

Strange Skies

by
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Based on the novel by Matt Marinovich

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EXT. JOHNSON'S POND - DAY

We are soaring above a frozen pond, the ice an almost blinding white. The surrounding poplars frosted with new snow, the sky at tree line an ash grey.

As we fly in slow-motion, we see a **young girl**, ten, gracefully glide along the surface on metallic skates. She lithely makes several figure eight movements, marking the ice, effortlessly spinning up and around and back again, as we float above and beyond her.

We hear the voice-over of our narrator: **Paul Mauro**.

PAUL (V.O.)

It astounds me. The euphoric felicity wrought by the simple act of a child skating around endlessly in a circle.

As we float around the other side of the girl, she looks upward, showing the thousand watt smile of impeccable orthodontia.

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

Blissfully unaware that what separates them from youthful joy and plunging to a gelid death is a thin sheet of frozen water.

The girl, now staring straight at us from our birds-eye view, frowns.

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

Stupid little fuckers, aren't they?

We hear the blood-curdling scream of an infant and we are in:

INT. ERIC'S HOUSE - DAY

A baby boy, **Matthew**, howls in agony. His tear-stained eyes pained with hunger.

A lone breast: pale, saggy, varicose-veined and stretch-marked, is pushed into his mouth by a dry hand with bad nails. This silences him as he chugs away.

PAUL (V.O.)

I mean, God bless 'em. If a tit in my mouth could make all my worldly concerns go away, life would be much simpler.

The camera moves back to reveal **Terry**, mid-thirties but looking forty. Her face is pale and malnourished. The purple rings around her eyes indicate she doesn't sleep much. She has a 'Fantastic Sam's' unisex haircut and the gravity of her entire body has begun to shift downward.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Even if that tit happens to look like a
 rotten eggplant.

The camera now swings around to show **Paul Mauro**, 38. Not an unattractive man, but the years are starting to age him: physically, mentally and emotionally. He sits at a dining room table opposite Terry. She looks to Paul, whose timid exterior and demeanor mask his sharp, cutting cynicism.

TERRY
 Sorry Paul. The kid's gotta eat.

PAUL
 Oh. No, no no. Do what you gotta do.

He smiles weakly at her. His eyes are sad.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Terry was a real catch once. Nice cans. I accidentally caught her changing one time at a pool party when Eric first starting dating her.

Paul sits next to his wife, **Lee**, attractive.

LEE
 He's so hungry!

Paul forces a laugh.

PAUL
 Yeah. Cute.

Terry shoves a chunk of ham in her mouth as the kid sucks like there's no tomorrow.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Now look at her.

Paul's mouth is agape, a forkful of mashed potatoes unable to make its way to his face. His hand trembles.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It's terrifying to think that the false promise of emotional value that kids provide could end in all of this.

The camera wheels around the room and we see that we are in the South Orange, New Jersey home of Paul's brother, **Eric**. It is a gruesome, cramped little suburban affair: the walls covered in a grotesque burnt orange patterned wallpaper, layered in grease and film and crayon drawings. The floor is littered with toys, the counter tops filled with detritus and newspapers.

LEE
I made a broiled ham steak with a mustard
glaze not long ago.

TERRY
Oh yeah?

LEE
Very easy Terry. You just mix the mustard
with brown sugar and vinegar, cook it in
a shallow pan. It's good with asparagus.
Pilaf. It was good, right honey?

Paul distractedly smiles towards them.

PAUL
Terrific.

Opposite Lee sits **Eric**, 40, with a 'SPIN DOCTOR'S TOUR
'94' T-shirt and a goatee from the same era. He stares
blankly, sipping a beer, oblivious to the animated
conversation the two women are having.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My brother Eric. He thought he was
building a kingdom.

Paul looks to his wife Lee, who makes goo-goo eyes at the
nursing infant.

LEE
Who's the pretty baby? Who's the pretty
baby?

She looks to Paul lovingly, batting her eyelashes at him.
He forces a half-smile.

PAUL (V.O.)
Who *is* the pretty baby?

He stares at the kid's cross-eyed, fat little face.

TERRY
Bobby, take the goddamn ashtray out of
your mouth!

Paul looks across the table to see two other small
children, **Bobby**, 4 and **Megan**, 2. They chatter incessantly
and scream, food flying from their lips, pasted against
their cheeks. Everyone at the table smiles in amusement.
Paul grimaces sourly.

PAUL (V.O.)
When you eat with a kid?

As Paul stares at the kids with his rotten expression, Lee leans against him and feeds him a carrot, which he chews slowly, his eyes gone slack.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Their beady little eyes barely break the plane of the table, and you have to endure inane conversation that would make a chimp sound like William Butler Yeats.

Lee kisses Paul on the cheek. He smiles at her.

LEE
 Aren't they adorable?

PAUL
 Sure are.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Well not me. No way, no how. I just have to figure out a way to tell Lee. Break it to her gently. She'll understand.

Lee smiles warmly at Paul. Paul runs his hands lovingly through her hair.

PAUL (WHISPERING) (CONT'D)
 Love you.

They kiss.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I mean, I do. I love her to death. But kids? Not my bag.

She goes in for a hug. He embraces her.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But now wouldn't be the right time to tell her. She has enough on her mind, what with problems at work, not to mention that thing they cut off my bicep. Who knows what that might be?

Paul thinks for a moment, his eyes reflecting a sort of realization. He is then snapped into the conversation at the table by the screeching laughter of Terry.

TERRY
 All of a sudden I look up and THE WHOLE STOVE IS ON FIRE!

Paul looks at the infant, chugging away on that boob. He seems to shoot Paul a "What the hell are you looking at?" Glare.

Paul cocks his head and looks up again at the completely oblivious Terry, openly breast feeding at the table.

LEE

Oh my god! Did you hear that Paul?

Paul is staring at Bobby, who is incessantly punching Eric in the crotch over and over, laughing maniacally. Eric barely blinks.

LEE (CONT'D)

Paul?

Paul turns to Lee, lost in thought.

PAUL

Huh?

Eric catches Paul's eye again. Something is wrong with his face. What is it? He realizes and blurts out loud:

PAUL (CONT'D)

JESUS ERIC! WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED TO YOUR EYEBROWS?

Alarmed, Terry turns towards Eric, moving her breast from the baby's mouth and shooting a jet of milk onto Paul's lap.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Paul and Eric stand outside on a dilapidated back porch covered with wet leaves. Eric's eyebrows almost totally gone, Paul's crotch moist with milk.

Paul looks up to the thickening clouds in the late afternoon sky and a sense of foreboding crosses his face.

ERIC

Fuckin' grease fire man! My whole head could've gone up in a ball of flame.

Paul smiles slyly at this.

PAUL

You wouldn't have minded that, would you, you old dog?

ERIC

The fuck you talking about?

PAUL

I mean, wouldn't that be great? Just check out, leave all this behind?

ERIC

Hey man, speak for yourself. I got a good thing goin'. Don't project your shit onto me.

Eric pulls a half of a joint from a cigarette box and lights it. He takes a tug and hands it to Paul.

PAUL

I can't. I'm driving back to Brooklyn.

ERIC

So what? It's not like you have three kids strapped to the backseat.

Paul gives Eric the sly look again.

ERIC (CONT'D)

But it's good man. I'm not complaining.

Paul takes a quick toke and coughs. He looks to a rusted hunk of metal that used to be a Webber kettle chained to a tree. It is missing a leg and looks like a sadly abandoned robot, left to waste in a pile of desiccated leaves.

PAUL

Nice grill.

ERIC

That shit causes cancer bro.

Paul looks incredulous.

ERIC (CONT'D)

The way it cooks the meat or something. So Terry won't let me use it anymore. We're into this Silk Tofu stuff. You ever had Silk Tofu?

PAUL

Fuck off.

ERIC

C'mon, pretty soon you're going to be walking in my shoes.

PAUL

What, managing a Panda Express and spending the remainder of my days gambling online to make ends meet?

ERIC

Hey man, I got kids to feed. Someday you will too and you'll understand that.

PAUL
I could just walk away Eric. I could just
kiss Lee on the cheek one morning and get
in the Mazda. Drive off.

Eric tosses the joint into a pile of leaves.

ERIC
That's nuts. Lee's great.

Paul stares nervously at the smoking pile. Eric lights a
cigarette and hands Paul one, distracting him.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Here.

PAUL
She wants kids. I can't do it man. They
scare me.

ERIC
That. Is intensely sad.

Paul looks again to the pathetic grill.

PAUL
Eric. You live in New Jersey in a house
that smells like lunchmeat and feces.
Three screaming, eating, pissing machines
running amok. *That's* intensely sad.

ERIC
No bro. It's the greatest.

Paul pauses, then looks thoughtfully to his brother.

PAUL
I was at the doctor last week.

ERIC
Oh yeah?

PAUL
Yeah. There was a little lump on my
bicep, so I went and had it checked out.

Eric blows out some smoke.

ERIC
No shit.

PAUL
The doctor said it was an adnexal
carcinoma.

ERIC

PAUL
I'm gonna tell you dummy. He did this
sentinal node excision, took it out, you
know. I gotta go in Tuesday and get the
results.

ERIC
Is it bad, or what?

PAUL
Probably not. But there is a small chance
it might have spread to my lymph nodes.

ERIC
Jesus. Does Lee know?

PAUL
Yeah. She's not taking it too well.

ERIC
I'll bet.

Eric now throws his cigarette into the pile of leaves.

Paul looks again to it. A plume of smoke rising.

PAUL
And you wanna know the funny thing? When
the doctor told me, I wasn't worried I
was going to die. At that moment, I had
only one thought in my head: "I may have
a malignant tumor, but at least now I
don't have to have a kid."

Eric stares at Paul.

ERIC
You're demented and need serious help.

PAUL
I'm demented? Eric, you have no eyebrows.
Oh, and Blind Melon called, they want
their facial hair back.

Eric takes a deep breath.

ERIC
You always knew how to hurt me bro.

PAUL
Eric, I'm not trying to hurt you, I'm
trying to help you. Stop killing
yourself. Run. As fast as you can.

ERIC
You're projecting again. Kids are great,

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

I think it's just what you need to get out of this Selfish bullshit mode you're in.

PAUL

Jesus. I don't even know if I like being married.

ERIC

Problems at home?

PAUL

Not really. I guess. You know...

ERIC

Well, hey, look man, It's never storybook and all that jazz. But you make it work. Just look at mom and dad. Forty years. And it's not like they didn't have bumps in the road.

Paul looks at Eric and furrows his brows.

PAUL

Eric. Dad cheated on mom with five hundred and seventy-one different women.

ERIC

Yeah. But he never told her about them. He saved her from that hurt.

PAUL

Are you fucking retarded? He wrote every single one down in a book that she found after he died. It broke her heart. It killed her.

ERIC

You know man, I can't get with you when you're all negative like this.

Paul stares dumbly.

PAUL

What are you? Suffering from septic kid shock? You know what, just run, seriously. I'll cover for you until you get a few miles away.

He looks again at smoke teeming above the pile of leaves, then back to Eric, who has an expression of almost laughable sincerity on his face.

ERIC

One day you're going to understand. There's love here. And that's all that matters.

They stare at each other in silence for a moment. Then Eric rips a huge fart. Paul sadly nods.

EXT./INT. PAUL'S MAZDA - NIGHT

On the street outside Eric's house, Lee and Paul sit in silence in the Mazda. Piles of dead leaves surround the row of old Victorians with vinyl siding, one right after another, which line the street. It is beginning to rain.

LEE
Where are you?

Paul stares into the rearview mirror. He looks completely worn out. He looks up to the sky, now completely black.

PAUL
Huh?

LEE
You're so far away.

PAUL
No. I'm just....

LEE
I thought we were going to tell them.
About the lump.

PAUL
No.

LEE
I want to talk about it.

PAUL
I thought you wanted to talk about ham.

LEE
You know that food is my 'go-to' subject
when I'm avoiding something painful!

They smile at one another.

PAUL
Just promise me we'll never end up like
that.

LEE
How?

PAUL
Oblong and washed-out in New Jersey.

They both laugh. Then Lee looks sincerely to Paul.

LEE
It's not all that bad, is it?

PAUL (V.O.)
Here we go. Doesn't she realize that
after thirty-five there's a good chance
the kid turns out a retard?

Lee suddenly looks very serious.

LEE
Let's talk about...the thing.

PAUL
No. I get the results Tuesday. I don't
want to make a big deal out of it.

Lee pouts.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I mean, what can I do? All I can do is
wait.

Lee holds Paul's hand tightly.

LEE
I know you're going to be okay.

PAUL
Thanks.

LEE
And once you're okay. I want to get
pregnant.

Paul looks out the window and swallows.

PAUL
I guess we'll just have to wait until
Tuesday.

Lee looks forlorn. Paul stares out at the darkened sky.
Blue clouds hovering against the black, starless night.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

*Eric runs through his backyard, head aflame. An incessant
beeping runs underneath.*

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Early morning. Paul awakens to find his digital alarm
clock beeping and reading six a.m. He shuts it off.

He looks to Lee who snores and lays in a pile of her own drool, a novel with the 'Oprah's Book Club' gold medallion shining on its' cover open across her chest.

INT. SHOWER - DAY

Paul, depressed, washes himself.

INT. PATH TRAIN - MOVING - DAY

Paul rides a PATH train and stares blankly into space. He looks out the window into the sky: slate grey, bilious clouds looming overhead.

EXT. MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY - DAY

Paul walks across a long blacktop parking lot towards a building in a large office park. The sign reads: MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY.

INT. MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY - DAY

Paul walks through aisle upon aisle of cubicles in an undistinguished office with off-white walls and brown carpet.

He sits at his desk and boots up his computer.

With a kind of wistfulness, Paul looks at the screen saver: a Norman Rockwell-lite painting of a farmhouse in winter, the lights on, the sun just setting, a child walking back home.

Suddenly, a clattering like castanets can be heard.

Lisa Hunt, a dumpy and overweight young woman in ill-fitting clothes carrying fistfuls of pill bottles in each hand lumbers towards him. He looks resigned.

Lisa smiles at Paul as she approaches. Paul clicks open some spreadsheets on his computer.

LISA

HEY!

PAUL

Hey, let's jump back into this.

Lisa sits opposite Paul, her ponderous weight causing the shocks on the swivel chair to take tremendous pressure.

Paul sniffs the air.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What's that smell?

LISA
Uck! I left this sweater in the washer
overnight. It's a little mildewy.

Paul just stares.

LISA (CONT'D)
Okay. So what's this again?

He looks closely at Lisa's adult acne, then back to his
pages.

PAUL
Well, it's just the layout of the data
flow operations group.

She breathes heavily from her mouth.

LISA
Wait. What?

PAUL
Um, DFOG.

Paul looks on helplessly as Lisa lines her pill bottles
along his desk. The bottles read: "*For the treatment of
Diabetes.*"

PAUL (CONT'D)
That's the anagram anyway.

Lisa looks amorously into Paul's eyes. He looks to some
papers on his desk and begins explaining to her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Listen to me. 'Anagram.' I mean
'Acronym.'

He chuckles.

Paul shows Lisa some papers. She just giggles and
playfully shoves him. It's forceful though and he nearly
falls out of his chair.

LISA
You're hilarious!

Paul half-smiles, barely masking his disdain.

PAUL (V.O.)
Not nearly as hilarious as the eighteen
cupcakes you shoved into your craw this
morning.

Lisa clicks a pen.

LISA
So DFOG stands for what now?

Paul stares at Lisa and imagines:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Lisa crosses the street. Paul zooms by in his Mazda and WHAM! Runs right into her. She rolls up on the hood and shatters the windshield, her fat face pressed up against the glass.

INT. MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY - DAY

Paul smiles a demonic grin as Lisa shovels pills into her mouth.

INT. PATH TRAIN - NIGHT

Paul sadly rides the PATH train home in the dark.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY - NIGHT

Paul walks through a crowded Port Authority to a subway train.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - NIGHT

Paul stands on a crowded subway train and thinks.

EXT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul puts a key in the front door of his apartment building.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul enters the apartment and approaches the bathroom, hearing water running.

He discovers Lee curling her eyelashes while she pees on the toilet with the door open.

LEE
Don't forget. Dinner with the Browns.

PAUL

Aw hon. I got a butt load of work I gotta get done tonight.

LEE

You said a week ago you'd go! Now why don't you be a nice guy for once and do what you say you're gonna do!

She slams the door in his face. Paul leans against it.

PAUL (TO HIMSELF)

Whatever.

The last dribble of Lee's urine can be heard. Paul shudders. The sound becomes...

INT. BROWN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A bottle of white wine being poured into a glass. Pull back to reveal: Paul and Lee have dinner with **Brenda and Felipe Brown**. Brenda is a cute, pixie-like woman and Felipe is a rather staid conservative type with wire-framed glasses and a strong chin. Brenda and Lee speak animatedly. A small girl, **Justine**, sits in a corner coloring.

PAUL (V.O.)

If Lee had her way, we'd join the ranks of the Browns and other couples who move to Park Slope to mate, breed and die.

Brenda takes off her watch and displays it for everyone.

BRENDA

I mean, if you found this watch laying in the woods, you wouldn't say "Wow, look at this thing that just happened here in nature!" No. You'd say, "wow look what someone created." Well there's no difference between this watch and a tree. It had to have been created. And created intelligently.

PAUL (V.O.)

Domesticity has turned Brenda into some kind of fucked-up born-again. She's literally bored herself into religion. Not that she hasn't had an assist from old Felipe.

Felipe pipes up rather stiffly.

FELIPE

You know if I subscribe one more investor to a security issuance this week, I'll just about burst!

The conversation stops dead. Brenda stares, Lee smiles. Paul picks at his food. Felipe goes back to eating.

PAUL (V.O.)

Way to pick it up, snazzy. Bore your hot little wife right into the arms of The Lord. What a waste.

BRENDA

Well, all that is well and good. It puts a roof over our head. But if you don't turn your life over to Jesus, literally what is the point?

Paul and Lee share a "Ugh!" look. Paul looks back at Brenda.

PAUL (V.O.).

I'd like to fuck the god right out of her.

LEE

Oh! You know who we love is Paula Deen, on The Food Network?

Paul's eyes glaze over.

BRENDA

OH MY GOODNESS I LOVE HER!

Felipe shushes Brenda.

FELIPE

Honey. Justine is having quiet time.

Brenda embarrassingly puts her hand over her mouth.

Lee gets up and sits down on the floor with Justine, rubbing her hair.

LEE

She had a special Pannini sandwich on her show the other day that was, you know, Cibatta bread and you slice it and you put white truffle butter on each side, and then you stuff it with Mozzarella, Proscuitto di Parma, Sopressata, the Calabrese kind, lettuce. Uh, Radicchio, balsamic vinegar, basil, olive oil and you take it...

As Lee goes on and on, her voice goes silent. The camera moves in on her as she drones on about the recipe, running her fingers through the head of the small child, staring at Paul and giving him a sly wink.

Paul stares hopeless.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Paul sits in a crowded waiting room in his doctor's office. The room is filled with sick-looking people except for two: Paul, and an extremely attractive, statuesque and exotic woman, **Alex Hivinshki**. She is olive-skinned, brunette, well-attired and reads a copy of Paris Vogue. Paul looks her up and down. She is way out of his league.

He looks to the wall: a poster of a well-built African American athlete, **Demetrius Davenport**. The poster reads: HELP PUT THE SMACK-DOWN ON CANCER. He is in a Minnesota Vikings uniform, holding a football aloft in one hand and pointing his finger straight out at Paul, who snickers. This gets the attention of Alex, who looks up at Paul from her magazine.

PAUL

Just what we need, right? Medical advice from some date rapist.

ALEX

Excuse me?

PAUL

This guy. Davenport. He wants you to know how concerned he is about cancer. Meanwhile he's giving roofies to underage girls on party boats.

She gives him a glare, completely creeped out. Her eyes drift back to the magazine. Paul is red-faced.

A nurse appears.

NURSE

Alex Hivinshki?

Alex stands and disappears into the office. He turns and sees the entire waiting room staring at him.

PAUL

What?

The nurse emerges again.

NURSE
Mister Mauro?

Paul turns sharply to her, expecting another accusatory stare.

PAUL
What?

NURSE
You can come on back.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

Paul looks around at the cold, clinical details in the examining room: the silver metal counter tops, the antiseptic wipes, the blood-pressure cuff. He suddenly hears the voice of Doctor Tolson through the thin walls in the room next door.

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)
How are we doing today Alex?

There is a pause. The voices become quieter, more muffled. Paul listens closer. He hears only parts of things.

ALEX (O.S.)
How serious is it?

Doctor Tolson is quieter. Paul struggles to put his ear next to the wall, but trips on a scale and knocks some containers over. As he bends down, picking up cotton swabs and tongue depressors, he hears Alex weeping rather loudly. He freezes and sits back down.

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)
I'm afraid there's nothing more we can do. I'm sorry.

Paul hears Doctor Tolson rather clearly as he opens the door to leave, turning back to say one last thing to her.

DR. TOLSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Alex, we're going to make this as comfortable for you as possible.

ALEX (O.S.)
Okay. Thanks.

He hears the doctor close the door and almost immediately he opens Paul's door, startling him.

DR. TOLSON
Hello Paul.

He pumps Paul's hand in a shake. He throws his clipboard to the silver counter top where it lands with a metallic thud. Paul stares at the clipboard. Time stands still. He turns towards the doctor.

DR. TOLSON (CONT'D)

Paul... You passed the test.

Paul almost looks disappointed, confused.

PAUL

No spread?

DR. TOLSON

The sentinel node came back negative.
You're A-Okay.

PAUL

Are you sure?

DR. TOLSON

Go on. Get out of here. Just schedule a chest X-ray and a follow-up appointment. I'll see you in six months.

Dr. Tolson is smiling broadly. Paul is not.

PAUL

But there's a five percent chance the test missed something. You said that at the beginning.

Dr. Tolson's smile fades.

DR. TOLSON

Paul, the test came back negative for spread. Do you want cancer?

Paul seriously contemplates this question.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

Paul walks down the hallway towards the elevator, deflated.

PAUL (V.O.)

So this is it: Welcome to the rest of your life. It won't be today good sir, but someday, you'll wake up one morning, eighteen years gone, and realize your life is over.

(MORE)

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 You'll take your ragged-looking wife on a short cruise, gamble the last of your savings away, get a black belt in silence, and drive fourteen hours to Utica to visit your spawn on Thanksgiving, pass on the coffee, and plow into an oak tree on the way home. Awesome.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Eric runs through the backyard, his head aflame.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

Paul continues to walk in disappointment, his shoulders sinking by the second.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Paul walks distractedly into a waiting elevator. He hears a voice from behind him:

ALEX (O.S.)
 Hi.

Paul is startled to see Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 You okay?

PAUL
 Me? I'm great.

He stares at her up and down. She's gorgeous. He accidentally presses the garage button on the elevator.

ALEX
 You're shell shocked too.

Paul presses several more buttons before he gets the right one. Then he just blurts out:

PAUL
 This blows.

Alex just stares at him. Silence. Then the PING of the elevator and the door opens.

Alex grasps Paul's hand, smiling warmly, pulling him along.

ALEX
 You're coming with me.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

They walk out onto a busy Manhattan street. Alex whistles for a cab.

Paul looks around to see if anyone is catching this.

A cab pulls up and Alex pulls him in.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Alex speaks to the driver:

ALEX
23rd and Lex.

As the driver pulls into traffic, Alex puts her hands all over Paul and begins fondling him. She kisses his ears, his neck. Paul is aroused but a bit hesitant and Alex picks up on this.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I've never done this before.

PAUL
Me neither.

He looks her in the eyes. She is in a state of high arousal.

ALEX
There's got to be some upside to dying.

She smiles. He smiles back. They attack each other.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

A photograph of a smiling Alex and her husband on their wedding day vibrates until being kicked down by Alex's bare foot, accompanied by grunts and moans. Paul and Alex, completely naked, hump on a king-sized bed. The room is filled with expensive furniture.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Later: Paul sweatily does Alex from behind. He notices a pamphlet, LIVING WITH BREAST CANCER, on a table. He adjusts his eye line, looking over to a grand piano. Atop the piano is a photograph of Alex and her husband on some Caribbean island.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Post-coital. Paul sits up in bed. Alex stands naked on a balcony in the late morning sun, smoking a cigarette.

PAUL
Shouldn't you put a robe on or something?

ALEX
Who cares?

Alex looks back at Paul and smiles a sad, crooked grin. Her naked, sweaty body glistening golden in the sun.

Paul hops up and stands naked near the piano. He picks up the photo and examines it. There's Alex and her husband. But he is also drawn in by the deep blue skies and white sandy beaches. Alex walks up behind him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Cinnamon Beach. Caneel Bay. St. John. We went there on our honeymoon.

PAUL
It's beautiful.

Alex slaps Paul on the ass and goes into the bathroom.

INT. WALK-IN CLOSET - DAY

Now wearing a robe, a thin, post-coital patina of sweat on his brow, Paul explores a deep walk-in closet.

Hundreds of pairs of men's shoes: Fine-grained, all custom-made. Fitted shirts draped in dry-cleaner bags. Rows of cuff links and assorted jewelry totalling in the millions. In the corner, a bag of expensive golf clubs.

Paul touches the smooth fabric of the shirts, admiring things he's never had.

Alex stands in the archway of the closet, looking at him.

ALEX
Let's go shopping.

PAUL
What? Why?

ALEX
It's time to squeeze a life of luxury into every living day.

PAUL

Cool.

INT. BARNEY'S - DAY

Alex leads Paul by the hand through the luxurious New York department store.

She buys him an expensive buffalo hide biker jacket. He puts it on and feels like a new man.

A salesman fits Paul with a thousand dollar pair of shiny black boots. Alex is sitting at his side.

SALESMAN

Why don't you try walking around?

Paul stands and struts. He checks himself in a full-length mirror. He likes what he sees but focuses on his hair. He tries to pull his bangs forward. Unsatisfied.

ALEX

What do you think?

He turns towards her with ruffled brow. She looks at his hairline.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. I'll call Rex.

INT. BARNEY'S - DAY

Paul and Alex walk through the store. He is grinning in his fancy new duds. She begins to seem absent.

PAUL

Everything OK?

Alex just nods. She sees a fur coat and moves towards it. Paul looks over and sees an area of changing rooms.

ALEX

Hey. How about it?

Paul looks at Alex in white sable. She wears a sarcastic grin as she models for him. He gives her the thumbs up, then smiles big.

ALEX (CONT'D)

What?

INT. CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Paul fucks Alex hard inside a small dressing room in Barney's. She wears the fur coat.

INT. HAIR SALON - DUSK

Rex, Alex's hairdresser, gives Paul a haircut. He turns him towards a mirror. Paul grins broadly. He looks younger, more stylish, richer. He turns to show Alex, who wears her new fur coat but stares sadly out the window. His grin fades. He looks up to Rex and nods.

INT. HAIR SALON - DUSK

Alex distractedly signs the credit card slip and walks out the door. Paul grabs her card and follows.

EXT. HAIR SALON - DUSK

Paul chases Alex down the street, eventually catching up with her. He holds the card out.

ALEX

Let's take a walk in the park.

She walks right into traffic. Cars screech to a halt and honk at her as she darts into Central Park. Paul follows, holding the American Express card in his hand.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DUSK

It's getting dark. Paul feels a chill but Alex is oblivious. He tries to grab her hand but she pulls away and sits on a bench. He sits next to her.

She stares at a curtain of algae on the surface of the pond. Paul sees the sky reflected in it, stars beginning to appear. He admires his new clothes.

ALEX

Isn't it incredible?

PAUL

Yeah. Thank you. I've never worn real buffalo hide before. It's amazing.

ALEX

No. The fact that we're not going to be here anymore. That this is all going to go on without us.

PAUL
I don't know about you but I plan on coming back as a grasshopper.

ALEX
No. This is it. We're both as good as dead.

PAUL
How about a little levity? This is some depressing shit.

Alex is oblivious to Paul's insensitivity.

ALEX
You know the funny thing? Last week I thought I was the center of the universe. And then suddenly the world's not even paying attention.

Alex looks at her fur coat, her jewelry. She gets a burst of energy.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I don't want to sleep tonight. I don't want to waste any more time. I've got to figure out what to do with the rest of my life. We could still do something amazing.

PAUL
What? Like learn to hang-glide or something?

Alex squeezes Paul's wrist really tight, digging her nails into his skin.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Jesus! You're hurting me!

ALEX
We could become human bombs or something. Blow up Cheney!

Paul gets a nervous look on his face and looks around to see if anyone has heard. Alex, frustrated, releases her grip and walks off.

PAUL
Hey! Your credit card!

She just keeps walking. Paul looks after her in a daze, holding the card in his hand.

His eyes widen in realization. He pulls a cell phone out and dials.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Hi.

Lee's voice can be heard on the other end.

LEE (O.S.)

I've been trying to call you babe. I've left fifteen messages.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

I had to take a walk. I couldn't go back to work. I had to think.

There is silence on the other end. Then Lee begins to weep.

Paul says nothing. He looks torn. She begins to weep.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

It's okay. We'll get through this. It's just... It's spread to my lymph nodes. Doctor Tolson is giving me a... five...percent...chance of survival.

Paul thinks: "Is that the right number?"

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Wait... yeah. Five.

LEE (O.S.)

I understand.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

This changes everything.

LEE (O.S.)

Yeah. I understand. I love you.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

I'll be right home.

LEE (O.S.)

Come right home. Don't do something stupid.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

Okay.

He hangs up, putting the phone back in his pocket. He realizes his fly is open and zips it up. He takes a deep breath and smiles, walking boldly down the sidewalk.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul throws open the door. Lee is standing there, all cried out. She stares at him framed in the doorway in his leather coat and boots. He looks a foot taller.

PAUL
I went shopping.

She's stunned speechless.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Later. Paul and Lee sit at the dinner table, halfway through a meal. Lee weeps. Paul stares guiltily at her for a second, then goes back to finishing his pork chop.

LEE
How can you go on eating?

PAUL
Well, I'm not dead yet.

The phone rings. He goes to pick it up.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Hello?

Screaming children can be heard and soon Eric's drunken voice.

ERIC (O.S.)
Hey bro, Lee called me. I love you. I just--- SHUT UP! I'M ON THE PHONE!

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Hey Eric.

INT. ERIC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

*Intercut with Paul and Lee's apartment.

The children are running rampant. Terry is changing the diaper on the baby. Eric is drinking.

ERIC
You wanna watch these kids or what?

One of Eric's kids starts screaming bloody murder.

TERRY
Why don't you clean the shit out of this one's diapers for once?!

ERIC

I'm on the phone with my brother! He has cancer!

TERRY

You're drunk! And you're using this as an excuse.

Paul is holding the phone away from his ear.

PAUL

Eric, why don't I call you back later?

He hangs up the phone.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What's for dessert?

Lee looks at him in astonishment.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Eric runs through his backyard, head aflame. This time, however, he douses his head in a thick bank of snow atop his rusted grill. Hisssssssss.... The flame goes out. He lifts his head from the grill, revealing it to be the smiling face of Paul.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul awakens from deep sleep. He smiles.

INT. PATH TRAIN - DAY

Paul rides the train to work with his slick haircut and new duds. He beams brightly, as does the sun. Not a cloud in the sky.

EXT. MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY - DAY

He walks across the parking lot and into the office building, his head held high, his stride broad and confident.

INT. MONARCH HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY - DAY

He struts to his desk, boots up his computer. He stares at the young boy running towards the farm house.

PAUL (TO THE SCREEN)
Run home you little pussy. I'm heading in
the other direction.

Paul hears the clattering of pill bottles and looks up to
see Lisa Hunt hovering.

She lines her pill bottles along his desk and sits on the
swivel chair, audibly challenging its' hydraulics.

Paul stares at her with a wry grin. He turns to his
computer and clicks on some spreadsheets.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Sorry I missed yesterday.

LISA
Yeah, where were you anyway?

PAUL
I had an appointment.

LISA
Um, RUDE!

She barks a sarcastic laugh. Paul winces.

PAUL
All right, well let's just look at these
spreadsheets we were working on.

LISA
Hold on Speedy Gonzales!

Lisa sluggishly opens each pill bottle and removes a
pill, swallowing each one and taking a gulp of Diet Coke.
The tension is rising in the veins of Paul's neck, his
face reddening with each slow, deliberate gulp.

PAUL
SO! Here we are...

He nudges his face towards the computer screen.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Your customer has called in and asked you
about POS for DFOG. What do you enter?

Lisa places her meaty hand on Paul's leg.

LISA
Something's different about you.

PAUL
I got a haircut.

LISA
No, not that. You're assertive. I like
it!

He tries to edge his way out of her grasp.

PAUL
What do you enter?

He points to the screen, about to burst.

LISA
Oh my god! So serious! Okay. Let me
concentrate. DFOG. I already forgot what
that stands for.

PAUL
I'VE BEEN TALKING TO YOU ABOUT IT FOR SIX
MONTHS!

People in the office look over. Paul lowers his voice.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I mean really, come on now.

LISA
What line are we on?

Lisa rolls her chair closer to Paul and rubs her kneecap
against his. He stands up and stares at her.

PAUL
Okay. We're done here.

LISA
What?

PAUL
You know when training's over, so's your
time with me. So you conveniently forget
everything as soon as I tell you.

People are really paying attention now. Paul's boss has
come out of his office and is watching. Lisa looks hurt.
Paul sits.

LISA
Okay sit down please. Look, I didn't
mean...

She puts her hand on his leg again.

PAUL
Take your goddamn hand off my leg.

She does.

LISA
You could've just moved it off. You didn't have to get nasty.

PAUL
Even if I had wanted to, I couldn't get my fingers around it. It's like a loaf of sourdough.

Tears start to well up in Lisa's eyes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Let me ask you something...

He leans in close to her, almost whispering:

PAUL (CONT'D)
Did you really think I was going to fuck you?

The entire office goes silent. **Greg Boyden**, Paul's boss, speaks up.

GREG
Mauro. Why don't you come in here a sec.

Paul stares at Lisa and walks towards Greg's office.

INT. GREG'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul sits opposite Greg in his office. Greg is a frat-boy type with fluorescent white teeth. Paul looks penitent.

GREG
No wonder you flipped on Lisa. Dude!

PAUL (V.O.)
Jesus this guy is a douchebag.

Greg's head explodes, like that guy in 'Scanners.' Then *Greg's head is back to normal, Paul shakes it off.*

PAUL (CONT'D)
Yeah. It's a terrible thing this...
canc... Jesus!

GREG
Take it easy dude. You gonna be all right?

PAUL
I don't know. It metastasizes. It meta-sta-tas-ta-sized.

GREG

PAUL
It like spread to other parts of my body
like my bones and stuff. Whatever.

GREG
Dude. I am so sorry. I'll tell Tim. You
should take some time off.

PAUL
Aw man, no. I feel like I'm bailing on
you guys. The whole training deal...

GREG
We'll dump her on Tommy, dude. No
problemo. You gotta take care of your
health. My uncle Roy got that shit in his
testes. Dude lost a fuckin' ball.

Silence.

PAUL
Yeah. Well.

Greg shakes that off. Jumps up.

GREG
We'll handle it dude. Just go home.

Paul smiles.

PAUL (V.O.)
If having serious cancer is this much
fun, I'm never going to be healthy again.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Paul lays on his couch. Leaves are piling up outside on
the fire escape. 'The Tyra Banks Show' plays on TV. Paul
watches, bored, as he picks up his phone and dials.

PAUL (INTO PHONE)
Alex. It's Paul. Where are you? I'm
getting worried. All that bomb talk. Call
me?

Suddenly a key in the lock. Paul hangs up quickly. Lee
enters. He smiles, surprised.

LEE
I thought I'd take the rest of the day
off, come hang out with you. Is that
cool?

PAUL
Yeah. Of course. Come here.

She sits down next to him on the couch. He gives her a kiss, then goes back to watching the TV. Lee looks to the screen, then back at Paul.

LEE

Is this a good time to talk?

PAUL

I was just watching this Tyra Banks, and they were giving her shit for putting on weight and she was all like 'SO WHAT?!'

Lee turns the TV off. Paul looks at her.

LEE

Why are you sitting here watching this crap?

PAUL

That's what we do. We distract ourselves. It's in a pamphlet I gave you.

Lee takes a deep breath.

LEE

I think it's great you got a haircut Paul. And the leather jacket. And the boots. I mean, if I had cancer, I'd go on a spending spree too.

PAUL

But?

LEE

I feel like you're starting to act weird.

PAUL

This is about you getting pregnant, right?

LEE

Can't we talk about it?

Paul leaps up and paces the apartment, trapped like a rat in a cage.

PAUL

NO! How can we? I'm not going to be around in five years. Possibly three!

LEE

Stop shouting at me.

PAUL

I'm not shouting Lee! I have cancer!

LEE

Sometimes I think you just want to die.

Paul takes a deep breath and slowly walks over to the couch, taking a seat next to his weeping wife.

He puts his arm around her and holds her close, kissing her gently. Her crying dissipates.

LEE (CONT'D)

My mother wants us to go on vacation.
She wants to pay for it.

PAUL

That's big of her.

LEE

I could take a week off. I mean, the time
between us is so precious now.

Paul runs his fingers through her hair. He looks out the window and thinks.

PAUL

I think...I should go by myself.

Lee pulls away and stares at him strangely.

LEE

What?

Paul stands again, gesticulating with his hands. Laying it on thick.

PAUL

This might be the last time I really get
to figure out who I am... really get to
the bottom of me.

A silence.

LEE

All right. Like a retreat or something?

PAUL

Sure.

He sits back down and turns on the TV.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There's a killer beach called Cinnamon
Bay on St. John.

Paul notices Lee looking at him suspiciously.

PAUL (CONT'D)

She keeps eyeing him. He grabs his shoulder and winces.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ!

LEE
What?

PAUL
Sharp pain. Terrible pain.

LEE
I'll get one of my Vicodins.

Lee gets up and runs into the bathroom.

LEE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'll call my mother today. It's a good idea. You deserve it, Paul. You've been really incredible.

The camera moves in on Paul's satisfied face.

LEE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Don't forget. Dinner with the Browns tonight.

Paul's smile drops.

INT. BROWN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

As Paul and Lee enter, Brenda gives Paul a long, sincere look.

BRENDA
So. How are you?

There is a long silence as everyone stares at each other. Lee looks at Paul, wide-eyed and smiling. Brenda bites her lip.

PAUL
I'm fine.

BRENDA
Good.

LEE
We're fine. We're great.

Brenda laughs an uncomfortable giggle.

BRENDA
Good. Oh good!

Felipe uncorks a bottle. POP!

FELIPE
We're really sorry.

Paul looks Brenda hard in the eye.

PAUL
It's actually been a blessing.

Brenda's eyes tear over. She massages Paul's hand.

BRENDA
That's such a beautiful thought. So long as you understand that it is God's providence. You can't buy your way into heaven Paul. You must do it by his grace.

PAUL
You know, when you put it that way, it really throws everything into a whole new light.

Brenda's eyes widen more.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Born-again's just can't deal with that word, light. It's like Christian Heroin.

Brenda grasps Paul's hand tighter, bringing him to the table.

BRENDA (WHISPERING)
I want to hear more.

Lee notices the flirtation and is perturbed but follows.

INT. BROWN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Felipe and Lee eat slowly, quietly. Paul shovels blackened Tilapia into his craw like there's no tomorrow. Brenda stares fascinated by him

PAUL
This is great Brenda. What did you do to it?

BRENDA
You squirt some juice on it. Let it soak in.

She smiles at him, he smiles back. Lee rolls her eyes. Felipe gets up and goes over to his daughter.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

This must be so hard. Sitting here and listening to the same old conversation. I'd be crazy.

Paul puts his fork down, locks eyes with Brenda and with a mouthful of food says:

PAUL

When the time comes... I'm sure you'll do just fine.

Paul stares intensely into Brenda's eyes. She blushes.

INT. BROWN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Paul's bare ass plunges into a naked Brenda Brown, her legs sprawled upwards and outwards.

BRENDA

Oh Jesus! Oh Jesus!

The camera pans over to show the baby Justine asleep in a crib in the same room, a metal crucifix on a wall.

EXT. BROWN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Paul leaves the apartment, kissing Brenda, smiling.

PAUL (V.O.)

If my father can get away with five hundred and seventy-one, why shouldn't I get away with two? Three if I'm lucky.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul and Lee eat dinner in silence.

LEE

What did you do today?

PAUL

Nothing.

Lee continues to eat, then stops. Paul smiles.

LEE

Paul?

PAUL

Yeah?

LEE
I'm almost afraid to ask you this.

PAUL
Shoot.

LEE
I don't understand why you seem so happy.
Knowing she's got him on the spot and wanting to escape,
Paul stands up, feigning outrage.

PAUL
Kubler-Ross! Stage one! Denial. Read the
damn pamphlet Lee!

Paul storms out of the apartment. Lee just sits
dumbfounded.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Paul runs down the street, talking into his cell phone.

PAUL (INTO PHONE)
Alex! I need to see you. I'm coming over
right now!

He continues running into the subway station.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul runs into the lobby of Alex's apartment, where a
chubby, pock-marked young night watchman watches
'*America's Got Talent!*'.

PAUL
Hi. I'm here to see Alex Hivinshki.

The watchman looks up at him.

WATCHMAN
You a friend of hers?

PAUL
No. I mean yes.

WATCHMAN
She's dead.

PAUL
What?

WATCHMAN

Night before last. Jumped off the balcony. Landed on the sidewalk right out here in front.

Paul is stunned silent. The watchman takes a perverse pleasure in describing the details.

WATCHMAN (CONT'D)

You shoulda seen it. She broke on the pavement like a sack of wet fruit. I almost shit my pants. Thought it was another Arab attack for a second. Cops were cleaning brains off the glass all day yesterday. Fuckin' crazy dude!

He picks up a phone.

WATCHMAN (CONT'D)

Her husband's in. You wanna talk to him?

PAUL

No no. That's all right. Thanks.

Paul slowly backs out the door.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul walks out and looks at the sidewalk. He thinks he sees some specks of blood. He crosses the street and looks up at the balcony of Alex's apartment. There is a light on inside and the wind is blowing the yellow drapes outward. The sky above is a thick purple.

Paul retreats into the darkness. He walks at a quickened pace, before breaking into an all-out run. The sound of an airplane blasting off as he races away.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING - DAY

Paul parks his car in airport parking and lugs a duffel bag towards the shuttle. Planes taking off and landing can be heard.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Paul stands with his duffel riding the moving walkway at JFK airport.

INT. AIRPORT BATHROOM - DAY

Paul washes his hands and looks into the mirror. He removes his wedding ring and puts it in his pocket. He looks at the tan line on his ring finger.

INT. AIRPORT GIFT SHOP - DAY

Paul grabs a bottle of liquid tanner off of a shelf. He looks around to see if anyone is watching, then squirts a little in his palm and rubs it over his finger.

INT. AIRPORT BAR - DAY

Paul throws his duffel on the ground and takes a stool at the airport bar.

BARMAID

What can I get you?

PAUL

Scotch. Double.

She pours. He sips. And then he hears the voice of a small child behind him and that 'sour' look appears on his face.

JACK (O.S.)

I want to sit at the bar.

Paul turns and sees two people: **Barb**, an attractive and buxom blonde, wearing too much make-up, and **Jack**, her eight year-old son, who wears a Minnesota Vikings hat that is entirely too big for his tiny head.

Jack rudely steps on Paul's bag and hops up on the stool next to him, staring him in the eye. Paul frowns at the kid and takes a long sip, the ice clinking in his glass.

JACK (CONT'D)

Are you an alcoholic?

BARB

Jack! That's not nice! Sorry.

She squeezes his neck playfully, but he wrenches away from her.

JACK

Don't embarrass me. I'm talking to this guy.

Jack locks eyes with Paul.

JACK (CONT'D)
I asked you a question.

Paul stares.

PAUL
Nope. Just having my early morning
scotch. A double.

Jack smiles at this: kindred assholes? Paul turns away
and faces forward. The bartender runs over.

BARMAID
You can't sit at the bar. It's for grown-
ups.

Paul is looking at the barmaid's face as it falls.

BARMAID (CONT'D)
Oh. I'm sorry.

Paul turns and looks at the kid, who has removed his hat.
He is completely bald from Leukemia.

BARB
No reason to be sorry. We can move to
that table over there.

BARMAID
No. Just stay put. What do you want
honey?

JACK
A Coke on the rocks please.

Jack grins shittily at Paul, who narrows his eyes.
Noticing the ample cleavage on Barb, sitting on the other
side of Jack, he decides to engage them in conversation.
He is staring directly at her breasts as he asks:

PAUL
So, where are you two headed?

His forced geniality strikes a strange tone.

JACK
Mom, can we move down another seat?

BARB
Why?

Jack whispers to her loudly enough for Paul to hear.

JACK
Because. He's really creepy!

BARB
He gets like this sometimes. He's excited. We're going to Minneapolis.

PAUL
Wow. Minneapolis. That is exciting!

JACK
It's a special trip, dumbass!

BARB
Jack! Stop it!

JACK
Mom, he doesn't get it. Let me explain, guy.

Jack removes a glossy photo from his backpack. It is of the football player whose poster was in Paul's doctor's office. The photo is of him striking the same ridiculous pose, extending the football heavenward. It reads: *To J, Hang in there tough guy, D.*

JACK (CONT'D)
We're going to meet Demetrius Davenport. The Wish-On-A-Star Foundation put it together. It's going to be great.

PAUL
That *sounds* great.

Paul looks at Barb and smiles. She looks uncomfortable. Paul extends his hand in front of Jack, knocking him back a little.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'm Paul.

Barb shakes his hand.

BARB
Barb.

JACK
Whoa! Watch your reach, Jackson! You almost knocked my ass over.

BARB
Shut up Jack.

PAUL
No, it's okay.

BARB
Where are you headed?

PAUL

St. John.

An uncomfortable silence. Barb seems weirded-out by Paul. He looks at his watch.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Shit. Don't wanna be late. You two have fun now. Good luck.

BARB

Same to you.

Paul picks up his duffel and as he's exiting, behind Barb's head, gives the kid a dirty look.

INT. AIRPORT GATE - DAY

Paul looks over a glossy, colorful brochure for the Caneel Bay Resort in St. John. It details The Self Center, *"Which helps guests realize their own desires through a variety of body and mind approaches."* Suddenly a voice comes over the loudspeaker.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, flight 444 to St. John has been cancelled due to a mechanical problem.

Paul crumples up his brochure.

PAUL

The fuck it has!

He joins a crowd at the ticket desk, groaning and mumbling.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

There's another flight tomorrow at five forty five in the morning. I can put you on that if you like.

The crowd is dispersing.

PAUL

C'mon lady!

Paul looks for support, but finds only an elderly couple.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I'm sorry sir?

PAUL

I am terminally ill! I do not have a day to waste.

OLD MAN
My wife is too!

OLD WOMAN
What?

OLD MAN
He just said he's terminally ill. He
doesn't have time for this.

OLD WOMAN
Good for you! What do you have?

PAUL
Cancer.

OLD WOMAN
WHAT?

PAUL
CANCER!

OLD WOMAN
Liver failure.

PAUL
Right on.

OLD WOMAN
WHAT?

OLD MAN
HE SAID 'RIGHT ON!'

OLD WOMAN
WHY?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I can put you on a flight to Minneapolis
and you can connect there.

PAUL
Minneapolis?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I can upgrade you to first class.

PAUL
It's a *thousand miles* in the wrong
direction!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I'm very sorry. It's the best I can do
sir.

Paul looks as if he's going to carry on with his tirade.

PAUL
Okay, I'll take it.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Paul and the elderly couple move onto an airplane, sitting down across the aisle from one another. Then he hears a familiar voice.

JACK (O.S.)
Well well well...

Paul turns to see he is seated next to Jack and Barb.

JACK (CONT'D)
If it isn't the old boozehound.

BARB
Oh. Hi.

PAUL
Hello again. Change of plans, have to connect in Minneapolis.

JACK
What, are you stalking us now?

BARB
Jack, button it or I'm gonna smack you.

Jack pouts.

JACK
I want to change seats.

BARB
Well, you can't. The plane is starting to move.

PAUL
Your mother's right. You could fall over and kill yourself. We wouldn't want that, would we?

They give each other the stare: "I'm onto you buddy!"

Paul pulls the brochure from his pocket and reads. Jack looks over his shoulder.

JACK
What's a self Center?

PAUL
It's a place that grown-ups go to pamper themselves.

JACK
Sounds gay. Are you a fag?

Barb digs her fingers into Jack's arm and he screams bloody murder.

BARB
Okay, okay, I'm sorry.

PAUL
It's okay.

JACK
Yeah mom, don't get your panties in a bunge.

Paul looks dreamily at the pamphlet.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - NIGHT

Paul makes love to a beautiful blonde inside a hammock on a white sandy beach. An army of island natives in white robes practice Tai Chi around the hammock. Fireworks explode in the night sky. Suddenly he is interrupted by BEEP BOP BOOP!

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Jack is violently playing a Gameboy. Paul looks across the aisle to the elderly couple.

OLD MAN
Good for you for speaking up. And I'm very sorry to hear about your cancer.

PAUL
Thank you.

Paul looks back over at Jack. He is looking plaintively up at him.

JACK
You have cancer?

Paul frowns.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Some time later. Paul has three empty airplane bottles of scotch on his tray. Jack is going on and on about his Leukemia. Paul looks like he's going to kill himself.

JACK

A lot of times I get a fever, chills, night sweats, the flu. Sometimes I feel real weak, and I don't feel like eating so I lose a lot of weight.

PAUL

Yeah, well, mine has spread to my lymph nodes so ---

JACK

My gums bleed when I brush my teeth, I get headaches a lot, bruises, you name it.

PAUL

Yeah...well.

JACK

You still got your hair.

PAUL

My cancer is different. You can't treat it with Chemo.

JACK

Must not be too serious if your hair hasn't fallen out. My doctor doesn't even know how I do it. He thinks I'm some kind of hero or something.

PAUL

I'll probably die before you do, though.

Jack gets a pained, frightened look on his face.

JACK

What?!

Barb leans over, upset.

BARB

Excuse Me?!

JACK

I'm not going to *die* stupid!

Paul looks ashen.

PAUL

I, uh, I meant, um.. Just, I'm a lot older than you. You're just a kid.

Jack gets snotty again.

JACK

Paul mouths 'Sorry' to Barb. She turns away towards the window, frowning.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS AIRPORT - DAY

Paul exits the airplane just behind Barb and Jack.

PAUL
Look. Sorry about that back there.

Barb behaves a little more coldly towards Paul.

BARB
For someone who should be empathetic you sure aren't real sensitive, are you?

Paul doesn't know what to say. Jack, sensing his mother's dislike of Paul, gets an impish smile on his face and decides to goad her:

JACK
Why don't you come with us?

Barb squirms at this idea.

BARB
He can't. He's got to catch another flight, honey.

PAUL
Five hours.

Barb is trying to discourage Paul but not disappoint Jack.

BARB
It's pretty far from the airport. Are you sure you'll make it back in time?

Paul begins to shake his head 'no' but his eyes drift down to Barb's chest. She has undone one more button.

Paul swaggers a little bit from the booze and the plane ride. He fantasizes:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Demetrius Davenport smilingly tosses a football to a glowing Jack. The camera pulls back to reveal Paul feverishly banging a highly aroused Barb behind an equipment shed.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS AIRPORT - DAY

Paul smiles.

PAUL
Yeah. Sure. What the hell.

EXT. RECREATIONAL CENTER - DAY

Barb, Jack and Paul pull up in a cab. The Twin Cities Rec Center is in an urban area. It's swarming with people of all ages. A security guard with a Bluetooth phone in his ear stands at the entrance with a clipboard.

They exit the cab and the driver pulls out their luggage. Barb pays him and he drives off.

BARB
Here, hold my hand.

Jack pulls a football from his bag, grabs his mother's hand and removes his hat, revealing his bald head. He puts on a sad face. Paul stands back and watches as the crowd parts for the sick little kid.

PAUL (TO HIMSELF)
You sneaky little shit.

Barb and Jack make their way to the security guard. Jack turns around and waves Paul forward. He joins them. Barb is speaking to the guard who is looking at his clipboard.

BARB
Volero.

GUARD
Don't see it.

JACK
Maybe they spelled it with a B mom?

GUARD
No Bolero here either.

BARB
Well, you're going to have to let us in.
You can call the Wish-On-A-Star
Foundation. We came all the way from
Rhode Island.

GUARD
I can't call anyone right now, I'm doing
security. Can you step to the side
please?

BARB
Wait a second buddy!

She pokes him in the chest.

GUARD
DON'T PUT YOUR HANDS ON ME LADY OR I'LL
KICK YOUR ASS OUTTA HERE!

Within seconds, three other large men are shoving Barb, Paul and Jack out away from the door.

BARB
I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU TRY IT! YOU'RE
NOTHING BUT A LIMP DICK WITH A CLIPBOARD!

As they run across the street, Jack is crying, Barb is livid and Paul checks his watch. He is nervous. It is clear it's time to move on out.

Paul reaches out to pat Jack on his head, to say goodbye.

PAUL
Hey...

Jack, bawling, buries himself in Paul's arms. Surprised, Paul stiffly puts his arms around the boy, patting his back. He gives Barb a weak smile.

Jack pulls away and Paul sees his brand new buffalo hide jacket is covered in snot. He tries to shake it off and wipes some on a tree, but it's ruined.

Just then, a loud commotion is heard, and **Demetrius Davenport**, surrounded by his entourage, comes from the rec center. He pushes his way towards a mammoth SUV. Jack takes his football and runs towards him.

BARB
Jack, wait!

Jack runs right up to Demetrius, blocking his entrance to the SUV. He holds his football aloft. Barb runs up behind him.

JACK
I'm Jack Volero. The Wish-On-A-Star
Foundation said you wanted to meet me.

Demetrius looks down at Jack with annoyance.

DEMETRIUS
I'm done signing. Get out of my face.

Hearing this rankles Paul and he joins them.

PAUL
He's telling you the truth! He came all
the way from Rhode Island!

Barb looks incredulously at Paul. He looks at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Where in Rhode Island?

She smiles at him.

BARB
Coventry. It's just south of Providence.

Paul raises his eyebrow at Demetrius.

Demetrius looks at Paul, then back at Jack. He takes the
football in his hands. Jack smiles.

DEMETRIUS
See how this works? I sign it, and daddy
turns around and sells it on eBay.

Paul has had it.

PAUL
I'm not his daddy.

Demetrius looks to Barb and then back to Paul.

DEMETRIUS
You know what? I'd tap that ass too.

PAUL
Really? I didn't think conscious women
were up your alley.

The assembled crowd lets out a collective "ooh!"

DEMETRIUS
What you say?

PAUL
Maybe poor little sick kids aren't your
gig. Maybe You'd feel more comfortable
with an eightball and a yacht full of
fourteen-year old girls gone wild.

The whole crowd is frozen. Paul is stunned at his
newfound courage. He looks to Barb and Jack who just
stare at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
C'mon, let's go.

Paul walks across the street, then turns around where the

PAUL (CONT'D)
You guys coming or what?

Demetrius throws the football hard across the street.
Everyone turns to watch it spiraling through the air.

WHAM! It hits Paul square in the nose.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Paul sits on an examining table, a broken nose covered in
an aluminum splint, gauze stuffed in his nostrils. Barb
pulls a curtain back and comes in.

BARB
Hey.

PAUL
Hey.

Barb seems concerned but remains guarded, arms crossed.
She approaches Paul.

BARB
Does it hurt?

She lightly touches his splint.

PAUL
AAAAH!

BARB
Oh my god, I'm so sorry!

PAUL
It's okay.

BARB
And to think, you could've been sitting
in the airport enjoying a twelve-dollar
Sprite.

This makes Paul laugh, but it hurts his nose. Barb
smiles, then catches herself being vulnerable and puts up
her tough exterior again.

BARB (CONT'D)
That was a very brave thing you did
before. Sticking up for my boy.

Paul stares dumbfounded.

PAUL (V.O.)
What the fuck are you doing? Leave! You
don't need another family. You just

Paul abruptly gets up and begins putting on his blood-stained clothes.

BARB
What are you doing?

PAUL
Getting dressed.

BARB
You look like Leatherface.

He looks at himself in a mirror. Bloody clothes, mutilated face, she's right. So what?

PAUL
I gotta get to the airport. Where's my bag?

Barb's eyes widen.

BARB
Oh shit!

PAUL
What?

BARB
I don't know. In all that commotion, we must've left your bag there. Ours too. Maybe the ambulance has it...?

PAUL
C'mon lady, I have a plane to catch.

BARB
Paul, your flight left hours ago.

Paul looks at the clock on the wall. He stands deflated, with broken nose and blood-stained clothes.

PAUL
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?!!!

He pulls back the curtain and reveals a very old man in a hospital bed with two tubes stuck in his nose, looking terrified.

PAUL (CONT'D)
It's okay. I'm a victim too.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Barb, Jack and Paul eat dinner. Barb eats like a bird, Jack picks at his plate and Paul just guzzles wine and

BARB

I'm sure your bag will turn up.

He doesn't look at her. He has discarded his bloody clothes and is wearing a T-shirt that says: "YA DAMN RIGHT I'M FROM MINNESOTA!" and some horrible sweat pants. He finds a dried spot of blood on his new boots but scrapes it off with a fingernail.

JACK

Your eyes are going to be black and blue tomorrow.

Paul looks at the kid like he wants to strangle him.

JACK (CONT'D)

You'll probably look like a raccoon.

BARB

Jack!

JACK

Chill out!

Paul puts his wine glass down and touches his splint.

PAUL

Oooh!

BARB

Why don't you just go up to the room Paul. Between the wine and the Vicodin, you're gonna pass out in a sec.

JACK

HE'S SLEEPING WITH US?!

The entire restaurant turns to see the lady with too much make-up, the bald kid and the guy with the busted face.

BARB (QUIETLY)

Just one night Jack.

JACK

Why?

BARB

There weren't any rooms left. Besides, he's a nice guy.

Paul chokes on his wine.

PAUL

Sorry. Went down the wrong pipe.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Paul stumbles into the elevator. He sees a sign advertising 'SNOWMOBILING ADVENTURES!'. Everything begins to go blurry. PING. The elevator door opens.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Paul stumbles into the darkened room and into the double bed nearest the door, onto his face. He groans in pain.

He rolls over onto his back and passes out. His bloody clothes are piled on a luggage rack in the foreground, a severe snow storm beginning outside the window in the background.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Paul's crusty eyes open to the sound of the television. He sees Jack's bald head against the bed, watching cartoons, the volume turned all the way up.

Paul looks over to see Barb asleep in the bed opposite. He notices his boots have been taken off.

PAUL
Who took off my boots?

Jack doesn't take his eyes from the television.

JACK
Mom did.

Paul thinks.

PAUL
One by one or at the same time?

Jack just turns around and stares at him, confused.

Paul smiles slightly at this. He stumbles out of bed, still wearing his Minnesota T and leisure pants. He peels open the curtains to the biggest blizzard he's ever seen.

PAUL (CONT'D)
FUCKING COCKSUCKERS!

Jack leaps up in excitement.

JACK
I know! It's a megastorm! They say we might get up to sixteen inches!

Paul looks on in horror.

Barb rubs her eyes and awakens, looking out the window.

BARB
Oh my God! It's snowing!

JACK
I know! We're going to be stuck here for days!

Jack jumps up and down on Paul's bed.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Paul walks through the busy hotel lobby, passing an easel featuring a snow mobile reading: 'BLACKHAWK THUNDERCATS!' He sees a phone booth, gets in and dials.

LEE (O.S.)
Hello?

PAUL (ON PHONE)
It's me.

LEE (O.S.)
Hi.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
I'm not in St. John.

LEE (O.S.)
You're not? Where are you?

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Minneapolis.

LEE (O.S.)
I don't understand.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
It's a long story. I'm at a pay phone in a hotel in Minneapolis and my cell phone was in my bag which is missing. It's snowing a lot. Also my nose is broken.

LEE (O.S.)
Look, Paul, we need to talk.

Paul notices Jack walking through the lobby.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Now's not a good time.

Jack spots Paul and runs towards him, throwing open the phone booth door.

LEE (O.S.)
You're always saying---

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Look, Lee, I'll call you back later.

He hangs up. Jack grins at him.

JACK
Who's Lee? Is that your *girlfriend*?

Paul grabs Jack by the shoulders.

PAUL
Look you little shit, I know you're sick and everything but get off my ass!

Jack gives Paul a shit-eating grin.

JACK
Too bad. I think my mom likes you. YUCK!

PAUL
Really?

JACK
She took your boots off, didn't she?

Paul looks and sees the snowmobile sign.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Jack and Paul return to the room. Barb is on the phone.

BARB (ON PHONE)
He's fine... I'm not getting into that with you again....The answer is no...Tony, drop it...Besides, I'm here with someone... Yeah, a guy.

Barb looks at Paul and mouths the word 'Psycho.'

BARB (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Yeah yeah yeah... Goodbye.

She hangs up, takes a deep breath, smiles.

BARB (CONT'D)
All right. Now that *that's* behind us.

Jack has begun to put on his outdoor gear.

BARB (CONT'D)
Jackie, what are you doing, hon?

JACK
Paul's taking us snowmobiling. It's gonna
be rad.

Barb looks at Paul, surprised. Paul shrugs.

PAUL
I figure...it's the least I can do.

BARB
For what?

PAUL
I have no idea.

After an awkward moment, Paul sits on the bed, Barb sits
next to him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Was that your husband? On the phone?

BARB
Ex.

Paul brightens at this.

BARB (CONT'D)
Are you married?

PAUL
Ah, uh, no.

Paul holds up his ringless hand. To Barb it looks good,
but the fake tan has started to rub off on his palm side.
He quickly puts his hand back down.

BARB
Yeah, I can't get rid of this guy. He
uses Jack to stay in my life.

PAUL
Oh. One of those.

BARB
And he's not a nice guy, believe me.

PAUL
How so?

BARB
He wouldn't have stuck up for Jack like
that. He would've just been embarrassed.
Jack being sick just makes him...

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)
uncomfortable. Like he's less of a man
because of it.

PAUL
Well look, I'm not...

BARB
I had no idea what he was really like
when I married him.

Paul ponders this.

PAUL
I know what you mean, once you peel the
layers away.

BARB
Layer.

They both laugh. It hurts Paul's nose and he holds it but
they definitely share a moment as they stare into each
other's smiling eyes.

PAUL
You're divorced?

BARB
In the works. With Jack's leukemia, I
haven't even had the time to finalize it.
And this year hasn't been good. It really
hasn't.

Barb looks as if she's about to cry, then stifles it. She
whispers to Paul:

BARB (WHISPERING) (CONT'D)
Jack's not doing too well.

Paul just stares. Jack interrupts, fully dressed.

JACK
Let's go you turds, get your asses in
gear!

BARB
Oh just shut up!

JACK
Nice attitude.

BARB
Nice mouth. You kiss your mother with
that mouth?

JACK
Yep.

He kisses her on the cheek. She lets out a playful little shriek and hugs him. Paul is oddly moved by this gesture.

INT. TOUR BUS - DAY

Paul, Barb and Jack ride a tour bus with several others through the wintry landscape just outside Minneapolis. Jack sits alone in the row in front of them, reading a pamphlet out loud.

PAUL

It's just a few hours out of town, but I think it'll be worth it.

JACK (READING ALOUD)

Nothing compares to the power of untouched wilderness, stopping to catch your breath on a spectacular scenic overlook, or experiencing the solitude of riding where no one has ever snowmobiled before.

BARB

It's really nice that you're doing this.

PAUL

Stop saying that.

BARB

What? It is. Tony takes Jack to McDonald's and drops him off on the end of the driveway.

Paul laughs. So does Barb, begrudgingly.

BARB (CONT'D)

I wish it was a joke.

PAUL

Look, I'm not going to act altruistic and pretend I'm doing it all for him. It'll be good for me too. It sounds like... freedom.

Paul looks out the window. He sees his own reflection: two deep dark circles have formed around his eyes. He loses his smile.

JACK (READING ALOUD)

Enjoy the breathtaking scenery, spot wildlife such as moose, deer and wolves, or maybe tall timber and deep powder are what you're after.

The camera zooms in on Paul's black eyes and they become:

EXT. SNOWMOBILE RENTAL HOUSE - DAY

Two black snowmobiles racing across the powder into the distance. The camera pans over to the ski lodge/rental house.

INT. SNOWMOBILE RENTAL HOUSE - DAY

Paul stands at the rental counter talking to a clerk. Barb and Jack look around the shop at gear.

CLERK

It's 175 dollars per vehicle for the day. Plus you'll need to rent gear. And the little guy will need a guide. You're lookin' at, oh, eight, nine hundred.

PAUL

Jesus.

CLERK

Hey man, nobody rides for free.

Paul gives him an icy stare.

EXT. SKI LODGE - DAY

Paul and Jack are in full snowsuits: goggles, gloves and all. Paul moves stiffly. Jack jumps up and down. A guide, **Rudy**, moves them towards two machines. Barb stands in the background.

RUDY

Just stay close by me. Keep it around or under eighty. And stay on the trails. We don't wanna lose you when the weather is like it is today.

PAUL

Yeah yeah yeah.

RUDY

C'mon buddy.

Jack hops up on the back of Rudy's vehicle. Paul turns around towards Barb, a worried look on her face. Paul looks ridiculous in his snow gear.

PAUL

Don't worry! It's gonna be great!

EXT. SNOW TRAIL - DAY

Paul is going ninety miles an hour on his snowmobile. He has a giant smirk across his face as the wind and G-forces ripple his skin. He lifts his goggles up. His black eyes are smiling.

PAUL
WOOOOO-WOOOOOO!

Paul looks to Jack. Jack is smiling.

PAUL (SHOUTING) (CONT'D)
Not too bad, huh sport?

Jack gives him a thumbs-up. He is giggling madly.

EXT. SNOW TRAIL - LATER

Rudy pulls up alongside Paul and motions for him to pull over. Jack is shivering.

RUDY
I think we should head back. The kid's freezing.

PAUL
Oh c'mon! I'm just getting started.

RUDY
Look, the weather's gonna get fierce soon. We should turn around.

PAUL
Look, why don't you two go back. Get him some hot cocoa. All right if I spin around a little longer?

RUDY
Jeez mister, I don't know.

PAUL
C'mon man. Don't be a dick about it.

RUDY
Fine. Just stick to the trails, will ya? And if you get into any trouble, You're on your own. Got it?

PAUL
Fine.

Rudy gives a dismissive wave. Jack waves his frozen little arm weakly. They ride off into the distance until

Paul cranks his snowmobile up and zooms off.

Racing among the pines at almost a hundred miles an hour, Paul giggles like a child. Suddenly, something catches his eye. He slows and stops his machine.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Whoa, whoa whoa. What's this, what's this?

Paul's P.O.V.: a large clearing past the pines. Vast, fresh powder, the fading sun in the distance.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Paul does donuts across the large, circular clearing. The pines that lined the trail he was on are way off in the distance.

Paul is giddy as a school girl. Happier than we've ever seen him. Laughing and screaming.

PAUL
YEAH! OH YEAH!

Paul pulls on the brakes and the snowmobile skids out. He is laughing so hard, he is nearly out of breath.

He stares off into the open sky, the snowflakes becoming larger, the landscape overwhelming around him. He takes a big deep breath of air, his chest puffing up. He lifts up his goggles. He smiles.

Then, he hears a cracking. He looks beneath him. The ground seems to be opening. He kicks away some snow. He is above ice.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Oh Jesus no.

He hears some more cracking. He looks around and realizes he is on a frozen lake. His eyes widen. He quickly jumps off the snowmobile, but as soon as he does, the ice buckles under the weight of it.

He watches as the mammoth contraption sinks under, bubbling up in the water.

He removes his hat and runs his hand through his hair.

He walks to the ledge of the ice and looks down, his face reflected in the water.

CRASH! The ice he is standing on collapses beneath his feet and he is half-submerged in water.

With his upper body strength, he pulls himself out of the hole and onto the surface.

He looks into the hole to see the snowmobile sinking to the bottom of the lake. His eyes close for a moment.

He begins to pull himself and crawl off the lake.

EXT. SNOW TRAIL - DAY

Paul has made his way back to the trail, the pines lining him on either side, but it has begun to snow heavily again and he can't see two feet in front of his face.

Added to that, his clothes are waterlogged and his face is covered in ice. And it's getting dark out.

He stops for a moment. He lifts his goggles. He goes to his knees. Breathless. He falls on his back. Shivering.

PAUL (WHISPERING, TO
HIMSELF)

Help me. Somebody help me. I'm sorry.

Suddenly, Paul's brother, Eric, emerges from the snow.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Eric. What are you doing here?

ERIC

I thought you wanted help.

PAUL

You can't help me. You can't even help yourself.

ERIC

Look at you. You have all the answers.

PAUL

I lied to Lee. I told her I had serious cancer.

ERIC

Why?

PAUL

I don't want to have kids. I don't want to be you.

ERIC

You always were a jerk-off.

PAUL

Come on, Eric. Admit it. You've been trying to kill yourself for years. You're

ERIC
You don't get it. There's love here.

PAUL
Don't start with that.

ERIC
You telling me you didn't get a glimpse
when you stuck up for that kid?

Paul is silent. Eric lights a cigarette and turns. As he does so, his house in New Jersey appears.

Eric tosses his cigarette into a pile of leaves. It goes up in flames.

PAUL
The leaves are on fire.

Eric walks away and disappears into his house.

The entire house ignites into a giant ball of flame.

PAUL (CONT'D)
ERIC! WAIT! DON'T GO! DON'T LEAVE ME!

As the house becomes an all-consuming fireball, their light becomes the blinding headlamp of an oncoming snowmobile. Rudy hefts Paul aboard and drives off.

INT. SKI LODGE - NIGHT

Paul sits shivering on a table covered in blankets. Barb talks to Rudy in the distance. Jack hops up on the table and sits next to Paul.

JACK
They didn't want to go back for you. They said it was too dark and the weather was too thick. They wanted to wait until morning. But I made them. I made them go back.

Paul looks at Jack. He is shivering, but there is a look in his eyes that this gesture has genuinely touched him.

PAUL
Th-th-thanks.

Jack smiles.

Paul looks back at Barb. He manages a jittery smile to her. Barb looks skeptical.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Paul sits shivering, covered in blankets. Barb brings two more. Jack stares at him from the other bed.

BARB
Are you sure you don't wanna see a doctor?

PAUL
Positive. B-besides, what's he gonna tell me? You're sick? I have cancer. Hypothermia is a walk in the park.

JACK
Dude. You're like some kind of awesome superman.

Paul shivers but manages a wink to Jack.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Later. The lights are off. Jack is asleep, Barb at his side. Paul still shivers. Barb stirs, looks towards him.

BARB
You're still trembling.

Barb sits up in bed.

BARB (CONT'D)
I could lie next to you. It might help.

Wearing only a long 'Minnesnowda!' T-shirt, her fit thighs visible beneath, Barb gets up, crawling into bed with Paul.

PAUL
Are you sure he's asleep?

BARB
Positive.

Paul's shaking hands make their way up Barb's shirt.

BARB (WHISPERING) (CONT'D)
Oh my god! Your hands are like freezer packs.

PAUL (WHISPERING)
Sorry.

They both start to laugh. Then try to stifle it. Barb reaches her hand down below on Paul. His eyes go wide.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 F.Y.I. Fun fact: A frozen man's penis is
 the first body part to thaw out.

BARB
 There you go. Poor guy.

Paul pulls down Barb's underwear. It's clumsy. Awkward. She climbs on top of him, moans. Stops. Covers her mouth. They both hear Jack's breathing. They go at it a little more. Stop. Jack moves around. They go at it a little heavier, Barb riding on top of Paul, trying to silence her blissful groans.

JACK
 Mommy.

They stop cold. Silence.

BARB
 It's okay. He's talking in his sleep.

Barb is now rocking back and forth atop Paul.

BARB (WHISPERING) (CONT'D)
 Are you gonna come?

PAUL (WHISPERING)
 I don't have to.

BARB (WHISPERING)
 No no. Go ahead.

PAUL (WHISPERING)
 I want you to come.

BARB (WHISPERING)
 I can't. I'll make too much noise. You come. It's fine. Just pull out and come all over my ass.

JACK
 Mommy.

BARB
 He's asleep. Just keep going.

JACK
 I'm not asleep mommy. I'm wide awake.

Barb clenches up tight, just as Paul is letting out an orgasmic groan. Barb sticks her hand over his mouth, muffling the sound.

They both look over, Jack is silhouetted, sitting up in bed. There is a long silence. Barb takes her hand off of

PAUL

Hey pal. Mommy's just warming me up...

Barb slowly climbs off of Paul.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You know...Like Luke Skywalker and the
Ton-ton?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Paul stares at his blackened eyes in the mirror. Barb and Jack are still asleep.

He puts on his bloody clothes. He takes one last look at Barb, the make-up stripped away, peaceful in sleep.

Jack looks like a little angel.

Paul exits the room and closes the door.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

He walks quickly down the hotel hallway, not smiling.

The sound of a jet flying overhead builds in intensity as Paul walks and we are in:

EXT. ST. JOHN POOL BAR - DAY

Paul is standing in four feet of completely clear water. His body pale and flabby against the tanned and toned tourists of St. John. He sips a tropical drink through a straw, sunglasses across the bridge of his metallic splinted nose. He doesn't smile. The scenic beauty is a sharp contrast to his sad demeanor.

He looks up to the sky. Paul's P.O.V.: The sky is clear blue, but tinted a strange red through his rose-colored shades. He moves them back and forth, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. He frowns.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - DAY

Paul walks alone across a white sandy beach.

PAUL (V.O.)

It's nice here. And there isn't a kid in sight. I thought I could discern a childlike scream earlier in the distance, but that was it. The noise was quickly extinguished.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - DAY

Paul removes the bandages from his nose. There's just a little yellowish black bruise under each eye. He tries to smile but it seems strained.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - DAY

Paul participates in a yoga class, everyone in identical white robes.

PAUL (V.O.)
I'm brilliant. I really am. A late bloomer, but still. I could be sitting in Englewood Cliffs, listening to Lisa Hunt wheeze and unscrew her pill bottles.

EXT. NARROW WHITE PATH - DAY

Paul walks with a group of people in white robes down a long white path with palms and bent green grass.

PAUL (V.O.)
I could have a fucking kid!

INT. SAUNA - DAY

Paul is being given a massage by a broad shouldered man who places rocks on his back and rubs his shoulders. Paul's expression is blank.

PAUL (V.O.)
Worse yet, I could be dead. Frozen solid beneath Bald Eagle Lake!

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - DAY

Paul watches the sailboats off in the distance.

PAUL (V.O.)
A psychologist friend of Lee's once told me at a party that I suffered from Anhedonia, the inability to experience true pleasure. I told him to go fuck himself.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - DUSK

Paul practices Tai Chi with a group in white robes on the beach at dusk. He has developed a tan.

PAUL (V.O.)
 Anyway, when you have momentum, nothing
 really gets in your way. Not Anhedonia,
 not even cancer.

Paul makes eye contact with a pretty young blonde. She
 smiles at him, and he at her.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Paul eats alone at a busy restaurant on the beach: the
 very definition of lonely in a crowd. He spots the young
 woman from his Tai Chi class. He waves her over. She sits
 down.

LUCY
 I'm Lucy. I saw you in class.

PAUL
 Paul.

LUCY
 What happened to your face Paul?

PAUL
 Oh this? I had a disagreement with a
 drinking fountain.

She laughs at this silly joke. He smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 No. I tripped over an alligator and fell
 through a plate glass window onto a
 lawnmower.

She laughs even harder.

LUCY
 Oh my god!

PAUL
 Yeah. So what brings you to the self-
 center?

LUCY
 Oh, you know, messy divorce, strained
 relationship with my parents, early
 thirties career malaise. The usual. You?

PAUL
 Terminal cancer.

She laughs even harder.

PAUL (CONT'D)

She holds her hand to her mouth.

He gives her a wry smile. She laughs again.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Paul is fucking Lucy hard but dispassionately under white sheets. Although the setting is idyllic, the sex is perfunctory. He is distracted by the blinking red light on the phone, But continues thrusting.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Later. Paul stares up at the ceiling fan. He does not smile. Lucy kisses his chest.

Paul sits up in bed. Lucy moves over to the side, lighting a joint. She offers it to him. He declines. He turns on the TV.

The movie 'The Champ' is on. Young Ricky Schroeder cries over his father's body, as he lies dying in the ring.

RICKY SCHROEDER (ON TV)
Don't die Champ! I love you, don't die
Champ!

Paul's eyes well up with tears. Lucy looks over at him and laughs.

LUCY
You homo!

He turns off the TV, wiping away his tears, sniffing. He turns away from her on his side. He thinks:

EXT. REC CENTER - DAY

In front of the gathered crowd, Barb holds down Demetrius legs and Paul his arms as Jack kicks and punches him in the stomach. Demetrius screams in pain as the crowd cheers them on.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

He smiles thinking about this. Lucy looks to the blinking light, to Paul who ignores it. He closes his eyes.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - DAY

Paul drinks a glass of orange juice in a white terry cloth robe. He opens the white wicker shutters of his bungalow, revealing the white sandy beach. He looks down to the phone, the blinking red light. He dials "8."

DR. TOLSON (ON PHONE)

Hi Paul. It's doctor Tolson. I'm sorry to bother you on your vacation. Your wife gave me the number. call me as soon as you get this, okay? 212-545-6176.

Paul is puzzled. He hangs up, then dials Dr. Tolson.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

Hi, Paul Mauro for Doctor Tolson.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

One moment please.

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)

Paul. I've been trying to reach you.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

What's up?

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)

Listen. I have some bad news.

Silence. The blood drains from his face.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

I'm...I'm in St. John. Have you ever been to St. John?

Silence.

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)

Once. Long ago. Lovely place. Listen, the chest X-ray came back.

PAUL (ON PHONE)

It's another perfect day. I mean, it's almost intimidating. Have you ever been parasailing?

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex jumps from her balcony window, stark naked. The big yellow curtains billow in the wind. We are above her as she plummets downward, looking up at us and smiling broadly. She looks ethereal and free.

INT. PAUL'S BUNGALOW - DAY

DR. TOLSON (O.S.)

Paul, I hate to ruin your trip, but you should come back as soon as you can.

Paul slowly drops his hand, bringing the phone to his side. He stares at his bare feet. We can vaguely hear Dr. Tolson giving out bad news, although we can't quite make out what he is saying.

WHAM! Paul slams down the phone. He yanks the cord out of the wall and throws the phone out the window onto the sand. A uniformed groundskeeper runs up and stares at it. He looks at Paul quizzically.

PAUL

It's a phone! I didn't throw a baby out of the window! Get a life!

The groundskeeper picks up the phone and walks away with it.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S BEACH - DAY

Completely dazed, Paul walks out onto the beach, staring into the sea. He hears a low scraping sound behind him.

Paul turns to see a small man with a broom, dressed in the attire of a resort employee, sweeping the white sand.

He watches numbly as this man performs his futile task, the seemingly endless beach stretching out beyond him, focusing on a few grains at a time.

He looks at the clouds gathering in the sky.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - NIGHT

The clouds in the sky become the clouds on Paul's lungs. We back away to see that he is looking at a set of X-Rays, riding on a New York subway train. Although he frowns, he looks ridiculously tan against the pale citizens riding the train in New York in the early winter.

Paul stares into space. The conductor's voice booms.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

Seventh avenue is the next stop. Seventh avenue, Park Slope.

Paul hears this and gets off the train.

EXT. SEVENTH AVENUE SUBWAY STOP - NIGHT

Paul walks up the steps at the seventh avenue subway in Park Slope, Brooklyn. He is like a zombie as he comes across a cheese shop, its' windows all decked out for Thanksgiving. Paul's eyes are like black-rimmed saucers.

PAUL (V.O.)

Will I be around for next Thanksgiving?
Will anyone miss me?

He turns to see a tiny bookstore on a corner.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Paul walks in dazed. He is startled by the gentle older woman who greets him.

BOOKSTORE LADY

Can I help you?

Paul stares at her in disbelief. Then he blurts out:

PAUL

Hi. I feel especially awful about myself
and I'm looking for something about
someone particularly evil, more evil than
me. You know... So I can feel better.

The woman stares blank-faced. Then:

BOOKSTORE LADY

There's Hitler.

PAUL

Great.

A large Hasidic woman in the store looks over at him. Paul looks embarrassed and follows the bookstore lady away from her glare.

The bookstore owner reaches up and hands Paul a hardback copy of '*Last Mystery of the Third Reich.*'

PAUL (CONT'D)

Thank you.

BOOKSTORE LADY

You're welcome.

She walks away and Paul tries to read but he cannot focus, his eyes dart to the store window where he sees Brenda's husband, Felipe, standing outside. Paul smiles, happy to see a familiar face and puts the book back on

When he turns back, Felipe is embracing and kissing a woman. And the woman is Lee, Paul's wife. Paul looks like he's been punched in the gut by a horde of Vikings. They walk off, laughing, and Paul involuntary cries out:

PAUL
OH COME ON! REALLY?

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul sits in his darkened apartment, smoking a cigarette. Lee comes in, sniffs.

LEE
Is something burning? Paul?

She turns on the light.

LEE (CONT'D)
Oh my god. I didn't even know you were here. When did you get back?

She notes the cigarette.

LEE (CONT'D)
When did you start smoking again?

PAUL
What difference does it make?

Lee sighs.

LEE
Let me guess what stage you're at now...self-pity?

Paul does not answer. He takes a long drag.

PAUL
I saw you. In the bookstore window.

Lee thinks. Realizes.

LEE
Oh. I'm sorry Paul.

PAUL
I'm fucking livid.

LEE
What gives you the right to be livid at me?

PAUL
I'm dying. Have a little class.

LEE

Oh Jesus. Here we go again.

PAUL

I mean, didn't that make you think twice?

LEE

It did. But you made it impossible for me to be close to you.

Paul stands, pacing.

PAUL

BULLSHIT! You just want kids. You're just moving on. Why not steal poor Brenda's husband?

LEE

Poor Brenda?!!

She looks at him with a knowing disgust. He sits down.

PAUL

Jesus Christ, those born-again really do confess everything, don't they?

Lee stares at him in revulsion.

LEE

You know, you're really something else Paul. You're really something else. Goodbye.

Lee gets up and leaves, slamming the door. Paul smashes a lamp from pottery barn.

PAUL (V.O.)

My father told me never to marry someone smarter than me. "That's how you get away with things," he said.

He looks out the window to see Lee walking away down the sidewalk.

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

But who, really, in the history of mankind has ever gotten away with anything?

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

A week later. Unshaven, unkempt, bloodshot eyes, in a bathrobe with a cigarette dangling from his lips, Paul walks through his filthy apartment, littered with empty pizza boxes, beer cans and booze bottles. Maury Povich plays on the TV.

He goes into the bathroom. He finds a few pill bottles: Vicodin, Tylenol with Codeine.

He throws the pills on the kitchen table and smashes them with a hardcover copy of 'Fatherhood' by Bill Cosby.

He dices the powder up with a razor blade and snorts it off a framed wedding photograph of Lee and himself. He falls back on the couch.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul climbs naked onto Alex's balcony, smiling, climbing the rails. Ring ring ring.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT

Paul comes to and answers the phone.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Lee?

ERIC (O.S.)
Paul? Jesus bro, you sound like shit.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Eric. What's up?

ERIC (O.S.)
Well, Terry wanted me to invite you over for Thanksgiving....

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Yeah okay.

Paul hangs up. His head falls back.

INT. ERIC'S HOUSE - DAY

Thanksgiving day. A familiar scene. We're right back where we started from. Paul eats dinner and tolerates the constant screaming of the children. Resigned. Lifeless.

Eric's oldest son throws a yam that hits Paul in the face. He hardly reacts.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul and Eric stand on Eric's back porch. It is burnt black from a fire. Paul surveys the damage.

PAUL
What the hell happened?

ERIC
Leaves caught fire. Who the fuck knows how.

Eric takes a drag on his cigarette.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Terry wants to have another kid.

PAUL
Are you serious?

ERIC
Yeah.

PAUL
Well...good for you.

ERIC
What?

PAUL
You're alive. You're spawning. This is good.

ERIC
I can't tell if you're joking.

PAUL
I can't either.

ERIC
You're a weird fucker.

PAUL
I think I'm in love.

ERIC
You're in love?

PAUL
I'm in love with a family. A woman and her kid.

ERIC
I thought you hated kids.

Paul smiles.

PAUL
This one's an exception.

Terry shouts out the screen door at Eric.

TERRY
You gonna defrost this fucking pie? It's
not gonna do it itself.

ERIC
Yeah.

Eric absent-mindedly tosses his cigarette into a pile of leaves. He goes back into the house. Paul stomps it out, making sure it's fully extinguished.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul excitedly runs into his apartment, throwing a wet bag of Thanksgiving leftovers on the table and picks up the phone, smiling as he dials.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Coventry. Rhode Island. The number for a
Barbara Volero.

Paul hastily jots down the number and hangs up, dialing again.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Barb! It's Paul. Paul Mauro.

The sound of the phone hanging up loudly can be heard.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Barb?

Paul hangs up and dials again.

PAUL (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Hey, I think we got---

BARB (ON PHONE)
Listen scumbag! Don't ever fucking call
here again!

The phone clicks again. Paul stands frozen, holding the receiver.

PAUL
Happy turkey day.

INT. PAUL AND LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Two weeks later. Paul's beard is fuller, his face more haggard. He is weeping inconsolably, watching television. The camera swings around to show that he is watching Benny Hill chase a half-naked woman around.

Paul turns it off. He stops crying. He thinks. He picks up the phone and dials.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
Barb, it's Paul. Please don't hang up!

INT. BARB'S HOME - NIGHT

Barb sits in the kitchen of her home, on the phone.

*Intercut with Paul's apartment.

PAUL (ON PHONE)
I know it was the wrong thing to do.
Leaving like that.

BARB
Oh, you figured that out? You want to be forgiven? That it?

PAUL
No. Just wondering how Jack is.

Barb is silent for a long time.

BARB
He's doing better.

PAUL
What happened?

BARB
None of your fucking business.

Silence.

PAUL
Anyway. I wanted to say Merry Christmas.

BARB
It's two weeks away.

PAUL
I know. Can I ask you a question?

BARB

No.

PAUL

What kind of tree are you getting this year?

BARB

The same kind we get every year. The fake one down in the basement.

Paul thinks:

PAUL

Listen, I'm coming to visit you.

BARB (SARCASTIC)

Sure. That sounds like a great plan. You can fuck me and ditch my dying son in the morning.

There is a long silence on the phone.

PAUL

I told you I was an asshole. You gonna keep busting my balls? I wanna come and help you have a merry fucking Christmas.

Barb just barely smiles.

BARB

C'mon, give me a break.

PAUL

Look, it's either that or I sit at home listening to Jingle Bells while I stick my head in the oven.

Barb laughs at this.

PAUL (CONT'D)

The really jazzy Andy Williams Jingle Bells.

She laughs again.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm glad my very real suicidal thoughts have brought a smile to your face.

Barb is smiling.

BARB

Paul. It just... It's not so simple as that.

PAUL
 Let me make it up to you. What's your
 address?

Barb contemplates.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Paul's Mazda drives up I-95 with a Christmas tree twice
 the size of the car strapped to its' hood.

PAUL (V.O.)
 I'm going to do it. I'm going to be the
 cancer Grinch this year.

EXT. COVENTRY STREET - DAY

Late afternoon. The cloudless sky is tinged with pink.
 The ground is covered in snow. Paul looks at a Mapquest
 printout with the address 271 Hollyhock Lane. He looks up
 and sees it:

271. A modest house with a nice yard. But dead-set in the
 middle of the front lawn is a disconcerting detail: A
 cement block and a forty foot flagpole with an enormous
 American flag, flapping in the breeze. Then Paul sees the
 faded blue BUSH/CHENEY sign in the bay window.

PAUL
 You gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me.

He pulls into the driveway and gets out of his car. Barb
 cracks the screen door in an extra-large sweatshirt.

BARB
 Hi Paul.

PAUL
 Hi Barb.

BARB
 Nice tree.

PAUL
 Nice flag.

She looks up at it and smiles.

BARB
 It's my ex's. He put it up when the war
 started. I haven't had the time to get it
 removed.

PAUL
Let's get some migrants from Home Depot
to chop that fucker down. I'm buying.

She smiles slightly, as Paul follows her into the house.

PAUL (CONT'D)
How about the sign?

Barb grabs that and rips it into pieces. She hands the
pieces to Paul as he walks into the house.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Well all right.

INT. BARB'S HOME - DAY

Paul and Barb sit in her small kitchen, drinking coffee.
They stare at each other not speaking, sipping.

The kitchen table is littered with Jack's hospital
papers, tons of them, lined with coffee cup rings.

PAUL
Jack's not doing well?

BARB
No. He's not. He's bleeding inside. They
switched him to Clolar. It's something
they give kids when they're doing fine
for a while and then relapse.

PAUL
I'm sorry.

BARB
So did you come all this way to get laid?

PAUL
No.

BARB
This isn't going to work. It's my fault.
I shouldn't have told you to come.

Paul stands up, paces.

PAUL
Look... I'm just... the tree. How about
we just decorate the tree? That'll be a
nice surprise for Jack. And then I'll
just drive away. You won't see me again.
Fair enough?

Barb stands. She slaps Paul hard in the face.

BARB
Fair enough? You sick, selfish son of a bitch.

PAUL
I'm sorry.

BARB
Shut up. What you did to my son is unforgiveable. So you better hope he accepts your apology.

Barb slaps him again. Paul is stunned into silence.

BARB (CONT'D)
Now go get the fucking tree.

Paul runs out.

INT. BARB'S HOME - DAY

Paul pushes the enormous tree through the front door, shedding nearly every needle in the process. When he gets it in, it looks like a twig with a few branches on it.

PAUL
Well shit.

They both look at the pathetic thing laying on the ground. Barb's face contorts into one of amusement.

BARB
Oh.

Paul stands the tree up. Barb begins to laugh.

BARB (CONT'D)
Well, you made the effort.

She laughs harder.

PAUL
It was going to be great.

They both laugh.

BARB
It doesn't matter anyway. Jack's doctor says there's a good chance he'll still be in the hospital for Christmas.

She is on the verge of tears. Paul hugs her and she accepts his embrace. The phone starts ringing. She doesn't answer.

PAUL
Your phone is ringing.

BARB
That's Tony. My Ex. He calls me twenty
times a day. I don't even answer it
anymore.

It stops ringing. Barb grabs Paul's hand and smiles.

BARB (CONT'D)
Hey! You wanna go for a ride?

INT. SUV - MOVING - DAY

Barb drives Paul around town in a giant, flame-red SUV.
Everyone seems to know her. Cars honk. Pedestrians wave.

PAUL
You're popular here.

BARB
It's Jack. Everybody knows about it. He's
like the town mascot now.

They drive by a pond. Barb pulls over.

EXT. JOHNSON'S POND - DAY

A frozen pond just off the road. Both children and adults
skate on it.

BARB
That's Johnson's Pond. Jack and I skate
there every winter. He hasn't been well
enough this year.

PAUL
Very pretty.

Barb is lost in thought for a moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Barb?

She snaps out of it.

BARB
Oh. Sorry.

She drives off.

EXT. WAL-MART - DAY

Barb pulls into the large parking lot of a WAL-MART and turns off the ignition.

BARB
I'll be right back.

PAUL
Where are you going?

BARB
I told Jack I'd bring him a Nutter
Butter.

She gets out and slams the door. Paul watches Barb skip into the WAL-MART. People smile and wave at her. She disappears into the store and Paul is startled at the sudden rapping on his window.

A uniformed cop, broad-shouldered, mid 40's, with dark, slicked-back hair looks in at him. He has intense eyes. The window is open about six inches, so he purses his lips, talking through the crack.

PAUL
Is there a problem officer?

The cop walks around the car and gets in the driver's seat. He stares at Paul.

COP (TONY)
Nice ride huh?

PAUL
The car? Yeah. Yes.

COP (TONY)
Are you comfortable? You look a little
cramped.

The cop toggles the little button adjacent the seat and Paul goes sliding slowly forwards instead of backwards, his harness seat belt choking him a little.

PAUL (CHOKED)
Are we parked in a handicapped or
something?

TONY
Get the fuck out of my car.

Paul realizes this is **TONY**.

Paul nods. He tries to unlock the door, shaking. He finally gets it and opens the door but gets stuck in the still fastened seat belt. He undoes the latch and stumbles onto the blacktop.

Tony gets out and walks around the car towards Paul as Paul tries to hustle away from him.

TONY (CONT'D)

Hold on. Hold on.

Paul freezes, his back to Tony. Tony kicks Paul square in the ass and he falls to his knees. Paul gets up.

PAUL

Hey man. Don't kick me in the ass.

Just as Tony is about to lunge forward, a pack of Nutter Butters hits him square in the forehead.

BARB

Get back in the car Paul!

Paul is frozen as Tony bends over to pick up the cookies. He smirks and throws them back to Barb.

TONY

What a great mother you are. Buying that crap for Jack. Driving around like a whore with this scumbag so everyone can see.

Barb starts to move towards Tony but they are interrupted by a honk. All three look over to see **Tony's girlfriend**, a redhead with clumps of mascara and Lee Press-On Nails in a silver BMW tapping the horn. Barb points to the car.

BARB

There Tony. Heat Miser will give you a lift.

Tony walks to the BMW, He looks at Barb.

TONY

You just assaulted an officer of the law, sugar. Luckily I'm off duty.

Tony smiles a sinister grin at Paul.

TONY (CONT'D)

Nice to meet you Paul.

He gets in the Beemer and they peel off. Paul is frozen.

BARB

You coming?

Paul looks to Barb, terrified.

PAUL
You didn't tell me he was a cop.

BARB
Must've slipped my mind.

PAUL
He wears his uniform off duty?

BARB
He wears it to bed. Well, the gun anyway.

PAUL
Great.

They get in the SUV and drive off.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Barb and Paul walk into Jack's hospital room. It is stuffed with gifts: flowers, toys, silver balloons, even a giant wooden key resting against the window.

Jack is asleep, a blanket pulled up to his chin. He looks very ill. There's an IV taped to his wrist. He wakes up and faintly asks:

JACK
Did you bring the Nutter Butters?

Barb puts them on the bedside table. Jack smiles weakly.

JACK (CONT'D)
Mom? I think I'm gonna puke again.

BARB
It's the Clolar. I thought they weren't going to start you until noon.

Barb kisses Jack on the forehead and sits down next to him. Jack is ignoring Paul, choosing instead to focus on the football game on TV.

JACK
Demetrius is playing today.

BARB
Paul came a long way to see you. Remember last night I told you he was coming? He brought a tree with him.

Jack is silent. Paul gestures to the giant key.

PAUL
What's that?

BARB
The mayor stopped by. Gave Jack a key to the city.

JACK
It doesn't open anything. It's fake.

Jack looks right at Paul.

JACK (CONT'D)
Just like you.

BARB
I'll let you two catch up.

Barb goes into the bathroom and closes the door. Paul takes a seat next to Jack.

PAUL
Hey.

Jack doesn't look at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I know I let you down. I should've said goodbye. I'm hoping we're still pals.

Jack still focuses on the TV.

JACK
Not fucking likely.

PAUL
Hey. C'mon. Don't talk like that.

JACK
Why not? You do.

PAUL
Yeah. But I'm an asshole.

JACK
I saved your life. Remember that, guy? If it wasn't for me, you'd still be freezing on Bald Eagle Lake.

PAUL
I know Jack. I'll never forget it.

Jack's expression is less serious, but he still watches the game. Paul watches Demetrius Davenport in action.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You know what Jack? I remember how sad you were in Minnesota. Disappointed by Demetrius because he wasn't the guy you thought he was. That's just the way it is. They put on a big show about what great heroes they are, but they're just jerks. All of them. I'm no different. Sometimes I pretend to be something I'm not. And I'm not even sure who that is. But I'm trying... with you and your mom. If you're willing to still give Demetrius a chance, can't you cut me some slack?

Jack looks at Paul. He is about to break into a smile but it quickly distorts into a painful grimace.

JACK

OW!

Paul gets freaked out. A nurse, **Laura**, comes rushing in.

LAURA

Jack?

JACK

My wrist hurts!

Laura adjusts the catheter in his wrist.

LAURA

Just a few more hours honey.

Barb comes bursting out of the bathroom, fly still open, black lace panties exposed. Paul notices this.

BARB

What the hell's going on?

She is buttoning her jeans.

LAURA

Everything's fine.

Laura exits.

BARB

Were you really in that much pain baby?

JACK

Yes. And can you zip up your pants please? Paul's checking you out.

Paul gives Jack that narrow-eyed sideways glance again.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Paul sits on the window sill, looking out to the sky. Cloudy. He plays with the giant key. Barb and Jack are both fast asleep. They look peaceful. Paul smiles. Then he hears a deep booming voice coming down the hallway. He stands up.

Tony enters, out of uniform, wearing a shirt buttoned down to his mid chest and a distressed brown leather bomber jacket. He holds a gift wrapped package. His girlfriend is on his arm, holding a giant teddy bear.

TONY

Well, well, well. If it isn't Paul from Minnesota. Hello Paul.

Paul is trying to stay cool.

Barb wakes up, her face tensing. Jack weakly opens his eyes.

TONY (CONT'D)

Hey buddy boy. I brung you somethin'.

Tony places a gift-wrapped package next to Jack's legs. Paul notices his holstered gun as he bends over.

JACK

The only time you bring me things is when you've been a dick to mom.

Barb smiles. Tony looks to her.

TONY

You teach him that language?

Barb shrugs. Tony narrows his eyes at Paul.

TONY (CONT'D)

That's not true Jack. I bring you stuff because I love you. I want you to get better.

JACK

Whatever.

Jack quickly darts up and begins to tear the box open.

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND

There's a card.

The card just falls to the floor, unopened. Jack pulls out an orange and green football jersey from the box, the word *Bulldogs* stitched across the front.

TONY
You get better Jack, coach says he'll let
you play next season.

Jack tosses the jersey aside.

JACK
Yawn. I'm over it. What else?

Tony's girlfriend puts the teddy bear next to him.

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND
We thought you might like this.

JACK
You thought wrong, firecrotch.

Tony gets up in Jack's face, grabbing him by the
shoulders.

TONY
HEY! You don't talk to her like that!

Jack just stares Tony in the eye, Tony releases his grip.
Barb is ready to pummel him. Paul slinks back down to his
seat.

Tony backs away, nervous and sweaty. Jack just grins at
him.

TONY (CONT'D)
Who wants a smoothie? I'm buyin'!

Barb stands up and pulls Paul by the arm.

BARB
C'mon Paul. Let's go.

She pulls him out the door but stops and turns around to
an uneasy Tony. She whispers to him:

BARB (CONT'D)
If you ever lay a hand on my son again,
I'll hit you so hard you'll be shitting
teeth for a week.

Barb and Paul begin to exit.

JACK
Mom, don't go.

BARB
It's all right honey. Spend some time
with your dad. We'll be back.

Jack looks sad but Barb smiles at him. Paul gives Jack a wink. Jack smiles back at him. Tony notices this and frowns. Paul and Barb leave.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Barb comes across Laura, the nurse.

BARB
Will you please keep an eye on my ex?

As Barb and Paul walk away, Laura gives a knowing smile and enters the room.

EXT./INT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Barb and Paul sit in the SUV.

PAUL
He's quite a guy that Tony.

BARB
The fuck do you know? For all I know you're worse than him. I don't even know who you are.

Paul leans back and lets this soak in.

PAUL
You're right. I don't know what it feels like. I'll just shut up.

Barb looks up to the window of Jack's room. She can see the flicker of the TV and she just bursts into tears.

BARB
I feel so powerless. I wake up every morning and I can't believe this is really happening.

PAUL
Listen, if it would be easier, I could just take off.

BARB
You mean easier for you?

PAUL
No, I...

BARB
How do you feel when you wake up? Are you scared shitless about dying? How do you deal with it?

Paul stops and thinks. He really has nothing to offer but empty platitudes.

PAUL
You just gotta go on. One step at a time.
Don't sweat the small stuff. Courage.

Barb looks confused, then she smiles.

BARB
Oh, I get it.

PAUL
What?

BARB
It hasn't hit you yet.

He sits back. He opens his mouth to speak but does not. He realizes she's right. Barb smiles sweetly and pats Paul on the leg. She turns the car on and they drive off.

INT. BARB'S HOME - NIGHT

Barb and Paul decorate the pathetic tree. It isn't so bad once they have it ornamented and wreathed with garland.

BARB
Shit. I forgot the cresh.

PAUL
What's a cresh?

BARB
A cresh. It's a french clay thing.

He looks at her, puzzled.

BARB (CONT'D)
It's a french clay baby Jesus! It's in the basement. Would you get it?

Paul exits laughing. Barb calls after him.

BARB (CONT'D)
It's by the washing machine.

Barb takes a sip of wine, looks at the tree. She smiles.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Stepping down the creaky steps to the basement, Paul sees a bunch of cobwebbed baby toys, a ten-speed bike with a flat tire, the washer and drier, and leaning against the drier, between the Maytag and a cement wall, is a Force 150 crossbow with olive and brown camouflage.

Paul gingerly lifts the weapon. It has some heft to it. He can barely pull back the cord. His whole body shudders. He puts it back. Looks at it. Finds the clay baby Jesus and picks it up.

INT. BARB'S HOME - NIGHT

Barb is admiring the tree. Paul enters.

PAUL
What's with the crossbow?

BARB
I told you he was psycho. I'm just happy he took the guns out.

PAUL
I'm sure he's thrilled we're trimming the tree together.

Barb laughs and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

Paul plugs in the lights, illuminating the room. They smile at one another.

PAUL (CONT'D)
So... What now?

BARB
I'm not having sex with you so don't even ask.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Barb lies awake in her bed. Paul lies on the floor.

BARB
Paul?

PAUL
Yeah?

BARB
 Can you take Jack to see Santa tomorrow?
 The nurse said he'd be strong enough to
 leave the hospital for a few hours and
 you two haven't spent any time alone.

PAUL
 Santa?

BARB
 There's one at the Warwick mall.

PAUL
 Sure.

BARB
 Good.

Barb hops out of bed and starts putting her clothes and boots on.

PAUL
 What are you doing?

BARB
 I'm going back to the hospital.

PAUL
 He's asleep.

BARB
 Doesn't matter. It's just the thought of
 him lying there. Sleep in the bed. I'll
 be back in an hour.

She's out the door. Paul stands up, goes to the window, watches her drive off. He looks at the Mazda. He stares at it long and hard, then shuts his eyes.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - DAY

Paul wakes in a fog. Barb is asleep in a chair opposite the bed. He stands, picks her up in his arms and puts her in the bed, tucking her in. He kisses her forehead. She wakes up.

BARB
 Paul?

PAUL
 Yeah?

BARB
 How much time have you got left?

PAUL
I'm not sure. I try not to think about
it.

Barb pauses. She has a pained expression on her face and
barely squeezes these words out:

BARB
I'm pregnant.

PAUL
Huh?

BARB
I'm pregnant. I'm going to have your
baby.

Paul is stunned.

PAUL
Uh... Uh... Are you awake right now?

BARB
Minnesota. It was an accident, I know,
but I'm having it.

PAUL
Barb...

BARB
Paul. You need to get comfortable with
the idea that I'm going to have your
child. I would have told you before but I
figured you were out of the picture.

PAUL
Shouldn't we...

BARB
I'm not asking you. I'm telling you. I
know you won't be around and I'm okay
with that.

PAUL
Are you sure?

BARB
This isn't about you. It's better if you
leave after a few days. I know you don't
want to be here anyway.

PAUL
Don't I have any say...

BARB
No. Now go take Jack to see Santa.

Barb rolls over and goes to sleep. Paul stands frozen for a moment, then goes downstairs.

EXT. BARB'S HOME - DAY

Paul exits the house. He stands for a moment thinking. He smiles. He gets in the SUV.

INT. SUV - DAY

Paul drives Jack to the Warwick Mall. Jack has his sneakers obnoxiously kicked up on the dashboard.

JACK

Of all the nurses, Laura's got it for me bad. She's crushing on me big time. Right here.

Startled, Paul pulls a sharp, screeching right.

JACK (CONT'D)

Then there's Mandy. She just looks at me and melts. I don't want to hurt her feelings, because Becca likes me more than either of them. Right at the next light.

Paul is getting pissed off at Jack's directions.

JACK (CONT'D)

Cause, this one time they had a fight about who was gonna give me a spongebath. *This* light. You seem really distracted today. Is everything all right?

PAUL

Yeah. Great.

Paul makes the turn and can see the giant mall in the distance.

JACK

THAT'S THE MALL DUDE!

Paul speeds up and takes the exit ramp too fast. He notices Johnson's Pond, just beyond the metal railing where he takes the turn to the mall. Jack is forced to lean against him from the centrifugal force.

EXT. MALL - DAY

Paul zooms into the mall parking lot and screeches to a halt. He looks at Jack with an almost zealot's fervor.

PAUL
READY TO SEE SANTA?

Jack is freaked out.

INT. MALL - DAY

Paul walks into the mall, looking for a directory. Jack grabs his hand. Paul is surprised by this. He looks down at the hand, then at Jack who is looking around the mall in amazement. Paul finds the directory.

PAUL
He's on the B Concourse. Follow me.

As Paul and Jack are riding on the escalator, Paul becomes faint and slips, gripping the handrail for dear life. When they get to the top, a dizzy Paul has to sit on a bench.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Hold up. Hold up.

Paul looks around at the food court and the Christmas decorations, swirling about in a psychedelic haze. Jack's face appears.

JACK
Paul. Are you okay?

PAUL
I'm fine.

Paul puts his head between his knees and spits. Then sits back up.

JACK
Maybe it's your meds.

PAUL
I'm not taking any meds! Would you just shut up for a second?

Paul says this loud and some other people in the mall notice, frowning at him. Jack runs off. A woman with thick, caked-on make-up looks sternly at Paul.

MAKE-UP LADY
That's child abuse.

PAUL
Hey, Tammy-Faye, child abuse would be making a kid stare at you.

The woman is shocked. Paul looks around for Jack, then

PAUL (CONT'D)
You see where he went, Bozo?

Shocked, the woman just points.

MAKE-UP LADY
Through the sunglass hut.

PAUL
Thanks.

Paul saunters off to find Jack.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Paul finds the hordes of parents and children waiting in line to meet Santa. He cranes his neck, looking for Jack. He tries to move ahead. A fat woman with a fatter daughter puts her arm in front of him.

FAT WOMAN
Where do you think you're going?

PAUL
I'm looking for my son. He's in a Minnesota Vikings cap?

FAT DAUGHTER
The boy with the bald head.

FAT WOMAN
Oh.

Her expression changes to one of sympathy.

FAT WOMAN (CONT'D)
They let him go to the front.

Paul looks forward, squinting his eyes to see that, indeed, Jack is sitting on Santa's lap, his hat off, that shit-eating grin on his pale mug. Jack begins to hop animatedly up and down, and Paul moves to the side out of their line of sight.

SANTA
O.K. That's enough little boy.

JACK
Is it?

SANTA
Excuse me?

JACK
That half a boner in your pants says

Paul's eyes go wide in shock.

Santa removes candies from his pocket.

SANTA
Those are Mentos young man.

JACK
Only foolin'. Hey, does that thing itch?

Jack pulls on Santa's fake beard and snaps the elastic back in his face.

SANTA
Hey!

Paul smiles at this.

JACK
Wait a second. Didn't you sell my mom and me a pretzel at Auntie Anne's a week ago?

Paul is really laughing now. Santa looks around to see if anyone is catching this.

SANTA
You must be confusing me with someone else.

JACK
It's all right. I know you're not the real Santa.

A bunch of mothers in the front of the line put their hands over the ears of their kids.

Paul makes a move to grab him but he's just enjoying this too much to interfere.

SANTA
Why would you say that?

JACK
You mean other than the beard, your Nikes, the stomach pad that smells like six Christmases worth of B.O. and the Coor's light on your breath?

The entire line is aghast. Kids are crying. Paul is laughing. And a couple of security guards are descending.

SANTA
How do you know what Coor's Light smells like?

JACK
My old man drinks it. He's a low-rent
phony like you.

Jack hops off of Santa's lap.

JACK
Plus, if you were for real, I wouldn't
have gotten fucked with the toys I got
last year.

The entire crowd lets out an audible gasp. As the
security guard goes to grab Jack, Paul intervenes and
swoops him up.

PAUL
I got this one guys.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Paul and Jack walk silently through the parking lot. Paul
is smiling.

PAUL
That was pretty funny back there.

JACK
You won't tell my mom?

PAUL
Nope.

Jack smiles.

INT. MAZDA - DAY

Paul and Jack drive back from the mall. Paul looks sad.
He glances over to the passenger seat to see a sleeping
Jack. Peaceful. He holds an empty Nutter Butter wrapper
in his hand and the corners of his mouth are stained with
Peanut Butter.

INT. BARB'S HOME - DAY

Paul walks in, exhausted. Barb looks beautiful, lounging
on the sofa, reading a book next to the lit up Christmas
tree. She smiles at him.

BARB
How was Santa?

PAUL
Terrific.

He smiles back at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
How are things around here?

BARB
Well, the phone's stopped ringing.

PAUL
That's good, right?

BARB
I don't know. It scares me.

PAUL
Why?

BARB
Because it means he's ready to take it to
the next level.

Paul rolls his eyes.

PAUL
Awesome.

Paul and Barb are startled by the phone ringing.

BARB
Perhaps I spoke too soon.

PAUL
Sit down. I'll get it.

She sits back on the couch. Paul answers the phone.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Hey Tony? I think it's time you moved on.

Paul hangs up the phone and takes it off the hook.

In a moment, a horn starts violently honking from outside. Paul and Barb run to the front door and open it to see Tony peeling away in his Beemer with his girlfriend in the passenger seat. He screams out the window:

TONY
NICE FUCKING MAZDA, FAGGOT!

Paul closes the door and chains it. Barb moves to the couch. He turns around to see her beaming brightly. She holds her arms out to him.

BARB
Come here tough guy.

He moves towards her. She puts her arms around him. And they engage in a long, wet kiss.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul and Barb make passionate love, vastly different from their first awkward encounter. They smile and laugh and stare deep into each others eyes. They kiss deeply, caressing each other everywhere.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Post-coital. Barb and Paul lie holding one another tightly, eyes wide open.

PAUL
It hit me by the way.

BARB
What did?

PAUL
That I'm going to die.

BARB
I'm sorry. That's terrible.

She laughs.

PAUL
Thank you.

She playfully shoves him. He smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I always felt, not God necessarily, but *something* was looking out for me. I mean at me. Monitoring. "There goes Paul, he's fixing the sink." "There's Paul eating a Falafel." But there's no one there. No one.

Barb pulls his face close to hers.

BARB
I'm here.

She kisses him. He embraces her.

PAUL
You know, I could stay. If you wanted me
to.

BARB
Is that what you want?

PAUL
Yes.

BARB
Fine.

They kiss. Paul nestles his head against her and goes to sleep.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Later. Barb is fast asleep. Paul is wide awake. He decides to slip on his boxers and head downstairs.

INT. BARB'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Kitchen is dark. He walks to the refrigerator and opens the door, turning away to shield his eyes from the light, he notices that Tony is sitting at the kitchen table, his knuckles clenched, his giant watch causing a glare..

Paul is frozen staring at him.

TONY
Help yourself.

PAUL
Jesus. You scared me.

TONY
I know. You left the back door open. I mean, what's the sense of chaining the front if you're gonna leave the back wide open?

PAUL
Yeah.

TONY
You can put your cock away.

Paul looks down and notices his dong hanging out. He puts it back in his boxers.

TONY (CONT'D)
Make yourself a sandwich. Then come and sit down.

Paul nervously pulls out two pieces of wheat bread and a jar of Mayo. He spreads the Mayo on the bread and shakily presses the slices together. He puts it on a plate and sits opposite Tony.

Tony pulls the chain on the light hanging over the table. It makes him seem vampirish.

TONY (CONT'D)
You know there's cold cuts. Salami, pickles.

PAUL
I'm okay.

TONY
That's a pathetic sandwich.

PAUL
I'm not even hungry really.

Paul forces himself to look Tony in the eye.

TONY
Jack tells me you have cancer. Is that true?

PAUL
Actually... It's a funny thing... I didn't...and now I do... so...

TONY
So there's really no point in killing you.

Silence.

PAUL
Not really.

Paul takes a bite of his Mayonnaise sandwich and quickly spits it out onto his plate.

Tony leans forward.

TONY
Listen. I gotta run. But I want you to relay a message to my wife. I'd tell her myself but she's not taking my calls. Plus when I see her in public, she has a tendency to throw things at me.

PAUL
The Nutter Butter.

TONY
Yeah. Whatever. The message...

Tony stands up. Paul gears himself for death.

TONY (CONT'D)
Is that Jack is going to be spending
Christmas with my girlfriend and me.
You'll tell her?

PAUL
Absolutely.

TONY
Good. And stay away from my kid or I'm
going to kill you anyway. Enjoy your
sandwich.

Tony walks out the back door and Paul can hear his car
zoom off.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - DAY

Paul awakens. Alone. Could it have been a dream? He hears
Barb rustling in the kitchen and goes downstairs.

INT. BARB'S KITCHEN - DAY

He walks in to find Barb cooking eggs and bacon and
pouring coffee. And a Mayonnaise sandwich with a bite
taken out of it on the kitchen table.

PAUL
Barb...

BARB
Tony was here.

PAUL
How did you know?

BARB
I could smell the Aqua Velva.

PAUL
He scared the shit out of me.

BARB
What did he say?

Paul just stares at her for a moment. Her face sinks.
Then:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Jack's room is empty, save for the useless key to
Coventry.

BARB

Where's Laura?! She knows better than
this!

NURSE

She has the day off. It's Christmas eve.

BARB

How could you just let them take him?!?!
He's in the middle of a Chemo cycle!!!

NURSE

His father kept saying how much he just
wanted him home for Christmas. I...

Barb just stares at Jack's empty bed.

Paul stands in the corner in a kind of paralyzed agony.

INT. BARB'S HOME - NIGHT

Barb is weeping inconsolably on the sofa. Paul holds her
tight. The Christmas tree lights blink on and off.

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Barb is asleep. Paul is wide awake. There is a time-lapse
dissolve which takes us into:

INT. BARB'S BEDROOM - MORNING

An exhausted Barb still sleeps. Paul is wide awake. He
looks over at the clock: Six A.M. He gets out of bed and
puts on his clothes.

INT. BARB'S KITCHEN - DAY

Paul finds Tony's info in an address book.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Paul grabs the crossbow from next to the drier.

He grabs an arrow and a tip in a toolbox.

He grabs the crossbow, throwing it over his shoulder.

INT. MAZDA - DAY

It has just begun to snow, and Paul drives his Mazda with purpose, the crossbow visible in the back seat.

EXT. TONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul pulls the Mazda to the side of the road in front of Tony's house. It is a well-to-do neighborhood. Tony's is a white brick, three story colonial with a large chimney. It has a long, curvy driveway, an enormous front door with a gigantic wreath hanging from it.

Paul flips on his hazards. He gets out of the car, the crossbow slung over his shoulder, his fist clenching an arrow.

He begins his ascent up the driveway.

He stops at the front door and rings the bell. He takes the arrow and, with great consternation, pulls the steel wire backwards, locking it in place. His whole body convulses from the pressure of it.

He waits about ten seconds. Then, picking up his right foot, he rings the bell again. Soon, he can hear stirring inside and he sees a figure through the curtained side window.

Tony opens the door. They stare at each other: Tony, in his silk bathrobe and slippers. Paul, shuddering as he points an arrow square at Tony's chest. Even his face is spasming from holding the wire back. Tony's girlfriends voice can be heard from inside the house.

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND (O.S.)

Who is it?

TONY

No one.

The men are in stand-off mode for a few seconds. Then, Tony makes the slightest lurch towards Paul. Paul points the weapon downward and accidentally releases.

They stare at one another, then both look down. The arrow is sticking out of Tony's slippered foot, the foot nailed to the floor.

TONY (CONT'D)

Tony falls backwards and lands in the doorway. Paul tosses the crossbow in a bush, steps over him and into the house.

INT. TONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul enters the large home and sees a gigantic fake tree with what looks like hundreds of presents under it. As Tony's girlfriend enters the room from the kitchen with a cup of coffee, Paul ascends a spiral staircase.

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND

Tony, what's in your foot?

Paul hears a blood-curdling scream and then Tony gasping:

TONY

Call 911! Call 911!

Paul tries the first door, a bathroom. A second door: the kids room.

INT. KID'S ROOM - DAY

Paul lifts the covers off the top bunk. It's the girlfriends' kid. Fat and slobbering.

He tries the bottom bunk. Jack sleeps soundly. Paul gently tries to rouse him.

PAUL

Jack. Jack.

Jack sleepily opens his eyes. He sits up. He puts his arms around Paul's shoulders.

PAUL (CONT'D)

How fast can you get dressed?

INT. TONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul quickly carries Jack down the stairs.

TONY

How much blood am I losing?

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND

The ambulance is coming. Oh my god! I'll get some ice.

Tony's girlfriend goes into the kitchen. Jack is still half-asleep as Paul carries him over Tony through the front door. Tony is so focused on his foot he doesn't even notice.

EXT. TONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul is carrying Jack down the driveway. Jack looks back towards the house. Rubbing his eyes, he sees his father laying in the doorway.

JACK
What's going on?

Paul is getting his keys out.

PAUL
Nothing. It's all good.

Almost at the car, Paul freezes as he can hear Tony's girlfriend scream from the house:

TONY'S GIRLFRIEND
HE SHOT MY BOYFRIEND! SOMEBODY HELP ME
PLEASE!

Jack gives Paul a stern look.

JACK
Put me down.

Paul places Jack on the ground. He stares up at him.

JACK (CONT'D)
You shot my dad.

PAUL
He deserved it. C'mon, let's go have a
nice Christmas.

Jack begins to cry. Big, heaving sobs. Paul is looking around waiting for the sirens. Paul grabs Jack's hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Let's go.

Jack wrenches his hand away.

JACK
I'm not going with you.

Paul crouches in front of him and speaks with intensity.

PAUL

Your mom loves you more than anybody in the world ever could. And we're both gonna die soon. You and me.

JACK

You're going to die!

Jack looks at Paul for a moment. Then he takes off back towards the house.

Deflated, Paul watches Jack run back inside. Paul gets in his car, turns off the hazards, starts the ignition. And then he hears Jack's voice:

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

WAIT!

Jack is running back towards the car, this time with his Minnesota Vikings cap in hand. Jack hops in the car, breathless.

JACK (CONT'D)

I was just getting my hat.

Paul smiles.

INT. MAZDA - DAY

Paul smiles as he drives a sleepy-eyed Jack home. Jack puts his mittened hand on top of Paul's and grabs it tight. Paul looks down at this, clearly moved.

INT./EXT. BARB'S HOME - DAY

Paul and Jack practically kick the door open. Barb is staring at the Christmas tree, but she immediately turns around. Tears fill her eyes. Jack jumps into her arms. She looks to Paul, signals him to join them. He just slowly nods his head 'no'. She looks confused.

The sound of sirens can be heard in the distance. Barb listens to them knowingly. Paul steps out onto the porch.

PAUL

I should probably just go. Things get bad when I stick around.

Barb, holding Jack in her arms, pops open the screen door. She listens to the sirens getting closer. She laughs.

BARB

You think?

This makes Paul laugh too.

Paul gets in the still running Mazda. He rolls down the window and calls to her:

PAUL
You'll be all right.

Barb laughs again.

BARB
I need you to tell me that?

He smiles at her. She smiles back. A deep, knowing understanding between the two of them. Jack sleepily hugs his mother. Paul puts the car in reverse and peels off down the street.

Barbs eyes are beginning to tear, but still she smiles. She looks to her son and takes him inside. Still smiling.

EXT. COVENTRY STREET - DAY

Two police cars follow Paul in quick pursuit. Their lights flashing, their sirens blaring. He drives with a strange, sad smile on his face. And although his speed is well over 100 MPH, he seems eerily calm.

Paul floors it. He recognizes the road he is on.

He looks off in the distance, to the mall where he took Jack to see Santa.

He smiles and looks up. One of those 'God Speaks' billboard is above him. It reads: "Will the road you're on get you to MY place?" - God. Paul laughs. But in his revelry, he loses focus of the metal railing separating him from the frozen pond dead ahead.

EXT. JOHNSON'S POND - DAY

Travelling at an alarming speed and taking the sharp turn, the car breaks through the guard rail.

We are now in the moment at which the film began: The car sails in slow motion over a young girl skating on the ice. She watches as it floats over her head...

And lands. WHAM! Right onto the ice.

Paul's head hits the dashboard and the windshield shatters. The hood buckles.

The car goes slip-sliding across the pond. Skaters race to get out of the way.

Birds skitter from their branches, shorn of leaves. They flap their wings against the sun, gently peeking through a haze of clouds. The light flickers across Paul's face as the car moves forward.

PAUL (V.O.)

You're gonna go out anyway, might as well go big, right?

Paul looks over to the passenger seat. The empty Nutter Butter wrapper lays there and flaps a little from the breeze coming through the cracked windshield.

The cops stop their vehicles on the road and get out to watch.

Paul looks at the ice-skating girl outside his window. She looks like an angel, all dressed in white. He smiles as his car drifts farther from her.

And like a newborn child, Paul looks at the world around him as if for the first time: the sky, the sun, the fluttering birds, the children with wonder in their eyes. He seems to understand something in a new way.

He looks at himself in the rearview mirror. His front teeth are cracked and his lip is bleeding.

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

At least you did something. At least you made somebody else happy for a change.

The car slides to a patch of thin ice. He hears the sound of the ice breaking beneath him.

He makes eye-contact with the terrified skater girl, moving farther away from him as the car slithers onto the thin ice.

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

I hope this girl will skate away and tell some reporter exactly where I went under, so Barb and the kid I'll never meet can skate over me years from now.

The car stops moving. Paul sits still. He has plenty of time to get out and escape but he does not. He sits, calmly smiling. At peace. Everyone surrounding the car watches in silence. Not moving an inch.

Paul looks past the curious skaters to two snowmen on the banks of the pond. One, a large man and the other a small child. He observes the stick hands touching each other.

He grins. The stick hand of the large snowman falls off his round torso and into the snowbank.

His eyes refocus to the young skater girl. A small stream of snot runs down from her nose. She wipes it on her rainbow-colored mittened hand, without a hint of selfconsciousness.

CRASH! The ice breaks and the car is completely submerged under water.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Paul smokes a cigarette naked on Alex's balcony. He peers over the edge and smiles.

INT. MAZDA - DAY

Paul's car fills with water as he watches fish go by.

PAUL (V.O.)
I'll never know if it's a boy or a girl.
Whether he'll break bottles on this
frozen lake when he gets older, or smoke
pot on a humid summer night and imagine
he sees my ghost. Or her. Could be a
girl. That'd be a kick in the pants.

The water is nearly up to Paul's chin. He looks out the window through the hole in the ice. He can see the sky, slightly cloudy, the wind blowing snow flakes.

The water is now above Paul's head. He smiles and some air bubbles escape his mouth.

EXT. JOHNSON'S POND - DAY

The tires touch the bottom of the pond and the camera slowly pulls away from the car.

PAUL (V.O.)
Now's a good time to figure out the
future of the world. Now's a real fine
time to finally show some interest.

EXT. JOHNSON'S POND - DAY

The camera tracks the young skater girl as she races away from the sinkhole, the water bubbling up in the distance.

THE END.

