

"Seven Hill City"

screenplay written by

Christopher Pettazzoni

&

B. Thompson Stroud

based on a novel by

B. Thompson Stroud

Copyright 2005

SEVEN HILL CITY

FULL SHOT: CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

A stark image of Jesus being nailed to the cross. We hold this image with NO SOUND for a few seconds.

Then, a female voice, the small and strong voice of ARANEA comes in. She is reading lines from Charlotte's Web by E.B. White. We stay on the image of the crucifixion.

ARANEA (V.O.)

"Where's Papa going with that axe?" Said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast. "Out to the hoghouse," replied Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

We jump to a c.u. of Jesus' tired face. Blood streaks down from his head to his cheeks from the crown of thorns.

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

"I don't see why he needs an ax," continued Fern, who was only eight. "Well," said her mother, "one of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

Jump again to Peter and Mary in the crowd, staring at Jesus with tears in their eyes.

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

"Do away with it?" Shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

C.U. of the soldier's hammer nailing Jesus' hand to the cross.

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

Mrs. Arable put a pitcher of cream on the table. "Don't yell, Fern!" She said. "Your father is right. The pig would probably die anyway."

C.U. of the bloody wound in Jesus' side.

ARANEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Fern pushed a chair out of the way and ran outdoors. The grass was wet and the earth smelled of springtime.

C.U. of some spectators off to the side. Some still appear to be screaming for murder, while others seem to be rethinking their judgments in the face of this horror.

ARANEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Fern's sneakers were sopping by the time she caught up with her father. "Please don't kill it!" She sobbed. "It's unfair."

C.U. on the clouds above the mountain.

We cut to a black screen. THUNDER CRASHES.

Then a HEARTBEAT.

Then SILENCE.

TITLE AND CREDITS

FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

A hard rain falls on a funeral tent. The priest speaks, but is drowned out by the sound of the RAIN HITTING THE TENT.

A group of people stand under the tent. All are affected by the situation, but silent. This is not the case with the older woman of about 70 sitting at the front of the crowd, SOBBING. She dabs her eyes with tissue, but they are wet again quickly. Her other hand tightly clutches a Bible.

Off to the side by one of the tent's poles, a pudgy young boy of about 12, BROOKS, stares at the coffin. Aside from the older woman, he is the only other person crying.

We see the headstone. It's large: a marker for a family plot. On the left it reads, "Harold T. White, 1921-1995." On the right it reads, "Gloria F. White, 1925-."

The older woman, presumably Gloria, still SOBS.

The priest finishes the rites and nods to the man at his left, who presses the button to lower the coffin into the ground. The MECHANICAL SOUND of the machine lowering the coffin and SOBS from Gloria are overpowered by the sound of the RAIN.

Brooks has seen enough. He walks out from under the tent.

We sit, ground level, about thirty feet from the tent. Brooks walks our way until he stops a few feet from us.

We can only see his wet shoes in the grass. He's still CRYING. He squats and begins to SOB, now in full view. The rain STOPS.

Along with Brooks' SOBS, we hear FOOTFALLS in the grass from o.s. Then, two shiny, black shoes enter the frame from the side and stop next to Brooks. White tights go up from the shoes to the hem of a pretty plaid skirt.

Brooks stops crying for a moment to look up at the new arrival.

He stands and we rise with him.

The girl, ARANEA, 10, looks up at Brooks. She is petite and has long white hair in ringlets. Tear tracks streak from her green eyes to her cheeks. Without warning, she hugs him.

He fails to react at first, then hugs her back. Her fingers lace around his back as she hugs him tightly. He gives in and resumes SOBBING into her shoulder.

After a moment, he tries to speak, but he's still crying.

BROOKS
W-who...?

She hushes him softly to stop.

ARANEA
(quivers)
It's okay, you don't know me. I
fell out of the sky.

She lets out a little giggle through her own tears.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I landed on a pile of grass and
now my butt is wet.

Brooks' hands grip her tighter.

We jump again to a long shot across the cemetery.

Jump again to a c.u. of a headstone, the "deceased" year, specifically. It reads "1996."

A shot of some wilted flowers on a headstone being battered by the rain.

Jump again to a c.u. of the "deceased" year on a headstone, it reads "1997."

A man of about 85 walks slowly among the stones. He's wearing a serviceman's hat and carrying a small American flag. A woman about the same age locked elbows with him holds an umbrella over their heads.

Jump again to a c.u. of another "deceased" year: "1998."

A dump truck BEEPS as it empties it's load of dirt into an open grave while a groundskeeper in a yellow poncho directs.

Jump again to a c.u. of another "deceased" year: "1999."

A pink construction paper card sits on top of another headstone, pinned down from the wind by a smaller stone. The card is soaked from the rain, but the different colors of crayon are still visible: in a child's handwriting, "Mommy."

We're back looking at Brooks' family gathered around the headstone. They use umbrellas to keep out of the rain instead of a tent. A coffin is being lowered on the right side of the large headstone now. The information on the right side of the stone has been updated: "Gloria F. White, 1925-2000."

About thirty feet away, Brooks, now 17 and beginning to grow into his size, hugs the still petite Aranea, 15. He SOBS even harder this time.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- DAY

Brooks walks down the busy hall with CURTIS. Curtis is tall, blond and handsome, but he doesn't carry himself like he's aware of it. As he walks, he reads from a notebook.

CURTIS
Picayune.

BROOKS
Of little value or importance.

CURTIS
(still reading)
Of little value...

BROOKS
The performance of The Gladiators
in their match against Bill and
Randy Mulkey was picayune. Of
little value or importance.

CURTIS
(laughs)
Okay. Picayune. Yeah, I'm gonna
write "The Gladiators" on my
paper and hand it in. Thanks.

BROOKS
No problem.

CURTIS
Brooks has a picayune relationship
with that girl 'cause he doesn't
know who she is and is too goofy
to go find out and ask.

BROOKS
I've only met her twice, Curtis.
Let it go.

CURTIS
At funerals. What else you gotta
do at funerals besides talk? You
could'a talked to her.

BROOKS
You mourn at funerals. They aren't
social gatherings. You don't
bring dip. I was being brave by
just being there and not dying.
Or wanting to. Whatever.

Brooks glances at the men's room door as they pass it. He
stares it anxiously for a moment, then looks back ahead. Curtis
doesn't even notice.

CURTIS
Maybe next time she falls out of
the sky you should ask her to
hang out, maybe we could all--

BROOKS
I'm a pussy, alright? Let it go.

They walk in silence for a moment as Curtis goes back to
studying his notebook.

CURTIS
"Picayune. Of little
importance...value or importance.
Paltry. Brooks' love life is
picayune."

Brooks smiles, then shoulders Curtis into the wall.

INT. CLASSROOM -- AFTERNOON

Brooks in a quiet classroom. All are bent over a vocab test
on the desks in front of them.

C.U. on Brooks' pen as it cruises down the page to number 20:
"PICAYUNE." The pencil hovers above the blank answer line next
to the word.

Brooks smirks.

Back to the page as the pencil writes "The Gladiators."

Brooks smiles at it and scratches his head with his pencil.

A sound from o.s. makes Brooks look up: the SQUEAKY WHEEL OF
THE A.V. CART in the hall. Aranea is the one pushing it.

Brooks sees her and his face goes slack, eyes wide.

Just then the BELL RINGS, making Brooks jump in his seat. People begin to get up from their desks to leave.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks' head is visible above the rushing crowd for a moment, as he jumps to see ahead past the throng of people.

He jumps again.

Brooks stops at a crossing of another hallway. He frowns in the middle trying to look all four ways at once.

His eyes catch the sign pointing to the boy's room door.

He stares at it for a second, then walks back the other way.

INT. CAFETERIA -- LATER

Brooks sits next to Curtis at a lunch table in a loud cafeteria.

Curtis is pouring way too much ketchup on his fries. Brooks is absently dissecting his square pizza with his spork.

BROOKS
Aranea Cavatica.

CURTIS
You saw her? She goes here?

BROOKS
I lost her, though.

Curtis stars to wolf his food.

CURTIS
Did you talk to her?

BROOKS
No...

Brooks looks up across the cafeteria and his face goes slack.

Aranea is walking right by their table.

He quickly drops his gaze back to the pizza autopsy.

He looks back up to watch her walk out the door.

INT. BATHROOM STALL (HIGH SCHOOL) -- LATER

Brooks kneels over the toilet, vomiting violently.

He stops, catches his breath, then sticks his index finger into his mouth.

Brooks stops dead when he hears the MEN'S ROOM DOOR OPEN, and a set of FOOTSTEPS walk in.

Brooks quickly walks out of the stall and over to the sink. The kid that walked in watches Brooks and lights a cigarette. Brooks washes his hands quickly and exits, never looking at the smoking kid.

INT. AUDITORIUM -- DAY

A crowded auditorium. A large banner across the crowd reads "CONGRATS AND GOOD LUCK GRADUATE'S! CLASS OF 2001!" Streamers still flutter and balloons get batted around. It looks like the ceremony has just finished.

CRYSTAL, 44, steadies a disposable camera at someone. She wears a hideous green dress and too much makeup. But not enough to hide the black eye.

CRYSTAL
Jesus fuck, Curtis, quit horsin'
around!

Brooks and Curtis stand next to each other, both dressed in burgundy and gold robes, and holding up diplomas. Curtis is flexing his pectoral muscles so hard that veins have broken out across his forehead. Brooks laughs.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
CURTIS!

CURTIS
(stops flexing)
Mom, just take the picture.

SNAP and a flash.

Brooks relaxes his smile and looks around.

His eyes bulge a bit.

Aranea is in the crowd not far from them.

Curtis notices Brooks, then sees who he's looking at.

CURTIS (CONT'D)
No shit.

BROOKS
(without looking at him)
She's probably just here to film
it for the yearbook or something.

CURTIS
Who cares? Now's your chance!

BROOKS
What am I supposed to say?

She's walking their way. Curtis darts over to her and takes her hand, leading her back to where Brooks is.

CURTIS

Mom! Mom! Take a picture of the three of us.

Aranea smiles as he guides her in front of them to pose.

Curtis unleashes a massive smile and Aranea smiles and raises two fingers for victory. Brooks' face is frozen with terror.

SNAP and a flash. Freeze on the picture.

INT. BROOKS' ROOM -- NIGHT

The image becomes the worn photo taped to his computer monitor.

Brooks sits at the desk bent over another form. This one is an enrollment application to Lynchburg State College.

The last question on the page has enough room on the answer line for one word. The question reads: "What one word, would you say, best describes yourself?"

Brooks thinks, and glances at the photo on the monitor.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE -- DAY

Brooks sits before the desk of the Dean of Admissions.

The dean peers through the reading glasses at Brooks' essay as Brooks fidgets.

In the dean's p.o.v., we scan down to the last question. We glide across Brooks' answer: the word "compensation."

The dean drops the page to his desk and stares at Brooks. It's impossible to tell if his expression is stunned amazement or profound disgust.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT: SCHOLARSHIP FORM

Brooks' application information has been filled in on the form.

Three line items appear about three-quarters down the page. First: "TUITION- \$30,000/yr." Then: "SCHOLARSHIP AMOUNT- \$27,000/yr." Last: "REMAINING BALANCE- \$3,000/yr."

At the bottom, there are two signatures: Brooks' and the dean's.

A red stamp of "APPROVED" covers the signatures and the seal of the dean's office.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DORMITORY -- NIGHT

Snow falls lightly outside the dorm. One window on the ground floor flickers with signs of life.

INT. BROOKS' DORM ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks sits indian-style on a futon. He's wearing boxers and eating salt & vinegar potato chips, and watching japanese professional wrestling: Tiger Mask versus Dynamite Kid.

The picture from the monitor is now stuck to his bulletin board.

A KNOCK from outside.

Before Brooks can react, the door is opening slightly. The DEAN pokes his head in the door with a big grin on his face.

DEAN

I hope I'm not interrupting.

Brooks doesn't move from where he sits, or react at all.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I'd certainly hate to be interrupting the creative flow of "the compensator." I just wanted to stop by and make sure you got the flyer about creative writing department's short story contest. They're having a meeting tomorrow night in Pembroke at 7:30 if you're interested. There's quite a few people there that share your "creative blessings." It'd be a great learning experience. You'd fit right in!

The dean sees he's not getting a response, but stays pleasant.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Okay! Well, I don't want to take any more of your time, so...hope to see you tomorrow night!

The dean slinks back out into the hall and walks off.

Brooks goes back to watching t.v. without shutting the door.

EXT. STUDENT THEATER -- AFTERNOON

A flyer stuck to the door: MIYAZAKI'S POM POKO, 1:00, 4:45.

INT. STUDENT THEATER -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks watches Pom Poko with about twelve other students.

He glances over at a girl sitting a few seats away: Auburn. Dark sunglasses are pushed up on her face.

Brooks goes back to the movie.

Then looks back at her again.

EXT. AUBURN'S DORM -- EVENING

It's rapidly growing dark outside of Auburn's dorm. AUBURN and Brooks sit opposite each other, indian-style, on a picnic bench outside the entrance. Auburn has a healthy figure, a lip ring, and freckles to match her reddish hair.

BROOKS

Then there's also the parallel of the tanukis and the humans, and how the tanukis end up having to adapt just like humans do, in order to survive. But aside from that, should we, as humanity, just keep adapting and fuck all other species we share the earth with, or should we try to be conscious of the fact that not everything can adapt as quickly as we can, and move forward in a different way? And are we responsible for making sure that other species keep up? So, is evolution the enemy? Or is it just as natural as everything else and we just feel guilty for being good at it? I don't know.

AUBURN

And who knew testicles could be used so effectively as weapons?

Just then, the campus lights come on above them. Auburn responds with a smile and slides her sunglasses back on.

INT. BROOKS' DORM ROOM -- NIGHT

Brooks' room is dark aside from his dim desk lamp. Auburn sleeps in his bed peacefully, small smile on her face. Brooks sits up awake next to her.

He looks down at her, then looks across the room.

We see that, from across the room, he's staring at the picture of Aranea tacked to his bulletin board.

INT. BATHROOM STALL (BROOKS' DORM) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks is bent over the toilet, vomiting.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE -- DAY

One hand, holding a letter opener, slides it into the letter held in the other.

They remove the contents: two pieces of paper.

One is the tuition invoice for Brooks White with the amount due of \$3,000. The other is a note that says "Thanks, anyway."

EXT. BROOKS' ROOM -- DAY

Brooks tosses two large bags into the back of his white, 1978 Toyota Corolla. Auburn stands off to the side, watching.

He stops, packing done, and looks at her. She just looks back.

BROOKS
It's only a half hour away.
I'll be around.

AUBURN
Oh, I know. It's no big deal.

They stare for a moment longer.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
Grave of the Fireflies on the
seventeenth, right?

BROOKS
I'll be there.

Another look, then Brooks kisses her.

He walks to his car, gets in, and starts it up.

He drives off.

Auburn waves lightly.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

C.U. of a picture of a fetus surrounded by a thick font reading "ABORTION IS MURDER!"

The picture is in the upper-left corner of a personal check that's being filled out by an old woman at the register.

Brooks waits sullenly at the other side of the register, wearing a blue smock. He's staring at the picture on the check.

He glances up and sees the rest of the line at his register waiting for the check to be completed.

The elderly woman fills it out with fine chickenscratch, as her elderly husband stares off into space. He wears a foam/mesh ballcap that reads "CHOOSE LIFE" across the front.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- EVENING

Brooks' MOTHER washes dishes in the kitchen sink.

Brooks walks in and tosses his blue smock onto the table.

MOTHER

Hey. How was work?

BROOKS

(without looking)

Terrifying.

(taking off his shoes)

Oh, Curtis is going to come over tonight to watch wrestling at nine.

MOTHER

Oh, that'll be nice.

BROOKS

Yeah, it's been almost two years.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Brooks sits on the couch alone, watching wrestling. A worn wrestling mask rests in his lap.

He looks up at the clock on the wall: 9:23.

Then back to watching tv.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- MORNING

A gray morning. We hear the PHONE RINGING from inside.

INT. BROOKS' BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The PHONE RINGS TWO AND A HALF TIMES, waking Brooks up.

He looks at the clock on his nightstand. It's 10:38.

BROOKS

God.

He gets up with as much speed as his sluggish body will allow.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks strides down the hall dressed in his work outfit. A clip-on tie is hooked to the edge of his collar, and his blue work smock drapes over his shoulder.

BROOKS
(calling out)
I'm going to work. If they call,
just tell them I'm running behind
because I had a flat...

He trails off and stops in the doorway to the kitchen.

His mother sits at the table with Curtis' mother, Crystal. Crystal's ample mascara coats her cheeks from crying. Both women look at Brooks gravely.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROOKS' ROOM -- EVENING

An overhead light turns on in the closet. Brooks' arms wrangle the clothes on the rack to one side to uncover the last hung item closest to the wall: a black suit.

His hand takes it and the lights click off.

The suit gets tossed onto the bed.

Brooks stands there in his boxers and t-shirt and stares at it, still in its plastic sheath from the drycleaner.

He looks up at the picture of he, Aranea and Curtis taped to his computer monitor.

INT. FUNERAL HOME -- NIGHT

A large viewing room full of people. At the head of the room, a half-open casket containing Curtis' body. Crystal stands by the casket, face coated in runaway mascara, hugging and talking with people as they view the body.

Brooks stands off to the side of the packed room all alone, staring at the ground. He looks up at the clusters of friends/family that have formed.

He watches Crystal across the room as she sobs at someone.

CRYSTAL
Why? Why would he do that?

We see only the back of the person she's speaking to as they shake their head and hug her.

The look of contempt on Brooks' face grows to visible anger. He detaches himself from the wall and heads for the door.

He angrily tries to shove open the door, but instead awkwardly SLAMS into the glass, getting raised eyebrows from the people nearby.

He pushes the bar on the door to release the latch and it opens properly this time.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks storms out and down the steps into the parking lot, still wet from rain earlier that day.

He angrily stomps through a puddle, when a voice from o.s. stops him right in the middle of it.

ARANEA (O.S.)

Brooks?

He turns, and there she is.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Hey.

BROOKS

Hey.

She walks towards him.

ARANEA

Are you...? Um... I...made you
a present.

She reaches out and offers him a tiny piece of paper. He takes it and opens it.

In perfect calligraphy, it reads: "I'm sorry."

Brooks hitches as the tears run down his cheeks.

Aranea is there in a flash, holding him tightly as he lets go.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- DAY

Through the grainy eye of a video camera, we see Curtis standing on the railing of the porch facing the yard. On the lawn below him, laying on a dirty mattress, is Brooks. JON calls the match from behind the camera.

JON (O.S.)

(in announcer voice)

Ladies and gentlemen, in my twenty-five years in the business, I have never seen what we are about to see! "The Man From the Streets" is gonna fly!

Curtis begins to pound his skinny chest for the crowd.

ARANEA (V.O.)

One Friday afternoon, we were told to bring something to class that reminded us of our childhood.

(MORE)

ARANEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was a group exercise to help
us learn about ourselves or
something. Community college's
version of show-and-tell.

Then he leaps off the porch, does a full somersault, and lands
a full foot away from where Brooks lies.

Brooks begins to thrash in agony on the mattress from the hit.

JON (O.S.)
Unbelievable! Just un-bee-
lievable!

Curtis makes that CHEERING CROWD sound by exhaling heavily.

ARANEA (V.O.)
Anyway, I brought in a stack of
crayon drawings of unicorns and
mermaids and managed to put the
whole class to sleep.

He walks over to where Brooks lay, and rips the oversized
"championship" belt from around Brooks' waist.

ARANEA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But then Curtis puts on this
video of you and him wrestling
in the front yard, and everybody
just went bonkers.

Curtis struts around with the belt held over his head.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Another wet, gray day. Brooks and Aranea sit on the hood of
Brooks' car, talking, about thirty feet away from the spot
where Curtis' burial service is taking place.

ARANEA
The girls shrieked and the boys
were chanting along. We could
have charged admission. It was
darn near a cultural event.

(she smiles at him)
What was that thing he'd do to
you all the time that would make
you so mad? Where he would drop
you on your head and you'd end
up throwing the camera at him?

BROOKS
You mean you actually paid
attention to that stuff? If I'd
known women would be watching,
I'd have kept my shirt on.

Aranea smiles and pushes his shoulder.

ARANEA
Of course I was paying attention.

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- DAY

Back to the grainy video. Curtis is attempting an elaborate move on Brooks.

BROOKS (V.O.)
The move is called the "Tiger
Driver Ninety-One."

Brooks is being held upside-down and seems to know what is coming. He tries to fight back, but Curtis is determined.

ARANEA (V.O.)
"Ninety-One?" Are there Ninety
other "Tiger Drivers?" Do they
involve actual tigers being driven
anywhere?

Curtis completes the move and drives Brooks' head into the mattress painfully.

Curtis laughs and raises his arms triumphantly.

Brooks wobbles as he gets up, then chases Curtis angrily.

BROOKS (V.O.)
Nah. A guy in a tiger mask
invented it, so it's tiger, and
your head gets driven into the
mat, so that's driver. Nineteen
Ninety-One was the year he debuted
it. He did it right, but I didn't
want him to actually do it.

Curtis laughs as Brooks chases him.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Back to Brooks and Aranea on the hood.

ARANEA
A guy in a tiger mask?

BROOKS
You wouldn't believe me if I
told you his name.

ARANEA
I promise I'll believe you.

BROOKS
His name was Tiger Mask.

ARANEA
(shouting)
HA HA!

This gets a few turned heads from the people at the service.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I don't believe you. And the
Japanese yelling? Does Tiger
Mask yell?

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- DAY

Back to the video and Curtis preparing to Tiger Drive Brooks.

BROOKS (V.O.)
Curtis would imitate the Japanese
announcers. They always name
the moves in English, but, y'know,
they speak Japanese, so it comes
out sounding like "tie-gar du-
rive-ar-uh."

Curtis names the move in perfect sync with Brooks' v.o.,
enunciating each syllable exaggeratedly.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Aranea laughs and Brooks smiles.

Aranea looks as Brooks' eyes latch onto the burial not far
from them.

ARANEA
Curtis really meant a lot to
you, didn't he?

Brooks nods lightly.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

Brooks' face twists for a second. His eyes tear up.

BROOKS
God... I played Nintendo with
him last Saturday, and we made
plans to watch wrestling together
on Monday, and he never...
(swallows hard)
I haven't been back long and he
didn't call... It's like he waited
for me to come back. Like he
wanted to say goodbye to me, and
that's just so melodramatic and
obvious and...

He drops his head and tries to push it all back down.

He looks up and Aranea is looking right back at him. It calms him and he smiles lightly, thankfully.

ARANEA
Here, look at this.

She pulls up the right sleeve of her jacket and shows Brooks a cross-shaped scar on her palm about an inch wide.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
My stigmata. Know how I got it?

BROOKS
You've been chosen by God to spread the faith and bring goodwill towards others?

ARANEA
I should be so lucky. Curtis showed me what a dragon screw leg whip was. All of a sudden, I'm being hurled across the room by my leg, and when I stuck out my hand to break the fall, I took a glass and two coasters with me. Cut my hand all up and this is what stayed.

Brooks smiles, then begins to take off his shoe.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
You're doing what exactly?

BROOKS
Showing you something.

Now his sock is coming off.

ARANEA
Your stigmata?

He holds up his foot. There's a large scar across the bottom.

BROOKS
Yup. I was going to body-slam Curtis into the bushes, and I stepped on the mattress in the wrong place. One of the springs shot out and went all the way through my foot.

ARANEA
Ouch!

BROOKS
Yeah.
(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Now every time I put my shoes
on, I get the image of Curtis
lying on the grass laughing at
me while I jumped around screaming
like a girl.

Aranea laughs and Brooks puts his sock back on.

ARANEA
Aw...it's like we're soulmates.
Soulmates via unsupervised
wrestling.

BROOKS
Is there any other kind?

They share a smile.

People milling away from the grave get their attention. Curtis' mother, Crystal, is sobbing loudly into someone's shoulder.

CRYSTAL
(distant, through sobs)
Why did he do it to me? Why did
he do it? Why?

Aranea hops down from the hood and walks over to her. Brooks watches, unsure of what to do.

Crystal is at first slightly apprehensive of the stranger, then lets her guard down as Aranea talks to her (too distant to hear).

Then, Crystal is hugging her.

Aranea talks to her a little more as Crystal nods. She almost smiles through her tears and seems to thank Aranea.

Aranea walks back over to the car where Brooks sits.

BROOKS
What did you say to her?

ARANEA
I told her that Curtis loved
her, no matter what, and I
promised her that he was fine.

BROOKS
How do you know?

ARANEA
(simply)
I checked.

Brooks looks at her for a moment and can think of no reply.

They watch the mourners return to their cars and begin to leave. A light rain begins to fall.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks gets in the driver's seat and closes the door.

He rolls down the window. Aranea stands outside of it with an umbrella over her head that looks like a panda bear.

Brooks sits there for a moment not doing anything, looking empty. Aranea watches him.

ARANEA

Hey, you know what? You're going to be okay. In fact, you're going to be completely and utterly full of okay.

Brooks looks at her and raises his eyebrows.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

This is the part where you say "oooookaaaay whyyyyy."

She reaches in and squeezes his cheeks to help him speak.

BROOKS

Oooookaaaay whyyyyy?

ARANEA

Because you've got your guardian angel looking out for you.

Brooks rolls his eyes.

BROOKS

Please. To teach me the true meaning of Christmas or something?

ARANEA

No. There's more to it than that. Like you said, I've been chosen by God to spread the faith and bring goodwill towards others.

(shows him her palm)
I am fully prepared to make all of your statues bleed.

BROOKS

Those poor statues.

ARANEA

Exactly. ...We'll make it through together, okay? It's nothing but daisies and waterslides from here on out.

He smiles a bit and looks down at his lap.

BROOKS

Okay.

When he looks back up, she's already about fifty feet up the road, walking away.

Brooks scrambles desperately to get out of his car. Once he does, he just stands there, unsure of what to do next.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Aranea! Hey!

She turns to look at him.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(fumbling)

Uh, where are you going? How can I...? You're only around when...

ARANEA

(smiles)

Don't worry. Whenever you need me, just think about your guardian angel.

With that, she turns and keeps walking.

Brooks stands there for a moment looking totally unsatisfied with this, but unable to think of anything to do about it.

He gets back in his car and SLAMS the door.

He closes his eyes and his head falls back on the headrest.

A KNOCK KNOCK on his window snaps him back up.

It's Aranea. He rolls the window down again.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Hey, I was just kidding. That would have been pretty lame.

She reaches through the window and drops a folded piece of paper onto Brooks' lap.

He opens it up.

It's an old crayon drawing of a unicorn running through a field. Scrawled at the bottom: "Aranea Cavatica, age 6." The "I" in her last name is dotted by a ladybug.

Brooks smiles warmly, completely disarmed.

He looks up like he's going to say something and she's gone again: back up the road, splashing in puddles as she goes.

On the window, 555-7109 has been drawn in the condensation.

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- DAY

Back to the grainy home video. Curtis is addressing the non-existent crowd with the championship belt over his shoulder.

CURTIS

To all my fans out there, to all
you Man From the Street-ites, I
just want you to know that I am
totally invincible and can never
be defeated!

Jon does the CHEERING CROWD noise in response.

CURTIS (CONT'D)

This Sunday I will meet my arch-nemesis, the overrated and totally uncool Jack Mask Jr., the Tijuana Superstar. He will surely feel my fury!

He raises his arms triumphantly and walks backwards as Jon makes the CROWD GO WILD again.

Curtis steps onto the pile where they had left their shoes, trips, and falls backwards into the bushes.

The camera jerks and Brooks, Jon and Curtis can be heard LAUGHING.

The screen flickers, then goes to static.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- NIGHT

The room is lit only by the colored Christmas lights strung up. An ELVIS COSTELLO SONG PLAYS on the stereo, not quite in tune with the RHYTHMIC SQUEAKING of the futon.

Despite the fact that Auburn and Brooks have now approached the most energetic stages of the sex they're having, they carry on a completely casual conversation.

BROOKS

So I'm wondering if I should start being more open with my feelings and tell people when something really affects me.

AUBURN

Yes, I think that's a good idea, being open. Complete dehiscence.

She digs her blue fingernails into his chest beneath her.

BROOKS

But what happens if I'm open and
don't get the reaction I want?
If someone I care about doesn't
feel the same way and ends up
laughing in my face?

AUBURN

The sacrifice of personal
existence is necessary to the
preservation of the species,
hon. Your struggle is not unique.

BROOKS

I've just seen so much pain in
my life already...I hope I can
avoid the pain I bring upon
myself.

Auburn grinds herself forward, lowering herself to Brooks.

AUBURN

Am I not helping?

BROOKS

...You're helping.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- DAY

C.U.: a small cardinal lies on a facecloth in a shoebox, eyes closed, not moving. Frank Sinatra CROONS softly in the background.

Brooks sits indian-style on the living room floor next to the shoebox, staring down at the bird.

Aranea is in the kitchen. She has a phone propped in the crook of her shoulder. As she talks into it, she presses an iron onto a terry cloth.

ARANEA

(into the phone, taking
directions)

Okay. Okay. I'll call again if
anything changes. Okay, thanks.

She hangs up.

Brooks is in the living room, still sitting by the box, but is now looking all around at the house that, as his expression shows, he didn't expect.

It is old and dusty like a British museum. Black and white photographs in elaborate frames hang on the walls. The camera focuses on some of the odd objects inside: Cats spelling "MEOW" standing on an old floor model television. A b/w photo of a child holding a tattered doll. A book case holding yearbooks and two copies of common books for high school reading.

Brooks focuses on one framed photo: a picture of Aranea, maybe about six years old. She sits on the steps of a home with a big grin and her white hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Brooks smiles lightly and contentedly at the picture.

Just then, Aranea comes back in and sits down beside him.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Here, I warmed these up.

She scoops the tiny bird into her equally tiny hands as Brooks stuffs the rest of the box with the warm cloth.

BROOKS
So it just flew right into your kitchen window?

ARANEA
Pretty much. I was actually going to make you a grilled cheese since you were so nice to me on the phone. I figured, that's what civilized people do, right? So I had just harnessed my culinary chi, and the poor thing just collided. It was horrible.

She lays the bird back into the box, and pulls the edge of the warm cloth over the bird like a blanket. She has tears in the corners of her eyes.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
There.

Brooks stares at her as she tends to the bird. He has that same look he had while he was looking at her picture.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Now they tell me we just have to wait and hope for the best.

BROOKS
Well, I'm sure it would have been delicious. The grilled cheese, I mean.

ARANEA
Oh, yeah. Stupid bird had to go and disrupt my picnic luncheon. I hope it doesn't die, though. That would disrupt many picnic luncheons.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- NIGHT

We're back in Auburn's room, where she and Brooks both lounge on the debris of their lovemaking.

Brooks sits with his back to Auburn, staring at his shirtless chest in the mirror on her wall with great dissatisfaction.

BROOKS
I think I'm just ready for
something more in my life.

He grabs the loose flab on his belly in two handfuls, grimaces, then lets it drop. Auburn lies back, staring at the ceiling.

AUBURN
(melodramatically)
More than the grocery store?
Dare we dream the impossible?

BROOKS
Stop it, I'm serious.

AUBURN
I can tell. You're using man
voice.

BROOKS
Yes, I'm using man voice. Being
able to use it in these situations
is one of the perks of being a
man.

She rolls her eyes and TURNS THE STEREO UP with her toe.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
I feel like I'm finally ready to
get my act together. I need a
second job so I can go back to
school, or start writing that
book I wanted to write.

AUBURN
(before he finishes)
Look, what, exactly, are you
looking for in life? Are you
just saying all this because
you're not happy with how you
look with your shirt off or do
you actually have a plan to
achieve your goals?

Brooks pulls the covers over himself self-consciously.

BROOKS
I don't actually have a plan.
But I think I'm in love, y'know?
And that's a start, I guess.

AUBURN
(scoffs)
Love.
(MORE)

AUBURN (CONT'D)
I hate to break it to you, hon,
but I'm not exactly the housewife
type.

BROOKS
...I wasn't talking about you.

Brooks sits still and braces for reaction, not turning.

After a second, Auburn sits up and puts her mouth right next to Brooks' ear.

AUBURN
(whispers)
Good.

Then she kisses the back of his neck, and springs to her feet.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
Want anything from the bistro?

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Brooks and Aranea now sit in seats across the room from each other. The shoebox still lies on the floor between them.

ARANEA
My father once told me a story
about a family of birds buried
beneath some dirt he was trying
to clear, and how he decided to
just change locations instead of
disrespecting them, y'know?

Brooks nods.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
My dad's a great guy. I'll have
to introduce you sometime.

BROOKS
What does he do?

ARANEA
He digs graves.

Beat.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I wasn't entirely...on purpose.
My mom had me when she was forty-
two. I was all wrong. My hair
was solid white, no color at
all. But my dad thought I was a
natural miracle.
(MORE)

ARANEA (CONT'D)
That's how I got my name. It
means "spiderweb" in Latin. In
some Latin dictionaries, anyway.
Latin is so hard to figure out.
In another dictionary it probably

BROOKS
(smiles)
Want to know something pretty
sad? I already knew what your
name meant. I looked it up when
I found out we went to the same
school.
(smiles nervously)
Creepy, huh?

ARANEA
Oh, no. No. Well, yeah, it
kinda is. But it's still sweet.

They both laugh a bit and Brooks goes completely maroon.

BROOKS
Hey, Aranea, I wanted to thank
you for--

Just then, a tiny CHIRP.

Aranea perks up.

ARANEA
Did you hear that?

She leaps down to the floor and hovers over the shoebox with
the cardinal in it.

Brooks smiles bittersweetly, due to the lost opportunity. He
gets down beside Aranea and looks into the shoebox.

The tiny bird now CHIRPS a little more regularly and takes in
it's surroundings.

Aranea is lit with a blinding smile.

Brooks can't help but smile, too.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

A slow day at the supermarket. Rain comes down in torrents.

Brooks scans items and sends them down to SCOTTY, the bagger.
Scotty is about 16, and pierced in several places.

As he bags the GRUMPY CUSTOMER's items, he talks to the
completely uninterested Brooks.

SCOTTY

One time, I saw this bumper sticker that said, like, "unborn babies have no laws to protect them, but dolphins do," and I was like, "wow, that's really meaningful." Then I felt sorry for all the dolphins, 'cause they had to have laws to protect them.

Brooks briefly looks like he's going to try and process this information, then thinks better of it.

The grumpy customer watches Brooks with great anticipation. She springs on him as he scans the second package of bologna.

GRUMPY CUSTOMER

Are them buy one get one free?
The sign says them's buy one get one free.

BROOKS

(checks)

Indeed them is.

SCOTTY

Oh, and this one time, there was this bumper sticker, right, that said "racist people suck," and the "suck" was in huge red letters, and that was on the same car, I think.

BROOKS

(without looking)

Yeah, but I bet a really clever racist could blow that guy's mind.

Now it's Scotty's turn to try and fail to process a statement.

The grumpy customer impatiently waves her money at Brooks, trying to get his attention from watching Scotty struggle.

GRUMPY CUSTOMER

Excuse me!

BROOKS

Right, sorry! Uh, your total comes to fifteen seventeen.

She wiggles the twenty again for Brooks to take it. He does.

She collects her change and groceries and leaves.

A handsome middle-aged man (SOLOMON) in a pink polo shirt takes her place in front of Brooks.

SOLOMON
Wow, she sure was grumpy!

Brooks smiles and shrugs as he rings up the man's diet shakes and squeeze-tube yogurt and sends it down to Scotty.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
You have to wonder if some of the people have the love of Jesus Christ in them at all. Tell me, where do you go to church?

SCOTTY
(eagerly)
I go to Timberlake Christian.

SOLOMON
Oh, really? I go to Thomas Road.

Scotty nods and smiles warmly in response.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
I heard a great sermon last Sunday evening about how immigrants, not Americans, must learn to adapt in our new patriotic America. It was quite moving. You should try to get a copy if you can.

SCOTTY
Oh, I will, definitely.

Brooks is watching this exchange like he's trying to tell if Scotty is pulling this guy's leg or not.

BROOKS
Nine eighty-four.

Solomon happily pays.

SOLOMON
Well, it was nice speaking to you both. Take care!

He collects his bag from Scotty and shakes his hand.

Brooks raises his eyebrows as he flips his register light off.

BROOKS
Scotty, you never told me you went to church.

SCOTTY
I go to a lot of different churches with my friends. There are some fine lookin' women at church, know what I'm sayin'?

He pulls out a knit cap and a pack of smokes as he makes for the door. Brooks follows.

EXT. SUPERMARKET -- CONTINUOUS

The rain still comes down amazingly hard.

Scotty lights up and Brooks props himself against the wall under the supermarket's front canopy.

SCOTTY

There's this one girl, right?
Damn, I gotta hit that!

BROOKS

So you just go to pick up women,
then?

SCOTTY

Nah dude, it ain't like that.
It's like, it's where we all
hang out and we get to praise
and all that. I'm all about the
praising, right? The women are
just tight as hell, that's all.

He flicks his cigarette butt at a bird on the sidewalk, causing it to fly away.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

It's what you're supposed to do.
It's all righteous and whatever.
Besides, what else am I supposed
to do in this town?

BROOKS

Eat. Sleep. Die. Go to church.

Just then, a mammoth SUV pulls up along the sidewalk under the canopy. Solomon trots up to the two boys.

SOLOMON

Ho ho ho! I almost forgot to
give you this!

He hands both Brooks and Scotty a pamphlet. The cover has a rainbow across it and says, "The Real Facts of Life!"

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Have a blessed day, boys!

Solomon shakes both their hands and trots back off to his SUV.

The SUV speeds off across the parking lot.

Brooks crumples up the pamphlet and tosses it into a trashcan.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Brooks is in the bathroom, bent over the toilet.

He presses down on his tongue with his index finger, but only gags painfully. Tears well up in his eyes from it.

He tries again, but still nothing. He begins to cry a little.

Then, a KNOCK at the door.

MOTHER (O.S.)
(through the door)
Are you okay?

Brooks quickly gets up and wipes the spit from his fingers and the tears from his eyes.

BROOKS
Uh, yeah.

He opens the door and tries to sound annoyed at the idea that anything could be wrong. His mother's face is concerned but afraid to pry too hard. He looks down at her shoes.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
What's up?

MOTHER
You have a phone call.

She puts her hand on his and he lets her take it.

Her hand takes his, but instead of grasping it, she slides her fingers and thumb over his index finger.

Startled and aware, he snatches his hand away.

But it's too late: she rubs her thumb and forefingers together, feeling the moisture she wiped from his hand. She just looks at him.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
It's a girl.

She turns and walks away.

INT. BROOKS' BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks in and closes the door.

BROOKS
(into the phone)
Hello?

ARANEA (O.C.)
What's up, homeslice?

BROOKS
Aranea? Hey! I didn't think
you had my number.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

ARANEA
I don't. I tried to look it up
in the phonebook, but I realized
that I had no idea what your
parents' names were. So I started
calling all thirty-four "White"
listings until I found you.

INT. BROOKS' BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks still looks stunned and excited about the call.

ARANEA (O.C.)
You're number eleven, by the
way.

BROOKS
Good to know.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

ARANEA
Anyway, I called you for a reason.
I wanted to know if you maybe
wanted to do something this
weekend?

INT. BROOKS' BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks almost forgets to reply.

BROOKS
Uh, yeah! Absolutely! What did
you have in mind?

ARANEA (O.C.)
Well, I thought you might like
to come to church with me on
Sunday.

Brooks loses his smile and sits down on his bed.

ARANEA (O.C.) (CONT'D)
We're having a lunch afterwards
and I'm bringing grilled cheese
sandwiches specifically for you.

This brings some of his smile back.

ARANEA (O.C.) (CONT'D)
They're going to be delicious.
How could you possibly say no?

EXT. AUBURN'S DORM -- NIGHT

Brooks sits on the picnic table outside of Auburn's dorm. He's dressed in a nice suit and tie, and has a brown paper bag in his hands.

The door to the dorm opens and Brooks springs up and runs over to it to get inside.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- MOMENTS LATER

A long hallway lined with doors. Each is covered in flyers, photos and dry-erase boards slathered in drive-by obscenities. There's also a large number of people milling about between them. Girls in "show" pajamas talk in groups or into cellphones. Tall men in rugby shirts and filthy ballcaps are led around on invisible leashes.

Brooks wades through all this towards a door with a strikingly pretty asian girl sitting in the full lotus position in front of it. The girl is KIRBY. She's so deeply engrossed her book that she doesn't notice Brooks until he speaks.

BROOKS

Hey, Kirby.

KIRBY

(looks up)
Hey, Brooks. Nice suit. Did somebody die?

BROOKS

Nobody in about a week or two, so things are looking up.

He bends down to read the title of her book.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Japanese For Busy People? Why are you reading that?

KIRBY

I'm brushing up before my family visits next weekend.

BROOKS

Kiki, I hate to break it to you, but your family doesn't speak Japanese. You grew up in the suburbs.

KIRBY

Then I'm punishing them for ignoring their heritage and denying me a dignified childhood in 1950's rural Japan.

BROOKS

Oh, you went to the Miyazaki
film festival, didn't you?

KIRBY

I'm going to make them Hamburger
Helper and put a bunch of rice
noodles in it. Culinary satire.

BROOKS

Learned anything crucial yet?

KIRBY

Biru ga ii desu.

She gestures to the door behind her.

BROOKS

What does that mean?

KIRBY

"I'd like some beer." Auburn's
been repeating it all night. I
think she has brain damage.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

With an OOF, Brooks is on his back on the futon with Auburn
straddling him and kissing his neck.

BROOKS

Uh, Auburn?

AUBURN

(still kissing)

Hm?

BROOKS

Are you going to introduce me to
your friends?

They look over at the two guys playing her Playstation. They're
from the same can as the other men seen trolling the dorm.

AUBURN

Oh, they aren't my friends,
they're just some guys.

(looks back at Brooks)

Your outfit. The suit. You
look good.

She goes back to kissing his neck.

BROOKS

Thanks. Uh, normally this is a
good thing, but I don't know if
I'll get a chance to iron in the
morning before church.

She loses all passion at the mention of this and exhales loudly into his shoulder.

She then props herself up, still straddling him.

AUBURN

Okay, Brooks, fun fact: you don't go to church anymore, correct?

BROOKS

I haven't gone recently, no.

AUBURN

You stopped going after your grandparents died, right?

BROOKS

I tell that story too much, don't I?

AUBURN

You once said that religion is a crutch for the weak.

BROOKS

Actually, I think Jesse The Body Ventura said that.

AUBURN

Whatever.

She looks around for her glass and finds it next to a bottle of cheap tequila. She takes a swig.

BROOKS

Look, I know, but tomorrow is different. I'm going with--

AUBURN

The one you're in love with. The little girl with the big teeth.

BROOKS

Well...

AUBURN

(slugs her drink)
Brooks, your love is misguided.
It is merely desire. You're
being straddled and you're
thinking about church.

She leans back down to him again, but he grabs her wrists and pushes her back up.

BROOKS

Don't talk to me like that. You have no right to judge my desires, especially when they aren't even desires.

She shakes her hands free and reaches over to the ashtray on the table where her glass was.

She doesn't find what she's looking for and GRUNTS at the two guys playing the video game.

One reaches around quickly and hands her a joint.

AUBURN

Desire and love are the same thing, save that by desire we always signify the absence of the object; by love, most commonly the presence of it.

She takes a hit from the joint.

BROOKS

You're quoting Thomas Hobbes now?

She blows smoke and smiles.

AUBURN

I've always been a bit of a tiger.

She leans down and kisses him, but he pushes her away.

He gets up quickly, forcing her up with him. She has trouble keeping her balance.

He walks out the door.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks storms out of Auburn's room and strides down the hall.

Halfway to the elevator, Kirby walks out of the bathroom, electric toothbrush sticking out of her mouth. She seems confused to see him again.

KIRBY

Hey, again.
(sees his expression)
Oh God, what's wrong?

BROOKS

This whole thing. I can't do it anymore. It doesn't make sense. She's just...not what I want right now.

KIRBY

Okay, that's a lot of exposition for someone to take on their way out of the bathroom. Now tell me why Auburn is running down the hall in her underwear.

Brooks turns to see Auburn stumbling after him in pajama pants and a sports bra. She's sweating and looking pale.

AUBURN

Brooks! I'm sorry, I shouldn't have snapped at you like that. I didn't get to thank you for the sushi, and those guys...

She sways a bit and props herself against the wall.

Kirby goes over to her and looks at her face with concern.

KIRBY

Auburn, honey, you look like creeping death. You should have put on a shirt before you came out here. Hacky-sack people can see you.

They look up and see a Jesus-looking hippie looking staring.

AUBURN

I'm...fine.

Her head begins to droop and sway, and she slumps against the wall and slides down to her butt.

Brooks and Kirby both squat down beside her.

Kirby holds Auburn's face up and pulls her eyelid open.

KIRBY

Okay. She's going to be okay, but I need to go across the street and get a few things. Just take care of her till I get back.

Kirby gets up and starts walking down the hall.

Brooks takes Auburn's arm and puts it around his shoulder.

KIRBY (CONT'D)

(from down the hall)

And try not to have a whole bunch of sex while I'm gone!

Brooks has Auburn standing now, but a small trickle of vomit is dripping from her slack mouth. A bit hits Brooks' tie.

BROOKS
(calling back)
I'm think I'm fine with that.

INT. BATHROOM (AUBURN'S DORM) -- MOMENTS LATER

Auburn vomits into the toilet and cries weakly. Brooks is gently wiping her face and brow with a wet paper towel.

He tosses the used paper towel into the toilet gets up.

BROOKS
I'll be right back, I'm going to
get a cloth or something. Just
try to make it into the toilet.

AUBURN
Not all of us in the stall are
professionals.

Brooks walks out, shaking his head and smiling humorlessly in response to Auburn's flawless zinger.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The two guys playing Playstation earlier, BEER BARON and GAMECOCK, are now sitting on the futon, eating the sushi.

Brooks ignores them and goes right to Auburn's dresser.

GAMECOCK
Hey, is that chick coming back?
Auburn, or whatever?

BEER BARON
Yeah, is she your girlfriend or
anything?

BROOKS
(without looking)
No, we're just good friends.

He finds a clean cloth and a towel in the dresser.

GAMECOCK
Dude, she needs to hurry back.
We need more weed.

BEER BARON
Nah, man.

He pulls out a baggie with about six white pills in it. Brooks stops his exit.

BEER BARON (CONT'D)
The world's first and only organic
ecstasy experience!

BROOKS
You aren't going to...you weren't
planning to give any of that to
her, were you?

BEER BARON
Well, yeah, that's why I brought
it. I mean, if you aren't her--

He is cut off abruptly by Brooks punching him in his nose,
knocking him to the floor.

GAMECOCK
Damn!

Brooks turns and walks out of the room.

INT. BATHROOM (AUBURN'S DORM) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks back in, shaking his right hand.

Auburn's face rests on the seat of the toilet. A string of
drool and vomit trails from her mouth onto the seat.

Brooks helps her up off of the floor and guides her over to
the bench by the showers.

Once she's sitting these, he strips down to his boxers.

He starts up the shower using only the "cold" handle.

He undresses Auburn.

He guides her into the freezing shower and lets the cold water
wash over her.

He quivers from the cold as he washes her face.

She opens her eyes slightly and looks at Brooks.

AUBURN
So you love her, huh?

He just looks back at her.

He holds her close to himself and continues to wash her in the
freezing water.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- MORNING

P.O.V.: BROOKS

His eyes blink open. Through the gum of his vision, we see
the Hello Kitty digital clock: 9:49.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks runs out of Auburn's room and down the hall, tie-ing his tie and tucking in his shirt as he runs for the elevator.

He gets in and presses the button for the ground floor.

P.O.V.: BROOKS

Through the closing elevator doors, we see Auburn coming out of the stairwell into the hall. She has a paper bag from the school bistro in one hand, and a tray with two coffees in it.

She stops and looks at Brooks in the elevator just as the door closes. There was no time to say anything.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks is speeding down the road, still trying to make himself look decent.

Brooks slows at a yellow light right before the bridge.

He looks at the clock on the dash: 9:56. He hits the gas and goes through the yellow light just as it turns red.

He makes it about halfway across the intersection when his car begins to slow down.

Confused, he looks down at his foot as it pumps the gas pedal, but still nothing.

The car crawls to a stop right in the middle of the road.

The sound of his engine FADES along with all other sound, aside from his HEARTBEAT.

Still confused, he looks at something down the road to his right. His eyes bulge.

A large logging truck is headed right for him.

His foot hits the gas again rapidly, but gets no response.

Brooks' expression turns to stunned fear as he looks to his right and sees the truck already close and moving towards him in slow motion.

BROOKS' P.O.V.:

The truck barrels right at him slowly. At about fifteen feet away, time catches up again.

Then, just as the massive grill of the truck connects:

BLACK SCREEN

Light comes up all around to the point of being almost blinding.

A silhouette forms in the middle, barely blocking out the light. It is a person, with long wings spread out, coming towards us, arms outstretched.

Just as it's face is about to become clear, we cut away harshly.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Brooks snaps to and tries to get his bearings.

He looks down: he's sitting on his grandparents' grave.

He hops down and looks around.

In the distance, a little white-haired girl in a plaid skirt is skipping along the path away from him.

He begins to run after her.

Her fingers trace the edge of Curtis' tombstone as she passes.

Tiny white flowers spring from where she touched.

Brooks still runs after her, trying to avoid falling into an open grave.

He stops and realizes that all of the graves in the cemetery are empty.

He looks up at the little girl again and sees the little girl at the giant black gate at the edge of the cemetery.

She raises two fingers at him, then skips through the gate as it closes.

He runs to the gate and tries to pry them open, with no luck.

From the other side of the gate, a man in green bell-bottoms and a butterfly-collared shirt walks over to the gate. He's in his late forties, and has tight, curly hair. This is ST. PETER.

ST. PETER
(to Brooks)
Can I help you?

The man smiles warmly at Brooks.

Brooks rests his forehead on the black bars of the gate.

BROOKS
I was just trying to catch up
with someone.

ST. PETER
Aranea Cavatica. I know her.
Story of your life, right?

BROOKS
(smiles)
Seems that way. So can I go
through?

ST. PETER
Weren't you just hit by a truck?

BROOKS
Uh, yeah, I guess so. I seem
fine, though.

ST. PETER
Hm.

His eyebrows go up.

ST. PETER (CONT'D)
What gives you the idea that
you're good enough to be here,
with her?

BROOKS
Uh...huh?

ST. PETER
Every attempt you've made towards
redemption has been spoiled by
your desire to rise above your
teenage mediocrity. Now you're
chasing after her again, and you
smell like pot and girl dorm.

Brooks has no reply. He looks down.

ST. PETER (CONT'D)
Let me ask you a question. If
you did end up winning her over,
what would you do with her?

Again, Brooks has no reply.

ST. PETER (CONT'D)
Now, stop pretending. The light
is green.

St. Peter walks away.

Brooks looks confused by this last comment. Before he can ask, Aranea stands where St. Peter was. She is smiling.

A loud HONK from o.c.

Brooks and Aranea both turn to look.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Another loud HONK from behind, followed by TWO MORE.

Brooks snaps out of his trance and looks around: he's back in his car at the lights before the bridge.

The light is green, a fact which more HONKS attest to.

Brooks hits the gas and drives through.

Instead of getting on the bridge, he pulls over to the gravelly shoulder of the road and parks the car.

He sits there, staring down at his steering wheel.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

We're back to where we were at the gate with St. Peter.

ST. PETER

Let me ask you a question. If you did end up winning her over, what would you do with her?

BROOKS

I don't know. I don't know, but it doesn't matter, because I'm still going to sit here and think about her anyway. She is the imperfect ideal. The thing I don't have and don't understand, because it's almost like she's what I want to be. Feeling this way is the only thing I can count on in my life. I don't even want to get to know her anymore. I just want to be with her, in a box at the end of her bed, just letting her be herself and letting me watch it.

St. Peter smiles.

INT. BROOKS' GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE -- DAY

Brooks, age 8, sitting beside his Grandfather HAROLD on the couch watching "The Gospel Bill Show."

INT. SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS -- MORNING

Brooks' grandmother GLORIA is putting cut out images of apostles and livestock onto a blue felt board. Brooks, age 8, watches attentively.

GLORIA

...Which is why sometimes we have to believe in things we can't see. Because we believe them in our hearts.

EXT. JOHN LYNCH BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks sits on the railing overlooking the river and the skyline of Lynchburg. He has a satisfied little smile on his face.

He swings his legs back across the railing, and starts to walk over to the shoulder where his car is parked.

A logging truck careens onto the shoulder about ten feet from where he stands and SMASHES into the side of Brooks' car, taking it across the road with it.

Brooks stands there, stunned.

EXT. CHURCH -- AFTERNOON

Brooks pedals his bike furiously into the church parking lot, which is now mostly empty.

He parks it and starts up the path to the door.

From behind:

ARANEA (O.S.)
You probably don't deserve this,
but you're going to get it,
anyway.

Brooks turns and sees Aranea standing there. She has a paper plate in her hand adorned with a grilled cheese and potato salad.

BROOKS
(panting)
Aranea, I'm so sorry.

ARANEA
What's on your tie?

Brooks looks down at the dried vomit on his tie.

BROOKS
Oh, I must've spilled something
on it. I'm really sorry.

She hands him the plate.

ARANEA
I know. It sucks, though. You
missed an amazing sermon about
love from Paul, our youth leader.

They begin to walk along the fellowship hall as Brooks eats the grilled cheese.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

It's like, love is the ultimate selflessness. It's the total sacrificing of one's self, even one's very life, for the good of another person. That's when you see that love isn't needing someone, it's wanting someone. The true compliment is when somebody knows your faults and doesn't love you in spite of it, but loves you because of it. Because they want to.

They stop at a long wall that blocks off a steep hill leading down to the cemetery. Brooks rests his plate on it as they look out.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Love is more than just an emotion. It's directly orchestrated by God as a metaphor for the love He has for His creation. So the two people that contribute to create it begin the triangle relationship. Y'know, that the two people are on the bottom corners, and as they move upwards towards God, they move closer to each other.

BROOKS

Seems like something you feel pretty strongly about.

ARANEA

Yeah, I feel strongly about love. Isn't that the most beauty pageant thing you've ever heard?

They both laugh.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

So! How are you going to make this up to me?

BROOKS

Oh. I, uh... Actually, there's this film festival tomorrow at my old college from like five till midnight. Lots of great foreign films. Studio Ghibli stuff. I thought maybe you'd like to go, too.

ARANEA

Sounds great. But isn't wrestling on tomorrow night?

BROOKS
For you, I can miss wrestling.

ARANEA
(smiles)
I'd love to.

BROOKS
Great! It's a date, then.

Aranea loses her smile.

ARANEA
Oh.
(looks away, then back again)
Oh.

BROOKS
What? What's wrong? Did I...?

ARANEA
No, it's okay. I just don't
date.

The words hang heavily for a moment.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I realize that obsessing over a
word might sound anal. You've
got to understand, though, that
that word has an awful lot of
societal baggage attached to it
that you can't help but take
with you on one.

BROOKS
W...what do you mean?

ARANEA
Okay, here it is: The way I see
it defined in the lives of others,
a date cannot be causal, because
it's essentially about finding
somebody to marry, which is a
pretty serious thing. So I define
a date as a presence of two
agendas.

Brooks nods, taking this all in, but his expression is that of
a deer hypnotized by headlights.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
There's the silent understanding
that it's more than just hanging
out, and the evening has a filter
of romantic potential on it.
(MORE)

ARANEA (CONT'D)

This leads to preconceived notions and expectations and that really murders decent human relations, y'know?

Brooks nods again, but still looks like he's about to vomit.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

You simply don't feel that pressure if you've found someone that you get along with exceptionally well. You'll just naturally want to invest more into the relationship. So, I guess I'd just like to think that relationships could be free of connotations. When I meet a person, I just want to look at them as a human being first. So yeah, I don't date. I hang out. And if God isn't lining me up for the nunnery, maybe one day He'll let me marry my best friend.

EXT. JOHN LYNCH BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks standing alone in the middle of the intersection before the bridge.

He looks to his right and sees the logging truck slowly barreling right for him. Again, NO SOUND, just a HEARTBEAT.

He turns and faces it. He closes his eyes.

Time catches up at about fifteen feet away, and the truck closes in.

When it hits:

BLACK SCREEN

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- NIGHT

We are still black.

There's a SHUFFLING/FUMBLING SOUND, and SQUEAKING LIKE SNEAKERS ON WET TILE.

Auburn's voice swims in:

AUBURN (V.O.)

Or how about this...

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- EVENING

Brooks sits, shirtless, on Auburn's futon, brow slightly furrowed, looking into space. Auburn continues to speak from o.c.

AUBURN (O.C.)

You could put in some quality time with the rim of the toilet, then suck in your gut while she walks around not noticing you, sending yourself deeper and deeper into personal madness all the while.

BROOKS

She doesn't not notice me. She invited me to church with her.

AUBURN (O.C.)

You don't think that she invites everyone she knows to go to church with her? It's probably like an innuendo for her, except she actually means going to church.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

Back to darkness. More squeaking and shuffling. A cough and a wet sniffle.

Auburn's voice swims in again:

AUBURN (V.O.)

So if she won't date you because you're not some magical gift from God, why don't you use that against her?

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks sits in the same spot, still staring.

He snaps out of it.

BROOKS

What?

Auburn leans forward into the frame: she's been sitting behind him.

AUBURN

Use it against her. She won't reciprocate unless God herself gives her a sign, right?

BROOKS

Basically, yeah.

AUBURN

Well, if she doesn't believe in romantic trail and error, then take the power into your own person to give her the sign she's looking for. If you don't, dear friend...

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

Back to darkness. As Auburn finishes her sentence, the words waver and fade again.

More shuffling. A long INHALE, then EXHALE.

AUBURN (V.O.)
...the dream is over.

THE LIGHTS COME ON. Brooks stands before the mirror and recoils a bit at the sight of himself: blood and bile cover his chin and mouth, as well as his right hand and white t-shirt. He begins to breathe heavier and sways on his feet a bit.

Auburn's words swim back in:

AUBURN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Why are you being so destructive about this, anyway? She's just a girl. You're walking the fine line between art and cliché.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM

Brooks still staring off with Auburn cuddled up behind him. She has her arms wrapped around his bare chest.

BROOKS
When I was in the graveyard the first time, nothing made sense. My world was broken and I was falling. But then she was there, and she hugged me for no reason. I don't know why she was there or why she did it. Since then, she's always been on the border of my life, looking around, seeing what she could help me with or fix.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

There's blood on the tile floor and blood on and in the toilet, matching the mess on Brooks himself. He tries to focus and takes another deep breath, but sways again as he exhales.

BROOKS (V.O.)

The problem is that I keep fearing that the things I do for Aranea will never exceed the efforts of any other random soul that felt something cheap for her. Maybe if I felt something cheap for her, she'd give herself to me, and I could pretend.

He takes one step back, then his eyes roll to the whites.

In slow motion, we follow the trajectory of Brooks' head down to the bloody floor.

AT 60 DEGREES, WE CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

St. Peter looking through the bars of the gate at Brooks again:

ST. PETER

If you did end up winning her over, what would you do with her?

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

Still falling slowly.

AT 45 DEGREES, WE CUT TO:

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- NIGHT

Brooks punching Beer Baron.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

Still falling slowly.

AT 30 DEGREES, WE CUT TO:

Rapid images of:

The wrestling video with Curtis

Pom Poko

A piece of folded paper with "miraculum" written on it

Aranea as we first saw her in the graveyard when Brooks was 12

Then, just as Brooks is about to hit, Auburn's words swim in again:

AUBURN (V.O.)

Oh, I've got it.

An inch from the ground, we freeze.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

She raises a finger high in the air.

AUBURN

You can dig a hole and hide in it, and when she walks by, you can push a giant monolith up from the ground, and she'll be forced to evolve into somebody that gives a damn.

She gets up quickly and throws on a hoodie.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

You want anything from the bistro?

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (BATHROOM) -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks hits the floor with a THUD THAT IS BOTH LOUD AND FAR AWAY AT THE SAME TIME.

Fade out.

EXT. ARANEA'S STREET -- EVENING

Black boots walking down a street. They belong to Brooks. With a light smile, he tromps through the fallen leaves that have collected by the curb of the suburban street.

Over his shoulder is slung a shopping bag. Its contents and Brooks' marching cause it to make RHYTHMIC CRUNCHING SOUNDS, not unlike the leaves that he's stepping on as he walks.

Brooks re-affirms his grip in the bag's neck. The momentary shift causes one tiny rectangle of folded orange paper to fluff out of the bag and flutter to the ground. It lands face up on the pavement in Brooks' wake, revealing the word "MIRACULUM" written on the front.

He reaches the crest of the quiet street's hill, and stops to look down at the rest of the street ahead of him. Specifically, Aranea's house, which is about thirty yards and a few trees away.

He takes a deep breath and looks around. The smile still on his face, he looks optimistic and terrified at the same time.

He sits down on the blacktop indian-style and continues to look around.

After a moment, he lies back on the pavement, looking up to the sky.

BROOKS' POV: A speck of a commuter jet streaks it's contrail across the sky in the corner of his vision.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (DAYDREAM) -- EVENING

Aranea sits in her living room.

She is instantly aware of the sound of footsteps tromping across what must be her roof.

She gets up to investigate.

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (DAYDREAM) -- CONTINUOUS

Aranea walks out of her front door onto her lawn.

She turns to look up at the roof.

As she does, Brooks, on the roof, releases the contents of the shopping bag into a perfect updraft, sending the hundreds of multicolored miraculites in the air above Aranea. MUSIC UP.

In slow-motion, we watch as they flutter around her like flower petals as she watches in stunned wonder.

Then Brooks is next to her and she goes to him. They embrace beneath the shower of paper.

She raises up to kiss him.

EXT. ARANEA'S STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

FULL SHOT

Brooks' face, eyes distant and grinning absently. He still lying back on the pavement.

P.O.V. BROOKS

The jet in the sky has moved about a quarter of an inch from this perspective. A quick flash of motion in the peripheral, then a SMASH of broken glass from o.c.

FULL SHOT

Brooks' face. His brow furrows as he's forced out of his daydream and he sits up to turn and see the source of the noise.

P.O.V. BROOKS

Focus on a broken Coca-Cola bottle smashed in the street about twenty feet away. Glass, a red and white label and corn syrup spread in all directions. Then, A LIGHT SQUEAL OF TIRES as a pickup truck swerves to avoid the wreckage.

Brooks' eyes grow wide as he realizes he's sitting in oncoming traffic.

Through the windshield, we see the driver of the truck, a man of about 40, almost simultaneously regard the obstacle he's just avoided and notice the new one in front of him.

The truck swerves violently again as Brooks does his best to leap from the indian-style position to the safety of the curb. He makes it by inches and lands hard.

The driver looks in his rear-view to see if he'd managed to avoid his second obstacle.

The shopping bag full of little papers blows up and hooks itself onto one of his windshield wipers. The bag and the endless supply of little papers coming from it obscures his vision.

Brooks watches in horror from the sprawled position on the pavement as the truck continues to swerve and SCREECH down the street, miraculites leaving a contrail of their own behind it.

By now, the commotion has lured the first few curious suburbanites to their doors and porches to see what all the ruckus is. One of them is Aranea.

The truck pitches up on it's left two wheels for a moment, then swerves hard to the right to counter it. This sends it up over the curb and onto Aranea's lawn, and headed right for the steps where she's standing.

Brooks goes white.

In the space on the lawn between the truck and Aranea is a birdbath, which is mowed down by the truck.

With only feet to spare between the truck and Aranea, the base of the birdbath, which has been plowing a groove into the lawn from underneath the truck, locks up against the foundation of the steps and props the front of the truck up like a begging dog only inches from Aranea.

The impact of this upending sends the last of Brooks' miraculites into the sky around Aranea and across her lawn, fulfilling their intended destiny in almost the worst way possible.

Wheels still spinning, the truck is otherwise still. Aranea, who has not moved an inch since stepping outside to see what was making all of the noise, leans forward and calmly draws a heart in the mud that's caked on the pickup's hood.

The driver of the pickup tries to free himself from the deployed airbag.

Out of breath, Brooks arrives on the lawn, looking apprehensive as well as relieved that she's okay.

Aranea is looking around with a small smile as the little pieces of paper flutter around her.

On the hood of the pickup, a cardinal is perched. It has a piece of green paper in it's beak that reads "miraculum."

EXT. ARANEA'S BACKYARD -- LATER

A small dog jumps around inside and around a cheeseburger maze from a McDonald's playground.

Brooks and Aranea are standing in front of her back door, looking at the cheeseburgers.

BROOKS

Aranea? Why do you have big metal cheeseburgers in your back yard?

She squats down to look inside the burgers.

ARANEA

I wanted the little fry guy with the spring sticking out of his butt, but I couldn't get it shipped. I thought the cheeseburger labyrinth was the way to go.

EXT. ARANEA'S FRONT YARD -- MOMENTS LATER

A tow truck is cleaning up the car accident. Lots of shuffled dirt and loud beeping.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Aranea stands at a window looking out. Brooks sits Indian-style with his back to a couch, repeatedly re-adjusting himself.

ARANEA

My front yard looks like the fertile crescent.

(beat)

That was a Mesopotamia joke, by the way.

BROOKS

They taught us about Mesopotamia during the first month of school for like six years in a row. We'd start there and get up to World War II, and then start over the next year. "World History." When we finally got to U.S. history I starting thinking of Calvin Coolidge as a priest-king.

ARANEA

The patron saint of presidential alliteration, perhaps?

BROOKS

I don't know, "presidential alliteration" makes the whole thing sound too P-E. Like he had to start eleven words in one sentence with the letter "B."

Aranea begins silently counting her fingers. The light bathes her from behind. She pauses, then rushes across the room and sits down beside Brooks.

ARANEA

Okay.

(silently counts her fingers again)

But Brooks, wouldn't it be better to back this banal bantering with a better base than Calvin Coolidge?

She raises her hand to hi-five Brooks.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, baby! Nine words!
That qualifies me for participant alliteration! Woo!

Brooks and Aranea laugh and sit silently for a beat. Aranea scratches her elbow. Brooks touches his shoe to hers.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

So, you think there's a parody shuttle run?

BROOKS

Maybe if they made an astronaut do it. But that might be the irony shuttle run.

ARANEA

I was so bad at the shuttle run.

BROOKS

Me, too.

ARANEA

I was always too skinny to run well.

BROOKS

And I was too fat.

ARANEA

Oh, you aren't fat.

Brooks grimaces in pain for a moment and turns away.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Hey, you're not fat.

Brooks finally exhales.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

He rests his head on the back of the couch.

BROOKS
No, no, I'm fine. I was just...
You're fine, I just... I've been
having some stomach problems
lately, and I guess diving for
my life wasn't the best way to...
go about making that...better.

ARANEA
Ooh. I wasn't aware you were
diving for your life. If I'd
known you were in such a bad way
I wouldn't have let you sit around
waxing 7th grade historical with
me. Why have you had stomach
problems?

BROOKS
I just...I've had some problems
with my stomach.

ARANEA
Do you mean stomach problems
like medical problems, or stomach
problems like personal problems?

BROOKS
What do you mean by "personal
problems?"

ARANEA
Is your stomach worried about
finding a date for the spring
social? You know what I mean by
personal problems.

A shot of Brooks' hand.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Brooks?

A shot of Brooks' foot as it slowly moves away from Aranea's.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
...Oh.

Beat.

The tow truck outside BEEPS LOUDLY as it does its job.

FULL SHOT: PIECE OF PAPER

A shot of a piece of paper on which is written "YOU'LL NEVER GET RID OF THOSE CHUBBY CHEEKS, THEY'RE HEREDITARY!" in red magic marker.

Shot of a book on Aranea's bookshelf: Garfield Loses His Feet.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Brooks, stop if for a second and
look at me.

Aranea grabs Brooks by the wrist and kneels in front of him. She places his hand on her chest, across her heart.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Can you feel that?

Brooks nods, losing his breath.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
My heart hasn't beaten regularly in three years. One day I woke up on the kitchen floor staring up at a refrigerator magnet, and all of a sudden my landlord is standing over me and I'm in a hospital with tubes running up my nose. I don't know if you've ever had tubes in your nose but it's harsh.

Brooks' eyes are welling up.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I'm in no position to tell you to stop doing it. I've done the same thing. My body doesn't work now. It stopped that day on the floor. I don't care if the magnet said "You Can Do It." I can't.

Aranea moves her face closer to Brooks.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
And ever since then, I've been completely insane.

BROOKS
(closing his eyes)
Suddenly I feel incredibly symbolic.

ARANEA
Epic poetry, blah blah blah.

BROOKS

In a helpless kind of way we're
like soul mates. Soul mates via
horrifying eating disorders.

ARANEA

Is there any other kind?

Long pause.

BROOKS

I guess that explains the
cheeseburgers.

INT. SUPERMARKET -- NIGHT

The bright fluorescent shine throughout the near-empty store. The clock on the wall reads 1:13. Stockers in work clothes as well as the pallets of cans and boxes that they're stocking the shelves with occupy the aisles.

Brooks mans the lone lit register at the front of the store, cleaning nothing off of the conveyor with purple cleaning spray.

Scotty mops the same three feet of floor as he talks to Simon. Simon is of about the same age as Scotty, and wears a huge sweatshirt decorated with flames on the elbows and a skull on the front. He LAUGHS every few seconds at what Scotty is saying to him.

BROOKS

Hey, Scotty. If you're finished,
you can go. I'm good here by
myself.

SCOTTY

Yeah, aight.

As Scotty wraps up his mop job, a guy and a girl, again about Scotty's age, walk past them. They walk waist-to-waist, giggling to themselves.

Scotty takes and exaggerated look at the girl's ass as she walks by. Once they're around the corner, Scotty comments:

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

Swear to God, why is it that all
the prettiest girls go out with
all the ugliest guys?

Simon does his job and LAUGHS at the comment.

BROOKS

I dunno. I think your argument
loses credibility when you remain
as ugly as you are without a hot
chick.

Simon is now BELLOWING WITH LAUGHTER.

SCOTTY
What did you say?

Scotty walks up to Brooks in his best thug-trainee style and looks him in the eye.

Then his scowl relaxes and he smiles.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
Hah, right. Yeah. You're lucky
I'm clocking out now.

He and Simon then take off down the chip aisle to the back of the store.

Brooks shakes his head and smiles. He goes back to cleaning nothing.

After a few moments, Scotty's voice booms over the p.a.

SCOTTY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
(over p.a.)
Cashier to the back, please.
Cashier to the back.

Brooks frowns and he walks down the chip aisle to the back.

INT. BACK ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks through the double doors to the back room. It's part loading bay, part coatroom, and with the addition of a crappy table, it's part employee lounge. It's also where the timeclock and bathrooms are located, which is where Scotty and SIMON are standing now.

Scotty has a massive grin on his face and looks like he's about to burst. Simon is doing what he does best, but is now trying like hell to stifle the laughs by launching them into his elbow.

SCOTTY
Brooks Brooks Brooks c'mere c'mere
c'mere!

He waves Brooks over excitedly.

Brooks walks over, looking apprehensive.

Scotty points at the door to the women's restroom.

He raises one finger to his lips to shush Brooks, then leans closer to listen. Brooks does the same.

The unmistakable SOUNDS OF TEENAGE SEX can be heard through the muffled door.

Brooks rolls his eyes, and Scotty and Simon erupt into fresh GIGGLES.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
They're doing it in there, man!

BROOKS
I know.

SCOTTY
Well, you gotta do something about it.

BROOKS
I have to do something about it?

SCOTTY
Yeah! You're the only person up front. That's your job.

BROOKS
How is it my job?

In response, Scotty reaches over and punches his timecard.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
You son of a bitch.

Scotty, grinning like a madman, holds his hand to the door in an "after you" gesture.

Brooks exhales heavily and steps to the door.

The SOUNDS OF TEENAGE SEX can still be heard as Brooks puts his hand on the door.

Then, it STOPS.

Brooks leans in to put his ear to the door.

The door swings open, catching him off-guard.

The TEENAGE GIRL stands at the door looking appalled at Brooks.

TEENAGE GIRL
Oh my God! What the fuck are you doing? Fucking pervert!

She smacks Brooks across the face.

Scotty and Simon both cover the "O" shape their mouth is making with their hands.

Right behind her the TEENAGE GUY steps up.

TEENAGE GUY
Man, what the fuck?

He shoves Brooks and grabs the girl by the wrist to lead her out.

Brooks, still stunned by the slap, reacts like a batwing door to the shove, and steps aside to let them pass.

The teenagers exit the back room.

Simon and Scotty both stand there, stunned.

SCOTTY

Did she slap you? She slapped you. She did slap him?

SIMON

She slapped him.

Brooks is still stunned, like he's trying to figure out if that all really just happened.

Scotty trots by him into the bathroom.

SCOTTY

Aw, man! Sick!

BROOKS

God, what?

SCOTTY

Dude, you've gotta clean that up?

BROOKS

Dude, I've gotta clean what up?

SCOTTY

That.

Brooks looks in.

BROOKS

Man, the baby changing station?

Simon erupts into fresh LAUGHTER.

SCOTTY

Have fun, man. Peace out.

With big grins, Scotty and Simon both leave.

POV: THE MESS

Brooks looks at us with grim resignation.

He exits the doorway of the bathroom.

RUMMAGING AND COMMOTION can be heard o.c.

Brooks comes back into the doorway with a facemask and plastic bags over each hand. In one bag hand, he holds a massive ball of brown paper towel.

He apprehensively begins to walk toward us, his grimace increasing the closer he gets.

Just as the paper towel covers our vision:

AUBURN (O.S.)
(singing, over p.a.)
I...don't know how...to love...
him...

The paper towel pulls back and Brooks looks up, brow furrowed.

INT. SUPERMARKET -- CONTINUOUS

Auburn stands at Brooks' register, a bag of fast food in one hand, the register microphone in the other. She's singing into it.

AUBURN
(singing, over p.a.)
What to do...how to move...him...

Brooks emerges from the back room and walks to the front. Every stockboy he passes is craning their neck towards the front of the store.

Auburn waves the fast food sack hand at Brooks once she sees him, then puts it down at his register.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
Excuse me. I can use food stamps
to buy cigarettes, right?

Brooks walks right by her smile and lifts the bag off of the counter.

He grabs a paper towel and sprays the steam-print where the bag sat.

Auburn watches him wipe and her smile fades to a mix between an "are you serious" face and an "excuse me all to hell" face.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
(sarcastic)
Sorry.

BROOKS
(catches her tone)
I didn't mean... It's just
getting to be a lot of work
keeping this place clean.

She crosses her arms and look around, like she's not sure if this was a mistake or not.

Brooks looks at her like he's trying to think of the right way to apologize and thank her.

He looks over and spots Scotty and Simon outside the store, faces pressed against the window, looking at Auburn.

Scotty looks at Brooks and mouths the words "she's hot," then does the universal hand gesture for "big boobs."

Brooks frowns and waves him away.

Auburn turns to look.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
So. Did you need...? I mean,
why are you...

AUBURN

Brooks. I was just in town for a party and thought I'd bring you some food. I'm not doing the creepy stalker girlfriend thing. I'm not even your girlfriend, so being creepy and stalking is a few steps ahead.

Brooks nods and looks at anything but Auburn.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
Hon, you know that I normally find this "brooding artist" thing you do incredibly attractive, but today is my own personal sad anniversary, so there's no reason for you to get all quiet and ruin it for me.

Brooks looks at the clock on the wall.

BROOKS
You've only got...eleven minutes before we stop selling alcohol.

Auburn is stunned.

AUBURN
I...

She stares at Brooks and he doesn't look back.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
Whatever.

She turns and walks towards the cooler section of the store.

Brooks rolls his eyes and puts the heel of his palm to his forehead.

He leaves the register to follow her.

He peeks around the corner down the aisle where Auburn is perusing the alcohol selection in the cooler.

He walks over to her slowly.

BROOKS
So why is this a sad anniversary?

AUBURN
Forget it.

He stands close beside her.

BROOKS
What are you going to get?

She shrugs.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Well, it really depends on what kind of night you want to have. If you wanted to take out your work-related frustrations on your nagging wife, you wanna go with this.

(points up)
If you want to run into a telephone pole on your way out of the parking lot, you can try this.

(points down)
And if you suddenly have the urge to have sex with your brother, here's your best bet.

He points to an end-cap of faux-moonshine jugs.

Auburn finally cracks into a quiet laugh. She closes her eyes as she does it and traces her nose on his bicep. Brooks smiles.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
So why is this a sad anniversary?

AUBURN
You really want to know, do you?

BROOKS
I wouldn't have asked otherwise.

She crosses her arms.

AUBURN

Yeah, but you didn't ask when I
was fishing for it.

BROOKS

That's more of a fault in the
obviousness of your fishing.

He bends down and takes a twelve pack of citrus malt-beverages
out of the freezer.

AUBURN

My fishing is fine, thank you.
And I only need six. I want to
be able to drink the majority of
them before Kiki fails a math
test and threatens to stab herself
in the stomach.

He bends again to replace the twelve with the six.

BROOKS

You're avoiding the question,
though.

AUBURN

Yeah, I know.

They walk back to his register.

Brooks watches her as he rings up the six pack for two dollars.
She's not saying anything.

BROOKS

You--

AUBURN

(interrupting)
There was this guy...a long time
ago.
(exasperated)
Why does every story begin like
this? The world is filling up
with emancipated females and my
sad story starts with "there was
this guy a long time ago." Ugh.

BROOKS

It's okay.

AUBURN

Brooks, you might not want me to
talk about it here. You're at
work and I'm just sad. I
shouldn't have come to you for
this.

(MORE)

AUBURN (CONT'D)

How wrong is it for a woman to
expect the man to build the world
she wants rather than create it
herself?

BROOKS

Yes, and we have art to save
ourselves from the truth.

Auburn raises her eyebrows and looks at him.

AUBURN

You countered Anais Nin with
Nietzsche. I think that says
something profound about our
relationship.

Brooks looks at her with a light smile.

BROOKS

Your booze is getting warm.

She just stares at him like she's still unsure.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Just tell me.

At this point, the right margin of the frame moves to the left until it's halfway across, splitting the frame down the middle. Auburn still stares at Brooks on the left side, but the right side is black.

Then, the right begins to fade in.

EXT. AUBURN'S HOUSE (2000) -- DAY

A nice home in the suburbs and a beautiful day. A large and dirty pickup is parked in the driveway. A handsome (but slightly dim-looking) young man stands in front of it. A much younger Auburn stands before him, tearing the paper off of a small present.

AUBURN

His name was... I was seventeen and he was twenty-four. He asked me to marry him on my seventeenth birthday, and of course I said no.

She opens the box to reveal a ring. Her jaw drops.

He kneels before her, smiling.

She shuts the box in stunned disgust and hands it back to him. His eyes are wide and perplexed.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

One of his friends told him later that it was because he didn't make enough money. It wasn't that at all, really. I just...I was seventeen, y'know?

She storms back up the driveway and into the house.

He's still kneeling.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT: PASTEL SUNSET

A lamely artificial backdrop of a pale orange skyline.

AUBURN

I didn't want to get married to anyone. I still don't. It's an empty gesture.

A brightly smiling man in a tuxedo appears on the left.

A brightly smiling woman in a gown appears on the right.

They hold hands, and their rings send out an artificial-looking wave of light.

Once the wave goes over both of them, they're still standing hand in hand, but in normal clothes. They still smile wide.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

It's when two people are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part.

At a very accelerated rate things begin to appear all around them, each with an audible POP:

A fake-looking house grows up behind them.

A fake-looking car pops into the driveway, with a TOOT-TOOT.

The woman's belly swells up with a HISS of an inflating balloon.

With another POP, a little boy appears.

The woman's belly begins to HISS again.

Another POP and they're joined by a little girl. The woman is now noticeably fatter.

The kids begin to run around at incredible speed, and get bigger (older) as they go.

The original man is now hunching over a little more and losing some hair. The woman is now dumpier. Yet they both still smile.

The little boy and girl are now teenagers BICKERING with each other.

They stop bickering with each other and start YELLING at the man and woman.

A "STUDENT DRIVER" sign appears on the roof of the car in the driveway with another POP.

The boy and girl stop yelling at the man and woman and exit on their respective sides in a huff.

At the same time, a college grows up in the background behind them next to the house.

With a SMASH, the car in the driveway is suddenly a wreck. The girl walks back into the scene and shrugs.

The college deflates and the boy (looking ratty and unshaven) walks back in, drops a duffel bag and plops on a couch that appears under him.

He pulls out a remote and starts flipping channels on a tv that appears with a POP.

The woman and man both age quickly, postures getting worse and hair going gray.

The girl's stomach starts to HISS like the woman's did.

The woman's breasts drop about six inches down her chest all at once with a BOING sound.

The rest of the man's hair falls out all at once.

They still both smile brightly.

AUBURN (CONT'D)
The kind of marriage you make
depends on the kind of--

BROOKS
(interrupting)
Auburn.

She stops and looks at him. Everything on the right side freezes in place.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
No more quotes. Just tell me.

The right side goes black again.

After a second, it comes back in.

INT. BANK -- EVENING

Dale, dressed in a mechanic's uniform and filthy with grease, pushes a check to the tell or the other side of the window.

AUBURN

(low)

He had this savings account that he'd put money into every time he got paid. He kept telling me that he was saving up to buy me this expensive piece of jewelry that would "win me over," like I was that shallow.

Brooks walks around his register and crouches down in front of her.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT: WHITE BACKGROUND

Dale stands in his mechanic garb looking handsome and dim.

The background suddenly changes to deep forest.

A hunting rifle appears in Dale's hands.

Suddenly, Dale's clothes are replaced with a full camouflage hunting gear, complete with face paint. It's so perfect that his eyes and his goofy smile almost seem to float there against the forest backdrop.

AUBURN

The money he had left, he would spend on boy things, like hunting equipment. Those really redneck hats that have the leaves printed on them? He'd wear that and a bright blaze orange vest that you could see from the highway.

The bright orange vest suddenly appears on him, giving him away completely. He grins and waves.

She smiles a little and rolls her eyes.

EXT. DALE'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Dale showgirling a set of blindingly shiny rims on his incredibly dirty pickup truck.

INT. DALE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

DALE showgirling a massive black shotgun.

AUBURN

I would skip class and go over to his house and he'd show me the things he bought. "Check out these rims I got for the truck," or "look at this Beretta 1200 I got at the gun show."

A tear runs down her face past the light smile that has yet to fade completely.

Auburn sits on a beanbag chair, with her back to Dale, playing Nintendo, looking annoyed.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

I would sit on a bean bag chair on the floor of his apartment and play Super Dodgeball while he showed me all of his new toys. Because, I mean--

AUBURN (CONT'D)

How interested is a girl going to be in a Beretta 1200 police shotgun?

They both say it at the same time.

From this point, the sound comes from the right side of the screen. On the left, Auburn just stares as the story tells itself.

Dale shrugs off the comment in a way that seems very familiar to him. He goes back to exploring the shotgun, and Auburn goes back to playing Nintendo.

He pulls a small slip of paper out of the packaging.

DALE

(reading)

"The stock and forend are made of a special strengthened techno polymer." Hm!

AUBURN

Whatever the hell that means.
What do you even need it for?

DALE

Protection. One day I'll have our family to defend.

AUBURN

(rolls eyes)

Yeah, super. Me and our thirty kids will be thankful when you have to defend our trailer from a coked-up rhino.

DALE

A trailer? No way. Me and the boys have it all worked out. We're going to expand the garage and lease some new diagnostic equip-

A flat BOOM rips through the room and resonates.

Auburn jumps slightly with the sound.

We only hear the HIGH-PITCHED WHINE that a loud noise leaves in your ears, which drowns out the "FUCK" that Auburn yells after she jumps in her chair and covers her ears. It dissipates and Auburn's volume comes back up.

AUBURN

What the fuck was that? A transformer or something?

A THUMP from behind her.

She gets up and turns to look at Dale, dazed expression on his face. The thump she heard was him falling to his knees. The wall behind him has been covered in a spray of blood. The shotgun lies on the floor in front of him.

At first, she looks confused. Then her eyes bulge.

Dale's stomach has a charred black hole in it about the size of a grapefruit.

She opens her mouth to scream, but has no breath to do it.

He looks over at her, still dazed. Thin tendrils of smoke rise from behind his back.

DALE

What happened?

She just looks at him, eyes wide.

He begins to WHIMPER and CRY as he looks around and down at himself, but no tears come. His face is quickly going from pale to translucent.

Auburn still stares.

He looks at her and begins to shake his head. In a voice that's not much more than a breath:

DALE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Tears begin to well up in her eyes and she shakes her head.

She starts to walk over to him, then stops.

Then starts again.

She takes his hands.

AUBURN

No. No. NO. You are NOT sorry to
me. You're not...I'm...

She starts to cry more with him.

He begins to slump down to the floor under his useless legs
and she follows him down, eyes wide.

His face begins to twist and he draws his arms into himself as
he reaches the floor. Auburn looks at him with the terror of
not knowing what to do.

Dale begins to SCREAM. The screams are wails of pain and dying;
animalistic. Several end in raspy coughs and phlegm mixed with
blood coming out of his mouth. He claws at the floor.

Auburn does her best to comfort and hush him, but recoils in
fear every time he screams. She starts crying again.

He lifts his head up and scans the floor around him. His eyes
stop when they see the gun.

He reaches for it and grabs the barrel. He drags it over to
himself.

Auburn watches him and starts shaking her head again.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

(quiet, scared)
No. No don't...

She reaches over to take his hands off the gun and he shoves
her hands away.

He reaches again and grabs it. He pulls it over to himself,
GRUNTING painfully.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

No! Dale, listen. No.

He starts to cry again through his screams as he clutches the
gun to himself, barrel now under his chin.

DALE

I'M SORRY I'M SORRY I'M SORRY I'M

She tries to take it, but he shoves her again. She lands on
her stomach with a startled YELP.

AUBURN

NO, DALE, DON'T--

The flat BOOM rips through the room again.

Auburn covers her ears. All we hear is the HIGH-PITCHED WHINE, but we can see that she is screaming and kicking her feet on the floor.

Dale, behind her, is still.

The sound fades as the whole right side fades back. The split retreats back to the right, leaving just Auburn, shaking with tears in her eyes.

Brooks inhales after what looks like a very long time. He can only stare at her.

Brooks looks over past his register: some of the stock boys are standing at the end of the aisle watching them silently.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

I rolled over, and he was lying next to me, as close as you are to me now, and his eyes were wide open. It was death. Not boy-in-a-box death, not sad-relative-wish-we-had-more-time death. It was death itself, just lying there, looking at me. And all I could think of was how it affected me, and what it meant to me, and I started photographing these images in my mind, like they were mine. And not two minutes before that, I wasn't letting him apologize to me because I was being selfish and I thought he was stupid for hurting himself like that.

She begins crying full-gale now, and he holds her.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

The people from downstairs were there then, standing over me. They were talking and I started seeing black, like someone was dimming the lights until I couldn't see anything. The last thing I remember was looking back over my shoulder at them huddled over him, thinking he'd done it to himself for me.

BROOKS

Nobody thinks that, do they?
You've told other people about this before?

AUBURN

A couple of people. My mother. She was...fairly supportive. She put me into therapy a few weeks later. They gave me pills and told me over and over that it wasn't my fault, when I never said it was. I've never told anyone about it and expected them to genuinely care. Sometimes I'm afraid that the first person I open up to is going to have a worse story of their own, thinking that they're empathizing with me when they're really just trivializing it and making me feel common.

BROOKS

I wouldn't trivialize what you've felt. I don't really know what to say...

AUBURN

Don't say anything, then.

She leans in and kisses him, but he pulls away.

BROOKS

Hey, what are you doing?

She doesn't answer.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

She leans in again.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Auburn, what are you doing?

She sighs, angrily.

AUBURN

What? I need to feel warm. I need to feel strong.

Brooks stands up.

BROOKS

Look, I'm here for you if you want to talk and all, but that's...that's not really something I'd be able to handle like that...

AUBURN

(cold)

I can't believe you're doing
this to me.

BROOKS

What can't you believe I'm doing?
I'm just--

AUBURN

(standing)

NO. You're not "just." You're
denying me when I need you. I
do know how to love you.

BROOKS

Wait a minute. You can't just
change the way you're feeling on
the fly because I didn't want to
take advantage of you.

AUBURN

You could never take advantage
of me. Are you forgetting all
the times you came to my door?
Remember the time you wrecked
your car a week before exams and
they wouldn't let you take the
make up tests? I sat with you
on the steps of Crawford until
dawn listening to you cry.

(getting louder)

What about when your parents
screwed up your student loan
payments and you didn't have
enough credit to get financial
aid and go back to school? I
just squatted there with my legs
spread and let you work out all
of your problems.

Brooks looks around and sees that they still have the stockboys' attention.

BROOKS

Auburn--

AUBURN

What about the time your idiot
friend killed himself and all
your perfect little zealot could
do was make conversation?

All sound fades to a DULL, FAINT HUM. An old man with a large
beer gut pushes a cart up one aisle and back down the next.
The stockboys all stare, shamelessly. Scotty and Simon drink
non-alcoholic beer under a streetlight in the parking lot.

Brooks' words come out thick.

BROOKS

I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I
don't love you.

AUBURN

Nobody asked you to.

She walks out.

Brooks stands there, looking around. The rest of the supermarket carries on like nothing happened.

Brooks picks up the bag of food and pulls out a cold cheeseburger.

He starts back down the chip aisle to the back of the store as he unwraps the burger and takes a bite.

He shoves open the gray swinging doors to the back room and disappears into them.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SUPERMARKET -- MORNING

It's still dark as Brooks walks out to his car. The far east of the black sky has begin to turn the deepest of blues.

BROOKS (V.O.)

The Bible, the Holy one, says
that when the "End" finally stops
being near and gets here, it
will be in a city of seven hills.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

He drives through the wet morning.

EXT. LARGE INTERSECTION -- CONTINUOUS

The main streets are empty aside from his car. The traffic lights at a large intersection flash yellow repeatedly.

BROOKS (V.O.)

If illustrated Christian
literature has taught me nothing
else, it has taught me that Satan
will grow his hair out and fill
out his facial hair to pass
himself off as Christ.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

He drives through the wet morning.

BROOKS (V.O.)
He and his angels will settle
down in a rebuilt temple and
rule for three and a half years,
and the world will just eat it
up.

EXT. LARGE INTERSECTION -- CONTINUOUS

The main streets are empty aside from his car. The traffic lights at a large intersection flash yellow repeatedly.

BROOKS (V.O.)
Then, out of the blue, the real
Jesus will do a double-take, say
"wha-wha-what?" And we'll all
be doomed.

He drives right through.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE -- MORNING

A guy behind the counter of about the same age doesn't even look up from his book.

BROOKS (V.O.)
All of the Christians meeting
the criteria will ascend to Heaven
and the ones who haven't painted
the walls and set up the beds in
their hearts for Jesus will be
left behind.

Brooks walks past rows of junk food and microwave "meals" to the restroom.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE (BATHROOM) -- MOMENTS LATER

The stall door opens and Brooks walks to the sink.

He spits in it and washes water on his face.

BROOKS (V.O.)
The problem with this is that
history associates four ancient
world capitols as having seven
hills: Byzantium, Babylon,
Jerusalem and Rome.

He stares at the mirror for a moment, then starts fishing in his pockets.

BROOKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In one of the more morbid and
defeatist efforts of humanity,
all of the founders of these
cities searched out locations in
(MORE)

BROOKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
valleys and between rivers where
they could glance up from their
hut or ziggurat and be surrounded
by the world influence and fame
that comes with being the host
of our eternal damnation.

He pulls out a quarter and puts it in the condom machine next to the mirror.

BROOKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Even today, the major Christian
landmarks of the world rest
silently between seven hills.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MORNING

He drinks a giant Mountain Dew as he drives.

BROOKS (V.O.)
Twelve-year old Jesus taught in
a temple in Jerusalem. The Pope
lives in his own tiny little
country in the middle of Rome. A
statue of Jesus stands watch
above Rio de Janeiro.

EXT. COLLEGE -- MORNING

He drives slowly onto the campus lot. He watches the guard booth at the front gate cautiously as he passes it.

BROOKS (V.O.)
Four hours south of Washington,
D.C., there is a city called
Lynchburg. Sixty-five thousand
people. They shop in normal stores
and live on normal streets. They
can see Jerry Falwell, minister
and Speaker of the House for
Christianity, walking in the
mall.

The uniformed old woman inside sleeps with her chin on her chest.

BROOKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They wave to him, and most of
the time, he waves back.

EXT. AUBURN'S DORM -- MOMENTS LATER

He pulls up to a spot outside of Auburn's dorm and puts the car in park.

BROOKS (V.O.)

We went to the same high school,
he and I; he in the Forties, and
I in the nineties. In the grand
scheme of legendary towns,
Lynchburg is a dot; a flesh-
colored dot that can only be
seen if you look closely.

He looks up at what must be her window for a moment.

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

But Lynchburg is not a normal
city. There is a man in town who
has been hiccupping for sixty-
four years. In 1958, a factory
exploded and covered downtown in
six inches of popcorn. Lynchburg
is home to a NASA turning station,
rocket engines that are fired
when the Earth's rotational speed
needs changing.

He puts the car in reverse and backs out of the spot.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MORNING

Driving along. The sun is starting to come up behind the last
of the rainclouds.

BROOKS (V.O.)

Unless you've lived here, you
can never understand how we feel,
waiting for something to happen.

EXT. CEMETERY (PARKING LOT) -- MORNING

He pulls into the cemetery parking lot and parks.

BROOKS (V.O.)

Knowing that when Jesus really
does show up, fake Jesus or no,
we will see him first.

EXT. CEMETERY -- MOMENTS LATER

Nothing moves aside from Brooks, still in his work clothes,
walking through the wet grass.

BROOKS (V.O.)

God lives in the heart of every
born-again Christian, but God
also lives in my hometown.

He arrives at a placard that reads "Curtis Dean Bunch, 1983-
2005."

He sits down in the grass beside it, Indian-style.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Hey.

He looks down.

All is SILENT.

A raindrop falls on Brooks' nose, getting his attention.

He looks up and raises his hands out, waiting for more rain. None comes.

He relaxes again, sitting, and closes his eyes.

A bird's "CHEEP" from o.s. makes them open them again.

He spots a cardinal hopping around the footstones. The bird CHEEPS again.

Brooks just stares with slight apprehension.

Then, from o.s.: another CHEEP.

Brooks turns to his left and sees another cardinal landing on the grass a few feet away from him.

The first one flies only inches from his face, getting his attention and making him flinch, and lands in the grass behind him.

Brooks turns back around, and another cardinal stands where the first one stood. CHEEPING begins to fill the air.

Looking even more apprehensive, Brooks cautiously begins to draw his legs out from under him and rock back onto his palms.

The CHEEPS start to become synchronized.

Then, they all STOP at exactly the same time.

The birds suddenly fly off.

After a moment of silence, FOOTSTEPS become audible.

A set of legs walks up alongside of him, and the body it holds up begins to lay down a red and white checkered blanket on the muddy grass.

Aranea lowers herself onto the checkered blanket and sits, indian-style.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Where did you come from?

ARANEA

The sky.

BROOKS

No, I meant... It's seven in the morning. I didn't hear your car pull up.

ARANEA

I was dropping my dad off. Herman Horatio Honda is parked up by Kid's Haven Memorial. I was on a swing and then I felt a raindrop, and then I saw you down here. I thought I'd say hey.

BROOKS

Hey.

ARANEA

Hey.

Brooks can barely keep his eyes open.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

You look tired.

BROOKS

I am tired. I worked graveyard last night.

ARANEA

Funny. My dad works graveyard. Only during the day.

BROOKS

I'll bet he doesn't have to put up with people having sex in the bathrooms, though.

ARANEA

People were having sex in the grocery store bathroom? That's disgusting. How does that even work?

BROOKS

Aranea, when a man and a woman love each other very much...

ARANEA

No, I know how. I know how that works. I meant in the bathroom, in the grocery store.

BROOKS

The baby changing station. And balance, I guess. I don't know.

ARANEA

Ugh. People should have some respect for themselves. Or at least buy something first.

BROOKS

Thankfully, they were zipping up and shipping out by the time I got there. The girl actually slapped me on the way out. It was nice touch.

ARANEA

That doesn't sound like a nice kind of touch. Are you okay?

BROOKS

I'm six-two and two hundred pounds. She'd have to be hitting me with board with a nail through it for me not to be okay.

ARANEA

You never know what they might pull on you next time, though. You can call me, y'know. I know I don't have a lot of force behind my punches, but I have big rings, and I've seen a lot of karate movies. As long as they attack you one at a time, I think I could hold them off.

BROOKS

So what you're saying is that if someday black ninjas are having sex in the bathroom of the supermarket, that you'll be there to protect me?

ARANEA

Soul mates via martial arts combat.

BROOKS

And if I try to kiss you, you'll turn on me?

ARANEA

You're darn right I will. I'll pierce you with poison darts. I won't let you die, though. I'll travel to the mountains or whatever to get the antidote for you, but I'll let you writhe in pain long enough to learn your lesson.

They smile and she yawns.

BROOKS
You look tired, too.

ARANEA
Hm? Oh. Yeah, sorry. I wasn't expecting one of our conversations this early in the morning.

BROOKS
"One of our conversations"?

ARANEA
You know, the snappy banter, referencing the past; that kind of thing. I always feel like I have to keep up with you. Right now, I'm trying to think of a way to work the Tiger Driver into the dialogue.

BROOKS
You don't have to do that. I'm just rambling most of the time. If I ever put any serious thought into what I said, I could quote poetry or make profound observations about life instead of making jokes about your cheeseburgers.

ARANEA
Was that a euphemism?

BROOKS
You'll see me dig up one of these people and ballroom dance with them before you hear me use a euphemism on you.

ARANEA
But that's what I mean: you remembered what we'd talked about before. I don't know anyone else that does that.

BROOKS
It's what I remember the most.

ARANEA
You remember conversations with me the most?

BROOKS
Sometimes I find myself doing five things at once to forget them.

They smile.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
So what are your plans for the
rest of the day?

ARANEA
Napping is first and foremost.
I plan to make an event of it.
I'm laying my pillows on the bed
like Lincoln Logs and hibernating
like a zoo animal.

BROOKS
How long do you plan to hibernate?

ARANEA
Until feeding time, when they
bring in the carcasses. I, of
course, will not eat any of the
carcasses, since that would render
my simile inaccurate.

BROOKS
Which is the last thing we need
at this point in the conversation.

ARANEA
Right. Oh, and at seven I'm
meeting with my youth group to
plan for our Halloween party.
The standard fare: music, bobbing
for things, and the little kids
running around in costumes and
you have to give them candy,
otherwise the whole purpose is
defeated.

BROOKS
Give candy to disguised children.
Got it.

ARANEA
Can you come to the party? We
usually have it a few days before
Halloween to avoid the holiday
rush. We wouldn't want anyone
getting trampled at the store
shopping for Snickers at the
last minute.

BROOKS
Yeah, it's terrible how commercial
the holiday has become. It used
to be a celebration of the dead.
Now look at it.

ARANEA

Anything that brings people together in the spirit of gluttony and bad fashion can't be all bad. It's a happy time of year. Everything is orange.

BROOKS

If the punch is orange, I'll come to the party.

ARANEA

Of course the punch is orange. Think of it this way: it's a good way to meet a lot of good people in the church outside of the sermons and dress clothes. I know that you're going through some hard times right now...and maybe all that talk about the afterlife and where we go and what we do...maybe you should wait a little while for that.

BROOKS

It's hard not to think about death when it's all around us.

ARANEA

Then why not celebrate it? We'll make you feel better by dressing up as skeletons and dancing around like idiots.

He smiles.

BROOKS

There won't be any weirdness between us? There won't be any questions or expectations...?

ARANEA

Brooks, they're skeletons. If you can't see skeletons in black and white, you're hopeless.

BROOKS

That was a bad joke.

ARANEA

I know.

BROOKS

Time for sleep?

ARANEA

Agreed.

BROOKS
You'll keep me informed on the
hibernation?

ARANEA
I'll have my keeper call your
keeper.

BROOKS
Good night.

ARANEA
Good morning?

BROOKS
Good morning.

ARANEA
Good night.

She leaves.

He sits and the rain starts to fall.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROOKS' ROOM -- AFTERNOON

A full rain hits the window.

From under a twisted pile of sheet and blanket, a hand emerges.

It feels around on the nightstand, then find what's it's
searching for: a pen.

Then it comes back and finds the other item it wants: a notepad.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (KITCHEN) -- EVENING

A full shot of a ripped out piece of notebook paper in someone's hand. The writing on it reads: "A beautifully-crafted pink opalescent glass angel, with brass halo, wings and accents. A multifaceted clear jewel is used for her head. She is 9" tall, 4" wide. A must have for the angel collector or that someone special."

The paper lowers and is replaced with a pink opalescent glass angel.

Brooks stares at it. The box and tissue it came in lay on the kitchen counter.

His concentration is suddenly broken by a WHUMP on the glass of the kitchen window.

He goes over the window to see.

Laying motionless on the grass outside the window is a small brown bird.

Brooks grabs a dishcloth and tosses it into the microwave.

After it's set, he starts down the hall.

INT. BROOKS' CLOSET -- MOMENTS LATER

We sit on the floor of Brooks' closet. The inch of light pouring in through the slightly open door suddenly becomes three feet of it as the door opens.

Brooks squats down in the doorway and pulls a shoebox from a dark corner.

He takes a pair of bad hightops out and dumps them on the floor of the closet.

He stands up taking the box as we hear the microwave in the kitchen BEEPING to let us know it's done.

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

The orange sun is now starting to shine through the cracks in the clouds. Brooks walks out of his back door holding the shoebox and towel.

He fluffs up the dishtowel in the box as he kneels next to the bird, but then he looks at it and stops.

Something about the bird's position makes it clear: it's dead.

He pauses for a moment, then gets up to walk back inside. He leaves the shoebox next to the bird.

INT. BROOKS' HOUSE (KITCHEN) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks quickly but delicately wraps the glass angel back in the tissue and places it back in the box, then the box into a plastic shopping bag.

Ready to go, he pats his pockets and scans the counter and table. He looks confused.

Then he remembers.

EXT. BROOKS' HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks back out the door towards the bird and the shoebox.

He flips the already-askew lid of the shoebox off. His car keys are sticking out of a fold in the dishcloth.

He grabs the keys and stands up to put them in his pocket.

He looks back down at the bird.

Using the lid, he scoops the bird into the shoebox.

He folds a corner of the dishcloth over the bird's body, then puts the lid back on as he sets it on the grass.

BROOKS
(quietly)
Sorry.

He walks off.

EXT. ARANEA'S STREET -- EVENING

Brooks walks down the street towards Aranea's house. He spies a man in a bad brown suit taping a yellow piece of paper to her front door.

The man turns and walks back to his car. Just as he does: the paper falls off the door and falls to the ground like a leaf.

Brooks walks slowly enough so that the man is driving away by the time he gets to Aranea's house.

He looks around, then picks up the piece of paper.

In red ink, it reads: "Aranea, Didn't see you at church this week, stopped by about the rent. Will give call later. We missed you at services! -Stanley"

Brooks processes this info with a slight look of disappointment, then starts trying to tape the note back to the door.

ARANEA (O.C.)
Psst!

Brooks snaps his look in the direction of the noise: the roof of Aranea's house.

First we only see fingertips gripping the gutter, but then Aranea peeks her head over as well. Her hair is more of a chestnut color now.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Boo!

She lets out a snorty laugh.

She waves, then re-affirms her grip on the roof.

BROOKS
Hey.

He smiles and raises his eyebrows at her.

ARANEA
Y'know, I probably should have thought this through before I actually ended up on the roof.

BROOKS

I was wondering about that, too.
Couldn't you have just not
answered the door? The guy didn't
look menacing. I'm sure you
could have worked things out.

ARANEA

What you don't know is: as soon
as your back is turned, he breaks
out the nunchucks.

She shimmies further back onto the roof. Brooks walks back
into the yard to accommodate the angle.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Usually my Dad gives me the money
to pay him when I see him at
church, but with my Dad getting
called into work this morning
and me being so tired, I just
said "to fudge with it."

BROOKS

Yeah, he mentions that in the
note.

ARANEA

Me saying "to fudge with it?"

BROOKS

No, about not seeing you in
church. Is your dad at work
now?

ARANEA

As far as I know. Come on up.
The view is unbelievable. You
can see all the way across the
street.

Brooks turns and looks across the street.

There's a duplex with one side's door open. A hibachi smokes
on the driveway just outside the door. A large, shirtless man
stands inside the doorway, watching the hibachi.

Brooks turns back to look at Aranea.

BROOKS

Okay.

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (ROOF) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks gets up the ladder onto the faux slate-shingled roof.

He gingerly walks over to where Aranea sits.

He sits, Indian-style on the roof next to her and joins her in looking at the "view."

ARANEA

The best part is: from here you can't tell that he's shirtless.

He pulls his plastic shopping bag out.

BROOKS

I got you a present.

He hands it to her.

ARANEA

Groceries?

BROOKS

Yes. Two-for-one evaporated milk.

ARANEA

(laughs)

For all my fudging needs!

She looks down into the bag.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Wait. You actually got me a present.

BROOKS

Well, yeah. That's the crucial part of giving you a present.

She closes her eyes and opens her mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. Then she tries again:

ARANEA

Why did you get me a present?

BROOKS

I woke up and I couldn't find five things to do at once, so I started thinking about you...our conversation, and I thought I would do something nice for you since you always manage to do something nice for me.

ARANEA

I haven't gotten you any presents, though. I don't know what you...

BROOKS

The graveyard thing.

ARANEA

The other day? I was there and I saw you. It would have been inconsiderate of me to drive by and pretend you weren't there.

BROOKS

Not that graveyard thing. The... the other thing.

She looks back down and her lips quiver slightly.

ARANEA

What do you mean?

BROOKS

For the longest time, all I've wanted was someone that I could think about when they're not there. Someone to be more than I expected, more than I could just assume. You were there for me when my grandfather died. You were there for me when my grandmother died. And you were there for me when Curtis died. Every time I was faced with this monolithic, evolved fact of life, you were there in the crossfire with me and I didn't know why, and you didn't make me ask. You just did something nice for no reason, and it made me happy. Just knowing that you'll be there when I reach for you helps me believe in something better.

ARANEA

Brooks...

With a tear on her face, she crawls on her knees over to him and hugs him.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

I can't think of anything to say to that. Thank you. Just...thank you so much.

(sits back down)

Okay, so what did you get me?

She opens up the box and takes out the angel.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Oh, gosh...

The sunlight hitting the angel gives her face a pink glow.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Oh, Brooks, it's so...

She holds it by the base and it snaps off in her hand. The angel itself falls into her lap. Her eyes bulge.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
...broken. Brooks, oh my gosh,
I'm SO sorry... It was beautiful!
I didn't mean to--

Brooks nods silently, never taking his eyes off of the base still in her hand.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
I think I have some superglue in
the house. I can fix it no
problem. Ohhh...I'll make it up
to you right now, I promise.

BROOKS
You don't have to do that. I
know you didn't do it on purpose.
It's fine.

ARANEA
Oh, don't be so chivalrous. I
know you probably spent a lot of
money on it and it meant a lot,
so I appreciate it. I just... I
know! Do you mind if we stay up
here for a while? I've got some
sandwich stuff in the fridge, if
you want to go down into the
house and get it. We can make
sandwiches and wait for the stars
to come out. It'll be nice. Oh,
and I have books! We can read
and relax. Look in the hallway
closet: I've got big pillows and
a blanket with panda bears on
it! We can spread it out so we
don't wake up with shingles.

BROOKS
Well, I'd be cheating myself by
turning down your offer of a
panda bear blanket. Wait...did
you just make a roofing joke?

She smiles.

ARANEA
Bad puns are the fulcrum to my
clever.

EXT. ARANEA'S FRONT YARD -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks gets to the bottom of the ladder and stands there for a moment.

Suddenly, he begins to throw an absolute fit, biting several curses back to a whisper.

Something flying overhead gets his attention.

Another object soars over his head: a tennis ball.

A SHUFFLING noise comes from the roof and Aranea's fingers are seen gripping the gutter.

She peeks her head over at him.

ARANEA

Hey. You okay?

BROOKS

Uh, yeah.

ARANEA

Okay. The blanket and the pillows are in the hall closet. Right past the fish tank.

She smiles brightly at him and he can't help but smile back.

She digs into the gutter and pries out another tennis ball.

She tosses it off the roof and it bounces across the street.

BROOKS

Okay.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

The front door opens slowly and Brooks walks in. He does so quietly and slowly, as if this were a sacred place. Nothing about it has changes since we were here last: cardboard boxes, dusty furniture, fishless (yet clean and running) fish tank.

He walks down the hall to three closed doors.

Not knowing which one it is, he opens the middle door.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (EMPTY ROOM #1) -- CONTINUOUS

The room is completely empty.

Brooks' brow furrows as he looks in, then he closes the door.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Another door opens and reveals the bounty of several pillows and, after some digging, a blanket with panda bears on it.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) -- MOMENTS LATER

Now the refrigerator door opens. Turkey, cheese, and a loaf of Wonder Bread are retrieved.

It closes. A magnet shaped like praying hands is stuck to it, pinning to the fridge a green piece of paper stained with mud that reads "miraculum."

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks, now with blankets and sandwich gear under his arms, makes for the front door.

He stops before reaching it, though, and peers down the hall at the last door.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (EMPTY ROOM #2) -- MOMENTS LATER

The door opens and Brooks looks in.

It's also completely empty.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

He closes the door and just stands there in the hall.

Brooks' face first shows signs of confusion, then slow understanding.

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (ROOF) -- EVENING

Brooks and Aranea sit on the panda blanket. Discarded sandwich crusts and several books sit with them.

Brooks tells a story while Aranea laughs.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (ROOF) -- NIGHT

Evening fades to night, and Brooks and Aranea fade from loud banter to Brooks lying on his back and Aranea's cheek resting on his shoulder.

ARANEA

Brooks? You're still coming to the Halloween party, aren't you?

BROOKS

Yeah.

ARANEA

Good. Just checking.

Silence for a beat.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Brooks? You aren't going to try
to kiss me at the Halloween party,
are you?

BROOKS
Nah.

ARANEA
Good. Just checking.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (ROOF) -- MORNING

POV: BROOKS

The sunlight burns through the film on Brooks' eyes as he blinks them open. One slowly falling object stands out among the backdrop of blue sky and trees: a white feather.

Brooks inhales and the feather rests on his teeth.

He exhales and the feather lifts off again.

This process repeats three more times, when an errant breath carries the feather off into the trees.

Brooks sits up. He's alone: only a groove in the panda blanket remains of Aranea.

EXT. ARANEA'S FRONT YARD -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks begins to climb down the ladder. Before reaching the middle he looks over to see a dog sleeping in the next yard.

Brooks extends and bends his right arm in a 90 degree angle, and rotates his shoulder a few times.

He decides NOT to drop a BIG ELBOW on the dog, and continues down the ladder.

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks up to the front door of the house. A small shape sits on the welcome mat: an origami swan.

Brooks picks it up and holds it at eye-level.

He pumps the swan up and down in his palm.

He unfolds it and finds a key inside.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) -- MOMENTS LATER

The living room is dim without the sunlight reaching the windows yet, but it looks the same as it always has: boxes (that seem arranged rather than stacked randomly), shag carpet, old couch.

On the coffee table is three more origami animals: a hippo, a rhino and a leopard. They stands around a plate with a single cupcake on it.

Brooks picks up the hippo and holds eye-level, like the swan. He notices the printing on the paper used to make the hippo and unfolds it: it's the page of an origami book explaining how to make origami hippos.

He looks at the other two animals and notices the same thing.

The cupcake on the plate has a folded piece of paper wedged into the icing. Brooks unfolds it. In perfect calligraphy, it reads: "Eat Me."

He picks up the cupcake with a light smile and takes a bite.

He glances down at the plate and sees another note under where the cupcake sat: "Don't Throw Me Up."

He walks down the hall, finishing the cupcake, and scanning all of the blank and white photos on the wall. They're all of Aranea, in various stages of life through about age ten: one at a McDonald's birthday party, another of her trying to drink out of a bird bath, one on a swing.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (EMPTY ROOM #1) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks opens the door again to the empty room and walks inside. His feet ECHO on the hardwood floor.

He stands there for a moment noticing the thick layer of dust on the ceiling fan.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) -- MOMENTS LATER

He walks back into the living room and plops down on the couch.

He takes off his shoes and tilts his head back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) -- AFTERNOON

A telephone RINGS LOUDLY.

Brooks' eyes flutter open.

He clumsily gets up as we wipes the drool from his cheek and finds his way to the source of the ringing: the kitchen.

He passes the microwave and notices the time: 3:16.

BROOKS

Crap.

As he heads for the phone, he sees a bottle of blue sports drink on the kitchen table.

Taped to it is another note: "Drink Me Fore X-Treme Thirst Quenching."

He smiles at it as he picks up the phone.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Uh, sorry, hello?

OFFICER ARABLE
Yes, is this mister...Cavah-ka-te-uh?

BROOKS
(correcting)
Cavatica. I mean, no, this isn't him. He. Can I take a message?

He fumbles around for a writing utensil.

OFFICER ARABLE
Yes, sir. This is Officer Arable from the Campbell County Sheriffs Office calling in regard to the 1992 Honda Accord registered under the name of Mr. A. Cavatica that was involved with the head-on collision this afternoon on the corner of Timberlake Road and Waterlick Road. The vehicle was unmanned and I'm calling to get information for...

The words are drowned out by THE SOUND OF BROOKS' HEARTBEAT, which begins PUMPING LOUDER AND FASTER.

BROOKS
Um, thank you...I'll make sure to tell...him as soon as--

He drops the phone and runs out of the kitchen.

After a moment, he runs back into the room and hangs up the dangling phone properly.

Then he runs off again.

INT. BROOKS' CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks' hands grip the wheel intensely as he drives. His eyes are blank, but focused. Robotic.

He drives silently for a few moments.

He stops at a red light and stares up at it. His thumb absently taps the wheel in no noticeable rhythm.

Without warning, he lets out a deep and loud YELL.

He lets his forehead fall down to rest on the steering wheel. His lips move as he speeds through silent prayer.

BROOKS

God? Is there anything I can say here that won't sound bad?
(responding to the silence)
Yeah, I'm sorry, too.

A HONK from behind.

Brooks looks up and sees that the light is green.

He also sees Aranea, kneeling by a bed of yellow and purple flowers on the other side of the road.

EXT. TIMBERLAKE ROAD -- CONTINUOUS

Brooks' car turns quickly into the parking lot of a bakery, his car straddling the line on the left side.

The moment the car is stopped, Brooks jumps out of his door and takes off for the side of the road. The "BONG BONG BONG" chime of his open car door can still be heard.

He wears socks, not shoes, so he runs gingerly across the westbound lanes of the road to the median.

Once there, he gingerly crosses the eastbound lanes to where Aranea is kneeling.

He stops when he sees a thin stream of blood from within her blue sun dress leaking down her thigh and pooling in the bend of her knee. Her hair is as black as ebony.

She is carefully pulling a yellow flower, roots and all, out of the ground. Blood from her hand drips along the stem and mixes with the soil still clinging to the root and drips rhythmically to the ground.

Brooks slowly reaches out and wraps his fingers around her hands, flower and all.

She turns towards him, but her eyes are closed. Her cheeks are wet with old tears.

ARANEA

I thought I would walk home.

Brooks just stands there, unsure of what to say or do. Cars WHOOSH past indifferently.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

I couldn't feel my blood anymore.
It kept going away.

She pulls her hands free of his and the flower falls to the ground.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
(points to her stomach)
It turned black. I thought it
was supposed to be water.

The fabric of her dress sticks to her abdomen. It's stained black and red. Brooks can only stare.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
It turned black.

BROOKS
(faintly)
I know. I can see it. It's purple.

She reaches out and grabs his wrist. Blood from her hand oozes onto his hand as she squeezes.

ARANEA
No, Brooks.

She opens her eyes. The green in them is gone, replaced with glistening black irises swimming in white.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
It turned black.

Brooks inhales, steeling himself.

BROOKS
Can you stand up?

ARANEA
I thought it was supposed to be water when you're opened there.

BROOKS
Not for you.

ARANEA
I feel so light. I feel empty.
Like I'm pouring.

BROOKS
Aranea. Stand Up.

He stands with her arms around his shoulders and helps her to her feet.

He carefully helps her walk to the side of the road.

He crouches down with his back to her.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Here.

She puts her arms around his shoulders and he grabs the back of her knees and picks her up. She closes her eyes.

They start across the road.

ARANEA
(whispers)
Piggyback.

BROOKS
(laughs)
Some pig.

DISSOLVE TO:

FULL SHOT: BLACK SCREEN

SOLOMON (V.O.)
In life, we must always consider
the consequences of our actions.
In Christianity, we must always
consider the consequences of
disobedience towards God. If we
misuse our sexuality, what will
be the consequence?

INT. CHURCH -- MORNING

A brass collection plate slides into frame. Resting on it is several wrinkled dollar bills, some silver change and a few collection envelopes.

A crisp ten dollar bill is placed in the center, and the plate moves on.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
It is a common misconception
that a girl's virginity is her
own.

We now see the man who placed it there: Solomon. He sings along with his wife and the rest of the congregation, as the sunny morning shines through the stained glass. They're both dressed the way the term "Sunday best" was coined for.

INT. HALL -- MORNING

A crowd of smiling people sip coffee and eat danish in a sunny hall, still in their church clothing.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
When a woman is married, she
accepts the headship of a man,
her husband.

Solomon and Delia are among them. Solomon speaks to a group of couples as Delia beams at him. The couples have the same eerie look as Solomon and Delia: the husband standing in the front and contributing, while the wife stands to the side, slightly behind her husband, smiling at their spouse with robotic pride and awaiting command.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ is the head of the household, and the husband is the head of the wife.

Not only is this the case with the group that Solomon is speaking to, it appears to be the same throughout the hall.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Solomon stands before a class, lecturing about the copy of Reviving Ophelia he holds.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
Her virginity is really a gift
from God, given to her to care
for.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Solomon sits at a desk in his office, grading papers.

Various framed documents adorn his walls. One that we stop on is a Ph.D. in Women's Studies. Others cite contributions to the church community. A cross hangs in the center of the wall. Every other inch of flat space in the room is covered in books. There's even a few boxes of some on the floor.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
She has but one opportunity, as
well as a responsibility, to
give this gift to her husband.

INT. SOLOMON'S HOUSE (DINING ROOM) -- NIGHT

He sits across from his wife at the dinner table, eating asparagus.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
If she chooses unwisely, she
cannot get it back.

His wife talks and he just stares blankly.

INT. OUTSIDE SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Solomon opens his office door.

A female student is there and he greets her warmly. She smiles.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
While it is the choice of the
girl how her virginity is lost,
or rather: given away, if a girl's
virginity is given away
prematurely, she always feels
used afterwards.

He puts a hand on her shoulder and ushers her in.

He looks past into the hall and sees two male students watching with a smirk.

He gives them a look of absent contempt and closes the door.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- LATER

Solomon and the student sit across from each other.

He speaks to her with a warm smile, like he's giving her fatherly advice.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
For she has given her gift to
someone not chosen by God for
her, and she has violated His
will.

She shrugs and nods.

He smiles.

INT. SOLOMON'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) -- NIGHT

Solomon sits on one end of the couch. His wife lays sleeping with the cat at the other end. The blue glow of the tv is the only light. Solomon flips channels with his brow furrowed.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
Today, the value of virginity is
lessened by the media. It is
sacrificed to the pagan god of
entertainment.

He flips to a reality show where a woman in a bikini top is eating a handful of bugs.

Solomon frowns.

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Though most girls undoubtedly
prize their gift, they are faced
with many seemingly good reasons
to give into temptation.

He flips to a talk show where two women make out ferociously, while an angry man is being held away from them. The title on the bottom of the screen reads, "MY SISTER STOLE MY WIFE FROM ME!"

He shakes his head.

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Some girls feel that giving away
their virginity will make them
(MORE)

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
fit in. Some give it away because
they think it will bring them
love, or to retain the supposed
love of their boyfriend.

He flips to a show where a cute young girl flirts with a
handsome older professor.

Solomon stops and watches.

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Regardless of the reason, it is
selfishness, it violates God,
and it is a decision that cannot
be taken back.

The girl in the show sits on the professor's desk and smiles
at him.

Solomon glances over to make sure that his wife is still asleep,
then goes back to watching.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Solomon stands before his class again and asks them a question.

He scans the class and points to a student with her hand raised.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
Any sin leaves scars. Scars that
remain for years to come, if not
for the rest of one's life.

As the student answers, Solomon's eyes wander long her neckline,
across her tight t-shirt, across her red lips as they talk,
then to her eyes as she looks right back at him. She raises
her eyebrows expectantly.

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The same is true for premarital
sexual intercourse. It, too,
causes scars. Sometimes in the
heat of the moment, it is not
easy to think ahead of that
moment; to think of the
consequences, of the scars.

He snaps out of it and tries to carry on like nothing has
happened and affirms that she has the correct answer.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

He sits at his desk reading the Bible.

He looks up from the book and pauses for a moment.

SOLOMON (V.O.)
But it is impossible to act
against God concerning such a
remarkable and profound act and
not leave a scar.

He walks over to his window and looks down at the campus below.

He watches two pretty girls walking together. Then another group of three going the other way.

SOLOMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Even many years into a marriage,
the scar left by premarital
immorality can still affect your
beloved husband or wife.

He looks away from the window and goes to a small mirror that hangs on the wall. He checks his looks in an almost scientific way; like he's trying to verify his good looks through math.

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

I have seen couples in counseling who took part in illicit relations before marriage with each other. I see in them judgment, guilt, blame, and a trauma within their conscience. I hope that they now realize that we reap what we sow.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Solomon stands before the class, reciting from a pamphlet he holds. Across the front: "The Real Facts of Life!"

SOLOMON

Sin leaves scars. Though the cut of sin may heal, the scar does not disappear. It stays with us until we move into our next life. And I ask every young woman to think about these scars, scars on themselves and on those they cherish, before they enter into an act that violates the will of God.

He pauses and looks at the class for impact.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Anyone care to comment on what message Pastor Daniels is trying to convey to the young women of the world in this writing?

Three people raise their hands, Kirby is one of them, but Solomon looks right past them.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Miss Bryant?

Auburn looks up in surprise from the elaborate doodle she has drawn. She's dressed in sleepy sweats and has no makeup on.

AUBURN
Uh... Well, how about that it certainly backs up where Helen Gardner was coming from when she said that, of all human beings, a woman should spurn the Bible first.

Solomon smiles, but at least half of it is forced.

SOLOMON
I've often wondered about that perspective. Specifically, why God's greatest creations should view His love as hostile and disingenuous.

AUBURN
It probably has to do with where it says in the Bible that a father may sell his daughter for a slave, that he may sacrifice her purity to a mob, and that he may murder her, and still be a good father and a holy man. That he may sell or swap any number of wives and still be a good husband. It classifies her as property instead of a self-directing, free human being. From the sounds of that, I think God would be shocked to find out that we have an opinion on it at all.

This gets a small laugh from a few students and another forced smile from Solomon.

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

The class gathers itself up to leave.

Solomon looks up from his desk and tries to sound nonchalant.

SOLOMON
Excuse me, uh, Miss Bryant? If you could stay behind for a moment, I would appreciate it.

With her back to him, she rolls her eyes at Kirby.

Kirby smiles and raises her eyebrows at Auburn as she leaves.

Auburn apprehensively walks up to his desk.

He's arranging papers and awkwardly trying to look busy.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Yes, I wanted to talk to you about your performance in my class.

AUBURN

I'm sorry if what I said came across as bitchy, I meant no disrespect.

SOLOMON

No, not at all. You're a bright young girl. We're getting close to the middle of the semester and I noticed that you haven't been trying as hard as you could be.

AUBURN

I have a C, right?

SOLOMON

Well, yes, that's average, but nothing to strive towards. I'd like to see more initiative.

AUBURN

My mother said my initiative was invisible.

SOLOMON

Well, the invisible and the nonexistent look very much alike.

AUBURN

(rolls eyes)
Vernon.

SOLOMON

Excuse me?

AUBURN

Dr. Thomas S. Vernon said that. The invisible and the nonexistent look very much alike.

SOLOMON

Very interesting. Tell you what, Come by my office this afternoon around six o'clock. We can talk more...personally about your initiative, and you can point out all of my quotes as I say them.

AUBURN
(stammering)
Oh, I didn't mean--

SOLOMON
No disrespect taken. Just come by my office and we can talk about your initiative or whatever you'd like. I'm sure that there are ways we can come up with to help you out before midterms, and maybe for the rest of the semester.

AUBURN
Oh, well...sure. Okay.

SOLOMON
Auburn, listen to me.

He stands up and places is hand on her shoulder.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
You are a beautiful and talented young woman. I've had my eye on you all semester. I see a lot of promise in you and your work. I don't think you'll need a lot of time to get where you're going. If things go well, you won't have to be in my office for very long at all. Do you understand?

She is wide-eyed, but obedient.

AUBURN
I think so. I mean, if you think I can get a higher grade.

SOLOMON
I think you're a straight A student on the inside.

Nods and empty smiles are exchanged.

She shoulders her bag and walks out as Solomon watches.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- EVENING

A crumpled up ball of paper flies into a wastebasket.

We see Solomon in jump-shot pose across the room. He pumps his fist once in celebration of the basket.

He's got a noticeable spring in his step as he tidies up his office.

Tidying up papers and making sure his desk's surface is clear.

Tossing books into boxes and shoving them into corners in stacks.

Fluffing the crumbs and dust out of his chairs.

Taking the picture of his wife off his desk and putting it face-down into a drawer.

The SECRETARY peeks her head in the door. Solomon jumps when she speaks.

SECRETARY
Staying late again tonight,
Professor Anderson?

SOLOMON
(startled)
What? Oh, yes. I have a...
Yes, I'll be a bit late tonight.

SECRETARY
Okay. Have a good night, then.

SOLOMON
Yes, you too. Thank you.

She exits.

As soon as she's down the hall a bit, he closes the door and locks it. He gives it a tug to make sure the lock is secure.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- LATER

The digital clock on Solomon's otherwise empty desk changes from 5:59 to 6:00.

Solomon is sitting behind the desk, trying out poses.

He crosses his leg. The uncrosses it.

He puts his elbow on the desk to look casual, then dismisses that pose as well.

He looks down at the clock again. 6:00 changes to 6:01.

He begins to look anxious.

He drums his fingers on the desk and stares blankly off.

6:03 changes to 6:04.

He is now sitting with the bridge of his nose pinched between his fingers.

A KNOCK at the door snaps him back to faux-casual.

SOLOMON
Come in!

The doorknob shakes.

KIRBY (O.C.)
(from outside the door)
It's locked.

Solomon rolls his eyes at his own carelessness and gets up.

He grips the knob, exhales deeply, then opens the door.

His smile fades.

KIRBY (CONT'D)
Hey, Professor Anderson.

He has a hard time not sounding like she wasn't who he expected.

SOLOMON
Hello, Miss Takahata. I wasn't
expecting you.

KIRBY
Oh, I know. Auburn Bryant is my
roommate. I was going to dinner
with her and she told me that
she had a meeting with you at
six.

SOLOMON
Is Miss Bryant with you?

KIRBY
Yeah, she's in the potty. She
should be right out. I was going
to wait in the hallway until you
guys were finished.

SOLOMON
Oh. I don't know how much time
we'll need. Could be an hour or
more. You might want to go ahead
without her.

KIRBY
It's okay. I sit in hallways
for sport.

The door to the ladies' restroom opens and Auburn walks out. She wears a black button-up sweater, a knee-length black skirt, and boots that wind a strap high onto her shin. Her hair is crystalline and spiked into horns. Her eyes are lined with a wide black and her lips are lethal red above her silver labret spike.

Her boots TROMP in the empty hallway as she walks to Kirby's side. She looks up to wave at Solomon, then looks back down.

AUBURN

Hi.

SOLOMON

Come in, Miss Bryant.

He goes into his office.

Kirby tugs on Auburn's sweater.

KIRBY

I'll hang onto this for you. I
don't think you're going to catch
a cold in there.

AUBURN

(taking off the sweater)
I don't know what I'll catch in
there.

She walks in slowly.

She closes the door behind her, she waves exaggeratedly to Kirby in the hall. Kirby sits in the full-lotus on the middle of the hallway floor.

SOLOMON

Have a seat.

She sits and crosses her arms and puts her hands on her bare arms.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

You look...

He looks her over: her hair, the makeup on her eyes and lips, her labret, her breasts pouring out of the top of her thin top.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

...different than I was expecting.

There's something in his voice that says he doesn't mean that positively. Auburn doesn't catch it, though, and answers with a blush and a polite smile.

AUBURN

Thank you.

She looks around the room and exhales through her teeth. He looks away from her. There's doubt on his face.

AUBURN (CONT'D)

So, do we just...get it over
with? Or is there a procedure
involved or something?

He blinks several times as he looks at her, then he leans forward and takes her hand into his. When he speaks now, all anxiety is gone from his voice, replaced with patriarchal authority.

SOLOMON

I want to ask you something very personal, and I want you to give me the most honest answer you can, all right?

Auburn nods.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

I want to ask you about your drug problem.

AUBURN

...Wait, what?

She takes her hand out of his and places it over her chest.

SOLOMON

Lately I've noticed you dressing all in black, wearing a lot of makeup, piercing yourself. I realize the symptoms and want to help you.

AUBURN

You've noticed me piercing myself? What, like in class?

SOLOMON

The spike under your lips...is it a cry for help?

AUBURN

(angry)

I've had this since I was seventeen.

SOLOMON

All right now, no need to get upset. I just want you to know that you don't have to pierce yourself or draw on yourself to make you more attractive to men. All you're doing is making an object of yourself, and there's no need for that. You're not alone here, Auburn. There's people at this university that care about you and want you to make the best decisions for your life.

AUBURN
Look, I'm very uncomfortable right now, so can I just go? I don't... I don't need this.

Angry tears sit in the corners over her eyes.

SOLOMON
If you think that's what's best, I can't keep you here against your will. But I would like to give you something to take with you.

He goes into his desk and pulls out a folded pamphlet from beneath the photo of his wife. It's "The Real Facts of Life!"

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
(handing it to her)
In case you feel alone and need some companionship. It provides and in-depth look into premarital sex and dating, and how putting God first just washes all your sins right away.

Auburn only stares, mouth slightly agape.

AUBURN
It is the final proof of God's omnipotence that he need not exist in order to save me.

SOLOMON
I don't appreciate that, Auburn.

AUBURN
I didn't say it.

SOLOMON
Peter De Vries said it.

AUBURN
Bite me.

With that, she's up and opening the door. He still sits in his chair, holding out the pamphlet.

INT. OUTSIDE SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Kirby, still in the full-lotus, looks up as Auburn storms out.

KIRBY
What, you're done already?
(laughs)
That's new.

AUBURN
Let's go.

KIRBY
What? What happened?

AUBURN
Nothing. Let's go.

KIRBY
What happened? Was it not good?

AUBURN
Kiki, shut the fuck up and let's just go, okay?

KIRBY
I'm just saying, if it only takes that long maybe I should forget my B and go for the gold.

Auburn answers by giving her the finger without looking, then SLAMMING THE DOOR to the stairwell behind her. Her boots TROMPING DOWN THE STEPS fade slowly.

KIRBY (CONT'D)
All right.

She looks from the stairwell door to Solomon's open door.

She gets up.

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Kirby walks into Solomon's office.

KIRBY
Is everything okay?

Solomon looks up like he's been awakened from a dream.

SOLOMON
Hm? Oh, yes. Everything is fine. A case of mistaken motivations.

KIRBY
What did you want her for, then?

SOLOMON
...Come, sit down.

She does.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
I want to ask you something very personal, and I want you to give
(MORE)

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
me the most honest answer you
can, all right?

KIRBY
Of course.

SOLOMON
Does Auburn have a drug problem?

KIRBY
Oh, no not at all. Well... About
a month ago, a Phi Kappa Pi guy
tried to get her to take herbal
ecstasy, but Auburn's inamorato
punched his lights out before
she took any. Which is hilarious
because herbal ecstasy doesn't
really do anything to you anyway.
It's like ginkgo biloba. Just
say no to increased cognitive
function.

Solomon smiles in spite of himself.

SOLOMON
Her inamorato?

KIRBY
Her un-boyfriend.

Solomon nods. He finds his eyes wandering to her neck, and to
her tight red t-shirt.

SOLOMON
So will you talk to Miss Bryant
and make sure that everything is
understood, and that assumptions
should not be passed along as
fact?

KIRBY
I'll see what I can do. She
really did think you were going
to give her a Dean's List grade
if she had sex with you.

She says it so matter-of-factly that Solomon is stunned.

He snaps back to casually being casual.

SOLOMON
Yes, well, that's not usually
how it works.

KIRBY
Would it work for me?

He's stunned again. She just smiles.

After a moment of silence and eye contact, Solomon slowly stands.

He walks over to the window and closes the blinds.

There is a CLICK from behind him and the overhead light turns off, leaving the room only lit by Solomon's desk lamp.

He slowly walks back over to his chair and sits down.

She walks up to where he sits. She's naked from the waist down.

She climbs onto him and straddles him in the chair.

She pushes herself against him and he cautiously puts one of his hands on her. Then the other.

She bends down and kisses him on the mouth. His hands tighten around her body and shoulder and he thrusts his hips up into her.

She moans slightly and one of his hands rushes up to cover her mouth.

She arches back until her shoulder blades rest on his desk.

His hands push her shirt up as he kisses and rubs her stomach and chest.

Suddenly, a line of text rushes across her stomach. He stops dead. A WHISPER follows.

He looks all around.

Another line of text speeds by on the wall where the light from the desk lamp shines. More WHISPERS follow.

He looks back down at her. Now, the words on her stomach stay: EXODUS 33:16 "So shall we be separated, and all of Thy people, for all the people that are upon the face of the earth." A VOICE speaks the words written.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)
So shall we be separated, and
all of Thy people, for all the
people that are upon the face of
the earth. Exodus, chapter thirty-
three, verse sixteen.

Solomon begins to look all around frantically.

More lines of text fly over Kirby's body and the walls. More WHISPERS swim just below comprehensible levels.

Another VOICE comes and Solomon's head snaps to the wall where the same text stays.

VOICE #2 (O.S.)
 I am the Lord thy God, which have separated you from other people. Leviticus, chapter twenty, verse twenty four.

He looks back down at Kirby. Her body is a highway of racing lines of text. Another VOICE speaks.

VOICE #3 (O.S.)
 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in the manner, giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Jude, chapter seven.

The full line of this text lies across Kirby's bare chest. The words "GOING AFTER STRANGE FLESH" are bolded to stick out.

Solomon starts to look less like he's afraid of losing his mind and more like he's receiving the message being sent.

SOLOMON
 Kirby, stop.

The text and WHISPERS still fill the room. Another new VOICE.

VOICE #4 (O.S.)
 Rid me and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose--

SOLOMON
 Kirby, I'm sorry.

The whispers and text stops and it's just Solomon and Kirby.

KIRBY
 What? Are you talking?

She looks up at him.

SOLOMON
 Don't look at me. I mean...

He lowers himself back into his chair. He won't look at her.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
 I can't do this. I'm sorry.

She sits up on the desk.

KIRBY

Don't pretend like this is shocking. Are you afraid that somebody might find out that college isn't just about books and learning? Pfft. That went out with the dinosaurs.

SOLOMON

I'm...just afraid.

The voice comes back again quickly, surrounded by WHISPERS.

VOICE #3 (O.S.)
--suffering the vengeance of
eternal fire--

KIRBY

Afraid of what? God?

SOLOMON

...Yes.

KIRBY

Yeah, well, there you go.
(smiles)

You won't be seeing me in class
anymore this year, correct?

SOLOMON

Of course not.

KIRBY

And Auburn gets an A for effort,
right?

He doesn't speak right away, but he still can't look at her.

SOLOMON

...Yes.

KIRBY

Good.

Still smiling she hops down from the desk and begins dressing.
He doesn't watch.

Once she's dressed and by the door, she stops.

KIRBY (CONT'D)

Y'know, for a women's studies professor, you sure don't know a lot about women. ...But, I guess that might have been the whole point, so forget I said anything.

She walks out the door, leaving him in his chair.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOLOMON'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Solomon sleeps, face-down on his desk, open Bible next to him.

He wakes up and un-sticks his face from the paper his cheek lied on.

He looks around morosely and feels the stubble on his cheek.

He begins to cry.

EXT. COLLEGE -- MORNING

He walks through the campus towards the parking lot, still crying.

He reaches his massive SUV. He opens the door and pauses.

He begins to sob so hard that he falls to his knees.

Two STUDENTS walk by and notice.

STUDENT #1
Is that Professor Anderson?

STUDENT #2
Dude, keep walking.

They walk by pretending not to notice.

INT. SOLOMON'S SUV -- MOMENTS LATER

Solomon driving and still crying.

EXT. TIMBERLAKE ROAD -- CONTINUOUS

Solomon's SUV drives by a street sign: "Timberlake Rd."

INT. SOLOMON'S SUV -- MOMENTS LATER

In an effort to regain some composure, he looks at himself in his rear-view mirror.

He breaks down again.

Then, a new voice.

VOICE #5 (O.S.)
All you need is love.

Solomon's head snaps up.

He looks in the rear-view and all around, but no one is in the car with him.

Then, something catches his eye outside.

A sign on the side of the road reads: "All."

Another sign follows it: "you need."

Solomon just stares. The SOUND OF THE ENGINE AND THE WIND FROM HIS OPEN WINDOW BEGINS TO FADE.

Another sign: "is."

The last sign: "Love."

Solomon still stares for a moment, processing.

Then he smiles. First with surprise, then with realization, and last, with great relief.

Through the windshield in front of him, we see that the SUV has veered into oncoming traffic. A Honda speeds directly at us. Solomon never turns. He's still smiling.

Just as it hits, the screen goes black.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

A stark white room. The bed Aranea sits in looks massive with her tiny body in it. She is bandaged heavily around her midsection and she pokes a cube of Jell-O with a fork.

Brooks sits in a recliner along the side of the room.

BROOKS
If I told you that I hated
hospitals, would I be giving in
to cliché?

She doesn't look up from her Jell-O.

ARANEA
(tired)
No... Everyone hates hospitals.
If you could think of a
more...creative way to say it,
you'd be something of a scholar,
I suppose. A poet. Ode to a
Cube of Jell-O.

He smiles.

BROOKS
Hey. Don't feel like you have
to entertain me with banter today.
You were impaled on a fence post.
The doctor pulled out a five-
inch splinter. I would understand
if you wanted the conversation
to take a more reserved tone.

She glances up at him quickly, then back to the Jell-O.

ARANEA

Our conversations make me feel
better sometimes.

BROOKS

Really? Wow. That's surprising
since the first conversation we
ever had was about suicide.
Then I put my foot in your face.

ARANEA

That wasn't the first time we
talked.

BROOKS

It wasn't?

ARANEA

No. The first time I ever talked
to you, I told you that my butt
was wet. I'm Omega on the Latin
alphabet of coolness.

Brooks smiles.

ARANEA (CONT'D)

Do you remember the first thing
that I ever said to you? I told
you I fell out of the sky. I
gave away the whole plot twist
right there at the beginning.

BROOKS

No, you said something before
that.

(trying to remember)

You said something else. I was
so sad that I lost it somewhere.

She smiles.

ARANEA

I did. I didn't think you'd
remember. I told you that your
Father wanted me to come over
and talk to you.

BROOKS

What? You know my dad?

ARANEA

No.

(points up)

Your Father. Capital F. You
can't expect Voltaire out of a
ten-year old.

BROOKS

Oh. Where's your father, Aranea?

ARANEA

He art in Heaven.

BROOKS

No, your father. Lowercase F.

ARANEA

Oh.

(looks away)

He's...at work. I mean, no.

He's not at work. He's not coming. He's not...

(looks back at him)

...ever coming.

BROOKS

Yeah, I know. I figured out a lot of it. Why didn't you tell me?

ARANEA

Everyone I meet is lonely. The love of God is right there inside of them, living in their hearts, but they're lonely anyway. They want Boyfriends and girlfriends. They want mothers and fathers. They want heritage and vindication. They want to feel like they matter. It's so easy, but they don't get it right. All they need is love, but they don't get it right. One day, I woke up and realized that I wasn't getting it right, either. I didn't know how to be lonely. The thought never occurred to me. But all of a sudden, I felt it, and it made me sad. I didn't want you to be sad.

BROOKS

So, he...he's never been there?
At all?

ARANEA

It never occurred to me that I'd need another one. He's always been there for me, whether I could touch him or not. I can't see him, but my heart won't stop believing that he's right here.

BROOKS

My father and I used to wrestle all the time. We'd drag a mattress out and strip down to our tighty-whiteys and t-shirts. He put that love into me. We haven't done it in years, though. He works a lot and always tells me he's too tired. He doesn't really ask me about how I feel or what I think. My mom has to remind him about my birthday sometimes. It's a shame, but...I don't even mind sometimes. I don't doubt for a minute that he loves me, even if he's not there all the time. So I know what you mean.

ARANEA

...Have you talked to any of the doctors?

BROOKS

Nope. I'm not family or spouse, so I'm pretty much out of the loop.

ARANEA

That's probably for the best. I feel so badly for the man who ran into me. He had it so much worse. I'm praying for him.

BROOKS

I feel bad for him, too, if he had it worse than you. You died for six minutes yesterday.

She looks at him.

ARANEA

I died for six minutes?

He nods.

BROOKS

They didn't tell you?

ARANEA

I didn't notice.

Brooks stands up.

BROOKS

Do you want me to check on him?

ARANEA

If you don't mind. You should
get some sleep.

BROOKS

I don't want you to be by
yourself.

She smiles.

ARANEA

I know.

BROOKS

(reaches into his pocket)
I had a speech prepared in case
you died again.

ARANEA

(smiles)
You had a what?

BROOKS

A speech. When people die in
movies, they either get held and
the person screams "NOOOOOO" to
the sky, or they get a speech.
I thought screaming would be
inappropriate here, so...

ARANEA

Ha. So let's hear it.

BROOKS

Okay. You have to pretend that
I'm doing fake movie crying after
each period.

(reads, monotone)

Oh no, dude. Don't be dead.
Why, God. Why would you take
her away from me. Why. Take me
instead. Take me, God.

(stops reading)

And then I had some stuff about
sports utility vehicles and gas
prices, but it's honestly too
political for such a tender and
honest moment.

Aranea laughs and pulls a pillow over her head.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Okay, I have no speech. This is
my receipt from my costume. Not
the epic poetry you've come to
expect from our friendship.

ARANEA
You're still coming, right?

BROOKS
Yeah. Just try not to die again,
okay?

ARANEA
I don't know how long I have
left, but I'll stay with you
until you don't need me anymore.

BROOKS
How long will that be?

ARANEA
Until the day I die. Which was
yesterday.

INT. ICU -- LATER

Brooks walks up to the doorway of Solomon's cubicle. Solomon's face and arms are wrapped heavily in bandages. Several monitors beep next to his bed.

INT. ICU WAITING AREA -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks into the waiting area. The only other person there is Delia, Solomon's wife.

Brooks walks in and sits down next to her.

After a moment, he initiates conversation.

Delia looks happy to have someone to talk to. She starts talking.

After a little while, her face begins to twist, and she starts to cry.

Once her words are taken over by crying completely, Brooks embraces her. She cries into his shoulder.

She regains herself and wipes her eyes. Despite this, she smiles at him with gratitude.

A figure arrives in the doorway and both Brooks and Delia look up.

She walks over to the door.

Brooks watches as the doctor takes Delia into the hallway and begins speaking to her.

Delia starts to cry again, but she never takes her disbelieving stare from the doctor.

She begins yelling "NO" over and over again through her tears.

Brooks, still in the waiting room, turns away. Tears run down his cheeks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Brooks walks from his car up to Aranea's door. He's wearing dress clothes and a tie.

He knocks on her door. A cutout of a pumpkin with a cat popping out of it hangs on her door.

It opens and there she is: she wears a red t-shirt that says "terrific" on it, blue jeans, and a Tiger Mask wrestling mask. It covers her whole head aside from her eyes and mouth from the lips down.

ARANEA

Is that your costume? What are you supposed to be? A Mormon?

BROOKS

Yes, actually. My wife is dressed up as a hobo and my other wife is going as a pirate. I've got a great book that I'd like for you to read.

She laughs painfully and her hand goes to her abdomen.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

My costume is in the car. I was going to change when we got there.

They start walking to his car.

ARANEA

Do you like my costume?

BROOKS

I kind of want to give you a flying head-butt.

ARANEA

Was that a euphemism?

BROOKS

No. Absolutely not.

EXT. HALL -- NIGHT

Brooks and Aranea walk from his car across the parking lot towards the hall. Brooks carries a shopping bag.

Aranea waves to familiar faces as they walk.

INT. HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

They walk in. The hall is bustling with MUSIC, CONVERSATION AND LAUGHTER.

Brooks leans towards Aranea and whispers something, gesturing to his shopping bag.

She points to a door.

They separate: him toward the door she pointed to and her to more people happy to see her.

INT. HALL (BATHROOM) -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks takes some white makeup out of the shopping bag and starts spreading it on his face.

INT. HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks out of the bathroom. He's now wearing a long, black robe with a hood that covers most of his white face. He walks with a tall scythe.

He scans the room for Aranea, but sees only partying children and adults.

He grabs a cup of punch and starts walking in.

Right in front of him walk Scotty and Simon. They seem to be dressed normally. Scotty notices Brooks.

SCOTTY
Brooks? Talk about the last person I expected to see here!
What's up, man?

BROOKS
Well--

SCOTTY
(interrupting)
The grim reaper! That's tight!

BROOKS
Why didn't you guys wear costumes?

SIMON
We did! We're serial killers!

SCOTTY
Yeah! They look just like everybody else!

BROOKS
With that logic, aren't you also dressed like child molesters?

SIMON
(ignoring him)
Dude, did you see Jenny Eyes?
She's dressed like a harem girl.

SCOTTY
What's a harem girl?

SIMON
Like a belly dancer.

SCOTTY
Oh, sweet.
(to Brooks)
I'm gonna go check that out.
Good to see you, man.

BROOKS
Yeah, you too.

We hear them as they walk away:

SCOTTY
(to Simon)
Man, next year I'm just going as
a pirate.

SIMON
Yeah, a butt pirate.

Brooks can't help but laugh at this.

As he walks along through the hall, he smiles at the cute costumed children, happy conversation and games going on all around.

He pauses, almost wistfully, to take in the sights.

From the corner of his eye, he notices an OLD WOMAN. She sits silently and motionless as though she is about to die in her chair.

Brooks focuses and walks to her.

OLD WOMAN
I have been afraid for her for
many days. I have been afraid
that she would come for me. But
her eyes are dead.

BROOKS
...I thought she would have more
time than this.

ARANEA (O.C.)
Brooks!

Brooks turns to look. Aranea is standing across the room.

She points at the punchbowl and mouths the word "orange," then gives him the thumbs-up.

OLD WOMAN
Then you know what she is?

BROOKS
I didn't for the longest time.

OLD WOMAN
(smiling)
Don't fall in love with yourself, boy. It's only a costume.

BROOKS
Do you need her?

OLD WOMAN
...Sometimes.

After a pause, she nods her head "yes."

BROOKS
Me, too.

Aranea walks up to them.

ARANEA
This mask is starting to squeeze my head.
(laughs)
I don't know how that guy wrestled in it. Somebody hugs me and my ears turn purple.
(looks at Brooks)
What's the matter?

BROOKS
I don't know. This just doesn't feel right.

ARANEA
You're right. I should've said 'why so grim?' That would've been way funnier.

BROOKS
No, Aranea, I'm serious. I don't think it's a good idea for us to be here.

OLD WOMAN
Aranea.

ARANEA
(kneeling)
Yes, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN
I was so afraid of you.

Aranea's face turns cold. She stands and takes a step back, her back against Brooks' chest.

She reaches behind her head to untie the mask, grazing Brooks' chin with her knuckles. She removes the mask and drops it to the floor.

ARANEA
You don't have to be afraid of
me. I'm not here for you.

BROOKS
You're here for me.

ARANEA
(doesn't turn around)
...I can't do that to you, Brooks.

BROOKS
She needs you. She needs
you...probably a lot less than I
do. There's a... There was a
moment when your forehead touched
mine and I wanted to tell you
about how you helped me remember
God. I wanted to tell you how
sorry I was that you ever had to
know what a hospital looked or
smelled like. I wanted to tell
you that if I live to be a
thousand years old in a house
with a thousand monkeys and a
thousand typewriters, that, works
of Shakespeare and banana-related
refuse aside, I would not begin
to understand why you don't see
in you what I do, and why you
would look at yourself and not
instantly be filled with the
satisfaction of flawed perfection.
I wanted to ask you to sit around
with me reading books and doing
nothing, so that later we could
talk about what we read, or learn
new words in the dictionary. I
wanted to show you that no matter
when the sign came or what it
looked like I was forever pinned
to this loop around your life,
since no part of my brain would
imagine that you would be pinned
to mine. ...I wanted to die.
...I wanted you to take me.

Aranea begins to cry. Her eyes turn a light shade of green.

ARANEA
Brooks...

BROOKS
Don't get me wrong, I'm going to hate myself in five minutes and want to take it all back. And I'm going to beat myself up like I always do, and then I'm going to stop and... I'm going to stop it and grow up. Finally. I don't want to die anymore. No matter how much I tell myself that I need you. Because I do. I need you.

Aranea turns to face him. She recoils a bit when she sees his facepaint.

ARANEA
Heh. Your mask is scary.

BROOKS
She needs you.

ARANEA
I know. ...Brooks, I need you to go. I need you to turn around and walk out of the back door and never look back.

BROOKS
That would be lame. I'm not going to leave you.

ARANEA
Okay, good. I was lying anyway.
I don't want you to go.

She looks at him with swirling green eyes.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Hey.

BROOKS
Hey.
(smiles)
Don't be afraid.

ARANEA
(mouthing the words)
Thank you.

Aranea softly headbutts Brooks in the chest.

She turns around, kneels, and places her head in Old Woman's lap.

Fade white.

INT. HALL (BATHROOM) -- LATER

We hover above the water in a toilet bowl. Brooks' Grim Reaper reflection looks back.

He presses his index finger to the back of his throat, to no reaction. He relaxes and closes his teeth on the finger.

He punches the stall wall as hard as he can.

He grabs Aranea's tiger mask from the ground at his knees, and exits.

EXT. HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

The door Brooks exits from is further down the building from the hall, where it connects to the church. Aranea is sitting on the steps, crying. White wings, speckled with blood, protrude from her back. Her tears are blood.

Brooks sits beside her Indian-style and says nothing.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a wad of toilet paper, and tries to wipe away her tears. It leaves pink smudges.

BROOKS

How long can you stay?

ARANEA

You knew. You never told me that you knew.

BROOKS

...Who else do you have to take?

ARANEA

The man who hit me. The man at the hospital. I have to take him.

BROOKS

When does he have to leave?

ARANEA

Six days.

BROOKS

I'm sorry.

ARANEA

And when I go, I can't...

BROOKS

I know.

ARANEA
Oh dude, don't be dead.
(laughs)
I don't remember the rest.

BROOKS
(monotone)
Why God, why would you take her
away from me. Why. Take me God,
take me instead.

ARANEA
That's such a good speech. Thank
you for writing it for me.

BROOKS
It is not often that someone
comes along who is a true friend
and a good writer.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE -- DAY

Aranea stands on a stepladder looking at a massive book. Brooks stands beside her holding a shopping bag.

ARANEA
(flipping pages)
Y'know, Heaven isn't really
anything like these illustrations.
For starters, we aren't all naked
children.

A college girl in a chair nearby looks up from her magazine and gives Aranea a condescending look.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
Hm. I should take this back
with me.

BROOKS
But I thought you couldn't take
it with you?

ARANEA
Why not? I'm going to pay for
it. I don't want to just leave
it somewhere.

BROOKS
I dunno. That's just what the
expression says. I was under
the impression that you were too
happy in Heaven to worry about
having things.

ARANEA

What fun would Heaven be without things? God made all of it. He planted the ideas for all these books and the talent for all of the paintings and photos.

BROOKS

You're right, but we only know what we're told.

ARANEA

It's so sad that more people don't realize that these books and pictures are all love letters to the world. From the people who create them and the people who created the world. It's so basic that everyone second-guesses it. Like there's got to be something more complicated behind it all. I mean, when you sit down to paint a picture, you don't think, "Hm, I'm going to paint a masterpiece." You think, "Hm, I'm going to paint a bowl of fruit," but then it just comes out "masterpiece."

BROOKS

You took the same art courses I did. It was either, "Hm, I'm going to paint a bowl of fruit," or "Dude, I'm totally going to draw a naked girl with a machine gun."

ARANEA

That's why you put your trust in God's hands. He tells you to paint the bananas instead of being a big walking banana.

BROOKS

Ha. Was that a euphemism?

ARANEA

Yes. Yes it was.

She reaches up to put the huge book back up on the shelf.

BROOKS

Y'know, you can be pretty creepy sometimes.

She reaches under her shirt and gently slides her first two fingers into the bandage around her abdomen.

After a moment, she pulls out a bloody three-inch feather.
She holds it out and lets it fall.

ARANEA
I know.
(suddenly suspicious)
Hey, wait a second.

BROOKS
What?

ARANEA
This whole time I've been up
here, you've been thinking about
what wrestling moves you could
do on me, haven't you?

BROOKS
No! Not even once.

ARANEA
(smirks)
Which one did you decide on?

BROOKS
...The powerbomb.

INT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) -- AFTERNOON

Aranea sits on her couch. She looks like she's waiting for something. The sound of COOKING (pots and pans clanging, silverware, etc.) comes from the kitchen.

Brooks emerges from the kitchen. He's wearing an apron and an oven mitt on each hand. He carries two plates, each with a sandwich on it.

BROOKS
Okay! One for me, one for you.

ARANEA
Oh, Brooks! Grilled cheese!
This is the big payoff for all
we've been through.

BROOKS
It came out of nowhere, just
like you promised. You sent me
in expecting common spicy noodles,
and instead you found culinary
enlightenment.

ARANEA
(with a mouthful)
There won't be grilled cheese
sandwiches like this in Heaven.

BROOKS
(smiles)
Here, you can have mine.
(slides his sandwich onto
her plate)
I'll have no sandwiches and you
can have two.

ARANEA
Ooh, opposites day.

BROOKS
(mocking)
Ooh, opposites day, hur hur.

Aranea convulses with laughter.

EXT. ARANEA'S HOUSE (ROOF) -- AFTERNOON

Aranea sits on the roof, flipping through photo albums full of black and white photos of her childhood. Two suitcases sit next to her.

A RUMBLE of thunder echoes in the distance, making her look up at the looming stormclouds.

She goes back to flipping.

She takes one picture out of the album. It's the one of Brooks, Aranea and Curtis. She stares at it for a moment with a sad smile.

She scotch tapes it to the side of one of the suitcases. Several other pictures are already taped to them.

Rain begins to fall.

She looks up into it. Tears of blood leave pink streaks on her cheeks.

She raises her hands to the drops as they fall harder.

She stands and her wings spread out behind her. She cries harder and the blood streams down her face.

She collapses down onto the roof, sobbing. Her wings don't stop the downpour.

She slams her fist down onto the roof several times. Blood streams down her arms, followed by black like ebony.

She raises her hands to her face and sees the black on them.

Her hands dart to her hair. She runs her fingers through it and the black streams off like ink.

A single strand of ivory hair falls down in front of her face and her green eyes cross to focus at it.

She begins to cry again, but water, not blood. Her smile grows wide.

She sits up and starts to laugh.

She rolls onto her back and begins kicking her feet. Her laughs become howls that echo across the neighborhood.

EXT. CEMETERY -- AFTERNOON

Brooks stands in the grass, hands in his pockets.

Aranea walks towards him.

She wears a white tank top. Her large white wings are folded behind her. She holds a duffel bag in one hand. The picture of her, Brooks and Curtis is taped to it.

They smile at each other.

BROOKS
I'm surprised the birds didn't
show up for this.

ARANEA
Well, I'm not officially leaving
until tomorrow morning at twelve
forty-five. They'll probably fly
me out as high as they can go.
A wind is coming by in a few
minutes to pick me up. I have to
get ready. It's a long trip.

BROOKS
Aren't you cold in that?

ARANEA
(laughs)
YES. I'm freezing. But I need
the shoulder room.

She stretches her wings out and flaps them once.

They stand there silent for a moment.

Brooks smiles at her.

BROOKS
Hey.

ARANEA
Hey.

She smiles back.

She walks towards him to hug him, but he bends down and picks her up at the waist.

He squeezes her.

She pushes her palms into his shoulders and lets out a YELL.

She extends her wings again and they block out the sun.

She lowers to her elbows and scratches the back of his head.

He puts her down and she hugs him.

ARANEA (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Brooks?

BROOKS
(whispers)
I know. I'll see you in a few?

The wind gusts up from behind him, pushing him forward.

She presses her forehead against his.

ARANEA
In more than a few.

She begins to rise.

He opens his arms and the wind picks her up.

She waves to him from the sky.

He smiles and waves back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUBURN'S DORM -- DAY

Kirby sits in the center of the lounge floor in the full-lotus position. Her eyes are closed, deep in meditation.

JESUS (O.C.)
(waverry)
Kirby...

Kirby's eye twitches as the interruption.

JESUS (CONT'D)
(waverry)
Kirby...I'm here, Kirby...

Kirby blinks open her eyes.

Kirby's POV:

We see JESUS standing before her, smiling. The world around his head swims with shimmery light.

He holds his hand out and we see the stigmata in his palm.

She blinks hard several times.

Kirby's POV:

We now see more clearly: "Jesus" is just the hippie we saw in the dorm earlier. The "stigmata" is a melty chocolate.

JESUS (CONT'D)
(offering)
Rolo?

KIRBY
(smiles, gets up)
No thanks.

JESUS
Ready?

KIRBY
Sure. Just let me grab my phone.

INT. AUBURN'S DORM ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Kirby pushes open the door and walks in.

She walks across the room, stepping over the Playstation controller wires, and snatches her phone from her desk.

She turns to Brooks and Auburn, who are sitting on Auburn's futon indian-style, controllers in hand. An empty pizza box sits open between them.

KIRBY
Are you two all right?

AUBURN
(doesn't look up)
We're fine.

Suddenly she begins to violently slam her thumb into one of the buttons.

She lifts up, GROWLING, and throws the controller to the ground.

Brooks smiles a bit at this.

KIRBY
Yeah, okay. You look totally fine.

She rolls her eyes and walks back across the room to exit.

Auburn sits back down and runs her fingers through her hair.

Neither of them move or say anything.

FADE TO BLACK