD

But I'll get it done. I really think
it's going to be something.

CELIA

(Kissing his cheek)

I know it'll be something. Something
great.

The oven timer BEEPS.

BUD
(Finger pointing up)
Ah ha. Dinner's ready.

Celia and Bud set the table for dinner.

EXT. NICK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Morris' car pulls into the driveway.

INT. CAR - CONT.

Nick opens the passenger door to leave.

MORRIS
Thanks for making that pathetic video
of me.

NICK
Yeah.

MORRIS
I'm sure most girls who see it will
shriek away in horror. Hey, at least
it's comedy. The world always needs
more comedy, right?

NICK
It's fine. Don't worry. Once you
upload that video to your WebDate
site you won't be able to keep your
Johnson in your pants. It'll be
flying around like a bee in a field
of flowers.

MORRIS
Charming.

NICK
Talk to you later.

MORRIS
Yeah, later.

Nick get's out and shuts the door behind him. Morris
looks at himself in the flipped-up rear-view mirror. He
sighs.

MORRIS
(Speaking like a news reporter)

He was a real lady killer. 31 years old, funny, smart, attractive, and if that's not enough: a doctor.

(Speaking like himself)

And I got nothing.

He flips the rear-view mirror back down and drives away.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - CONT.

Nick enters the house and looks around the front room.

NICK

Emily?

He hears the sound of her falling down. She grunts.

Nick runs over to a back room.

NICK

You ok?

INT. BACK ROOM - CONT.

Emily is very cute, slender. Nick helps her to her feet from the floor.

EMILY

(Out of breath)

Yes, of course. I'm fine. I was just trying a new method of meditation.

NICK

What new method?

EMILY

Upside down on my head.

NICK

Honey? You could hurt yourself.

EMILY

Don't be silly. I'm in complete balance and control at all times.

NICK

I could see that.

EMILY

You see, it's just a matter of finding one's complete balance point and going with it. See-

She closes her eyes while trying to lower to the floor with one leg up. She falls, but Nick grabs her.

NICK

That's fine. You don't need to impress me. I already know you can do it.

EMILY

I just wanted to show you how much I've learned.

He holds two fingers to her mouth.

NICK

Shh. That's ok. Let's just get out of this room and make something for dinner. Ok?

EMILY

Sure.

They walk out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Nick's reading a book. Emily is watching a video on meditation.

EMILY

Baby? What are you reading?

NICK

Oh, it's a treatment of existential theology by some German guy. It's mostly hogwash.

EMILY

(Walking over to him)

Why would you say that?

NICK

Well, I've never heard of anyone referring to Gabriel Marcel's concept of one's personal commitment to religious faith as commonplace.

EMILY

Uh huh.

NICK

I'm gonna have to start teaching this next week to my students. I hope they can see the short-sightedness of this guy.

EMILY

Right. So, would you like to watch a movie? I rented "Seven".

Nick pauses. He looks back to his book. Sighs. And shuts it.

NICK

Sure. Let's do it.

They walk hand in hand to the TV room.

EXT. MORRIS' HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

This is a nicely kept, smaller house. An alarm clock screeches.

INT. BEDROOM - CONT.

As the alarm buzzes, Morris reaches a hand over to the bedside table and tries to blindly turn it off. He misses and changes the sound to am talk radio. He tries again and then changes it to a music station.

Finally, he opens his eyes a little bit and turns off the alarm. He looks at the time: 6:15am.

MORRIS

Ahh!

He forces himself out of bed and walks half-asleep to the bathroom. His hair is wildly out of place. He has a dusting of facial hair.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

He flips the light on and squints even more. He picks up his toothbrush without looking and puts a load of shaving cream on it. He tries to brush his teeth. He seems to notice something is wrong and puts the toothbrush down.

He then puts toothpaste on his shaving cream brush applicator and rubs it all over his face.

He picks up his contact saline solution and squeezes a stream into his mouth and gargles.

INT. BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

In the shower he lets the water hit his face. He makes funny short bursts of "morning" sounds to try to wake up.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

The light is on. He has shaved, his hair is still wet. He tries to put his tie on and is having some trouble. Finally he gets it good enough and walks into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT.

He flips on the light and looks at the time. It reads 6:45.

MORRIS

Shit.

He switches into high gear, slides into his white doctor's coat and grabs his stethoscope. He plucks his briefcase off the floor and his keys and turns off the lights.

He exits the house out of the side door.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MINUTES LATER

As the garage door goes up, Morris' car backs out. The door goes back down and the car takes off in a rush.

EXT. BJORN'S HOUSE - SAME MORNING

The morning settles on a house. It's BJORN'S house, another friend of theirs. The front door opens and Bjorn steps onto the porch in his boxers. He stretches wildly and yawns deeply.

In one hand he holds a cup of coffee. He picks up the morning newspaper and then gazes around the neighborhood.

BJORN

(To no one)

Good morning, Portland.

He scratches his groin, turns around and steps inside. The door shuts.

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME MORNING

The kitchen is empty until Celia hurries in. Bud follows her with a mug of coffee. He's dressed in a robe. He holds a lit cigarette.

BUD

Here. Have a sip.

Celia turns around and grasps the mug. She takes a few sips and hands it back to Bud.

CELIA

Thanks, Pumpkin. You're so dutiful.

She looks at the clock which shows 7:36am.

BUD

What time's the bus?

CELIA

7:45.

Getting her coat and putting it around her shoulders.

BUD

One more sip of coffee and you got to hit the road, babe.

CELIA

(Hurried)

Shit. You're right. Ok thanks.

He opens the door and helps her onto the porch.

EXT. PORCH - CONT.

He follows her to the edge of the porch. She takes one last sip of coffee. They kiss.

BUD

Have a good day, sweetie.

CELIA

(Walking away)

You too. Say hi to Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche, and Lord Byron.

BUD

I will. Love ya.

CELIA

Me too.

He watches as she scurries away. He flicks his cigarette away and turns to go back inside.

INT. HOUSE - CONT.

Bud walks back in and shuts the door behind him. He sets the coffee mug down and falls onto the couch and closes his eyes, exhausted.

EXT. NICK AND EMILY'S HOUSE - SAME MORNING

Emily walks out of the house with her bicycle. Nick is right behind her with his bicycle. They walk their bikes down the steps onto the sidewalk.

They both put on helmets and snap the straps around their respective chins.

EMILY

Let's have a kiss.

They try to kiss, but the helmets hit each other. They laugh.

NICK

Ah well. I'll make up for it tonight after work.

EMILY

(Smiling)

Is that so?

NICK

Yes.

EMILY

I'm gonna hold you to that.

NICK

Now that's a promise I don't mind keeping.

EMILY

Alright. Have a good one, Hun.

NICK

Love ya.

They ride their bikes in separate directions.

EMILY

(Yelling back)

I'll be a little late. I've got hypnosis class.

NICK

Right. Hypnosis. Call me later.

They ride away.

INT. BUD AND CELIAS HOUSE - MORNING

Bud is still sleeping on the couch. He looks rather comfortable.

EXT. BJORN'S HOUSE - MORNING

He get's into his truck. He has a big coffee thermos with him. He pulls down his driveway and out into the street.

INT. CAR - CONT.

Bjorn takes a sip of coffee and puts on some really engaging old bluegrass country/folk music on the stereo and sings along.

EXT. BJORN'S WOODSHOP - MORNING

He parks the truck and enters his shop.

INT. SHOP - CONT.

He flips on a bunch of lights and turns on a radio. It's a similar type of old country/folk music. He hums along cheerfully.

He picks up some wood on which he's been working and feels the surface. He fastens it to a machine and starts to work.

INT. MORRIS' CAR - DAY

Morris is in his tie and white coat. He's parked on a residential street eating a hamburger. He picks up his cell-phone and dials.

MORRIS

Hey, Nick. It's Feller. I snuck out of the clinic for lunch. Had to be alone for a few. Anyway, give me a call after work and maybe we can get some beers or something. Later.

He takes the last bite and wads up the paper. He turns on the ignition and looks at the time.

MORRIS

Back to the kids.

EXT. CAR - CONT.

The car speeds off through the neighborhood.

EXT. REED COLLEGE - DAY

Sweeping view of the picturesque collegiate setting. Nick eats the last of his lunch while sitting on a bench in the park. His book is open.

A student walks by.

STUDENT

Hi, Professor Price.

NICK

Hey, Chuck. How's that Melville report coming?

STUDENT

I could really get more out of one of his shorter novels. Why Moby Dick?

NICK

Well, it's in the curriculum, ya know. You think we should start with something shorter?

STUDENT

Yeah.

NICK

You pick. Surprise me.

STUDENT

Awesome.

While the student walks by, a Frisbee slams into the back of Nick's head.

NICK

Jesus!

He turns around and a dog picks up the Frisbee and runs toward a woman. She walks over to Nick. This is 28 year old MEGAN VAN BEEK.

MEGAN

Oh my God. I am so sorry.

NICK

I just wasn't expecting it, that's all.

MEGAN

So it might have been ok if you knew it was coming?

NICK

(Laughing)

Well, not exactly.

MEGAN

(Looking at her dog)

Kafka has a predilection to roaming almost overly free at times.

NICK

Franz Kafka?

MEGAN

I think he likes his name. Though he wasn't born in Prague, he seems to share certain similarities to the man.

NICK

I find that hard to believe.

MEGAN

It's true. Did you know that Kafka chose to live with his parents most of his life? That's just like my dog. Still with his momma.

She insinuates herself.

NICK

But the real Kafka was a well-read Czechoslovakian attorney and philosopher.

MEGAN

I'm not saying that every similarity exists between the two. Just the more formidable ones.

Nick looks at her as she throws the Frisbee again.

NICK

Are you a student or?

MEGAN

Oh, I'm sorry. My name's Megan. I went to college here a few years ago. I just can't seem to tear myself away from the place. I live over there in some rentals.

NICK

I see.

MEGAN

I suppose you're a big professor.

NICK

Well, I-

MEGAN

Trying to enter the grand fortress of the teenage mind and implant your little seed of self-important babble.

NICK

Hey. I work hard at this.

MEGAN

How many classes you teach?

NICK

Just two right now, but-

MEGAN

So you take up the slack by ripping through books like the one on your lap. Let's see..

She looks at his book.

MEGAN

Hegel? No doubt to further define your most probable limited knowledge of Kierkegaard and classic Cartesian philosophy. No doubt to trick your self into believing that the 'Science Of Logic' is a great work. A masterpiece.

NICK

But it is a great work. Still revered even today.

MEGAN

Don't you ever wonder why great philosophers and thinkers have very little or no impact on modern society?

NICK

I suppose I don't.

MEGAN

It's because most of it isn't relative to today's standards.

NICK

But that's where you're wrong. It is relative.

MEGAN

You're mistaken, um.

NICK

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Nick Price.

They shake hands.

MEGAN

Price, huh. Ever think about changing it?

NICK

Changing what? My last name?

MEGAN

Yeah. Price? I mean, it sounds like hanging out with you is a great bargain or something. Too good to pass up.

She laughs.

NICK

I suppose you were a philosophy major.

MEGAN

Me? Hell no. Leisure studies.

NICK

You're frickin kidding me?

MEGAN

Nope. You see, I think Americans are brainwashed into thinking that leisure is synonymous with lazy. Certainly many in this country are pitifully lazy. That's why I refer to our true nationality as American't.

NICK

American't?

MEGAN

That's right. I also took some creative writing. Particularly poetry.

NICK

Cool.

MEGAN

Yeah, I'm just a frustrated poet, in some ways.

NICK

I'm sure your poems are great. Try one on me.

MEGAN

Right here? Out in the open? I couldn't.

Nick looks at his watch.

NICK

I've got a couple minutes. Come on.

MEGAN

Ok, why not? Here goes. ...But don't laugh.

She clears her throat. Her demeanour changes to one of deranged seriousness.

MEGAN

(From memory, eyes closed)

In that manic light, where everything physical shifts akin to a point of Zen. In a new mind where the air breathes you, and movement floats like an infant's head or a descending maple leaf in holy air. I found comfort there a while in my

accelerated state ascended behind myself, outside looking in. Viewing the leaves as canvases in the wind, falling in death and stirred as if alive again. I felt the shapes of faces with my golden soul and my golden eye, and I knew each person, stoned in the know, as if I were their divine judge, waiting for each soul to pass through my subjective window. Seething, askew, coal, fire, anger.

Nick looks at her in complete awe, speechless. She snaps out of a trance-like state.

MEGAN

Anyway, I've got to get going. Nice talking to you.

She starts to leave. Nick stands up.

NICK

But Megan, wait. I- Can't we meet sometime? I mean, to discuss various topics. You know, things of an academic nature. The great poets. Classic novelists.

MEGAN

Oh, you are a bad boy, aren't you? Yeah, I guess. I know where to find you.

She tosses the Frisbee again and jogs away.

NICK

Right. See ya.

When she's gone. He looks around the campus as if he'd done something wrong. He picks up his book and walks back to the buildings.

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - DAY

The living room is empty. Bud is no longer laying on the couch. We hear typing.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - CONT.

A cigarette burns in an ashtray. Bud has a glass of wine and a cup of coffee nearby. He is typing into his computer.

He stops typing and laughs at something he wrote. He drags the cigarette. He sips coffee. He sips wine.

The phone rings and he picks it up.

BUD

Hello? Hey Nick Price. Long time no talk. Me too. Been kinda busy. You know. Yeah, it's going well. A real twist on modern day Hemingway-ian prose. Yeah, I think you'll get a kick out of it.

He stands up and walks out of the room with the cordless phone.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

He walks to the front door.

BUD

Hiking? I don't see the point. Self-abuse to what end? When?

He opens the door and walk onto the porch smoking.

EXT. PORCH - CONT.

He sits on a railing.

BUD

Tonight? Well, I got some work to do. Celia will be home later. What? Well, I suppose I can leave a note or call her or something.

He smashes his cigarette out and flicks it away.

BUD

Really? Morris and Bjorn? Sounds like an all-out riot. Ok, I'll go with you, but I'm not promising anything. Yeah, I'll be waiting. Oh and by the way. Is this a black tie affair?

He laughs and takes out another cigarette.

BUD

See ya in a couple hours.

As soon as he hangs up, the phone rings again.

BUD

Hello? Sweetie! How are you?

Fade out.

EXT. FOREST PARK - LATE DAY

Morris' car drives up and stops. The driver, front passenger, and rear passenger doors open. MORRIS, NICK and BUD exit the car.

Morris is still in his shirt and tie. Nick is in shorts. Bud is dressed nicely as always; tie, slacks.

MORRIS

(Removing his tie)

I got to get out of these clothes.

NICK

I shed mine a while ago.

MORRIS

Seriously Bud. I can't believe that you can go hiking in such attire. Look at you.

BUD

The true downfall of the modern western world was the creation of casual Fridays. Haven't you been to Europe? Anytime they are seen in public they make a noticeable effort to dress respectfully.

MORRIS

But there are extremes.

BUD

Come on now. Who here doesn't secretly loath people who go to the grocery store in their god-awful Sunday afternoon sweats? It's a disgrace. Grocery stores are the modern-day gymnasium. Lifting sacks of food has become equivalent to weight lifting.

NICK

I never thought about it like that. But now that you mention it, I agree.

Excuse me while I heave at the very thought of it.

Nick pretends he's puking. Morris removes his clothes and changes into shorts right in front of everyone.

MORRIS

Why expend energy worrying about it though?

NICK

Because he'd like to keep his lunch where it belongs. In his stomach. Right Bud?

BUD

It doesn't stop there. I can sit for hours. Days. Probably years contemplating the absurdity and utter nonsensical futility of society and its hideous inhabitants.

Morris throws his clothes into the car.

MORRIS

Anyone need to put anything else in the car?

NICK

No. Where's Bjorn?

MORRIS

Said he'd be here.

They look down the street. Nick picks up his cell-phone and dials.

NICK

Hold on.

MORRIS

Bud, thinking like that seems like a lot of useless energy.

BUD

For you, maybe. But not for me. It fuels my mental momentum.

NICK

Shut your mental momentum up for a second.

(To the phone)

-Hey, Bjorn. What's up? Where are you?

Bjorn's truck chugs up the street toward them. Nick keeps talking.

NICK

Hey, I think I see ya.

MORRIS

Imagine that.

(Like a sports-caster)

Ladies and Gentlemen. Hold onto your nuts for the arrival of one of the greats in woodworking. None other than Bjorn, the Norwegian Woodman. It's said that only the ladies truly know why they call him the Woodman.

NICK

(Into the phone)

Yeah, Feller's delusional again. He's incessantly talking about your wood. He seems to be obsessed with it.

MORRIS

Shut up. Apparently, you've never seen it. Now hang that damn phone up.

Bjorn parks and gets out of the car. A total mountain-man. Boots, plaid, flannel, etc..

BJORN

Sorry I'm late. Had to wrestle a crock. You know.

NICK

Just like Bjorn. Full a shit.

BUD

What a crock.

They all shake hands.

BJORN

Well, who's idea was this little outing?

BUD

I think Morris.

MORRIS

No. It was Nick. Apparently he's missed the woods and was feeling somewhat nostalgic.

BUD

Personally, I can subsist just fine without such intimate contact with nature. If you think about it, that's why nature kicked us out.

They begin hiking on the trail.

BJORN

Don't be silly. Nature isn't through with us yet.

NICK

I hate to admit it, but Bud's got a point.

MORRIS

But how can he possibly have a point?

NICK

Think about it. We'd be eaten alive if we tried to live in, say, a jungle, for instance.

BUD

Exactly. Though we sprung forth from the grasp of the wilderness, we can never go back.

INT. FURTHER ON THE TRAIL - MINUTES LATER

Bud lights a cigarette while they wait for Morris to urinate close-by in the woods.

BJORN

(Motioning to Morris)

That looks like a gratifying idea. I think I'll join ya, Feller.

MORRIS

Whoa. Let me finish first. There's a couple drops that keep clinging for dear life.

NICK

Those are the drops that always get
the edge of the toilet bowl dirty.
You know what I mean?

BUD

Yeah. My wife hates those drops.

BJORN

Hurry up, Feller.

Feller shakes his johnson area vigorously.

NICK

If you sit down when you take a leak,
then you don't make a mess. It's
better that way.

MORRIS

Sit down to piss? What are you, a
little girl? Jesus, did you hear this
guy?

Morris walks back to them as Bjorn runs over and urinates
in a similar place.

BJORN

Ahh. Much better.

BUD

Sometimes I sit down. You know, when
I get up in the middle of the night
with a full bladder.

MORRIS

You too? What is this? The end of the
frickin world, or what? People
wearing sweats to the store; guys
sitting down to piss. It's all too
much for me.

NICK

You'd hate married life then. It's a
great big piss-sit-down. You remember
protesters in the sixties and the
peace sit-ins? Well, it's the polar
opposite.

BUD

And it affects married men all across
the globe.

NICK

(Singing like John Lennon)

All we are saying. Give piss a chance.

They laugh as Bjorn finishes and walks back to them.

BJORN

I just gave piss a chance. And I feel so much better for it.

They continue hiking.

MORRIS

If that's what marriage comes to. I'm not so sure it's for me.

NICK

By the way, Feller. You gotten any replies to your ad?

BJORN

Ad? You place an ad, Morris?

BUD

What kind of ad? You trying to sell your body again? I tell ya, you'll die a pauper.

MORRIS

Shut up.

INT. FURTHER ON THE TRAIL - CONT.

Hiking.

NICK

I wouldn't even respond to any if they don't include a picture.

BJORN

Yeah. Can you imagine the beasts that lurk behind those fiber-optic cables?

BUD

The beast from within. On a blind date.

MORRIS

No way. I'd never go out with a girl unless I knew what she looked like.

I'm not crazy. But I did get a couple emails.

NICK
Really? Anything good?

MORRIS
Nope. No pictures.

BJORN
You want pictures? I can email you some great websites.

MORRIS
Not those pictures, damnit. I guess I'll just keep looking.

They walk in silence for a few seconds.

MORRIS
So how is married life anyway, Nick?

NICK
Shut it, Feller.

BUD
What?

BJORN
Something's up?

NICK
No. Nothing to fear. Happy as ever.

MORRIS
(Singing)
Give piss a chance.

They walk off the scene.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

The guys are sitting down on logs and rocks.

NICK
It's just that I feel like I'm lacking some mental stimulation.

MORRIS
Mental masturbation.

NICK

No. Just attention to the subtleties
of observation.

BJORN

With breasts?

NICK

No!

BUD

Nice breasts?

NICK

It's not about breasts. I knew you
guys wouldn't understand. It's ok,
I'm alright now.

MORRIS

(Laughing)

Why? Did you meet someone?

NICK

(Unconvincingly)

Umm, no. No way.

MORRIS

Oh my God. You met someone.

BUD

I'm not sure I want to hear this.

BJORN

(Holding his ears)

Me neither.

NICK

Christ, guys. I just met someone who
knows something about literature,
that's all.

BUD

Oh my God. One of his students.

MORRIS

Nick!

NICK

No. Not a student. Some chick walking
her dog named Kafka.

BUD

What? An existential canine? How absurd.

BJORN

(Facetiously)

How utterly meaningless and futile despite living in an otherwise irrational universe.

NICK

Shit.

BUD

I suppose dogs may actually be the only really true existentialists of our time. They sleep, eat, play, and shit; therefore they are.

NICK

Therefore you suck.

BJORN

I want an existential canine. Where can I get me one?

NICK

Forget it. It's not important anyway. Nothing's going on. Don't worry about it.

Nick and Morris look at each other as if they know more may be going on.

Bud lights a cigarette and takes a drag.

MORRIS

How can you smoke when all this natural beauty surrounds us?

BUD

You're the one who invited me. And by the way, smokers need to stick together. Our true goal is to find the most remote and gorgeous location on earth, and then light-up. It's our way of saying thanks to mother earth.

BJORN

Speaking of that. Who wants to get out a here and go have a beer?

They all stand up at the same time.

NICK

Finally, someone with some true sense.

MORRIS

Way to go, Bjorn. First round's on you.

BJORN

Of course. The highly educated doctor and philosopher can't afford it. I understand.

BUD

Hey, what about me?

BJORN

Beer on a writer's salary? Come come now. Let's get serious.

They walk back down the trail.

BUD

Thanks a lot. At least I'm worth my weight in beer.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - MINUTES LATER

Back at the cars.

MORRIS

Great hike, guys.

BUD

(Appearing uncomfortable)

Yeah, but I can't wait to get home. I'm gonna rip my wife's panties off.

BJORN

Christ, Bud. We haven't even been out here very long. How can you miss her that much?

BUD

(Adjusting his own pants)

No. It's just that they feel so tight after that hike.

They laugh.

INT. MORRIS' HOUSE - EVENING

Morris checks his email on a laptop computer.

MORRIS

Interesting. But no picture. What the-? Why no picture?

He types more.

MORRIS

Wait a minute. Who's this? 5'5".
Attractive. 28 years old.
Professional. But shit - no picture.

He types in a reply and then pauses to think. Finally, he presses one button (send), and then sits back in his chair and looks up.

MORRIS

Oh well. We'll just have to see.

He shuts off the computer and stands up. He walks into the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

He turns on the light and stares at himself in the mirror.

MORRIS

(British accent)

Doctor Feller, I presume. You look like total crap. Where's your future heading? I know not. Where's your existential canine? Certainly not present.

He laughs and turns on the faucet. He splashes water on his face.

MORRIS

Ridiculous.

Fade out.

EXT. REED COLLEGE - DAY

Nick secretively walks around pretending to read his book, but mostly looking for Megan.

A student walks by.

STUDENT

Yo. Teach.

NICK

Hey. See you later in class.

STUDENT

But class is just about to start.

Nick looks at his watch.

NICK

You're right.

He turns around and heads toward a building.

NICK

Thanks.

The student shakes his head in disbelief. As Nick walks he notices a piece of paper stuck in the bench he was at yesterday.

NICK

What the-?

He walks over to the bench.

EXT. BENCH - CONT.

A note is wedged between the wood and is sticking out. He grabs it, opens it up and reads it to himself.

NICK

(Whispering)

Megan.

He shoves it in his pocket and looks around. He then runs to class.

EXT. CAFÉ IN THE CITY - LATER THAT DAY

A quaint little out-of-the-way café on a non-busy street. Nick rides up and parks his bike. He locks it up.

INT. CAFÉ - CONT.

Nick walks in, backpack filled with books. He looks around. He walks up to the counter.

NICK

Just decaf, please.

INT. CAFÉ - CONT.

An empty table awaits as Nick walks over and sits down, backpack now off his shoulders. He sips his decaf and looks around.

The door opens and Megan comes in. He waves her over.

MEGAN

You got my note.

NICK

Very James-Bond of you. I'm surprised it didn't explode after I read it.

MEGAN

That would have been Mission-Impossible.

NICK

Right.

A clerk approaches as Megan sits down.

CLERK

Get you anything?

MEGAN

Green tea, please.

The clerk leaves and Megan looks at Nick with a smile.

MEGAN

It lubricates the grey matter.

NICK

The whole of England can't possibly be wrong.

MEGAN

That's true. Tea breaks four, five times a day. Good stuff.

Nick opens his backpack.

NICK

So, you wanted me to bring my texts?

MEGAN

I want to make sure that you give those kids proper exposure to the right books.

NICK

Why the hell do you care?

MEGAN

Because when I was there, no professor had the wherewithal to withstand forcing us to read the weaklings. You know, Karoak, Dickens, Twain.

NICK

What's the difference?

MEGAN

The ultimate effect of a society's fascination with mediocre literature is directly linked to turning out great masses of quasi-educated persons. This is reflected in the poor quality of modern media.

NICK

Theater, movies, television?

MEGAN

Exactly. And novels. I mean, my God. When was the last time you saw a truly great movie?

NICK

I'm not sure that's the point. It's entertainment. That's the very reason it exists.

MEGAN

Oh, is it? Christ, Nicholas, it could be so much more. It has been so much more. I think it can be again.

NICK

But my students?

MEGAN

I guess we have to start somewhere. We shouldn't tolerate crap any longer. It's an outrage.

NICK

Well, there's always the old books and works. The classics.

MEGAN

Yes, yes. But humanity can accomplish so much more. We're at a time in history when we really need to break through all the bullshit and create. Really create.

They sip their drinks.

NICK

A modern day renaissance.

MEGAN

But we could do without the black plague.

NICK

Yeah. We've already got terrorists out there with bottled anthrax.

MEGAN

I want to infiltrate the system from the inside.

NICK

(In disbelief)

You're mad.

MEGAN

Not quite. Now, let's see some of those books. Oh, and do you have the intended curriculum for the semester?

They shuffle through books and papers as the scene fades.

EXT. NICK AND EMILY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Nick walks up the porch steps with his bike. He unlocks the door and opens it up.

INT. HOUSE - CONT.

Nick walks in the house and puts the bike away. He's trying to be quiet.

INT. BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

Nick brushes his teeth and looks at himself in the mirror.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

He quietly removes his clothes and gets into bed gently.
She is facing the other direction.

EMILY

(Sleepily)

Grading papers this late?

Nick pauses.

NICK

Not exactly. Got into a discussion
with a couple students. You know. No
big deal.

EMILY

I just worried a little. That's all.

He puts his arms around her.

NICK

No big deal, honey. I was wrong for
not calling. Time just crept up on
us.

She turns to face him.

EMILY

I'd just rather know and not have to
worry.

NICK

I know.

EMILY

The mind begins to wander.

NICK

I could imagine.

EMILY

So, ...welcome home.

They look at each other in the dim evening light.

NICK

Sorry.

They kiss.

EMILY

Good night.

NICK

Yep.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Headlights follow a street around left and right turns. Finally, the car stops and the headlights go out.

INT. INSIDE THE CAR - CONT.

Someone is breathing from the inside of the car as they look out at Nick and Emily's house. We don't know who it is. We fade out.

EXT. OUTSIDE NICK AND EMILY'S HOUSE - MORNING

All is still. There is no car parked in the street any longer.

The front door opens and Nick and Emily carry their bikes down the steps as before.

NICK

I'll call you this time if I'm going to have to work late, ok?

EMILY

Yeah. Don't worry about it. I love ya, ok?

NICK

I know.

They kiss, but their helmets bump again. They laugh.

EMILY

See ya tonight.

NICK

Ok, bye.

They ride their separate ways again.

EXT. EMILY RIDING HER BIKE - CONT.

Emily rides the bike. As she leaves Nick and the house, a worried look forms upon her face. She sniffs as if almost crying.

EXT. FLOWER SHOP - MINUTES LATER

This is a cute flower shop in the business section of a residential neighborhood. Emily enters the scene and gets off of her bike.

She unlocks the shop and goes inside.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - LATER THAT MORNING

There are a couple shoppers browsing around the store. Emily talks with a co-worker behind the counter. This is MELINDA.

EMILY

Just a little weird, that's all.

MELINDA

You know what they say? If you suspect something, there's usually a good reason for it.

EMILY

Who says that?

MELINDA

Well, me. I guess.

EMILY

But this is Nick we're talking about. My best friend. My husband. My confidante.

MELINDA

Hey, no one says anything has to be going on. Relax. It was just one night.

EMILY

You're right. Sorry for bringing it up. I'll keep this kind of thing to myself from now on-

MELINDA

(Interrupting)

No. You can still bring it up.

A customer carries a flower arrangement to the counter.

MELINDA

That's so pretty.

EMILY

Is it a gift? Or-

CUSTOMER

Well, you see. It's my niece's birthday Friday. I just love that little dear.

EMILY

Would you like me to gift-wrap it for you?

CUSTOMER

Oh yes, please. That'd be nice.

Emily takes the arrangement and goes to the back room as Melinda works the cash register.

EXT. CAFÉ - DAY

Nick rides his bike in front of the café. He parks and locks it up.

INT. CAFÉ - MINUTES LATER

Megan is already there. She has a bunch of papers spread out on a table upon which she is writing. She looks at Nick.

MEGAN

Good. You're here. What's the matter?

NICK

Nothing. I probably shouldn't have been out so late last night. That's all.

MEGAN

Hey, let others draw their own conclusions. That's their problem. Not yours. Remember. We've got work to do.

He sits down and sighs.

MEGAN

Wait a minute. You do think this is important, don't you? If not than we should stop right now. I mean, you can always slide back into your comfortable world and go on like nothing is wrong. You can always escape back into your books rather than make them a reality for others.

NICK

It's just that I don't know where this is going.

MEGAN

Hey. Let's just slow down a bit here.

She opens a book and puts on reading glasses.

MEGAN

I've been considering the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious. In that we are all psychically influenced by the reservoir of our experiences as a species.

Nick looks up and grows more interested.

NICK

The psychic inheritance? My God, you know Jungian theory too?

MEGAN

He used this to try to explain the déjà vu phenomenon.

NICK

Yeah, right. But why didn't anyone ever try to define the vuja de phenomenon. The feeling like nothing has ever happened before. These are questions that frequently plague my thoughts.

Pointing to a passage in the book.

MEGAN

How about this? Jung wrote about the Mother Archetype.

NICK

Not familiar.

MEGAN

As infants, we come into this world ready to want a mother. And those who's mother failed to satisfy the demands of the archetype grows up seeking comfort in such endeavours as the church or meditation.

NICK
Or sports statistics.

The café clerk walks to the table.

CLERK
Can I get you guys anything?

NICK
Decaf, please.

MEGAN
Green tea.

The clerk leaves.

MEGAN
You should drink regular coffee.

NICK
What?

MEGAN
No, seriously. Caffeine fortifies
sperm.

NICK
What kind of? Where do you get your
information?

MEGAN
I've got my sources.

NICK
Well, I'm sure my sperm are just
fine.

MEGAN
Typical male response.

NICK
What's that supposed to mean?

MEGAN
Look. I'm not the one getting all
bent out of shape about his own
semen.

NICK
You're the one who brought it up.

MEGAN
You're the one who ordered decaf.

He stands up as the clerk comes back with the drinks. She places them on the table and he sits back down. They sip their respective drinks.

NICK

Maybe I should just go.

MEGAN

Hey. What's that supposed to mean? We're just getting started here. What about the curriculum for your students? What about Boethius? We haven't even delved into Boethius.

NICK

Boethius? Scholar. Philosopher. Author of 'Consolations of Philosophy'?

MEGAN

I suggest you get out a notepad. We've only just begun.

She puts a pen into his hand and pushes her glasses further onto her nose.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S HOUSE - LATE DAY

Emily is doing sit-ups on the floor in the front room. Laundry is in the basket ready to be folded.

EMILY

(Sit-ups)

Forty six. Forty seven. Forty eight.
Forty nine. Fifty.

She grunts and hoists herself up and onto her feet. She looks at her watch.

EMILY

(With a worried look)

Hmm.

She picks up a remote controller, presses a button and the stereo comes on. After walking to the laundry basket, she begins to fold clothes.

In the pocket of one of Nick's pants she pulls out a partially washed and dried piece of paper. She's able to barely fold it open.

ON THE NOTE - CONT.

The words are hard to read, having been through the washer and dryer:

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS, MEET ME AT THE CAFÉ. MEGAN.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONT.

She looks very concerned, yet composed. She puts the note into her pocket and continues folding.

EXT. MORRIS' HOUSE - EVENING

Early evening. The lights inside are on. Romantic music plays.

INT. MORRIS' HOUSE - CONT.

Morris stands in his robe, freshly showered. He holds the remote to the stereo, having just turned it on. Sinatra music plays.

He sets the remote down and walks to the back of the house.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

He looks at himself in the mirror and smiles a "sexy" smile. He combs his hair and winks. He sings with the music theatrically.

He goes to the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONT.

Various clothes are laid out on the bed ready to wear. He picks up some clothes and holds them to his body. He turns around to a full-length mirror on the door.

MORRIS

Too dark.

He picks up another item of clothes and looks in the mirror.

MORRIS

Too bright.

He then picks up something flashy to wear.

MORRIS

(Disgusted)

When did I get this?

He throws it on the floor far away from where he stands.

The phone rings.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT.

He picks up the phone.

MORRIS

Yeah! Oh, hi Bjorn. Naw just hanging around.

He walks back in the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONT.

Picking up clothes with one hand, phone in the other.

MORRIS

Tonight? Well, actually, if you must know, I'm expecting company.

He's obviously discontent at most of the clothes choices, ceremoniously tossing them one by one onto the floor.

MORRIS

Yeah, the computer dating service. Picture? Umm, sure. Sure. Nice picture. Very nice.

He tosses more clothes.

MORRIS

(Truthfully)

Ok! She didn't send her godamn picture. But what am I gonna do? I gotta start somewhere. Christ, Bjorn. How 'bout you? Why aren't you ever looking for a girlfriend?

He holds up a turtleneck in the mirror with an inquisitive look.

MORRIS

When you least expect it? Man, I've been least expecting it for months now. I couldn't possibly be expecting it any less than I am now.

He throws the turtleneck onto the floor.

MORRIS

Well, you do it your way. I'll
continue in my own pathetic crappy
way. I gotta get going. We'll get
beers another night. Right. Later.

He hangs up and looks at the bed. There are no more
clothes on it. He frustratingly flops onto the bed on his
back and sighs.

INT. MORRIS' BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

He's wearing regular clothes, nothing special. He's
trying to style his hair. The music continues. He sings
with the singer.

The doorbell chimes and he puts his hair back into its
usual shape quickly.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

He grabs the remote and turns down the volume.

MORRIS

(To himself)

Please, be hot. Please.

He walks to the front door and peers out of the eye
piece.

MORRIS

(Horrified. Whispering)

Oh my God! What is that?

He backs away from the door, staggering.

MORRIS

(Whispering)

Holy shit.

He grabs the remote and turns off the stereo. While
looking at the door with repugnance, he backs out of the
front room.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

He runs in and turns the cold water on the sink faucet.
He rinses his face several times.

MORRIS

(Repetitively)

Though I walk through the valley of
death, I shall fear no evil. Though I
walk through the valley of death, I
shall fear no evil.

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Celia opens the front door. She kicks off her shoes and
sighs. She shuts the door.

CELIA

Honey?

She walks toward the hall.

INT. HALL - CONT.

BUD'S VOICE

(From the office-room)

In here.

INT. OFFICE-ROOM - CONT.

Bud sits at the desk. Books are open and strewn in a
perimeter about him. He's typing his novel. He looks
tired, but happy to see her.

CELIA

Hey.

They peck each other on the cheek.

BUD

Hey. Welcome home.

CELIA

Thanks.

BUD

You look tired.

CELIA

No big deal. It's just that I- Well,
let's just say I'm happy to be home.

BUD

Why? What happened? Something happen
at work?

CELIA

Not really. Just thinking about how
proud I am of you.

BUD

Me? What do you mean?

CELIA

Well, I know how hard you've been working on your novel. I mean, you already know I think you're brilliant.

Bud stands from the desk.

BUD

Sweetie? If you think I should stop for a while, I'll understand. I know how hard it must be for you to be the one working right now. But-

CELIA

No. It's not that at all.

BUD

Sure it is. And I can totally understand it. We're in this together.

CELIA

But, Bud. You got me wrong. I want you to write. I want you to keep going. To keep trying to attain your goals. Our goals. Now, sit back down.

She lowers him back to the desk.

CELIA

I just need you to listen sometimes when I have concerns with my work. That's all. Just listen.

BUD

But Celia. You should know you always have me for that.

CELIA

I know. I know. It's just good to hear it sometimes.

She sits on his lap and they hug. She looks at the computer monitor screen.

CELIA

Wow. Page 173?

BUD

Yeah. I'm serious about this one.
It's feeling good. It's kicking my
ass. But it's good. Here. Check some
of it out-

They read they screen as Celia gets a pleased look on her
face.

EXT. NICK AND EMILY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Nick rides to the house and carries the bike up the
stairs. He opens the front door.

INT. HOUSE - CONT.

He sets the bike against a wall and removes his helmet.
He walks back to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT.

Emily is making dinner, her back to us. Nick walks in.

NICK

How 'bout a hello or something?

He kisses her on the back of her head at the same time as
he sees the partially laundered note from Megan on the
counter next to where she is standing.

NICK

What's that?

She remains silent as Nick picks it up and opens it.

NICK

This go through the washing machine
or something?

(Realizing what it is)

Shit. Em. You don't think-

She leaves the kitchen. He follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONT.

She walks through to the bedroom. He follows.

NICK

Hey now. Give me a chance to explain
a little bit. Jesus, Emily. You've
already figured it all out, I guess.
Huh?

EMILY

What's been left to figure?

INT. BEDROOM - CONT.

There is a single piece of luggage laying on the bed.
They walk into the room.

NICK

Everything. Everything's left. You
have no idea what's been going on.

She turns around with tears in her eyes.

EMILY

You're right. I don't know what's
going on. I feel like I never know
what's going on. You're so goddamn
aloof and detached, you could be
planning a war and I'd never know it.

NICK

Listen to me.

EMILY

I'm sick of listening to you all the
fucking time. How about listening to
me for a change? Huh? How about
listening to how I've been there for
you one hundred percent throughout
your ridiculous spiritual battles
with yourself and the world? How
about listening to how I put my whole
life on hold so you could stay here
and teach in that damn school. Or how
I remain so fucking patient all the
time. Patient while you obsess on and
on about how society doesn't
appreciate this and that, and how our
culture takes so much beauty for
granted.

NICK

Emily, no.

EMILY

When all the while you've been taking
me for granted. Well, I'm sick of it.

She picks up her luggage.

NICK

Oh my God. Where are you going?

EMILY

I just need a break. That's all. Some time.

NICK

Please, don't. I haven't even done anything.

She puts two fingers to his mouth and shuts him up.

EMILY

Shh. I don't want to hear it right now. You might get your chance later. But for now, let's just give it some time.

They look at each other quietly. After a pause, she turns around to go.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

She walks into the room with her bag. He follows.

NICK

(Choked up)

But I don't want you to go.

She takes the car keys.

EMILY

I have to. We need this.

NICK

I don't.

EMILY

Yes. We do.

NICK

Aren't you going to tell me where you're going? At least tell me that.

She opens the front door and looks at him.

EMILY

I'm going back to Kansas.

She exits the house and shuts the door behind her. He kneels on the floor next to the couch and breathes heavily. He rips up the note from Megan.

NICK

(Angrily)

God Damn it!

He looks around the room at everything; pictures, furniture, items on shelves.

NICK

God Damn it!

He stands up and picks up the phone. He dials.

NICK

Feller. Hey, you wanna get a beer?

EXT. THE PIG AND WHISTLE PUB - EVENING

Traditional Irish-style pub. Quaint and appealing. Morris walks in.

INT. PUB - CONT.

There are several people inside sitting at tables; the typical casual pub-scene.

Morris sees Nick waving him over to a booth.

INT. BOOTH - PUB - CONT.

Nick and Morris slap each other a high five as Morris sits down.

MORRIS

(Joking around)

Yo, wassup homey.

Morris then notices that Nick is acting solemn.

MORRIS

(Changing his tone)

Woe, what's the hell's a matter with you? Something happened. Something big.

Nick pours Morris a pint of beer from a pitcher.

NICK

You might say that.

MORRIS
You loose your job or something?

NICK
No.

MORRIS
Rent go up?

NICK
No.

MORRIS
Dick fall off?

Nick gives Morris an unappreciative look.

NICK
Emily left.

MORRIS
What? You guys are like a gleaming
light of hope for all of us single
people.

NICK
Well, not any more.

MORRIS
That just doesn't make sense.

They hear a voice and look up.

INT. PUB - CONT.

Bud and Bjorn walk in and see where Nick and Morris are
sitting. They walk over to join them.

INT. BOOTH - PUB - CONT.

All four guys sit around the table.

MORRIS
(Indicating Bjorn)
I thought I smelled something.

BJORN
Very funny, Feller.

BUD
You're a funny Feller.

MORRIS

Bud, I would have expected a guy like Bjorn to say such a thing. But a scholarly and literary giant like yourself? Come now.

BJORN

Hey, why me? I own the complete works of Lord Byron.

NICK

That certainly ensures you have superior intellect.

BJORN

Of course it does. Thanks Nick.

NICK

I was being facetious.

Bjorn punches Nick in the arm. The waitress approaches.

WAITRESS

Hey guys.

BUD

How about two more glasses?

MORRIS

And another pitcher. What was this, Nick?

NICK

The English bitter.

WAITRESS

(Leaving)

Coming right up.

Bjorn rubs his arm.

MORRIS

So it looks like Nickey here got himself in a little bit of trouble.

BJORN

Trouble? Like the time he ran through the gym dressed like a female cheerleader during a school assembly?

NICK

In my defence, I didn't wear pantyhose. Well, at least I didn't wear a bra. Well, at least I didn't wear a wig. Well, I guess I wore all of those.

BUD

And I bet you still do.

They laugh.

BUD

So what's the problem, Nick?

Nick looks at Morris.

MORRIS

Nick's wife took off.

BUD

What?

BJORN

She what?

NICK

She found a note from Megan.

BUD

Who?

MORRIS

That intellectual chick.

BUD

Oh, yeah.

MORRIS

I knew she'd find out. Nick, you ass.

NICK

Damnit. There's nothing to find out. I haven't done anything except talk to her. And have decaf.

BJORN

Decaf? Oh my God. That's the problem right there. The emasculation of mankind begins with decaf.

MORRIS

And the piss-sit-down.

NICK

Shut up, man.

BUD

You should at least drink regular coffee. If not, espresso. Or even better, a triple americano.

NICK

You're missing the point. I want Emily to come home. What am I gonna do?

The waitress sets down a pitcher and two more glasses.

WAITRESS

Start a tab?

MORRIS

Yeah, that'd be great.

She leaves.

They all look down at their beers and pause. Some drink. They pat Nick on his shoulders.

MORRIS

I'm sorry, Nick.

BUD

Yeah, me too.

BJORN

Me too.

NICK

Anyway, thanks for meeting me here. It really helps.

BJORN

I got a joke if you're in the mood.

NICK

Yeah, why not.

MORRIS

Your jokes usually suck, man.

Bud lights a cigarette.

BJORN

Not this one. Ok. This guy's at a bar and he's totally fucked up. In fact,

he's so fucked up that he ends up puking on his own shirt.

BUD

Is this an autobiography?

They laugh.

BJORN

Shut up, man. And the guys goes 'Ah shit. My wife's gonna kill me. She said if I ever come home drunk again, she's gonna leave me'.

NICK

This brilliant joke isn't helping me yet.

BJORN

The bartender goes, 'Sir, I know the solution. It's simple. You hand your wife a ten dollar bill and say the guy sitting next to you was so fucking drunk that he puked on your shirt. And he was so embarrassed that he gave you ten bucks for the laundry'.

MORRIS

Not a bad alibi.

BJORN

So the guy goes home and sure enough his wife is pissed off to hell. As she's packing her bags to go, he hands her the money and says, 'No honey. You don't understand. It was the guy sitting next to me who got so drunk he leaned over and puked on my shirt. Here! He gave me ten bucks for the laundry. See?'.

Their all into the joke by this time.

BJORN

So the wife takes the money and says, 'Oh, that was thoughtful of him. But wait a minute. Why are there two ten dollar bills here?' So the guy looks at her and says, 'Oh, I forgot to tell you. He shit in my pants too'.

Morris puts Bjorn in a headlock as the guys laugh.

MORRIS

Bjorn, you idiot. Where do you get these stupid jokes?

NICK

I think in a fucked up way it actually made me feel a little better.

Morris releases Bjorn from the headlock.

BJORN

See. I'm not so crazy after all.

MORRIS

Nothing you can say will ever disprove your insanity.

BJORN

(Standing up)

Thanks a lot. I gotta take a piss.

Bjorn leaves.

MORRIS

So what about this Megan chick? What's she all about?

NICK

Just a friend. Just someone I can discuss literature and philosophy with. That's all. Otherwise, she isn't my type at all. If Emily would have just delved a little further-

BUD

But you can't secretly carry on a friendship with anyone outside of marriage. Especially if she's female. People get suspicious. Emotion gets the better of them.

MORRIS

Really? Even a stable relationship like Nick and Emily's.

BUD

I guess.

NICK

Well, now I'm fucked. She went back home to Kansas to commiserate with her mother.

MORRIS

You just got to give it some time. She'll come around. You guys were meant to be together.

Nick pats Morris on the shoulder reassuringly.

NICK

Thanks.

Bjorn walks back. He's got two more pitchers in his grasp. He sets them on the table.

BJORN

Drink up, boys. It's bitter time.

MORRIS

Oh shit. I gotta work tomorrow.

BJORN

Call in sick.

MORRIS

I can't.

NICK

I think I will.

BUD

Me too.

MORRIS

Bud, you don't even have a job. How can you call in sick?

They laugh while they top off their beers.

INT. MORRIS' HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

The alarm clock clicks on and Morris yelps in agony. He slaps the clock a few times until it eventually turns off.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

The clock goes off again. Morris shuts it off and sits up in bed. He looks tired.

He walks like a zombie to the shower. We hear the water come on.

EXT. REED COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Nick walks through the campus with his cell-phone to his ear.

NICK

(To himself)

Come on, Emily. Pick up.

He looks at the phone and curses. He tries to call again.

NICK

Come on. Why aren't you picking up?

(Leaving a voicemail)

Hey, Em. I need to talk to you. I've been doing a lot of thinking and- and I'd rather share it with you one on one. So please, call me back.

He hangs up just as a couple students walk by.

STUDENT#1

Hi, Professor Price.

NICK

Hey guys.

STUDENT#2

Why'd you change the curriculum half-way through the semester?

NICK

What?

STUDENT#1

Yeah. We just got used to the idea of the old one. And now we have all this new stuff to learn.

STUDENT#2

I mean, we kind of get what you're trying to do with the new syllabus, but it's a lot of material, you know.

One student takes out the new syllabus.

NICK

Let me see that thing.

Nick grabs it and looks it over. He gets frustrated.

NICK

How'd you get this?

STUDENT#2

You gave it to us.

STUDENT#1

It was in our boxes a couple days ago.

NICK

It was?

STUDENT#2

Are you ok, Professor Price?

NICK

Can I have this?

STUDENT#1

(Shocked)

Sure. You made it.

NICK

You guys still have the old curriculum guides?

STUDENT#2

You told us to burn them.

NICK

Oh my God.

Nick runs to the school.

NICK

I'll see you guys in class later?

The students are confused.

STUDENTS

Ok?

EXT. CAFÉ - DAY

Megan walks by with her dog, Kafka, on a leash. She sits down at an outside table and sets her backpack down. She unzips the pack and removes some books.

She takes out a pen and pad and opens a couple books. The dog sits at her feet and pants.

She lets out a subdued nervous laugh as she writes something on the pad. The dog whimpers.

INT. REED COLLEGE - OFFICE ROOM - DAY

Nick opens the front door and walks toward the secretary, SANDY.

SANDY

Professor Price.

NICK

Sandy.

SANDY

Well, your ideas have sure changed things around here. Your students are reading books that the administration hasn't even heard of before. Very tricky of you.

NICK

Really?

SANDY

You better watch yourself though. The dean wants to see you in his office. You better have a good explanation for what's going on.

She points to a door which is presumably to the dean's office.

NICK

Sandy. I don't know what's going on. I mean, this all doesn't make sense. Hey. Can you do something for me?

SANDY

Maybe, but you're not so liked around here right now.

NICK

Could you look to see if we had a student at this school a few years ago Named Megan?

SANDY

(Laughing)

I'm sure we've had many Megans. You got a last name?

NICK

No. But there's got to be something outstanding about this one though. A few years ago. Between five and eight years ago.

SANDY

I'll try. Now get in there.

Nick walks into the office.

INT. THE DEAN'S OFFICE - CONT.

This is the office of DEAN GEOFFREY MCCARTER. He stands by a window looking out at the campus. A letter rests on his desk.

DEAN

(Looking out the window)

Sit down.

Nick sits on a chair next to the desk.

DEAN

You see that letter on my desk?

NICK

Yes, Sir.

DEAN

It's a copy of an email I received today. Read it. Go ahead.

Nick picks up the letter.

LETTER VIEW - CONT.

*Portland Art Museum
1123 SW Park Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97201*

Dear Dr. McCarter:

We received a rather chilling email yesterday apparently from some members of your student body. They claim to be "sorrowful" that we continue to support "gauche" and "talentless" artists. They go on to claim we are poisoning the civilized

world with "tired" and "exhausted" examples of art which should have been "demolished beyond recognition" long ago. In closing, they made reference to a new renaissance which they hope to bring about after the rightful and virtuous destruction of our edifice. Please contact us immediately so that we can extinguish these embers before they become flames.

Nick sets the letter back onto the table.

NICK

What the hell is this?

The Dean steps away from the window and turns to face Nick.

DEAN

This is an outrage. And this is only one of several emails as well as calls we've received today from other institutions and businesses throughout the country.

NICK

Is this some kind of joke?

DEAN

Damnit, Nick! I've seen your new syllabus. What the hell were you thinking? Trying to brainwash your students for what goal? To bring about the transformation of society as we know it? I mean, this is sick. Sick!

NICK

I don't think I understand.

DEAN

Do you want to see the emails from Universal Pictures regarding threats made on their writers and staff? Would you have wanted to hear the phone calls from major fashion designers, stores, music production companies, and politicians.

NICK

Politicians?

The completely irate dean grabs Nick by the throat.

DEAN

If you don't do something and do something now, Reed College as we know it will be kaput. Extinct. It'll be just a distant memory in our minds.

Nick stands up and wiggles out of his grasp.

NICK

(Choking. Hyperventilating)

I think we've been infiltrated by someone. I would never do something like that. Never!

DEAN

(Crazy Mad)

Don't bullshit me, Price! This shit is all over your new curriculum!

NICK

I know. I know. But I swear. It wasn't me.

DEAN

Get your sorry ass out of my office. I've got investigators on the way here as we speak. But don't go far. I'm sure they'll be wanting to talk with you all about this little mess.

Nick walks out of the office rubbing his throat and coughing.

INT. SECRETARY'S DESK - CONT.

Nick looks at Sandy.

NICK

When you find something about Megan, give me a call right away. Oh yeah. She majored in leisure studies.

SANDY

(Writing it down)

Megan. Leisure studies. Right. Have a good day, Professor Price.

He leaves as she walks over to a group of large file cabinets.

EXT. REED COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Nick unlocks his bike and rides away frantically.

EXT. STREET BY THE COLLEGE - CONT.

As Nick rides he sees a house with a dog in front of it.

NICK

(Excitedly)

Kafka!

He turns toward the house.

EXT. HOUSE - CONT.

The dog looks at him and then pushes itself through a doggie-door into the house. There are some words on the outside of the house which read:

ADULT CARE HOME

He leans his bike on the lawn and walks onto the porch. He knocks on the door.

After a few seconds a heavysset man opens the door.

MAN

(Mentally slow)

Who are you?

NICK

Hi there. I'm a professor over at the college. Names Nick. Nick Price.

The man just looks at him with a dense yet inquisitive look on his face.

NICK

Umm. I was just wondering if that was your dog on the porch?

MAN

Yeah.

NICK

What's its name?

MAN

(Giggling)

She's named Doggie. I named her
myself. Doggie. Get it?

Nick looks confused.

NICK

A dog named Doggie. Very nice. Umm,
It's just that she looks just like
another dog I've seen around here.
I'm sorry to have bothered you.

Nick steps off the porch as the man closes the door. He
gets on his bike and rides away continuing to look at the
house suspiciously as he goes by.

EXT. MORRIS' CAR - LATE DAY

Morris drives through residential streets; coming home
from a day of work. The Beatles song 'The Fool On The
Hill' plays on the radio.

INT. CAR - CONT.

Morris loosens his tie and turns a corner. He sings with
the song sarcastically.

MORRIS

*The fool on the hill sees the sun
going down, and the eyes in his head
sees the world spinning 'round.*

(Changing the station)

Those damn fools on the hills.

The radio changes to some death-punk metal tune. He
frantically changes it again to classical music.

MORRIS

(Relaxing)

Ahh...

INT. MORRIS' HOUSE - COMPUTER ROOM - EVENING

Morris clicks the mouse on his notebook computer.

MORRIS

I need pictures, people. True color-
quality sons-a-bitchin' pictures.

He clicks the mouse and reads.

MORRIS

Oh but she sounds so very nice.

The front doorbell rings. Morris shuts the notebook computer and looks up.

MORRIS

And she's here!

He scurries out of the room.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

He looks at himself in the mirror.

MORRIS

(Displeased)

Shitski!

The doorbell rings again. He leaves the bathroom.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

He ceremoniously saunters up to the door. He closes his eyes and leans forward.

MORRIS

(Whispering)

I hereby pronounce you to be very
very hot. Very hot indeed. And the
verdict is:

He opens his eyes and looks through the eye-piece. In utter fear and disgust, he lunges away from the door. He makes a crucifix with his hands.

MORRIS

(Whispering)

Oh demon. Oh wicked spirit. I
officially exorcise the beast from
within you!

He runs away from the front room making sure to not make much noise, so that his would-be date on the porch cannot hear.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

Morris splashes cool water onto his face and hollers in a high-pitched tone for a few seconds.

MORRIS

There but for the glory of God go I...

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Celia comes home and brings in the mail and the newspaper. She kicks off her shoes.

CELIA

(Yelling through the house)

Bud? Where are ya?

BUD'S VOICE

In the office.

CELIA

You didn't get the mail today. Or the newspaper. What's up?

She walks to the back of the house toward the office.

INT. OFFICE - CONT.

Bud is intensely working on something as she walks into the room. She places the papers on the desk.

CELIA

What's going on? You look too serious.

BUD

Honey. It looks like an article I wrote last year is getting some interest.

CELIA

What?

BUD

You remember that piece I did on the downfall of the American humanities?

CELIA

Not really.

Bud rubs his tired eyes and leans back in his chair.

BUD

It was the one of the only things I wrote that ever got published. Just a short thing in the 'Portland Connection'. Kinda tongue-and-cheek.

She sifts through the mail.

CELIA

So what? What about it?

BUD

I don't know. It's pretty weird. All of a sudden I'm getting all these emails from people about it.

CELIA

Really?

BUD

And some of these emails are coming from major companies.

CELIA

What is that supposed to mean?

BUD

I'm not sure. It doesn't make sense.

Celia excitedly opens a piece of mail.

CELIA

Hey. This one's from that agent in New York.

BUD

Oh my God. Don't tell me anything unless it's good news. Things are too weird right now for me to take bad news.

She pauses while reading the letter. She then looks up from the page and smiles.

BUD

Huh? Could it possibly be? Something good? Something positive?

CELIA

They want to read your first chapter. They say here that it's an offensive, absurd and yet provoking concept.

BUD

(Excitedly)

That's good!

(More reserved)

I think.

She bends over and kisses his cheek.

CELIA

Who cares what those emails say. You just might have your foot in the door with these guys.

BUD

Long live Wilcott and Martin Literary Agency.

He drinks from his wine glass and laughs.

CELIA

Let's celebrate.

BUD

How about dinner out?

CELIA

Really?

Bud stands up and finishes his wine.

BUD

Dinner out. Francois, Italiano, Mexicano, Thai, Germania. Anything strike your fancy?

They head toward the hallway.

CELIA

Everything strikes my fancy.

They leave the room.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Nick talks on the phone while pacing the room nervously.

NICK

Jesus Christ, Feller. This is getting pretty fucking weird. I don't know who she is. I don't know what her last name is. Where I can find her?

He looks out a window suspiciously and pulls the blinds down.

NICK

They think it was me who rallied my students to post threats to all these companies. But I don't even think they could do something like that. I think it was all her deal. I don't know what to do. If I don't find her, then they're gonna indict me! They're already digging through my personal crap at the school.

(Distracted)

Ah shit, Morris. There's someone on the other line. Yeah, I'll talk to you later.

He presses a button on the phone.

NICK

Hello? Oh yes, I'm Nick Price.

He paces even more nervously.

NICK

Tomorrow morning? Yeah, I can make it. No problem. 8am sharp. Ok fine. Thank you officer. We'll see you then.

He hangs up the phone and curses.

NICK

Son of a bitch!

He walks back to his computer room in a quiet rage.

INT. CAR - CONT.

In the darkness of the evening we see that we are inside of a car which is temporarily stopped outside of Nick's house.

We hear the driver breathe as the running engine softly purrs.

INT. EMILY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - KANSAS - EVENING

Emily sits quietly in a dimly lit room. The television's light washes over her, though the volume is low. She sits cross-legged on a couch with her arms flung around a large pillow cushion.

She's looking past the tv light.

Her cell phone rings, yet she doesn't answer it. She stares as the ringer ceases its noise.

She grabs the pillow more tightly and sighs.

EMILY'S MOTHER
(Voice from another room)
You ok, honey?

EMILY
Fine. Just go to bed. I'll see you in the morning.

Her mother pokes her head into the room.

MOTHER
Are you sure?

EMILY
Yes, mom. I'm ok.

MOTHER
Alright, honey. If there's anything you need.

EMILY
I know. Now go.

MOTHER
Love you.

EMILY
Me too. Goodnight.

Her mother leaves. We hear her footsteps fade down the hallway as the tv light distorts the room.

EXT. REED COLLEGE - MORNING

Nick locks up his bike, stands, and adjusts his tie. He looks at the brick building and then all around the neighborhood as if looking for Megan.

NICK
(Whispering)
Where the fuck are you?

He walks toward a building reluctantly.

EXT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Bud holds a coffee mug out for Celia to take one last sip before she walks to the bus. He's in his robe.

CELIA

Thanks, Hun. I'll talk to you later today, ok?

BUD

Fine.

He hands her a manila envelope.

BUD

Just put this in the mailbox on the way to the bus stop.

CELIA

(Excitedly)

I will.

She walks down the sidewalk.

BUD

Love you.

CELIA

Me too.

He walks into the house.

INT. REED COLLEGE - DEAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Nick opens the door and walks into the secretary's room. Sandy looks up.

SANDY

Nick! What the hell's going on?
What'd you do?

NICK

Nothing. I swear it was this Megan person. Have you dug up anything on her yet?

SANDY

I'm trying.

NICK

(Frantic)
Well, try harder!

The Dean's office door opens and Dean McCarter walks out with a very solemn look on his face.

DEAN

They're here.

Nick gulps nervously. The Dean watches as Nick walks through the door into the office. The Dean enters and shuts the door.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - CONT.

Three gentlemen sit around the desk. They're dressed in impeccably pressed suits. They are 'all business'.

The men do not stand. They do not shake Nick's hand. Only one man does the talking.

AGENT

Professor Nicholas Price. Please, sit down.

Nick sits and stares at the man. The Dean sits behind his desk.

DEAN

These men are agents from the FBI.

NICK

What? The FBI?

AGENT

There've been occasional threats through the past few years similar to these new ones. Until now, we've not been able to locate a clear origin to them.

NICK

Until now?

AGENT

We take these threats as indicators. Indicators to something deeper. Something more covert. According to our sources, more lies beneath the surface. And we feel like we've found our man.

NICK

But-

Nick tries to stand, but the FBI man rushes over and pushes him back into the chair.

AGENT

We'd like to take you downtown and ask you some more questions.

Nick tries to squirm out from his firm grasp.

AGENT

Any attempt to not cooperate fully with us will be taken as an outright act of defiance that can and will be tried in a United States court of law.

NICK

My God. Am I being arrested?

The man releases Nick and steps back.

AGENT

You're being detained until we accomplish our mission.

The FBI agent looks at the other two men and they stand.

AGENT

Dean McCarter. You've been very helpful. If you don't mind, Mr. Reynolds here will stay behind and question each of Professor Price's students one by one.

DEAN

Of course. You may use the room at the end of the hall.

AGENT

Thank you. Professor Price? Please stand.

Nick stands up as the Dean opens the door.

INT. FRONT OFFICE - CONT.

Sandy is voraciously reading files. She looks up to see the men.

DEAN

Sandy, please get room A-2 ready. Mr. Reynolds is going to use it.

Sandy and Nick look at each other as he is escorted away by the two FBI men. She holds up a file.

As the men escort him out the front office door, Nick sees that the name on it is 'Megan Van Beek'.

NICK

Hey! Sandy. Call me.

The men shut the door. The Dean looks angrily at Sandy.

DEAN

What the hell are you doing?

SANDY

(Setting the file on her desk)

I'm not sure yet.

The FBI agent takes a sip of his coffee and walks down the hall to the empty office.

EXT. ST. JOHN MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

Hospital personnel walk about the grounds on their way to their respective job site.

Morris is dressed in his tie and white coat. He walks while holding a paper coffee cup in one hand and the briefcase in the other.

He turns toward the 'Pediatrics' clinic. There is a mother and her 5 year old son walking in as well.

MORRIS

(To the child)

Hey, little guy.

BOY

(Rambling)

Did you know I got the coughes. My mom says that I got it from school.

He coughs.

MORRIS

(Smiling at the mother and child)

Is that so? Well, we're gonna try and make you feel better, buddy. Let's go inside.

He holds the door open for them.

MOTHER

Thanks a lot.

MORRIS

(Smiling)

No problem.

As Morris turns to go in, a female doctor walks out and they bump into each other. He nearly spills his coffee.

DOCTOR

I my gosh! I am so sorry.

MORRIS

(Righting himself)

No harm. No foul.

He notices that she is very cute.

MORRIS

Do you work here? I haven't seen you before.

DOCTOR

I just came by to introduce myself. I'm a new emergency doc here at the hospital. Kim Delaney.

She holds out her hand and Morris sets down his briefcase to shake it.

MORRIS

Great to meet you. I'm one of the Pediatricians here. Morris Feller.

KIM

Cool.

MORRIS

Where'd you do your residency?

KIM

Just came back from Chicago.

MORRIS

Came back? So you must actually be from Portland?

KIM

Isn't it amazing? There's not many of us left. You too?

MORRIS

Yeah. I know what you mean.

She steps away from the door so other patients can enter.

KIM

Well, I guess I'll be calling you
from the ER on occasion.

MORRIS

(Laughing)

Ooh. Hopefully not too much.

(More serious)

Actually, it's no problem at all.
Call me anytime.

They look at each other for a moment before she leaves.

KIM

Have a good day, Morris.

MORRIS

I will. You too.

He watches as she walks away. A look of pleasant surprise
comes over his face.

NURSE'S VOICE

(From inside the clinic)

Doctor Feller. Your first patient is
ready.

The look on his face turns sour, and he enters the
building. The door shuts behind him.

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - COMPUTER ROOM - DAY

Bud clicks the computer mouse anxiously and stares at the
screen.

BUD

(To himself)

My god. I've never had so many
emails.

He tears himself away from the desk and computer and
walks into the hallway.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT.

He walks to the coffee machine and pours black coffee into the mug.

A knock comes at the front door. Bud freezes. He sets down the coffee container and mug.

The knock continues. He walks into the front room.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

He sees a black car idling in front of his house. The engine is running, waiting.

BUD

What the-?

He opens the door and sees two men dressed the same as back at the Dean's office; pressed suits, blank expressions.

BUD

(Extremely nervous)

May I help you?

As before, only one man speaks.

MAN

Is this the home of Earnest B. Hawkins, a.k.a. 'Bud' Hawkins?

BUD

Uhh, yes Sir. It is.

MAN

May we speak with Mr. Hawkins?

Bud looks nauseated. He's still in his robe.

BUD

That's me. What's going on?

MAN

We're from the FBI.

They flash their badges. Bud almost collapses.

MAN

Your co-operation is needed. Mr. Hawkins, if you will, please get dressed. We're going downtown to answer a few questions.

Bud tries to regain some composure.

BUD

Uh, Of course. W- Won't you please
come in while I get dressed?

The men step into the house and look around.

BUD

(Almost shaking)

I, I'll just be a m- minute.

INT. BJORN'S WOODWORKING SHOP - DAY

The radio is on and quaint old country/bluegrass plays.
Bjorn wears goggles.

He's at the controls of a lathe. He's smoothing out a
piece of wood while singing along.

INT. FBI BUILDING - PARKING GARAGE - DAY

The black car pulls into the underground parking lot and
stops in a space. The FBI agents get out. The front
passenger agent opens the back door of the car and Nick
is escorted out.

The agent tries to help Nick out, but Nick pulls his
shoulder back.

AGENT

Ok, ok. Relax. Let's try to be civil
here.

NICK

Civil? I'm suddenly wondering about
the current limits of my civil
liberties, and if they're being
breached.

AGENT

I suggest that you decide fast and
you decide firmly that you're going
to co-operate fully until you know
exactly what you're up against.

Nick quiets down and walks ahead of the men to an
elevator. The other man presses the elevator button and
its doors open.

AGENT

(Motioning to Nick)

After you.

Nick gets in and the men follow. The doors close.

INT. FBI FRONT OFFICE - DAY

Typical sights and sounds of an investigations office. Nick walks through the doors with the two agents following very closely behind.

Special Agent WALTER GRUFFMAN stands to greet them. He's somewhat more reasonable than the other agents.

GRUFFMAN

Professor Nicholas Price, I presume.
Can we get you some coffee? A soda?

NICK

Uhh. No, I'm good.

GRUFFMAN

(Looking around the room)

As you can see, your little stunt has
created quite a commotion around
here.

NICK

But it wasn't me-

GRUFFMAN

(Sharply)

You'll get your chance to speak,
Price. But for now, please follow us
into my office.

Out of fear, Nick shuts up. They begin to move into the office just as they hear a disturbance brewing on the other side of the room.

Nick looks and sees Bud being escorted into a room as well. Bud initially doesn't notice Nick.

NICK

(Agitated)

Bud! Hey!

One of the agents pushes Nick the rest of the way into the office and slams the door closed. But just before the door shuts, Bud and Nick connect eyes and try to holler out to each other, in vain.

EXT. THE ADULT CARE HOME - DAY

The dog bursts out of the doggie-door in a barking, yelping craze. It runs away down the street.

We hear screaming and agony coming from the inside of the house.

INT. ADULT CARE HOME - CONT.

The house is in disarray as if someone has been throwing and breaking things in a violent rage.

The heavysset mentally-slow man that we met earlier is backed up against a wall alone crying in fear. Someone is yelling and screaming on the second floor.

MAN

(Crying)

Make her stop. Please. Make her stop.

INT. VIEW OF STAIRS - CONT.

The scene ascends the staircase and approaches the noise. Other residents of the house walk quickly downstairs to get their distance.

The screaming continues. There's the sound of things breaking.

Continue ascending the stairs until we arrive on the second floor. We hear someone pleading.

VOICE

Please, settle down. It'll be ok.
Everything's gonna be just fine.

INT. ROOM - CONT.

An older woman is wiggling the handle of the bathroom door. This is SHIRLEY, the person who runs the care home.

SHIRLEY

It's time to come out now, honey.

A woman's voice comes from the bathroom.

VOICE

(Wild with insanity)

God! I'm here! I've done your work.
I'm here. Take me!

SHIRLEY

Stay with me, sweetheart! Help's on
the way. Please hold on!

We hear the sound of an ambulance siren in the background approaching the house. Several adult care residents cry out from downstairs in fear. Shirley continues in vain trying to open the door.

VOICE

(From the bathroom)

I merge with the almighty in a cloud!
I am the wind! I am the Messiah!

More things break as Shirley tries to break down the door.

All of a sudden, eerily, the sounds in the bathroom cease. Shirley listens.

SHIRLEY

Sweetheart? You ok? Hey? Answer me!

VOICE OVER - IN THE BACKGROUND

While the following scene takes place, we hear Megan's voice reciting her own poetry, similar to when she recited the poem on the Reed College campus in front of Nick earlier in the screenplay.

MEGAN (V.O.)

*I remember a ceremony of angels
conducted in my room that evening.
Conducted with music and dance and
poetry of the highest mind, with
words of the kind derived from the
spirits of wilderness.*

INT. HOUSE - SLOW MOTION - CONT.

The ambulance arrives and the paramedics rush upstairs.

SHIRLEY

Oh my God! She just stopped. It's too
quiet in there!

PARAMEDIC

Stand back!

Two paramedics kick in the door, which splinters on its edges as it bursts open. The bathroom is completely trashed.

A woman is curled up in a fetal position, frightened and crying incessantly, lying against the back wall. Even though sweat covers her face and hair and she is utterly frightened, we notice that it is Megan Van Beek.

MEGAN

(Mumbling and crying psychotically)

I'm s- s- sorry. So s- sorry. So s- sorry...

VOICE OVER - IN THE BACKGROUND

MEGAN (V.O.)

Words that go unrecorded, subject to constant change in meaning that only the insane can discern, for a moment.

INT. HOUSE - SLOW MOTION -CONT.

The paramedics go in and try to comfort her.

PARAMEDIC

Everything's fine now, ma'am.
Everything's gonna be ok.

VOICE OVER - IN THE BACKGROUND

As the paramedics help her onto her feet and walk her downstairs, her voice continues in the background.

MEGAN (V.O.)

I remember sitting for hours, raging at the world I was born into. Raging at an astral cloud, the colors of blood and fire pouring as I went, and screamed deep and infinite from an archetypal realm. Knowing the town had felt my holy wrath.

EXT. FRONT YARD - SLOW MOTION - CONT.

The paramedics load her into the back of their ambulance as the other adult care residents look in fear of knowing that it could have been any one of them.

INT. BJORN'S SHOP - DAY

Bjorn whistles with the bluegrass music as he works the lathe machine on a piece of wood. The radio station becomes riddled with static for an instant, and he looks up.

At that moment, his hand slips and he lunges forward accidentally INTO the lathe. He suffers a moderately-sized laceration on the skin of his arm.

BJORN

(Holding his arm)

Shit!

He shuts off the lathe and looks at the cut on his arm.

BJORN

That's gonna need some attention.

He throws off his goggles and wraps a towel around the wounded appendage. He goes into his office.

INT. SHOP OFFICE - CONT.

He opens a drawer in the desk and fiddles through a bunch of business cards and ID's. He finds one card that states:

St. Johns Medical Center

Proof of Insurance

He pockets the card and goes out to his truck.

INT. FBI BUILDING - WALTER GRUFFMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick is being interrogated by Gruffman.

GRUFFMAN

My God, Price. It's all over your computer emails, your classroom syllabus, your notebooks. You left a paper-trail the length of the Great Wall of China.

NICK

Exactly! Don't you think I would have tried to cover some of it up if it was really me who did all this?

GRUFFMAN

Are you trying to say you've been framed?

The phone on the desk rings. Gruffman presses a button.

GRUFFMAN

Yeah? Uh huh. Ok. Fine patch her through.

Gruffman looks suspiciously at Nick. Nick sits back in his chair.

GRUFFMAN

(To Nick)

It's the Dean's secretary.

NICK

Sandy!

GRUFFMAN

(Abruptly)

Yes ma'am. You found what? Uh huh.
Really? Well, in light of the current
situation, that is very interesting.

EXT. ST. JOHNS HOSPITAL - CONT.

Bjorn walks toward the Emergency entrance holding his bloody arm in the towel.

At that moment, an ambulance pulls up and the back doors open. The paramedics remove a gurney with a more calm MEGAN resting much more comfortably than a few minutes prior.

Megan has the presence of mind to notice Bjorn standing there watching. They look at each other for a significant moment.

MEGAN

(To Bjorn)

Hi.

BJORN

(Transfixed)

Hey.

The paramedics wheel Megan's gurney through the double doors. Bjorn pauses, breathes and then walks through the ambulatory entrance.

EXT. REED COLLEGE - DAY

The black car races into a lot and parks.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

The FBI agent who had been interviewing students flips through a file. Megan Van Beek's file. Sandy and Dean McCarter stand over his shoulder.

DEAN

Unbelievable.

Gruffman and Nick burst through the doors and run to the others.

NICK

Thank God, Sandy!

GRUFFMAN

(Reaching for the file)

Give me that thing!

He sits down and quickly reads. Nick sits down and breathes a sigh of relief.

GRUFFMAN

So this Megan Van Beek goes here for one semester back in '94. Suddenly she has her first psychotic break and is subsequently diagnosed as having some mental disorder.

NICK

Really?

SANDY

It says bipolar somewhere in there. Or Paranoia. Or something like that.

DEAN

I remember her. She was at the top of her class. Recruited right from Portland, her home town. How often do we successfully recruit a genius from our own town and manage to keep her here?

SANDY

Yeah, kids of that calibre usually get rides to Ivy league schools.

Gruffman coughs and flips some pages.

GRUFFMAN

But what was her beef with modern society? Why all the hatred directed toward America?

NICK

Maybe she thought that this country has much more creative potential.

Maybe she thought that instead of rewarding heroes and brilliance, we reward mediocrity and conformity.

They look at Nick, who regresses in timidity.

NICK

Not that I think any of that stuff.

GRUFFMAN

We gotta find her. McCloud?

The other FBI agent stands up.

GRUFFMAN

Let's get a background check on her right away.

AGENT

Yes, Sir.

The agent grabs a phone and dials.

EXT. ADULT CARE HOME - MINUTES LATER

The black car screeches to a halt outside the home. The engine idles as special agent Gruffman hops out of the passenger door. He walks onto the porch and knocks on the door.

After an uncomfortably dead-silent pause, the door finally opens and Shirley stands there; eyes stained with tears, appearing exhausted.

SHIRLEY

Yes?

GRUFFMAN

I'm sorry to bother you today, but I'm Walter Gruffman, with the FBI. We're looking for a young woman who has, or may still be, living here. Megan Van Beek?

She opens the door the rest of the way to reveal the damage inside that Megan caused earlier during her rage.

SHIRLEY

I'm afraid, she probably won't be back here for quite a while. She was taken to St. Johns.

GRUFFMAN

I see.

SHIRLEY

May I ask if she's in some sort of trouble?

GRUFFMAN

Well, ma'am. That's a question that'll have to be answered by trained professionals and the legal system.

Shirley looks sad. She looks down at the floor, and then back to Gruffman.

SHIRLEY

Sir? For the record. As long as she takes her medication, she's the sweetest, brightest person I've ever met.

Gruffman nods to her and walks away.

GRUFFMAN

Thanks you for your help.

He gets into the car and it speeds away.

INT. EMILY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - KANSAS - EVENING

Emily and her mother are in the kitchen preparing dinner. They're laughing and having a good time with each other.

EMILY

You were totally sand-bagging me, mom. I know you were.

MOTHER

No way. I haven't played golf in months. In fact, the last time was when you visited back in May.

Chopping tomatoes.

EMILY

Fat chance, mom. You've got a track record of stuff like that.

MOTHER

Is that so?

EMILY

And I can prove it. How 'bout back a few years ago you were on the tee and you sliced into the fringe. Remember that?

MOTHER

I really sliced! Like I am this carrot.

She slices up a carrot. They laugh.

EMILY

So then why did you let me beat you on the first four holes only to lose at all the others?

MOTHER

Oh, come on. You know I love you and I'd never sand-bag you.

The phone rings and Emily's mother picks it up. Emily had tried to stop her from answering it.

EMILY

Mom, no!

MOTHER

(To the phone)
Hello?

She pauses and then looks at Emily.

EMILY

(Whispering)
Mom? Is it Nick, or what?

Her mother continues to listen.

MOTHER

(To the phone)
I see. Well, I love you too,
Nicholas. Yeah, you be careful.

By that time we can see the true desperation in Emily for Nick. She yearns for the phone.

MOTHER

Here she is, honey.

Emily grabs the phone, kisses her mother on the cheek and darts into the television room.

Emily's mother, now alone in the room, takes a deep sigh. She looks at a picture of Emily and Nick's wedding which is propped upon a window sill.

She smiles as she resumes chopping vegetables.

INT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Celia is on the phone desperately trying to find Bud.

CELIA

(To the phone)

It's just not like him to be gone like this. I mean, what else does he have to do? Where else does he have to be? Anyway, I gotta go.

She hangs up.

CELIA

Shit!

EXT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - CONT.

One of the black FBI cars drives up and stops. Bud emerges from the back door.

BUD

It's been truly a pleasure, gentleman. Let's do this over a fine wine and a smoke next time.

He slams the door shut and the car speeds off.

INT. HOUSE - CONT.

Celia watches as Bud ascends the yard to the porch. She runs to the front door and opens it.

EXT. PORCH - CONT.

She runs out of the house onto the porch and hugs him with such vigour that they both nearly topple over.

CELIA

You scared the crap out of me! My God, Hun. What happened?

BUD

You'd hardly believe it if I told you.

They kiss.

BUD

First thing's first. Let's make some coffee, open a bottle of our finest Pinot Noir, and then I'll tell you all about it.

They walk into the house hand in hand. The front door closes behind them.

EXT. THE PIG AND WHISTLE BAR - NIGHT

Morris' car comes to a stop outside the pub. Nick, Bud, and Morris get out. Bud lights a cigarette.

NICK

Where's Bjorn?

MORRIS

Said he'd be here.

BUD

Yeah, I haven't seen his valiant battle wound yet.

MORRIS

(In a sports-caster's tone of voice)
Lathe versus arm. And the victor?
Lathe!

They walk into the bar.

INT. BAR - CONT.

They walk to the back where their booth is waiting. They sit down.

Nick takes out his cell phone.

MORRIS

Hey, man. He said he'd be here.
Relax.

NICK

I just want to see.

He presses buttons and waits.

NICK

Yo, Swedish Meatball? Where are ya?

Morris and Bud see Bjorn enter the bar and begin to walk over.

NICK

Istanbul? What the fuck are you talking about?

The guys laugh as Bjorn sits down.

BUD

You're reliance on the fragile world of communications technology is staggering. Has it ever occurred to anyone that simple conversation may still work?

BJORN

Conversation's overrated. I prefer mental telepathy. The next phase of human evolution has got to be expansion of the mind.

MORRIS

Yeah, right. It's all in his frickin' mind.

Laughter.

BJORN

No, seriously. Those who uncover the ability to use one hundred percent of their minds will take us to a new level in human development.

The waitress stops at the table.

WAITRESS

Hey, the bitter guys.

NICK

Amazing. You remember.

WAITRESS

(Smiling)

Coming right up.

She goes back to the bar.

NICK

Bud and I are body cavity searched by the goddamn FBI and all you can talk about is mental telepathy? Christ.

BUD

Yeah, let's see that combat wound of yours.

Bjorn removes the bandage on his arm and all the guys stare.

NICK

Damn. That doc does good work.

BUD

She's an artist.

BJORN

It kind of hurts.

MORRIS

She seems like quite a woman.

They look at Morris.

NICK

What? Do I sense something between you and her? Huh?

MORRIS

Shut up, dick. I just think she's a nice person, that's all.

BUD

Leave him alone. He's a big boy.

MORRIS

What about you Nick? What's going on with you and Emily?

NICK

I think things are gonna be good again.

Nick pulls out a plane ticket from his pocket.

NICK

Kansas City here I come!

They congratulate him by hitting his shoulders.

NICK

And I heard Bud got an advancement
from that agency for his novel.

Bud pulls a plane ticket from his pocket.

BUD

Celia and I are going to New York
tomorrow! Can you fuckin believe it?

They congratulate him as well.

BJORN

That's stupendous. You all deserve
it.

The waitress sets two pitchers of beer on the table and
four glasses.

They look at Bjorn, who looks defensive.

BJORN

Hey, don't worry about me. I think I
met the woman of my dreams. I just
need to wait until the thorazine
kicks in.

They laugh again.

MORRIS

That's pretty fuckin weird, dude.

BUD

Yeah, but in a teleological way, it
sort of makes perfect sense.

NICK

Yeah, that's right. Good for you,
Bjorn. But remember, if Megan ever
forgets to take her medicine, you're
in for a world of hurt.

BJORN

We all know what she's capable of.
That's true. I think I can handle it.

Morris picks up his pint of beer.

MORRIS

A toast!

They pick up their beers.

MORRIS

To four guys who have withstood a fuck load of shit in the past few days. Body-cavity searches, broken hearts, a brush with insanity.

BUD

And piss-sit-downs.

MORRIS

Drink up, fellas.

They cheer and drink.

EXT. BUD AND CELIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

A cab waits outside. They hurry onto the porch and lock the front door behind them.

CELIA

Come on. Let's go.

BUD

New York here we come.

Bud looks at Celia.

BUD

Sweetie?

CELIA

What?

BUD

I hope we can make it there.

She laughs and grabs his hand. She leads him down the porch and yard to the cab. They get in.

CELIA

(To the cabby)

To the airport, please.

EXT. AIRPORT - MORNING

Nick walks toward the entrance. He stops and takes out the ticket. He kisses it, smiles, and proceeds to walk into the airport.

INT. MORRIS HOUSE - EVENING

Sinatra music comes from the stereo in the front room.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - CONT.

The laptop computer is folded and placed in a carrier bag, as if it is not needed any longer.

INT. BATHROOM - CONT.

Morris sings along with the music while splashing water onto his face.

MORRIS

(Singing)

I get a kick out of you.

The doorbell rings as it has before. He looks up and shuts off the faucet. He dries his face.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONT.

He grabs the remote and turns down the volume.

MORRIS

(To the stereo)

We'll listen to you later. But,
please, stay there!

He puts down the remote and walks to the front door. He looks out of the eye-piece and smiles.

MORRIS

(To himself)

Yes.

He opens the door and Kim Delaney, the emergency doctor, smiles back.

KIM

Well, this is a cute house.

MORRIS

Thanks. You look great. Come on in.

He holds the screen door open while she slides by. They hug.

MORRIS

Nice to see you.

KIM

You too.

MORRIS

I was thinking Italian food. You know, since my buddies almost got busted by the FBI. I thought it might somehow be fitting.

She laughs.

KIM

Italian's fine. How're your friends doing?

MORRIS

Well, Nick's recovering. I think he learned a good lesson out of all of this. He's at the airport right now just about to board a plane to Kansas.

KIM

Wow.

MORRIS

And Bud? Well, apparently some literary agent in New York wants to meet with him in person. So he and his wife are going to the airport too.

He picks up his keys and they walk toward the front door.

KIM

What about that guy whose arm I sutured?

MORRIS

Bjorn? Yeah, he loves his stitches, by the way.

KIM

(Laughing)

Thanks.

MORRIS

He says he's gonna wait until Megan gets back on her meds and out of psyche. Claims he's in love with her.

KIM

Amazing. Who would've thunk it?

They step out of the door and onto the porch.

KIM

And what about you?

Morris looks at Kim and smiles.

MORRIS

Me? I'm happier than I've ever been.

He closes the door leaving an empty front room with Sinatra streaming from the stereo that was left on.

FADE OUT:

END.