

anatomy of a stick figure

by

abram makowka

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INT. SAN FERNANDO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

Forgotten, HALE TROUTWINE, 40, sits upright in the front pew.

He holds his breath. His strained eyes quiver intensely. Stubble sprouts from his cheeks and the knot in his tie bulges a little too much.

He's obviously had better days. Heck, better years.

Hale stares at a bronze urn. It is bordered by two different photographs of an apathetic teenage girl. One is a high school yearbook photograph.

He is stunned by what his eyes tell him.

A heavy pearl of perspiration spills down Hale's crinkled, wet forehead, seeps into his eye brow, dangles for a slight moment, and drops into his eye.

He blinks.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

November 22, 2006 - one week earlier

A film editing flatbed sits at the center of this obsessively organized space.

Hale paces in circles. Clean shaven. Color coordinated. He does not wear a tie.

He nervously rehearses with a Polaroid photograph he holds in his clammy hand -- the same apathetic teenage girl.

HALE

The day is - Today is - Your
birthday. The date - No - the day
you were born. The day - And I've
been looking forward to today - the
day of your birth - because - it is
your birthday - obviously - but
because I did something special for
you. For your day - your birthday--

He abruptly cuts off. He checks his watch. He cringes.

He hurries over and tacks the Polaroid onto a board, covered in other Polaroid photographs of other teenagers.

He grabs an envelope from his desk against the wall. He turns it over. It is sealed.

HALE

Crap.

He rips it open.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The upstairs kind that connects bedrooms. Hale quietly tiptoes, ever so deliberately down the creaking hallway, in stocking feet. In one hand, he holds his loafers. In the other, a birthday card without its envelope.

Hale stops at a closed door. He squats. He softly slides the card...

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...under the door.

A girl snatches it from the floor and immediately drops it in the trash can. It is the girl from the photographs. She is SAL TROUTWINE. She is blonde, lanky and purposefully dishevelled. Today is her sixteenth birthday, but she does not seem too excited.

She turns to grab her worn mailman's bag from her bed and notices Hale, through the window, scurrying over to a station wagon on the driveway.

SAL
Asshole.

INT. BROWN STATION WAGON - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Hale quickly reverses down the driveway. A can of film and a briefcase sit on the passenger seat.

ARIS (O.S.)
(outside car)
Hale?

He cringes. He steps on the brake. He looks over to see a woman in a clinging track suit. She walks up the sidewalk, towards him. She is ARIS TROUTWINE, 40. Hale's wife.

ARIS
Forgetting someone?

Hale does not roll down his window. He just looks at her.

ARIS
Where is she?

SAL (O.S.)
I'm right here.

Hale looks behind Aris and sees --

EXT. STATION WAGON - SAME

-- Sal trudging down the front walk.

SAL (CONT'D)
He was trying to ditch me.

Aris spins away from the car, a huge grin grows on her face.

HALE
(inside car)
No I wasn't--

ARIS
(overlapping)
Happy Birthday baby!

Aris wraps her arms around Sal, hugs her tightly -- too tightly. Sal grunts. Aris releases.

ARIS
It's your day, so try and have a
great one, okay?

SAL
Whatever.

INT. STATION WAGON - CONTINUOUS

Sal slumps into the passenger seat. Hale looks over at her.

HALE
Didn't you read my card?

SAL
(rote)
"Dear Sal, Happy Birthday, your
father, Hale."

HALE
No--

SAL
Got it memorized.

HALE
I added something this time.

Sal turns away. Aris leans in the open passenger door.

ARIS
Don't be upset with him, baby. He
can't help it.

HALE
Great. Thanks very much, Aris.

ARIS
My pleasure, honey. Bye.

Aris closes the door. Hale reverses. Aris waves as she backs up the driveway.

CUT TO:

EIGHT MILLIMETER COLOR FOOTAGE:

The infamous Zapruder film of John F. Kennedy's Dealey Plaza assassination.

HALE (V.O.)
The day was November 22, 1963.
Forty-three years ago today.

The president sits next to his wife Jackie in the back seat of a cruising convertible limousine.

HALE (V.O.)
He waved and smiled at men who
wanted to be him, at their wives,
who wanted to be with him...

Suddenly, a STICK FIGURE appears on the grassy knoll, gripping a crudely drawn gun. Another gun-totting stick figure appears in the window of the nearby book depository, and one even shoots up from under the limousine seat, behind Governor Connolly and his wife; who sit across from the president.

They all aim their crudely drawn guns at the limousine.

HALE (V.O.)
...and unfortunately, at the
person, or people, who wanted him
dead.

The president is hit in the chest. Then, Connolly is hit, he and his wife duck forward. Finally, the very last bullet splits the president's head open.

The three stick-figure assailants disappear from where they came. The limousine disappears under a dark overpass.

WE PULL BACK INTO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

The footage ends. The screen is blasted with bright white projector light. Hale snaps off the projector and strides to the front of the full class. The fluorescent lights stagger on overhead.

HALE

Today is an unforgettable day. For many reasons.

Hale looks down at Sal and smiles to let her know he's talking about her. She sits in the front row and responds with a roll of her eyes. Hale quickly looks away.

HALE

Questions?

Almost every hand in the room shoots up, including Sal's.

WILBUR (O.S.)

So who really did it?

Hale looks over to see WILBUR PORCINI, a clunky, pale clod, sitting by the window, waving his beefy arm in the air. Hale focuses, suddenly the following appears above Wilbur's head --

Wilbur Porcini

Curious student with signs of potential.

Will succeed with extra encouragement.

Questionable class conduct.

-- then disappears.

WILBUR

Was there really someone in the limo?

HALE

Wilbur, calling out sort of defeats the purpose of raising your hand, doesn't it?

WILBUR

Yeah, I guess. Sorry. I just really want to know who did it.

HALE

I don't know who really did it. And Oswald might not know.

TANYA (O.S.)

Was that the guy on the grassy knoll?

Hale glances left to see TANYA ALLEN, freckles and a head of frizz, at the back of the room, arm in the air. The following appears above her head --

Tanya Allen

Obvious social insecurities.

Dislikes essay format.

Due to possible rejection of original ideas.

-- then disappears.

TANYA

Because that's what I put on the test and you marked it wrong.

HALE

Did you explain your answer?

TANYA

No.

HALE

Then that's why you got it wrong.

TANYA

But the book said--

HALE

Do you believe everything the book says?

TANYA

Sometimes.

HALE

So if the book said the Maple Leaf never made it to Plymouth Rock, but sank in the Atlantic Ocean instead, would you believe it?

TANYA

...Maybe?

A few students giggle. Tanya blushes.

HALE

I'm sorry but I don't remember any perfect scores on the test.

The giggling stops.

TANYA

Wasn't that ship called the Mayflower?

Hale looks at Tanya, grins with welcomed disbelief.

HALE

Yes Tanya, it was. Good job.

Tanya smiles up at Hale, nods gratefully. Hale turns away and addresses the entire class:

HALE

When you simply accept what someone else offers you as the truth, without your own investigation, you're at your most vulnerable.

Hale looks back at Tanya.

HALE
Right Tanya?

She nods.

TANYA
Right, Mr. Troutwine.

Hale almost smiles --

SAL
Where the hell is my sticker?

He looks down at Sal.

HALE
I'm sorry. What?

SAL
My sticker? Where is it?

Hale shrinks in front of his class. He stares at Sal, lost.

HALE
I - well - I --

Sal grabs tests off the desks on either side of her. Hale's eyes remain on Sal.

SAL (CONT'D)
Now if I was Gena, I'd be glowing
all class too. I mean, even though
she only got a "C-" you gave her a
"Most improved Player" sticker.

GENA REYNOLDS, 16, clumsy, sweet and plagued with baby fat, snags her test back. In doing so, she knocks her trapper-keeper to the floor.

GENA
Sorry--

SAL
And then there's Pedro. Now, we all
know he's a genius, but today he's
also a "Super Star!" Wow! Ninety-
three percent! Congrats Petey!

Sal tosses the test to PEDRO ALMONDO, 15, a mousey, Salvadorean whiz kid.

SAL
Too bad I still did better than
you.

Pedro barely catches his test.

HALE
Sal, please--

SAL
Now personally, I think we're too old to still get stickers on our work, but since everyone else did, I'm kinda jealous.

HALE
There's no need for--

SAL
No. I want to know. Where is my sticker? Did my sticker fall off my test? Should I check the floor?

HALE
We can discuss your test after--

SAL
I rocked my test!

She rips her test in two, tosses the pieces in the air.

SAL
Guess it just wasn't worthy of a sticker.

Hale opens his mouth. Nothing comes out. The bell rings. He stands frozen as Sal and the rest of his students leave.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hale indignantly regards his reflection in the mirror.

HALE
Good job, Hale. Glad we rehearsed.

He splashes cold water on his distressed expression. He reaches blindly for the paper towel dispenser. He bumps into a trash can, knocking it over. Garbage spills out on the floor. He looks down at it. Water drips from his face.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Gena leans against the wall, waiting. Hale steps out of the bathroom, dabbing his forehead with a paper towel. Gena pounces.

GENA
Mr. Troutwine?

Hale jumps, startled. He spins around to see her. The following appears over her head --

Gena Reynolds
Average student with good work ethic.
Easily embarrassed.
Misunderstood by peers.

-- then disappears.

HALE
Gena. Hi. Hello.

GENA
I just wanted to say, thanks, for
the support. I know I'm not doing
so hot in your class.

HALE
Okay. You're welcome.

Pause.

HALE
You're improving.

GENA
I think your films are great. Just
great, you know.

HALE
Thank you.

GENA
Yeah. Now I totally question my
perception of like everything. I
feel, like, enlightened.

HALE
Okay.

GENA
I don't mean to gush.

HALE
Oh, no, that's fine. It's very
nice.

GENA
I'd really like to try making my
own film.

Hale focuses, slightly intrigued.

GENA
Maybe I could do it for extra
credit, to make up for my lame
grade in your class.

HALE
And what would your topic be?

GENA

Huh. I guess I don't know yet. But
it will be something cool for sure.

Hale nods.

GENA

So do you maybe have a camera I
could borrow?

HALE

I think so.

GENA

Yeah? Really?

HALE

Yes. But it really has to be yours,
Gena. Not like mine.

GENA

Of course. Anyway, how could mine
be anywhere near as good as yours.
Mine will probably suck for sure.

Hale smiles politely.

GENA

Hey, do you ever tutor outside of
school? You could teach me how to
use the camera.

Hale looks away.

HALE

No. I never meet with students
outside of school.

GENA

Oh. Well, you really should.

Hale does not know how to respond.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Hale meanders. He programs the date into a digital camera. He
catches his reflection in a mirror, through the LCD screen.
He stops. He watches himself, watching the LCD screen.

ARIS (O.S.)

Let's go, Hale! Candles are
burning!

Hale jumps and pussyfoots down the hall.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

ON DIGITAL VIDEO --

We settle on Sal. She slouches beside Aris. Sixteen burning candles cover the glistening surface of a chocolate cake on the table.

SAL
Turn it off.

HALE (O.C.)
Why?

SAL
I'm not blowing out the candles
until you do.

ARIS (O.C.)
It is her birthday, Hale.

Sal looks away. We pan over to Aris.

ARIS
Turn it off.

We hold on Aris for a long moment, then...

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hale closes the LCD screen and sits down across from his wife and daughter.

HALE
I don't see what the big deal is. I
record all your birthdays.

ARIS
Blow out your candles, baby.

Sal leans forward --

SAL
I wish Mr. Troutwine put a sticker
on my test.

-- and huffs out her candles.

HALE
That was an honest mistake.

SAL
Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't.

HALE

And I asked you not to call me Mr. Troutwine.

SAL

Why not? Isn't that who you are?

Sal glares at Hale.

ARIS

Look what I found in Sal's trash.

Aris shows Hale the birthday card.

ARIS

I don't remember agreeing that she could skip school if she wanted to.

SAL

Told you he wanted to ditch me.

HALE

She went. What does it matter?

ARIS

You didn't ask me. You lied.

HALE

I didn't think you'd mind.

ARIS

Oh but I do. I do mind.

HALE

I thought she'd like a day off. I was obviously wrong.

SAL

Or maybe you wanted the day off.

HALE

What?

SAL

When were you really ever around on my birthday?

HALE

I film all your birthdays.

SAL

Without your stupid camera. When were you actually there? I don't remember.

Sal turns to Aris.

SAL (CONT'D)
Mom, do you remember?

Aris shakes her head as she cuts the cake.

ARIS
No.

HALE
Aris?

ARIS
Well, she is right, Hale.

SAL
And this year, you realized you
were stuck with me in class, so you
tried to get me not to go. So you
wouldn't have to deal with me.

HALE
That's just not true. I - I even
showed a special film in class
because it was your birthday.

SAL
Really? Was that for me?

HALE
Yes.

SAL
Guess what mom, I was born on the
same day some president got his
head blown off. Isn't that awesome?

Sal watches as Hale abruptly pushes up from the table.

HALE
You missed the point. Enjoy your
cake.

SAL
Where are you going?

ARIS
Don't you want any?

HALE
No.

Hale heads for the door.

SAL
Dad wait!

Hale turns back. Sal grabs the cut piece of cake and throws
it at him. It splatters all over.

SAL
Eat it! Eat my fucking cake!

Hale stands there, looking back at Sal, frosting dripping from his face.

HALE
I can't.

He wanders out. Furious and hurt, Sal watches the door swing back into place. Aris strokes her daughter's arm, smiles.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Hale brushes his teeth.

ARIS (O.S.)
You really blew this birthday.

He looks up to see Aris standing in the doorway, watching him.

ARIS
I'm impressed.

Hale spits and continues brushing, a little harder now.

ARIS
Do you really think showing a film of some president's murder was appropriate for her birthday?

HALE
It was not just some president, Aris. Okay? It was JFK.

ARIS
Oh.

Hale rinses out his mouth, efficiently.

HALE
He was assassinated forty-three years ago today. Very important. Sal was born sixteen years ago today. Also very important. That was my point. I was showing the importance of today.

ARIS
Bit of a stretch, don't you think?

HALE
No. As a matter of fact, I don't.

Pause. Aris smiles at Hale for a moment, then nods and walks away. Hale shakes his head.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hale walks out of the bathroom. Aris is in bed, under the covers, looking at him.

ARIS
Hale?

He pauses, though he does not want to.

HALE
Yes?

ARIS
I think you're very clever.

HALE
Okay.

ARIS
Hale?

He looks at her.

HALE
Yes, Aris?

ARIS
I need a little something.

Aris pulls the sheets from her naked body. Hale looks away.

CUT TO:

Hale mechanically shifts up and down on top of Aris, under the covers, for a tiny eternity. He still wears a shirt. She actually moans. The bed creaks. He holds his breath.

He stares into the shadow her neck makes on the pillow. His body pounds, but he is elsewhere.

ARIS
Yes! Oh yes!

Aris's face contorts. She orgasms.

ARIS
Stab me with him!

Hale abruptly halts, troubled by this exclamation. He rolls off and turns his back to Aris.

ARIS
Don't you want to finish?

HALE
It's fine.

ARIS
Do you want me to try with my
mouth?

Hale pushes out of bed, starts to dress.

HALE
I still need to do some work.

ARIS
In the garage? Is that where you'll
finish it off?

HALE
What? No.

ARIS
Does it bother you that I think
that's what you'll do?

HALE
I don't know how to respond to
that.

ARIS
I bet you're about to explode.

HALE
I am not.

ARIS
Then I don't do it for you anymore.
Is that it?

Pause.

HALE
Aris, please, I need to work.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hale walks by Sal's door. He pauses. His shoulder blades
clench. He turns back and knocks.

HALE
Sal?

No response.

HALE
Sal, I'm sorry you didn't like the
film. Even though it was for you.

No response.

HALE

Don't you want to say anything to me?

Still no response. He waits for a moment, then blurts:

HALE

You. Didn't have to embarrass me in front of my class either, you know. You crossed a line and - and you're not to do that ever again. (pause) So happy birthday and good night.

Hale walks away.

INT. SAL'S BEDROOM - SAME

Empty. She's gone. The window is slightly ajar.

EXT. RANDY'S DONUTS - NIGHT

A 1950's populuxe building with a huge doughnut on its roof.

LEWIS TODD, 16, strikes a match, lights a candle poking out of a chocolate doughnut. His faded clothes, wrinkled. Hygiene, not the best. His fingers are dirty with spattered paint. He rarely smiles but tonight is an exception.

LEWIS

Promise you won't throw this at me.

He turns with the doughnut. Sal sits at a picnic table, smiling.

SAL

I pinky swear.

Lewis sings "Happy Birthday" to Sal. Sweet and monotone. Sal blushes. He places the doughnut in front of her. When he finishes singing, she stares at the burning candle for a moment, then blows it out.

CUT TO:

16 MILLIMETER COLOR FOOTAGE:

Grainy. A scene from the Vietnam War. Villagers scatter from huts as US soldiers explode from the napalm smoky jungle.

The image pauses.

INT. GARAGE - SAME

Hale thinks for a moment, then leans over the flat bed. He draws on the frames of film stock with grease pen.

He rewinds the film.

CUT TO:

16 MILLIMETER COLOR FOOTAGE:

The same scene. However, this time, a crudely drawn UFO floats through the napalm clouds above the jungle. It zaps straw huts, villagers and soldiers with a scrawled laser.

Gun-totting stick figures parachute from the sky as the straw huts and people turn into black smudges.

The image pauses.

INT. GARAGE - SAME

Hale sits back in his chair. He studies the same frame in his magnifying monitor. Satisfied, he turns it off.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - EARLY MORNING

Aris fast-walks through her neighborhood - a fembot on speed. She will pass by neighbors heading off to work. She will wave. None of them will notice. She will never stop grinning.

INT. BROWN STATION WAGON - MOVING - MORNING

Tan corduroy sport coat and a white oxford shirt. Hale blends in with his creme caramel upholstery. He drives. Sal sits in the passenger seat, looking at an old VHS video camera on her lap.

SAL

How old is this thing?

Hale glances over.

HALE

Please be careful.

Sal rolls her eyes, turns and puts it on the back seat.

SAL

What's it for anyway?

HALE
Gena Reynolds asked if she could
borrow it.

Sal looks at Hale sharply.

SAL
You're kidding, right?

HALE
I think she plans to make a film of
her own.

Sal turns away.

SAL
God. What a kiss ass.

HALE
I don't know about that. She seems
genuinely interested.

SAL
Great.

Hale looks over at Sal, confused.

HALE
Sal, is something wrong?

SAL
Nope.

Hale watches her for a moment, then returns his eyes to the
road. They continue on in silence.

EXT. OUTDOOR HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

A wolf pack of male teachers watch Hale show Gena how to use
the VHS video camera. She basks in Hale's attention.

MR. MOGHTADER
After all these years, I still
don't get it.

MR. POLSKA
What?

MR. MOGHTADER
Look at the way she's looking at
him. I've never had a student look
at me like that.

MR. WENDERS
If I keep them awake a whole period
I feel lucky.

MR. MOGHTADER, MR. POLSKA, and MR. WENDERS, all middle-aged, all tortured by the vibrant youth of their students, sit surrounding JACK CUMMINGS, mid-20s. He's cocksure but naive. The new teacher on the block.

MR. MOGHTADER
They hang on his every word.

PRINCIPAL LES MOORE, 50, kind eyes and a comb-over, sits down with his lunch tray.

MR. POLSKA
Guess it pays to do things differently.

MR. MOGHTADER
He's full of shit, if you ask me.

LES MOORE
Have you never sat in on one of his classes? They really are quite interesting.

MR. MOGHTADER
Thank you, Mr. Principal.

JACK
Who is he?

MR. POLSKA
Hale Troutwine. The district's most beloved and annoying teacher.

JACK
What's so annoying about him?

MR. MOGHTADER
Just...everything.

MR. POLSKA
The kids love him. They sleep through our classes so they're ready to participate in his.

JACK
So you guys are jealous. That it?

LES MOORE
They are indeed.

MR. MOGHTADER
My boy, "envious" would be a better description of the way we feel.

Hale finishes with Gena and walks towards the gossiping teachers.

MR. WENDERS
Shush. Here he comes.

Hale smiles cordially as he passes.

HALE
Gentlemen.

They all smile and nod back.

Hale eyes an empty table by the wall. He also notices Sal, sitting between him and his destination. Hale approaches:

Sal sits at another table, eating with Lewis. Lewis draws in a sketchbook. We see that he is sketching Sal but she cannot.

SAL
Can I see?

Lewis moves the sketchbook away.

LEWIS
Nope.

SAL
I know you're drawing me.

LEWIS
Well, I'm not.

Sal huffs.

SAL
Why can't we hang out after school
and go to the carnival together?

LEWIS
We are going together.

SAL
No, you said you're going home.

LEWIS
Right. I gotta go home, but then
I'll come by and get you.

SAL
You promise?

Lewis stares at Sal for a moment, then grins.

SAL
What?

LEWIS
You want me to pinky swear too?

SAL
Shut up.

LEWIS
I'm not your boyfriend.

SAL
No one said you were.

Lewis raises his eyebrows.

SAL
Please. As if I'd want you to be
anyway.

LEWIS
You would. Don't lie.

SAL
Oh, you know what...

Sal playfully shoves Lewis. Lewis looks up, notices Hale,
arriving at their table.

HALE
Hi Sal.

Sal does not look at Hale.

SAL
Hey.

HALE
Was today's film okay with you?

SAL
Why do you care what I think? I'm
sure Gena loved it.

Hale stares at Sal, confused. Lewis notices the awkwardness.

LEWIS
How's it going, Mr. Troutwine?

Hale turns his focus onto Lewis. Suddenly, the following
appears above his head --

Lewis Todd
Transfer student. Articulate.
Grades suffering lately.
Father unavailable for mid-quarter conference.

-- then disappears.

HALE
I'm fine, Lewis.

SAL
You gonna ask him how he's doing?

HALE
Thank you, Sal. I was about to.

Hale smiles at Lewis, slightly unnerved.

LEWIS
I'm cool, I guess.

HALE
That's...very good.

Hale looks at Sal for a moment. She does not look back.

HALE
Well, enjoy the rest of your lunch.

Hale continues on to his empty table by the wall.

LEWIS
I think you hurt his feelings.

SAL
Yeah right. He doesn't have
feelings.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER

The projection screen quickly retracts. Hale stands in front of his students.

HALE
I'm sure you're all aware we have a
visitor today.

The students shift in their seats to see Jack.

HALE
He will begin teaching here in the
Spring. Welcome, Mr. Cummings.

Hale starts to clap. The surprised students join in.

JACK
Thanks. Hi everyone.

Jack waves around the room. The awkward clapping subsides.

JACK
Can I ask a question?

HALE
Yes.

JACK
You don't mind?

HALE
No. Please. That's why I'm here.

JACK
What did you mean to say with the
film you just showed us?

HALE
How about you first. What do you
think it means?

Pause. Jack smiles, politely.

JACK
I don't. That's why I'm asking.

HALE
Okay. But what I mean to say and
what you think it means are two
different things.

JACK
True. But you're teaching it. You
should teach us what it means.

HALE
Why?

JACK
So these kids don't leave here
thinking aliens fought in Vietnam.

HALE
Why not?

JACK
Because it isn't true. It's a lie.

HALE
Says who?

JACK
Says everyone.

Hale nods.

HALE
And what if they're all lying and
I'm telling the truth?

JACK
I highly doubt that.

HALE
Then what if everyone's lying?

JACK
They're not.

HALE
Are you sure about that?

JACK
Absolutely positive.

HALE
So was the man who proclaimed the
world was flat.

STUDENT
(coughs)
Moded!

The class laughs. Jack glances around, embarrassed.

HALE
Cut it out.

The laughing quickly ends.

HALE
Mr. Cummings, all I mean to say is
that with each step forward, we're
realizing how riddled with mistakes
our history really is. The man who
said the world was flat didn't lie.
I think he believed it was true. As
you believe there were no aliens in
Vietnam. And I'm sure most would
agree with your belief as they did
his. But what happens when future
evidence proves otherwise, as it
did back then?

Jack and the students stare up at Hale, dumbstruck.

HALE
I'd much rather suggest an alien
presence in Vietnam and entice some
personal investigation by my
students than be the man who
guaranteed the flatness of our
world.

The bell rings.

HALE
But that's just me.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

School's long over. Stragglng students leave the building.
Others sit on the curb, chatting, waiting to be picked up.

We hear a jingle version of "turkey in the straw," and then we see it --

POPSICLE PETE'S ICY TREATS TRUCK -- It slowly cruises by the school. The jingle blares from a speaker on the roof.

INT. ICE CREAM TRUCK - SAME

The unkempt, glassy-eyed man driving is POPSICLE PETE, 35. He wears a cut-off shirt and overalls. His head was shaved but has since grown in some, much like his whiskers. He grips the wasted butt of a menthol cigarette in his clenched teeth.

POPSICLE PETE
Now, see, if anybody tries to flag
us down, you ain't gonna see 'em.

He does not have a southern accent. He simply speaks poorly. He talks to Lewis, who sits in the passenger seat, slouched down as far as possible.

LEWIS
We've been around the block twice.
None of these kids want ice cream.

POPSICLE PETE
That's okay. Soon we'll have
plenty'a other tasty stuff in here.

Behind them, we can see the ice cream freezer and shelves of candy.

LEWIS
Can you at least turn the music
off? It's embarrassing.

POPSICLE PETE
It draws attention.

LEWIS
Yeah. I know. Smart move.

Popsicle Pete slams on the brakes. The truck abruptly halts. He spits out the butt, turns to Lewis, and leans in close.

POPSICLE PETE
No. See--

HONK! -- Cars wait behind. Driver's are instantly heated.

POPSICLE PETE
You don't know shit.

LEWIS
Dad, you're blocking traffic.

POPSICLE PETE
All's you know is what I tell you --

HONK!! -- Pete glances in his side-view mirror. He waves, forces a smile and drives on.

POPSICLE PETE
I'm truly sad for you Lewie.

LEWIS
Why's that?

POPSICLE PETE
Pretty soon, you get your license and I can start cooking full time; and since you find my truck so embarrassing, driving it ain't gonna be much fun for you.

LEWIS
If getting my license means driving this truck, then forget it.

POPSICLE PETE
So you'd rather stay home cooking for me full time then?

LEWIS
No.

POPSICLE PETE
It's one or the other.

LEWIS
I told you, I'll make deliveries but that's it.

POPSICLE PETE
You told me? That's funny.

LEWIS
I also go to school so--

Popsicle Pete punches Lewis in the jaw. The jingle music abruptly cuts off.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Hale eats dinner in silence. Aris sits across the table, watching him. Sal's plate of food sits beside her, untouched.

ARIS
Why isn't she coming down?

Hale looks up from his plate. He shrugs. Aris stands and walks out.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sal is in front of the mirror, robed, towel-drying her hair.

ARIS (O.S.)
Sal?

Sal pauses.

SAL
What?

ARIS (O.S.)
Come out her please.

SAL
No. I need to get ready.

Sal listens. Aris does not respond. She continues drying her hair.

ARIS (O.S.)
I'm waiting.

Sal huffs.

INT. SAL'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aris sits on the end of the bed. Sal walks out.

ARIS
Did you forget about dinner?

SAL
No. I'm not hungry.

ARIS
Would I be wrong to assume you're still upset with your father?

SAL
Upset about what?

ARIS
Yesterday. The way he acted on your birthday. It wasn't very nice.

SAL
Yeah, well, I'm used to it.

Pause. A long one.

ARIS
Honey, I'm trying to talk to you.

SAL

Why?

ARIS

Because you missed dinner. You're clearly upset about something.

SAL

No, mom. I missed dinner because I need to get ready.

ARIS

Sal Troutwine, I know you better than that.

SAL

Obviously not, if you're just now realizing something is wrong.

Pause.

ARIS

Okay. I'm sorry. I had no idea.

SAL

Neither does he.

ARIS

Who?

SAL

The kids at school think Dad's the best teacher ever. They're lucky they don't have him for a father.

ARIS

Why do you say that?

SAL

When they ask him for extra help, he says he won't meet outside of school.

ARIS

He does?

SAL

He treats me like them. Like a student. If I'm not in class, I don't exist.

ARIS

Honey?

SAL

It's true! I don't know why he ever wanted me in the first place.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

Lewis backs out of his room, pulling the door shut. His cheek is swollen. A few moving boxes are piled along the hall wall.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

Lewie?

He cringes.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

You ready to go?

LEWIS

I'm leaving now.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

Not without this you ain't.

Lewis walks down the hall. Pete steps out of the kitchen, holding a shoe box. He tosses it to Lewis.

POPSICLE PETE

How you gonna make a delivery
without nothing to deliver.

LEWIS

Because I'm not. I can't.

Pete stares at his son's face for a moment, then grins.

POPSICLE PETE

I got you good there, didn't I?

LEWIS

What?

POPSICLE PETE

Your cheek. Gave it some good
color. Yeah. Gave it a nice glow.

Lewis tries to hand the box back to Pete.

LEWIS

I can't take this now.

Pete walks towards him, pushes the box away.

LEWIS

(getting nervous)
I - I'm going out.

Pete stands over him now.

POPSICLE PETE

Maybe your other cheek would like
to match. Make a nice rosy pair.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A single-story stucco box on a street of single-story stucco boxes. The single story: working class people with bigger concerns than the appearance of their crappy rented homes.

Lewis barrels out with the shoe box. He slams the door.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Hale rinses his plate at the sink.

ARIS (O.S.)
Your daughter doesn't think you
want her.

Hale turns around.

HALE
What? Want her?

Aris walks away.

HALE
Aris? Want her how?

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Sal stands on the sidewalk, waiting for Lewis. Behind her, Hale opens the front door and steps out.

HALE
Sal?

She spins around.

SAL
Is it the phone? Is it Lewis?

HALE
No Sal, you mother said you might
be upset with me. Is this true?

SAL
So he didn't call for me?

HALE
No. I don't think so.

Sal glances down the street. Empty. She gets anxious.

SAL
Dad, Lewis is coming any minute.

HALE
Okay. We can talk later then.

SAL
Yeah. Whatever. Sure.

Hale watches her for a moment, then steps back inside...

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...and closes the door.

ARIS (O.S.)
Did she leave yet?

He grimaces and turns to see Aris standing behind him.

HALE
No. Not yet.

ARIS
So?

HALE
We're going to talk later.

Aris nods, facetiously, and walks away.

HALE
We are, Aris.

ARIS (O.S.)
Okay Hale, whatever you say.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Sal does not notice her father, watching her from a living room window, her concern regards something else entirely. She looks frustrated and even hurt. Getting stood up can do that.

She stammers off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Through the thick pane of glass, Hale watches with confusion as Sal disappears down the street, alone.

Behind him, framed photographs of Aris, running in various marathons, hang from the opposite wall.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LATER

Sal walks up to the front door. In a window, she sees a rambling television. The ice cream truck is on the driveway. She rings the doorbell -- broken. She knocks...and waits.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)
Who's there?

SAL
Mr. Todd, it's Sal.

The door whips open, revealing Popsicle Pete.

POPSICLE PETE
Sally girl, nice to see you again.

SAL
Mr. Todd, we've never met before.

POPSICLE PETE
Doesn't mean I ain't seen you.

Pete grins at her.

POPSICLE PETE
At school. I've seen you around
your school.

SAL
Oh.

Sal looks by him, into the house. She's getting less and less comfortable as the seconds pass.

SAL
Is Lewis here? He was supposed to
meet me.

He checks her out when she's not looking. Likes what he sees.

POPSICLE PETE
Nope. Went out with some friends
from our old neighborhood.

She almost loses her breath.

SAL
What?

Pause.

POPSICLE PETE
You were supposed to hang out, huh?

Tears quickly well in her eyes. Sal sniffles, looks away.

SAL
I mean, can my life get any worse?

Pete shakes his head, maybe disappointed in Lewis. Most likely befuddled by the gift, luck just left on his doorstep.

INT. GARAGE - SAME

Hale stands at a cupboard, scanning a tower of labeled eight and sixteen millimeter film cans. He mumbles.

HALE
April 4, 1968. April 4, 1968--

A knock at the door. Hale turns as Aris pokes her head in.

ARIS
Hey there, Mr. Troutwine.

HALE
Hi?

ARIS
Sal won't be back for a while.

HALE
Okay.

Pause.

ARIS
So can I come in?

HALE
Why?

ARIS
Thought we might try a different setting.

HALE
For what?

Aris grins seductively. Hale realizes.

HALE
No way. This is where I do my work.

She glares at him for a moment, then yanks the door closed.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sal sits on an old couch, looking around at the barren interior. More moving boxes. Piled stuff. She hears the television snap off. She looks up to see Pete. He walks in with a bottle of cheap Tequila and two small juice glasses.

POPSICLE PETE
Haven't done much with the place.

Sal is troubled by the liquor in his hand.

POPSICLE PETE
Don't care much for decoration. My
wife always took care of that.
Scoot over.

Sal hesitantly slides over. Pete sits beside her.

SAL
When's Lewis gonna be back?

POPSICLE PETE
Not too late. We'll just hang out a
little. You like tequila?

Pete looks over at her.

SAL
Are you serious?

POPSICLE PETE
You never shot tequila before?

Pete pours some into each glass.

SAL
I just turned sixteen.

Pete hands her a glass. She takes it, unsure.

POPSICLE PETE
Well then, Happy Birthday.

He clinks his glass with hers, throws back the shot. Sal
watches him wince pleasantly. She looks at the glass in her
hand, shrugs and gulps the Tequila. She cringes and coughs.

POPSICLE PETE
That's a girl.

He pats her back, takes her glass, and pours two more shots.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Aris is in the bathtub, surrounded by the froth of
dissipating bubbles. She masturbates.

The phone rings. No one answers it.

EXT. BUS STOP - SAME

Lewis slams the pay phone receiver down. A city bus pulls up. He heads over to it. He no longer has the shoe box.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LATER

The bottle of Tequila is half-empty. Sal, looser and drunk, lies on the couch, alone, staring at the ceiling.

Her grin is crooked.

SAL

I love your son. Even though he stood me up. He's like my best friend. Did you know that?

No response.

SAL

Popsicle Pete sounds like a porno name. You a porno star, Pete?

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

What do you think?

Sal rolls over to see Pete walking in. His shirt is off. Her smile falls away. He exhales a cloud of misty smoke.

POPSICLE PETE

Think I got the body for it?

Sal sits up, unsteady. Her eyes sag. She tries to focus.

POPSICLE PETE

Maybe we're in a porno right now.

SAL

I'm - I think I'm drunk.

POPSICLE PETE

No. Come on, you're not drunk.

SAL

Where's Lewis?

Pete sits down beside her.

POPSICLE PETE

Not back yet.

SAL

Where is he? Why isn't he back?

She tries to lie back down. Pete holds her up.

POPSICLE PETE
Hey, I want to show you something.

SAL
No. I gotta go home.

He shows her a glass pipe, packed with a white, translucent rock. The pipe rim is burned the color of molasses.

POPSICLE PETE
It's okay. It's good. I made it myself. (pause) It'll sober you up.

SAL
It will?

POPSICLE PETE
If he comes home and thinks I got you wasted, he'll kill me.

SAL
He will?

POPSICLE PETE
Oh yeah. He really cares about you.

SAL
He does?

Pete nods. She takes a closer look at the pipe.

SAL
What is it?

POPSICLE PETE
Ever heard of ice?

SAL
That's not ice. I need water.

POPSICLE PETE
It's a special kind of ice.

SAL
Please, I really some need water.

POPSICLE PETE
Okay, okay, you try it, sober up some, and I'll drive you home. Give you a ride in my Icy Treats Truck.

Sal looks up at Pete, considering. He offers her the pipe.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LATER

Lewis walks up the block to his house. He notices the ice cream truck is gone.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Lewis pushes in. The house is empty.

LEWIS

Dad?

He looks over and sees the half empty Tequila bottle and two used glasses.

LEWIS

No wonder you made me go.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Humid and small. A flowery wallpaper fades on the walls. The counters are covered in a confusing amalgam of burners, beakers, pipettes and clear, tangled tubing. Empty liquid drainer jugs fill the sink. Broken, headless, matches are everywhere, as are used cold medicine packs. A quiet mess.

Lewis walks in.

LEWIS

Fucker had a date.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Hale stares at Sal's bedroom door. After a moment, he knocks.

HALE

Sal?

Nothing.

HALE

Sorry to wake you, but, ah, well, I have work to do and I'm sure you have plans, so I was hoping we could talk now.

Nothing.

HALE

Sal?

Hale thinks about leaving. He looks down at the doorknob. He takes a deep breath and reaches for it...

INT. SAL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sal is in bed, under the covers. She still wears her clothes from last night.

The blonde hairs on her quiet face shimmer in the dappled daylight. Her eyelids sag, partially closed. She looks too peaceful.

Hale slowly steps in. He walks towards her. Whispers.

HALE

Sal?

She does not move. Aris appears in the doorway behind him.

ARIS

(whispers)

What are you doing?

Hale jolts, startled. He turns to face Aris.

ARIS

It's Saturday.

HALE

So?

ARIS

Let her sleep.

Hale holds his ground.

HALE

What's the big deal?

Aris steps between him and the bed.

ARIS

Let her sleep, Hale.

Hale gives up and heads out. Aris sniffs the air.

ARIS

Wait.

Aris walks over to the bed, takes a closer look at Sal.

ARIS

She's been drinking. I smell it.

She leans over her.

ARIS

Baby?

No response.

ARIS

I don't think she's breathing.

She feels Sal.

ARIS
She's not. She's freezing!

Aris grabs her, pulls her up -- a weighted rag doll.

ARIS
She's not breathing. Wake up, baby.

Hale steps closer as Aris tries to wake Sal. His mind draws blank.

HALE
Sal?

Hale does touch her.

ARIS
Do something!

He freezes up. He just stares at Sal's lifeless face, her head, slumping from side to side, as Aris shakes her.

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

A police car sits behind an ambulance. A pair of paramedics wheel Sal's sheet-covered body down the front walk.

MINISTER (V.O.)
...Perhaps it is a dull aching
emptiness that fills your heart and
soul...

Aris follows close behind, weeping, a hand reaching. A police officer walks behind her.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Hale stands at the window. Expressionless.

MINISTER (V.O.)
...Perhaps you ask, "what could I
have said or done differently?"...

He runs his finger along the pane, following the gurney.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Lewis walks up the street. He sees Aris, trembling. He sees Hale in the window, frozen. He sees the Paramedics, lifting the gurney into the ambulance.

MINISTER (V.O.)
...Some of you may feel guilt over
something you did or did not do in
the last few days...

He halts, realizing, and watches the ambulance drive away. Once it is gone, he tries to move on, but does not know where to go. He remains, stranded on this block of sidewalk cement, struggling not to cry.

INT. SAN FERNANDO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - MORNING

The bronze urn is bordered by two framed photographs of Sal.

MINISTER (O.S.)
All of this is normal.

Lewis sits in the last row. He wears a thin oxford shirt and cheap tie.

MINISTER (V.O.)
Your grief is bound up in feelings
that are part and parcel of the
sudden loss of this loved one.

Hale sits in the front pew with Aris. His tie knot bulges.

MINISTER (O.S.)
In light of this, I cannot
emphasize enough that this is not
your fault--

A driblet of sweat slips into Hale's eye. He blinks. All sound vanishes.

For a moment, Hale suffers alone, struggles to breath. He stares at the bronze urn, tie-dyed by sunshine through stained glass.

Then, he catches his breath. Sound returns.

MINISTER (O.S.)
...Let us pray.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - POPSICLE PETE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Popsicle Pete stands in front of a full-length mirror, wearing nothing but boxer briefs. His sagging eyes stare at his reflection, stiff, crazed. A menthol cigarette burns between his teeth.

Behind him; an unmade bed, more boxes, strewn clothing.

Suddenly, his body ignites. He reaches behind his back, yanks a pistol from his waistband and aims it at his reflection.

POPSICLE PETE

Ha!

He pulls the trigger - click.

POPSICLE PETE

Blamo!

He steps closer to the mirror, leans in.

POPSICLE PETE

Trying to stick me up? Huh? That
what you want to do?

He actually waits for a response.

POPSICLE PETE

Come on then, I dare you!

He sees Lewis in the mirror, darting by in the hall.

POPSICLE PETE

Hey?

LEWIS (O.S.)

What?

POPSICLE PETE

Come back here.

Lewis backs up, remains in the hall. Pete spins around,
grinning.

POPSICLE PETE

How's that little friend of yours?

Lewis notices the pistol.

LEWIS

Who?

POPSICLE PETE

Sally girl.

Lewis walks away.

LEWIS (O.S.)

Her name is Sal.

POPSICLE PETE

Yeah. How's she doing?

Pause.

LEWIS (O.S.)

She's dead.

Pete's eyes jolt open.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Pete steps into the hall, anxious.

POPSICLE PETE
What do you mean, she's dead?

Lewis reaches his door, pauses.

LEWIS
I don't know. What do you think it means...

Lewis looks right at Pete.

LEWIS
...to be dead?

POPSICLE PETE
Don't fuck with me, Lewis.

LEWIS
Don't ask stupid questions.

POPSICLE PETE
Damn it. I want to know what happened to her!

Lewis stares at Pete, surprised by his exclamation.

LEWIS
Last Friday, I was supposed to meet up with her but you made me do that run, so I didn't. In the morning, I went to say sorry and she was dead.

POPSICLE PETE
Yeah, but how? How was she dead?

LEWIS
In her sleep.

POPSICLE PETE
From what?

LEWIS
Jesus Christ, Dad. I don't know. Why do you care so much, anyway?

Lewis shoves into his room and slams the door. Pete remains in the hall, his eyes are troubled and quivering.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Aris struts in, carrying the bronze urn. Hale slowly follows.

ARIS
We need to find the perfect place.

She places it on the mantel and turns to face him.

ARIS
What do you think? So we can always
look at her.

HALE
Fine.

Aris grits a grin.

ARIS
Oh...Kay.

She turns and lifts the urn from the mantel.

ARIS
Maybe you'd like to suggest
somewhere amazing.

She walks towards Hale.

HALE
Anywhere will be fine.

ARIS
Really? And what do you think that
says about you?

She offers the urn to Hale.

HALE
(re: the urn)
What?

ARIS
Take it.

Hale backs away.

HALE
No.

ARIS
These are her remains, Hale. Take
the urn.

HALE
They are her ashes. Remains go in a
casket.

ARIS
My God, isn't this just perfect. I
knew you'd be like this.

HALE
Like what?

ARIS
Take the urn, Hale!

She thrusts it at him --

STOP. Everything pauses. Dotted lines dash vertically across the scene and emit white light. We hear clicking. The entire image shifts left. It is replaced by an entire frame of white. This frame shifts left and is replaced by:

OLD VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

Slightly green tinted. A baby cries.

We follow a much younger Aris into the same living room. The furniture is arranged differently. There are no marathon photographs on the walls...yet.

Aris turns to face us. She looks pale, worn out. She holds a bundled new born baby.

ARIS
Please take her? I need to lie down.

She offers the baby to us. We back away.

HALE (O.C.)
I'm filming. You hold her.

ARIS
Hale please. I'm exhausted.

HALE (O.C.)
I can't.

ARIS
You can't? Or you don't want to?

Pause.

HALE (O.C.)
I'm filming.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Hale sleeps in bed, alone. He is twisted in bed sheets.

WHACK! -- Hale's eyes snap open.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

WHACK!! -- Hale slowly descends the stairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

WHACK!!! -- Hale walks in and freezes when he sees Aris.

She squats at the wall, now covered in framed photograph after framed photograph of Sal. In some places, there are three or four framed copies of the same picture.

Some with Aris. None with Hale.

A pile of Aris's unframed marathon photographs sits on the coffee table. The bronze urn is back on the mantel.

HALE

Aris?

WHACK!!!! -- She hammers another nail into the wall.

ARIS

Did I wake you?

HALE

Yes.

ARIS

Sorry. I just had to do something about this wall. Before it was all me. Now it's all her.

He notices his absence in the photographs.

HALE

Now it's the both of you.

Aris backs away to admire her night's work.

ARIS

I think it's amazing.

HALE

Where am I? I don't see me.

ARIS

Oh. Well, I suppose you took all of these. I can try to find some that include you. Would you like that?

Hale turns and walks away.

ARIS

Hale?

HALE
I need to get ready for work now.

CUT TO:

Hale in the shower. Scalding water. He scrapes his skin with Aris's rough, natural sponges.

CUT TO:

Hale in front of the mirror. He shaves quickly, sporadically. He nicks his chin. It bleeds. No reaction.

CUT TO:

Hale knots a tie tightly around his neck. He yanks on slacks, tucks in a striped shirt, pulls on a sport coat.

He rips a piece of blood-blotched tissue from his chin.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Hale hurries to the door. He picks up his briefcase and a can of film. Aris turns from the living room wall. Oblivious.

ARIS
Have a great day!

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hale barrels out, almost trips over a bouquet of flowers, on the doormat. He inspects the card. A small smile flutters quickly across his lips. The flowers are from his students.

He takes a deep breath and welcomes the world.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALL - LATER

Hale hurries, clearly late. Bouquet in one hand, briefcase and can of film in the other. He reaches his classroom door, slaps on a smile --

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- and pushes in.

HALE
Sorry I'm late.

The students look up mid-sentence, from their open text books and notes. Hale halts. Thunderstruck. Jack Cummings turns from the blackboard.

JACK
Welcome back--

Hale spins around.

HALE
What do you think you're doing?

JACK
I --

Hale storms over, slams his briefcase, film can and bouquet down on the table and snatches the chalk from Jack's hand.

HALE
My chalk.

He spins to the desk, carelessly gathers Jack's belongings. He shoves them to Jack. The bouquet falls to the floor.

HALE
My desk.

He points at his students.

HALE
My students.

Jack backs away from Hale.

HALE
Why are you teaching in here?

JACK
I'm --

HALE
This is my classroom!

JACK
I'm...only subbing.

Hale slowly turns to see his students - eyes wide, mouths gaping.

JACK
I also think you...might have been assigned a new room.

Hale turns back to Jack. Jack jumps, nervous.

JACK
But I'm not sure.

INT. AUDITORIUM - LATER

Principal Les Moore leads Hale onto the stage.

LES MOORE
Sorry about the confusion, but I
wanted to wait until you came back
to surprise you with my decision.

He turns to face Hale, smiles.

LES MOORE
Welcome to your new classroom.

Hale looks around.

HALE
The auditorium?

Les starts into his pitch...

LES MOORE
Oh yes. We can put a big projection
screen up here for your films. You
can teach from the podium. I think
it's a great place for the kids to
learn. Don't you?

HALE
Absolutely I do. But why?

LES MOORE
You're the best teacher we've got.
You deserve the best classroom.

HALE
If you're doing this because Sal--

LES MOORE
She was a good girl, Hale. One of
our best students. And nothing's
going to make the sadness caused by
this loss easier to endure. (pause)
I'm doing this because of you.
Because of what you do for the
students at this school.

Les rests his hand on Hale's shoulder.

LES MOORE
That's why. Okay?

HALE
Okay. Thank you, Les.

LES MOORE
So you let me know when you're
ready.

HALE
Now. I'm ready now. Tomorrow.

LES MOORE
Are you sure? There's no rush.

HALE
Wouldn't say so if I wasn't.
Besides, it's better if I'm here.

Les looks at him for a moment, unsure, then breaks a smile.

LES MOORE
Good. Then tomorrow it is.

They shake hands.

INT. GARAGE - LATER

Hale works, hunched over his editing table. His hands race, precisely, cutting and taping the gliding film stock.

SAL (O.S.)
She was a good girl.

Hale sits up.

SAL (O.S.)
One of our best students.

He spins around on his stool, sees the wall of Polaroid photographs. Daunted, he watches the students rise and walk out of their pictures. Sal is the only one that remains.

SAL
And nothing's going to make the
sadness caused by this loss easier
to endure...unless you're Mr.
Troutwine.

Hale blinks. Nothing changes.

SAL
Mr. Troutwine doesn't know how to
feel sad, does he?

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hale quickly backs out of the garage, yanking the door closed. Before turning, he takes a deep breath.

He hears Aris chuckle behind him. He blanches.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Aris sits on the sofa, reading a journal. She looks up, grinning. She sees Hale, still facing the door.

ARIS
The things she put in here. Some of
it is very funny.

HALE
(without turning)
Who?

ARIS
I'm reading Sal's journal. Would
you like to hear something she
wrote about you?

Hale turns around, nervous.

HALE
I don't know. What is it?

Aris fingers through some papers.

ARIS
Remember when we went to Morro Bay
and Sal got stung by the school of
jelly fish?

HALE
...Yes.

Aris looks up at Hale.

ARIS
It was a good trip, right?

HALE
I suppose so.

Aris nods and returns her eyes to the journal. She reads.

ARIS
We're in Morro Bay. I don't know
why. Mom hates the water. Dad says
he came here once with his parents.
I wonder if he even knows how to
swim. I should ask him. (pause)
Okay, I can't believe what just
happened. So I ask him if he knows
how to swim and he says yes, so I
tell him to show me. He won't but
wants to film me swimming instead.
For the memories, he says. Yeah
right. So I go swimming and he
stays on the beach filming and
guess what happens? I get stung by
like a bazillion jelly fish. I
scream for him and he just keeps
filming. Films the whole thing and
I'm screaming for help.

(MORE)

ARIS (cont'd)
Then the old lady at the front desk
tells mom and me that it's mating
season for the sticky blue jelly
fish here in Morro bay. What a
jerk. I bet he knew that and let me
go swimming on purpose. Jerk. Jerk.
Jerk!

Aris looks up at Hale, smiling. He is not.

ARIS
Was it really a bazillion? Sounds a
bit much to me.

Hale stares back at her, vacant and cold.

ARIS
But very funny, don't you think?

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

The ice cream truck pulls up to the curb. The jingle music
plays.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)
You still hurting?

LEWIS (O.S.)
What do you think?

Lewis shoves open the door and jumps out.

POPSICLE PETE
Hey now, hold up a minute.

Lewis stops, turns around, annoyed.

POPSICLE PETE
You wouldn't say she was your best
friend, would'ya?

LEWIS
What?

POPSICLE PETE
I mean, you hardly knew her, right?

Lewis stares at Pete in disbelief.

POPSICLE PETE
You didn't care much about her.

Lewis slams the car door, walks away. Pete calls after him.

POPSICLE PETE
The sooner you get over this, the
better off me and you will be!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY

Mr. Moghtader and Mr. Polska finish at the urinals and wash their hands at the sink.

MR. MOGHTADER

Well, I don't have any kids, thank Christ, but if I did, and one of them died, I sure as hell wouldn't be back to work a week later.

MR. POLSKA

No? You'd rather stay home where everything reminds you she's gone?

MR. MOGHTADER

It's called mourning. It's like he's ignoring it.

MR. POLSKA

How the hell do you know he's ignoring it?

MR. MOGHTADER

Okay look, I only brought it up because I thought you would just agree with me and we could talk a little shit about the guy before next period--

MR. POLSKA

Jesus man, why are you being so mean? His kid just died.

MR. MOGHTADER

She went to school here for almost three years. Never once did I see them act like family.

MR. POLSKA

So what?

MR. MOGHTADER

Did you?

MR. POLSKA

I wasn't looking.

MR. MOGHTADER

Les just upgraded him. Gave him the auditorium. Did you know that?

Polska heads for the door.

MR. POLSKA

(disgusted)

Did you know your skin's turning green?

MR. MOGHTADER

Huh?

MR. POLSKA

The envy oozes from your pores.

CUT TO:

Hale, sitting inside a stall, listening.

MR. MOGHTADER (O.S.)

The man's obsessed with being a teacher. He probably wasn't a very good father. Now, he's off that hook and gets rewarded for it?

Hale holds his breath, waits, praying them leave.

MR. MOGHTADER (O.S.)

It's fucking pathetic.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

The house lights illuminate. Hale stands at the podium. The students applaud and cheer from the first two rows of seats below. Hale winces. The echoed cheering it too much for him. His eye flit and flutter from student to student.

Names and information appear above heads. Small explosions. Words collide. Hale blinks. Nothing changes. Names become unrecognizable. Never-ending, jumbled strings of letters.

The applause thins and stops. The students stare silently at Hale. He looks utterly confused. He steps back from the podium, grabs his briefcase, and darts behind the curtains.

Gena Reynolds leaps from her seat and follows after Hale with her borrowed VHS camera.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hale fast walks. Les Moore heads towards him from the opposite direction.

LES MOORE

Class over already? How did it go?

Les stops to meet him. Hale ignores, blows by.

LES MOORE

Hale? Everything okay?

Hale bursts into an awkward sprint. He slams through a set of double doors. Les watches after him, bewildered.

EXT. OUTDOOR HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Hale still sprints, along the outer edge of the empty lunch area. He has trouble breathing. He abruptly halts and buckles over, slamming his palms down on the nearest table. He gasps.

CUT TO:

VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

From a distance, we watch Hale catch his breath. After a moment, he looks up and around. He notices Lewis, sitting alone at the same table he sat at with Sal, days earlier.

EXT. OUTDOOR HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - SAME

Lewis, wearing a pair of headphones, works on the same sketch of Sal, now shaded and dimensional. It is exaggerated, but beautiful just the same.

He feels someone watching him and looks up to see Hale. Hale quickly drops his head again, wipes his sweating forehead.

Lewis closes his sketchbook and turns off his Walkman.

LEWIS
Hi, Mr. Troutwine.

Hale looks up again. Lewis waves.

HALE
Hi. Hello.

Pause.

LEWIS
You okay?

HALE
Me? Yes. I'm fine.

LEWIS
Were you running?

Hale glances back in the direction from which he just came.

HALE
Yes. I suppose I was running.

LEWIS
From something or to something?

Hale stares at Lewis, almost startled.

LEWIS
Why were you running?

HALE
Oh! I don't know. Exercise.

Lewis looks at Hale's khaki slacks, his dress shirt.

LEWIS
Forget your gym clothes?

HALE
What? Yes. Yes I did.

Pause.

LEWIS
So where you going?

HALE
Going?

LEWIS
(re: his briefcase)
You are leaving aren't you?

HALE
Yes. I think so.

LEWIS
To go where?

HALE
Oh. Well, I don't know.

LEWIS
Can I come?

HALE
Excuse me?

LEWIS
Do you mind if I come with you?

HALE
Yes. I guess I do.

LEWIS
Why?

Pause.

HALE
You have school.

Lewis smiles.

LEWIS

So do you.

We hear a doorbell ring.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Aris, in a track suit, opens the front door to reveal
DETECTIVE RON FORSYTH, 35, young face, groomed moustache,
cheap suit. He holds a file folder.

FORSYTH

Aris Troutwine?

ARIS

Yes?

FORSYTH

My name is Ron Forsyth. I'm a
detective.

He shows her his badge.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Aris sits across from Forsyth.

FORSYTH

I really do hate dragging you
through the mud again but we do
have some more information
regarding your daughter's death.

ARIS

(gulps)

Okay.

FORSYTH

Sal did not die, solely, from
alcohol poisoning.

ARIS

She didn't?

FORSYTH

Tests show that alcohol was only
partially responsible. A low level
drug trace was also detected.

ARIS

Maybe a decongestant? Sal took one
before bed sometimes. Her room can
get rather stuffy.

FORSYTH
No. It is an illegal stimulant
called methamphetamine.

ARIS
Oh. And is that like...what do they
call it these days? Pot?

FORSYTH
Uh, no. Actually, It isn't like
that at all. It's a much stronger
drug. More like crack or speed.

ARIS
But my daughter didn't even drink.

FORSYTH
(nods)
It was probably her first time.
That's when accidental overdoses
usually happen.

ARIS
Someone must have drugged her.

Forsyth smiles politely.

FORSYTH
Mrs. Troutwine, sometimes nice
parents, like you, think they know
their kids, but they really don't--

Aris slaps her hand on the table.

ARIS
No! My daughter did not do pot or
pop crack or anything else!

FORSYTH
Maybe your husband--

ARIS
I was a good mother.

FORSYTH
I'm sure you were.

ARIS
If anyone's to blame, it's him.

INT. STATION WAGON - MOVING - LATER

Hale drives, slowly. Stares forward.

LEWIS
So, where we going?

Lewis sits in the passenger seat.

HALE
I have no idea.

LEWIS
If you want to go home you can--

HALE
I don't - want to go home.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Aris travels the same route she does every day. She passes the same houses and absent-minded neighbors. She does not realize the pungent scent of her denial.

Those that never noticed her before, make a point to approach. To step into the street and ask how she is.

With each condolence, it becomes harder and harder to hold a smile. Soon, Aris is overwhelmed and scurries home.

EXT. CIVIC YARD - LATER

Foundation walls from a building long since torn down, sprout up from the yellow, trash-spattered weeds and grass. The graffiti on these storyteller walls is wondrously calculated and intricate. Downtown buildings scrape the distant skyline.

Hale's station wagon pulls up to a gaping hole in a rusted, chain link fence.

INT. STATION WAGON - SAME

Hale peers out through the windshield.

HALE
What is this place?

Lewis shoves his door open.

LEWIS
I want to show you something.

EXT. CIVIC YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Hale stands beside the wagon. He watches Lewis step through the hole in the fence.

HALE
I'll just wait here.

LEWIS
Why?

HALE
I don't think we're supposed to go
in there.

LEWIS
We're not. Who cares?

HALE
The person that put up this fence.

Lewis points at the painted walls.

LEWIS
You know how long it takes to paint
all those pieces?

HALE
No.

LEWIS
Hours. Man, days even. We'll only
be a few minutes. Come on.

Lewis turns and walks off.

LEWIS
Pretend we're on a field trip.

Hale remains for a moment, then checks to make sure the car
is locked. He reluctantly steps through the gate hole.

CUT TO:

Hale follows a few steps behind Lewis. He looks around at the
urban ruins. Lewis bends over, scoops an empty beer bottle.

LEWIS
Me and Sal came here after school
sometimes.

HALE
Why?

LEWIS
She didn't want to go home either.

Hale pauses, stung.

LEWIS (CONT'D)
I'd let her watch me paint.

HALE
You wanted to show me something--

SMASH! - Lewis heaves the bottle against a pillar of cement. It explodes. Hale steps away, startled.

LEWIS
Some people build stuff. Just so
other people can break it down.

Lewis looks back at Hale.

LEWIS
Right?

HALE
I...don't know.

Lewis nods.

LEWIS
It should be just around here.

He walks down and around a wall. Hale swallows nervously.

CUT TO:

Hale rounds the corner. Lewis points at the wall.

LEWIS
There.

Hale looks over and sees a spray-painted outline - a girl standing with her arms by her sides. This graffiti is not clean and beautiful like the rest. It is crude and rough.

LEWIS
Last time we were here, some kids
were painting one of the other
walls. Sal borrowed a can of their
paint and made me outline her.

Hale steps closer to the wall, studies Sal's hollow outline.

LEWIS (CONT'D)
Said sometimes she felt invisible.
But if I could trace her, I must be
able to see her.

Hale looks at the "smiley face," painted where her real face should be.

HALE
Did she do that?

LEWIS
I did. She wanted to cross it out
but the paint can was empty.

After a moment, Hale turns from the wall. His face is blank.

HALE
Was my daughter sad?

LEWIS
Yeah, I guess. I mean, if she felt
invisible.
(then...)
You'd have to be kinda sad if you
felt like that.

Hale nods curtly and marches off around the wall.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Popsicle Pete stands in shadow, peering out through bent
blinds. He watches Lewis climb out of Hale's station wagon
and approach. The wagon drives away.

Pete lets the blinds snap back into place.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lewis walks in and heads down to his bedroom. Pete appears
behind him.

POPSICLE PETE
I needed you for a run.

LEWIS
Sorry.

POPSICLE PETE
Who was that?

LEWIS
One of my teachers.

Lewis spins around.

LEWIS
He's also my dead friend's dad. My
dead best friend.

POPSICLE PETE
Excuse me?

Lewis turns into --

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- and closes the door.

He walks in. The door bursts open behind. Pete barrels
through, grabs Lewis, and slams him against the wall.

POPSICLE PETE
What were you doing with her dad?

Lewis squirms.

LEWIS
Let me go!

POPSICLE PETE
Tell me god damn it!

LEWIS
Talking. We were just talking.

Pete releases Lewis but remains over him.

LEWIS
Why do you care?

POPSICLE PETE
What does he know?

LEWIS
About what?

Pete realizes he may have said too much. He backs away.

POPSICLE PETE
What did you talk about?

LEWIS
His daughter. Not like we have
anything else in common.

POPSICLE PETE
I want you to stay away from him.

LEWIS
Hello? I can't. He's my teacher.

Pause.

POPSICLE PETE
Well, I don't want him around here
ever again.

LEWIS
Don't worry. Neither do I.

It takes Pete a moment to realize that was an insult.

LEWIS
Can you get out of my room now?

POPSICLE PETE
Don't you go making trouble for me.

Pete turns and heads out.

LEWIS
Sure you cooked that shit right?

Pete spins back and sees the smirk on Lewis's face.

LEWIS
I think it's making you paranoid.

Pete glares at Lewis for a moment. Quiet. Capable of anything. Lewis knows this but pushes anyway...

LEWIS
You hearing any voices?

Pete attacks. Lewis tries to scramble by but Pete trips him to the floor, drops to his knees and proceeds to wail on him.

LEWIS
Making you soft too! That all you got!?

Pete stands, unbuckles his belt and yanks it from his waist. Lewis looks up at him from the floor.

LEWIS
Guess so, if you're using that.

Pete rises the belt above his head. As the flailing leather cracks down against Lewis we...

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING

Hale pulls onto the driveway behind a champagne-colored Lexus Sedan. He huffs, obviously aware of who it belongs to.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aris sits with her parents, HELEN and PHILLIP, both 60. She looks tense, ready to pop, does not pay them much attention. Phillip nods for Helen to say something.

HELEN
Honey let's try and take your mind elsewhere, okay?

Aris nods vaguely.

HELEN
Are you familiar with this bamboo shack the Jews build at the end of September every year?

Aris shakes her head, just as vaguely.

PHILLIP
That's where you want to take her?

HELEN
Quiet Phil.

PHILLIP
It's called a sukkah.

HELEN
Fine. Sukkah. Sounds like I've got
flem. Anyway, the Hasidic family on
our corner had one in their
backyard. Last weekend they went
out of town and left their two
oldest home alone. And Saturday
night they had a party and what
happens? They burn the shack down.

Aris could not care any less.

PHILLIP
It gets worse too.

HELEN
Much worse. We happen to be the
only ones on the block with a pool.
So what do they do, they break into
our yard and use our pool water to
put out the fire.

PHILLIP
Don't forget the roses--

HELEN
Trampled my rose garden, turned our
lawn into mud. I can only hope a
few thorns got under their skin.

HALE (O.S.)
Hi.

They all turn to see Hale, standing in the hall.

HELEN
Still working late I see. Even now.

Hale forces a smile.

HALE
How are you, Helen?

PHILLIP
She's raring to join the Nazi party
is what she is.

HALE
Really? I hear their numbers are
growing.

HELEN
Hale? He was kidding.

HALE
Of course. Good to see you, Phil.

PHILLIP
Missed you at Thanksgiving, buddy.
Tons of left-overs.

Pause.

HALE
So, are you two just over visiting?

ARIS
She was drugged, Hale.

HALE
Excuse me?

ARIS
Sal was drugged! Overdosed! And
that's why she died!

STOP. Everything pauses. Dotted lines dash vertically across the scene and emit white light. We hear clicking. The entire image shifts left. It is replaced by an entire frame of white. This frame shifts left and is replaced by:

OLD VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

Slightly green tinted. We hurry into the living room, where young Aris sits with her young parents. They are all smiling.

HALE (O.C.)
Okay. Camera's on as requested.
Why's everyone so happy?

Aris looks at her parents. They nod.

ARIS
Hale, honey?

HALE (O.C.)
Yes Aris?

ARIS
I'm pregnant.

Pause.

HALE (O.C.)
What?

Aris nods excitedly. The camera shakes some.

ARIS
Isn't that amazing news?

Nothing.

ARIS
Hale?

HALE (O.C.)
...Yes, Aris?

ARIS (O.C.)
Hale, is something wrong?

Nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - RESUME

Hale stares off. Aris, Helen and Phillip stare up at him.

ARIS
Hale?

He finally shakes his stare and glances at Aris.

ARIS
Did you hear what I said?

Pause. He ignores Aris and addresses her parents.

HALE
Always nice to see you both.

Hale pivots and walks away. Helen and Phillip share a look.

INT. GARAGE - LATER

Hale sits on his stool, staring at Sal's Polaroid photograph. She stares out at him, frozen, annoyed and apathetic.

ARIS (O.S.)
Methamphetamine.

Hale jolts. He turns to see Aris standing at the door.

ARIS
It's a drug.

HALE
I know what it is.

ARIS
They found it in her system.

HALE
Japanese gave it to their Kamikaze
pilots during World War two.

Aris grunts.

ARIS
You're doing this on purpose.

HALE
Doing what?

ARIS
Giving me fact instead of reaction.

HALE
You would prefer something else?

ARIS
Prefer? Yes. Expect? No.

HALE
You would know better than me if
Sal was doing drugs--

ARIS
You bet I would!

HALE
...Okay then.

Hale turns away. Aris calms some.

ARIS
Look, Hale. I get it, okay? You
blame me. I blame you.

HALE
Sorry. I never said I blamed you
for anything.

ARIS
Of course not. You never say
anything about how you feel.

HALE
I don't? Maybe I should try it now.

Hale faces her.

HALE
Aris, I feel...like I'm being
unnecessarily attacked by you.

ARIS
Really nice. Mock me too.

HALE
I'd be careful where I pointed my
finger, if I was you.

ARIS
Well, don't you dare think about
pointing your finger at me. I'm not
the one who pushed her away.

HALE
No. You're the one that smothered
her with bullshit.

Aris glares at Hale for a moment, then stammers off.

ARIS (O.S.)
I'm sleeping in her bed tonight.

Hale closes his eyes, nods, exhausted.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Hale backs out of the garage. Suddenly, he hears sounds from
the living room. He walks across the hall and steps into --

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He follows the cacophonous sounds, growing louder. He halts
before the photographs, thunderstruck. The photographs move,
make noise. They are alive.

Hale side-steps along the wall in awe, looking at Sal's life
in reverse order:

Her yearbook photo. Sal changes the expression on her face as
an unseen photographer - CLICK, CLICK, CLICK - snaps the
shots. Sal, fifteen, plays basketball. She tears down the
court - BOUNCE, BOUNCE, BOUNCE - and shoots a two-pointer.
The crowd cheers. Three identical photographs of Sal,
thirteen, leaping from a rock - SPLASH, SPLASH, SPLASH - into
the ocean. Sal, twelve, tap dancing. Ten, nine, eight, seven,
six, she blows out the candles on her birthday. Five, four
identical photographs - Sal rides her tricycle towards us,
giggling and waving. Three, two, one, Sal sits in her high-
chair. Her face is covered in food, she pounds her fists,
crying.

Hale pauses, focuses on this photograph. Baby Sal whips her
head around and glares out at Hale. She screams. Hale steps
away, frightened, sees the urn, sitting on the mantel below.
It twitches and topples over, falling - SLOW MOTION - from
the mantel.

Hale screams silently. Horrified.

SAL (V.O.)
Some people build stuff. Just so
other people can break it down.

The urn smacks the ground and ash erupts, splashing in all directions, catching the air, floating up and around Hale --

INT. GARAGE - MORNING

-- lurches awake, almost falls from his stool. He looks around, shaken by his dream. Aris knocks on the garage door. She looks in at him, scowling.

ARIS
You slept in here?

HALE
I - guess so. Yes.

ARIS
You have a visitor.

HALE
Who?

ARIS
Remember Sal's friend, Lewis?

HALE
He's here?

ARIS
Looks like he's been in a fight.
Maybe you should call his parents.

Hale rubs his eyes.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Aris walks towards Lewis. He stands, gazing at the wall of photographs. His face is bruised and cut. He notices Aris.

LEWIS
That's, like, almost her whole life
up there, huh?

ARIS
Just about.

LEWIS
How come Mr. Troutwine isn't in any
of them? Where is he?

Aris opens her mouth to respond--

HALE (O.S.)
Right here.

They both turn to see Hale, slowly approaching. Yesterday's clothes are wrinkled. The side of his face is indented and red from his awkward sleep positioning.

HALE
How can I help you, Lewis?

Lewis turns towards Hale. Hale sees his wounds, halts.

HALE
What happened to you?

LEWIS
It's nothing. Are you going to school today?

HALE
No. I don't think so.

LEWIS
How about tomorrow?

HALE
I...don't know when I'm going back.

ARIS
You don't?

HALE
No Aris, I don't.

LEWIS
I don't either.

Aris and Hale look at Lewis.

HALE
But you can't miss school.

LEWIS
And you can?

HALE
Someone will sub for me. You'll fall behind.

LEWIS
Even if I'm there, I will. I can't focus. She's everywhere I look.

Lewis blushes.

LEWIS
Sorry, that was lame.

ARIS
No. It was very sweet, Lewis. I
know how you feel.

Lewis feels her staring at the cuts and bruises on his face.

ARIS
Who did that to you? Was it someone
at school?

LEWIS
Yeah, just, these older guys. I'm
the new kid, you know how it is.

HALE
What are their names?

Lewis will not look at Hale, keeps his eyes to the floor.

LEWIS
Who?

HALE
The students that did that to you.
Who are they? I'll report them.

LEWIS
I...don't remember. I don't really
know them.

HALE
Did they come to your home and do
that?

LEWIS
What?

HALE
I gave you a ride home yesterday.

ARIS
You did?

HALE
This must have occurred afterwards.
Am I right?

LEWIS
...Yeah.

HALE
You didn't go back to school did
you?

LEWIS
...No.

HALE
So then they must have come to your
home and attacked you.

Lewis stares at Hale.

HALE
Pretty bold of them. Wouldn't you
say?

Hale waits for Lewis to respond.

ARIS
Hale? Leave him alone. He obviously
doesn't want to talk about it.

HALE
I'm only trying to help.

LEWIS
Then tutor me. So I don't fall
behind.

HALE
No.

ARIS
Hale?

HALE
I'm sorry, Lewis. I don't do that.

LEWIS
Why?

ARIS
What else are you going to do if
you're not going to school?

HALE
Nothing!

Both Aris and Lewis are stunned by Hale's outburst.

HALE
I'm going to stay here and do
nothing. I'm sorry. I never meet
with students outside of school.

Hale turns and climbs the stairs.

LEWIS
You did yesterday.

HALE
Yesterday was an unusual day.

ARIS
Is that why you always ignored Sal?

Hale pauses, back to them.

ARIS
She said you treated her just like
one of your other students.

Pause.

HALE
Lewis, I think you should go to
school...and whoever it was that
hurt you should be reported. Don't
let them get away with it.

Lewis watches him go, rejected and confused.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Aris follows Lewis out through the front door.

ARIS
Lewis, you'll probably think I'm
nuts for asking but, have you heard
of a drug called methamphetamine?

Lewis pauses, nervous.

ARIS
Do kids your age use this drug?

LEWIS
I...don't know. Why?

ARIS
It was in Sal's system. It was the
real reason she died.

Lewis turns around to face her. He cannot believe his ears.

ARIS
My Sal didn't use drugs, did she?

LEWIS
...No way.

ARIS
So she was drugged. I'm sure of it.

His worst nightmare.

ARIS
You knew her pretty well. Do you
know who could have done this?

He can hardly shake his head, no. He knows he's lying.

ARIS
No. I didn't think you would.

Aris smiles kindly, clueless.

ARIS
It's okay. Thank you, Lewis. Bye.
Aris closes the door, leaving Lewis shocked.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hale stands at the window. He watches Lewis dart away from the house and dash down the block.

ARIS (O.S.)
Poor kid's hurting inside and out
and what do you do?

Hale spins around.

ARIS
Yell at him. Sal would be shocked.
Aris pauses.

ARIS
Or actually, no, she'd probably
expect you to respond so
insensitively. She'd be so
expectant that maybe she wouldn't
even notice at all.

She nods as she walks into the bathroom.

ARIS
By the way, I'm having a treadmill
delivered this afternoon.

HALE
I --

Aris closes the door.

HALE
-- was yelling at you.

He exhales.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

Lewis barrels in.

LEWIS

Dad!

No response. He tears down the hall...

LEWIS

Where the fuck are you?

... and kicks open his dad's bedroom door.

Inside, Popsicle Pete screws a middle-aged meth-head. He pounds on her, hard and boring. Her diluted eyes stare forward, empty. Pete notices Lewis but does not flinch.

POPSICLE PETE

Want at her? I'm almost done.

The trash looks up at Lewis. She offers a crooked smile.

Lewis pulls the door closed. He walks away slowly, listening to the monotonous creak of his life less ordinary. Then...

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

Oh boy! Shit yes!

It's too much.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lewis rushes to the sink, buckles over, and almost pukes. His breathing is rapid, overwhelming.

POPSICLE PETE (O.S.)

Lewie? You still here? She's ready and willing!

Lewis catches his breath, drinks water from the tap. Popsicle Pete stumbles in behind him, pulling up his briefs.

POPSICLE PETE

What? No school today?

Lewis does not turn around.

POPSICLE PETE

Hello? I'm talking to you.

Pause.

LEWIS

Why'd you do it, dad?

Pete steps closer.

POPSICLE PETE

Do what?

LEWIS

What? You figured you could get her hooked with a free taste and the rest of the kids would follow? Soon the whole school would be cranking and you'd get rich with no effort? That it, dad? Was that the plan?

POPSICLE PETE

Slow your roll--

Lewis spins around.

LEWIS

Answer the question.

POPSICLE PETE

She came looking for you. When she saw you wasn't here, she got real upset. I was trying to cheer her--

LEWIS

That's bullshit and you know it.

(pause)

I'm miserable and you never try to "cheer me up".

POPSICLE PETE

Now come on, that's different--

LEWIS

You don't give a shit if I'm sad about mom, but my friend shows up and all of a sudden your heart starts bleeding? Yeah right.

POPSICLE PETE

We had a few drinks. My judgement got fucked. Shit just happened.

Lewis shakes his head, expectantly disappointed.

LEWIS

Your fucked judgement killed her. You do realize that.

POPSICLE PETE

I ain't realizing shit.

LEWIS

Your very own home-cooked recipe. Not only does it make the chef paranoid but kills kids too.

POPSICLE PETE

Watch it. I will fuck you up.

LEWIS

You proud, dad?

Pete turns and walks out.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Pete walks back to his bedroom. Lewis chases after him.

LEWIS
Feel good about what you did? Gonna
go celebrate with that crack whore
in your room?

Pete pauses, his back to Lewis.

LEWIS
You know, I really wish you died in
the car wreck with mom or instead
of mom. Anything other than this.

Pete's back tenses.

LEWIS
You're worthless to me and everyone
else.

Lewis waits, ready for Pete to react. He does not. He pushes
into his room and closes the door.

LEWIS
Do you hear me?

Lewis pounds on the door.

LEWIS
All you do is ruin my life!

CUT TO:

16 MILLIMETER COLOR FOOTAGE:

A younger Sal swims aimlessly in the waters of Morro Bay.
From time to time, she waves at us and disappears below the
surface.

Suddenly, she stops, her expression changes, terror. She
waves her arms in the air, hysterically. We hold on her,
unmoved, as she is attacked by the aforementioned jelly fish.

The image freezes and rewinds.

INT. GARAGE - SAME

Hale pauses the film negative. He cuts away a sequence of
frames and sets aside the rest of the roll.

He leans over the flat bed and draws something in each frame of the remaining negative, with grease pen.

CUT TO:

16 MILLIMETER COLOR FOOTAGE:

Sal swims aimlessly in the waters of Morro Bay - side by side - with a crudely drawn STICK FIGURE.

Hale removes the jelly fish attack. The image loops a few times, then it freezes.

INT. GARAGE - SAME

Hale sits back in his chair. He stares at the same frame in his magnifying monitor. He shakes his head, not satisfied.

He grunts and starts erasing his drawing. Energetic dance music erupts from the living room. His hand jerks, startled.

He accidentally rips the film negative in half.

HALE

Shit.

Hale grimaces.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The dance music blares. Sal fast-walks, with laughable determination, on a brand new treadmill. It is in the center of the room. It faces the wall of photographs. The sofa is pushed off to the side. Thick plastic covers the entire floor. Hale storms out of the garage, covering his ears.

HALE

Aris?

ARIS

Yes?

HALE

What is going on?

ARIS

What's it look like?

HALE

I'm trying to work.

ARIS

Okay, and I'm trying to work out.

HALE
Yes, but--

ARIS
You did say you planned on doing
nothing today, didn't you?

Hale watches Aris's body move, mechanically. He sees pearls
of sweat rolling down her neck. He is disgusted.

ARIS
Maybe staying home wasn't the best
idea for you.

She forces a quick, flat grin and returns to her workout.

HALE
(mumbles)
I hate you.

ARIS
(without glancing back)
Sorry, did you say something?

Hale pivots and rushes out...

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...of the house, climbs into his station wagon...

INT. STATION WAGON - SAME

...and slams the door. He strangles the steering wheel. The
old leather cracks and squeaks in his grip --

He slams the car horn...

CUT TO:

VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

From a distance, we approach Hale in his station wagon. The
horn blares and blares and blares. Constant and ugly. Just as
we reach the car we...

CUT TO:

INT. STATION WAGON - SAME

A hand knocks on the window. Hale jumps, looks up to see Gena
Reynolds. She waves, sheepishly. Hale is instantly
embarrassed. He rolls down his window.

GENA
Hey, Mr. Troutwine. Did I scare
you?

HALE
No. It's...okay.

GENA
I just wanted to see how you're
doing.

HALE
My horn got stuck...is all.

Gena is unsure how to respond. Hale just looks at her.

GENA
So, you know, how are you doing?

HALE
I'm, well, I'm getting by. I
suppose.

GENA
So then you'll be back to school
soon?

HALE
No. Don't think so.

GENA
Before the end of the semester?

HALE
I don't know, Gena. Probably not.

Gena nods, devastated.

GENA
So does that mean I can't get extra
credit for my film?

Hale looks up at her, drawing a blank.

GENA
You let me borrow this camera.
Remember?

She shows him the VHS video camera.

HALE
Your video. Right. How's it going?

GENA
Really good. Really really good.

HALE
Did you mention it to the sub?

GENA

I don't mean to be rude, but he wouldn't get it. Mr. Cummings teaches straight from the book. He's not innovative like you.

HALE

Oh, well, thanks for that Gena.

GENA

No, I mean, it's totally the truth.

Pause.

HALE

I'll give Cummings a call. Okay?

GENA

You'd really do that? God, you really are the best.

HALE

Let's not get carried away.

GENA

No. You really are. You're the best teacher I've ever had.

The word "teacher" rings in Hale's ears.

HALE

I need to go now, Gena.

GENA

Oh yeah? Where are you going?

HALE

I'm... really not sure.

Her excitement instantly dissipates.

GENA

Oh. Okay then.

An awkward moment.

GENA

Well, take care of yourself.

HALE

You too.

GENA

Okay. Bye.

Gena turns and scurries away. Hale watches after her.

HALE

Gena?

Gena spins back, smiling, grateful.

GENA

Yes, Mr. Troutwine?

HALE

Just make sure your film is honest.
In its portrayal of...whatever it
is you're documenting.

GENA

I will, Mr. Troutwine. I really
will.

She walks away. Hale rolls up his window.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Hale walks by Sal's open bedroom door. He hears Aris chuckle.
His shoulders clench.

ARIS (O.S.)

Hale?

He pauses.

ARIS (O.S.)

Hale?

HALE

Yes?

Pause.

ARIS (O.S.)

Please come where I can see you.

Hale rolls his eyes and backs up. He looks into the bedroom,
sees Aris, under the covers in Sal's bed. A lamp is on. She
reads Sal's journal.

HALE

Yes?

ARIS

Come sit.

She pats the bed.

HALE

No thank you.

Aris drops her eyes, grins.

ARIS
Hale, do you remember --

HALE
No.

Hale walks away.

ARIS (O.S.)
Can I remind you?

HALE
No.

ARIS (O.S.)
What good are these memories if we
can't laugh at them?

He disappears into his bedroom and closes the door.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Popsicle Pete stares into Lewis's empty bedroom. He smokes a menthol. His eyes are dark. His tweaked mind broods.

CUT TO:

EXT. CIVIC YARD - DAY

Lewis's sketch book is propped, against a wall, surrounded by cans of spray paint. It is open to the pencil drawing of Sal, complete and detailed.

Lewis stands on a ladder, painting over the crude trace of Sal with precision. He fills in an outline of a larger version of the exact same drawing from his sketch book.

Hale walks up quietly. At first, he says nothing, watches Lewis paint. The kid is good with a spray can.

After a moment, Lewis climbs off the ladder, backs away, inspects the unfinished work.

HALE
What happens if you lose track of
the outline?

Lewis spins, jolted.

LEWIS
...I won't.

HALE
What if you get stuck?

LEWIS
I don't.

HALE
Never?

Pause.

LEWIS
...I keep going. Start over if I
got to. If I abandon a piece,
because I get stuck, everyone else
who paints here would notice. They
wouldn't let me paint here any
more. They would cross my shit out,
disrespect me for giving up.

Hale just nods. Oddly, he can relate.

LEWIS
What are you doing here?

HALE
Same thing you are. Can't go to
school.
(then...)
Didn't feel like being home.

Lewis nods, turns to face the wall. He studies the painting.

LEWIS
I never really paint stuff like
this but that traced outline she
made me do was so sad. I wanted to
repaint it with something
different. I wanted her to look
alive somehow, you know?
(then...)
I want her to be alive.

Pause. A distant ambulance siren wails. Lewis looks off
towards the sound.

LEWIS
She deserves that.

HALE
From the moment she was born, I
filmed almost everything she did.
Never once did she look as alive as
she does there on that wall.

Lewis turns back to see Hale.

HALE (CONT'D)
I suppose it's because I was always
hiding behind a camera pretending
to capture memories I never really
earned. I abandoned her out there.

LEWIS

No--

Hale smiles, sadly.

HALE (CONT'D)

Oh yes. I did. I abandoned her. And unfortunately for me, I can't rewind and edit my life with her the way you can fix your painting.

Pause.

HALE (CONT'D)

I can't find my way back to the outline and bring her back to life.

LEWIS

You didn't kill her either.

HALE

No? Then who did?

Lewis stares at Hale, wonders if he's really asking.

HALE

The blame has to fall somewhere. And I'd say I'm probably the best candidate for that. Wouldn't you?

The chance to rescue Hale presents itself.

HALE

I'm sure Sal told you lots about me. About the way she felt.

Hale waits.

HALE

No? Maybe that's just my wishful thinking.

Lewis shrugs, allowing the strong current to carry Hale off.

HALE

Okay. Well, then I'll let you get back to your painting.
(then...)

Bye.

Hale, drowning, backs away, turns and walks off, leaving Lewis to balance his very own guilty ton.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Hale steps through the front door.

HALE
Aris? Whose truck is that on our
driveway?

No response. Hale hears Aris laughing and talking with
someone in the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hale walks up to the edge of the carpet and immediately halts
upon seeing this:

Aris sits on the displaced couch with a lean, rugged
construction worker. She points out photographs in an album
open on her lap.

Hale steps into the room. The plastic on the floor crinkles.

Aris and the man both look up at him.

ARIS
Hale, hi. You remember Joel.

JOEL DAVIS, 45, watches Hale, almost startled.

ARIS
Can you believe his number is still
the same?

Hale's wide, quivering eyes lock on Joel's face.

ARIS
After all these years --

STOP. Everything pauses. Dotted lines dash vertically across
the scene and emit white light. We hear clicking. The entire
image shifts left. It is replaced by an entire frame of
white. This frame shifts left and is replaced by:

OLD VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

Slightly green tinted. We step through the front door into
the same house, years earlier, now brand new. Minor
construction still under way. A tool belt dangles from the
bannister.

We can make out the vibrant, multicolored petals of a wild
flower bouquet in the bottom of the frame.

HALE (O.C.)
Honey?

We hear the door close.

HALE (V.O.)
It's official, honey! I am now a
high school history teacher!

No response.

HALE (O.C.)
Honey?

We hear strange sounds from the living room. A pattern of creaking and a quiet moan. We move towards them.

We turn into the living room and freeze upon seeing this:

Young Aris is bent over the couch, naked from the waist down. Young Joel pounds on her from behind. His carpenter pants around his ankles.

ARIS
Yes. Oh. Don't stop.

Joel slams into her, harder and harder and --

ARIS
Yes! Stab me with him!

The camera trembles. The bouquet falls away to the floor.

Joel grabs her waist. He grunts and...climaxes. He looks up at the camera, at us. He freezes - caught - with no idea he just created a doomed life. Aris also looks up at us, unfettered by our presence.

ARIS
Hale? What are you doing here?

The camera holds on her. We're forced to watch.

ARIS (O.S.)
Hale?

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - RESUME

Hale's body tremors, filled with so many different emotions. He will muster them all into a thick sarcasm.

ARIS
(slightly unnerved)
I...thought you went to school
today.

Pause.

JOEL
...How you doing, Hale?

HALE
Joel, I'm hanging in there. You?

JOEL
You know, can't complain. I'm
really sorry about, well, you know.

HALE
Thanks.

Hale glares at Joel, making him more uncomfortable than he is already.

HALE
So I'm sure my wife filled you in
on everything.

JOEL
Yeah. Basically. Pretty weird, huh?

HALE
Yes Joel, it is. Though we've had
all these years to get used to it.
I can imagine how you must feel.

JOEL
Yeah, you know...weird.

HALE
So you said.

Pause.

HALE
Tell me, how's your business?

JOEL
Good. Can't complain.

Pause.

JOEL
How are those kitchen cabinets
holding up?

HALE
We replaced your cabinets a long
time ago. Started falling apart as
soon as you finished the work.

JOEL
...Really?

HALE
Pretty disappointing actually.

JOEL
Man, I am sorry. For everything,
you know.

HALE
Yes Joel. I do know. Can I walk you
to the door?

Joel blinks.

JOEL
Oh. Okay. Sure.

Joel stands.

JOEL
Good to see you, Aris. Thank you
for sharing all of this with me.

Aris nods, vaguely.

HALE
No Joel, *thank you*, for sharing
this with us.

CUT TO:

Hale closes the front door, walks back into the living room,
inappropriately cheerful.

HALE
What a nice surprise.

ARIS
Hale, I had to tell him. For
closure--

HALE
Shut up.

Sarcasm evaporates, leaving a residue of startling bluntness.

ARIS
What?

HALE
Just shut the fuck up, Aris. Now
and forever.

ARIS
Why are you speaking to me like
that? I did this for us.

Hale nods.

HALE

You invited the man that you ruined
our lives with over to our home and
you did it for us? Really? You
thought I'd appreciate that?

ARIS

I thought you would understand,
yes.

HALE

You are such a passive-aggressive,
self-serving bitch. It's baffling.

Aris is speechless and confused.

HALE

You thought I would understand? Of
course you did. Why not? I'm a god
damn sprig of grass to you, swaying
in the most subtle of your
complaints and snapping right back
after you trample me. It's crystal
fucking clear now, don't you see? I
wasted my life with you. And I
wasted Sal's life with you.

ARIS

This is all my fault, is that it?

HALE

(smiling)

No. God no, Aris. I blame myself. I
allowed this. This is my fault.

Aris pushes up from the couch, walks towards Hale.

ARIS

So say what you need to say. Get it
out. Whatever you think I deserve.
Then we'll be okay.

She wraps her arms around Hale's tense body.

ARIS

Please honey, you must forgive me.

HALE

I hate you, Aris.

ARIS

What?

HALE

I hate you.

She releases him, backs away.

HALE

I don't think I've ever told you anything more honest.

Aris falls back on the couch, dumbstruck.

HALE

I never should have told myself I would forget what you did or promise I would forgive you. I always wanted to love Sal as my own and I think I did but definitely not like I could have. I failed all of us. I won't do that anymore.

Pause.

ARIS

What are you going to do?

HALE

I'm going to divorce you, Aris. I want you to leave. I want you to leave today.

ARIS

But you can't do that.

Hale turns and calmly leaves the room.

HALE

I'll come out once you're gone.

ARIS

Hale?

HALE

Take anything you want. I'm cleaning the house out tomorrow.

ARIS

How can you do this to me?

Hale pauses at the garage door.

HALE

I suppose once you've done it to yourself for so long, it's easy to do to someone else.

He pushes in and quietly closes the door. Aris looks around, utterly baffled.

FADE TO:

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hale climbs into bed. He pulls the sheets over his body. He notices one remaining photograph of Sal on the bed-side table. He looks at it, sadly.

He rolls away and closes his eyes.

A moment. His eyes snap open. He smells something. He sniffs the sheets, the pillows, the comforter. He smells Aris.

He leaps out of bed, yanks the pillows from their cases, sheets from the mattress and the duvet from the comforter.

He opens a window and heaves everything onto the front lawn.

He climbs back into the barren bed, rolls over and closes his eyes again, this time, for the night.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT

Popsicle Pete barrels out of his bedroom, wearing only his briefs. His body is flushed and sweaty.

POPSICLE PETE
Wish I was dead, huh?

He storms down the hall.

POPSICLE PETE
You wish I was dead? You're gonna wish I was dead!

He kicks open Lewis's bedroom door.

POPSICLE PETE
Wake up, motherfucker! Put up your dukes!

Pete realizes the room is empty. His face fills with turbulent concern.

POPSICLE PETE
Fuck!

He punches the wall. It implodes. He cries out in anguish. He turns and trudges back to his bedroom, tears in his eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hale walks in with a huge pile of Aris's clothing. He drops it on the treadmill. He glances up at the wall of framed photographs. His eyes hook onto a few noticeable blemishes.

CUT TO:

Hale finds the photographs Aris is in and covers her head in each with a smiley face sticker.

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

The door flies open. Hale backs out, yanking the treadmill. The belt is covered in a pile of Aris's belongings.

HELEN (O.S.)
Just what do you think you're
doing?

Hale glances over his shoulder. Helen, Aris's mother is marching up the front walk way.

HALE
A little end of the year cleansing.
Excuse me.

Helen moves out of the way as Hale drags the treadmill down to the curb. Hale notices Phil, Aris's father, waiting in their car, across the street.

HALE
Hey Phil.

Hale waves. Phil quickly waves back, embarrassed and nervous his wife might notice.

HELEN
You won't get away with this!

Hale turns around to face Helen.

HELEN
I refuse to let you treat my child
like garbage.

HALE
Okay, but I'm only treating her
stuff like garbage. The stuff she
left behind. Take it if you like.

HELEN
What you're doing here is wrong!

Hale smiles.

HALE
I know it is.

He walks back to the house.

HELEN
You do?

Hale pauses, turns back.

HALE
Are you familiar with the saying,
"two wrongs don't make a right"?

HELEN
Of course I am.

HALE
Would you believe I discovered an
exception to the rule?

Hale does not wait for her response, he continues up into the house and closes the door. Helen remains on the front walk, thunderstruck.

EXT. CIVIC YARD - LATER

The ladder is gone. The entire wall is covered in paint. The piece of Sal is massive and complete -- She sits in profile, her legs are crossed. Her arms wrap around, pulling her legs up to her chin. A huge pair of wings rise from her back. Dripped paint defines the delicate feathers.

Beautiful and melancholy -- Sal.

Hale and Lewis stand on the ground, tiny, before it.

HALE
I knew it would be beautiful.

Lewis smiles up at his work, proud.

LEWIS
Stayed up all night to finish.

Hale looks at Lewis.

HALE
Thank you...for being so good to
her.

Lewis's expression immediately deflates. He remembers what he knows, what he should tell Hale.

LEWIS
I really should go home. Get some
sleep.

HALE
Will your dad hurt you again?

LEWIS
No more than he has already.

Pause.

HALE

If...you just need a place to rest,
you're welcome at my house. My wife
is gone. You can have Sal's room.

LEWIS

Your wife's gone? Where?

HALE

Away from me. Probably to live with
her parents. Where ever.

Lewis stares at Hale, slightly shocked.

HALE

We won't be married for much
longer.

LEWIS

What happened?

Pause. Hale looks off, wonders how to explain. It takes him a
while, then...

HALE

This isn't a very good metaphor
but, well, anyway, ever break a
vase and glue it back together
hoping no one wouldn't notice?

LEWIS

...No.

HALE

Do you see where I'm going?

LEWIS

...I guess.

HALE

My marriage was the broken vase and
Sal was the glue holding it
together.

Hale cringes at his pathetic explanation.

HALE

I should teach poetry.

LEWIS

You don't seem too upset.

HALE

I'm actually relieved, if you can
believe it. And maybe a little
shocked.

LEWIS
What about Mrs. Troutwine?

HALE
I bet she's devastated. Though it
really has less to do with me than
with what I allowed.
(then...)
She can never do worse than what
she did to me.

Pause.

LEWIS
What did she do to you?

Hale's never told this to anyone, let alone been asked. He
smiles kindly upon realizing...

HALE
You know, it just doesn't matter
anymore.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LATER

Hale's station wagon pulls up to the curb.

HALE
You sure you'll be okay?

LEWIS
It's cool. Thanks for the ride.

Hale glances up at the house, in through the front window.
The interior is dark.

HALE
...No problem.

Lewis climbs out, closes the door, and runs up to the house.
Hale watches, concerned.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Lewis pushes in, closes the door. He sees Popsicle Pete,
still in his briefs, lying on the couch. His pistol rests on
his chest. He stares at Lewis. Lewis moves to walk away.

POPSICLE PETE
Don't you move!

Lewis halts. Pete quickly sits up and grips his pistol.

POPSICLE PETE
You ratted me out, didn't you?

Lewis looks at Pete, smirks.

LEWIS
You really need to stop smoking
that shit. You're delusional.

Pete points the gun at Lewis.

POPSICLE PETE
Did you rat me out?

LEWIS
That's awesome. Now, you're
pointing a gun at me.

POPSICLE PETE
Are you a rat? I want to know!

LEWIS
No! Jesus Christ!

Pete leaps up, approaches Lewis, who is now getting nervous.

POPSICLE PETE
How do I know you didn't tell that
teacher everything? I told you not
to bring him around here no more
and what do you do?

LEWIS
He gave me a ride home! That's all!

POPSICLE PETE
How can I trust you? You want me
dead.

They are very close now, almost face to face. Lewis watches
the gun in Pete's shaky hand.

LEWIS
Dad no--

POPSICLE PETE
I don't think I can, Lewis. I just
don't. Nope. Not trustworthy.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - SAME

Hale is no longer in his car. He slowly creeps towards the
house, completely unsure of what he is doing.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - SAME

Pete nods uncontrollably.

POPSICLE PETE
I love you but, nope, don't trust
you. Want to, but I can't. Your
mother would. I just can't.

Pete raises the gun at Lewis.

LEWIS
Yes you can. You're just freaking
out. I didn't do anything --

Hale's heavy pounding on the window startles them both.

HALE (O.S.)
Stop!

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - SAME

Hale helplessly looks around, searching for a way to help --

BANG!! - a gunshot erupts from inside the house.

Hale winces.

CUT TO BLACK:

Silence. After a moment, we hear police sirens, as we...

FADE IN:

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - LATER

A Paramedic's white sheet slowly falls through the interior
air. It settles into the grooves and contours of Popsicle
Pete's dead body.

Through the window, we see Police Officers leading Hale and
Lewis to separate squad cars.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Hale sits alone in the barren space. He stares at his hands,
folded on the table before him.

The door whips open. Detective Ron Forsyth sticks his head
in. Hale slowly looks up.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Hale walks away from Forsyth, who remains at the front
entrance.

FORSYTH
I really am sorry about all this,
Mr. Troutwine.

Hale nods, slightly. Distant.

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

Hale plods up to his house. He reaches the front door and stops upon seeing a VHS cassette, waiting on the door mat.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hale pushes the VHS tape into the VCR. He backs away and sits down on the couch to watch.

Gena appears on the screen. She reads a letter to the camera:

GENA
Dear Mr. Troutwine, I finished my
film.

She looks up into the camera:

GENA
And in the nick of time too, huh?

She smiles and looks back at her letter.

GENA
Mr. Cummings won't give me extra credit. He doesn't see how it relates to class. But that's okay. He's a big idiot. Everyone thinks so. He also says he never heard from you. I'm sure it would have helped but I'm not mad. You've had a lot going on lately. Anyway, I hope you like it. I really tried to make it honest. Like you said.

She looks up again.

GENA
Bye.

The screen abruptly fills with black and white fuzz and loud static. Hale does not react.

CUT TO:

VHS VIDEO CAMERA FOOTAGE:

Hale stands at the podium on the auditorium stage. The students applaud and cheer from the rows of seats below. Then, the image freezes.

GENA (V.O.)
We all know and love Hale Troutwine
the teacher.

Gena's words will be so sincere, they will reach a point of absurd cheesiness.

CUT TO:

Wilber Porcini. He shoves his face into the camera.

WILBUR
Best damn teacher I ever had!

CUT TO:

Tanya Allen. She won't look at the camera.

TANYA
He never makes me feel stupid.

CUT TO:

Mr. Moghtader. We chase him down a school hallway.

MR. MOGHTADER
No. Leave me alone. I don't want to
be on camera.

GENA (O.C.)
Please.

Moghtader finally stops. He turns around to face the camera.

MR. MOGHTADER
What can I say that everyone
doesn't know already? The man's
gifted. Compared to him, we all
suck at teaching. They should clone
him and execute the rest of us. I'm
sure you kids would love that.

CUT TO:

Hale stands on stage with Principal Les Moore. They shake hands. Les Moore leaves. Hale remains, turning in a circle to take in the space.

GENA (V.O.)
But what about Hale Troutwine, the
man? Who is he before and after the
school bell rings?

CUT TO:

Wilbur Porcini. He backs away from the camera.

WILBUR
The hell if I know.

CUT TO:

Tanya Allen. She finally looks up, into the camera, worried.

TANYA
I'm not sure. Please don't tell. I
feel stupid.

CUT TO:

Mr. Moghtader. He stares into camera, blank.

MR. MOGHTADER
No clue whatsoever.

CUT TO:

Hale, hurrying down the hall, away from us. Les Moore steps
out of his office and addresses Hale. Hale bursts into an
awkward sprint. He shoves through the open doors --

The image freezes.

GENA (V.O.)
It's time to step out of his
classroom and into his world.

CUT TO:

Hale, sitting in the front pew with Aris, at Sal's funeral.

GENA (V.O.)
He is a father. Mourning the
monumental loss of his only
daughter.

We ZOOM in on the two pictures of Sal and the bronze urn.

CUT TO:

Hale, sitting in his car, slamming his car horn.

GENA (V.O.)
He is a husband. Struggling with
the manic ghost of a wife he no
longer knows.

We PAN left and ZOOM in through a window to see Aris, fast-walking on her treadmill.

CUT TO:

Hale, talking with Lewis, in front of the large wall piece of Sal.

GENA (V.O.)
He is a friend. Blessing those
people lucky enough to actually
meet with him outside of school.

We ZOOM in on Lewis.

CUT TO:

Hale, slowly creeping up the lawn, towards Lewis's house.

GENA (V.O.)
And he is a hero. Risking his very
own life for those he cares about.

We ZOOM in through the front window, where Popsicle Pete points his pistol at Lewis. Hale pounds on the window.

HALE
Stop!

Pete turns, aims the gun at the window, at Hale. Lewis tackles him. Hale searches for a way to help.

BANG!! -- a gun shot erupts from inside the house. Hale freezes, outside.

We PAN right and continue to ZOOM in on Hale's face. The image freezes.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Hale stares at his own face on the screen. His eyes reflect this strange, uncomfortable sensation, like hearing your voice on an answering machine for the first time.

GENA (V.O.)
The honest truth is, Hale Troutwine
is just a man. One more awe-
inspiring than most but a man
nonetheless. He is a human being
like the rest of us. He hurts as we
hurt and struggles as we struggle.
And although we understand his life
extends far beyond the classroom,
his students cannot wait to have
him back.

Hale smiles, a slight yet proud smile.

ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN WE...

CUT TO:

Jack Cummings, trying to teach Hale's students. Suddenly, they all leap from their seats and throw wads of paper and fruit at him.

CUT TO:

More black and white fuzz. Static. Hale stares at it.

The doorbell rings.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hale opens the door to reveal a bruised and battered Lewis. He still manages to smile, though his curled lips are timid.

HALE

Hi.

Pause.

LEWIS

I feel like I should tell you something.

HALE

I already know.

Lewis drops his gaze, embarrassed.

LEWIS

Sorry I didn't tell you sooner.

HALE

It's okay. I can understand why you didn't.

Lewis nods, grateful.

LEWIS

So what are you going to do now?

Pause.

HALE

I think...I'll go swimming.

As Hale welcomes Lewis into his home, we...

CUT TO BLACK:

We hear the sound of waves, crashing on a beach as we...

FADE IN:

EXT. MORRO BAY - BEACH - DAY

The winter sun gleams above. Very few people move about on the boardwalk and those that do, wear warm coats and scarfs.

Hale, wearing nothing but a bathing suit, walks down to the water's edge. He holds the bronze urn in his hands.

A wind blows in from the ocean. Goose flesh covers his entire body. His teeth jitter. He takes a deep breath and walks in.

When he can no longer walk, he swims. He paddles with one arm, holding the urn high above his head with the other.

He swims until the coast line could fit in his hand and then stops. He treads water for only a moment, as he takes one final look at Sal's bronze urn.

Then, he lowers it below the surface and simply lets it go.

-- UNDERWATER --

The bronze urn drops like a bullet, it's weight quickly carries it down into the dark depths and out of sight.

Nothing. Silence.

Then suddenly, from the darkness below, a twirling funnel of ash rises back up to the surface. Each tiny particle catches sunlight, reflecting it in all directions and colors.

As Hale begins to kick his legs for shore, the flickering specks come alive, whipping and whirling around him, carrying him home.

Soon, the sun will pass behind a cloud, the warm currents will take hold, and a man's beautiful farewell will dissipate.

FADE OUT.

THE END