

COWBOY

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FARM - DAY

Wind blows against an old, crumbling farmhouse, its windows shattered, now just shards of grimy glass.

A torn screen door SMACKS against the door frame.

A sun-bleached barn, exhausted, leans against a wide blue sky.

Up a dirt road on a hill overlooking the farm, PAUL HUBER, late forties, leans against his white BMW. He is tall, but his once athletic build has softened.

Paul watches as a bulldozer RUMBLES toward the farmhouse.

The sound of SPLINTERING wood and SHATTERING glass echoes in the distance as Paul climbs into his car and slams the door.

EXT. MANHATTAN - NIGHT

A taxi door slams shut. Looking out the window is JACOB HAUN, 18, with a New York Jets cap pulled down over a beige cloth mask that covers his face.

Reflected in the window is LAUREN HAUN, Jacob's mother, pretty, but disheveled, her eyes filled with tears. Behind her, furniture is piled on the dark sidewalk.

She reaches out, placing her hand on the window as the taxi pulls away.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Jacob peers out the eyeholes of his mask as the cab drives by Greek statues lit by street lights in Atlas Park, Queens: Athena holding out her hand, Sophocles holding a mask.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - NIGHT

At the end of a long corridor, Jacob still in his mask, all alone, struggles with his suitcases.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Jacob looks out the eyeholes of his mask at the people around him, asleep in the darkened plane.

INT. BAGGAGE CLAIM, SPOKANE AIRPORT - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, stands close to a pillar, avoiding the crowd. People glance over at him, whispering to each other.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, sits on a bench by his luggage all alone. A Native American man, the DRIVER, leans against a blue van, texting on his phone. After a beat-

DRIVER
Hey. Need a ride?

INT. VAN - DAY

The van pushes through barren countryside.

DRIVER
You going to the university then?

Jacob, in his mask, sits in the back seat, silent. The driver, perplexed, keeps looking at Jacob in the rear view mirror. A beat, and then-

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Yeah. I know a guy, chain smoker.
Worked with propane. Burned his
face all up. Charred it. Ah, you
know, a couple operations he ain't
so bad. Still smokin' though.

Jacob stares out the window. Then, quietly-

JACOB
I know a boy who was born with a
tail.

DRIVER
Ah, you know, it happens. You hear
about that kind of thing.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

The van drives by a sign that reads *Pullman - Home of Washington State University.*

A cow, ESTHER, stands near the sign in a field at the edge of the WSU campus. Hanging off her back is a fully formed fifth leg. She looks up and watches as the van cruises by.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul climbs out of his car. RICK BLEU, Paul's assistant, a muscular 22 year old African American man, gets out of the passenger side. They walk to the door.

PAUL

Look, I know we got a lot of work to do, but he shouldn't bother us.

RICK

So it's your sister, the actress, it's her kid?

PAUL

Yeah, yeah, crazy. Calls me the other night, you know, kicked out of her place, doesn't know what to do with him. It's just... I mean, what was I supposed to do?

RICK

Well, he *is* family.

PAUL

Yeah, except I haven't seen him in years.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul and Rick come through the front door.

PAUL

Jacob? Jacob!

(a beat, and then-)

Huh. I gave him the code for the key. He should be here.

RICK

Maybe his plane was late?

Paul checks his cell phone.

PAUL

Strange, he hasn't called.

RICK

You sure he has a phone?

PAUL

Why don't you set up the laptops on the table there, get what you can on that Jones kid.

Paul goes up the stairs and into his den. The shades are drawn. A cluttered desk. A small bed pushed up against the wall. He notices two suitcases in the center of the room.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Jacob?

From inside the closet-

JACOB (O.S.)

Yeah?

Paul slides the closet door open. Jacob, in his mask, lies on the floor, his head on a pillow.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Hey, Uncle Paul.

PAUL

(perplexed)

Hey, Jacob. What are you doing in here? Everything okay?

JACOB

Yeah, been sleeping.

PAUL

What's that you're wearing there?

JACOB

(lying)

Oh, I got burned... by some propane.

PAUL

Okay, well, make yourself at home.

Paul closes the closet door, confused.

INT. PAUL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul paces in front of the fireplace. Football games play on the two laptops on the coffee table in front of him.

PAUL

She didn't say anything about this. And I have no way of getting a hold of her. Her cell is off, or disconnected, or...

RICK

It's tough times out there, man.

PAUL

He's up there... I mean... okay,
he's burned, or whatever, which she
didn't, you know, tell me about.
But what I can't figure out is what
the hell is he doing in the closet?

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Jacob, in the dark closet, stares out the eyeholes of his
mask. A phone RINGS in another room.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul sits on his bed with a beer in his hand, watching TV. He
picks up the phone.

PAUL

Hello? Oh, hey Lauren. Yeah, yeah,
he made it fine. Listen, why didn't
you tell me he was burned? What?
What do you mean? So he's not...
Well, what the hell's wrong with
his face then? Uh huh. So why does
he wear the mask?

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Jacob, in the closet, listens to the MURMUR of Paul's voice.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

PAUL

He's not going to leave his room?
Lauren, why didn't you tell me
about this? Well, has he seen
anyone, a doctor? Of course not.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Paul knocks on the closet door.

PAUL

Your mom's on the phone.

Jacob, in his mask, slides the door open and takes the phone
from Paul. Paul stares down at him, bewildered.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM, WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

Football practice. Paul, bored, meanders on the sidelines, a clipboard in his hand. He sighs and looks at his watch.

INT. DEN - DAY

The closet door slides open. Jacob peers out through his mask, and then, after a beat, he closes the door.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul eats dinner at the dining room table alone. He looks up at the ceiling, shakes his head, finishes his beer, and goes upstairs. He knocks on the den door and then opens it.

PAUL
Hey, Jacob? You hungry? Why don't
you come down and eat?

From inside the closet-

JACOB (O.S.)
I'll get something later.

PAUL
(frustrated)
All right. I'll see you.

INT. DEN - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, opens the closet, climbs out, and goes to the adjoining bathroom. He takes a deep breath, gets down on his knees and crawls to the toilet, avoiding the mirror. He stands up and relieves himself.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Paul loads frozen dinners into his shopping cart. TESS, early forties, approaches him.

TESS
(flirty)
Paul Huber.

PAUL
Oh, hey, Tess.

TESS
Haven't seen you in a while.

PAUL
Well, I've been busy. The season's about to start... Oh, and my nephew came for a visit, you know, so...

TESS
Huh.

PAUL
So, how's uh... shit. How is...

He snaps his fingers, trying to remember.

TESS
April?

PAUL
April!

TESS
(disappointed)
Yeah, comes before May. She's fine.

PAUL
Good, good. She's adorable.

TESS
I'll see you around, Paul.

He sighs, defeated.

PAUL
Yeah. Take care of yourself, Tess.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Paul pulls two boxes of food out of the microwave and sets them on the dining room table and sits down.

PAUL
Jacob! Dinner! Jacob! God damnit.

He leaves the table, climbs the stairs, and goes into the den. The bed has been stripped. A light comes from under the closet door.

Inside, Jacob in his mask, is asleep. A lamp shines on a sketch pad in his lap. There is a KNOCK on the closet door. Jacob jerks awake and slides the door open.

Paul looks at him, perplexed, and then over to the stripped bed.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 (frustrated)
 Man. I made dinner if you want it.
 (turning to leave)
 Something wrong with the bed?

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

Paul eats his dinner. Jacob, in his mask, regards a withered green bean at the end of his fork. His food is otherwise untouched. Paul, irritated, wipes his mouth and stands up.

PAUL
 Throw it out if you don't want it.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob, in his room, holds a green towel in front of him. He moves into the bathroom and drapes it over the mirror. He hears a KNOCK at the front door and turns, listening.

The front door opens and Rick steps into the house.

RICK
 Hello? Anybody home? Hello?

Rick looks around and then heads up the stairs. He stops outside Jacob's room and gently knocks on the door.

RICK (CONT'D)
 Hello? Anybody in there? It's uh...
 it's me, Rick, Paul's assistant. He
 sent me over to get some mail.
 You're Jacob, right? Listen, it's
 probably right there on the desk.

JACOB (O.S.)
 What's it look like?

RICK
 Just a stack of manila envelopes.
 Could you grab them for me?

After a long beat, the door opens a crack. Several envelopes pass through, and Rick takes them.

RICK (CONT'D)
 (awkwardly)
 Thanks. Just came by to get these.
 (a beat, and then-)
 Well, all right. See ya later.

JACOB (O.S.)
I saw you play last year.

RICK
Oh yeah?

JACOB (O.S.)
In the Holiday Bowl.

RICK
Man, don't remind me.

JACOB (O.S.)
You got hurt.

RICK
Yeah. Blew out my knee. On to
bigger and better, I guess. Anyway,
I gotta run. It was good to meet
you, Jake.

Inside Jacob's room, Jacob goes to the window and watches as Rick leaves the house and climbs into his car.

INT. STADIUM - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

JEFF NELSON, a 34 year old assistant coach, sits opposite Paul's cluttered desk.

PAUL
No, no, no... I'm not interested.

JEFF
She's my wife's friend, from the
gym. They work out together. Name's
Emily, I think. Smart, sweet bod,
dude. Nice smile. The whole thing.

PAUL
What's she doing in Pullman?

JEFF
What are any of us doing here?
She's a professor of... something,
I don't know. Oh, and she golfs!

PAUL
She does?

JEFF
Look, I'll text you her number.

Paul shakes his head. A beat, and then-

PAUL

I had a good thing in Illinois,
Jeff, defensive coordinator,
competitive team, good marriage.

JEFF

I know, I know, man.

PAUL

Just sailing along. Then they shit-
can Webster, and they don't even
give me an interview, just cleaned
house. And here I am back in my
home-fucking-town, coaching special
teams. And what the hell happened
with Michelle? I sure as fuck
didn't see that coming.

JEFF

Well, give this girl a call, man.
Get back on the horse. I'm tellin'
you, dude, she's... she's hot.

There's a KNOCK on the door. TED DAVIS, 64, head coach,
stands in the doorway.

TED

Coach Huber, need to talk.

Jeff hops up from his seat.

JEFF

Hey, Coach.

PAUL

Sure, Ted. Come on in.

JEFF

Seven okay for that tee time, Paul?

PAUL

Sure.

Jeff leaves. Ted closes the door. Tension fills the air.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Have a seat, Ted.

TED

I'm fine, thanks.

PAUL

All right.

TED

Chip talk to you about the scrimmage last week? No discipline in the lanes, piss-poor tackling.

PAUL

Yep.

TED

And so yesterday you let 'em go early. You wanna tell me why?

Paul stares at Ted for a long beat.

TED (CONT'D)

Listen, I don't give a two shits about how you did things before. But here, on my staff, you don't let kids go early, ever. Repetition and detail. Until they get it right. You got me? Repetition and detail.

(a beat, and then-)

Say it.

PAUL

Excuse me?

TED

Repetition and detail. I wanna hear you say it.

PAUL

Really. You want me to say it.

TED

Out loud. Repetition and detail.

A long beat, as they stare at each other.

PAUL

(begrudgingly)

Repetition and detail.

TED

And maybe you should play a little less golf and spend a little more time looking at film.

(opening the door)

Oh, and uh... I'm not Ted. All right? I'm Coach. Let's win some games this year, huh?

INT. JACOB'S BATHROOM - DAY

The back of Jacob's head is seen as he stands in a robe meticulously combing his wet hair in the same direction over and over. In front of him is a towel draped over the mirror.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Paul comes through the front door and goes into the kitchen. He sees Jacob in his mask, sitting at the table. The table is set--a bowl of green salad and a pot of steaming pasta.

PAUL
Wow. You cook? You cooked this?

JACOB
Yep.

PAUL
I'll be damned.

JACOB
I couldn't eat that crap again.

Paul grabs a beer and sits down. They eat in silence, then-

JACOB (CONT'D)
Uncle Paul?

PAUL
Yeah?

JACOB
Um... Where's Aunt Michelle?

PAUL
Michelle? Huh, well, that's a good question.

JACOB
What happened?

PAUL
Well, last fall I went on a recruiting trip. I was gone a few days, and when I came back...

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul comes into an empty bedroom and looks around in shock.

PAUL (V.O.)
...all of her stuff was gone.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

PAUL
Everything. She even took the sheets off the bed. Didn't leave a note, email, nothing. Couple days later she sent me a text, from Boise. She'd run off with a lawyer, a Mormon. Some guy she met online.

JACOB
Wow.

PAUL
Yeah, well, he can have her. Mormons haven't suffered enough.

A beat, and then-

JACOB
This is a small town.

PAUL
Especially in the summer.

JACOB
When does school start?

PAUL
Next week.

They eat in silence, and then-

PAUL (CONT'D)
So, Jacob, come clean with me. I talked to your mom. She says it's not burned, your face. So what happened? What's with the mask?

JACOB
(slowly)
Well, hm... it's like this. I was born with a hideous, deformed face, and when I was growing up, my friends, teachers, family, none of them had the courtesy to tell me. And then a while back, last year, after a few nights of insomnia and... and just walking the streets in the dark... and panic attacks on
(MORE)

JACOB (CONT'D)
 subway cars, I came home from
 school one day, and I went into the
 bathroom, and I looked in the
 mirror, like for the first time,
 and suddenly looking back at me...
 looking back... was one seriously
 ugly motherfucker.

Paul watches as Jacob eats.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 And that's why I wear the mask.
 It's my gift to you.

EXT. BARREN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

In Jacob's dream, we fly above a vast prairie, approaching
 the figure of a small boy standing beside an old Victrola.
 With the exception of a sock on his left foot, the boy is
 naked. The voice of an old woman is heard.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)
 Dance with me.

The boy, terrified, turns toward the voice. On his tiny
 shoulders sits the head of the older Jacob, the face
 deformed, bulbous and twisted.

INT. STADIUM - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Rick and Paul sit at Paul's desk, watching game film.

PAUL
 So, he's having nightmares now.
 Woke me up last night. Screaming.
 (pointing at the screen)
 Hey, rewind that. Go back. Right
 there. Look at that lateral foot
 speed. Who is that?

Rick looks down at the papers on the desk in front of him.

RICK
 Mason. That freshman walk-on.

PAUL
 Keep your eye on him.

RICK
 So is he still wearing the mask?

PAUL

Yeah, yeah. Hey, remember that Polish kid? Went nuts?

RICK

You mean that cat who was in the weight room day and night, all jacked up on Anadrol and D-Ball?

PAUL

Remember him? He couldn't get himself big enough. I mean, this mountain of a dude looks in the mirror and thinks he's small.

RICK

It's reverse anorexia.

PAUL

Well, Jacob looks in the mirror and thinks he's ugly, not just ugly, but hideous.

RICK

You know, I've read something about that. It's been diagnosed. They think they're deformed or uh...

PAUL

He won't even leave the house. It's like he's trapped in there.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, opens the closet, walks out of the room and down the stairs, touching the walls as if he were moving in darkness. He inspects the living room, then sits down on a couch, trying to act normal, comfortable.

After a beat, he slowly takes off the mask. Except for his greasy hair and his pale unshaven face, he is a handsome 18 year old boy. He slowly looks around, nervous.

There's a loud SMACK at the front door. Jacob dives to the floor. He waits, hearing nothing, then rises, goes to the window, and sees a newspaper boy riding his bike up the street. Jacob collects himself, then goes to the front door.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

The front door opens and Jacob swoops up the paper. He regards the day, then closes the door with a flourish.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob, panicked, leans back against the door, clutching the newspaper to his chest, taking deep breaths.

JACOB
It's okay. It's okay.

INT. STADIUM - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul stares at the text from Jeff on his cell phone. He takes a deep breath, then taps the phone number in the text. He waits, obviously nervous.

EMILY (V.O)
Hello. Hello?

He hangs up, shakes his head, and then starts to get up. His phone RINGS. He stares at it, sighs, and then answers.

PAUL
Hello?

EMILY (V.O)
Hello. Who is this? Did you just call me?

PAUL
Emily?

EMILY (V.O.)
Yes.

PAUL
I'm sorry. This is Paul... Paul Huber. I just was in the middle of something there. I'm sorry about that. Um, my friend Jeff, Jeff Nelson gave me your number.

EMILY (V.O)
Oh, right, Paul. Jeff told me you might call.

PAUL
Hey, that rhymed.

EMILY (V.O)
What?

PAUL
Paul and call. They... they rhyme.

EMILY (V.O)
Oh, right.

PAUL
Well, um, how are you?

EMILY,
Oh, I'm all right, and you?

PAUL
Hunky... hunky dory, as they say.
Does anyone even say that anymore?
Uh oh, I'm dating myself. What do
they say nowadays?

EMILY (V.O)
Well, "good" or "fine" will do.

PAUL
Okay, well, I'm... I'm good then.

EMILY
Great.

PAUL
Great. Well, listen, I was thinking
Italian. You like Italian? I mean,
you know, how about Thursday night?
You want to go out, right?

EMILY (V.O)
Um... Okay.

PAUL
I'm sorry. I'm not very good at
this. It's been a while. It's a...

A long silence.

EMILY (V.O)
Are you okay?

PAUL
Yeah, yeah, of course. I'm "good,"
right? Um, so what do you say?
Eight o'clock? Thursday night?
De Luca's?

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Rick sits at the table, fiddling with a golf club. Jacob sits
across from him, in his mask and Jets cap, eating. Small talk-

RICK
So, you're a New Yorker, huh?

Jacob nods.

RICK (CONT'D)
How come you don't sound like a New Yorker?

JACOB
What do you mean?

RICK
Like Pacino or De Niro.

JACOB
I don't know. You're from Seattle, right? Why don't you sound like Kurt Cobain?

RICK
(laughing)
Touché. You know, I went there once. Good food. But greasy-ass pizza!
(A beat and then-)
But, you know, few dabs with the napkin, and it's all good. It was summer, and man, so humid. Went in a rowboat in the park. Saw this one-armed dude playing the saxophone. Watched the fireworks.
(He watches Jacob.)
So, you're a Jets fan, huh? Guess you gotta root for somebody. The Hawks are playing your boys in a couple weeks. Too bad for you.

JACOB
They're not gonna lose.

RICK
Oh really? 10 bucks says you're wrong. I'll even give you 7 points.

JACOB
I don't need 7 points.

RICK
(laughing)
Aw-ight. It's a bet, bro.

JACOB
I don't have 10 dollars.

RICK

Your uncle will be good for it.
 (holding up the golf club)
 Yeah, I gotta work on my game. You
 wanna understand The Man, Jake, you
 gotta play The Man's game.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Paul, in a suit and tie, sits at a table alone, checking his phone, waiting... and waiting... for Emily. He sighs, checks his phone, again, then chugs down the last of his wine.

He gets up to leave, but as he passes the lounge, he stops, then heads in. Tess, the woman he saw at the grocery store, is bartending. She slides a glass of beer to a man at the end of the bar.

PAUL

Hey, Tess.

TESS

Hey, what happened to your date?

PAUL

She couldn't make it. Listen what time can you get out of here?

TESS

Oh no, no, Paul. You can forget that right now.

PAUL

How about a scotch and soda then?

He reaches across the bar and touches her hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Tess, come on. It'll make us feel better.

TESS

(giving in)
 God damnit.

INT. TESS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul and Tess finish. Paul rolls off of her, breathing heavily.

TESS

Wow. I see stars.

PAUL
I'm hungry. I didn't eat dinner.

Tess's daughter, APRIL, is heard calling from another room.

APRIL (O.S.)
Mommy? Mommy! I'm thirsty.

Tess rolls out of bed, puts on her bathrobe. They whisper.

PAUL
Tess?

TESS
Yeah?

PAUL
I'm just gonna... take off.

TESS
Imagine that.

PAUL
C'mon. It's nothing personal.

TESS
No, of course not, Paul.

PAUL
Look, Tess, you... you're terrific.

TESS
Yeah, right. I'm terrific.

APRIL (O.S.)
Mommy?

TESS
(disappointed)
See you around, Paul.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul moves slowly up the stairs. He stops and looks into the dark den. Jacob is now lying in the bed.

JACOB
Hey, Uncle Paul.

PAUL
Oh, hey. You moved to the bed.

JACOB
How was your date?

PAUL
It was fine. Just an old friend.

JACOB
With benefits?

PAUL
Uh... well, yeah. Actually.

JACOB
Cool. On TV there were spiders
having benefits, if you know what I
mean. Then the female ate the
male's head. Fertilizes the egg,
you know. Which is truly
beneficial.

PAUL
(bewildered)
Yeah, well, you have a good night.

MONTAGE - THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR: EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

The campus comes alive. A cheerleader falls into the arms of
a male cheerleader. A crowd roars. Students fill a lecture
hall, play frisbee in a busy courtyard, etc...

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

Paul, on the field, puts his hand on a player's shoulder.

PAUL
You a little lost out there?

EXT. FRAT HOUSE - DAY

CAROLYN CRUZ, a 20 year old reporter for the campus TV
station, stands in front of a camera holding a microphone.

CAROLYN
Rush week has begun and already...

INT. RICK'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Rick stuffs a book into his bag, Carolyn on the TV behind
him.

CAROLYN
...there have been several arrests.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Under a canopy of burning fall colors, two college girls in a convertible drive by with music blaring.

INT. JACOB'S ROOM - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, looks out the window as the car drives by. His pants and shirt are on backward. He steps back into the center of the room and lets out a long scream.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Rick comes through the front door. Alarmed by the scream, he rushes up the stairs.

RICK
Jacob?

INT. JACOB'S ROOM - DAY

Rick enters. Jacob stops screaming.

RICK
Um... You okay, man?

Jacob nods, embarrassed.

RICK (CONT'D)
You uh... you know your clothes are on backwards.

JACOB
I was just fooling around.

RICK
Huh. What were you screaming about?

JACOB
It's... it's nice out there.

RICK
Yeah. Yeah it is.
(reaching into his bag)
Hey, I grabbed that book you wanted. Ovid? What you wanna read this old shit for?

JACOB
It's classic.

RICK
Well, it's on my card, so, you know, don't get the pages all sticky.
(laughing)
Damn, Jake, you had me freaked, up here screamin'. You all right though?
(a beat, and then-)
Okay, okay. Listen, it's none of my business, but I gotta ask, have you seen a doctor? Have you talked to anyone? 'Cuz I know something about this. I'm a psych major, you know. I mean, do you even know that what you got has a name? Body Dysmorphic Disorder. A lot of people got this. Think they're ugly, or fat or whatever. You're not alone, Jake. And it's treatable, with meds and therapy...

JACOB
You're right. It's none of your business. I'm fine.

Rick looks at Jacob in his backward clothes.

RICK
Aw-ight. Well. Peace.

Rick reaches out his fist. They fist bump. Rick turns to leave.

JACOB
Game's on Sunday. One o'clock.

RICK
I'll see if I can make it.

JACOB
We have a bet.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob, without his mask on, clutches the front door knob. He takes a deep breath, then looks through window at the rolled up newspaper on the front lawn. He hurls the door open.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob stands in the door way, paralyzed. He slams the door.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

JACOB
(taking deep breaths)
Okay. No problem. You got this.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

The door opens, and Jacob rushes out. He crosses the lawn with his head down and picks up the paper.

MAILMAN
Greetings and salutations.

Jacob looks up at the MAILMAN who stands on the sidewalk, finishing off a joint and tossing it into the street.

MAILMAN (CONT'D)
You shacking with the coach?

Jacob, stunned, doesn't respond.

MAILMAN (CONT'D)
Well, here's yer' mail.
(handing Jacob the mail)
You smoke? I can fix you up.

Jacob doesn't respond.

MAILMAN (CONT'D)
Looks like you could use a little.
Well, you know where to find me.

The Mailman walks away. Jacob, stunned, drops the mail and the paper onto the lawn and sprints into the house.

INT. MANHATTAN APARTMENT - EVENING

Lauren, Jacob's mother, sits on the floor, sipping wine, talking on the phone.

LAUREN
What kind of question is that? It was a Macy's catalogue. I had tits, they needed to sell bras. It's a far cry from pornography.

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jacob sits on the floor, flipping through an old porn magazine.

JACOB
You think anyone whacked off to it?

LAUREN (V.O.)
I'm not going to answer that. Hey,
are you going to see your grandpa
while you're out there?

JACOB
No. No, I'm not going out.

LAUREN (V.O.)
It'd be nice. He's getting up
there, you know? You miss me?
(a beat, and then-)
Well, there's a lot of silence.

JACOB
(emotional)
Yeah.

He looks up, hearing Paul's car pull into the driveway.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Uncle Paul's home, I gotta go.

LAUREN (V.O.)
Okay, listen, you tell Paul that...

JACOB
Bye, Mom. I miss you.

INT. MANHATTAN APARTMENT - EVENING

Lauren tears up with the phone to her ear.

LAUREN
Jacob?

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob rushes into Paul's bedroom, opens a dresser drawer and jams the magazine inside. He goes back to his bedroom, to the window, and sees Paul in the yard by the mail and newspaper Jacob had dropped earlier. Paul gathers them up, looking around, confused.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jacob, not wearing his mask, slinks from the house in a long, black coat, his Jets cap pulled down over his face.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Jacob rushes down the dark sidewalk, past darkened homes.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Through the window of a dorm, young men play pool. Jacob stands in the darkness, outside, watching them.

CUT TO:

Jacob, crossing a dark, deserted courtyard.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Jacob enters a lecture hall and sits in the darkness, staring at the podium. He raises his hand, and then, after a beat, he lowers it and looks around the room.

CUT TO:

Jacob's dream: a black and white image of a young woman in an evening gown. She comes into focus, dancing, jittery, like an old time movie.

A warbly rendition of The Mills Brothers' "Stardust" plays over her image--"Sometimes I wonder why I spend the lonely nights..."

She gets closer, a wild gaze on her face, her arms open, inviting a dance.

Her expression changes as she falls away, and then, shrinking into darkness, her entire image shatters like broken glass.

CUT TO:

Jacob asleep in the dark lecture hall. A hand touches his shoulder and gently shakes him. He looks up to see the old, wrinkled face of a JANITOR.

JANITOR

Son?

Jacob looks up, screams, and bolts from the room. The janitor watches after him, bewildered.

INT. CONVALESCENT HOME - DAY

Paul walks down a dimly lit hallway and looks into a room. JOSEPH, Paul's 78 year old father, sits in a chair, watching the Seahawks-Jets game on a small TV.

PAUL

Hey, Pop. How you doing?

Joseph turns and tries to smile at Paul. Having received a tracheotomy, a cotton dressing that surrounds a circular valve is at the base of his throat.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Oh, uh, I brought you these.
(holding a bag of socks)
I know how your feet get cold.

Joseph takes the socks. He puts a voice amplifier up to his throat, his voice robotic.

JOSEPH

Thank you.

They watch the game.

PAUL

You see our game yesterday? We damn near pulled it out.
(a beat, and then-)
I don't know, Pop. It's tough to get the talent out here. Oh, you remember Lauren's kid, Jacob?

Joseph nods.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well, he's staying with me now. Just visiting for a while. Lauren wanted me to say hi. She's doing... she's great. How are you? How's the hip coming along? Good? Yeah? Tough as nails, Pop. Tough as nails.

They watch the game in silence.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Rick and Jacob watch the same Seahawks-Jets game. Jacob wears his Jets cap over his mask. A DING is heard from the kitchen. Jacob goes into the kitchen and opens the oven door.

RICK (O.S.)
Your boy is all banged up, Jake!

Jacob pulls a pizza out of the oven and slices it. He takes his cap off, looks to the living room, and then slowly pulls off his mask.

He puts the cap back on his head, stuffs the mask into his pocket, picks up the pizza and moves into the living room with a strut in his step. He sets the pizza on the table with an exaggerated bravado.

JACOB
Yeah, I was thinking about getting
a beer. You want one?

Rick stares at Jacob, seeing his face for the first time.

RICK
Um... yeah, beer.

JACOB
Don't stare at me! Stop... Fuck!

Jacob jumps back behind the couch, out of Rick's eyeline.

RICK
All right, nobody's staring. Just
watching football here. Damn, Jets
go down 7 and you start lashing
out! Is that how it is?

Rick picks up a slice of pizza and watches the game.

JACOB
People are always staring at me.

RICK
I hear that. Got the same problem.
But you look as good as I do,
people are bound to stare.

JACOB
I'm not that weird, Rick.

RICK
I know that.

JACOB
I used to have a girlfriend.

RICK
Yeah?

JACOB

Stacy. Stacy Reyes. She got a full scholarship to Cornell. I used to work at her dad's bakery in Harlem. Took the train every morning, early. Made about a million bagels.

RICK

I used to work at an auto parts store. Don't know a damn thing about cars.

Rick turns and looks at Jacob. Jacob stiffens, but doesn't turn away.

RICK (CONT'D)

It's cool, Jake. It's cool.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Paul, in his bathrobe, stops outside Jacob's door and hears the shower. Over this, a phone is heard RINGING.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Hello?

Paul pushes the door open and notices several text books on Jacob's bed. He goes into the room, inspects the books.

PAUL (V.O.)

Lauren, it's Paul.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Paul, is everything okay?

PAUL (V.O.)

Yeah, everything's fine. It's just... it's Jacob. He sneaks out of the house at night.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Jacob?

PAUL (V.O.)

Yeah. I know this sounds crazy, but I think he wants to go to school.

INT. PAUL'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Jacob sits at the table in his mask, reading a textbook. Paul sets a bowl of cereal in front of Jacob, then slides the book away, sits down, and reads.

PAUL

So, little quiz. Tell me, where
does the heat of the sun come from?

JACOB

It's a thermonuclear reaction.
Small atoms becoming bigger.

PAUL

Yeah, good, close enough.
(a beat, and then-)
You know, Michelle and I used to
talk about having kids. It might've
been nice, you know, to have a son,
watch him do stupid kid things...
go visit him at his college, meet
his idiot friends. Is that crazy?

JACOB

No.

PAUL

You think your mom might like that?

Jacob looks at Paul for a long beat.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Jacob, without his mask, walks briskly down a sun-drenched
sidewalk, pulling his Jets cap tightly over his eyes.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Jacob enters a courtyard filled with students. A girl bumps
into him, smiles, and says, "Excuse me." He sees her face and
continues moving, looking around, his confidence growing.

INT. RICK'S DORM - DAY

Rick types on his laptop. His telephone RINGS.

RICK

Talk to me. Oh, hey Jake. What's
up? What? Why? All right.

EXT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

A window on the fifth floor opens and Rick's head pops out.

RICK
Hey, Jake! What are you doing?

Jacob paces below, looking up, trying to control himself.

JACOB
Nice day, isn't it? Nice day for a
walk! The birds, the trees...
(suddenly screaming)
I'm gonna do it!!!

RICK
Do what?

JACOB
Go to school.

RICK
What?

JACOB
Go. To. Fucking! School!!!

RICK
Well, no shit?

Jacob looks around, suddenly embarrassed.

JACOB
Yeah, well, I gotta go. See ya.

Jacob turns and sprints away, his coat flailing behind him.
Rick watches him go, amazed.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob, in his mask, helps Paul stuff leaves into a large
plastic bag.

PAUL
Just seems a little fast is all.
Just a couple weeks ago you
wouldn't come out of your room.

JACOB
Omnia mutantur.

PAUL
What's that?

JACOB
It's Latin. Everything changes.

PAUL

Hm. I suppose that's true.

Paul smiles, then looks up and admires the day.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hunting season starts next week.
It'll be nice to get out there.
What do you think?

Jacob bends over and stuffs leaves into the bag.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hey, what happened to your hand?

JACOB

I don't know. I was a little kid.
Mom left me with Grandma and
Grandpa for the summer...

PAUL

Out here? On the farm?

JACOB

Something fell on it I think. A log
or something. Had to have surgery.

Paul examines Jacob's hand. There is a broad, crescent-shaped scar across the back.

PAUL

(suspicious)

Hm.

(pointing to his own hand)

See that? Antler of an eight point
buck. Right through the palm. It
was dead. I was drunk.

A beat, and then-

JACOB

I don't want to shoot anything.

PAUL

(laughing)

Okay.

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Jacob sits at the desk, filling out admission forms. Rick leans against the door frame.

RICK

Since you're going to be the big man on campus, you know, you might want to come. And, Jake, it's a Halloween party, so you can wear a mask... or whatever you want.

JACOB

I'll think about it.

RICK

You know, meet some people. You like girls, don't you? Or boys, whatever. There'll be a lot of those too.

JACOB

What are you going as?

RICK

Youngblood Priest.

JACOB

From *Super Fly*?

RICK

Wait, you know *Super Fly*?

JACOB

Come on. It's classic. "Never a dude like this one! He's gotta plan to stick it to the man!"

Rick looks at Jacob, surprised.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul, carrying a brown paper bag, knocks on Jacob's door.

PAUL

Jacob! My room, pronto!

Paul goes into his room and pours costumes and masks onto his bed. Jacob, not wearing his mask, enters the room.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Let's see, not a big selection here. But, you know, we got some classics. What do you want to be?

JACOB

What do you got?

PAUL
Well, we got the...

Paul turns and looks at Jacob, seeing his face for the first time.

After a moment, he holds out two masks--The Wolfman and George W. Bush. Jacob takes The Wolfman. Paul stares at Jacob, and then pulls the Bush mask over his head.

PAUL (BUSH) (CONT'D)
"Don't underestimate my
strategy."

Jacob slowly pulls The Wolfman mask over his head. They stand for a moment, looking at each other through the eyeholes of their masks.

PAUL (BUSH) (CONT'D)
How do I look?

JACOB (WOLFMAN)
Like an idiot.

PAUL (BUSH)
Mission Accomplished!

Jacob turns and walks out of the room. Paul watches him go through the eyeholes of his mask.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Jack-o'-lanterns glow on porches. Trick-or-treaters move along the sidewalk. A doorbell RINGS.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jacob, in his Wolfman mask, opens the door and sees THREE KIDS dressed as characters from The Wizard of Oz.

KIDS
Trick or treat!

JACOB
Are you off to see the Wizard?

DOROTHY
No! It's just a Halloween costume.

JACOB
Oh. Well, great. The wizard sucks
anyway.

INT. PAUL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob, in the Wolfman mask, sits on the couch, watching the final scene of *Creature From The Black Lagoon*--the Creature riddled with bullets falls into the water, dead.

Paul enters, putting on a sport coat.

PAUL
Saddest monster movie ever made.

JACOB
King Kong's pretty sad.

PAUL
Yeah. Well, I'm heading out.

JACOB
Gonna get some action?

PAUL
(smiling)
We'll see. You know, Jacob...
(a beat, and then-)
I'm glad... you're getting
yourself, you know... I'm glad
things are working out.

JACOB
Uncle Paul?

PAUL
Yeah?

JACOB
Remember to wear protection.

Paul chuckles.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

A noisy crowded club full of people in costumes. Paul, drunk, sits at the bar in his sport coat, sipping a drink. Jeff Nelson, the assistant coach, dressed as a cowboy, comes up.

JEFF
Hey, Paul! You see all the tail up
in here? Damn! I'm with my wife,
but, oh shit, she's here, man!
Emily, you gotta check her out!

PAUL
Oh, no no. I don't wanna...

JEFF

I know it was a shit sandwich what she did, standing you up like that! But, dude, you gotta see her.

Jeff takes Paul by the elbow across the room. Jeff's wife STEPHANIE is dressed as a clown. EMILY is sexy librarian.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Look who I found! Stephanie, you remember Paul, right?

STEPHANIE

Of course! Hi, Paul!

JEFF

And, Paul, this is Emily!

Emily, uncomfortable, offers her hand.

EMILY

Hi, Paul. It's nice to meet you.

Paul drunkenly takes her hand, pissed off.

PAUL

Oh, is it? It's nice to meet me?

Paul leans over and whispers into her ear.

EMILY

(offended)

Excuse me?

PAUL

You heard me. See you later, Jeff.

Paul turns and leaves the bar. Emily sits there, shocked.

STEPHANIE

What happened?

JEFF

Hey, Paul! Where you goin'?

STEPHANIE

What did he say?

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jacob turns off the TV and pulls off the Wolfman mask, suddenly determined.

He climbs the stairs, and goes into the bathroom and stares at the green towel that covers the mirror. He closes his eyes and pulls the towel down.

He opens his eyes and looks at his reflection. Staring back is the twisted face of a monster, tears filling its eyes.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul cleans his car in the driveway. Rick walks up.

PAUL

Hey, Rick. What are you doing here?

RICK

Ah, just droppin' off some more books for your boy. Apparently he thinks I'm the bookmobile.

PAUL

Yeah, listen, about Jacob. You're not going to believe this... I mean, he was getting better, right? Now he's up in that fucking closet again... won't talk to me, won't eat. I called my sister. She says he just does this sometimes, goes into a funk. Now he's crying about how he wants to go home.

INT. JACOB'S ROOM - DAY

The door opens and Rick peers in. The room is dark, the shades drawn. Rick enters and knocks on the closet door.

RICK

(casually)

Jake, I'm tellin' you, man, you missed a helluva party. You remember Lily, that girl I told you about? She came as a belly dancer. Damn! Nobody knew who I was.

(going into the bathroom)

People don't appreciate the classics.

He stops, noticing that the mirror has been shattered.

RICK (CONT'D)

Oh man.

(comes into the bedroom)

Anyway, it was a crazy party, man.

(MORE)

RICK (CONT'D)

(knocking on the closet)

Hey, Jake, I got your books.

(He waits, and then-)

Aw-ight, they'll be here on the dresser for you. I gotta split.

(a beat, and then-)

You know, I saw this flick last week, one of them old slash-'em-ups. And this girl is walking down some dark hallway and you just know the boogie man is gonna jump out any second. And you just want to yell, "What are you doing, girl? Get the hell outta' there." And of course the boogie man jumps out, cuts her all to pieces, when she could have just run the other way, come back later with a Glock and put his shit down. Know what I'm saying, Jake? The boogie man ain't so scary, as long as you're ready for him. See you later. Keep it real, Jake. All right? Peace.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Rick walks out of the house. Paul coils up a garden hose.

RICK

Man, I think I know why your boy's in the closet.

PAUL

Why?

RICK

Last night he took the towel off the mirror. And... Paul, he's not well. I've been reading a lot about this... Body Dysmorphic Disorder, and I've even been talking to one of my professors about it, and you've got to realize that what's in his head, how he sees himself, it's real. To him, it's real.

PAUL

Okay, great... but why? Where does this come from? Is it genetic?

RICK

Could be. But that's the million dollar question. Right?

(MORE)

RICK (CONT'D)
 Could be a genetic predisposition,
 but like many disorders, something
 may have triggered it. Hell, I
 don't know.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul rushes up the stairs, goes into Jacob's room, and throws open the closet door.

PAUL
 Get out.

Jacob, in his mask, doesn't move.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 I said, get out of there!

JACOB
 Leave me alone.

Paul grabs Jacob's arm and pulls him to his feet. Jacob staggers, and Paul shoves him backward onto the bed.

PAUL
 Why don't you pack your bags? Huh?
 You want to leave? 'Cuz I'll buy
 you a plane ticket! You can go home
 right now! Except, oh wait, you
 don't have a home. You're here.
 You're stuck with me!

JACOB
 Whatever.

Jacob gets up and moves toward the closet. Paul shoves him back onto the bed.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Don't touch me!

PAUL
 Sit down!

Paul goes to the bathroom and points at the broken mirror.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 You see that, Jacob? That is a lie!
 It's a lie! And, you know, even if
 it were true, if your face looked
 like a baboon's ass, I wouldn't
 care! Nobody cares. There are ugly
 people in the world, Jacob!

JACOB
You don't know!

PAUL
You know what? You're right. I
don't. I can't possibly know what
you're going through. Right?

JACOB
Right.

A beat, and then-

PAUL
Forget it. You want to quit, Jacob?
Then quit. Give up. Maybe that's
the best way to go. Just let it
beat you. Just crawl back into your
closet.

Paul walks about of the room.

INT. WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

Rick works out on the leg press. Paul approaches.

PAUL
Hey, Rick, how's it feeling?

Rick sits up, touches his knee.

RICK
Ah, you know, baby steps.

Rick grabs a towel and wipes his sweaty forehead.

RICK (CONT'D)
Hey, Paul, I've been thinking about
what you told me, about going to
grad school, and I was wondering if
you'd write me a letter of rec?

PAUL
Sure, of course. I'd be glad to.

Rick moves to the water fountain. Paul follows him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What're you doing for Thanksgiving?

RICK
Headin' home after class. Why?

PAUL

Well, it's a bye week, you know, no game. So I'll be home, alone, with Jacob. Thought you might like to come over, eat, you know...

RICK

Man, I wish I could. But my gram always cooks. Kind of a big deal.

PAUL

All right. Well, just thought Jacob might like having you there.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul and Jacob sit at the dining room table, eating turkey. Jacob, wearing his mask, chuckles as Paul tells a story.

JACOB

You must've been really drunk.

PAUL

I was. Anyway, I finally get the door open, and standing in the living room, right over there, is a guy all dressed in black with my flat-screen in his arms. Michelle flips on the light and I'll be damned if it isn't Earl Martin, my best friend in Junior High!

JACOB

You're kidding.

PAUL

Nope. It's Earl. And he looks up and says, "Paul Huber! How the hell are you?" And I say, "What are you doing, Earl?" And Earl says, "Well, Paul, I guess I'm robbin' you." And Michelle is so smashed, she starts laughing and falls on the floor. And what do I do? I mean, it's an awkward situation. So I offer him a beer. But get this, Earl says he doesn't like beer. He likes wine.

JACOB

What did Aunt Michelle do?

PAUL

Well, she runs downstairs and comes back with a bottle we'd been saving for a special occasion. Man, she was crazy like that. Impulsive. Must've been a hundred dollar bottle of wine. So we sit 'til 3, 4 in the morning, Michelle, me, and Earl, drinking, catching up. And when the wine's gone and we run out of things to say, I walk him to the door, tell him to give me a call sometime, and he disappears into the night.

JACOB

You're full of shit.

PAUL

No, I swear to God. That's how it happened.

JACOB

Did you ever see him again?

PAUL

No, no. A few months later, though, he called me, said he'd gone to rehab and was cleaning up his act. But then he asked for tickets to the U.C.L.A. game. And, you know, this time I was sober, so I told him to go to hell.

INT. JACOB'S ROOM - MORNING

Jacob, wearing his mask and pajamas, opens the blinds and squints as he looks at the falling snow. Over this a phone conversation is heard.

LAUREN (V.O.)

I'm sorry to call you so early honey. But I had to tell you something. I got it! I got the part. Brandon just called. We start rehearsals tomorrow.

JACOB (V.O.)

That's great, Mom.

Jacob puts on his bathrobe, walks out of the room and down the stairs. He unlocks the sliding glass door and walks out onto the back porch.

LAUREN (V.O.)
Yeah, the money's good. It's..
it's... you know, back on my feet.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - MORNING

Jacob looks at the even blanket of snow that covers the yard.

LAUREN (V.O.)
I... Jacob. I knew we'd be okay.

Jacob walks down the steps, the snow softly CRUNCHING under his feet.

LAUREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Everything just kind of works out.

He walks to the middle of the yard and stops.

JACOB (V.O.)
It's snowing, Mom.

Jacob reaches up and pulls the mask off his head.

LAUREN (V.O.)
Is it? I know how you love the
snow.

He tilts his head back and spreads his arms.

JACOB (V.O.)
It makes everything new.

Jacob opens his fingers, releasing the mask. It descends onto the snow.

EXT. CAMPUS - MORNING

A group of students walk down a snow-covered path, their breath visible in the cold air. One of them is Jacob, wearing his long black coat and his Jets cap.

INT. LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Jacob enters the lecture hall and watches a lecture already in progress. He takes a seat in the back row, looking around.

PROFESSOR
And then what you have is a star
that has used up its nuclear fuel.
What happens? It collapses. How it
(MORE)

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
ends up depends on how much mass it
had. And a star with as much mass
or less mass than the sun gives off
a planetary nebula.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Jacob moves along a sidewalk. Rick's car pulls up beside him
and the window rolls down.

RICK
Jake! What are you doing out here?

Jacob ignores him, picking up his pace.

RICK (CONT'D)
Don't ignore me when I'm talking to
you, bro!

JACOB
I'm going home.

RICK
From where?

JACOB
Class.

RICK
No shit? You went to a class?

JACOB
Learned about planetary nebulea.

RICK
Well hey, hop in. Tell me about it.

Jacob keeps walking as Rick rolls along beside him.

RICK (CONT'D)
Oh, I see. That's the way it's
going to be now. Big man on campus!

JACOB
Don't you have some place to be?

RICK
Oh my! Rapunzel, Rapunzel let down
your hair!

Jacob gives up, hops in the car and slams the door.

CUT TO:

A door slamming, a screen door against a door frame, a roost of chickens exploding into the sun-filled air, a black snake slithering across dry grass, a gold pendant in the shape of a runner falling through darkness.

JACOB (V.O.)
(whispering)
Uncle Paul. Uncle Paul?

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul sits up and sees Jacob, standing by his bed.

PAUL
Jacob? What is it?

JACOB
Something stepped on my hand.

PAUL
What?

JACOB
I had a dream. I think it's a
memory... maybe... from the farm.
Something stepping on my hand. An
animal or something.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

A cow, Esther, the same cow we saw earlier, stands at the edge of a snow-covered field. A car flies by. Esther looks up and sees a line of cars--students leaving for winter break.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Jacob walks down the deserted streets of downtown Pullman. He crosses the street and approaches the box office of The Blue Rose Theatre. The marquee reads "Kubrick's SPARTACUS."

INT. THEATRE - DAY

Jacob sits in the theatre, the light from the screen illuminating his face. Over this, a phone is heard RINGING.

RICK (V.O.)
Speak to me, Jake.

JACOB (V.O.)
 Hey, Rick. I called to ask you
 about something. I... I want to get
 a room in the dorms next semester.

On the screen, Kirk Douglas raises his fist to the sky and screams. Several men ignite a huge log on the top of a hill. Jacob watches the action, transfixed.

RICK (V.O.)
 Jake. That's great, man. But you
 know, it's kinda' late though. They
 might be full up.

JACOB (V.O.)
 Yeah, well, I was thinking, since
 you know, you're an R.A. and you
 have an extra large room...

RICK (V.O.)
 Whoa! Wait a minute, Jake. You
 mean, in here? Sorry, bro...

On screen, Roman soldiers try to outrun the burning log.

JACOB (V.O. CONT'D)
 No problem. Just thought it'd cool
 if we were roommates and shit.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jacob comes out of the theatre, into the dark, cold night.

RICK (V.O.)
 It'd be cool, I guess. But I got a
 lot of stuff... I mean, I got this
 whole life here. I don't know, man.

JACOB (V.O.)
 Just think about it... please?

INT. PAUL'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A fire burns in the fireplace. Paul sits in his chair, watching Jacob as he unwraps a gift. Rick is beside Jacob on the couch with a wrapped gift in his lap. Jacob opens his gift--Nike running shoes.

PAUL
 You're going to need those, all the
 walking you're going to be doing.
 Okay, Rick, your turn.

JACOB
Thanks, Paul.

RICK
Hey, Paul, I didn't get you shit.

PAUL
Shut up. Open it.

Rick unwraps his gift--a book.

RICK
"In The Pig Room."

PAUL
You know, it's sports psychology.

RICK
Thanks, Coach.

Paul picks up his gift--a rolled up sheet of thick paper. He unrolls it, revealing a charcoal sketch of an 8-point buck.

PAUL
Hey. You drew this?

JACOB
Yeah.

PAUL
Wow. It's something. Looks like the one that got me.

After a moment, Rick stands up and looks at Jacob.

RICK
Well, we better go. Don't wanna miss your flight. Paul, have a good Christmas. You're not gonna be all alone, are you?

PAUL
I'm fine. Got my dad here and...

Rick pulls Jacob's suitcases out the front door, into the falling snow. Paul and Jacob stand and head toward the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You sure you want to give all this up next semester? Move into the dorms with that guy?

JACOB
Yeah, I guess so.

PAUL
Look's like it's back to frozen
dinners for me. I'm going to miss
that Chicken Fiesta you make.

JACOB
Yeah.

There is an awkward silence as they look at each other.

PAUL
Well, all right.

JACOB
(stoic)
Yeah, um... thanks, Paul.

PAUL
Get out of here, you punk. Say hi
to your mom for me.

Jacob walks to the car. Paul watches him go.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The big, bright, noisy city. Christmas lights glow in the
streets and shopper's bustle down sidewalks.

INT. THEATRE - NYC - NIGHT

On stage, Lauren, in a 1930s costume, leans over an desk and
shoots a sarcastic line at a befuddled fat man. The audience
erupts with laughter. Jacob, sitting in the back row, smiles.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Jacob stands near the end of the hallway bustling with actors
and crew. Lauren comes through a doorway and sees him. She
stares at him, welling with pride.

LAUREN
You made it. I can't believe you're
here.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Lauren sits at a lighted mirror, taking off her make-up.
Jacob, wearing his Jets cap, stands beside her.

LAUREN

I'm glad you liked it. I felt a little flat in the first act. And that phone. Jesus, I was dying. But that's what previews are for!

A gorgeous actress enters in a bra and panties.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Oh, Meredith, I'd like you to meet Jacob, my brilliant son!

MEREDITH removes her bra and reaches to shake Jacob's hand.

MEREDITH

Nice to meet you, Jacob. Wow, he's even cuter than you said, Lauren.

LAUREN

Meredith has been so good to me.

MEREDITH

Oh, shut up.

LAUREN

You shut up, letting me stay with you. Hell, gettin' me the audition.
(to Jacob)
Put your eyes back in your head!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PULLMAN - NIGHT

A door opens. TRAVIS, a cocky middle-aged man, peers out.

TRAVIS

Can I help you?

Paul, drunk, looks around, confused.

PAUL

I got the right place here? Is uh... is Tess around?

TRAVIS

Yeah. She's with April. Can I help you with something?

PAUL

Oh, I just... uh...

Tess comes to the door.

TESS
I got it, Travis.
(off his look-)
I said I got it.

Travis goes inside. Tess steps out and closes the door.

TESS (CONT'D)
(coldly)
What are you doing, Paul?

PAUL
What's with uh...

TESS
It's Christmas. He's her father.

PAUL
Huh. Well, I just uh... I saw this.
(holding out a doll)
And I thought of April.

TESS
What, you want me to wrap it?

PAUL
I just...

TESS
What do you want, Paul?

Paul looks down, thinking about it.

PAUL
What do I want?
(a beat, and then-)
Just give this to April.

He pushes the doll at Tess. She doesn't take it.

TESS
Keep it. She has enough dolls.

PAUL
Merry Christmas to you too.

TESS
You know, I deserve better than
this.

PAUL
Than what?

TESS

We're getting old, Paul. Things have to mean something.

PAUL

Ah, meaning. Yes.

TESS

Bring something to the table. Something besides your dick. I'm not gonna be some... recreation for you.

PAUL

Great. Merry fuckin' Christmas!

Paul turns, throws the doll into the darkness, and heads down the snowy path.

TESS

Paul, don't be an asshole!

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - NYC - NIGHT

A yule log burns on the TV in the dark living room, "Oh Holy Night" quietly playing under it. The soft glow of a pathetic Christmas tree lights Jacob as he sleeps on the couch.

Lauren, wasted, sits on the floor facing him. The sound of FUCKING can be heard from the bedroom.

LAUREN

I had to beg him, and it was only supposed to be a few months.

JACOB

(waking up)

What?

LAUREN

And now you're all better. Uncle Paul fixed you all up. Well, I got news for you, I'm better too.

JACOB

What are you talking about?

LAUREN

You can stay, sweetie. Please? You can go to school here. Next fall maybe. CUNY... or... or... NYU!

JACOB

No!

The fucking stops.

LAUREN

I don't know if you understand this, Jacob, but we... we can't afford that place...

JACOB

But Uncle Paul's going to...

LAUREN

Uncle Paul. Uncle Paul. I owe your Uncle enough. We are not going to add tuition on top of it!

JACOB

They accepted me!

LAUREN

Honey, sweetie, what's there for you? I mean, seriously. Fucking farms? Pigs and cows and... dirt?

Meredith comes out of the bedroom in a skimpy robe. She goes to the kitchen and gets a glass of water.

MEREDITH

Is everything okay?

LAUREN

(shining it on)
Oh, hey, Meredith. Yeah, we're just chatting.

JACOB

Yeah, she's saying that I can't go back. I have to stay here.

LAUREN

What?

JACOB

Can I stay here with you, Meredith? Sleep on your couch? Eat your food?

LAUREN

Jacob, stop it! He's joking.

MEREDITH

You guys are fucking nuts.

LAUREN

I promise I'll get you the rent
when I get my next check.

MEREDITH

I don't want the rent. I want you
to find your own place. Okay,
sweetie?

A man's voice is heard from the bedroom.

MAN (O.S.)

Merry! Let's go.

MEREDITH

I'm coming! Fucking Viagra. Merry
Christmas, Jacob.

JACOB

Merry Christmas.

EXT. MANHATTAN CITY STREET - NEW YEAR'S EVE

The city is alive with reveling partiers. The front door of a
brownstone opens and a pretty girl, STACY, rushes down the
steps followed by a YOUNG MAN.

JACOB (O.S.)

Stacy?

Stacy turns and looks down the dark sidewalk. Jacob slowly
appears in his Jets baseball cap.

STACY

Jacob? Is that you?

YOUNG MAN

Stacy, c'mon. We're gonna be late.

STACY

Okay, okay. Give me a second.

JACOB

How's it going?

STACY

Fine. Wow. How are you?

JACOB

Good. Doin' good.

STACY

Still living with your mother?

JACOB
No. No. I'm going to school.
Washington State University.

STACY
Oh, really? Isn't that where your
uncle coaches?

JACOB
How's Cornell?

STACY
Well, I'm actually gonna take time
some off. I might go to City
College in the fall.

JACOB
Oh, did something happen? Or...

STACY
No... no. Just... You know...
things... and other things.

JACOB
Well, City College is cool.

STACY
Wow. It's been a long time.

JACOB
Yeah.

YOUNG MAN
Stacy!

STACY
Hey, get off my balls, man!
(a beat, to Jacob)
Well, listen, I can't stay...

JACOB
You ever get your tattoo?

STACY
Ah, no.

JACOB
The swan. Well, it was fun drawing
it for you anyway.

STACY
I still have it, you know, the
drawing, just in case. I still look
at it sometimes.

JACOB

That's cool. I know how you like them... swans. That one we used to watch in the park, remember? Just swimming around, all alone? It was so sad.

A beat, and then-

STACY

It's good to see you.

YOUNG MAN

(texting on his phone)
Come on Stace, they're waiting.

JACOB

Stacy, I'm sorry, about last year.

STACY

It's okay.

JACOB

No, I shouldn't've disappeared on you like that. I shoulda' called. I shoulda' returned your calls. I shoulda' been better. But something happened that... that's hard to explain.

STACY

(tearing up)
Things happen, Jacob.

JACOB

Yeah. Omnia mutantur, nihil interit.

STACY

(smiling)
You and your Latin.

Jacob goes to her.

JACOB

Stacy...

STACY

(stepping back)
It was great seeing you again, Jacob. Say "hi" to your ma for me.

Stacy smiles and then turns away. The young man grabs her hand, and Jacob watches as they disappear into the darkness.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Jacob walks down a dark street, the sound of partiers in the distance counting down: "12! 11! 10! 9! 8!"

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The countdown continues on the TV. Paul, drunk and alone, sits in his underwear, holding a big spoon and a metal pot.

PAUL
7! 6! 5! 4! 3! 2! 1!

He shouts and clangs the pot madly for several seconds, then stops and stares at the TV--confetti falling in Times Square.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - NIGHT

Jacob sits in a subway car, crowded with drunken partiers. A QUARTET performs doo-wop.

QUARTET
"Sometimes I wonder why I spend the
lonely nights dreaming of a song."

Jacob peers up at them from under the rim of his Jets cap, recognizing something hauntingly familiar in the tune.

MONTAGE: WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

The campus comes alive with returning students, heading into dorms, unpacking, partying, playing pool, etc.

INT. RICK'S DORM - DAY

The door opens and Jacob, with two suitcases, looks in.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Jacob stands in line, clutching books to his chest, his hat pulled down. Rick stands beside him, observing his behavior. Over this, campus reporter Carolyn Cruz can be heard.

CAROLYN (V.O.)
The semester has begun and while...

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Jacob, with his cap pulled down, sits in the back row, looking at all the students around him.

CAROLYN (V.O.)
 ...classes are now in full swing...

INT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

Jacob walks through the dorm lounge, a book bag over his shoulder. On the TV, Carolyn continues her report.

CAROLYN
 ...the usually raucous Wazzu fraternities have been unusually quiet... Leading many to ask, "Is something brewing?"

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS BUILDING - NIGHT

Carolyn and her editor, TOMOKO, exit the building.

TOMOKO
 Okay, so plane crash, school shooting, or hurricane?

CAROLYN
 Wow. I'd have to say plane crash. I mean, you got the smoke, the fire, the crying relatives, the investigation.

EXT. DARK PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The metal door of a horse trailer slams open. Three large fraternity brothers, KANI (Samoan), KENTRELL (African American), and BRICE (white), look inside.

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS BUILDING - NIGHT

TOMOKO walks into the parking lot toward her car.

TOMOKO
 Thanks for helping me with my project, Carolyn. Your narration kicks ass.

CAROLYN
 No problem. Good luck tomorrow.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

The shadowy figures of the frat brothers Kani, Kentrell, and Brice lead Esther the five-legged cow--the same cow we saw before--across an empty courtyard.

INT. JESSUP DORM - NIGHT

A YOUNG WOMAN stands outside an elevator. The doors open and staring at her from inside is Esther the five-legged cow. The doors close. The Young Woman stares at the door, shocked.

CUT TO:

The fifth floor hallway. Kani, Kentrell, and Brice stand outside the elevator, waiting. The doors open. They look at each other and then go for Esther.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob sleeps in his bed. In his dream, a gold pendant in the shape of a runner falls slowly through darkness. A flash of sunlight glints off its smooth surface.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)

Jacob???

The pendant falls silently onto the muddy ground. A child's hand glides over the earth. As it reaches for the pendant, a cow hoof stomps on the hand, smashing it into the mud.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

A bed creaks. Distressed breathing. Rick's light CLICKS on, illuminating Jacob in pajamas, sitting on the side of his bed, obviously upset. Rick squints under the light.

RICK

Hey, Jake. You all right over there? Been making some noise.

Jacob rises, clutching his hand as he paces the room.

JACOB

I don't know. My hand. My...

Rick, concerned, watches as Jacob leaves the room.

EXT. JESSUP DORM - NIGHT

As Carolyn walks across campus, Kani, Kentrell, and Brice run out of the dorm, whooping and laughing.

INT. JESSUP DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jacob rushes down the hallway, into the bathroom.

INT. JESSUP DORM BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jacob staggers up to a row of sinks, looks in the mirror, gasps at his reflection, and spins away, crashing into Esther. Esther snorts, and Jacob jumps back and screams.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

As Carolyn walks across campus, a SCREAM is heard from the dorm behind her. She turns and looks up. A window shatters and a body flails through the air, landing in a massive hedge. Shocked, Carolyn pulls out her phone and films.

From inside the camera we see her hand part the bush, revealing Jacob who is upside down and bleeding.

CAROLYN (O.S.)
Are you all right? What's your name? Can you tell me your name?

JACOB
Cow. The cow.

CAROLYN (O.S.)
What?

The camera whips around to a group of onlookers in pajamas.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Someone call 911!!!

INT. JESSUP DORM - NIGHT

Rick pokes his head out of his room. He listens and then runs down the hall to the bathroom, pushing the door open.

RICK
Jake!

He sees the cow standing against the far wall and stops. He turns, sees the broken window, and walks to it. Five stories below, he sees the gathering crowd.

RICK (CONT'D)
Jesus.

INT. STUDENT UNION - DAY

Students mill about in the cafeteria. On a TV in the corner, Carolyn is seen reporting the story of Jacob's fall.

CAROLYN

...and was apparently so startled by this fraternity prank that he jumped through the window, plummeted five stories, landing in this bush.

INT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

Several guys sit on couches watching Carolyn on TV.

CAROLYN

He has been taken to University Hospital where his condition is thought to be serious.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Jacob, face scratched and bruised, sleeps in a hospital bed.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

The student's identity is at this time unknown. When asked, his only reply was...

CUT TO:

Carolyn's video footage of Jacob upside down in the bush.

JACOB

The cow.

INT. STADIUM - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

On the TV screen, Carolyn finishes her story.

CAROLYN

This is Carolyn Cruz reporting for KWSU Campus News.

The TV goes blank. Paul stands with the remote in his hand, staring at the blank screen in disbelief.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Winter sunlight shines through a bank of windows onto Paul as he walks down a long corridor in search of Jacob's room.

PAUL (V.O.)

How are you doing?

JACOB (V.O.)

Fine.

CUT TO:

Paul speaking with a doctor in the hallway.

JACOB (V.O.)

Feel pretty stupid.

CUT TO:

Paul at the end of Jacob's bed.

PAUL

I'm sorry I couldn't be here sooner. I had to go to San Diego, you know, recruiting.

JACOB

That's all right.

PAUL

Jacob, listen, you gave it a hell of a shot...

JACOB

It was an accident.

PAUL

You jumped out a window, Jacob!

JACOB

There was a cow...

PAUL

You could've been killed. Were you trying to... I mean, is that it?

JACOB

No. I turned around, there was a fucking cow!

PAUL

Well, it's over. I'm putting you on a plane.

JACOB

What?

PAUL

This is not working out, Jacob! I talked to your doctor, and you know that test you took?

JACOB
It was a stupid test!

PAUL
Well, it says... you got problems.
As if we didn't know that.

JACOB
There's nothing wrong with me!

PAUL
Is that a joke? You need therapy!
Medication.

JACOB
I just want to go to school!

PAUL
You're going home, back to your
mother.

JACOB
There is no home. My mother is a
drug addict!

PAUL
What? I thought she was clean.

Jacob scoffs.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I don't know what to do, Jacob.

JACOB
I'm a legal adult. I can do
whatever I want.

PAUL
(tenderly)
Look, Jacob, you're lying to
yourself... about something. You
gotta stop and face this thing,
whatever it is. I mean, can you
work with me here?

Jacob takes a deep breath and looks at Paul.

JACOB
I'll take the meds.

PAUL
And you'll move back to the house.

JACOB

No.

PAUL

God, you're a mule-headed...
Anything happens again, and you're
back in with me. Deal?

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A nurse pushes Jacob in a wheelchair out of the hospital. Rick, carrying Jacob's crutches, flirts with her. Above her left breast is a name tag reading, "Julia."

EXT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

Rick's car pulls up outside the dorm. Rick gets out and helps Jacob as he hobbles on his crutches.

INT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

Rick pushes the button on the elevator. The doors open. A guy and a GIRL get off. The girl points at Jacob and smiles.

GIRL

Hey! Cowboy! You're Cowboy.

Jacob and Rick step into the elevator and the doors close.

JACOB

Why'd she call me Cowboy?

INT. JESSUP DORM - NIGHT

Jacob lies on his bed, reading. There is a KNOCK at the door. He freezes. There is another KNOCK.

Outside, in the hall, Carolyn turns and walks away. The door to Jacob's room opens and Jacob slowly peers out.

CAROLYN

Jacob? Hi! I'm Carolyn Cruz. Can I
talk to you for a minute?

INT. PLANETARIUM - DAY

In darkness, students lean back in their seats, staring up at the screen above them. A PROFESSOR stands in front.

PROFESSOR

Okay. Barry?

The lights dim further as the screens above are filled with stars. Jacob looks up at the galaxy above him.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

We begin this semester looking at the many planets of the solar system, studying their complexities, their intricacies and how they relate to and can teach us about the planet Earth. We are now approaching Saturn. Saturn shines as a steady, yellowish light in the night time sky.

On the screen, from Jacob's POV, the swirling light of Saturn reshapes into the form of a woman in a gown, dancing. She reaches out, then falls back into the darkness. Her image shatters like glass.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS BUILDING - DAY

On a large monitor, Carolyn stands in the midst of a herd of cows, a microphone in her hand.

CAROLYN (ON THE MONITOR)

Here on the Campus of Washington State University, the study and research of the Holstein cow has gained national recognition. However, what was once academic, has now become recreational. Many students at Washington State consider this "Cow Sport" a long standing tradition. But recently these traditions have turned into tragedies. It was only last spring when sophomore, Michael Allen, was crushed beneath the weight of one of these huge animals. Allen had apparently been the victim of an innocent night of cow tipping which had somehow gone terribly awry.

On the screen, Carolyn crosses her throat with her hand. Tomoko sits in her editing bay with Carolyn behind her. Tomoko freezes the image. She makes a notation on her note pad and then hits the fastforward button.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

It's the second take. I screwed up the first.

Tomoko lets it run a moment and then presses play. Carolyn's image appears on the screen. She is outside Jessup Dorm.

CAROLYN (ON THE MONITOR) (CONT'D)

All set? Okay. Even more recently, freshman Jacob Haun fell prey to the annual "Fifth-Floor Sigma Phi Mutant-cow Prank." Until now, the tradition of placing Esther, WSU's resident five-legged cow, on the fifth floor of Jessup Dormitory has been harmless fun. However, just two weeks ago, Jacob Haun was so startled by the cow that he fell out of the fifth floor bathroom window and miraculously suffered only a broken leg.

In the editing bay, Carolyn points to the screen.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

Okay, cut it right there, and then fast forward to Zemeski.

Tomoko forwards to the image of WSU President GAIL ZEMESKI.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

President Zemeski, what limits could you impose that would protect students from the dangers of their very own traditions?

ZEMESKI (ON THE MONITOR)

Well, Carolyn, it's our job to provide a safe environment for all students and to allow them to partake in the very traditions that make this university unique. Regarding the recent Jessup Dorm incident, well, as far as limits go, we may have to consider doing away with the cow.

CAROLYN (O.S.)

Doing away with?

ZEMESKI (ON THE MONITOR)

Well, maybe donate it to another university's veterinary program.

Carolyn, in the editing bay--

CAROLYN
Okay. Okay. All I want is "We may
have to do away with the cow."

TOMOKO
That's it?

CAROLYN
Yeah. Just the one line.

On the screen, the image of Jacob appears. He sits in a chair
in his dorm, his baseball cap pulled over his eyes.

TOMOKO
Who's that?

CAROLYN
That's our protagonist.

On the screen, Carolyn's voice is heard.

CAROLYN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Could you speak up a little, Jacob?

TOMOKO
Why won't he look up?

CAROLYN
I don't know.

They watch the screen for a moment.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
Shit, I can't use any of this.
There's something interesting about
him though, right?
(staring intently at Jacob
on the screen)
What's going on in there, Cowboy?

INT. HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Kids jump around the living room, playing video games.
LASHAUN, a large teenager leans against a wall. Paul, in a
sport coat and tie, sits on the couch next to an elderly
African American woman, MS. DOUGLAS, who looks at a brochure.

PAUL
Ms. Douglas, I think if LaShaun
decides to attend Washington State
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

University, it would be just the first step toward an NFL career. And it's not a bad school.

LASHAUN

I hear it's a party school.

MS. DOUGLAS

Is that true, coach?

PAUL

Well, every school has a certain amount of that. But I can assure you, Ms. Douglas, that Washington State is a solid academic institution. In fact, my nephew came all the way from New York and he's having a fine experience.

LASHAUN

They got that five-legged cow I was telling you about, Grandma.

MS. DOUGLAS

That one you was showin' me on the internet?

LASHAUN

And that "Cowboy" that jumped out the window. That's this school.

MS. DOUGLAS

Well, now I don't want you jumping out windows.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Jacob, his baseball cap pulled over his eyes, struggles with his crutches as he pushes a plastic tray down a food line.

CUT TO:

Jacob sitting at a table eating his lunch. Rick sits across from him. Two STUDENTS pass by the table, noticing Jacob.

STUDENT #1

Moo!

STUDENT #2

What's up, Cowboy?

RICK

Man, that's some irony. For someone who doesn't want to be noticed. You've become a star.
 (examining Jacob)
 So, uh... how's it going? You taking your meds?

Jacob nods.

RICK (CONT'D)

Jake, what is it? I mean, you don't have to tell me, or anything... But when you look in the mirror, like, is it your skin? Your nose?

JACOB

I don't look in the mirror.

RICK

Ya know, I read that some of them look in the mirror all day long, can't help it, always combing their hair, fixing their make-up. Some people even get plastic surgery or try to do it themselves. Cut their faces all up...

JACOB

What's your point?

RICK

Well, when you did look in the mirror, what did you see?

JACOB

You don't want to know.

RICK

Sure I do. And you know, Jake, I read it helps if you talk about it.

JACOB

(suspicious)
 You've been reading a lot lately.

EXT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Jacob, on his crutches, struggles past a YOUNG MAN who stands by a table with a sign that reads, "Save Esther."

YOUNG MAN

Hey! Cowboy! You wanna sign a
petition to save Esther?

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Jacob sits in the back of a small classroom listening
intently to the passionate lecture of an OLD PROFESSOR.

OLD PROFESSOR

Were the Greeks and Romans insane?
Gods walking among us? Animals
conversing with human beings? Or
were there fundamental human truths
in these stories? Let's consider
the story of Prometheus. You may
have heard of him, the champion of
humankind, who created man from
clay and stole fire, who was
punished by Zeus, chained to a
rock, his liver eaten every day by
an Eagle, and then visited by a
talking cow. But why? What is this
story really about? What does this
story tell us about ourselves?

INT. DORM - DAY

Jacob, his cast now gone and using a cane, limps to a wall of
mailboxes. He opens his mailbox and pulls out a postcard.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE - DAY

A Volkswagen bus drives down a dirt road, dust rising behind
it. Over this, Jacob's father is heard.

FATHER (V.O.)

"Dear Jacob. Sold house in Iowa.
Moved to New Mexico."

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Jacob's father stands facing a painting easel on a hill in
the desert. He is in his mid fifties, bearded, and balding.
He holds a thick paintbrush in one hand a joint in the other.

FATHER (V.O.)

"Painting. A lot. Promising. Sold
some. Bought food and paint.... And
more time."

INT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Jacob's father pays a Native American woman behind the counter for his groceries. He turns and goes out the door.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

It is pouring rain. Jacob's father looks down at a small Native American boy in shorts who sits outside the door hugging his knees close to his chest.

FATHER (V.O.)
"Found a new spirit here. A new
spirit, thinking of you."

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Jacob's father, drunk, faces his painting, the huge blue sky behind him. He picks up a can of maroon paint, and hurls it at the canvas, sending the easel flying. He walks over and looks down at the toppled painting, and the maroon paint dripping off.

FATHER (V.O.)
"Proud of your courage. Keep
drawing and never avert your eyes."

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jacob and Paul stand in the kitchen. Jacob finishes reading the postcard.

JACOB
"Love, Dad."

PAUL
Wow. How long has it been?

JACOB
A while.

PAUL
What's on the card there?

JACOB
It's one of his paintings.

Jacob hands the postcard to Paul.

PAUL
Hm. It's... nice.

JACOB

He sends us money sometimes. Once I thought I saw him getting into a cab in Soho. Mom says he's crazy.

PAUL

Ah, I don't know about that. She was probably just pissed off or something. But she loved him. And for a while there, he was good to her. He just wanted something else.

JACOB

Yeah, sure.

PAUL

It had nothing to do with you.

JACOB

Exactly.

PAUL

I didn't mean it like that.

JACOB

I know. It's cool that he's an artist, and he's being true to himself, or whatever. I just wish I got more than a postcard every once in a while.

PAUL

Yeah. Well, sorry to say, pal, but we don't get to pick our parents.

INT. JESSUP DORM LOUNGE - NIGHT

Jacob plays pool by himself. From across the room, the campus news is on the TV: Carolyn stands in front of a raucous group of students holding protest signs ("Stop Bovine Brutality!") and chanting "Fight to save the cow! End the cruelty now!"

CAROLYN (ON THE TV)

I'm standing outside the student union where hundreds of students have gathered in protest over President Zemeski's recent comments about doing away with Esther, the five-legged cow.

(MORE)

CAROLYN (ON THE TV) (CONT'D)

An extraordinary unification of many disparate groups have formed: animal rights activists, football players, fraternities, even members of the theatre department, in concern over the rights and treatment of Esther. The protesters report that they have received as many as 12,000 signatures in their "Save Esther" petition drive. One of those signatures belongs to freshman, Jacob Haun, whose now famous encounter with Esther marked the beginning of this unusual movement. If the Cowboy can learn to forgive, can't President Zemeski learn to forget? This is Carolyn Cruz reporting for KWSU news.

Jacob, using the pool cue to support himself, stands only three feet from the TV, staring at the screen, dumbfounded.

INT. PLANETARIUM - DAY

Jacob, wearing his mask, stands under a huge dome of white screens. The lights switch off and Jacob is surrounded by an endless star-filled sky.

The sky transforms into a dark dreamscape as the voice of the astronomy professor is heard.

PROFESSOR (V.O.)

In the sky, Sagittarius is marked by an asterism known as the teapot, found near the archer's bow and arrow. Sagittarius appears best on a summer evening, though it...

Jacob looks up and into the eyes of a naked girl. It is Carolyn.

She slowly unbuttons his shirt, kissing him gently on the neck. She puts her arms around him and caresses his back, not at all surprised to find a cow leg jutting out from between his shoulder blades. She strokes it lovingly.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - MORNING

Jacob sits on his bed. Rick lies in his bed, listening.

JACOB

What do you think it means?

RICK
What do I think it means? Are you serious? Dude, it means you gotta weird-ass hard-on for Carolyn Cruz.

INT. RICK'S CAR - DAY

Rick and Jacob move steadily through traffic. Jacob changes the music to a Donny Hathaway song.

JACOB
No, man. This.

RICK
Wait, you like Donny Hathaway?

JACOB
Dude, he's classic.

A green Subaru passes in front of them.

RICK
Hey man! That's her!

JACOB
Who?

Rick pulls up behind the car stopped at a red light. He jumps out, runs to the driver side window and points back at Jacob.

The driver turns her head and looks out her back window. It's Carolyn.

The light turns green. Rick waves to Carolyn and runs back to his car. Carolyn pulls away.

RICK
What are you doin' Thursday night?

JACOB
Uh...

RICK
Good. We're goin' to a party.

JACOB
We are?

RICK
Yeah. I just got ya a date.

Jacob stares ahead at the dashboard in disbelief.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jacob limps back and forth, upset. Paul packs a suitcase.

JACOB

...I mean, he didn't even ask me.
He just jumped out and...and...now
I'm goin' with her to a party.

PAUL

Well, I can see why you're pissed.
That's a shit sandwich right there.

JACOB

Total shit sandwich.

PAUL

What does she look like?

JACOB

What's that matter?
(off Paul's look-)
She's... she's filthy.

PAUL

Filthy? What, she doesn't bathe?

JACOB

No, no filthy, you know, hot.

PAUL

Ah, you're using the lingo. Filthy,
huh? She's filthy. How in the hell
does that mean hot?

JACOB

Where you going?

PAUL

Recruiting trip.

JACOB

So I should just talk to Rick?

PAUL

Just tell him you're not going.

JACOB

Well...

PAUL

What?

JACOB
I want to go.

INT. RICK'S CAR - NIGHT

Jacob sits beside Carolyn in the back seat. Rick pulls up to an apartment building and looks at himself in the mirror.

RICK
I look good. I look good, right?

CAROLYN
What, are you kidding? Go get her!

RICK
Aw-ight. Be right back.

Rick gets out. Carolyn looks at Jacob for a long beat.

CAROLYN
Yeah, I haven't been to The Cage in a while. It can get pretty crazy there. Have you ever been?

Jacob shakes his head.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
Jacob, what is it? Do I smell? Is there something in my teeth?

JACOB
No.

CAROLYN
Well, how about a little eye contact then?

Jacob doesn't look at her. She sighs and sits back.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
You know, Jacob, I wanted to come. You're acting like you don't even want to be here.

JACOB
Whatever.

CAROLYN
Fine. I guess this is just a big waste of time then.

JACOB
I'm not trying to be a jerk.

CAROLYN
Could've fooled me.

JACOB
It's just, I don't know what you're
doing... here. I mean, you're...

CAROLYN
What?

JACOB
If I say it, it'll sound totally
whack.

CAROLYN
Okay...

JACOB
You're... like... crazy beautiful.
Or even more, whatever's more than
that. Exquisite...or stunning.
Or... It's, like, hard to look at
you. Like staring into the sun.
Almost... or something.

Carolyn stares at Jacob. After a moment he turns his head and looks into her eyes. She smiles.

The passenger door opens and JULIA, Jacob's nurse from the hospital, gets in the car. Jacob introduces her to Carolyn. Rick climbs in the driver's side and starts the car.

INT. FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT

The large living room of "The Cage" is filled with a raucous crowd of college students dancing to loud music. Rick, Julia, Carolyn and Jacob enter. TYG, an African American student, rushes out of the crowd.

TYG
Wassup, Bleu!

RICK
Hey, Tyg. This is Julia.

TYG
It's a pleasure, Julia.

JULIA
Good to meet you.

RICK
Hey, Tyg, is Bailey around?

TYG
He's out back. C'mon.

RICK
Tell him I'll be there in a minute.

Rick turns and looks at Jacob, who is clearly overwhelmed.

RICK (CONT'D)
Excuse us, ladies.

Rick throws his arm around Jacob and takes him aside.

RICK (CONT'D)
How ya doin', buddy?

JACOB
It's crowded.

RICK
It's a party, man. Your first college party. Look Jake, I wouldn't've brought you here if I didn't think you could handle it. You can do it... Right?

JACOB
Yeah. I'm the shit.

RICK
(laughing)
That's right, you're the shit. Now, Julia and I are gonna go hang. If you need anything, I'll be around.

Rick and Julia disappear into the crowd. Carolyn stands beside Jacob. They watch the proceedings before them.

CAROLYN
I've seen some crazy shit here!

JACOB
Yeah?

CAROLYN
Yeah, girl on fire. Guy almost drown with his head in a fish tank. You want a beer?

CUT TO:

Sometime later. Jacob by a keg, taking a sip of his beer, a thick layer of foam on his upper lip. Carolyn reaches over and wipes it off with her thumb.

Jacob follows Carolyn into the crowd. People notice him and point him out to their friends, taking pictures with their phones.

A tall, good looking male student approaches Carolyn, smiling. They embrace. She turns around to Jacob.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
Jacob, I'm gonna go say hi to somebody, okay?

Carolyn disappears into the crowd. Jacob sits down on a couch next to a drunk GIRL, obviously upset.

GIRL
Hey, Cowboy!

Jacob doesn't respond.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Hey! I'm talking to you!!!

Jacob looks away.

GIRL (CONT'D)
That's right. Don't look at me. You monster!

Jacob looks at her, suddenly terrified.

JACOB
What?

GIRL
All guys, all y'all, monsters.

JACOB
Oh.

GIRL
(crying)
Fuckin' Marcus!

CUT TO:

Sometime later, Jacob, drunk, struggles through the crowd holding a fresh beer. He gets bumped, suds drip over his knuckles, he smiles. He gets to the couch and carefully sits down. Carolyn flops down beside him, a fifth of rum in one hand and a plastic cup in the other.

CAROLYN
Hey, Jake!

She pours a large shot of rum and hands it to him. He drinks the shot and grimaces. She stares into his eyes.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

Eyes. Your eyes. My eyes. Eye and I. The same. Eye and I.

She pours another shot. Jacob drinks it. She pours herself one, and drinks it. She gently places her hand on top of his scarred knuckles.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

"Subjectivity is truth." That's Kierkegaard. There is no real objectivity. Just what you see with your eyes. Eye and I.

(looking into his eyes)

You have to tell your story. Honestly. As best you can. That's it. And you can't get all weepy every time there's a fire or a robbery! Or when someone falls out a window! It's about the story. It's about the truth. The facts. Being able to look right at them, right at them. And it's tough... sometimes... it's tough.

Jacob listens, taking it in. A petite BLOND GIRL approaches Jacob from the dance floor.

BLOND GIRL

Hey Carolyn, can I dance with him?

CAROLYN

Sure. Why you asking me?

BLOND GIRL

(pulling Jacob up)

You're the Cowboy, aren't you? I've always had a thing for cowboys.

The song changes to a slow groove. Blond Girl wraps her arms around Jacob and grinds against him. As she does this, Jacob looks over at Carolyn, who stares back at him.

MONTAGE:

Couples grinding to the music. Rick and Julia talking to friends. Jacob dancing with Blond Girl. Students passing a joint back and forth in the kitchen, etc.

CUT TO:

Jacob drunkenly falling onto the couch. Carolyn, drunk, offers him a shot. He shakes his head. She slowly brings it to her mouth, but her movement is interrupted by Jacob.

JACOB

Carolyn?

CAROLYN

How was your dance?

JACOB

Whatta ya see...

CAROLYN

Ya wanna watch out for her, Jake, she's nuts.

JACOB

Whatta ya see when you look at me?

CAROLYN

What?

JACOB

When you look at me...

CAROLYN

Okay, look, Jacob, I gotta be honest. I... I kinda' see a news story. I'm sorry.

JACOB

No that's okay. I knew you really didn't want to go out with me.

CAROLYN

No, no I did.

JACOB

But, hey, maybe that's even better. You're a reporter, right? So, as a reporter, describe me.

CAROLYN

I don't know, Jacob. You're interesting. Not like any guy I've ever... you know... fucking narcissists. Liars.

JACOB

No. No. I mean... my face. My face.

CAROLYN
You wanna know what your face looks
like?

JACOB
Give a report, you know, as a
reporter. Describe my face.

She examines him for a long moment.

CAROLYN
Okay. Yeah. This is Carolyn Cruz
reporting just inches from Jacob
Haun's face. He's got blue eyes.
Straight teeth. Nice square jaw.
(getting turned on)
Strong cheek bones. A cute nose.
Full lips. If he had more
confidence...

He reaches up and gently touches her face. She takes his hand
in hers, leans in, and kisses him. She pulls back.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
Whoa. That's not sposed' to happen.

Carolyn gets up and walks away.

JACOB
Holy shit.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Jacob comes out of the house, music THUMPING, and walks into
the middle of the lawn, delighted and amazed.

JACOB
"Beauty, terrible beauty. A
deathless Goddess."

He tilts his head back, looking up at the blanket of stars
spread across the sky, and falls back on the grass.

From the shadows, three dark shapes appear over him, the
three fraternity brothers, Kani, Kentrell, and Brice.

KANI
Yer' da' Cowboy, right?

Obviously drunk, they sit on the grass beside Jacob.

KANI (CONT'D)

Listen, Cowboy, we just wanted to say wer' sarry...

BRICE

About the broken leg. We didn't want to hurt anybody. Fuck.

KENTRELL

Five legs man!

Kentrell and Brice give each other a high-five over Jacob.

KANI

Damn straight. And we're not gonna let 'em take her away! Fuck that!
(whispering to Jacob)
We know where dere keepin' her.

KENTRELL

You should meet her. Hey guys...

Kani looks down at Jacob and points at him.

KANI

You gotta meet her, man.

They grab Jacob and lift him off the ground.

KENTRELL

You two gotta make up.

They carry him to a nearby car. Jacob sees his reflection in the car window. His face is a twisted, deformed blur.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Kani drives through campus. Jacob sits between Kentrell and Brice in the back seat, his eyes closed.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A screen door flies open and a Young Jacob, in a Cub Scout shirt and underwear, runs across the porch, down the steps.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)

Jacob!!!

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Jacob's head falls back with his mouth open. Brice pours beer into Jacob's mouth.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Young Jacob races toward a barn, a roost of chickens exploding upward around him.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Jacob nearly chokes, spitting the beer on himself.

KENTRELL

Whoa there.

In the flash of a passing light, Jacob sees the back of his hand, mangled and bleeding. A split-second later, it is normal again.

EXT. VETERINARY STABLES - NIGHT

The car pulls up to the stables. Kani, Brice, and Kentrell pull Jacob from the car.

INT. VETERINARY STABLES - NIGHT

The door opens and Kani, Brice, and Kentrell carry Jacob's nearly limp body to the open end of the stables and set him down on the floor by a fence. Kani grabs a length of rope, and they tie Jacob to a post.

KANI

(whispering)

Never avert yer' eyes.

They leave, the door SLAMMING shut behind them.

Jacob turns his head and looks out at the darkness beyond the fence. Out in the distance the sound of RUSTLING can be heard.

ESTHER the five-legged cow snorts and lumbers toward him.

Jacob, terrified, sits up, his eyes widening.

Esther stops at the fence, stretching her head through the beams, close to his face.

They stare at each other, their breath visible in the cold air.

She speaks to him in the soft voice of a young woman.

ESTHER

Who is it that I see tortured here
in this cold, dark place? What sin
is it for which you are being
punished?

Jacob stares at her, frozen.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Tell me, where is it my wanderings
have brought me? Where am I?

JACOB

I... I don't know.

ESTHER

Please. Speak to me. I have been
tried enough.

JACOB

That's Ovid.

ESTHER

Yet, I have not found the way....
to leave my misery.

JACOB

The Metamorphoses.

ESTHER

And where are you bringing me?
What fault, what fault, Jacob, do
you find in me that I should be
made to suffer so?

JACOB

None. It's not my fault.

ESTHER

Whose then?

JACOB

I don't know.

ESTHER

I think you do.

Jacob stares at Esther and then begins to cry.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Please. I beg of you. Do not hide
from what I must endure.

JACOB

You don't want to see... what I
have to show you.

ESTHER

What will I see?

JACOB

Everything.

Esther steps slowly away from the fence, turns, and
disappears into darkness.

ESTHER (O.S.)

I will see it.

EXT. CAMPUS - MORNING

Shadows give way to the orange-gold light of morning. Lawns
between stone buildings glisten with frost.

EXT. STABLES - MORNING

A campus squad car is parked outside the stables, its lights
flashing. The stable door opens and Jacob, cold and hung
over, comes out, followed by a security guard.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jacob is slumped at the dining room table. Paul sets a glass
of orange juice and some aspirin in front of him.

PAUL

Here. Get rid of that headache. You
know, Rick was here banging on my
door at 3:30 this morning. We were
worried about you. Jesus, Jacob.

JACOB

Someone was chasing me.

PAUL

At the party? Before they tied...

JACOB

No. When I was little. On the farm.

PAUL
On the farm? On our farm?

Jacob nods. Paul sits down and thinks for a long moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Was it... was it a woman?

JACOB
(emotional)
She was chasing me.

PAUL
God no.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul, having a nightmare, tosses and turns in his bed.

PAUL
(in his sleep)
No. Please no.

CUT TO:

His nightmare: a woman's hand gliding over Cowboy and Indian bed sheets.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Paul, in a suit and tie, with dark circles under his eyes, is slumped behind the wheel, deep in thought.

EXT. SAN BERNARDINO SUBURB - DAY

Paul gets out of the car and walks up a driveway, past a silver Lexus, towards a large, Spanish-style home. He collects himself and knocks on the door.

The door opens and a middle-aged man, MR. LANCASTER, looks out. Paul smiles, putting on his best face.

MR. LANCASTER
Coach Huber? We didn't know if you were coming.

PAUL
(shining it on)
Yeah, I'm sorry I'm so late. I kind of got turned around... and...

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Students throw suitcases and duffel bags into their cars.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

As spring break begins, we find that yet another chapter has been written in the bizarre on-going saga of Esther, the five-legged cow. Two days ago, Jacob Haun, better known as "Cowboy," was found tied to a post in the veterinary stables on the east side of campus.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Jacob lies on his bed, despondent, staring up at the ceiling. Rick stuffs a sweatshirt into a bag and zips it up.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

He was apparently abducted by three male students whose identities are at this time unknown.

Rick throws the bag over his shoulder and looks at Jacob.

RICK

C'mon, take you five minutes. Throw some clothes in a bag. We'll be in Seattle in no time. Cool city, Jake. It's not NYC, but...

Jacob doesn't respond.

RICK (CONT'D)

You sure you're all right? Look, you tell me who they are and I'll go over and put their shit down.

JACOB

It's okay, Rick.

RICK

Aw-ight. Have a good spring break. Peace.

Rick reaches out his fist and Jake reluctantly reaches out his. They fist bump, and Rick leaves the room.

Jacob sits up on the bed.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

Jacob Haun, you may remember, is the freshman who last January began the cow controversy by falling out of a five story window after being frightened by Esther in the annual Sigma-Phi cow prank.

EXT. PULLMAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Jacob, in his Jet's cap, pulls a suitcase down a street.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

This latest incident will more than likely seal the fate of Esther, and will fuel the fire raging among the concerned student body.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob walks up the driveway to the front door.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

Sources say that no action will be taken until after spring break, action that may result in Esther being "done away with," thereby ending these strange late night encounters between Esther the deformed cow and Jacob Haun, the Cowboy.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob enters and looks around at the quiet, empty house.

CAROLYN (V.O.)

This is Carolyn Cruz for KWSU News. Have a good spring break.

EXT. SAN BERNARDINO SUBURB - DAY

The front door opens and Paul comes out, shaking Mr. Lancaster's hand. JARED LANCASTER, a muscular high school football star stands in the doorway with his arms crossed.

PAUL

(overdoing it)

You want to start next year, Jared?

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
Well, as far as I'm concerned
you're our starting linebacker,
right now. Today! That's a promise.

Paul starts to leave, and then turns around, shouting.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(unhinged)
Crimson and gray, baby! Jared
Lancaster! Middle linebacker!

Jared and his father look at each other, laughing awkwardly.

JARED
Hey Coach, wait up!

Jared jogs from the house. Mr. Lancaster goes inside.

JARED (CONT'D)
Can I talk to you for a minute?

PAUL
Sure, Jared, what is it?

JARED
Thanks for coming down, or
whatever, but listen, I gotta be
straight with you, I was just bein'
polite. I mean, I am going to start
next year, but uh... for U.C.L.A.

PAUL
(disappointed)
Oh. Really? Well. That's great.

JARED
I decided last week. I mean, come
on, it's U.C.L.A.

PAUL
(disgusted)
Yeah. Sunshine, pretty girls. You
know, you could've saved me a trip,
shown some consideration.

JARED
Well, you want me to play for your
team, maybe you shoulda' showed up
on time, maybe, I don't know, you
shoulda' sent the head coach.

PAUL
Yeah, well...

JARED
I mean, seriously, who are you?

Paul drops his briefcase and lunges at Jared.

PAUL
You lousy piece of...!

Jared shoves Paul away. Paul stumbles back, stunned.

JARED
What's wrong with you, man?

Jared kicks the briefcase across the pavement at Paul. Paul stares at Jared and then picks up his briefcase. He moves down the driveway and violently kicks the side of the Lexus, leaving a dent in the door.

JARED (CONT'D)
What the??? Jesus Christ! Dad! Dad!

Paul jumps into his rental car, turns the key in the ignition and speeds away.

INT. AIRPLANE - EVENING

Paul sits in a darkened plane. He unscrews the lid of one of several small bottles of Jack Daniels.

INT. DEN - PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jacob slowly takes off his clothes, deep in thought.

INT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Paul, disheveled and drunk, makes his way through the crowd at baggage claim. He sees Ted Davis, the head coach, standing by himself in the concourse.

PAUL
Oh, hey, Ted.

TED
You put your hands on that boy?

PAUL
Jeez, you drove all the way out...

TED
Did you?

PAUL
 You coulda' just called. I got my
 phone here... somewhere...

TED
 Coach Huber, did you put your hands
 on that young man?

PAUL
 Kid was an asshole.

TED
 I want you to clean out your office
 on Monday. You're fired.

Paul extends his hand to Ted.

PAUL
 (sarcastically)
 Thank you. Thank you so much,
 Coach!

Ted ignores him, turning and walking away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Hey, you're not gonna give me a
 ride? That's okay. That's all
 right. Repetition and detail!
 Right? Repetition and detail,
 motherfucker!!!

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob, in his pajamas, sits at the dining room table, deep in
 thought, a glass of water on the table in front of him. He
 puts his finger on the top of the glass and pushes it over.
 Water pours out onto the table in a puddle.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Paul, drunk, gets out of his car and walks through the
 pouring rain towards the restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Paul, soaked by the rain, enters the restaurant, moves past
 several tables and into the darkened bar. He rushes through
 the room past a middle-aged BARTENDER.

BARTENDER
 Hey Paul... Tess is in the...

Paul goes through a door to a small room in back. Tess sits at a desk surfing the internet.

TESS
(looking up, surprised)
Hey Paul. What's up?

PAUL
(agitated, pacing))
I don't want to do this, Tess. I can't do this anymore.

TESS
Paul, what's wrong?

PAUL
(emotional)
I've been thinking, you know? I mean, I mean, this is my life? I don't want to just fuck you, Tess.

Tess stares at him, taken aback.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I have all this... but I can't...
(tearing up)
God. It didn't have to happen. I didn't do anything, okay! I was a fucking child! I have feelings for you, Tess, but...

Tess stands to comfort him.

TESS
Paul, why don't you...

PAUL
What was I supposed to do???
(a beat, intensely-)
I could hear the thrashers. Out in the field. But I was inside. I was stuck and there were cowboys and Indians on the sheets. And she was there... she wouldn't let me go...
(a long beat, and then-)
I gotta go. I gotta go!

TESS
Paul!

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Paul makes his way through the heavy rain to his car.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob, in his pajamas, paces by the dining room table.

JACOB
(determined)
I'll see it. You want me to see it?

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The hand of an old woman, spotted and wrinkled, lowers the arm of a Victrola onto a spinning record.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob paces back and forth. He stops and closes his eyes.

JACOB
Show me. I'm right here.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

"Stardust" plays on the Victrola. "Sometimes I wonder..."

There is a small, framed black and white photo on a nearby table of a young woman in an evening gown, dancing.

The small hands of a child push against the table, and the picture rocks back and forth.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Paul speeds down the dark, rainy streets.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob, in anguish, grabs the glass out of the puddle of water on the table.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The picture of the dancing woman falls off of the table and shatters on the floor.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob slams the glass on the table, crushing it under his palm.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Gray hair hangs in front of an old woman's face as she crouches beside young Jacob. He is bent over, clutching the edge of the table.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob is bent over the dining room table, blood leaking out from between his fingers and mixing into the water.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The screen door flies open as young Jacob, in a Cub Scout shirt and underpants, sprints out of the house. Chickens explode into the air.

INT. BARN - DAY

A barn door slams shut.

Young Jacob climbs the fence of an old corral. POUNDING is heard from the barn door.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)
Jacob!!! Open this door!!!

Young Jacob slips, his chest hitting the fence, and the gold pendant in the shape of a runner pops off his shirt and floats in the air.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jacob bolts through the house to the front door.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - NIGHT

Paul pulls into the driveway. His headlights wash over Jacob as he sprints across the lawn.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul jumps out of the car and runs into the street, chasing after Jacob, the rain pelting him.

PAUL
Jacob!!!

Paul stops, breathing heavily, looking down the dark street where Jacob can no longer be seen.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Jacob sprints through the driving rain to the veterinary stables and climbs the wooden fence. He leaps into the muddy corral, slipping and falling to one knee.

He picks himself up, moves through the herd of cows, and stops in front of Esther. He stares at her a long beat, her eyes staring back.

Jacob slowly reaches up and places his hand on her head, rain streaming down his face.

INT. PAUL'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul, soaking wet, picks up the phone and dials.

PAUL

Hi, it's me.

(a beat, and then-)

Yeah, I know, it's late. I'm sorry. But something's come up and I had to call. Listen, um... Dad, I know you worked hard. That... that farm almost killed you. But... but I gotta ask... Did you know? Did you know what she was doing? I mean, I've tried. I've never laid down, Pop. I've been tough as nails, but I'm forty-eight years old and I've never been happy. I've been afraid my whole life, because you weren't there, and she was... she was. Why weren't you there?

Paul turns and sees Jacob, his wet pajamas sticking to his skin.

Paul drops the phone and goes to him, taking him into his arms.

From the telephone, Paul's father's voice through his voice amplifier, can be heard, as Paul and Jacob hold each other in the darkness.

FATHER (V.O.)

Son? Son?

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Sunlight shines through the sliding glass door, glinting off the broken glass on the dining room table. Paul, still in his clothes, wakes up in the chair.

INT. DEN - MORNING

Jacob lies curled up in bed, his bloody hand wrapped in a bandage, his eyes open.

INT. STADIUM - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul stands in his nearly empty office, taking plaques off the shelves and placing them into a cardboard box.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Jacob sits on a park bench facing a courtyard, intensely moving a piece of charcoal over the sketch pad in his lap.

INT. PAUL'S GARAGE - DAY

Jacob walks up to the open garage, his sketch pad under his arm. He stands and watches as Paul puts boxes on a shelf.

PAUL

Hey.

JACOB

Hey.

PAUL

Kinda' running out of room here.

(a beat, and then-)

Yeah, I picked up something for dinner. Halibut. Some potatoes.

JACOB

Okay. I'll be upstairs.

They stare at each other, and then Jacob turns and leaves.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

The glow of dusk fills the backyard as Paul sets up patio furniture. Rick walks onto the patio.

PAUL
Oh, hey, Rick. How was your spring
break?

Paul goes to a round table and cranks open the umbrella.

RICK
I heard what happened.

Paul finishes with the umbrella and steps back.

PAUL
Every year I put this ugly shit out
here. I don't know why. No one ever
really uses it.
(swigs his beer)
You want a beer?

RICK
(emotional)
Man, Paul...

PAUL
Remember that third game, Oregon
State? You were banged up pretty
bad. You were... you were hurting.
I sent you back in. I should have
never done that.

RICK
There was no way you coulda' kept
me out of that game. No way.

PAUL
You ever think that sometimes,
maybe, we try to be too tough? To
be brave... or at least what we
think is brave, whatever that is. I
mean, what, exactly, are we trying
to prove?

RICK
(getting emotional)
You know, Paul, I'm gonna be honest
with you. You were never one of
those... you know, "rah rah"
coaches you see in movies or
whatever. You might not even be a
great coach, I don't know... But
after my knee... well, you saved
me. You let me shadow you... you're
the one who suggested psychology,
grad school. You showed me my
future.

After a long beat-

PAUL
Come on, have a beer with me.

RICK
Well, if you're gonna force me.

PAUL
Then you can help me fix this damn grill.

INT. HUMANITIES BUILDING - DAY

Jacob, unshowered, in a daze, walks down a crowded hallway.

CUT TO:

The PROFESSOR, in the middle of his lecture.

PROFESSOR
You see, Solomon's solution to the whole custody battle was to place the baby between the two women...

Jacob sits, hunched over his notebook. At the top of the page there is a line of notes that turns into violent scribbles.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Rick sits at his desk, working on his laptop. Jacob lies on his bed, studying.

JACOB
How's it going?

RICK
Fine. Just some final revisions.

JACOB
You know, you never told me what your thesis is on.

RICK
Oh, it's nothing. Just... just sports psychology.

There's a loud RAP on the door. The door opens and a fat kid, CARLISLE, leans in.

CARLISLE
 Hey, uh Rick, man, the crapper's
 overflowing again.

RICK
 Damn, Carlisle, what I tell you
 about putting your chemistry shit
 down there?

CARLISLE
 I didn't do anything!

Jacob watches as Rick leaves the room. Jacob sets his book
 down and moves to Rick's desk.

CUT TO:

A few minutes later. Rick comes into the room

RICK
 That fucker did it again.

He stops and stares at Jacob, who sits at Rick's desk,
 reading Rick's thesis.

RICK (CONT'D)
 Hey, man, what are you doing?

JACOB
 "Subject suffers from low self-
 esteem and unreasonable fears of
 rejection."

RICK
 What the...

JACOB
 "Distorted Perceptions, A Case
 Study in Body Dysmorphic Disorder.
 By Rick Bleu."

RICK
 Jacob.

Rick grabs Jacob's shoulder. Jacob jumps to his feet and
 pushes Rick back.

JACOB
 Fuck you, Rick!

RICK
 Jake...

JACOB
Writing a paper about me?

RICK
No, Jake. It's my thesis. It's got nothing to do with you. I mean, your name's not even in there.

JACOB
So you act like we're friends, you take me to parties, and you let me move in with you, for what? For a paper? So I can be your case study?

RICK
Now wait a minute, Jake. You know it ain't like that.

JACOB
That's why you asked all those questions.

RICK
Jake, it's just a paper, man! It's not about you!

JACOB
"Subject has recurring dreams of being chased. Subject is often irritable and depressed!"

RICK
Hey, hey, just chill, man.

JACOB
You think you know me???

Jacob rushes at Rick. They wrestle, knocking books off of shelves. Rick pins Jacob down onto the bed.

RICK
Jake, listen, man, just take a breath, okay? Just... just relax.

JACOB
I thought you were my friend.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Jacob moves across a crowded courtyard, carrying a book bag. Carolyn jogs up beside him.

CAROLYN

Long time no see. How's it going?
How was your spring break? Mine was
shitty. Palm Springs, rained the
whole time. Rain, in the desert.

JACOB

I'm sorry about that.

CAROLYN

Hey, listen, you wanna hang out
some time?

JACOB

Why? You wanna do a story on me or
something?

CAROLYN

What? No. I just... No, Jacob,
not... That's over. I just wanna
hang out. With you. See what's in
that New York brain of yours.

JACOB

I wish I could believe you.

CAROLYN

Well, give me a chance.

JACOB

I don't know.

CAROLYN

Look, Jacob. What happened... you
didn't deserve. You didn't ask for
any of it. You just became part of
a larger story. And sometimes
people get trapped in it, in the
story, and it's not fair. I'm
sorry. I really am.

A long beat, as he takes it in.

JACOB

Well, I'm sorry, 'cuz you probably
couldn't handle my New York brain.

CAROLYN

Oh, I couldn't?

JACOB

Well, you might get brain-mugged or
something.

CAROLYN
Oh, I better be careful.

INT. JESSUP DORM - DAY

Paul knocks on Jacob's door. He waits for a response and then knocks again.

PAUL
Jacob, it's Paul.

The door opens. Jacob peers out.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's get out of here.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - DAY

The steady HUM of the motor is all that is heard as Paul and Jacob stare out the windshield at the vast landscape.

They come to a hill, and Paul pulls over and stops. It's the hill from the very beginning, but instead of a battered, old farmhouse, there's a housing development under construction.

PAUL
So, what do you think?

JACOB
You thinking of moving out here or something?

PAUL
Let's take a look.

EXT. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - DAY

Paul's BMW rounds a corner and comes to a stop in a cul-de-sac under construction.

Paul gets out of the car and takes a few steps into the street, looking around. The passenger door opens and Jacob climbs out.

PAUL
You don't recognize it, huh?
(pointing to the distance)
The uh... the barn was over there.
The chicken coup. Couple out-
buildings there. The house... was
over there.

He points at a nearly completed house across the street. Jacob moves up beside him and stares at the house.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I finally sold it... what was it, a year ago now. It's amazing how fast they put these things up.

(a beat, and then-)

She loved to dance. But Dad, he never took her out. So instead, she danced with me. Foxtrot... waltz.

(a beat, and then-)

She was just a woman, Jacob. A sad woman trapped... on a farm. And she was sick, you know? She took something from us, and we'll never get it back. But she's gone. She's gone now. It's all gone.

(a beat, and then-)

There's gonna be families here, Jacob. I mean, there's gonna be some guy mowing his lawn right here. And who knows? Maybe he's got something going on with the housewife across the street. There's gonna be a basketball hoop right over there... and kids playing... People just... going on with their lives.

Paul and Jacob look around, taking it in.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Paul, in a suit and tie, looks around as he walks through a crowd of rowdy of teenagers. He stops a BOY passing by.

PAUL

Excuse me? Can you tell me where Carl Dorschlag's office is?

BOY

Mr. D.? Yeah. Down at the end of the hall.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Paul pushes the cart and stops when he sees Tess, with her daughter April, standing in the checkout line.

She turns and pushes her cart out the door.

Paul rushes after her, grabbing a bouquet of flowers and tossing a ten dollar bill on the counter.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Tess pushes the cart, April chatting beside her. Paul runs out of the store, the flowers in his hand.

PAUL

Excuse me!!! Ma'am??? I think these fell out of your cart.

TESS

(awkward)

Oh, hey Paul. How are you?

PAUL

Good. Yeah, good. I saw you and I thought, you know, now there's a lady who needs some flowers.

TESS

Well thanks.

(takes flowers, warms up)

That's... that's nice, Paul.

PAUL

(to April)

Hi.

APRIL

Hello.

Paul takes a hold of her cart.

PAUL

Here. Let me get this for you.

Paul pushes the cart up to Tess's car. She opens the trunk and they begin placing the groceries inside.

TESS

(skeptical)

What is this, Paul? What's going on?

PAUL

What? I'd thought I'd just, you know, spread some joy.

TESS

Oh yeah?

April stands by a neighboring car, a BARKING dog inside.

TESS (CONT'D)
Honey, get away from there. Please?
Just get in the car.

April opens the door of the car and climbs in.

TESS (CONT'D)
She wants a dog.

PAUL
Yeah. Hey, I wanted to tell you, I
got a job.

Tess closes the trunk and looks at him for a beat.

TESS
Well, that's great, Paul. Wow.
Congratulations. So where you
headed off to then?

PAUL
Oh, it's just this little place.
You probably haven't heard of it.
(off her look-)
I'm staying here, Tess. I'm
sticking around. Gonna be coaching
over at the high school.

TESS
Oh, really?

PAUL
Yeah. It's the damndest thing,
isn't it? But it's what I want.

TESS
Is it?

PAUL
Yes. I want to stay here. And I
wanted to tell you that.

TESS
What are you telling me, Paul?

PAUL
You're going to make me spell it
out, aren't you?

Tess stares at him, not responding.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well, what am I supposed to say? I mean, you know... I... I... You're enjoying this, aren't you?

Tess smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Do you want me to tell you that I'm... I don't know... that I'm excited, and for the life of me, I don't know why. I mean, should I say that I woke up this morning and I thought "I wonder what's going to happen today?" I mean, how do I say that I'm... I don't know, hopeful?

TESS

Well, the first thing you do is buy a lady some flowers. Then you ask her out.

PAUL

Yeah, but... what do you think she might say?

TESS

Hm... I don't know. But it's worth a shot, isn't it?

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Jacob leans back in a chair, eating microwave popcorn, watching a legal drama on his laptop. Over this, the phone is heard RINGING.

JACOB (V.O.)

Hello.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Do you want the good news or the good news.

JACOB (V.O.)

Hi, Mom. How about the good news.

On the screen, a Latino cop sits on the witness stand.

LAUREN (V.O.)

Okay, first! I've been clean and sober for... wait for it... wait for it... thirty days!

JACOB (V.O)
That's great, Mom.

LAUREN (V.O.)
Well you know, one day at a time,
and all that, but I feel great. I
really do. And numero dos: I'm
coming out! To Pullman! Coming to
bring you home for the summer! Oh,
and I got the part on *Trial by
Fire*. The bitchy, power-hungry
prosecutor. I got it, Jacob!

On the screen, Lauren, in a pantsuit, stands up behind her desk in the courtroom.

LAUREN
Ob-freakin-jection, your honor!

Jacob smiles.

EXT. VETERINARY STABLES - DAY

A crowd of students holding protest signs chant, "Fight to save the cow, end the cruelty now!!!" Several of them wear "Save Esther" t-shirts. Carolyn stands in front of the camera, holding a microphone.

CAROLYN
I'm now outside the veterinary
stables where a wild mob is
protesting the removal of Esther,
in what now appears to be the final
chapter in this strange saga. Any
minute now, Esther will be loaded
onto this truck...

She points to the stables, where a large pick-up, towing a horse trailer, is parked. Campus police surround the truck.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)
...and driven across the country to
Kansas State University, which will
serve as Esther's new home.

INT. VETERINARY STABLES - DAY

Two men lead Esther out of the stables. CHANTING is heard in the distance. They walk her up a ramp and into the trailer.

EXT. VETERINARY STABLES - DAY

The truck starts and the crowd of students rush up to it.

CAROLYN

It appears as though the truck is
now heading toward the street!

Carolyn and the camera man follow the crowd as the students
begin pounding on the side of the truck.

CAROLYN (CONT'D)

Well, it doesn't look like the
driver has any intention of
stopping! It looks like this is it!
This is good bye. It's been a hard
fought battle to save her, with
petitions and protests, but it
looks like the administration has
won out. And so, on behalf of all
of us here at Washington State
University, so long, Esther. We'll
miss you.

The truck pulls away. Students chase it, but then give up,
standing still in the street, signs hanging at their sides.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

The professor stands in front the packed lecture hall, as
teaching assistants hand out exam booklets.

PROFESSOR

You have two hours. Please answer
every question as completely as
possible. And if you have to guess,
at least be creative.

A booklet is set in front of Jacob. He takes a deep breath.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Lauren, chewing gum, paces in an empty courtyard. Students
start to file out of the building. She searches the crowd for
Jacob.

He walks out of the building, chatting with another student.
Lauren watches him, amazed, nearly overcome with pride.

JACOB

Mom! How's it going?

She hugs him.

LAUREN

Well, this Nicorette I'm chewing is the only thing between me and sanity. I was so nervous! How'd it go in there? You think you did good?

JACOB

I did all right.

She puts her arm around him as they walk through campus.

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Jacob takes clothes from his dresser and places them inside his suitcase. Lauren stands at the window looking down.

LAUREN

That's a long way to fall. It's a miracle you survived.

JACOB

Mom, why don't you ever talk about Grandma?

LAUREN

Oh, well, what's there to say? You know, she died and you're sad for a while and then you go on. She was a nut though. She used to iron our socks, you know, underwear, everything. Everything had to be perfect. Just perfect. But people in town, now they just loved her. Sylvia this, Sylvia that!

The door opens and Rick walks in.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

You must be Rick! I've heard so much about you.

RICK

(shaking her hand)
It's nice to meet you, Miss Haun.

LAUREN

Oh please, it's Lauren.

RICK

I saw you on TV.

LAUREN
Did you? Aren't I a bitch? It's so
fun!

JACOB
(coldly)
Mom?

LAUREN
Huh?

JACOB
We have to go.

LAUREN
Oh, do we?
(to Rick)
We're having dinner at Paul's. Will
you be there?

Rick looks at Jacob, who stares back, coldly.

RICK
No... no... I've got stuff to do.

LAUREN
That's too bad.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY

Jacob plays croquet. Paul stands at the barbecue. Lauren sits
at the patio table beside Joseph, her father, who is in a
wheelchair. Lauren gets up and moves to Paul.

LAUREN
I can't believe it, Paul. He's much
better than I expected.

PAUL
Well, his mind is still sharp.

A croquet ball smacks against Joseph's wheelchair. Jacob runs
over and picks it up sheepishly.

JACOB
Sorry, Grandpa.

JOSEPH (WITH HIS VOICE AMP)
No... problem.

LAUREN

God, it's weird. Seeing him like this, though. He used to be like a machine, out on the farm.

PAUL

Yeah.

LAUREN

How'd we get so old?
(a beat, and then-)
You know, when he's gone, it'll just be you. Last of the Hubers.

PAUL

Oh, I don't know.

Lauren straightens up and looks at Paul curiously.

LAUREN

Is there something you want to tell me, Paul?

PAUL

Nah.

LAUREN

It would be nice.

PAUL

Yeah?

LAUREN

You'd make a good father.

She watches Jacob whack at the croquet balls.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Look at him.

Paul glances up.

PAUL

Yeah. He's something.

LAUREN

Paul, thanks. You really... you stepped up.

PAUL

Oh, come on.

LAUREN

No, really, Paul.

From inside the house the doorbell is heard RINGING.

PAUL
Oh, uh... Lauren, can you set up
the table there?

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul opens the front door. Tess, in a pretty summer dress,
holds a bowl in her hands. April clings to her side.

PAUL
Oh, hey. Hi, April. Come on in.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY

Paul comes out through the sliding glass door.

PAUL
Jacob? Everyone?

Jacob, holding a croquet mallet, walks over to the patio
beside Joseph and Lauren.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I want you to meet someone.

Tess and April come out of the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Um... this is Tess and her daughter
April. Tess, this is uh... this is
my family.

LAUREN
Hi, Tess! I'm Lauren. Let me take
that from you.

TESS
Thanks. It's macaroni salad.

PAUL
Tess, this is my father, Joseph.

JACOB
Hi, April.

APRIL
Hi.

JACOB
You want to play croquet?

EXT. CAMPUS PARKING LOT - MORNING

Carolyn puts a box in the back of her car and notices Jacob loading suitcases into a nearby car.

CAROLYN

Jacob!

JACOB

Hey, Carolyn. What's up?

Lauren stands at the side of the car, talking on her cell phone. She turns and watches as Jacob and Carolyn talk.

CAROLYN

Takin' off? Back to The Big Apple?

JACOB

Yeah.

CAROLYN

Listen, Jacob, I guess I should thank you. Because of your story, I got an internship this summer. I mean, you know, the best internship. Guess where?

JACOB

I don't know. A news station?

CAROLYN

Funny. But you better look out because we're gonna be spending a lot of time together.

JACOB

In New York?

CAROLYN

(flirty)

I don't know anyone there but you. And I don't want to be lonely.

JACOB

Well, I can probably take care of that for you.

CAROLYN

You know, I think about that night, and it was like fate or something. Like mythology... so random... but like preordained... you falling from the sky.

JACOB

Yeah. I'm a Greek god. Don't tell anybody.

She chuckles.

CAROLYN

Oh, did you hear about Esther? She never made it to Kansas State.

JACOB

What?

CAROLYN

When the truck arrived, they opened it up and Esther wasn't in there. She vanished. Can you believe that?

Lauren comes around the car, putting her phone away.

LAUREN

Are you Carolyn? I'm Lauren, Jacob's mom.

CAROLYN

Hi.

Jacob rolls his eyes as they shake hands.

LAUREN

Jacob says you're a reporter. You know, I'm in television.

CAROLYN

Oh my God. Are you... You're on that show... that new show...

LAUREN

Trial by Fire.

CAROLYN

I knew you looked familiar. Jacob, why didn't you tell me your mom is famous?

JACOB

(annoyed)

Mom. I gotta get some more stuff. Carolyn, text me when you get to town, okay?

CAROLYN

Of course!

INT. JACOB'S DORM ROOM - MORNING

Rick folds clothes and places them into a suitcase. Jacob enters, grabs his last suitcase and heads out.

JACOB
Take it easy, Rick.

RICK
Hey, Jake. Listen, man, I screwed up. Okay? I shouldn't have done that.

JACOB
Okay. Whatever.

RICK
No, please, Jake, hear me out. I just... I mean, why was I so interested? You know? Why'd I have to write that paper? Thing is Jake, I drive across this state, through small towns. And, you know, I stop to get gas, something to eat. And those people look at me. I can feel their eyes following me. And I think, "What? Am I ugly? Am I really what they see, some kind of monster?" Jake, I know what it feels like when people do that. And real or imagined, it hurts... it makes you feel like you're not one of them, not human. I get it. That paper wasn't just about you.

JACOB
You still should've told me.

RICK
I know. And I'm sorry. I really am. I'm sorry, Jake.
(a beat, and then-)
Man, who would've thought? White boy shows up from New York... Shit, look at us.

JACOB
So, did you decide on grad school?

RICK
Yeah, man. I'm going to Wisconsin.

JACOB
Good. More cows.

Rick laughs.

JACOB (CONT'D)
You take care, Rick.

RICK
Let's keep in touch, huh?

Jacob nods. Rick crosses the room, raising his fist. Jacob does the same and they touch knuckles.

RICK (CONT'D)
Peace, Jake.

JACOB
Peace.

INT. RENTAL CAR - MORNING

Lauren drives off the campus. Jacob sits beside her.

LAUREN
Carolyn seems nice. Have you two...

JACOB
No. Not yet.

LAUREN
Well, wear protection with that one, if you know what I mean.

JACOB
Mom, can we stop by Paul's.

LAUREN
Jacob, we're running late.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jacob rushes through the front door with a sketch pad in his arms. Paul, on his laptop, sits at the dining room table.

JACOB
Uncle Paul?

PAUL
Hey, Jacob, shouldn't you be on your way to the airport?

JACOB
I just wanted to give you this.

Jacob hands Paul the sketch pad.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Just some drawings... of this last
year.

PAUL
Oh, cool. Thanks, Jacob.

JACOB
I gotta go. We're kinda' running
late.

Paul stands up and leads Jacob to the front door, casual.

PAUL
All right, well, you have a good
summer. Okay?

JACOB
You too.

PAUL
I'll still be here when you come
back in the fall.

JACOB
I know.

PAUL
Ah, bring it in here one last time.

They hug. It starts as a standard goodbye hug, but then turns ferociously emotional. They grasp each other, holding, clutching, as if they're the only things keeping each other up, as if they'll never let go.

After a long beat-

PAUL (CONT'D)
I just wanted...

JACOB
Please don't say anything.

PAUL
But...

JACOB
This is enough.

PAUL
Yeah. It's enough.

They separate.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Thank you.

(a beat, and then-)

You changed some things for me.

JACOB

(joking)

Hey, I do what I can. I'm like a superhero. I'm... Cowboy.

Paul smiles.

PAUL

Well, get outa' here, Cowboy. Get back there to your salty pretzels and your greasy pizza.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jacob gets into the car, wiping his eyes.

LAUREN

(gently)

All set?

INT. SPOKANE AIRPORT - MORNING

Jacob and Lauren check their bags at the check-in counter.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Paul stands in the dining room, looking down at the sketchbook on the table in front of him. He opens it to a charcoal drawing of the deformed and twisted face of a monster.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Jacob and Lauren struggle with their carry-on luggage as they move down the crowded aisle of the plane.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Paul turns a page of the sketchbook--a similar drawing of a face, this time the angles less extreme, the features somewhat softer.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Jacob sits by the window. Lauren, sitting next to him, looks at the scarred knuckles of Jacob's hand. She reaches over and places her hand on top of his and gently holds it.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Paul turns the last page of the sketchbook. He stares, his eyes clear and intense.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

The plane begins to speed down the runway.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Paul stares down at a portrait of Jacob, the shadows and angles now minimal, showing Jacob as he actually looks, no longer deformed, just the face of a handsome teenage boy.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Jacob's face fills the frame as he looks out the window, the plane ascending into the sky.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

High above a vast, open prairie, the nose of the plane pierces the bottom layer of clouds.

Esther the five-legged cow lifts her head and looks up at the sky, knowingly, as the plane flies into the clouds.

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Jacob continues to stare out the window at the blanket of white clouds that stretch off to meet the horizon and the blue sky above.

FADE OUT.

THE END