

## THE LAST DAYS OF JACK SWEENEY

FADE IN:

INT. SHOPPING MALL — DAY

EXTREME CLOSE-UP on JACK SWEENEY'S face. He is twenty-three with wide intelligent eyes that seem aged beyond their years. Jack looks down at his feet, lost in thought.

PULL BACK slowly. Jack is standing MOTIONLESS as a SWARM OF SHOPPERS surge past him.

JACK (V.O.)

Have you ever been lost? Surrounded by hundreds of people but completely out of place?

INT. SWEENEY HOME — DAY

The Sweeney home is filled with expensive furniture and artwork. Every room is picture perfect but sterile. Jack opens a sliding glass door to:

EXT. SWEENEY HOME — DECK — CONTINUOUS

The backyard of ROBERT and GLORIA SWEENEY, an influential couple in Milwaukee business and social circles. They sit rigidly on patio furniture, cocktails in hand. Gloria looks to Robert who stares fixedly across their sprawling backyard.

JACK (V.O) (CONT'D)

Have you ever had everything and wanted none of it? Loved someone, but never really seen them?

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT — LIVING ROOM — MORNING

Jack emerges from his bedroom to find AARON WATERS, a stoner buddy and now Jack's freeloading roommate, passed out on the couch surrounded by beer bottles. A scraggly-looking DOG rummages in a pizza box as the TV flickers fight scenes from the Jerry Springer show.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Have you ever self-medicated? Taken  
your life in your own hands and lost  
the battle? Have you ever given up?  
Spent an entire day screaming 'Fuck  
You,' ...

INT. SWEENEY OFFICE BUILDING — JACK'S OFFICE — DAY

A well-dressed HR REPRESENTATIVE gestures around the empty office, his dialog inaudible. Jack stares past him to watch a flock of birds flying outside the window.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
...But never opened your mouth? Have  
you ever wished you were somewhere  
else...

EXT. NIGHT CLUB — NIGHT

Jack exits the club as a pair of UNDERAGE GIRLS in tight skirts scamper to the door. They are blocked by a large BOUNCER. One girl nervously smiles up at him, trying to flirt. The bouncer smiles wolfishly back at her then guides her by the elbow to a small curtained area.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
...Or even someone else? Have you ever  
done something you knew you'd regret?  
Walked right off the cliff, swallowed  
the poison?

INT. SUPERMARKET — DAY

A tiny ELDERLY WOMAN carefully picks through tomatoes. She looks up hopefully as Jack passes with his cart.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Have you ever been so alone that a  
stranger looked like a miracle to you?

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN — DAY

Jack stands on the shore watching the tide wash over a dead bird.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Have you ever seen death? Looked right  
at it and allowed your mind to move  
beyond the fear?

INT. BUS STATION – BATHROOM – NIGHT

Jack splashes water on his face. He looks in the mirror at his ragged expression then refocuses on a skinny HIPSTER behind him. The man is holding a small tube in his lips while he heats a piece of foil. Crack.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
If you answered yes to any of these  
questions, chances are your life is  
just as fucked up as mine was.

FADE TO BLACK:

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But sometimes before things can get  
better

INSERT: The image of a speeding bullet against a black background.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
They have to get a lot worse.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT – BEDROOM – MORNING

An alarm clock switches to 6:00 and PUNK MUSIC fills the room. Jack fumbles for the off button. He groans and stares at the ceiling a moment before forcing himself out of bed. He stumbles to the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM – SHORTLY AFTER

Jack's bedroom door opens and Jack emerges a new person – well groomed, wearing a suit and tie, but obviously still fatigued.

He is surprised to see Aaron awake with the TV on. The dog lies beside the couch and raises his head to look at Jack.

JACK  
What the hell are you doing up?

AARON  
Are you kidding me? This is when all  
the best shit is on.

Aaron gestures to the episode of Cops he's watching. Jack shakes his head as he makes his way to the kitchen.

AARON (CONT'D)  
So you're really going through with  
this, Jack?

Jack raises a carton of juice to his mouth saying nothing. Aaron continues, mostly to himself.

AARON (CONT'D)  
There are plenty of other ways to piss  
off your old man.

Aaron takes a hit from a small bong. He holds it then exhales in a long continuous stream of smoke. Without acknowledging any of this, Jack sets the carton back in the fridge, folds a piece of plain white bread into his mouth and steps out of the kitchen.

He grabs his backpack and heads to the door.

JACK  
(pointing to the dog)  
Gone by the end of the day.

Aaron answers automatically.

AARON  
Yep.

EXT. BUS STATION — SHORTLY AFTER

Jack sits alone on a bench, slumped with chin in hand. A bus SQUEALS to a stop in front of him. The words, "DO I DARE DISTURB THE UNIVERSE?" are graffitied on the side. Jack reads this and smiles faintly.

INT. SWEENEY OFFICE BUILDING — MAIN OFFICE — LATER

Jack steps through a set of double doors onto a large office floor. There are cubes on either side of a main aisle and the back wall is lined with private offices with a conference and break room set in the middle. His parents stand stiffly inside his office, waiting to welcome Jack into their world. He takes a deep breath and enters.

ROBERT

Jackson.

Robert has the distinct rigidity and clipped tone of the military. Jack nods warily at him. Gloria stands by attentively.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Paul has already shown you the ropes?

JACK

Yeah.

There is an uncomfortable silence between them.

GLORIA

I know you're concerned about how this will turn out, Jackson, but we believe this will be a good thing for you.

Jack forces a smile, but Robert is finished here.

ROBERT

I'll let you settle in. If you have questions you can come down to my office.

As he exits, Robert pauses briefly beside Jack, his tone icy.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And if you run out of reports to write you can always take out the trash.

Gloria maintains her stoic smile.

JACK

You're coming back for lunch right?

GLORIA

Not today. I have a planning meeting to discuss the art for the fall fundraiser.

She absently smooths the lapels of Jack's suit then gestures to an abstract painting on the wall.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I picked this out for you. Your father would never have approved the cost, but I just knew it was for you.

JACK

I like the colors. It's like teenage angst meets corporate America.

GLORIA

I really have to go, I just couldn't decide where to put this.

She fusses with a decorative plant finally settling on a spot on the corner of Jack's desk.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

There, now that looks perfect.

(turning to Jack)

I hope you have a wonderful day, Jackson.

After she leaves Jack slumps into his chair and stares at the plant.

CUT TO:

The same plant, withered and dying. Several weeks have passed. Jack's office is empty as Robert enters. He picks up the nameplate on the desk. The 'SON' has been scraped off leaving 'JACK SWEENEY.' Robert scoffs and tosses it back on the desk. He thumbs through papers then opens a drawer and pulls out an origami bird made from a candy wrapper and a lengthy chain of paper clips.

Jack walks in carrying his lunch and stops short, then closes the door behind him. Robert holds up the paper clips.

ROBERT

This is what I'm paying you for?

JACK

Everybody keeps stuff at their desk.

ROBERT

I've given you this opportunity, Jackson, and I expect you to make the most of it. I've stood by for the last five years while you fucked up again and again.

Jack flinches.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I thought you'd have all of this flakiness worked out of your system by now. Jesus, Jackson, you'd think we raised you to be some sort of pansy.

JACK

That would be terrible wouldn't it?

ROBERT

You'll show me some respect! I'm your father. And more than that I'm your boss.

Jack's tone is darkening to match his father's.

JACK

I only took this job to make you and Mom happy. If it were up to me I'd be out there

(points out the window)  
doing something worthwhile with my life, not sitting behind a desk pushing papers for my old man.

Robert raises his hand to point at Jack who shifts back on his heels, sensing what's coming.

ROBERT

Without me, you'd be out on the streets.

Robert brushes past his son to exit. Jack bends over his desk and slowly releases his breath, defeated for the moment.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - THAT EVENING

Still in his office attire Jack slouches on the couch, beer in hand watching the History Channel. The dog stares at Jack who diligently ignores him.

His program cuts away to a commercial. A CAR SALESMAN begins an OVER THE TOP sales pitch...

SALESMAN (ON TV)

Is it time for a change in your life?  
Cant's seem to find what you're looking  
for? Or are you just sick and tired of  
the same old boring choices? Well come  
on down to Dealin' Don's Den of  
Dodges...

He hits mute and leans his head back to groan loudly in disgust. The dog begins HOWLING in solidarity. Jack startles and shoos him with his foot, but the dog quickly jumps out of the way.

The front door opens and Aaron enters.

AARON

Holy shit, look what the cat dragged in.

JACK

Not a cat, Aaron, the fucking dog.  
Still here.

AARON

His owner's not back from Cabo yet.

Aaron heads to the fridge for a beer.

JACK

I don't care when he's back, I told you  
to get rid of him. He chewed through  
another one of my shoes this week.

AARON

I told you to keep your door shut.

JACK  
It's my fucking apartment.

AARON  
You look like shit, Jack. Did you get passed over for a promotion or something?

Jack slumps further into the couch.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Quit.

JACK  
What?

AARON  
Quit. Quit your stupid fucking job. Walk in tomorrow and tell your dad to take his corporate lifestyle and shove it up his ass.

JACK  
You're a moron.

AARON  
Why? Because I think being happy is important?

JACK  
Because you think money isn't.

Their voices are rising.

AARON  
Hey man, I make money.

JACK  
You sell dime bags to teenagers so you can go clubbing. Somebody needs to have a job here.

AARON  
And you need this shit job to pay for what? Rent? In a building your dad owns? For the new car you leave parked

on the street? You've got a free ride  
and you're too stupid to take it.

JACK  
(really angry now)  
You think all this is free?

The dog feeds off the tension between them and starts barking  
furiously.

JACK (CONT'D)  
(to dog)  
Shut The Fuck Up!

The dog scoots under a table. Jack takes a deep breath, trying  
to cool off. Aaron proceeds cautiously.

AARON  
Anybody can be angry, Jack. That's easy.  
But to be angry with the right person,  
at the right time and for the right  
reason – that's not within everybody's  
power.

JACK  
Did you just pull that out of your ass?

AARON  
(smiling wickedly)  
Out of Aristotle's.

Jack goes to the fridge for a beer, but Aaron has taken the last  
one.

JACK  
Typical.

Walks to the door.

AARON  
Where are you going?

JACK  
I need beer if I'm going to take advice  
from you and Aristotle.

Opens the door to leave as Aaron calls after him.

AARON

Pick up some of those toaster pizzas while you're out. Just the pepperoni ones, the supremes give me gas.

INT. GROCERY STORE — LATER

Jack rides his shopping cart through the aisles like a skateboard. He skillfully grabs items and tosses them into his cart as he sails by.

Rounding a corner he nearly mows down LUCY, the elderly woman from the open.

Lucy strains to reach an item on a high shelf. Her hands shake and her eyes are watery and hauntingly blue. She has a head bob and wears a perpetual smile that makes her seem almost comically happy.

Jack catches his breath at the near miss then sheepishly walks around his cart to take down a can for her.

LUCY

No, no, the cream of celery. Just to the right.

Jack replaces the first can and takes down the correct one.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Thank you, dear. I'd die of old age before anyone in this store offered me assistance.

Jack smiles, in no hurry to move on.

LUCY (CONT'D)

I think you've helped me before. In fact I'm sure of it. Not in this aisle but over in produce. The oranges always get the best of me. They stack them so high, you know.

JACK

Maybe. I come here a lot. I have a roommate who eats me out of house and home.

LUCY

Sounds like my Barry. He would clean his plate and come back for seconds no matter if I was serving steak and potatoes or slop and beans.

They push their carts slowly up the aisle, side by side.

JACK

Well maybe you could ask Barry to come along to help you.

LUCY

Oh, my Barry's not back just yet. I expect him any day though.

JACK

Oh yeah, is he off on business or something?

LUCY

No, no. Or I guess you could say he's on business for Uncle Sam. He's over in Vietnam fighting with all the other boys.

Jack stops and the color drains from his face. Lucy places a hand on his arm.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Not to worry, Dear. I don't think they're taking any more boys just now, although I'm sure you'd look fine in a uniform.

She smiles, hoping he'll come around then continues on.

JACK

So you haven't heard from Barry, in what... How long?

LUCY

Oh, there was the one card for Mother's Day. After that it was only them letters from D.C.

She looks confused momentarily then continues with disdain.

LUCY (CONT'D)

M.I.A. they said. What a bunch of silly letters to attach to a person, don't you think?

She shakes it off and smiles at Jack, unruffled.

LUCY (CONT'D)

That's all right though. We all make mistakes.

(more to herself)

We all make mistakes.

She disappears around the corner and Jack slowly follows.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack's jerks spasmodically - dreaming.

EXT. SARAJEVO, BOSNIA - 1914 (DREAM)

A couple descend the stairs of an official looking building and get into a car. The man, ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND, wears a decorated military uniform with a large headpiece made of feathers. His wife, SOPHIE, is well composed in a bustling dress.

In a back alley across town GAVRILO PRINCIP, a poorly dressed young Bosnian national, loads a small handgun. His SIX COHORTS hold revolvers or small bombs and exchange brief words in their native tongue. They look desperate as they disperse.

The car carrying the Archduke winds its way through narrow streets as part of a small motorcade. The driver of Ferdinand's car takes a wrong turn and stops. Princip, at a café on the corner, turns his head as he spots them. He steps into the street. Without hesitation he raises his gun and fires.

As the bullet leaves the chamber the sound is deafening.

INSERT: The image of a speeding bullet against a black background.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack jerks awake, gasping.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jack steps out and finds Aaron in front of the TV watching Nancy Grace. The dog lies faithfully by the side of the couch.

JACK  
(re: Nancy Grace)  
Jesus Christ.

The dog bounds up to greet Jack, but Jack shuns him as he walks to the fridge for orange juice.

AARON  
(without looking away from the TV)  
The dream again?

Jack furrows his brow. *How does he know?*

AARON (CONT'D)  
It's not like I can't hear your moans from out here, and you haven't had a girl in there for months.

JACK  
Fuck off.

AARON  
What is it anyway? Copy machine jam?  
Maybe a really nasty paper cut?

Jack slams the fridge door, rattling the contents.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Fuck, man! Take it easy. You used to have a sense of humor.

JACK

Yeah, and you used to not be such a dick.

Aaron is chastened. He would say something, but Jack has already disappeared into his room.

EXT. SWEENEY BUILDING – THE NEXT MORNING

Jack looks wrung out as he walks along the drive leading to the building. We see a BUS drive past in the background.

A man in red running shorts and no shirt is jogging confidently across the parking lot. Jack starts to snicker before realizing it's Robert. He quickly ducks behind a tree, cursing his cowardice. As Robert turns the corner Jack slowly steps out and continues into the building.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – MAIN OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

The whole office is abuzz. Jack spots MALCOLM, a middle-aged, black man with glasses and a ponytail, and heads over to get the scoop.

JACK

Hey. What's going on?

MALCOLM

HR called a meeting at 3pm.

Jack lifts his hands – *So?*

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

It's for the whole building.

JACK

What does that mean?

MALCOLM

Whatever it means, it ain't good.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – CAFETERIA – 3pm

Dozens of employees are crowded at lunch tables looking nervous. Robert, now dressed in an expensive suit, stands at the front of

the room with several EXECUTIVES and a small team of HR REPRESENTATIVES. They are a united front.

ROBERT

This merger represents substantial growth for our business. It's the future of industrial automation.

An employee blurts from the crowd -

EMPLOYEE

So if the business is growing, why are there going to be layoffs?

Robert looks to one of the HR representatives who steps forward to address this.

HR REP #1

We'll be combining our staff with IXcel's. Their company is laid out much the same as ours, which means there will be some redundancies.

A ripple of UNREST stirs the crowd. Malcolm RAISES HIS HAND and the HR Rep calls on him.

MALCOLM

And when exactly will we know if we've been made "redundant"?

The HR Rep looks to Robert then continues.

HR REP #1

We're going to have one-on-one meetings with every employee in the next hour.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING - HR DEPARTMENT - SHORTLY AFTER

Jack stands in the corner of the crowded floor. Four offices line the wall and the middle two have doors closed with HR Reps #2 and #3 consulting with an employee behind each. Reps #1 and #4 stand by their offices on either side, keeping watch.

Suddenly SHOUTING erupts from the second office. An OLDER MAN storms out, pushing his way through the crowd to exit. REP #2 steps out and shares an OMG look with REP #1.

The third office door opens and another EMPLOYEE exits, a look of relief etched across his face. He keeps his head down and quickly makes his way out. REP #3 holds a clipboard and calls another name without hesitation.

HR REP #3  
Marcus Elliot

MARCUS steps forward and is taken into the 3<sup>rd</sup> office. Rep #2 steels herself for the next encounter, forces a smile and calls out the next name.

HR REP #2  
Chris Plemmons

All eyes search him out as CHRIS stands frozen in the crowd. Rep #1 quickly steps forward to escort him into the 2<sup>nd</sup> office.

Jack's eyes connect with Rep #4, PAUL, from the open. Jack immediately looks away. Paul makes his way over and whispers.

PAUL  
Your dad said it was okay for you to go  
back to your office.

Jack has a distinct moment of relief followed quickly by the realization that everyone around him is now regarding him with contempt. He silently slips into the hallway.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – MAIN OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

Jack walks in and sees Robert huddled with the group of executives. They're shooting the shit as if they don't have a care in the world.

Jack glares and he and Robert lock eyes. Robert tilts his head –  
*You have a problem with me?*

Jack looks away in disgust and retreats inside his office.

INT. CITY BUS – THAT EVENING

Jack's head is pressed against the glass of the mostly empty bus. Behind him a YOUNG HISPANIC COUPLE are engaged in an animated conversation in Spanish that echoes through the bus.

Jack's phone RINGS. He checks it, looks annoyed but answers.

JACK

What?

AARON (ON PHONE)

Are you coming out tonight?

JACK

I'm having dinner with my parents.

AARON (ON PHONE)

Ditch it. Tell them you're reading the Wall Street Journal or something.

Jack focuses on a red and white sign posted inside the bus – STOP BULLYING NOW! STAND UP & SPEAK OUT. He shakes his head.

JACK

No. I want to go.

He hangs up, resolved to a new purpose.

INT. SWEENEY HOME – FOYER – LATER THAT EVENING

The doorbell RINGS. Gloria scampers down the hall and is met by ROSIE, a neatly dressed maid. Gloria waves her away then swings the door open.

GLORIA

Hello, sweetheart!

JACK

Hi, Mom.

INT. SWEENEY HOME – PARLOR – SHORTLY AFTER

Gloria and Jack stand in front of an easel holding a black and white DRAWING done on delicate paper. The details are elaborate and painstakingly done. It is beautiful in its simplicity.

GLORIA

Here's the piece I told you about.  
I tried to keep the focus on the faces,  
their expressions. When you take out  
the color and just look at the people,  
the festival becomes a backdrop and you  
can see the range of emotion. The  
reverence, the excitement...

She's getting lost in her description, but Jack, impatient,  
takes her hands bringing her back into the moment.

JACK

It's nice, Mom, really.

Gloria's eyes drop. Jack looks down the hall.

JACK (CONT'D)

Is dinner ready yet?

INT. SWEENEY HOME - DINING ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Robert sits with a newspaper in one hand, a whiskey in the other.

GLORIA

Honey, Jackson's here.

ROBERT

(without looking up)  
Did you show him your little drawing?

Gloria absorbs this with a stiff smile.

GLORIA

Yes.

ROBERT

And what do you think, Jackson?  
A lot of little lines traced on a  
lightboard. Not even her own work.

JACK

She spends hours on those! She makes  
all the choices about shading and  
contrast.

ROBERT  
From other people's photographs.

JACK  
They're in the public domain!

This is not what he wants to talk about.

JACK (CONT'D)  
But you don't need to concern yourself  
with other's hard work, do you?

Gloria interjects to keep this from escalating.

GLORIA  
Let's have some dinner, alright?  
(toward kitchen)  
Rosie!  
(then)  
She's made us her chicken cacciatore.

Jack and Robert stare tensely at each other as Gloria once again sets her smile firmly in place.

LATER

Dinner in painfully silent, the hostility between Jack and Robert barely reined in. Gloria tries to lighten the mood.

GLORIA  
Did you hear the university is  
commissioning a Zen garden?

No response.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
They've hired a famous landscape  
architect who specializes in Asian  
design. It should be done sometime in  
the spring, maybe we could...

ROBERT  
I don't think Jackson cares about the  
university, Gloria. He certainly had no  
interest in going there.

The momentary truce is shattered. Jack slams his fork onto the table.

JACK

You really wanted me to go to that goddamned school? You seemed more than happy to see me ship out.

Robert is all too eager to engage Jack in battle.

ROBERT

I thought a little discipline would be good for you.

JACK

Yeah, nothing like professional killing to help you find your way in life.

ROBERT

You haven't got the backbone to be a killer. They wouldn't let you scrub latrines in Kuwait.

GLORIA

PLEASE!

They are caught off-guard by the desperation in her voice.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Is it unreasonable to ask that we have one civilized meal together?

Jack clenches and unclenches his fists, composing himself.

JACK

Sorry, Mom.

Robert sits forward. He won't stop until he's dealt the final blow.

ROBERT

Why don't you apologize to her for the post-partum depression you saddled her with? Or maybe it's the 23 years that came after that filled her medicine cabinet with pharmaceuticals.

Gloria gasps.

JACK

Jesus Christ, Dad! You laid off 20% of your staff today. Wasn't that enough blood in the water for you?

ROBERT

You're a goddamned child who has no concept of how to run a business. You couldn't make it a day without a hand-out.

GLORIA

(near tears)

Robert, please stop this.

JACK

Oh, fuck you and your charity. You've always wanted me on a short leash so I couldn't embarrass you with any sort of inferior lifestyle.

The kitchen door swings open and Rosie tentatively enters. Her eyes fix on Gloria who stares at the wall, holding back tears. This is clearly a rescue mission.

ROSIE

I was wondering if anyone wants desert?

Jack rises and tosses his napkin on the table.

JACK

I'm done here.

Jack stops to kiss his mother on the head then exits without a word.

EXT. SWEENEY HOME — MOMENTS LATER

Jack brusquely shuts the front door and walks up to a shiny black BMW. He fishes in his pocket then abruptly stops and pounds both fists on the roof of the car. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. He stops just as suddenly and closes his eyes.

INSERT: The bullet flying through the air.

RETURN TO SCENE.

He retrieves his keys and unlocks the door.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jack walks in, restless and brimming with pernicious energy. He paces from the kitchen to the couch. The dog gets up, tail wagging. Jack stumbles over something and curses, then bends to pick up a game controller that's been chewed.

JACK  
Goddammit!

The dog ducks under the coffee table.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Hey!

Jack struggles to reach him but finally grabs his collar and starts to pull. The dog bites his hand.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Ow! Jesus Christ!

Jack is livid and reaches for the dog again but the dog whimpers and backs into a corner. Jack sees the dog's terror and it registers - he is something to fear.

LATER

It's dark except for the flickering light of the television. Jack stares blankly at the images of wartime Hitler.

Jack's phone RINGS.

JACK  
What?

AARON (ON PHONE)  
Hey man, are you at home? I need you to do me a favor.

JACK

I'm not in the mood right now.

AARON (ON PHONE)

Bullshit. I need you to record a show for me. It's important, you may want to write this down.

Aaron is clearly drunk and we hear CLUB MUSIC in the background.

JACK

Yeah, well why don't you come home and record it yourself?

AARON (ON PHONE)

Can't. I'm about to hook up with the sweetest little honey of exchange student you ever saw. The girl doesn't even speak English, she's Taiwanese.

JACK

Congratulations. Use a condom. Goodnight.

AARON (ON PHONE)

Wait, wait! My show. You gotta record Cheaters at 3am. Hook me up, man.

JACK

All right! Are we done?

AARON (ON PHONE)

What crawled up your ass? That's right, you had dinner with the folks. Did Rosie burn the meatloaf or something?

Aaron spins into drunken laughter and Jack pulls the phone away from his ear. Realizing his joke has fallen short Aaron sobers.

AARON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Guess it's bad. Look, why don't you meet me out? Have a few beers, hit up some girls.

JACK  
That's all I need right now - to  
babysit your drunk ass.

AARON (ON PHONE)  
Jesus, Jack. You even sound like your  
dad.

This lands on Jack hard. He looks to the dog who eyes him warily  
from across the room.

AARON (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
Come out. I'll meet you at the bar.

JACK  
Yeah, all right.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Dressed in nice jeans and a simple black shirt, Jack grabs his  
keys and heads to the door. He spies the dog eyeing him  
cautiously and sighs. He needs to make this right.

He turns and heads to the kitchen, opens the fridge and  
contemplates. He gaze locks in on something.

JACK  
(crouching down)  
C'mere, boy.

Jack holds out a hot dog. The dog rises quickly but keeps his  
distance.

JACK (CONT'D)  
C'mon, ...

Jack pauses as he realizes he has no idea if the dog has a name.  
He studies him for a moment - his narrow face, untamed hair, an  
underbite.

JACK (CONT'D)  
(his voice sing-song)  
C'mere, Gary Busey. I've got a treat  
for you.

The dog responds and takes the offered food. Jack smiles and pets his head.

EXT. NIGHT CLUB – LATER

Jack steps away from his Beamer and walks toward the entrance. A group of young men in tight pants and elaborate hairstyles are entering at the same time. One EMO GUY holds the door open for Jack, a detailed rendering of a cupid tattooed down the inside of his arm. Cupid's bow is at the ready, the arrow points into the club.

INT. NIGHT CLUB – MOMENTS LATER

Jack makes his way to the bar and flags the BARTENDER.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

JACK

Corona. Have you seen Aaron?

BARTENDER

He hooked up with some girl. Left about 10, 15 minutes ago.

Jack shakes his head – *unbelievable*.

Suddenly someone is SHOUTING next to him and a muscle-bound CLUBBER on the barstool to his left is showered with a drink that splashes onto Jack as well.

ANGRY CLUBBER

Bitch!

A SEXY WOMAN in a tight mini dress stalks away as the man grabs napkins to clean himself. Jack does the same.

ANGRY CLUBBER

(without looking at Jack)  
Sorry about that.

He nods toward the woman who is standing with her friends, throwing glances back their way. Clearly talking shit.

ANGRY CLUBBER (CONT'D)

Fucking girls. They all want to play their little games. Get you hard and then get pissed when you try to do something about it.

JACK

(not sure how to respond)

Yeah.

ANGRY CLUBBER

Like, why they even gotta dress like that if they don't want you looking.

JACK

I think they're okay with the looking.

The man is in his own world, scowling and brooding.

ANGRY CLUBBER

I wish the sprinklers would go off right now. Ruin their stupid little dresses, their makeup running all down their faces.

He downs his drink without ever taking his eyes off the girl. Jack observes him like a science project.

ANGRY CLUBBER (CONT'D)

I should find the fire alarm right now and pull that shit. Send those bitches and all the faggoty-dressed assholes running for the door.

He pauses to assess Jack's attire. He passes.

Jack doesn't know where to go with this. He's amused with the level of anger the guy is putting off, but he's uncertain if he's dangerous.

JACK

You know, pulling the fire alarm won't set off the sprinklers.

ANGRY CLUBBER

How the fuck do you know that?

JACK  
Kid did it in 6<sup>th</sup> grade on a dare.

The man considers this.

JACK (CONT'D)  
You've gotta actually have smoke near  
the smoke detectors.

ANGRY CLUBBER  
Like set a fire? Man, are you crazy?

Jack is relieved. He's just a blowhard.

JACK  
No, not a fire. You just have to hold a  
lighter up to one. Haven't you seen  
that in movies?

The man nods, thinks about the movies he's seen. Jack moves on.

INT. NIGHT CLUB – SHORTLY AFTER

Jack steps out from the men's room and pauses to take in the crowd. There are little clusters of jocks, yuppies, even a few cougars. He exhales loudly – *what am I doing here?*

He turns to head to the door but runs straight into ABBEY, a young woman headed to the bathroom.

They both fumble with apologies, but this gives Jack a chance to really see her. She's about 25 in low-top Chucks, a well-worn pair of jeans, and a t-shirt that hugs her curves. She is not a traditional beauty but carries herself with a confidence that makes her stand out.

Jack stares like he's discovered a new species. Abbey notices his look, arches an eyebrow and turns wordlessly toward the restroom. Jack catches her arm but she quickly pulls away. He rebounds.

JACK  
Hi, I'm Jack.

She nods, not interested in flirting, but not rude.

ABBEY

K.

She disappears into the bathroom and Jack is left hanging. He smiles, looks to the door and back to the restroom, and then moves against the wall. This is worth waiting for.

Without warning the sprinklers go off. CHAOS ensues. People SCREAM and start pushing. Jack steps away from the wall, scrambling for what to do next. A MAN rushing past CHECKS him on the shoulder and Jack lands hard on the floor. He shelters his head then suddenly he's being pulled upright.

ABBEY

Get up! You're gonna get trampled!

Jack takes a step, winces and falters on one foot. Abbey hoists one arm over her shoulders and helps him to the exit.

EXT. NIGHT CLUB – MOMENTS LATER

Abbey helps a limping Jack to what has become a HUMAN PERIMETER around the club. People are soaked and scared. SIRENS close in.

Abbey is still supporting Jack but she's clinging to him as well. Jack instinctively puts his arms around her and they stand taking comfort in each other as they watch the melee.

Abbey finally registers what's going on and pulls away.

JACK

Wow, thank you. I would have gotten creamed in there.

ABBEY

How's your foot? Do you need a doctor?

JACK

No, I'm good. I've twisted it before, the ligaments are just weak. Thanks again...

(prompting)

ABBEY

Abbey.

Jack nods. He likes the name, he likes her. Abbey shifts self-consciously under his intense gaze. Then she remembers -

ABBEY

Shit!

JACK

You all right?

ABBEY

(looking around)

I've gotta find somebody.

Abbey darts across the parking lot searching. She stops at a TALL WOMAN who is wrapped around a large ATHLETIC GUY. They talk for a moment then Abbey walks back in the direction of Jack, looking around unassumingly as she goes.

JACK

(calling to her)

Abbey!

She looks up and returns to him.

ABBEY

I came with a friend. She says she's got a ride though.

Jack smiles, nods. Abbey fills the silence.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Leave it to her to hook up during a crisis.

An awkward beat passes between them, then

ABBEY (CONT'D)

So are you here alone?

JACK

A friend invited me out, but he ditched me.

Abbey assesses the scene - emergency vehicles are arriving and the parking lot is becoming more chaotic.

ABBEY

I think we should get out of the way.  
Do you need a ride?

Jack casts a brief glance to his Beamer.

JACK

Yeah, that'd be great.

As they head toward Abbey's car we see the Angry Clubber being wrestled from the building by two large bouncers.

INT./EXT. ABBEY'S VOLKSWAGEN JETTA - SHORTLY AFTER

Buildings and houses slide past the window. Jack watches Abbey. He can't stop grinning. She glances over and returns his smile, then nods silently and fixes her eyes to the road.

JACK

You know, you haven't even asked where  
I live.

Abbey stares straight ahead, totally in control.

ABBEY

I figured you'd tell me if you really  
wanted to go there.

Jack smirks and leans back to enjoy the ride.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - LATER

The pair sits on the hood of Abbey's car, relaxed and engaged in lively discussion.

ABBEY

You can't tell me you think that  
verdict was fair. It's a classic case  
of might equals right.

JACK

I didn't say it was fair. I'm just  
saying you don't get to smash a window  
and take a stereo as a consolation  
prize for being repressed.

ABBEY

See, but that's why it's so dangerous.  
People go crazy when you take away  
their voice. It's unnatural.

Jack gets quite. His mind has wandered.

JACK

In the army they teach you which ribs  
to insert a knife between  
(places his fingers at this spot)  
so you can penetrate a lung and your  
enemy won't be able to cry out.

Abbey is shocked. The mood has shifted.

ABBEY

You were in the army?

He nods. A beat passes.

JACK

My dad was in all the Desert Storm  
stuff. I guess I thought I would figure  
some things out about him if I went too.

ABBEY

Did that work?

JACK

Not really. I never finished my tour. I  
started having trouble breathing on  
some of the runs we did. Turns out I  
have asthma.

Abbey nods.

JACK (CONT'D)

They discharged me on medical grounds.

ABBEY

When was this?

JACK

Couple years ago.

ABBEY

What'd you do after that?

JACK

I worked at a funeral home in  
Greenfield for a while.

Abbey looks dismayed.

JACK (CONT'D)

Yeah. I guess it just seemed like the  
next step after the army.

ABBEY

What kind of work did you do at a  
funeral home?

JACK

Prepping bodies for embalming, getting  
them dressed. But also some janitorial  
stuff. Mopping floors...

(beat)

taking out the trash...

He trails off and looks away.

ABBEY

And now?

JACK

(shrugs)

And now I'm working at my dad's company.

ABBEY

And how is that?

JACK

On a scale of army to dead bodies?

(thinks about this)

It's worse.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM — MORNING

Jack and Abbey lie entwined on the bed. The dog nudges open the  
door and happily licks the sole of Jack's dangling foot.

JACK  
(jerking upright)  
Ahh!  
(sees dog)  
What the...? Get out!

Jack searches for something to throw but the dog beats a hasty retreat. Abbey sits up, groggy.

ABBEY  
Was that your dog?

Jack exhales a long breath and falls back onto the bed.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Aaron slurps a giant bowl of cereal as Jack and Abbey emerge from the bedroom. Abbey and Aaron freeze, staring at each other. Jack walks nonchalantly to the fridge.

JACK  
Abbey, this is Aaron. Aaron, Abbey.

ABBEY  
Um, hi. Jack didn't tell me he had a roommate.

JACK  
He's not a roommate. Roommates pay rent.

AARON  
(still agape)  
Technically I'm more of a life coach.

As Jack opens the fridge the dog quickly joins him looking for a handout. Abbey comes over to pet him.

ABBEY  
Then this must be your personal trainer.  
What's his name?

Without hesitation

JACK  
Gary.

Aaron is still trying to catch up.

AARON

Yeah, Gary. So you two met last night?

JACK

At Jinx, when you stood me up.

AARON

Seems like you had a good time.

ABBEY

(eager to change the subject)

It was really crazy. There was a fire and everyone had to evacuate. Jack almost got trampled in the rush.

AARON

Shit.

JACK

Yeah, it's true. She totally saved my life.

(gives her a winning grin)

But there was no fire. Some jackass set off the sprinklers.

ABBEY

You saw that?

JACK

No, he told me about it. He was bent about some girl. Said he wanted to ruin her night.

ABBEY

He was a friend of yours?

JACK

No! Jesus. He was just some meathead at the bar talking shit.

Abbey looks to Aaron for confirmation.

AARON

Trust me, he doesn't have that many friends.

JACK

He was talking about pulling the fire alarm. I wasn't sure what he would do.

AARON

But pulling the alarm won't set off the sprinklers. Remember Russell Clark from gym class?

JACK

That's exactly what I told him. You have to use a lighter. Everybody knows that.

ABBEY

So wait, you gave some pissed off guy, who you didn't know, instructions on how to set off the sprinklers?

JACK

I didn't think he would actually do it.  
(contemplates)  
I don't think I cared if he did.

ABBEY

Someone could have gotten hurt. YOU almost got hurt.

JACK

(smug)  
But then you wouldn't have had a chance to save me.

Jack hands Abbey a glass of juice then pats the top of Gary's head, never breaking eye contact with her. His intensity is magnetic. Abbey blushes and looks away.

INT. DINER - LATER THAT MORNING

Jack and Abbey sit at a booth eating breakfast.

ABBEY

So Aaron, he's a friend from school?

JACK

Yeah, I've known him since, what, since grade school I guess.

ABBEY

That's cool. I've never had a friend that long.

JACK

Good to know.

ABBEY

Smartass. You guys don't seem to have a lot in common. He seems a little...

JACK

Lazy?

ABBEY

I wasn't going to say that!

JACK

Actually he's really smart. Like scary smart.

ABBEY

Really?

JACK

Yeah, he could blow your mind, easy. We had chemistry together in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and he had the whole periodic table memorized. Just knew it. Couple of kids asked him how he did it and he told them he'd look at an element and take a hit, look at the next element then take another hit.

Abbey laughs.

JACK (CONT'D)

It was bullshit though. He's one of those people who doesn't have to struggle to learn something. It's just there.

ABBEY

So what's he doing with all this innate knowledge?

JACK

(without missing a beat)  
Selling drugs.

ABBEY

Seriously? And you let him get away with that?

Jack holds up both hands - *don't look at me!*

JACK

What can I say. He's a conscientious objector.

ABBEY

To what? Work?

JACK

More like life I guess.

Abbey thinks about this while Jack studies her. Their eyes meet and there's a pull they both feel.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack is restless in his bed. He tosses and moans and we see the images from his dream again.

Ferdinand descending the stairs, Princip huddled with his accomplices, the car turns down the wrong street, Princip pulls out his gun.

INSERT: The bullet flying through the air.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Jack jerks awake, his breathing ragged, sweat dotting his skin.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron is channel surfing on the couch. Gary happily greets Jack as he steps out of his room. Jack bends to pet him, glad to see the little dog.

AARON

Abbey in there with you?

JACK

I'm meeting her tonight.

Aaron nods then eases in.

AARON

Is it about your dad?

JACK

No. Nothing like that.

Jack heads for his orange juice.

AARON

But it's always the same?

Jack nods.

AARON (CONT'D)

The good doctor Freud says dreams are a form of wish fulfillment. But reoccurring nightmares are the exception. The nocturnal compulsion to repeat a trauma, even one that exists only as a dream, overrides the pleasure principal and comes from a more primitive part of the mind.

JACK

It's 4 in the morning, Aaron. Please don't psychoanalyze me.

AARON

I can't properly psychoanalyze you until you tell me the details.

Jack shakes his head, annoyed, and pauses for a long moment.

JACK  
It's not even a dream really.

He stops, irritated with himself.

JACK (CONT'D)  
So stupid.

AARON  
Go on.

JACK  
You know the assassination of Franz Ferdinand?

AARON  
You mean the catalyst for World War I?

Jack nods.

AARON (CONT'D)  
That's your dream?

JACK  
I know. It's crazy, right? I just keep seeing it over and over again. The car makes a wrong turn. Princip just happens to be at a café across the street. And that one shot, that one bullet kills a guy, which sparks more violence and more until the whole world is on fire. It's like this one random act that changed the course of history.

Jack speaks excitedly, caught up in the energy of the dream.

AARON  
So what I'm hearing is that your dreams are as dull as the shows you watch.

JACK  
C'mon, man!

AARON

I don't know, Jack. Sounds like some sort of fixation with power.

JACK

Why would you say that?

AARON

Princip was a nobody, right? But his actions affected millions of people. It's like you with that guy at the club. With one suggestion you set in place a series of events that ultimately led to you getting laid. It's the simple man's power to change the world around him.

Jack absorbs this, wrestles with it.

AARON (CONT'D)

But seriously, you should find some better shows to watch. South Park, reruns of the Golden Girls. Something.

Jack is lost in contemplation.

INT. INDIAN RESTAURANT — EVENING

Seated at a cozy booth in the corner Jack and Abbey look like consummate sweethearts. They lean in as they talk - no one else in the world.

ABBEY

My job at the shelter is a part of the field instruction for my masters. They let me set my hours each week, but I'm mostly there in the evenings because I'm at the coffee shop until 1. And I do my classes online so I can squeeze them in whenever. I make it work.

JACK

And you still find time on the weekend for clubbing and some light rescue work.

ABBEY

It's a thing of beauty.

She laughs and they stare for a moment.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

So what about you? You don't like your job, but there must be something else.

JACK

Compared to you I'm a total fuck up. There really isn't anything in my life that fulfills me the way your job does you.

ABBEY

It's okay. You just haven't found it yet. And you must have been good at something. In school maybe?

JACK

Does that imply I'm not good at anything now?

ABBEY

(raising an eyebrow)

I wouldn't say that.

Jack grins broadly then slowly shakes his head, thinking.

JACK

Nothing really. I wasn't bad at anything - I always made the honor roll and all that. I guess I just never found my niche.

ABBEY

Nothing? There wasn't one subject you liked? Maybe wood shop. I could see you with power tools.

JACK

Have I mentioned I'm accident prone? I drilled through a table in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and they never let me back in.

(then)

I don't know. I guess the only thing I ever really got into was history.

ABBEY  
History.

JACK  
Sexy right?

ABBEY  
We'll have to get you a pipe. Why  
history?

JACK  
It was always just nice, you know -  
having the world all laid out. Seeing  
what came next with nothing to  
calculate or predict. And if you let it  
in you start to see the patterns - the  
flaws that separate us, the  
achievements that connect us. It's like  
learning what it is to be human.

Abbey looks at him and nods - still taking him in, still falling.

EXT. INDIAN RESTAURANT - LATER

As they exit Abbey pauses. A pair of homeless men are huddled in  
a doorway across the street.

ABBEY  
Hold on.

Abbey carries her to-go container to the men. She speaks to them  
for a minute before she returns.

ABBEY  
We can't get them to come in to the  
shelter.

JACK  
No?

ABBEY  
They have their set up here and they  
don't think they need any help.

JACK

Maybe they don't.

ABBEY

Look at them, Jack. They're sleeping in a doorway. Does that look like fun to you?

JACK

No, but it's a choice they've made. Why should you try to change it?

ABBEY

Because when the weather gets cold, they could freeze. Without money for food they could starve. They don't get any kind of medical attention and some of them are mentally ill.

JACK

Ok, so get the police out here. They could spend the night inside for a change then be directed to the shelter.

ABBEY

I'm not going to call the cops on them! The world has already beat them down, why would I want to add to their misery? It wouldn't do any good anyway. One of them always stays up as lookout and they scatter when the police get close. They have a whole system. It's how they've survived this long.

JACK

Then maybe you shouldn't worry about it.

ABBEY

But if we don't care, no one will!

JACK

Okay, okay. I give in. I will spend the rest of the night caring without actually doing anything about it.

ABBEY

We just did. We made sure they had a meal tonight.

JACK

Always on a rescue mission.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – MAIN OFFICE – MORNING

Jack ducks toward his office, but pauses when he sees Malcolm. He approaches cautiously, waiting to see how he's received today.

Malcolm offers Jack a friendly smile.

MALCOLM

Hey, Jack.

JACK

Hey. Sorry I didn't get to talk to you on Friday.

MALCOLM

That's the beauty of the Friday afternoon layoff - you don't give the troops time to rally.

JACK

But you're okay?

MALCOLM

I'm here, aren't I?

Jack looks around at several empty cubes.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

But your dad's not going to lay me off. I'm a gay black man. That's a discrimination lawsuit just waiting to happen.

Jack smiles, grateful for the levity.

JACK

Yeah, well I'm glad you made the cut even if it was for the wrong reasons.

MALCOLM

Oh, I'm okay with the reasons. I'll keep a copy of *Roots* and a rainbow flag at my desk if it keeps my paychecks coming.

Jack laughs.

JACK

Turn up your computer speakers, start blasting a little Village People and some Barry White.

MALCOLM

Now you're talking!

They get carried away. Malcolm starts humming YMCA as Jack head bobs along.

DARREL, a sour-looking man in his thirties, roles his chair out from an adjacent cubicle and looks on in contempt.

Malcolm and Jack are brought out of their revelry. Darrel eyes the pair curtly then returns to his work.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Not everyone is so glad to see me hanging around.

Jack nods, sobered.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE — LATER THAT DAY

Jack sits at his computer, brow furrowed, hard at work. His cell phone RINGS. As soon as he glances at it he smiles.

JACK

Hi.

Just then Robert comes to Jack's office, scowling when he sees him on the phone.

JACK (CONT'D)

Let me call you back.

ROBERT

Hope I'm not disturbing you.

Jack holds his tongue.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Max called from the garage. He said your car has been sitting in front of a nightclub all weekend, that there was a fire there Friday night. He was concerned.

JACK

Oh, I was going to pick it up after work today.

ROBERT

So you were there.

JACK

Yeah. But there wasn't a fire, the sprinklers just went off.

ROBERT

That's a shame. This city could do with a few less of the drug addicts and degenerates who frequent those places.

Jack stiffens and clenches his jaw.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I read in the paper about a sixteen year old girl who was raped at a club a few weeks ago.

Jack's tone becomes more menacing as he decides to take on his father, but he loses himself in his anger as he does.

JACK

I heard about that too. I guess this city could do with a good purging, couldn't it? Maybe I should have told the guy how to set a fire instead of how to set off the alarm.

Robert is taken off guard.

ROBERT

You told someone to set off the fire alarm?

JACK

A guy I met. Some girl wrecked his evening so he decided to wreck hers. All he need was some direction. I think most people benefit from a little push now and then, don't you?

He knows Jack is bating him, but Robert won't back down.

ROBERT

I have found that to be true. Your average person knows what he wants, but is too afraid or inept to achieve it. A good leader can point them in the right direction, harness that potential.

JACK

And I bet it makes you feel powerful to be the one to trigger that.

ROBERT

Well, not all men are destined to wield power. Most will just fuck it up when they play at it.

The phone on Jack's desk RINGS, ending the standoff.

JACK (ON PHONE)

Hello?

(pause)

Um, sure. Now?

(pause)

All right. I'll see you in a few minutes.

Jack hangs up. Robert eyes him, waiting.

JACK (CONT'D)

Paul needs to see me in his office.  
(nervous)

Do you know what it's about?

ROBERT

No, but I'm sure I'll find out. I have a meeting with him at 2:30.

Jack nods and looks away.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – PAUL'S OFFICE – SHORTLY AFTER

Paul sits behind his tidy, generic desk. Jack knocks then pokes his head in the door.

JACK

You wanted to see me?

PAUL

Please, have a seat.

Jack reluctantly obeys.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(in full HR mode)

As you know this merger has meant a lot of change going on. A lot of...excitement.

Jack nods.

PAUL (CONT'D)

We just need everyone to be mindful of the circumstance and not make waves at this point. We would all like to see things quiet down.

JACK

Alright.

PAUL

Good. Then we're on the same page. I needed to speak with you, Jack, because we received a complaint that you were engaged in an inappropriate conversation with another employee.

JACK

Inappropriate?

PAUL

The company is of course accepting of all lifestyles choices, but we also ask that personal matters not be brought to the workplace.

JACK

I'm not sure I follow...

It dawns on him.

JACK (CONT'D)

Are you talking about Malcolm? Darrel complained about me talking to Malcolm?

PAUL

We don't need to go into details. This is simply an informal coaching session on your professional demeanor. It will be noted in your file, but won't count against your performance.

Jack struggles to check his temper. He focuses on an inspirational poster behind Paul's desk – a picture of a serene beach captioned: DESTINY IS NO MATTER OF CHANCE. IT IS A MATTER OF CHOICE.

JACK

Sure. I'll work on my demeanor.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – OUTSIDE PAUL'S OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

Jack shuts the door behind him. He is seething and shakes his head as he contemplates. His features darken as an idea sparks.

INSERT: The bullet flying through the air.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Jacks heads off down the hall.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – BREAK ROOM – LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Jack stands at the entrance of the break room and eagerly glances at his watch - 2:15. He heads into the maze of cubicles and stops beside a frumpy, MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN.

JACK

Hi, Lois. Did you see someone left doughnuts in the break room?

LOIS

Oh, really?

Lois beelines to the break room as Jack follows. She plucks a doughnut from a box on the counter and takes a bite.

JACK

I think Darrel brought them in over lunch.

LOIS

Hmmmm. He's the quiet one next to Malcolm, right?

JACK

Yeah.

(casual)

Maybe we should say thank you.

Lois nods and pushes the rest of the doughnut into her mouth. She grabs another from the box then sets off.

Jack watches as Lois talks at the side of a cubicle wall then we see Darrel slide out in his chair looking quizzically at the break room. Jack ducks inside and waits. Moments later Darrel walks in.

Darrel eyes the doughnuts then addresses Jack curtly.

DARREL

Are you telling people I brought in doughnuts?

JACK

I brought them in. Nothing like an éclair to set your whole day right.

Jack selects an oblong donut from the box and slowly takes a bite. He makes the action sexual as he maintains eye contact. Darrel is immediately incensed.

DARREL

Do you think that's funny?

JACK

I think it's delicious.

He licks his lips suggestively.

DARREL

You're too stupid to know what's good for you, aren't you?

JACK

I don't have to be smart. My dad's the boss.

DARREL

Yeah, he is, but I happen to know he's not a fan of this sick shit.

JACK

(shrugs)

What daddy doesn't know...

DARREL

And what makes you think he won't find out?

JACK

Oh, I think you'd like nothing better than to tattle to HR again, but you're going to think twice about that.

DARREL

And why is that?

JACK

Because you're not going to want anyone to know you offered me a blow job if I put in a good word for you with my dad.

Darrel stills, shocked, then regains his composure.

DARREL

You've got no proof to back up that filth.

JACK

You're right. It'll be your word against mine, but I'm sure I could pay off any number of employees to say they've seen you frequenting certain men only clubs. Malcolm also might have something to say about you having a beef against him after he rejected your advances.

DARREL

(teeth barred)

That nigger breaths a word about me, I'll make sure it's his last.

It's Jack's turn to be startled. He reevaluates Darrel.

JACK

Jesus Christ, it's not just the gay thing. You're some racist piece of shit!

Darrel looks around to make sure no one is hearing this.

DARREL

You want to take some coon shaft up your ass, be my guest, but if you bring my name into any of it, I'll set you faggots on fire!

Jack looks over Darrel's shoulder and sees Robert, Paul and a handful of other SUITS headed to the conference room next door.

Jack takes a step farther into the break room. It is L-shaped and bends to the left to accommodate a small table and chairs. He loses his line of site on the approaching group as he disappears around the corner.

JACK

Why don't you just step back here with me and take it out on my cock. I'm sure

I haven't got anything near what Malcolm's packing, but you can at least tell me if you like vanilla more than chocolate.

DARREL

How dare you speak to me like that!

Darrel takes a step forward, but Jack acts quickly and shoves him just hard enough to push him back into the vertical portion of the room. Darrel's anger escalates at this physical confrontation.

DARREL (CONT'D)

What the fuck?

Jack baits him with a low, menacing voice.

JACK

Come on, Darrel. I heard you like it rough. If you do me real well, we'll invite Malcolm over and see what you can take on the other end.

Darrel comes unhinged. He lunges at Jack, pummeling him.

DARREL

You faggot! You cocksucking faggot!  
I'll kill that nigger if he comes near me!

In an instant Robert, Paul and the group of suits are rushing into the break room. They wrestle Darrel off Jack who is on the floor, curled in a ball - the picture of the weakling his fathers believes him to be.

Jack takes his hands off his head and peers up at his father who looks at him with disgust.

LATER

Jack, Robert and Paul stand next to the sink. Jack uses a paper towel to clean blood off a split lip. His eye is also blackened.

JACK

I don't know what came over him. I brought in doughnuts - I was trying to smooth things over like you suggested -  
(he motions to Paul who nods)  
I offered him one and he got really angry.

Robert eyes Jack suspiciously.

JACK (CONT'D)

He said I was picking out one that was phallic or something. That Malcolm put me up to it. He said Malcolm stole a job from him and was trying to make him look bad.

PAUL

Malcolm was selected as the more favorable candidate for the last promotion in sales.

JACK

I don't know. I offered to get Malcolm and let them talk about it but he lost it. He kept hitting me and I couldn't even get off the floor.

Paul nods sympathetically while Robert makes little effort to mask his contempt.

PAUL

Well, he won't be bothering you anymore. Security has escorted him out and his badge has been revoked.

(tentatively)

Would you like us to call the police so you can press charges?

ROBERT

I don't think that is necessary.

JACK

Yeah, I'm okay. Just shaken up a bit. As long as he can't get back in the building, I'll feel safe.

Paul nods and turns to leave.

PAUL  
We'll take care of it.

As Robert turns to exit he casts a last look at Jack. Jack's face transforms from the mask of victim to that of trickster. His eyes darken as he smiles triumphantly. Robert stops abruptly as Jack strides past him without a word.

INT. CITY BUS — THAT EVENING

Jack looks pleased despite his fresh wounds. The same Hispanic couple board the bus arguing, clearly a lover's quarrel. Jack follows them with his eyes as they head to the back of the bus.

Jack smiles. He texts Abbey — "Meet me at Little India at 8?"

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT — LIVING ROOM — LATER

Jack walks in. Gary's waiting for him, tail wagging.

JACK  
Hey, boy! You wanna go for a walk?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET — SHORTLY AFTER

Jack and Gary cruise down the sidewalk. Both appear to be smiling. A few people stare at Jack's face and he smiles confidently back at them. His wounds are his badge.

They turn a corner and walk past a large sign that says DEAD END.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT — LIVING ROOM — LATER

Jack enters with Gary, looking happy and energetic. Aaron, just waking up, is alarmed to see Jack's face.

AARON  
What the hell happened to you?

JACK  
I got in a fight with some asshole at work.

AARON  
Looks like you lost.

JACK  
Uh-uh. Piece of shit got fired.

AARON  
He lost his job?

JACK  
Trust me, he couldn't have deserved it more. He was some homophobic bully.

Aaron is putting the pieces together.

AARON  
Jack, did you try to get him fired?

JACK  
Hell yeah, I did. He played right into it too. All I had to do was make a couple of gay comments and the guy blew up.

AARON  
Why would you do that?

Jack is surprised by Aaron's question.

JACK  
Somebody needed to stand up to him.

He turns to head to his bedroom.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I'm meeting Abbey. Gary's been walked so all you should have to do tonight is make sure no one steals the couch. Think you can handle that?

Jack closes his door behind him.

INT. INDIAN RESTAURANT — THAT EVENING

Jack and Abbey sit in their same corner booth, Jack is relaxed and speaks confidently.

JACK

The best part was the look on my dad's face. He thought I was such a sissy. You could just see his contempt for me.

ABBEY

And that's a good thing?

JACK

No. Of course not. But it's honest. He totally hates me. I'd rather he just act like it.

ABBEY

Jack, I'm sure he doesn't hate you. He's your dad. Maybe he just has trouble showing how he feels.

JACK

We don't need to talk about this. How was your day?

EXT. INDIAN RESTAURANT — LATER

Abbey takes food to the homeless men as Jack looks on.

JACK

Good deed done for the day?

ABBEY

Not quite. I'll need to clean you up a bit before I'm satisfied.

JACK

Nah, I like it. I look like a man's man.

ABBEY

Easy, Tyson.

As they walk away Abbey casts a last look to the men who are eagerly eating from the box of food.

JACK

The weather report says we're supposed to get snow over the weekend.

ABBEY

Really?

JACK

Not much, but it's going to drop below freezing.

Jack looks back toward the men.

JACK (CONT'D)

Maybe it will be the incentive they need to come in to the shelter.

ABBEY

It will take more than that. They were out here all last winter. Steve, the taller guy, lost a couple toes to frostbite.

Abbey looks dismayed as she quietly contemplates their fate. Jack nods and glances back once more, gears turning.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – OUTSIDE ROBERT'S OFFICE – DAY

Approaching Robert's door, Jack pauses when he hears Robert and a COLLEAGUE talking.

COLLEAGUE

So Gloria's thing this year is some sort of auction?

ROBERT

It's the usual drudgery. This year we get to pretend we care about the women's shelter while our wives spend money on art from people who can't find real jobs. We'll be keeping two communities of social leeches going.

COLLEAGUE

Hey, as long as there's a bar.

They both laugh. Jack knocks and enters.

JACK  
(to Robert)  
Here are the reports you asked for.

COLLEAGUE  
Jesus, kid. I heard you got in a fight  
but I didn't know you got your ass  
kicked.

JACK  
Yeah, well you should see the other guy.

ROBERT  
You didn't touch a hair on his head!

JACK  
I know.

An awkward silence, then

COLLEAGUE  
So why would I need to see him?

JACK  
Because right now he's probably sitting  
in his underwear thinking about how  
he's going to pay his mortgage.

Jack turns and exits.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE — MOMENTS LATER

Jack sits down at his desk. His eyes are drawn to the picture on  
the wall that his mom picked out. He picks up the phone.

JACK (ON PHONE)  
Hey, mom.

INT. SWEENEY HOME — DRAWING ROOM — LATER THAT EVENING

Jack and Gloria stand over a large lightboard that holds her  
current project.

JACK  
This is amazing.  
(looking around)

JACK (CONT'D)  
How many is that now?

GLORIA  
Oh, just a few.

JACK  
I count 7. They're getting easier then?

GLORIA  
Or maybe I'm just getting sloppier.

JACK  
This one is the best yet. They're  
really beautiful, mom.

Gloria has a hard time taking this compliment. It seems almost painful for her.

JACK (CONT'D)  
The auction Friday, is it going to  
include local artists?

GLORIA  
Quite a few, yes.

JACK  
Anyone as good as you?

Gloria scoffs as Jack wraps an arm around her. She looks up at him and shakes her head. She kisses her fingers and lightly places them on Jack's split lip.

EXT. BUS STOP — EVENING

Jack steps off the bus and heads toward home.

EXT. SUPERMARKET — SHORTLY AFTER

Jack walks the length of a strip mall that includes his local grocery store. He passes a poster papered on the wall that shows a woman filling bowls in a soup kitchen. It reads: HELP YOURSELF BY HELPING OTHERS.

As he passes the front of the grocery store he sees Lucy struggling to free a cart from a linked row.

Jack pauses, watching her, then pulls out his phone.

INT. SUPERMARKET – SHORTLY AFTER

Jack approaches Lucy as she toddles down an aisle.

JACK

Hi, uh, do you remember me?

Lucy looks at him and smiles vaguely.

LUCY

Looks like you got a little roughed up, son.

JACK

Yeah. I wanted to give you this.

He extends a piece of paper to her.

JACK (CONT'D)

My girlfriend works at a homeless shelter and they get a lot of vets in. This is a support group that meets on Wednesdays at the community center on 5<sup>th</sup> street.

LUCY

That sounds nice, dear.

Jack takes her hand and folds the paper into it.

JACK

You should go. Maybe you could talk to some other soldiers about Vietnam. They could help you understand what it was like for Barry.

Lucy frowns. Jack is still uncertain if she understands.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's tomorrow night. It's maybe 10 blocks from here. Would you want me to give you a ride?

LUCY

No, no. I get around just fine on my own. The senior bus will drop me most places I'd like to go.

JACK

That's good. I think it might help.

Jack smiles kindly and she returns this with a glowing grin.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jack sits flipping through a book as Aaron steps out of his room.

JACK

Finally.

AARON

Do we have pressing business?

JACK

Do you have sleeping pills, sedatives, something like that?

AARON

For your nightmares?

JACK

Do you ask all your buyers what they're going to do with their score?

AARON

You're acting weird this week, man. You seem...happy.

JACK

Is that a problem?

AARON

People on a high don't ask for sedatives.

JACK

They're not for me. It's a project. Well not a project, more of a calling

JACK (CONT'D)  
maybe. I've decided to start helping  
people.

AARON  
With sleeping pills?

Jack struggles to present his case.

JACK  
You know the old lady at the grocery  
store?

Aaron shakes his head.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Yeah, of course you don't. There's this  
lady, really old. She still thinks her  
son is coming back from Vietnam, so I  
gave her some info on a support group  
for vets.

AARON  
And you think that's going to help?

JACK  
I think it's a step in the right  
direction.

AARON  
Cause you know what's best for some  
lady you met at the grocery store?

JACK  
Man, you're too caught up in your own  
shit to understand any of this.

AARON  
I'm caught up? You're talking about  
drugging some old lady.

JACK  
They're not for her!

AARON

Jack, whatever you're thinking of doing,  
you need to reconsider.

JACK

Whatever. Forget I said anything.

Jack stalks off to his room.

INT. CITY BUS - EVENING

Jack sits in his usual seat. The bus slows to a stop and the Hispanic Couple climb on board. This time just the woman is talking, obviously chastising her boyfriend.

The man takes out his wallet to pay their fare then heads toward the back. As he's stuffing his wallet into his back pocket, his hands fly up in response to something she says and his wallet tumbles to the floor.

Jack picks up the wallet and starts to call to the man but suddenly has a different idea. Jack looks closely at the girlfriend's uniform. In embroidered letters it reads Dunia - Juanita's Salon.

He opens the wallet then takes out his phone and types in the numbers from the man's credit card. When he's done he returns the wallet to the boyfriend at the back of the bus.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT EVENING

JACK (ON PHONE)

Hi. I'd like to order a dozen red roses.

(pause)

Yeah, deliver to Juanita's Salon on  
Sycamore.

(pause)

I'd like to pay by credit card.

Jack looks at his phone and begins to read off numbers. As he's finishing Aaron comes out of his bedroom, dressed for the day.

JACK (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

I'd like the card to read - To Dunia,  
All my love.

(pause)

JACK (CONT'D)  
Yeah, thanks.

He hangs up and Aaron eyes him.

AARON  
You have a girl on the side?

JACK  
Just spreading a little good will.

AARON  
Jack, I think you might be taking this helping thing too far.

JACK  
(changing the subject)  
You going out tonight?

AARON  
Ben's picking me up.

JACK  
Shipment come in?

AARON  
I hope so.  
(then)  
I'm recording a Springer marathon tonight, so don't fuck with anything.

Jack nods. Outside a horn HONKS.

AARON (CONT'D)  
You stay out of trouble.

JACK  
Sure.

Jack watches out the window as Aaron climbs into a car.

INT. AARON'S ROOM — MOMENTS LATER

Jack opens drawers and looks through bins and containers on Aaron's shelves. He picks up a stack of cards in a drawer and a

ten-dollar bill falls out. Jack sorts through the stack to put it back and opens a birthday card with a cartoon tiger riding a bike, a balloon tied to the handlebars. Inside it's signed, "Hope this helps. Love, Mom."

Jack looks through the stack and finds several similar cards, each better suited for a child's birthday and each with a tattered \$10 bill inside. Jack returns them carefully to their drawer.

He finally comes across a stash of prescription meds. He sorts through bottles until he finds one labeled KLONOPIN. He grabs the bottle and turns to leave, ushering Gary out as he goes.

JACK

C'mon, Gary. You don't need to chew on any of the shit in here.

INT. JACK'S ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Jack pours a dozen Klonopin into a small paper cup then uses a spoon to crush these into a powder. He pours the powder into a small baggy and places it in his pocket. He stashes the bottle in one of his dresser drawers.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jack grabs his keys and heads for the door then pauses to look back at the TV.

Jack sits on the couch, remote in hand and begins going through the menu. He finds Aaron's recording for the Jerry Springer Show and deletes it. He then searches through the guide until he finds "THE WALTONS." He smiles and sets up a recording.

INT. INDIAN RESTAURANT - LATER THAT EVENING

Jack and Abbey sit at their usual booth, their meal finished.

ABBEY

...But Sam always has an off-color joke for me.

JACK

He's the one with Asperger's?

ABBEY

Yeah. So tonight his new one is,  
"What's the difference between your job  
and a dead hooker?"

(pause)

"Your job still sucks."

JACK

Oh! That is off-color. I'd say that's  
somewhere in the neighborhood of puce.

ABBEY

Right?

JACK

And did you have a comeback for that?

ABBEY

I told him it's still better to have a  
job so you can pay for live hookers.

JACK

You're really good with them you know.

ABBEY

I know. That's why I'm there. It feels  
really good to know exactly what you  
should be doing.

JACK

Was that a dis?

ABBEY

No! I was speaking for me.

JACK

But if you were speaking for me?

ABBEY

Oh, I think you're coming along.

Jack nods confidently.

JACK

I think so too.

A WAITRESS arrives with a to-go order in a white bag. They rise to leave.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Here I'll carry that.

Jack grabs the bag and looks through it.

JACK (CONT'D)  
They didn't give us utensils. You want to grab some from the kitchen?

ABBEY  
Sure.

As Abbey walks away Jack quickly pulls out the to-go box and a plastic spoon, then retrieves the baggy from his pocket. He dumps the powder into the rice and stirs, then quickly closes the lid and places the box back in the bag as Abbey returns.

EXT. INDIAN RESTAURANT — MOMENTS LATER

Jack smiles and hands the bag to Abbey.

JACK  
Here. Go do what you were born to do.  
Go help some people.

Abbey smiles broadly then happily delivers the box to the men hunched in their doorway. Jack looks on breathlessly.

INT. ABBEY'S BEDROOM — LATER THAT EVENING

Jack is tugging on his jeans. He retrieves his shirt from the floor and pulls it over his head. Abbey emerges from the bathroom wearing underwear and a t-shirt.

ABBEY  
You're leaving?

JACK  
I have to work tomorrow.

ABBEY  
Yeah, me too. But I have to be up at 5am to make the yuppies their coffee.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Which I believe is about 3 hours sooner than you start filing their expense reports.

JACK

I need to check on something.

Abbey looks at him questioningly.

JACK (CONT'D)

I left a surprise for Aaron.

ABBEY

That sounds disturbing. But I guess I already got what I wanted from you.

Jack grabs her playfully and wrestles her back to the bed.

EXT. INDIAN RESTAURANT – LATER

Jack approaches the doorway and sees the men slumped over, sleeping soundly. He pulls out his phone and dials 911.

JACK (ON PHONE)

Yes, Hi. I'd like to report two homeless men sleeping in a doorway on West 33<sup>rd</sup> and Market.

(pause)

Yeah, I know. But they're not waking up. I came out to offer them some food, but they're not responding at all.

(pause)

Yeah, I can wait.

Jack hangs up and leans against the building. He pulls out a pair of headphones and starts listening to a song – I Wanna Get Better by Bleachers. "How a life can move from the darkness/She said to get better/So I put a bullet where I shoulda put a helmet/And I crash my car cause I wanna get carried away/That's why I'm standing on the overpass screaming at myself/Hey, I wanna get better"

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM – LATER THAT NIGHT

Jack walks in to find Aaron sitting on the couch in the dark. He's amused, knowing his prank has played out.

JACK

Hey, Aaron. Nothing good on TV?

AARON

(deadly quiet)

You're so fucking pleased with yourself, aren't you?

JACK

Oh now who needs to lighten up?

AARON

(voice rising)

You think it's funny? Tampering with peoples' lives? You think you can just pull the strings and watch everybody dance?

JACK

I would hardly call your trash TV addiction a life.

In the blink of an eye Aaron is off the couch and shoves Jack hard, knocking him off his feet.

JACK (CONT'D)

What the fuck?

Gary comes charging to Jack's aid, but Jack holds him back, afraid of this sudden tirade from Aaron.

AARON

You pathetic little shit! You've got all this stuff

(gestures around the apartment)

and you whine more than any fucking person I know. Poor little Jack and his superior melancholy.

JACK

Have you lost your goddamned mind?

AARON

You spend so much time pissing and moaning about your life. About how daddy doesn't love you. You don't see anyone else but him, do you?

JACK

(getting back on his feet)

What, man? Tell me. What the fuck am I supposed to see? My loser roommate who spends all his time getting stoned and watching Jerry Springer? You got pissed when I subbed in family programing, big surprise.

AARON

You're so fucking stupid. All those times growing up when you left your mansion on the hill to smoke pot with me in the trailer park. You saw my house, you saw it was just me and my mom. All these years and you've never once asked about my dad.

JACK

Oh Jesus Christ, Aaron. Your dad was never around! Didn't he like walk out when you were five or something?

AARON

(shouting)

I was three!

He pauses to tone down his anger.

AARON (CONT'D)

Three years old and I can't remember anything. Not his face, not his voice, nothing. Except this once. This one time my mom's making dinner and she's watching the news and says, "Oh my god, it's your dad." But I wasn't quick enough. I wasn't quick enough and I missed it. All I saw was the back of his head as they put him in a cop car.

JACK

So that's it? You watch all this garbage TV hoping to see your dad? Man, if you don't even know what he looks like...

AARON

I see him Every Day! Every wasteoid, every asshole who beats his wife or buys a winning lottery ticket with his pack of smokes. Every Day. And that's the closest I'll ever get.

Jack stares in shocked silence.

AARON (CONT'D)

But your dad is here and yeah, he's a prick. And maybe he doesn't love you. But he's here. And YOU get choose if he's in your life. You get to choose but instead you're fucking with everybody else. Making choices that aren't yours to make!

They both go quiet.

JACK

Aaron, look, I'm...

AARON

Don't. Don't say it now. Wait until you mean it.

Aaron disappears into his room leaving Jack alone in the dark.

INT. CITY BUS — EVENING

Jack is lost in thought as the bus pulls to a stop. The Hispanic man boards and Jack perks up. The man is alone today. Jack tries to makes eye contact, but the man is oblivious to him, clearly brooding over something.

Jack turns back to the front of the bus, perplexed. We see his reflection in the glass as the bus passes a sign — NO U TURN.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT — LIVING ROOM — LATER

Jack walks in and is greeted by Gary. He stoops to pet him, scanning the apartment, then goes to Aaron's bedroom and knocks. No answer. Jack's phone RINGS.

JACK

Hello.

ABBEY (on phone)

Hi. Listen, I'm not going to make it to your mom's auction tonight.

JACK

Ok?

ABBEY (on phone)

The men from Little India were brought in this afternoon and I want to help them settle in.

Jack smiles.

JACK

You finally got them in, huh?

ABBEY (on phone)

The police brought them over after a night in the hospital. Something made them sick and they had to have their stomachs pumped. They're still not in great shape.

JACK

Oh.

ABBEY (on phone)

I hope it wasn't something in the food we gave them. I mean, I've never had a problem with that place before.

JACK

(contrite)

I'm sure it wasn't anything you did.  
(then)

JACK (CONT'D)

Maybe it will turn out to be a good thing. They're at the shelter now. That's the best place for them.

ABBEY (on phone)

I have to go. I'll check in with you later, okay?

JACK

Sure.

He pauses then starts to say something else.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey, Abbey, love y...

Before he can get this out, the phone line cuts off.

Jack holds the phone for a minute, thinking, then heads to his room to change.

EXT. SWEENEY HOME — LATER THAT EVENING

Jack rings the doorbell, shivering in the cold. Rosie answers.

ROSIE

Jackson, what are you doing here? Your mother's show will be starting soon.

JACK

Yeah, I know. I just needed to pick up a few things.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE — GALLERY — LATER

Jack slips in with several large rolled papers under his arm. A curator quickly greets him.

CURATOR

I'm sorry, sir. No one is allowed back here until after dinner.

JACK

Yeah, I know. I'm just delivering a few more pieces.

CURATOR

I don't think so. All the art was set up days ago.

JACK

These are a last minute addition. My mom is in charge of the auction. Gloria Sweeney?

The curator is still not letting him pass.

JACK (CONT'D)

These are actually some of her work.

Jack starts to unroll one paper and pushes past the curator to spread it across a nearby display case.

The curator grudgingly looks on. Jack holds his breathe.

JACK (CONT'D)

So?

CURATOR

It is good, but I'm afraid we don't have any more space available.

JACK

Well, they aren't for sale. She really meant them for display. She would have brought them earlier, but with the car accident and all...

Jack brushes his split lip.

JACK (CONT'D)

Maybe I could just put them up in the entryway?

Jack shines his most charismatic grin and the curator's resolve wavers.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE — DINING ROOM — LATER THAT EVENING

A room filled with Milwaukee's high society. Gloria stands at a podium in front of all looking empowered and radiant.

GLORIA

Thank you for your commitment to the Broadway Women's shelter. The work they're doing to keep the women and children of this city safe benefits us all. And now ladies and gentlemen, we'll let everyone take a look at the artwork.

Jack beams at her. She's in her element.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE — FOYER — MOMENTS LATER

Gloria enters the foyer where people are clustered around a handful of easels set up to one side of the gallery door. Gloria makes her way through the crowd and GASPS loudly, horrified to see it's her drawings they're looking at. Jack is close behind her and his face, so hopeful, falls.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE — CURRATOR'S OFFICE — LATER

Gloria sits on a small couch. She has been crying and keeps her head down. Robert paces the room while Jack stands against the wall looking like a kid in the principal's office.

ROBERT

What the hell were you thinking?

JACK

I just wanted people to see it, so she would know her work is worthwhile. I wanted her to believe in herself for once.

ROBERT

Well, as you can see, your little plan failed miserably.

JACK

That's not because the work isn't good. Mom..

ROBERT

You know, enough! We're through discussing this. You've embarrassed her enough for one evening. This whole week

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
your behavior has been completely  
erratic. I think you would benefit from  
some time to get your head on straight.

JACK  
What does that mean?

ROBERT  
Let me just make it clear - don't  
bother coming in on Monday.

Jack stares at him in shock.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jack enters, his suit jacket over one arm, looking defeated.  
Gary greets him.

JACK  
Hey, buddy.  
(looking around)  
Is Aaron home?

He listens but the apartment is silent. Sighs. He heads to the  
fridge, grabs a beer, tosses Gary a hotdog, then slumps on the  
couch, thinking things over.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - THE NEXT MORNING

Jack walks purposefully down the sidewalk. He spots a KID  
rounding up carts in the parking lot.

JACK  
Hey, I was wondering if you could help  
me find an old woman who comes here all  
the time? Really short. Her head bobs  
like one of those dashboard figures.

CART BOY  
Lucy? Yeah, she comes here every couple  
days like clockwork. She should be in  
sometime this afternoon with the senior  
bus.

JACK  
Great. Thanks.

LATER THAT DAY

Jack sits on the curb outside the store. A short bus pulls up.  
Lucy slowly climbs out and Jack greets her as the bus leaves.

JACK  
Hi, Lucy.

LUCY  
Oh, hello.

JACK  
I'm Jack. Remember me?

She smiles vaguely.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I gave you the info for the support  
group. For veterans?

She nods blankly.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I was just wondering, did you go? To  
the meeting?

LUCY  
Meeting?

JACK  
Yeah, at the community center. With the  
other soldiers?

She's slowly gaining coherence.

LUCY  
The meeting with the soldiers? Those  
dirty old men?

Jack recoils slightly.

LUCY (CONT'D)

That meeting was nothing but a haven  
for filthy liars.

JACK

I had just thought...I thought they might  
be able to help you.

LUCY

Help me? They didn't know anything  
about my Barry. They don't even know  
about the war. Nobody does. Nobody  
understands there are still men over  
there. Good boys. My Barry is such a  
good boy.

Jack nods, tries to smile.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Even when he was just a little thing.  
He would bring me flowers from  
alongside the schoolhouse. Bring them  
in big bunches, as many as he can carry,  
and put them right in my lap.

(pauses)

It's getting late in the day. He should  
be home by now.

She looks around. Jack is at a loss.

JACK

But Barry's not a little boy anymore.  
You know that?

LUCY

(snapping at him)

Do you think I'm an idiot?

JACK

I'm just trying to help.

LUCY

Then run down to the corner and make  
sure he's on his way. Mrs. Deerborne  
keeps him after sometimes when he's  
behind with his math.

JACK  
(gently)  
He's not coming back from class today.

LUCY  
(panicked)  
He is coming back!

People stare on their way into the store.

JACK  
Lucy, calm down.  
(looking around)  
We'll get you some help.

Jack reaches out, but Lucy won't let him near.

LUCY  
I don't want your help! Get away from  
me!

A worried shopper takes out her phone and makes a  
call. Jack is desperate to calm her.

JACK  
Listen, I can help you find Barry.  
We'll look for him together. Maybe he's  
at your house right now.

LUCY  
(eerily lucid)  
You think I don't know. You think I  
don't know where he is? I know. I've  
always known.  
(pitch increasing to a howl)  
I know. I Know. I KNOW! I don't want to  
know. I don't want to know any of it. I  
don't WANT to know!

She's completely breaking down, thrashing and crying. Several  
shoppers rush in to keep her from hurting herself. Jack can only  
look on in horror.

INT. ABBEY'S APARTMENT — HALLWAY — LATER THAT DAY

Jack knocks and waits, his head leaning against the door until he hears the lock turning.

JACK

Hey. I was hoping you were home.

ABBEY

Are you okay?

Jack looks like hell. She steps to the side so he can come in.

JACK

I don't even know anymore.

He starts pacing.

JACK (CONT'D)

I, I've been trying to work out what I should be doing, you know. You've always known what you're supposed to do and you're good at it.

(shaking his head)

I thought I could be good at it too.

ABBEY

Jack, what are you talking about?

JACK

I thought I was helping people. I've been trying to help people!

ABBEY

Slow down and tell me what's going on.

JACK

I told you about the lady at the grocery store, the one with the son in Vietnam. I sent her to the support group for vets, but it didn't help. God, it made things so much worse.

ABBEY

Jack, it's okay. You thought you were doing the right thing. We all make mistakes.

Jack cringes. Abbey strokes his cheek.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Jack, I'm sorry, but I can't stay. I'm heading back to the shelter. Steve and Dale are still having trouble settling in and I'm really trying to make this transition work for them. I just came home to grab some clothes.

Jack looks troubled.

JACK

Yeah, I'm glad you can help them.

Abbey pauses, sensing something.

ABBEY

Jack, you didn't do anything for me did you?

He stills.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

To help me?

Abbey's phone RINGS.

ABBEY (CONT'D)(on phone)

Hello

(pause)

Yeah, I'm on my way.

(then to Jack)

I've got to go.

JACK

Okay.

ABBEY

Stop by tomorrow, we can talk then.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jack comes home to an empty apartment. After checking Aaron's room he sits on the couch to pet Gary. He looks to the door, waiting, then picks up the remote. He surfs through channels and

stops on an episode of Cops. He sets the remote to the side and carefully considers the show.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Jack is tossing and moaning, having the dream again. The car, the wrong turn, the gun.

INSERT: The bullet flying through the air.

RETURN TO SCENE.

He sits up violently clawing his chest, looking for the bullet. He tries to calm himself, his fatigue palpable.

Jack walks to his dresser and takes out the Klonopin. He opens the bottle and shakes a few pills into his hand and downs them with water from a glass by his bed. He places the Klonopin bottle on his NIGHTSTAND and lies down.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM – MORNING

Jack wakes to sounds in the apartment.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Aaron is carrying his stuff out.

JACK  
What's going on?

AARON  
Sorry, I figured you must be gone.

JACK  
I was just tired I guess. Are you moving out?

AARON  
I'm going to stay with Ben for a while.

An awkward beat.

JACK

Look, Aaron, I didn't mean for things to get so screwed up. If you just give me a chance to make it right

AARON

You can't always fix things, Jack. I mean I get that you want to try. I see it in you every day, that struggle. But this game you're playing, like a kid with an ant farm.

JACK

That's not what I intended. I saw what Abbey could do to help people, and even how you always know the right things to say, and I just thought I would be able to do that too. To make a difference in people's lives.

AARON

But what you really want is to change your own life.

JACK

(heavy sigh)

Yeah. I guess I thought helping others might change my life too. I thought I could make things better for everybody.

AARON

You wanted to start a revolution. Like Princip.

JACK

(scoffing)

Maybe.

AARON

The thing with that, Jack, is revolution is just another word for circle. Like the earth revolving around the sun, man, you end up right back where you started.

JACK  
I wish I could go back to the beginning  
of all this.

AARON  
You can't undo anything, but you can  
start by admitting you made a mistake.

Jack nods solemnly. Aaron bends to pet Gary.

AARON (CONT'D)  
You two take care of each other.

INT. ABBEY'S APARTMENT — LATER THAT DAY

Abbey holds the door as Jack enters.

JACK  
You look tired.

ABBEY  
It was a long night.

JACK  
They're still not doing well?

ABBEY  
Just really angry. They feel like they  
got railroaded.

JACK  
Yeah. Listen Abbey, I need to tell you something.

She stills.

ABBEY  
K.

JACK  
I fucked up.

Abbey holds her breath.

ABBEY  
You did something to them.

JACK

I really thought it would help get them into the shelter.

Abbey is really quiet. Jack starts rambling.

JACK (CONT'D)

I realize how stupid it was now, and that it wasn't up to me to fix, especially not in that way, but I thought if I could force a change that it would make their lives better.

ABBEY

What was it?

JACK

What?

ABBEY

(angry)

What did you give them?

Jack is startled by her tone. He swallows.

JACK

Klonopin.

Abbey nods.

JACK (CONT'D)

It wasn't a lot. Just enough to make them sleep.

ABBEY

(quietly)

Get out.

JACK

Abbey

ABBEY

Get Out!

She won't look at him. He nods and turns to leave. Her voice is determined, in-control.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

I don't want to see you again.

Jack freezes in the doorway. The floor has dropped out beneath him.

INT. JACK'S CAR — MOMENTS LATER

Jack gets in, shaken. He's still trying to process what happened.

He drives to his apartment and parks, but can't bring himself to go inside. He pulls away from the curb and just drives. The day turns into evening, turns into night as he drives with no destination.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN — EARLY MORNING

Jack sits on the hood of his car watching the sun come up over the lake. He's been out all night thinking things over. He gets back in the car. There's still something he needs to do.

EXT. SWEENEY HOME — DECK — LATER THAT MORNING

Jack slides the door open and pauses. Gloria sits motionless, staring blankly across the yard.

JACK

Is it okay if I come out?

Gloria turns and gives him a weak smile.

Jack sits next to her, hesitant to touch her or say anything. For a moment they both just stare into the distance. Slowly Jack starts to cry and places his hands over his face.

GLORIA

Oh, honey, don't.

JACK

I'm sorry. I fucked everything up.

Gloria moves to the ottoman in front of his chair and takes him in her arms as he completely breaks down.

LATER

Jack kneels beside his mom, his head on her lap. She runs her fingers through his hair. He is calm now and thinking.

JACK

Did you get your drawings back from the auction house?

Gloria stiffens, the subject still sore.

GLORIA

Yes.

JACK

Good. Promise me you'll keep them.

GLORIA

Of course I will.

JACK

I had no right to take them. I should have asked, but I knew you'd say no.

GLORIA

(tired)

Jackson. I just don't need to share them with the public.

Jack sits up and speaks to her sincerely.

JACK

But they're so beautiful.

GLORIA

But not exceptional.

JACK

That's not true!

GLORIA

It's okay, honey. I've always known my work was good, but not great. I make those drawings because it lets me be closer to the art I love.

JACK

But, Mom, you could do so much more.

Gloria takes his hands and looks into his eyes.

GLORIA

Listen to me now. I will never be a famous artist or even a professional one. If I have any gift, it's that I can see the greatness in other's work. And that's enough for me.

JACK

I just want you to be happy.

GLORIA

Making those drawing, working with art, those things do make me happy. But it's not going to make me happy to pretend to be a better than I am.

She smiles and runs her hand down his face.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Some of us are just destined to be ordinary, Jackson. And that's okay. There's plenty of middle ground.

Jack drops his head and looks on the verge of tears again.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if I...if we've ever made you feel like you had to be something more. You're perfect just the way you are.

Jack nods slowly and looks up at her.

JACK

You are too.

Gloria hesitates for a moment, then smiles.

INT. SWEENEY HOME — FOYER — LATER

Gloria holds Jack's hand as they walk to the front door.

GLORIA

So what are your plans for the rest of the day?

JACK

I don't know. I guess I have a lot of cleaning up to do.

GLORIA

Did your dad say when you can come back to work?

JACK

I don't know. I haven't seen him since the auction.

GLORIA

But he went by your apartment this morning.

JACK

What?

GLORIA

One of the neighbors called complaining about a dog barking so he was going to stop by on his way to work.

Jack is almost panicked now.

JACK

I have to go!

He rushes out the door to his car.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT — LIVING ROOM — LATER

Jack bursts through the door, immediately searching for the dog.

JACK

Gary? C'mere boy!

The door to Aaron's room is wide open and Jack rushes in, scanning. He continues to search around the apartment.

The door to Jack's room is cracked.

JACK (CONT'D)

Gary?

A hairy leg protrudes from the far side of the bed. Jack moves in, relieved, but Gary lies on his side, legs askew, head flopped to one side. Jack stoops to touch him.

JACK

Gary? Gary?

He lifts the lifeless dog into his lap and beneath him is the chewed Klonopin bottle - empty. Jack cradles him and pushes his face into his fur.

JACK

No. No. No!

He rocks back and forth with the dog in his arms, his cries echoing through the apartment.

INT. JACK'S CAR - LATER

Jack looks distraught and angry as he speeds across town.

EXT. SWEENEY BUILDING - SHORTLY AFTER

Jack's BMW whips into a parking space and Jack is out the door, slamming it behind him.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING - MAIN OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jack bursts through the double doors and heads straight for his father's office. Robert is at his desk as Jack flings open the door.

ROBERT

What the hell do you think you're doing?

JACK

(screaming with fury)  
How could you do that?

Robert is on his feet in an instant and grabs Jack violently by the arm.

ROBERT  
You'll march your ass straight out of  
here!

Jack rips his arm away and looks like he could take a swing at Robert. His intensity keeps his father at bay.

JACK  
You killed him!

ROBERT  
Lower your voice! How dare you come  
barging in here.

JACK  
You went into my apartment! You left  
the door open.

ROBERT  
I will not speak to you about this here,  
Jackson.

JACK  
You killed him.

Robert moves to grab Jack again, but Jack steps forward aggressively, making it clear he will put up a fight.

ROBERT  
I don't give a damn what you think I  
did. You need to leave. Now.

A standoff. Jack's anger still escalating - fists balled, teeth clenched.

JACK  
I fucking hate you!

INSERT: The bullet flying through the air.

RETURN TO SCENE.

The noise of a GUNSHOT is deafening. Everything starts to happen in SLOW MOTION. The glass wall of the office SHATTERS behind

Jack. He flinches then sees Robert bring his hands up to his chest. Blood.

SCREAMS echo across the department. Jack whirls around to see Darrel standing 30 feet away, a gun pointed directly at him. Jack freezes. Another GUNSHOT rings out but Jack is being shoved to the side. A dull THUD is heard as a second bullet lodges in Robert's chest.

Jack falls to the ground with Robert. Outside the office we hear more SHOTS and SCREAMS. Jack lifts his head and sees several SECURITY GAURDS close in on Darrel. One GUARD raises his gun and shoots Darrel in the head.

Jack turns to his father lying beside him. His eyes are open but he is gone.

Jack is MOTIONLESS, like in the open, while everything rushes around him – feet run by the office, screams and cries still echo, two security guards come in and crouch beside him, examining Robert, but still Jack doesn't move.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Jack is frozen throughout as everything continues to move and pulse around him.

A. Jack, still covered in blood, holds his crying mother in a hospital corridor.

B. Jack sits next to a desk in a police station as an officer types a report.

C. Jack at his father's funeral, hand in hand with his mother on a crisp fall day, the leaves swirling, staring at nothing as the minister drones on.

D. Jack stands in his apartment, looking into his bedroom where he found Gary, as movers take away boxes and furniture.

INT. SWEENEY BUILDING – ROBERT'S OFFICE – DAY

Jack stands staring into the office. The shattered glass has been removed, but the red stain on the carpet remains. Workers walk by in the background.

Jack MOVES. He walks to the desk and picks up the nameplate - ROBERT SWEENEY. He turns and carries it out the door with him.

INT. UNIVERSITY - HISTORY DEPARTMENT - DAY

Jack sits at one of several desks surrounded by bookshelves holding thick tomes and various maps scattered on the walls.

Aaron walks in.

AARON  
Hi, Jack.

JACK  
(surprised but pleased)  
Aaron. It's really good to see you, man.

AARON  
Yeah, sorry it took me so long. I came by the apartment...

JACK  
Yeah, it just felt like it was time for a change.

Aaron nods. He looks at the nameplate on Jack's desk - his father's.

AARON  
Sorry about your dad, man. That has to be hard.

Jack flinches a little, the grief still fresh.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Are you going by that name again?

Jack smiles and nods.

AARON (CONT'D)  
No one's called you Robert since we were in junior high and you went through that Kerouac phase.

JACK

It was probably just one more way to lash out at him, going by my middle name. But everything comes back around, right?

Aaron smiles.

AARON

So, Robert Sweeney, big man on campus, eh?

JACK

Well, since Jack Sweeney never made it to college, I thought maybe Robert should.

AARON

And you're working here?

JACK

Internship.

AARON

That's good, man. A fresh start.

JACK

Something like that. I still have a few more things to take care of.

AARON

Abbey?

JACK

Yeah, her.  
(thoughtful)  
And someone else.

AARON

Well, I'm sure they'll be pleased to see the new and improved Mr. Sweeney. Just be yourself.

JACK

Thanks. And Aaron?  
(a beat)

JACK (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.

AARON  
Yeah, man. I know.

INT. NURSING HOME — DAY

Jack walks into a commons area where residents are scattered about in wheelchairs and on couches. Lucy sits staring out a window. He approaches hesitantly.

JACK  
Hello, Lucy.

Lucy turns to look at him, but says nothing.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I hope it's okay I came to visit.

Still nothing. He presses on.

JACK (CONT'D)  
It seems nice here. Lots of light. And  
lunch smelled great on the way in.

He pauses, waiting for something from her, searching for more to say.

JACK (CONT'D)  
It's beautiful outside today. Chilly,  
but the sky is so clear.

Lucy watches him but makes no reply. They sit in silence.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Maybe I'll come back to see you again?  
(pause)  
Ok. You take care, Lucy.

He turns to leave.

LUCY  
Did you remember a scarf?

JACK  
What?

LUCY  
If it's chilly out you'll need one.  
You're always forgetting, and I don't  
want you getting sick again.

Jack looks troubled.

JACK  
Lucy, I'm not sure you remember me. I  
met you at the grocery store.

LUCY  
You should wear the red one I made for  
you. You still have it?

She stares pointedly at him, waiting. He's quiet for a moment,  
then smiles hesitantly.

JACK  
I think I can find it.

Lucy smiles and visibly relaxes.

LUCY  
Good.

EXT. HOMELESS SHELTER — DAY

Jack watches from a distance as Abbey enters the shelter. A  
shabbily dressed MAN shuffles past Jack.

JACK  
Hey man, can you do me a favor? I need  
to get this letter to a woman who works  
at the shelter — Abbey?

HOMELESS MAN  
She the pretty one with the smart  
mouth?

Jack smiles.

JACK  
That's the one.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER — SHORTLY AFTER

The man walks inside and finds Abbey by a desk. We don't hear the dialog between them, but he hands her the letter. She holds it for a moment before opening it.

JACK (V.O.)

Dear Abbey,

I know you don't want to see me again, but I hope you'll hear me out.

I was selfish. I told myself I was helping people, but I was really just manipulating others because I couldn't control what I wanted in my life.

The fact is I was too messed up to help you or anyone else. I couldn't even save my dog.

I tricked you and some people you cared about got hurt. I made my mom cry, turned on my best friend, and took away an old woman's son. I got a man fired and I watched my dad die because of it.

I did these things. I can't take any of them back. All I can do now is try to live with them.

I'm not asking you to rescue me. I just wanted to be honest with you, and with myself.

One more thing I never got to say - I love you.

Robert Jackson Sweeney

Abbey looks up from the letter toward the door.

FADE TO BLACK