

ART SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL

By Dan Clowes

ART SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL - POLISH 12/26/03

-EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

We see from OUR HERO'S POV as he is methodically PUMMELED by two eleven-year-old BULLIES. Adolescent fists PUNCH US IN THE FACE, a series of painful THUDS. We switch angles to reveal JEROME PLATZ, also eleven, who accepts the beating without resistance.

-INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Later that day, Jerome, slightly bruised, sits alone drawing in his math book. The BULLIES sit at a nearby table with some OTHER BULLIES. We see JEROME'S DRAWING: The two bullies are buried waist-deep in mud, screaming, while an idealized Jerome empties the contents of a gigantic toilet onto their heads. An OVERWEIGHT CLASSMATE looks over Jerome's shoulder and starts to giggle. Other kids gather around. One of the bullies notices all the commotion.

CUT TO:

-EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

We see Jerome being pounded, exactly as before. The camera moves up and away, drifting from the action. Over this, we hear:

JEROME (V.O.)

I am a genius. I am the greatest artist of the twentieth century.

-INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Jerome, dressed as PABLO PICASSO (with rubber bald-wig and artist's palette), speaks to the class.

JEROME

I pretty much invented Modern Art, and I do weird abstract paintings even though I could paint totally realistic if I wanted to.

Everyone in the class wears a costume (Lincoln, a hockey player, etc).

JEROME (CONT'D)

RM Also, even though I am super short and bald, I am able to have sex with any beautiful woman I want just because I'm so great.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Several students look back at the TEACHER, who tries to hide her discomfort with an INANE GRIN.

-INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

CLOSE-UP on a DRAWING, in progress, of a very CUTE GIRL. The camera TILTS to reveal a PERKY SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD, not quite as cute as the drawing, facing us from across the table. JEROME, also seventeen, finishes with a flourish and presents it to her. She effuses and then, to his disappointment, beckons for her BOYFRIEND.

BOYFRIEND

Pretty good.

CUTE GIRL

Someday if you get famous, this might be worth a lot of money!

Jerome watches them leave. EUGENE, his nerdish friend, joins him.

EUGENE

You're wasting your time, Jerome -- you need to set your sights on a more realistic girl.

JEROME

(plaintively watching the Cute Girl recede into the distance)

I just need to get out of here and become a famous artist and everything else will fall into place.

Just then, STOOB, a lanky jock, grabs Jerome from behind and wrestles him out of his chair with a playful half-nelson.

STOOB

Hey, Pencil-Prick -- thanks for helping me out with that poster for Erikson's class. He said I was a natural artist!

JEROME

A natural scam artist.

STOOB

RM You got that right, queer-bait!

Stoob grabs something from Jerome's back pocket.

STOOB (CONT'D)

Whaddayou, jackin' off in school now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME
(trying in vain to get it back)
It's a college brochure, you moron!

STOOB
"Strathmore Institute." What the hell
kind of college has a naked chick for a
teacher?

JEROME
She's an art model, you stupid ape.

Stoob drops Jerome. He hands back the brochure with a
conspiratorial grin.

STOOB
You're alright, Platz.

Stoob leaves to rejoin the in-crowd. Eugene takes the
brochure and looks at the cover: A SEMI-NUDE MODEL poses for
a serious-looking professor and his class.

EUGENE
I don't know, Jerome...are you sure about
this?

JEROME
I know what I'm doing.

EUGENE
It just seems a little too good to be
true, don't you think?

He opens the brochure to a big, impressive photo of the
picturesque STRATHMORE CAMPUS.

-EXT. ART SCHOOL CAMPUS - DAY

The brochure photo DISSOLVES to a static "live" image of the
campus. The camera starts to move, revealing this to be the
only presentable section of a GRAFFITI-COVERED URBAN
WASTELAND. We continue in the same direction toward the
STRATHMORE INSTITUTE DORM (on which a banner reads: "Welcome
Freshmen"), and on through a series of shots over which the
MAIN TITLES are superimposed:

A SOBBING MULTI-PIERCED FRESHMAN hugs a filthy stuffed Panda
as she waves goodbye to her parents.

A different set of parents meet their son's new roommate - a
HEAVILY-TATTOOED YOUNG MAN wearing leather cross-straps and
chaps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another kid drops his TRAVEL BAG, spilling an array of ELABORATE DRUG PARAPHERNALIA.

A super-square SUBURBAN DAD kisses his RIDICULOUSLY-FILTHY HOMELESS-LOOKING DAUGHTER on the cheek.

A crowd of LOCALS standing just outside the school gate heckles the parade of incoming freshmen.

And finally, the camera STOPS on our hero JEROME, as he waves to a departing Volvo and turns, with suitcase in hand, to face the dorm.

-INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Jerome is unpacking his suitcase in a tiny dorm room. We meet his roommates: VINCE, a would-be tough-guy, and MATTHEW, a WASPY, closet-case fashion major. VINCE barks into his cell-phone head-set, away from the other two.

VINCE

Yeah, it's based on the whole thing with the campus murderer, but...HELL no, it ain't no boring-ass documentary -- forget that shit!...Fuckin' A! Of COURSE there's gonna be TONS of action, are you kidding me?

MATTHEW

(eyes easel, etc.)
You're an art major?

JEROME

Yeah, drawing and painting. What are you guys?

MATTHEW

I'm fashion; he's film, I guess.

VINCE

(in background)
Are you for real!? You're shitting me, right?

MATTHEW

God, this is so depressing.

RM

JEROME

What's wrong?

MATTHEW

Nothing, I just really, really miss my girlfriend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VINCE

One hundred percent...You won't be sorry!
I love you too, Grandpa!
(Hangs up)
YES!

A pause. He notices Jerome and Matthew.

VINCE (CONT'D)

(Extends hand)
I'm Vince.

JEROME

Jerome.

VINCE

What was your name again?

MATTHEW

Matthew.

VINCE

God, I'm so fucking jazzed -- I get to
make my movie!!

(waits in vain for one of them
to ask about it)

Yeah, it's like this total balls-out epic
about all the crazy shit that's been
going down in the 'hood, y'know?

MATTHEW

(emotionless)
That's fantastic.

VINCE

You guys freshmen?

They nod.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Yeah, well you lucked out. You get to
benefit from the sage counsel of a
seasoned veteran.

MATTHEW

You're a sophomore?

RM

VINCE

Junior. You guys listen to me and you'll
do alright.

MATTHEW

Why do you still live in the dorm?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VINCE
A lot of juniors live in the dorm.
What's wrong with that?

MATTHEW
Nothing.

VINCE
Hey, it keeps me real.

-INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Vince and Jerome sit in the crowded cafeteria at dinner hour. Jerome looks around -- he spots a gawky NEBBISH holding court for three dotting ART-GIRLS.

VINCE
That guy's some hot-shit sculpture major.
It's official -- Jerome is in paradise.

JEROME
I've never seen so many beautiful girls.
Matthew joins Vince and Jerome with his tray.

VINCE
Pff! This is nothing; you should've seen last year's crop. Enrollment's way off since the murders. I heard a lot of freshmen chickened out.

JEROME
What murders?

VINCE
You're shittin' me, right?

MATTHEW
I heard about it. Somebody killed a guy right on campus, or whatever.

VINCE
Three people in the neighborhood since March.

(back to Jerome)
You gotta be fuckin' with me -- you really didn't know about the Strathmore Strangler before you came here? He killed a guy like ten days ago! What are you, from out-of-state?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME
No, the suburbs.

VINCE
Then you have no excuse! What about
Richard Natwick?

JEROME
Who's that?

VINCE
Jesus!

JEROME
I don't really follow the news.

VINCE
Okay, I'm gonna give you the story, but
you gotta pay attention...This is a huge
story! This is national news, man!

JEROME
Okay, okay. I'm listening.

VINCE
(takes a breath)
Okay, so right after the first murder
there's this guy named Richard Natwick,
who's like a second year painting major,
and he has a show at the student
center...

-INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

In a cramped gallery, we see RICHARD, a wild-eyed young man,
standing proudly among a group of paintings that say things
like "MURDER = GLORY" and "KILL A COP FOR FUN." Two fairly
obvious PLAINCLOTHES COPS enter the gallery and look around.

VINCE (V.O.)
The cops don't get that this guy is just
some artsy schmuck and they start asking
around...

-INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

We see POLICE VIDEO of a series of female students.

RM
FEMALE STUDENT #1
Yeah, it wouldn't shock me at all. He
really creeps me out.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEMALE STUDENT #2

He's always talking about blood and spiders and all that shit. I'm like, dude, whatever it is, get over it.

CUT TO:

FEMALE STUDENT #3

Yeah, I'm sure it's him. He just has a very negative quality. Like a rapist/child molester quality, you know?

-EXT. ART SCHOOL CAMPUS - DAY

Four cops grab Natwick as he emerges from the dorm.

RICHARD

Get your hands off me, you filthy --

They slam him face-first into the wall and cuff him.

VINCE (V.O.)

So then a couple of the professors start to freak out and before you know it, he's like a fuckin' martyr all of a sudden.

-EXT. POLICE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A LARGE GROUP OF STUDENTS chants "Art is not a crime!"

VINCE (V.O.)

And so of course it turns out he's completely innocent and the cops have to totally eat shit.

-EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY

A tan, suburban MOM AND DAD stand in front of a ranch house.

MOM NATWICK

(thick, slow Florida drawl)
He was still down here with us when that gal got stabbed.

DAD NATWICK

Strangled.

-INT. CAFETERIA-NIGHT

JEROME

So what happened to him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VINCE

He had his fifteen minutes of fame and then he got hurt real bad during some crazy-ass performance art thing.

-INT. STUDIO - DAY

On GRAINY VIDEO, we see Richard, tied to the wall, naked, with jumper cables attached to his nipples.

RICHARD

Okay, hit the juice!

-INT. CAFETERIA-NIGHT

VINCE

Anyway, you gotta read my script. It's all in there. It's totally huge!

Jerome spots a BEAUTIFUL GIRL sitting alone. Something about her is strangely familiar.

VINCE (CONT'D)

So what, you don't get the paper in the suburbs? This guy could be from the suburbs, for all they know. The pigs -- they don't have a fuckin' clue.

Jerome flips back through his sketchbook to a DRAWING of the NUDE MODEL from the STRATHMORE BROCHURE. He notices that this girl has a DISTINCTIVE NECKLACE, similar to one the model was wearing, but he can't quite make a positive ID. She leaves.

VINCE (CONT'D)

(glances at Jerome's sketchbook)

So you're a drawing major?

JEROME

Drawing and painting.

VINCE

That's awesome. I hear you guys get to see tons of naked vagina!

-INT. FIGURE DRAWING CLASS - DAY

Jerome waits anxiously for his first FIGURE DRAWING class to start. CLASSMATES file in. PROFESSOR SANDIFORD, 45-ish, enters, enthusiastically clapping his hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Let's go, Leslie -- time to work your magic! Five minute pose, people! Let's hit the floor running!

Jerome hones in on who he hopes is the model: A POUTY BLONDE wearing what looks like a bathrobe. From behind a screen, however, comes LESLIE, a craggy, rat-haired drug addict who doffs his filthy dashiki and takes the stage. Jerome, undaunted, begins to draw; a strong, confident line. We see a series of DRAWINGS of various poses, all slightly ridiculous but handled by Jerome with deft aplomb.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

I don't have any great wisdom to impart to you people other than these four magic words: DON'T HAVE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS! If you want to make money you should drop out right now and go to banking school, or to website school... anywhere but art school! Remember, only one out of a hundred of you will ever make a living as an artist!

Jerome unconsciously adopts a heroic painterly stance as he draws. We move in on his determined face.

JEROME (V.O.)

I'll be that one!

We dolly past Jerome to the faces of the other students.

SHILO (V.O.)

I'll be that one.

ARMY-JACKET (V.O.)

I'll be that one.

ENO (V.O.)

I'll be that one.

And so on, down the line. Their voice-overs overlap each other, building to a cacophonous din.

LESLIE

(ridiculous and unexpected nasal Brooklyn accent)

RIV Can I get a break, Sandy?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

That's a break, people! Take five!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Most of the students go out in the hall to smoke. Leslie wanders over to a preppy-ish girl and makes small talk, his "thing" hanging at eye-level. Jerome looks up from his drawing to see the Professor staring at him with great intrigue from the hallway, affirming that he is indeed The Chosen One. A scrawny, ghoulish wise-ass, BARDO, sidles over. He spots Jerome's copy of PICASSO: CREATOR AND DESTROYER.

BARDO
You into Picasso?

JEROME
Yeah, he's the greatest.

BARDO
He's vastly over-rated, but that book's a riot. I love the part where he says, "Nature must exist so that mankind may rape her."

JEROME
Yeah, I love that too.

We see that Jerome's love is perhaps a little more earnest than Bardo's. Bardo examines his fellow students as they reenter the room.

BARDO
Jesus, why are the people in these freshman classes exactly the same every year? There's the angry lesbian, the boring blowhard, the vegan holy-man...

Jerome giggles. In the background, another student, KISS-ASS, follows the Professor back into the room.

KISS-ASS
Professor, I just wanted to tell you that I looked up some of your paintings on the internet, and I thought they were really terrific.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
(sarcastic)
You get an A for the semester.

Behind them enters another student, a MIDDLE-AGED HOUSEWIFE.

BARDO
And there we have "Kiss-Ass," and "Mom."
You get at least one of each in every class.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BARDO (CONT'D)

Mom's youngest just left the nest and she's ready to "explore her creative side."

MOM

(in background, to Sandiford)
...I feel like I'm finally about to ripen, artistically.

JEROME

(somewhat amazed)
How do you know all this stuff?

BARDO

Because I'm a living cliché just like everybody else. I'm the guy who keeps dropping out and changing his major because he's afraid he really sucks at everything.

Jerome takes this in.

JEROME

So who am I?

BARDO

I'm not sure. I haven't figured you out yet.

Trailing behind the others, a distinctive YOUNG MAN re-enters the classroom. He looks more like a SUBURBAN JOCK than a Bohemian navel-gazer, and as such stands in sharp contrast to his uniformly non-conformist classmates.

BARDO (CONT'D)

Jesus, who's the weirdo?

-INT. DARK AUDITORIUM - DAY

Cut to PITCH BLACK, over which we hear the deadpan monotone of art history professor SOPHIE HOFFENKAMP.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

What is art?

Ka-chunk. A slide projector clicks. More blackness.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

RM: Is this art?

A slide of the MONA LISA fills the frame and is strained into focus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or this?

The VENUS OF WILLENDORF.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or this?

A TOOTHBRUSH.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
For centuries, this was art.

A CARAVAGGIO.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And later, this...

A ROTHKO.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And now, after thousands of years of
development, mankind has arrived at the
pinnacle of artistic achievement.

A DEFLATED BLUE WEATHER BALLOON sags over the edges of a
museum pedestal.

SOPHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Just because something is "new" and
"fresh," does that necessarily mean it
has any value?

The lights come on and we see Sophie, 50-ish and high-strung,
with a super-dry, ironic manner.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
The art world has always put a premium on
youth, on finding "the latest thing." In
fact, if any of you kids haven't signed
on with a major gallery by the end of
this semester, you should probably just
kill yourselves.

We see that most of the students find this mildly amusing,
except for Jerome, who, with absolute seriousness, copies her
words into his notebook like it's a homework assignment.

-INT. ANOTHER CLASSROOM - DAY

Jerome and Bardo mindlessly knead large wads of clay. In the
background, PROFESSOR OKAMURA, a Tommy Chong-look-alike,
talks one-on-one with Kiss-Ass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR OKAMURA

I d-o-n-t c-a-r-e if you come to class or not.

He writes "don't care" on the blackboard as he says the words. Meanwhile, Jerome has unconsciously made a vague "cock and balls" shape with his clay.

PROFESSOR OKAMURA (CONT'D)

(noticing this)

Hey, don't try to make anything -- just get a feel for it.

Jerome, embarrassed, crushes it into a lump.

BARDO

Okay, let me see if I got this right: You're the guy who never got laid in high school, so you decided to come here to bone your way through an endless line-up of art-skanks.

JEROME

Not exactly...I mean, I really do want to be an artist...a great artist...you know, if possible.

BARDO

Which will enable you to bone a line-up of art-skanks. So, why wait? Art school is like a pussy buffet.

JEROME

I don't want just any girl.

Bardo looks around for a micro-second. He spots a CUTE CLASSMATE with a Bette Page hair-do.

BARDO

Look, there she is, the beautiful beatnik art-chick of your dreams.

JEROME

Yeah, so?

BARDO

RM So go ask to borrow something. It's the easiest thing in the world.

Jerome hesitates; Bardo pushes him forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JEROME

Hi...Uh...could I...do you think I could borrow your pencil?

BEAT GIRL

Why? What for?

He can't think of a good reason.

JEROME

Oh, never m--

BEAT GIRL

Oh my God.

She grabs his arms and stares directly into his face.

BEAT GIRL (CONT'D)

You have the most beautiful eyes. You have to let me take a picture of your eyes.

Jerome looks back at Bardo. It's a go-project.

-INT. BEAT GIRL'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

The BEAT GIRL is curled up in a ball on the floor, laughing maniacally. Jerome reaches over to try to calm her down, but this elicits only an AGONIZED WAIL. As soon as he removes his hand from her shoulder the laughing resumes.

JEROME

How about pizza? Do you want to go get pizza?

She starts to SQUEAL LIKE A PIG.

-EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

The class sits outside drawing a BIG ROCK. Bardo speaks as though continuing his thought from the previous scene.

BARDO

The only trouble is, all those beatnik chicks are totally insane. What you really want to find is a nice, innocent suburban girl -- some freshman chick who hasn't been corrupted yet...

We pan past Jerome to reveal such a girl. She looks up from her drawing and smiles sweetly.

-INT. SUBURBAN GIRL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jerome and SUBURBAN GIRL are sitting on her canopy bed. Her room is decorated like a little girl's room ca. 1970. She is playing intently with her STUFFED ANIMALS, completely oblivious to Jerome.

SUBURBAN GIRL

(little kid voice)

Stay out of that cave, Koala Bear -- there's snakes and bats!

(gruff Koala bear voice)

Don't be silly, Pepper. I'm not afraid of a little snake!

JEROME

Or if you don't want to do that, maybe we could go see a movie?

She ignores him.

SUBURBAN GIRL

(as Koala Bear)

Well, look who's here -- it's Doctor and Mrs. Walrus, on their way to Pillow-town.

-INT. SHOP CLASS - DAY

Bardo, wearing goggles, saws through a piece of plywood.

BARDO

Come to think of it, they're all insane. You should just find yourself some nympho slut and have a one-night stand.

Again, the camera wastes no time in finding a specimen of this genus. She bites her lip seductively.

-INT. NYMPHO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The place is a filthy pig-sty, decorated with horrible paintings. Jerome sits next to her on the couch, leaning in to make his move. She stops him.

NYMPHO

Oh wait -- I just want to tell you that I definitely don't have AIDS. I've been tested like forty times, so I know it for a fact.

With that out of the way, she awaits the continuation of Jerome's advance. We hear a baby crying in the next room.

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CONTINUED:

NYPHO (CONT'D)
 (shouting right next to
 Jerome's ear)
 KEEP THE FUCKING KID QUIET, YOU MOTHER-
 FUCKING ASSHOLE!!
 (back, tenderly, to Jerome)
 It's just my old man.

-INT. DORM ROOM -NIGHT

Vince, Matthew and Jerome sit at their desks working. Jerome puts the finishing touches on his rock drawing. Matthew pins fabric to a dress-maker's dummy.

VINCE
 Are you serious? You never been laid
 before?

JEROME
 It just hasn't worked out. I have very
 high standards.

VINCE
 Man, I gotta take you out whore-busting
 some night. We gotta remedy this
 situation before it gets any worse!

MATTHEW
 (projecting)
 Maybe you have psychological issues that
 make it difficult for you to feel
 comfortable with your own sexuality.

As he speaks, he unconsciously jabs pins into the mannequin's crotch.

JEROME
 Could be, I guess.

VINCE
 You guys know what whore-busting is?

They don't bother to respond. Jerome stares out the window.

VINCE (CONT'D)
 That's when you leave the money on the
 dresser and you fuck the whore and go to
 sleep, and when you wake up in the
 morning not only is your money still
 there but she's left you a tip! In all
 the times I fucked a whore I never once
 paid for it!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jerome watches a girl walk past the dorm. Maybe he's hallucinating, but it looks once again like his DREAM GIRL from the brochure.

-INT. SCHOOL STUDIO - DAY

The students put up their drawings of the big rock at the end of a long row of student art-studio cubicles.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
(going through the motions)
Does anybody see anything they like?

ENO
(points)
That one has a certain particular tension that really seems to work.

KISS-ASS
It has a very palpable "rock-ness" to it.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
(sighs)
What I find interesting is that none of you deviated from the parameters of the assignment. My rules are purely arbitrary, people -- I expect you to come up with your own standards. God forbid you should try to guess what I'm looking for.

Jerome focuses on his OWN DRAWING which we see from his POV. The voices of the class fade down and give way to a triumphant Wagnerian chorus. The drawing remains in place as a NEW BACKGROUND dissolves in -- it is now in a GILT-EDGED FRAME, behind a RED VELVET ROPE. The music swells. We dolly right; the next painting is a MICHAELANGELO.

-INT. DARK AUDITORIUM - DAY

We hold on the Michaelangelo. The music is replaced by the restless murmur of the ART HISTORY CLASS. The slide projector clicks to a black screen and the lights go on.

SOPHIE
Hamlet, War and Peace, Beethoven's Ninth, Guernica...These are works which hold as much meaning, power and relevance today as they did in the time of their creation. What makes a work of art timeless? What qualities must it possess?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We see that Jerome is paying close attention. He writes down "Hamlet, War and Peace, etc" in his notebook.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
(spots girl with her hand up)
Yes?

GIRL #1
Everything on your list was done by a dead white male.

GIRL #2
Yeah, I noticed that, too.

SOPHIE
(deadpan)
Well, to be clear, they were not yet dead when they created those works.

GIRL #1
You're just playing into the hands of the patriarchy.

Jerome waits patiently for the lecture to continue.

ENO
Let's face it, the history of art is largely about the implementation of masculinity.

GIRL #1
Oh, that is such bullshit...

ENO
It's all part of some Darwinian imperative. Most artists become artists because, quite simply, they have no other way to attract a mate. Take a look -- I hardly think I'm the first to point out that a vast preponderance of artists are, shall we say, *physiologically deficient* in some way.

-INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

A co-ed BASKETBALL GAME is in progress. A BULL-DYKE drives to the hoop for an uncontested lay-up. KISS-ASS gets the ball and lazily tosses it to an obese teammate, HURST, who carries it at arm's length down the court.

COACH
DRIBBLE, Hurst!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HURST
(shaken)
Please don't yell.

We find Jerome warming the bench next to two cute art-school COEDS. They are doing their nails, oblivious to the game.

COED#1
Are you going to the Marvin Bushmiller talk tonight?

COED#2
Yeah, are you?

COED#1
Yeah, but we better get there early.

COED#2
It's weird how he's so famous and everything. I used to see him around Strathmore all the time when I was a freshman.

COED#1
I remember going to his show at Broadway Bob's, and then the next thing I know he's on the cover of ARTFORUM.

COED#2
Yeah, well, that's how it works.

COACH
(blowing his whistle)
PLATZ! Get in there!

Jerome is given the ball. He tries to dribble, but it is immediately stolen by an AGGRESSIVE TATTOOED GUY, who passes the ball to a VERY EFFEMINATE TEAMMATE. It glances off his head and he bursts immediately into tears. A CHAOTIC SHOVING MATCH follows.

COACH (CONT'D)
I gotta go back to teaching retards.

-INT. AUDITORIUM - EVENING

MARVIN BUSHMILLER, 25, is on stage seated next to DAVID ZIPKIN, a sycophantic James Lipton-ish professor. In the audience we see Jerome, sitting next to his classmate, ARMY-JACKET.

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CONTINUED:

QUESTIONER #1

Where do you see art headed in the 21st century?

PROFESSOR ZIPKIN

Now there's an easy one!
(mild laughter from the audience)

MARVIN BUSHMILLER

Art who? (more laughter) No really, that's such a stupid question. Why don't you ask me something relevant? Ask me how much money I have in the bank...

QUESTIONER #2

Did you learn anything at Strathmore?
(mild laughter builds to a smattering of applause)

MARVIN BUSHMILLER

Yes, I learned many things: I learned that the faculty is made up of old failures who teach only because they need the health insurance. Present company excluded, of course.

PROFESSOR ZIPKIN

I was about to say...
(embarrassed laughter)

MARVIN BUSHMILLER

No, David here was too busy trolling for freshman boys to worry about his health.
(More pained laughter)

QUESTIONER #4

What advice would you give to a --

MARVIN BUSHMILLER

Look, there's really only one question any of you want to ask: You want to know what it would take to turn you into me. Now listen closely, because I'm going to give you the answer: In order to be a great artist you simply have to be a great artist. There's nothing to learn, so you're all wasting your time. Go home.

Army-Jacket raises his hand.

ARMY-JACKET

Why are you such an asshole?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The audience murmurs their disapproval. Jerome leans as far away from A-J as possible.

MARVIN BUSHMILLER

That's a great question!
(relieved laughter from the audience)

No, really. It really is.
I am an asshole because it is my true nature. Maybe it's everybody's true nature. Every single one of you looks like a fucking asshole to me, but who knows? The difference between you and me is that I have gained the freedom to express my true nature. And what could be more beautiful than truth and freedom?

The audience applauds enthusiastically, Jerome clapping loudest of all.

-INT. FIGURE DRAWING CLASS -DAY

Professor Sandiford bounds into the room.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

It looks like our model is running a little late, so in the meantime, I want everyone to draw his or her neighbor.

Jerome's neighbor is JONAH, the square-looking jock guy. They exchange nods and begin to draw each other without a word. Bardo enters. He perches behind Jerome and watches as he deftly captures Jonah (as a blank-faced bumpkin) in a few quick strokes.

BARDO

Jesus, you're a cruel bastard.
(hands Jerome a cup of take-out coffee)
Here. I stopped off at Broadway Bob's.

Bardo wanders over to check out Jonah's picture. From behind Jonah's back, he feigns a look of horror. He wanders back to Jerome.

BARDO (CONT'D)

(To Jerome)
RM They'll let anybody in this school.

JEROME

What is Broadway Bob's, anyway? I thought it was like a gallery, or something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARDO

It's a very famous shithole run by an obnoxious windbag who takes credit for launching the career of every half-talented monkey who ever took a class at Strathmore. Avoid it at all costs unless, like me, you enjoy coffee that tastes like day-old piss.

Jerome gags. Suddenly we hear the clacking of heels and an out-of-breath female voice.

AUDREY

Sorry I'm late!

Into the room bursts AUDREY, the girl from the cafeteria! His DREAM GIRL from the brochure! She stomps across the floor and disappears behind the screen.

BARDO

(out of the side of his mouth)
Looks like this is our lucky day.

She emerges in a terry-cloth bathrobe and takes the stage.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Let's start with a five-minute pose.

She gracefully sheds the robe and assumes a standing pose. She is wearing nothing but the DISTINCTIVE NECKLACE, which Jerome sees clearly for the first time. He is absolutely OVERWHELMED. He begins to draw very carefully, angrily erasing the first few imperfect lines. We see the drawing develop. Suddenly, she breaks the pose.

AUDREY

I'm sorry Sandy, I'm just dying for a cigarette.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

That's a break, people!

She puts on her robe and skips out into the hall. Jerome watches her leave. Bardo pretends to reach for Jerome's drawing.

BARDO

RM I'm going to the john --can I borrow this?

Jerome swats him away. Exit Bardo. Jerome continues to work on the drawing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Audrey reenters, and wanders toward Jerome's easel. HIS HEART IS POUNDING OUT OF CONTROL as she carefully scrutinizes his work.

AUDREY

You really captured my otherness.

He smiles, not exactly sure whether this is good or bad.

-EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

Jerome and Bardo walk briskly through the HORRIBLE NEIGHBORHOOD beyond the gates of the campus. Scary locals taunt them.

SCARY LOCAL #1

Hey faggots!

SCARY LOCAL #2

What a cute couple!

They ignore them as best they can. Jerome is still thinking about that model.

JEROME

So you've seen her before? Who is she?

BARDO

Don't get your hopes up. That's prime real estate, my friend.

JEROME

Is she a student, or just a model? Do you--

BARDO

(interrupts)

Look, forget about her for one minute -- you're about to have a life-changing experience!

SCARY LOCAL #3

Why don't you paint me a pretty picture, fag-boy?

-EXT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT -EVENING

Bardo presses a rusty buzzer. After a long wait, there is a burst of static but no response.

BARDO

Hey Jimmy, it's Bardo. I brought someone over to meet you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another crackly pause.

BARDO (CONT'D)
I've got a bottle of Slivovitz for you.
(Reads label)
It's 80 proof, made in Poland, imported
by the--

BZZZZT.

-INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

JIMMY, middle-aged, opens the door with a disarming cheerfulness. He looks friendly and avuncular, like a dishevelled newscaster.

JIMMY
Boys, welcome! I'm afraid you caught me
in the middle of one of my shows.

We enter the living room. Like Jimmy, it all looks pleasant enough on the surface, but as we get closer we see just how shabby and drab and run-down everything is. The theme song to *The Facts of Life* drones from a TV in the back room.

BARDO
This is Jerome.

JIMMY
A pleasure.

Jimmy clenches Jerome's hand and makes meaningful eye-contact with him for an uncomfortable moment. They sit.

BARDO
Isn't this a great place? Jimmy's got
rent control.

Jerome smiles and nods politely. Jimmy selects a large, filthy paper cup from the wastebasket and casually fills it to the top with Slivovitz.

BARDO (CONT'D)
(with evil smirk)
Jerome here wants to be a great artist,
Jimmy.

RM JIMMY
How terrific.

Jerome makes a self-deprecating, "aw shucks" gesture.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Tell me, Jerome, are you exceptionally skilled as a cock-sucker?

Jerome laughs and averts eye-contact. There is an uncomfortable pause.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

That wasn't a rhetorical question, Jerome. Are you a "great artist" when it comes to fellatio?

JEROME

No, I guess not.

JIMMY

That's no good.

He takes two big gulps.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

So who do you like?

JEROME

Hmm?

JIMMY

"Hmm?" Who is your favorite artist, Jerome?

JEROME

(takes his time trying to come up with a safe answer)
Maybe Picasso.

JIMMY

Oh, I see. Very good. Our old friend Pick-asshole: The nasty little dwarf who went his whole life without a single original thought. I presume you're joking?

He takes another hearty slug.

BARDO

Jimmy's a Strathmore grad.

RM

JIMMY

(with mock pride)
And just look at me now!

He looks around at his squalid furnishings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Just think, Jerome, one day this could all be yours! You're going places, young man, I can feel it!

Jerome laughs politely, but Jimmy isn't done yet.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

But you really need to take some lessons in COCK-SUCKING and ASS-LICKING! Otherwise, you might find yourself rotting away in some SHITHOLE, postponing suicide for the slim chance that you might possibly one day see some GLORIOUS PLAGUE or PESTILENCE bring HORRIBLE SUFFERING to your HATEFUL SPECIES!

(to Jerome)

WHAT ARE YOU SMILING ABOUT??!

Jerome can't seem to wipe the silly smirk off his face.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

LAUGH AWAY, LAUGHING BOY!! I WILL STOMP YOUR GUTS TILL THEY SHOOT OUT YOUR ASS!! I WILL BURY YOU ALIVE AND SHIT ON YOUR GRAVE!!

He pours the last ounce from the bottle and slugs it down. He glances back at the TV in the other room, on which we see a blurry Mindy Cohn.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Okay boys, show's over. I have to get back to my masturbation.

He shoos them out.

-EXT. BAD NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

They walk home along the same street.

BARDO

Isn't Jimmy great?

JEROME

Definitely.

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Professor Sandiford stands in front of a wall of SELF-PORTRAITS. Jerome's is by far the most impressive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Starting next week, I will be selecting the most effective piece from each session and placing it in the hall gallery with the best work from some of the other classes.

VEGAN

Which gallery?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

On this floor, down at the end of the hall.

ARMY-JACKET

(incredulous)

By the men's toilet?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(somewhat exasperated)

Yes.

(turns to the self-portraits)

All right, let's get going on these. Who wants to start?

Jerome straightens up. A FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL points to a crude abstract doodle.

FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL

I like Flower's drawing.

SHILO

Yeah, me too.

ENO

It seems like she's trying to do something more than just draw herself. It's really more about the process of drawing.

Jerome looks at Bardo -- are they serious?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Is there anything else up here that commands your attention?

Again, Jerome straightens. No response.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Anything more on Flower's piece?

Jerome SIGHS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)
Yes, Jerome?

JEROME
Nothing.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
There's no such thing as nothing in this class. Tell us what you think.

Jerome holds his tongue.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)
We're waiting, Jerome.

JEROME
I don't know...I mean, it's just a lame Cy Twombly imitation and it looks like she did it in about two minutes.

The class is shocked. Flower bursts into tears.

FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL
That is such bullshit! Just because her drawing isn't perfect, you act like it's automatically bad!

SHILO
Yeah, at least it has humanity!

VEGAN
Yeah, totally! Jerome's drawing looks like it was done by a machine! Flower's is full of playfulness and...and yeah, like, humanity.

JEROME
(defensively coopting Jimmy's shtick)
What's so great about humanity? Humans are a bunch of jerks! I hope some plague wipes out the whole species!

The class erupts; Jerome is berated from all sides. Bardo finds the whole thing highly amusing.

RM PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
Okay, people, that's enough. I am required to give you these kinds of assignments, but they are CERTAINLY nothing to CRY about, Flower.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Now I want everybody to kiss and make up because we will soon be moving on to far more important stuff.

-INT. FIGURE DRAWING CLASS - MOMENTS LATER

Jerome, angry and regretful, is packing up his stuff. JONAH, the overly-normal jock, approaches.

JONAH

Man, I agree with you one hundred percent.

JEROME

Huh?

JONAH

I think the entire human race should be wiped off the face of the earth.

JEROME

Oh, I didn't really...I mean, I was just -
- you know...

JONAH

Hey, you don't have to apologize. I'm totally with you.

-INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Jerome and Bardo round a corner to inspect the HALL GALLERY, which is really nothing more than a dingy, water-stained BULLETIN BOARD.

BARDO

Jesus, pathetic.

Two BAKED SOPHOMORES exit the adjacent men's room making fart noises and giggling. Jerome looks at the empty bulletin board with nothing less than REVERENCE AND AWE. SHILO approaches them.

SHILO

Hey, you guys have to come to my opening tonight.

She gives each of them a FLYER.

RM

SHILO (CONT'D)

(To Jerome)

You were really an asshole in class today.

She exits to chase after the Baked Sophomores.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARDO

Don't you want to see Shilo's "opening"?

He makes a vagina shape with his fingers.

JEROME

How did she ever get a gallery show?

BARDO

It's totally meaningless. Any idiot can sign up for one of those student galleries.

They each look at the flyer, a grainy Xerox with several of Shilo's BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOS. One of them catches Jerome's eye --it looks like Audrey! Zoom in.

BARDO (CONT'D)

Oh man, I didn't notice that! We gotta go!

Bardo points to the line at the bottom of the flyer that reads "FREE REFRESHMENTS."

-INT. STUDENT GALLERY - NIGHT

It's a GROUP SHOW with no cohesive theme (a few sculptures, some small collages, and Shilo's photos). All ten or so attendees SURROUND A CENTRAL FOOD/BEER TABLE with their backs to the art. Jonah is there, keeping to himself.

BARDO

(Mouth full, scanning the table for more food)

Great work, Shilo.

Only Jerome looks at the art, specifically the photo of Audrey, a blurry profile. Shilo wanders over.

JEROME

Do you know this girl?

SHILO

We had her as a model, remember?

JEROME

RM Do you know who she is? Do you know her name?

SHILO

God, you're such a prick. Can't you say anything nice about my pictures?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly, a VOICE comes from behind them.

AUDREY

Hi.

Jerome whips around. Audrey steps up to the portrait.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Oh wow, that came out really good.

She's clearly just being nice, but the gesture is somehow very sweet. She recognizes Jerome.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Oh, hi.

Bardo approaches. Audrey looks at another picture, then turns back to Jerome.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I'm Audrey, by the way.

BARDO

(cutting in)

Is that your real name, or are you just obsessed with Audrey Hepburn like every other art school chick?

AUDREY

Actually, I was named after an old cartoon.

She fishes a LITTLE AUDREY necklace from inside her shirt. Jerome gets a close look at the famous necklace for the first time.

BARDO

Oh wow, an ironic pop-culture reference.

Jerome glares at him. Audrey starts to edge away. Just then, the BAKED SOPHOMORES enter with a case of beer. Bardo makes a beeline for the table.

JEROME

Do you know that guy?

AUDREY

RM No, I thought he was your friend.

JEROME

No way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

Oh, you're the guy from Sandy's class! I have such a bad memory for faces. I'm sorry.

JEROME

It's okay. I'm Jerome.

AUDREY

I was just thinking about you today. I saw a photo of Marie-Therese Walter in an old exhibition catalog that looked just like the way you drew me.

Jerome's eyes glaze over in a lovesick stupor.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

She's one of the women who modelled for Picasso.

JEROME

(snaps out of it)
I know who she is. I know just the picture you're talking about.

AUDREY

(impressed)
You do?

Jerome notices that Bardo is headed back toward them, holding two beers.

JEROME

(gallantly)
Uh-oh, let's get out of here!

He guides her through the crowd out into the hall, losing Bardo, who we see in the background being cornered by Shilo.

AUDREY

You didn't have to do that.

JEROME

I couldn't bear to watch you get cornered by that creep again.

RM

AUDREY

I have to get going, anyway. I'm kind of making the rounds tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JEROME
(disappointed)
Oh really? Well, maybe some time we
could --

AUDREY
I have to go to a Donald Baumgarten show.

JEROME
Oh, I've heard of him. He's an old pop
art guy, right? Yeah, he's really
good...he's great.

AUDREY
He's absolutely awful, but I can't get
out of it.
(a pause, then suddenly)
Do you want to go with me?

Jerome is absolutely dumbstruck.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
C'mon, please? I hate to take the subway
by myself, especially with that weirdo
out there strangling everybody.

-INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - NIGHT

Jerome and Audrey try to talk, but can't hear each other over
the noise of the train. Jerome looks at their reflection in
the window. What a cute couple! Romantic music overtakes the
subway noise. He moves his hand SLIGHTLY CLOSER to hers.

-INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

They enter the gallery. Audrey is radiant and graceful as
she makes her way through the crowd. Everyone seems to know
her. Jerome hovers a step behind, soaking it all in. We
wind up in the back of the gallery where a WEATHERBEATEN GREY-
HAired, PONY-TAILED ARTISTE sits among others of his ilk.

AUDREY
Hi.

The pony-tailed man turns around. His craggy face betrays a
life of hardship, alcoholism, etc.

RM DONALD BAUMGARTEN
Audrey! I was afraid you weren't coming!

He hugs her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

So how's it going?

DONALD BAUMGARTEN

I think I might have sold two of the
small ones...the ones you hate.

AUDREY

I like them just fine, you know
that...just not as much as the big, blue
ones.

DONALD BAUMGARTEN

I know...

AUDREY

Daddy, this is Jerome. He's a big fan of
yours, so I brought him here to meet you.
Jerome, this is Donald Baumgarten.

Jerome's jaw practically hits the floor. This is her father?
He gives Audrey a "why didn't you tell me?" look.

JEROME

Wow, it's a real honor to meet you, sir.

DONALD BAUMGARTEN

My pleasure, son.

AUDREY

I hate to do this, Daddy, but we're going
to have to leave in a minute.

DONALD BAUMGARTEN

But you just got here.

AUDREY

I know, but Jerome has to meet someone at
another party and we're already late.

Jerome is a bit startled by this but nods along.

DONALD BAUMGARTEN

Well, thank you for coming, sugar...will
I see you Sunday?

AUDREY

RM I'll call you. Congratulations!

-INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

They stand, waiting for the train back to Strathmore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

Well, I did my good deed for the week.

JEROME

I can't believe you grew up with a dad like that...I mean, he's a famous artist!

AUDREY

He's hardly a famous artist. Really, it's just embarrassing. He should have given up thirty years ago.

(a pause)

God, I'm starving.

-INT. BROADWAY BOB'S COFFEE HOUSE - LATER

Our couple sits, eating dessert in this legendary art-world hang-out. A PERFORMANCE ARTIST is doing his thing for a small audience in the background. Jerome spots a distinguished-looking GREY-HAIRED MAN drawing in his sketchbook while a beautiful young woman looks on.

JEROME

Is that who I think it is?

AUDREY

He's always here. That table is practically reserved for Post-minimalists.

Jerome looks around, taking it all in.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

This is where everybody gets their first big show. It's like the launching pad from Strathmore to the real world.

JEROME

(with false nonchalance)

So how do they pick who gets a show?

AUDREY

Oh, you know...they go to the surveys and all that...

BROADWAY BOB appears at their table.

RM

BROADWAY BOB

What's the matter? Don't you love me anymore? When's the last time you came to see me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Audrey stands up and kisses him, as one would a favorite uncle.

AUDREY
Jerome, this is Broadway Bob.

Bob half-heartedly extends his hand without ever once glancing in Jerome's direction.

BROADWAY BOB
Yeah, how ya doin'?

AUDREY
Bob knows everybody.

BROADWAY BOB
Every artist you can think of had their first show in this place -- Bushmiller, Naugle, Bilbo -- you name it. And the minute they get famous they got no time for me!

He spots something across the room.

BROADWAY BOB (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Hey! I told you to stop hassling my customers!

A PLAIN-CLOTHES DETECTIVE and a UNIFORMED OFFICER are talking to a table of art students.

BROADWAY BOB (CONT'D)
Fucking brown-shirts!
(To Audrey, as he stomps off)
Good to see you, sweetheart. Say hi to your father.

They watch from across the room as he berates the cops.

JEROME
So, what kind of art do you do?

AUDREY
Me? I'm not an artist.
(watches the cops leave)
God, don't you just hate the pigs?

RM
From behind Jerome, a sinewy, Patti-Smithish 24-year-old, CANDACE, appears. She seems to be well-acquainted with Audrey.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CANDACE
(pointing at Jerome)
Who's this?

AUDREY
(not too happy to see her)
Jerome. Jerome, this is Candace.

Jerome extends his hand. Candace stares at it.

CANDACE
Audrey and I used to bump cunts.

Jerome is a little thrown.

CANDACE (CONT'D)
(with flat insincerity)
Just kidding. Ha ha.
(she stares at Audrey)
But little Audrey doesn't want to play
with me anymore, does she?
(shifting back to Jerome)
What do you think of these paintings?

JEROME
They're fine...I mean they're not the
most -- you know...

AUDREY
They're Candace's paintings.

JEROME
Oh, I didn't mean -- I mean, I think
they're really good, I just --

CANDACE
Where DO you find them, Audrey? Anyway,
thanks to this little exhibit it looks
like I'm getting a spring show at the
Haberman.

JEROME
Wow, that's really great --
congratulations!

CANDACE
Golly gosh!!

RM
She pinches his cheek. Broadway Bob beckons for her.

BROADWAY BOB
You! Get over here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CANDACE

Later, kids.

She vanishes into Bob's office. Jerome notices for the first time the subject of the painting across from them.

JEROME

Is that you?

Audrey nods.

JEROME (CONT'D)

It doesn't really capture you.

AUDREY

Nope.

JEROME

So why are you a model? Just for the money?

AUDREY

Oh yeah, I make a fortune.

JEROME

Are you paying your way through school?

AUDREY

That's what I used to say, but I dropped out a long time ago.

She thinks about it.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I guess I haven't figured out what else to do...I can't seem to tear myself away from this place...

Jerome focuses with great intensity on her every word.

JEROME

You know, nobody ever gives the model any credit, but in a way, they're just as important as the artist. It's really much more of a collaboration than people think.

She smiles, charmed by his apparent sincerity.

AUDREY

So, what do you want to do, Jerome?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Jerome tries his best to look dignified and confident. This is his big moment to sell himself.

JEROME

I want to be the greatest artist of the twenty-first century.

AUDREY

(giggles)

I just meant what do you want to do now? I should probably get home.

JEROME

(embarrassed)

Oh, jeez, I'm sorry, I...

AUDREY

No, I think that's great. I think you really could be a great artist. You have the right kind of energy.

He looks her directly in the eye. Did she really say what he thinks she said?

-INT. DORM ROOM -LATER

A buoyant Jerome enters. Vince, wearing only his underpants, types furiously at the computer.

JEROME

You won't believe what I --

VINCE

(rudely interrupting)

Did you hear the news?

JEROME

No, but guess what I --

VINCE

The strangler got another one -- some poor schmuck on his way to the subway.

(continues clacking away)

I got some major rewriting to do.

JEROME

Jesus, really? I was on the subway tonight.

VINCE

You're lucky to be alive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

So guess what I was doing.

VINCE

Smoking pole?

JEROME

No, I was out on a date with the most beautiful girl in the whole school.

VINCE

Well alright...Can I smell your finger?

Jerome rummages through his stuff until he finds the old brochure.

JEROME

Look.

He points to her photo.

VINCE

(stops typing)

No shit. Nice.

JEROME

She thinks I'm a great artist.

VINCE

You fuckin' snake! So what the fuck are you doin' here, man? Did you already pop her?

JEROME

No...I mean, we just met. I --

VINCE

Man, if she was my girlfriend I'd be poundin' that shit day and night!

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Prof. Sandiford paces around the room as he talks, pausing to give an unwanted back-rub or two.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(speaking with carnival-barker gravity)

NOVEMBER TWENTY-SEVENTH! Keep this date in your drug-addled little brains!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

This will be the day of THE POST-THANKSGIVING ASSESSMENT, where each of you will put up all your work and a bunch of us professors will sneak in behind your backs and give you a grade.

He moves toward a BIG WALL CALENDAR. There is a RED STAR in the middle of December.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

HOWEVER, it is but a mere prelude, a dress rehearsal, for THIS day.

His finger THUMPS into the red star.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

DECEMBER THIRTEENTH. The FINAL SURVEY. Here, you will receive your one and only official grade for the class...provided, of course, you haven't all been murdered by then!

No one laughs at his little joke.

ARMY-JACKET

I heard that the final survey is where a lot of big-shot gallery owners and stuff show up to troll for new talent.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(bemused)

Well, I wouldn't worry about that too much.

ARMY-JACKET

All I'm saying is this could be a big break for somebody.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

This is not Schwab's drug store, young man, and you are definitely not Lana Turner.

ARMY-JACKET

(taking it personally)

What does that mean?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

RM It means that you children are many, many years away from such worries.

(shifts gears)

Eno! Why haven't you been doing the assignments?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ENO

Frankly, I find them constricting, and largely irrelevant. My work has nothing to do with form or light or color, but with questioning the fundamental nature of aesthetic experience.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

I'll buy that. Jonah? How about you?

Jerome and Bardo perk up.

JONAH

I'll...uh...I'll bring something in next time...sorry.

ARMY-JACKET

I also heard that the student with the best grade in the final survey gets to have a one-man show at Broadway Bob's.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

That has been known to happen, yes.

ARMY-JACKET

Professor Okamura told me that no one from your class has ever gotten the best grade.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(irked)

Well, Larry tends to care about these things a lot more than I do...

ARMY-JACKET

I also heard they're cutting faculty next semester and all the profs are shitting bricks over getting a student to win the Broadway Bob show.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(exasperated)

You kids are far too preoccupied with all this nonsense -- art is not a contest, people!

FLOWER

RM Isn't it true that Marvin Bushmiller got his big break when he got the best grade in the survey?

Professor Sandiford sighs.

-INT. BROADWAY BOB'S COFFEE HOUSE - EVENING

Jerome sits alone drinking coffee. He studies a photograph on the wall of Marvin Bushmiller shaking hands with Broadway Bob. AUDREY ENTERS. Jerome waves and joins her at the counter. She pours herself a cup of coffee.

AUDREY

I just came in to get a coffee.
 (She glances at her watch)
 I have to model for Professor Bogle's
 class at six-thirty.

JEROME

Can I walk with you?

AUDREY

God, you're so polite.

-EXT. CAMPUS - EVENING

They walk through the campus. The sun is just starting to set, giving the sky an OTHERWORLDLY GOLDEN HUE.

JEROME

So what are you doing this weekend?

AUDREY

I don't know...I never know until the
 last minute. How about you?

JEROME

Well, I was thinking maybe we --

VINCE (O.S.)

(shouting)

JEROME! WAIT UP YOU STUPID FAGGOT!

Vince runs up behind them with his video camera. Jerome is mortified. Any connection to a creep like Vince could kill his chances.

JEROME

This is -- uh -- my roommate...

He gives Audrey a "can you believe I'm stuck living with this
 guy?" look.

VINCE

(sweating and out-of-breath)

This is perfect!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

Look, we have to go.

VINCE

This will only take a second. I need an insert shot of a couple kissing, and this light is awesomely perfect.

JEROME

(pushing him away)

Look, we don't have time right now, okay. I'm sure you can find plenty --

AUDREY

Oh c'mon, I don't mind.

VINCE

Excellent! Follow me.

He leads them to a picturesque corner and positions them. Jerome is not quite ready for this.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Okay, action! Go for it!

They KISS. It's the GREATEST MOMENT OF JEROME'S LIFE, whether his dream girl is merely acting or not.

VINCE (CONT'D)

(Lowers the camera)

Awesome work, people!

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jerome and Bardo mount their drawings to the wall. Bardo nudges Jerome and nods toward the door. Jonah enters, carrying a LARGE CANVAS.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

This is your first real week of art school. From now on there are no official assignments. Last week I asked you to bring in what you thought was your best work, old or new. This will be the starting point from which some of you will, I hope, grow into artists.

He walks along the wall, pausing briefly at Army-Jacket's painting, which features a headline that reads "We live in a police state."

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Ain't that the truth?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He continues on down the line, toward Jerome's painting --a small color PORTRAIT OF AUDREY, based on the original figure drawing.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Well, what have we here?

Jerome smiles. At last! But Sandiford skips right past and goes to the next piece, a ridiculous mess of WIRES, CIRCUITS, AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

(after a two-second appraisal)

It'll never fly, Wilbur!

A mousey Asian girl slumps. Jerome watches in disbelief as Sandy continues on.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Whose is this?

Bardo elbows Jerome.

JONAH

Oh, that's mine.

We see his painting --it's a big, bold, very simple picture of a SPORTS CAR. The technique is seemingly crude, as though painted by a child, but it has a certain compelling purity. Sandy studies it for a very long time.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Where have you been all my life?

Jonah chuckles uncomfortably.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

What does everyone think?

FLOWER

It's so...I mean, it's like he figured out how to unlearn all the typical art-school bullshit...it's really great!

ENO

It has the visceral singularity of outsider art, though the conscious rejection of spatial dynamics could only come from an intimacy with the semiotics of picture-making.

Jerome, slowly boiling, finally explodes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JEROME

Are you kidding me? This is the absolute
-- I mean, how can you possibly...

The entire class glares at him.

JEROME (CONT'D)

(bitterly; it's not worth
pursuing)

Forget it...

Professor Sandiford moves along to a goofy "drawing" done with what looks like Silly String.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

This is interesting...

ENO

It's not quite finished, but I thought
the class might like to see the various
stages of my process.

The dopey artwork seems totally incongruous with Eno's high-brow persona. Jonah looks back and catches Jerome's steely glare. They eye each other like two gunfighters across the saloon.

-INT. DARK AUDITORIUM - DAY

Sophie lectures from her standard perch beside the podium.

SOPHIE

"Outsider Art" is a term applied by critics to any kind of art that has been created outside the confines of the established art world.

A slide of a Henry Darger drawing appears on the screen.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Outsider artists are often half-wits, psychopaths or con-men, and their work ranges from the truly inspired and passionate...

She clicks to the next slide -- a John Wayne Gacy clown painting.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

to the pathetic and ridiculous.

-MONTAGE

The film stock switches to GRAINY VIDEO, and we see the following scenes of CAMPUS LIFE:

STUDENTS PLAYING FRISBEE.

AN OLD PROFESSOR FEEDING THE PIGEONS.

A COUPLE (JEROME AND AUDREY) KISSING.

Over this we hear a sinister monologue:

STRANGLER (V.O.)

Look at you -- so content with your happy little lives! But none of you know the taste of true happiness...the happiness that only death can bring!

We see a DARK FIGURE from the back as he surveys the campus.

STRANGLER (CONT'D)

I am hell on earth personified!

He pulls a small rope taut with his gloved hands, holding it awkwardly to the side so that it can be seen on camera from behind.

-EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

The VIDEO continues: The camera moves with annoying self-consciousness, as loud rap music blares. LESLIE, the craggy male art-model, playing a tough-but-honest POLICE DETECTIVE, brutally interrogates a low-life street-informant played by HURST (the chubby kid from gym class).

LESLIE

(trying, and failing miserably,
to sound "tough")

Listen, dick-sucker -- if I find out you know something, I'm gonna turn your face into ground mother-fucking round -- understand?

HURST

(trying/failing to sound
"street")

RM I-I swear I don't know nothing about no murders, man!

LESLIE

If another corpse turns up on my beat, I will hold you personally responsible!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He slaps him hard across the face. Hurst MOANS. We hold on his uncomfortable grimace far too long before the screen goes black.

-INT. SCHOOL EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

We have been watching this on a small monitor in a shabby editing room. Present are VINCE, his bearded assistant JASON, and Jason's bored girlfriend, DONNA. Vince turns on the lights. Donna gets up to leave.

DONNA
(to Jason)
How much longer are you gonna be?

JASON
It's up to the boss.

He nods at Vince, who scowls back at him. Donna kisses Jason and heads for the door.

VINCE
Hey, hey, hey! You can't just leave!
What do you think of the movie so far?

DONNA
(completely blank-faced)
It's fine.

VINCE
(glaring)
Yeah, thanks.

She leaves. Vince stews for a minute.

JASON
She doesn't really get this kinda shit,
y'know? I wouldn't worry about it.

VINCE
I gotta cram some kind of love story into
this thing. Skags make up fifty percent
of the audience!

-INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Jerome, on his way to class, runs into Kiss-ass.

KISS-ASS
(excited)
They're putting up the work in the hall
gallery for the first time!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jerome goes to investigate. There is a small crowd gathered at the end of the hall. Jerome stops dead in his tracks. There, front and center, is JONAH'S BIG PAINTING.

-MONTAGE

It's HALLOWEEN. The dorm is festooned with artsy Jack-o'-lanterns We see various students working on their costumes:

A GIRL in a complicated PAPER MACHE BODY-SUIT is accidentally SET ON FIRE.

A LANTERN-JAWED STUD tries on an elaborate FAIRY PRINCESS OUTFIT.

An earnest-looking fellow SPRAY-PAINTS HIS FACE silver which causes a terrible coughing fit; etc.

During this, we hear:

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (V.O.)

Of all our holidays, none is so important to the art student as Halloween. It is on this occasion that the many divergent impulses found in all young artists - creativity, self-expression, and especially vanity and narcissism -- join together to forge a seamless fusion in which, for this one night, the artist himself becomes a living work of art.

-INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

We Join Sandiford, dressed as Caesar, as he enters the HALLOWEEN PARTY. There are lots of goofy costumes. Many Frida Kahlos. We move our way through the crowd until we find JEROME, dressed as a clichéd "artist," with Dali moustache, beret, and striped shirt. He approaches VINCE, whose "costume" is an old fedora, and a familiar-looking BLONDE BOMBSHELL.

JEROME

Nice costume.

VINCE

What are you supposed to be? An old-time fag?

RM

BLONDE

Aren't you going to introduce me to your charming friend?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VINCE
 (with a smirk)
 Yeah Jerome, I'd like to you to meet my
 new friend, uh...

BLONDE
 Serena.

VINCE
 Serena.

She extends her hand, palm-down, for Jerome to kiss. Just as
 he is about to comply, he realizes that it's MATTHEW in drag.

JEROME
 Oh, Jesus!

He drops the hand in disgust.

MATTHEW
 (with a haughty flip of the
 hair)
 Well I never! Excuse me, gentlemen!

He sashays off. AUDREY, dressed as a 1920s-style gun moll,
 enters. Jerome ditches Vince and goes to join her.

JEROME
 Hi

AUDREY
 Hi.

CANDACE approaches, dressed exactly as before.

CANDACE
 (to Audrey)
 Remember when we came as slave and
 master? Those were the days.

AUDREY
 No they weren't.

JEROME
 (to Audrey)
 Do you want something to drink? There's
 some weird orange punch over there.

AUDREY
 Oh, how sweet. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

At the punch bowl, Jerome spots BARDO, dressed as a suburbanite, complete with Supercuts hairdo and golf pants. PROFESSOR SANDIFORD joins them.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

So, how are you fellows liking art school so far?

BARDO

(deadpan)

Really great.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(to Jerome)

Sometimes you don't seem like you're too happy with the way the class is going, Jerome.

JEROME

No...it's okay...it's just --

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Look, I know how it is. Anyway, I just want you to know that I'm around if you ever want to talk. You can come by the studio and I'll put on a pot of tea and we can just shoot the shit if you want...you too, Bardo.

BARDO

(again a wiseass)

Thank you, sir.

Sandiford moves on. Bardo nods toward Audrey.

BARDO (CONT'D)

You better get back there, Platz; you're about to be cock-blocked by Joe College.

Jerome looks back to see that Audrey is talking to JONAH, who is dressed as an old-fashioned black-shirt-white-pinstripes-style gangster.

JEROME

What the fuck...

He hustles back with the drinks. As he approaches we hear:

AUDREY

(To Jonah)

...How did you ever do that painting? It's like you've never seen another painting in your life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Jerome hands Audrey her drink.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Oh, thanks...

She stands next to Jonah, posing for Jerome.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Isn't it weird? Look how perfectly we match.

She turns away and resumes talking to Jonah. Candace moves next to Jerome.

CANDACE

Better luck next time, stud.

She pats him condescendingly on the back as Audrey and Jonah walk off.

-INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Jerome is lying on his bed. He stares at the ceiling, deep in thought. Open across his midriff is a book entitled MODERN OUTSIDER ART.

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Another class critique. Next to Jonah's latest (another big painting in the style of his earlier "Sports Car," this time of a VIKING SHIP) Jerome puts up a LARGE CANVAS of his own, a painting of an OLD REFRIGERATOR. This one is more consciously childlike than his previous work; it looks like one of Jonah's, though with far more polish and finesse.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(amused)

It looks like a duel! Comments?

FLOWER

Jonah's seems totally original and authentic and Jerome's seems just lame.

VEGAN

Yeah, it's pathetic.

(looks back at Jerome)

No offense.

RM

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KISS-ASS

Yeah, it's like Jonah is tapping into this total childhood innocence...like he's got a whole way of seeing that's completely outside the box...and Jerome is totally in the box, y'know?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Okay, okay, let's give Jerome a break. I mean, what he's trying to do is essentially impossible. You can't hope to sing in your own unique voice using someone else's vocal cords.

We see only the back of Jerome's head as he faces the class. Every muscle fiber throbs with suppressed anger.

-EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP on a WOMAN's face as she walks past the campus gate. Suddenly, she looks into the camera and her blank expression turns to one of EXTREME HORROR. She is being STRANGLED. We see the whole scene from the attacker's perspective, all very messy and chaotic. Once the victim's body falls limp, she is dragged by her hair and left to die next to an overflowing trash bin. We HOLD on this image.

DISSOLVE TO:

-INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

A GRAINY BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH on the cover of a TABLOID NEWSPAPER, which Vince waves around for emphasis while telling his roommates about the crime.

VINCE

Again, he picks a totally random victim. This chick was like a cashier, or something.

MATTHEW

How do they know it's the same guy?

VINCE

Oh come on, it's obvious -- there's a million clues. For one thing--

RM

MATTHEW

(doesn't want to get into it)
That's okay, I believe you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VINCE

Look at her -- she was only thirty-one years old.

He holds up the paper and directs them to her photo with a somber glance.

VINCE (CONT'D)

I mean, it's like a goddamn miracle... I'm here bustin' my nuts to come up with a female character and this guy drops one right in my fuckin' lap!

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

We see Audrey, alone, dressing behind the curtain in Sandiford's classroom (the main FIGURE-DRAWING room). Just outside the door, two ART-DORKS are talking.

ART-DORK #1 (O.S.)

Who'd you have for a model today? We got the Yeti again.

ART-DORK #2 (O.S.)

Audrey.

ART-DORK #1 (O.S.)

I never thought I'd say this, but I'm getting kinda sick of Audrey...I mean, I've seen her naked like 500 times.

ART-DORK #2 (O.S.)

I know, she's been around forever.

ART-DORK #1 (O.S.)

I'd still fuck her though.

In the corner of the room is an ever-growing pile of discarded art. We recognize several failed pieces from Sandiford's class, including Jerome's failed JONAH IMITATION.

-INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Audrey, disgusted, stomps past the dorks.

ART-DORK #2

Good job today, Audrey!

RM
She can't even muster a dirty look. As she heads for the stairs, she notices a new painting in the HALL GALLERY. It's Jonah's VIKING SHIP. She studies it with inscrutable dispassion.

-INT. DORM HALLWAY - DAY

Jerome is in the hallway, dialing a grimy COMMUNAL PAY PHONE. Towel-clad art-girls wander behind him. After several rings, Audrey answers.

JEROME

Hi, it's Jerome Platz.

We see Audrey in close-up talking on a cell phone.

AUDREY

Well, hello Jerome Platz.

JEROME

(summoning every ounce of nerve)

I was just calling to...I...uh...I have to go home for Thanksgiving, and I was just wondering if you had any...if you possibly wanted to come with me. I know it's not for over a week, but I thought I'd ask you...

AUDREY

(pause)

God, that's really sweet...

JEROME

I mean, you don't have to or anything, but I just thought I'd...

AUDREY

Yeah, unfortunately, I was just about to go up north to visit my Grandmother, but...God, that's really nice of you...

(a moment of silence)

Anyway, I guess I'll see you at the Post-Thanksgiving Assessment. I definitely want to check that out.

Jerome says goodbye and hangs up. Oh well. A wild-eyed AMPHETAMINE-ADDICT runs out of his dorm room and grabs Jerome by the sleeve. He's someone we've seen fidgeting around in the background, but he's not in Sandiford's class.

AMPHETAMINE ADDICT

RM Hey Jerome, I need your input on something.

Jerome follows him into his room. It looks like the aftermath of a tornado; everything has been smashed, overturned, strewn about.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

Do your roommates know about this?

AMPHETAMINE ADDICT

Not yet...

(pause)

So what do you think? Do you think I should hand this in?

-INT. BROADWAY BOB'S COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

We rejoin Audrey in a continuation of the previous scene. Her cell phone sits closed on the counter as she eats a piece of cake. CANDACE stands next to her waiting for take-out.

CANDACE

Don't you think that's a little creepy -- to invite you home for Thanksgiving?

AUDREY

I guess it's a little weird, maybe...

CANDACE

You must emit some kind of hormone that attracts desperate, clingy losers.

AUDREY

I don't know...there's something about him...He always makes me feel like I'm on a date in Junior High, or something.

CANDACE

As I recall, you spent Junior High hanging out with a bunch of coked-out 35-year-old art dealers. I don't remember too many "dates."

AUDREY

Yeah, exactly.

CANDACE

Listen to me, Audrey: That guy is a total waste of time. Really, it just couldn't be more obvious. What's wrong with you that you can't see that?

AUDREY

RM You're right, I'm sure....

CANDACE

I thought you were all mad for that what's-his-name...Jonah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

I am, I think...

CANDACE

You don't need another boyfriend, you need about fifteen years of therapy!

AUDREY

This is going to be different -- I'm really going to make it work this time.

CANDACE

If you're going to play out this twisted scenario, at least pick someone who has a chance.

AUDREY

You're right...I will...

CANDACE

And when this one doesn't work out, you can always come crawling back to me.

Candace surprises her with an unwanted kiss and quickly exits. Clearly, Audrey doesn't relish this prospect.

-EXT. PROF'S APT. - NIGHT

Jerome stands outside a NONDESCRIPT STUCCO BUILDING. Sandiford answers the door while talking on a cordless phone. He waves Jerome into a drab living room.

-INT. PROF'S APT. - NIGHT

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

(on phone)

That's really bad news, Lorenzo, because I feel like I've just turned a corner...no, of course I understand completely, but isn't there...

His voice trails off as he wanders into another room. Jerome sits at a small table and looks around. A few moments later, MRS. SANDIFORD, a worn-down, asexual, faculty wife, enters carrying an artsy-fartsy tea service.

MRS. SANDIFORD

RM I'm Helen Sandiford. Sandy will be right with you.

She serves him with the barely-polite distaste of one who has played host for way too many ungrateful students over the years.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

Oh wow, thank you, Mrs. Sandiford. I really appreciate --

She leaves, ignoring him. Jerome looks around. There are several UNIMPRESSIVE PAINTINGS on one wall. Jerome gets up to have a look. Professor Sandiford enters.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Those are mine, yes.

JEROME

They're really good...really great...

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Yes, I rather like them...

(then, bitterly)

Unfortunately, our opinion is not in the majority. I guess they're a little too difficult for some people.

They sit at the table and awkwardly drink their tea. Jerome's eyes dart around the room, focussing on various sad details.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

So, Jerome, what are you not getting from my class?

JEROME

Oh, it's not that at all...it's just, I feel like...I don't know, I'm not exactly sure what I should be doing...I feel like I need to establish my own style, or to --

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Oh that is such bullshit, Jerome. You kids are far too young to get all hung up on something like finding a "style." That's the last thing you should be thinking about.

JEROME

Well what about Jonah? He seems to have sort of a style.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

RM Oh, his work has such a marvelous quality, don't you think?

Sandiford focuses on Jerome. He makes direct, and rather uncomfortable, eye-contact.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

You're very uptight, Jerome. You need to loosen up. At your age, it's essential that you learn to experiment with all different kinds of art and philosophies and lifestyles.

JEROME

You think that's what I should try to do? Experiment?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Absolutely.

Sandy places his hand on top of Jerome's.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

I hope I've been of some help to you, Jerome. I am here to facilitate your experimentation in any way I can, be it in or out of the classroom.

Jerome's look is one of NEWLY-INSPIRED DETERMINATION. He is absolutely oblivious to the Professor's insinuations.

JEROME

Thank you, Professor.

-MONTAGE

We see various students at work on their projects while bad rock music plays:

A POT-BELLIED FELLOW WITH A LONG, FLOWING MANE wears a gold thong while posing in a full-length mirror for a very inept life-size self-portrait.

MOM, in her Martha Stewart-ish kitchen, puts the final touches on the WORST PAINTING EVER.

An INTENSE, BEARDED WEIRDO holds a camera at arms' length to take a photo of his own TESTICLES.

PROFESSOR ZIPKIN stands in the AMPHETAMINE ADDICT's trashed dorm room and nods approvingly at the carnage.

A PAINT-COVERED NAKED MAN throws himself at a gigantic canvas tacked to a wall, then writhes on the ground in extreme pain.

Amidst these, we see Jerome in various stages of work: Doing research in the library, working in his studio, etc.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

At the end of this sequence, a CRANKY GUARD kicks Jerome and a few others out of the studio building.

CRANKY GUARD
Go on, get out! Go home! Get out of my building!

Jerome struggles to keep the artwork from spilling out of his OVER-STUFFED PORTFOLIO as the guard slams the door behind him.

-INT. TRAIN CAR -NIGHT

Jerome sits quietly with his portfolio. The manic energy of the prior scene is replaced by an introspective stillness. Out of the crowd he spots a familiar face: It's EUGENE, looking very Ivy League-ish. Next to him sits an attractive sorority girl.

EUGENE
Jesus, Jerome, is that you?

JEROME
Eugene?

EUGENE
What's up, man?
(off Jerome's look)
Oh...Jerome, this is Sarah. We're going to Mom's for Thanksgiving.

JEROME
(stunned by Eugene's rapid climb from dorkhood)
Oh yeah, me too...I mean, I'm going to my house...you know...

EUGENE
You look really...interesting.

JEROME
Yeah, you too. What's -- uh -- what's up with you?

EUGENE
Nothing much...How about you? Still doing art and stuff?

JEROME
Yeah, you know...

They stare at each other, a million miles apart.

-INT. THE PLATZ FAMILY DINING ROOM -NIGHT

Jerome's family is seated around the Thanksgiving table. His PARENTS are 50-ish New-Yorker-subscriber democrat suburbanites: decent folks who don't quite understand their son. Also present: His 16-year-old sister CYNTHIA, a doddering AUNT, and CLIFFY, a chubby, 30-ish sports-fan cousin. A football game is on TV in the background and Cliffy fades in and out of the conversation depending on the score.

CYNTHIA

So I've been thinking maybe I'll go on tour with Dominick's band this summer. They're going to play some shows in the Midwest and they need somebody to sell tee-shirts and stuff.

DAD PLATZ

Who is Dominick?

CYNTHIA

He's just this guy who's friends with Stacy's big brother.

MOM PLATZ

Forget about it.

CYNTHIA

God, you are so unfair! Jerome gets to go to art school and I can't even go on a summer trip!

There is a break in the game. Cliffy's attention shifts to Jerome, with whom he has a mild fascination.

CLIFFY

Hey Jerome, so you gonna get a job doin' paintings somewhere once you're done with school?

JEROME

No, that's not really how it works.

CYNTHIA

Who in their right mind would buy one of your stupid paintings?

RM

MOM PLATZ

Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

God, why do you love Jerome so much more than me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFY

You know what you gotta do, Jerome? You gotta figure out who's the top guy in your business and you gotta somehow hook up with him. 'Cause you know, Jerome, it's not what you do so much as who you know. That's how it is in my business, anyway...and hey, it's all business, right?

JEROME

(enduring Cliffy's meaningless chatter)

Yep.

(then somewhat nervously, as though about to make an important announcement)

Yeah, in fact, I've--

CLIFFY

(his attention diverted back to the game)

FUMBLE! What?!? What are you fucking crazy? That was out of bounds! Oh my God, you have got to be kidding me...

(then, calmly, back to Jerome)

No, I'm serious Jerome, if you can make the right connections, you got half the battle won right there. Anyway, that's my advice.

JEROME

Yeah well, I guess I've already made a few connections. My girlfriend's dad is kind of a famous artist...

Cynthia's fork stops an inch away from her open mouth.

CYNTHIA

Your what?

MOM PLATZ

(to Dad)

Hugh, could you help me get the pies out of the oven?

They head for the kitchen. The second the door swings closed we hear muffled cheers.

CYNTHIA

We thought for sure you were a homo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DODDERING AUNT

(slowly, somewhat slurred)

My friend's granddaughter paints little pictures on the shoes...oh, what do they call them? She paints pictures of little animals and flowers and what-not on the shoes and I believe the other children pay her...Sneakers! Is that what they call them? Anyhow, that's just an idea of something you could do, Jeremy.

-INT. JEROME'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - NIGHT

Jerome sits on a fold-out sofa looking through the art from his portfolio. The room is filled with nothing but EXPENSIVE EXERCISE EQUIPMENT. His Mom enters and sits next to him.

MOM PLATZ

I hope you're not too upset about your room. It was your father's idea.

JEROME

No. It's okay.

MOM PLATZ

We're just so excited about your little friend. So when are we going to get a chance to meet her? Do you think she'd like to come to Nana's with us during Christmas vacation?

JEROME

I don't know, I'll have to see...

MOM PLATZ

Do you have a picture of her? I'm sorry, I'm just so --

Jerome looks down at the pile of artwork in front of him. He digs out his VERY FIRST FIGURE DRAWING OF AUDREY, leaving it partially covered so that only the head sticks out. Mom anxiously pulls the drawing from the pile revealing Audrey's naked torso.

MOM PLATZ (CONT'D)

(a little thrown)

She's lovely Jerome...

(with gnawing doubt)

She is a real person, isn't she?

-INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

A sign reads "POST-THANKSGIVING ASSESSMENT." Bleary-eyed students carry their work into what passes for an exhibition hall. On one side of a two-sided bulletin board, Jerome puts up FIVE PAINTINGS FROM HIS PORTFOLIO, each in a different style.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

Okay, everybody -- out! Move it! We need peace and quiet to fully absorb the splendor of these timeless masterworks.

-EXT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

In the courtyard outside the gym, the students of the freshman class of the Fine Arts department mill around. A few IDIOTS play hackey-sack. We can see through the window into the gym a small group of professors moving slowly from one bulletin board to the next. Jerome walks away from Bardo to a depressing CONCESSION STAND. He deliberates.

JEROME

Pack of Kools.

-EXT. GYMNASIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Jerome sits alone, puffing on his FIRST-EVER CIGARETTE. He blows an ostentatious smoke cloud. Bardo looks over and shakes his head. KISS-ASS comes bounding out of the gym.

KISS-ASS

He says they're all done. We can go in now.

-INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

Jerome heads toward his display. His grade is tacked to the board, hidden by the overhang of a drooping canvas. He slowly lifts the canvas: IT'S AN A! Below that is tacked an envelope marked "comments." He grabs the envelope and, swelled with pride, marches through the hall. He spots Flower's display and pauses to check out her grade. Implausibly, she too has an A. He looks around -- more As. Everyone seems to have an A. A guy whose entire display is a wadded-up paper towel has an A. He spots Jonah's display. He too has an A, but his is LARGER, and, unlike any of the others, LETTERED IN RED INK.

-INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Jerome sits reading over his comment sheet. The horrible words echo in his head: "You're playing it too safe!" "No edge at all" "Nothing to say" "Needs to be more provocative -- shake things up!" A voice breaks through the reverberating din of words.

AUDREY

Hey...heads up, Platz.

He looks up to see Audrey smiling at him. She sits down, and begins to devour a large jelly donut.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

So are you going to Marvin Bushmiller's birthday party?

JEROME

No...I didn't even know about it...

AUDREY

Oh, it might be an invite-only thing. It's probably all done through his gallery, so maybe they...

(trying to cover her gaffe)

I'm sure it'll be a total drag anyway.

JEROME

When is it?

AUDREY

Oh, I don't even know. I think it --
(she spots Jonah)

Hey! Over here!

Jonah joins them.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

How did you do?

JONAH

I can't believe it. I got an A.

JEROME

Everybody got an A. It's a total scam to trick everybody into feeling good about themselves.

JONAH

I never got better than a C my whole life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME
(disdainfully)
That's hard to believe.

JONAH
Yeah, I guess I didn't go to class too much...too busy getting into trouble, y'know?

AUDREY
(intrigued)
Really?

JEROME
(trying to look equally tough)
Yeah, me too.

JONAH
Huh, no kidding. You grow up in the city?

JEROME
Not right in the city, but I came here all the time...all the fuckin' time...practically lived here...

JONAH
Yeah, then you know how it is...Yeah, I used to get into some pretty hard-core shit, I guess...

AUDREY
We've all made our share of mistakes, I'm sure...

JONAH
Yeah, no shit...no fucking shit...
(turns to Jerome)
So how about it, dude? You got any deep, dark secrets we should know about?

-INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

The BEAT GIRL (Jerome's hysterical date) sits cross-legged on a stool, holding a script.

RM BEAT GIRL
(Reading from the script; not a bad actress)
Murder?! Don't worry so much, man -- nobody's going to murder me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VINCE (O.S.)
 (flat and slow)
 I don't want nothing to happen to my best
 'ho. The streets ain't safe no more.
 Not since --

BEAT GIRL
 Fuck you! You're just trying to keep me
 down. And I'm not your whore any more!
 (tries it again, with sarcastic
 emphasis)
 I mean, "I'm not your whore no more."

VINCE (O.S.)
 Oh God, bitch -- you know I love you so
 fuckin' much.

BEAT GIRL
 Love? That ain't nothin' but a four-
 letter word for sex...
 (she lowers her script)
 This is total shit, you know that?

We now see Vince and the rest of the room.

VINCE
 No, I don't know that.

BEAT GIRL
 Oh come on -- all this gangsta mutha-
 fucka bullshit. What, are you going to
 play an ironically-happy pop song when I
 get strangled?

Vince looks at his shoes.

BEAT GIRL (CONT'D)
 Why do you want to regurgitate this
 warmed-over Hollywood crap for the
 zillionth time? Don't you have anything
 original to say?

VINCE
 I think I do.

BEAT GIRL
 Then you need to say it! You have to
 learn to follow your instincts! Be
 daring! Show some backbone!
 (points at script)
 This is completely worthless.

Her words hit Vince right in the gut.

-INT. TORSIELLO GALLERY - DAY

Jerome enters. MARVIN BUSHMILLER'S work and name are on prominent display. Jerome looks around, practically gape-jawed at the impressive fixtures and luxurious furnishings. Every square inch conveys that this is truly the highest stratum of the art world. An angry-looking HIPSTER looks up from his desk.

GALLERY HIPSTER

Can I help you?

JEROME

Actually, yes, I...

(he pauses for a second,
changing his angle mid-
sentence.)

I heard that Mr. Bushmiller is having a party this week and I was wondering if there was any possible way I could go.

GALLERY HIPSTER

I really don't think so.

JEROME

Look, I was going to tell you some elaborate lie, but I decided to be honest with you. I'm totally desperate. Isn't there anything you can do? I promise I'm not crazy. I won't even talk to Mr. Bushmiller at all. Please? I'll do anything...

GALLERY HIPSTER

No, that's okay...

Jerome drops to his knees, pleading.

JEROME

Please? Please? Please?

-INT. MARVIN BUSHMILLER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

We see Jerome, wearing an EMBARRASSING RED UNIFORM, tending bar. An impatient middle-aged ART DEALER takes a sip from his drink and hands it back.

RM

ART DEALER

Did you put any Grenadine in this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jerome adds Grenadine. The man wanders off, and for the first time Jerome has a chance to examine the setting: A BEAUTIFUL, MODERN PENTHOUSE APARTMENT filled with FASHION MAVENS and ART-WORLD HEAVY-HITTERS. It's as though he's stepped directly into his most exaggerated fantasy. Despite the uniform, he is thrilled to be there. HE COVETS THIS LIFE SO INTENSELY HE CAN BARELY STAND IT.

BIG GUY
Stoli and tonic.

Jerome makes it, and looks up to face the next person in line: It's AUDREY. They recognize each other at precisely the same instant. Jerome has a line prepared for the occasion.

JEROME
I heard Marvin needed some help, so I figured why not?

Audrey seems embarrassed to see him and we immediately see why: Jonah is her DATE FOR THE EVENING. Poor Jerome is crushed.

AUDREY
I...uh...I guess I'll have a Tom Collins.

Jerome glances at his open bar guide, and makes it without another word.

JONAH
Just a Bud is fine.

JEROME
(without looking up)
We have Spaten and Hoegarden.

JONAH
The first one.

There is an intense non-verbal exchange between the three of them. Audrey sips her drink and turns away, unable to sustain eye-contact with the defeated Jerome.

AUDREY
(with sympathy and regret)
You look so busy. We'd better leave you
RM alone for awhile.

They edge away.

NEXT IN LINE
Give me a Nuclear Holocaust.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JEROME
What's in that?

NEXT IN LINE
(impatient)
I have no idea.

Jerome consults his book. He glances up to see Audrey, far across the room, introducing Jonah to her Dad, who warmly shakes his hand. Other party-goers are drawn to the radiant couple and soon they have a small crowd encircling them. Jerome scans past the bottles in the bar cabinet. His eyes land on a SAMBUCA label.

-EXT. JIMMY'S APT - NIGHT

He stands at Jimmy's door, pressing the buzzer.

JEROME
(barking drunkenly)
It's Jerome...I'm Bardo's friend...I want to get shit-faced with you!

A brief pause, then BZZZZT.

-INT. JIMMY'S APT - NIGHT

They sit, each with his own bottle. Jimmy uses a filthy cup, as is his way. He looks at the bottle.

JIMMY
I drink Slivovitz, not Sambuca.

He drinks it anyway.

JEROME
You were right about art. It's all about the cock-sucking.

JIMMY
It's not what you do, but who you blow.

JEROME
(preoccupied, getting even madder)
And even that's not enough! They're lining up ten deep to suck cock! You don't even have a chance unless you're the most ruthless, cold-blooded --

Jerome lurches forward and VOMITS on the rug.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME (CONT'D)

Oh Jesus, I'm really sorry.

Jimmy hardly seems to notice. He tosses a NEWSPAPER on top of the offending splatter and sits back down. It's the SAME EDITION that Vince was reading earlier (with the story of the latest Strathmore murder). Jerome's befogged memory strains to make the connection. Jimmy notes his interest.

JIMMY

Have you heard about the great man's latest masterpiece?

JEROME

Huh?

JIMMY

It's some of his finest work, I believe. Damn good stuff!

JEROME

Who? The murderer?

JIMMY

Murderer? That's so disrespectful. He's much more than that.

JEROME

I've got a few victims for him if he's interested.

JIMMY

(finishes off the cup with three slow gulps)

Do you want to see my paintings?

-INT. JIMMY'S STUDIO - NIGHT

They enter the studio, a windowless room wallpapered with twenty years of clippings, drawings, paintings, etc. Jimmy leads him to FIVE SMALL PAINTINGS tacked to the back wall. The paintings are CRUDE PORTRAITS OF THE MURDER VICTIMS.

JIMMY

This is my humble tribute to the great man. He doesn't simply reproduce reality like an ordinary idiot artist, he courageously reshapes it to suit his own needs!

Jerome nods, too drunk to fully grasp the extent of Jimmy's nuttiness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIMMY (CONT'D)

And why did our great artist select these particular victims? Who can say? A REAL artist KNOWS when he has found his ideal subject!

(pointing at each canvas in turn)

Perhaps this one was a DISHONEST CASHIER...this one might have reminded him of a DOMINEERING AUNT...and this one - - maybe he was just TOO STUPID TO BE ALLOWED TO LIVE!

JEROME

All of humanity is too stupid to live!

Jimmy looks at him, somewhat impressed.

JEROME (CONT'D)

(too loud)

Fuck them all!

Jimmy puts his hand on Jerome's shoulder.

JIMMY

My boy!

-INT. JIMMY'S APT - NIGHT

They are back in the living room. Jerome is really out of it.

JIMMY

...I say you can't do anything really good until you truly don't care at all if you live or die. Kill me right now, I couldn't care less. It's only when every human misery is just a big joke that you can finally get some enjoyment out of this life.

JEROME

I wish someone would kill me right now.

JIMMY

Do you want me to kill you?

RM

JEROME

Go for it.

JIMMY

(an evil pause)

Oh my gosh, the bottle's empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

I guess I better go before I throw up on your rug again.

Jerome stumbles toward the door, Jimmy grabs him by the shoulders and holds him for a tense moment.

JIMMY

Wait! I want to give you something.

He heads back into the studio and returns with a ROLLED-UP CANVAS. He hands it to Jerome with a pat on the back.

JEROME

What's this?

JIMMY

A gift from me to you.

JEROME

Oh no, I couldn't.

JIMMY

You could, you could.

-EXT. BAD NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Jerome stumbles past a GRAFFITI-COVERED DUMPSTER. He lifts the lid to throw away Jimmy's painting, but somehow can't quite let it go. He unrolls a few inches and looks at it with drunken intrigue.

-INT. SCHOOL STUDIO - NIGHT

Jerome staggers into the studio building. The CRANKY GUARD stops him.

CRANKY GUARD

Let's see your pass.

JEROME

Huh?

CRANKY GUARD

PASS!

Jerome fumbles for it.

CRANKY GUARD (CONT'D)

Are you drunk?

JEROME

No way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He glances at his pass and lets him go. Jerome rounds a corner and we immediately hear a loud SPLATTER as he pukes on the plastic floor. He enters his cubicle and unrolls Jimmy's canvas. It's one of Jimmy's MURDER VICTIM PORTRAITS, *The Dishonest Cashier*. He pins it to the wall next to the original figure-drawing of Audrey (the one he showed his Mom). Jimmy's is a HIDEOUS, ANGER-DISTORTED, DORIAN-GRAY VERSION of its counterpart. He notices that the victim's OBITUARY is pasted to the canvas, along with what looks like her BUSINESS CARD. He looks at the drawing of Audrey and starts to cry. He KISSES her on the lips.

-EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT -MORNING

Jerome is sitting on the pavement outside Audrey's apartment. Audrey notices him from her window and comes down to investigate.

AUDREY

What are you doing?

JEROME

(still drunk)

I just wanted to see you.

AUDREY

Jesus Christ, Jerome, you're a mess...A guy like you can't just start drinking like you're Jackson Pollock in one night...

JEROME

A guy like me...

AUDREY

Come on...you need to sober up.

-INT. BROADWAY BOB'S COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

They sit in a booth. Jerome looks dishevelled and wild-eyed.

AUDREY

What are you doing, Jerome?

JEROME

I just don't get what you could possibly see in that stupid jock asshole.

RM

AUDREY

I don't "see" anything. He's just a friend...

(pause)

like you are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

Like I am!

She touches his trembling hand.

AUDREY

Yes.

JEROME

You and I have something -- there's something between us...you can't just ignore it, there's something there, there's a--

AUDREY

Have you ever even had a real girlfriend, Jerome?

JEROME

No, because I never felt this way about anybody ever before!

AUDREY

I just don't think you really --

JEROME

You cannot think that jerk is a great artist! I know you don't believe that...

AUDREY

You really shouldn't worry about what I think. I'm not worth it.

JEROME

Yes, you are.

AUDREY

I'm just as shallow as everybody else. I mostly base my opinion of an artist on what other people say, or how much their work sells for, or all that superficial nonsense.

JEROME

No, you don't...

AUDREY

RM (trying to let him down easy)
Sometimes I'm not even sure if I give a shit about art at all. I mean, who cares? Who needs it? Nobody. It's just the only world I know, that's all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JEROME

Will you be my girlfriend?

AUDREY

Jerome...

Jerome's eyes fill immediately with tears, though his expression remains oddly numb.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Look at you, you really are a mess.

JEROME

If you see that jock asshole, tell him I will bury him! I will bury him alive and shit on his grave!!

-INT. MUSEUM - -DAY

Audrey and Jonah are sitting in an otherwise unoccupied museum gallery. Judging by the art, we are apparently in the Modern Wing.

AUDREY

So what's your favorite painting of all time?

JONAH

(thinks for a minute)
Maybe the Mona Lisa.

AUDREY

(laughs)
You're so funny! The sad thing is that's probably what most people would say.

JONAH

I know...It's fucking pathetic.

She moves a little closer to him.

AUDREY

How come a guy like you doesn't have a million girlfriends?

JONAH

I don't like to be tied down, I guess.

RM

AUDREY

Never?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JONAH
(looks at her)
No, not never.

Audrey slides even closer.

AUDREY
You're very mysterious, you know.

Suddenly, Jonah is overcome. They kiss.

JONAH
I guess you could say I have an interest
in, like, the dark side of humanity.

AUDREY
Me too.

JONAH
Yeah, you strike me as a girl who knows
where all the bodies are buried.

AUDREY
(a pause -- the mood is broken)
Oh, God, don't say that.

JONAH
What?

AUDREY
Nothing...It's just something somebody
said that really creeped me out...

JONAH
What?

AUDREY
It was something like "I will bury you
and shit on your grave."

JONAH
(very interested and concerned)
Somebody said that to you?

AUDREY
It was just something Jerome said...I
mean, he didn't really say it to me, it
was just -- he was really freaked-out,
you know. He --

JONAH
When was this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

Don't worry...It's nothing...I'm sure I'm totally overreacting...

JONAH

I'm just concerned for the guy, that's all. He hasn't been coming to class, y'know, and I just wonder what --

AUDREY

(she touches his arm)

God, that's really amazing. Most artists are so self-centered.

-INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Jerome sits alone at the bar, drinking film-noirishly. In the background we see a table of ART-GIRLS, and a few LOCALS playing pool/pinball. BARDO enters.

BARDO

Well look who's here. Where have you been all week?

JEROME

I've just been having a really hard time.

BARDO

Look, you should just do what I always do -- drop out and start over again next semester. This is my third time...soon to be my fourth...

Jerome glances at him.

BARDO (CONT'D)

Yeah, I've pretty much had it with Sandy's class. I'm thinking of switching over to video.

(a beat)

I mean, we may as well stay in school as long as we can. We can't be artists forever.

JEROME

You don't understand...I'll never have another chance like this. I can't just start over...I'll never find another Audrey...

BARDO

Oh, please...don't start with that again...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He notices the locals are trying to make time with the art-girls.

JEROME

I need her...Every artist needs a subject; she's my perfect subject. I can't let her slip through my fingers...

BARDO

C'mon, let's go rescue these art-chicks. That's easy pickin's.

JEROME

(Doesn't even hear him)

I know I can get her back if I can just come up with something for that final survey. I need to get their attention, that's all. They'll forget all about Jonah.

BARDO

(eyeing girls)

Yeah, yeah...C'mon, we're gonna miss our chance.

JEROME

I've got to think of something. I know I'm better than that jerk...I know it...

The art-girls escape.

BARDO

There they go.

JEROME

What should I do? There has to be something...

He makes direct eye-contact with Bardo, desperate for any kind of help or human understanding.

BARDO

You know, I think I finally figured out who you are.

JEROME

Who?

RM

BARDO

You're the class douche-bag.

He pays and leaves. Jerome drains the last drop from his glass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He notices, in the far corner booth, a solitary figure with her face buried in her hands. It's SOPHIE, his art history professor. He wanders over and sits at her table, watching her cry for an uncomfortable moment before she notices him.

JEROME
(concerned)
What's wrong?

SOPHIE
Do I know you?

JEROME
I'm in your Tuesday/Thursday class.

SOPHIE
Oh God...

She can't believe she let a student see her like this.

JEROME
I know how you feel.

SOPHIE
No you don't. You couldn't possibly know how I feel. What a stupid, arrogant thing to say.

JEROME
You're right...I'm sorry...

SOPHIE
I have nothing!

She breaks down again.

JEROME
Did your husband leave you?

SOPHIE
Oh God, it must be all over school.

JEROME
No, don't worry...I was just...

SOPHIE
Look, what do you want from me?

RM

JEROME
(thinks about it)
You seem to really care a lot about art...I mean, at least you have that, right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SOPHIE
That's all I have.

-INT. SCHOOL STUDIO - NIGHT

Jerome enters the studio. The cranky guard is asleep, snoring loudly. Jerome heads down the dark hallway, but stops suddenly when he sees a LIGHT coming from his OWN CUBICLE. He edges closer and peers through a crack -- it's Jonah, rummaging through his stuff! Jerome watches as Jonah looks very closely at Jimmy's *Cashier* painting. Jonah takes out a SMALL DIGITAL CAMERA and takes several pictures. Jerome accidentally kicks a coffee can filled with brushes, startling Jonah, who hastily pockets the camera and sneaks off. Jerome emerges from the darkness and goes into his cubicle. He REMOVES the painting from the wall.

-INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Jerome heads toward class, for the first time in quite a while. Army-Jacket rolls up on his skateboard. He does annoying tricks while he talks.

ARMY-JACKET
So, it looks like you've finally got
Jonah on the run.

JEROME
What do you mean?

ARMY-JACKET
He was asking about some painting of
yours. You got a big surprise for us at
the final survey?

JEROME
(thinks)
I don't know.

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Prof. Sandiford stands before the class amid a sparse accumulation of last-minute projects.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD
The reason we have you put up your work
in the Post-Thanksgiving Assessment is to
give you a chance to make improvements
and adjustments before the Final Survey,
but we can't help you if you don't bring
anything to class...this means you,
Jerome! Don't give up on me!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JEROME

I'm working on something...

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

No secrets in this class, young man!

A few of the students look at Jerome, intrigued by the notion of his "secret painting." A "buzz" is starting to develop. Jerome and Jonah exchange brief eye-contact. The professor approaches Jonah's latest.

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD (CONT'D)

Nice stuff, Jonah... We're expecting big things from you at the final survey!

KISS-ASS

So you're saying that Jonah's the only one with a chance at the best grade?

PROFESSOR SANDIFORD

No, of course not.

SHILO

That's what it sounds like.

ARMY-JACKET

Professor Okamura says you'd have sex with your own mother's corpse to have a student with the best grade.

-INT. SCHOOL STUDIO - NIGHT

It's very late and Jerome has the building to himself. He is working on his own version of a "murder painting," which he has pinned up next to Jimmy's *Cashier* painting for reference. It's not going well. Suddenly, the door squeaks open. Jerome quickly tears down the two paintings and hides them under his supply table. The FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL walks by his cubicle. He just stands there, smiling awkwardly.

FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL

What?

JEROME

Nothing.

(a pause)

How ya doin'?

RM

FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL

Forgot my cigarettes.

She fetches them quickly and stomps out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FILTHY-HAIRED GIRL (CONT'D)
 (as she leaves)
 You're weird.

He re-pins the paintings and gets back to work. Time passes: We see him get more and more discouraged in several dissolves. He just can't capture the angry, chaotic affect of Jimmy's original. Finally, he yanks what has become a HOPELESS, MUDDY EYE-SORE from the wall and crumples it up in disgust. He slumps, defeated, to the floor. He reaches into his coat-pocket for a flask of Slivovitz and takes several big slugs, all the while staring desperately at Jimmy's painting.

-INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT DOORWAY - NIGHT

An especially groggy-looking Jimmy unlatches the bolt-lock and faces him.

JIMMY
 What do you want?

JEROME
 (seething and desperate)
 I need a big favor.

Jimmy stumbles back inside. Jerome enters behind him.

JIMMY
 I see you've come empty-handed.

JEROME
 I know, I'm sorry, I --

JIMMY
 You must think I'm the cheapest whore in town!

Jimmy sits on the couch, barely able to keep his eyes open. Jerome is too fidgety to sit still. He moves from chair to table, nervously chain-lighting a cigarette from the previous butt.

JEROME
 I'll bring you a case of Slivovitz...or whatever you want...I want to buy the rest of your paintings.

RM

JIMMY
 They're not for sale.

JEROME
 Please, just tell me what you want.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIMMY

I don't want anything.

JEROME

I -- I just --

JIMMY

I thought you were an artist.

JEROME

I -- I am...I just --

JIMMY

Do you want to be an artist or an
"aficionado"?

JEROME

An artist...

JIMMY

What do you think the artist cares about?
Does he think all day about fine wines
and black-tie affairs and what he's going
to say at the next after-dinner speech?

There is a long pause as Jimmy closes his eyes. It seems for a moment that he might have fallen asleep.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

No! He lives only for that narcotic
moment of creative bliss! A moment that
may come once a decade, or never at all!
YOU THINK I'M WRONG?

Jerome shakes his head "no."

JIMMY (CONT'D)

FUCK YOU!! YOU KNOW NOTHING AT ALL!!
ABOUT ANYTHING!!

JEROME

I don't care about fine wines. I just
want -- I don't know, I want...

There is a long pause as Jimmy stares at the floor. His demeanor changes and for a brief moment he actually seems vulnerable, full of sadness and regret.

RM

JIMMY

I know what you want. I was once like
you...

(he looks Jerome in the eye)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

If it was me, I'd get my way by any means possible. I'd GRAB THEM BY THE BALLS and I'd never stop twisting. Once you're on top, they're helpless -- you've got them SQUIRMING UNDER THE TOE OF YOUR SHOE!

JEROME

But...

Jimmy starts to cough.

JIMMY

Will you PLEASE put out that god-damned cigarette before you kill me with your awful smoke!!

He launches into a horrible red-faced coughing fit. Jerome makes an attempt to snuff out his cigarette in a tea-cup on the edge of the sofa, but he still has only one thing on his mind. He waits for a brief pause in the coughing.

JEROME

What about the paintings?

Jimmy curls up, exhausted, in a fetal ball on the couch.

JIMMY

I don't care. Do whatever you want.

He lies motionless with his back to Jerome, breathing softly. Jerome's cigarette is still smoldering in the tea-cup. He fishes it out and revives it with a long drag. He puts it back in the precariously-balanced cup and disappears into the hallway that leads to Jimmy's studio.

-INT. JIMMY'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Jerome rolls the paintings into a tube and looks around for a rubber band. He settles for a SMALL PIECE OF ROPE hanging from a hook. As he leaves, he notices what looks like BARDO'S STOCKING CAP pinned to the wall.

-INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

Cut to VIDEO. As a loud, operatic score builds to its climax, we see a colorful series of slickly-edited cuts:

Sped-up Stock footage of SOLDIERS MARCHING.

The BEAT GIRL doing an ANGRY INTERPRETIVE DANCE (also sped-up).

An overly dramatic shot of THE STRANGLER on his knees, BEGGING THE HEAVENS FOR MERCY.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A slow-motion shot of the BEAT GIRL being doused with a BUCKET OF BLOOD.

A writhing mass of EARTHWORMS.

We then see the audience for this cinematic extravaganza: VINCE, JASON, a smiling BEAT GIRL, and a SOUR-LOOKING OLD MAN wearing large aviator glasses. This is VINCE'S GRANDPA. The music crescendoes and fades. Jason gets up to turn on the lights.

GRANDPA
(after a dyspeptic pause)
What the hell was that?

VINCE
Don't worry -- it's totally a rough cut,
and that's just a temp score without any--

GRANDPA
I thought you were going to make a nice
little murder picture, but here you've
got the worms and the dancing and...
(turns to Beat Girl)
Did you like it?

VINCE
It's symbolism, grandpa!

GRANDPA
And where are the guns? I thought this
was supposed to be a shoot-em-up!

VINCE
The guy's a *strangler*, grandpa -- what am
I supposed to do?

GRANDPA
I want guns!

VINCE
That's the name of the movie -- The
Strathmore Strangler! You want The
Strangler to shoot people?!

GRANDPA
I paid for a movie with guns!

RM

-INT. DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON

Jerome looks at the FIVE MURDER PAINTINGS laid out on his desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It's the first time he's really had a chance to study them. One of them has a LOCK OF HAIR taped to it; another has what looks like the victim's ACTUAL DRIVER'S LICENSE glued to the corner. Jerome picks at it, unsure as to how the likes of Jimmy could have fabricated such a convincing facsimile. Matthew enters and sits. He seems troubled.

MATTHEW

Can I talk to you about something?

JEROME

(not listening)

Sure...

MATTHEW

I - I have a confession to make.

JEROME

Yeah?

MATTHEW

Oh, forget it.

JEROME

(turns and tries to show some interest)

What?

MATTHEW

Nothing. Forget I said anything.

JEROME

What is it? Some boyfriend problem?

MATTHEW

What!? Why?

JEROME

I don't know...what is it then?

MATTHEW

Why did you say that?! Do you think I'm gay?!

JEROME

I don't know...

MATTHEW

RM Really?

JEROME

Yeah, maybe, I guess....

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATTHEW

Yeah, well, that's it. That's my confession: I think I'm gay.

JEROME

Okay.

MATTHEW

Okay.

Jerome shakes his head and returns to the paintings.

-INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

PROFESSOR ZIPKIN measures the clavicle of a partially-draped Audrey with giant wooden calipers. He addresses the class.

PROFESSOR ZIPKIN

...of course, not everyone has such delightful bone symmetry. Remember that ridiculous old crone they sent in here last week? My god, what a creature!
(He breaks into a weird laugh.)
That's all for this week. Thank you, my dear.

Audrey covers up and escapes behind her curtain in the corner. It is the same classroom that Professor Sandiford uses. She emerges to lace up her shoes, propping her foot on a discarded sculpture in the now-enormous CORNER PILE OF ABANDONED ART. She looks down to see a painting of her LITTLE AUDREY NECKLACE sticking out from the bottom of the heap. She yanks it out, causing a small avalanche. It's Jerome's color PORTRAIT OF AUDREY, covered with footprints and charcoal dust. She brushes it with her sleeve and stares at it for a very long time.

-INT. JONAH'S APARTMENT STUDIO - DAY

Jonah is painting, his face contorted in a Mick Jagger-ish scowl. Top forty rock blares from a small clock-radio. The shot widens and we see that he's in a small room in a modern apartment. A youngish woman enters, carrying an agitated toddler. This is JONAH'S WIFE, MARIE.

MARIE

I thought you said you were working?

RM

JONAH

I am working. I gotta have this done for Monday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIE

It doesn't have to be perfect, Jonah --
it looks fine...

JONAH

It's got a long way to go.

MARIE

I don't know what's gotten into you,
Jonah. When you were working narcotics
you didn't spend all your off-hours
smoking crack...

(the toddler cries)

Look at your son, Jonah. He misses his
Daddy.

JONAH

Will you get off my ass for once.

She glares at him, swallowing an angry outburst.

MARIE

Lonny and the guys are here to see you,
or are you too busy for them, too?

JONAH

Alright, I'm coming...

-INT. JONAH'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jonah enters the living room, wiping his hands with a rag.
LONNY is Jonah's boss, a shaved-headed, 45-ish detective.
With him are KEVIN and MIKEY, his tough-guy underlings.

KEVIN

Well look who's here. How's the Mona
Lisa comin', Rembrandt?

MIKEY

Hey, Jonah, you're off duty -- you don't
have to dress like a fruitcake today.

JONAH

Yeah, great to see you guys, too.

MARIE

How much longer is this gonna go on,
Lonny? I never see him anymore since he
became an artist.

JONAH

I'm just trying to do my job, okay?

(CONTINUED)