The Senior Senior

by

Douglas Pike (c) 2018
EXT. ASBURY PARK, NJ - DAY

The Asbury Park boardwalk is desolate. It is a dreary, post-Labor-Day morning.

EXT. BOARDWALK STOREFRONT

The exterior of a rundown storefront displays a weathered sign: Pugh's Cotton Candy, The Fluff of Dreams. Next door, a new sign over the window: Zera, The Fortune Teller - Know Your Future Today! A light is on inside Pugh's and in the apartments above the respective stores.

INT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY - 7 A.M.

PAUL PUGH, 28, fusses with a dilapidated cotton candy machine. His ill-fitting T-shirt and denim shorts are coated with multi-hued wisps of product.

The paunchy, bespectacled proprietor fumbles with containers of sugar, powdered egg and bacon bits, sloppily scooping each into the machine's rusted, center receptacle.

    PAUL PUGH
    Bacon and egg flavored cotton candy -- I smell sweet and savory success.

He flips the power switch several times until the noisy contraption kicks in.

INT. COTTON CANDY MACHINE

Thin yellow wisps gradually emanate from a tiny hole near the bowl's center.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul grabs a paper cone, deftly spins it around the bowl's interior perimeter, gathers the accumulating fluff. He turns off the machine, inspects his creation. It's horribly lopsided. Cotton candy extends to his elbow. He holds the cone up triumphantly.

    PAUL PUGH
    Perfect!
INT. THE PUGH'S APARTMENT - SECONDS LATER

DIANE PUGH, Paul's wiry-built wife, also 28, nervously sits at the kitchen table in this cramped, shabby apartment. Stacks of unwashed dishes are interspersed with open food boxes and dirty small appliances.

Diane's pencil flies across a ledger, as she attempts to do the business' bookkeeping at the table. She pauses, picks up a cup of coffee. Spotting an error, she slams down the cup, soaking her paperwork. She throws the pencil, runs both hands through her red, curly hair and gives it a sharp tug.

DIANE PUGH
It' just a damned cotton candy shop! Why do debits have to exactly equal credits in such a pissant business? Can't they just be close?

She picks up the ledger, bolts to her feet, reveals she is pregnant.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
We are not getting audited again this year!

Diane turns towards the sink.

SINK

The coffee-stained ledger hits the bottom of the sink, joining assorted unwashed glassware, utensils and plates. A spritz of dish soap and a stream of water hit the dirty page.

BACK TO SCENE

DIANE PUGH
Problem solved, our books are clean.

Paul rushes into the kitchen, presents his latest cotton candy creation to his wife. He pushes it within an inch of her scowling face.

PAUL PUGH
So, what do you think?
KITCHEN COUNTER

Diane reaches back, grips the kitchen counter edge behind her, digs in her red, chipped, fake nails, breaking off two.

BACK TO SCENE

Diane closes her eyes, inhales.

DIANE PUGH
It's awesome, Paul. Smells just like bacon and eggs... and strawberry cough medicine. Just what the public wants.

PAUL PUGH
You like it? You actually like it? Tell me you like it!

Diane releases her death grip of the counter. She gently takes the candy from Paul, sniffs it a second time. Paul beams.

DIANE PUGH
I love it! L-love it! In fact, I love it so much, I want you to line my coffin with it.

Diane inverts the the strange concoction over Paul's head, forces it down into his hair.

Paul cringes, winces.

PAUL PUGH
Aw, baby! What gives?

DIANE PUGH
My patience! My patience is giving way, Paul! We're running a business that has four good months a year. Those four months have to pay twelve months' worth of bills.

Paul pulls a strand of cotton candy from the inverted cone on his head, tastes it, approves, sticks it back in his hair.

PAUL PUGH
I'm aware of that -- we've been doing this for seven years.
But we're barely covering six months' worth of bills.

She points to her belly.

And in case you've forgotten, there's going to be another mouth to feed in a few months, and it can't survive on cotton candy.

Paul slumps into a seat at the kitchen table. It wobbles terribly. He pays no attention; it's been that way for years. He blows dust out of an empty cereal bowl, fills it from an open box at hand.

The milk went bad last week.

Paul pushes the bowl aside.

I can make this into a twelve-month-a-year business, Diane. I have ideas.

Diane leans over Paul's shoulder, speaks directly into his ear.

Oh, that's right; pardon me. I forgot I'm married to the Thomas Edison of cotton candy!

She stands up straight, steps away.

Cotton candy... it's, it's in my veins!

It's between your ears!

Paul sniffs, wipes his nose with his shirt sleeve.

Do we have any tissues?

Diane grabs a roll of toilet paper from next to the sink, tosses it to Paul.
DIANE PUGH
Some people aspire for a luxurious home. I aspire to someday have more than one kind of paper product. This is all we've got!

He unwinds a few sheets, wipes his nose, sniffs again.

PAUL PUGH
It's a new day. Let's try to be hopeful for a change, all right?

DIANE PUGH
Speaking of new days, did you remember to wake Kenny, before running down to the shop -- like I asked you! It's the first day of school for Christ's sake!

Paul slams his hand on the table top. It tips, sending much of its contents to the floor.

PAUL PUGH
Shit! Ken! Ken, get up! School today! Get your butt outta bed!

INT. KEN PUGH'S ROOM
The tiny, windowless bedroom is badly in need of a fresh coat of paint. Crumpled linens and pillows, on the bed, cover whomever lies beneath. The floor is strewn with clothes, towels, footwear and boxes of assorted junk.

In the far corner, a painter's easel supports a partially finished canvas. Several art posters adorn the walls.

DIANE PUGH (O.S.)
Ken! Ken, you'll miss the frikkin' bus! Get movin'!

A moan is heard, then stirring, but the bed linens remain still. A hand emerges from under the bed, followed by the back of a full head of gray hair.

PAUL PUGH (O.S.)
This is the year, Ken, right?

KEN PUGH, fully born from under his bed, stands, scratches his ear, hiccups. He's dressed in khakis and a light blue, buttoned-down shirt. Ken is sixty-four and looks it. Blue eyes and a slim physique, along with his ample hair, are his few saving graces.
KEN PUGH
Yep, this is the year I'll finally graduate. I always said forty-six was my lucky number.

Ken looks over his shoulder, at the work-in-progress painting perched on the easel.

EASEL
A half-finished landscape, rendered in an impressionistic style, shows considerable talent.

BACK TO SCENE
Ken takes a step towards the easel, pauses, looks at his watch, sighs. He sits on the bed, picks up a sock off the floor, followed by one shoe. After putting them on, he repeats the process with the other foot.

KITCHEN
Ken shuffles in, assesses the mess and the tension in the air.

KEN PUGH
Mornin', son... Diane... What's for breakfast?

Diane yanks the hair-encrusted cotton candy cone from Paul's head, hands it to Ken. Ken, disgusted, inspects it, pulls off a hair-free strand, tastes it.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Your latest experiment, Paul?

Paul shrugs.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Keep at it; there's quite a bit to be said for persistence.

Diane jeers.

DIANE PUGH
Where's persistence gotten you, Ken?

KEN PUGH
Twelfth grade.

CUT TO:
EXT. BUS STOP - MINUTES LATER

A dozen high-school-age STUDENTS mill about at the bus stop. Ken is visible in the distance, walking as fast as someone his age can.

KEN/BUS STOP INTERCUTTING

Lunch box in hand, wearing an army-issued backpack, Ken huffs and puffs. His arthritic limp keeps him from attaining his desired pace. A speeding school bus passes by.

The bus stops at the assigned stop. Doors open, kids pile in, jabbering to one another.

Ken waves, hopes the bus driver will spot him and wait. Fifty yards to go.

KEN PUGH
Wait up, CHARLIE! Your dad always did! Your grandpa, too, occasionally.

Bus doors close, the vehicle departs.

Ken stops, kicks the pavement with his right toe. The sound of thunder is heard o.s.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Nuts!

Sweaty Ken pushes on. He hears running o.s., stops, looks over his shoulder.

KEN'S POV

A tall, athletic, upperclassman and acquaintance of Ken's, MATT CURTIS, approaches quickly, running at full speed. He stops upon catching up to Ken.

BACK TO SCENE

MATT CURTIS
You're never going to make it on time at the speed you're going, Ken. First day -- you don't want to be late.
KEN PUGH
Matt, at the pace I'm going, I'll be lucky to make it there by winter break. There's another bus stop four blocks from here, but no way I'm goin' to make it.

MATT CURTIS
Then you need to take the Curtis Express!

KEN PUGH
The what?
Matt steps in front of Ken, pats himself on the back.

MATT CURTIS
The Curtis Express -- quit talking and hop on!

Ken, stunned, snaps out of it, hops onto Matt's back. Matt takes off, sprinting for the next bus stop.

NEXT BUS STOP
Matt, not even winded, arrives at the stop as STUDENTS are boarding. Ken hops off Matt's back.

MATT CURTIS
A new record, with time to spare.

KEN PUGH
Let me know when the Curtis Express has flights to Detroit. I've got a sister there; you'll save me a bundle.

Matt boards the bus, followed by Ken.

INT. BUS
Matt and Ken work their way back towards, and take, the few open seats left. Students unfamiliar with Ken stare confusedly. TWO STUDENTS seated in front of Ken and Matt converse.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #1
Hey, did you see? Matt Curtis brought his grandfather!

Students in the immediate area laugh. Student-on-Bus #2 pokes Student-on-Bus #1 in the arm.
STUDENT-ON-BUS #2
That's not his grandpa. Ain't you heard about Ken Pugh? He's like a hundred years old and still in high school. He's the only student at Woodrow Wilson High who voted for Woodrow Wilson.

Ken overhears, rolls his eyes, leans closer to the students in front of him.

KEN PUGH
I'm only sixty-four.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #2
Oh, you should be very proud of yourself, Kenny. Why can't you graduate?

Ken leans back.

KEN PUGH
Long division, mostly. If it wasn't for long division I might have graduated at sixty.

STUDENT-ON-BUS #2
Well, things may be different this year -- there's a new principal and I hear he's plenty tough.

Ken tries to swallow, cannot.

KEN PUGH
New principal? What happened to Mr. Campbell?

STUDENT-ON-BUS #1
He died. Don't you know anything?

Ken turns to Matt.

MATT CURTIS
I heard Mr. Campbell gagged to death on a stale Twinkie.

KEN PUGH
No... Just like my Uncle Albert.

CUT TO:

INT. HOME OF PRINCIPAL VINCENT CANNATONNA - 7:30 A.M.
BATHROOM

Lean, meticulous VINCENT CANNATOONA, 38, the new principal of Woodrow Wilson High, stands before the mirror over the bathroom sink. Attired in a black suit, his brown hair slicked back, Vincent reaches into his breast pocket, pulls out wire-rimmed spectacles and puts them on. He brings his chiseled face to within an inch of the mirror and sneers.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Students of Woodrow Wilson High
School, I am your new principal,
Vincent Cannatoona. If you learn
anything from this first meeting,
let it be this--

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.)
What flavor Pop Tart do you want?!
Vincent? Vincent Cannatoona!

Vincent lowers his gaze, shudders.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Vincent! I asked you a question!

Vincent slaps the side of the sink with his open hand.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Strawberry, Candace!

He indignantly sniffs, resumes his menacing expression.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Let it be this--

CANDACE CANNATOONA (O.S.)
Frosted, or unfrosted? We have
both!

KITCHEN

A runaway freight train, Vincent storms into the kitchen, comes to an abrupt halt inches from his wife.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Frosted! Two frosted strawberry
Pop Tarts, if you please, Candy!

Angrily, silently, blonde, petite CANDACE 'CANDY'
CANNATOONA shoves two Pop Tarts into the toaster, forces down the device's lever. She tosses the Pop Tart box into the pantry, slams its door shut. Candace adjusts her fashionable dress, untangles her coordinated necklace.
CANDACE'S POV

She peruses the kitchen's multitude of unopened and partially opened moving boxes. Disarray reigns.

BACK TO SCENE

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Bad enough this place looks like a Salvation Army warehouse -- I don't need you calling me Candy on top of it! After two years of marriage, you know I prefer being called Candace. Candy Cannatoona sounds like a novelty food product for cats, and a terrible one at that!

VINCENT CANNATOONA
It was a slip of the tongue... Candace. First-day-at-the-new-job tension, plus moving cross country at the last minute -- everything's happened so fast.

Vincent sits bolt upright at the kitchen table, drinks juice. He tenderly picks up the copy of Roget's Thesaurus next to his place setting, fondly looks at it, as if it was the Holy Bible, then gently sets it down.

Candace stares out the kitchen window, at the front lawn, her back towards Vincent.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
I'm going to need more money, Vincent -- a great deal more. The contractors want to start right away.

Vincent clears his throat, takes another drink.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Buying a house sight unseen was the worst decision you've made since I've known you.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Is it possible to have one day in ten where you fail to remind me of that?

Candace spins around, confronts her husband.
CANDACE CANNATOONA
No! Not until I've transformed this handyman's nightmare into a place I'm proud to show our family, friends and your new colleagues.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
You mean your mother.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Well... yeah.

Vincent stands, takes in the disorderly surroundings, picks up his thesaurus.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
How much?

Candace waves her index finger at Vincent.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Don't pin me down to a specific number! I know you, Vincent. As soon as I commit, you'll start grinding it down to pocket change.

TOASTER
The smoking appliance dings. Two smoldering Pop Tarts pop up.

BACK TO SCENE
They both stare at the charred pastries.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
It's going to take $50,000, at least. And that's assuming nothing unexpected crops up, and you know something unexpected will crop up!

Vincent looks up to the ceiling.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I'm surprised the smoke alarm didn't go off.

Using barbecue tongs, Candace plucks the Pop Tarts from the toaster, drops them on a plate. One slides off, hits the floor.
CANDACE CANNATOONA
I'm not, nothing in this dump works.

The smoke alarm blares. Vincent grabs the remaining Pop Tart, takes one bite, discards the remnant in the trash. Thesaurus in hand, he heads for the door.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Like I said -- fifty thousand, at least!

VINCENT CANNATOONA
High school principals don't get paid like investment bankers.

Vincent exits, slams the door. Candace picks up the Pop Tart from the floor, nearly takes a bite, discards it. The smoke alarm stops.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Tell me something I don't know, Vincent.

The smoke alarm resumes.

CUT TO:

INT. WOODROW WILSON HIGH SCHOOL - DAY 8:15 A.M.

A narrow, dimly-lit hallway in this decrepit school is jammed with raucous STUDENTS seeking their respective home-rooms, while others congregate at open lockers.

TEACHERS stand in doorways to their rooms, answering student questions, giving directions MOS.

KEN

Ken amiably stumbles along in the crowd, occasionally waves to students or faculty he recognizes, none of whom wave back.

At room 405 he stops, greets the ancient, frowning TEACHER.

KEN PUGH
Hello, Miss van Wart. Looks like I've got you for homeroom again. This makes seventeen years in a row.
MISS VAN WART, pencil stuck in her gray hair, takes a deep breath, coughs a smoker's cough. Her black dress is coated with dandruff.

MISS VAN WART
To be punished like this, I must have done something truly horrible in a previous life. Just take a seat, Pugh.

KEN PUGH
What did you do this summer?

She grabs the pencil from her hair, snaps it in two.

MISS VAN WART
I prayed for death every day.

KEN PUGH
But here you are!

MISS VAN WART
I guess I just didn't pray hard enough.

Mr. Cannatoona's voice booms over the P.A.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)
Attention, students of Woodrow Wilson High School! Attention and stand up straight!

HALLWAY
Everyone in the hallway stands tall, freezes, as if they'd just heard the voice of God.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)
Student Ken Pugh! Report at once to my office!

HALLWAY
Students exhale, resume activity.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, thunderstruck, makes eye contact with Miss van Wart.
KEN'S POV

Miss van Wart breaks into an ear-to-ear smile, reveals horrible, tobacco-stained teeth.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken takes a deep breath, departs. Miss van Wart looks heavenward.

MISS VAN WART
Even if it's only for twenty minutes, thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING AREA, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Shiny, varnished pine frames a door with brass fittings and cloudy glass, emblazoned with the new principal's name. Ken meekly approaches seated, middle-aged, MRS. KLATTER, the receptionist, who is engrossed in her paperwork.

Ken silently mouths the principal's name, on the door, chuckles.

KEN PUGH
Cannatoona, funny. Hi, Mrs. Klatter.

The receptionist looks up towards Ken, disappointment in her eyes.

MRS. KLATTER
Oh, God, it's you, again. I strongly advise you to get that smirk off your face, Pugh. Mr. Cannatoona doesn't see the humor in his name, or anything else for that matter.

Ken nods. Mrs. Klatter points to a seat with a ruler.

MRS. KLATTER (CONT'D)
Park it, he'll be with you in a minute.

Ken complies. Seated, he crosses his leg, placing his left ankle on his right knee. He idly plays with his shoelace.

Mr. Cannatoona's office phone conversation, o.s., is audible in the waiting area.
VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
Candy, I'm not paying for a mahogany deck. Pick something less exotic -- maple or plywood will look just as good at one third the price.

The conversation pauses. Ken unnecessarily unties and reties his shoelace, looks up.

KEN'S POV

Mrs. Klatter, brow furrowed, stares at him, perplexed. She rubs her left temple with her pencil's eraser.

MRS. KLATTER
What's your game, Pugh?

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, dumbfounded, shakes his head, uncrosses his leg.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
That's too much, Candy. I'm not happy with that, Candy... Why not just make a big pile of money in the street and set it on fire?!

O.s. the sound of Vincent's phone slamming down is heard.

Ken follows Cannatoona's indistinct shadow as it rises and moves along the textured glass, nearing the office door.

KEN'S POV

Cannatoona's door flings open. Powerful hands set firmly on narrow hips, he seems to to occupy the entire door frame.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA
You Pugh?

Ken stands. Vincent grimaces, tugs an earlobe, sizes Ken up.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Your posture -- it's dreadful, man!

(MORE)
VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Little wonder you're a loser.
Straighten up, for God's sake.
You can't go through life with
posture like that.

Ken attempts to stand up straight, does not make an
impression. Vincent wilts, steps to the side.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Get in here.

INT. CANNATOONA'S OFFICE

Obsessively tidy, the office is dominated by an ornate
desk. Numerous framed photos highlight Vincent's time in a
military academy and the army. A large bulletin board
displays official documents and assorted cutouts from
magazines.

Ken cautiously sits in the hard, straight-backed chair
facing Vincent's desk. Vincent stands next to his executive
desk chair. A vague sound o.s., outside his window,
suddenly draws his attention. He separates the slats on
the Venetian blinds, peers out, grunts, releases the slats
and returns his attention to Ken.

Ken forces a wan smile. Vincent picks up his beloved
thesaurus, holds it next to his own head.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Do you know what this is, Pugh?
Wait, let me rephrase that for
someone who has been left back
forty-five times. Forty-five!

Vincent pauses, collects his thoughts, takes a deep breath.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
This is a thesaurus, Ken.
Enlighten me with what you know
about a thesaurus.

Ken widens his shirt collar, his eyebrows sail up.

KEN PUGH
Before you held up that book, I
thought it might be the name of a
Roman general... or, maybe a
meat-eating dinosaur.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Stop talking, Pugh -- and s-s-sit
up s-s-straight!
Ken jolts, sits up, nearly tips over his chair. Vincent places the book on his desk, paces behind it.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Typically, a fourth grader would know that a thesaurus is a book of synonyms -- and please, do not jump in and further embarrass yourself by saying you thought a synonym was something you sprinkle on toast! I've heard that one a thousand times and I do not find it funny in the least -- not one little bit!

Vincent stops pacing, rests his forearm on the headrest of the his chair.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
The value of the thesaurus is that it helps those who regularly use it expand their vocabulary, thereby improving their writing and speaking skills, as well as their overall intelligence.

KEN PUGH
Oh, that sounds nice.

An exhale of futility from Vincent.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
By not knowing what a thesaurus is, you have more than amply demonstrated your... disdain (Vincent taps the cover of the thesaurus) for higher learning. And, Pugh, in a larger sense you are an obstacle, an impediment... (taps the book again) to this institution's success and my career.

KEN PUGH
Principal Campbell never spoke to me this way. He was a nice man.

Vincent comes around his desk, goes nose-to-nose with Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
And now he's a rotting corpse. Get used to it. Become... inured.

Vincent grabs and holds up the book.
VINCENT'S POV

Ken sweats profusely.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent's phone rings. He immediately picks up, listens, then engages.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
A koi pond? No, Candy. No, Candy. Especially not in the laundry room. I don't care what celebrity has one. No, no, Candy. Goodbye.

Vincent hangs up.

KEN PUGH
You don't like Candy? I love candy. I even had cotton candy for breakfast today.

Vincent's mouth drops open; his face reddens.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I was not referring to a confection. Candy is my wife's name, Pugh.

KEN PUGH
Oh, oh, I am very sorry, Mr. Cannatoona. I had no idea--

VINCENT CANNATOONA
No, you haven't. If you did, you would know what the purpose of a comma is. There is a world of difference between "no candy" and "No, Candy!"

Ken recoils, cowers.

Vincent seizes a manila folder from his desktop, sits on a corner of the desk. From the folder he retrieves and inspects a document.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
This is a very important document, Pugh. It deals with what's left of your future.

(MORE)
VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
I'll save you the ordeal of
reading it now, because at the
rate you read it could take up the
rest of the day and probably a
good chunk of tomorrow.
Succinctly, it says this is going
to be your last year at Woodrow
Wilson High.

KEN

Ken's eyes widen, tear up.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Either you graduate, or you will
be expelled, without a diploma.

KEN PUGH
But--

Vincent jumps to his feet.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
But nothing, Pugh. You'll pass
every class, or be out on your
ass... which handily rhymes.

KEN PUGH
Woodrow Wilson High is my life.

Vincent stuffs the document into Ken's trembling hand.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Oh, and one more thing. Your old
service credits have been ruled
obsolete, by me.

KEN PUGH
Meaning?

Vincent snorts.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Meaning, in addition to your
academics, you'll have to go out
for a sport and earn new ones.
KEN PUGH
I'm sixty-four! I have varicose veins and a prostate the size of a Lender's bagel. I have to pee every thirty minutes. What sport could I possibly try out for?

Vincent opens the office door, escorts Ken.

VINCENT CANNATONA
Too bad for you we don't have a pissing team. I haven't the slightest idea, Pugh. Try them all.

WAITING AREA

Ken exits, the door slams shut behind him. Vincent's phone rings o.s. Mrs. Klatter looks up from her paperwork.

KEN PUGH
What am I going to do, Mrs. Klatter?

MRS. KLATTER
You better get to your first class, Pugh. You're incredibly late.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOMS - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS

The following shows the remainder of Ken's academic classes for the day, leading up to gym.

A) Seated in a biology classroom, Ken is handed a massive text. He remains wide-eyed, stunned, from his earlier meeting. Ken is oblivious to the teacher's lecture o.s. Vincent's warning rings through his head non-stop.

VINCENT CANNATONA (V.O.)
Expelled!

B) Seated in math class, a second forbidding-looking text is dropped onto Ken's biology book. Ken remains stupefied.

VINCENT CANNATONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(louder)
Expelled!!
C) The same scenario prevails in history class, with two over-sized texts added to the growing pile.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(louder still)
Expelled!!

D) English class. The added books here hide shocked Ken from view.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(deafening)
Expelled!!

CUT TO:

INT. GYM LOCKER ROOM - 2:45 P.M.

Students, including Ken, enter and moan over the state of the overused and under cleaned locker room. Steam clouds waft in from the nearby showers.

Athletic director, ED DAHRJA, short, fat and bald, oversees the commotion.

Surrounded by classmates, Ken rests his backpack on a wooden bench, hesitantly starts to unpack his gym clothes.

GYM STUDENT #1
You're a friggin' old fossil. You can't undress with us, you wrinkled pervert.

Ken takes off his shirt.

KEN PUGH
New year, same old complaints. I'm a student, too, and a widower with a son ten years older than you -- and I'm no pervert, so just relax.

Students hurriedly don gym uniforms.

GYM STUDENT #2
Jesus Christ! He's got gray chest hair. Your pubes white, too, old dude?

Derisive laughter breaks out. Someone throws a roll of toilet paper. Ken ignores the theatrics, continues changing.
ED DAHRIA (O.S.)
C'mon ladies, we haven't got day!
Last one out on the gym floor
gives me fifty perfect push-ups!

KEN PUGH
(to GYM STUDENT #2)
Mr. Diarrhea hasn't lost his charm
since last year.

Ken secures his street clothes in a locker, locks up.

GYM STUDENT #2
Was that a joke? His name is Dahria.

KEN PUGH
I'm quite sure it's pronounced diarrhea.

GYM STUDENT #2
Whatever, it's your funeral,
Methuselah.

GYM
Ken's gym class pours through the locker room door. No one
wants to suffer the consequences of being last.

The warm, poorly ventilated gymnasium has a twenty-foot
ceiling and inadequate lighting. Chipped, green walls have
large, frayed mats hanging on them. Climbing ropes and
rings are secured well above the cracked gym floor.
Horses, parallel bars and other apparatuses are pushed off
to the sides.

Mr. Dahria blows his shrill whistle furiously. Ken is dead
last out the door. Mr. Dahria approaches him, whistle
blaring. Finally, he stops.

ED DAHRIA
I can't treat you any differently
than the rest, Pugh. It would set
a bad example.

KEN PUGH
I completely understand, Mr.
Diarrhea.

ED DAHRIA
Good! Good! Now give me fifty
perfect ones, Pugh!

Dahria turns to the rest of the class, blows his whistle.
ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
The rest of you, form three rows
of ten and start--

He pivots back towards Ken, now on the floor, stiffly
attempting to get into the push-up position.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
Pugh! How did you pronounce my
last name?!

Ken, sweat-soaked, buries his face in the crook of his arm.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATE AFTERNOON

At day's end, Ken, exhausted mentally and physically, sits
alone, slumped in the last row. As the half-empty bus
grinds along, his eyelids flutter, then close.

KEN'S DREAM

Ken, age 18, is attired in a Woodrow Wilson High football
uniform, minus his helmet. He stands in a vast, barren
desert in midday heat. The sky above is cloudless.
Exhausted, Ken pants, tries to catch his breath.

KEN'S POV

Numerous footprints in the sand, starting at his feet, lead
to the crest of a nearby sand dune. His teammates,
congregated there, wave to Ken, then resume running, until
out of sight.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH
Wait! Wait up, guys!

Ken forces himself to run, falters after a few yards,
collapses to his knees.

Suddenly, Ken is 64, still in his uniform, now ill-fitting.
Before him, a depression forms in the sand. It rapidly
grows deeper and wider. The surrounding desert swirls with
the menacing depression its focus.

Ken gets to his feet, tries to escape, but it is a losing
proposition. He is swallowed by the void in the sand. All
goes dark.
Still 64, in uniform, Ken finds himself standing in the canned goods aisle of a supermarket.

KEN'S POV

Save for Ken, the aisle is empty of customers. The store is well lit, silent. A quick perusal shows the entire aisle is stocked with cans of tuna.

He selects a can, draws it close. Principal Cannatoona's face adorns the label.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken tries to put the can back, but it won't release. Other cans, as if drawn to a magnet, fly off the shelves, adhere to Ken, who doubles over.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)
Stand up straight, Pugh! Stand up! Stand up!

INT. SCHOOL BUS

The bus is empty, except for Ken and Charlie, its petulant driver, who stands in front of him with clenched fists.

CHARLIE
Stand up, Pugh! Stand up!

Ken, startled, awakens.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
This is your stop, Pugh. Get off my bus! I have to get home to my equally crabby wife!

Outside, rain pours down.

CUT TO:

INT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY SHOP - MINUTES LATER

There are no customers. The sound of wind and rain o.s. fills the shop. Paul doesn't notice, he is focused on his latest cotton candy creation, as it develops. Concentric layers of the confection, each a different color form the petals of an over-sized flower supported on a paper cone. He skillfully uses a narrow, pointed wooden dowel to articulate each petal.
Ken rushes into the shop, drops his books. Startled, distracted, Paul applies too much pressure to the last layer of candy, deforming the entire piece.

**PAUL PUGH**
Shit! Look what you made me do!

Ken, not really aware of what he has done, picks up his books, deposits them on the counter. He takes off his soaking shirt, gives it a shake, wrings it out, squints in Paul's direction.

**KEN PUGH**
What's that, Paul? What are you working on?

Paul, disgusted, returns his attention to the flower, attempts repair.

**PAUL PUGH**
Until you came in, it was a cotton candy flower. Now I'm not exactly sure.

Ken puts his shirt back on, approaches Paul.

**KEN PUGH**
Paul... that's beautiful, simply beautiful.

Paul appreciates the compliment.

**PAUL PUGH**
I'm glad you approve. This could be a huge hit for us next season. I think I could get seven or eight bucks for one of these. Nobody else on the boardwalk has anything like it.

Ken reaches out, lightly touches a petal.

**KEN PUGH**
Pugh's pansy...

**PAUL PUGH**
Say what?

**KEN PUGH**
Pugh's pansy. You'll need a name for your flower. Pugh's pansy has a nice ring to it.

Paul considers the suggestion, smiles. He resumes fine tuning the creation with the dowel.
PAUL PUGH
So, how was the first day of school, Dad?

Ken slouches.

KEN PUGH
I don't really know where to begin, son.

PAUL PUGH
Really? After forty-six years?

Ken gathers up his belongings, heads for the stairs that lead up to the apartment, exits.

KEN PUGH (O.S)
I just don't know where to begin.

INT. THE PUGH APARTMENT

Diane, standing at the kitchen table, angrily mumbles to herself as she fusses with the whole chicken she's preparing for dinner.

DIANE PUGH
Goddamned bird has to make into the oven before Paul comes back up here. He sees it, he'll want to stuff it with cotton candy as an experiment. Anything with a hole isn't safe in this goddamned apartment.

Ken enters, looks at Diane, then for a place to drop the textbooks he's barely holding onto.

KEN PUGH
Hello, Diane; I made it back.

She stops fussing, punches the bird, brushes back hair that has fallen onto her face.

DIANE PUGH
I see; the prodigal father returns.

Spotting nowhere to place the books, Ken, bushed, drops them on the floor.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
Ten second rule, Ken. If they stay there longer than that, they end up in the trash.
Ken forces a laugh, not sure if she means it, or not.

KEN PUGH
I've yet to see anything picked up off this floor before or after ten seconds. I'll take my chances.

Diane ignores the remark, flops the chicken into a roasting pan, then places it in the oven. She takes a seat, avoids eye contact.

DIANE PUGH
Listen, Ken. Paul and I have been talking about something and he can't seem to muster the nerve to tell you, so that leaves it up to me, no surprise.

Ken leans back against the fridge, knocks off magnets.

KEN PUGH
Oh?

DIANE PUGH
Yeah, it's a pretty big deal, for you.

KEN PUGH
I just saw Paul. He didn't even hint at--

DIANE PUGH
Well, he was in the middle of cotton candy R and D. You know, once he's in that mode nothing gets him out.

Diane mindlessly stirs the sugar in the sugar bowl.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
Ken, you're going to have to find your own place.

Ken leans harder into the fridge, activates the ice cube dispenser, sends a stream of cubes onto the floor.

KEN PUGH
You can't be... You can't be serious.

DIANE PUGH
It's not just my idea. Both of us, Paul and me, talked it over, and not for the first time.

(MORE)
DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
With the baby coming, we'll need your room. And we're tripping over each other as it is, so the only solution, the best solution, is for you to get your own place... and the sooner the better.

KEN PUGH
The sooner the better?

Diane nods.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
I have a right to be here. You're my family. You can't make me go.

Diane stops stirring the sugar, licks the spoon.

DIANE PUGH
Yes I... we can. I've looked into it. First of all, your name doesn't appear anywhere on the lease. And I spoke with a lawyer, that JASON SKROTA, over on Church Street.

KEN PUGH
Next to the Korean barbecue place?

DIANE PUGH
Yep, that's the one. Ever hear of an eviction notice, Ken?

She stands, goes to the oven, opens the door, bastes the bird. Ken ponders the term.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
It means we can legally force you to leave, if it comes to that.

Diane closes the oven door.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
Find a place in the next few weeks, okay?

CUT TO:
INT. KEN'S ROOM - LATE THAT EVENING

Ken lies on his book-strewn bed, idly flips through the pages of his history book. An illustration catches his eye; he pauses.

OPEN HISTORY BOOK

The page bears a color illustration that depicts the U.S. Cavalry forcing Native Americans from their tribal land at gunpoint.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken closes the book, sighs, looks over his shoulder at his unfinished painting.

He rolls off the bed, opens a folding chair, sits in front of the easel, smiles at his work. His index finger runs over raw portions of the canvas, explores possibilities. Ken sits back, looks for, finds and picks up his palette.

KEN'S POV

Meager amounts of paint are squeezed out of crumpled tubes, onto the encrusted palette.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul selects a brush from a glass jar containing many that are worn and dirty, begins blending colors on the palette.

Nighttime hours pass. The digital clock on the dresser reads five-thirty a.m.

Ken inspects the now-finished landscape. Satisfied, he puts down the palette, returns the brush to the jar.

He stands, stretches, picks up the painting by its sides. He carries it to the nearby lamp, views it at assorted angles, nods approvingly.

KEN PUGH
An inviting place, wish I was there.

Ken walks to the bedroom door, painting in hand. He opens it, listens.
KITCHEN

Ken cautiously steps into the kitchen. The coast is clear. He heads for the stairs, descends.

BEHIND THE COTTON CANDY STORE

The screen door at the back of the building opens. Ken emerges, with his painting, in the dimmest of morning light. A yellow cat, with numerous, small reddish patches on its coat, meows, startling Ken, then scampers off.

O.s., the sound of distant cars on the freeway is heard. Overhead, a single-engine plane, lights flashing, heads out to sea.

Ken takes a deep breath, shuffles over to a rusted dumpster, stops. He takes a final look at his latest creation, tosses it in, takes an unsteady step back.

The cat, named MEASLES, jumps onto the plastic lid covering one half of the open dumpster. It stares at Ken intently.

KEN PUGH
Hi there, Measles.

MEASLES
Another masterpiece bites the dust, aye, Kenny?

KEN PUGH
No place to hang 'em, no place to sell 'em. That leaves the city dump as my gallery.

Measles assumes a relaxed, curled position.

MEASLES
Gosh, you're an upbeat guy. Always a pleasure talking with you, Ken.

KEN PUGH
Some days I wish I was you, Measles.

MEASLES
I ate a dead mouse, with one eye missing, for breakfast. From the looks of it, it died three days ago. Still wish you were me?
KEN PUGH
Well, not as much as a minute ago, but you get the picture.

Measles laughs.

MEASLES
No, but the dumpster did.

KEN PUGH
Clever kitty.

Measles stands, stretches.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
My life is suddenly filled with more uncertainty than ever. I wish I knew what to do, Measles.

MEASLES
Sorry, but as a humble alley cat, your human problems are a bit beyond me. Well, gotta run, busy day ahead. So much licking to do, so little time. Good luck, Ken.

Measles leaps off the dumpster lid, dashes off, squeezes under a fence.

Ken goes back inside, shuts the screen door.

CUT TO:

INT. WOODROW WILSON HIGH - THE NEXT DAY

MISS CHMUT'S HISTORY CLASS

With much animated arm flapping from fortyish, pony-tailed MISS CHMUT, her class finally settles down. For its remaining minutes, Ken, in the back row, tries to hide behind the mountainous male student in front of him.

KEN'S POV

Smiling Miss Chmut, youthful for her age, stands on tiptoes in an attempt to spy Ken. Successful, she waves, as if her hand were on fire.

BACK TO SCENE
MISS CHMUT
Ken? Kenny Pugh? You can't hide from me forever, Ken. Do you remember you owe me a report on Ulysses S. Grant, from last year?

KEN PUGH
It was actually from three years ago, Miss Chmut. I'm close, but not completely ready.

Miss Chmut's smile evaporates. She takes a determined step closer.

MISS CHMUT
Principal Cannatoona spoke to me about you and your situation, Ken. There will be no more procrastinating. If you fail this class, you'll be expelled. In the remaining time, give your report, orally. Right now, Ken.

KEN
Ken silently mouths the word "orally."

BACK TO SCENE
All eyes in the classroom are on Ken. The STUDENT next to him pokes him in the arm.

HISTORY STUDENT #1
Go ahead, Pugh; it should be a breeze. You babysat for Grant, didn't you?

A second STUDENT leans towards Ken, whispers.

HISTORY STUDENT #2
Just be sure to say Grant was known as the father of our country.

Ken plods to the front of the class holding a wrinkled sheet of paper. Poorly-suppressed laughter, snickering abounds. Miss Chmut remains standing, leans back, uses the edge of her desk for support. Raising one hand, she silences the class.
KEN'S POV

Twenty-five pupils who could not care less. He turns his gaze to Miss Chmut.

KEN PUGH (O.S)
One more day?

She shakes her head.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken clears his throat. Aware of his trembling free hand, he presses it against his side.

KEN PUGH
U-Ulysses S. Grant was born in Ohio, in 1822... and died in 1885.

HISTORY STUDENT #1 (O.S.)
Did anything happen in between?

The room erupts with laughter.

MISS CHMUT
Mr. Wiseguy in the last row, see me after class. The rest of you, settle down. Continue, Ken, if you have anything to add.

KEN PUGH
I do. People mostly know Grant as the victorious general in the Civil War, others just think of him as a drunkard; but there was much more to the man. After quitting the army in 1854, and rejoining in 1861, he quickly rose through the ranks by proving his abilities and by earning the respect of those he commanded. He had suffered greatly, financially, in the seven years he was out of the military, and was nearly destitute by the time he re-entered. After the war, he sought no political office, but saw the need to serve his country in the difficult period of reconstruction, so he did, but only at the request of others.

(MORE)
KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Grant gets little credit for the fact that, during his eight years as president, he fought hard to get voting rights for freed slaves and Native Americans. Bad investments made after he was president threw him into poverty once again, but he came through for his family, to whom he was deeply devoted, by writing and selling his autobiography, in the face of the pain from terminal cancer, completing the project only days before dying. Grant was an honest, humble, kind, principled man, who deserved a better end. Hopefully, someday, he will be fully appreciated. That's all I have to say.

Dead silence in the classroom. Miss Chmut grabs a tissue from the box on her desktop, wipes her eye. The bell rings, ending the class. Everyone quietly exits.

CUT TO:

INT. GYM CLASS - MINUTES LATER

Mr. Dahria stands near the entrance to the locker room, at the conclusion of gym class, emphatically blowing his beloved whistle. Sweaty students stream by. As the last few approach, including Ken, Dahria finally relents.

ED DAHRIA
C'mon, hurry it up, ladies! We ran a little late. Change clothes and get to your next class -- no time for showers.

Dahria's nostrils flare when Ken gets close. He takes a step back.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
I'm making an exception with you, Pugh. You got old man stink. Take a shower, or maybe two, no matter how late your are. I don't want to be held responsible for someone passin' out.

KEN PUGH
Yes, sir. May I--
ED DAHRIA
And get that gym suit fumigated --
or burn it! Smells like a zebra

turd stuffed with blue cheese!
Cripes!

Ken takes off his shirt, wraps it around his hand.

KEN PUGH
Can I have a word with you, sir?

ED DAHRIA
Yeah, sure, but keep your
distance. I've got a department
meeting in ten minutes and I don't
want to come in smellin' like a
hobo's ass.

KEN PUGH
I understand completely. I need
to get on a sports team this year,
to get new service credits
because--

Dahria blasts his whistle, silencing Ken.

ED DAHRIA
Get to the point, man! The fumes!
I'm succumbing!

KEN PUGH
Sorry, sorry I didn't respond
quickly enough. I admire people
like yourself, Mr. Dahria, who
answer right away, you know,
without thinking.

Dahria growls.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
As I was about to say, I know
tryouts for the football team are
today, after school, and that
you're the head coach. Can I...
Can I try out?

Dahria laughs, doubles over, catches his breath.

ED DAHRIA
Pugh, you're priceless!... You're
not serious, are you?
KEN PUGH
Mr. Cannatoona says I need service credits to graduate. I don't want to go out for a sport, but I have to. It's either that, or be expelled.

ED DAHRIA
But football? You got some kind of death wish, Pugh?

Ken reflects for ten seconds.

KEN PUGH
Sure, almost every day, lately.

ED DAHRIA
Well, the team's going to be pretty pathetic, based on those returning from last year's exploding donkey of a season.

KEN PUGH
Exploding what?

Dahria becomes flustered.

ED DAHRIA
I'm not that good with metaphors. The point is, I don't need you dying on me, on top of all the other problems I've got with the team.

Dahria turns away from Ken, towards the locker room, checks his watch, blows his whistle.

ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
I suggest you quit squeezin' each others' rear ends in there, ladies. You've now got two minutes to get to your next class!

KEN PUGH
Mr. Dia... Mr. Dahria? Sir?

Dahria, annoyed, quickly turns back to Ken.

ED DAHRIA
What, Pugh?

KEN PUGH
There must be some position. Let me try, please.
Dahria steps closer, waves away body odor fumes.

    ED DAHRIA
    Do you even watch football?

Ken rolls his eyes, sheepishly raises his eyebrows.

    ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
    Name one current player in the NFL.

Ken thinks, thinks some more.

    KEN PUGH
    Pop quizzes are not my strength, Mr. Dahria. Umm... Jeffrey... Unitas?

Dahria howls, holds his sides. Ken laughs, too, but is not sure why.

    ED DAHRIA
    You mean Johnny Unitas?

Ken shakes his head, then nods in agreement.

    ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
    Unitas last played in '73.

Dahria pushes back the brim of his cap, scratches his forehead, sighs.

    ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
    I'll tell you what, Pugh; show up after school today and I'll see if I can find something that suits you, though I can't for the life of me imagine what that might be.

Ken beams, tosses his shirt in the air, tries to catch it and misses.

    ED DAHRIA (CONT'D)
    South field -- on time!

Ken swipes the fallen shirt off the floor, stiffly runs toward the locker room, stops half way, catches his breath, continues.

Dahria observes, shakes his head in disbelief.

CUT TO:
INT. MATH CLASS - LATER

Matt Curtis sits next to Ken, in the back row of MR. SHOPLIFSKY's trigonometry class. Matt tries to focus on what is being written on the blackboard, but Ken distracts him with whispered questions about football.

KEN PUGH
Matt, Matt...

Matt waves Ken off.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
One more question, that's all:
The player who throws the ball -- what's he called?

Matt, disgusted, whispers from the corner of his mouth.

MATT CURTIS
The quarterback, Ken.

Frustrated, Ken erases a previous notation he's made in his notebook.

KEN PUGH
I thought you said the quarterback plays defense; that he defends against receivers and also assists in stopping the run.

Angered, Matt turns to Ken.

MATT CURTIS
(whispering, but louder)
That's the **cornerback**, for Christ's sake. There's a difference, a huge difference, between a quarterback and a **cornerback**, Ken.

BLACKBOARD

Mr. Shoplifsky, his back to the class, completes drawing a series of triangles on the blackboard, pauses, gently sets down the white chalk on the ledge. He smooths his fringe of gray hair with both hands, then clasps them behind his back.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY/BACK OF THE CLASSROOM  INTERCUTTING
Mr. Shoplifsky

Matt Curtis is correct, Kenneth Pugh. There is an immeasurable difference between the roles of quarterback and cornerback, in the game of football.

Shoplifsky turns and faces the class.

Mr. Shoplifsky (Cont’d)

Just as there is an immeasurable difference between failing and passing my trigonometry class!

Ken

I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Shoplifsky. It's just that--

Mr. Shoplifsky

How many years have you been in my trigonometry class, in a row, Kenneth?

Ken silently counts on his fingers.

Mr. Shoplifsky (Cont’d)

Incredibly, it's more than you have fingers, Kenneth, unless you have eleven fingers. Eleven! Eleven consecutive years of your miserable excuses and absurdly wrong answers.

Ken

I'm pretty sure it's twelve years, Mr. Shoplifsky.

Mustachioed Mr. Shoplifsky tugs both ends of his paisley bow tie, grimaces.

Mr. Shoplifsky

Kenneth, stand.

Ken stiffly rises.

Mr. Shoplifsky (Cont’d)

Kenneth, name the three basic trigonometric functions.

Ken looks to Matt for help.

Matt Curtis

You're on your own.
KEN PUGH
S-sine...

MR. SHOPLIFSKY
Continue.

Ken plays with a shirt button.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY (CONT'D)
Ken? Ken!

KEN PUGH
Co... sine.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY
Impressive, there's hope, Pugh. Care to go for the trifecta?

KEN PUGH
Tan... something. It starts with tan; I'm certain of that.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY
I'm getting goosebumps, Pugh!

The class bell sounds. Ken heaves a sigh of relief.

BACK TO SCENE

The other students stand, gather their belongings, start exiting. Sounds of students in the hallway, o.s., are audible. Ken walks to the front of the classroom.

KEN PUGH
Saved by the bell, Mr. Shoplifsky.

MR. SHOPLIFSKY
Don't kid yourself, Pugh. You're hanging by gossamer.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - MINUTES LATER

The gray-and-yellow-painted, prison-like cafeteria is illuminated by hanging, single-bulb fixtures protected by dusty, wire grids. Groups of students rush to find tables where they can share their allotted time in the company of friends. Trays rattle and collide on the long, slick, metal tables.

Ken, lunch box in hand, wanders past crowded tables, in search of relative solitude at the back of the room.
KEN'S POV

A lone, Asian-looking man, named TUKK, wears orange coveralls, sits by himself, inspecting his plate of food. He is most unhappy. The man is of squarish build, has straight dark hair, combed forward, and a wispy mustache. He looks up, makes eye contact with Ken, looks back down at the plate.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken's wave is not seen, and if it was, it would not have been returned. Regardless, he approaches, smiles.

KEN PUGH
Hello, Tukk. I see you've decided to stay another year as Woodrow Wilson High's top janitor. Welcome back!

Tukk refuses to look up. Ken takes the seat next to Tukk, clunks down his battered lunch box.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Mind if I join you?

Tukk's sideways glance and sneer supplant a verbal reply. A chocolate cupcake whizzes between both men, strikes the wall behind them, bursts apart, leaving a stain.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
I thought you said last year was it for you. That you were fed up and headin' back to... where is it you're from again? Scoop-a-doop?

Tukk draws a deep breath, sits back in his folding chair. Strangely, Tukk speaks with a thick Australian accent.

TUKK
It's Shaktoolik, Alaska, sittin' on glorious Norton Sound, you twit. When the Asbury Park Department of Education offered me a half-a-million-dollar signin' bonus, for stayin' on one more year -- well, I just couldn't very well bring myself to say no to their generosity, now could I?

Ken opens his lunch box, pauses.
KEN PUGH
Half a million?! Tukk, you're rich! I had no idea janitorial work paid so well! I wish I knew that back in the fifties. Sure, you've got to clean poop out of urinals, and scrape two inches of hardened chewing gum and dried boogers off the bottoms of hundreds of chairs, but--

Tukk slams his formidable hand down on the table. The crash is unnoticed over the room's din.

TUKK
Oh, please shut your gob, Ken. Can't you see I'm upset?

Tukk lifts the edge of his plate a few inches, drops it.

TUKK (CONT'D)
You call these sardines? Crikey, they're not fit for a bloody dingo! In Shaktoolik, we'd grind these pups down into a mash to grease our snowmobile treads with! Bloody hell! Whadda you got for lunch, mate? Maybe we can work out a deal.

Agreeable, Ken rummages through his lunch box, pulls out a bottle of Ensure. Tukk grabs it, inspects the label.

TUKK (CONT'D)
What's this stuff?

KEN PUGH
Oh, that's Ensure; it's a liquid meal, for older folks like me.

Tukk tosses it back in the lunch box. Ken takes it back out, twists the cap with difficulty.

TUKK
That it, mate?

Ken removes a wad of pink cotton candy wrapped in cellophane.

TUKK (CONT'D)
I'm afraid to ask what that is? Is it a tuft of your granny's hair?
Ken unwraps it, yanks off a chunk, hands it to skeptical Tukk.

KEN PUGH
It's cotton candy, from my son's shop, on the boardwalk. You look like you've never seen it. Don't they have cotton candy in Skunk-a-doo?

Ken chuckles, takes a bite, followed by Tukk, who enjoys it.

TUKK
Kenny, 'ow long you been goin' to high school?

Ken washes down his mouthful of candy with a gulp of Ensure.

KEN PUGH
Seems like forever, but that's about to change, unfortunately.

Tukk grabs another piece of cotton candy, sniffs it, devours it.

TUKK
Why's that?

KEN PUGH
The new principal, Mr. Cannatoona.

Tukk harrumphs.

TUKK
Oh, that bugger.

KEN PUGH
He says, either I graduate this year, or I get expelled. Either way, I'm out.

Ken takes a final swig, recaps the empty bottle, tosses it back in the lunch box.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Worse, I have to go out for a sport.

TUKK
You pullin' my tail, Kenny-boy?

Ken shakes his head.
KEN PUGH
I'm goin' to football tryouts
after school today. I have to say
I'm not optimistic.

Tukk wipes the corners of his mouth.

TUKK
My condolences, in advance, Kenny.

Ken stands, shrugs, gets hit in the chest with a doughnut, ignores it.

KEN PUGH
Why? Who's gonna die?

TUKK
Most likely you, you twit.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTH ATHLETIC FIELD - 3:30 P.M.

Wearing a poorly-fitting uniform, Ken stands on the fifty yard line. He holds his helmet in front of him, perplexed as to the proper way to put it on.

In back of Ken, other PLAYERS engage in various exercises and drills. An assistant coach, holding a clipboard, MR. YERLAX, approaches Ken.

COACH YERLAX
Pugh!

Startled, Ken drops his helmet, accidentally kicks it a foot away.

COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)
Pick up that helmet and put it on! Now!

Ken picks it up, but isn't sure how to wear it. He starts to put in on backwards. Yerlax throws down his clipboard, grabs the helmet from Ken.

MR. CANNATOONA

Standing at the top of the stadium steps, Vincent observes Ken's predicament through binoculars, softly laughs. Winded Mrs. Klatter approaches, disturbs his amusement.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
What is it?
MRS. KLATTER
It's Mrs. Cannatoona, sir. She is on the phone and very upset.
Something about tree roots in the master bathroom.

Vincent wilts, departs with Mrs. Klatter.

BACK TO SCENE

COACH YERLAX
The cage goes in the front -- to see out of, you numskull!

Ken tries to put it on, but the helmet is clearly too small for his cranium. He removes it, looks at it questioningly.

KEN PUGH
Are you sure? It would provide better ventilation for the back of my head, if it was the other way around.

When Ken tries to put it on backwards, Yerlax gives him the look of death. Ken notices, silently turns it around, manages to squeeze it on.

COACH YERLAX
And what's with your shoulder pads?! They're half way down your back! Pugh, you look like a camel mated with the Hunchback of Notre Dame!

Ken futilely reaches behind his back, attempts to raise the pads to the tops of his shoulders.

KEN PUGH
I thought they protect your shoulder blades. I have a little arthritis in my left one, you know.

Yerlax picks up his clipboard, pauses, slams it back down into the turf.

COACH YERLAX
Get your sorry, geriatric ass over to the sled, Pugh! I was told to find a position for you; one where you won't get broken in two on the first play, but I don't believe that is humanly possible!

(MORE)
COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)
Good god! Where is the ghost of legendary coach George Halas when you need him?

Ken walks towards the sled.

COACH YERLAX (CONT'D)
Run, damn it! This is football, not window shopping at the mall!

SLED

Ken and Yerlax watch as a group of players take a three-point stance, then hit the sled at a COACH's command. Ken looks at Coach Yerlax.

KEN PUGH
You expect me to do that, Coach?

Impudent Coach Yerlax goes face-to-face with Ken, chest bumps him.

COACH YERLAX
No, I want you to go bake me twelve dozen sugar cookies with sprinkles on top!

Ken takes off his helmet.

KEN PUGH
I do know a good recipe, Coach Yerlax, but I don't see how that would help the team very much.

Mr. Dahria approaches, assesses the situation.

ED DAHRIA
Well, Coach Yerlax, how is our new star quarterback progressing?

Ken is stunned.

KEN PUGH
Star quarterback? Now, that's the one that throws the ball, right?

Coaches Yerlax and Dahria facetiously nod, hold back laughter, look at each other.

Ken, elated, pumps his fist.
COACH YERLAX
That's right, Kenny. The quarterback throws the ball--

ED DAHRIA
And sometimes he runs with the ball.

Ken frowns, scratches his butt.

KEN PUGH
I don't think I'd much like to do that, if it is okay with you gentlemen. (whispers) I have a trick knee.

Coach Dahria rubs his chin, feigns giving serious thought to Ken's stated limitation.

ED DAHRIA
Okay, then. But you know, Ken, there's a third thing that quarterbacks sometimes do, that I think you'd be perfect at.

KEN PUGH
What would that be, Coach? Nothing too strenuous, I hope.

ED DAHRIA
Rather than describe it in detail, why don't you go with Coach Yerlax here to the supply room?

KEN PUGH
Certainly, Coach.

ED DAHRIA
Coach Yerlax, please acquaint Ken with 'Old Blue.' Get him suited up and be back here in fifteen minutes.

Coach Yerlax nods, smiles, pats Ken on the back.

COACH YERLAX
Let's go, Pugh.

Yerlax's smile transcends to a frown. He grabs Ken's jersey sleeve, leads him away.
FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Coach Yerlax leads Ken back to Mr. Dahria. A dozen team members trail along, laughing hysterically, as Ken is now adorned in a cheaply made mascot outfit intended to represent a bluefish.

COACH YERLAX
Here's our new mascot, Coach!

FOOTBALL PLAYER #1
Is that bluefish I smell, or Pugh fish?

FOOTBALL PLAYER #2
Hey, Pugh, nice bluefish uniform! Does that come with fries and cole slaw?

FOOTBALL PLAYER #3
You look almost as good as the bluefish I saw washed up by the pier yesterday, Pugh, but you smell worse!

The coaches and players howl with laughter. Ken removes the headpiece.

KEN PUGH
Will I at least earn my service credits, seein' as I'm still doin' one of the three things quarterbacks do?

The mocking laughter intensifies.

ED DAHRIA
Not a chance in hell, Pugh! Not a popsicle's chance in hell!

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Ken, sound asleep, is the lone passenger, as Charlie grinds gears through Asbury Park streets.

KEN'S DREAM

Wearing the lower half of the bluefish mascot uniform and his helmet, Ken sits at his easel in the end zone of a football field. He holds a palette and brush, stares at the canvas.
CANVAS

Partially completed, the painting depicts a bottomless pit. O.s. a faint but intensifying rumbling is heard.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken, now aware of the sound, looks upfield.

KEN'S POV

A cheering CROWD urges on Mr. Cannatoona, who sits atop an advancing steamroller. He is accompanied by Ed Dahria and Coach Yerlax. Out for blood, the trio angrily yell, make threatening gestures.

In huge letters, the rotating drum of the steamroller bears the word 'hope.'

BACK TO SCENE

Frozen in the face of impending doom, Ken glances at the depiction of the bottomless pit. With seconds remaining, he realizes the pit is his only salvation.

Ken dives into the pit, disappears, just as the steamroller crushes his easel and seat, ending the dream.

INT. BUS

Exasperated, Charlie the bus driver stands before Pugh.

CHARLIE
No bus boners on my bus, Pugh!

CHARLIE'S POV

Startled, Ken awakens from his nightmare.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
A man your age! And on a school bus, no less! If I wasn't runnin' late I'd call the vice squad -- so help me!

Looking down, Ken notices he does indeed have a bus boner. He clamps his legs together, gathers his possessions.

BACK TO SCENE
KEN PUGH
Sorry, Charlie. The last time that happened I was ten years old.

EXT. BUS
The doors open, Ken stumbles out. The doors close.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I'm switchin' to a paper route!

The school bus drives off. Ken starts the short walk home. After two steps, a black sedan pulls up to the bus stop. The passenger-side window descends, draws Ken's attention.

KEN'S POV
I gravelly voice from within the car calls out.

MAN IN CAR
Hey, you! I'm a little lost. Can you help me out over here?

Ken cautiously approaches.

BACK TO SCENE
Ken looks in the open window.

VEHICLE INTERIOR/KEN INTERCUTTING
A paunchy, middle-aged man with a bad comb-over extinguishes his half-smoked cigarette. He wears a cheap, shiny, blue suit, pink dress shirt and a green necktie.

MAN IN CAR
Yeah, I'm not familiar with this neighborhood. I'm lookin' for someone.

The man lights another cigarette with a gold lighter, farts.

KEN PUGH
Who?

MAN IN CAR
His name is--
KEN PUGH
Wait, wait, I've seen your face..
Um, on a billboard, near Church
Street. It's... Skrota, Jason
Skrota, the lawyer.

Jason claps.

JASON SKROTA
Congratulations, you win a paper
clip, Pops, or, should I say,
Kenneth Pugh?

Ken inches back.

KEN PUGH
My daughter-in-law mentioned your
name.

JASON SKROTA
Don't go runnin' anywhere just
yet, Pugh. I've got somethin' for
you.

He opens the center console, rummages through food wrappers
and legal papers jammed together in a folder.

JASON SKROTA (CONT'D)
Ah, here's the baby.

Finding the sought-after document, he leans out the open
passenger-side window, stuffs it into Ken's shirt. Aghast,
Ken lunges back.

JASON SKROTA (CONT'D)
You have officially been served,
Kenneth Pugh. That is an eviction
notice. Do you know what that
means?

Ken gulps.

KEN PUGH
It means my family doesn't care
about me.

Skrota smirks.

JASON SKROTA
I forgot to bring my violin, so
skip the melodrama. It says you
have to be out of the apartment
before Christmas. Capisce?
Holding the document in both hands, Ken lowers his head, nods. The car's window closes; the vehicle speeds off.

CUT TO:

INT. PUGH’S COTTON CANDY SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Beneath a flickering overhead light, a neighborhood INEBRIATE attempts to pay for the cotton candy he ordered with seashells collected off the beach.

PAUL PUGH
I agree, they really are very lovely shells, except for this one here that's got chewing gum wedged into it, but--

INEBRIATE
Then you'll take 'em?! Good!

Paul holds back, refuses to hand over the candy.

The shop door open, Ken enters, holding up the eviction notice, so Paul can see it. With Paul distracted, the drunk takes advantage of the situation, grabs the candy, runs out. Ken closes the door, slowly.

KEN PUGH
How's business?

PAUL PUGH
Oh, booming -- some day I may make enough to get the wiring fixed.

Paul taps the flickering light, gets it to stay on. He looks away when Ken steps to the counter, lays down the eviction notice. Ken observes the shells, moves them around.

KEN PUGH
These are some nice shells. You accepting them now, in addition to cash?

PAUL PUGH
Yeah, sure. Diane's idea.

They both chuckle. Ken stops first, turns serious.

KEN PUGH
Those were the homes of clams and snails. They got to stay in them until they reached their natural end.
Paul scoops them into a garbage pail.

PAUL PUGH
Human situations are a lot more complex than those of snails and clams.

KEN PUGH
Apparently so. Look, I know Diane pushed for this, but why'd you give in so easy? Did she threaten to leave?

PAUL PUGH
No, she threatened to stay.

They smirk.

PAUL PUGH (CONT'D)
I had to agree. She's very strong-willed. Look, I'll help you find--

Ken waves Paul off.

KEN PUGH
Don't. I'll find somethin'.

Ken turns, heads for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. PUGH'S COTTON CANDY - SECONDS LATER

Ken exits, closes the door behind him, without looking back. His attention is immediately drawn to a DELIVERY MAN depositing a coin-operated fortune telling machine in front of Zera's, the shop next door. The delivery man pays no attention to Ken, releases the machine from the wheeled dolly it's attached to, departs. Ken looks at Zera's front door.

DOOR
A hand-written sign on the door reads: enter and learn your future.

BACK TO SCENE
Ken looks at the machine again, notices its front pane of glass is cracked, lightly runs his finger along its length.
KEN PUGH
I should tell her about that.

Somewhat scared, Ken approaches the front door, hesitates, looks in to see if anyone is present.

KEN'S POV

Thick maroon drapes keep all but a few dust-filled rays of light from entering and illuminating a small parlor, overcrowded with dark, antique, carved furniture. A little, round table at its center is covered with a lace tablecloth and adorned with a crystal ball mounted on a short brass stand.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken's back is tapped by a thin, female fingernail painted black. Shocked, he jumps, turns around, grabs his chest.

KEN'S POV

ZERA, a petite, thin-faced woman wearing a purple shawl, forces a quick smile, reveals several gold teeth. Wisps of dyed, dark red hair straggle out, catching the sea breeze, from under the green silk scarf covering her head. She wears too much red lipstick and lavender eye shadow.

Zera clutches a paper shopping bag to her chest. It's barely holding in its contents. The same can be said for her low-cut blouse.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH
Can I help you with those -- I mean, with that... that bag.

ZERA
You can help me by getting out of the way.

Ken steps aside, allows Zera to get to the door. She fumbles with her keys.

KEN PUGH
Um, I, uh, wanted to stop in and tell you that they delivered your machine with a cracked pane of glass. I thought you'd want to know about it.
Zera pauses, looks over her shoulder, raises an eyebrow.

ZERA
I know.

ZERA'S POV
Ken is embarrassed.

KEN PUGH
Sorry, Zera, of course you do -- you're a psychic.

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA
I know because I got it for fifty percent off. Damaged goods discount, you see.

Zera loses control of the bag of goods. A carton of cigarettes and a bottle of creme de menthe spill out, along with assorted incidentals. Ken moves to help, but she quickly gathers everything up on her own.

ZERA (CONT'D)
That's okay, thanks. Do you want to come in, Ken?

Ken's eyes widen at the sound of his name.

KEN PUGH
You know my name -- you really are psychic.

Zera smiles, looks around to make sure no one else is present. She steps closer to Ken.

ZERA
Confidentially, just between you and me, I know your name because the walls in this dump are thin enough to see through.

She opens the shop door, motions for Ken to enter.

INT. ZERA'S
Now inside, Zera quickly heads for an adjacent back room protected by a velvet curtain hung from a sawed-off broom handle. She partially slides it open, disappears behind it. The sound of tinkling glasses is heard o.s.
ZERA (O.S.)
Have a seat at the table, Ken.

Ken points to the table.

KEN PUGH
This one here, with the crystal ball on it?

He steps to the table, grabs the chair's carved wood headrest. Liquid being poured is audible o.s.

ZERA (O.S.)
It's the only one, Ken.

He sits, facing the back room, descends into the poorly supported upholstery. The glass ball catches his eye.

GLASS BALL
Heavily chipped, the ball has seen better days, as has its tarnished brass base.

BACK TO SCENE
Zera pulls back the curtain a bit further, exits carrying two cordial glasses filled to the brim with green liquid. A lit cigarette dangles from her lower lip.

ZERA
Fond of creme de menthe?

Ken's eyes are transfixed as she attempts to carefully set the glasses on the lace tablecloth. A tiny bit of Ken's spills, regardless. Annoyed, Zera takes the seat opposite Ken.

ZERA (CONT'D)
Damn it! Hate to waste a drop, with what that thief at the deli charges for the stuff.

KEN PUGH
I've never had creme de menthe. I like the color quite a bit.

Gingerly, he picks up his glass, sets it back down.

ZERA
Not your cup of tea?

KEN PUGH
Was never much of a drinker.
Zera downs hers in one gulp, takes a long drag from her cigarette, slides Ken's glass in front of her.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
So, tell me something about myself you couldn't have heard through the walls.

Zera downs the second glass's contents, deliberately sets it on the table, coyly smiles.

ZERA
You're subject to bus boners.

She casually flicks cigarette ash onto the floor. Ken cringes, hides his face with both hands.

KEN PUGH
No! No! How could you know!? Wait! It's not true! That's not true at all!

He starts to stand. Zera motions for him to stay put. She laughs, he sits back down.

ZERA
Ken, it's okay; I saw you get off the school bus. It's no big deal. My third husband got them all the time -- for him it was a major problem.

KEN PUGH
Why?

ZERA
He was a bus driver, drove ten hours a day. By the time he got home, he was exhausted, in every way imaginable, if you get my drift.

They both laugh.

KEN PUGH
That was funny, Zera. I really needed a good laugh. I could use a few hundred more.

ZERA
If you'd like, I could give you a quick reading, right now -- for half price. Just ten dollars; it would give you some peace of mind, Ken.
Ken takes a close look at the crystal ball, rubs its weathered surface, sits back. He reaches into his pocket, removes and opens his wallet. Ken plucks a five and five singles from it, sets the cash on the table, in front of Zera.

KEN PUGH
I'm in.

Zera scoops up the bills, stashes them inside her blouse. She extinguishes the cigarette on the table's side, stands, walks to the window, closes the curtains. In the darkened room she flicks a switch, activating a spot light that makes the crystal ball dazzle.

Zera retakes her seat, brings her face within inches of the glowing glass. The light and shadows cast on her face render her ghastly.

Her bony fingers mimic the kneading of dough, as they dance above and around the globe. After a minute she stops massaging the air, sits back, takes a deep breath, composes herself and closes her eyes.

ZERA
You are under assault on all sides, Ken Pugh. Besieged and put-upon by family, professionals, administrators... people much younger... students, I see. Students, immature, mocking students.

Ken gasps.

ZERA (CONT'D)
Despite this adversity you will be resilient. Though you fear the future, you should take heart and be hopeful.

Zera opens her eyes, leans forward, kneads the air above the crystal ball once more. A few seconds pass; she rests her hands on the table, closes her eyes.

ZERA (CONT'D)
Tidings from your late wife.

KEN PUGH
Kate, she was never on time. You hit that nail on the head.

ZERA
The future fades. Fog enshrouds the bridge between the two realms.
The crystal ball dims. Zera stands, goes to the window, opens the drapes, heads for the adjacent room.

KEN PUGH
You are a gifted woman, Zera. I wish I could have spoken with Kate -- it's been so long.

ZERA
Perhaps I can coax her to communicate during a future session.

Zera further pulls back the curtain to the small room off the parlor. She enters for an instant, returns with the bottle of creme de menthe, pours herself another drink.

Ken looks to the more-revealed side room, sees a portion of something familiar on the wall. He stands, points.

KEN PUGH
Zera, what's that you've got hangin' on the wall back there?

Ken walks towards the side room.

ZERA
Oh, that? Just a little something I rescued out of the dumpster the other day. You like it?

She turns, sees him enter the room.

SIDE ROOM

Ken slowly walks in, inspects his work, as if seeing it for the first time. Zera enters, stands next to him.

KEN PUGH
That's my work, Zera. That's my painting. I did that.

ZERA
I know, Ken. It deserved a better fate. Like I said, I rescued it.

Ken runs his finger along the painting's edge, straightens it.

ZERA (CONT'D)
You're very talented. Your work appears to be influenced by the Impressionists. Would you agree?
KEN PUGH
Yeah, they are my favorites.

Zera taps Ken on the shoulder.

ZERA
I look forward to seeing you again. Since we're neighbors, I'll extend the half-price offer, indefinitely.

KEN PUGH
Why, thank you, Zera. I will certainly be back, but, just one thing...

He draws closer, looks about, though no one else is present, then whispers.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
That matter about the bus boners... You won't tell anyone else, will you?

Zera smiles, holds his hand.

ZERA
Of course not, Ken. Don't worry, I'll keep your bus boner just between you and me.

Ken, perplexed at the double entendre, raises an eyebrow.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CANNATOONA'S HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

Seated in the living room, on an unopened packing crate, Candace studiously flips through a large book of carpet samples. Similar books containing samples of wallpaper and tile are stacked around her and on the nearby coffee table, along with numerous invoices. The room is a shambles after the first day of remodeling.

O.s. a door slams, hard.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
Candace, I'm home. My god! Who set off a bomb here? What's happened to the place? Where are you?

Candace bookmarks the sample book with a pencil, closes it, removes her glasses.
CANDACE CANNATOOA
In here, Vincent, the living room.

Vincent enters, looks around, astounded.

VINCENT CANNATOOA
You mean what's left of the living room. The work crew inflicted this in one day?

CANDACE CANNATOOA
Inflicted? I call it progress. They would have done more, but they got called away onto another job.

VINCENT CANNATOOA
Thank goodness.

Flabbergasted, he sets down his briefcase, loosens his necktie. Vincent is drawn to the site of a former light switch that is now a large hole, from which a dozen tangled wires protrude. He flicks the end of one wire with his index finger.

CANDACE CANNATOOA
So, how was your day? Everything now running to your satisfaction at Greater Woodrow Wilson High?

As he replies, Vincent slowly walks around the devastated room.

VINCENT CANNATOOA
I would have to say, answering your question depends on one's personal definition of satisfactory. If the announced bankruptcy of the company that took deposits from 311 seniors, who expected to get graduation rings, and will now get nothing, is satisfactory, then yes, everything is running to my satisfaction.

CANDACE CANNATOOA
That doesn't sound very good to me.

Vincent, oblivious to her comment, continues pacing, ruminating.
VINCENT CANNATOONA
And! If a leaking roof above the music room, turning $20,000 worth of sheet music into musical mush is satisfactory, then yes again, everything is running to my satisfaction.

He stops at the coffee table, rummages through the mound of bills, pauses, looks up. Candace inches away.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Lastly! If you consider county health inspectors discovering that the canned cheese sauce used to make mac-n'-cheese in the cafeteria expired during the Carter administration, to be satisfactory, then hell yes, every damn thing is running to my personal sat-iss-faction!

Vincent smiles maniacally. Candace, unfazed, picks up and opens the carpet sample book to where she marked it. She raises it so Vincent can see.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Now that you got that out of your system, what do you think of the ultra-deep-pile Moroccan blue?

Vincent shakes his head, momentarily emerges from his madness.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Where is that going to go?

CANDACE CANNATOONA
The garage; the interior decorator told me that carpeted garages are all the rage.

Vincent flips the book shut, clutches a handful of invoices. His eyeballs bulge as he silently absorbs their details.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
A hand-carved, teak pergola with pink-marble, Corinthian columns? Twelve thousand dollars!

CANDACE CANNATOONA
Pergolas, too, are all the rage.

Vincent throws the bills in the air.
VINCENT CANNATOONA
All the rage! All the rage! You want to see rage -- right here, right now?!

Vincent jumps up and down on the fallen invoices.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
I think I am, and I don't care for it in the least, Vincent. Calm yourself down!

Vincent heeds the advice, stumbles. Candace stands, begins picking up the paper.

CANDACE CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
We deserve a home that reflects your rank in the community and our social status. Remember, if you hadn't bought this dilapidated cabana--

VINCENT AND CANDACE
(together)
Sight unseen--

Vincent folds his arms.

CANDACE CANNATOONA
We wouldn't be spending so much money making it look presentable.

Vincent kicks the coffee table, storms out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE VINCENT'S OFFICE - DAY LATE OCTOBER

The sitting area outside Principal Cannatoona's office is occupied by Ken Pugh and a second student, CAROL NORTH, blonde and eighteen, also a senior. Carol sits next to Ken. They both mindlessly stare at the office's Halloween decorations.

KEN'S POV

Commercial cutouts of a witch, ghost and pumpkin, all grinning, are attached to the opposite wall with an overabundance of wide masking tape.

BACK TO SCENE
KEN PUGH
Carol, look at that; they must have used a whole roll of tape.

CAROL NORTH
Yeah, it's more a celebration of masking tape than Halloween.

An awkward silence ensues. Mrs. Klatter exits Vincent's office, files paper in a nearby cabinet.

CAROL NORTH (CONT'D)
You all prepared for the big exam tomorrow, Ken?

KEN PUGH
Which big exam would that exactly be?

Shocked, Carol points to her history text.

CAROL NORTH
Miss Chmut, second period world history? It's all she's been talking about for over a week.

KEN PUGH
Sounds like it really is important.

She puts her palm to the top of her head, rolls her eyes.

CAROL NORTH
She said it counts for one third of the semester grade.

Ken straightens up.

KEN PUGH
I'm going to have to get right on it, but I'm not too good at preparing under stressful circumstances.

MRS. KLATTER (O.S.)
Or any other circumstances.

Ken wrings his hands, stresses. Carol notices, sympathizes.

CAROL NORTH
Look, Ken, I've heard about your situation, facing being expelled and all...

(MORE)
CAROL NORTH (CONT'D)
I don't live far from you. Why
don't you come over, after school,
after you get off the bus? We can
study together. It might help.

Ken's eyes widen.

KEN'S FLASHBACK
Ken steps off the bus with a bus boner.

BACK TO SCENE
Ken shudders. Carol takes out a piece of paper and pen,
from her purse, starts writing.

    CAROL NORTH
    Here's my address and phone
    number. Stop by, around four,
    okay?

She hands the note to Ken, stunned by the offer.

    KEN PUGH
    In all the years I've attended
    Woodrow Wilson High, no one's ever
    offered to help.

Carol stands, smiles.

    CAROL NORTH
    I'm not guaranteeing you'll get an
    A, but it might keep you from
    failing. See you later.

She waves, starts to exit.

    KEN PUGH
    Don't you have an appointment with
    Mr. Cannatoona right after mine?

She continues on her way without replying. Ken looks at
the piece of paper, ponders, folds it, sticks it in his
shirt pocket.

    VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
    Pugh, get in here!
INT. VINCENT'S OFFICE

Ken, slumped in his seat, avoids making eye contact with Cannatoona, who stands by the window.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Pugh... S-s-sit up straight. Your posture makes me s-s-sick.

Ken complies.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
I've been keeping track of you this semester, close track -- and I don't like what I see.

Vincent picks up a sheet of paper from his desk, gives it a cursory glance, lays it down, making sure the paper's edges are parallel to the sides of the desk.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
You didn't make the football team. Hell, you couldn't even make mascot.

KEN PUGH
Why dress up like a bluefish, if doesn't earn any service credits?

Vincent walks to the bulletin board, casually peruses various official postings. Eventually, he turns towards Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I've recently spoken with the Superintendent of Schools, Doctor Pink, about your... situation.

Vincent presses his hands together, as if in prayer, brings fingertips to his chin.

KEN PUGH
Oh?

Ken squirms in his chair.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Yes, I consulted with him to see if we could accelerate your deadline for improved performance.

KEN PUGH
In September, you said I had until the end of the school year, in June.
VINCENT CANNATOONA
True enough, but you've not indicated, to me, in any way, shape or form, that you are on the right path, academically, this term.

KEN'S POV

Ken's attention is riveted on a picture, cut out from a magazine, that is pinned to the bulletin board behind Vincent.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA
As a result, I feel judgment can and should be rendered after fall exams.

VINCENT'S POV

Ken's facial expression belies his ability to pay attention to the conversation. Instead, he is focused on something posted on the bulletin board.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent turns, looks at the board, tries to detect what the object of interest is. Unsure, he turns back to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
What, what are you looking at, Pugh?

Ken stands, points, sits back down.

KEN PUGH
Behind you, pinned to the bulletin board... that picture.

Vincent turns to the board, confirms what Ken has spied, turns back to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
That is a painting by Cezanne, one of my favorite artists: Mount Saint Victoire. I nearly majored in art history when I was an undergraduate. Are you familiar with Cezanne?
Ken shrugs, is non-committal.

KEN PUGH
It looks a bit familiar.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Familiar? In what way? What do you mean?

Vincent removes it from the board, approaches Ken. Holding the image between his thumb and index finger, he dangles it in front of Ken.

KEN'S POV

The cutout depicts a landscape, in France. Hypnotically, it rocks back and forth in front of Ken.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH
It's so much like the other.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
What other?

Ken shakes his head vigorously.

KEN PUGH
An old painting, at home, in the attic. It's so similar -- the style, I mean.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Really? Whose is it?

KEN PUGH
Don't know, originally. Been there since I was a kid. It was covered over with dirty burlap. It was there when my folks moved in, long, long ago.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (V.O.)
My god, what if it's a real Cezanne? Even Candy couldn't spend what it's worth.

As best he can, Vincent suppresses his joy at having possibly stumbled across something of extreme value. He re-pins the picture to the board, bites a knuckle, turns, devilishly smiles.
VINCENT CANNATOONA
I'd be very interested in seeing this painting of yours, Ken... uh, when the opportunity arises, of course. No rush.

KEN PUGH
No rush?

VINCENT CANNATOONA
In the next week, or two, perhaps sooner, if it comes to mind to bring it in.

KEN PUGH
Sure.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
As I am sure you've deduced from my phone conversations, my wife loves to spend money and is in the midst of redecorating our home. She will need a picture or two to hang, of that I am sure. Who knows? If the painting you bring in is any good, I might be interested in purchasing it from you.

KEN PUGH
For money?

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Yes, yes, for money. I am sure I could scrape together f-forty dollars, or so. You could save me from her expensive taste.

KEN PUGH
That would certainly be nice -- found money.

Vincent nods approvingly, catches himself being too enthusiastic. He resumes his poker face and professional demeanor, clears his throat, sits at his desk.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
That's it for today, Pugh. I have administrative matters to tend to.

KEN PUGH
What about what you said before-- about my deadline moving up? Y'know, from June to this December?
Vincent sucks in through his teeth, leans back.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
It's tentative, conditional.
We'll see. Work on those grades,
Pugh. I am watching. And sit up
straight.

Vincent points to the office door. Ken rises.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
And start using a thesaurus.

Ken exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - LATE AFTERNOON

The sole passenger, Ken steps off the bus, which makes a
hasty departure, expelling a cloud of black exhaust.

Ken retrieves Carol's note from his pocket, unfolds and
reads it to himself, mouthing the words. He checks to make
sure he is unseen, then quickly looks down at his crotch.
He sighs, puts the note away, walks towards home.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Ken peers in through the shop's front door, sees no one,
lightly knocks.

ZERA (O.S.)
It might be easier to just give
you your own key.

Ken turns, smiles.

KEN'S POV

Zera holds two large shopping bags.

KEN PUGH (O.S)
I think I have a customer for a
painting of mine.

ZERA
Wonderful, wonderful, Ken. Help
me bring these in; I want to hear
all about it.
INT. ZERA'S SHOP

Ken takes the bundles into the small room adjacent to the parlor. He exits and sits at the reading table, where Zera joins him, glass of creme de menthe in hand. She takes a sip.

KEN'S POV/ZERA' POV  INTERCUTTING

ZERA
Let's hear. Who's the lucky buyer?

Excited, Ken taps the tabletop with both hands, then grabs the armrests, lunges forward.

KEN PUGH
It's Principal Cannatoona! Can you believe it?

ZERA
Cannatoona's the nut job that's making your life miserable, giving you nightmares.

KEN PUGH
I know! That's what makes it so amazing!

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA
How did that happen?

Ken messes up his hair, blinks rapidly.

KEN PUGH
I don't know, I don't know what happened. All I know is, it happened fast! Something came over me!

Ken jumps to his feet, paced.

ZERA
What came over you?

KEN PUGH
I was in his office, for yet another brow beating, when I noticed a photo of a painting by Cezanne on his bulletin board.
Zera lights a cigarette.

ZEKA
And?

Ken stops, collects his thoughts.

KEN PUGH
Out of nowhere, I came up with this crazy story, well... a lie, that I had a painting in a similar style in my attic. I said it had been up there since my folks bought the place.

ZEKA
A total lie?

KEN PUGH
Oh, yeah! Hogwash! Pure hogwash!

ZEKA
Then what happened?

Ken sits back down.

KEN PUGH
He said he wanted to see it; said he might actually pay me forty dollars for it. Forty!

Zera stands, crushes out the cigarette, raises both hands, as if motioning an oncoming car to stop.

ZEKA
So you don't really have the painting, or any painting, and you don't have a deposit from the potential buyer, correct?

Ken cheers.

KEN PUGH
I know! Isn't it great?!

ZEKA
I wish I could agree. Tell me, your intention is to... what? Paint a landscape or still life, in the style of Cezanne, bring it in and hope Cannatoona forks over forty bucks for it?
Ken nods. Zera observes, shakes her head, paces, thinks. She stops, picks up the crystal ball, strokes it, peers into it, sets it down.

ZERA (CONT'D)
The entire situation, Ken -- it's an opportunity for you to get out from under Cannatoona's thumb, for good.

KEN PUGH
I don't get it. How?

ZERA
Cannatoona thinks you may have an actual Cezanne and that you have no idea what it's really worth.

Ken scratches his head, looks doubtful.

ZERA (CONT'D)
I know Cannatoona's game. He'll buy it from you for forty dollars and then shop it around to art dealers to see if any of them think it's real. If he succeeds, he could get hundreds of thousands for it -- I'll bet he's married.

KEN PUGH
Yes! And he says she likes to spend.

ZERA
I knew it!

Ken settles down, bites his lower lip.

KEN PUGH
Zera, I don't like where this is headed. It sounds like it could lead to something dishonest.

Zera walks up to Ken, firmly grabs the front of his shirt with both hands.

ZERA
Listen, Ken, you can't entirely leave your future up to fate. Sometimes you have to intervene and take action to get the outcome you want. And sometimes you have to sacrifice a principle.
Ken is astonished. She releases her grip.

KEN PUGH
Sacrifice a principal?

KEN'S MUSING

Ken, dressed as an ancient Mayan priest, looms over bound-and-gagged Vincent Cannatoona, who writhes upon a massive, carved, stone altar. From his sleeve, Ken produces a long, jeweled dagger. The rising sun, behind Ken, illuminates both men in golden light. O.s., a chorus of one hundred voices is heard; it's volume crests as Ken looks skyward, raises the glistening blade overhead.

BACK TO SCENE

ZERA
You know what I mean, by sacrificing a principle, right?

KEN PUGH
I could use a short explanation.

ZERA
It means, sometimes a basically good person, such as yourself, needs to do something slightly bad, to achieve a greater good. Got it?

KEN PUGH
Oh, I see. I'm glad you explained that. I had something slightly different come to mind.

ZERA
So here's my suggestion. Get to work on the painting. Don't sign it and make it look as much like a Cezanne as you can. Then take it in and see what Cannatoona says. If he buys it from you and unloads it, you could inform the authorities that it's your work. What he did would be considered fraud and the school board will force him to resign.

KEN PUGH
Mercy.

CUT TO:
INT. PUGH APARTMENT - DINNER TIME

Ken glumly sits at the kitchen table, stares at his food. Diane hungrily eats from her plate.

KEN'S POV

An overcooked, frozen TV dinner. Ken's plastic fork aimlessly pushes around scorched peas, dried out potatoes, a blackened hunk of fatty mystery meat.

BACK TO SCENE

KEN PUGH
Why did I get stuck with the lousy TV dinner?

Diane pauses, looks up, swallows, without emotion.

DIANE PUGH
I found it in the back of the freezer, no expiration date on it. God only knows how long it was sittin' back there. The garbage pale was full, so I made it for you. Enjoy.

Ken stabs a potato, breaks a tine, releases the fork.

KEN PUGH
How thoughtful of you, Diane. Where's Paul?

Diane burps, pours herself some soda.

DIANE PUGH
The king of cotton candy is downstairs, in his palace, trying to fix an electrical problem, yet again. Something on your mind?

KEN PUGH
Well, I was wondering if we could talk about the eviction--

Diane bolts to her feet, points to her protruding belly with her fork.

DIANE PUGH
Pregnant! Even more pregnant than a month ago! See?
She drops the fork, turns in profile, accentuates the bulge by arching her back.

DIANE PUGH (CONT'D)
Your situation hasn't changed, Ken. The baby will be coming into this trash heap and you're going out! Period!

Ken pushes away dinner, stands and walks to his room. He enters and quietly closes the door.

INT. KEN'S ROOM

Ken sits on the edge of his bed, a thick text book in hand.

KEN PUGH
Did Carol say the big history test is tomorrow, or next week?

He flips through the book, closes it, sets it aside, looks around the room. Ken gets off the bed, onto his knees. From beneath it, he pulls out an old blank canvas, from which he blows ample dust. He stands, shuffles to the easel, secures the canvas to it. Ken turns on a lamp, opens his paint supply box, prepares to begin painting.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS CHMUT'S HISTORY CLASS - THE NEXT DAY

Silence prevails and the tension is palpable in Miss Chmut's class, as she methodically walks the aisles, individually handing out stapled test sheets from the stack resting in the crook of her arm. The sound of her square shoe heels striking the wooden floor creates an ominous beat.

MISS CHMUT
Remember, no one is to start until all the tests are handed out and I say, "begin."

Carol, sitting next to Ken, furtively taps him on the arm, whispers.

CAROL NORTH
Why didn't you come over to study?

KEN PUGH
I really wanted to, but, uhh... I was on the bus and something came up.
CAROL NORTH
I hope you're ready. Are you?

Ken shakes his head. Carol makes the sign of the cross in the air.

KEN PUGH
What's that for?

CAROL NORTH
It's the last rites.

Ken looks away. Miss Chmut has stopped next to his desk.

MISS CHMUT
Should I even bother to give you one of these, Ken?

Ken extends his open hand.

KEN PUGH
Sometimes miracles happen, Miss Chmut.

She shudders, hands Ken an exam, moves on. Ken inspects it, flips it over, lays his pen on it.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
I don't believe this is one of those times.

CUT TO:

INT. KEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT
TWO WEEKS LATER

KEN'S POV

The brush makes a few light strokes, adds finishing touches to the completed still life. Not a copy of any known Cezanne, the painting of fruit in a bowl, resting on a table, is in the master's style.

BACK TO SCENE

Ken steps back, approvingly nods, then sighs.

KEN PUGH
Not a copy of a known Cezanne, it's exactly what I wanted, in every way, but do I want this?
BACKYARD

In the silence of the night, Ken stands in front of the dumpster, painting in hand, brushes in his back pocket. An overhead flood light casts long shadows.

KEN PUGH
I wonder what Kate would have advised.

A meow is heard, o.s.

Measles leaps onto the closed portion of the dumpster, saunters about, stops.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
Good evening, Measles.

MEASLES
Ken, Ken, Ken... another donation to the city dump?

KEN PUGH
Maybe.

MEASLES
Let's have a look first.

Ken angles the canvas towards the cat. It rocks its head from side to side, judging.

MEASLES (CONT'D)
Even in this dreadful light I can tell you've outdone yourself.

Ken takes another look at his work.

MEASLES (CONT'D)
You'd be a fool to discard it. You are holding, in your hands, your salvation from Vincent Cannatoona.

KEN PUGH
How do you know about Vincent Cannatoona?

The cat stretches, takes a seated position.

MEASLES
I have ears, and no qualms about listening in on private conversations.

Ken chuckles.
MEASLES (CONT'D)
Listen, Zera's awake; she's a regular night owl. Go see what she thinks. You'll do well to take her advice; she's a smart lady.

KEN PUGH
All right. Where are you headed?

MEASLES
Talking about Vincent Cannatoona has made me famished for a can of tuna.

Measles jumps off the dumpster, into the dark. Tin cans rattle o.s.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S SHOP - MINUTES LATER
Ken, with his painting, stands at the front door. Before he knocks, it opens. Zera, in a bathrobe and without makeup looks far less mysterious. A pink bath towel is wrapped around her hair, in the fashion of a turban.

ZERA
A late-night visitor, how intriguing. Is that what I think it is?

KEN PUGH
It is. I finished it a little while ago and couldn't wait to show it to you.

ZERA
Come on in. I'll close the drapes and turn on a light.

INT. ZERA'S PARLOR
A dim light comes on, modestly lighting the room. Zera turns it down further.

KEN PUGH
Shouldn't you turn the light up, to get a better view?

ZERA
We don't want to draw any unnecessary attention, now do we?
Ken taps the side of his head.

KEN PUGH
Of course, I didn't think. Got to think.

Ken holds up the work for Zera. She silently evaluates, smiles broadly.

ZERA
Ken, you have outdone yourself.

KEN PUGH
That's exactly what Measles said!

ZERA
Sh-h-h. Measles? Who's Measles?

Ken, embarrassed, looks away, lowers the painting.

KEN PUGH
It's that spotted cat that's always hangin' around. It saw me on my way over here.

Zera doubles over with laughter, contains it, lightly raps Ken with the back of her hand.

ZERA
You are so funny, Ken. You actually had me believing you for a second.

Ken laughs halfheartedly.

KEN PUGH
Yeah, silly old me.

ZERA
When are you planning on taking it in to the mark?

KEN PUGH
The mark?

Zera nervously fusses with her robe.

ZERA
Uh, sorry, my cousin Mark came to mind for some reason. I meant Vincent.

Ken looks at the painting.
KEN PUGH
I used fast-drying oils, so I think it should be ready to show tomorrow.

Zera has an idea, holds up one finger. She runs to the side room, comes back with a camera.

ZERA
Let me take a picture or two. You should have some proof of your connection to the picture, Ken.

KEN PUGH
You think ahead, Zera. I like that. I should think ahead, too, at least sometimes.

Ken takes the brushes out of his back pocket, holds them and the painting in front of himself, belt high. Zera snaps two flash shots.

ZERA
Good luck, Ken; I'm rooting for you.

She gives Ken a quick kiss on the cheek.

KEN PUGH
I'm kind of nervous about tomorrow. Maybe I shouldn't do this.

Zera gives him a second kiss, on the lips. She opens and drops her robe.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
I'm afraid I'm a little out of practice.

ZERA
Just make believe you're riding on the bus.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING AREA OUTSIDE VINCENT'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Ken nervously sits in the waiting area. He taps the edge of the burlap-wrapped painting. Mrs. Klatter types away, stops, quizzically looks at Ken.
MRS. KLATTER
What's that you've got there, Pugh?

KEN PUGH
Something for Mr. Cannatoona -- a painting.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
Is that Ken Pugh I hear out there?

Vincent comes to his office door, along with a student, WILLIAM, with whom he was conferring. The door opens.

WILLIAM
I really need that letter of recommendation today, Mr. Cannatoona, or I won't get that part-time job.

Vincent pats William on the head, patronizingly.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I'm sure you do. Come back tomorrow, William, not before.

He guides William in the direction of the exit. William frowns, leaves. Vincent turns to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Hello, Ken. Let's see what you've got. Mrs. Klatter, why don't you take a break?

INT. VINCENT'S OFFICE

Before Ken can take a seat, Vincent sets his hand on the wrapped canvas, takes possession. He picks up his reading glasses and proceeds to the window, where he opens the blinds.

KEN PUGH
It's been in the attic since my folks bought the house -- up in the attic, the rafters.

Vincent turns his attention to Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Yes, I know, Ken. You told me that previously.

KEN PUGH
Sorry, I forgot.
Ken looks down, folds his hands. Vincent begins unwrapping. He grins as progressive layers come away, raising a cloud of dust. Finally revealed, he holds it up with his back to the window, blocking his view of Ken.

Ken looks up, notices he is out of view, takes in and quietly releases a deep breath, but remains restless.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Uh-huh... uh-huh... Mmm...

KEN PUGH
Mr. Cannatoona, sir, I need to be excused. I have to pee.

Vincent is oblivious to the request, looks very closely at the canvas, then extends his arms to view it at a greater distance.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Uh-huh... uh-huh!

KEN PUGH
So may I be excused?

Vincent lowers the painting, then gently rests it upon his desktop. He takes a step back, fixated on the work, then looks up at Ken. He takes off his reading glasses, twirls them.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
No, you may not.

KEN PUGH
But--

VINCENT CANNATOONA
No. I won't be but a minute, or two, so s-s-sit up straight and exercise some self control.

Ken sits up. Vincent looks at the painting intently.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
It's not bad, not bad at all.

KEN PUGH
Thank you.

Vincent instantly stares at Ken.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
What are you thanking me for?
VINCENT'S POV

Ken is stunned by the catastrophic question.

KEN PUGH (V.O.)
What have I done?

Vincent steps closer to Ken.

KEN PUGH
I'm just... I am very happy that you... like... it.

BACK TO SCENE

Vincent pauses, looks back at the painting.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I never said I liked it, never said that at all. I only said it wasn't bad.

KEN PUGH
Would you like to buy it?

Vincent tugs on his shirt's French cuffs.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I suppose. I mean, if my wife doesn't care for it, it might dress up the garage or tool shed a bit. I'll give you th-thirty bucks for it.

Vincent reaches for his wallet.

KEN PUGH
I seem to remember you saying forty, forty dollars.

Vincent puts his wallet away, goes expressionless.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Thirty bucks, Pugh, take it or leave it.

KEN'S OPEN PALM

Three crumpled tens hit Ken's open hand.

BACK TO SCENE
VINCENT CANNATOONA
You can go now.

Ken stands, heads for the door.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Oh, Pugh, before you go... I understand you miserably failed Miss Chmut's history exam.

Ken's back faces Vincent.

KEN PUGH
That's true.

Vincent rocks on his heels.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Your deadline, Pugh -- it's December, not June, and that is non-negotiable.

Ken exits, closes the door behind him. Vincent waits until he can no longer see or hear Ken. He opens a desk drawer, pulls out a phone book, leafs through it.

VINCENT CANNATOONA (CONT'D)
Fine art dealers, fine art dealers...

CUT TO:

EXT. FROMKIN'S FINE ART - AFTERNOON LATER THAT DAY

A blue sedan pulls up in front of Fromkin's Fine Art Gallery, comes to an abrupt stop. Vincent emerges from the car wearing dark sunglasses. He looks around, hurriedly retrieves the burlap-wrapped painting from the car's back seat, runs to the front door.

INT. BACKROOM, FROMKIN'S FINE ART GALLERY

Tall, emaciated NORRIS FROMKIN, in his mid-70s, places the unwrapped painting on a massive easel in the back room of his gallery. The room contains floor-to-ceiling wooden racks designed to facilitate the storage of artists' canvases.

A foot away from the work-in-question, he lowers his reading glasses to the tip of his bulbous nose, bends at the waist, places hands on hips, and analyzes.
Vincent sits on a tall stool, accepts a glass of wine from a young, female ASSISTANT who subsequently exits.

Fromkin noisily inhales and exhales through his nose.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
What do you think? Is it a Cezanne? A genuine Cezanne?

Stone-faced Fromkin turns to Vincent.

FROMKIN
I've been looking at it for thirty seconds, sir. I spend more time than that looking at a sandwich, before taking a bite.

Fromkin turns his gaze back to the still life. Vincent guzzles his wine, loosens his tie.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
Cezanne is frequently copied. Many galleries, and even a museum or two I know of, whose names I will not mention, possess forgeries.

He carefully picks up the painting, turns it around, peruses the back of the canvas, then holds it over head, utilizing the fluorescent light above.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
I would say the raw canvas itself is of the right period.

Vincent quickly stands.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Really? That's fantastic!

Fromkin casually waves him off.

FROMKIN
Becalm yourself, sir. That doesn't mean the pigment upon it is, as well.

Vincent wilts, retakes his seat.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
Clever forgers go to great lengths to obtain old canvases they can strip and paint on. It's all part of the deception.
Fromkin picks up a small flashlight, shines it on the canvas. His nose nearly makes contact with the work.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
The palette of colors is consistent with other works of Cezanne.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
That's what I thought.

Fromkin freezes, looks upward.

FROMKIN
What you thought? Perhaps I should tear up my certifications and ask you to make the determination.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I... I... That's not what I... You're the expert, not me.

Fromkin steps away from the easel, turns off the flashlight, flattens his dyed-blonde hair.

FROMKIN
You are a very impatient man, Mr. Cannatoona and that concerns me.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
It's just the excitement, the uncertainty. To think that this painting sat in my wife's aunt's attic for so many years and survived. And that it may be a genuine Cezanne -- it's somewhat overwhelming.

FROMKIN
As I said, you are a very impatient man -- and a very lucky one, in my professional opinion. You and your wife are in the possession of a--

Vincent whoops and hollers, pumps his fist, hops about.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
Sir! A little decorum, if you please!

Vincent halts.
VINCENT CANNATOONA
But it's a genuine Cezanne!

FROMKIN
No, it is not. I am certain of that.

Vincent collapses to the floor, curls up, whimpers.

FROMKIN (CONT'D)
But it is a genuine Edouard Manet!
And Manet, a contemporary of Cezanne, was a great artist in his own right. It is an early work, and clearly not one of his best. Would you take $400,000?

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - LATE AFTERNOON

Dragging his backpack down the bus' steps by one strap, Ken wearily steps off the bus. The doors close behind him and the bus departs with the backpack, which was on the last step. Ken discards the shredded strap, heads for home.

ALLEYWAY BETWEEN PUGH'S COTTON CANDY AND ZERA'S SHOP

Ken trudges down the narrow alleyway towards the back of the building, stops. Something isn't right; he picks up the pace.

BACK OF BUILDING

Ken, petrified, stands before stacks of cardboard boxes containing the contents of his bedroom. He approaches, looks over the top.

KEN'S POV

Furniture from his room sits behind the boxes.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul emerges from the back door carrying two dresser drawers overflowing with clothes. He spots Ken, diverts his gaze, sheepishly approaches.

KEN PUGH
Paul, what on Earth are you doing?
Paul places the drawers on a chair, tucks in his shirt.

**PAUL PUGH**
It's Diane, Dad. Only a couple months before the baby's due and last night she threatens to walk out again, unless I do this. She packed a suitcase this time! What am I supposed to do?!

**KEN PUGH**
Where am I supposed to go? I haven't found a place yet. I haven't even started looking.

The sound of a raindrop hitting the top of a box is heard, followed by several more, in quick succession. Paul and Ken momentarily look skyward.

O.s., the sound of a window opening.

**ZERA (O.S.)**
You should be ashamed of yourself, Paul.

Both men are drawn to the voice.

**KEN AND PAUL'S POV**
Zera leans halfway out a second-story window.

**BACK TO SCENE**

**PAUL PUGH**
I've been ashamed, for months.

**ZERA (O.S.)**
Then at least help your father get all his stuff in here. I'll come down and open the back door.

**KEN PUGH**
Sounds like I found a place.

**PAUL PUGH**
You okay with me helping?

**KEN PUGH**
I am most appreciative, son.

*CUT TO:*
INT. ZERA'S BEDROOM - MORNING THE NEXT DAY, SATURDAY

Zera's second-floor bedroom is crowded with a combination of her antique furniture and Ken's assorted possessions.

Ken lies on his back, comfortably snoring among rumpled linens. Zera, in her bathrobe, enters, folded newspaper in hand. From a foot above Ken's chest, she playfully drops it, awakening him. Ken coughs, sputters.

KEN PUGH
What the heck? What's this?

ZERA
Good morning to you, too. The early edition arrived an hour ago. Take a look at page twenty-four.

Ken sits up, flips through the paper.

KEN PUGH
What am I supposed to be lookin' for?

ZERA
You'll see.

Ken stops at the suggested page. The paper blocks Zera's view of his face. Seconds go by. Ken slowly lowers the paper to his waist.

KEN PUGH
Do you think that's it?

Zera lights a cigarette.

ZERA
Can't be anything but.

KEN PUGH
But it doesn't say it's a Cezanne. It says it's a Manet.

She points to the article.

ZERA
It happened yesterday. A local art dealer is presented with a previously unknown work, purchases it from an unnamed local who claimed it was found in an attic -- for $400,000! Ken! What else could it be?!

Ken ponders, smiles.
ZERA (CONT'D)
Cannatoona not only took the bait, he took the rod, the reel, the anchor -- the whole friggin' boat!

O.s. a firm knock is heard at the downstairs parlor door.

Zera moves to the bedroom window, slightly parts the drapes, peers down.

ZERA'S POV

No one can be seen at first, then a quick glimpse of a male figure in a black raincoat, who heads back to the front door, knocks again, harder.

BACK TO SCENE

VINCENT CANNATOONA (O.S.)
Anyone in there? I'd like a reading, right away. Cash customer.

KEN PUGH
That's Mr. Cannatoona's voice! He's going to kill me!

Zera quickly turns toward Ken.

ZERA
Sh-h-h.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZERA'S FRONT DOOR - SECONDS LATER

Zera opens the door a crack.

ZERA'S POV

Vincent, anxious, takes a step back.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
I know this is outside your regular business hours, but I would like a reading, now, and I'm willing to pay a premium for the inconvenience.

Vincent fiddles with his dark glasses, wets his lips.
Zera fully opens the door.

ZERA
I don't usually do this -- come in.

PARLOR
Zera points to a seat at the reading table; Vincent slinks into it. She turns on the spot light, illuminating the crystal ball. She sits opposite Vincent, sticks out her open hand.

ZERA
Two hundred, up front.

Vincent delves into his coat pocket, produces a wad of bills, fills Zera's palm. The money disappears into her robe.

ZERA (CONT'D)
You don't strike me as the type that runs to a fortune teller, especially at off hours.

Vincent sits back, grabs both armrests.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
Right you are about that. Normally, I'm a realist; someone who only believes in what he can see and touch, but...

ZERA
But life has just thrown you a massive curve ball, so you seek advice from outside the mainstream, right?

Vincent nods.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
You are good.

Zera sticks out her open palm.

ZERA
Another hundred.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
More? I just paid--
ZERA

A hundred, or we're done.

Vincent produces a hundred-dollar bill, slaps it into her palm.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Let me see your left palm.

He extends his hand. She draws closely, runs her index finger along several lines, withdraws, sits back, closes her eyes.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You're facing a moral dilemma.
You are a man who is torn apart on the inside.

When he pulls his hand away, she seizes it, takes another look, sits back.

ZERA (CONT'D)

You've experienced good fortune recently... money.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Yes, I have.

ZERA

But not cleanly. The money is tainted.

Vincent looks away.

ZERA (CONT'D)

Such newfound wealth can be a blessing, or a curse.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

And that's why I'm here! Which is it?!

KEN PUGH (O.S)

It's a curse.

VINCENT CANNATOONA

Who said that?

Ken, using the folded newspaper, pulls back the curtain to the small side room, steps into the parlor. Zera stands, turns on the lights. Vincent starts to get up.

ZERA

You should stay seated.
Vincent slumps back into the seat. Ken lays the paper, open to page twenty-four, on the table.

ZERA (CONT'D)
You've committed fraud, Mr. Cannatoona, art fraud. People go to prison for that, for a long, long time.

Vincent swallows hard, breathes heavily.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
The painting was inspected by an expert, who asserts it's a Manet. He believed my story: it came from my wife's late aunt's attic. Anyone coming forth with a different story -- well, that's just hearsay.

Zera opens the reading table's drawer, pulls out the photos of Ken. She holds one up for Vincent to see. When Vincent leans forward, she pulls it back an equal distance.

ZERA
I'm sure you can see it just fine. That's Ken with the painting, the $400,000 painting. You don't need to get within grabbing distance.

Vincent pulls back, wipes sweat from his brow.

KEN PUGH
And Mrs. Klatter saw me bring in a painting to your office. The one you gave me thirty dollars for.

VINCENT CANNATOONA
So, what are you going to do? Turn me in? Destroy my career, my life?

Ken and Zera knowingly look at each other.

ZERA
Not necessarily. All three of us have needs. You have a wife that likes to spend. Paying your bills... that's a need. Ken here needs to stay in school, indefinitely, and have a financially secure future -- that's his need.
VINCENT CANNATONOA
And yours?

Zera rocks her head, from side to side, purses her lips.

ZERA
Me? Well, I'm running low on creme de menthe.

VINCENT CANNATONOA
How much are you looking for?

KEN PUGH
Two-hundred-fifty thousand.

Indignant, Vincent puffs, folds his arms. Ken steps close.

KEN PUGH (CONT'D)
It's non-negotiable, and s-s-sit up straight.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEHIND ZERA'S SHOP - SPRING

Ken and Zera, wearing sunglasses, lie on chaise lounges, enjoying the sun. On a small table, between them, sits a bottle of creme de menthe and two half-full glasses. Zera holds a folded newspaper. Ken yawns.

ZERA
So, how are your grades going for the spring term?

Ken smiles.

KEN PUGH
Doin' great, same as the fall term: all effs.

ZERA
Think you'll ever graduate?

Ken takes a sip from his glass, lies back.

KEN PUGH
God, I hope not.

Zera pats the newspaper.

ZERA
You know, Fromkin auctioned off your 'Manet.' He got $1.4 million for it.
Ken removes his sunglasses.

KEN PUGH
Really?

Zera takes off hers.

ZERA
Yep. Don't you think you should get started on another one?

Ken puts his glasses back on.

KEN PUGH
I'm still working on the van Gogh.

Zera puts her glasses back on.

ZERA
Think you'll finish it up today?

KEN PUGH
You know I don't do homework on weekends.

They hold hands. Measles jumps onto Ken's lounge chair, sits, purrs.

FADE OUT:

THE END