

(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

DELUSIONS OF A GARDEN-VARIETY

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(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

OVER BLACK:

TITLE: 10:53PM. FEBRUARY 14th, 1975.

FADE IN:

EXT. IRISH BAR - NIGHT

Run-down. Wind carries TRASH down the street as a DOG barks.

The bar's door BURSTS open -- HANK HERTZWELL (50s, coarse) falls out onto the concrete.

The door SLAMS shut. Hertzwell staggers up, shouts --

HERTZWELL
Put a fucking sign up if you don't
want someone pissin' there! Assholes.

He PUNCHES the air -- loses his balance -- stumbles.

Hertzwell catches himself on a wall. He clutches his chest, breathes heavy, wobbles away.

INT. BENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Smoke wafts from a JOINT through a tight and cluttered apartment. BENNY (20s, smooth) sits at a desk, feet up.

He holds a PHONE to his ear. Looks at a pile of books on the table -- "WRITTEN BY HANK HERTZWELL" on the covers.

BENNY
Listen, I dunno what y'all mean by
"litigate", but Mister Hertzwell
knows the score.

A beat.

BENNY (cont'd)
There ain't no point in talkin' 'bout
suin' us, he'll be there. I ain't one
to judge, not in my nature -- but
he's actually a lot better now'days!

EXT. HERTZWELL'S STREET - NIGHT

Dark and narrow. Ex-motels and boarded-up houses.

Hertzwell writhes in pain on the sidewalk. Beyond drunk, he clutches SCOTCH to his chest and screams into the night.

HERTZWELL
Heeeeeeeelp! Help!

A faint wind rolls through the concrete jungle.

Hertzwell tries to HEAVE his torso up -- he groans in AGONY and settles back down on the concrete.

He lets out a heavy exhale.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Five minutes. Every drunk can stand,
if you give them five minutes.

With resignation, Hertzwell stares into the black sky.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
I've already been down here for two.
Maybe one-and-a-half. That makes
three more. Then I can stand. I can
do that. Ten feet -- that's it.

A COP CAR rolls by, stops -- a window lowers and COP 1 (young) pokes a FLASHLIGHT out into the street.

Hertzwell sticks his arm out to block the beam of light.

COP 1
Hank?

The engine cuts. Cop 1 and COP 2 exit, loom over Hertzwell.

COP 2
Hank Hertzwell. 'Bout half-hour ago,
we got a call from a coupla ladies
sayin' a creepy weirdo was on the
ground, holdin' a bottle like a baby
and hollerin' like a bird. Is that
you?

Hertzwell cranes his neck at them -- squints. Slurs.

HERTZWELL
Do I know you? Lookit, I fell over --
hit my head. That's all. I'm not
dangerous. I'm not some punk. I'm not
gonna stick anyone. Just pick me up,
carry me ten feet, and I'm at my
front-door.

Cop 1 and 2 glance at each other, look down at Hertzwell.

COP 1
Where you been tonight?

HERTZWELL
A friend's.

COP 2
You got friends?

HERTZWELL
Fuck you.

COP 1
Oh!

COP 2
Woah, simmer down, Hank. We ask
respect for officers of the law, and
I'm just askin' questions here.

Cop 1 shines the flashlight directly into Hertzwell's face.

COP 1
You been drinkin', Hank? What ya got
there?

HERTZWELL
Just cut the horseshit and take me to
jail, will ya?

His head flops back onto the concrete.

INT. JAIL - DRUNK TANK - NIGHT

Bleak, a room full of DRUNKS.

Hertzwell enters -- the door shuts behind.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Drunk tank. Humanity's unwashed
asshole, bent over in rancid glory.

With a few tentative steps, Hertzwell scans the room:

SOME are unconscious, OTHERS stare at the ceiling. One sits
and defecates in the public toilet, as a VOMITING MAN pukes
in a corner.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Apparently, in AA, they talk about
having a "moment of clarity". Mine
came when I realised I was meant to
be in a place like this.

Hertzwell waddles over to a seat, sits down.

An ANGRY DRUNK stands at the PAYPHONE, receiver to ear.

ANGRY DRUNK
She saids I done what?!

Hertzwell keeps his eyes to himself. Slumps in the chair.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
There was always something comforting
about scum.

An ELDERLY WOMAN pokes him.

ELDERLY WOMAN
I'll suck ya dick for a dollar.

HERTZWELL
I'll pass, thanks.

The Angry Drunk SLAMS the phone against the wall, walks away, leaves it to dangle.

A beat. Hertzwell looks around. He gets up, walks to the phone. He hangs it up, puts in a quarter. Dials.

Waits.

Someone on the OTHER LINE picks up.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Hey, Benny. I'm gonna have to give
you a different address.

The Vomiting Man hacks up BLOOD, to no reaction.

EXT. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

A CAR idles outside. Hertzwell exits the jail, approaches.

He opens the door and clambers in.

INT. BENNY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Benny drives, taps on his wheel.

Hertzwell has half his body out of the WINDOW, as he THROWS up onto the road and the side of Benny's car.

He pulls back in, wipes his mouth, raises the window.

A beat. Benny stares straight ahead.

A HULA-GIRL wiggles on his dashboard.

Hertzwell looks at Benny, looks out at the road.

HERTZWELL

Uh. Sorry. About this.

BENNY

You're good, Mister Hertzwell. Least you didn't miss your flight -- I got us onto the next one.

HERTZWELL

Oh, fuck. I can't do a flight.

BENNY

Not with that attitude, partner.

HERTZWELL

No, seriously. Can I cancel?

BENNY

Uh, Mister Hertzwell, ya signed a contract. Y-Ya already spent the money! Ya can't cancel.

HERTZWELL

But I can't do it.

BENNY

Sure ya can! All's it is is reading some poems, right? How hard can that be?

Hertzwell leans back, puts his hand to his mouth. Tries very very hard not to throw-up again.

BENNY (cont'd)

Hey, I read that one you did about the guy eatin' lunch at the park last night, seein' all them young couples? Wantin' to leave so bad he done leaves his sandwich? Man, that's the *best* description of loneliness I seen. 'Bout how hard it is, bein' alone and all that?

HERTZWELL

It was --

Hertzwell burps -- swallows. Grimaces.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
It was about *needing* to be alone, but
thanks.

The car quietens. Benny drives silently.

Hertzwell looks out at the road -- sees a sign: "GAS
STATION, HALF-MILE".

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
We're gonna have to make a stop.

BENNY
Mister Hertzwell, we *need* to make
this flight. I-I already scheduled in
some airport bar time, alright?

HERTZWELL
We're pullin' over.

Benny relents, nods.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Quaint, in the middle of nowhere. Benny leans on his car,
smokes a joint. He seems happy.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Quiet, cramped with stock. Hertzwell peruses the BEER aisle.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Some prick with a doctorate at Oregon
State thinks I'm a genius. Just the
idea someone like him likes someone
like me is nauseating.

He grabs a sixer of something cheap.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Hertzwell CHUGS a beer on the way to Benny's car.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
College kids. The fuck do they know?
How to shit in someone else's mouth?
They'd have crucified Faulkner, but
they want me there?

He throws the empty CAN to the side, gets in.

The car starts.

INT. AIRPORT LOUNGE BAR - DAY

Wide and modern.

Benny and Hertzwell sit by LARGE WINDOWS -- through them, PLANES take-off and land outside.

Hertzwell stares into a glass of whiskey, sways on his seat.

HERTZWELL

--And I'll tell you somethin' else about these ivory tower cocksuckers, these martini-drinking, limp-wristed, daddy's money motherfuckers. They'll pat you on the back, and disinfect their fucking hand after. All they wanna do is wheel me in, poke at me, gawk at me, treat me like I'm that fuckin'--fuckin' poor bastard King Kong or something. It's *bullshit*.

He can barely keep his head up. Benny clicks his fingers in his face to keep him alert.

BENNY

C'mon, Mister Hertzwell, no good speakin' like that. Ya gotta stay positive.

HERTZWELL

Uh-huh. Positive? Positive about what?

BENNY

Lotta things!

HERTZWELL

Positive about being able to wipe my own ass?

BENNY

You're a guest of honour! Aren't you even just a lil' bit excited?

HERTZWELL

Have you been listening to a fucking word I've said?

BENNY

It's about inspirin' the next generation. The youth of today!

Hertzwell gives a short laugh.

HERTZWELL

Oh, yeah? Since when did you become my fucking publicist?

BENNY

Since ya fired the last one for "lookin' Jewish". Why ya so down on yourself all the time?

HERTZWELL

Live a little.

Benny looks out at a plane taking off.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

I feel like I'm dying.

BENNY

Yeah. Hate to do this, Mister Hertzwell, but they're boardin' soon. Ya gotta hurry up.

Hertzwell finishes the glass with one swig. They get up.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

A PLANE sits on the track. PASSENGERS board.

Benny helps Hertzwell up the stairs, who clings onto the hand-rail for dear life.

INT. AIRPLANE - FLYING - DAY

Engines hum under a quiet flight.

Hertzwell sits at a window, Benny beside him. Benny reads a comic-book as Hertzwell stares at clouds, drinks a whiskey.

An AIR STEWARDESS walks down the aisle with a CART.

AIR STEWARDESS

Any drinks, snacks?

Benny looks at Hertzwell. He's absent. Benny turns back.

BENNY

We're good, thanks.

The Air Stewardess smiles, carries on down.

Hertzwell looks at her as she leaves -- stares at her ass as she gets further away...

METALLIC SCREECHING roars through the plane --

The front half of the plane TEARS off!

PASSENGERS and SEATS rip out into the sky as the fuselage FALLS through the air --

People SCREAM and CRY as the Air Stewardess CLINGS on for dear life -- moments from being sucked out --

AIR STEWARDESS

Hank! Save me! Save me! Please! I need you!

Hertzwell BOLTS out of his seat, into the aisle --

He CLIMBS up the seats toward the Air Stewardess as debris FLIES by him.

He grabs her by the waist and PULLS her down -- they fall with the fuselage --

Land in a ROW OF SEATS, the Air Stewardess conveniently on top of Hertzwell.

She holds his face, looks into his eyes.

AIR STEWARDESS (cont'd)

Oh, Hank, how do you do it?

HERTZWELL

Shut up and kiss me.

They passionately kiss.

The blood-curdling screams continue.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - FLYING - DAY

Hertzwell snores against the window. Benny reads a comic.

Benny looks over -- DROOL hangs from Hertzwell's mouth.

With a napkin, Benny wipes it away.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

Large, bright and colorful. A "GO BUCKEYES!" banner hangs on the wall.

STUDENTS set up chairs in front of a small STAGE.

INT. TAXI - MOVING - DAY

Hertzwell stares out of the taxi window, wooden.

Benny checks his WATCH, nervous. The TAXI DRIVER listens.

BENNY
(to Taxi Driver)
Okay, buddy, just hit this right and
gas it, we can run the rest.
(to Hertzwell)
We can still make it on time.

With a nod, Hertzwell shrugs Benny off. Benny time-checks.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
I get why Ernie blew his head off.

The Taxi Driver hits the right.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

More STUDENTS enter, fill out the chairs.

An INTERN walks onto the stage, which has a TABLE and a CHAIR on it. He adjusts the MIC-STAND.

INT. TAXI - MOVING - DAY

The Taxi Driver puts the pedal to the metal.

Hertzwell fills an empty WATER BOTTLE with vodka in the back, tries not to spill it.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

Chatter echoes through the place.

The Intern fastens the MICROPHONE to the stand, leans in:

INTERN
One, two. One, two.

Feedback HISSES through. The Intern recoils.

INTERN (cont'd)

Sorry!

The FACULTY check their watches, murmur.

FACULTY MEMBER

I told you we shouldn't have blown
the budget on this.

The Intern fiddles with the mic on stage.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - AUDITORIUM - DAY

The taxi SCREAMS to a halt.

Benny scrambles out, runs to the other side, opens the door
and helps Hertzwell out.

They run toward the auditorium.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

Loud.

The FACULTY check their watches, look at each other.

From the other side of the hall, the doors SWING open --

Hertzwell doubles-over, breathless. Benny smiles.

The Intern runs over.

INTERN

Hey, you good?

BENNY

Yeah. Good to go.

INTERN

Sir? Do you need five minutes? Some
water?

Hertzwell raises his hand.

HERTZWELL

No -- It's... I'm fine. I have my
own.

BENNY

We're good.

The Intern nods, leads Hertzwell to the stage. The audience APPLAUDS, some wolf-whistle.

Benny walks to the back of the audience, grins as he watches Hertzwell take the chair.

Hertzwell composes himself. The applause dies down. Silence takes over. Hertzwell stares into the crowd. Looks lost.

Benny's face falters.

Breathing in, Hertzwell picks up a BOOK on the table by his side. One of his. He opens to a page.

HERTZWELL

There's a futility
In tenderness.
When arms are
In arms, bodies
Together
You sink.
Sink into the womb
The dark, the warmth
The quiet room.
She looks at you
As predators reign
Outside's so far away
You never felt pain.
You could live there,
Forever
and the rest
A shrapnel of time
Held in the chest.
This night will end
As the sun rises,
Crests of light
No more surprises.
And morning come
A beacon, a summons:
"Raise, ye weary men"
It shouts, as you
are Born again.

A beat. Applause. Hertzwell drinks from his bottle.

LATER:

Q&A session. Hertzwell scans the room, uncomfortable.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Uh, you.

He points.

STUDENT 1 stands.

STUDENT 1
Thank you for the readings today,
Mister Hertzwell. I wanted to ask --
where do you get your ideas?

HERTZWELL
Brunettes, mostly.

He points at another.

STUDENT 2
Mister Hertzwell, do you consider
yourself part of the Beat Generation?

HERTZWELL
Who cares?

He points at another.

STUDENT 3
Love your work, Mister Hertzwell.
Would you recommend writing as a
career?

HERTZWELL
Are you fucking serious?

Some laughter.

LATER:

Students file out and leave.

Hertzwell disembarks the stage. Benny comes to his side.

BENNY
You did great, Mister Hertzwell.

HERTZWELL
Let's get the fuck out of here.

They walk on. Benny spots someone.

BENNY
Oh, there's someone you should meet.

Benny takes Hertzwell by the reluctant arm and chauffeurs
him to DOCTOR MARIA INSKO (30s, understated).

She speaks with a few COLLEAGUES.

BENNY (cont'd)
Doctor Insko? Mister Hertzwell.

Maria turns and looks at Hertzwell, she lights up. Offers her hand. Stiff, Hertzwell shakes it.

MARIA
Mister Hertzwell, it's an absolute pleasure to finally meet you.

HERTZWELL
You're Doctor Insko? You're a woman?

Benny grimaces, leaves.

MARIA
I'm the head of the English department here at OSU.

HERTZWELL
And you like *my* work?

MARIA
I wrote my thesis on your short stories.

HERTZWELL
They must be handing doctorates out for anything now.

Maria laughs.

MARIA
Let me introduce you to my colleagues.

Hertzwell shakes the hands of COLLEAGUE 1 and COLLEAGUE 2.

He turns back to Maria.

HERTZWELL
So, uh. Do you drink?

MARIA
Not at two in the afternoon, no, but I do drink coffee. Want to come to my office?

HERTZWELL
Sure.

Maria smiles at Hertzwell, leads him away.

INT. MARIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Cavernous, with a desk, piles of books and neatly-sorted paperwork. Stately and quiet.

Hertzwell inspects Maria's walls -- the accolades, the shelves of literature, the pictures.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

She wouldn't look at me twice if she didn't know who I was. Or be so repulsed she wanted to curl up and die.

Maria sets two cups of COFFEE down on the desk.

MARIA

Creamer?

HERTZWELL

Black's fine.

He keeps to the walls. Finally, Hertzwell turns to her.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Where's Insko from?

MARIA

It's Polish. And I believe Hertzwell was originally German, right?

HERTZWELL

Originally. Got yankified at Ellis Island. Do you also know my pant measurements?

MARIA

I know you don't usually do these kinds of events.

Hertzwell takes a seat at her desk, takes up his coffee.

Maria studies him.

MARIA (cont'd)

Honestly, I'm surprised you agreed to come in the first place.

HERTZWELL

My driver, Benny, bugged me about it. He's a good kid -- little dumb.

MARIA

Well, I want to thank you, on behalf of the English department, for doing this. I think you inspired a lot of young people today.

Hertzwell derisively snorts. He drinks the rest of his coffee, wakes up a little.

HERTZWELL

Why did you want me here?

MARIA

Do you want me to be honest?

HERTZWELL

Preferably.

Maria shifts, straightens.

MARIA

This department is under-funded and out-performed. I've had to let people go. Let me tell you -- that doesn't make you popular with the troops. It would be dishonest of me to say you being here doesn't light a fire up management's ass about taking me seriously.

HERTZWELL

Yeah -- forget the politics. That isn't my question. Why me? You could've had any random asshole with a typewriter and a Pulitzer on the West coast, why me?

The question catches Maria off-guard. She laughs, nervous.

MARIA

Well, Mister Hertzwell--

HERTZWELL

Please, call me Hank.

MARIA

--You, in particular, have a way of cutting through the *noise*. I think. I don't know -- forgive me, but, I find you sort of *fascinating*, in a way. You know?

HERTZWELL

Are you blowing smoke up my ass?

MARIA

You're the one who asked.

A beat. Hertzwell smirks. Looks away.

MARIA (cont'd)

Listen, feel free to say "no". But, some of the staff were thinking of having a small reception for you tonight, in the faculty room. Now, don't worry, I told them you'd probably want to be on the next plane out of here, but it would mean a lot if you could--

HERTZWELL

I'll go.

Maria stops -- leans back.

MARIA

Really? Are you sure?

HERTZWELL

Will you be there?

MARIA

I will.

HERTZWELL

I'll be there.

Maria softens.

MARIA

That's great news!

Hertzwell takes a sip from his water bottle.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Small and grimy.

Benny puts LUGGAGE BAGS down on one of the single beds.

Hertzwell sits on a mattress, rubs his forehead.

BENNY

How long we stayin' here?

HERTZWELL

Day or two. Don't you want a vacation?

BENNY

Hell, what you says goes, Mister
Hertzwell.

Benny unpacks Hertzwell's SHIRTS on the bed, folds them.

BENNY (cont'd)

Just outta character, y'know?
Thoughts ya said you hated bein' away
from LA.

Benny carries a pile of shirts to the CLOSET, places them on
top of a shelf.

Hertzwell pulls out his wallet, grabs some CASH.

HERTZWELL

Benny?

Benny turns around.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Sixer of beer and some smokes.
Something cheap.

BENNY

You got it.

Benny takes the money and leaves.

With a sigh, Hertzwell lies down on the bed.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A RECORD PLAYER crackles out SOFT ROCK. Benny listens as he
lies on his bed.

Hertzwell smokes and drinks by the window.

HERTZWELL

Why didn't you tell me Insko was a
woman?

BENNY

I didn't think it mattered.

HERTZWELL

Still. Ya never brought it up.

BENNY

Brought what up, Mister Hertzwell?

Uneasy silence settles in the room.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
He wouldn't get it. Too green.

Hertzwell exhales a cloud of smoke.

HERTZWELL
Ah. Just forget it.

Benny sits up, furrows his brow.

BENNY
What? You wanna bang this broad,
Mister Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL
Watch it.

BENNY
Jeez, sorry.

Cautious, Benny lies back down.

Hertzwell smokes, looks out of the window.

The MOON hangs in the sky.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
When you're alone for too long it
gets harder to remember what people
are like. Maybe being alone's a bad
thing after a certain point. Still,
it's stupid to think they won't
disappoint. Everything disappoints.

Benny taps to the beat of the song on his lap.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
But she seems different. Better.
Real. Why did she seem different?

INT. OSU ENGLISH FACULTY ROOM - NIGHT

THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT congregates in a book-lined, palatial
place, drink and eat. Crisp JAZZ plays in the room.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
I was a specimen to them. King Kong.
A vestige of some other age. Flailing
in decay. In madness. They viewed me
like they'd view an oddity in space.
A nobody. Everybody. But she seemed
different. Why did she seem
different?

Maria and her colleagues are in mid-conversation.

Professor LAURY (30s, thin and refined) chimes in:

LAURY

He looked a lot less homeless than I expected.

OTHERS join -- EDWARDS (40s) and HUBURG (60s):

EDWARDS

Did you see the lines in his face? He looks ill.

HUBURG

The man's as I expected -- I mean, really, the laureate of the underworld? Who could be better suited?

MARIA

I don't know, there's a certain *sadness* about him, which I didn't anticipate.

EDWARDS

Really? You thought a man like that wouldn't look anything *but* on death's door? He looks like his work -- ready to roll in the grave!

HUBURG

When is he supposed to get here, anyway? I guess we shouldn't presume he'd be punctual.

LAURY

Oh, I'd suppose he's throwing up in a bar somewhere by now.

The faculty laughs. Maria remains silent.

MARIA

Alright, jokes aside -- let's remember why we're doing this, okay? The man's an artist, and our guest--

LAURY

And Greg from administration is gonna swing by in half-an-hour, and you want us on our best behaviour. Right? You can simmer down, Maria, okay, we get it.

Maria bristles. Huburg sips his wine.

HUBURG
Yeah, I don't think it's *us* you'll
have to worry about.

The door to the lounge opens -- Hertzwell stumbles through the entrance, drunk beyond conscience.

All turn and greet him. Maria walks over.

MARIA
Mister Hertzwell! Thank you for being
here, we are honoured.

HERTZWELL
Uh, thanks.

She takes his COAT, hangs it.

Hertzwell approaches the glob of suits and ties. He holds a BOTTLE OF WINE.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
I brought this.

Huburg raises, takes the bottle, inspects it.

HUBURG
You're a Malbec type, hm? Never had
you figured for that.

HERTZWELL
This? I thought it was grape juice.

Huburg laughs. Hertzwell forces a smile.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
I wanted to stick that bottle so far
up his ass, he'd cry red for weeks.

LATER:

The faculty and Hertzwell sit around and drink. They stare at him intently, as he avoids eye contact.

LAURY
Is it true you still smash up rooms
and slash your hands when you get
drunk?

HERTZWELL
Yeah.

LAURY

You're a little old for that, don't
you think?

Hertzwell shrugs. His head wobbles slightly.

He pours himself another drink.

Maria gets up, walks to the record player.

MARIA

(to the room)
Any preferences?

HERTZWELL

(to Maria)
Do you have Bach?

She looks through the VINYLs.

EDWARDS

Fan of the classics? Man of
surprises. What's your favourite
movement from Beethoven's fifth
symphony?

HERTZWELL

Second.

Maria pulls out "Bach's Greatest Hits".

MARIA

We *do* have Bach.

She puts the vinyl on the turntable. The needle falls into a
groove and Bach fills the room.

Maria checks her watch. Awkward silence.

HERTZWELL

Uh, so, Maria--

Huburg pipes up.

HUBURG

You know what would be riotous fun?
If you could give us a poetry
reading, Mister Hertzwell.

MARIA

Grant, this man is our guest, he's
not here for our amusement--

HERTZWELL

It's no bother, Maria. No bother at all.

(to Huburg)

You want one of mine?

HUBURG

See, he's happy to! Of course, Mister Hertzwell. Give us your best shot.

Hertzwell gets up and walks over to his coat.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

Dance little monkey, dance. I'll give 'em something to talk about over their cocktails and opinions about ballet. They're mad. Crazy. Fuck 'em.

He pulls out a small book from the pocket and walks back.

He stands next to Maria, pages open.

MARIA

You don't have to--

HERTZWELL

No, no. It's my pleasure. *Really.*

Hertzwell flips through the book.

Lands on a page. He breathes in.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

(reading)

I want my innards, torn
Torn from my belly,
Devoured in scorn.
My guts to sever
Like red ribbons in a mound
The unending tether,
Tumbling toward the ground.
Kill me quick, kill me slow
Rid me of life
The heave, the throw--

Anger raises in his voice -- he takes a swig --

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

--Let them rip my eyes
Rip me head to toe
Let them cut me with knives
Cast my corpse below--

LAURY
(to the faculty)
Not bedtime reading, I can tell you
that much!

Huburg and Edwards laugh.

Hertzwell turns to Laury and SWINGS for him --

GREG FROM ADMINISTRATION (50s) enters --

Hertzwell's fist MISSES Laury's face --

Laury recoils --

Hertzwell trips, loses balance --

COLLAPSES into the table, SMASHES through it.

The faculty shriek.

Blood OOZES from a gash in Hertzwell's head. He's out cold.

HUBURG
Dear Lord!

LAURY
The table!

Maria runs toward the phone, dials 9-1-1.

She looks at Greg From Administration across the room, who
stares back at her in bewilderment.

EXT. SUBURBS - DAY

Large houses and white-picket fences along a green and
peaceful road. A blue sky hangs above.

A CAR pulls onto an immaculate driveway.

Hertzwell gets out of it, well-groomed and in a suit.

He walks up to the front door -- it opens as he reaches it.

Maria stands in the doorway, pregnant.

She beams at him.

HERTZWELL
Hi, hon.

MARIA

I'm so glad you're home, darling.

They hug and kiss.

GUNFIRE erupts in the distance--

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Small and sterile. Hertzwell sleeps in a hospital bed.

Benny shakes him.

BENNY

Mister Hertzwell? Mister Hertzwell?

Hertzwell stirs awake, grumbles.

HERTZWELL

What the fu-- I'm still here?

BENNY

'Fraid so, Mister Hertzwell, but look -- I brought you a notepad and a pen, like you asked.

Benny hands Hertzwell the items -- he looks at them, puts them down on the table by his side.

Hertzwell's hands are bandaged.

HERTZWELL

Jesus. When are they letting me out of this fucking place? It's a cut.

BENNY

Can't say, don't know.

HERTZWELL

Well, it better be soon. Feel like I'm going crazy in here.

BENNY

Oh, don't be dramatic, Mister Hertzwell! Least you didn't break your neck. 'Magine that. Could have been worse.

HERTZWELL

I'd prefer my head had split like a fucking orange. Can you smell all that bleach? It's like its seeping into my brain.

BENNY

It ain't too bad. I mean, look, ya got pillows, a sheet -- shit, this place is a damn sight cleaner than what ya used to! 'Least their ain't new organisms growin' in the walls 'ere.

There's a knock at the door. A DOCTOR enters (40s, sharp).

DOCTOR

Mister Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL

When are you people gonna release me?

The Doctor walks over to Hertzwell's bedside with a glum look. She turns to Benny.

DOCTOR

Um, excuse me--?

BENNY

Benny.

He shakes her hand.

DOCTOR

Benny. Could Mister Hertzwell and I have the room for a few minutes?

BENNY

No problem. Hey, uh, y'all sell condoms up in here?

DOCTOR

No.

BENNY

Alrigh'.

(to Hertzwell)

That Chinese chick, in room twenty-three-A? Hard to tell, man, but I think she been givin' me the "let's fuck look", know what I'm sayin'?

HERTZWELL

Nice.

Benny leaves.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

She's actually Korean.

DOCTOR

So. We ran those tests, because there were a couple things we didn't like in the initial exam.

HERTZWELL

Yeah, and I'd like that fucking gallon of blood you took back, by the way. Is all this bullshit just so you can keep me and charge another day?

DOCTOR

Mister Hertzwell...

She pulls up a nearby chair and sits down. Looks at him.

DOCTOR (cont'd)

Mister Hertzwell, you have leukemia.

A beat.

Hertzwell's face falls.

HERTZWELL

What?

DOCTOR

It's a cancer of the blood.

HERTZWELL

I know what leukemia is. What do you think?

DOCTOR

Well, we originally thought the extent of your liver damage pertained *mostly* to your lifestyle. However, upon further examination... It appears that the cancer has spread from the blood into your lymphatic system, and from there into your liver. I'm sorry to inform you, but our current prognosis is that this is terminal.

Hertzwell throws his hands up.

HERTZWELL

Fuck this. I'm gettin' a second opinion.

DOCTOR

That is your right, yes, but--

HERTZWELL

(angry)

It *is* my fucking right! And I'm exercising it. I'm gettin' a second opinion -- from a real doctor, this time. A fucking *man*.

Ugly pause.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Can you get the fuck out of my room, please?

The Doctor nods, leaves.

Hertzwell lies in silence.

He covers his face with his hands.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Light drizzle. A MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR (20s) smokes outside. Hertzwell exits the hospital, joins him.

HERTZWELL

Let me bum one.

The Man In A Wheelchair gives him a cigarette. He's missing a few teeth -- dirty, maybe an addict.

Hertzwell lights it, puffs.

MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR

What you in for?

HERTZWELL

Fractured my neck goin' down on a broad. You?

MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR

Car accident.

HERTZWELL

Don't look too bad for a car accident.

MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR

Y'should see the driver. He's dead.

Man In A Wheelchair relaxes his body, sighs.

MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR (cont'd)
Tree branch came in through the window, took his face off. Poor motherfucker, man.

Hertzwell looks off in the distance -- smokes.

HERTZWELL
You know a good bar 'round here?

MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR
Depends. What you looking for?

HERTZWELL
Some place dark. And unpopular.

INT. BAR - DAY

Dark and unpopular. Hertzwell sits alone on a stool, drinks scotch from a glass and keeps his eyes forward.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Race is on. 'Bout time. What gets me first -- myself or the cancer? Weak men die of cancer. The strong kill themselves.

Hertzwell counts out change on the bar. He takes it, gets up and heads over to a JUKEBOX.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Now I'm just like every other jerk-off with a sob story. Goin' around, thinking he's special 'cos of some pain. Meet a woman like Insko, get cancer.

As he looks at the MUSIC SELECTION, Hertzwell stays -- tries to stand straight.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
God's last laugh. Like she'd want a sickly old man anyway. Fuck, I'm pathetic. Pipe dreamin' as always.

He slots in the coins. Bashes a button.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Hemingway knew when to call it quits. Strong men kill themselves.

Something harsh plays. Hertzwell returns to his stool.

He picks up his glass, drinks.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Maybe tonight. Maybe I get in a fight
tonight. Maybe I get punched -- maybe
they crush my head like a fucking
balloon, pop, lights ou--

MAZY (30s, drifter) sits on the stool next to Hertzwell.

MAZY
Hey!

HERTZWELL
Hello?

MAZY
Was it you who put this song?

HERTZWELL
Yeah.

MAZY
I love this song.

HERTZWELL
I punched the buttons at random.

MAZY
You're funny. What's your name?

Hertzwell finishes his drink, signals for another to the BARTENDER. He turns to Mazy.

HERTZWELL
Himmler. Nice to meet you.

MAZY
Mazy. Charmed.

They shake hands. The Bartender delivers another scotch to Hertzwell, who picks it up.

MAZY (cont'd)
So, Himmler. Wanna buy me a drink?

HERTZWELL
Whaddya want?

MAZY
Long Island iced tea.

Hertzwell whistles at the bartender.

HERTZWELL
Long Island iced tea for the lady.
Put it on my tab.

BARTENDER
Sure thing.

The bartender goes and makes the drink.

MAZY
You from round 'ere?

HERTZWELL
No. I'm a writer.

MAZY
Ooh, you smart-smart.

MAZY (cont'd)
What you writin' about?

HERTZWELL
Me, mostly.

MAZY
You an interestin' guy?

The Long Island iced tea arrives. Mazy sips at it.

Hertzwell looks Mazy straight-on.

HERTZWELL
Alright. Let's quit the runaround
here. How much?

MAZY
Twenty dollars for a half hour.

A beat.

HERTZWELL
Sure.

They both get up.

EXT. BAR - PARKING LOT - DAY

The sound of Hertzwell and Mazy kissing in a beat-up CAR.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
It's good to feel like a teenager
again. Worst part of dying old is you
didn't die young.

The car starts to rock on its side.

MAZY (O.S.)
You sure you don't wanna use a
rubber?

HERTZWELL (O.S.)
Baby, with my disease -- a rubber
won't do much.

The rocking quickens.

Hertzwell groans -- the rocking stops, the car stands still.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Thing is, if you are gonna die old --
no point in doin' it alone.

The sound of a belt buckle -- the car door opens.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mid-afternoon. The NEWS plays on the TV as Benny smokes a joint out of a window.

NEWS PRESENTER (ON TV)
--ecretary of State, Henry Kissinger,
expressed further concerns that South
Vietnam's position is untenable.
Predicting Saigon could fall to the
North Vietnamese Army, possibly in
just a few months--

Hertzwell stumbles in. Benny exhales a cloud of smoke.

BENNY
Hey. Did ya know they sent my brother
out there?

Hertzwell looks at the TV: a gunfight in the jungle.

HERTZWELL
What is it with you and the Orient?

BENNY
He didn't come back. Some kid on his
squad got scared, pulled his rifle --
shot my brother square in the head
'cos he thought he was VC. I don't
keep no grudges, though, kid was my
age. Shit, if I was in the jungle I'd
probably done similar. Kid hung
himself, coupla years back.

Stumbling, Hertzwell turns the TV off. Points at the joint.

HERTZWELL

Smoke enough of that shit and *your* head's gonna be mush.

BENNY

Nah, it's cool, man. The guy at the gas station said this shit's clean.

Hertzwell sits down on his bed, stares to the floor. He clutches his chest, stops, looks at Benny.

HERTZWELL

When can you drive?

BENNY

Anytime ya need. I'm actually better after some reefer.

HERTZWELL

Okay. I need to buy some nice clothes.

Benny puts his joint in an ashtray and gets up. He grabs his keys and goes for the door -- Hertzwell is still on the bed.

BENNY

Uh, Mister Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL

(breathless)

Just... Just give me five minutes.

BENNY

No problem.

Benny waits by the door. Hertzwell tries to compose himself.

INT. MARIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria drinks coffee and sorts paperwork.

There's a knock at the door.

MARIA

Come in.

Hertzwell enters, wears a cheap suit.

Maria continues to sort her work.

HERTZWELL

Hi.

She looks up -- stops, stares.

MARIA

Sorry, Muhammad Ali and George Foreman are down the hall.

HERTZWELL

Yeah, about that -- I wanted to come and apologise. For breaking your table.

MARIA

Okay. So?

HERTZWELL

So, I'm sorry.

MARIA

Good, I'm glad you're sorry. You nearly cost me my job. I had to spend two hours with human resources explaining your little stunt.

Not sure what do with himself, Hertzwell puts his hands in his pockets and looks to the floor.

Maria sighs.

MARIA (cont'd)

How's your head?

Hertzwell turns -- scans the walls.

HERTZWELL

Better. May have knocked some sense into it.

He looks at her.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Um. I'm happy to replace your table.

Maria lets out a smile, sets her cup down.

Hertzwell furrows his brow.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

What's so funny?

MARIA

Laury was actually kind of... *Proud*,
that you wanted to hit him.

HERTZWELL

Smug bastard.

She laughs.

MARIA

Right? He said it felt like being in
one of your stories.

HERTZWELL

Maybe I *will* write about him.

MARIA

You want to give him a bigger ego?

HERTZWELL

It will be disparaging.

MARIA

Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure.

HERTZWELL

Every name under the sun I'd use to
describe that prick. Believe me.

Silence creeps in.

Hertzwell avoids Maria with his eyes.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Well. Anyway. That's it. Better let
you get back to it.

MARIA

I appreciate you coming in, Mister
Hertzwell.

HERTZWELL

No problem. And it's Hank.

Hertzwell opens the door, eases through it --

MARIA

How long are you in town?

He stops, turns back and looks at her. He lingers on the
sight for a couple moments.

HERTZWELL
Fuck it. Would you like to go to
dinner with me tonight?

A beat.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Hertzwell fastens his tie in the mirror. He grabs a comb,
runs it through his hair, looks at himself.

Benny and SANG-HEE (20s) enter, laughing.

BENNY
Woah, Mister Hertzwell. Whatcha all
dolled up for?

HERTZWELL
I'm going on a date.

BENNY
(genuine surprise)
You?

Hertzwell shoots Benny a look.

BENNY (cont'd)
Sorry.

Benny holds Sang-Hee by the waist.

BENNY (cont'd)
Anyways, Mister Hertzwell. This is
Sang-Hee.

SANG-HEE
Nice to meet you.

HERTZWELL
Sure.

BENNY
You lookin' good, man.

Done, Hertzwell grabs a bouquet of FLOWERS, turns to Benny
and Sang-Hee.

BENNY (cont'd)
Who's the lucky lady?

HERTZWELL
Insko.

BENNY

That Oregon State chick?

HERTZWELL

She's the *head* of the English department.

With that, Hertzwell pulls out his wallet, hands a few dollar bills to Benny.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Scotch. Smokes. Cheap.

BENNY

You're drinkin'? Might wanna hold off 'til you see her.

HERTZWELL

I was drinkin' scotch before you were in your father's balls, punk.

BENNY

I'm just sayin', Mister Hertzwell, ya don't wanna get too--

HERTZWELL

Fine, I'll get it myself.

Hertzwell puts the money back in the wallet and leaves.

Sang-Hee looks at Benny.

SANG-HEE

Jesus, he's an asshole.

BENNY

Sometimes. He means well, though. Anyways, y'all smoke pot over in the Kor-eas?

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A small CAR pulls up outside -- Maria's. She honks.

Hertzwell emerges from one of the rooms, walks down, holds the flowers behind his back.

Maria pops the passenger door open -- Hertzwell enters.

MARIA

Y'know, we could have set you up somewhere a slight better than this.

HERTZWELL

Hotels make the rooms too nice. I like the stink of other people.

He gives her the flowers.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

These are for you.

MARIA

Oh, you are so sweet. Thank you.

She takes them, smells, puts them in the back.

The engine starts, the car drives off.

INT. RESTAURANT - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hertzwell paces. Drinks from a flask.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

The fuck am I doing? More to the point, what the fuck is *she* doing? Cans like hers, the brains to boot -- the fuck is she doin' with me? Maybe she just wants a story for a boozy circle-jerk in the faculty room.

He stops, sighs -- looks at himself in the mirror.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

Jesus, Hank, what's *happened* to you?

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Classy and slow. Hertzwell and Maria sit at a table.

Maria reads the MENU.

MARIA

Red or white?

HERTZWELL

Whatever's their best.

She looks up.

MARIA

Must say -- never had you pegged for a place like this. Are you still apologising?

HERTZWELL

Can't I do *something* nice?

MARIA

Just surprised, is all. Guess there's more to you than I thought.

HERTZWELL

Well, there you go. Seems you really can't psycho-analyse someone through their work.

MARIA

Disparaging my profession aside, you can -- to a degree. You have a habit of making yourself rather bare in your books.

HERTZWELL

I'm just honest.

MARIA

Which reveals more than you realise.

Hertzwell smiles. Leans in.

HERTZWELL

Since you already know me so well. How long was I married to my ex-wife?

MARIA

Seven months.

HERTZWELL

What does that tell you?

MARIA

You're hard to live with.

HERTZWELL

Right. Now, she was a whole lot dumber than you. So, what are you doing here?

MARIA

What am I doing here? You asked me to dinner. I agreed. That's why I'm here.

HERTZWELL

But do you want to be?

MARIA

I do.

HERTZWELL

Why?

MARIA

Because you're interesting.

A beat.

MARIA (cont'd)

You try really hard to find reasons for people not to like you, you know that?

HERTZWELL

Call it prior experience.

Maria laughs. Hertzwell leans back.

MARIA

Want to know what I think?

HERTZWELL

You're the one with the doctorate.

MARIA

I think it's a *little* performative.

HERTZWELL

Really? That's what you think of me?

MARIA

I do.

HERTZWELL

Clearly, I've made a terrible impression.

MARIA

No, no. Just how I see it.

HERTZWELL

Wow. Y'know, you should be a shrink. Literature is wasted on you.

MARIA

Oh, there's overlap.

The two look at each other. A nice quiet settles in.

Maria straightens.

MARIA (cont'd)

There is something I've always wanted to ask you.

HERTZWELL

I can still get it up.

MARIA

Are you happy?

A beat. Hertzwell snorts. The question bemuses him.

HERTZWELL

That's the question? Am I "happy"? Well, uh. Let me think. One day, you wake up and realise it's been three years. Then ten. Fifteen. Twenty. So on and so on. Holidays, birthdays, they come and go. All the same, never right. Some point on the way, things calcify. You calcify. You get stuck. Like a record. Skipping. Repeating. So all you do then is spend your time waiting out the clock. And I'm sick of it. But other than that-- I'm pretty cheerful.

Maria smiles, lets out a short laugh. Hertzwell smirks.

Slow, Maria moves her hand across the fabric of the table -- it meets Hertzwell's, and they clasp together.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

I had a dream about you.

A WAITER arrives.

WAITER

Good evening -- may I start you with some drinks?

Hertzwell keeps his eyes on Maria as the Waiter readies his notepad and pen.

HERTZWELL

Wine. Something expensive.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Hertzwell stumbles out of the restaurant, drunk. Maria has her arm around him.

They laugh as they stagger down the street.

Maria stops.

MARIA

Wait -- wait, where did I park my car?

Hertzwell looks down the street, turns back to her.

HERTZWELL

Where even are we?

Maria laughs.

MARIA

No, seriously.

They look into each other's eyes. Linger.

Hertzwell catches something in his peripheral -- he looks up, sees a BIRD on a street lamp.

HERTZWELL

Oh. Watch this.

Hertzwell bends down, picks up a rock.

He straightens up, aims for the bird --

MARIA

What are you--

He THROWS the rock straight at the bird -- it HITS --

The bird FALLS to the asphalt, SPLAT. Dead.

HERTZWELL

Bulls-eye!

Hertzwell laughs, looks to Maria -- she stares back in horror, takes a few steps back.

MARIA

What the fuck is *wrong* with you?

Maria shakes her head at him, walks away. Hertzwell takes a step toward her --

HERTZWELL

What? It was a joke. Maria--

MARIA

Stay away from me.

She heads to her car -- gets in, starts it, drives away.

Hertzwell stands. Watches her rear lights disappear.

He walks on, alone, under rows of STREETLIGHTS.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Rowdy. Full of angry, lonely MEN.

Hertzwell sits at the bar. Drinks scotch.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Square one. Forget her. Who needs
her? Strong men kill themselves.
Rotting out from the inside is no way
to die. You have to go down punching.
Like your life matters. Tonight is
the night.

With a tight brow, he looks at his COMPATRIOTS:

A few stools down -- a SKINHEAD (40s), who sports a SWASTIKA
on his neck, drinks a beer.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Could be heroic. Hertzwell dies
fighting a Nazi. Nah. Too saccharine
for me. Too noteworthy. No one would
buy it.

Over in a dark corner, a HUGE BIKER. Wears shades indoors.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
*He could kill me. David and Goliath.
Smash my brains across the ceiling,
throw my body around like a rag-doll.
But I at least want a chance, right?
To square a few away. That counts,
counts for something.*

Leaning half-conscious on a table, a MIDDLE-AGED DRUNKARD
(50s) sways, mumbles to himself.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
A couple shots and we'd be even.
Fifty-fifty. He got some anger. You
can see it in the hairline. What if
he's too easy? One punch and he's
down like a paper bag. Same for me, I
suppose.

Hertzwell looks some more -- CODY (30, childish) sits next
to him, signals the Bartender.

CODY
Whiskey, neat.
(MORE)

CODY (cont'd)
(to Hertzwell)
What you havin'?

HERTZWELL
Uh. I can pay myself.

CODY
Call it a courtesy.

HERTZWELL
(to the bartender)
Scotch.

BARTENDER
You got it.

The Bartender leaves to get the drinks. Cody taps on the counter with his hands.

Hertzwell looks at him with unease.

HERTZWELL
(stiff)
Thanks.

CODY
You recognise me?

HERTZWELL
I know you?

CODY
I seen you in here before. That day
you got done screwin' the town
bicycle, ya come in 'ere and ordered
a round for the house.

HERTZWELL
Yeah, well, I might have a drinking
problem, so sometimes I forget
things.

CODY
Oh, it's cool, brother. Real cool.
You and me?

Cody wags his finger between the two of them.

CODY (cont'd)
We get each other, man.

HERTZWELL
I legitimately don't know who you
are.

CODY

But I know you, Hank.

Hertzwell wants to hit him.

CODY (cont'd)

You like to get heavy.

HERTZWELL

I what?

CODY

Nothin' by it. I tie one off myself, now and then. We gots the same sickness, buddy, no wrong in it -- it's a disease. You like to get heavy. Town like this, that's hard to come by.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

Could I take him?

Setting down his scotch, Hertzwell leans toward Cody.

HERTZWELL

What do you mean by heavy?

CODY

Quit playin' with me, man. I know what you are.

HERTZWELL

You ain't ever fucking met me.

CODY

Oh yeah? Then who was askin' me last time for some--

Cody taps his nostril. Hertzwell laughs, leans away.

HERTZWELL

Last time I touched that shit was years ago. It gets you all fucked up.

CODY

Well, how 'bout you make "last time" tonight? I got some stuff. You, me, coupla my buddies. Play some cards. Drink some beers. Smooth, easy.

HERTZWELL

I drink alone.

CODY

Then why did ya sit in a bar? C'mon.
What you got to lose, man?

A beat. Hertzwell thinks -- "nothing". Their drinks arrive.
They pick them up and drink, maintain eye-contact.

EXT. BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Hertzwell and Cody exit the bar, walk towards Cody's CAR.
It's old, a bit rusty.

CODY

Name's Cody, by the way.

They get in the car.

INT. CODY'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Tight -- filled with JUNK. Hertzwell looks out of the
window.

Cody stares ahead.

CODY

'Ey, uh, can you spot me forty-
dollars?

HERTZWELL

What?

CODY

Jus' spot me forty-dollars. You
wanna get beers, smokes, right? Gonna
have to hit a gas station on the way.

Hertzwell gets out his wallets, gives Cody the money.

CODY (cont'd)

Thank ya kindly.

Cody pockets it. Hertzwell shifts in his seat.

HERTZWELL

What do you do?

CODY

Huh?

HERTZWELL

For work.

CODY

Part-time at a bottlin' plant.
Moonlight as a country singer on
weekends. That's my true passion.

HERTZWELL

I used to work in a post office.

CODY

Oh yeah? What do ya do now?

HERTZWELL

I write.

Cody turns the car.

CODY

You write, huh? Yeah, been there,
yessir. Wrote a coupla songs myself.

Hertzwell nods, exhales.

EXT. OREGON GAS STATION - NIGHT

Hertzwell sits in Cody's car. Cody exits the gas station
with beers, bottles and cigarettes. He gets in.

INT. CODY'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Cody and Hertzwell drink beer as Cody drives.

CODY

Sorry for drivin' careful, parole
officer is bein' a bug up my ass.
They catch me breathing the wrong
way, they gon' bust me back for seven
years. You know I ain't allowed no
firearm? Can you believe that shit?

He glances at Hertzwell.

HERTZWELL

Yup.

CODY

Fuckin' unconstitutional, what that
is. Here's me, thinkin' this was
fuckin' America. I still gots one
anyways, but *man*. It's like we're a
got-damn Communist country now-days.

Hertzwell looks out of the window. Sips.

CODY (cont'd)
Okay, hol' up here. Gotta run an
errand then we'll get to my place.

HERTZWELL
Uh-huh.

The car pulls into a DRIVEWAY.

EXT. CODY'S EX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Small. Cody cuts the engine, gets out, leaves Hertzwell in
the car.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
He's an idiot. But even they can have
somethin' to offer. Sometimes.
Usually not. Fuck else am I gonna do?
Listen to Benny humpin' all fucking
night? Fuck that.

Hertzwell drinks from his bottle.

He looks out of the windscreen -- furrows his brow.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
What the fuck?

ISABEL (9 years old) walks up to the car, taps on the
window. Hertzwell rolls it down.

ISABEL
Who are you?

HERTZWELL
Uh. I'm Hank. I'm a friend of uh...
Cody?

ISABEL
You my daddy's friend?

HERTZWELL
...Yes? I uh... I suppose so. What's
your name?

ISABEL
Isabel.

Cody exits the house, walks up to Isabel.

CODY
C'mon, Isabel, hop in the back
sweetheart.

Isabel clambers into the back of the car, shoves the trash out of the way.

Cody sits in the driver's seat, swigs from his beer. He twists his key -- the engine sputters alive.

ISABEL
(to Hertzwell)
Why do you look like that?

CODY
Oh! That ain't nice, Issy, we don't speak to people that way.

HERTZWELL
It's okay--

CODY
She can be a ball-buster. Gets it from her mom. The fat bitch. I get her on weekends.

The car reverses out of the driveway.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Long and dark. Cody's car WHIZZES down.

INT. CODY'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Hertzwell stares at himself in the side-view mirror. Cody cracks open another beer. Isabel hums in the back.

CODY
These fuckin' parole officers. You should see 'em. Gettin' all up in your shit. Quit drinkin' this, A-A that -- how about FUCK YOU! It's my right to come home and have a beer. Government ain't got *shit* to do with it.

Hertzwell looks at Cody. Looks in the rear-view. Isabel smiles to herself as she watches the lights pass by.

HERTZWELL
So, uh, Isabel, you go to school?

CODY
Oh, she a brain-box, this one. Not sure where she gets it from.

(MORE)

CODY (cont'd)
Tell my friend here what you got on
your Math test.

ISABEL
B-plus.

HERTZWELL
"B-plus"? That's very impressive. You
like Math?

ISABEL
It's okay!

HERTZWELL
I always hated it. So if I need
someone to help me out, I'll ask you.

Isabel laughs.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
What do you wanna be when you grow
up?

She shrugs.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
I was like that at your age. Keep
your grades like that, you can be
whatever you want.

ISABEL
What about a teacher?

HERTZWELL
Sure. You like your teachers?

ISABEL
Some. There's one I don't.

HERTZWELL
Oh, why's that?

ISABEL
One time on break, me and this girl,
Sasha, were playing and she--

Cody puts a CASSETTE in the car's deck.

Loud country starts to play.

CODY
One sec, baby.
(to Hertzwell)
You hear this?

HERTZWELL

Uh, yeah.

Hertzwell goes to turn back to Isabel -- Cody keeps on.

CODY

This is me, nineteen-sixty-nine. Me and the boys got loaded, played a three hour gig in the middle of nowhere. Damn po-lice had to come and tear the crowd away from us, man. We were hot shit -- are hot shit. We got a record comin' out, too.

HERTZWELL

A record?

CODY

Yessir. Bonafide studio album. We're gonna take that shit international, so help me God. Biggest band this here town ever gon' see. Just a few more tweaks, that baby will be ready for a pressin'. We been workin' on it close to five years, now. Ya see, we're what you'd call *perfect-itionists*.

Hertzwell looks in the rear-view mirror. Isabel smiles as she watches the lights pass by.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - NIGHT

Wide and rustic, nestled in a FOREST. Lights hang across pathways as a dog barks incessantly.

Cody drives his car through the trailer park, pulls up outside a MOTOR-HOME.

INT. MOTOR-HOME - NIGHT

Hertzwell, Cody and Isabel enter. The place is a wreck. Clothes all over the floor.

CODY

Alrigh', Issy, go wash up in the back and go to bed.

ISABEL

Is he staying with us?

CODY
'Fraid not, honey.

ISABEL
(disappointed)
Aw.

CODY
He a busy man, baby, he writes.

Isabel disappears into the back.

A small DOG sleeps in a cage, next to a pile of its own
shit.

Hertzwell glances at it -- stares at Cody with a burning
sense of hatred.

Cody opens a KITCHEN CABINET -- he pulls a bag of COCAINE
down from the top-shelf, shows it to Hertzwell.

CODY (cont'd)
Grade-A. Shit's for real. Wanna key?

HERTZWELL
How do you afford this?

CODY
We get buckets of water from the
neighbours. Wanna try some?

Hertzwell looks around.

HERTZWELL
Maybe we should go elsewhere.

CODY
Oh, don't you be mindin' her.

HERTZWELL
Let's go somewhere else.

CODY
Sure thing.

They leave.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - NIGHT

Cody and Hertzwell walk toward THREE guys outside a
TRAILER -- FRANK (40s, gaunt with a tic), MELVIN (20s, buck-
teeth) and KOWALSKI (50s, bald, a scar around his scalp).

They drink beer and smoke cigarettes.

CODY

'Ey Frank. Got ya some fresh meat.

FRANK

What's up, C-Cody?

They shake hands. Frank points his cigarette at Hertzwell.

FRANK (cont'd)

Who's y-ya friend?

HERTZWELL

Hank.

CODY

Melvin, Kowalski. He's a writer.

Melvin and Kowalski nod at Hertzwell.

FRANK

Writer, huh? What brings ya h-here?

HERTZWELL

Research. You boys play cards?

MELVIN

Shee-it, we play cards. This a high-end game, you dig?

HERTZWELL

High-end, huh?

KOWALSKI

Either leave richest man in park, or poor bastard without pant.

FRANK

Y-ya been w-warned!

HERTZWELL

I like those odds.

The five of them enter Frank's trailer.

INT. FRANK'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Smoky and dim. Hertzwell snorts a LINE of cocaine off of the table, which Cody, Frank, Melvin and Kowalski sit at.

Hertzwell leans back in his chair, swigs down a glass of scotch and smiles as an argument unfolds.

They're drunk and slurry.

MELVIN

CIA got Kennedy. Who else can shoot
the president? Ain't no bug-eyed
freak, *that's* for sure.

FRANK

It was th-the fuckin' m-mob,
Melvin -- those c-cocksuckers run
everythin'.

CODY

All y'all trippin' moose-balls if you
ain't thinkin' it was the Ruskis.

Kowalski shuffles cards.

KOWALSKI

Are we to sit and bitch like woman or
are we play cards?

FRANK

J-Jus' a minute, Kowalski -- C-Cody,
you think the fuckin' R-Russians got
the brass to pull that shit o-over
'ere? We got like twenny n-nukes
pointed at th-their ass!

HERTZWELL

What about the moon landing?

Uproar at the table. Cody groans.

CODY

Don't bring that up--

MELVIN

Biggest load of B-S I ever done seen.
You tellin' me you can get a man over
that way, without runnin' outta gas?
As bullshit as my blood is red.

CODY

You an idiot, Melvin.

MELVIN

And you blind as a motherfucker,
Cody. Them shits are bouncing on
wires, man -- you can see it!

Hertzwell laughs to himself, pours more scotch.

KOWALSKI
Are we play or not?

FRANK
F-Fuck man, ya been sh-shufflin' for
doggone f-fourty minutes, why don't
you j-just deal?

KOWALSKI
Because you keep TALK!

Cody uses a RAZOR to cut lines of coke. Hertzwell snorts
one.

FRANK
D-Don't blame me f-for your
indecisionism, a-asshole. I-If you
wanna deal, d-deal.

KOWALSKI
Then bet! Blackjack.

The guys throw CHIPS into the centre of the table.

Hertzwell puts a LARGE bet.

Melvin whistles.

MELVIN
Jeez. On the first hand?

HERTZWELL
I thought this was "high-end".

KOWALSKI
Match and I deal.

Reluctant, the others match Hertzwell's bet.

Kowalski deals the cards for Blackjack.

KOWALSKI (cont'd)
Ace. High and low.

Each has two cards, one UP, one DOWN. Hertzwell has a KING.

They check their face-down cards -- hide them again.

FRANK
H-Hit me.

Kowalski gives Frank a card.

MELVIN
Stand.

CODY
Hit me.

Kowalski hits Cody.

HERTZWELL
Stand.

KOWALSKI
Okay. What have?

They reveal their cards. All of them have bad hands -- apart from Hertzwell, who has an ACE. Perfect 21.

FRANK
Beginner's 1-luck.

CODY
Nice goin'.

Hertzwell takes the chips, pulls them toward him.

HERTZWELL
I can't help it. I feel lucky tonight.

LATER:

Another hand. Hertzwell reveals his cards. 10, 6, 5. 21.

CODY
Jee-sus...

FRANK
You ch-cheatin', motherfucker?

LATER:

Another hand. Hertzwell reveals. Jack, 7, 4. 21.

KOWALSKI
(enraged)
What fuck is this?

LATER:

Hertzwell shows his cards. Two Queens, an Ace.

FRANK

I-I d-don't like playin' wit' y-ya f-friend, Cody.

Empty beer bottles are everywhere. Everyone is wasted.

Frank and Cody smoke cigarettes as they look at Hertzwell pull more chips toward his mountain.

Melvin lights a joint. Kowalski snorts a line, coughs.

MELVIN

Shit, well. I better call it quits. I gots to pay child support.

FRANK

Y-Yeah. Me t-too.

HERTZWELL

I thought you got heavy? I thought this was high-end?

KOWALSKI

You have luck of wizard. It is bull's shit.

FRANK

W-Well, let's c-call it boys--

Cody springs up.

CODY

Woah, hold on for a sec.
(to Hertzwell)
You got balls, Hank?

HERTZWELL

What d'ya got?

CODY

Double-or-nothin'.

MELVIN

On fuckin' Blackjack? He could buy the whole damn state!

CODY

Nah, I gots somethin' better. Somethin' real heavy.

HERTZWELL

Spit it out then.

Like a showman, Cody pulls a REVOLVER from his pants.

Everyone besides Hertzwell ducks -- shouts.

Hertzwell laughs.

FRANK

P-Put that fuckin' th-thing away!

CODY

It's alright, it's alright -- it's just a gun. Nothin' crazy. Ain't nothin' to piss and shit about, either.

MELVIN

Cody, you sumbitch, you shoot me with that thang and I'm gonna get *pissed*.

Cody puts the revolver on the table. Everyone calms.

CODY

Y'all listen here. Double-or-nothin', Hertzwell. Good ol' roulette. You pull the trigger, and your brains *ain't* on the wall -- double. If they are... Well, we won't owe ya nothin'.

FRANK

Y-You ain't d-doin' this shit in my h-house.

CODY

If he wins that pot, you ain't got a house, man! Think!

KOWALSKI

Let him do, Frank. Is only way.

Hertzwell looks at the revolver. Turns to Cody.

HERTZWELL

Cut me a line.

Cody cheers. With his razor, cuts Hertzwell a line.

Hertzwell snorts it.

MELVIN

There ain't no fuckin' way you dumb enough to do this.

FRANK

I-I'm n-not cleanin' skull off ma c-carpets, so y-you b-better miss, m-motherfucker.

Hertzwell rears his head up, sniffs.

Cody loads one bullet into a chamber, spins and closes it.

CODY
Godbless, ya crazy bastard.

He offers the revolver -- Hertzwell gladly takes it.

KOWALSKI
Go with wind.

Hertzwell puts the barrel to his head.

MELVIN
Oh, this the craziest shit I seen in
a long while.

Melvin hides his face.

Frank watches in awe.

Kowalski crosses his fingers, nods.

Cody cuts a line for himself as he chugs a beer.

Hertzwell's finger wraps around the trigger -- the tip rests gently on the metal, only a hair away...

Hertzwell looks at the mix of horrified and gleeful faces before him. He SMILES, ear-to-ear.

PULLS the trigger --

CHK! Nothing.

Groans, shouts and cheers erupt from the table.

Hertzwell puts the revolver down. His face falls.

The trailer door opens -- Isabel wanders in.

ISABEL
Is my daddy here?

Everyone shuts up. Melvin hides the gun.

Cody rushes over to Isabel.

CODY
What you doin' out 'ere, baby? Go to
bed, c'mon. This is daddy's time.

He ushers her out of the trailer -- they leave.

Hertzwell looks at the door as it shuts. Kowalski pokes him. Hertzwell turns.

KOWALSKI

In Poland, you be neck-deep in shit
with hole for brains now. Good game.

They shake hands -- Hertzwell a bit uncomfortable.

FRANK

Y-You w-wanna w-work out a payment p-
plan, Hank?

HERTZWELL

Keep the money. I'll be going anyway.

Hertzwell gets up, takes the bottle of scotch -- leaves.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - SUNRISE

Birds chirp. The sun peeks over the horizon.

Hertzwell stumbles between the trailers, wanders through the park, away from Frank's.

Cody comes toward him in the opposition direction.

CODY

Hank? Where ya goin'?

HERTZWELL

I'm leaving.

CODY

One more game? *Triple-or-nothin'*?

The two stop at each other. Hertzwell looks into Cody's eyes.

CODY (cont'd)

Hey, buddy. I don't like the way ya
lookin' at me.

Hertzwell PUNCHES Cody in the face --

Cody SMACKS into the ground, blood GUSHES from his nose. He holds it in agony, writhes on the ground.

HERTZWELL

You low-life piece of SHIT!

CODY

You broke my fuckin' nose--

HERTZWELL

You're lucky I don't break your
fucking NECK!

Hertzwell KICKS Cody in the stomach. Cody grunts in pain.

CODY

Alright, alright, stop! Fuck! Is this
about the forty-dollars?

HERTZWELL

Scumbag-motherfucker.

With that, Hertzwell leaves Cody to cry on the floor.

EXT. FIELD - SUNRISE

Beleaguered, Hertzwell shuffles down a dirt path, flanked by
miles of grass.

A morning MIST rises in the field, as sunlight shoots
through it in an ethereal ballet.

Hertzwell stops, breathless. He leans on a FENCE, lights a
cigarette. Watches.

He unzips his pants and URINATES into the grass. Takes in
the view.

EXT. TRUCK-STOP - DAY

A small place off a ROAD. Rural, with GREY skies.

Hertzwell ambles down the asphalt, the last of a long walk.

He heads toward the stop, enters a PHONE BOOTH outside. He
slots in a quarter.

HERTZWELL

Operator. Yeah. I wanna talk to the
county probation office.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Benny and Sang-Hee lie on top of each other in bed, asleep.

The phone RINGS. Benny wakes, groans. Grabs the phone.

BENNY

Hello? Mister Hertzwell? Where ya at,
man--

(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
(a beat)
Where?

Benny sighs, rubs his head.

BENNY (cont'd)
Okay. Gimme an hour.

He hangs up, shakes Sang-Hee awake.

BENNY (cont'd)
Sang-Hee. Sang-Hee.

SANG-HEE
What?

BENNY
Ya gotta go, angel -- Mister
Hertzwell needs me, and I gotta wash
this stank off.

Benny takes her off him, gets up.

EXT. TRUCK-STOP - DAY

Quiet. Hertzwell sits and drinks beer on the curb. His tie undone, his suit a mess.

It RAINS.

Benny pulls up in the CAR, rolls down the window.

Hertzwell sits, looks into space, eyes wide and open. He gets wetter and wetter.

BENNY
Mister Hertzwell? You good, Mister
Hertzwell?

Hertzwell looks at him.

BENNY (cont'd)
Shit.

Benny gets out the car, helps Hertzwell up.

BENNY (cont'd)
C'mon, man, ya don't wanna catch a
cold out 'ere.

He escorts Hertzwell toward the passenger DOOR, opens it. Hertzwell clambers in, stares ahead.

Benny looks at him -- shuts the door.

INT. RENTAL CAR - MOVING - DAY

Hertzwell leans his head against the window. Stares at nothing in particular.

WIPERS bat raindrops as they fall on the windshield.

Benny keeps his eyes on the road -- glances at Hertzwell every now and then.

BENNY

So... Ya get lucky? Where ya been?

HERTZWELL

Don't ask.

BENNY

A man who don't kiss and tell -- I can respect that.

HERTZWELL

I just... I just want to sleep.

BENNY

You got it, Mister Hertzwell.

Quiet falls over.

Hertzwell listens to the hum of the engine. Closes his eyes.

Benny drives. He opens the glove-box -- grabs a joint and puts it in his mouth.

He lights, puffs. Hertzwell sniffs -- eyes open.

HERTZWELL

Are you fucking kidding me?

BENNY

'Ey, I'm tired, man. Gotta concentrate someways.

Benny rolls down his window.

He looks out of his rear-view, checks a map.

BENNY (cont'd)

Hick-ass roads... Got me all twisted up and shit. Ya know where we at?

Hertzwell shakes his head, sighs.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Benny races down a wet country road.

INT. RENTAL CAR - MOVING - DAY

Benny keeps smoking, checks the map, checks the road.

BENNY

Ya woulda thought they'd have a sign
or somethin', right? "Civilisation
this way", ya fuckin' bum...

Hertzwell stares into the passing FOREST.

Benny smokes, checks the map, the road...

HERTZWELL

Benny.

BENNY

One sec, Mister Hertzwell. Think I
seen that tree with the curves befo'.

HERTZWELL

Benny.

BENNY

Shit, we goin' in circles now? The
fuck kinda place is this, Mister
Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL

Benny.

BENNY

Y'know, least with L-A, ya know where
you're at. 'Tween a tweaker and a
whore? Shee-it, you on Hollywood
Boulevard, baby. Out here, there
ain't nothin' to it.

(wistfully)

Why I moved there.

Exhale of smoke, Benny checks the map --

HERTZWELL

(angry)

Jesus Christ! *Benny!*

BENNY

What?

HERTZWELL

I have leukemia.

Benny looks up at Hertzwell.

BENNY

What?

Hertzwell points --

HERTZWELL

Look out!

Benny turns to road --

A BLACK BEAR wanders into the PATH ahead.

Gripping the WHEEL, Benny swerves HARD to the right --

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The rental car FLIPS off the asphalt -- SPINS --

HURTLES in MID-AIR --

SMASHES into a row of TREES. Debris SCATTERS. Smoke RISES.

The bear runs off in the opposite direction.

A FLOCK of BIRDS flee from the scene -- squawk into the sky as they flutter away.

A beat. The RAIN comes down HARD.

The passenger-side door pops open -- Hertzwell collapses out onto the ground with cuts and bruises, a torn suit.

He crawls on the grass, lies on his side -- groans.

The car is a WRECK. From inside, Benny SCREAMS in pain.

Hertzwell staggers to his feet -- limps over to the other side of the car.

He YANKS the door open -- Benny flops out. Tears and blood run down his face. He shouts in agony.

BENNY

I'm fucked up, Hank!

Hertzwell puts his arms around Benny -- HAULS him out -- Benny's screams go a notch LOUDER.

The two fall to the ground.

Benny's leg is broken -- fucked up, bloody and horrific, like sausage packaging without the meat.

HERTZWELL

It's okay -- you're okay!

BENNY

I'M NOT FUCKIN' OKAY! I can't fuckin' move it! Oh, FUCK!

HERTZWELL

You're okay! Look at me!

BENNY

It won't fucking *move* -- Hank!

Hertzwell grabs Benny's face, forces him into eye-contact.

HERTZWELL

Benny! Quit whining! We're *okay*.
We're alive. You're okay, Benny,
you're alive! We're alive!
(screams to the sky)
We're FUCKING ALIVE!

Benny hyper-ventilates as Hertzwell shakes him.

Uncontrollable, Benny breaks down into MANIC LAUGHTER -- then WEEPS, as an agony-fed SCREAM punctuates.

He buries his face in Hertzwell as they embrace.

Hertzwell stares at the ground.

They soak in the rainfall, sink in the mud.

Benny violently sobs, screams HARDER as the water-logged earth turns RED around his leg.

Hertzwell pulls away from Benny, exhales.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

We're gonna have to get you up.

BENNY

No! No, no. Ain't no fuckin' way,
man, ain't no fuckin' way--

HERTZWELL

I'm sorry.

BENNY

No -- NO! I can't! Please, HANK --

HERTZWELL

Benny, if we wanna get out of this fucking place, we're gonna have to *walk*.

BENNY

No, no, Mister Hertzwell -- I can't fucking do it -- please -- listen to me!

HERTZWELL

Yes you can! On three, I'm going to lift you up.

BENNY

DON'T--

HERTZWELL

On three, Benny! Lean on me!

BENNY

PLEASE, NO--

HERTZWELL

Be good, kid -- just do what I *fucking* say, alright!

BENNY

HANK, PLEASE--

HERTZWELL

One!

BENNY

NO!

HERTZWELL

Two!

BENNY

DON'T DO IT--

Hertzwell prepares --

HERTZWELL

THREE!

-- he HEAVES Benny upwards! Benny WAILS, leans on Hertzwell. His leg bends as he stands, like an empty sock.

BENNY
AHH! YOU FUCKING BASTARD!

HERTZWELL
BREATHE, Benny -- just breathe!

Benny can't take it -- collapses. Hertzwell catches him, lowers him gently onto the ground.

BENNY
(through tears)
I'm gonna fuckin' die here.

Hertzwell paces, puts his hands to his head as Benny continues to scream and shout.

In panic, Hertzwell runs over to the ROAD. He waves his arms and shouts into nowhere:

HERTZWELL
Help! Help us! Someone!

Nothing.

Hertzwell runs back to Benny, who's breathing is sharp.

BENNY
I ain't fuckin' makin' it, Hank --

HERTZWELL
Not with that attitude, partner! Come on, look at me --

Light, Hertzwell SLAPS Benny across his cheeks -- Benny's eyes widen, fixate. He gasps.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Good. Look at me. Now, we're going to get you out of here -- I promise.

Hertzwell's voice is HOARSE. Benny shakes his head.

BENNY
I can see the light, Mister Hertzwell. Jesus Christ, Hank, I--I think I'm goin' to hell--

HERTZWELL
The fuck you ain't, ya little *shit!* Snap out of it! You're gonna be fine, kid, I promise.

Down the road -- the sound of WHEELS.

Hertzwell perks up. He staggers over to the road --

A CAR drives towards them.

Hertzwell WAVES his arms like a madman.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
HELP! Help us!

The car slows -- stops.

The driver-door opens, and steps out -- Laury.

He covers his head with a NEWSPAPER as he gawks at the two.

LAURY
Jesus Christ, what the fuck?!
Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL
You? Fuck -- forget it, we ain't got
time! Help me get him into your car.

Quick, Laury opens the back door of his car.

Hertzwell and Laury RUSH over to Benny --

Laury gets the legs, Hertzwell gets the arms -- they HAUL
him up -- Benny SCREAMS again as his leg dangles to the
side --

BENNY
Am I gonna lose my fuckin' leg,
Mister Hertzwell? I don't wanna lose
it, man, please, I don't wanna--

HERTZWELL
Just BREATHE, Benny!

They carry him over to the car --

LAURY
Wait!

Laury lets go -- Benny's leg flops down -- he SHRIEKS --

HERTZWELL
(over the sound)
What the fuck are you doing!?

Quick, Laury opens his TRUNK, pulls out a BLANKET.

LAURY
Those seats are genuine calf leather!

HERTZWELL
Are you SERIOUS!?

Laury throws the blanket over the BACKSEATS -- him and Hertzwell lay Benny on them.

Hertzwell fixes the SEATBELTS over Benny.

He and Laury CHARGE into the FRONT of the car --

Laury turns the key in the ignition and SPEEDS off.

INT. LAURY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Laury accelerates, squints through the RAIN. His wipers only help so much. Hertzwell turns to Benny in the back seat.

HERTZWELL
Stay awake, kid. C'mon. Listen to me--

Tears stream down Benny's face as he bleeds out.

BENNY
Lord Jesus, I done come before you,
just as I was. I'm sorry for ma sins,
I repent, please forgive me, O' Lord
Jesus--

HERTZWELL
Fuck. He's delusional.
(to Laury)
Hurry up!

LAURY
I'm going as fast as I can, okay? I--
I can't see for shit with this rain--

HERTZWELL
Well, look harder and go FASTER!

Laury shifts gears, panics.

Hertzwell wipes sweat, rain and dirt from his brow.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Oh, Jesus Christ--

BENNY
In your Name, I forgive all y'all
others for what them done did against
me--

Hertzwell turns around --

HERTZWELL

Will you cut the Catholic CRAP!
You're a fucking Jehovah's Witness!

LAURY

Uh, Mister Hertzwell -- probably a
bad time to bring this up, but...
Have you sent us a new table, yet?

HERTZWELL

Can you shut the FUCK up and *DRIVE*,
man!

Benny sticks his hand out to Hertzwell. He's weak.

Hertzwell takes it, breathes heavily.

BENNY

(delirious)

This is the end, right?

Hertzwell stares into Benny's eyes -- squeezes his hand.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Hertzwell, with a few stitches and bandages, writes on a
notepad as he sits in a beige lounge.

Laury walks over with two cups of COFFEE.

LAURY

Think you'll need this.

He hands one to Hertzwell, who stops -- briefly -- to take
it. Laury settles in a seat next to him.

HERTZWELL

Thanks.

Hertzwell continues to write.

LAURY

What were you doing out there?

Hertzwell puts the notepad down. Looks at Laury.

HERTZWELL

I'm sorry. For trying to punch you.

LAURY

Ah. I had it coming.

HERTZWELL

You did.

Laury chuckles.

LAURY

That car was a wreck. It's a miracle you survived.

HERTZWELL

Where do you get off, asshole? That kid's in the operating room. Jury's still fucking out on him.

LAURY

I wasn't talking about the kid.

With a short laugh, Hertzwell glares at Laury.

HERTZWELL

You know what, Laury? I know guys like you. I know that you love this. You'll be telling this story for the rest of your fucking life. At the watercooler, at parties, when you make tenure, to your wife, your son, on your death bed, but you know what? You won't mention the fact, that as that sorry son-of-a-bitch was bleedin' out in your backseat, you had the brass balls to ask me about your fucking *table*.

A beat. Laury sighs, gets up.

LAURY

I better leave you to it.

HERTZWELL

Yeah, that's right. Your table's in the mail -- *prick*.

Laury walks away. Hertzwell returns to his notepad.

A NURSE enters.

NURSE

Mister Hertzwell?

Hertzwell gets up. The Nurse approaches him.

HERTZWELL

How is he?

NURSE

He's pulled through, sir. We have him stabilised.

Hertzwell lets out a long, heavy exhale.

HERTZWELL

Can I see him?

NURSE

No, not now. He's under heavy sedation. But, I will let you know when you can, okay?

Hertzwell nods, the Nurse leaves. He sits down.

Hertzwell lets his head hang, runs a hand through thinning hair. Leans back against the chair.

Maria enters. Hertzwell sees her. Stands.

She stops, stares at him.

HERTZWELL

Insko? What are you doin' here?

MARIA

Um. Laury, he told me on the phone, about... I'm sorry.

She awkwardly hugs him -- quickly pulls away.

HERTZWELL

He's gonna make it.

MARIA

He's a good kid.

HERTZWELL

No. He's strong.

They stand together. Awkward mannequins.

MARIA

...Are, uh... Are you okay?

HERTZWELL

Do you want me to be honest?

A brief smile flashes across Maria's face.

MARIA

Not sure.

HERTZWELL
I'm doin' better.

Hertzwell inhales, brings himself to look into her eyes.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Uh. I know I ain't right.

MARIA
It's not that, Hank. I just think...
I just think that, maybe, you're best
appreciated... From afar.

Hertzwell forces a short laugh. Nods.

HERTZWELL
That very well may be the case,
Maria.

Maria smiles, looks down. Hertzwell's face hardens.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Wait. That rat-fuck, Laury, he had
time to call you?

MARIA
I, uh, I don't really want to get
into it.

Hertzwell softens -- lets go.

HERTZWELL
Yeah. Waste of time.

Uneasy quiet.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
So, uh... You wouldn't wanna grab a
coffee?

MARIA
Actually -- I think I better go. I'm
glad Benny is okay. Really.

HERTZWELL
Thanks.

MARIA
Okay. Goodbye.

She inches away, waves.

Hertzwell nods at her.

HERTZWELL
Goodbye, hon'.

Maria leaves. Hertzwell sits back down.

He looks at his notepad.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Fuck, I need a drink. But Benny *is*
okay. I gave him my word. And he's
okay. That counts for something.

Hertzwell picks up his pen, writes something down.

INT. HOSPITAL - BENNY'S ROOM - DAY

Benny is very rough, but alive. His leg is in a thick,
straight cast. He's stiff.

Hertzwell enters.

BENNY
Howdy, Mister Hertzwell.

For a moment, Hertzwell takes in the state of him.

Slow, he goes to Benny's side.

HERTZWELL
So, uh. How are the meds? They
workin'? You got enough?

BENNY
Yeah, yeah, it's all good, man.

Benny groans.

BENNY (cont'd)
Some pain.

HERTZWELL
At least you're alive.

Hertzwell pulls up a chair, sits by the bed.

BENNY
Ain't nothin' ever fuckin' simple
with us, eh?

A beat. Hertzwell shakes his head.

BENNY (cont'd)
You believe in God, Hank?

Hertzwell rolls his eyes, sighs.

BENNY (cont'd)

'Cos ya know what I had today? I had what they call, a, a "moment of clarity". If that bear, wasn't on that damn road, at that damn time, and I wasn't speedin' -- we wouldn't be here right now.

HERTZWELL

Right. And?

BENNY

And? Everything is *pre-ordained*, Mister Hertzwell. We ain't got shit to say in the matter. When I left this mornin', fuck. I was so happy I coulda swatted a mosquito with the python in my pants, y'know? Little did I realise, I'd be done pushin' down the first domino in a cosmic chain of events, thus fundament'ly alterin' my pre-conceived perspectives and ill-thought notions about this here existence. Forcin' me onto a whole new trajectory in ma life. Into the great, wild expanse of the unknown. Shit. I saw the face of God today, Mister Hertzwell. Ain't no mistakin' it.

Hertzwell looks at Benny. Really looks at him.

HERTZWELL

Can I be honest with you? We all got a hole to fill, Benny, and if puttin' God in there works for you... It works for you. But you wanna know why you're really in here?

Benny stares back, breathes heavily.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

You're in here because of me.

BENNY

Nah. Don't be sayin' that, man. It ain't your fault.

HERTZWELL

Maybe, maybe not. But you still went out there for me. Y'see, Benny, the thing is... We are our own gods.

(MORE)

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
Which is terrifying. But it's true.
Knowing that is what sets you free.

A beat.

BENNY
Know what they said?

HERTZWELL
What?

Benny clicks his tongue.

BENNY
Said I'm gonna be a gimp for the rest
of ma life. We're talkin' god-damn
nerve damage. Limpin', somethin'
called "Arthur-itis"--

HERTZWELL
Hey. You got lucky. You don't get to
be ungrateful, kid.

BENNY
Hell, maybe you right. They saids
they thought I was dead as Dillinger
when ya brought me in. Too much blood
loss, or somethin'.

Hertzwell smiles at Benny, gets up.

HERTZWELL
I better let you sleep. I'm fucking
exhausted.

He goes toward the door --

BENNY
Mister Hertzwell?

Hertzwell turns.

HERTZWELL
Yeah?

BENNY
Thank you.

Hertzwell stands for a moment -- nods, leaves.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Lights are low. An electric hum. Quiet.

Hertzwell lies across a row of seats -- sleeps.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The slow beep of a HEART MONITOR. Curtains drawn.

Mazy, in black, cries, as she holds the wiry hand of Hertzwell. He lies in a hospital bed. Clinging on.

The Doctor puts a hand on Mazy's shoulder.

DOCTOR
It won't be long, now.

The Doctor leaves the room.

Mazy holds a tissue to her nose, squeezes Hertzwell's hand.

A brief smile curls across Hertzwell's lips. Shuts his eyes.

In the corner, the Man In A Wheelchair sits. He coughs -- BLACK BILE falls from his mouth, down his front.

Hertzwell's eyes open -- Mazy is gone.

Benny stares at him from the same corner.

Hertzwell shakes -- the heart monitor FLATLINES.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Hertzwell BOLTS upright, awake and alert. Breathes heavy.

He clutches his chest -- calms down, slowly.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

In a wheelchair, Benny smokes a joint by the window.

The place is a dump. Bottles of alcohol, stains and cigarette ends litter all over.

A JAZZ VINYL spins on a record player.

Hertzwell enters, with a bag of more liquor.

He walks over to Benny, hands him a bottle of VODKA.

Hertzwell pops a cigarette in his mouth, lights it, pours a glass of scotch. Neat.

He takes a seat next to Benny, who pours himself a shot.

HERTZWELL
To being alive.

BENNY
Amen to that.

The two men clink their glasses, drink. They put them down, exhale in relief.

Hertzwell hardens, looks over at Benny.

HERTZWELL
Benny. You're fired.

Benny laughs, calms and looks back at Hertzwell. He's about to speak -- but off Hertzwell's look, his smile fades.

BENNY
Ya... Ya gotta be jokin', right?

Sullen, Hertzwell shakes his head.

BENNY (cont'd)
Hank. I need this job, man.

HERTZWELL
Benny--

BENNY
I mean, fuck that. Ya need me.

HERTZWELL
I do. But, that ain't fair. Is it?

BENNY
On who?

HERTZWELL
On you. Look at us. Look where we are. Is this really what you want?

The air sucks out of the room. Benny deflates.

BENNY
Wait... No. Mister Hertzwell, all I want is to be right here, right now. With you.

HERTZWELL
And that's kinda my point. You got a life to live, kid. And life ain't this.

BENNY
Then who's gonna look after ya?

HERTZWELL
Look after me?

BENNY
Yeah. Ya think I fuckin' forgot?

HERTZWELL
Forgot what?

BENNY
What you said. 'Fore the crash.

Hertzwell sighs.

HERTZWELL
You remember that, huh?

BENNY
It's true?

Hertzwell nods.

BENNY (cont'd)
How bad?

HERTZWELL
I got it bad, Benny.

Benny looks out the window.

BENNY
Shit.

HERTZWELL
Me and you both.

With some reluctance, Benny turns to Hertzwell -- goes to say something, stops.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
What? What is it? If it's pity, you can shove it up your ass.

BENNY
No, no, it's... If ya wanna fire me, then--

HERTZWELL
This isn't a debate.

BENNY

I beg ta differ, motherfucker. Ya wanna fire me, ya gotta answer me this.

HERTZWELL

I'm not answering shit.

BENNY

How does this fit in with the whole "I am a god" thing? Ya sayin' you gave *yourself* cancer? Hm? And I gotta lose my job -- for what? 'Cos you says so?

A beat. Hertzwell laughs, looks away.

BENNY (cont'd)

Nah, don't be jerkin' me off on this, Mister Hertzwell. You said we're all our own gods. Well, I'm callin' bullshit on that, yes sirree. Cancer? That's an act of God. Bear wanderin' out in the middle of goddamn, bum-fuck, hick-ass nowhere, causin' me to flip a goddamn motor-vehicle thirty yards and shit? *That's* an act of God.

HERTZWELL

Why are you getting up my ass about this?

BENNY

'Cos I nearly *died*, Mister Hertzwell. That's gotta count for fuckin' somethin'! Anythin'. That's gotta matter. Now I'm unemployed? Ya for real?

HERTZWELL

Tell me. What do you want to do when you're older, Benny?

BENNY

Well. I want to be like you, Mister Hertzwell.

HERTZWELL

Why do you wanna be like me?

Benny falters. Hertzwell gives him a knowing look.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

See? You don't know.

BENNY

I wanna write.

HERTZWELL

Then pull your head out of your ass!
You were stoned on dope and pussy,
you wouldn't have seen that goddamn
bear if it was on stilts and selling
fucking quaaludes!

BENNY

Oh, so it all my fault now? 'Cos I
seem to remember Mister Compassionate
over 'ere was crucifyin' *his* ass over
at the hospital!

HERTZWELL

There's blame on both sides, Benny --
but it isn't a dictum from above! It
was a fuck-up. Let it be a fuck-up.

Benny scoffs.

BENNY

So, you gave yaself cancer, and I
done fucked my own leg up? Why? For
what? *I* wanted that? I wanted that
piece o' shit bear to be out in that
damn road? I wanna lose my own
fuckin' job?

Hertzwell stands up, swigs from his scotch.

HERTZWELL

You want spiritual advice? Speak to a
fucking yogi! I'm sure there's some
asshole in sandals at this motel who
can light up your fucking chakras,
for fifty-dollars upfront!

BENNY

I don't 'preciate you standin' when I
am vertically impaired, Hank--

HERTZWELL

Tough shit! Everyone looking for some
bastard to blame. Me, you, God, the
universe, whatever. I'm sick of it.

BENNY

Lemme ask ya this. If it's all up to
us, then how come ya still such a
lousy, miserable *fuck*? How does that
work, Hank?

(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
Ya talk all this shit, but where the fuck did it all get ya, huh? We experienced a miracle, Mister Hertzwell, a bonafide *miracle*. We were given a message. We were given a second chance!

HERTZWELL
(shouts)
YOU were!

Uncomfortable silence. Reality hits. Benny softens. They stare at each other. Simmer. Hertzwell paces.

BENNY
...I, uh... I'm sorry.

A beat.

HERTZWELL
No. No, I am.

Hertzwell sits back down.

The two stare at the floor.

Hertzwell looks at Benny.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
You want to know why I'm doing this?

Benny shrugs. Nods.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)
You want to write? Live a little. Embrace things for what they are. Meet a woman. Suffer. Get divorced. Meet another. Wake up with a hangover. Get in a fight. Hold someone you love in the rain. *Everything* disappoints, so expect nothing. You've gotta take things by the *balls*, Benny. It has to be *you*. You are your own master. I can't teach you how to do that.

A beat. Benny mulls over Hertzwell's words.

BENNY
I think I get it.

HERTZWELL
Yeah?

BENNY

Yeah.

Benny smiles.

BENNY (cont'd)

Yeah! I know what I'm gon' do with my life.

Benny wheels himself over to the door.

HERTZWELL

Where are you going?

BENNY

Be back shortly, Mister Hertzwell.

Benny leaves.

Hertzwell sighs, shakes his head. Drinks.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Benny races his chair toward the DOOR of 23-A. He stops, knocks on the door.

Sang-Hee opens it, looks down at Benny -- she recoils.

SANG-HEE

My God! What happened to you?

BENNY

I lost my way, baby. But I'm on the right track now. Sang-Hee, I gotta ask you somethin'--

SANG-HEE

Jesus, are you okay?

BENNY

Some pain. But I'm good with it.

Benny wheels closer to Sang-Hee, looks up into her eyes.

BENNY (cont'd)

Sang-Hee. Ya gotta listen. I been runnin' in circles all ma life round this Earth, and to think -- I never bothered to check out the Kor-eas! We coulda met a whole lot sooner.

SANG-HEE

...Again, I was born in St. Louis--

BENNY

Details ain't important no more,
baby. What matters is this, right
now, you and me. I been done driftin'
in this world, chasin' cheap thrills
and couches to crash -- tryin' to
find happiness in that is like tryin'
to catch a ghost in a net.

Benny takes Sang-Hee's hand -- she lowers so they're level.

BENNY (cont'd)

All 'til I met you, baby. Due to
unforeseeable machinations from a
realm beyond the periphery of human
purview, I done been told one
thing -- love is the only thing that
matters in this here life. So, I come
to you today, an honest man.

He clasps her hand with both of his -- they look deep into
each other's eyes, lost in them.

BENNY (cont'd)

Seong Sang-Hee, will ya marry me?

Sang-Hee's jaw hangs agape.

SANG-HEE

Are you serious, Benny?

BENNY

Never been more serious 'bout any
other damn thing in ma whole life.
'Cos without you, there *ain't* no
life. No point to this world.

A beat.

SANG-HEE

Yes!

They embrace -- kiss.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Alone, Hertzwell sways to the soft saxophone of the jazz
record. As he moves, he pours himself another glass --

Throws it back. Pours another. Again.

After the third he stumbles -- catches himself on a table.

Hertzwell gets up, composes himself. He grabs the BOTTLE off the side, swigs directly from it.

He staggers over to the PHONE -- dials -- mis-dials, stops.

HERTZWELL

Shit!

He punches his hand on the table. It cuts, bleeds.

Hertzwell dials again -- it rings.

He puts the phone to his ear, sits down.

INT. HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA - LOUNGE - DAY

Spacious and open. Bright sunshine dapples into the space through soft, white DRAPES.

The phone rings.

On the COUCH, lays LOUISE (30s, poised), asleep.

She stirs as the phone continues -- wakes up.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Hertzwell holds the phone tight. He shuts his eyes as the line continues to ring out.

INT. HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA - LOUNGE - DAY

Louise wanders over to the phone, drowsy. She picks it up.

LOUISE

Huh-Hello?

A beat.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

TEARS form in Hertzwell's eyes. He smiles.

LOUISE (V.O.)

... Hello? Louise Deren speaking.

HERTZWELL

Hey, honey.

His voice cracks.

HERTZWELL

Oh, I've just been thinking. Do you remember that house on the beach we took you to? When you were just a kid? Back -- uh, back just before the divorce?

LOUISE (V.O.)

Do you mean... Laguna? The beach house?

Hertzwell cracks with a smile.

HERTZWELL

That's the one.

LOUISE (V.O.)

Yeah, you fell over in the sand -- got some in your mouth. Me and Mom couldn't stop laughing.

HERTZWELL

I remember that, believe me. Took a whole week to get that fuckin' taste out. It was horrible.

He stubs his cigarette.

INT. HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA - DAY

Louise lies down on the couch, looks at the ceiling.

LOUISE

Yeah. What I remember most about that place was the smell of brine.

A beat.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

Did we make you happy?

Louise sits up.

LOUISE

What?

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

Me and your mother. I know we fucked up. I fucked up. But did we make you happy?

Concern mounts on Louise's face.

Hertzwell stares at the PHONE. He lifts his drink -- KNOCKS it down his throat -- staggers back -- loses balance --

Stabilises.

He grabs the bottle again, pours a glass. He puts a cigarette into his mouth, lights it. Drinks.

INT. MOTEL - SANG-HEE'S ROOM - DAY

On the wheelchair, Sang-Hee and Benny make out.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Hertzwell pours another glass. Goes to drink -- winces.

He puts the glass down, sways slightly. He puts his hand on his chest -- his body tightens with PAIN.

Hertzwell doubles-over -- VOMITS.

He staggers -- loses balance -- COLLAPSES, whacks his head off the table and falls into his own sick.

INT. MOTEL - SANG-HEE'S ROOM - DAY

Sang-Hee takes Benny's shirt off -- Benny stops her.

BENNY

Uh, ya know what, Sang-Hee? Wi'these painkillers, I don't think the cowboy can show up to the rodeo. Catch my drift?

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Hertzwell crawls across the carpet, continues to THROW UP as he makes his way. He groans and heaves.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - DAY

Weak, Hertzwell clambers into the bathroom -- he throws his body onto the toilet -- head over the water --

Hertzwell PUKES. Chunky, endless streams of puke.

Hertzwell leans his back against the wall, struggles to BREATHE. He tries to calm -- another round comes up --

Hertzwell hovers over the bowl, HACKS up some more --
BLOOD falls into the water -- along with bits of food.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Sang-Hee wheels Benny towards his door.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Sang-Hee and Benny enter.

BENNY
We got some great news, Mister
Hertzwell--

They stop in their tracks -- their mouths HANG.

BENNY (cont'd)
What--the--fuck.

The room looks like a bomb hit it. Furniture turned over,
VOMIT all over the walls, carpet, a trail of blood...

SANG-HEE
Oh, my God. What happened here? What
is this, Benny?

Benny opens the BATHROOM DOOR --

INT. MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - DAY

Hertzwell lays against the wall, blood and vomit around his
mouth. He breathes in and out.

BENNY
Oh, Jee-sus!

SANG-HEE
Is he dead?!

BENNY
Sang-Hee, call an ambulance, baby--

HERTZWELL
No! No ambulance! I'm fine!

BENNY

Ya gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me,
Mister Hertzwell -- th-there's blood
and puke up all over the damned
place! Fuck ya mean you're fine?

HERTZWELL

Just--help me up--

Sang-Hee panics.

SANG-HEE

W-What should we do?

Benny panics also.

BENNY

Shit, man -- FUCK! I-I-I -- just,
just get help, I guess--

HERTZWELL

I said, no! No help! I'm fine! Just
help me up.

A beat.

Hertzwell looks at Benny and Sang-Hee.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

Please. Just haul me up, a few steps,
that's it. I'll be fine.

Sang-Hee and Benny look back at him in horror.

HERTZWELL (cont'd)

What's the faces for? Thought you had
good news? Huh?

SANG-HEE

Uh... Benny?

Benny shifts, uncomfortable.

BENNY

We're... We're gettin' married.

HERTZWELL

Married? Are you fucking insane?
You've known her for all of five
minutes!

BENNY

This 'tween me and the Lord, Mister Hertzwell. But, this ain't 'bout me, Hank--

HERTZWELL

Jesus, when you said you got it, I didn't realise you meant you'd get fucking hitched! Haven't you learned a damn thing from all of this?

BENNY

Respectfully, as ya friend -- ya got blood all over ya mouth, and vomit all over ya damned shirt. We might wanna focus on you, right now.

Hertzwell sighs. Looks at his shirt. Looks at Sang-Hee.

HERTZWELL

I'm sorry, hon'. I'm not the best at first impressions.

Sang-Hee doesn't know what to say.

Benny rubs his forehead.

BENNY

Shee-it, man. Sure ya okay, Mister Hertzwell?

HERTZWELL

I drank too much. That can happen now and again. But I'm fine, Benny. Really. I just need to be lifted to my bed. Take me to my bed, and I'll be just fine. Okay?

BENNY

...Fine.
(to Sang-Hee)
Okay, baby, use me as a dolly.

MOMENTS LATER:

Benny sits by Hertzwell, who sits at the end of the bed.

Sang-Hee gives him a glass of water, and wipes the blood and vomit off his face with a tissue.

HERTZWELL

Thanks.

Sang-Hee takes a few steps away from him.

Benny looks at her.

BENNY

Uh, Sang-Hee, why don't you wait for me at your place? I'll be there in a minute -- think John Wayne wants to see ya.

SANG-HEE

Just... Let me know if anything--

BENNY

I will, honey, I will.

With a watchful eye, Sang-Hee leaves -- fast.

Benny turns to Hertzwell, who's eyes are on the floor.

BENNY (cont'd)

We was thinkin' of havin' a lil party. The three of us. To celebrate me gettin' wed and, y'know, not bein' dead. Up to it?

Hertzwell snorts.

HERTZWELL

I can make an appearance.

BENNY

Well, can't be feelin' too bad, then! Uh. Want me to clean this mess, Hank?

HERTZWELL

No, no. I'll do it.

BENNY

Ya sure?

HERTZWELL

You've done enough, Benny. It's okay. You can go.

BENNY

Alrighty then, Mister Hertzwell.

The two sit in quiet. Hertzwell looks at Benny.

HERTZWELL

Just gimme five minutes. Five minutes, and I'll get up. Okay?

Benny studies Hertzwell. Gives a stiff nod.

BENNY

Okay.

HERTZWELL

Y'know, Benny... You're a good man.
Y'just happen to be in a cruel world.

Hertzwell lies down.

Benny takes another look at him. Wheels out and LEAVES.

Hertzwell stares at the ceiling. His heart POUNDS.

His eyes wane -- close. His heart beats FASTER.

Hertzwell's head falls to one side -- his eyes open a little, struggle to stay that way.

A little smirk curves across Hertzwell's mouth.

His eyes fall shut again, and he slips asleep --

The pounding stops. Lights out for Hank.

On the BEDSIDE TABLE, rests Hertzwell's NOTEPAD and PEN.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Wide and long. CITY lights SHIMMER on the dark horizon.

A CAR speeds down.

INT. DEAN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Smoke wafts around DEAN's (30s, severe) face as he smokes a cigarette, pushes his foot down.

The RADIO crackles:

RADIO HOST (V.O.)

--as allegations mount, and evidence continues to come to light, it appears that the Nixon White House has an up-hill battle in coming weeks to regain public confidence.

Dean glances at his passenger seat -- EVA (8) sits, looks out the window. Content.

He looks back to the road.

RADIO HOST (V.O.) (cont'd)
Next, tragedy in San Bernadino
county. In a stick-up gone wrong,
three men are thought to have lost
their lives when a firearm was--

Dean swiftly adjusts the radio -- changes to another
channel. POP music plays.

Eva looks at the MOON as it hangs in the sky outside.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Her name was Eva. Dean didn't want
kids -- didn't want them to be like
him. But once she was there, she was
the only reason he was.

Eva looks at Dean.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
She knew a lot. A lot for her age.
Dean knew very little -- that's why
he loved her so much.

Dean furrows his brow at the road, exhales smoke.

EVA
Daddy?

Dean looks at her -- back at the road.

DEAN
What's up, honey?

EVA
Why does the moon follow us?

DEAN
Huh?

EVA
The moon. It's been with us since
home.

DEAN
Well, the moon likes us, honey -- he
wants us to have a good trip. He's
sayin', daddy loves you very much --
he'll take good care of you.

EVA
But the moon can't talk!

DEAN

Don't the birds talk? Don't the bees talk, flapping their lil wings, pollinatin' every which way? Everythin' talks, honey, you just gotta learn to listen.

Eva smiles -- fills with energy.

EVA

Does the moon talk about me?

DEAN

Oh, of course! He likes you, sweetie. Knows you're gon' do great things. Great things. Says you the smartest kid either side of the Mississippi.

EVA

Really?

DEAN

Yessir. How 'bout ya give Mister Moon a wave?

Eva waves out of the window at the moon.

She turns back to Dean.

EVA

Why is he so far away?

DEAN

He likes bein' far away. He feels safer far away.

EVA

What's so wrong about bein' close?

DEAN

Ain't a thing wrong with it, honey, he just likes it that way. Ain't for him, ya know?

Dean throws his cigarette out of the window.

EXT. URBAN STREET - NIGHT

Long, narrow and dark. Dean's car sits on a CURB.

He exits the vehicle, turns to Eva in her seat --

DEAN
Alright, I'll be right back. Okay?

EVA
Okay!

She beams at him. Dean smiles at her, nods.

He closes his door, walks down the street to a PAYPHONE.
Dean slots in a few coins, dials a number.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
It was a cold night. The kind that
hurt. But Dean liked the cold. It
felt good on his skin.

Wary, Dean puts the phone to his ear.

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tiny, but comfortable.

MAGGIE (20s, exhausted) lights a cigarette on a STOVE-TOP,
paces around the room.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Maggie felt like she could scoop her
insides out. They burnt in her like a
furnace -- sending smoke up through
her throat. She couldn't bare to be
awake, let alone stand.

A DETECTIVE (50s, rotund) and two BEAT COPS stand awkwardly
in the room, drink coffee.

The phone rings. She TEARS it off the hook.

MAGGIE
Hello?

DEAN (V.O.)
Maggie. Are you alone?

Maggie sighs -- tears form in her eyes.

MAGGIE
Jesus Christ, Dean. Jesus Christ!

The police's interest piques. They look at Maggie.

MAGGIE (cont'd)
Is she safe? Where are you?

DEAN (V.O.)

Look--

MAGGIE

Answer me, you piece of shit!

DEAN (V.O.)

She's safe. She's with me.

MAGGIE

Ohhh, what a fuckin' relief! Jesus, what they're sayin' about you on the news... Tell me, *tell* me this isn't true. I beg you. Oh, God. Tell me this is some kind of fucking joke, some fucking *nightmare*--

EXT. URBAN STREET - NIGHT

Dean looks down the street. Shakes his head.

DEAN

I'm sorry. It went bad.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

You're sorry? *You're* sorry? What the fuck do you mean you're sorry?! Bring her *back*. Turn yourself *in*.

DEAN

Oh, yeah! Put my tail in my legs, walk into the station, suck the cock of some fuckin' judge and go back inside? FUCK that! I ain't fuckin' goin' back!

He looks back at the car. Eva looks out the window, at him.

Dean simmers, covers his face.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

I fucking *TOLD* you! I told you! How many times did I say you were either goin' to get pinched or get shot, how many fucking *TIMES*--

DEAN

It's an occupational hazard, Maggie, the fuck do you want me to say? I didn't hear you complainin' when dinner was on the table, and you had all the smokes and fuckin' liquor you ever wanted--

MAGGIE (V.O.)

Don't you fucking *dare* throw this back at me. Dean. I want my child back. I want her home, I want her *safe*. Please. Turn yourself in.

Eva waves at Dean from the car. Dean waves back.

He turns toward the wall.

DEAN

I can't do that.

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Maggie rubs her forehead, paces. The Detective has his notepad and pencil ready.

MAGGIE

Look. Tell me where you are. I'll pick her up. I just want her back. Give me my daughter back!

DEAN (V.O.)

I'm her *father*. She's comin' with me.

MAGGIE

Dean, your fuckin' face is all over the evening news! What do you mean she's coming with you -- all the way to fuckin' prison? They got an ABP on you in the entire fuckin' state! *Think!* Please. I need you to think, honey, because I know this ain't like you. I know you're all fucked up--

EXT. URBAN STREET - NIGHT

Dean hangs up. CRICKETS chirp.

He walks over to the car, opens the DOOR -- peers inside to look at Eva.

DEAN

You hungry?

Eva smiles at him.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Quaint, 50's style. Low noise and low patronage.

Dean and Eva sit in a CUBICLE. Eva eats pancakes, as Dean has a salad.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

Every Sunday they went to a diner off a freeway. Crummy little place. But Eva loved it. Dean didn't have much routine in his life, but he always made sure that Sunday evening was free. Thought it what made him a good father. Maybe it did.

He places a few pieces of LETTUCE on his fork -- FLICKS it at Eva.

She laughs, places a piece of pancake on hers, flicks it at Dean's face -- hits his head.

They both laugh.

DEAN

Okay, okay, truce now. We're both even.

EVA

You started it!

DEAN

At least I didn't hit you!

EVA

But you tried.

He smiles at her, picks at his salad.

DEAN

How're the pancakes?

EVA

Fluffy.

DEAN

Good fluffy?

EVA

Good fluffy.

They sit in silence, eat.

Eva looks up at Dean.

EVA (cont'd)

Where's mom?

A beat. Dean's guard goes up.

DEAN
She's uh... She's at home.

EVA
Why isn't she with us?

DEAN
Well. Uh. She can't come. She,
y'know, she has to do some stuff,
with her cousin, she couldn't make
the time. So it's just us.

EVA
Where are we going? Is it far?

DEAN
Hell, we can go however far you want,
hon'. Anywhere.

EVA
But where's outside of here?

Dean chews.

DEAN
There's a lot to the outside, Eva.
There's deserts and jungles, and
mountains and seas. All sorts of
things to see--

EVA
We don't have that here?

DEAN
We've got things.

EVA
We've got mom.

Dean forces a smile. He ruffles her hair.

DEAN
Finish ya pancakes.

Eva focuses on her food.

Dean's eyes wander across the diner. At another table --

TWO PARENTS (30s) sit with a TODDLER. The Toddler squirms
and cries -- the MOTHER and FATHER move to comfort them.

Dean stares at the family. Looks at Eva.

DEAN (cont'd)
I'll be right back.

Eva nods.

Dean gets up, walks away.

INT. DINER - RESTROOM - NIGHT

Old and dirty. Dean enters.

He walks toward a STALL and goes inside -- closes and LOCKS the door behind him.

Dean unzips his jeans and pisses into the bowl. He stares at the wall.

Etched into a tile is a SMILEY FACE. It stares at Dean.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)
Thing was, he knew he was like the rest of them. Face down in the gutter. And he hated himself for it. But change had always been in the rear-view for Dean. Thought that at least he knew what it meant to live in the front.

Dean's eyes lock with the face's.

HERTZWELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
For all the good that did him.

He stares, furrows his face.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Dean places some CASH down on the table.

One corner of a NOTE is covered in BLOOD.

Dean takes Eva's hand -- they walk out.

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Maggie lights a CIGARETTE on the stove-top. Paces.

The Detective straightens, looks at her. The Beat Cops pour another cup of COFFEE.

DETECTIVE

Ma'am, are you sure there's *nowhere* you can think of that your husband might go? Any relatives', friends'?

MAGGIE

He ain't got no friends. Rat bastards like him don't *make* no friends. And don't get me started on the fuckin' relatives. How do I know what's goes on in that damned mind of his?

DETECTIVE

But you must have *some* idea. Anywhere? Gas stations? Hole in the walls?

MAGGIE

Are you fucking kidding me? He has my child--

DETECTIVE

And he can't be too far gone, yet. Wrack your brain. Ain't there anywhere you can point us to?

MAGGIE

How the fuck should I know where he goes to buy his fuckin' lunch?

DETECTIVE

Anything can help, Misses Insko.

Maggie exhales a cloud of smoke -- stops, leans.

She looks at the Detective.

EXT. DINER - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Calm. SIRENS sound off in the distance -- grow louder...

RED and BLUE LIGHTS. POLICE CARS arrive in the lot -- OFFICERS exit, charge toward the diner.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The Officers enter. A WAITRESS wipes down a table.

In a cubicle, rest half-eaten pancakes and some money.

INT. DEAN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Dean drives FAST. Eva sits next to him, watches the STREETLIGHTS fly by.

EVA
Why are pancakes fluffy?

Dean accelerates. Stares at the road.

DEAN
Uh. 'Cos they want to be fluffy, I guess. They like bein' fluffy. Wouldn't you?

EVA
But you aren't fluffy!

DEAN
I know *I* ain't. But I'd sure like to be. 'Magine that, covered in butter 'n' syrup. Wouldn't be a thing wrong in the world with that.

Dean forces a smile.

Eva looks out of the window.

Dean SHIFTS gears -- accelerates.

DEAN (cont'd)
Uh. We need to make a stop, hon'. Won't be long. Just an errand.

EVA
Okay.

She smiles to herself. Dean wipes sweat from his forehead.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Catholic -- stately and ornate, on an inner-city street.

Dean's car pulls up. He exits with Eva.

He crouches in front of her, holds her shoulders.

DEAN
Okay, honey.

He zips up her COAT, puts gloves over her hands.

DEAN (cont'd)
I just gotta do somethin', okay? You
just gotta wait here.

EVA
Where are you going?

DEAN
Just doin' an errand. I'll be quick,
okay?

Dean walks her over to the church steps -- sits her down.

EVA
But where are you going?

DEAN
Not far, baby. I'll be close, very
close. Just stay here, keep warm.

EVA
When will you be back?

DEAN
Before you know it, sweetheart. I
promise you.

Dean kisses her on the forehead. He stands, looks at her.

DEAN (cont'd)
I'll be right back.

She looks up at him in confusion.

Dean smiles. Fights TEARS as they swell in his eyes.

He turns, walks away -- the smile falters and drops.

Eva watches him leave, disappear into the distance.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Small, run-down. No cars outside.

Dean approaches the NEON 'OPEN' SIGN above the door. He
pulls a .45 PISTOL from his waistband, turns the safety off.

He pushes the gun into his coat pocket, carries on.

INT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Narrow. A CASHIER (30s) flicks through a MAGAZINE at the counter. A RADIO plays by his side.

Dean enters -- the DOOR BELL rings.

The Cashier looks up. They lock eyes.

Dean darts down an AISLE -- falsely peruses the wares.

He takes a few glances at the Cashier through the shelves -- who maintains a solid STARE on him.

Dean moves through the aisles, checks price tags...

The Cashier's fingers crawl toward a REVOLVER behind the counter -- wrap around the handle.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

It's quiet outside.

A quick LIGHT flashes inside the gas station -- a GUNSHOT rings out, echoes away.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

A WIND rushes by the church. A DOG barks in the distance.

HERTZWELL (V.O.)

It was calm, and Eva sat there as if she would forever. And as she looked into the black sky, all she could see was light.

Eva sits on the church steps, eyes above.

She watches the MOON, as it hangs over her.

FADE OUT