

About Schmidt

**by Alexander Payne
and Jim Taylor**

**inspired by the novel
by Louis Begley**

**second draft
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EXT. MUTUAL OF OMAHA HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The very structure suggests sturdiness and reliability.

INT. WARREN SCHMIDT'S OFFICE - DAY

A WALL CLOCK READS 4:58.

WARREN SCHMIDT, 66, sits at his desk looking up at the clock. The desk is completely clear except for a telephone.

Next to the desk are several large CARDBOARD BOXES. They are marked "SCHMIDT ACTIVE DOCUMENTS," and "SCHMIDT FILES ARCHIVE."

Warren looks at the clock again -- 4:59 and thirty seconds. He remains motionless for a full thirty seconds.

THE SECOND HAND
finally rounds 12.

WARREN STANDS,
puts on his jacket, walks to the door. He wistfully pats the boxes, takes one last look, turns out the light, closes the door.

OFF SCREEN -- Cheers followed "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Then -- a THUNDERBOLT.

INT./EXT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

RAIN.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD --
Warren drives. His wife HELEN, 64, sits next to him.

OPENING CREDITS begin, wiped on and off by the windshield wipers.

Helen spots something up ahead.

HELEN
Look, Warren -- your name in lights!

Warren leans forward and makes out --

THE BIG NEON SIGN
for Gorat's Steakhouse. Below, awkwardly spaced letters spell out
"Happy Retirement Warren Schmidt."

Warren nods slightly, leans back in his seat.

EXT. GORAT'S STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

The Cadillac pulls into the PARKING LOT. Credits continue.

INT. GORAT'S STEAKHOUSE BANQUET ROOM- NIGHT

ON THE WALLS --

framed PHOTOGRAPHS of prize-winning cattle that have been slaughtered for this fine Omaha eatery.

WARREN

eats his steak.

WIDE --

Twenty or so people sit around a T-shaped table. Warren and Helen sit at the head. On a side table lie wrapped gifts.

Warren happens to be seated right where two tables are joined. He tries crossing his legs and must mask his discomfort.

GARY NORDIN, 34, clinks a greasy knife on his water glass. His neck is thick, and his Brooks Brothers collar is too tight.

GARY

For my part, I'd just like to say, Warren, that as the new guy taking over for you, I hope I can fill your shoes, because from the looks of the people here and what they think of you, they sure seem awfully big.

General courtesy laughter. Credits continue.

GARY (CONT'D)

As most of you know I recently moved here from Hartford with my wife Sandy here and Kimberly, our 14-month-old, and you've all just made us feel so welcome, and Warren, I want you to feel just as welcome to drop by the office to visit anytime you want. As we've been discussing in the last couple weeks, I might have some questions to ask you about our various accounts and such. So-- here's to you, Warren.

He raises his water glass in an awkward toast gesture. All join in. Warren manages a smile as everyone mumbles some variation of "Here's to Warren," or "We're sure going to miss you," or "Good luck, Warren."

A stout older fellow with a loud, abrasive voice -- RAY NICHOLS -- chimes in.

RAY

Hey, Warren, how do you feel about these young punks taking over our jobs? They shoved me out the door three years ago. Looks like some kind of conspiracy to me!

Everyone laughs affectionately. Ray stands.

RAY (CONT'D)

Now I've known Warren here probably longer than most of you have been alive. Warren and I go way back, waaaaay back to the horse and buggy days at Mutual. But that's ancient history. We were good friends not only at work but also out on the golf course and on fishing trips up at my cabin in Minnesota. And what I want to say to you publicly, Warren, so all these young hotshots can hear, is that that gold watch there doesn't mean a goddamn thing.

Warren finally feels a note of connection with someone.

RAY (CONT'D)

And this dinner doesn't mean a goddamn thing, and the social security and pension don't mean a goddamn thing.

Ray's wife MILDRED smiles uncomfortably as she grabs his hand to get him to take it easy, but Ray is on a roll.

RAY (CONT'D)

None of these super-fishy-alities mean a goddamn thing. What means something, what really means something, Warren.

Ray takes a dramatic, drunken pause.

RAY (CONT'D)

What really means something is the knowledge that you devoted your entire life to something meaningful -- to being productive and working for a fine company -- hell, one of the biggest insurance carriers in the nation --

Ray counts on his fingers and at one point counts the same finger twice.

RAY (CONT'D)

...to raising a fine family, to building a fine home, to being respected by your community and having some wonderful, loyal friendships.

Hearing the part about raising the family, Helen puts her hand on Warren's, but he doesn't react.

RAY (CONT'D)

At the end of his career, if a man can look back and say, "I did it. I did my job," he can retire in peace and glory and enjoy riches far beyond the monetary kind. So all you young people here, here's a role model. Right here. I want you to take a good look at a very rich man.

All applaud. Ray leans over the table to shake hands with Warren. In doing so, one side of his jacket trails through his mashed potatoes and gravy. Ray sits back down, and everyone resumes eating.

Warren looks at his food, can't take another bite. He slides his chair out.

WARREN

(to Helen)

Be right back.

ANGLE FROM THE DOOR --
as Warren leaves the room behind him.

INT. GORAT'S LOUNGE - NIGHT

Warren takes a seat at the bar. It's noisy and crowded. There's a SINGER accompanied by a GUY with a drum machine and keyboard.

The BARTENDER puts down a cocktail napkin.

BARTENDER

Good evening.

WARREN

Vodka gimlet, please.

Warren sits alone at the bar waiting for his drink and waits and waits -- it seems to take a lifetime.

CREDITS END

INT. SCHMIDT HOME - NIGHT

Helen and Warren remove their rain coats and hang them up. The PHONE RINGS. Helen answers.

HELEN

Hello? Oh, hi, honey. Yeah, uh-huh, it ran a little late, yeah. Of course he is.

(to Warren)

Warren, get on the phone. It's Jeannie.

Warren takes the phone. Helen gets a rag and wipes up the water they spilled walking in.

WARREN

Jeannie, how you doing? Uh-huh. Oh, it went just fine. Yeah, quite a big event. Oh, I know; don't give it another thought. You've got bigger fish to fry. I know. We'll see you out there pretty soon anyway. Yeah. Just a gold watch and some gag gifts, you know. Yeah, it's pretty nice, I guess. The what? Oh, yeah, I did get it. The robe. Yeah, that's quite an item. From you and Randall. I see. Well, it's going to come in handy. And tell Randall thanks for me too. Okay. Bye now.

INT. SCHMIDT BEDROOM/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Warren unties his tie. Helen is at work removing her face. Warren continues to disrobe and put on his pajamas.

HELEN

Did you thank Randall?

WARREN

I did.

HELEN

And what did he say?

WARREN
Well, I just told Jeannie.

HELEN
You didn't thank him personally?

WARREN
No.

HELEN
Why not?

WARREN
He didn't get on the phone.

HELEN
Why not?

WARREN
I don't know. He didn't get on the phone.

HELEN
You should have asked for him. You should make more of an effort. He's going to be your son-in-law, and you hardly know him.

WARREN
I know him well enough.

HELEN
I wish you'd try to be more positive. She's lucky to have him.

WARREN
(resigned)
Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

HELEN
You should make an effort.

They go about their business.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You know, my father didn't think so much of you at first.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Warren awakens and looks at the clock -- it's exactly 7:00 AM. He heads to the bathroom. Helen keeps SNORING.

From outside the bathroom we hear his ablutions -- toothbrush, urine, spit. Finally he comes out and stops, looks at --

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A DESERT -- an endless ocean of SAND.

Helen lies in bed some 100 meters away.

THE BEDROOM AGAIN --

Warren gets his robe and heads out of the bedroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Warren sits reading the NEWSPAPER. Suddenly he hears an insistent HONK-HONK-HONK from outside. He gets up and looks though the window to see --

HELEN

in the front seat of a RECREATIONAL VEHICLE, a brand-new BOUNDER parked in the driveway. She smiles and gestures for him to come outside.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Still holding his newspaper, Warren wanders out into the driveway. The vehicle is new and clean and still has the sticker. Helen pokes her head out the window.

HELEN

Where to, mister? Looks like you
need a ride!

INT. BOUNDER - DAY

Warren opens the door and steps up. Helen is waiting at the tiny dining table. She has prepared a big breakfast -- waffles, orange juice, eggs.

HELEN

Surprise!

Warren expresses no visible happiness.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I thought it would be fun to have
breakfast in here today -- you know,
see what it'll be like.

WARREN

Oh, fine.

He climbs inside awkwardly and squeezes in across from her. She pours coffee.

HELEN

Isn't this fun?

WARREN

Well, it kind of gives us a rough idea.

HELEN

We're going to have a lot of good times in this thing, Warren.

Warren doesn't feel like going anywhere, especially with her.

WARREN

Yeah.

HELEN

Phyllis Cohen told me about their trip to Padre Island. We could drive down there, down to Texas. And I still really want to see the Pacific Northwest and Oregon. And then we could take that cruise to Alaska.

WARREN

Now just hold your horses. We've got plenty of time to figure it out.

Helen holds out her DIXIE CUP of orange juice for a toast.

HELEN

Here's to a whole new chapter.

Warren nods, does his best to seem cheery. They tap their Dixie cups together.

INT. TV ROOM - DAY

Warren, remote in hand, sits in front of the TV.

FLIP

A daytime talk show.

FLIP

A Bob Hope-Phyllis Diller movie.

FLIP

Close-ups of starving wide-eyed brown and black children, flies buzzing about their eyes and mouths. An 800 number is displayed.

VOICE-OVER

...ravaged by drought and famine.
You'll join the thousands of caring
sponsors...

FLIP

An exercise class - "Bodies by Jake."

FLIP

Back to the starving children. A baby with a distended belly is weighed with negligible movement from the scale's needle.

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

-- the only way possible: one child at
a time. All it takes is just 22
dollars a month -- 73 cents a day --

73¢ a day now flashes at the top of the screen.

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

-- when you become a World Children's
Crusade sponsor. You'll work the
miracle of granting one needy,
desperate child a future. You'll give
that child the opportunity every human
being deserves -- the chance at living
up to his or her full potential, the
chance to live a life worth living.

WARREN

is riveted, moved by this appeal.

THE TV AGAIN --

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

Soon your child will begin to hear a
voice swell within him -- the voice
of pride and self-esteem, the voice
that tells him somewhere in the world
he matters just enough that someone
wants to revive his spirit.

CLOSER ON WARREN --

VOICE OVER (CONT'D)

But only if you take action, only if you
pick up the phone right now and call
World Crusade will one of these children
have a chance at a meaningful life -- a
life free from despair and hopelessness...

Almost without knowing why, Warren picks up the phone. Squinting at the screen, he puts the receiver to his ear.

HELEN (OS)

Warren!

WARREN

Just a minute!

HELEN (OS)

We're going to be late for supper.

WARREN

Just a minute!

THE TV AGAIN --

more STARVING CHILDREN, looking at us with their big, round, imploring eyes.

INT. NEW TOWER RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A TRAY OF FOOD --

is carried across the dining room, resplendent with plates of prime rib, baked or mashed potatoes, choice of spaghetti or rice.

The WAITRESS arrives at a table where Warren and Helen Schmidt and Ray and Millie Nichols are seated. She flips open a belted tray-stand and begins serving.

RAY

(eyeing his meat)

Saaaaay.

HELEN

Ooh!

MILLIE

Isn't this nice?

RAY

They do a good job here.

WAITRESS

We all set? Can I get you anything else -- steak sauce, extra sour cream..?

RAY

I'd say we're in pretty good shape.

HELEN

Thank you.

The waitress leaves them.

MILLIE

Isn't she cute?

They all begin eating. Silent, the four of them consume their prime rib, stare vaguely.

ALL LIGHTS DIM EXCEPT FOR A LIGHT ON WARREN,
and the din of the restaurant subsides.

About to lift another bite to his lips, Warren stops, looks at --

-- Millie wiping mashed potato from both sides of her
knife onto her fork before raising the fork to her mouth
-- Peas falling off a fork, bouncing with loud duns
-- extra "au jus" dousing prime rib.

WARREN'S EYES

dart from place to place. Something in the SOUND implies
Warren's distorted -- or very clear -- perception.

-- Helen's greasy lips part every few chews.
-- A knife cuts through prime rib, an abrasive SCREECH as
the knife reaches the plate.
-- The burned-out bulbs on the wagon-wheel chandelier.
-- The waitress's thick calves beneath thick support hose.
-- The CLOCK.

Warren drops his head, pinches the bridge of his nose. Helen
notices Warren's distress and leans over to him. But we can't hear
her dialogue, just the distant impression of someone speaking.

WARREN

No, I'm, I'm fine. Just a little tired,
I guess.

He takes another bite of prime rib. It tastes like carrion.

by Dad's mouth, flesh.

EXT. MUTUAL OF OMAHA - DAY

Warren's Cadillac pulls into a VISITOR PARKING space.

INT. MUTUAL OF OMAHA - DAY

It's a high floor, and Warren steps off the ELEVATOR. He's
dressed in suit and tie and looks ready for work. He walks
jauntily toward --

INT. GARY NORDIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Warren walks by the new SECRETARY.

SECRETARY

Oh hi, Mr. Schmidt.

WARREN

How are you? Say, is Gary in?

SECRETARY

He's right inside.

Warren gives a little KNOCK and goes into --

INT. GARY'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Warren walks into an office that is completely rearranged. Gary is on the phone and gives Warren a gesture of "I'll just be a sec. Have a seat."

Warren takes a seat across from the desk that used to be his. He looks at Gary's little personal touches -- the family photograph, the motivational posters, the stress-reducing squeeze balls.

Gary hangs up the phone.

GARY

(extending his hand)

Hey, there he is! What do you say, partner?

WARREN

Pretty good, pretty good. How you getting along?

GARY

Not too shabby.

WARREN

I see you're all moved in.

GARY

Oh yeah, oh yeah. So what brings you by this neck of the woods?

WARREN

Oh, I was just driving by and I thought I'd pop in and see what kind of trouble you're getting into.

GARY

Oh, you know, keeping busy. Keeping busy.

WARREN

And I guess I wanted to make sure you didn't have any more questions about our accounts.

GARY

No, I think I've got a pretty good handle on things. You did a super job of handing everything over. Just super. Smooth sailing all the way.

WARREN

Because I've been concerned that a few of those open items I walked you through might have slipped through the cracks, and it's kind of been nagging at me.

GARY

Nope.

That just sits there a moment.

GARY (CONT'D)

Heck, a business degree from Drake ought to be worth something.

They laugh.

GARY (CONT'D)

But if anything bubbles up to the surface, Warren, I'll be sure to give you a holler. You can bet on that.

(checking his watch)

Oops. I've got to get to a meeting out west. You want to walk down with me?

WARREN

Okay. Sure.

EXT. MUTUAL OF OMAHA BACK STEPS - DAY

Before Gary and Warren walk down the steps toward the EXECUTIVE PARKING LOT, Warren hesitates.

WARREN

Well, I'll say good-bye right here. I'm out front.

GARY
(extending his hand)
Warren, it's always a pleasure.

WARREN
Likewise.
(wagging a fatherly finger)
But you call me if you need anything.

GARY
Oh yeah. Have a good one.

WARREN
You bet.

They shake hands and start in opposite directions. Then --

GARY
Say, Warren?

WARREN
Yeah?

GARY
Come to think of it, there is
something I've been meaning to ask
you about. I can't believe I forgot.

WARREN
(elated)
Sure, Gary. What is it?

GARY
Is it just me, or did you have
trouble opening the left-hand drawers
of the desk? The key is super tight
in there, and you have to jiggle it
and twist it pretty hard to get it to
work, and I keep thinking the key's
going to break right off. Any
pointers?

WARREN
(deflated)
You... you have to pull up on the top
drawer while you're unlocking it.
That ought to do the trick.

GARY
I'll give it a try. Thanks, Warren.

Gary heads for his car.

EXT. MUTUAL OF OMAHA BUILDING - SIDE ALLEY - DAY

Warren walks around the building on his way back to the front parking lot.

He passes a row of DUMPSTERS. Next to the last dumpster Warren notices --

HIS CAREFULLY LABELED FILE BOXES,
now crumpled and soggy from a recent rain.

THAK! THAK!

A butcher knife separates a CHICKEN LEG from a THIGH. We are in --

INT. SCHMIDT KITCHEN - DAY

Warren comes in the backdoor. Helen wears an apron.

HELEN

How'd it go at the office?

WARREN

Oh fine. It's a good thing I went. I was able to clear up some loose ends and set him straight on a few things..

HELEN

That's wonderful.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

SORTING THROUGH THE MAIL

shows the usual assortment of bills and ads and do you need your carpet steam-cleaned. But one --

THICK YELLOW ENVELOPE

bears the logo of WORLD CHILDREN'S CRUSADE in the corner. There is a little sketch of two children, their hands extended in a gesture that suggests begging for a hug, or for money.

Warren opens the letter.

INSERT --

LETTER

Dear Mr. Schmidt, You're about to change the world for little Ngudu Umbo. As you become a WCC sponsor, providing the start of a meaningful and productive life for Ngudu..

Warren examines the material. There's a PAMPHLET entitled, "Sponsoring a Child," and a separate SHEET describing the child:

SEX	M
BIRTHDAY	Unknown
COUNTRY	TANZANIA

And of course there's a PHOTO of Ngudu: thin neck; wide, mournful eyes; black skin; puffy cheeks; close-cropped woolly hair.

THE CHECK --

as Warren writes "Twenty-two and 00/100 -----."

WARREN'S EYES --

as he re-reads the material. We hear the check RIP from the pad.

THE LETTER AGAIN --

THE LETTER (CONT'D)

Please consider enclosing a letter to NGUDU. You may want to include some personal information about yourself. You're not just sharing your money with your child -- you're sharing your love.

He picks up pen, thinks about what to write, can't seem to come up with anything, looks again at the words --

"... personal information about yourself..."

Warren looks up, thinks, looks down again at the blank piece of paper. He begins to write.

WARREN (VO)

Dear Ngudu, My name is Warren R. Schmidt, and I am your new foster father. I live in Omaha, Nebraska. My older brother Harry lives in Roanoke, Virginia with his wife Estelle. Harry lost a leg two years ago to diabetes.

Warren pauses -- what else to say?

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I recently retired as a division manager of the Actuarial department at Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company -- you might have heard of it because of the old TV show. They might have even filmed some of it around where you live. Anyway, as I say, I just retired.

MORE

WARREN (CONT'D)
 (he can't help himself)
 ... and goddammit if they didn't replace
 me with some kid half my age who
 doesn't know the first thing about
 running a department. Brought him out
 from Connecticut or some goddamn place.
 Cocky little son-of-a-bitch.

Warren suddenly catches himself, looks at what he wrote. He
 scratches something out, continues writing.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
 ... son-of-a-gun. I am 66 years of
 age. That must sound pretty old to a
 young fellow like yourself. The
 truth is it sounds pretty old to me
 too, and I still can't believe I'm
 retired, can't believe it's all
 behind me. Where has the time gone?

IN THE BATHROOM --

Warren straightens his tie in the mirror. He leans forward,
 squints.

CLOSE ON HIS CROWSFEET

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
 Nowadays when I look in the mirror
 and see the wrinkles around my eyes--

CLOSE ON HIS CHICKEN NECK

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
 ...and the skin on my neck beginning to
 sag--

WARREN'S PILLOW,
 the indentation of his head.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
 ...and the hair on my pillow--

CLOSE ON WARREN'S FOOT
 traced by blue lines like a road map, as he pauses while pulling
 on a sock.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
 ...and the veins on my ankles, I just
 can't believe it's me.

INSERT -- PHOTOS

of Warren's graduation from high school and college. In a group shot of "Future Business Leaders of America," young Warren holds up one side of the banner.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

When I was a kid I used to think that maybe I was special, that somehow destiny had tapped me to be a great man -- not like Churchill or Walt Disney or somebody like that. But somebody, you know, at least semi-important.

A QUICK TILT DOWN STOCK MARKET PRICES
in the newspaper stops on "SCHMIDT INTL."

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I was going to start my own business, build it up into a big corporation, watch it go public, you know, maybe make Fortune 500.

THE COVER OF FORBES

shows Warren on the cover, arms crossed, smiling the confident smile of a powerful industrialist.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I was going to be one of those guys you read about.

The **MAGAZINE FADES AWAY**, and Warren's arms unfold, his smile vanishes, his shoulders drop, he turns his back and walks away, getting **SMALLER AND SMALLER**.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Instead I took a job at Mutual and I just stuck with it. I never made my move, never broke out on my own, as much as I wanted to. I thought I was doing the right thing -- supporting my family and moving up in a fine company -- but along the way all the dreams I had as a young man just faded away.

CLOSE ON THE LETTER

as Warren writes the next sentence, his **VOICE CRACKING**.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

Somehow I convinced myself that my dreams were just any young man's foolish dreams.

A TEAR SMEARS THE WORD "DREAMS,"
and another falls too.

THE MEMENTOS

that decorate his study:

- A photograph of a group of men who completed a management training seminar.
- A certificate of recognition of 25 years of service from Mutual.
- A photograph of Warren shaking hands with SPIRO AGNEW.
- The watch displayed in the velvet case.

BACK IN HIS HOME OFFICE

Warren sits at his desk, momentarily paralyzed. He picks up his pen to continue.

A DESKTOP PHOTO OF HELEN AND YOUNG JEANNIE --

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

But what about my wife and daughter?
What about my family? Don't they
give my life meaning?

INT. SCHMIDT BEDROOM - NIGHT**CLOSE ON HELEN**

asleep. Her mouth hangs slack, and she SNORES LOUDLY. Warren lies wide awake, looking at her as though at a complete stranger.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

My wife's name is Helen, formerly
Helen Meyers of Sloan, Iowa. We've
been married forty-two years.
Lately, every night, I ask myself the
same question. Who is this old woman
who lives in my house?

A PAN -

from Helen's face to Warren and Helen's WEDDING PHOTO, ZOOMING IN on Helen's young face.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Is she really the same woman I
married?

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

Warren carries bags as he and Helen walk to the car. Helen removes the keys from her purse and clutches them.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Why is it that every little thing she
does irritates me? Like the way she
gets the keys out of her purse long
before we reach the car.

Warren looks ahead into the distance of the vast parking lot. A
superimposed ARROW moving up and down points to their car far away.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Warren watches Helen staring obsessively at the items passing the
price scanner, checking them against the register's price display.
No discrepancy shall pass.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

And the way she watches the checkout
clerk at the grocery store.

INT. TV ROOM - DAY

Warren watches TV. Helen bustles in excitedly holding a
newspaper, her finger on a full-page AD for a new corporate
seafood restaurant.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

And her obsession with trying new
restaurants.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Warren and Helen entertain two other couples.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

And the way she cuts me off sometimes
when I try to speak.

HELEN

...and the next thing you know, Warren
and I are standing there waiting for
the hostess to acknowledge us, you
know, to even look at us, and she
goes ahead and seats the people who
came in after us--

Warren tries to clarify.

WARREN

Well, the thing is that--

HELEN
...which normally I wouldn't mind,
you know, but we had been standing
there for at least...

INT. BEDROOM/BATHROOM - DAY

Helen comes out of the bathroom wielding an ENEMA BAG AND TUBE.

WARREN (VO)
And the way she...

Warren's reverie is interrupted by a shrill voice.

HELEN (OS)
Warren!

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Warren looks up startled.

WARREN
(meek)
Yes?

Helen is at the door.

HELEN
Lunch.

He discretely covers the letter. As Helen walks away he notices --
HER SHOES --
the way they're worn down and the loud FLIP-FLOP they produce.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Warren and Helen sit at the kitchen table eating TOMATO SOUP.
Maybe Helen SLURPS a little too loudly. Not a word passes between
them. Finally --

HELEN
It's low salt.

WARREN
Not bad.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Warren enters and eagerly gets back to work.

HELEN'S BUTT HITS A CHAIR

WARREN (VO)

And I hate the way she sits.

HELEN'S ARMPIT --

An odd shot.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

And the way she smells.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Through a cracked door we see Warren on the TOILET. His pants are around his ankles, and we hear a muffled TINKLE.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

For years now she has insisted that I sit when I urinate. My promise to lift the seat and wipe the rim and put the seat back down wasn't good enough for her. No.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Warren takes a deep breath, composes himself. Writes again, glancing up at --

A PHOTO

of a much younger Warren smiling with his little daughter.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

(his tone softening)

But then there's Jeannie. She's our only. I bet she'd like you -- she gets a big kick out of different languages and cultures and so forth. She used to get by pretty good in German.

INT. JEANNIE'S ROOM -- FLASHBACK

WARREN'S POV --

Jeannie's door magically opens, and 6-year-old Jeannie looks up from her toys and runs toward us.

JEANNIE

Daddy!

WARREN (VO)

She's my little girl.

INT. ICE SKATING RINK -- FLASHBACK

ANGLE FROM THE STANDS --

Many LITTLE GIRLS are taking skating lessons.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

She lives out in Denver so I don't see her much anymore. Oh sure, we stay in touch by phone every couple weeks and she tries to come out for the holidays, but not as often as we'd like.

Little Jeannie looks up at us and waves.

JEANNIE

Daddy, look!

We wave back.

INT. BATHTUB -- FLASHBACK

Very little Jeannie is naked in the tub playing with toys, laughing, perhaps SPLASHING us.

WARREN (VO)

She has a position of some responsibility out there with a high-tech computer outfit, so it's very hard for her to break away.

EXT. "WATERBEDS AND MORE" - DENVER - DAY

A bland suburban waterbed store. Oh, look - they're having a sale.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Recently she got engaged to a fellow named Randall Hertzell, so I suppose we'll be seeing even less of her now.

RANDALL HERTZELL comes walking out of the store. He is lean and tall and wears a mustache and pony-tail. He waves at us and comes walking over.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

We went out there last year to meet him. He works in a waterbed store or something. Personally I don't feel he's quite up to snuff for our Jeannie, but I suppose she's no spring chicken anymore. But I still think she could have done a heck of a lot better.

INT. GRADE SCHOOL AUDITORIUM -- FLASHBACK

Sixth-grade Jeannie plays VIOLIN in an orchestra RECITAL. -- We move closer to her.

We linger on young Jeannie, very concentrated, alternately bowing and counting her rests.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

(wistful)

Jeannie_

INT. HOME OFFICE -- NOW

Warren draws a long breath, near tears, looks back down and writes again.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Well, look at the time. I've been rambling on and on, and I'm sure you've had enough of this belly-aching. You probably want to hurry on down and cash that check, get yourself something to eat. So take it easy, and best of luck with all your endeavors. Yours very truly, Warren Schmidt.

He paper clips the check to the letter, which is by now several pages long. He has trouble folding it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Now in his overcoat, Warren walks past the kitchen, where Helen is bent over, brandishing a DUSTBUSTER.

WARREN

I'm going out to mail a letter. You need anything?

HELEN

No.

He heads toward the door.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Don't dilly-dally.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Warren parks his Cadillac and trots inside, bearing the sealed record of his unburdened soul.

INT. CADILLAC - DAY

Driving his car, Warren catches sight of something alluring out of the corner of his eye.

EXT. DAIRY QUEEN - POV - DAY

It beckons.

INT. DAIRY QUEEN - DAY

It's Warren's turn.

WARREN
Um, I'll have a Blizzard with vanilla ice cream and uh...

YOUNG FEMALE WORKER
What would you like in it?

WARREN
Let's see... I'll have some, uh, Reese's pieces and some cookie dough. Yeah, cookie dough.

EXT. DAIRY QUEEN - DAY

Warren sits alone at a PICNIC TABLE eating his Blizzard on this overcast day.

At the other picnic table sit a rather large YOUNG WOMAN and her YOUNG SON. Like Warren they enjoy their Dairy Queen treats in silence.

EXT. SCHMIDT HOUSE - DAY

Warren's Cadillac turns into his driveway.

INT. SCHMIDT HOUSE - DAY

Warren comes in the back door, hangs his overcoat on a hook.
Is Helen still vacuuming? Sounds like it.

He glances in the KITCHEN and sees --

HELEN LYING ON THE FLOOR

in an improbable position. She's not moving now, but it's clear
that not long ago she was trying to drag a TELEPHONE toward her.

The sight sinks in for a moment, then Warren rushes to her, kneels
down and rolls her on her back.

WARREN

Helen! Helen! What's wrong?

No response.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Helen... oh God... Helen!

(panicking, shaking her)

Helen!

Warren awkwardly embraces her. The dustbuster continues to WHIR,
sucking at nothing.

Note: During the following sequence, Warren remains in the same
place in frame while the backgrounds change around him. The
effect is one of a swirling out-of-body experience.

INT. SCHMIDT KITCHEN

Warren watches while PARAMEDICS carry out a STRETCHER.

INT. MORTUARY

Warren walks through a COFFIN SHOWROOM.

INT. FUNERAL HOME

Warren sits across the desk from a MORTICIAN and writes a check.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE

Warren talks with a PRIEST, arranging for services.

INT. AIRPORT GATE AREA

Warren's daughter JEANNIE and her fiancée RANDALL HERTZEL walk off the jetway. Jeannie embraces Warren tightly.

INT. FUNERAL HOME CHAPEL

Warren accepts warm wishes from friends at the WAKE.

INT. CHURCH

Warren sits in the front pew next to Jeannie.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Warren is seated under a graveside canopy at this burial plot close to the interstate. The PRIEST is talking, though we hear him only faintly. The swirling sequence ends.

Warren looks over at --

THE MOUND OF EARTH
covered with a tarp. And at --

THE COFFIN
hovering over a pit. And at --

THE CLOUDS
on this gloomy day. And at --

HIS DAUGHTER JEANNIE
seated next to him. Next to her sits Randall.

INT. SCHMIDT HOME - DAY

A post-funeral RECEPTION is winding down -- there are glasses and plates everywhere. People are filing out. Jeannie and Randall are beginning to clear dishes and put chairs back in place.

Warren says his GOOD-BYES to the last three guests -- Warren's best friend Ray Nichols and a couple of old friends, GEORGE and JOANNE. Dear old Ray is quite broken up and has trouble fighting tears.

RAY
I can't believe it, Warren. I still
can't believe it.

WARREN
...I know, Ray. I know.

RAY

She just... she was too young... she was just so...

WARREN

I know. Thank you, Ray. You're a good friend.

They shake hands firmly and reach around for a brief manly hug.

RAY

You take care of yourself, Warren.

WARREN

I will, Ray. You too. We'll see you real soon. Thanks for everything.

Ray leaves, shaking his head, lost in grief.

JOANNE

We're going to say goodbye too, Warren. You know how sorry we are. We're going to miss Helen so much.

WARREN

Yeah.

GEORGE

She was a great gal, just the sweetest, warmest, most wonderful. If you need anything -- anything at all -- you give us a call. Okay?

WARREN

Yeah.

GEORGE

(emphatically)

Okay?

WARREN

Yeah.

Warren closes the door on them. He turns to his daughter.

WARREN

Nice of everybody to bring all this food. All these cold cuts. Going to have a lot of leftovers.

Warren surveys the food, gets momentarily lost in thought.

CLOSE ON --

yellow CHEESE CUBES.

CLOSE ON --

folded slices of ROAST BEEF with a CHERRY TOMATO in the center.

CLOSE ON --

a plate of RICE KRISPIE BARS.

CLOSE ON --

WARREN.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Yep.

Jeannie approaches her father and throws her arms around his neck.

JEANNIE

Oh, Dad.

WARREN

I know, Jeannie. I know.

They hug each other tightly. Jeannie cries softly, and Warren strokes her hair.

Randall quietly observes this intimate moment, moved by such a deep connection between father and daughter.

Unable to contain his love, Randall steps forward and rubs Jeannie's back. He then extends a comforting hand onto Warren's back too.

RANDALL

She was a very special lady.

Warren opens his eyes and looks at Randall's face inches away.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

I for one am really going to miss her. I miss her already. I know we all do.

Warren now breaks the embrace with Jeannie, an embrace completely sullied by this interloper.

Randall picks up an almost empty bottle of WHITE WINE and pours it into three PLASTIC CUPS.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Let's drink to her.

He hands a cup to Jeannie and another to Warren, who accepts it reluctantly.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Here's to Helen. They broke the
mold. They broke the mold.

(gazing heavenward)

Helen, we love you and we miss you.
And we always will. Here's to you.

Randall downs his wine in one gulp. Jeannie sips hers. Warren
just puts his glass back down on the table.

INT. WARREN'S DEN - NIGHT

Weary from the day, Warren seeks a moment of solitude. He sits at
his desk, leafs absently through the FUNERAL PROGRAM.

Randall appears in the open doorway.

RANDALL

(very concerned)

How you doing? You doing okay?

WARREN

I'm fine.

RANDALL

Sure?

WARREN

Yeah. You ought to get to bed.

RANDALL

We're on our way. I just thought I'd
check up on you. Must be really
tough. I remember when my aunt died.
It was so unreal. It was the fourth
of July. I'll never forget it.

Randall reflects momentarily on the cruel fleeting nature of life.
Then --

RANDAL (CONT'D)

So listen, Warren, I know now's
definitely not the time to talk about
it, but before we leave if you want
to take a few minutes and get your
mind off all this craziness, there's
something real important I want to
talk to you about.

WARREN

What's that?

RANDALL

It's an investment opportunity that I don't think you'll want to pass up. And I want to give you first crack at it.

WARREN

Oh?

RANDALL

And it's not a pyramid scheme. A lot of people think it's a pyramid scheme, but it's not. It's a sure fire way to double your money, maybe even triple it without any risk at all. I've looked into it and... The thing is, Warren, you know, I'm not going to be selling waterbeds forever. I got plans. We've never had much chance to talk about it, you and I, but I got a pretty good business head on me, and, you know, I been going to a lot of seminars lately and I really --

Sounded familiar?

WARREN

Can we... can we talk about this tomorrow?

RANDALL

Oh yeah. Right. Absolutely. That's what I was saying. Whenever you're ready.

WARREN

Goodnight, Randall.

RANDALL

Goodnight, Warren. You hang in there.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Warren is in bed but he can't sleep. He rolls on his side and stares at the void beside him. He reaches out one hand and touches the empty pillow. His fingers discover a stray GRAY HAIR.

LATER --

WARREN'S HAND

turns his ALARM CLOCK around. It's 3:26 AM.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Warren pads out of the bedroom and in the darkness makes his way to the stairway.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Warren sits at the kitchen table drinking a glass of milk.

INT. TV ROOM - DAY

Warren wakes up on the sofa. He looks around, dazed. How did I end up here?

Suddenly his attention is drawn to the distant WHIR of Helen's dustbuster. Uneasy, Warren rises and follows the sound.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Warren pushes open a swinging door to reveal --

RANDALL
on his hands and knees dressed in sweats, cleaning up spilled coffee grounds.

WARREN
Turn that off.

Randall turns around, startled.

RANDALL
Huh?

WARREN
I said turn it off!

Frightened by Warren's outburst, Randall fumbles for the switch.

RANDALL
Sorry. I'm sorry, I just--

WARREN
(composing himself)
Use a broom.
(pointing)
In the little closet over there.

Warren exits back through the swinging door.

EXT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Warren shuffles along in his pajamas, the camera trailing behind. He pauses briefly to look into Jeannie's room, then continues on and stops in front of the open doorway to --

INT. WARREN AND HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

OVER WARREN'S SHOULDER --

Jeannie stands in front of her mother's dresser, looking forlornly through the perfume bottles, jewelry boxes and framed photos.

Warren observes her for a moment. Then --

WARREN

There you are.

JEANNIE

Oh, hi Dad.

WARREN

(entering the room)

Why don't you take some of those things? Take whatever you want.

Jeannie holds up a STRING OF PEARLS.

JEANNIE

Maybe just this for now.

WARREN

For God's sake, take more than that. I'm going to have to go through her things pretty soon and, you know, donate it all or whatever so--

JEANNIE

I wish I could stay and help you with all this, Dad, but--

WARREN

No, I know. I know--

JEANNIE

-- I've already used up all my personal days this year, not even counting the honeymoon, and Randall's got to get back to the store, and all the wedding plans--

WARREN

Yeah. The wedding.

JEANNIE
(holding back tears)
I can't believe she's not going to be
there. She's not going to see my
wedding.

Warren puts his arm around her and squeezes her tight. We can
tell they are unaccustomed to such closeness.

WARREN
(affectionate)
You know what's flashing through my
mind right now?

JEANNIE
What's that?

WARREN
Oh, just when you were little and we
all used to go to Elmwood Park, and
you'd swing and ride that thing that
goes around and try to catch
butterflies by the creek.

JEANNIE
Yeah.

WARREN
And when I used to take you to ice
skating classes at Ak-sar-ben.

JEANNIE
No. That was Mom. Mom always took
me to ice skating.

WARREN
You sure? Because I distinctly
remember taking you to ice skating.

JEANNIE
I don't think so. Maybe once.

WARREN
I'm pretty sure it was more than
once. Well, anyway, that was a nice
memory.

JEANNIE
Yeah.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Warren is sitting at the kitchen table awaiting the sandwich that Jeannie is preparing for him.

JEANNIE
Mayonnaise or mustard?

WARREN
I like both.

JEANNIE
Okay.

WARREN
And don't toast the bread too much.
I don't like my bread very toasted.

JEANNIE
(with a sigh)
Got it.

WARREN
And I'll have some of those barbecue potato chips. Not the plain ones. Those are your mother's. The barbecue ones are mine. In fact, you and Randall can take those plain ones. They'll just go to waste here. I won't eat them.

JEANNIE
Fine.

WARREN
It's so good to see you. I sure wish you didn't have to get back so soon. Can't you stay a few more days? I feel like we really haven't had a chance to, you know, catch up.

JEANNIE
I know.

WARREN
Couldn't you just talk to them at work? They'd understand.
(a feeble joke)
Heck, who's going to take care of me?

Jeannie brings over a plate of food and a glass of milk.

JEANNIE
Here's your sandwich.

WARREN

Oh, wonderful. Just wonderful.

JEANNIE

You know, Dad, you're going to have to get used to taking care of yourself now.

WARREN

(mid-chew)

Yeah.

JEANNIE

You're not going to have somebody running your errands for you, picking up your clothes, doing the grocery shopping. You might need to hire a maid or something.

WARREN

A maid? Oh, no, no. I can take care of things. I don't need that extra expense.

JEANNIE

Don't be so stingy. I'm going to be worried about you, and —

WARREN

Well, that's why I'm asking you to stay longer and sort of help me out for a few days.

JEANNIE

Dad, I have my own life! I mean, it's nice you want me to stay, but leave it alone now.

WARREN

(cowed)

Okay. I know.

JEANNIE

And even if I could get more time off, what am I supposed to do about the wedding? That's like a full-time job all its own.

WARREN

Now that you mention it, I've been thinking about that, and I was wondering if maybe you should consider postponing it.

JEANNIE

Postpone the wedding? Are you crazy?
We can't do that. It's all set.
Even if we wanted to, we'd have to
wait God-knows-how-many months for
the church again, and we'd lose all
our deposits and everything.

WARREN

Actually, I made a couple calls, and
if we made a decision this week, we'd
only forfeit half the deposit on the
church and the reception hall. I'm
just saying you might want to take
this opportunity to, you know,
rethink things.

JEANNIE

But everyone's invited and RSVP'd and
everything.

WARREN

They'd understand. I mean, out of
respect for your mother.

JEANNIE

Mom wouldn't want us to change
anything. I know it.

WARREN

(shifting gears)

Well, the thing is, Jeannie, your
mother and I... we talked a number of
times very seriously about you and
Randall and...

JEANNIE

What did she say?

WARREN

Just that... that she loved you and she
wanted you to be happy. And that
maybe Randall wasn't quite... well, we
both just wanted to make sure you're
not going to have any regrets. I
just think you might want to keep
your options open, that's all.

Jeannie can't really comprehend what Warren is saying.

JEANNIE

But she helped us pick the date and everything. And I was on the phone with her almost every day planning it. No, I don't think she'd want us to change it.

WARREN

All right. Okay. Have it your way. You know best. You and your mother.

They sit in silence a moment. Warren continues to eat. Jeannie sips her beer.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Good sandwich.

JEANNIE

(abruptly)

Why did you get such a cheap casket?

WARREN

What?

JEANNIE

I could tell you got the cheapest casket. Everybody could.

WARREN

(swallowing first)

Now that is not true. That is not true. I specifically did not choose, as you say, the cheapest casket. There was one less expensive which they showed me and I refused.

JEANNIE

You mean... a pine box?

WARREN

I don't remember what it was.

JEANNIE

So you got the second cheapest casket.

WARREN

If you must put it that way. Look, I know you're upset, but I don't think it's right for you to focus on one little thing and take it out on me.

JEANNIE

She never got anything she wanted.
You never bought her anything.

Problem -

WARREN

Hey, hey, hey. What are you talking about now? What are you saying? What about the Bounder? What do you call that? That's an expensive vehicle sitting out there. I didn't want to buy that. That was completely your mother's idea.

JEANNIE

She told me she had to pay for half of it. She had to sell her stock to pay for it or something.

WARREN

That was her decision. I was willing to go as far as the Elite, but no, she had to have the Imperial. She wanted the whole she-bang. What was I supposed to do? Tell her she couldn't? It was her money. You can't call me to task on that one.

Now the front door opens and slams, and a VOICE calls from the living room --

RANDALL (OS)

Jeannie? Jeannie?

JEANNIE

In here, Randall.

RANDALL (OS)

Where?

JEANNIE

In here! IN HERE!

Randall opens the door.

RANDALL

Oh, hey. There you are. Thirty minute warning. You better get packed.

JEANNIE

Here I come.

Jeannie heads out the door. Randall watches her go, then turns to Warren.

RANDALL

Looks like you two were having a little heart-to-heart.

INT./EXT. CADILLAC - DAY

Warren is driving the kids to the airport. Jeannie sits beside him looking out the window. Randall is in the back seat. Warren shoots furtive glances at his daughter. Then -

RANDALL

Hey, was that Blockbuster here last time? I don't remember that Blockbuster.

WARREN

No, that's new.

RANDALL

Huh.

INT. EPPLEY AIRFIELD TERMINAL - DAY

Randall, Jeannie and Warren step off the ESCALATOR and head toward the gates. Jeannie and Randall carry their hand-luggage.

With Jeannie a few steps ahead, Randall suddenly remembers something.

RANDALL

Oh. Hey. I just thought of something. Did you ever read "When Bad Things Happen to Good People?"

WARREN

No.

RANDALL

It's really amazing. It really helped me out when my aunt died. You should read it. When Jeannie and I get back to Denver, I'm going to send you my copy. The workbook too. I did most of the exercises, but you can just write next to my answers or something.

WARREN

Thank you, Randall. That'd be great.

INT. UNITED EXPRESS GATE AREA - DAY

The flight is boarding. Randall and Warren shake hands.

WARREN
So long, Randall.

RANDALL
You'll be in our prayers. And I'm
going to e-mail you about that
investment thing, okay?

WARREN
Oh, yes. Thank you.

Warren turns to his daughter.

WARREN (CONT'D)
Okay, Jeannie.

Father and daughter embrace.

JEANNIE
(in his ear)
You take care of yourself, Dad. I'll
see you in a few weeks.

Warren is overcome with many different emotions and fights to maintain his composure. After a moment, Jeannie releases her arms but Warren holds on, unable to let go, his eyes still closed.

FLASH!

Randall takes a SNAPSHOT to capture the moment. The camera begins its NOISY AUTO REWIND -- the end of the roll.

RANDALL
That was a good one. That's going to
be a really great shot.

Warren and Jeannie release their embrace. While she gathers her carry-on baggage, Warren watches her, on the verge of tears.

RANDALL (CONT'D)
Yeah, I got the plane in the
background. Very cool.

JEANNIE
(to Warren)
Bye, Dad.

WARREN
So long, Jeannie.

JEANNIE

So we'll see you in a few weeks.
It'll be great.

WARREN

Okay.

RANDALL

Bye, Warren.

Jeannie and Randall head toward the JETWAY.

RANDALL (CONT'D)

You take care of yourself.

Warren watches them present their BOARDING PASSES to the STEWARDESS. Randall goes first through the doors.

Jeannie gives her father a final little wave, then proceeds around the corner. HOLD on the empty frame.

WARREN

turns his gaze and walks heavily away.

WARREN (VO)

Dear Ngudu, I hope you're sitting
down, because I'm afraid I've got
some bad news.

EXT. EPPLEY AIRFIELD PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

Warren trudges back to his car.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Since I last wrote to you, my wife
Helen -- your foster mother -- passed
away unexpectedly of an aneurysm.

INT. CADILLAC - DAY

Warren sits in his seat, draws the lapbelt around him, puts his key into the ignition.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

The services were lovely and very well
attended. Jeannie came in from Denver
with her friend, and folks drove up
from as far away as Des Moines and
Wichita. It was a very moving tribute,
anyway you look at it. I wish you
could have been there.

Warren turns the key in his ignition and is rewarded only with the GRINDING SOUND of a bad starter.

His anguish and frustration rising to the surface, he tries again, but this time he keeps the key engaged, forcing the starter to eat itself alive.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A TOW TRUCK is backing into position, preparing to haul Warren's car away. Warren stands nearby.

EXT. SCHMIDT HOME - DUSK

Warren is dropped off by a TAXI.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

But now that all the excitement is over, and the smoke has cleared...

INT. SCHMIDT HOME - DUSK

Warren closes the front door and turns to face the vast emptiness and silence of his home.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

... it's just me and my thoughts knocking around in this big old house.

He wanders into the --

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

-- and absently opens the refrigerator. It's full of left-overs from the funeral reception.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

Funny thing is, that's the way it was way back when, before I had a wife, before I had a career... before I had a daughter.

Warren digs out a slice of AMERICAN CHEESE and begins unwrapping i

INT. TV ROOM - NIGHT

WE MOVE CLOSER TO WARREN

sitting next to a lamp, drinking a SCOTCH ON THE ROCKS. There's Husker game on TV, but he's not really watching.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

I believe I mentioned in my previous letter that I was a manager in the Actuarial department at Mutual of Omaha. If I am given a man's age, profession, place of residence, marital status and medical history, I can calculate with great probability how long that man will live. In my case, now that my wife has died, there is an eighty five percent chance that I will die within eleven years, provided I do not re-marry. Marlin Perkins himself died only two years after his wife passed on.

He leans his head onto the chair back and rests his eyes, his mouth dropping open.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

All I know is I've got to make the best of whatever time I have left.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TV ROOM - DAY

Warren's face is in the SAME POSITION on the chair, but now he sports DARK CIRCLES under his eyes and a FIVE-DAY GREY BEARD. He awakens. As he gets up, we sense that he hasn't changed out of his pajamas in days.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

I don't want to kid you -- adjusting to life without Helen has been quite a challenge.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

DISHES are piled up, the GARBAGE overflows. Flies BUZZ.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

But I think you'd be proud of me. Yep, this house is under new management, but you'd never know the difference.

He opens the refrigerator but sees nothing of interest. In fact there's almost NOTHING in there.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
Helen wouldn't want me sitting
around, wallowing in self-pity, no-
siree-bob. Why, she'd tell me to
shape up or ship out!

He opens a cupboard and finds only a stale package of TACO SHELLS.
Warren fishes one out of the box and takes a bite.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Now attired rather haphazardly -- perhaps his shirt is misbuttoned
-- Warren climbs into the BOUNDER and starts it up.

WARREN (VO CONTD)
So I try to get out as much as I can,
you know, try to stay active, stick
to my routine. That's very important
in the face of big life changes.

EXT. BAKER'S SUPERMARKET - DAY

The boulder arrives, Captain Warren at the helm. It consumes two
parking spaces

INT. BAKER'S SUPERMARKET - DAY

IN THE FROZEN FOOD AISLE --
Warren stocks up on frozen EGG ROLLS, TATER TOTS, MINI PIZZA
ROLLS, HUNGRY MAN DINNERS and cartons and cartons of ICE CREAM.

WARREN (VO CONTD)
Oh sure, I'm not quite the cook Helen
was, but I remember a trick or two
from my bachelor days.

AT THE MEAT SECTION --
Warren selects a tray of EIGHT PORK CHOPS.

A WOMAN shopping close to Warren gets a good whiff of his STENCH
and quickly moves away.

EXT. BAKER'S SUPERMARKET - DAY

Warren has just finished loading the last of a DOZEN GROCERY BAGS
onto the floor of the Bounder.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

It's a lot of work keeping a household together. I suppose eventually I'll sell the place and move to a little condo -- you know, less upkeep and so forth -- but for now I'm getting by just fine.

Suddenly he is seized with a mild discomfort, realizes he forgot something.

WARREN

Damn.

He slams the Bouncer door and heads back toward the store.

INT. BAKER'S SUPERMARKET - DAY

FROM A SHELF --

Warren selects the largest tube of PREPARATION H.

IN THE LIQUOR AISLE --

Warren is simply heading toward the checkout counters, but passing all those inviting rows of alcohol, he picks up a bottle of CUTTY SARK.

APPROACHING THE CHECKOUT COUNTERS --

Warren sees that even the express lanes are JAMMED. At first defeated, he gets an idea. Is anyone looking?

Warren furtively CONCEALS the ointment and the bottle on his person and nonchalantly saunters toward the exit.

EXT. BAKER'S SUPERMARKET - DAY

Five steps out of the store, Warren is approached by a PLAIN CLOTHES SECURITY GUARD and a BAG BOY.

GUARD

Sir. Sir!

Warren's eyes go wide, and he speeds up, pretending not to hear.

GUARD (CONTD)

Hey, I'm talking to you!

Warren FREEZES, letting the Cutty Sark slip. It SMASHES on the pavement.

INT. BAKER'S SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

Warren sits uncomfortably on a metal FOLDING CHAIR, his head in his hands. On a small table in front of him is the tube of Preparation H.

The guard and the STORE MANAGER watch him. The store manager shakes his head -- it takes all kinds.

Warren looks in his wallet, pulls out his BAKER'S CARD.

WARREN

I've got one of these. Been shopping here for years. Can't you let it go just this once?—I'll pay you whatever you want.

MANAGER

You should have thought about that before you left the store.

Two BURLY OMAHA POLICEMEN come through the door.

POLICEMAN #1

This the guy?

INT. OMAHA POLICE DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

THROUGH IRON BARS --

Warren is in a holding cell, sitting on a bench across from a WINO.

OFFICER (OS)

Okay, Hemorrhoids. Let's go.

Gathering what shreds of dignity left him, Warren rises.

WARREN

The name is Schmidt. Warren Schmidt.

EXT. BAKER'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

No cars remain in this section of the parking lot, none except the BOUNDER.

A POLICE CRUISER rolls up and lets Warren out.

WARREN

Appreciate the ride, officers.

POLICEMAN #2

You stay out of trouble now.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren opens the door and climbs in. He dives into his bags like a hyena, and his hands get covered in milky GOO. He holds up the source -- a carton of MELTED ICE CREAM.

Now he unearths a box of TATER TOTS and opens it, ravenously stuffing the thawed little puffs into his mouth.

WARREN (VO)

Oh sure, sometimes I can be a tad forgetful and miss a meal or two, but I guess that's hardly worth mentioning to someone in your situation.

INT. SCHMIDT BATHROOM - NIGHT

Warren lies asleep in his BATHTUB, a newspaper dangling from his hand, his mouth slack. He startles awake, looks around, is completely disoriented. He rises from the tub, sees no towel, and begins to BLOT himself with the newspaper.

WARREN (VO CONTD)

It occurred to me that in my last letter I might have misspoken and used some negative language in reference to my late wife. But you have to understand that I was under a lot of pressure following my retirement.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Warren sits at the kitchen table shuffling through some PHOTOS. He smiles sadly from time to time.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I'm not going to lie to you, Ngudu. I miss her. I miss my Helen. It's been a rough few weeks, and I've been pretty, you know, broken up from time to time.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

HELEN'S CLOSET --

Warren approaches it as though it were a holy shrine. He opens it.

INSIDE THE CLOSET --

He's touching her dresses one by one, smelling them, remembering the times she wore them.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Helen dedicated her life to me and to raising our family. I guess I just didn't know how lucky I was to have a wife like Helen until she was gone.

MINUTES LATER --

Warren is sitting on the floor opening all of Helen's SHOEBOXES. Her little feet, her little shoes--

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

(his voice quavering)

Remember that, young man -- you've got to appreciate what you have while you still have it. Helen-- I just can't believe she's gone. I'm sorry, Ngudu. I've got to go now. Hope all's well. Warm regards, Warren Schmidt

He opens one more box but instead of finding shoes, he discovers a slim bundle of LETTERS bound by a purple ribbon. Letters? I never wrote her any letters.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

At his desk, Warren is reading from the letters. With every word he DEFLATES a little more, his face sagging, his eyes clouding over.

FROM ABOVE --

Warren drops his head in his hands, the LETTERS laid out before him like leaves torn from a book of broken dreams.

EXT. DEAN'S BARBER PARKING LOT - DAY

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD OF THE BOUNDER --

Warren watches the outside of the shop. Someone emerges.

IT'S RAY NICHOLS --

striding toward his Chrysler.

Warren jumps out of the Bouncer and heads toward Ray.

RAY

Jesus, Warren! You scared me. What are you doing here?

Warren doesn't respond.

RAY (CONT'D)
You look terrible. What's the matter?

Warren ineffectually HURLS the wad of letters at Ray, and they flutter off in all directions.

WARREN
I thought you'd want these back.

Ray captures one of the letters against his chest and examines it. As it all sinks in --

RAY
Oh, God, Warren. Oh, Jesus.

Warren just stares at him, fuming.

RAY (CONT'D)
That was so long ago, Warren. Must be twenty-five, thirty years. I-- oh, Jesus. I never thought-- She kept these?
(slightly proud)
I can't believe she kept these.

Warren rushes Ray and STRIKES him with open palms like a ridiculous windmill. Ray does his best to block Warren's blows.

RAY (CONT'D)
Jesus, Warren. Stop it. Stop hitting me. Let's talk about this.

Ray manages to put a car between him and Warren.

WARREN
You were my friend.

There's nothing else to be done. Warren heads back to the boulder.

RAY
(calling after him)
It was all just a stupid mistake, Warren. You were out in Frisco, and things started up and got a little out of hand, that's all. I'm sorry.

WARREN
(as he gets in the Bounder)
It's over. It's all over. It's all over.

RAY

Warren--

VRRRM! VRRRM! VRRRRRRRRRRM! Warren REVS the Bounder and with a SCREECH pulls violently out of the parking lot, knocking over a garbage can on the way.

INT. SCHMIDT BEDROOM - DAY

Warren lugs huge armloads of CLOTHING out of Helen's closet and dumps them into cardboard BOXES.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Warren empties drawers and cabinets of MAKEUP and TOILETRIES into a box.

EXT. HI-VEE SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - DAY

The Bounder pulls to a stop in front of a SALVATION ARMY DONATION STATION.

The Bounder's side door swings opens, and out come BOX AFTER BOX of Helen's belongings.

Some of the boxes burst or tip over, spilling their contents.

EXT. SCHMIDT HOME - DAY

Warren pulls the Bounder into the driveway and walks toward his house.

MRS. BRUSH is watering her lawn next door.

MRS. BRUSH

How are you getting along, Warren?

WARREN

Oh, fine, just fine. How are you?

MRS. BRUSH

We're fine, but we sure miss Helen.
I don't have anyone to give my Sunset
magazines to anymore.

WARREN

Oh yeah. She liked that. Well, nice
to see you there, Mary. Give my best
to Julius.

MRS. BRUSH
Will do. We'll see ya.

INT. SCHMIDT HOME - DAY

Still smiling from his neighborly exchange, Warren walks through the living room and OUT OF SIGHT down the hall.

CAMERA HOLDS

on the sight of the empty hall. Then -- LOUD, WAILING SOBS waft toward us from the distance.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

A tidy place with lace curtains and patterned wallpaper. Little wrapped seashell soaps and a stack of designed napkins sit on the sink basin.

Still sniffing, Warren enters, lowers his trousers, and begins to sit. He catches himself and STANDS. He reaches to lift the seat but on second thought leaves it down.

CLOSE ON WARREN

as his stream commences. He gets an IDEA -- he raises first one hand, then the other. The sound of the stream shifts randomly from water-on-water to water-on-plastic to water-on-rug.

Now Warren begins to turn completely around -- slowly completing one full circle, then another, finally picking up the pace and SPINNING like a top, anointing the entire bathroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Warren is in the midst of a troubled, fitful sleep. We MOVE CLOSER to him, and just as we're upon him he OPENS HIS EYES. He has had a REVELATION.

WARREN
Jeannie. Jeannie.

He rises.

WHOOMF!

A SUITCASE hits the bed and is opened wide.

Warren opens his closet, begins to remove clothes and place them on the bed.

THE SUITCASE AGAIN --

As Warren struggles to zip it shut.

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

The Bounder zooms past a sign "Now leaving Omaha."

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren drives, determined, obsessed.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

A weary and disheveled Warren is at a PAYPHONE.

CHEERY WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)

(a recording)

You've reached Moon Dog Electronics.

If you know your party's extension --

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP -- Warren presses three digits and is transferred to --

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

Shipping and receiving, this is Jeannie.

WARREN

Jeannie, it's Dad. How are you?

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

Totally swamped. What's up?

Everything okay?

WARREN

Everything's great. I have a big surprise for you. Guess what.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

Where are you calling from? You sound weird.

WARREN

That's what I want to tell you about. I'm on the road. I'm on my way out to see you. Right now I'm just outside Grand Island.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

What are you talking about?

WARREN

It's just that I've been thinking about things, and I've realized that I haven't been the greatest father to you and, well, you're about all I've got left, Jeannie. And I want to make it up to you. So I've decided to come out to Denver and help coordinate all the wedding arrangements, take the burden off of you. That's the least I can do.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

You mean you're coming now?

WARREN

(proud)

If I drive straight through I'll be there in time for supper.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

(finally)

Um... I don't think so, Dad. That's not such a good idea.

WARREN

Why not? I've just been sitting in Omaha twiddling my thumbs. I should be out there helping you. I mean, what the hell.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

The thing is, Dad, we don't need your help right now. Roberta and I -- and Becky -- pretty much have everything under control. Roberta's been amazing, by the way. Really amazing.

WARREN

Besides, it'll give us a chance to spend some quality time together and have some good talks, you know, before... before I lose you forever.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

Dad, you're not listening. It's not a good time for you to come. It's just not.

(shouting at a co-worker)

No, use the bubble-wrap on that one. It's too big. Yeah.

MORE

JEANNIE (ON PHONE CONT'D)

(to Warren again)

I'm sorry, Dad, but I don't know any other way to say it. Frankly at this point, you'd just be in the way.

WARREN

(deflated)

But I'm all packed and on my way in the Bounder. I could just sleep in there. I wouldn't be in the way at all. By the way, she's really handling great on the open road. Smooth as silk.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

I just think it's better if we stick to the plan, and you get here the Friday before the wedding like we said. You should just turn around and go home. I mean, it's a sweet offer, but like I say, we got too much going on around here.

WARREN

(wounded pride)

But I assume you won't object to me sending any more of those checks.

JEANNIE (ON PHONE)

Jesus, Dad. I don't have time for this.

MOMENTS LATER -

Warren trudges back to the Bounder.

CLOSE ON THE GAS PUMP

as the total passes \$41.00 with no end in sight.

WIDE --

Warren is filling the seemingly bottomless tank of the Bounder. It's as though he were trying to fill his empty soul.

A pot-bellied FARMER wanders by.

FARMER

That a Bounder?

WARREN

Yep.

FARMER

Thought so. Where you headed?

Warren is caught off-guard. That's a very good question.

WARREN

Um... let's see. Well... out to Denver.

FARMER

Denver, huh?

WARREN

My daughter's getting married.

FARMER

Say! Congratulations.

WARREN

But I've got a few days to kill on the way, so I suppose I'm going to take my time about it... see some sights.

FARMER

Good for you. You going to see Pioneer Village?

WARREN

That's a good idea. Now that you mention it, my wife and I must have driven by it a dozen times, but she never wanted to stop.

FARMER

Oh, she didn't, did she?

CLOSE ON WARREN

WARREN

Now I'm going to stop.

THE GAS GAUGE AGAIN --
It STOPS on \$62.37.

EXT. I-80 - CENTRAL NEBRASKA - DAY

Warren's RV makes its way across this flat, sprawling agricultural landscape. The composition of the shots and the music reinforce Warren's sense of loneliness and alienation.

INT. BOUNDER - DAY

Warren drives, a sad, anxious expression on his face. Suddenly —

WARREN
(mocking Jeannie)
"At this point you'd just be in the way."

WARREN NOW SEES A BIG SIGN --
"Harold Warp's Pioneer Village. See How America Grew.
Next Exit." He beams.

EXT. MINDEN, NEBRASKA - DAY

The Bounder approaches the compound known as Harold Warp's Pioneer Village. (Harold Warp, by the way, invented FLEX-O-GLASS.)

As Warren emerges from the Bounder, his expression reveals a deep sense of the moment, of arriving at a place long dreamed about.

Warren arrives at the FRONT DOOR to the main building and tries to open it, but it's LOCKED. He peers through the window and in the distance notices a MAN wearing a toolbelt. Warren knocks loudly.

MAN
(approaching)
We're closed for repairs. Closed.
Nobody here. Come back after the 22nd.

WARREN
How's that?

MAN
(louder)
We re-open on the 22nd.

WARREN
Oh. Thank you.

INT. BOUNDER - DAY

Warren is sitting at his little kitchen table, sluggish from his severe depression. He's trying to write but the words are coming slowly, painfully.

WARREN (VO)
Dear Ngudu, I don't know. I don't know anything anymore. I just_ I just don't know. I can't go on. My whole life_ it's just nothing. It's nothing_ and now_ and now my GODDAMN PEN IS OUT OF INK!

Warren goes into a tantrum, throwing his pen across the Bounder and tearing up the letter.

INT. THE BOUNDER - DAY

Warren is driving, a desperate look on his bleary face.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Dear Ngudu, How are you? I am fine. A week or so ago, I decided to take a little road trip on my way to Jeannie's wedding out in Denver. Jeannie had wanted me to come out early and help with the arrangements, but I told her I needed some time to myself. To tell you the truth, I've been feeling a little down lately, a little lost.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The big Bounder rolls along, heading toward a mournful sunset.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

So I decided to visit some places I hadn't been to in a long time and maybe try to figure out what has made my who I am today. There's so much of my life I can't seem to remember, Ngudu, whole sections of my life that are just gone.

The Bounder now takes an EXIT.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

So my first stop was none other than Holdridge, Nebraska. I thought it might be a good idea to re-visit the house where I was born sixty-seven years ago next March.

EXT. HOLDRIDGE, NEBRASKA - DAY

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD --

The "Welcome to Holdridge" sign replete with the traditional logos of Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

We moved away from Holdridge when I was not much older than you, and I've often wondered what our old house looks like today. Funny, I never forgot the address -- 249 Locust Avenue. I remember my Dad saying he paid \$11,500 for that place. Believe it or not, that was a lot of money in those days.

A STREET SIGN -- LOCUST AVENUE

WARREN LOOKS AT IT,
breathes a satisfied breath as he guides his vessel around the corner.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

249 Locust Avenue. Yes, sir.

He looks out the window scanning the addresses. All these old houses: 225, 229, 237, 243 and finally --

249 LOCUST AVENUE.

But wait -- there's no house here. It's a --

EXT. FOUR-DAY TIRE STORE - DAY

Looks as if that lot was re-zoned.

At first crestfallen, Warren quickly decides to make the best of it. He's come all these miles, waited all these years.

The Bounder pulls into the parking lot.

INT. FOUR-DAY TIRE STORE - DAY

Warren walks into this modern tire store as though walking reverently into his past. It's all coming back to him.

A chipper TIRE SALESMAN named KEN comes up.

KEN

Can I help you, sir?

WARREN

No, that's okay. I'm just looking around. I used to live here.

KEN

Here... in the store?

WARREN

Yep. My childhood home was right on this spot.

(walking a few steps,
extending his hands)

In fact my bedroom would have been right about here, the dining room over there and --

(catching himself)

Of course, that was a long time ago. Way before you were born.

Warren wanders off, lost in his memories. The MUSIC SWELLS with a nostalgic and romantic sense of the past.

SOUNDS FROM THE PAST

now filter in -- a child practicing piano, a lively dinner, a lovingly scolding mother, a game of hopscotch, a barking dog. Warren looks wistfully out the store's front window.

WARREN (CONT'D)

You're not going to believe this, but we used to have a tire swing right out front.

KEN

Huh. Well, listen, you let me know if you need any help with some tires today. My name's Ken.

WARREN

(touched)

Thank you.

EXT. FOUR-DAY TIRE STORE - DAY

On his way back to the Bouncer, Warren surveys the parking lot as though it were still his front yard.

WARREN (VO)

An awful lot had changed since my day, but it was still good to be home again. Very good indeed.

Spotting some LITTER, Warren picks it up and walks it to a nearby receptacle.

EXT. O'NEILL PARK - DAY

Warren wanders onto an empty PLAYGROUND. He approaches MONKEY BARS and jumps up, hangs for a second, drops back down.

NOW WARREN RIDES A DUCK
mounted on a giant spring, rocking to and fro.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
I think I was a happy child.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The boulder zooms past a sign that reads, "Welcome to Kansas."

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
(increasingly Charles
Kuralt-ish)
Next stop, Lawrence Kansas, where I
paid a visit to my old alma mater,
K.U. I hadn't been there in years
and years, and now seemed the perfect
chance to stop by.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS (LAWRENCE) - DAY

The Boulder heads toward the center of campus.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS - DAY

Warren walks through campus as STUDENTS bustle about.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
Believe it or not, I still have
dreams about being late for class.

EXT. BETA SIGMA FRATERNITY HOUSE - DAY

Warren climbs the steps of this old converted house.

INT. BETA SIGMA HOUSE - DAY

A DOOR --
as a hand raps on it.

DAVE (OS)
Hey, you looking for one of us?

WIDER --

Warren turns and looks down the HALLWAY as two YOUNG MEN with
backpacks approach.

WARREN

Say, you boys live here in this room?

PHIL

Sure do. What's up?

They push past him, and one of the boys opens the door with a key.

WARREN

Believe it or not, this was my room
too when I was a Beta Sig years ago.
Do you mind if I just take a quick
peek for old times' sake?

DAVE HAGGART, an Electrical Engineering student with pimples
around his mouth, and PHIL GOBERSON, a good-natured, oafish sort,
exchange a look.

DAVE

I don't care.

PHIL

Whatever.

INT. PRAT BEDROOM - DAY

The boys put down their backpacks on their respective beds.
Warren follows them, takes a wistful look around the room.

DAVE

So, you were a Beta Sig, huh?

WARREN

Oh, yeah. Uh... Oi Koi.

Dave and Phil smile proudly.

DAVE AND PHIL

Kai Ro.

They offer their hands to Warren and perform the secret handshake,
which of course cannot be described here.

DAVE

What are you doing here?

WARREN

I'm just sort of looking around.
Haven't been back in years and years.

INT. FRAT DINING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON CHICKEN FRIED STEAK

CLOSE ON MASHED POTATOES AND GRAVY

CLOSE ON VEGETABLE MEDLEY

WARREN

is eating lunch along with all the current frat members.
Charismatic CHUCK WOODARD walks over leans down to talk to Warren.

CHUCK

Word is we have a veteran Beta Sig in our
midst. Which one of you might that be?

Hearty laughter.

WARREN

It's me.

CHUCK

No, I know. How are you? Chuck
Woodard, chapter president.

WARREN

Warren Schmidt. Omaha, Nebraska.

They perform the secret handshake.

CHUCK

And Haggart tells me you've never been
back for a visit before this.

WARREN

Not since the early fifties. Always
too busy to break away for reunions.
But I have contributed quite a bit of
money over the years. You know.

INSERT - A CONTRIBUTION REPLY FORM

offering choices of \$500, \$250, \$100, and \$75. A pen puts an "X"
in the box next to a "OTHER" and writes in \$12.00.

BACK TO SCENE --

CHUCK

Well, the place has probably changed a lot
since then, but I doubt the food has
gotten any better.

That cracks Warren up.

CHUCK
Have you had much of a chance to look
around the campus?

WARREN
Not too much, no.

CHUCK
Why don't you guys take Mr. Schmidt
on a little tour this afternoon?

PHIL
I can't. I got Spanish.

DAVE
I have a review section for my Circuits
Design mid-term tomorrow, but I guess I
could meet you after that.

CHUCK
Oh, and be sure to show him Schuyler.
Warren has a sudden reaction of horror.

WARREN
Show me what?

PHIL
The new Schuyler Student Center.

CHUCK
It's incredible.

DAVE
Yeah, it just opened about six months
ago. It's huge. It's got like an
international food court, concert
hall, conference rooms, a coffee
house, computer center, bowling
alley, pool table and video game
room, what else? Oh, a bookstore,
travel agency, barber shop.

PHIL
Frozen yogurt and cookie store, all
sorts of stuff. And it's a really
cool-looking building.

CHUCK
And it was largely donated by none
other than Roger Schuyler, an old
Beta Sig like yourself. You know who
he is, right?

Warren looks deeply into his chicken fried steak.

WARREN

He was my roommate.

PHIL

You mean in our room? The one Dave
and I have now?

Warren nods slowly.

PHIL

Dude!

Phil extends his hand to invite the high five, and Dave responds
with vim.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CAMPUS - DAY

Dave and Warren are taking their little tour.

WARREN

You see that tower? In my day, kids
used to climb up that thing and
unfurl a Go Kansas banner before big
football games.

DAVE

Oh yeah? Some guys built a huge bong
up there last year. It was pretty
hilarious.

Warren has no idea what a bong is.

WARREN

A bong, huh? That's great.

DAVE

(pointing)

Last but not least, here is the
Schuyler Student Center.

THE SCHUYLER STUDENT CENTER

is an immense, sprawling edifice. Above the front doors, in
gigantic letters, are the words, "Schuyler Student Center."

Dave starts to walk toward it, but Warren balks -- he rubs the
back of his neck, feigns fatigue.

WARREN

Say, Dave, I think I've had a little
too much excitement for one day. I
should let you focus on your studies.

DAVE

At least poke your head in and have a look at the frescoes.

WARREN

I know where it is now, so I can come back. Thanks a lot for your hospitality and the tour and everything. I know I kind of barged in on you. You've been great.

He offers his hand for the secret handshake.

DAVE

You know, we're having a little mixer tonight to welcome the new pledges and little sisters. You ought to stop by.

Warren gives a knowing smile.

WARREN

Oh, no. That's for you young fellas. I know what goes on at those things.

DAVE

No, really. It's nothing wild -- more just like a reception. I'm sure we'd all be honored if you came.

WARREN

Honored? Really?

DAVE

Yeah. It'd give everybody, especially our new pledges, a sense of our, you know, our heritage as Beta Sigs.

WARREN

(brightening)
Really?

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

WARREN TAKES A SHOWER

through the blurry shower door, humming an old tune.

EXT. BETA SIGMA - NIGHT

The Bounder rolls up and comes to a stop.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren opens the little vanity mirror inside the visor and combs his hair, checks his appearance.

INT. BETA SIGMA - NIGHT

FRATERNITY and SORORITY STUDENTS mill about the lower floor. There is music, but no one dances. There is beer, but few drink. Dave spoke correctly -- it is indeed more of a reception than a party, and there is stiffness about the affair.

Warren comes through the front door. He wears a sporty polo shirt beneath his jacket.

He smiles warmly at no one in particular as he enters the main room. He even seems to have a little bounce in his step. He looks around amicably for a familiar face. He finds none, and there is that awkward moment of a nice guy in limbo at a party.

He spots the drinks table and heads thither. A young man acts as BARTENDER.

BARTENDER

Yes, sir. Are you looking for someone?

WARREN

I'm looking for a cold beer is what I'm looking for.

BARTENDER

You got it.

The young man begins to fill a plastic cup from the keg.

WARREN

And none of this 'sir' stuff. I'm one of your Beta Sig brothers.

BARTENDER

Oh, right. You were the guy at lunch. Right. Roger Schuyler's roommate.

WARREN

I taught him everything he knows.

Chuck and Phil sidle up. Chuck puts his arm around Warren's shoulder.

CHUCK

(to the bartender)

Did you check this guy's ID? He looks a little young to be drinking.

They laugh, and Warren laughs a little too hard.

WARREN

...check my ID...

PHIL

Chuck wants to introduce you when he gives his corny little welcoming speech and all. That okay with you?

WARREN

Oh, like I'm a visiting dignitary.

CHUCK

Well, since you have been out of school for a couple of years, we want some tips on what to do when we graduate.

They laugh again, and again Warren does so a bit too effusively.

CHUCK

So you having a good time?

WARREN

The time of my life. It really takes me back to when I was you fellas' age. Doesn't feel as though any time has passed at all. But you guys are a little too low-key here, I mean, c'mon. When we had fraternity parties in my day, we used to let it all hang out.

CHUCK

Oh, it can get pretty wild sometimes. You'd be proud of us.

WARREN

I don't know. I'm still a little disappointed in you guys. I'm going to have to include this in my report.

Warren CHUGS the rest of his beer and motions to the bartender to fill it up again.

LATER --

President Chuck addresses the faithful.

CHUCK

-- and the second letter, Sigma, is the eighteenth letter of the Greek alphabet. As you math types know -- but I'll say it for the benefit of us normal people -- Sigma, in math, is the mathematical symbol meaning the "summation of all the figures in a problem." So I want you new pledges and little sisters to remember that as Beta Sigmas we are a whole; we are the summation of all our component parts.

ANGLE ON WARREN

sitting in a chair in a corner. He's a little drunk by now. He is studying something in the palm of his hand.

WARREN'S HAND --

containing a little piece of PAPER with notes for a speech.

WARREN LOOKS UP AND BLINKS

trying to memorize his remarks.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

We are a family of brothers and sisters, and with the concepts of Beta and Smigma, we can achieve more together than we ever could as individuals. For he who stands away from the pack can never be dealt with or played with. I hereby welcome you into this elite club.

All applaud or raise their glasses.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

There's one more thing I want to mention, and that is that we have with us tonight a very special guest. He's right over there in the corner--

Warren stands up, almost at attention.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

--and no, he's not some graduate student crashing the party.

Warren gets a big kick out of that.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

He's one of us -- a veteran Beta Sig brother from yesteryear who represents our very special heritage.

Warren is listening but also still going over the speech in his mind

CHUCK (CONT'D)

You know, the men of Beta Sigma are a unique breed who leave their unmistakable stamp on history. Beta Sigs are found in every walk of life and in all fifty states. Most recently, of course, Roger Schuyler, a Beta Sig from this very chapter and head of one the nation's largest construction firms, based out of Chicago, designed and donated our new student center. And now, I'd like to present you to someone who in this very house was-- Roger Schuyler's roommate!

The applause is so thunderous that no one hears Warren's name.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Warren Spitz!

SMILING FACES

of those applauding, proud to have in their presence a man once in such proximity to greatness.

Warren's smile wilts before he politely freshens it. He slips the piece of paper into his jacket pocket.

The music comes back on, and people return to talking. A young man approaches Warren.

YOUNG MAN

So what was Roger Schuyler like? You guys stay in touch?

WARREN

(confidential at first)

You want to know what Roger Schuyler was like? He was a selfish jerk. That guy cheated and screwed around and treated everybody like dog, you know, poop--

MORE

WARREN (CONT'D)

(getting fired up)

-- and now he's running around like he's some kind of bigshot. You want to guess who did his Statistics final that time so he could get an A and get into Phi Beta Kappa and all that?

(jabbing a finger into his own shoulder)

Me. You're looking at him. Me, that's who. He mention that in his book?

YOUNG MAN

I don't know.

Warren now spots Dave nearby and breaks away.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Hey Dave. Dave. Come here. Let me buy you a little drinky-winky.

He takes Dave by the arm and drags him to the drinks table.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Two beers, please.

DAVE

No beer for me. I still have two chapters to review for tomorrow. I'll have a Diet Coke.

WARREN

I can't get over you guys. No drinking, no carousing, no carrying on at all. I thought you college kids -- let me tell you something, and I want you to listen very hard. That test tomorrow is meaningless.

(he's starting to slur)

The senselessness of it all is going to hit you someday like a ton of bricks. What matters now is to enjoy your youth. Do you hear me? Live it up a little. Let me show you how we used to do it in my day.

Warren takes his beer, lifts it to his lips, takes a deep breath and chugs the whole thing, little streams of beer trailing down the sides of his mouth and onto his neck. He slams the plastic cup onto the table.

WARREN

Fill her up, partner. With ethyl, if you got it.

He does so, and Warren downs this one even faster.

WARREN

Aaaaaah. That's better. Now that's two for me and zero for you. C'mon, do yourself a favor. You've got to live life!

DAVE

Well, maybe just one. I had a big dinner, anyway.

WARREN

That's the spirit.

He slaps Dave hard on the back. They take their beers.

WARREN

One, two, three.

Down the old hatcharoo. Warren finishes his slower this time, and not without gagging noises. Dave takes only a sip.

WARREN

Set 'em up again.

DAVE

Don't you think you'd better slow down a little, Mr. Schmidt?

WARREN

Slow down? You think I ought to SLOW DOWN? I've been slowing down all my goddamn life! I've had enough slow down here, slow down there, slow down left and right and over there. YOU slow down!

Everyone has now quieted and turned to look at the scene by the drinks table. Warren reels around. Dave is on the verge of tears.

WARREN (CONT'D)

What are you all looking at me like that for? This guy thinks I should slow down. I think you should all be speeding up! Let's have a party.

He starts to dance grotesquely around the room, exhorting all to join his festive mood.

WARREN (CONT'D)

C'mon, everybody, let's have a party!
Let's sing some drinking songs and
have a real party! C'mon, you guys!

He grabs a pretty YOUNG WOMAN and begins to dance with her.
Warren releases the unresponsive girl, seizes a PLEDGE, and now
starts to dance with him.

Finally stumbles and falls but gets back up again.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Why are you all so BORING? You know
who I am? I'm Roger Schuyler's
roommate. I'm Roger fucking Schuyler's
roommate! But he didn't build that
building. I did! He's MY roommate.
It's MY building!

Someone has cut the music by this time, and between Warren's words
is a terrible silence.

He collapses in a chair, and his voice trails off. He slumps,
mouth open. He blinks heavily, and we cut to his blurred point of
view.

Everyone is still. Chuck motions to Phil. They walk over and
hoist Warren out of the chair. As they drag him out of the room,
we occasionally cut to Warren's point of view -- the traveling
floor, the stunned onlookers.

CHUCK

Son of a bitch. Grab his coat, and
let's get him the fuck out of here.

They reach the little steps that lead to the front hall, and
Warren's feet knock against them as he is pulled up.

On the last step Warren's feet are knocked so hard that his FALSE
LOWER TEETH fall out and roll on the carpet.

PHIL

What was that?

CHUCK

Oh, for Christ's sake.

Following them, Dave dutifully picks up the denture with a piece
of newspaper.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

The door is flung open, and Warren is heaved upon his bed. Phil and Chuck leave. Dave lays the denture on the kitchen table and leaves.

INT. BOUNDER - MORNING

WARREN'S LOWER DENTURE
is being scrubbed in the SINK.

WARREN

now fits the plate back in his mouth. He looks haggard and drawn. As he turns away from the sink, his head throbs even more severely, and he holds his head, sits down.

WARREN (VO)

Well, Ngudu, I'm happy to report that the campus may have changed a bit, but it was the same old KU I remember, full of friendship and camaraderie.

NOW DRIVING

Every breath, every blink seems painful.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I managed to hook up with some kids at my old fraternity Beta Sigma, and we had a grand old time, really put on the dog. I'm no spring chicken, of course, but you'd be surprised how well I held my own with the younger set.

EXT. GAS STATION IN SMALL TOWN - DAY

The Bounder pulls to a stop.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Here's some advice: I highly recommend that you pledge a fraternity when you go to college. The relationships you form there will stick with you for the rest of your life.

NOW AT THE PAYPHONE -

Warren reads a number from the UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS ALUMNI DIRECTORY and dials.

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)

Hello?

WARREN

Yes, is Roger Schuyler there please?

WOMAN

May I say who's calling?

WARREN

Yes. This is, uh, George Wilson from the university club out here in Lawrence.

WOMAN

(bright)

Oh, just a second.

A moment later --

ROGER SCHUYLER

Hello?

WARREN

Mr. Schuyler?

ROGER SCHUYLER

Yes. And your name is Wilson. Have we met?

WARREN

No, I'm fairly new here, and I'm afraid I've been called upon to deliver some rather unfortunate news.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)

Oh?

WARREN

This afternoon there was an incident at the student center. A fire.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)

Oh, my God.

WARREN

The damage is quite extensive. The firemen are still out there, but it looks as though it could be a total loss.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)

Oh God.

WARREN

They think it was arson.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)
Oh, my God. Was anyone hurt?

WARREN
(that's a good one)
Well, that's the very unfortunate
news. The bodies of two freshman
girls have been recovered so far, and
there could be more.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)
Oh, God. Oh, my God.

WOMAN (ON PHONE)
(distant)
Roger, what is it?

WARREN
And five firemen have been
hospitalized so far. One in critical
condition.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)
Oh, my God. No.

WARREN
(barely keeping it together)
A wall caved in on them.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)
Didn't the sprinklers work? And the
fire doors?

A NOISY SEMI pulls into the gas station, nearly drowning out their
conversation.

WARREN
I've got to go now. They need me.
I'll call you back as soon as I can
with an update.

ROGER SCHUYLER (ON PHONE)
Wait_

Warren hangs up and immediately doubles over with laughter.

EXT. BROKEN BOW, NEBRASKA - DAY

Warren exits an old building that houses a local MUSEUM.

WARREN (VO)

Anyway, after my little walk down memory lane, it was tourist time for yours truly. I made my way back to Nebraska and stopped in at the Custer County historical museum in Broken Bow to see their fine collection of arrowheads.

INT. MINI-MART - DAY

Drinking from a soft-drink cup with a capacity greater than the human bladder, Warren is talking with a NATIVE AMERICAN CASHIER.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Later that same day, at a local grocery, I was lucky enough to encounter a real Indian, or Native American, as they like to be called nowadays. We had a nice chat about the history of the area, and he really opened my eyes. Those people got a raw deal. Just a raw deal. Don't forget they were here before we were.

EXT. THE KEARNY ARCH - DAY

This is an immense arch constructed over I-80. Like at the St. Louis arch, visitors can climb to the top for a fine view and shop at the gift store on their way out.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I finally went up into the new arch over the interstate outside Kearny, climbing all 179 steps.

EXT. "THINGS 'N STUFF" ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

A typical roadside bric-a-brac place.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

And, you know, I pull the Bounder over whenever I feel like stretching my legs, taking in a local sight, or browsing for antiques.

INT. ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

Warren is browsing inside.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

The other day, for example, at an antique store in Cozad, I came across a fine collection of rare Hummels.

THE ADORABLE HUMMEL FIGURINES --

now at the cash register - a CLOG DANCER, a HOBO, a CHILD PLAYING AN ACCORDIAN.

WIDE --

Warren is talking to the rather LARGE WOMAN who owns the shop.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

The owner told me that Hummels, aside from being very decorative, increase in value on average 6% a year, provided they are kept in mint condition.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren is at his dinette table, eating soup and admiring the HUMMELS laid out in front of him.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Helen loved Hummels.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Warren opens the door to find middle-aged JOHN RUSK.

JOHN RUSK

Ahoy, there!

WARREN

Yes?

JOHN RUSK

I said ahoy!

WARREN

Ahoy to you.

JOHN RUSK

(extending his hand)

John Rusk. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

WARREN

Warren Schmidt-- Omaha.

JOHN RUSK

Say, I hope I'm not disturbing you, but I couldn't help noticing you've got one of the new Imperial M36's. What a beauty! Man, oh, man.

WARREN

Thank you. Yeah, it's quite a. I'm pretty happy with it.

JOHN

We're still dragging around -- my wife and I -- we're still dragging around an old 31M, if you can believe it. I tell you, though, we've had some pretty good times with her, a lot of memories. It'd be hard to let her go at this point.

WARREN

Uh-huh.

An awkward moment while John waits for an invitation. Then --

JOHN

Permission to step aboard, Cap'n?

WARREN

How's that?

JOHN

Can I take a look inside?

WARREN

Sure. Be my guest.

Warren steps back. John Rusk climbs the gangplank.

JOHN

Yeah, jeez, look at all this room. That extra five feet really makes a difference. Say, you keep a mighty clean galley, mister.

WARREN

Thank you. I've only been on the road about a week.

JOHN

You're kidding! This is your maiden voyage?

WARREN

Yes.

JOHN RUSK
And you're traveling solo?

WARREN
That's right.

JOHN
Holy Christ! You've got to come over
for dinner. We've got to celebrate.
My Vicki's one heck of a cook -- I
mean if you're free, of course.

WARREN
(in the spirit)
I don't know. I'll have to check my
calendar.

EXT. KOA CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Warren has combed his hair and changed into nicer clothes -- a
sportcoat and open shirt. He carries a six-pack of MICHELOB.

He passes the more low-rent RV's and arrives at the Rusk's
Boulder. He knocks, and VICKI RUSK opens the door.

WARREN
Ahoy, there.

VICKI
Ahoy!

INT. RUSK BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren steps aboard.

VICKI
I'm Vicki Rusk.

WARREN
Warren Schmidt.

VICKI
John was so excited to meet you.

Warren extends the six-pack to Vicki.

VICKI
Oh, you shouldn't have.

WARREN
(sniffing the air)
Smells de-lish.

Vicki goes to the stove and stirs a pot.

VICKI
I hope you like chicken.

WARREN
Oh yeah.

A FLUSH is heard, and almost simultaneously John Rusk emerges from the bathroom between Vicki and Warren.

JOHN
There he is!

WARREN
Hey!

They shake hands like old friends.

JOHN
Can I take your coat?

WARREN
Sure.

Warren removes his coat. While John puts it on a mini-hanger in the tiny closet, Warren smells a new odor.

WARREN (CONT'D)
Something burning?

JOHN
Hmm? Oh, no. I just lit a couple of matches is all.

WARREN
Oh.

The limited space inside the Bounder requires all three occupants constantly to maneuver around one another.

JOHN
Shall we adjourn to the living room while Vicki's -- you're almost ready, aren't you, hon?

VICKI
Just about. John, Warren brought beer.

JOHN
Why, thank you, Warren. Have a seat.

Warren and John sit side-by-side on the sofa-bed sofa.

WARREN

So what do you do back in Eau Claire?

JOHN

My brother and I have little shoe store.

WARREN

Shoes, huh?

JOHN

It's a Famous Footwear. Yes sir, people will always need shoes. And Vicki here's an occupational therapist. So that's our day job, you might say. But now that the kids are on their own, we've got it structured so as we can be on the road free as the wind about five months a year. How about yourself?

WARREN

I was in the insurance game, but I'm retired now.

VICKI

(putting salad dressing bottles on the table)

Dinner's ready.

JOHN

(motioning Warren to join him)

Why don't you tell us about it over supper?

They walk the two steps to the dining area. It's all so small and awkward. They SQUEEZE into their seats, but once settled John slaps his hands together, expressing great satisfaction.

LATER --

They are lingering over coffee and poppy-seed cake. They've eaten well, drunk well, and have clearly bonded in the benevolent glowing light of Bounder spirit.

The Rusks have dragged out their FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM and are showing it to Warren.

VICKI

And this is Roger and Denise and their daughters--

WARREN

Now Denise is your oldest?

VICKI

No, she's the middle one. They're out in Delaware. And these little cuties are Katie and Sloan.

WARREN

A girl named Sloan? Never heard that one before.

JOHN AND VICKI

(with a laugh)

Neither had we!

JOHN

Do you have any pictures of your daughter with you?

WARREN

Hmmm? No. Not on me.

JOHN

Nothing in your wallet?

WARREN

I might have one of George Washington, though.

That just cracks John and Vicki up.

JOHN

Or Abraham Lincoln.

WARREN

Who?

They're on a roll!

VICKI

When did you say your daughter's getting married?

WARREN

This Saturday.

VICKI

I'm surprised you're not out there already - you know, helping with the arrangements and all.

WARREN

I'm on my way.

JOHN

What did you get them for a wedding present?

WARREN

Well, I figured I'm paying for the wedding, so--.

JOHN

(chuckling)

Oh yeah, I know how you feel. Had two daughters of my own. No, but seriously, what're you getting them?

WARREN

(stumped)

Um... I guess some kind of cookware or small appliance or something. Maybe a gift certificate.

VICKI

Oh, that's always good. Then they can get what they want.

JOHN

You never have to return a gift certificate, that's for sure.

(noticing)

Jeez, looks like we're a little low on truth serum here. If I go out for another six-pack, you guys going to be okay?

WARREN

Oh yeah.

LATER --

Warren and Vicki are alone now, and they have repaired to the "salon" area of the Bounder. Vicki is perched with her legs tucked under her, like a middle-aged slightly overweight Midwestern Scotch-German Erté nymph.

WARREN

Yep, that's quite a family you got there. You and John are very lucky.

VICKI

Yes, we are.

(shifting gears)

Warren, may I make an observation?

WARREN

Sure.

VICKI

And you won't get offended?

WARREN

I don't think so.

VICKI

Well, you put a pretty good face on things, considering all you've been through lately.

Warren just nods a little, unsure where this is going.

VICKI (CONT'D)

And I've only just met you, but I have a good instinct about people. And what I'm feeling from you is that despite your good humor and your positive outlook, inside you're a very sad man.

WARREN

Well, you know it is quite an adjustment there when you lose a spouse.

VICKI

But it's more than that, something more than grief and loss I see in you. Something deeper.

WARREN

Like... like what?

VICKI

Oh, I don't know you well enough. But I'm guessing anger. Yes, anger. Maybe... I don't know. Fear. Loneliness.

Warren says nothing. He suddenly feels very naked.

WARREN

(low)

I am a little lonely.

VICKI

I knew it. You see?

WARREN

You're a very understanding woman.

VICKI

I know. A lot of people say that.

WARREN

(gathering his courage)

You want to know the real truth?

VICKI

I'm listening.

WARREN

I didn't love my wife. Maybe I never loved her. Not the way she deserved. I just couldn't give her everything she needed to be happy. I couldn't. I couldn't. And my life. I just think I've wasted my life. my whole life is just.

Warren trails off, overcome by his own honesty. Vicki reaches out to comfort him, touching his shoulder.

VICKI

Oh, you sad man. You sad, sad man.

He bends his head to rest it on Vicki's shoulder. A little uncomfortable with the whole situation, but ever the gracious hostess, Vicki gently cradles his head.

VICKI (CONT'D)

You sad man.

The intimacy, the alcohol, the intoxicating scent of Vicki's \$19.00 perfume -- it's all too much for vulnerable Warren.

Suddenly he seizes her head and presses his lips against her mouth. He even whimpers.

VICKI

(pushing him away)

What are you doing?

Warren dives for her lips again, but Vicki turns stern. She SHOVES Warren away, stands up.

VICKI

I don't know what kind of ideas you've got, mister, but I think you need to leave now.

Warren just stands there, surprised by his own actions and by Vicki's reaction..

VICKI (CONT'D)
You need to leave now.

WARREN
I'm sorry-- Oh God-- I didn't mean to--
I was just-- I mean, you understand
me, and I--

VICKI
(now frightened)
Get out. Get out.

Warren gets to his feet, his shame palpable.

WARREN
Could I get my coat, please?

Vicki reaches into the little closet and hands Warren his jacket.

EXT. KOA CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Warren now scampers back across the campground. He reaches his Bouncer and starts to DISCONNECT it from the hook-ups.

INT. WARREN'S BOUNDER - NIGHT

Warren steps up, climbs into the driver's seat and starts the engine.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Warren backs out his RV and heads toward the exit.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

WARREN'S POV --

As he turns into the road, his headlights find a solitary figure. Why, it's JOHN RUSK just back from his trip to the corner. Looks like he got a whole case too, not just a six-pack.

Unsure how to react to what looks like Warren's Bouncer, John gives a little aborted wave.

Warren keeps his eyes straight ahead and SPEEDS UP.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAWN

Sunrise finds the Bounder on the shoulder as a HIGHWAY PATROL car pulls up behind it. The PATROLMAN gets out and walks up to the driver's window.

There's Warren passed out against the steering wheel, a thick strand of DROOL hanging from his open mouth. He seems dead. RAP-RAP-RAP. Warren startles awake, looks around disoriented, finally slides open his window.

PATROLMAN
Need any assistance?

WARREN
No, I was just a little too tired last night to go on, so I pulled over.

PATROLMAN
It's illegal to park on the shoulder. And extremely dangerous. There's a KOA campground about 12 miles back.

WARREN
I must have missed that.

PATROLMAN
I'm not going to write you up, but you're going to need to move your vehicle.

WARREN
I'm just going out to Denver to see my daughter. She's getting married, and --

PATROLMAN
Well, she'll want you to get there in one piece.

The patrolman leaves. Warren gathers himself together, starts the Bounder up and pulls off the shoulder, out onto the high-speed interstate, ready for adventure.

WARREN (VO)
As my journey draws to a close, I reflect back on all I've seen and done, and I think it's been a good trip, a rewarding trip. And last night, my final night on the road, was the best of all. It was a very special night.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DUSK

The Bounder makes its way down a pastoral tree-lined gravel road.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

I'd spent a wonderful day driving in the North Platte area. On a lark I turned down a country road, and before you know it I found myself in a very lovely wooded area.

LATER -

Warren steps out of the Bounder and looks around him at the thick shrubbery. He can hear the nearby creek. He keeps looking around -- what a lovely spot.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

It was so quiet. And I was all alone, and -- bear with me here -- I felt something sort of come over me, like a sense of peace, you might say. Nature can do that to you sometimes -- make you feel all small and overpowered. Make you think about things. Important things.

LATER -

Warren sits OUTSIDE the Bounder on a folding chair, drinking a Scotch and enjoying the smells and sounds.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Long story short, I decided to be adventurous and spend the night right there.

LATER -

Warren is now ON TOP OF THE BOUNDER, wrapped in a blanket

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Just me and my thoughts and God's great universe stretched out above me.

We notice that Warren is looking at --

THE HUMMELS

all laid out in front of him, illuminated by a couple of CANDLES.

WARREN

picks up one of the Hummels and kisses it before replacing it alongside the others.

WARREN

(addressing the Hummels)

Helen... Helen... I miss you so much.
This trip would have made you so
happy. I've seen so many things I've
wanted to show you and thought so
many thoughts I wish I could have
shared with you. Oh, Helen...

(losing it)

I forgive you. I forgive you for
Ray. I know it was a long time ago,
and maybe I wasn't the king of kings.
But I tried. I tried real hard. I'm
sorry I let you down.

(dissolving in tears, now
addressing the sky)

Helen, I miss you so much. Can you
forgive me? Can you ever forgive me?

THE BLACK SKY, THE INFINITE STARS -
As Warren's sobs continue.

WARREN (VO)

And lying outside, looking up at all
the stars, I had a sort of Epiphany.
The universe or Helen or something
seemed to be telling me there were
certain things I had to clear up,
certain situations I had to set right.

Just then - a SHOOTING STAR goes by.

WARREN --

moved by the miracle he just witnessed, mouths a silent wish and
awkwardly crosses himself.

LATER -

It's DAWN now, and Warren, bundled up in blankets atop the
Boulder, is awakened by his own SHIVERING and CHATTERING TEETH.

FROM BELOW -

Warren peeks over the edge - it's a long way down, and he's cold
and stiff. Warren turns around, easing a foot over to search for
the first step on the ladder. After a clumsy and protracted
struggle, he finally manages to lower his aching body back to
Earth.

LATER -

The Boulder pulls out abruptly and the forgotten Hummels tumble
off the roof, SMASHING TO BITS on the road.

EXT. PAYPHONE SOMEWHERE - DAY

Warren has just finished dialing.

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
You have reached the voice mailbox
of_

RAY (ON PHONE)
_Ray Nichols.

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
At the tone, please record your
message.

BEEP.

WARREN
Ray, it's Warren. I know we
separated on a bit of a sour note.
But I just thought I should call and
let you know that I've been doing
some thinking and some soul searching
and, well, I'm willing to talk about
all this. If you are. I mean, we've
been good friends all these years,
and I don't know. I just wanted to
say that I'm willing to talk about
this. Because with all the —

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
(interrupting)
If you wish to continue recording or
deliver your message, press pound.
To erase your message and start
again, press star.

Warren momentarily panics, unsure which key is which. He presses
one.

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE CONT'D)
Message erased. To record your
message, press star-nine...

Warren looks at keypad for a second, then hangs up.

INT. DINER - BRULE, NEBRASKA - DAY

Warren sits at a BOOTH by the window, writing to Ngudu.

WARREN (VO)

Yes sir, no more pussy-footing around for yours truly. From now on, I'm going to do exactly what I want and say exactly what I feel.

The WAITRESS comes over, pen and pad at the ready.

WARREN

I'd like a plain omelet, no potatoes, tomatoes instead, a cup of coffee and wheat toast.

WAITRESS

No substitutions.

WARREN

Oh. Okay. I'll just have the potatoes then.

WAITRESS

I'll be right back with your coffee.

The waitress takes Warren's menu. He picks up his pen to finish his letter.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Well, I'll close now and get this little travelogue in the post before I cross over into Colorado and head on into Denver. Wish me luck -- I might be dropping a pretty big bomb when I get there. So until next time, this is you trusty correspondent Warren R. Schmidt signing off.

EXT. POST OFFICE - BRULE, NEBRASKA - DAY

Warren mails the letter at a mailbox outside this small-town post office and bounds back to the Bounder.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Bounder zooms past us. DENVER looms in the distance.

EXT. DENVER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK

An older neighborhood with lots of trees and large rambling homes.

The Bounder creeps around a corner.

EXT. HERTZEL HOUSE - DUSK

Warren ascends the front steps of this large older home with a big wooden porch and RINGS THE DOORBELL.

A few moments later the door is opened by ROBERTA HERTZEL, a large, grand woman in a long, flowing muu-muu and festooned with enormous jade jewelry -- necklace, jangling bracelets and rings. Oh, and no bra.

ROBERTA
(extending her hand)
Warren, how grand to see you again.

WARREN
Hope I'm not intruding.

ROBERTA
Not at all. I was happy to get your call and learn that you were finally in town.

WARREN
I don't suppose Jeannie's here yet.

ROBERTA
They should be over in about an hour.
Come on in.

INT. HERTZEL LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Roberta leads Warren into this much lived-in house, takes his coat.

ROBERTA
I sent you a card. Did you get my card?

WARREN
(no idea)
Oh, yes. Very nice card. Thank you.
Lovely card.

ROBERTA
But I want to say it to you in person. I am so sorry about Helen. I met her only that once, but as you know we talked often on the phone after the engagement. She was a fine, fine woman. A fine, fine human being.

WARREN

Thank you. And of course you know we had planned to do this traveling together.

ROBERTA

You poor thing.

WARREN

That's why we bought the Bounder.

ROBERTA

We all miss her. Just tragic.

That sits there a moment.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

So what can I get you to drink? I bet that you would like a cocktail.

WARREN

(holding up his hand)

Oh, no, I'm fine. I'll wait till the kids get here.

ROBERTA

Well, I am having a Manhattan.

WARREN

What the hell. Make it two.

LATER --

Roberta and Warren sit on the sofa in the living room.

ROBERTA

Ooooooh. That's better. This last week has been very stressful. The only way Helen is lucky -- and I mean the only way -- is that she didn't have to go through this week with Jeannie and me.

(with melodic cadence)

The church. The caterer. The florist. The dress. The relatives. The travel arrangements. The motels. The bridesmaids. The groomsmen. The gowns. Do you realize how many people still have not RSVP'd? I spent the morning tracking them down. Warren, it does not stop.

WARREN

Thanks for taking such good care of everything.

ROBERTA

But I don't want to trouble you with all of this. You've had a wonderful trip, and I do not want to spoil that for you.

Yes, she does.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

By the way, we do still need that check for the church. Did Jeannie mention it to you? Because we've needed it for a few days now, and it has actually been a bit of a problem.

WARREN

Oh! Jeez, I've sort of been in my own little world, and I guess I must have missed that.

(getting up)

I'll run out to the Bouncer right now and get my checkbook.

ROBERTA

(waving him to sit still)

Oh no. Nonsense. It can wait. You sit still and finish your drink. I want to hear all about your trip.

Suddenly some GUY yells from the kitchen.

VOICE

Roberta? Ro-BERT-a!

ROBERTA

(yelling back)

What?

VOICE

I can't get the goddamn thing off!
How do you turn this thing off?

ROBERTA

(to Warren)

Would you excuse me?

Roberta gets up and wafts away, the ice clinking in her drink. She pushes her way through the swinging kitchen door.

ROBERTA (OS)

What is your fucking problem? Don't you think I have enough to deal with?

LARRY (OS)

That's why I offered to come over and help. I am trying to help you.

ROBERTA (OS)

Well this is no help! Look at it. What do you expect me to do now?

LARRY (OS)

I'll do it if you just tell me what you want! I'm not a mind-reader!

ROBERTA (OS)

Forget it. I'll do it. Just like I have to do everything around here! Get out!

LARRY (OS)

I am not a mind-reader! I AM NOT A MIND-READER!

ROBERTA (OS)

Do you understand English? Get out!

She pushes her way back through the swinging door. She sits again next to Warren. Her face is flushed.

ROBERTA

I'm sorry.

(a long exhale)

You met Larry last time, didn't you?

WARREN

Just briefly.

The back door SLAMS loudly.

ROBERTA

Larry is like a little boy. Ever since our divorce, he thinks the only way he can get my attention is to cause a fuss. I understand it. I do. I feel sorry for him. I just... My first husband was the same way.

WARREN

I didn't know you were married before.

ROBERTA

It lasted nineteen months. He turned into a real horse's ass.

WARREN

Huh.

ROBERTA

But I'm sure things will be different for Jeannie and Randall. Now Randall -- he really knows how to treat a woman. Honestly, don't you think Randall is something special?

WARREN

He's... well, I know Jeannie seems to be rather taken with him.

ROBERTA

That always helps, doesn't it?

Warren gives his best courtesy laugh.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

You know, when I had my hysterectomy, that boy did not leave my side for one minute. Not one minute. People used to raise their eyebrows because I nursed him until he was almost five, but I think the results speak for themselves. I raised a very sensitive, devoted boy who has turned into a sensitive, devoted man. And he's also quite easy on the eye, if I do say so myself. Don't you agree?

As though on cue, Jeannie and Randall walk in the front door. Randall is wearing the worn-out suit and bad tie of a waterbed salesman and is carrying a large BOX.

ROBERTA

Look who's here!

RANDALL

Hey, Dad! How's it hanging?

Randall puts down the box and hugs his future father-in-law. Warren responds as best he can.

WARREN

Fine.

RANDALL

You're here. I'm stoked.

Warren releases Randall and turns to his daughter.

JEANNIE

Hi, Dad.

WARREN

Hi, sweetheart.

They embrace.

JEANNIE

So how was your trip?

WARREN

Great. Just great.

RANDALL

Great.

WARREN

Ran into a little traffic coming into town this afternoon. Ended up veering off 90 onto the 6 but that wasn't any better. Must have been an accident or construction or something.

RANDALL

That's Denver for you.

ROBERTA

You won't catch me driving on the interstate.

RANDALL

What you want to do next time is get off at Capitol Avenue and take it about four miles up to 75. Head west, and that'll lead you directly to Kingsley Ave.

WARREN

Thanks for the tip.

ROBERTA

(indicating the box)

Here, Randall, bring that into the kitchen.

Roberta and Randall exit, and Jeannie starts to follow.

WARREN

Jeannie, if you've got a moment, I need to talk to you about something.

JEANNIE

Can it wait? I want to help these guys.

WARREN

It's very important. I just need a few minutes alone with you.

JEANNIE

Okay, Dad. No problem. Later.

INT. ROBERTA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON RANDALL

eating his food. The way he eats his pork chops says it all -- cutting farmer style, switching hands, dousing his bites in ketchup and apple sauce, smacking loudly.

WARREN

watches him from across the dinner table. These are the greasy lips that kiss my daughter's flesh. And he looks at --

ROBERTA. And at --

LARRY and SAUNDRA (we'll meet them shortly). And --

DUNCAN.

He is clearly Randall's younger brother. Same hair, same mustaches, same sloped forehead. And at --

JEANNIE

next to him. She seems to be smacking a little too.

WARREN

Say, Randall, how'd that investment situation work out for you? You never called me.

No one speaks. Randall turns a little pale.

LARRY

Don't bring that up.

DUNCAN

Turned out to be some kind of pyramid scheme.

RANDALL

No, it wasn't!

DUNCAN

All I know is I lost eight hundred bucks.

RANDALL

Well, if you'd stuck with it a little longer, you would have seen results. Guaranteed. You bailed out too soon.

ROBERTA

Can we change the subject, please?

RANDALL

See, you just didn't find enough quality reps of your own, and you screwed the whole thing up for me too. You never really took the time to understand how the "power" system works.

(counting on his fingers)

Principal, ownership, wealth, uh...

ROBERTA

Boys, let's change the subject.

DING-DING-DING --

Larry clinks his knife to his glass and stands.

LARRY

Well, as father of the groom, I'd just like to welcome our guest and --

ROBERTA

Larry, we know who you are, and you're going to have plenty of chances to make toasts tomorrow and the next day.

LARRY

Would you let me finish? Please?

ROBERTA

Can't we just enjoy our food?

LARRY

Go ahead -- enjoy your food. But I have something to say.

(clearing his throat)

I just want to acknowledge that we are gathered together around this table as a family for the very first time. And I wanted to welcome Warren, who has journeyed a very long way to be with us here tonight. So, Warren, welcome.

MORE

LARRY (CONT'D)

(squeezing Sandra's shoulder)
And on behalf of Sandra and myself,
I'd just like to say that we are very
proud to welcome Jeannie into our
family. And Warren, I just want you
to know that we love Jeannie very,
very much. Right, Sandra?

SAUNDRA

Yes, we do. We love her.

ROBERTA

Okay, Larry. That's enough. Save it
for tomorrow.

LARRY

(sitting back down)
I'm done. You're interrupting me,
and I'm already done.
(extending his glass)
To our family.

All extend their glasses and clink, all except Roberta. Everyone
resumes eating.

WARREN

Thank you, Larry. Thank you very
much.

Jeannie leans across Randall to KISS Larry on the cheek.

JEANNIE

That was lovely, Larry. Thank you.

Warren notices this closeness between Jeannie and her in-laws. He
then looks at --

RANDALL

who has resumed eating.

LATER BY THE FRONT DOOR --

Warren is exchanging pleasant good-byes with Larry, Sandra and
Duncan, but he's fishing for a moment with Jeannie.

WARREN

(finding his chance)
Say, Jeannie, how about that few
minutes alone?

JEANNIE

Oh yeah. Right. I forgot.

She shoots a glance at Randall, on his way out the door.

RANDALL

We got a pretty big day tomorrow.

JEANNIE

(to Warren)

Can it wait?

WARREN

Actually, no. Just give me a few minutes.

Jeannie looks at Randall with a look of "I have to do this--"

RANDALL

Take your time. I'll get the car started.

Warren and Jeannie go out onto the --

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

It's a screened in porch -- wicker furniture, a porch swing, burned-down candles.

JEANNIE

Okay. So what's up?

WARREN

Like I said, I've been doing a lot of thinking.

JEANNIE

And...?

Dare he? He hesitates, but he has come too far, traveled too many miles.

WARREN

And... long story short. I think you're making a big mistake.

(lowering his voice)

Don't marry this guy. Don't do it. You'll regret it sooner or later. I know it. I just know it.

Jeannie searches his face, incredulous.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Don't marry Randall. I'm begging you.

JEANNIE

(finally, as if to a child)
 Okay, Dad. Calm down. It's okay.
 You're just wiggling out a little. I
 totally get it. You're really tired.
 It's been a very emotional period for
 all of us, and Mom's gone, and she's
 not here anymore to calm you down --

WARREN

No, you're not listening. You've got to
 listen to me. This guy, he's just not
 up to snuff. You know, he's just so--

HONK HONK --

Randall is just so impatient.

JEANNIE

Dad, I've always known you've had
 some misgivings about Randall, but
 you just don't know him well enough.
 People have told me all sorts of
 stories about parents freaking out at
 the last minute. It's natural to be
 afraid to let your daughter go.

WARREN

No. This is not like that.

HONK HONK HONK --

JEANNIE

Dad, I gotta go. Listen, get some
 sleep. Let's just forget we had this
 conversation. Tomorrow's a really
 super-busy day. Everything's going to
 be fine.

She kisses him and trots toward the street. Warren watches her
 go.

INT. RANDALL'S ROOM - NIGHT

The sound of BRUSHING TEETH over --

A PHOTOGRAPH

of teenage Randall in his basketball uniform.

A ROW OF RIBBONS

all reading "PARTICIPANT."

A DIPLOMA

congratulating Randall Hertzfel for completing a two-week electronics class.

WARREN

is dressed in pajamas and brushing his teeth as he takes in Randall's old room, a museum of Randall's mediocre adolescence.

NOW EXITING THE ADJOINING BATHROOM --

Warren gets into Randall's bed and is mildly alarmed to discover that it's a WATERBED. But soon he gets his sea legs and turns out the light.

LYING IN BED --

Warren closes his eyes.

FADE TO BLACK

UNDER BLACK:

The TICKING of a clock. The ticking grows steadily LOUDER.

MORNING --

Warren opens his eyes. The ticking continues. Warren looks up at -

A WALL CLOCK

hanging near the bed. It's a battery-operated BUDWEISER clock.

WARREN

now realizes where he has awakened. He rolls over to get out of the water bed but can't. Ouch. What's going on?

Warren now realizes he has a TERRIBLE PAIN IN HIS NECK AND SHOULDER. He contorts around, keeping his head rigidly fixed, makes another failed, sloshing attempt to rise out of bed. He GROANS repeatedly.

THE BUDWEISER CLOCK --

as its hands spin rapidly around from 8:15 to 10:07.

THE DOOR --

as a little KNOCK is heard.

WARREN (OS)

Come in.

The door opens, and Roberta pokes her head in.

ROBERTA

Good morning, mister sleepy-head!

Roberta stops short and is distressed to see --

WARREN

lying improbably on the ground, one leg still up on the edge of the bed.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

Warren, what's wrong?

WARREN

Oh, I'm fine. Just a little stiff is all. My neck, uh... I'll be okay.

ROBERTA

Did you fall out of bed?

WARREN

(a feeble old-man joke)

I guess it was just a little farther to the ground than I thought.

ROBERTA

Let me help you.

WARREN

No, I think it's better if I'm on a hard surface.

LATER --

Warren is back in bed again, propped up on several pillows, his head tilted rigidly to one side. He is in great pain.

Roberta, Jeannie and Randall stand hovering over the patient. Jeannie and Randall are in a hurry -- we can tell from their jackets, ruddy cheeks and how they jangle their keys.

JEANNIE

I don't know, it still seems pretty weird for this to happen today, of all days.

WARREN

I'm sorry, Jeannie. I'm sure I'll rally in a few hours. The Advil is kicking in pretty good.

JEANNIE

It's just that we've just been really stressed out the last two weeks. While you've been out on your little trip, we've been kind of barely holding this thing together, and now for you to... crap out on us.

RANDALL

(good-natured, as though
scolding a child)

If you think this is going to make us
cancel the wedding, you're sadly
mistaken, young man. Nice try.
Strike two.

Did Randall really just say that?

WARREN

I just think it's the bed. I need
something firmer.

RANDALL

No way. That's an Aquarest Z-9000.
Top of the line. It's definitely not
the bed.

WARREN

I don't know. I'm pretty sure I need
a harder surface.

RANDALL

That's a common misperception. A
waterbed is the best thing there is
for back and neck support. See, your
back isn't straight like a board.
It's more like a long "s." Only a
waterbed supports all the natural
contours of your back. After all,
you spent the first nine months of
your life in water.

ROBERTA

Anyway, the point is that you, Mr.
Schmidt, have a new job today. Your
job is to stay here and rest.

JEANNIE

All right. Let's just deal with
this, okay? I've got to get going.
Dad, where's the receipt I gave you?

WARREN

The receipt?

JEANNIE

For the programs. At the printers.

WARREN

It's in my breast pocket over there
on the chair.

JEANNIE

(retrieving it)

I guess now Randall will have to pick them up.

RANDALL

What do you mean? I gotta go to the airport and get Brian and Dave, and then run them by the tux shop and --

JEANNIE

Well, I can't do it. Do you think I can do it?

(meltdown)

I can't do everything! I cannot do everything!

ON WARREN --

as Jeannie begins to SOB. He tries to sit up, but winces in excruciating pain.

HOURS LATER --

Warren is alone in bed reading ENCYCLOPEDIA BROWN. This case is a real puzzler, and Warren must turn to the back of the book for the surprising solution. So it was the junk dealer after all.

WARREN

By golly.

Roberta comes in with a tray of FOOD.

ROBERTA

Anybody hungry?

WARREN

I could eat a horse.

ROBERTA

Chicken noodle soup okay?

WARREN

Wonderful.

She sets the tray down next to Warren.

ROBERTA

Anything for me in the bedpan?

WARREN

(low)

Yes.

Roberta now SITS on the bed, creating some rough seas. When the waves calm, she places a napkin on Warren's chest and grabs a spoon and steaming bowl from the tray.

WARREN

Oh, I can feed myself.

ROBERTA

Maybe you can. I just think this might be easier for you.

WARREN

(he knows she's right)

Thank you.

Roberta begins feeding Warren spoonful after spoonful. An odd but undeniable intimacy informs their conversation.

ROBERTA

You know, sometimes injuries like yours are more psychological than anything else.

WARREN

No, this is definitely real.

ROBERTA

I don't mean to imply that you're imagining your injury. It's just that... sometimes these things can be brought on by other factors -- stress, anger, maybe holding onto some feelings you need to let go of. You might want to look at that.

Warren slurps his soup, looks at her.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

You've been through a lot lately.

WARREN

It's the bed. I'm telling you, I slept wrong.

ROBERTA

You can choose to believe that if you want to, but when I look in your eyes, I see a sad man, a very sad man.

Warren's expression is one of mild panic. Hasn't he heard this somewhere before?

WARREN

(affecting a smile)

Oh, no. I'm fine.

Roberta catches some soup dribbling down his chin and spoons it back into his mouth.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

Don't lie to me. Jeannie told us all about your little panic attack last night.

Warren opens his mouth to speak but Roberta pre-empts him with a mouthful of soup.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

And I don't blame you. It's a perfectly natural reaction. In the beginning I had my own reservations. After all, as the veteran of two failed marriages, I have learned a lot about what works and does not work between two people. And knowing what I know, and having seen the kids together much more than you have, I can tell you they are in very good shape. They have a very healthy relationship -- spiritually, emotionally and physically. I'm not sure how much Jeannie has really told you about her relationship with Randall -- I understand she was closer with her mother. But Jeannie and I have grown very close. She confides in me. And, well, you already know how famously they get along as friends. But what you may not know is that their intimate life is positively white hot.

Warren is not happy knowing this.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

The principal reason that both my marriages failed was physical. I am an extremely sexual person. I can't help it -- that's just how I'm wired. Even when I was a little girl. Most people find this hard to believe, but I had my first orgasm when I was six. In ballet class.

MORE

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

Anyway, suffice it to say I've always been very easily aroused, and Jeannie and I have a lot in common that way. The point is that neither Cliff nor Larry could keep up with me. As much as I tried to understand it and as much as I valued the companionship, it became an insurmountable problem. Now I don't want to betray Jeannie's confidence, but I can assure you that she and Randall are not going to run into those kinds of difficulties. They may have other problems along the way, but they will always have their sexual life to fall back on. More soup?

WARREN

No, I think I'm set.

INT. RANDALL'S ROOM - DAY

Warren is on his feet, awkwardly trying to slip his second arm into his dress shirt, an excruciating task.

The door opens, and Roberta comes in. She is now very nicely dressed for the rehearsal.

ROBERTA

How are we doing?

Unable to turn his head, Warren grotesquely pivots his entire body in order to see Roberta.

WARREN

Just dandy. A couple more Advil should do the trick.

Warren now raises his chin in order to lift his collar and has a hideously painful reaction.

ROBERTA

I think you need something a little stronger. Give me a second.

While she is gone, Warren continues the process of trying to put his tie on. The wide end winds up much longer than the skinny end, but Warren makes the decision to let it go.

Roberta comes back in with a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE.

ROBERTA

I have these left over from my hysterectomy. They've expired, but I'm sure they're okay.

WARREN

What is it?

Roberta raises the glasses hanging around her neck and examines the label.

ROBERTA

Percodan. I guarantee you, within a half-hour, you'll be on cloud nine.

EXT. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF CHRIST - NIGHT

A fine neighborhood church.

INT. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF CHRIST - NIGHT

THE REHEARSAL --

Both families and the BRIDESMAIDS and GROOMSMEN.

CLOSE ON WARREN --

He is blissful. The world is beautiful. Sure, his pupils are dilated, his mouth is dry, and he licks his lips compulsively, but what the hell.

REVEREND KRESGE

Following the procession, the bridesmaids will stand on this left side here, pretty much along where the candles are, and the groomsmen will stand over here. Just be sure to leave enough space so the bride and groom don't feel crowded. They need to have a little room to maneuver. And the bride's father, Mister, uh, Schmidt will take his seat right there in the front row. Mister Schmidt?

WARREN

Hmmmmh?

REVEREND KRESGE

Mr. Schmidt, you can take your seat now, right over there in the first row.

WARREN

(sort of to himself)

Messerschmitt. You can call me
Messerschmitt. They used to call me
Messerschmitt at the frat house. Yes
sir.

He cracks up.

REVEREND KRESGE

Yes. Well, why don't you just have a
seat right over there?

EXT. THE BRIARWOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A fancy Tudor-style eatery.

INT. THE BRIARWOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

THE BANQUET ROOM --

where the Hertzels, the Schmidts and others are seated to dinner.

Larry is characteristically mid-toast.

LARRY

There is so much love in this room. So
much love. And if I may say something
on a personal note, I learned about
love from my own parents, two
extraordinary people who themselves
were married sixty-two years. They're
here right here in this room with us
tonight. I can feel them. Hello, Mom.
Hello, Dad. I miss you. And I love
you. But you taught me so much, and I
am privileged to be able to pass along
all I learned to my sons and--

During Larry's speech, the camera DOLLIES along a row of attentive
guests, coming to rest on Warren who is ROLLING HIS HEAD around
and around, in another world entirely.

INT. ROBERTA'S OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

Roberta drives with a still dopey Warren beside her.

ROBERTA

You seem to have come around pretty
good there, Warren. You're a changed
man.

WARREN

That stuff you gave me -- wow.
You've got to write the name of that
down for me. That really does the
trick. Boy, I tell you.

ROBERTA

I know what will really get you out
of the woods. As soon as we get
home, I'm going to turn on the hot
tub, and you are going to take a nice
long soak before bed. You'll sleep
like a baby, and tomorrow morning
you'll be good as new.

WARREN

Whatever you say, Dr. Howzel.

EXIT. ROBERTA'S DECK - NIGHT

Warren is marinating in the sunken HOT TUB. The steam, the
bubbles. A second-storey WINDOW OPENS. Roberta's head pops out.

ROBERTA

How does it feel?

WARREN

Oh, this is incredible. I had no
idea. This is indescribable.

ROBERTA

Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell
you?

The window closes. Warren leans his head back on the rim of the
tub. Then --

The patio door opens, and Roberta comes FLIP-FLOPPING out in her
robe and sandals.

ROBERTA

Mind if I join you?

Before Warren can respond, Roberta steps out of her sandals and
drops her robe, revealing every bit of her glorious NAKED self --
her ample bosom, her full abdomen, her surgical scars, her thick
graying bush.

Warren experiences a rush of sudden terror. Roberta puts one foot
into the tub.

ROBERTA
(a long exhale)
Oooooooooohhhhhh. Hot, hot, hot. Oh,
that's good.

Unsure where to look, Warren does his best while Roberta SLOWLY eases herself into the tub. Finally, and with much Archimedian displacement, Roberta is up to her neck.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)
That's better. Ohhhhhhhh.

Warren looks around to see if there are any nearby hills he can run for.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)
What a night. I was very moved. I mean, I've been so stressed in the last few weeks that I'd sort of lost sight of the fact that... my little boy is getting married. And so is your little girl. You think about it from the day they're born, and now it's here. It's a miracle.

WARREN
Yeah, it's pretty amazing all right.

ROBERTA
Did you have fun?

WARREN
Well, Jeannie and Randall seem to have some very nice friends out here.

ROBERTA
Yes, they do. I just wish Larry would learn not to say everything that comes into his brain. He has no filter. And it's gotten worse since he's been with Sandra.

They sit in silence a moment.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)
That's what I like about you, Warren. You don't waste words. You speak when you have something to say. That's very attractive in a man.

WARREN
Thank you.

ROBERTA

Just think. After tomorrow we're all going to be one big family. And of course, I'm going to insist that you consider this your second home. I'll set a place for you at the table for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and I won't take no for an answer. And I don't know if Jeannie has told you about this, but we don't give traditional gifts at Christmas. We make them. It can be a painting or a poem or a song. We're a very creative family. One year Randall made a spoon rack for my spoon collection. And it goes without saying that you'll have to come with us to our time-share up in Breckinridge.

WARREN

I don't ski.

ROBERTA

That's perfect! Neither do I. It'll just be you and me while the kids are on the slopes.

UNDERWATER --

Roberta's hand travels through the bubbles and comes to rest on Warren's knee.

WARREN

can barely suppress his panic.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

Here we are -- a divorcée and a widower. Sounds like a perfect match to me.

Warren suddenly GETS UP and steps out of the tub.

ROBERTA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Warren finds his towel, his trunks clinging sadly to his body.

WARREN

I need to get to bed.

ROBERTA

(genuinely puzzled)

Just like that? Come on, we were having such a nice talk!

WARREN

I'm all tuckered out. Goodnight,
Roberta. Thanks for everything.

Warren turns to go inside.

EXT. ROBERTA'S STREET - NIGHT

Still in his trunks and wrapped in a towel, Warren walks barefoot across Roberta's front lawn toward the Bounder.

INT. BOUNDER - NIGHT

The door opens, and Warren climbs up, locking the door behind him. He is not tuckered out, as he told Roberta. He is wide awake.

He pulls a little 8-ounce can of V-8 out of his mini-fridge and tries to open the irritating peel-off top.

IN THE LITTLE BEDROOM --

He gets under the covers.

FROM OVERHEAD --

Warren lies awake, his eyes wide open. CAMERA DESCENDS until we are very close on his face. Sleep is out of the question. WORDS drift into his thoughts --

ROBERTA

It'll just be you and me while the
kids are on the slopes.

RANDALL

Well, if you'd stuck with it a little
longer, you would have seen results.
Guaranteed.

JEANNIE

So you went for the second cheapest
casket... the second cheapest casket...
the second cheapest casket...

RANDALL

After all, you spent the first nine
months of your life in water.

ROBERTA

Most people find this hard to
believe, but I had my first orgasm
when I was six.

AT THE LITTLE SINK --

Warren douses his face with water. He then backs up and sits on the little sofa bed. It's all just too much.

MUSIC --

PACHELBEL KANON in D
played on a FLUTE and PIANO.

INT. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

A MUSICAL DUO --

Their playing is so delicate, so ethereal, so lame.

THE WEDDING PROCESSION --

-- Randall waiting expectantly by the minister. Instead of his usual pony-tail, he now wears his hair loose to mark this once-in-a-lifetime occasion.

-- Roberta walks solo, nodding broadly to people as she goes. Roberta has chosen an African floral theme today. And an unfortunate hat.

-- Larry walks with Sandra. Sandra is unsteady on her heels. Larry has a huge grin on his shiny face.

-- Finally EVERYONE STANDS as the WEDDING MARCH commences. Warren walks Jeannie down the aisle. She is nervous and excited and wears too much make-up. Warren has deep, deep circles under his eyes, and his neck is still very stiff.

We follow them all the way until Warren lifts her veil and kisses her cheek. Jeannie then takes Randall's hand as they find their place before God. Warren takes his seat in the front row.

DISSOLVE MONTAGE -- A SERIES OF IMPRESSIONS FROM THE WEDDING. Intercut with Warren's face, it becomes a mish-mash, the way Warren is experiencing it.

-- A BRIDESMAID at the lectern reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

BRIDESMAID

Love is patient and is kind; love
does not envy. Love bears all
things, believes all things, hopes
all things, endures all things.

-- Randall reading his own VOWS.

RANDALL

_ and I shall love you every day of my life. And when I say every day, I mean every day. And when I say "day," I mean all 24 hours, all 1440 minutes, all 86,400 seconds. I will use every moment to show my love, wipe away your tears, share your laughter_

-- The SOLOIST singing a reverent arrangement of a familiar song.

SOLOIST

Cherish is the word I use to describe_ And there are so many ways I wish that I could hold you. And there are so many ways I wish that I could love you_.

-- The minister ministering.

MINISTER

And do you, Randall Gerard, take Jeanne Osmond to be your lawful wedded wife_?

MINISTER

(simultaneously)

Do you, Jeanne Osmond, take Randall Gerard to be your lawful wedded husband_?

-- Randall and Jeannie.

RANDALL

I do.

JEANNIE

(simultaneously)

I do.

Now all the super-imposed images fade away, leaving only WARREN, as behind him the wedding guests APPLAUD. Fighting his feeling of overwhelming emptiness, he finally applauds too.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - DAY

The sign-board reads, "Congratulations Hertzell -- Jeannie and Randall!"

INT. HOLIDAY INN BANQUET ROOM - DAY

A CHAMPAGNE FLUTE --
as a FINGER taps it.

WIDE --
Warren is gesturing to a WAITER.

WARREN
(mouthing)
Could I have some more?

Warren is already quite DRUNK and isn't paying much attention to the TOAST being given at the DEEJAY BOOTH by best man DENNIS. He is nervous about his own upcoming toast, and he is MAKING NOTES on a NAPKIN.

DENNIS
But Jeannie, I just have to share one last thing. I gotta tell you what Randall told me the morning after your first night, you know, that night you guys met at Corky's Brewhouse.

LARRY
leans over and taps Warren's shoulder.

LARRY
You're on deck.

WARREN
Huh?

LARRY
You're on deck. You're up next.

Warren just nods, clearly very nervous.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Just say what's in your heart, Warren. That's what I do. Say exactly what's in your heart.

Warren ponders this.

WARREN
Yeah. That's what I'm going to do.
That's exactly what I'm going to do.

DENNIS
continues his toast.

DENNIS

He called me up, and I could tell there was something different in his voice. Remember, Randy? You called me and you said, "Dennis. I met this girl and, well, this is going to sound pretty weird coming from me... (pausing for effect) ... but this is one chick I might actually want to see again."

General knowing laughter. Jeannie mock-slaps Randall's shoulder.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

But seriously-- It wasn't a couple weeks later when we're out drinking and, scout's honor, we're talking about this and that and suddenly he turns to me and he goes, "Dennis, I think I might be in love."

A general "awwwwww." Warren remains impassive.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

And then he told me a bunch of other stuff I'm not quite at liberty to go into. But what I noticed in his voice that morning almost two and half years ago has been confirmed here today. You guys are just a great couple, and you guys really helped me out with that thing a couple months ago, and I'll never forget it. I love you guys. And I drink to you.

(loudly, the amp distorting)

Randall and Jeannie forever!

He raises his glass and drinks. All join in and tap their silverware on their glasses until Randall and Jeannie smooch.

Warren is nauseated by this and, emboldened by the resolve to speak his mind, he CRUMPLES the napkin with his notes and casts it aside.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

And now I'd like to turn things over to the proud father of the bride, Warren Schmidt.

Amid much applause, Warren hesitantly stands and walks to the microphone. He looks down, gathers his thoughts. There is expectation in the air. Finally --

WARREN

I didn't get much sleep last night. In fact, I didn't get any sleep at all. So forgive me if I'm a little_ foggy.

He looks over at --

JEANNIE AND RANDALL,

his daughter and his new son-in-law. They look back at him, anxiously awaiting his benediction. Jeannie_

WARREN

searches his soul for the right words.

WARREN (CONT'D)

I was awake all night, thinking about things, thinking about a lot of things. But I guess I should have been thinking more about what I was going to say here today.

Scattered, uncomfortable LAUGHTER. But Warren doesn't laugh along with them. He was serious.

WARREN (CONT'D)

I was thinking about Jeannie when she was a little girl and about how sweet she was, how she was everything to Helen and me. And I was thinking about how sad I was when she moved to Boulder. Of course I supported her decision to go to college, but I guess somehow in the back of my mind I always thought she'd land back in Omaha. With her mother and me. But it didn't work out that way. People go their own way in life. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Warren realizes he's rambling and tries to focus. Those notes he was making sure would be handy. He glances over at where he was sitting, only to see a WAITER clearing the table.

The speech that follows is so forced that it's painful to watch, like a Special Olympics version of a wedding toast.

WARREN (CONT'D)

But, you know, today is a special day. We're here to mark a crossroads in the lives of two people, a crossroads where they come together and now walk along a new road.

MORE

WARREN (CONT'D)

It's not the same road they were each on at the beginning. It's a new road. A wonderful new road. It's a road that, um_

He stares at a spot on the floor. His body is completely heavy.

WARREN (CONT'D)

As many of you know, I lost my wife recently, and Jeannie lost her mother. Helen and I were married forty-two years. She died very suddenly. I know we all wish she could be with us today, and I think it would be appropriate to acknowledge just how pleased she was that Jeannie had found someone to share her life with, a companion, a partner.

(the words tasting of metal)

From what I've seen, Jeannie, I'm betting you and Randall will have as happy a marriage as Helen and I did. I recall the day Jeannie first told us she had been proposed to. We hadn't yet met this Randall fellow, so we were understandably a little suspicious. Later she brought him home for Christmas so we could get a look at him. I remember there was a big snowstorm. Randall here helped me shovel off the front walk. He pitched right in.

Randall beams and nods and jokingly flexes a muscle for the benefit of the crowd.

WARREN (CONT'D)

But that brings me to what I really wanted to say. What I want to say is that, uh_ Thank you to you, Randall, for taking such good care of my daughter, especially recently with our loss. Ever since I arrived here on Thursday afternoon, just two days ago, I've so enjoyed getting to know Jeannie's new family here in Denver.

MORE

WARREN (CONT'D)

(finally on a roll)

Roberta, thank you for your generosity,
for opening your home. Your talent in
the kitchen. Larry, your eloquence.
Saundra, your skill at handicrafts is
truly remarkable -- that item you
showed me was so very, very artistic.
Duncan, I haven't gotten to know you
very well, but I could tell from our
brief conversation Thursday night that
you're a very thoughtful young man.
And everybody else. Terrific people.

(He's almost there.)

In conclusion, I just want to say that
on this special day, this very special
occasion, I am proud.

Everyone is a little unsure about the moment. Was that it? Then --

LARRY

(raising his glass)

Hear, hear!

Now everyone knows what to do. All raise their glasses and drink.
Then the RINGING of silverware on glasses. Jeannie and Randall
kiss again to the delight of the crowd.

Warren makes a run for the bathroom.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Warren rushes into the bathroom and heads for the URINAL.

ON WARREN'S FACE --

as he begins a seemingly ENDLESS PEE, one hand on the wall for
support. A range of emotions -- from grief to relief -- crosses his
face.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Warren and Jeannie are DANCING arm-in-arm to a lovely slow tune.

JEANNIE

I can't believe everything worked out
so well.

WARREN

Yep, I'd say you really pulled it
off. I'm proud of you.

JEANNIE

Thanks for understanding about the money. I know it was more than you expected.

WARREN

I just want you to be happy. That's all I've ever wanted.

She leans her head on Daddy's shoulder. Randall saunters up and taps Warren on the back, makes a gesture of cutting in.

RANDALL

—May-I?—

WARREN

Be my guest.

Warren wanders off the dance floor. He takes a seat at an empty table and watches his daughter dance.

WARREN (VO)

Dear Ngudu, You'll be glad to know Jeannie's wedding came off without a hitch. It was a first-class affair all the way. Right now she and Randall are on their way to sunny Hawaii, on my nickel of course.

INT. BOUNDER - DAY

Warren drives.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

As for me, I'm on my way back to Omaha. I'm driving straight through this time, and I've only made one stop. That's right -- I finally got to visit Pioneer Village.

EXT. PIONEER VILLAGE FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Warren walks across the parking lot and through the front doors.

INT. PIONEER VILLAGE MUSEUM AREA - DAY

Warren wanders among the myriad displays of historical artifacts. The sheer volume of objects is staggering.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

You really have to see it to believe it. Looking at all that history and all those things made by people long dead kind of gets you thinking.

EXT. PIONEER VILLAGE - DAY

Passing a COVERED WAGON, he stops at a SOD HOUSE and pats the wall, impressed by its durability after all these years.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

We're all pretty small in the big scheme of things, and the most you can hope for is make some kind of difference. But what kind of a difference have I made? What in the world is better because of me? I have accomplished nothing. Even my trip to Denver was insignificant compared to the journeys others have taken, to the hardships they endured, the bravery they showed.

INT./EXT. BOUNDER APPROACHING OMAHA - DAY

Through the windshield we see a sign -- "OMAHA NEXT 11 EXITS."
PAN to Warren at the wheel.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

When I was out in Denver I tried to tell Jeannie that I thought she was making a big mistake, but it just didn't work. And now she's married to that guy, that imbecile. I'm a coward. And I'm a failure. There's no getting around it.

INT. SCHMIDT HOUSE - DAY

Warren opens his front door, pushing extra hard because of the voluminous MAIL that has been pushed through the door. He puts down a suitcase and stoops to collect the mail.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)

Relatively soon I will die. Maybe in twenty years, maybe tomorrow. It doesn't matter. Once I am dead, and everyone who ever knew me dies too, it will be as though I never existed. What difference has my life made to anyone? My life has added up to nothing.

LATER --

In shots that echo those following Helen's death, Warren walks alone through his house. Somehow now its emptiness seems even vaster.

WARREN (VO CONT'D)
Hope things are fine with you.
Sincerely, Warren Schmidt.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Warren sets his suitcase down on the bed and takes off his jacket. Aaaaahh. But wait -- something smells a little funny. Not just funny, but BAD. He follows his nose to the source of the smell and heads toward --

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Warren cringes at the rank smell of his own stale urine. He takes a BATH TOWEL, soaks it in water and kneels to begins scrubbing the carpet.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Warren throws the stack of mail on his desk and notices --

A LETTER
that has traveled a very long way. The stamps are odd and colorful. Even the envelope is strange. It's from TANZANIA.

Warren opens the letter and pulls out two sheets of paper. He sits down and begins to read.

WOMAN'S VOICE (OS)

(French accent)

Dear Mr. Warren Schmidt, My name is Sister Nadine Gautier of the order of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. I work in a small village near the town of Mbeya in Tanzania. One of the children I care for is little Ngudu Umbo, the boy you sponsor. Ngudu is a very intelligent boy and very loving. He is an orphan. He recently needed medical attention for an infected eye, but he is doing better now. He loves to eat melon, and he loves to paint. Ngudu and I want you to know that he receives all of your letters. He hopes that you are happy in your life and healthy. He thinks of you every day, and he wants very much your happiness. He is only six years old and cannot write, but he has made for you a painting. He hopes that you will like it. Yours sincerely, Sister Nadine Gautier

Warren puts down the letter and unfolds the other piece of paper. There he finds --

A CHILD'S WATERCOLOR PAINTING

There's a tree and a big smiling sun and two stick figure people holding hands. It is beautiful and colorful -- a sweet, sweet child's painting.

WARREN

looks at Ngudu's painting and is flooded with emotion. Somehow this child's simple act has unleashed all of Warren's complex, long suppressed emotions, emotions he will never understand. His breath shortens. Tears come. His wife, his daughter, his emptiness, his loneliness, his grief, his entire misspent life. But then, out of his tears emerges an odd, uncontrollable SMILE.

THE END