

# "THE HAPPIEST GUY IN TOWN"

An Original Screenplay

By

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EXT. THE CINERAMA DOME - DUSK

The enormous white geodesic Cinerama Dome movie theater on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. It stands out sharply against blue sky like a giant golf ball waiting to be hit. There is a long line of people winding around the block waiting to get into the first evening show.

The wobbling hard rubber wheels of a shopping cart roll along the pavement. Inside the shopping cart is a multitude of empty bottles and cans as well as several stuffed black garbage bags and a filthy yellow blanket. Pushing the shopping cart is a dirty, ragged street person wearing a soiled, very wrinkled brown suit coat and matching pants. He is thirty-two, but it's hard to tell. His unruly black hair and the patchy growths of facial hair combined with the streaks of dirt on his face and a dazed, thousand yard stare in his eyes make him look of an indeterminate age. He is TODD HOLMAN.

Todd rolls his shopping cart along the line of people waiting in front of the Dome and begins panhandling, never looking anyone in the eye.

TODD

Spare some change?

Most people look away or simply continue with their conversations as though Todd doesn't exist.

TODD

Can you spare some change?

The next PATRON looks up with a pissed-off expression.

PATRON

Fuck off! I work for my money! I don't need to support you!

Todd continues up the line asking and re-asking the same question. A few different people give him some change and one woman gives him a dollar. Most of the people just ignore him.

A well-dressed, good-looking MAN and WOMAN in their thirties, watch Todd pass without giving him money, then turn to each other with sad, concerned expressions.

WOMAN

That's really a shame.

MAN

(nods)

Yeah, it is. And he can't be all that old. Not more than forty.

WOMAN

How do people get that way?

MAN

They just don't care. They let themselves go.

WOMAN

Yeah. What a shame.

MAN

(nods)

Yeah, it is.

The line starts to move and they head into the theater.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND REDEMPTION CENTER - NIGHT

Todd and many other homeless street people stand in line behind a California Redemption Center with their shopping carts and garbage bags full of bottles and cans. Todd drops off his load and gets a couple of dollars and some change. He puts his money into his suit coat pocket and pushes his shopping cart away.

INT. WILCOX LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Todd stands in line at a small liquor store run by Koreans. When it's Todd's turn at the counter he reaches into his pocket and takes out several crumpled dollars and a pile of change which he spreads out on the counter. The middle-aged, Korean CLERK watches with a mixture of boredom, exasperation and a tiny touch of pity.

TODD

(looking away)

I'll take the biggest bottle I can afford of  
the cheapest scotch and one of these  
beef sticks.

Todd points at the clear plastic container holding shriveled cigar-like beef sticks. The clerk pokes through the money, reaches behind himself and takes a pint bottle of Cluny scotch, then shakes his head. He speaks with a Korean accent. He slides the container of beef sticks away from Todd.

CLERK

You don't want that shit. A buck for that  
not worth it. Go get a package of bologna  
or salami. More meat for the money.

TODD

(nods his head)

Right.

He goes over and grabs a package of bologna and brings it back to the counter. The clerk rings up the purchase and it comes to \$4.14. He counts Todd's money and there's only three dollars and eighty-nine cents. Todd shrugs and slides the package of bologna away. The clerk shakes his head.

CLERK

It's OK. You take it.

Todd takes his items and leaves.

The clerk watches him go, sighs and turns back to his Korean newspaper.

EXT. RUG STORE - NIGHT

Todd is crouched in a doorway of the Broadway rug store on Sunset Blvd. at Wilcox. It's a good place to crash because its got awnings and recessed doorways in case it rains. There are several other street people crouched in the doorways nearby. Todd has his shopping cart with him and is covered with a dirty yellow blanket. He eats the bologna and washes it down with scotch. He looks through a free publication called "Homes" containing color Photos of houses for sale. Todd turns the page and there is a black and white photograph of an empty wooded lot. Todd stops chewing. He looks more closely at the photo and there is now a lone figure sitting on a hill at the center of the lot, beside a For Sale sign. Todd's eyes widen in a faraway gaze.

Our view of the photograph of the empty lot grows closer and closer...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODDED LOT - DAY

...And the black and white photograph becomes color, then comes to life. It's a sunny fall day in northern Michigan. The leaves on the trees are vibrant and colorful. It's early morning sunlight glistens on the dew. As we move closer we see that the lone figure sitting on the hill is in fact Todd. He is wearing the same brown suit and tie (although clean and well-pressed), and is freshly shaven and showered. He surveys the lot. It's about ten acres. In the distance is the intermittent roar of a freeway.

TODD  
(to himself; smiling)  
Location, location, location.  
(shakes his head; cynically)  
Financing, financing, financing.

He sighs dolefully, then reaches into his coat pocket and takes out a half pint bottle of peppermint schnapps. Todd takes a mighty swig, doing in a third of the bottle. He screws up his face, shakes his head hard and exhales.

TODD  
*Eeeow!* Pays to buy the best.

Todd opens his eyes wide and stands. He puts the bottle back in his pocket and walks down the hill. On the dirt road in front of the vacant lot sits a blue Chevy Chevette.

INT. TODD'S CAR - DAY

Todd gets into the little car and slams its tinny sounding door. He puts the schnapps into the glove compartment and takes out a box of Tick-tacks. He dumps a bunch into his mouth. He sucks on them for a second, then suddenly brings his fist to his mouth in a fake punch and spits the Ticktacks into his hand like they're his teeth.

TODD  
(imitating Brando)  
I coulda had class, I coulda been a contendah.

He puts the Tick-tacks back in his mouth and starts the car.

EXT. CHEBOYGAN - MORNING

Todd's Chevette travels up Main Street through the quaint little town of Cheboygan, Michigan, situated at the northernmost tip of the lower peninsula on Lake Huron. The multitude of trees are breathtakingly colorful.

The homes are, for the most part, modest, well-kept, wooden frame houses with screened-in porches or breezeways with mowed lawns and large backyards. One of two

houses per block are made of red brick and appear solidly constructed of interesting, old designs. All of the cars parked in the driveways are American made and tend toward Ford Escorts and Plymouth Horizons, although there are occasional Buicks, Oldsmobiles and pick-up trucks.

Downtown Cheboygan is a two block stretch of Main Street with stores and businesses, a Woolworths, and old-fashioned movie theater, The Kingston, now split in two. At the head of the street is a municipal parking lot. Todd's car pulls in.

EXT PARKING LOT - DAY

Todd vets out of his car and steps up to the parking meter. The sign says "Four hours for .25 cents." Todd puts in two quarters and gets eight hours.

EXT. MAIN STREET/DOWNTOWN CHEBOYGAN - DAY

Todd walks up Main Street. Everybody that he passes he knows. He nods and smiles and says "Good morning" in a chipper tone. He stops at the door of Better Business Equipment and goes inside.

INT. BETTER BUSINESS EQUIPMENT - DAY

This is a small office supply store decorated with old cash registers and safes. There are no customers. At the counter is a heavy-set man with dark curly hair wearing a suit and tie. He is ED.

ED

Eh, Todd, how's it hangin'?

TODD

Eighteen and a half inches of pure fury, and I don't fold it half for anyone. How's biz?

ED

Great. Although a customer would be nice.

TODD

Hey, I'm buyin'. I'm a customer. I need a new pen. None of the pens I presently own is pleasing me.

ED

(understanding)

Uh-huh. Are you still in your fine-point rollerball phase?

TODD  
(shrugs)  
Go ahead, sport, make my day.

Ed comes around from behind the counter and leads Todd to the pen aisle. Ed takes a pen from the rack.

ED  
The very newest thing. Just came in yesterday  
and I thought of you.  
(holds it up)  
Disposable fountain pen.

Todd takes the pen and inspects it.

TODD  
(skeptical)  
Hmmm. And why is being disposable a positive  
attribute in this day and age?

Ed's face lights up.

ED  
It's sealed. It won't leak. Always the major  
drawback with fountain pens.

TODD  
(nods; impressed)  
Valid point. Touché. But will it last?

ED  
The guy said it would last for months with  
daily use.

Todd rolls his eyes saying, "Oh sure."

TODD  
I'm a tad skeptical about that last bit of  
hyperbole. Nevertheless, being a born  
thrill-seeker, I'll take it.

Ed goes back around the counter and rings it up.

ED  
Two-oh-seven.

Todd pays up.

TODD

How's Jenny?

ED

Swelling. I think she's giving birth to a baby elephant. What're you doin' tonight?

TODD

Blind Pig. Piston game. 7:30. Be there.

ED

(confiding)

Pistons're playing like shit.

TODD

(points at him; seriously)

Don't be a fair weather fan. Back to back world champions, don't forget it.

ED

All right, I'll see ya there.

Todd starts to leave. He holds up the pen.

TODD

If this pen leaks I'm gonna kick your sorry ass.

ED

Cry me a river, greaseball.

Todd leaves. Ed smiles, then goes back to work.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Todd walks up Main Street. Once again, everyone he passes he knows. He passes Gilhouley's Produce Store with vegetables on display outside. An old Irish woman named MRS. GILHOULEY arranges her stock. Todd affects a pretty good Irish accent.

TODD

Top o' the mornin' to ya, Mrs. Gilhouley.

MRS. GILHOULEY

(real Irish accent)

Top o' the mornin' t' you, Todd.

TODD  
How are ya this fine fall day?

MRS. GILHOULEY  
(shrugs)  
Slow, as usual. And produce don't last.

TODD  
Ain't it the truth. Good day to you, Mrs. Gilhouley.

MRS. GILHOULEY  
Good day to you, Todd.

Todd walks past the Huron Furniture Company just as two long-haired, tattooed, hippy/biker types are carrying a couch out the door. They are CHRIS & DICK. Todd greets them.

TODD  
Dudes. What it is?

CHRIS  
Hey, Todd. Wha's 'appening?

TODD  
Piston game. 7:30. Blind Pig.

DICK  
(disgusted)  
Are you kiddin'? Forget the Pistons? It's the Red Wings. Ten and oh.

TODD  
Yeah, yeah, that's great. But the Pistons're on tonight.

Chris and Dick load the couch on the back of a truck.

CHRIS  
I'll be there.

DICK  
Figures you'd like the Pistons, you fry-brain.

CHRIS

Hey, fuck you. Who you callin' a fry-brain, fry-brain!s Now hold your end up.

DICK

See ya, Todd.

(remembers)

Oh, have you read the new Silver Surfer? It's really great.

Todd keeps walking.

TODD

(over his shoulder)

New comics are for the birds. Old comics are the good ones.

EXT. JO ANN FABRIC STORE - DAY

Todd steps up in front of the Jo Ann Fabric Store and stops. He just stands there with a funny, baffled look on his face. He begins to walk in a circle.

INT. JO ANN FABRICS - DAY

There are no customers in the fabric store. At the counter stands a white-haired, middle-aged woman named TRUDY. She sees Todd through the window and calls back over her shoulder.

TRUDY

Hey, Laura. Guess whose loitering around in front of the store?

From the back room steps LAURA WILLISON, an attractive, shapely, twenty-nine year old woman with red hair and green eyes. She too sees Todd through the window and a smile plays across her face. She returns to the back room.

Todd walks back and forth a few times, then finally opens the door and comes in. He sees Trudy, smiles and waves.

TODD

Morning, Mrs. Burton.

TRUDY

Morning Todd. I can set my watch by your arrival.

TODD

Yeah. Laura here?

Trudy points over her shoulder toward the back. Todd nods and heads down an aisle of bolts of fabric.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Todd pops his head into the back room to find Laura busily unloading a box of fabric rolls. She glances up at Todd nonchalantly and keeps doing what she's doing.

LAURA

Morning Todd.

TODD

Good morning. And how are you this bright, sunny day?

LAURA

Fine. You?

TODD

Couldn't be better. I'm here to continue our running debate on why I believe that you should marry me, or at least move in with me.

LAURA

(sighs)

OK.

TODD

(put off)

But if you don't want to, we'll just skip it.

LAURA

No, no. Go ahead.

TODD

Well, you could be a little more enthusiastic.

LAURA

(fake enthusiastic)

Oh, please, please, please, tell me, tell me now.

TODD

One day, little missy, I'm gonna stop pursuing

you and that'll be that.

LAURA

Is that a threat?

TODD

(his eyes narrow)

Maybe.

He turns to leave. Laura steps up to him and takes his arm. Todd turns and Laura puts her arms around him. When he doesn't reciprocate, she takes hold of his dangling arms and puts them around her.

LAURA

All right, go ahead. What's today's point?

TODD

(hurt)

You're mean to me, y'know. I like you more than anyone and you treat me bad.

LAURA

(sincerely)

I'm sorry. Really. But you have to remember that I was already married and didn't like it. But go ahead.

TODD

OK. It's a single question. Everything else is beside the point. Are you happier with me or are you happier without me?

LAURA

That's two questions.

TODD

No it's not, it's one question with two choices. You don't have to answer now. Think about it.

LAURA

Todd, I have a good time with you, you know that.

TODD

Then why, aren't we together?

LAURA

We're together right now.

TODD

I mean always.

LAURA

I know what you mean.

TODD

You know, we're not so young anymore. By the time my Mom and Dad were thirty they'd been through a war, had two kids and owned their own home.

LAURA

I'm just not ready yet to make any commitments, OK? I just don't want to.

TODD

Why not? What're you waiting for?

LAURA

I don't know. A sign.

TODD

(exasperated)

Everybody else in the world gets by with just liking each other, why do you have to have a natural disaster?

LAURA

I'm just like that. I don't like to be hasty.

TODD

Laura, we've known each other our whole lives. We've been going out for over a year. I haven't spent an entire night in my own bed for months. What else do you need?

LAURA

(shrugs)

A sign?

TODD

Well, fine. That's great. Think about my question, or set of questions.

LAURA

What're you doing tonight?

TODD

Piston game. Blind Pig. 7:30. Wanna go?

LAURA

But the Pistons are doing so bad.

TODD

What do you care? You don't even like basketball. I'll be there.

LAURA

All right. See you there.

TODD

All right.

Laura leans forward and kisses him. Todd reaches around and grabs her tush. After the kiss she nuzzles his neck.

LAURA

You always taste so minty.

TODD

That's 'cause I'm a sweet guy. The kind of guy you ought to appreciate more.

They break apart.

LAURA

See you tonight.

TODD

'Bye.

Todd leaves. Laura looks up after he's gone and smiles.

EXT. DECADE 31 REALTY OFFICE - DAY

Decade 31 is a small, storefront realty office on Main Street at the end of the block. Through the window we can see a blonde, round-faced, rosy-cheeked, middle-aged

woman named EILEEN, sitting at one of two desks. She turns around as Todd enters from the back.

INT. DECADE 31 OFFICE - DAY

Todd hangs up his coat, smiles at Eileen and sits down at the other desk.

TODD

Morning Eileen.

EILEEN

Morning Todd. Out at the vacant lot?

TODD

Yep. Still vacant, too.

EILEEN

What a surprise.

TODD

Anything happening?

EILEEN

You've got a showing at ten. The Thompson house.

TODD

(lights up)

Ah yes. My Grandfather built that one. That's a swell house.

EILEEN

(looks down)

And Mr Crispin called.

TODD

(very interested)

Really? What does he want?

EILEEN

Lunch with you at noon. The Steak & Ale.

TODD

(lighting up)

He's gonna be here? All the way from Detroit? But it's not time for his yearly visit. What's this

all about?

EILEEN

He didn't want to see any statements or reports, I asked. It must have something to do with you.

TODD

(mildly overcome)

It's the vacant lot! They're finally accepting my proposal. Oh, man! This'll be the biggest project of my life. If they go for it, as I outlined it, that means an industrial park and a subdivision. This'll be the biggest thing that ever happened to this rinky-dink little town. This would help every business in town. It could be a boom!

Todd goes to a file drawer and begins removing files.

TODD

If I can pull this off we could be the major city of the northern half of the lower peninsula!

EILEEN

(grinning)

If you could pull this off maybe you could get Laura to marry you.

Todd stops what he's doing and reflects.

TODD

No, it's probably not enough. She needs something bigger, like a nuclear war.

(waves his hand)

Whatever. Things are definitely looking up.

EXT. THE THOMPSON HOUSE - DAY

Todd's car pulls up in front of a nice, old, red brick house. He pops a couple of Tick-tacks in his mouth. A moment later a black Ford Taurus pulls up behind him. Todd gets out of his car and a couple in their late twenties gets out of the Taurus.

They are the Uplingers, STAN and KELLY. He has a well-trimmed beard, is balding and wears silver wire-rimmed glasses. She has long, thick black hair, a black sweater and wears black stretch pants with stirrups running under her black flats. She looks like a Jules Fieffer character. Kelly is immediately in love with the house and blatantly shows it. Stan is

trying to be a good businessman and wears a poker face, although he's obviously a bit annoyed with his wife for being so obviously enthusiastic.

KELLY

Oh, wow!

STAN

Uh, it's, pretty old, isn't it?

TODD

(smiling)

Built in 1919.

STAN

That is old.

TODD

Not compared to say, Paleolithic Man or dinosaurs.

KELLY

It looks really well-built.

STAN

(cautioning)

Just because it's old doesn't mean it's necessarily well-built.

TODD

(grinning)

Just by the by, my grandfather did all the brickwork. He was considered to be one of the best masons in the whole area.

STAN

(impressed)

Really? Your grandfather?

TODD

Yeah. What brings you to Cheboygan, if you don't mind me asking?

KELLY

Stan got a teaching position at Cheboygan Community College.

STAN

I was teaching first grade in Saginaw.

TODD

What do you teach now?

STAN

Fantastic literature.

TODD

No kidding. You like comic books?

STAN

I love 'em. I've got a pretty good collection.

TODD

Me, too.

(proudly)

I've got The Fantastic Four, number one.

STAN

(impressed)

No shit? Really?

TODD

(nods)

Yep. And a lot of other good ones, too. But anyway, this house...

STAN

(smiles)

Right.

TODD

Honestly, it's a great house. One of the nicest in town, for the size and price. I'd really love to own it myself, but, being single, I rent. But anyway, the last owner put in new plumbing and restored all the woodwork, too.

KELLY

(enthusiastically)

That's great. Let's go inside and look.

STAN

Just hold on. My wife, is really into gardening.

How's the soil around here?

TODD

(to Kelly)

Flowers or vegetables?

KELLY

Mainly vegetables. Flowers are OK.

TODD

Me, too. I grew a seventeen ounce tomato last year. I got the blue ribbon at the county fair.

KELLY

(impressed)

No kidding? That's a big tomato.

TODD

Yeah. It was like a bowling ball. The soil's great for vegetables, I can personally vouch for that. And each year my girlfriend grows the most incredible flowers you've ever seen. They're all dying now, but I can take you past her place to see them, they're still beautiful. For the price, this is the best house you're going to find in the area, maybe the whole state.

Stan and Kelly both look convinced. They look at each other and a whole conversation goes on in their eyes. Her eyes say, "I love it, let's please buy it." His eyes say, "I love it, too, but let's not move too fast."

Todd looks away, a slight grin playing on his lips. He's sold them and he knows it.

STAN

Let's see what it looks like inside.

TODD

(leads the way)

There's new tile, new carpet and it was recently repainted. And the woodwork's fantastic. It's other-worldly. It's like it was imported from ancient Assyria or something. Guys with long beards riding chariots, it's very odd . . .

They all head inside.

EXT. STEAK & ALE RESTAURANT - DAY

Todd sits in his car in the parking lot going over his paperwork and proposal one more time. He knows it all by heart, but still... He makes a note with his new pen, then holds it up and admires it.

TODD

Not bad.

Finally, he sighs and shoves all the paperwork into his briefcase. He's about to open the door, then stops, reaches over and opens the glove box. He takes out the little bottle of peppermint schnapps, gives a quick look around to see if anyone's watching, then takes a big slug. His eyes go wide and he gasps slightly. He shakes his head, tosses the bottle back in the glove box, pops some Tick-tacks in his mouth and gets out of the car.

INT. STEAK & ALE - DAY

The Steak & Ale is a reasonably nice restaurant, part of a national chain. It's dark and fairly expensive. A very pretty, rather downbeat young woman named ALYSCHIA is the hostess. Her bored, unhappy expression evaporates upon seeing Todd.

ALY

Hi, Todd. How're you?

TODD

(grins)

Great. Couldn't be better. You look devastating, as always.

ALY

(blushes)

Thanks.

TODD

Where've you been? I haven't seen you around. Why weren't you at Ed and Jenny's bash?

ALY

(looks down)

I didn't have anyone to go with. I wasn't gonna go alone.

TODD

(smiles)

You're funny. You're the best-looking girl in

town and you never have a date.

ALY

(conspiratorially)

If I didn't like Laura so much I'd steal you away.

TODD

That might be a lot easier than you think. Look, we're all getting together tonight at The Blind Pig. Pistons're on. Wanna come?

ALY

(looks down)

I don't know.

TODD

What's the matter, you not a Piston fan either?

ALY

It's not that, I just don't want to go alone.

TODD

(seriously)

Aly. You're our friend. We all like you. You don't have to have a date to get together with your friends. Come on.

ALY

(looks up and smiles)

OK.

TODD

You never know, Laura might not show.

ALY

But I wouldn't do that to her.

TODD

I know. Bummer.

(they both grin)

Uh... Is there a Michael Crispin here?

Aly looks down at her clipboard.

ALY

Yes, he is. Right this way, sir.

TODD

Oh, thank you so much.

Aly leads Todd to a back booth where a thin, intense man of fifty with steel gray hair is seated. He is MICHAEL CRISPIN.

Aly says quietly to Todd.

ALY

(whispers)

I'll see you tonight.

TODD

Great. See ya later.

(to Crispin)

Mr. Crispin, good to see you.

(they shake hands)

CRISPIN

Todd. Nice to see you. Sit down.

(Todd sits)

That's one good-lookin' lady. You're gonna see her tonight, huh?

Crispin gives him a "You lucky son of a bitch" look.

TODD

She's a friend.

CRISPIN

I wish she was my friend. So, how's it goin', buddy-boy?

TODD

Couldn't be better. And you?

CRISPIN

I'm gettin' there.

(he downs the rest  
of his drink)

Have a drink?

Todd looks at his watch.

TODD

It's a little early, but... What the hell.

Crispin raises his hand and snaps his fingers loud. A perky young WAITRESS immediately appears.

CRISPIN

It's never too early for anything. When you get to be my age you'll understand that.

WAITRESS

Yes, sir?

CRISPIN

Two gin and tonics. Light on the tonic.  
(to Todd)

That okay?

TODD

(shrugs)

Fine.

The waitress writes it down, then turns to Todd and smiles.

WAITRESS

Hi, Todd.

TODD

(looks up)

Hi, Sherry.

Todd looks back to Mr. Crispin who is leering at him.

CRISPIN

You dog.

TODD

She's another friend.

CRISPIN

I like your friends. So, how's business?

TODD

(nods)

Good. Steady. I sold a house this morning.

CRISPIN

They closed?

TODD

They will.

CRISPIN

You know that, huh?

TODD

(nods)

Yeah, I do.

CRISPIN

(grins)

I'll bet you do. A good salesman knows when he's sold someone. And you're a good salesman, Todd.

TODD

(shrugs)

Thanks.

CRISPIN

Forget thanks, it's a fact.

The waitress brings their drinks.

CRISPIN

Thanks, babe.

(to Todd)

So, how many houses is that this week?

TODD

(pauses)

Uh... It's the only one.

CRISPIN

(surprised)

In a whole week?

TODD

It's not a big buyer's market here. You know that. We mainly deal in summer rentals.

CRISPIN

I do know that, but even still. One house a

week?

TODD

In a good week. I average twenty houses a year. That's not quite one every two weeks. And generally most of the sales come down between January and April, so I can sometimes go more than a month without a sale. Sometimes two months. You know all of this. And just by the way, I sell and rent more space here than the next two Realtors combined.

CRISPIN

I do know all of this. I'm just trying to make a point.

(downs his drink)

Want another?

Todd hasn't even started on his.

TODD

No thanks.

(takes a sip)

What point?

Crispin snaps his fingers, holds up his glass and one finger.

CRISPIN

How would you like to sell a house everyday?  
Maybe more than one a day?

TODD

(sighs)

That would be a lot of commissions.

CRISPIN

It sure would. And I'm not talkin' forty to sixty thousand dollar houses either. I'm talkin' a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty thousand dollar houses. Then you're lookin' at a lot of commission. How does that sound?

TODD

It sounds... Profitable. But you can't mean here.

CRISPIN

I don't.

TODD

Do you mean in the suburbs of Detroit?  
Bloomfield Hills?

Crispin waves his hand.

CRISPIN

Nah. Houses don't sell that fast there, and most of 'em are more'n two-fifty. My house is worth four hundred.

Crispin is getting bombed.

TODD

Really?

CRISPIN

Sure. There's a house up the street from me that's worth six if it's worth a cent. Five thousand square feet, tennis court, pool, the works. The ex-president of Ford lives there. A buddy o' mine. We golf together. Guy can't chip worth a shit—

TODD

(pleasantly interrupting)

—What about all these houses for sale?

The waitress brings Crispin a fresh drink. As she's about to take the old one he grabs it and dumps the contents into the new one overflowing it.

CRISPIN

Look out, tidal wave. Thanks, hon. Anyway, I'm talkin' about L.A. Los Angeles. Where our company's world headquarters is located. Been there?

TODD

When I was a kid I went to Disneyland once.

CRISPIN

(confused)

That's in Florida, isn't it?

TODD

That's Disneyworld.

CRISPIN

(waves his hand)

Who gives a shit. So, anyway, we've got housing developments in and around L.A. comin' out our ass. And the schmucks at world headquarters totally overestimated the market growth and overbuilt like mad. Now the market's gone soft and they've got houses up the ying-yang.

TODD

And they're still selling a house a day?

CRISPIN

Shit, in total they're selling a lot more'n that. But you're right, not every salesman is selling one a day. Some aren't moving one a week. And the interest is killing 'em. And that's where you come in. They've put out a call to all the district managers to get their best people out to L.A. to bail their sorry asses out. I suggested you.

TODD

You mean, you're not here about my proposal for the industrial park and subdivision?

CRISPIN

(disdainful)

Fuck no. We're not interested in that, we've told ya twenty times. I want you to go to L.A.

TODD

(shakes his head)

I don't want to go to L.A. I'm happy here.

CRISPIN

Shit! Don't kid me, pal, I know how much you pull down.

(he points at Todd's drink)

Finish that up, you're way behind.

(he snaps his fingers  
and holds up his drink  
and two fingers)

How the hell can you be happy if you're not netting fifty G's a year? And you're not.

Todd finishes his drink and nods sadly.

TODD

No, I'm not.

CRISPIN

Goddamn right you're not. And nobody can really be happy on a cent less'n a hundred, take my word for it. Are you married?

TODD

No.

CRISPIN

How old're you?

TODD

Thirty-two.

CRISPIN

And you're not fuckin' married? Shit, I was married and had three kids when I was thirty-two. Why aren't you married?

The new drinks arrive.

TODD

(shrugs)

I don't know.

CRISPIN

You don't know. Shit. You're not married 'cause you can't afford it. That's why.

TODD

(skeptical)

I'm not so sure about that. I do pretty good, by Cheboygan standards.

CRISPIN

(cynical)

*Cheboygan standards.* Jesus Christ! All right, so then why aren't you married?

TODD

Well, my girlfriend doesn't want to, that's why.

CRISPIN

Why not?

TODD

She was married before and didn't like it. And now she just doesn't want to.

CRISPIN

(seriously)

Let me explain something to you, Todd. I don't care what her attitude is or what her reasons are, if you pulled down a hundred thousand a year, she'd marry you. Simple.

TODD

(sees the possibility)

You think so?

CRISPIN

Definitely. Let me give you a little fatherly advice, Todd. Take this job and get your ass outta this podunk town or you're never gonna get anywhere. This is your big chance. Remember, when opportunity knocks...

TODD

(nodding)

Right.

Crispin fishes in his pocket for his wallet, then snaps his fingers.

CRISPIN

If you want this job you better let me know by Monday. That's the deadline, then I'm gonna get someone else. Take my word for this one, Todd, this'll be the smartest move of your life. I know. I'm older'n you.

(the waitress arrives)

How much is it?

-27-

WAITRESS

Fifteen-sixty, sir.

Crispin hands her a twenty.

CRISPIN

Here. Keep it.

WAITRESS

Thank you, sir.

Crispin points at Todd's drink.

CRISPIN

And finish your drink, boy. If you're ever gonna get ahead in this business you gotta learn how to drink with the big boys.

TODD

What about lunch?

CRISPIN

We just had it. I still gotta stop in Saginaw and Flint. Let's hit it.

Todd takes a last gulp and stands. He follows Mr. Crispin to the door.

EXT. STEAK & ALE - DAY

Mr. Crispin and Todd come out the door of the restaurant. Crispin is clearly staggering. They start to head in different directions, Crispin weaving his way toward a huge, gold Cadillac Fleetwood.

CRISPIN

Monday, buddy-boy. Don't let me down.

TODD

Yes, sir. Uh, do you think you should be driving?

CRISPIN

(offended)

You think I'm drunk? Shit, pal, you've never seen me drunk. Never will.

Crispin gets into his car, starts it up, backs out at 30 mph, comes to a screeching halt, then peels out of the parking lot in a cloud of blue burnt rubber smoke. He pulls out onto the road, having just gone through a stop sign, nearly gets into an accident, then screams away up the road at seventy.

Todd stands in the cloud of blue smoke and waves the smoke away from his face.

INT. TODD'S CAR - DAY

He gets into his car, looks at his briefcase sadly, then tosses it in back. He opens the glove box and takes out the bottle.

TODD  
(to himself)  
I don't know how to drink, huh?

He downs the remainder of the bottle in a single gulp. He tosses the bottle back into the glove box.

TODD  
(to himself)  
Is that what Laura wants and just doesn't  
know it?

Todd sighs, pulls up to the stop sign, stops, looks both ways, then slowly pulls out onto the road.

EXT. VACANT LOT - DAY

Todd sits on the hill of the vacant lot looking wistfully around. He reaches down, digs out a handful of dirt, crumbles it around in his hand and lets it slip through his fingers. At the bottom of the hill a red Ford Escort pulls up behind Todd's car. Laura gets out and walks up the hill.

Todd smiles as he watches her approach.

LAURA  
Hi.

TODD  
Hi. How'd you find me.

LAURA  
I stopped by your office and Eileen didn't  
know where you were 'cause she called the  
Steak & Ale and Aly said you'd left an hour  
ago. So, where else would you be?

TODD  
Pull up a chair.

Laura sits down on the ground beside him. She looks him in the eyes.

LAURA

You look swacked.

TODD

You should see the other guy. I had lunch with my district manager. I had one drink for each of his three. And then he drove three hundred miles back to Detroit.

LAURA

I'm glad I didn't have to get onto I-75 today. What's wrong?

TODD

(sighs)

Mr. Crispin offered me a top sales position in L.A. I could easily make three or four times as much as I'm making now, maybe even more, plus it's a big move up in the company.

LAURA

Well, that's great.

TODD

(seriously)

Is it? I'd have to move away.

LAURA

But it's a big opportunity.

TODD

(looks at her)

You really think so?

LAURA

Sure. You'll never make that kind of money here.

TODD

(searching)

Does that matter?

LAURA

Well, of course it does.

TODD

But what about us?

LAURA

(smiles)

We'll always have Paris.

TODD

(discouraged)

I'm not kidding, this is important. If I move away I might never come back.

LAURA

Then that's just how things were meant to be. I knew it would end sooner or later.

TODD

It doesn't have to. Why don't we just get married and move into your great big old house and live happily ever after?

LAURA

(shakes her head;  
very seriously)

I don't want to get married again. Don't base your plans on me.

TODD

So then what we have means nothing to you?

LAURA

It's not like that. I like you a lot. And if you're here it'll just go on the way it is. But I'm very happy with myself and I don't want to screw that up.

Todd considers for a second, then...

TODD

That's it. I'm gonna use the L-word.

LAURA

(quickly)

No, don't.

TODD  
(honestly)  
Why not? It's true.

LAURA  
(definitely)  
Because the minute that comes up the  
relationship ends. That's one thing I know.

TODD  
(exasperated)  
Not for everybody. Not for most people.

LAURA  
No, just for me.

TODD  
I don't know what to say. I can't make you  
love me. So I guess I'll take the job.

LAURA  
It's the sign I was looking for. You'll leave  
and we'll both move on.

TODD  
I really think you're wrong.

LAURA  
We'll see. I've gotta get back to work. I'll  
see you tonight.

TODD  
Right.

Laura leans over and kisses him. It's a long kiss. Todd's hands are in his lap. Finally, he reaches up for her and that's when she pulls away. Todd is left with his hands in the air. Laura walks down the hill, gets in her car drives away.

Todd watches her go, then sighs.

TODD  
Maybe she's right. What do I know? Maybe  
I'm kidding myself. Just 'cause I like to be  
with her and look at her and sleep with her,  
doesn't necessarily mean I love her, does it?

Todd shrugs.

INT. DECADE 31 OFFICE - DAY

Todd sits at his desk drinking a cup of coffee and telling Eileen the story.

TODD

...And then he went careening into traffic and drove away. So what do you think?

EILEEN

(smiling)

I think it's marvelous. And with world headquarters being right there you're bound to move up in the company much faster.

TODD

(explaining)

But look, it's not that I joined this company because I cared about the company; I care about real estate; houses; land. *This* real estate. Decade 31 just happened to be the only company in town. See?

EILEEN

I do see, but a good salesman can sell anything. And this was great training, because it's an depressed market.

TODD

(nods)

Yeah, that's true.

EILEEN

Don't you want to make \$200,000 a year?

TODD

I do. I mean, I never thought I did, but I guess I do.

EILEEN

Of course you do. Everyone does.

Todd seriously considers this.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Todd walks up Main Street with a thoughtful expression, his brow furrowed. He goes in the opposite direction he took earlier. He passes The Huron Furniture Company and Dick and Chris are hanging around out front smoking cigarettes. They see Todd and are taken aback.

DICK

Whoa! Todd's not smiling. What's the deal?

TODD

(seriously)

What do you guys think about L.A.?

Dick and Chris look at each other.

DICK

Good bud.

CHRIS

Yeah.

TODD

(confused)

Beer?

DICK

No, man. Hooter. Zeet. Combustibles.

He pantomimes smoking a joint.

TODD

(understands)

Oh, well, that's important.

(to himself)

Look who I'm asking?

CHRIS

You goin' to L.A.?

TODD

Maybe.

CHRIS

Send us back some.

Todd keeps walking.

TODD

Yeah, sure. And some automatic weapons, too. I'll make \$200,000 in my first week. And isn't that the point? Make as much money as fast as you can?

Chris and Dick both look at each other and nod their heads.

CHRIS & DICK  
(simultaneously)

Definitely.

INT. BETTER BUSINESS EQUIPMENT - DAY

Todd stands in the office supply store waiting patiently for Ed to get off the telephone.

ED

(into phone)

...No, not next week, tomorrow! You're two months overdue.

(listens)

I know there's a recession on, that's why I need the money.

(listens)

...Fine. ...Great. ...Bye.

Ed hangs up.

ED

Okay. L.A. Well, Jesus, Todd, I'm going broke here and you wanna know if I'd rather be making \$200,000 a year? What kind of question is that?

TODD

A silly one, I guess.

ED

F.Y.I., anyone that makes over \$150,000 a year is in the top 2% on the wage scale. The other 98% of us are dying.

TODD

I don't make \$150,000 a year and I don't feel

like I'm dying.

ED

That's 'cause you're single. You're a lucky guy.

TODD

(cynical)

Yeah, being single has always made me feel lucky. You know, I hate the way married people pretend like it's better being single. Being single at thirty-two sucks the big one.

ED

(leering)

Being single in L.A. with \$200,000 a year might just be okay.

Todd considers this very seriously.

EXT. THE HOLMAN HOUSE - DUSK

The Holman's family house is a small, wooden house a bit out of town, set back in the woods. The large front yard is very well-tended with flower beds everywhere. The many species of flowers are all dying now. Todd's car sits in the front drive behind a ten year old, yellow Chevy Nova.

EXT. HOLMAN'S BACKYARD - DUSK

The Holman's backyard is quite large, surrounded by thick woods. The last golden rays of sunlight filter through the colorful autumn leaves. There are a multitude of fruit trees, plants, shrubs, vines and flowers. MR. HOLMAN is 66, has white hair, is in pretty good shape (with a little gut and a red nose) and is very busy pruning trees. MRS. HOLMAN is 61, has brown hair streaked with white, is attractive and slim and looks like she's worked hard her whole life. She is making cuttings of her flowers. They both wear work gloves and windbreakers and are busy as bees. Todd follows behind one then the other and is made to hold things as they talk.

MR. H

Well, big guy, it sounds like the opportunity of a lifetime. To make a \$200,000 in a year, it's incredible. When I retired from the U.S. Postal Service after twenty-five years I was making twenty-two five. I'da sold both my kids and my wife into slavery and worked in a rock quarry for a hundred grand.

TODD

So then you're for it?

MR. H

Abso-Goddamn-lutely. You don't want to stay in this crummy little backwater the rest of your life. Join the navy and see the world.

MRS. H

Oh, Chuck, you're such a hypocrite. If anyone dared make a disparaging remark about Cheboygan in front of you you'd tear their eyes out, but you'll run it down at the drop of a dime.

MR. H

A hat. And I can do whatever I damned well please. I'm free, and over twenty-one.

MRS. H

Way over. When you were twenty-one Michigan still belonged to the Indians.

MR. H

(waves his fist)

One of these days, Alice. Bang, zoom to the moon.

TODD

(interjecting)

What is this? A vaudeville routine? This is my life I'm talking about. What do you think, Mom?

MRS. H

It's entirely up to you, Todd. If it's something you feel you've got to do then you should do it.

MR. H

Damn right. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

Todd considers it all, then shakes his head and sighs deeply.

EXT. THE BLIND PIG SALOON - NIGHT

The Blind Pig Saloon is a storefront bar on Main Street with the cryptic announcement above the door, "World Headquarters." We can hear the sound of a televised basketball game coming from within.

SPORTSCASTER (V.O.)

...He brings it up the court, stops at the top of the key and waits for the Pistons to get into position...

INT. BLIND PIG - NIGHT

The Blind Pig is a small sports bar with a zillion photographs on the walls and a canoe hanging from the ceiling. There are a multitude of TV's all around. At a long table in the back, all by himself, sits Todd holding a mug of beer. He has a pitcher of beer beside him with six unused mugs. Todd looks around expectantly, sighs and looks back at the game.

TODD

My friends. Fair-weather fans, one and all.

The Pistons score a basket.

TODD

(excited)

All right! Do it Pistons!

(looks around again;  
his smile fades)

Missin' a good game, too. Nobody gives a damn about me here.

Todd downs his beer and pours another one.

TODD

(to himself)

I'll make a lot of money, go out with good-lookin' babes, buy a nice car. It'll be great. Can't live my whole life in this silly little back-water.

Todd nods with some assurance and sips his beer. He looks up and Chris and Dick come walking up. The both look buzzed.

TODD

(smiles)

Hey, guys.

CHRIS

Hey, Todd.

DICK

How're the Pistons doin'?

TODD

Up by eight at the half.

CHRIS

All right!

TODD

Sit down. Anchor yourself to the planet Earth.  
Have a beer.

DICK

Don't mind if we do.

Dick and Chris take off their jackets, pull up chairs and pour themselves beers.  
Eileen, Todd's secretary comes walking up holding a Martini.

EILEEN

Todd. Fellas.

Chris and Dick nod.

TODD

Hi, Eileen. Nice to see you. Sit down.

Todd holds a chair for her and she sets down her drink and takes off her coat.

EILEEN

Now, what are we watching? Football or  
baseball?

TODD

Basketball.

EILEEN

And that's the Lions?

TODD

The Pistons.

EILEEN

Got it.

She sips her Martini.

Ed and his very pregnant wife, JEANINE, come walking up. Todd stands and smiles.

TODD

Look out, it's an incredibly pregnant lady.

JEANINE

Hi, Todd.

Todd and Jeanine kiss.

TODD

I can hardly get to you.

Ed and Todd shake hands.

ED

Whose winning?

TODD

Pistons by eight.

ED

Excellent.

Aly and the cute waitress, Sherry, from Steak & Ale both come walking in looking great. Chris and Dick check them out.

ALY

Hi everybody.

SHERRY

Hi.

Todd stands and hugs Sherry, then Aly. He whispers to her.

TODD

I'm glad you came.

ALY

Well, "L.A. LAW's" a rerun, so...

TODD

Have a beer.

He pours them both a beer.

Just then Mr. and Mrs. Holman come in. Todd sees them and waves.

TODD

Mom. Dad. Over here.

Mr. and Mrs. Holman walk up and everybody says hi.

Todd looks toward the door expectantly, then looks away. He sighs and shakes his head. He looks back at the door and there is Laura. Todd grins happily. Laura sees him and starts over.

Laura sits down beside Todd.

LAURA

Hi.

TODD

Hi. I'm glad you came.

LAURA

I said I would.

TODD

I know.

LAURA

Whose winning?

TODD

Pistons by eight.

LAURA

Great. Todd...?

TODD

Yeah?

LAURA

Will you come over tonight?

TODD

Yeah.

LAURA

OK. Good. And Todd?

TODD

Yeah.

LAURA

I'll miss you.

Todd looks at Laura for a long moment like he's going to say something, but doesn't. He's said it all. He puts his arm around Laura's shoulder and squeezes her. She snuggles up next to him.

Todd looks up the table and sees all of his friends smiling and laughing together. Todd grins contentedly, then glances up at the TV.

SPORTSCASTER (V.O.)

...We'll return to the Pistons and the Clippers  
at the Los Angeles Sports Arena in just a  
moment...

CLOSE-UP TELEVISION SET

We see a day, exterior, aerial shot of the Los Angeles Sports Arena, then a variety of shots of L.A.: downtown, Melrose, Hollywood Boulevard, then finally...

EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN/WINDSOR STREET - DAY

The white letters composing the "Hollywood" sign repose on the side of the mountain, enshrouded in a brown haze of smog.

Our view widens until we see two perfectly straight lines of palm trees cutting a path directly to the sign. We are on Windsor Street in Hollywood. Todd's blue Chevette comes driving up the street going toward the sign.

INT. TODD'S CAR - DAY

Todd looks all around, grinning.

TODD  
(to himself)

Cool.

EXT. 819 N. ALTA VISTA/APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

This is an old style West Hollywood apartment building with sixteen units on the ground floor, eight on one side, eight on the other, all facing into a cement walkway. There are about four medium steps between the door of apartment one and the door of apartment fourteen. The front lawn is small, but landscaped with grass and hedges. It's kind of quaint. There is a sign stuck into the lawn that says, "Apt. For Rent."

Todd and the landlord, GEORGE, a thin man in his mid-fifties wearing khaki pants and no shirt, approach the building.

GEORGE

It's really a lovely area here in West Hollywood.  
Central to everything. The Melrose strip is a  
block that way...

(he points to his left)

...The Beverly Center's a mile that way...

(he points straight ahead)

...Hollywood Boulevard's a mile that way...

(He points to his right)

This is a nice, quiet street with a lot of friendly  
young people living here, mostly actors, ya know.  
The apartment is fairly priced and the building is  
well maintained.

George and Todd have arrived at the door of apartment one, the front left door. George takes a big ring of keys from his pocket and opens the door.

INT. APARTMENT ONE - DAY

The door opens revealing a one-room efficiency—12 X 14—with a small kitchen and a bathroom. There is a ceiling fan and a hardwood floor. Todd takes one step in, glances into the bathroom, then takes three more steps and glances into the kitchen.

TODD

No bedroom, huh?

GEORGE

Nope. No library, either. That's what makes  
it so cheap.

TODD

Six hundred dollars? That's cheap?

GEORGE

For this area.

TODD  
(shakes his head)  
In Michigan I was paying four hundred a month  
for a two-story, three bedroom house with a  
garage and a big backyard.

GEORGE  
But it would be a helluva commute everyday.

TODD  
(nods)  
Yeah.

GEORGE  
So, what'dya think? I got someone else coming  
in an hour. This apartment'll be gone by tonight.

TODD  
How much to move in?

GEORGE  
First, last and security. Eighteen hundred.

TODD  
Unbelievable. It's lucky I have a good job.

GEORGE  
If you didn't I wouldn't rent to you. So...?

TODD  
So...  
(shrugs)  
...I'll take it.

George squeezes Todd's shoulder, then leaves his hand there.

GEORGE  
You'll be happy here. I can tell. And if you  
need some furniture, let me know. I got a  
lot of it.

Todd glances down at George's hand, then steps away.

TODD  
Thanks.

GEORGE

(winks at him)

My pleasure. Make it cash. I don't like checks.

INT. APARTMENT ONE (TODD'S APARTMENT) - LATER THAT DAY

The apartment now has a single bed, a desk painted with thick, white house paint, a wooden chair, and a dresser with cigarette burns on top. Todd sits on the edge of the bed, his hands folded in his lap. Two suitcases and a brown, cardboard file box sit beside him. He stares out the window to the street and listens.

To the right of his building is the Christopher Robin Nursery School with fifty, three to five year old kids screaming. To his left is a house full of long hair rockers blasting heavy metal music and a number of them are sitting on motorcycles and just revving them for no good reason. Across the street is a Hassidic Jewish school and the kids are formed into a brass band and are loudly playing "Hatikva" (Israel's national anthem). Beside that is an apartment building where cars keep pulling up, double-parking, people get out and run in, then quickly come back out and drive away. Every now and then someone from that building will scream at the Jewish boys in the band.

DEALER (O.S.)

(across the street)

*Shut the fuck up!*

A RABBI with a beard and a hat and a black suit yells back with an eastern European accent.

RABBI

Neighbor! Are you trying to ruin these children's lives? Watch your language!

DEALER (O.S.)

*I said shut the fuck up and I mean shut the fuck up!*

And so the sun sets on Todd in his new apartment. He takes a slug from a pint bottle of peppermint schnapps, then grabs hold of the brown, cardboard file box and hoists it up onto the bed. Removing the top reveals that it is solidly packed with comic books in plastic covers. Todd quickly runs through them with the ends of his fingers until he gets to a specific one. He delicately pulls it out. It is an old, yellowed, Fantastic Four comic.

TODD

(grins)

Number one.

He carefully puts it back in its place and closes the box.

EXT. DECADE 31 OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

At the top of a thirty-story office building is written the company name, "DECADE 31 REALTY." Our view tilts down to the front of the building and we see Todd's car pull up to the meter. Todd gets out wearing a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase. The voice of his SUPERVISOR is heard.

SUPERVISOR (V.O.)

You'll be working at a subdivision called Golden Hills in Palmdale...

Todd steps up to the parking meter and puts in a quarter. The meter buzzes and gives him seven minutes. Todd can't believe his eyes.

TODD

(to himself; outraged)

Seven minutes for a quarter? That's outrageous!

He pumps in all of his change, then walks into the building.

SUPERVISOR (V.O.)

...There are a thousand units priced between one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars...

Todd comes out the front door. He arrives at his car parked in front of the building. He finds that his meter has expired and he has a ticket under his wiper. He shakes his head and reads the back of the ticket. His eyes go wide.

TODD

(shocked)

*Twenty-eight dollars!!?*

He gets into his car and drives away.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FREEWAY (101) - DAY

Traffic is moving OK on the 101. Todd drives along with a piece of paper in his hand.

SUPERVISOR (V.O.)

...It's about forty-five minutes north-east. It's not a bad drive at all. You take the Hollywood to the Ventura to the 170 to the 5 to the 14 and

you're practically there...

Todd veers off the Hollywood onto the Ventura.

EXT. VENTURA FREEWAY - DAY

As Todd's Chevette merges onto the Ventura Freeway he finds a solid, unmoving mass of traffic, five lanes wide, stretching into infinity.

TODD  
(astounded)  
Oh my God!

CLOSE-UP - GOLDEN HILLS BROCHURE

The photograph in the brochure shows a lovely two-story house sitting in a tranquil setting of green, grassy hills and big, shady trees. The brochure is lowered to reveal...

EXT. HOUSE IN GOLDEN HILLS - DAY

...A house the exact same design as the photo only it is sitting on flat, cracked dry earth. The air is filled with brown dust from bulldozers. Beyond the house is the barren, endless expanse of the Mojave Desert.

Todd is standing in the street, holding the brochure, beside a middle-aged, female SALES MANAGER.

TODD  
Is that the Mojave Desert?

SALES MANAGER  
(nods)  
Uh-huh. Don't bring prospective buyers out to this end of the complex. Keep them at the front end where all the landscaping is.

TODD  
(amazed)  
And people actually pay a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to live here?

SALES MANAGER  
(a bit put off)  
This is our seventh development in Palmdale.

People come from everywhere to live here.

INT. HALF-BUILT MODEL HOME - DAY

Todd and the Sales Manager are inside a half built house. Todd is peering inside the wall.

TODD

(disbelief)

One strip of half inch fiberglass and eighth-inch dry-wall? I've never seen a house constructed of such cheap material.

S. M.

(offended)

This is California, Mr. Holman. There's no winter here, unlike Minnesota where you're from.

TODD

Michigan.

SALES MANAGER

(walking away)

What's the difference?

Todd follows after her. As they walk through the house Todd reaches up and softly touches a light fixture on the wall. It dislodges from the thin drywall and dangles from its wires. Todd tries to put it back but it won't go. He turns and finds the Sales Manager glowering at him.

Todd smiles awkwardly.

EXT. FREEWAY INTERCHANGE, 14 AND 5 - DAY

Todd merges from the 14 freeway to the 5 and finds a dead stopped traffic jam. Todd moans helplessly.

EXT. TODD'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Todd pulls up in front of his building and stops the car. He takes a deep breath, shakes his head and gets out. He is holding his jacket and large sweat circles under his arms staining his white shirt.

Sitting on the front lawn in a director's chair is a chubby Asian girl in shorts and a halter top reading a book on engineering. She is LINDA. Todd steps up to her.

TODD

Hi. I'm Todd. I just moved into number one.

Linda hardly glances up and speaks in a quiet, spiritless tone.

LINDA

Linda. Number three.

TODD

Would you mind if I used your phone? Mine hasn't been installed yet. I'll reverse the charges.

LINDA

(not looking up)

Go ahead.

TODD

(smiles)

Thanks. Nice to meet you.

Linda doesn't answer.

INT. LINDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's pretty barren: a bed, a desk and computer, a bookshelf with all technical books and a phone on top. Todd dials the phone. It rings once, then beeps and an OPERATOR comes on.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

A.T.& T. May I help you?

TODD

I'd like to reverse the charges on this call.  
My name is Todd.

OPERATOR

Thank you, Todd.

It rings.

INT. THE HOLMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Mr. and Mrs. Holman both have their coats on and are at the front door. They both stop as they hear the phone.

MRS. H

Oh shoot.

MR. H

Forget it. Let's go. We're late already.

MRS. H

Hold on.

She goes for the phone. Mr. Holman shakes his head.

MR. H

Goddamnit.

Mrs. Holman picks up the phone. The Operator speaks to her.

OPERATOR

I have a collect call from Todd, will you accept the charges?

MRS. H

(explaining)

We're just on our way out. We're late. You'll explain, right?

OPERATOR

Then you won't. Thank you.

The Operator clicks off.

INT. LINDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The Operator tells Todd.

OPERATOR

I'm sorry, they don't accept.

TODD

(totally shocked)

What?!

OPERATOR

Thank you for using A.T.& T.

The Operator clicks off. Todd stands there holding the dead receiver.

TODD  
They don't accept? My own parents?

Todd hangs up, then quickly picks up the phone and dials again.

OPERATOR  
A.T.& T. May I help you?

TODD  
I'd like to make this call collect. My name's  
Todd.

OPERATOR  
One moment.

The phone rings and rings and rings...

INT. LAURA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Laura has a hamper full of wet laundry that she's loading into the dryer. She hears the phone ringing upstairs and looks up.

LAURA  
(exasperated)  
Oh, no.

She sets down the hamper and dashes for the stairs. She bolts up the stairs two at a time.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura comes around the corner, strides across the kitchen and grabs the receiver of the wall phone. All she gets is a dial tone.

LAURA  
Hello? Hello?

INT. LINDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Todd stands there with a dead receiver in his hand, nodding his head and looking distressed. He hangs up the phone and dials again.

OPERATOR  
A.T.& T. May I help you.

Todd stupidly mouths the words as he hears them.

TODD  
This is collect. My name's Todd.

OPERATOR  
Thank you, Todd.

The phone rings...

INT. ED AND JEANINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ed is helping his incredibly pregnant wife down the stairs, a suitcase in his other hand. She is obviously in labor. The phone rings.

ED  
You wanna have the kid in the house?  
Is that it?

JEANINE  
The contractions didn't seem real.

ED  
You're two weeks overdue. How real do  
they have to be?

JEANINE  
Get that, would you?

ED  
Maybe you'd like me to wax the kitchen floor  
now, too?

JEANINE  
Just get the phone.

Ed hesitantly lets go of his wife and answers the phone at the foot of the steps. Jeanine continues to waddle across the room looking very unbalanced. Ed watches, highly unnerved.

ED  
Hello?

OPERATOR  
I have a collect call from Todd, will you  
accept the charges?

Jeanine looks like she's going to fall over.

ED

I can't.

He hangs up and dashes for his wife.

INT. LINDA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Todd stands there holding the phone, an incredulous look on his face.

OPERATOR

I'm sorry, they don't accept the charges.

TODD

I heard. Thanks.

OPERATOR

Thank you for using A.T.& T.

TODD

(stunned)

No, thank you.

Todd hangs up the phone with a dazed look. Suddenly, Todd's expression completely changes. Something is touching his ankle. He looks down and sees the head of a boa constrictor winding up his leg. Todd's terrified eyes follow the body of the snake five feet across the room where its tail is still under the bed. Todd has frozen into a pillar of salt. His mouth is open, but nothing comes out. The snake continues winding around his leg.

Linda steps into the apartment, sees the snake, steps up to it and grabs it, pulling it off Todd's leg.

LINDA

(scolding)

Oh, Rosie. Leave him alone.

She takes the snake by the neck, turns the head around to her and kisses its flickering tongue. She then turns the head around to Todd's ashen face.

LINDA

Todd, this is Rosie. She doesn't like men.

TODD

(croaking)

Right. That's very good to know. Thanks for

the use of the phone.

Todd quickly leaves Linda's apartment.

EXT. TODD'S BUILDING - NIGHT

The full moon hangs in the black sky above Todd's building. Todd's open window in the front of the building is dark. An outrageously loud motorcycle roars past, then another, then another.

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Todd lies in his bed wearing only boxer shorts. His eyes are open and his forehead is beaded with sweat. He has a slightly freaked-out expression. From the other apartments he can hear a TV set blaring, music playing, the washer and dryer running, the heavy breathing and groans of sex, as well as someone ripping loud, long farts.

A car alarm goes off, the kind that goes from honking to whooping to buzzing to snarling, then repeats and repeats, ad infinitum.

Led Zeppelin's "Kashmere" can be heard getting louder and louder and louder. Todd can see through his window a jacked-up Chevy Nova pull up in front of the building across the street. Someone gets out the car and runs inside. The music is deafening and totally distorted.

TODD

(to himself)

No, no, turn it up.

The guy in the Chevy obliges. A moment later the guy comes running out and gets in the car. They burn rubber and split.

Zeppelin diminishes until it's gone. Now it's just the sounds from the building again. Then there's the sound of a helicopter approaching. The whub, whub, whub of the rotors gets louder and louder until the chopper is directly overhead and begins to circle. The noise is overwhelming. And it goes around and around and around, then suddenly the street is brilliantly illuminated by a bright white spotlight.

Todd can't believe it.

TODD

(to himself)

What's next? A napalm strike?

He reaches over and grabs a fifth of peppermint schnapps. He takes a big slug.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BETTER BUSINESS SUPPLY - MORNING

The sidewalk in front of Better Business Supply is covered with snow and pedestrians bundled up in thick winter coats hurry by.

INT. BETTER BUSINESS SUPPLY - DAY

Ed, wearing a suit and tie, restocks the pen shelf. Ed picks up an unopened box of pens. He snaps the seal and pulls out a pen. It's an interesting, contemporary design in bright turquoise. Ed admires it.

ED  
(impressed)

Cool.

The door opens and the bell above it rings. Ed turns with a warm smile and holds up the pen.

ED

Todd...

But it's an old man.

Ed's smile fades and he lowers the pen.

ED

May I help you?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VENTURA FREEWAY - MORNING

Bumper to bumper traffic. Thousands of cars sit inert in the blazing California sun. The sun glares off all the windshields and chrome.

INT. TODD'S CAR - MORNING

Todd sits at the wheel rubbing his stinging, bloodshot eyes, wincing at the glare, then coughs hoarsely. He reaches down and picks up a box of Thrifty decongestants. He takes two pills and swallows them dry.

INT. SALES OFFICE/GOLDEN HILLS - DAY

A middle-aged MAN and WOMAN sit facing Todd at a desk.

MAN

How's the drive into L.A. from here?

TODD

(uncomfortable)

Uh, fine... Not bad... Uh, it could be worse,  
I guess.

WOMAN

How long does it take?

TODD

Twenty, uh... Half... Uh, less than an hour,  
sometimes.

This wasn't what the couple wanted to hear. They look at each other and frown. Todd shpritzes Afrin nose spray up his nose, then wipes it with a tissue.

An older HUSBAND and WIFE in their sixties now sit across from Todd.

HUSBAND

My wife loves gardening. How's the soil?

TODD

(uneasy)

Well, uh... It's pretty good. I mean, with a  
lot of irrigation you could grow any number  
of types of... cactuses.

That's not what the older couple wanted to hear, either. They look at one another unhappy.

Todd sighs and drips Murine into his stinging eyes.

Now a YOUNG HUSBAND and WIFE sits across from Todd looking very eager.

YOUNG HUSBAND

Would you say that the houses are well-  
constructed?

TODD

Oh, definitely... By southern California standards.

YOUNG HUSBAND

(suspicious)

What does that mean?

TODD

Well, it never gets very cold out here so there's no need to build a house the way they'd build it, say, back east.

YOUNG HUSBAND

So then what you're saying is that it's cheap materials, right?

TODD

(at a loss)

Uh... Not exactly.

The young husband and wife look at each other with a displeased expression.

EXT. GOLDEN HILLS - DUSK

Todd and the Sales Manager walk through the subdivision. She looks perturbed and Todd is rubbing the knotted muscles in his shoulders.

SALES MANAGER

Mr. Holman, you haven't sold one house in six weeks. I thought you were a top salesman back in Missouri?

TODD

(sighs)

I was. But this is a whole different market with completely different product.

S. M.

What do you mean? You were selling houses there and you're selling houses here.

TODD

But they're not the same. The houses I used to sell were well-constructed, made of solid materials. Some of them had stood for fifty, seventy-five or hundred years. These houses look like they'll fall down if you sneeze.

At which moment Todd sneezes. Both he and the Sales Manager turn and look at the house for a brief, expectant moment. It doesn't fall down.

SALES MANAGER

(angry)

There's absolutely nothing wrong with these houses, Mr. Holman. I expect to see a drastic improvement in your performance in the upcoming weeks.

TODD

When do I get paid?

SALES MANAGER

For what? You're on straight commission. Sell a house and you'll get paid. See you Monday. And have a nice weekend.

TODD

Thank you. You, too.

Todd gets into his car and watches the Sales Manager walk away. He reaches into his glove box and removes a pint of Jack Daniels. He closes his eyes and takes a big slug. He exhales the hot fumes, opens his eyes and sees the Sales Manager looking right at him. She frowns, shakes her head, turns and walks away.

TODD

Oh, fuck.

He turns the key and the starter revs and revs and after a long, strained minute, finally catches.

INT. TODD'S CAR - DUSK

Todd is caught in a traffic jam and winces at the glare. He coughs several times, then sneezes. He rubs his aching head.

EXT. TODD'S BUILDING - MORNING

Todd steps out of his apartment in his suit and tie looking bleary-eyed. He takes a deep breath of morning air, then coughs violently. He walks around to the front lawn and squats down before a couple of scraggily-looking plants growing in the dry soil beneath his window. Todd scrutinizes the plants and feels the yellowing leaves. He shrugs helplessly and steps over to the coiled hose. He turns on the faucet and begins watering his plants. The landlord, George, steps up behind him.

GEORGE

(pissed)

What the hell're you doing?

TODD  
(startled)  
I'm watering my plants.

George grabs the hose.

GEORGE  
We're in the middle of a Goddamn drought here, buddy. If the tenants in my building use too much water I get fined. The hose is off limits.

TODD  
But there's only a couple of plants here and I just water them every other day.

GEORGE  
Not anymore.

TODD  
Fine.

George coils up the hose, disconnects it from the spigot and takes it away.  
Todd looks down at the plants.

TODD  
It's you and me, guys. Survival of the fittest.

Todd walks away and the dying plants continue the sag.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EVERGREENS - DAY

Big fluffy flakes of snow float down from the sky and settle of the limbs of Evergreen trees.  
Our view moves over to...

EXT. HOLMAN HOUSE - DAY

Snow covers the roof and driveway. The sound of a football game on TV is heard as well as a straining electric motor from the garage door.

INT. HOLMAN HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Holman comes in from the garage wearing a big winter coat and gloves. She steps into the living room where Mr. Holman sits in an oversized easy chair watching the football game and drinking a beer. There is a big, decorated Christmas tree in the corner.

MRS. H

The garage door's snowed in, I can't get it open.

MR. H

Where do you need to go on a day like this?

MRS. H

Shopping. For food. You keep eating the stuff.

MR. H

You're right. I like food. Get more.

MRS. H

But I can't get out of the garage.

MR. H

Well I'm busy. Get Todd to do it.

MRS. H

Todd's gone, remember.

Mr. Holman's face goes slack.

MR. H

Right. I forgot.

(stands up)

I'll do it.

As he walks past his wife the two of them look into each other's eyes for a moment with concerned expressions.

MR. H

You think he's OK?

MRS. H

Remember when Roger first moved out? We didn't hear from him for at least six months.

MR. H

Yeah, but he was eighteen and went away to college where at least I knew what he was

doing part of the time. This kind of thing from  
Todd makes me nervous.

MRS. H

Todd could always take care of himself. I'm  
sure he's all right.

Mr. Holman doesn't look convinced. Mrs. Holman walks away. Mr. Holman gets his coat and gloves, but remains standing there with a furrowed brow. He looks over at the Christmas tree.

Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas" fades in.

EXT. 5 FREEWAY - DAY

It's a solid traffic jam, as usual, on the 5 Freeway. Todd's car is one of thousands inching their way along in the blinding sun.

INT. TODD'S CAR - DAY

Todd is already sweating as he sits in traffic. The car has developed a disconcerting shudder every couple of seconds. Der Bingle's voice begins to slow down like molasses are being poured down his throat. Then it stops completely. Todd ejects the tape, but it won't come out. As he angrily jabs at the eject button, suddenly all of the red lights on his dashboard come on and his car stalls.

TODD

(scared)

Oh no.

He tries to start it and it revs, but slower and slower and won't catch. Meanwhile, traffic has inched forward and the cars behind him start to honk.

EXT. TODD'S CAR ON FREEWAY - DAY

Todd gets out of his stalled car, his flashers blinking, and opens the hood. He looks at the engine but hasn't a clue what anything means. Cars pour around him like a rock in a stream. Many drivers express their dissatisfaction with the situation.

DRIVER #1

Dumb asshole!

DRIVER #2

Get the fuck off the road!

DRIVER #3

Buy a real car!

Todd's eyes go completely dead. Something important in his head has just snapped.

EXT. GOLDEN HILLS - DAY

A taxi pulls up in front of the sales office. Todd gets out holding his jacket. He's a total sweaty mess. He goes around to the driver's window with his wallet in his hand. The CABBY turns to Todd.

CABBY

Sixty-eight fifty.

An expression of shock makes its way through Todd's new deadened look, but quickly disappears. Todd pays up.

INT. SALES OFFICE - DAY

Todd enters the sales office putting on his jacket. He finds a new SALESMAN seated at the desk beside him. Although the guy is dressed well, there's a sleazy, predatory glint in his eyes. He is speaking to a middle-aged couple, MAN and WOMAN.

SALESMAN

These homes are constructed of the finest materials in the world and are assuredly the most affordable homes in the Los Angeles area.

MAN

Just how far outside L.A. are we?

SALESMAN

Fifteen minutes, and that's if the traffic's bad, which it rarely is.

WOMAN

I just love growing flowers, but the soils seems rather dry.

SALESMAN

It's not. It's irrigated constantly. You can grow anything here: flowers, shrubs, grass, rice, asparagus, anything.

(the man and woman look  
at each other very impressed)

So, what'dya say? This is the best deal you're

gonna find. And you'd better not wait 'cause these low prices won't last.

The man and woman look deep into each other's eyes, exchange unspoken words, smile and turn to the salesman.

MAN

We'll take it.

SALESMAN

Excellent. A wise decision.

Todd can't believe what he's just seen come down. The Sales Manager steps up behind him looking perturbed.

SALES MANAGER

(sarcastic)

So, Mr. Holman, you finally decided to grace us with your presence. What was it? A rerun of "Green Acres" on you just couldn't miss?

TODD

(flat tone)

Yeah. That's it. How'd you know?

SALES MANAGER

Don't joke with me. You'll regret it.

She steps up to the middle-aged couple and leads them to her office. Todd watches her go, then turns and finds the new salesman staring at him.

TODD

What're you looking at?

SALESMAN

A loser. The Sales Manager told me all about you.

TODD

(offended)

Well, hey, well fuck you and the horse you rode in on. And just by the way, you can't grow asparagus here.

SALESMAN

Who gives a shit? I made more money today

than you made in the entire quarter.

TODD

But you're a liar.

SALESMAN

I'm a salesman. I sell. You tell the truth and you don't sell. Think about it. I'm goin' to lunch. Selling two houses in one morning makes me hungry.

The salesman stands and leaves. Todd watches him go, then stares morosely down at his desk.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JO ANN FABRIC STORE - DAY

Trudy stands behind the counter waiting on a VERY OLD LADY who is obviously impatient.

VERY OLD LADY

How long do you intend to make me wait? I have a thousand things to do today.

TRUDY

Just one moment, Mrs. Webb. Laura's getting it.

(turns and yells)

Hey, Laura! Make it today!

A moment later Laura steps out of the backroom holding a bolt of cloth with a particularly ugly pattern of birds.

LAURA

Here it is. It was at the very bottom of a box.

VERY OLD LADY

I hope it's not dirty.

LAURA

It's perfectly clean, I assure you.

She hands it to Trudy who quickly rings it up. Trudy turns to put the cloth in a bag. Both she and Laura simultaneously see a male figure through the window, obscured by the frosted glass. He looks like he's loitering in front of the store. They both stop what they're

doing and look at each other—is that who I think it is? But, of course, it's not. The figure walks away. Laura looks down sadly, then heads for the backroom. Trudy watches Laura go.

VERY OLD LADY  
Don't you even say thank you anymore?

TRUDY  
I'm sorry. Thank you very much, Mrs. Webb.  
We appreciate the business.

VERY OLD LADY  
I should think you would.

Mrs. Webb leaves. Trudy turns and looks at the backroom, then shakes her head.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Todd is wearing his suit and tie and is speaking on the telephone.

TODD  
(into phone)  
Could I please get a cab at 819 North  
Alta Vista Boulevard.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)  
Going where?

TODD  
Palmdale.

DISPATCHER  
(amazed)  
Palmdale? That's an expensive run.

TODD  
You're telling me. How long?

DISPATCHER  
Within thirty minutes.

TODD  
Thanks.

He hangs up and sighs. The phone rings. Todd answers and it's his District Manager from Detroit, Mr. Crispin. We INTERCUT between Todd and...

INT. MR. CRISPIN'S OFFICE/ DETROIT - DAY

Mr. Crispin sits at a desk before a large picture window overlooking the icy Detroit River and snow-covered Windsor, Ontario.

TODD

Hello?

MR. CRISPIN

Todd? This is Michael Crispin from Detroit.

TODD

(smiles)

Hello, Mr. Crispin. How are you?

MR. CRISPIN

I'm fine, but you don't seem to be doing very well.

(opens a folder in front of him)

I just looked at the quarterly sales report and you only sold one house. Another salesman there sold fourteen. Two in one day.

TODD

(sighs deeply)

I know.

MR. CRISPIN

So what's the problem?

TODD

I don't know. It's a very different market. I guess I'm having difficulty adjusting.

MR. CRISPIN

I guess so. You know I recommended you for that job so your performance is a reflection on me. This is going to cause me a fair amount of embarrassment within the company.

TODD

I'm really sorry about that, Mr. Crispin. I'm trying my best. But these are crummy houses built in

the desert selling for a lot of money. I just feel bad trying to trick people into buying them.

MR. CRISPIN

(shocked)

Well. I can see you've got entirely the wrong attitude for the job. Nobody's tricking anybody into anything. You've totally lost your perspective. I wasn't sure I'd have to do this, but, I'm removing you from the job.

TODD

(stunned)

Removing me?

(brightens up)

That means I can come back to the Cheboygan office, right?

MR. CRISPIN

There is no Cheboygan office. We closed it.

Todd is totally shocked. He can't believe it.

TODD

What?

MR. CRISPIN

We closed it. Once you left it wasn't doing any business at all. It doesn't matter, it was never an important location.

TODD

(at a loss)

But..

(gets an idea)

If I come back you could reopen it.

MR. CRISPIN

It's not worth it. I'm sorry, Todd, but you're terminated. Don't take it personally, it's business. You understand, right?

Todd drops onto the bed with the receiver in his lap.

MR. CRISPIN (O.S.)

Todd...? Todd...? Hello...?

Todd hangs up the phone. He sits on the bed in the morning sunlight frozen, hardly breathing. Something else of importance just snapped.

The phone rings startling him. Todd picks it up.

TODD  
(flatly)  
Hello?

REPAIR MAN (O.S.)  
Todd Holman, please?

TODD  
Speaking.

REPAIR MAN  
Mr. Holman, this J.G. Auto Repair. We have your '82 Chevette.

TODD  
Yes?

REPAIR MAN  
Your car's got a lot of problems, I'm sorry to say. You need to replace the starter, the solenoid, the flywheel, the plugs, the rings, the carburetor, the alternator and the generator, not to mention you've got a cracked block. Your tires don't look very good, either.

TODD  
What do you suggest?

REPAIR MAN  
Junk it.

Todd shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath. He looks like he's in physical pain.

REPAIR MAN  
...Mr. Holman? ...Hello?

TODD  
Fine. Junk it.

REPAIR MAN

All right. We'll send you a bill for the labor.  
That's \$500, plus \$50 for towing.

TODD

Perfect.

He hangs up. He sits for a long second in his frozen position, then finally looks up at the ceiling.

TODD

(to God)

This is a test, right? This can't be for no reason, it's to see what I'm made of.

(with conviction; Todd points upward)

All right, fine! I'm made of a lot tougher stuff than you think! I can make good here or anywhere else! The location doesn't matter!

A horn honks outside. Todd looks out the window and see it's the cab.

TODD

(nodding)

Great.

He grabs his checkbook and opens it.

TODD

Five thousand and sixty-eight dollars. Plenty of money.

He exits.

INT. CAB - DAY

Todd gets into the cab. The CAB DRIVER turns to him.

CAB DRIVER

Where to?

TODD

Take me to a used car lot.

CAB DRIVER

In Palmdale?

TODD

No, around here.

CAB DRIVER

I thought you were going to Palmdale?

TODD

(intense)

I changed my mind. Let's move it.

The cab drives away.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY

A bearded CAR SALESMAN leads Todd across a used car lot. The crazy glint still shows in Todd's eyes.

CAR SALESMAN

Now, how much was it you wanted to spend?

TODD

(flatly)

About a thousand. Maybe twelve hundred

CAR SALESMAN

(frowns)

That's not much. How about this 1979 Imperial. Totally loaded, power everything, I could let you have it for, say, two thousand.

TODD

(intense)

All right, I'm gonna give you one more chance, then I'm outta here. A thousand to twelve hundred, and small. Don't try to hustle me.

The Car Salesman puts up his hands and makes a face.

CAR SALESMAN

Oooh, tough guy. What do you do? Salesman?

TODD

Yeah. Real estate.

CAR SALESMAN

That's where the real money is. Why're you buyin' such a cheap car?

TODD

None of your business. And don't hustle me.

CAR SALESMAN

(smiles)

You already said that.

(he stops in front of  
a red '81 Ford Escort)

Here's your car. '81 Escort, no frills, dependable transportation, 75,000 miles, runs like a charm.

TODD

(struck)

My girlfriend's got the same car. Newer, though.

CAR SALESMAN

(grins slightly)

Really? What a coincidence.

TODD

How much?

CAR SALESMAN

(pauses)

Fifteen hundred.

TODD

(starting to get angry)

Look, I said—

CAR SALESMAN

(sincerely; cutting him off)

—Hey, I'm sorry, but this is as close as I can come to meeting all your demands. It's small, it's reliable, it's cheap and your girlfriend's got the same car. Is she wrong? I really can't do and better and I don't think you can, either.

Todd considers all of this for a moment, then looks up.

TODD

Let me test drive it.

CAR SALESMAN

(nods)

Right. I'll go get the keys and a plate. I'll be right back. Wait here.

(he walks away grinning to himself; quietly)

Sucker.

EXT. L.A. AUTO INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

This is a small insurance office on Vermont. The sign is in English and Korean. Todd's new red Escort pulls into the parking lot and stops. He gets out of the car, but it keeps sputtering and dieseling, black smoke puffing from the tailpipe. Todd makes a move back toward the car and it stops. He turns away and it backfires loudly.

TODD

(to himself)

I can't believe it, he hustled me.

He heads inside.

INT. L.A. AUTO INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

Todd sits uncomfortably at a desk before a female, Korean INSURANCE AGENT with her hair pulled tightly back in a knot. She types into a computer whose monitor faces away from Todd.

INSURANCE AGENT

Thirty-two years old, male, living in West Hollywood, one accident when you were eighteen, no outstanding tickets.

She enters the information and shakes her head glumly. Todd feels like he's being booked for child molestation.

INSURANCE AGENT

That will be \$2800 for one year of coverage, without collision, payable in full in advance because you're not a state resident.

TODD

(aghast)

Twenty-eight hundred dollars!? Without collision? But I was paying six hundred dollars a year in Michigan with collision.

INSURANCE AGENT

This isn't Michigan, Mr. Holman.

Todd takes out his checkbook.

TODD

No kidding.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE/CHEBOYGAN - NIGHT

Laura's house is a big, old, twenties, brick house with a snow-covered gabled roof. Icicles hang from the windowsills. The bright winter moon shines in the sky.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura lies in her moonlit room in her big bed alone under many covers and quilts with her eyes wide open. Finally, she sits up and turns on the light. She looks at the digital clock on the bed stand. It's 12:47. Laura counts on her fingers.

LAURA

Eleven forty-seven, ten forty-seven, nine  
forty-seven. He should be home.

She picks up the phone and dials a long distance number. The phone rings and rings and rings...

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Todd's apartment is empty. His phone rings and rings and rings... A fist beats on the wall and the NEIGHBOR's voice is heard.

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Shut up with that Goddamn phone!

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura lets it ring a few times more, then hangs up. She looks infuriated.

LAURA

Why don't you have an answering machine?

She sits in bed feeling distressed, then turns off the light and lies back down. She stares at the ceiling with an unhappy expression.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SHAKEY'S PIZZA, WEST HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

This Shakey's Pizza looks like every other Shakey's Pizza in the country. People pick up their pizzas at the counter and eat them at long tables. At one side of the bar a bunch of men watch the basketball game on TV. Among them is Todd with a shot and a beer in front of him. There is a black guy with a goatee to his right. He is BUCK. There is a black man to his left wearing a nice suit. He is JED. All of them are pretty ripped.

BUCK

Man, Dennis Rodman is the ugliest mother-fucker in the NBA. He's so ugly his mother couldn't love him.

TODD

(defensive)

Hey! Dennis is the best defensive player in the whole league. He's got more heart than all of the fucking Lakers put together.

BUCK

I didn't say he wasn't a good player, I said he was ugly. Look at those fuckin' ears. He's a jughead.

Jed pipes up.

JED

Man, Pistons're all the knuckleheads from the whole league on one team. And nobody likes that Bill Laimbeer.

TODD

But he's a great player. All-time Piston rebound champ. And how would you like to be the only white guy out there, huh? The man's got balls.

JED

He's an asshole.

BUCK

And Isiah's a racist.

TODD

(outraged)

What? What do you mean?

BUCK

He said bad shit about Larry Bird. He's a racist. He thinks he's better than Bird 'cause Bird's white.

It's moved into a realm beyond Todd's comprehension. He's so annoyed he can't speak.

SPORTSCASTER (V.O.)

And the final score is Lakers 113, Pistons 93.

BUCK

Lose by twenty and the Lakers ain't even got Magic. Shit! The Pistons stink.

JED

Yeah, they used to be good, but now they're all washed up.

Todd shakes his head in disbelief. He downs his shot, and chases it with beer.

JED

You're in L.A. now, boy, get with the program. Become a Laker fan.

BUCK

That's right. Or the Clippers, anyway.

Todd stands and glares back at both of them with a defiant, alcohol-enhanced bravado.

TODD

I'll die first.

Todd staggers off into the night.

INT. TODD'S LITTLE KITCHEN – MORNING

Todd is dressed in his dark pants, white shirt and tie. He stands in his little kitchen overlooking the playground of the nursery school. The screams of the little kids is overwhelming. Todd squishes two decongestants out of their plastic bubbles, adds three Thrifty brand ibuprofen and washes them all down with Jack Daniels. He shakes his head, then takes a deep breath.

TODD

(to himself)

Breakfast of champions.

He takes a pot of boiling water from the gas stove and pours a cup of Ralph's brand instant coffee.

EXT. TODD'S BUILDING - MORNING

Todd sits on the low wall that lines the front walk of his building, drinks his coffee and opens the newspaper. There are a hundred kids all over the street, all screaming at the same time. Linda, his chubby Asian neighbor, walks by holding a stack of books.

TODD  
Morning.

LINDA  
Morning.

TODD  
How's your snake?

LINDA  
She's shedding. See ya.

TODD  
Bye.

She hurries past. Todd goes back to the paper. A moment later a goofy-looking kid of 24 with wet, thin blonde hair and thick glasses walks past. He is CHRIS. Todd looks up.

TODD  
Hi.

CHRIS  
Hi. Does that family with all the kids bug you?

TODD  
Family? I'm next to the nursery school. Those kids are here at seven A.M.

CHRIS  
Well, I've got a family right behind me with a baby that cries all night long.

TODD  
I've heard it, but that's not what keep me up.

CHRIS

You're lucky.

TODD

(smiles ruefully)

Yeah. Lucky.

CHRIS

Gotta get to work. See ya.

TODD

Bye.

Chris hurries off.

Todd looks back at the paper. He goes through the sections until he gets to the classifieds. He drops the rest of the paper. He takes his disposable fountain pen from his shirt pocket.

TODD

All right. Let's start at the top...

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING ON WILSHIRE & DOHENY - DAY

A big white, ten story building on Wilshire in Beverly Hills.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

A wooden office door with gold lettering that says, "Beverly Hills Realtors."

INT. OFFICE/BEVERLY HILLS REALTORS – DAY

We are looking at the sharp featured face of the OFFICE MANAGER of Beverly Hills Realtors. He wears a well-cut, fashionable suit. His hair is perfectly in place. His chin rests in his hand. Through the window behind him Wilshire Boulevard running west through Beverly Hills can be seen from ten stories up, finally disappearing into the smog. We can hear Todd's voice.

TODD (O.S.)

...I've sold easily more than a hundred houses, and leased several hundred rental properties. I'm very good with people and I think I'm a good salesman.

OFFICE MANAGER

(nods)

For what company was this?

A look of fear fills Todd's eyes.

TODD

Uh... Decade 31.

He's heard of it.

OFFICE MANAGER

For how long?

TODD

Six years.

OFFICE MANAGER

In L.A.?

TODD

No, Cheboygan, Michigan.

OFFICE MANAGER

(amused)

Cheboygan. Is that a big metropolis in Michigan?

Todd holds up his hand, palm out, and points at the tip of his middle finger.

TODD

No, it's a little town at the top of the lower peninsula.

OFFICE MANAGER

Isn't that wonderful, you can use your hand as a map. Why did you leave Decade 31?

TODD

(stuck)

Well... I was a top salesman in Michigan, then they transferred me out to Palmdale selling awful houses in the desert...

OFFICE MANAGER

(nods)

Uh-huh.

TODD

Well, I couldn't sell them. But I can sell a good house, I just have to believe in it.

OFFICE MANAGER

So you quit?

TODD

No... I was let go.

OFFICE MANAGER

(nods)

Uh-huh. Well, thank you, Mr. Holman. We'll be in touch.

Todd blew it and he knows it.

EXT. LANCE OTIS REALTY OFFICE - DAY

Lance Otis Realty is located on Highland Avenue in Hollywood in a small building.

TODD (O.S.)

...I've sold at least two hundred houses and leased several hundred rental properties...

INT. LANCE OTIS REALTY - DAY

LANCE OTIS is a middle-aged man with thin hair, a gray mustache and a soft, southern accent. Todd sits across from him.

TODD

...And I'd have to say that I'm really a good salesman.

LANCE

And now this was for which company?

TODD

(tightens up)

Cheboygan Realty. That's in Michigan.

LANCE

There's a Cheboygan in Wisconsin, too, isn't there?

TODD

(smiles)

Yes, there is. But it's with an S-H. In Michigan it's C-H.

Lance takes out a pen and poises it over a pad of paper.

LANCE

What's the address, phone number and name of your superior at Cheboygan Realty?

TODD

(stuck & panicked)

Uh... They went out of business.

LANCE

(surprised)

After all those hundreds of properties you sold and rented. How could that be?

Todd doesn't know. He's left with his mouth open.

EXT. ACME REALTY - DAY

Acme Realty is located in a run-down hovel of an office in downtown L.A. It's directly between a pawnshop and a bail bondsman. We hear the voice of the owner, LEON KARBEEKIAN.

KARBEEKIAN (O.S.)

Look, I don't give a fuck where you worked or what your qualifications are...

INT. ACME REALTY - DAY

The interior is actually worse than the exterior. Stacks of newspapers, broken toilets, lots of dust. Leon Karbekian is a fat, ugly, foul-mouthed creep smoking a big smelly cigar.

KARBEEKIAN

...You're on straight commission here. Sell or rent, you make money. Don't sell or rent and you're wastin' your own fuckin' time. My clientele is strictly spics and niggers and most of my properties are shitholes. But hey, everybody's gotta live somewhere, right? If I didn't rent to these people, who would? So, you want the job?

TODD

(hesitant)  
Uh... Yes.

KARBEKIAN  
Fine. You got it.

INT. TENAMENT APARTMENT - DAY

Todd leads a poor BLACK MAN and WOMAN through a truly horrible apartment. The plaster is cracked, yellowed and missing in big patches and dangling in others. Light fixtures hang from exposed wires, water obviously has leaked through the ceiling—it's a shithole, as promised.

The man looks at the woman and they both shrug.

BLACK MAN  
Well... I guess we'll take it.

Todd looks around like someone may be listening and sighs. He looks to heaven and waves his hand in disbelief of his own impending actions.

TODD  
Have you checked the buildings four blocks east of here on the south side of the street?

They both think, look at each other and shake their heads.

BLACK MAN  
No. Why?

TODD  
They're much better maintained at the exact same price.

BLACK MAN  
Same landlord?

TODD  
(shakes his head)  
No. That's why you should check it out. I mean, it's still not great and I'm sure there's a lot of problems, but it's not as bad as this.

BLACK MAN  
(skeptical)  
What d'you get outta this?

TODD  
A little peace of mind.

BLACK MAN  
(confiding)  
Then man, you oughta go t' work for them.

TODD  
(sighs)  
I tried. They don't need anyone.

The man shakes Todd's hand.

BLACK MAN  
Well, thanks a lot. I 'preciate it.

TODD  
(shrugs)  
Have a nice day.

INT. ACME REALTY - DAY

Leon Karbekian looks pissed off.

KARBEKIAN  
They didn't take it? What'dya mean?

TODD  
I mean, they didn't take it. They found a better place for the same money.

KARBEKIAN  
How do you know?

TODD  
They told me.

KARBEKIAN  
I don't understand. Niggers don't comparison shop.

TODD  
These did.

KARBEKIAN

And you didn't talk 'em out of it?

TODD

Why should I? If they found a better place.  
God bless 'em.

KARBEKIAN

You're the worst fuckin' salesman I ever had.  
You stink.

TODD

(angry)  
Yeah, well fuck you!

KARBEKIAN

No, fuck you! Get outta here! You're fired!

TODD

(stands)  
My pleasure.

Todd starts for the door.

KARBEKIAN

Loser! Get outta sales! You stink!

Todd leaves.

EXT. SPRING STREET - DUSK

Todd's sputtering, backfiring car drives up Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles. Our view moves upward and keeps moving...

EXT. DOWNTOWN L.A. - DUSK

...The sun is just setting. The sky is streaked with beautiful pinks and purples, backlighting the skyscrapers of downtown L.A.

EXT. THE HOLLYWOOD SIGN - DUSK

The sunset casts a soft pink glow on the giant white letters spelling "Hollywood" on the side of the mountain. The NBA musical theme which scores the TV basketball games is heard.

SPORTCASTER (V.O.)

We're here in Los Angeles, California where

it's seventy-eight degrees to bring you the  
Detroit Pistons versus the Los Angeles  
Clippers...

INT. BLIND PIG SALOON - NIGHT

We are looking at the large-screen TV in the Blind Pig Saloon in Cheboygan. Our view moves off the screen to the same long table we were at earlier and seated there are Chris and Dick. They have a pitcher of beer before them and are watching the game. They both look somewhat sullen and sip their beers.

CHRIS

Pistons aren't doin' very good.

DICK

They haven't all season, why should they  
now?

CHRIS

Yeah. It's hard to care. That's why is nice  
to have someone like Todd around. He just  
likes the Pistons. He doesn't care where they  
stand.

DICK

Yeah. It's not much fun watchin' these games  
without him. The fuckin' Pistons won't help.

CHRIS

Man, I'll bet he's livin' the good life out there in  
La-la land.

DICK

(smiles wistfully)

Yeah. Lyin' on the beach catchin' some rays.

CHRIS

Swingin' with blonde beach babes.

The both chuckle moronically and sips their beers.

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Todd sits on the one hard, wooden chair surrounded by empty beer cans and booze bottles. He hasn't shaved in a couple of days and wears only gym shorts. He is smashed

and holds a glass of scotch. He takes a sip and winces. The phone rings and he answers it.

TODD  
(lifelessly)  
Hello?

LAURA  
(excited)  
Todd?

TODD  
(flatly)  
Laura. Of all the people.

LAURA  
How are you? We haven't spoken in a long time.

Todd's eyes glaze with hurt and anger.

TODD  
Yeah, well... I got tired of calling. You never call back. And you never really wanted to talk anyway, so why bother?

LAURA  
I wanted to talk, I just couldn't think of what to say. Long distance calls make me nervous.

TODD  
I was paying.

LAURA  
Even still.

TODD  
So, do you know what you want to say now?

LAURA  
...I miss you.

TODD  
Ah. You miss me. Isn't that nice. Well it just so happens I'm past missing you. It hurt a lot, but I got over it.

LAURA

You did?

TODD

You have to, otherwise it destroys you.

LAURA

Are you drunk?

TODD

What of it?

LAURA

We'll talk another time.

TODD

(sarcastically)

Oh, sure we will. And I'll just sit next to my phone waiting for you to call. And you do the same.

LAURA

(very seriously)

Todd? What's happened to you?

TODD

I left the little town and came to the big city. I see the future and it's ugly.

LAURA

I'll call you.

TODD

Right. Give everyone my best.

LAURA

I will. Bye.

She hangs up. Todd doesn't. He speaks into the dead receiver.

TODD

See ya. So long. Maybe our next life.

He drops the receiver on the floor. He staggers out of the chair and goes to the kitchen. He comes back with a plastic liter size Coke bottle full of water and goes out the front door.

EXT. TODD'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Todd steps outside and the bright sun blinds his bloodshot, bleary eyes.

TODD

(to himself)

The L-word? For Christ sake what kind of relationship could it've been if we had to say shit like that? I was kidding myself.

Todd hears a door open near the back of the courtyard. He sees George step out of an apartment, followed by Chris with the thin blonde hair. Next comes a federal MARSHAL with a piece of paper in his hand. He escorts Chris up the walk.

MARSHAL

You understand that if you try to come back into this apartment you're trespassing and can be arrested.

CHRIS

(desperate)

But I've got nowhere to go. I've got no money.

MARSHAL

You ever hear of planning ahead?

CHRIS

But I've got a job, I just don't make enough money.

MARSHAL

Get a better job, or another job. I worked two jobs for years.

CHRIS

But what about my stuff?

GEORGE

(cuts in)

When you pay me what you owe me you can have it back. Nice and simple.

The Marshal let's go of Chris down at the sidewalk, then opens the door to his brown government car.

MARSHAL

Don't go back there without paying. You don't want me coming back here. Got it?

CHRIS

Yeah.

The Marshal drives away. Chris sits down on the step, puts his face into his hands and begins to cry.

Todd stands over his scraggily little plants and glances at Chris.

TODD

You say you've got a job?

CHRIS

Yeah. At a video store. But I only make minimum wage. After taxes that's \$150 a week. Rent's \$600. If I only didn't have to eat.

TODD

Uh... What if you move in with me?

Chris is surprised and not entirely sure what Todd means.

CHRIS

Are you gay?

TODD

No. It's just that that way we'd only have to come up with \$300 a month each.

CHRIS

That would be great. I'm not gay either.

TODD

Swell.

CHRIS

(sincerely)

Thanks. You're saving my life.

TODD

I'll get a key made. Just try to stay out of my face, OK? And you damn well better pay your half of the rent.

CHRIS

I will.

Todd sprinkles water from the Coke bottle onto the plants. They're just barely hanging on.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AM/PM MINI MART - NIGHT

Todd stands behind the counter wearing a blue and white outfit with "AM/PM" on the breast. His eyes are bloodshot and glazed. Beside him stands the owner of the store, MR. CHOI, a pissed-off Korean man.

MR. CHOI

These magazines behind the counter nobody gets to look at unless they buy 'em. Got it?

TODD

(emotionless)

Uh-huh.

MR. CHOI

Somebody asks for a hotdog, you make it. Don't let anyone make their own. Got it?

TODD

Yeah.

MR. CHOI

Most important. Don't let anyone steal anything. Stop 'em. Understand?

TODD

Yeah.

MR. CHOI

Okay. I'll see you at eight in the morning. Don't screw up, this store is my life. Understand?

TODD

I understand.

Mr. Choi takes his jacket and leaves.

Todd looks around and shrugs. This isn't so bad. He takes a Sports Illustrated Magazine from the rack, sits on a stool and flips through it.

A group of five 11 and 12 year old kids come into the store and play the video games. As soon as the games start bleeping the kids begin yelling and pushing each other. Todd looks up, but doesn't say anything.

Then a huge BIKER with long hair, a beard and a black leather jacket steps up to the counter. He points at the magazines behind Todd.

BIKER

Lemme see the Easy Rider Magazine.

TODD

(hesitant)

Uh... You can't look at those magazines, you have to buy 'em.

The Biker's eyes narrow and a sneer crosses his face.

BIKER

How'm I supposed t' know if I wanna buy it if I aint looked at it?

TODD

(confused)

I don't know. Those are the rules. I didn't make 'em.

BIKER

(leaning forward; intense)

*Lemme see the magazine, creep!*

TODD

Yes, sir.

Todd gets the Easy Rider Magazine and hands it to the Biker.

A male and female JUNKIE come stumbling in, their eyes halfway rolled up into their skulls. They zig-zag their way to the slurpee machine and proceed to make a total mess: dropping cups and straws, overflowing the slurpees and leaving the stuff running. Todd goes over to help them.

The front door opens and three ROCKER CHICKS in black leather, tight skirts, torn black stockings and army boots come into the store shrieking loudly. They go directly to the hotdogs and begin making them themselves. Todd sees this.

TODD  
(to himself)  
Oh, man.  
(to junkies)  
Excuse me.

Todd goes over to the Rocker Chicks.

TODD  
Sorry. I have to make these for you.

R.C #1  
Hey, cram it!

R.C.#2  
Yeah, we got it handled here.

TODD  
(insisting)  
No, really, let me.

R.C.#3  
Get lost!

Rocker Chick #3 throws her ketchupy hotdog on the floor, then the other two follow suit. They all shriek with laughter and run out of the store.

Todd sighs and gets down on the floor to clean up the mess. He glances up into the convex mirror in the corner and sees the kids from the video games filling their pockets with candy. Todd stands and goes over to them.

TODD  
Put that candy back, or pay for it.

KID #1  
Oh, yeah?

TODD  
Yeah.

The kid pushes Todd over another kid whose on all fours behind him. Todd falls on his back. The kids dash out of the store. Todd gets up rubbing the back of his head.

TODD

Unbelievable.

He glances over at the junkies who have the slurpee machine just pouring out onto the floor. Todd runs over and turns the thing off. He points at the overflowing cup.

TODD

You gonna buy this?

Both junkies look at the cup, then at Todd and shake their heads.

JUNKIE

It won't get green enough.

TODD

Then leave it alone. It won't get any greener.

The two junkies stumble away.

Todd goes back to the counter, finds the Biker gone and the cover of the Easy Rider Magazine crumpled and torn.

TODD

Holy shit.

Todd tries to flatten it back out. At which point a Mexican street gang of six guys enters. Right behind them is an old black HOMELESS man. The gang spreads out around the store speaking in Spanish. The Homeless man comes up to the counter.

HOMELESS

D'you sell single cigarettes?

Todd glances around the counter, then shakes his head.

TODD

It doesn't look like it.

The Homeless man takes a handful of change out of his pocket and spreads it out over the counter.

HOMELESS

How many cigarettes can I get for this?

TODD

A pack of cigarettes is \$2.35.

HOMELESS

I don't think I have that much.

(counting)

Five, ten, eleven, twelve...

Todd looks from mirror to mirror and sees that all of the gang members are stealing stuff from every aisle. The Junkies are messing with the coffeemakers and steaming coffee is streaming onto the floor near to where the hotdogs are. The Homeless man keeps counting.

HOMELESS

...Twenty-one, twenty-two...

Todd stands there feeling utterly helpless. One more of his reality lines has snapped. He's having a swirling, drowning sensation and is becoming short of breath. Everything's going around and around and around...

EXT. TODD'S APARTMENT DOOR - DAY

...The swirling stops on Todd's apartment door marked one. Todd steps up holding a brown bag with a bottle in it. He tries to open his door and it's locked.

TODD

(through door)

Chris?

There's no answer. Todd takes out his keys and unlocks the door.

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Todd opens the door and finds his apartment has been cleaned out. Everything is gone, including the sheets from the bed and the telephone. Todd's eyes are wide with shock. And then a bigger panic hits him.

TODD

Oh, no! My comic books!

He dashes to the closet. It is completely empty, no clothes, no shoes, no comic books. Snap! There's another one.

And then there's the ridiculously loud sound of a chainsaw buzzing like it's right in Todd's living room. Todd turns around with an insane, unhinged look like he's suddenly in a horror movie.

He goes to the window, opens it and sees...

EXT. TODD'S BUILDING - DAY

Mexican workers are cutting down the hedges on the front lawn with chainsaws. Other workers are tearing out the grass with hoes and yet another is ripping Todd's plants out by hand. Todd watches from the window.

TODD  
(quietly)  
What're you doing?

The MEXICAN worker whose tearing out his plants looks up at him and smiles with bad teeth.

MEXICAN  
Landlord don't want to pay gardeners no more. We put in nice bricks instead.

The swarm of workers continues to decimate the lawn. The worker beneath the window throws Todd's handful of dead, uprooted plants into the central pile of refuse. Todd is hyperventilating through a knotted face and clenched teeth. He glances up just in time to see a parking enforcement officer putting a ticket under his windshield wiper. That's it. All his lines to reality have snapped. Todd turns back inside.

The apartment starts to spin and he grabs the back of the chair for support. It won't hold him. The pain and despair are too heavy and drive him to his knees. A moan wells up inside him, like that of a half dead animal, then bursts forth. It rises in octaves until it alters into a howl, then a full-fledged scream.

There's pounding on the wall, followed by the angry voice of his neighbor.

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)  
Shut up in there, you asshole!

It's like someone shoved a red hot poker up Todd's ass. He jumps to his feet and starts pounding and kicking the wall.

TODD  
(screaming)  
*No! You shut up! I'll kick this fuckin' wall down  
and rip off your fuckin' head, you cocksucker!*

There's no response from his neighbor and Todd finally stops. He turns around and his eyes are closed. His face twitching in various spots.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - DAY & NIGHT

Todd sits in his straight-backed wooden chair, his eyes burning, a plastic half gallon bottle of generic vodka gripped tightly in his hand. Our view goes around his empty apartment awash in empty beer cans, booze bottles and Doritos bags, we pass the window and see that Todd's car is getting the boot...

...The spinning speeds up as a cacophony of sound is heard: the Jewish boys in their brass band playing "Hatikva" off key, little children screaming, a girl in another apartment chanting "Nom yo ho ren gyeh kyo" so quickly that it sounds like a swarm of bees buzzing...

...As our view passes the window it is now night. A TV is playing a sitcom with loud canned laughter, a baby is screaming, people in another apartment are having loud sex...

MALE SEX VOICE (O.S.)

(strained)

Oh, baby, yeah, do it, baby...

MALE SEX VOICE #2 (O.S.)

(low and upset)

Don't call me baby, Goddamnit!

...And someone down the way farts and farts, long ripping ones, then a helicopter hovers overhead, it's spotlight beams on illuminating the whole room. Todd lies on the bed in his wrinkled, sweat stained brown suit, empty bottles around him, his mouth open and his eyes unfocused...

...Night becomes day, dogs bark, phones ring, engines rev, little kids scream...

...Our view moves closer and closer to Todd to his bloodshot eyes, then into his pupil...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHEBOYGAN - DAY

The bright sun glistens off the surface of Lake Huron and illuminates the little town of Cheboygan.

A hunk of ice cracks loose from the shore and floats out into the lake.

Clumps of snow drop off the limbs of the trees.

Snow melts in the sun and forms puddles.

Water runs out of gutters and drain pipes.

Time lapse: buds push their way through the soil and twist their way out from the ends of branches.

INT. THE BLIND PIG SALOON - NIGHT

We see the canoe hanging from the ceiling, then our view moves down to a small table off to the side where Laura and Aly are seated, drinks on the table, a cigarette burning in the ashtray.

LAURA

(depressed & a bit drunk)

...They were saying on the news that they used to believe that the highest suicide rate was over the Christmas holidays, but they now realize it's really right now, in the spring, and they were saying that they couldn't figure out why and I suddenly got so depressed. Why? I mean, it's so obvious. It's mating season. If you're not mating then you don't know why you exist. Don't you think?

Aly looks at Laura with a pissed off expression.

ALY

(angry)

You know what? You're really an idiot.

This surprises Laura. She was expecting sympathy.

LAURA

What? Why?

ALY

Because you sent Todd away, that's why.

LAURA

I sent him away? He got a job.

ALY

Bullshit. You sent him away. And he really liked you. And now you're sitting here bitching about it's mating season and you're depressed? I'm your friend, but, honestly, fuck you!

Laura is really shocked.

LAURA

I sent him away? I was just being careful.

ALY

I should've stolen him away from you when I had the chance. And there were a few. And anytime I mentioned your name he would just look hurt.

Laura looks like she's going to cry.

LAURA

Really? I didn't mean it. It's just that I was already married—

ALY

—For a year, when you were twenty-two.

LAURA

Right. And it didn't work out.

ALY

But that's not fair. He didn't do that, someone else did. You're holding things against him that he didn't do.

LAURA

(sighs)

You're right.

ALY

Are you any happier now that he's gone?

LAURA

What?

ALY

Are you happier with him or without him?

LAURA

That's exactly how he put it.

ALY

Well? Isn't that the point?

LAURA

I guess it is. I'm happier with him. No question about it.

ALY

Then you're an idiot.

LAURA

(realizing)

Yes, I am.

ALY

When was the last time you heard from him?

LAURA

Not for a while. And the last time we talked he was as cold as I've ever heard him. It was like it wasn't him. He was mean.

ALY

Congratulations. You may have lost him forever.

LAURA

What have I done?

#### INT. TODD'S APARTMENT - DAY

The shades are pulled down so it's kind of dark inside. Someone's pounding at the door, followed by muffled voices. A key turns in the lock and the door opens letting in bright sunlight. A beam of light widens across Todd who is sitting on the floor wrapped in his dirty, yellow blanket. He has a beard and his eyes are bloodshot and squinting from the light. Two silhouettes stand in the doorway. They step inside. It is George and the Marshal who holds a piece of paper in his hand.

MARSHAL

Todd Holman?

TODD

(croaks)

Huh?

MARSHAL

I have an eviction notice here issued by Judge

O'Keefe in the county of Los Angeles. If you do not vacate these premises immediately of your own accord, I am empowered to evict you forcibly. Will you leave?

Todd slowly rises to his feet clutching the blanket, several beer cans clatter to the floor. He is wearing his wrinkled brown suit.

MARSHAL

If you return to these premises you will be trespassing and libel to arrest, a fine and possibly imprisonment. Do you understand?

Todd walks past them directly out the door.

EXT. TODD'S EX-APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The Marshall accompanies Todd to the edge of the property at the sidewalk. The front of the building is now completely landscaped in bricks, not a hint of foliage anywhere. A tow truck has just finished hooking up to the front of Todd's car, then tows it away. Todd doesn't even blink. The Marshall looks at Todd and shakes his head sadly. He gets into his car and drives away. Todd sits down on the curb, the yellow blanket around his shoulders. He watches as George leads two Mexican workmen into the apartment.

A group of five, ten-year old Jewish boys with yamulkas walk past on the sidewalk holding a basketball. They all look at Todd, then keep talking and continue past.

The Mexican workers come out of the apartment carrying loaded trash bags which they toss on the curb beside Todd.

George returns leading a prospective TENANT, a twenty-five year old boy with dark hair holding a guitar case.

GEORGE

It's a lovely area, central to everything. This is a nice, quiet street and the apartment, if I do say so myself, is very fairly priced at \$650 a month.

The prospective tenant simply glances inside then turns to George.

TENANT

I'll take it.

Todd rises to his feet. He pulls the yellow blanket tightly around his shoulders and walks slowly away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE - DAY

The leaves on the trees around Laura's old house are all budding and green. We can hear the sound of a phone ringing from within the receiver.

INT. LAURA'S HOUSE - DAY

Laura stands in the living room with the phone to her ear. It finally connects with a pre-recorded OPERATOR's voice.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

I'm sorry, the number you have dialed, 9-3-1-0-8-2-5, has been disconnected. No new number is available. 9-3-1-0-8-2-5 has been dis—

Laura hangs up with a distraught expression. She thinks for a second, then pick up the phone and redials. She gets a live, INFORMATION OPERATOR.

INFO OP (O.S.)

What city, please?

LAURA

Hollywood.

INFO OP

Yes.

LAURA

May I please have the number of Decade 31 Realty? The main office.

INFO OP

Thank you.

(she is connected to a recording)

The number is ...area code 2-1-3, 4-6-5-9-0-0-0...

Laura hangs up and redials. A DECADE 31 OPERATOR answers.

DECADE 31 OP (O.S.)

Decade 31 Realty, may I help you?

LAURA

I'd like to speak to Todd Holman, please. He's

a salesman.

DECADE 31 OP

I'll connect you with the sales department.

The phone clicks, then rings and is answered by a salesman named JOHN BORASKI.

JOHN

Sales, John Boraski speaking.

LAURA

Hi, I'm looking for Todd Holman. He's a salesman there.

JOHN

(unsure)

Todd Holman? Hold on.

(he sets the phone down and  
we can hear him call out)

Anybody know a Todd Holman? I got a lady that says he works here.

VOICE

He used to be up at Golden Hills. He got shit-canned in January, if I'm not mistaken.

Laura is shocked.

JOHN

Say it louder, why don'tcha.

(to Laura)

I'm sorry, Ma'am, Todd Holman is no longer employed here.

LAURA

(quietly)

Thank you.

She hangs up. She stands there looking disturbed.

LAURA

(to herself)

That's three months.

Laura goes to the closet and puts on her coat.

EXT. HOLMAN'S BACKYARD - DAY

Mr. and Mrs. Holman are busy as bees in they're backyard ripping out dead plants, tilling the soil and replanting.

Laura walks up frowning. Mr. and Mrs. Holman get the vibes immediately and stop what they're doing.

LAURA

Have you spoken with Todd recently?

Mr. and Mrs. Holman look at each other and both shake their heads.

MRS. H

No. Not for quite a while.

LAURA

How long?

MRS. H

(figuring)

Uh... Maybe two months. Why?

MR. H

Yeah, why?

LAURA

Well, I just called his number and its been disconnected.

(Mr. and Mrs. Holman

both nod; very concerned)

So I called Decade 31 in L.A. and he hasn't worked there since January.

Now Mr. and Mrs. Holman look as disturbed as Laura.

MR. H

So then what did you do?

LAURA

I came here.

MR. H

(nods)

Right.

MRS. H

Well, who can we call? What can we do?

LAURA

Maybe he left a forwarding address with his landlord. He hasn't gotten a new phone 'cause it didn't give a new number on the message, just that it's disconnected.

MR. H

We've got his address, or his old address, we can talk to the landlord.

LAURA

Right.

There's a beat as they all think.

LAURA

I'm gonna go there.

MR. H.

Me, too.

(turns to his wife)

Why don't you stay, these flights are gonna be really expensive since we're booking them so late.

MRS. H

Okay. I'll call the airlines.

The all turn and walk rapidly toward the house.

LAURA

I'll pay for my own flight.

MR. H

Oh no you won't. And I don't want to hear anymore about it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT

At the corner of Hollywood Blvd. and Orange St. is The Chinese Theater with its flashing lights and loads of tourists clogging the forecourt. Todd comes around the corner looking

a sight: he's long unshaven, his hair is messed up and dirty, his clothes are filthy and his eyes are glazed, bloodshot and unfocused. He's drinking a Miller Tall-Boy from the can. A black and white L.A. police cruiser pulls up beside him and keeps pace. The COP speaks to him through the open window.

COP

Hey, you!

Todd just keeps walking, totally oblivious. The Cop takes the portable spotlight and shines it in Todd's face. For a second Todd starts blinking, unsure of what's so bright. Finally, it gets his attention. He stops and turns.

COP

Yeah, you.

(the Cop gets out of the  
car and steps up to Todd)

No drinkin' in the street. It's gotta be in a  
bag.

The Cop takes Todd's beer and pours it into the gutter. Todd watches entirely unconcerned. The Cop sets the empty can on the curb.

COP

You got anything to say?

TODD

(flatly)

That's littering.

The Cop looks Todd straight in the face and pokes him squarely in the chest.

COP

You makin' trouble?

(Todd shakes his head)

I didn't think so.

The Cop gets back in the car and drives away.

Todd goes over to the can, puts his foot on top and crushes it. He puts the crushed can in his pocket. He looks around, then steps up to a garbage can and digs around. He comes up with a McDonald's bag. He empties it out, reaches into his other pocket and takes out a pint of scotch. He puts the scotch in the bag, takes a sip and walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAVERSE CITY AIRPORT - NIGHT

A small, Northwest Airlines 20-seat prop plane revs it's rotors. It begins taxiing down the runway.

INT. NORTHWEST AIRLINES PLANE - NIGHT

Laura sits at the window looking out, Mr. Holman is beside her. As they build speed and a lot of vibration, Laura turns to Mr. Holman smiling weakly.

LAURA

I've never been up in a plane before.

MR. H

(surprised)

Really? How'd you manage that in this day and age?

LAURA

I just never went anywhere.

The plane takes off. Laura's eyes widen and she gulps.

LAURA

It's kind of like a big elevator.

MR. H

Right.

(he looks away and sighs)

You know, I've always expected something like this from Todd.

LAURA

(confounded)

You have? Why?

MR. H

Well, he never got into any trouble at all. His older brother, Roger, was always in trouble. I think as a response Todd never did anything wrong. And he was always smiling and in a good mood. It's always made me a little nervous, like he was just storing everything up, waiting to blow.

LAURA

(nods)

I know what you mean.

MR. H

Todd's never had any worries, or vices, or bad habits. It's unnatural.

LAURA

He drinks.

MR. H

(astonished)

What? What do you mean?

LAURA

I mean, he drinks. Alcohol.

MR. H

(defensive)

Well, so do I.

LAURA

So do I. But we drink out in the open. Todd hides it. And he'd drink in the morning.

MR. H

How do you know?

LAURA

When I'd kiss him. He thought he was hiding it with mints. He also sleeps very badly. He gets up all night long. It's the alcohol.

Mr. Holman is really shocked by this information.

MR. H

For how long?

LAURA

At least since we started going out. That was almost two years ago.

MR. H

I had no idea. Did you say something to him?

LAURA

(shakes her head)

No.

MR. H

Why not?

LAURA

I didn't think it was my business.

MR. H

(seriously)

Whose business was it?

Laura turns and looks back out the window.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALLEY (COSMO ST.) - NIGHT

Cosmo St. is a dark, thin alley-like street lined with garbage dumpsters that runs one block between Hollywood Blvd. and Selma Ave. It is cold and raining. Between two dumpsters sits a large, cardboard, washing machine box covered with garbage bags. Beside it sits a stuffed shopping cart.

INT. WASHING MACHINE BOX - NIGHT

Inside the box lies Todd, curled up in his yellow blanket, asleep and shaking. He is having a nightmare and mumbling to himself.

TODD

(painfully)

Uh...no...no...no, please. Dish it off to Dumars,  
don't take the shot... Oh no! You missed again...  
It'll never go in... Never, never, never...

Suddenly, the top of the box is ripped open and dirty hands reach in and grab Todd. He gasps as he is jolted awake and dragged out of the box. He clutches his blanket. The perpetrators are two, filthy, bearded BUMS.

BUM #1

What the hell you doin' on Cosmo, ya bum?

BUM #2

Yeah, no bums allowed! Lowers the property values.

They push Todd around, then punch him a several times. Todd falls to the wet pavement with a bloody nose. They pounce on him and rip through his pockets. They find a few dollars and some change, a pint bottle of scotch and Todd's disposable fountain pen. Bum #2 opens the cap and ink drips out. He sneers and whips the pen across the alley.

BUM #2

It leaks.

They stand Todd up and kick him in the ass. Todd stumbles, then trudges away up the alley, his faced smeared with blood. He wipes his face with his blanket.

EXT. TODD'S EX-APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A gray Buick LeMans with a Thrifty Car Rental bumper sticker pulls up in front of Todd's old building. Laura and Mr. Holman get out of the car. As they approach they check the place out.

MR. H

Not a bad place.

They step up to the door of apartment one and knock. Laura has a hopeful expression. The door is answered by dark-haired fellow wearing only gym shorts. He is the TENANT (formerly the PROSPECTIVE TENANT). The apartment behind him is now full of books.

TENANT

(blinking)

Yes?

LAURA

We're looking for Todd Holman.

TENANT

(holds up his finger)

Hold on.

He disappears into the apartment. Laura and Mr. Holman look at each other hopefully. The Tenant returns a moment later with about ten envelopes in his hand. He hands them to Laura.

TENANT

Here. I threw away all the junk mail, the rest looks like bills.

Mr. Holman and Laura look at the envelopes and they're all addressed to Todd Holman. Three from the Gas Company, three from Pacific Bell, three from the DWP.

LAURA  
(pointlessly)  
So then I guess you haven't seen him in a  
while, right?

TENANT  
Well, I saw him the day he was evicted.

That word doesn't strike Laura or Mr. Holman well.

MR. H  
Evicted?

TENANT  
Yeah. By the Marshall.

LAURA  
How'd he look?

TENANT  
(thinks)  
Well... He didn't look like the happiest guy  
in town.

MR. H  
Do you know where the police station is?

The Tenant points to his right.

TENANT  
The Hollywood police station is on Wilcox  
and DeLongpre.

Laura and Mr. Holman both look totally blank.

MR H  
Is that far?

TENANT  
Uh-uh. I'll show you, I have a Thomas Guide.

CLOSE-UP - PHOTO OF TODD

This is a pocket-sized photograph in a wallet of a smiling, happy Todd.

INT. HOLLYWOOD POLICE STATION - DAY

Laura and Mr. Holman sit in front of a desk where a DETECTIVE is filling out a form on his keyboard.

DETECTIVE

How recent is that picture.

LAURA

Two years. That's just what he looks like.

DETECTIVE

And what hotel are you staying at?

Mr. Holman reaches into his pocket and removes a hotel key. On the plastic tag it reads...

MR. H

The Park Plaza.

The Detective looks at the key and types in the information.

DETECTIVE

All right. And we've got your numbers in Michigan. If we find him and you've left L.A. we'll call you there.

MR. H

(annoyed)

You're acting like you don't think you're gonna find him very soon.

DETECTIVE

We probably won't. People come from all over the world to drop out of sight here. It happens everyday of the week. We've got homeless people clogging the streets. Personally, I think it's the biggest problem we have. Let me get this done and I'll get it into the system. And that's it. You can go.

Laura and Mr. Holman stand and shrug hopelessly.

LAURA

Thank you.

MR. H

Yeah, thanks.

DETECTIVE  
(looks up)  
Ya know, you could try looking for him yourself.  
You'd recognize him a lot quicker than us.

Laura and Mr. Holman look at each other. A possibility.

LAURA  
Really? How?

The Detective reaches into his drawer and takes out a map of Hollywood.

DETECTIVE  
Leave your car here and walk up to, say,  
Santa Monica Boulevard...

EXT. WILCOX AT SANTA MONICA BLVD. - DAY

Laura and Mr. Holman step up to the corner of Wilcox and Santa Monica Blvd., look at each other, shrug and head off in different directions, Laura heading west, Mr. Holman heading east. They both have pictures of Todd in their hands.

DETECTIVE (V.O.)  
...Both of you head in different directions looking  
everywhere and asking everyone...

EXT. SANTA MONICA BLVD. AT BRONSON ST. - DAY

Mr. Holman stops and shows the picture to a black, homeless guy on a bus-stop bench. The guy shakes his head.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BLVD. AT HIGHLAND AVE. - DAY

Laura is in front of a doughnut shop on the corner of Santa Monica and Highland speaking to a group of six black and Latino guys and showing the picture. They all shake their heads.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BLVD. AT WESTERN AVE. - DAY

Mr. Holman gets to the busy corner of Santa Monica and Western and asks everybody around, which is a lot of black and Latino people. One and all either don't stop or shake their heads.

Mr. Holman walks north on Western, past crummy-looking furniture stores and pawn shops, then turns left on Lexington.

DETECTIVE (V.O.)  
When you get to Western, move one block  
north and walk back...

EXT. LABREA AND LEXINGTON AVE. - DAY

Laura turns off of LaBrea onto the side street of Lexington. There are few people on this street and Laura walks fast. The sweater she's wearing is starting to suffocate her.

DETECTIVE (V.O.)  
...When you get to LaBrea, move one block  
north and head back. You'll meet up in the  
middle. At Franklin you'll hit the hills and have  
to stop. You can cover this whole area in a  
day if you start early. You do it thoroughly for  
a few days and you'll have a good idea whether  
he's here or not. And make sure to wear  
sneakers.

EXT. LEXINGTON AT SEWARD ST. - DAY

Laura and Mr. Holman meet up in front of the costume shop on the corner of Lexington and Seward. They both shake their heads. They walk a block north, then each head back in the direction that they just came from.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN (TIME LAPSE) - DAWN

We are looking east along the Hollywood sign with Griffith Park Observatory in front of us. The sun rises behind the mountains. Our view moves down to the streets of Hollywood.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD. AT CAHUENGA - MORNING

People wait for the bus, panhandlers ask for money, people step up to the display of magazines at the newsstand. Our view moves up Cahuenga Ave., past the newsstand, past the Tandoori Indian restaurant, past the nameless, shabby door fronts and stops at one deep door front that is filled with two feet of garbage.

The garbage pile begins to move, then someone sits up from beneath all the refuse. It's Todd clutching his blanket around his shoulders, dried blood smeared around his nose, his teeth chattering. He blinks his eyes at the morning sun, then sees a pedestrian walking past.

TODD  
(hoarsely)  
Spare some change?

The pedestrian doesn't stop.

INT. PIZZA DELI - DAY

Mr. Holman and Laura sit at a white plastic table dismally eating slices of pizza on paper plates at the Pizza Deli on Hollywood and Cahuenga. The restuarant has a white, sanitary, hospital feel to it, although it's filled with Hollywood nutballs.

LAURA  
This isn't working.

MR. H  
This whole city isn't working. This is the ugliest big city I've ever seen. Pittsburgh's like Paris compared to this place.

LAURA  
And if we can't find him how can we expect the police to ever find him?

MR. H  
I don't know.  
(stands)  
Let's keep trying.

LAURA  
(stands and sighs)  
Right.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CINERAMA DOME - DUSK

There is a line forming around the Cinerama Dome for the first evening show. In the foreground across the street, Laura and Mr. Holman step up to each other. They both frown and shake their heads. Without a word they've now given up. They walk west up Sunset Blvd.

LAURA  
(flatly; blinking)  
The air here is terrible. My eyes sting and

my throat hurts.

MR. H

Mine, too. I mean, the air is brown, for God's sake.

They arrive at the corner of Sunset and Wilcox. Laura points to her left, up Wilcox.

LAURA

The police station's this way.

Mr. Holman points to the right at the Wilcox Liquor store.

MR. H

Let's get a can of pop.

They cross Wilcox at the light.

INT. WILCOX LIQUOR STORE - DUSK

Laura and Mr. Holman enter the little liquor store. Behind the counter sits a middle-aged Korean CLERK. The small store is separated down the center by one aisle of food products. Laura and Mr. Holman go to the cooler in back and get cans of soda. At the counter Mr. Holman instinctively pulls out the photo of Todd and shows it to the Korean Clerk.

MR. H

Have you seen this guy?

CLERK

(exasperated)

You already ask me twice. No, I never seen him.

MR. H

Okay, okay. How much?

CLERK

(rings it up)

Two dollar fifteen cent.

MR. H

(shocked)

A dollar for a can of pop?

CLERK

Plus fifteen cent tax.

Mr. Holman pulls out three ones. The Korean Clerk makes change, then loudly snaps open a paper bag. He puts the two cans in the bag. Mr. Holman wearily removes the cans from the bag, hands one can to Laura and they leave.

A moment later Todd steps around the center aisle holding a Miller Tall-Boy and a package of bologna. He sets the items on the counter, then reaches into all his pockets and pulls out change. The Clerk quickly counts the money, then looks up at Todd.

CLERK

You short again.

Todd pushes away the package of bologna. The Clerk pushes it back.

CLERK

You take it, just don't come back here.  
Understand?

Todd nods, takes his stuff and leaves.

EXT. WILCOX LIQUOR STORE - DUSK

Todd steps outside, reaches down to the ground and picks up his ragged, filthy blanket. He cracks the beer, takes a big slug, then walks south up Wilcox mumbling to himself.

EXT. CORNER OF WILCOX AND SUNSET - DUSK

Todd walks up to the corner of Wilcox and Sunset and waits for the light to change. The store directly on the corner is a Good Time Ticket Service with neon signs in the window reading in various colors: "Kings, Raiders, Rams, Angels, Dodgers, Lakers, Clippers." The colorful neon catches Todds eye and he turns and looks. His brow furrows as an important realization occurs to him.

TODD

(loud)

I've got it. I'll just become a Lakers fan!  
That's it!

Mr. Holman and Laura, standing and waiting for the light, both recognize the voice at the same time. They turn and look right at Todd, but aren't quite sure it's him he's such a mess.

LAURA

Todd?

MR. H

Is that you?

TODD

(smiles)

Hey, wait a minute. I know you guys. What're you doing here? Is this some kind of joke?

Todd looks around suspiciously. Laura and Mr. Holman both start to laugh, grab hold of Todd and hug him. Over Todd's shoulders both their faces can be seen smiling, then both simultaneously wince at the strong aroma. They each take an arm and lead Todd across the street. Tears run down Laura's smiling face.

MR. H

Come on, big guy. Let's get you a bath.

Todd goes along, his head wobbling and his eyes glazed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NORTHWEST AIRLINES JET - NIGHT

Todd's wearing some of his Dad's oversized clothes and sits in the seat on the plane between Laura and his Father. They both keep glancing at him with perturbed expressions. Todd is completely out of it. It's like he's had a lobotomy. Mr. Holman and Laura look at each other, neither knowing what to do.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHEBOYGAN - DAY

It's summer in Cheboygan. The trees are thick with leaves, motorboats pulls water-skiers on the lake, kids play on the beach.

EXT. HOLMAN HOUSE – DAY

Mr. Holman drives a riding lawn mower across the large green lawn. His face is caught in a deep frown.

INT. HOLMAN HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Holman walks up the hallway wearing a straw sun hat and carrying a pair of work gloves. She stops at a closed bedroom door. She brings her hand to the knob, then stops. She looks very upset. She speaks to the door.

MRS. H

Todd?

(no answer)

Todd...?

TODD  
(through the door)

Huh?

MRS. H  
You want to come help your Dad and me  
in the yard?

(no answer)

Todd...?

TODD  
Uh-uh.

MRS. H  
(starting to cry)  
Okay.

She wipes her eyes with her knuckle and walks away.

#### INT. TODD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Todd's bedroom was last decorated during high school. There is a poster of Bob Lanier dribbling a basketball wearing a blue, red and white Pistons uniform. Todd sits on the bed wearing a T-shirt and jeans with no shoes staring blankly out the window. He is clean now, but still has a number of scabs on his face and arms. The sound of his Dad on the lawn mower can be heard approaching then receding.

#### EXT. HOLMAN HOUSE - DAY

An old, beat-up, blue Imperial pulls into the Holman's driveway. Mr. and Mrs. Holman both stop what they're doing and look. Chris and Dick get out of the car. They wave their hands as they walk across the lawn.

DICK  
Hey, Mr. Holman.

CHRIS  
Mrs. Holman. Is Todd here?

MRS. H  
Yeah. He's inside. In his room. Go on in.

CHRIS

Thanks.

DICK

How is he?

Mr. and Mrs. Holman don't know how to answer.

MR. H

Go talk to him. See if you can't get him to say something.

Chris and Dick both nod and head inside. Mr. and Mrs. Holman turn back to what they were doing with pained expressions.

INT. TODD'S BEDROOM - DAY

There is a knock at the door, but Todd doesn't look up or answer. The door opens and Chris and Dick enter grinning.

DICK

(happily)

Hey, man. How's it goin'?

CHRIS

Yeah, what's up?

Todd turns slowly toward them. He looks like he might say something, but doesn't. The wind is quickly knocked out of Chris and Dick's sails.

DICK

Uh, Todd. You know the Pistons made the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Todd shows no sign of response.

CHRIS

Yeah. The first game's tonight. We're all gonna watch it down at the Blind Pig. Wanna go?

Todd turns back toward the window.

TODD

Uh-uh.

DICK

This is gonna be great, man. You can't miss it.

Todd could care less. Chris and Dick look defeated.

CHRIS

Well, if, you change your mind it's at 7:30.  
I know you're not drinkin' anymore, but you  
can have a coke or something.

Dick gives Chris a dirty look.

DICK

We're gonna split, OK?  
(remembers something)  
Oh, ya know, you oughta check out the new  
Batman, it's really supreme. I'll bring it by for  
you.

Todd turns and look at them with a really ugly expression.

TODD

All my comics got ripped off.

DICK

(shocked)  
Really? That sucks. You had some really  
cool, old ones, too, didn't you?

Todd looks back out the window.

TODD

(flatly)  
Fantastic Four, number one.

DICK

Bummer. I'm sorry to hear that.

CHRIS

Yeah. Me, too, man.

They all go silent. Chris and Dick look at each other and make faces of helplessness.

DICK

OK, then, we're gonna split.

CHRIS

Yeah. See you tonight, maybe.

Todd doesn't say anything or turn around. Chris and Dick leave and shut the door behind them.

EXT. HOLMAN HOUSE - DAY

Chris and Dick come walking out. Mr. and Mrs. Holman step up to them looking a tiny bit hopeful.

MR. H

Did he say anything?

DICK

Not much. He said his comic books got ripped off.

MR. H

Really? Jesus, he loved those silly things.

DICK

I know. I'll see ya.

CHRIS

Bye.

They get in their car and back out of the driveway. Mr. and Mrs. Holman don't move.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOLMAN HOUSE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At the dinner table sits Mr. Holman, Mrs. Holman, Laura and Todd. No one speaks. Todd stares down into his plate, not eating. They all glance at Todd then look away. Nobody's got much of an appetite.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOLMAN HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A cute, fat, six-month old baby crawls on the carpet in the living room. Ed sits on the floor with the baby. He glances at Todd who sits in the big easy chair staring at the floor. Ed turns and looks at Jeanine who stands in the doorway with Mr. and Mrs. Holman. Everybody looks uncomfortable.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOLMAN HOUSE/BACKYARD - DAY

Todd sits by himself on a lawn chair staring blankly into space. Laura comes walking around the side lawn and crosses the backyard to Todd. She is smiling.

LAURA  
(brightly)  
Hi, Todd. How are you?

Todd slowly looks up at her, then looks away without speaking.

LAURA  
(still chipper)  
Beautiful day, huh?  
(Todd still doesn't answer)  
What'dya say we go for a walk, huh?  
(Todd says nothing)  
It'll do you good. Stretch your legs.

Todd doesn't move a muscle. Laura takes hold of Todd's arm and hoists him out of the chair.

LAURA  
Come on, lazybones. We're goin' for a walk,  
like it or not.

Laura keeps hold of Todd's arm and leads him across the yard. He walks in a lethargic manner with his head down.

EXT. WOODSY STREET - DAY

Laura and Todd walk up very wooded street, the sun beams through the leaves dappling the ground in moving patterns.

LAURA  
It's nice to get out and move a little, huh?

Todd doesn't answer, but his head is up and he's breathing deeply. They turn off the paved street onto a dirt road.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

As they walk up a wooded dirt road the sound of the freeway can be heard in the distance. Todd's head is moving around as he looks from one side of the road to the other.

EXT. VACANT LOT - DAY

They arrive at Todd's vacant lot. A good portion of the deadness has vanished from his eyes.

TODD  
(mumbles)  
This is a good location.

LAURA  
(smiles)  
So you've said.

As they get to the hill Todd furrows his brow. Something's different. He looks all around.

TODD  
The sign's gone.

LAURA  
Which sign is that?

TODD  
The for sale sign.

LAURA  
Maybe it fell down.

Todd looks around.

TODD  
I don't see it.

LAURA  
(shrugs)  
Or maybe somebody bought it.

TODD  
Buy it? Why?

LAURA  
It's a good location, you said so yourself.

TODD  
(sourly)  
Yeah, but no one else ever thought so.

Nobody would buy it.

LAURA

I did.

TODD

(confused)

What? Why?

LAURA

For you.

Todd's eyes widen in wonder.

TODD

For me? But how? You couldn't have possibly had enough money.

LAURA

I didn't. I put up what I had and borrowed the rest.

TODD

(concerned)

You put up your family's house?

(Laura nods)

But that's all you've got in the world. What if you lose it? Then what have you got?

Laura looks into Todd's eyes.

LAURA

I've got you.

Todd's feels light headed. Something hits him.

TODD

But, but... Even still you couldn't have had enough money. The last time I checked they wanted a quarter of a million dollars. You're family's house isn't worth that much. I don't understand.

Laura grins and takes Todd's hand. She leads Todd up the dirt road. As they come around the corner they see a car parked on the side of the road. Then another, then

another and another. A whole line of them. Todd looks confused. Laura watches his face with devious glee.

As they get past all of the cars they see a group of people seated in a clearing in the woods having a picnic. As they get closer Todd sees that he knows everyone: there's his Mom and Dad, Ed, Jeanine and the baby, Chris and Dick, Eileen, Aly, Sherry, Mrs. Gilhouley, Stan and Kelly Uplinger, Trudy and several others as well.

Todd looks very confused as Laura, a big grin on her face, leads him over. Todd is hailed with a chorus of hearty "Hi, Todds" and "How ya doin's." Everyone lifts paper cups toward him.

EVERYONE

Here's to your new business, Todd. Best of luck. Congratulations.

Laura puts her arm around him.

LAURA

This is where the rest of the money came from, Todd. From all your friends.

Todd's mouth opens, but he can't speak he's so choked up. Laura sits Todd down. Ed hands him a paper cup and fills it with Vernors ginger ale. Laura looks around at everybody's grinning faces, then turns to Todd.

LAURA

Between us we were able to buy the land and secure another three hundred thousand in financing. It's not enough for the whole thing, but it's a start.

Tears are streaming down Todd's face. He doesn't know what to say.

LAURA

What're you gonna do, Todd?

EVERYBODY

Yeah. What're your plans?

TODD

(gulps)

Well... We could possibly start with a couple of houses. Big ones. Over there near the lake.

(he points)

I used to get calls all the time for big new houses near the lake that just weren't here.

LAURA

Yeah?

Everyone is smiling and listening intently.

TODD

We could probably build four of them, then turn around and sell them for \$150,00 each, which is a fair price for a big house. That's six hundred thousand dollars. Then we refinance the land and start to build the industrial park, a building at a time.

CHRIS

Where?

Todd stands.

TODD

Here, I'll show you.

Todd begins to walk back toward the hill and everyone follows him, grinning and smiling. Todd uses his hands to indicate where things will go.

TODD

We'll keep all the trees 'cause there's more than enough open areas to build on. That's the new trend in industrial parks, anyway. Bury 'em in the woods. We'll start with the businesses near the freeway which will attract people to come in from at least Petosky and Rogers City...

(the pitch of his voice rises as he gets excited)

...Then we'll put a subdivision over there. Nice, well-built, medium-priced houses for the new residents working at the industrial park to live in...

(Todd start up over the hill)

Then...

When Todd reaches the top of the hill he is wearing a suit, tie and a construction hard hat and is leading a group of workmen. As the workmen go past they reveal a sign that reads, "This site developed by Holman & Company Realty."

Todd stands on the top of hill, his hands on his hips, a satisfied look on his face. Laura steps up beside him. He puts his arm around her and pulls her close. Laura smiles and snuggles against him. Todd grins happily.

"THE END"

FADE OUT: