

**CHARLIE BARTLETT**

**BY  
GUSTIN NASH**

**May 4, 2005**

OVER BLACK comes the musing of a TEENAGE METAL HEAD GIRL.

TEENAGE METAL HEAD GIRL  
I think you can divide the world  
into two types of people...

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A taped interview. We could be in a therapist's office, or even a guidance councilor's. A 16 year old girl sits on the sofa. MANIC PANIC dyed hair, eyebrow ring, and an IRON MAIDEN tee-shirt that does little to conceal her third trimester load.

TEENAGE METAL HEAD GIRL (CONT'D)  
...There are the kind you meet, you talk to them a little, and you think like - Thank God I'm not them... But then there are the kind of people, you meet them, and the more you hang with them, the more you go - Man, I wish I had their life. And that's what I think of Charlie. You know? I mean whatever you want to call it. Smarts. Charisma. Whatever. Charlie's got it. And a lot of people want to be him...

(beat)

A lot of people want to be Charlie.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)  
But who do you think you want to be?

She briefly glances into camera, then averts her eyes with a self-conscious smile.

TEENAGE METAL HEAD GIRL  
I don't know. I guess, you know...  
I guess I'm really, really  
confused. I'm just... I'm confused.  
(suddenly upbeat)  
But, that's okay... because.... I'm  
a teenager!

CUT TO BLACK.

## CHARLIE BARTLETT

MOM (V.O.)

I'm not sure I totally understand.  
Is it his grades?

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

CHARLIE BARTLETT, 17, sits cross legged in an armchair. He wears a pressed shirt and a Garcia tie. He stares at the floor in morose silence, head hung low.

**Super: Six months earlier - Loomis Chaffee Boarding School**

Charlie's MOM and DEAN WEST can be heard through the slightly open door.

DEAN WEST (O.S.)

No, it's not his grades and it's  
not his attendance...

Their conversation drops to inaudible murmurs. The twenty-something RECEPTIONIST types and pops her chewing gum. She glances at the glum boy sitting in the armchair.

Charlie becomes aware of her observing him and looks her way. Sensing her concern, he throws her a disarming grin.

She gets an amused smirk and goes back to typing with renewed professionalism.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

MOM

I guess I'm not sure why he must be  
expelled then.

Charlie's mom is an elegant woman in her early forties. Dean West sits opposite her. He's younger, not the stodgy or conservative looking stereotype, but he's definitely a churchgoer.

DEAN WEST

This'll shed some light.

He hands her a driver's license,

MOM

A driver's license?

DEAN WEST

He's been running a laminating press out of his dorm room and selling them to the other students.

MOM

Oh Charlie...

DEAN WEST

Look, Mrs. Bartlett, I know he's not a bad kid. He's innovative. He's intelligent. He's highly motivated. But what he did was illegal, and we can't overlook that.

MOM

No, I understand. Okay then.

She stands and shakes his hand.

She opens the door to reveal Charlie in the armchair, looking over his shoulder at her questioningly.

MOM

C'mon, Charlie. Let's go home.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - DAY

They sit in the back seat of a town car manned by an unseen driver. Charlie watches the fall foliage zip by in the window. He turns to his mom and tries to discern her expression.

CHARLIE

You mad?

MOM

You know I'm not. I just can't fathom why you did it. It's not like you needed the money. I mean, really, Charlie, what would your father say if he were here?

Charlie shifts uncomfortably and returns his gaze to the window.

CHARLIE

They were just starting to appreciate me. I was the guy everybody wanted to meet.

MOM

Well, maybe there's more to high school than being well liked.

CHARLIE

Like what, specifically?

MOM

Nothing comes to mind. But it seemed like the right thing to say.

Charlie nods in amused concordance.

CHARLIE

Does this mean I'm going to public school?

MOM

'Fraid so. Don't worry, we'll get along. I won't even tell you to clean your room.

EXT. BARTLETT ESTATE - DAY

The town car pulls into the circular drive of the estate.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Why wouldn't I clean my room?

MOM (V.O.)

I thought all kids hated that.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Just because I'm going through puberty doesn't mean I'm unsanitary you know.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - PIANO ROOM - NIGHT

Hands on a piano, flying over the keys. They belong to Charlie. He plays a few measures and turns the page of music in front of him.

His mother comes down the stairs in her nightgown, a glass of Chardonnay in her hand.

CHARLIE

I might take the bus in tomorrow.

MOM

I was going to have Thomas drive you.

CHARLIE

I don't think anyone else is going  
to show up with a chauffeur.

MOM

You're probably right.

She leans against the piano and sets down her wine. Charlie stops playing long enough to slide a coaster under her glass.

She starts humming to the tune and then...

MOM

(singing)

We knew who we were then...

CHARLIE

(singing)

Girls were girls and men were  
men...

CHARLIE AND MOM

(together now)

Mister we could use a man like  
Herbert Hoover again... Those were  
the days.

His mother lifts up her glass and sighs wistfully.

MOM

Good night, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Good night, Mom.

He watches her gracefully ascend the stairs. He closes the piano and stares off. A moment of private anxiety.

INT. GARDNER HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

BLACKNESS. Then the garage door grinds open, giving way to a set of head beams that belong to the Chevy Nova pulling in.

The driver is PRINCIPAL NATHAN GARDNER, late forties, clean shaven and slightly greying.

He shuts off the engine. Stares at the dashboard in overwhelmed silence. After a beat he exhales deeply and gets out.

INT. GARDNER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Gardner comes through the door toting his brief case. He sets it on the kitchen counter and peels off his coat.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Anybody here?

WE FOLLOW him through the house into...

THE HALLWAY

Where he hangs his coat. He looks up the staircase and can hear the drone of The Cure playing upstairs.

He pads his way up the carpeted steps and reaches...

HIS DAUGHTERS ROOM

A door covered in police tape. A pad lock that's obviously in use when his daughter isn't there. Gardner knocks.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER.

Susan?

No answer. He cracks the door to reveal SUSAN GARDNER, 16, pacing around the room in her panties. She's on the phone despite a blaring stereo and the OC re-run playing on TV.

Gardner hesitates in disconcerted silence at the sight, until Susan senses he's there and looks up.

She crosses the room and turns down the music.

SUSAN

What do you want, Dad?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

A two figure electric bill.

She rolls her eyes. He shuts her door. WE FOLLOW him down the hall to his...

STUDY

He opens a cabinet filled with Johnny Walker Black and pours himself a glass. He looks out the floor to ceiling window at the swimming pool below.

MRS. GARDNER appears in the door.

MRS. GARDNER

You're home.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
Going on ten minutes now.

MRS. GARDNER  
Bad day?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
Sedwick's on my ass about a  
teachers strike. The PTA is  
screaming that education is clearly  
my last priority. I can feel three  
years of anger management flying  
out the window.

She comes in and kisses him on the mouth. This seems to  
pacify him a little.

MRS. GARDNER  
Well, I know what a difference  
you've made at this school.

A beat as he considers this.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
Have I?

MRS. GARDNER  
Inch by inch, day by day.

Even if it doesn't sooth him, he chuckles to indicate it has.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
I knew there was a reason I came  
home every night.

MRS. GARDNER  
Let's get some food in you and hit  
the hay. Who knows what tomorrow  
will bring.

An apprehensive expression sweeps across Gardner's face.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
Yeah... who knows.

Audacious MUSIC, could be PUNK, could be RAP. It kicks in as  
we...

CUT TO:



EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

STUDENTS arriving for school. We catch these scenes in a series of quick pans and handheld shots.

**Super:           Montgomery Mountain High School  
                  Great Farmington, Connecticut**

Filed along the brick wall of the school - PUNKS with piercings, tattoos and spiked hair. Looks of disdain and defiance.

In the parking lot, a circle of pick-up trucks and jeeps. FOOTBALL PLAYERS climb down. They wear their letters. Bump each other's fists.

We SWISH PAN just in time to catch a bevy of PREPPIE GIRLS in skirts and turtle necks, gabbing on their cell phones. One glances back at us and gives a sour look.

Congregated just out of sight, the METAL HEADS and STONERS pass a joint around, glancing over their shoulders apprehensively.

Three BLACK KIDS bump to separate iPods. Around them, a WIGGER following - caps turned backwards, pants hanging below their boxers.

A small pack of GEEKS get scattered as a SKATER comes hurtling down the bus platform. He wipes out and comes in close to show us his bloodied elbow.

Out on the field the CHEERLEADERS do their routine.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

The halls team with KIDS, and as the song reaches it's end, it laps over the next scene, where we find...

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET -DAY

...Charlie standing alone on the corner. He wears an Armani double breasted jacket over a white tee-shirt and carries an attaché case at his side.

The SHORT BUS chugs up the hill. Charlie waves it down. The bus pulls to a stop and the door folds open.

BUS DRIVER

I think you got the wrong bus.

CHARLIE

Montgomery Mountain, right?

BUS DRIVER

Well, uh... Yeah.

Charlie climbs aboard, oblivious to the driver's confusion.

INT. SHORT BUS - MOVING - DAY

Charlie squeezes past the SPECIAL ED KIDS playing slaps in the aisle. He takes a seat opposite the hulking LEN ARBUCKLE. Len gives him a goofy simper.

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie.

LEN

Hi, Charlie.

CHARLIE

How are you?

Len grins sheepishly and looks away.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Susan gathers her books. She notices Charlie just down the hall from her and watches him struggle with his locker.

SUSAN

They didn't give you a locker in the teacher's lounge?

CHARLIE

I'm not a teacher.

She looks him up and down.

SUSAN

You sure look like a teacher.

She crosses the hall to help HENRY FREEMONT, 17, post a bulletin. Henry is a thin senior, the kind of gothic drama freak that paints his fingernails black. They turn to address the hall.

SUSAN

Okay, everyone... The sign up sheet is here. Auditions will be held at four and everyone is welcome.

HENRY

For those that come, this year we're doing Henry the Fifth.

The corridor of students groan... Mumbles of "Get stuffed" and "Shakespeare was a fudgepacker" as the kids disperse.

Charlie regards Susan standing proudly by the sign up sheet. He crosses the hall and writes his name at the top of the list. He glances Susan's way and she beams.

SUSAN

See ya at four, professor.

INT. BOYS ROOM - DAY

MURPHY BIVENS is in the middle of a pot deal.

He's a metal head. Leather jacket with studs, tongue with studs, ears - studs... In fact, Murphy has so much metal on him, chains, keys, studs... he jingles when he walks. He watches his BUYER measure the marijuana with his fingers.

MURPHY

Man, why you lookin' at it like that? You know you're gonna buy it.

Charlie enters. The two boys peer over their shoulders nervously.

CHARLIE

Are we allowed to smoke in here?

The inquiry is met with two dumbfounded expressions.

Charlie shrugs. He sets his attaché case on the sink.

MURPHY

Is that an attaché case?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

MURPHY

So are you like a total faggot or what?

Murphy looks at his friend and they crack up.

CHARLIE

(genuine)

Is that a rhetorical question?

Murphy expression goes blank, the same thing his mind draws when he tries to remember what the word "rhetorical" means.

A beat as Charlie realizes he hasn't bridged the communication chasm. He turns away to wash his hands.

Murphy grabs him from behind and smashes his face against the mirror.

He spins Charlie around and throws him into one of the stalls. The stoner laughs as Murphy dunks Charlie's head into the toilet.

FROM INSIDE THE TOILET

Charlie - underwater. He opens his eyes and looks around with disorientation.

Murphy's lips are tight against his teeth in an expression of violent relish.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER (O.S.)

What's going on here, Murphy?

Murphy leaps back from the stall. Gardner stands behind him, hands on his hips.

MURPHY

Nothin'. Just messing around is all.

They both glance into the stall where Charlie gasps for breath, his hair matted down over his eyes. Gardner turns to Murphy.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Get to class.

Murphy mumbles something inaudible as he jingles out.

Gardner sizes up Charlie one more time before going over to the urinal to relieve himself.

Charlie fetches his attaché case off the sink.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Hey, you're not my French four sub, are you?

Charlie just lingers there dripping.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

WHITNEY

I don't see what the big deal is,  
ya know. I mean... it's just a  
hole.

WHITNEY DRUMMOND, 16, gabs with her CHEERLEADING SQUAD. They aren't in uniform, but easy enough to spot in hip hugging jeans and halter tops. Football captain, DUSTIN LAUDERBACH, 18, listens, his head propped up with his hand in boredom.

WHITNEY

I'm saying, what does my mom care  
how many times I get my ears  
pierced? The squad doesn't care.

DUSTIN

Whitney, I think you should get  
your na na pierced.

WHITNEY

That's gross. You 'tard. Why would  
I do that?

Charlie surveys the lunch room, a tray in his hands. He spots the sports crowd and notes them as the rowdiest table in the place.

Back at the table...

WHITNEY

Dustin, we make so many sacrifices.  
Why... Ya know... I mean, cheer  
takes up so much time. Cheer... You  
know what I'm saying? Cheer...

DUSTIN

Will you shut up, already. You're  
like not even saying anything.

Whitney giggles in spite of herself. The others join in.

Charlie finds a space on the bench and takes a seat. He sets down his tray and starts eating.

The table simmers to unbearable silence.

Charlie looks up to find unreceptive stares.

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie.

No response. Then... Dustin Lauderbach stands and lifts up his tray. The others follow suit.

They move their party to another table and in a few moments are back at the pitch they had reached before Charlie's arrival.

Charlie eats alone.

An overweight sophomore-in thick spectacles and an auto mechanic shirt takes a seat at the other end of the table. This is KIP CROMB WELL, 15, the kid nobody knows exists.

Charlie nods to him. Kip snuffles and shyly averts his eyes. They continue eating in silence.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

A DRAMA FREAK WANNABE auditions on the stage.

DRAMA FREAK WANNABE

Rome is thine, Thou art poor'st of  
all; then shortly art thou mine.

She takes a bow. Henry and Susan applaud from far back in the seats. They whisper to each other under the glow of the desk lamp as if they were Broadway producers.

HENRY

Thank, you. That was stunning.  
(shuffling papers)  
Charlie Bartlett!

Charlie peers around the curtain and shuffles out onto the stage. He's still carrying his attaché case.

SUSAN

So which of Shakespeare's works  
will you be performing for us?

CHARLIE

Uh... I'll be doing a monologue  
from Eric Bogosian's masterpiece,  
Pounding Nails in the Floor With My  
Forehead.

More whispering under the lamp. Henry shrugs.

HENRY

Well, go ahead then...

Charlie sets down the case and steps into the stage light. He clears his throat.

CHARLIE

BLOW ME! Oh, I'm gonna get an earring and put it in my nose. Oh, I'm gonna get a baseball cap and turn it around backwards. Oh, I'm gonna tattoo my eyelids. It's gonna say BLOW ME so everybody knows how I feel about them. Blow me. Blow me. Blow me. I'm gonna find the biggest ugliest pig and I'm gonna grease up its asshole...

HENRY

Great, thank you.

CHARLIE

Oh, I... I wasn't quite finished.

HENRY

No, no, that'll do. Thank you, Charlie.

Henry glances to Susan. She covers her mouth in hysterics.

CHARLIE

Okay, well... Thank you then.

He picks up his attaché case and drags himself off stage.

CHEERLEADERS (V.O.)

GO MONTGOMERY! GO! GO MONTGOMERY!

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Whitney leads the other cheerleaders - clapping, kicking, spinning. The MOTION SLOWS DOWN and SPEEDS UP to show the grace.

CHEERLEADERS

GO DUSTIN! YOU'RE OUR MAN! GO DUSTIN!

ON THE FIELD

Dustin carries the ball in a sprint. He rolls around an opponent. Hurtles over another.

He finally gets sacked from the side and goes down in a spray of turf and dirt.

IN THE BLEACHERS OVERLOOKING THE FIELD

A thick layer of cigarette smoke hangs over the crowd.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

WE FOLLOW Charlie as he strolls down the hall. He reaches his locker and spins in the combination. He removes a few books and puts them into his case.

He shuts his locker and heads down the hall. There comes a jingling sound. Charlie slows down. The jingling gets louder. Charlie turns...

...but it's too late. Murphy punches him square in the eye.

Charlie bucks his head and looks to Murphy in dazed disbelief. Murphy throws Charlie against the lockers with a reverberating WHAM!

Then he slugs Charlie in the stomach, doubling him over.

Murphy steps back and fits a set of brass knuckles onto his hand. Charlie sees the brass knuckles and tries to ward Murphy off.

CHARLIE

Please... Don't...

MURPHY

(mocking)

Please... Don't...

He belts Charlie in the face and the brass against bone makes a sickening CRACK. Charlie goes down, landing flat on his back. Murphy brings his foot down into Charlie's stomach.

MURPHY

How does that feel, ya wise ass bitch?

Murphy squats on Charlie's chest. Beyond them, one of MURPHY'S FRIENDS films the whole event with his camcorder.

MURPHY'S FRIEND

Fuck him up, Murph.

Murphy punches Charlie in the nose. Blood squirts up onto Murphy's cheek. Charlie sobs. His assailant has that gleeful look in his eyes again.

Murphy just keeps pounding.

We cut to a shot of the camcorder filming because it's just too much. CRACK, CRACK, CRACK. Then... Silence.



The kid behind the camera looks a little nauseous. Murphy stands up.

MURPHY

Let's jet.

They take off, leaving Charlie unconscious on the cold floor.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie's mom reads by the light of the table lamp. She hears Charlie coming in and taking off his shoes.

MOM

Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Yeah.

MOM

How'd it go?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Stellar.

Mom waits a beat, closes her book. She gets to her feet.

WE FOLLOW her into...

KITCHEN

...where the open freezer door obscures Charlie's face.

MOM

Yeah? Did you make some friends?

Charlie closes the freezer and his mom falters at the sight of two black eyes and a broken nose. Charlie's tee-shirt - stained with blood.

He brings the ice-pack to his eye.

A beat as his mom gets a look of resolve about her.

MOM

I'm calling Dr. Weathers.

INT. DR. WEATHERS' OFFICE - DAY

Charlie reclines on the sofa. DR. WEATHERS across from him, a notebook in his lap. He scratches at his beard.

DR. WEATHERS

We haven't talked in a long time,  
Charlie. It's good to see you  
again.

CHARLIE

Hey, yeah, you too.

DR. WEATHERS

Your mom tells me you've been  
getting into scrapes with the other  
boys.

A view of Charlie's face now. It's black and blue.

CHARLIE

That's the best euphemism for  
getting the living crap kicked out  
of you that I've ever heard.

DR. WEATHERS

Why are you being picked on, do you  
suppose?

CHARLIE

I dunno. Because I'm abnormal, I  
guess.

DR. WEATHERS

You don't feel normal.

CHARLIE

My family has a psychiatrist on  
call. How normal can I be.

Dr. Weathers chuckles.

DR. WEATHERS

How are classes?

CHARLIE

Okay, I guess. I have trouble  
concentrating sometimes.

DR. WEATHERS

Racing thoughts?

CHARLIE

You could say that.

DR. WEATHERS

What do you think about?

Long pause.

CHARLIE

Well, I have this one fantasy... I dunno.

DR. WEATHERS

Sexual?

CHARLIE

Not really. It's just this fantasy of me stepping out on stage, and all these kids are out in the audience and they're chanting my name - like I'm a rock star. So I step up to the mic.

Charlie leaps to his feet. Weathers jerks backwards a bit in alarm.

Charlie pretends to have a mic in one hand as he points into the imaginary crowd with the other.

CHARLIE

And I say "How you all doing tonight?" And they cheer. "It's great to see you all. I'm Charlie Bartlett, and if there's one thing I want you to walk away with tonight, it's that the sky is the limit. So for those of you with troubles... For those of you feeling confused, or scared, or angry... Remember, you are not alone. And there's still time to live your dreams!" And they cheer again and I go into a song. Usually something by Aerosmith.

Charlie becomes aware of Weathers frantically making notes, so he takes a seat on the sofa again.

DR. WEATHERS

Charlie, I'm going to write you a prescription for Ritalin.

CHARLIE

What for?

DR. WEATHERS

Well, it may help you focus a little more.

CHARLIE

So you think I have ADD or something?

DR. WEATHERS

Well, I won't know that until the Ritalin improves this concentration problem.

Charlie furrows his brow in confusion.

CHARLIE

You mean, if I take the medicine and get better, you'll then diagnose me as having had ADD?

DR. WEATHERS

That's the idea.

Weathers tears the prescription from his pad and hands it out.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Another taped interview. The SKATER before us has carried his deck in with him. He leans back and strokes his goatee.

SKATER

Yeah, man, nobody thought much of that kid at first. Partly 'cause he was like up in everybody's face like "I'm Charlie." You know, like totally honest, which you can't do.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Why not?

SKATER

Because bein' cool is all about bein' a mystery. You know, like this dude's not sayin' much - what's his deal. Bein' yourself is like a sure fire way to be pegged totally un-cool. But you know... that's Charlie.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

MRS. ALBERTSON, the science teacher, gestures towards the diagrams of a planet on the chalk board. She's a big, beautiful woman with an air of class.

MRS. ALBERTSON

The Earth rotates, and it revolves.  
Who can tell me the difference?

Mrs. Albertson wanders down the aisle a few feet and fixes her eyes on Charlie. He slouches in his seat in an effort to attain invisibility.

She catches sight of a raised hand in the front row out of the corner of her eye. It belongs to ADAM NEVINS, 16, an honors student wearing a ZENA T-shirt and a matching cap.

MRS. ALBERTSON

Yes, Adam.

ADAM

The planet rotates on it's axis and  
it revolves in an orbit...

Charlie glances down at his notebook which reads ROTATE =  
AXIS. REVOLVE = ORBIT.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

ON A MIC

as Gardner taps it to verify that it's on. The last of the stragglers take their seats, but the crowded gym buzzes with socializing STUDENTS.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

If you could all quiet down we have  
a lot on the agenda today.

Some snickering, but the students settle. Gardner glances back to SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK, a shrewd looking gent. Sedwick gives a nod of approval and Gardner continues.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

As promised, we're bringing back  
the Glen Wood concert field trip  
this year.

Hooting, clapping, and whistles of approval from the packed bleachers.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Now understand, only those who have  
waivers from their parents will be  
able to attend what will be a very  
chaperoned event. Obviously we'll  
be taking the votes you took into  
account.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL GARDNER (cont'd)  
 This year the list was topped off  
 by...

(looks at the paper in his  
 palm)

This looks like Outcast, but it's  
 spelled with a K.

Gales of laughter and cheers. Then-

STUDENT IN THE BACK  
 Outkast sucks!

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 As boggling to the mind as it may  
 be, it seems you are in the  
 minority.

More laughter.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Now on a less pleasant note, the  
 board passed the motion to put  
 cameras in the student lounge.

Murmuring in the bleachers. A tie-dye HIPPIE CHICK raises her  
 hand.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Yes?

HIPPIE CHICK  
 How can they do that? That's like  
 invasion of privacy.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 The board doesn't seem to see it  
 that way and there's a liability  
 issue. Now I'd like to introduce  
 our superintendent, Mr. Sedwick,  
 who is going to discuss the cell  
 phone issue in our district.

Sedwick begins to stand when a METAL HEAD in the back gets to  
 his feet.

METAL HEAD  
 But the lounge is the only place we  
 can hang out without teachers  
 around. Are there cameras in the  
 teachers lounge?

A shout of "Yeah" from the students. Gardner glances back and  
 catches Sedwick's irritation.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

This isn't a discussion. The board passed it. And we have other stuff to get to.

STUDENT IN THE BACK

This is total and absolute bullshit!

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You know what? Keep talking like that and see how far you get. You kids have a problem, you're going to have to find appropriate ways of expressing your objections.

And with that... the fire alarm goes off.

A beat as the students realize the perfection of the timing and they applaud.

Gardner glances back at Sedwick. Sedwick glares. Gardner goes back to the mic.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Okay, let's not have a stampede. Let's get outside and get this over with.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Gardner and Sedwick watch the students mill about. A pack of skaters take the opportunity to light up.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I guess we should have saved that item for last.

Sedwick doesn't laugh. He just keeps eyeing the kids.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

We're gonna have a problem if they think they can pull an alarm every time they don't want to be here.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I know.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

(still eyeballing the kids)

Find out who it was and turn them over to the police.

Gardner nods.

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

The short bus pulls to a stop. The doors fold open and Charlie steps off. As the bus pulls away, the special ed kids wave at him through the windows. Charlie waves back.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - PIANO ROOM - DAY

Charlie spots the paper pharmacy bag sitting on the piano. He opens it and takes out the bottle of Ritalin.

Charlie pops the pill and downs it with a can of diet soda.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie's foot bounces up and down nervously underneath the table. He's got the books cracked open beside his dinner. He hasn't so much as lifted a utensil yet.

Mom stands in the doorway of the kitchen. She puts her hands on her hips.

MOM

Did something happen to the window?

CHARLIE

Dunno. I'm doing homework.

Mom shrugs and disappears into the kitchen.

CLOSE ON CHARLIE'S PUPIL

as it dilates. Images of sentences, math problems, chemistry equations...

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie flops down on the bed and rolls over onto his side.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Charlie jumps rope in the furnished basement. Transfixed by a late night music video on TV.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie flops down on the bed again and stares at the ceiling.



INT. CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Mrs. Albertson gestures to the diagrams of a planet on the chalk board.

MRS. ALBERTSON

The Earth rotates, and it revolves.  
Who can tell me the difference?

She wanders down the aisle a few feet and fixes her eyes on Charlie.

MRS. ALBERTSON

You're new, right?

Charlie gives a timid nod.

MRS. ALBERTSON

How about breaking the ice by  
explaining the difference to the  
class?

She gestures for Charlie to go to the front of the room.

Charlie takes a deep breath and slowly rises to his feet. He makes his way down the aisle, catching the glares of seated students.

He gets to the blackboard.

CHARLIE

Well, I'm...

As he turns around and finds himself on the stage of a STADIUM, facing an endless sea of TEENAGE FACES staring up in silent anticipation.

CHARLIE

(tapering off)  
...Charlie Bartlett.

Beads of sweat can be made out on his brow. Charlie's eyes move across the crowd.

Susan Gardner and Henry Freemont, a few rows back. Dustin Lauderbach and his football team off to the side, their arms crossed. Whitney Drummond and her cheerleaders grouped together. Adam Nevins and the other geeks, hands in pockets. Murphy Bivens, leaning against a pillar, a cigarette dangling. Kip Crombwell, blowing his nose with a hanky.

A wave of anxiety sweeps over him. The crowd's glares are unwavering.

CHARLIE

I... I can't do this. I'm not normal.

The crowd starts to MURMUR. Kids exchange looks with one another, whispering and motioning. A moment of this and they settle again.

Charlie shakes with distress.

CHARLIE

(to himself)

I'm just not normal.

He looks up and meets the gaze of Susan Gardner.

SUSAN

Join the club, dude.

A few ad lib shouts of agreement; "Yeah" and "Seriously."

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie still in bed staring at the ceiling. He still wears a grin from the daydream.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - MOM'S ROOM - NIGHT

The clock reads 3AM. Mom bolts upright in her bed at the sound of her son downstairs shouting...

CHARLIE (O.S.)

COCK-A-DOODLE-DOOOOOO!

She makes a move to get out of bed. Hesitates.

MOM

Charlie? Is that you?

INT. BARTLETT HOME - PIANO ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLIE'S SHAKY POV

as we hurtle through the kitchen and smack the screen door wide.

EXT. BARTLETT ESTATE - NIGHT

Charlie comes barreling around the side of the house in nothing but his underwear... He runs right out into...

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - NIGHT

...and as fast as we're moving across the pavement, Charlie catches up to us, pumping his arms wildly.

CHARLIE

I am awake! The world is rotating!  
WAKE UP!

Windows light up and dogs BARK.

Charlie passes a parked car, stops, comes back, picks up a brick from the crumbling wall dividing the two yards, and throws the brick with full force through the window of the sedan.

The car alarm BLARES, bringing people to their windows. He turns around to face the awakened neighborhood and throws his hands in the air.

CHARLIE

MY NAME IS CHARLIE BARTLETT AND I  
AM NOT ALONE!

A SIREN BLEEPs. Charlie's backside gets lit up with red and blue. He turns around to face the police cruisers.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - PIANO ROOM - NIGHT

Mom hands the POLICE OFFICER a cup of coffee. He silences the squawking radio strapped to his side.

POLICE OFFICER

No history of drug use whatsoever?

MOM

Not at all.

POLICE OFFICER

Normally I'd suggest having him committed for a few hours down at the children's ward, though it appears he's comin' down some.

They both look over at the piano where Charlie now sits in his Armani jacket, his leg cuffed to the piano. He slips on a pair of sunglasses as if to indicate his boredom.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm not an MD but it's possible with an amphetamine like Ritalin to trigger a manic episode.

MOM

I'm sure that's what it is. It's a  
new medication.

Charlie starts playing the piano, pressing down all the keys  
at one end.

CHARLIE

(singing)

It's a new medication...

He moves down the scale.

CHARLIE

(singing; low voice)

It's a new medication...

(wacky voice now)

It's a NEEEEW medication!

Mom and the officer go back to talking. Charlie stops playing  
and his eyes settle on the bottle of...

...Ritalin, resting atop the piano.

WE CLOSE IN ON CHARLIE as he smiles at his own private  
revelation.

EXT. GREAT FARMINGTON - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The sun crests the horizon and melts away the shadows of a  
slumbering suburbia.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - DAY

Charlie in bed below us, his hands resting behind his head.  
He's still awake.

His alarm goes off and he silences it.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Charlie brushes his teeth in the mirror. He spits into the  
sink and looks at his reflection.

CHARLIE

(to himself)

Maybe you got slapped around for  
lunch money one too many times on  
your way to the bus. Maybe your pop  
has to booze himself up so he can  
plow roads with a sense of humor...

He stops and turns around in his place, trying to compose himself. Starts again.

CHARLIE

Maybe it's none of these things.  
Maybe it's all of them.

He steps in closer, giving one final delivery.

CHARLIE

Maybe it's none of these things.  
(beat)  
Maybe it's all of them.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

MOM

I hope you don't think you're going  
to school.

Charlie stands in the doorway with his attaché case.

CHARLIE

I'm feeling much better.

MOM

No way. You didn't sleep at all  
last night and neither did I. I  
want to talk to Dr. Weathers...

CHARLIE

Mom.

MOM

What?

Charlie takes a step in closer and places a hand on her shoulder.

CHARLIE

It's gonna be okay.

Mom looks away to hide that she's got tears in her eyes.  
Charlie hugs her and she sobs in his arms.

MOM

You scared me, Charlie. You really  
did.

CHARLIE

I know. It's gonna be okay.

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

The short bus chugs up the hill. It pulls up to the corner where Charlie waits.

INT. SHORT BUS - MOVING - DAY

Charlie moves down the aisle, and as he does there come the greetings of the special ed kids.

Charlie takes the seat opposite Len. The big lug sucks on a lollypop.

CHARLIE

Hey, Len.

LEN

Hey Charlie!

CHARLIE

You feel like making fifty bucks after school today?

LEN

I sure would, Charlie!

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Murphy Bivens jingles his way home from school. He struts along side the train tracks.

As he reaches the railroad crossing, a town car screeches to a stop, blocking his path.

He halts and curiously watches Len Arbuckle emerge from the back of the town car.

LEN

Hey, Murphy!

MURPHY

What the hell is this?

LEN

Charlie wants to talk to you, Murphy.

MURPHY

Get stuffed, you mongoloid.

Len grabs Murphy with two hands.

MURPHY

Get the hell off me!

Len drags Murphy a few feet and tosses him into the back of the town car.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - DAY

Murphy bangs his head against the far window. Len squeezes in next to him and closes the door.

Charlie sits on the seat facing them. The sunglasses, the trench coat, and the scarf draped around his neck, make him look a little menacing.

CHARLIE

How are you, Murphy?

MURPHY

You! Your ass is grass.

Len grabs Murphy's head and squishes his face against the window.

LEN

Charlie says you gotta be nice, Murphy.

CHARLIE

Murph, I think we got started off on the wrong foot. I wanna work this out.

MURPHY

I'm gonna put you in the hospital.

Len presses harder against Murphy's head and he groans. Charlie reaches forward and takes the bag of pot sticking out of Murphy's jacket.

He looks it over and holds it up. He motions for Len to release him. Len does and Murphy rubs his neck.

CHARLIE

You sell this stuff?

MURPHY

When I'm not smoking it.

Charlie removes his sunglasses to show off the two black eyes.

CHARLIE

Listen, Murph, I've had a lot of time to think about what you did to me. I kept trying to understand what I did to deserve that. And then, last night, it dawned on me... I could have been anyone. The point isn't what I did. The point is why you did what you did.

MURPHY

Yeah? And what did you come up with, genius?

CHARLIE

I think you're angry.

MURPHY

Man, you sound like my freakin' guidance councilor. I'm not angry. I'm stone cold psycho. What the hell have I got to be angry about, anyway?

Charlie leans forward and takes a breath. He's been waiting for this.

CHARLIE

I don't know. Maybe you got slapped around for lunch money one too many times on your way to the bus. Maybe your pop has to booze himself up so he can plow roads with a sense of humor, and when he gets home, you're a distant third to sloppy joes and a bad sitcom. Maybe because the girls at school call you a scumbag behind your back. Maybe because the school has you placed on the remedial track and your teachers are good at making you feel like an idiot. Maybe it's none of these things. Maybe it's all of them.

Charlie puts the sunglasses back on. Murphy is oddly silent. A contemplative expression.

MURPHY

What do you want from me?

CHARLIE

I want to be your friend, Murphy.



Murphy averts his eyes. Charlie's directness has clearly unsettled him.

MURPHY

Okay, maybe you're not a total tool. But I don't think guys like you and guys like me can be friends.

CHARLIE

Why's that?

MURPHY

I take the train tracks home. You drive around in a limo.

CHARLIE

That's true. Maybe we'll have to settle for business partners.

Murphy shifts his eyes in confusion. Charlie digs through his overcoat and produces the bottle of Ritalin.

CHARLIE

I have one hundred ten milligram pills of Ritalin that I need to sell at the dance.

MURPHY

What does that do?

CHARLIE

It floods the brain with Norepinephrin.

Murphy's blank expression.

CHARLIE

It's kinda like speed.

MURPHY

Right on.

Charlie hands Murphy the pills. He then takes a moment to get out his cigarette case and light a smoke.

CHARLIE

I figure ten bucks a pill. We split the profit. That means you make five hundred dollars without spending a nickel. Which is a lot more money you'd make selling these...

Charlie holds up the pot. Murphy nods. He motions to the cigarette.

MURPHY

Can I get one of those?

Charlie opens the case and Murphy takes one. Charlie gets out his Zippo and lights Murphy's smoke in the shell of his hand. They roll down the windows and the clouds get sucked outside.

MURPHY

Business partners, huh?

Charlie nods, smirking slightly. That's good enough for him.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

CHEERLEADER

Charlie never peer pressured me. I don't think you could call what Charlie ever did as peer pressure.

We're in another taped interview. She's 16 or so and wearing her cheerleading outfit.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Can you think of a time you ~~were~~ peer pressured?

CHEERLEADER

Well, I dunno. Okay well - A few months ago, we were over at Dustin's house and we like got really smashed. Like a whole bucket of Smirnoff Ice. And... see the only girls there were me and my friend Barbara. And the guys were like...

(football player voice)

Make out. Make out. We totally want to watch you two make out.

(back to normal)

And I'm like - Barbara, are we really drunk enough to dyke out in front of a bunch of horny guys? 'Cause, you know, I didn't have anything against bisexuality or anything, but I didn't like, feel ready. But then I realized that Barbara wanted to. And that made me feel like I had to. So I did.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Did that make you feel bad about yourself?

CHEERLEADER

Hells no! Now we do it all the time. In fact - that plus tons more. Sometimes I'm like...

(making a phone with her hand)

Barbara, I'm in heat. Get over here and double click my mouse!

She puts down the imaginary phone and beams with mischievousness.

INT. GARDNER HOME - SUSAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Susan leans into her reflection in the vanity mirror to apply a dark lip gloss. The rest of her outfit is all black lace and fish net stockings.

Two HONKS from outside bring her to the window. She throws it open to reveal Henry Freemont in his VW Jetta outside the house.

SUSAN

Henry!

HENRY

Susan! We're late.

SUSAN

I'll be right down.

She shuts her window with some effort, snatches up a pair of shoes and heads into...

HALL

She reaches the door to her father's study where Principal Gardner hunches over a reference book.

SUSAN

So one o'clock?

She props herself up in the door frame as she straps on her shoes.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

What happens at one o'clock?

SUSAN

My curfew. One o'clock, right?

Gardner takes a beat, leaning back in his chair.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Susan, this is probably futile but I have to ask...

SUSAN

I don't know who pulled the alarm. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you.

Gardner purses his lips - that answers that.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

So where are you going - looking like Betty Page?

SUSAN

Down to the brothel. My pimp's running a gang bang special.

She smirks slightly but her father's expression is blank.

SUSAN

The dance, Dad. I'm going to the dance.

Gardner nods.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Be home by...

SUSAN

(overlapping)  
...one o'clock. I got it.

She clops off down the hall.

We stay with Gardner as he makes a half hearted attempt to get back into his reading.

INT. ADAM NEVINS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Adam and his friends are crowded around a table of chips and dip, papers and role-playing books spread out across its surface. Adam watches in grim silence as twelve sided dice are thrown and someone exclaims at the result.

ADAM

I can't take this.

He stands and the others look at each other in alarm.

ADAM

All we do is sit around while the jocks are propagating the downward curve of our species.

(grabbing his jacket)

I'm going to the dance. At least there I can watch Whitney Drummond gyrate and maybe gather some genuine material for nocturnal emissions.

He departs, slamming the door behind him. The other nerds look at one another for a beat before grabbing their jackets and following after him.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Jeep Wrangler rocks back and forth, the windows fogging.

INT. JEEP WRANGLER - NIGHT

The two kids under the blanket are Whitney Drummond and Dustin Lauderbach.

Dustin collapses to Whitney's side and they both lay there breathless. Post coital silence. Then...

DUSTIN

I think I'm going to fail trigonometry.

WHITNEY

Your dad know?

DUSTIN

I think so. I told him.

WHITNEY

And what'd he say?

DUSTIN

He asked if I was ready for the game.

Whitney rolls against him and runs her hand down his face.

WHITNEY

In twenty years, what will you be doing with trigonometry anyway?

She sits up and rolls down the window to let the distant HIP HOP filter to them.

WHITNEY

I love this song.

Dustin sighs. She turns to him.

WHITNEY

You wanna go back in?

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A mostly empty corridor of lockers. Charlie leans against the wall at the far end of the hall. There is the muffled din of MUSIC, which swells when Murphy comes through the double doors of the gymnasium.

CHARLIE

How'd we do?

MURPHY

(scratching his head)  
Well, it's gone.

CHARLIE

Gone?

MURPHY

All of it. Every... every last  
pill. I...

Murphy glances back at the double doors.

CHARLIE

What?

Murphy looks back, bewildered. Charlie's eyes go from Murphy to the double doors. He steps forward and swings the doors wide and we are hit with the sight of...

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

...THE DANCE. Kids moshing and shouting at the top of their lungs to the lyrics of the song. A floor slick with sweat. Some of the boys start pulling off their soaked tee shirts, tossing them over the throng.

A teacher takes a step out of the corner - a gesture of protest, but stops himself when...

...the girls follow suit; tearing off their blouses and flinging them at the stage. Screams of joy.

The sound of raging hormones fueled by booze and amphetamines.

Murphy and Charlie stand in the corner, observing with fascination.

A particularly amped HIPPIE KID leaps off the stage and we FREEZE FRAME on him in mid-air, hovering over a crowd of hands poised to impossibly catch him.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Charlie counts a stack of ten dollar bills. Metallica plays. They've turned Murphy's furnished basement space into their office. Their videotaped fight plays on the television.

CHARLIE

There's more than a grand here.

Charlie goes to the stereo to turn down the music.

CHARLIE

Who is this?

MURPHY

Metallica.

CHARLIE

You got anything more relaxing?

MURPHY

Fool, what are you talking about? Metallica is good for all occasions. Gettin' drunk, chillin', gettin' laid. Metallica is the best gettin' laid music there is.

CHARLIE

Really?

MURPHY

Yep.

MURPHY'S FRIEND (ON TV)

Mess him up, Murph!

They turn their attention to the fight on TV. Charlie watches as Murphy takes him apart with the brass knuckles.

CHARLIE

Is that my face making that sound?

Murphy laughs.

MURPHY

It's kinda sad, dude. You didn't even put up a fight.

CHARLIE

What'd you tape this for, anyway?

MURPHY

I always have my fights videotaped.

CHARLIE

You do?

MURPHY

Yeah, man. They're fun to watch. In a GREATEST RODEO DEATHS kind of way.

Murphy goes back to counting money. Charlie watches him... the gears turning. Murphy becomes aware of it and glances up.

MURPHY

What?

Charlie just breaks into a grin.

MURPHY

What's that look for?

CUT TO:

VIDEO FOOTAGE...

...of Murphy throwing a BEEFY WRESTLER against a chain-link fence and laying into him with punch after punch. A CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR can be heard.

CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR (V.O.)

Bartlett Productions brings you...

The TITLE comes spinning out, splashing all over the screen with red, bloody letters...

CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR (V.O.)

Montgomery Mountain's Greatest  
After School Fights!

Murphy and the wrestler pound each other.

CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR (V.O.)

Starring Murphy Bivens...



Various cuts of Murphy's fights. As the promo narrator names each person, their name with a little arrow appears indicating the opponent.

CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Lester Hodgewell, Bert Bannister,  
Terry Gotham, Andrew Degado, Jose  
Gomez,...

It gets to Kip Crombwell.

CHEESY PROMO NARRATOR (V.O.)  
...And the kid in the auto mechanic  
shirt who's name nobody knows!  
Right here on Montgomery Mountain's  
Greatest After School Fights!

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

A feeding frenzy. Charlie hands out video cassettes from a satchel as Murphy collects bills from outstretched hands.

CHARLIE  
Slow down. Have your money ready.

The crowd starts to thin out a bit. Charlie and Murphy make their way down the hall.

HENRY  
Charlie?

Charlie stops and turns around.

HENRY  
You're Charlie Bartlett, right?

CHARLIE  
That's me. You're Henry Freemont,  
right?

Henry nods.

HENRY  
Can I talk to you for a sec?

Charlie looks to Murphy.

CHARLIE  
I'll catch up to you.

Murphy holds out his fist and Charlie bumps it awkwardly. He and Henry step into a doorway, out of sight of the other students.

CHARLIE

So what's up?

HENRY

I hear you can get a hold of medication.

CHARLIE

I guess. Why, what's goin' on?

HENRY

I have these spells. In class. Sometimes my hands get really sweaty and I have trouble breathing. At first I thought I was having a heart attack, but it only happens at certain times, so I'm thinking, maybe it's mental. Anyway, I can't tell my parents. They already think I'm a freak.

CHARLIE

Huh. Well, I'm not a doctor or anything, but... I don't know if Ritalin will help you.

HENRY

What will?

Charlie scratches his head.

CHARLIE

I'm not sure.

Henry's eyes go to the floor.

CHARLIE

But I'm gonna find out.

HENRY

Yeah? You can do that?

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'm gonna work this out. I promise. Cool?

Henry allows a weak smile.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Charlie wanders through the stacks, running his fingers across the bindings of the books. He pulls one from the shelf.

THUMP. A volume lands on the table. The cover reads DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS IV. Charlie takes a seat and opens it to page one. He begins reading.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

He finishes the last page and closes the volume, tossing it to the side. He leans back in his chair and gets a contemplative expression.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie watches his mother reading as she eats. He clears his throat.

CHARLIE

Mom?

MOM

Yeah, hon?

CHARLIE

I think I'm going to meet with a few other psychiatrists.

She lifts her gaze from the reading and looks at him over her glasses.

MOM

Something happen with Dr. Weathers?

CHARLIE

Not per say. But it's a broad field with many methods. Psychodynamic, Behavioral, Cognitive... It would behoove us to see what else is out there.

MOM

Huh. Well that sounds reasonable, hon. Email me the appointments and I'll have Thomas drive you.

She goes back to reading. Charlie regards her for a beat and stands to clear his place.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #2'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie - sprawled on the couch. PSYCHIATRIST #2, a squat little man, listens intently, touching his pen to his lips.

CHARLIE

So I guess you could say I feel depressed.

PSYCHIATRIST #2

When you say depressed...

CHARLIE

Like low energy. Excessive sleeping. Weight gain. Feelings of melancholy.

PSYCHIATRIST #2

Are these feelings persistent or do you find your mood to...

CHARLIE

Yeah, sometimes I'm on top of the world. Like delusions of grandeur. Like the exact opposite.

PSYCHIATRIST #2

Tell me about that.

CHARLIE

Well, I feel productive and I can't sleep at all. I lose weight and am given to frivolous spending and promiscuity.

The shrink furrows his brow. Charlie glances his way.

After a beat, the shrink reaches for his prescription pad.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #3'S OFFICE - DAY

PSYCHIATRIST #3 crosses her legs and sets her pad down in her lap as she listens.

CHARLIE

I get short of breath and dizzy. Nausea, blurred vision. Sometimes it feels like a heart attack.

PSYCHIATRIST #3

We call that a panic attack.

CHARLIE

Is that what they call it? What can we do?

PSYCHIATRIST #3

Well, I'm going to start you on a low dose of Klonipin and Xanax, and if it persists, we'll...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #4'S OFFICE - DAY

PSYCHIATRIST #4

...introduce You to some of the Seritergic Anti-depressants like Prozac. What else can you tell me about the...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #5'S OFFICE - DAY

CHARLIE

...feelings of depersonalization and boredom...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #6'S OFFICE - DAY

CHARLIE

...Anger and aggression. Irritability and...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #7'S OFFICE - DAY

CHARLIE

...Obsessive behavior is I guess what you guys call it. Like I'll have to check the oven before I go to school. And the repetitive things I do to deal with compulsions.

PSYCHIATRIST #7

What kind of compulsions are we talking about?

CHARLIE

Well, whenever I hear someone say a word that starts with the letter...  
(makes a P symbol with his hands)

I have to say five words that start with V and tap my head with my right hand.

The psychiatrist reaches for his prescription pad.

PSYCHIATRIST #7

I'd like to start you on twenty milligrams of Zoloft QAM.

Charlie gets a look of concern.

CHARLIE

Zoloft, huh? I hear Paxil is a lot like Zoloft only with a shorter half life.

The psychiatrist looks up from his pad.

CHARLIE

That way if I have a reaction, like a manic episode, it won't stay in my system as long.

The psychiatrist pauses momentarily. After a beat, he crosses out the script, tears it off, and starts a new one.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie sits at his desk, crowded in by stacks of PSYCHIATRIC MAGAZINES and JOURNALS. He's sorting through a dozen prescriptions.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Charlie and Murphy waltz down the hall. They reach Henry Freemont leaning against his locker.

CHARLIE

C'mon Henry, step into my office.

INT. BOYS ROOM - DAY

Henry squats alone in the stall. Looks like he's talking to himself on the can.

HENRY

It's this feeling like I'm alone and if I were to have a stroke right here, how long before someone would find me.

We slowly DRIFT across to the neighboring stall, where Charlie sits on the toilet making notes.

CHARLIE

And how long would you say these anxiety attacks last?

HENRY

Fifteen minutes, sometimes a little longer.

CHARLIE

But then you feel okay?

HENRY

Yeah, I mean, I don't pass out or anything.

CHARLIE

I dunno, I mean, I guess my point is, in everything I've read, there's not one case of anyone dying of a panic attack.

HENRY

No?

CHARLIE

Not one. So the next time you start to feel anxious... Just tell yourself "Hey, I'm having a panic attack, I'm not going to die. In fact, in fifteen minutes, I'll probably feel fine." ..

Henry snickers in amusement.

HENRY

What do I do until then?

Charlie stands up and gets out of the stall. He opens Henry's stall and motions for him to come out. Murphy leans against the sink smoking a cigarette.

CHARLIE

(to Murphy)

Start him on ten milligrams of Zoloft QAM and one milligram of Xanax as needed.

Murphy nods. Charlie turns to Henry and puts his hand on his shoulder.

CHARLIE

This should provide you with some relief. We'll meet again next week. Same time, same place.

HENRY

Thanks, man.

The bell SOUNDS and Charlie departs. Murphy sorts through the medication on the counter as Henry counts out a series of bills.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER (V.O.)

There is someone among you...

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

...who is in for a bad time.

Gardner pauses dramatically and we take the moment to get the REVERSE ANGLE - Gardner standing, hands in pockets. Beyond him, the bleachers, packed with STUDENTS who seem to be hanging on every word of this scandal.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Despite overwhelming evidence to support the contrary, I'm going to address that person like an adult and tell you that whoever pulled the fire alarm during the assembly is going to face criminal charges.

WE MOVE down the rows of teenagers. Settle on Charlie. He's the only one not riveted. He punches the buttons on his calculator and makes notes.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

If this individual is not brought forward, it's going to be the student body that suffers. And we will stop treating you as if you were adults.

Gardner stops pacing, takes a hand out of his pocket and gestures to take in the crowd.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

So... right here and now, I ask - Will the person or persons step forward?

A long pause. Time to take in the faces. Glares of contempt. Like inmates for the warden.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Very well. Until you do so, I am closing the Hastings Student Lounge.

The mumbles of protest grow to hisses and boos.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

(as they settle)

Now get to class.



The students moan and get to their feet. Charlie finishes his calculations and writes in his notebook

ON THE NOTEBOOK

as he writes X 723 STUDENTS = \$11,345/MONTH.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mom and Charlie dine to SOFT JAZZ. She glances up. Charlie is reading PSYCHIATRIC SYNDROMES AND DRUG TREATMENT.

MOM

Whatcha readin'?

CHARLIE

(absently)

Nothin'.

Beat.

MOM

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yeah, Mom.

MOM

You making any friends at all?

CHARLIE

Workin' on it.

A beat, then she shrugs and gets back to her salad.

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

Charlie stands on the corner. The short bus labors up the hill.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Charlie steps off the bus. His usual attire, though the sunglasses are an addition.

The kids on the platform watch him go inside...

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

...and as he makes his way down the hall, the twangs of MUSIC fade up. STUDENTS turn from their lockers to watch Charlie pass. He becomes aware of it and starts to stroll along, attaché case at his side.

He slows down and removes his sunglasses with a smile.

Near his locker, a CROWD OF KIDS waits expectantly. Murphy is among them. He nods to Charlie and grins.

CHARLIE

Well. Shall we get started?

He heads into the boys room and the pack of teenagers file in behind him.

MUSICAL MONTAGE

INT. BOYS ROOM - DAY

VARIOUS CUTS of KIDS in the stall.

METAL HEAD GIRL

...I mean he doesn't want to see me. I can't stop crying...

NERD

...He calls me a lard ass and last night he hit my mom...

STONER

...All I wanna do is drop acid. I just can't handle this place...

WRESTLER

...What if I don't want to go to college? I feel like I'm gonna hit someone...

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Gardner rounds the corner and is hit with the sight of a line of students waiting to use the boys room.

He approaches the MOTOR HEAD at the end of the line.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

There something wrong with the other bathrooms?

The motor head shrugs. The other students look at each other and awkwardly disperse.

Gardner isn't satisfied. He heads into the bathroom. Charlie and Murphy pass him on their way out.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - DAY

A MONEY COUNTER shuffles bills SCARFACE style. Murphy's on the phone. Charlie sorts through files and textbooks.

MURPHY

Renny Albertson says she's got dry mouth and nausea.

CHARLIE

Normal side effects. They'll pass. Have you seen the Morris Sapperstein diagnosis?

INT. BARTLETT HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Charlie enters looking groggy. He opens his medicine cabinet.

SHOTS OF MEDICATIONS - Zavontin, Depakote, Welbutrin, Xanax, Dexedrine, Librium, Klonopin, Prozac, Tegretol, Haldol, Ativan, Ritalin, Zyprexa, Paxil, Zoloft, Zanaflex...

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

Charlie makes his way to the corner and stops at the sight of twenty or so kids waiting at his bus stop.

INT. SHORT BUS - MOVING - DAY

The special ed kids look a little crowded, but glad for the company. Everyone crowds around the aisle where Charlie and Murphy are at work.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Charlie and the others descend from the bus. Whitney and the other cheerleaders watch him as they do their stretches.

WHITNEY

(shouting)

Hi, Charlie!

Charlie stops and looks around, trying to determine who's calling his name. So the cheerleaders help him.

CHEERLEADERS

HI, CHARLIE!!

Charlie spots them. A moment of surprise and he waves.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Charlie writes something down on a piece of paper and folds it. He passes it to the student next to him and we follow the note...

...across the room to Susan Gardner. She folds open the note. It reads: HI. I'M CHARLIE.

She tears a piece of paper out of her notebook. Writes something down. Folds it and hands it off.

We follow it across the room, until it reaches Charlie. He folds it open. It reads: YEAH, I KNOW.

He looks up and meets her eyes. He smiles. She smiles back.

END MUSICAL MONTAGE

INT. PSYCHIATRIST #8'S OFFICE - DAY

PSYCHIATRIST #8

I'm happy to hear you're getting along better.

Charlie sprawled out on the couch. Sunglasses and a trademarked shirt that reads: PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE THE REASON PEOPLE LIKE ME NEED MEDICATION.

PSYCHIATRIST #8

Adjusting to your new environment. And the Nerontin seems to be helping.

CHARLIE

Guess so.

PSYCHIATRIST #8

That's good, because the truth is, we really never know how you youngsters are going to react to these medications.

Charlie considers this.

CHARLIE

Trust me, Doc, bringing psychiatric drugs and teenagers together is like opening a lemonade stand in the desert.

The shrink furrows his brow. That's not exactly what he meant.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Another taped interview. This time a 15 year old BLACK GIRL with big hoop ear rings.

BLACK GIRL

Yunno, the whole school is like made up of groups. You know, like cliques. You know what I'm sayin'. Like me and my girlfriends. We're a clique. You know, you got like the skaters, and... the drama freaks, and the football players. You know what I'm sayin'. Grown ups have it too. Y'all have your own little cliques.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

I know what you mean.

BLACK GIRL

So there are these cliques and it's hard to go up to someone in another clique, because, well, you just don't do that. Those are the rules, ya know what I'm sayin'? So like, then there's Charlie. Who ain't in nobody's clique, or, I dunno, maybe he's in everybody's clique. See that's the thing about Charlie. Is that he's all about breakin' the rules. And I'm all - maybe if Charlie can break the rules, I can too.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Charlie stares out the window daydreaming. Then-

INTERCOME (V.O.)

Will Charlie Bartlett please report to the Principal's office. Charlie Bartlett to the Principal's office.

The intercom squeals out and all the students swivel their heads around to look at Charlie.

MRS. ALBERTSON

You better get going, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Yes, ma'am.

INT. PRINCIPAL GARDNERS' S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie knocks on the door.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER (O.S.)

C'mon in.

Charlie comes in and stands silent. Sedwick leans against the window, arms folded. Garder sits at his desk.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Have a seat.

Charlie has a beat of apprehension and then he sits.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I don't think we met yet. You are  
Charlie Bartlett. And I am  
Principal Gardner.

CHARLIE

How do you do?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Fine. And this...

(gesturing to Sedwick)

Is our superintendent, Mr. Sedwick,  
who made a special visit to meet  
you.

(beat)

Do you know why you're here,  
Charlie?

CHARLIE

Uh, not exactly.

Gardner picks up a remote control and turns on the TV, which begins to play MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN'S GREATEST AFTER SCHOOL FIGHTS.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

This might well be the most  
horrifying thing I've seen at this  
school.

Charlie sinks into his chair.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

Peddling this trash makes you  
reprehensible in the... You know  
what reprehensible means?

CHARLIE

Yes, Sir.

Sedwick glances to Gardner, not sure what to make of the etiquette.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Do you understand what you did wrong, son?

CHARLIE

Not really.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Well, you have three days of suspension to think about it.

Charlie's eyes go to the floor. .

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You can go.

Charlie stands and wanders out. Gardner looks to Sedwick.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

What do you know about him?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Expelled from a boarding school.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

Keep an eye on him. And get rid of that tape.

EXT. RAILROAD STREET - DAY

Susan Gardner walks down the lane of boutiques, she looks around and lights a smoke.

A van pulls up beside her and slows to her pace. She becomes aware of it and stops. The window hums down to reveal Charlie at the wheel.

CHARLIE

You wanna buy a stereo?

SUSAN

Aren't you like suspended?

CHARLIE

Three days.

SUSAN

Cool.

(beat)

You really got stereos in there?

CHARLIE

Just the one I use to listen to music.

(beat)

You wanna ride?

Susan looks around and shrugs.

SUSAN

Sure.

INT. VAN - MOVING - DAY

Susan sorts through Charlie's CD's. Would you believe she doesn't recognize a single one.

CHARLIE

So you're Susan Gardner, the Principal's daughter.

SUSAN

Yeah.

CHARLIE

How is that?

SUSAN

How do ya think? It bites the big one.

CHARLIE

What's he really like?

SUSAN

He's a total alchi. A few years ago he went ape on me and mom enrolled him in an anger management program. For all the good it did.

Charlie nods.

SUSAN

So you're the guy all the kids go to talk to.

CHARLIE

Yep.



SUSAN

So what do you talk to them about?

CHARLIE

You know, whatever. Their frustrations. Their anxieties.

SUSAN

What kind of anxieties?

CHARLIE

All kinds. Everybody worries. Everybody's afraid of something.

SUSAN

Like what are you afraid of?

CHARLIE

Death.

SUSAN

You're only seventeen.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but one day I'm going to die.

SUSAN

So what?

CHARLIE

Well, what if that's the end?

SUSAN

You don't believe in God? Are you like an atheist or something?

CHARLIE

I don't not believe in God. But I'm not sure I believe in him either. I'm agnostic, which seems to be the logical choice.

SUSAN

Doesn't seem logical to me.

CHARLIE

Look, this is my analogy. It's like there's this door, and behind it is a room you've never been in. The agnostic guy says - I've never been in that room, and I have no idea what's in there.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

The atheist guy says - I've never been in that room either, but I know for a fact that there's nothing in there. And then there's the theist, the guy who goes to church every Sunday, and this is the best one. He says - I've never been in that room, but I'm absolutely positive there's a monkey splashing around in a big vat of acid.

Susan giggles.

CHARLIE

Okay? So which one sounds like the logical choice to you?

SUSAN

The first one, I guess.

Long pause.

SUSAN

But wouldn't it be more interesting if there was a monkey splashing around in a vat of acid?

He looks at her thoughtfully.

CHARLIE

I guess I never thought of it that way.

She smiles and looks out the window. Charlie glances at her again.

CHARLIE

So you got a boyfriend?

SUSAN

Not at present.

CHARLIE

You want one?

SUSAN

Maybe.

Charlie nods and looks ahead. That's good enough for him.

INT. 20TH RAILROAD STREET BAR - NIGHT

Gardner reads at the bar. A cigarette burns between his fingers.

BARTENDER

Nathan, you want another?

Gardner nods and the bartender's hand comes in and fills his glass.

The cop who apprehended Charlie during his manic episode takes the neighboring seat.

POLICE OFFICER

Evenin', Nathan.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

How are you?

The cop nods and lights a smoke of his own.

POLICE OFFICER

I don't think we're gonna get 'em.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Why's that?

POLICE OFFICER

Whoever pulled the alarm knew we installed the ink and stepped out of the way. No telling the prints apart.

Gardner turns the page of his book.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I'm holding out that they're going to come forward.

POLICE OFFICER

Why would they do that?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Because deep down, kids want to do the right thing.

The cop shrugs.

POLICE OFFICER

Susie's growing up fast.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Yeah.

POLICE OFFICER

Saw her ridin' around with that  
guy. What's his name? Odd kid.  
Bartlett. Charlie Bartlett.

Gardner lifts his eyes from his reading for the first time.

INT. GARDNER HOME - HALL - NIGHT

Susan's door covered in police tape - Gardner bangs on it  
with his fist.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Susan! Susan, get out here!

Susan comes to the door and flings it open.

SUSAN

Jesus, what's your damage?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Where have you been tonight?

SUSAN

What do you care?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I wanna know! I wanna know where  
you were, who you were with...

SUSAN

Dad?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

What?

SUSAN

I can see that you're upset and I  
have no problem telling you those  
things.

Gardner stands there at a loss.

SUSAN

Communication is totally important  
to me. So by all means come back to  
me when you're not totally smashed  
out of your skull. You drunk A-  
hole!

She slams the door in his face.

Gardner stands there a beat, swaying a bit, considering whether to pound on the door again.

He turns and staggers down the hall to his study.

EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

Charlie makes his way to the corner. He stops and waits, watching the short bus struggle up the hill.

He smiles when he sees...

...the bus is so packed with kids, they're sticking out the windows. There's a banner decorating the side of the bus that reads: WELCOME BACK CHARLIE.

The bus pulls to a stop and the door opens.

BUS DRIVER

Comin' to school today, Charlie?

CHARLIE

If I must, I must.

He climbs aboard.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Lunch period - a cafeteria segregated by clique. Charlie's watching everyone with a pensive expression. So intently that we can't hear what Murphy is saying to him.

Charlie stands and steps up onto the table. A HIGH ANGLE view of the lunch room. The conversations simmer as students shush each other.

CHARLIE

Due to the booming economy of our fine school, I'm happy to announce that you are all invited this Friday to what will be... The most raging party in the history of Great Farmington.

The kids throw their hands in the air and cheer. They begin pounding the tables with their fists.

STUDENTS

CHARLIE! CHARLIE! CHARLIE!

EXT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A SINGER wails into the mic. There's a thrashing long-haired BAND behind him. Murphy's back yard has become a sea of teenagers. Dancing, singing, head banging, leaping into the pool fully clothed.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie takes in the sight from the upstairs window, his hands clasped behind his back. Murphy comes to his side.

MURPHY

Dustin Lauderbach wants a minute with you, dude.

CHARLIE

Is this really necessary? I was hoping to get a chance to enjoy this.

MURPHY

He'd really appreciate it. He's the captain of the football team, Charlie. That ain't a bad person to have owing us a favor.

Charlie nods and Murphy leaves his side.

EXT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Susan listens to two HIPPIE CHICKS sharing a joint.

HIPPIE CHICK #1

I'm sure he totally has a girlfriend.

HIPPIE CHICK #1

You're like sweating him, aren't you?

HIPPIE CHICK #1

Have you met him? He's so right on.

Susan smiles to herself.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A SIAMESE FIGHTING FISH floats in a bowl by the armchair. Dustin regards it a beat and slouches back into the seat.

Charlie sits across from him.

DUSTIN

My dad's a great guy. Everybody likes my dad. He's the life of the party.

CHARLIE

What do you think of him?

DUSTIN

I love the guy, 'cause like I said, he's a cool guy. I'm telling you this so that you understand that this problem isn't him.

CHARLIE

What is the problem?

DUSTIN

I'm sick of football. And I don't have enough time for studying to get into a good college.

CHARLIE

Have you mentioned this to him.

DUSTIN

No way.

CHARLIE

How about your mom?

DUSTIN

Anything I tell her goes in one ear and out the other. You know how moms are. They only hear half the stuff you say. What is that? There's a word for it.

CHARLIE

Menopause.

DUSTIN

So what should I do?

CHARLIE

Tell him you want to quit the team, I would think.

DUSTIN

Easier said than done.

CHARLIE

I guess I don't understand why.

A beat. Dustin looks over at the fish as he reflects. Then to the floor. He laughs suddenly at his own private thought.

CHARLIE

What's funny?

DUSTIN

I just... I remember when I first got to high school. My dad came home from work with a case of beer.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUSTIN'S BACKYARD - FLASHBACK - DAY

MR. LAUDERBACH, forties, overweight, sets up the grill. He hands Dustin a beer.

DUSTIN (V.O.)

He gets the grill going. Cooks up some burgers. Then he asks me...

They're in lawn chairs now. Lauderbach turns to his son.

MR. LAUDERBACH

You get your books today?

DUSTIN

Yep.

MR. LAUDERBACH

Go get them.

DUSTIN (V.O.)

We were both pretty smashed, so it was a little weird, 'cause he sounded serious.

EXT. DUSTIN'S BACKYARD - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

Lauderbach helps Dustin remove books from the satchel. He tosses one of them on the grill and it catches fire.

He glances over at his son who has a dumfounded expression on his face.

MR. LAUDERBACH

Go on.

Dustin looks down at the book in his hand.

He hesitantly takes a step toward the fire.



DUSTIN

What for?

Lauderbach puts his hand on his son's shoulder.

MR. LAUDERBACH

You're old enough to know the reality, kiddo. None of these will ever do you any good.

Lauderbach smiles. Dustin gives a forced smile back.

He tosses his book onto the grill and the flames leap higher.

They both start tearing apart the other books, tossing pages into the flames where they shrivel into black crispy flakes. They're laughing and guzzling their beers.

Just when it looks like the pile of texts might be too much, Lauderbach fires a squirt of lighter fluid and the grill erupts in a roaring pillar of flame.

BACK TO:

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

DUSTIN

I understand where he was coming from. My dad never graduated high school and he really made something of himself. Everyone told him he couldn't, but he did.

(beat)

My sports career is a big part of his life. I mean, he and the other dads actually run a betting pool. How can I possibly break it to him I don't even like the game?

CHARLIE

Interesting.

DUSTIN

What is? That I don't like the game?

CHARLIE

That you actually prefaced this saying this problem wasn't about your dad.

Dustin considers this. He taps the fish bowl.

DUSTIN

Okay, point taken. But I still don't know what to do.

CHARLIE

I think sooner or later it's going to be good to disappoint him.

DUSTIN

How is that good?

CHARLIE

Well, and this is just a hypothesis I'm working on, but one of our duties as teenagers is to occasionally piss off our parents.

Dustin gets an amused look. It fades.

DUSTIN

I don't know how to do that.

CHARLIE

Dustin, you're in good hands. We're gonna work this out.

Dustin considers this, staring at the ceiling.

DUSTIN

You know what?

CHARLIE

What?

DUSTIN

I believe you.

A smile. That's good enough for Charlie.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Charlie pushes his way through the crowded kitchen. He reaches the counter where the bus driver is tending bar.

BUS DRIVER

What can I get you, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Just a diet soda on the rocks.

The bus driver busies himself. Susan nudges her way to his side.

CHARLIE

Hey, what's up?

SUSAN

I've been looking for you  
everywhere.

He smiles shyly. She smiles back and takes his hand, and as she leads him up the stairs, the opening to Metallica's UNFORGIVEN comes in like an oncoming train. It plays over...

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

...where in the dim room Susan stands before Charlie. They're facing each other and the window behind them flashes from the strobe lights outside.

They gradually near each other. Lips touching tenderly. Charlie pulls back momentarily.

CHARLIE

I've never done this before.

A smile gradually creeps onto Susan's face.

SUSAN

I know that, Charlie.

Charlie's expression, a glint of surprise, gives way to relief. She pulls him close and they kiss. Metallica continues as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Where we catch SLOW MOTION snippets of teenagers partying. Thrashing, dancing, yelling, drinking, laughing...

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie and Susan make love beneath the sheets. Movement made choppy by the strobe.

EXT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We're above the party now, slowly circling. We rise higher and higher until the party drifts away and we're flying out over the suburban landscape of yards and pools. Metallica fades away.

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie and Susan are bundled together on the couch, half dressed.

SUSAN

Are you gonna like brag to all your buddies now?

CHARLIE

I dunno. Not if you don't want me to.

She shrugs.

SUSAN

Charlie Bartlett. Charlie Bartlett. What kind of name is that anyway?

CHARLIE

Well, originally, the name was Bartlenoskian. My great grandfather, Chuna, was supposedly the leader of a group of bandits living in the mountains of Romania...

CUT TO:

ROMANIA

Where GRAINY FOOTAGE shows a group of BANDITS riding horses, shooting rifles in the air. CHUNA BARTLENOSKIAN is at the head of the pack.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

They'd leave their hideout once a month to rob the merchant caravan that ran from Bucurest to Ploiesti...

Chuna playing chess with one of his men. The other bandits are crowded around.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

The rest of the time, he'd play chess with his men, He figured strategic thinking was essential to their survival. Unfortunately, he was not as good a bandit as he was a chess player because on one of the raids he got lost and was captured by the Czar's soldiers.

An ARMY OF RUSSIAN SOLDIERS surround the bandits. Chuna drops to his knees, his hands raised.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

He was sentenced to hang, but he befriended his guard, who, as it turns out, was also a chess fanatic, and after losing to his new friend thirty times...

Chuna in shackles as he plays with the RUSSIAN GUARD.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

...he got the guard to help him escape to America, where Chuna met his wife, a Swiss young woman who worked for a bank in New York.

A PHOTO of Chuna posing with his SWISS WIFE in front of the Statue of Liberty.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

They had a son and named him Stanley. When Stanley was of age he changed his last name to Bartlett and joined the Army as a medic.

A YOUNG STANLEY BARTLETT in basic training. He flips off the SERGEANT when the man's back is turned.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

He spent most of World War Two stationed in Cairo, where he met and married an Egyptian princess.

STOP MOTION of Stanley and his EGYPTIAN PRINCESS drinking wine on a yacht as they float down the Nile. The Pyramids loom in the background.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

But when Israel threatened an air strike, Stanley, his wife, and their son Gary returned to New York City, and he opened a small dry cleaning business.

Stanley couldn't be more bored, he's watching the coat rack go round and round.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Gary, my father, received a prestigious education at Cornell...

## CORNELL CAMPUS

A long haired hippie, GARY BARTLETT, spurring on the VIETNAM PROTESTORS

CHARLIE (V.O.)

...and afterwards, went to work for the IRS.

Gary Bartlett in a barber shop, regarding his new crew cut in the mirror.

STOP MOTION images of him crunching numbers, sorting receipts, the BUSINESSMEN behind him watching nervously.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

After ten years, the government finally caught on that he was allocating massive government funds to Anarchist groups in Boston and Chicago...

BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE of ANARCHIST PROTESTERS, toting signs that read GOOD GOVERNMENT IS NO GOVERNMENT.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

...so they through the book at him and he received a twenty year sentence.

## A PRISON CELL

The doors swing closed and Gary Bartlett grasps the bars.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

My mother, whose family supposedly descended from Alexander Hamilton - you know - the guy who died in the duel with Aaron Burr...

FOOTAGE of ALEXANDER HAMILTON shooting his pistol in the air. The CROWD laughs with him. Except for AARON BURR, who scowls and shoots Hamilton in the chest.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

...well, my mother, she met my father through an outreach program at the prison...

Charlie's Mom teaching Geometry. Gary Bartlett watches with hearts in his eyes. Sends a paper airplane her way.

She unfolds the paper airplane. The piece of paper reads: HI.  
I'M GARY.

CHARLIE (V.O.)  
...and after a long correspondence  
of love letters he asked her to  
marry him.

A WEDDING, on one side the ARISTOCRATS, and on the other,  
CONVICTS.-

CHARLIE (V.O.)  
Five days after the wedding, I was  
conceived during a conjugal visit.

A PRISON VISITING ROOM

Charlie Mom and Dad make love under the covers, candles all  
around.

WE DRIFT out into the hall where a PRISON GUARD looks at his  
watch.

CHARLIE (V.O.)  
My mother's parents died shortly  
after I was born. Leaving her the  
estate.

Mom holding an INFANT CHARLIE at her father's funeral.

CHARLIE (V.O.)  
So she spent the first six years of  
my life traveling the world...

A SERIES OF POSTCARD TYPE PHOTOS

of MOM and Charlie at various ages. ROME, TOKYO, PARIS, CAPE  
TOWN, LONDON, BERLIN, SYDNEY, RIO...

CHARLIE (V.O.)  
Finally she returned to the estate  
and enrolled me into private  
school...

BACK TO:

INT. MURPHY'S HOUSE - MURPHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLIE  
...and that's pretty much it.

Susan purses her lips and rolls her eyes a bit. A gesture of  
disbelief.

SUSAN

Did you just make that up?

CHARLIE

(straight face fades to  
amusement)

Maybe.

SUSAN

Charlie Bartlett, you are one of  
the strangest people I have ever  
met.

They kiss. After a beat, Charlie, throws off the covers and  
stands. He goes over to the window. Throws it open.

SUSAN

Whatchya doin'?

Charlie climbs out onto the roof in nothing but his boxers.

SUSAN

Oh my God. Charlie, get back in  
here!

The kids turn their heads up to Charlie.

CHARLIE

How are you all doing tonight?

The kids ROAR with joy.

CHARLIE

My name is Charlie Bartlett, and...

He pauses a moment at the realization that he has a hundred  
plus kids utterly captivated. He can't resist.

CHARLIE

...and I AM NOT A VIRGIN!!

He throws his hands in the air and the kids follow suit,  
CHEERING AND SHOUTING.

SUSAN

Oh, for cryin' out loud.

INT. KIP CROMB WELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

KIP (V.O.)

I can't think of any reason to stay  
on this planet...



WE DRIFT across a wall plastered with MARILYN MANSON and RADIOHEAD posters. We reach Kip Crombwell hunched over the desk as he types furiously on the computer. He's still wearing his auto mechanic shirt.

KIP (V.O.)

...No one at school even knows my name. The world just keeps going round and I have absolutely zero effect on anyone's life. The idea of even making contact with another human being is like trying to defy... gravity. There's just no point. And I have come to the conclusion that I am in fact... worthless.

He pauses and examines what he's written. CLOSE ON the word WORTHLESS, the curser blinking like an exclamation point.

Kip opens the desk drawer and removes a bottle of medication. He dumps the entire contents into his hand and stuffs the twenty or so pills into his mouth.

He grabs the can of Dr. Pepper on the desk and washes it all down.

Then stillness - he tilts back in his chair. A long beat of reflection and finally - peace.

He stands and goes over to the unmade bed. Flops down on the nest of sheets and blankets. Stares at the ceiling.

MRS CROMB WELL (O.S.)

Kip? Dinner's ready.

Kip lays there a moment longer and gets to his feet. Walks out into...

HALL

He stops at the top of the stairs. He turns around and wanders like a sleep-walker down the hall to the window at the end.

He throws the window open and climbs out onto...

THE ROOF

He looks up into the star filled night. A view of Great Farmington spread out before him.

He edges to the end of the roof and looks over. Below him is the metal divider between his house and the next, the sharp pronged spears pointed up at him.

He backs up a few steps and gets a running start. He leaps off the roof and lands...

...in a tree, tumbling through the foliage, breaking branches until the tree redirects his fall and lands him...

...on the hood of his neighbors' BMW, setting off the alarm.

Kip - sprawled on the hood unconscious. Across the street, windows light up one by one.

INT. BOYS ROOM - DAY

Adam Nevins sits in the stall. He tugs at his Zena cap, takes off his glasses, and cleans them with his shirt.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

How's the Prozac working?

ADAM

Well, I'm sleeping less. But I'm masturbating a lot more.

Outside the stall, Murphy gets an expression on his face that says - I didn't need to know that.

ADAM

Is that supposed to happen?

CHARLIE

Usually the opposite. Did you ask that girl out?

ADAM

No way.

CHARLIE

Why not?

ADAM

To use the parlance of our age group; that fine bitch is outta my league.

Adam gets a self-amused grin.

CHARLIE

Don't underestimate yourself.

ADAM

It doesn't really bother me. I've accepted that girls like that won't give guys like me the time of day. We get our revenge at the reunions when we show up rich with super-models on our arms.

CHARLIE

Really? Is that true?

MURPHY

Hells yes. You don't think Bill Gates gets mad pussy?

INTERCOMME (V.O.)

Charlie Bartlett to the Principal's office.

Charlie glances at his watch.

CHARLIE

Okay, Adam. Let's pick this up next week.

INT. PRINCIPAL GARDNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie cracks the door. Gardner - staring out the window. Mom's in one of the chairs. And on the love seat, a POLICE OFFICER flips through a magazine.

CHARLIE

What's going on?

MOM

Come in, Charlie. Come in and sit down.

Charlie hesitantly takes the other chair.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You know Kip Crombwell?

CHARLIE

I don't think so.

The police officer leans forward and shows Charlie a photo of Kip.

CHARLIE

Is that his name? I've seen him around.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Well, he tried to kill himself last night, Charlie. He took twenty pills of Ativan and jumped off his house. Now, Charlie, I'm not going to ask you whether you sold it to him, because this administration isn't stupid and we have a pretty good idea what you're up to...

MOM

No, I want to hear him say it. Accusations are one thing, Mr Gardner. I want to hear him say it.

She turns to her son. He sinks into his seat.

MOM

Charlie, is this what's going on?

All eyes are on him now and he's painfully aware of it.

CHARLIE

I don't think I should say anything without a lawyer present.

Mom wilts, her eyes wetting. It might as well have been an admission.

MOM

Oh Charlie...

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Mrs. Bartlett, we're not looking to press charges.

MOM

What do you want?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I want him to leave. I personally think he's dangerous. I think he's criminal.

A beat as Mom and Charlie takes this in. Charlie looks to her pleadingly.

MOM

Where is he supposed to go?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Wherever they go when they don't show up here.

CHARLIE

No.

(beat)

I'm happy here. And I'm not leaving.

Charlie stands.

CHARLIE

So you go ahead and do what you have to do.

He turns and walks out. The door slams. Mom starts gathering her things.

MOM

Shame on you.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Excuse me?

MOM

I said - shame-on-you, Mr. Gardner. I've been dealing with people like you a long time. Full of self-importance but taking no responsibility. Has it occurred to any of you that it's up to us these kids turn out right? So I guess - shame on me too. But I'll tell you one thing. My son is staying right where he is. You try expelling him and I'm going to make some calls and have your job.

She stands. Gardner expression shows he's not used to being threatened.

MOM

In the meantime, I have a boy to raise.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - DAY

Charlie watches the snow come down outside as Connecticut goes by in the window.

He glances over at his mother. She's watching the snow fall too, heedless of her son's gaze.

CHARLIE

Mom? Are you mad?

MOM

No, Charlie, I'm not mad. I don't know what to do and I'm worried.

CHARLIE

You don't have to worry.

She sighs and ruffles his hair. Charlie glances out the window as they pass the estate.

CHARLIE

Where are we going?

MOM

We're going to see your father.

EXT. WALL POLE STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

The town car pulls into the visitor's parking lot, the prison looming in the background.

INT. WALL POLE STATE PENITENTIARY - VISITING AREA - DAY

A line of VISITORS take seats and speak to INMATES through the plexiglass.

Charlie waits his turn. He fidgets with his hands, his eyes darting back and forth. He watches lips move - the mouths on the far side of the glass show missing or neglected teeth.

He looks away a moment in discomfort, but then lights up a bit when the GUARD escorts in...

...Charlie's DAD. Could be just another convict in a bright orange jump suit. He's a bit older than mom, greying slightly with scruffy shadow of facial hair.

But this convict is smiling as he takes a seat at the window.

Charlie doesn't move.

MOM

Go on, Charlie.

Charlie hesitantly goes to the glass and takes a seat. He picks up the phone.

CHARLIE

Hey, pop.

DAD

Charlie.

Long beat.

DAD  
Still at Loomis Chaffee?

CHARLIE  
No. Montgomery Mountain Public High  
School.

DAD  
Could be worse, I suppose.

Charlie cracks a smile.

DAD  
There's the grin I remember. So  
what's got mom so worried?

CHARLIE  
I've been getting into some  
trouble, I guess.

DAD  
I gathered that. But what for?

CHARLIE  
Like what did I do?

DAD  
No. Like - why are you doing it?

Charlie eyes go to the floor.

CHARLIE  
I guess. I dunno... I... The thing  
is, I'm really happy. For the first  
time, everybody really likes me.  
These things I'm doing... I don't  
know, I'm like the coolest guy in  
the school.

DAD  
Charlie.

CHARLIE  
What?

DAD  
There are more important things.

CHARLIE

Everyone keeps saying that. But you know what - I'm seventeen, and popularity is pretty freakin' important to me.

DAD

There are more important things, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Like what, God damn it?

A beat. His father leans in slightly.

DAD

Like what you do with that popularity.

Charlie gets oddly silent. The simplicity of it seems to move him.

DAD

Charlie, you know I don't preach. You know I've got no ground to stand on. But I've been on this planet a while, and through it all, I've figured out one very important thing.

Charlie listens intently.

DAD

~~What-you-do-in-this-life-matters.~~

Charlie just blinks thoughtfully. He gets an appreciative expression.

DAD

Stay out of trouble. And take care of your mother.

Charlie nods. His dad sets down the phone. Charlie watches the guard lead him away.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

The long quiet ride home in the snow. Charlie just stares out the window.



INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie slumbers. A distant noise rouses him.

There comes a BANGING SOUND from somewhere in the house.

Charlie furrows his brow and sits up a little.

CHARLIE

Mom? Is that you?

The BANGING SOUND comes again. Charlie hauls himself out of bed and WE FOLLOW him into...

HALL

...around a corner. He stops. There's a light coming from beneath the door at the end of the hall.

The BANGING SOUND. It's coming from beyond the door.

CHARLIE

Mom?

Charlie moves closer. A shadow moves across the light beneath the door.

Charlie reaches out. Grasps the door knob.

He turns it and pushes the door open to reveal...

A ROOM

with shimmering walls. The center of the room is taken up by a MASSIVE CHEMICAL VAT. Inside the vat, a MONKEY splashes around wildly. Droplets of ACID land on the floor and burn and sizzle on the tile.

ON CHARLIE

staring on in shock horror.

ON THE MONKEY

as it bares its teeth and let's out a spine chilling SCREAM.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - DAY

Charlie bolts from sleep with a gasp.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A taped interview. This one with a GOTHIC KID, piercings, torn black clothes and enough make-up to look him like a member of KISS.

GOTHIC KID

It's a roller coaster, man. This big emotional, hormonal roller coaster.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

What is?

GOTHIC KID

This time of our lives. Right? I mean, things are goin' well. You got good grades. You got friends. You got a girlfriend or boyfriend. That's like the big one by the way. And you're happier than you ever remember being in your whole life, which isn't saying much because you've only been on this planet seventeen years.

(beat)

Next thing you know your grades suck. Your friends turn against you. And your girlfriend or boyfriend dumps you. And you're in more pain than you've ever been in your whole life. Which, like I said, is not a long time at this point. But because you've never gone through it before, you start to think maybe you're going to feel like this the rest of your life. Your parents, they've been through it like ten times and are telling you things will get better.

COUNCILOR

They're usually right.

GOTHIC KID

Yeah man, but they listen to Joe Cocker so who cares what they say. That's what I like about Charlie. Because he understands. Because he's going through the same thing.

(MORE)

GOTHIC KID (cont'd)

I'm going through the worst pain I've ever had, and our parents and teachers, and doctors, they've all forgotten what's that's like.

(beat)

I think that's the reason so many people my age turn to suicide. It's not like you really want your life to be over.

(beat)

It's that you're so pissed off that nobody's taking you seriously.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Kip sits propped up in the hospital bed. He's half watching the DAYTIME DRAMA on the mounted television.

Charlie wraps his knuckles on the door frame.

CHARLIE

Hi, you're Kip, right?

KIP

Yeah.

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie.

KIP

I know who you are.

CHARLIE

Oh.

Charlie takes the awkward pause to pull up one of the chairs and take a seat.

CHARLIE

So how are you feeling?

KIP

Fine, I guess. They had to pump my stomach.

CHARLIE

How was that?

KIP

Pretty disgusting. But now they're worried I'll make a second attempt, so I get to watch TV all day.

CHARLIE

Cool.

Long pause.

CHARLIE

So did you really try to kill yourself?

Kip considers.

KIP

I dunno. I mean like, I really wanted to die.

CHARLIE

Really? But why?

KIP

Because I have nothing to live for.

CHARLIE

Nothing? Why not?

KIP

I guess part of it is that I scored a ten fifty on the SAT.

CHARLIE

Is that bad?

KIP

It's like seventy fifth percentile.

CHARLIE

Huh.

KIP

So I have no friends, and I'm an idiot. So what's the point?

Charlie scratches his head. Kip slurps soda from a straw.

CHARLIE

I think you're missing the big picture.

KIP

What big picture?

CHARLIE

The universe.

KIP  
What about the universe?

CHARLIE  
Well, the universe is a big place.

KIP  
Infinite.

CHARLIE  
What?

KIP  
It's infinite, theoretically.

CHARLIE  
Right, which probably means there's  
life on other planets.

KIP  
I guess. Not life like we think,  
but probably at least single cell  
organisms.

CHARLIE  
See, that's my whole point.

KIP  
I guess I don't get it.

CHARLIE  
Well, you could have been born a  
single cell organism on planet  
Zortex. In fact, given the odds,  
it's probably more likely. But you  
weren't. You are an organism on  
planet Earth. And not just any  
organism. You could have been born  
an amoeba or a fish, or a bird. But  
you got to be human being.

Kip snorts in amusement. Charlie starts gesturing wildly with  
excitement.

CHARLIE  
And... and... and not just any  
human being... You got to be...  
(counting on his fingers)  
...a white male - in the United  
States of America - in modern  
times.

(beat)

(MORE)

CHARLIE (cont'd)  
So maybe on the SAT you're only  
seventy fifth percentile, but in  
the universe, you're like ninety  
nine point nine nine nine  
percentile. So actually, you have  
everything to live for.

Kip stares at Charlie in total disbelief.

CHARLIE  
Feel better?

KIP  
I dunno.  
(breaks into a grin)  
Maybe.

And that's good enough for Charlie.

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Charlie pushes Kip around in a wheel chair. NURSES and  
INTERNS follow them with their eyes. Maybe because Charlie is  
dressed like Michael Corleone.

KIP  
So you're not selling any more  
drugs?

CHARLIE  
Nope, moving on to new enterprises.

KIP  
Like what?

CHARLIE  
Fulfilling people's dreams. What is  
yours by the way, so I can get  
started.

KIP  
My dreams?

CHARLIE  
Yeah, like what do you like to do  
with your time. Besides writing  
suicide notes.

KIP  
Well, I write other stuff too. I  
wrote a play.

CHARLIE  
What kind of play?

KIP

It's kind of a Rebel Without a Cause type story. I turned it in to the drama instructor but none of the drama kids even wanted to read it.

CHARLIE

Is it any good?

KIP

I dunno. You can read it if you want to.

INT. PRINCIPAL GARDNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Gardner tosses the manuscript onto Sedwick's desk.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

No. There's absolutely no way.

Charlie sits opposite him, he's wearing sunglasses and has a copy of the play in his lap.

CHARLIE

Why not?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

By sheer virtue of the fact that it's risqué. It's inappropriate.

CHARLIE

But it's true. It has truth. It's about us. And we want to see something like this here.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Charlie, I appreciate you taking steps with Kip Crombwell. That's really something. It's what I'd hope you'd do. But if the parents found out this school was putting on a play with kids doing... What you guys have them doing in here... There would be hell to pay.

The vice-principal picks up the manuscript with curiosity and starts flipping through it.

Charlie looks a little miffed.

CHARLIE

Fine.

He stands, takes the manuscript from the vice-principal's hands.

CHARLIE

If this school won't put this play on, I'll just produce it independently.

He turns and storms out. Gardner glances to his vice-principal, who shrugs.

Gardner sighs.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

HIGH ANGLE on the lunching students.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Excuse me, everyone. I have an announcement.

They silence and look upward at...

Charlie, standing on the lunch table. Murphy has his head in his hands in anticipation of the announcement.

CHARLIE

Due to complications with the insurance companies, I will no longer be supplying medication.

He takes a beat. No protests, no glares. Just shocked silence.

CHARLIE

I'm sure this will mean a lot of you are done speaking to me. However, for those of you still interested in sessions, I will be holding them free of charge.

He pauses. Dead silence. He gets down off the table and sits next to Murphy.

MURPHY

Well, there's goes the fuckin' X-box I had my eye on.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - CHARLIE'S ROOM - DAY

TIME LAPSE as Charlie stares at the ceiling and the sun rises, shafts of light from the blinds moving across his body.



EXT. DUQUESNE STREET - DAY

The short bus pulls to a stop and Charlie gets on.

INT. SHORT BUS - MOVING - DAY

Charlie moves down the aisle. Nobody but the ever-loyal special ed kids.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Charlie enters the corridor. As he FOLLOWS US he stares at the floor. When he finally lifts his eyes, he gets an astonished expression.

REVERSE ANGLE - Charlie standing before half the student body lined up outside the boys room. They smile at Charlie's surprise.

CHARLIE

Well, let's get started, shall we.

INT. BOYS ROOM - DAY

Murphy ushers Whitney into the bathroom. He shows her into a stall and closes the door.

She takes a seat and looks around in discomfort. She sighs.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Whitney, right?

WHITNEY

That's right.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

What's going on?

WHITNEY

I don't know.

Her eyes start to well up.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

You've got something to tell me, but I think you're worried about what I'll think.

WHITNEY

I guess. I... I really think there's something wrong with me.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Why's that?

WHITNEY

I've been crying a lot. Like at weird times. You know like... Cheer. Being on the squad. I have to pretend I'm peppy. And I can't wait for practice to be over so I can go home and cry.

She's really crying now, and it's making her make-up run.

WHITNEY

I've slept with almost every guy on the football team.

She breaks down into sobs.

We CUT over to Charlie in the neighboring stall. He's a little dumbfounded. Likewise, Murphy's cigarette falls out of his mouth.

CHARLIE

Do you, uh... Do you have a crush, uh... on any of them?

WHITNEY

Not really. I mean, I know they don't wanna be my boyfriend or anything lame like that. But they try to sleep with me and I don't wanna say no to them. Otherwise they'll be crappy to me.

CHARLIE

Wait, back up. What's lame about having a boyfriend?

WHITNEY

I dunno - like if I bring it up - they'll think I'm a total cheeseball. College girls don't ask them to be boyfriends.

Charlie considers this. He breaks into a grin.

CHARLIE

Whitney, I'm going to let you in on a little secret.

WHITNEY

What's that?

CHARLIE

College girls are coo-coo for coco puffs.

Whitney laughs through her tears.

CHARLIE

Seriously. Ask any grown up woman when she was out of her mind and she'll say college. I know, because my mom's friends are women. And let me tell you... It's a little disturbing.

Whitney grabs a piece of toilet paper and dabs her eyes.

CHARLIE

So I dunno. Maybe you should enjoy yourself. Take it slower. Go on a date or two and see if you like the dude.

WHITNEY

Please. Like who is gonna ask me on a date?

No answer.

WHITNEY

Charlie?  
(beat)  
You still there?

Charlie sits silently in the stall. He stares ahead as the gears turn. Then in pre-lap comes his voice...

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Could you settle down please. Guys, guys...

INT. PLAY HOUSE - NIGHT

A local play house. Fairly small. Charlie's up on stage in front of the mic.

Adam's crowd,, the A/V JOCKS, the HALL MONITORS, and the DRAMA TECHIES, gathered around the catering table where Murphy dolls out soft drinks.

CHARLIE

Get your complementary soda and if you could, take a seat.

The guys take their seats.

CHARLIE

Well, I told you guys that if you came, I'd make it worth your while. So without further ado, let me present to you... The ladies of the Montgomery Mountain Escort Service!

Murphy hits the button on the boom box and HIP HOP starts to pound out. One by one, the girls that make up the CHEERLEADING SQUAD prance out on stage in full uniform. Whitney is among them.

The boys in the audience gape.

Charlie nods to Murphy and the music cuts out.

CHARLIE

Okay guys. So which one of you is willing to fork up fifty bucks to take... Miss Whitney Drummond out on a date?

He motions for Whitney to step forward. She does and gets an air of shyness about her.

The boys just stare up in shocked silence. Whitney glances to Charlie questioningly.

CHARLIE

Do I hear fifty?

Silence. Then-

HALL MONITOR

Seventy five!

CHARLIE

I have seventy five, does any...

A/V JOCK

Eighty five!

CHARLIE

I hear...

DRAMA TECHIE

One hundred!

ADAM

One hundred twenty five!

ON WHITNEY

as the bids climb. The realization that she is in demand puts a surprised smile on her face.

INT. WHITNEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A doorbell sounds. Whitney opens the front door to reveal Adam standing outside, a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

WHITNEY

Wow. You actually brought flowers.

Adam adjusts his glasses.

ADAM

Yeah. Pretty lame, huh?

Whitney shrugs and takes the flowers from him.

ADAM

I've never actually been on a date before. So expect a lot more biffs.

WHITNEY

That's okay, Adam. I've never been on a date before either.

INT. MALL - CINEMA - NIGHT

TICKET GIRL

Are you aware this is an R rated movie?

Whitney and Adam stand on the far side of the glass.

ADAM

We're with Charlie.

The TICKET GIRL nods. TWO TICKETS pop out of the slot.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

We arrive right in the middle of a tackle. Clods of dirt fly and the players GRUNT.

IN THE BLEACHERS

The DADS huddle around MR. LAUDERBACH taking bets. Charlie breaks through the wall.

CHARLIE

I want visitors.

The dads look at each other and chuckle.

MR. LAUDERBACH  
I'm too old to take your lunch  
money, kid.

Charlie shrugs off the remark and digs a roll of bills out of his trench coat.

CHARLIE  
Can you guys cover a grand?

The dads' laughter dies.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - LATER

The dads are camped out around the cooler. The lawn chairs sag from the weight of beer bellies.

MR. LAUDERBACH  
C'mon Dustin, take no prisoners!

ON THE FIELD

Dustin lines up against the opposing team. Hands touch the ground.

DUSTIN  
Thirty two, forty one, hut, hut,  
HIKE!

He tosses the ball to the QUARTERBACK. He takes off, rolling around blockers, trying to find an opening.

He gets a few yards out and glances over his shoulder in time to see...

...the football spiraling toward him. He catches it and as he does, an OPPONENT strikes a glancing blow that spins Dustin around like top. But he doesn't go down. And amazingly, the football is still in his hands.

He looks up as another OPPONENT blocks his path. They face off a moment as each tries to determine which way the other is about to go.

Dustin's eyes inside the helmet - as he gets a look of determination.

He bolts. Past a bewildered TEAMMATE. Dodges an even more bewildered OPPONENT.

## IN THE BLEACHERS

The crowd goes silent. The cheerleaders deflate in the middle of their routine.

Because Dustin Lauderbach is running the...

MR. LAUDERBACH  
WRONG WAY! YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG  
WAY! JESUS WE'RE LOSING YARDAGE!

But Dustin can't hear him.

## ON THE FIELD

All he can hear is the HEAVING OF HIS OWN DEEP BREATHES. As he runs, the ball comes loose. He reaches out, fingers fumbling pig skin.

It tumbles to the ground, bouncing. An opponent makes a dive for it but misses, nearly tripping Dustin up. He manages to hurtle the prone player and snatch up the ball.

He keeps going. And going. All the way to the wrong in-zone.

He spikes the ball and throws his hands into the air as the HORN BLASTS.

Silence. Nothing but the stares of the crowd. Dustin grins, victorious.

## THE BLEACHERS

Mr. Lauderbach tips over the cooler in a violent rage.

He looks to the parking lot, where a figure is silhouetted against the exhaust from idling vehicles.

The figure steps into the light - Charlie in his trench coat.

MR. LAUDERBACH  
Get out your money, boys.

## INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie counts money into Dustin's hand.

They're in the locker room and Dustin stands in a towel. They get finished and Charlie turns to go.

DUSTIN  
So what did you think?

Charlie stops, leans against a locker.

CHARLIE

I think it was a shining moment for  
high school football.

Charlie smiles. Dustin smiles back.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Another taped interview. This one with a 16 year old WIGGER.  
Cap turned backwards, a gold chain dangling from his neck.-  
He's rapping into the camera.

WIGGER

(rapping)

Wake up, stand up, make yo demands.  
It's gonna go through if ya put it  
in his hands. He's gonna work it  
out, fork it out, and charge a  
toll. Rise up teeny boppers, this  
shiznit's out of control. We're  
part of yo nation, so tune into my  
station, but don't pretend you part  
a my generation. Give him props, he  
won't stop, he won't drop, this  
won't flop. You can call him a  
delinquent, a rebel, a crook. But  
there ain't no denyin'... Charlie's  
off the hook!

EXT. GREAT BARRINGTON - ESTABLISHING - DAY

In TIME LAPSE the snow melts gives way to blooming flowers.

INT. PLAY HOUSE - DAY

Henry Freemont dressed in a football uniform. He's up on  
stage and projecting out into the empty seats.

HENRY

Guys, you are going to love this  
girl. She's a total slut. You can  
do whatever you want her to. I  
mean, this girl does tricks.

The off stage sound of a DOORBELL. Henry heads off to answer  
it.

He comes back escorting Susan by the hand. She's dressed in  
tight, ripped blue jeans and a tank top.

The other ACTORS on the stage give drunken cheers at her  
arrival.



HENRY

Say hello to the boys.

SUSAN

Hello to the boys.

HENRY

I think the boys would like to see a trick.

The boys get rowdy.

SUSAN

What kind of trick?

HENRY

How about a little dancing?

SUSAN

I can't dance.

HENRY

Well, do something for us. I've been telling the boys how talented you are. You've got to show us something, right guys?

The guys cheer. Whistling, clapping. Susan steps into the stage light.

KIP (O.S.)

Hold it! Hold it!

Kip and Charlie are in the seats. Kip stands and waves his arms.

KIP

Susan, you need to be sultry. I want the guys in the audience revved up to see you take your clothes off.

SUSAN

Okay, Kip. I can do that.

KIP

Let's go again, from the top.

He sits down next to Charlie. Charlie leans in.

CHARLIE

How long before we can go up?

KIP

It still needs a lot of work.

Charlie nods. They settle to watch the next performance.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A picket-line of TEACHERS, toting signs. The kids are among them. Mrs. Albertson shouts into a loud speaker.

MRS. ALBERTON

The students aren't the only ones dropping out! What do we want?

CROWD

BETTER WAGES!

MRS. ALBERTON

When do we want them?

CROWD

NOW!

Charlie is among them. He hands a sign off to Murphy and takes the loud speaker.

INT. PRINCIPAL GARDNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Gardner and Sedwick watch through the window. Sedwick shakes his head.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK

What are you going to do about this? It's getting embarrassing.

Gardner just stares out the window with a somber air.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Charlie spurs on the crowd, pumping his fist into the air. The ruckus laps over into the next scene where we find...

INT. GARDNER HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

Gardner on the floor of his study. He's passed out.

There comes the THUD of music bass from down the hall.

Gardner's eyes flutter open. He watches the empty whiskey bottle vibrate on the floor. THUD. THUD. THUD. The bottle rolls up against the wall to ceiling window overlooking the pool.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 (half conscious)  
 Turn it down.

As if to spite him, the music gets louder. He climbs to his feet. Staggeres into...

HALL

He ricochets off the walls as he walks.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Susan... Turn it down.

He gets to her door and throws it open.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Turn down the God damned music!

SUSAN'S ROOM

She spins around from the vanity mirror. She's in a black prom dress, and against her pale skin, she looks a bit like Snow White.

She sees her father's angered expression and shuts off the music.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 You're ready for the prom. Is it that late already?

SUSAN  
 You know, Dad, should you ever climb out of this stupor you might make an effort to clue in.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Susan... I'm sorry. You look beautiful.

SUSAN  
 No, no, no, no, no. We are not having a father-daughter moment. Not with you like this.

Gardner wavers in the doorway. Susan turns around and busies herself in the mirror.

Gardner takes the moment to come in and sit on her bed.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 So who's the lucky boy?

SUSAN

None of your business.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Don't be like that. We can have him in. You know? Have some champagne.

SUSAN

He doesn't drink.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Now I really have to meet him.

SUSAN

Look, I'd actually consider telling you if I thought you'd approve.

Gardner considers this. A look of realization. He leaps to his feet.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You're... You're going with him, aren't you.

Susan turns around.

SUSAN

We're not discussing this.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Jesus, Susan, he's... He's trying to.... He's just using...

SUSAN

Please, don't be so freakin' narcissistic.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

He's a delinquent!

Susan suddenly flushes with anger.

SUSAN

Charlie's done more for this school than you ever will!

Gardner backhands her across the face. Hard enough to knock her against the dresser.

He slaps her again and grips her shoulders, shaking her.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

YOU LITTLE TRAMP!! YOU...

When he sees her terrified expression he releases her.

She starts to cry. He takes a few steps backwards. He's terrified himself.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Oh, Jesus, Susan... I...

SUSAN

Get out!

She's sobbing now.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I'm sorry. Please, honey.

SUSAN

GET THE HELL OUT!!

She violently shoves him out of the room and slams the door.

Gardner heads down the stairs where his wife meets him half way.

MRS. GARDNER

Nathan? Nathan, what's happening?

He doesn't answer. He just grabs his coat from the closet.

MRS. GARDNER

Nathan, what did you do? NATHAN!

He retreats out the door.

EXT. GARDNER HOME - NIGHT

The garage door grinds open and the Principal's Chevy Nova tears off into the street.

A moment of stillness. Then...

A limo pulls up to the curb. A few boys in tuxedos emerge from the back. Charlie, Murphy, Dustin. Murphy lights a smoke and they chat with smiles on their faces.

Charlie breaks from them and heads to the house. He rings the doorbell.

A beat and Susan cracks the door. She steps outside and closes the door behind her. She's still crying.

Charlie takes her in his arms. Looks like he's asking her questions.

Susan talks through her tears.

Charlie turns around and marches back to the limo. He answers the other boys' confused expressions by telling them to get in the car.

EXT. 20TH RAILROAD STREET BAR - NIGHT

Gardner is just getting out of his car as the limo pulls up. The principal glances at the town car as Charlie and the other boys get out.

Gardner tries to make a dash for the entrance but Dustin and Murphy cut him off and pin him to the brick wall of the pub.

Charlie casually approaches, hands in his trench coat, fire in his eyes.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

There is nothing I would like better in the world than for you to hit me right now.

CHARLIE

How could you be such a coward?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Fuck you, ya little punk. I don't care who your mother is. You're done at this school.

CHARLIE

You're a piece of shit. If you're pissed off at me, then be pissed off at me.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Kid, you don't know what pissed off is.

Charlie stares at him long and hard.

CHARLIE

It was me. I did it.

Murphy and Dustin release Gardner and back away.

CHARLIE

I pulled the fire alarm.

Gardner Charlie and the other two boys walk back to the street and climb into the limo.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The prom. Kids dancing to the band on stage. The double doors of the gym swing wide and Charlie enters with his entourage.

The band stops playing. Heads turn.

The celebration comes to a halt. Charlie passes through the crowd and reaches the stage.

He thrusts out his hand and the LEAD SINGER pulls him up.

Charlie takes the mic from him.

CHARLIE'S POV

The student body staring up in silent anticipation.

CHARLIE

How are you all doing tonight?

They ROAR and CHEER.

CHARLIE

My name is Charlie Bartlett, and if there's one thing I want you to walk away with tonight, it's that the sky is the limit. So for those of you with troubles, for those of you feeling scared or angry or confused... You are not alone, and there is still time to live your dreams.

They go wild as the band strikes up with the familiar strings of a ROCK SONG. Charlie begins to sing and the kids sing with him.

They sway back and forth. Lifting lighters... a sea of flickering flames.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

From the road, a caravan of POLICE CARS pull into the long drive onto the school campus, their flashers lighting up the night. We can still hear Charlie singing.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Images of kids dancing, thrashing, laughing. The band playing. And Charlie... wailing into the mic.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The POLICE OFFICERS emerge from their vehicles. They descend upon the school.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The police trek down the long corridor, handcuffs jingling at their sides. The song continues.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Charlie grabs up a guitar and smashes it into the synthesizer.

The other band members go wild and start trashing their own equipment to the ecstatic ROAR of the gymnasium.

And as Charlie finishes, tossing the mic to the band's SINGER, the kids cheer and help him from the stage.

He makes his way through the crowd and as they part...

CHARLIE'S POV

of half a dozen policemen waiting for him.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The police lead Charlie to the squad car in handcuffs. Students are pouring out of every door of the school.

One officer holds up his hands, warning them not to interfere.

They watch as an officer pushes down Charlie's head, placing him into the back of the car.

Charlie looks out at the students through the window. The body of kids pushes forward, but the police hold them back.

One HIPPIE CHICK struggles, calling.

HIPPIE CHICK  
CHARLIE! CHAR-LIE!

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A taped interview. This one with the HALL MONITOR.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)  
What's it like being the hall  
monitor?



## HALL MONITOR

Well, essentially I'm in a position to get a person in trouble. The hardest part about it is being resented. Because I'm doing something that's generally considered adult because it's a responsibility. And I guess people feel that I'm playing for the wrong team.

(beat)

That's why I admire Charlie so much. He bridges the gap between our world and the adult world. There's really no keeping a kid like that down. He's not just another rebel. The administration knows it. Which is why they called that assembly. They just never could have predicted what was going to happen.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

## PRINCIPAL GARDNER

If you could all just quiet down please.

Gardner shouts into the mic. The bleachers are packed with grumbling STUDENTS.

## PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I've called this assembly because I'm concerned. I've called you here to address the troubling things that are going on in this school. And to dispel the rumors. And to...

## GOTHIC KID

What about Charlie?

Shouts of "Yeah" and "Right on." Gardner blushes red with agitation.

## PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I'm going to get to Charlie Bartlett in a minute.

The students seem to sense his anger and settle a bit.

## PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I took this position because I believe our system is failing you.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL GARDNER (cont'd)  
 I'm a parent, and all I ever wanted was for you kids to have a chance. I believe each of you has potential inside you. But you guys have to understand this is a dangerous time in your lives. If the right things happen, you can make your dreams come true. But if the wrong things happen, you can suddenly find yourself in a nightmare instead...

THE KIDS' EXPRESSIONS

a moment where we get the impression that maybe he's reached them. Then...

MOTOR HEAD  
 We want to know what the HELL is going to happen to CHARLIE!!

STUDENTS  
 YEAH!!

Gardner fumes.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 You wanna know? Charlie Bartlett is gonna be charged with pulling that alarm, and if I can rack on dealing drugs on school grounds he'll be doing some time. He's ruined things for you, boys and girls. Because of him, the Hastings Student Lounge will become the Charlie Bartlett Detention Center. Anybody here still think he's cool? Anybody here think he's rad?

PUNK  
 Screw you! I'm gonna kick your ass!

The students shout and start tossing the contents of their book bags. The administrators duck as texts and pencils fly at their heads.

Gardner turns around to address Sedwick.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER  
 Call the police.

SUPERINTENDENT SEDWICK  
 What?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Go to my office and call...

THUNK! Gardner gets hit in the head with a book. The kids are chanting Charlie's name. They rush from their seats like a tidal wave.

The administrators scatter.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

The double doors fly open and Sedwick and Gardner make a mad dash down the hallway.

They are shortly followed by a MOB OF STUDENTS going ape. They trash the halls, banging the lockers...

A MOTOR HEAD spots the fire axe on the wall and smashes in the glass with his boot. The HALL MONITOR gets a hold of a fire extinguisher and heads into...

A CLASSROOM

and sprays everything in sight.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Gardner fumbles with his keys, desperately trying to unlock the Chevy.

The kids come pouring out the doors, rushing to them. Gardner gets in and unlocks the door for Sedwick.

Sedwick gets in just in time. The kids bang on the windows, making faces.

SEDWICK

Jesus, start the car.

Gardner looks around for the keys. He looks out the window and spots the keys hanging in the door outside.

But the kids haven't noticed, and they all clear as a PUNK comes running up with a metal trash can.

The punk tosses the can and it hits the windshield, cracking it into a spider-web pattern.

Gardner and Sedwick cower, but sit up when they see the kids have become more pre-occupied by...

...the FOOTBALL SQUAD crowded around the school bus.

Gardner and Sedwick stare on. The football players tip the school bus over, and it lands with a CRUNCH on another car - glass windows POPPING, the car alarm BLARING.

From the second floor of the building comes a CRASH, as a chair comes flying out a window. It lands on the hood of the Chevy, cracking the radiator and sending steam into the air.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

ON THE DOORS OFF THE STUDENT LOUNGE

as the motor head breaks through with the axe. The kids are taking the room apart. Lighting rolls of toilet paper and send them plummeting out the window.

EXT. BUS BARN - DAY

A parade of students emerge from the bus barn carrying plastic cannisters of gasoline.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

The bookcases are falling like a set of dominos. A kid tosses a flaming roll of toilet paper and the books ignite.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

The kids with the gasoline cans dump them out on the floor of the hall. A wave of fluid splashes down the length of the corridor.

INT. CHEMISTRY LAB - DAY

A SCIENCE NERD lights the counter top and watches the lab burn. Mini-explosions fueled by chemicals and the shattering of heated glass beakers.

INT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

The hall is empty and still. Then-

The roar of flames as they round the corner. The fire travels along a floor soaked in gasoline and the corridor of lockers gets engulfed.

EXT. MONTGOMERY MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Gardner and Sedwick watch from inside the car as plumes of black smoke billow from the shattered windows of the school.

WE RISE UP and over the school to a view of the football field, and the ARMY OF STUDENTS retreating into the woods.

WE SPIN AROUND... And as the police and fire departments pull up, sirens wailing... The school burns.

DISSOLVE TO: \_

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Charlie sits on the cot, his hands clasped between his knees. There is the sound of grating metal and the shadows of the bars sweep across his face.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

C'mon son. Mom's here to bail you out.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Charlie stares out the window. He turns to his mother and tries to discern her expression.

CHARLIE

You mad?

Her face is stoic.

MOM

I'm starting to think that you want me to be mad, Charlie.

Charlie watches the painful sight of his mother wiping her tears.

MOM

I'm sorry, Charlie. Some mother, right? I guess I just don't know how we're supposed to be.

Charlie considers and let's out a sigh.

CHARLIE

I guess that's okay, Mom. I don't really know either.

INT. DINER - DAY

The diner is packed with kids with nowhere else to go. Charlie and the guys are squeezed into a booth.

MURPHY

You should have seen it.

CHARLIE

How many arrests?

DUSTIN

None yet, but there's actually talk that they're going to go after everyone.

CHARLIE

I can't go away for two days without you guys burning down the school?

They all laugh. Charlie stirs his coffee with a spoon. His smile fades to a pensive expression.

DUSTIN

So what are you gonna do?

CHARLIE

I'm going to talk to him. I have to convince him to drop the charges.

ADAM

Talk... to Gardner?

KIP

You realize how much trouble you'll be in if you go within like however many yards of him?

CHARLIE

Look, it's gone too far.

MURPHY

Kip's right, Charlie, I'm pretty sure you go near him, he has the authority to shoot you.

CHARLIE

He's not gonna shoot me.

Charlie looks around the table. They don't look too convinced.

CHARLIE

You guys need to have a little more faith in people. Talking can really bring someone around. Especially when it starts off with an apology.

They exchange looks.

CHARLIE

I'm telling you, I can work this out.

INT. BARTLETT HOME - PIANO ROOM - DAY

Charlie plays the piano. Something upbeat. Maybe after a few false starts it's the PEANUTS THEME. Mom comes in and listens, tapping her foot.

Charlie reaches the end of the song and closes up the piano.

MOM

- Where you off to?

CHARLIE

Thought I'd have Thomas take me for a drive, maybe catch up with my friends later.

He gathers his things.

MOM

Don't be too late.

CHARLIE

I won't.

He leans in and gives her a peck on the cheek.

She watches him go with a longing expression.

EXT. GARDNER HOME - DAY

The Gardner home pit against the dusky sky. Charlie's town car pulls up on the far side of the street.

INT. TOWN CAR - DAY

Charlie rolls down the window to observe the house. Stillness save for the distant drone of a lawn mower.

Charlie takes a deep breath and gets out.

EXT. GARDNER HOME - DAY

WE FOLLOW Charlie as he makes his way across the street. Past the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH sign posted in the yard.

He walks up the pathway and reaches the door. He presses the doorbell. Sticks his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

After a few moments he peers into one of the windows, but the house is too dark to see. He knocks on the door, and as he does, the door creaks open.

INT. GARDNER HOME - ENTRY - DAY

Charlie peers through the slightly open door. He sticks his head in.

CHARLIE

Hello?

He can hear OPERA playing upstairs. He pushes the door wide. Steps into the entry.

CHARLIE

Is anybody home?

He waits a moment. Takes a few steps, stops. He turns around and heads for the door.

Stops himself again..

STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie appears at the bottom of the stairs. The OPERA is louder now.

CHARLIE

Hello?

He starts to climb the stairs, and emerges into the hall. He looks both ways. Heads toward the music.

He reaches the Principal's study. The door is open and the music is coming from the stereo on the wall. Charlie steps into...

THE STUDY

where he finds the Principal standing in front of his floor to ceiling window. His back is to Charlie and he's wearing his bath robe.

CHARLIE

Principal Gardner? Mr. Gardner?  
It's me, sir. Charlie Bartlett.

Gardner doesn't turn around. Charlie's eyes move about the room. Empty bottles all over.

Charlie goes back to Gardner and can see that the man is putting bullets into the cylinder of a revolver.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You shouldn't have come here,  
Charlie.



CHARLIE

Mr. Gardner? What...? What are you doing?

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You're not going to want to stay for this.

Charlie turns pale. He swallows hard, trying to compose himself.

CHARLIE

Mr. Gardner, what are you thinking of doing with that gun?

Gardner takes a swig from a bottle and clicks the cylinder into place.

He turns around slowly.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You better get going.

Charlie eyes go from Gardner's sad expression to the gun in his hand, and back again.

CHARLIE

Mr. Gardner, you can't do this. You can't just kill yourself.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I can't, huh?

CHARLIE

I mean... Why? I just don't understand.

Gardner's words come soft and low. There's no rage in them. Just drunken sadness.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Of course you don't understand. You think you've got it all figured out. I know, because there was a day, a long time ago, I was a pretty hip cat myself. But I grew up. AND I DON'T NEED YOU TO SAVE ME!

CHARLIE

I don't believe you. We all need saving from time to time.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

What do you know? You're seventeen  
God damn years old. We don't have a  
whole lot in common. I know you  
think you're a therapist, but do  
you really think you are gonna talk  
me out of this?

Charlie stands silent.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

You better get going, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Mr. Gardner...

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Get out.

CHARLIE

If you'd just...

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

GET THE HELL OUT OF MY HOUSE!

Gardner takes a menacing step forward and Charlie staggers  
back a bit, quickly losing his composure.

CHARLIE

I can't leave. How could I leave?  
Mr. Gardner, I'm sorry for what  
I've done. I am. And I think you're  
wrong... About us having nothing in  
common. And if you just let me show  
you this one thing...

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Show me? You're gonna show me?

CHARLIE

Just this one thing...

Charlie's crying now.

CHARLIE

...let me show it to you, and then  
I promise I'll let you blow your  
brains out, or whatever it is you  
want to do.

Gardner melts slightly.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Ah, Charlie. You're a good kid.  
Charlie, Charlie, Charlie.

Charlie wavers a bit, there's still the desperate drunken melancholy in Gardner's voice.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

I don't blame for you for any of this. And I really wish there was one thing you could show me that would convince me I'm wrong. But the fact is, I've failed. I've failed a lot of people. It's just a fact. And we both know there's nothing you can show me that says I haven't. Is there.

Charlie's managed to compose himself at this point, and even allows a glint of amusement.

CHARLIE

Geez Loueez, Mr. Gardner, when did you become such a freakin' pessimist?

A beat. Then Gardner cracks up. Chuckling at first, then bellowing, hysterical laughter. Charlie's blank expression says he doesn't know what to make of it.

Gardner collapses into the chair and sets the gun on the desk. He takes a deep breath.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

What are you gonna show me, Charlie?

Charlie wipes his eyes. He tries to compose himself.

CHARLIE

There's a car outside.

Gardner considers.

PRINCIPAL GARDNER

Okay...  
(beat)  
Okay, lead the way.

Charlie isn't sure at first, but Gardner gives him a nod.

Charlie heads out the door.

He stops, and gets a look of realization. He spins around in time to catch sight of Gardner snatching up the revolver.

CHARLIE

No!

Gardner puts the gun to his head and...

Charlie tackles him. The gun goes off, blasting one of the empty bottles. Charlie and Gardner go crashing full force through...

...the floor to ceiling window...

EXT. GARDNER HOME - DAY

...they plunge from the glass and separate during their fall.

Gardner lands - SMACK - on the pavement. Out cold. Charlie hits the diving board, snapping it and splashing into the pool.

UNDERWATER

a cloud of blood trails from Charlie's head as he sinks to the bottom of the pool. His eyes are open, but he's too stunned to move. The surface of the water shimmers above him. He thrashes wildly, creating a storm of bubbles, but he's drowning.

ON THE SURFACE

The broken diving board in the foreground. Gardner lays on the cement in the background. He's still unconscious.

UNDERWATER

Charlie loses consciousness.

He floats there in the turquoise haze a while. Motionless.

Above him, Gardner breaks the surface of the pool, his robe flowing out behind him. He kicks his way to Charlie and grabs the kid under the arms.

They rise to the surface and GASP as they are hit with the cold night air. Gardner tows Charlie to the shallow end as the kid coughs up the water in his lungs.

Gardner ascends the steps until he is out of the pool. Charlie hauls himself up until he's sitting on the edge.

Gardner wraps the soaked robe around his body and ties the tie. Charlie looks up at him and catches a glint of morbid amusement.

GARDNER

You still got somethin' to show me?

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Charlie and Gardner sit in the back seat. They've changed out of their clothes. Charlie is wearing one of Gardner's sweaters. He lights a smoke and rolls down the window. Gardner glances over, snatches the smoke from Charlie's lips and tosses it out the window.

Gardner goes back to looking outside. Charlie regards him a beat and rolls up his window again.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The town car pulls up into the crowded lot. Charlie and Gardner get out.

GARDNER

What is this?

CHARLIE

Are you gonna let me show you or not?

Gardner shrugs. He follows Charlie toward the building.

INT. PLAY HOUSE - NIGHT

The theater is jammed packed. Mostly kids, but some of their parents too. We arrive in the middle of a LAUGH from the audience.

The back door quietly opens and Charlie and Gardner squeeze in. They lean against the back wall.

ON STAGE

The ACTORS playing football players get rowdy.

ACTOR/FOOTBALL PLAYER

Man, is she cute? Seriously, dawg, I need to get laid tonight.

HENRY

You are going to love this girl. She's a total slut. You can do whatever you want to her. I mean, this girl does tricks.

The off stage sound of a DOORBELL. Henry heads off to answer it.

He comes back escorting Susan by the hand. She's dressed in tight, ripped blue jeans and a tank top. The other guys on the stage give drunken cheers at her arrival.

HENRY

Say hello to the boys.

SUSAN

Hello to the boys.

Gardner watches with curiosity. Clearly he had no idea his daughter was even in the play.

HENRY (O.S.)

I think the boys would like to see a trick.

We can hear the boys on stage getting rowdy as we cut to people in the audience. Whitney Drummond and Adam Nevins, side by side, holding hands. Dustin Lauderbach watching intently. Murphy Bivens playing with his earring. Kip Crombwell, a huge grin on his face.

SUSAN (O.S.)

What kind of trick?

HENRY (O.S.)

How about a little dancing?

SUSAN (O.S.)

I can't dance.

BACK TO THE STAGE NOW

HENRY

Well, do something for us. I've been telling the boys how talented you are. You've got to show us something, right guys?

The guys cheer. Whistling, clapping. A few guys in the audience shout "Hells yes!" And "C'mon, baby, show us what you've got!"

The ruckus grows until the audience is shouting, stomping, whistling. Susan shyly steps into the stage light. And...

...she starts to sing.

Softly at first, so it can't be heard over the din of the audience. But little by little, the audience starts to simmer down.

No one has to shush one another, because the song, sweet and tender. Not the words, just the beautiful operatic sound, gradually captivates the audience and silences them.

We move about the audience. Kids staring on, transfixed. Their parents, moved and misty. Adam puts his arm around Whitney and she leans against his shoulder.

Dustin leans back, a thoughtful smile. Murphy Bivens stares blankly, not sure what he's feeling. Kip Crombwell, gets an air of amazement. Henry and the other actors become so silent it's almost out of character.

ON SUSAN

singing. Sweet as a bird. And finally...

ON GARDNER

weeping. Tears of joy and pride streaming down his face. He wipes a few of them away and looks to...

CHARLIE

who watches her in utter adoration.

Gardner steps forward and puts his arm across Charlie's shoulders. Charlie glances up at him, but Gardner has already looked away.

They watch as Susan holds the final note, and as she finishes, she bows her head and the stage lights dim, leaving us in BLACKNESS, with nothing but the applause of an unseen ecstatic crowd.

INT. COUNCILOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The final interview. This one with Charlie.

CHARLIE

I don't know how other people would describe me. I only know how I would describe myself.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Talk about that then.

CHARLIE

Well, I guess I'm an optimist, 'cause when I see a person, I see potential. I see what could be instead of what isn't. You know what I mean. And I think the trick to people is getting them to see that in themselves. And remind them that what they're going through - their problems - well the people around them are going through the same thing. So to remind them that they are not alone. And they should shoot for the moon because even if you don't get there right away, you'll end up someplace different than where you started.

(beat)

Like me - see I applied to all the best schools, and maybe I won't get into Harvard, but maybe I'll get into Dartmouth.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

I actually know someone on the admissions board at Harvard.

Charlie leans back, an effort to look casual.

CHARLIE

Really.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Sure do.

A silent pause where Charlie glances into the camera briefly. He gets a thoughtful expression on his face, one that let's us know Charlie's gonna work it out. And we....

FADE OUT.