

MASTERS OF HORROR 2

"Sounds Like"

Written by

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FULL PINK, 06/14/06  
FULL BLUE, 06/09/06  
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23, 24, 24A, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31,  
32, 35, 36, 36A, 37, 37A, 39,  
39A, 41, 41A, 42, 43, 43A, 45,  
45A, 46, 46A, 48, 49, 53  
FULL WHITE, 06/02/06

WOMAN (V.O.)  
 -- I'm listening but you're  
 speaking too fast.

TECH (V.O.)  
 Okay. I'll say it again. Slower.  
 Click on the installer --

More VOICES, shreds of innumerable phone conversations,  
 join in, converge, overlap, morph into a monstrous  
 cacophony of noise. Louder. LOUDER --

CUT TO:

A PHOTOGRAPH - a proud father, 40's, sits in a small  
 SAILBOAT with his six year old son. PULL BACK to reveal  
 the photo is on the desk of --

-- LARRY PEARCE, the proud dad. He wears a simple suit  
 and tie. He's modestly handsome, intelligent looking. But  
 there's something cautious, even withdrawn, in his gaze,  
 as if he's afraid to observe the world too closely. This  
 doesn't bother him though. His job isn't to observe.

His job is to listen.

He wears a large set of HEADPHONES connected to a PHONE  
 SWITCHBOARD glowing with two dozen numbered switches.

Larry methodically presses the switches, monitoring each  
 call for several seconds before moving on.

He presses switch 11. The initial conversation we heard  
 CONTINUES:

WOMAN (V.O.)  
 -- I don't see it.

TECH (V.O.)  
 On your desktop? The blue icon --

WOMAN (V.O.)  
 What's an *icon* --?

Larry glances out an OBSERVATION WINDOW onto the PHONE  
 FLOOR. We see dozens of numbered CUBICLES and, in each, a  
 TECH SUPPORT ASSISTANT on a phone.

He finds cubicle 11, in which the harried TECH sits,  
 slouched before his monitor -

3 **THE PHONE FLOOR - CUBICLE 11 - CONTINUOUS**

3 \*

-- TECH adjusts his head-set, struggling to stay calm.

TECH

Ma'am. It's the *only* thing on your desktop...

WOMAN (ON PHONE)

"Desktop"... you mean my screen?

We ANGLE on a far wall. Above a banner reading: "Tech Support: Pleasant. Polite. Prompt." is a MIRRORRED WINDOW, behind which is --

4 **LARRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

4

-- LARRY, eyes shut, listening intently to the TECH's voice, to his shrill tone of growing frustration.

TECH (V.O.)

Okay. Do you see on the screen the words "Malleus Software"?

\*

WOMAN (V.O.)

I see something that looks like a... is it a trash can?

TECH (V.O.)

How about the word "Installer"?

Larry's finger hovers over a button marked "TERMINATE".

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

You put the disk in, didn't you?

WOMAN (V.O.)

I -

TECH (V.O.)

You didn't put the disk in!?

WOMAN (V.O.)

Where does the disk go?

TECH (V.O.)

How can you be so --

CLICK!

(CONTINUED)

Larry has hit the "Terminate" button. Switch 11 stops glowing. He looks out the window at the TECH, who is looking around, confused.

\*

Larry punches a number on his phone. The Tech picks up.

TECH (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Um. Hello?

CUT TO:

The TECH now sits uncomfortably across from Larry. Without his headphones we can now plainly see Larry's two celebrated secret weapons - his ears.

LARRY

You understand why I killed the call?

TECH

No. I don't. I was --

LARRY

I heard it in your voice. A tightening of the vocal chords. Thins out the upper registers. You were seconds away from screaming obscenities at the caller --

TECH

What? That's not true --

LARRY

I cut you off before that happened. She'll think it was phone error. Call back. Get another Tech who can offer her proper help. Without snapping.

TECH

I WASN'T going to snap. I --

LARRY

I need team players.

TECH

I am a --

LARRY

You were about to scream at her.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

TECH

I was not!

LARRY

My ears don't lie.

The guy springs to his feet, snapping.

TECH

Fuck you! You GO TO FUCKIN' HELL!!

Larry just stares back. A small triumphant smile.

CUT TO:

6 **INT. PARKING GARAGE - DUSK**

6

Toting his briefcase Larry steps up to his car --

VOICES

Oh yeah baby...fuck me... yeah...

Larry freezes.

The VOICES are close, LOUD, like someone whispering come-  
ons in his ear.

Chilled, he scans the space. Nothing moves in the shadows.

VOICES (CONT'D)

...making me wet... take me...

7 **INT. S.U.V. - SAME**

7

In the back, two lovers go at it. The WOMAN stops.

WOMAN

Whoa. Wait. There's someone there.

She's spotted Larry, a distant figure at the far end of the garage. The MAN chuckles, pulls her back down.

MAN

He can't hear us. C'mon... Oh  
god...harder, ahh... harder...

BACK WITH:

LARRY. A tormented look on his face. He can hear. Every lurid detail.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 7

He slides into his car. And slams the door.

8 **EXT - LARRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT** 8

A modest, two story affair with an attached garage. On the lawn a folky looking WHIRLIGIG spins in the evening breeze. A few kids play a noisy game of 'kick the can' in the street. \*

9 **GARAGE WORKSHOP - NIGHT** 9

Larry stands in a pile of wood shavings, absorbed in his latest project: a model SAIL BOAT. He uses a KNIFE to carve the hull smooth --

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

He winces at a the NOISE. He glances at the door to the --

10 **LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS** 10

-- where BRENDA PEARCE (40) sits on the couch, watching TV. \*

She's draped in a tattered bathrobe. Her face made-up, like she's off to a fancy party. But we get sense she rarely leaves the house.

She stares at the TV, her features locked into a permanent expression of mild alarm.

We TILT to her lap. She's knitting something as she watches. The dancing needles click against each other --

11 **GARAGE WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS** 11

CLANG! CLANG!

Larry shuts his eyes, pained. We realize, improbably, that he can actually HEAR his wife knitting.

Her needles sound like swords, clanging in battle...

CUT TO:

12 **MASTER BEDROOM - LATER** 12

Brenda pops an Somnopam. Thinks about it. Pops two more. \*

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

She sits at her MAKE-UP TABLE. X's out the day on her monthly planner. The next day is marked with an "O".

She stares at this wistfully...

13 **UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

13

Larry heads to the bathroom, passing dozens of framed FAMILY PHOTOS: Brenda, him, their son. \*

He pauses at a door. A sail boat decal on it. His son's room. He reaches for the doorknob. Has second thoughts. Continues down the hallway...

14 **MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

14

BRENDA \*

... and I think Celia's going to get fired. I really do...

Larry undresses as Brenda removes her makeup and talks - a nightly routine. She's as garrulous as he is mute, as if the sound of her own voice drowns out some awful truth. \*

BRENDA (CONT'D) \*

She keeps challenging Britt I mean Britt's the team leader and she just doesn't have any good ideas her proposal for the ad campaign was so boring I think she's history I mean she wasn't in next weeks preview...

She continues, unabated. Larry tries not to listen. He sits on the bed, slides on a slipper -

A piercing BEEEEEP!

From somewhere in the house. Larry glances up, annoyed.

LARRY \*

What the hell is that?

BRENDA \*

Smoke detector. It needs new batteries.

LARRY

(sighs)

Remind me to get some tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

BRENDA

\*

Speaking of tomorrow...

She gives him an expectant look. He glances at her.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

\*

It's that time again, Larry.

Somehow this news deflates him. He gives a dutiful nod.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

\*

Let's have dinner someplace first.  
Where would you like to go?

He rubs his eyes.

LARRY

Someplace quiet.

BRENDA

\*

Oh! I had that dream again...

And she's off...

BRENDA (CONT'D)

\*

Only this time we weren't on an  
island we were in a forest it was  
so, so cold you were making a fire  
to keep us warm and I was out  
looking for fire wood...

Larry lies down. Takes some EARPLUGS from the side table.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

...and then I saw her just laying  
there on a snowbank. There she was  
Larry! Oh, so precious and bundled  
up from the cold it was like a  
gift, a gift from an angel. I  
lifted her up and she didn't cry  
she just smiled up at me --

Larry squeezes the earplugs into his ears. He glances  
back at Brenda. Her chatter now a tolerable, MUFFLED  
DRONE.

\*

Larry shuts his eyes.

TECH 3 (V.O.)

... there is no way he could've  
seen me, okay?

CUT TO:

15

**INT. MALLEUS SOFTWARE - CAFETERIA - DAY**

15

A few TECHS huddle around a table, eating lunch.

TECH 3

From his little perch up there he  
can't see into my cubicle. No way.  
I'm tellin' you.

\*

TECH 1

What are you telling us, exactly?

TECH 2

Hidden cameras, right?

TECH 1

In the ceilings? Wouldn't put it  
past those tools in management.

TECH 3

No that's not it.

(beat)

He heard me.

TECH 2

He "heard" you?

TECH 1

And how *exactly* do you "hear"  
someone instant messaging?

TECH 3

No shit? My fingers tapping the  
keys on my cell? It's not  
possible, I know, but I swear, he  
heard me.

TECH 2

You're just pissed you got caught  
loafing off again. Numbnuts!

TECH 3

Guy's a Goddamn freak!

TECH 1

Oh, give him a break. After what  
he's been through?

CUT TO:

ANOTHER TABLE, at the other side of the room. LARRY sits  
alone with a book. We TIGHTEN on his ear --

(CONTINUED)

He's LISTENING:

TECH 3 (O.S.)

"Give him a break"? Remember how soon he came back to work, after it happened?

TECH 2 (O.S.)

Yeah. It was like the next day.

TECH 3 (O.S.)

A normal person would take a leave of absence. Something! Just shows how heartless the guy is.

TECH 1 (O.S.)

(uncertainly)

Well, it's how he dealt with it. Everyone has a different way of dealing with loss...

MOVE IN ON LARRY, pensive. FADE IN a child's LAUGHTER...

CUT TO:

16 **EXT. CITY PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK**

16

Lush. Bucolic. On the shore of a small lake a happier looking Larry plays with his six year old SON.

Larry launches a little model SAILBOAT (similar to the one we've seen him building). His SON plays with the remote control. The boat moves in little zig-zags.

The boy GIGGLES with delight. Euphoric, Larry embraces him, shutting his eyes, breathing him in. Then, slowly, his smile fades. His eyes open.

He HEARS something...

KATHUMP SHHH... KATHUMP SHHH... KATHUMP SHHH...

CUT TO:

E.C.U. INSIDE HIS SON'S HEART, blood pumping into ventricles, slurping through arteries...

CUT TO:



He glares over at an adjoining grave.

A tiny AMERICAN FLAG FLAPS in the wind. For Larry, every FLAP is like the explosive CRACK of a whip.

He rises. Steps over to the flag.

And silences it with the heel of his boot...

CUT TO:

SOMEONE'S P.O.V. - a TECH, headset on, is listening to a caller. The Tech's boyish looks make him appear much younger than his actual 19 years. This is DAVID.

21 **INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY**

21

It's Larry, headphones on, who is staring out his window at David. David sits in cubicle 11, the cubicle of the recently departed Tech who "snapped".

\*

ANXIOUS CALLER (V.O.)

...what if it's gone for good?  
What if I can't get it back?

DAVID (V.O.)

Hey. It's okay. Your data isn't gone. It's just lost. All we have to do is find where it got to, okay? I'm gonna help you.

Larry listens to David reassure the anxious caller. There's something about his empathetic tone that seems to reassure Larry too...

BRENDA (V.O.)

Guess what I found out today?

\*

CUT TO:

22 **INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

22

A chain affair. All you can eat buffet. Bustling with AARP seniors, kids, families.

In other words, hell.

Brenda and Larry sit at a corner booth. She's dressed up like its their first date. Larry just came from work.

\*

BRENDA

Jim's wife? Sarah?

\*

(CONTINUED)

Larry looks up from cutting his steak. Brenda leans in, lowering her voice confidentially. \*

BRENDA (CONT'D) \*  
She's expecting.

Larry studies his wife with a skeptical look. \*

BRENDA (CONT'D) \*  
Can you believe it? I didn't even know they were trying. Especially since she's the only one working at the moment, what with Jim being unemployed and all. Maybe she's counting on him being Mr. Mom.

LARRY  
She tell you she was expecting?

BRENDA \*  
No.

LARRY  
So Jim told you.

She looks into her food.

LARRY (CONT'D) \*  
Who told you then Brenda? \*

Brenda looks up, annoyed. \*

BRENDA \*  
No one *told* me Larry.

Larry shakes his head, disgusted.

BRENDA (CONT'D) \*  
I watched her getting her mail this morning and --

LARRY  
Oh. You watched her getting her mail.

BRENDA \*  
-- I could just tell. She had an aura about her. She glowed --

LARRY  
An aura.

HIISSSS! \*

Larry winces. Someone's pouring a carbonated drink -

\*

BRENDA

\*

-- with a radiance, like an angel.  
Yes. Larry. Other women can tell,  
Okay? It's a special gift we have.  
You wouldn't know anything about  
it. Would you, Larry? Would you?  
No you wouldn't. But she's  
pregnant. She is. And I'm sure Jim  
is just thrilled by it. Maybe you  
should go over there and talk to  
him about it. I'm sure he'd love  
to hear from you. You used to be  
pretty good friends... Anyhow...  
that's that. So. How was work  
today....?

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

She goes on, but Larry's own gift - his curse - is  
already tuning her out, replacing her noise with the too  
loud NOISE of the busy restaurant --

The SCRAPE and CLATTER of silverware -

The HISS of carbonated drinks -

The repulsive CRUNCH of mastication -

Larry clenches his teeth, trying to stay calm --

FATHER (O.S.)

...you gotta eat, Pumpkin. You  
wanna grow up to be a big girl  
like mamma, doncha...?

Larry glances over at a far booth. A young FATHER  
lovingly tries to coax his young DAUGHTER to eat.

ON LARRY, an aching sadness in his eyes, as he watches  
the father dote on his child --

BRENDA (O.S.)

\*

...was work today?

Brenda's inquisitive VOICE pulls him out of his spell.

\*

BRENDA (CONT'D)

\*

I was asking how work was today?

He picks up his knife, continues cutting his steak.

LARRY

Didn't see any auras, tell you  
that.

(CONTINUED)

BRENDA

C'mon. This is supposed to be our special night. Don't spoil it.

(beat)

We only get one chance a month, Larry.

Larry looks down at his meat. Then -

LARRY

I terminated a woman.

Beat. Now its Brenda's turn to look concerned.

BRENDA

What?

LARRY

She was describing to a Tech a problem with our graphics application. A common bug. We hear it a lot. It's usually a three minute call...

(beat)

About ninety seconds in I killed it. Just like -- that.

He makes a gesture with his knife.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Don't know why I did it. The call was going well. But I did.

He glances up at her, a sheepish look of amazement.

LARRY (CONT'D)

No one said anything.

Brenda stares at him oddly.

BRENDA

Huh. Guess you got away with it.

Larry considers this for a moment. Then nods. *Guess he did.*

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Larry?

LARRY

Yeah?

BRENDA

I had another one of those dreams.

(CONTINUED)

Larry's eyes begin to glaze over.

\*

BRENDA (CONT'D)

\*

Last night. Remember how last time we were in the forest? Well, this time we were in the desert - a big, big desert, just like the one we saw when we went to Vegas last year, remember? - and it was like we were Mary and Joseph and then there was a manger surrounded by palm trees and there was a glow coming from inside that manger so we walked up closer and, oh, Larry, oh do you know what was inside that manger...?

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

But the sound of her VOICE is already fading, her mouth opening and closing noiselessly, as Larry fixates on the FATHER and DAUGHTER behind her, across the room.

He watches the dad nuzzle his daughter's ear. No one else could possibly hear it. But Larry does. Clear as a bell -

FATHER

I love you.

BRENDA

\*

-- I love you.. Oh, larry... Oh...

Brenda moans with pleasure as Larry grinds away on top of her. But this is hardly passion driven sex.

\*

It's an appointment.

We GO IN ON LARRY, giving it his best. As the sex gets more heated, the NOISES get louder, more distorted:

The EXPLOSIVE RUSH of blood through vessels --

The BELLOWS ROAR of excited breathing --

The dry SCRAPE of fingernails on skin --

For Larry it all sounds like some amplified torture session. He shuts his eyes. Bearing it.

Yearning for silence.

24

**EXT. LARRY'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MORNING**

24

Larry rolls out in his CAR. He slows before his neighbor's driveway where an affable, athletic guy, JIM - 30's - is shooting hoops against his garage. Jim grins.

JIM

Heya neighbor.

He strolls over with the ball. Larry nods hello. He's not good at the small talk.

JIM (CONT'D)

(joking)

Little one-on-one before work?

\*

Larry stares at Jim, trying to size up his general demeanor. Jim smiles quizzically.

JIM (CONT'D)

What's up Larr?

\*

LARRY

Guess I owe you a congratulations.

JIM

Sorry?

Jim stares, perplexed. Larry blinks, nonplussed.

LARRY

Don't I? Aren't you? I thought...?

(beat)

My mistake. G'bye.

He waves, suddenly very annoyed at himself. But then Jim brightens, getting it.

JIM

Oh. Right! That.

(frowning slightly)

How'd you know? We haven't told anyone yet.

Larry blinks. *So Brenda was right...*

\*

LARRY

I guess my wife must have spoken with yours.

Jim breaks into a wry grin: "Women!"

(CONTINUED)

JIM

She never told me... Well, thanks  
Larr. Still hasn't sunk in I  
guess. Eight months is still a  
long ways off yet. There's so much  
to look forward to, but so much...

He sees how uncomfortable Larry looks. He trails off.

JIM (CONT'D)

Well. You know what I mean...

LARRY

Yeah.

An awkward beat.

JIM

How're you and Brenda doing?

\*

LARRY

Just fine. Well. G'bye.

He starts to roll up his window. Jim leans in.

JIM

Hey, that invitation still stands.  
Whenever you and the Missus want a  
little BBQ, you just holler, okay?

Larry waves and shoots off.

Larry sits across from his boss, who reads from a  
printout.

MANAGER

...3:45. 4:45. 6:32. 8 minutes?  
(looks at Larry)  
Call averages are up across the  
board, Larry. And last month our  
complaint ratio was 19%. That's  
more then the past six months  
combined. I rely on you to keep  
things running smoothly, Larry.

LARRY

I know sir.

MANAGER

How're things at home?

LARRY

Good.

Beat. The MANAGER'S brow furrows with friendly concern.

MANAGER

Look. We've all tried to be there for you and Brenda during this tough time. We offered you a paid leave of absence. You declined. Frankly, I regret not forcing you to take it. But I can't afford to make that mistake again Larry. I'd like you to talk to someone.

\*

He passes him a BUSINESS CARD.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

He's very good. Helped a bunch of us in management quit smoking. Just like that. And he's discreet.

\*

Larry looks up. Skeptical.

LARRY

I don't need a shrink. Really.

The MANAGER sighs and leans forward.

MANAGER

Motivational therapist, Larry. And, I'll be honest. This isn't a suggestion. You've made some bad decisions the past quarter. I want your numbers up. More importantly, I want you back to your old self.

The Manager nods at the card.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'll have Debbie make the first appointment if that helps. Deal?

\*

Larry peers down on the PHONE FLOOR. The new guy, DAVID, is huddled over his phone, deep in a call. Curious, Larry switches to it:

ELDERLY CALLER (V.O.)

-- lonely. It just get so lonely.

DAVID (V.O.)

We all get lonely Ma'am. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

ELDERLY CALLER (V.O.)

But I have no one to talk to anymore. Now that he's gone.

Larry frowns. Discussing personal details with a caller is forbidden. His finger moves to the TERMINATE button --

DAVID (V.O.)

Oh, but he's not gone, Ma'am.

Larry wavers.

ELDERLY CALLER (V.O.)

Wh - What do you mean?

DAVID

Well. His body may be gone. But not his spirit. And I'd say it's a person's spirit that's the whole reason we love them in the first place. Your husband had a big spirit, didn't he?

On the phone we HEAR the old woman whimper softly.

ELDERLY CALLER (V.O.)

Oh yes, he certainly did...

We MOVE IN ON LARRY. He's looking at the PHOTO of him and his son on the boat.

DAVID (V.O.)

Look. Nothing can replace him. You can't bring him back. But you have his spirit with you always. Never let go of that. And you'll never be lonely again.

OFF of Larry, rocked by his insurmountable loss --

David sits across from Larry, who's all business again.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Your job is to offer solutions to customer's software problems. Period.

DAVID

I know that. She was having problems with her DSL connection --

LARRY

She was having problems with her *life*.

David's eyes drop to the floor. He talks softly. But with conviction.

DAVID

And it took another, what, minute and a half to talk through them with her. Ninety seconds to offer just a little solace. To be more than just some robotic voice on the other end of the line. I know the rules Mr. Pearce. But I also know my heart.

Larry fidgets. This kid's moral resolve frustrates him. Yet he can't help admire it too.

LARRY

How old are you?

David looks up, perplexed.

DAVID

What's that have to do with anything?

Beat.

LARRY

I should report this to management.

DAVID

Fine. At least I'll walk out of here with a clear conscience.

Off Larry, impressed.

CUT TO:

30

**INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT**

30

Larry heads to the bathroom, grumpy, vexed by the day --

A piercing BEEEP! lurches him to a stop.

Damn smoke detector...

But then another NOISE catches his attention. He steps to the door to his son's room. Leans in, listening.

FOOTSTEPS

Someone is walking around. Inside his son's room.

We MOVE IN ON LARRY. All the blood drains from his face.

Terrified, he reaches for the knob. And slowly pushes the door. As he does, it swings open and -

BRENDA steps out. Startled, they both leap back. \*

BRENDA \*

Oh Larry! You scared me silly!

Larry's expression darkens.

LARRY

What were you doing in there?

BRENDA \*

Nothing.

She fidgets with something behind her back.

LARRY

What're you hiding Brenda. \*

She tries to walk away but he grabs her wrist. She yelps in pain as he forces her hand out.

She holds a MEASURING TAPE. And WALLPAPER SWATCHES with a balloon pattern.

For a nursery.

He stares at her with a look of betrayal. She begins to sob.

BRENDA \*

Larry! We need to start thinking about the future! We --

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Don't you EVER go in there again!  
You understand? You aren't allowed  
in his room!

Brenda stares at him, aghast.

\*

BRENDA

\*

Larry.

LARRY

Shut up!

BRENDA

\*

You talk about him like he's  
alive!

LARRY

Shut up! For once, just SHUT UP!!

Larry storms off. HOLD ON Brenda, sobbing.

\*

THERAPIST (V.O.)

You don't like to talk, d'you  
Larry?

CUT TO:

Larry sits across from the THERAPIST, an amiable Tony  
Robbins clone, tanned, fit, aggressively self confident.

The walls are covered with motivational posters: "Dare to  
be your best"; "Success doesn't come to you, you go to  
it"; "Life's only limitations are the ones we make."

Larry stares at his feet. He's in hell --

LARRY

All I want is a little peace and  
quiet now and then. That too much  
to ask for?

THERAPIST

Nope. Makes my job a bit difficult  
though.

LARRY

You know how many conversations I  
monitor, on average, every day?  
531.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LARRY (CONT'D)

That's 2,655 times a week I'm listening to *other* people complain about *their* problems.

The therapist leans forward.

THERAPIST

Yes, but I'm here to listen to *you* talk about *your* problem, Larry.

LARRY

I don't have a problem.

The Therapist nods thoughtfully.

THERAPIST

"I don't have a problem"... Yeah, I'd tell that to myself every morning - as I was reaching for my fix. Three packs a day, Larry. Never gave it a second thought. Dad died of lung cancer. "I don't have a problem". Mom died a year later. Still, "I don't have a problem".

(he leans forward)

Hey. You wanna know the secret of how I finally learned to tell myself I did have a problem?

Despite himself, Larry leans in, curious. An amused smile grows on the Therapist's face.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Next session, friend!

He leans back, chuckling. Larry shifts uncertainly.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

But that curiosity of yours is a good first step, Larry.

(serious)

Look. Something is eating you up inside. Something you refuse to acknowledge. Is it anger? Is it bitterness? Guilt? All these are perfectly normal feelings to have after suffering such a loss as you have. But keeping these feelings bottled up inside, living on the island of denial, like you are - this is dangerous. You do have a problem, Larry.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

And accepting that is the first  
step toward fixing it. It works. I  
haven't had a puff in six years.

Larry falters. The guy is getting to him.

LARRY

I...

The Therapist waits patiently.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I don't know.

The Therapist smiles reassuringly.

THERAPIST

It's okay. Think of this session  
as our meet and greet. Your foot's  
in the door. Next time, we can get  
down to real business, okay? So --  
(he steps to desk;  
picks up PHONE)  
How's next Tuesday for you?

\*  
\*

LARRY

Um. Should be good.

THERAPIST

Good.  
(into PHONE)  
Kim, what's my Tuesday like for  
Mr. Pearce? Uh huh... right...

TAP. TAP. TAP. TAP.

Larry blinks. *What's that...?*

ANGLE UNDER DESK -

The Therapist's foot is TAPPING a rhythm on the rug, a  
nervous impatience belied by his laid back demeanor...

Larry stares at him suspiciously, ears pricked.

CLOSE ON the inhale/exhale of the Therapist's BREATHING  
and a tell-tale phlegmy RASPING sound, as we:

CUT TO:

E.C.U. INSIDE THE THERAPIST'S LUNGS, rushing air BLASTING  
through bronchial passages dripping with mucus,

BACK TO:

(CONTINUED)

Larry's expression hardens. He understands now:

A SMOKER'S WHEEZE.

The Therapist finally hangs up, smiling as he jots something on a slip of paper.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Alrighty. Tuesday at 5:30 it is.

LARRY

(flat)

That won't work.

Beat.

THERAPIST

Oh. Okay. 6:30 work better for you?

LARRY

Where's your secret stash?

The THERAPIST looks up. Frozen smile.

THERAPIST

I'm sorry?

LARRY

You're jonesing for one right now. Aren't you? "Don't have a problem", my ass.

The guy holds the smile, but his tone goes cold.

THERAPIST

I haven't had a smoke in six years, friend.

Larry stands up to go.

LARRY

You're not my friend. You're a goddamn fraud. I can hear it.

Larry moves for the exit. The THERAPIST watches him for a moment, then suddenly stands up, irked.

THERAPIST

Hear it? Wait! Hear it? Hear what?

Larry turns at the door.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED: 31

LARRY  
Your addiction.

32 **EXT. JIM'S DRIVEWAY - EVENING** 32

CRAAAASH!

Jim smashes the ball through the hoop. He pulls his fist in a little victory gesture. Starts dribbling again --

33 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - GARAGE WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS** 33

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

Larry is frozen over the model boat, chisel in hand. Every THUMP of Jim's ball, like a mortar shot, makes him cringe.

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

Now it's Brenda, upstairs. Knitting. \*

CLANK! THUMP! CLANK! THUMP! CLANK! THUMP!

Larry grabs a set of industrial size sound muffling HEADPHONES, jams them on,, desperate for silence... \*

34 **LIVINGROOM - SAME** 34

Brenda sets down her knitting needles. And holds up what she's been working on so diligently. \*

A blue swaddling blanket. \*

CUT TO: \*

35 **INT. MALLEUS SOFTWARE - LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY** 35 \*

Larry peeks into the hall outside, watching the Techs head to lunch. He spies David among them, walking alone.

Larry grabs a file off his desk. He waits until David is just outside his door, and then --

36 **HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 36

-- steps out. He feigns surprise at bumping into David.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Oh. Hello.

David nods "Hi". They start walking together.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I decided not to report you.

(off David's look)

It was a first offence. So I'm letting it slide. But I can't say I'll be so forgiving next time.

DAVID

Thanks.

Beat. They continue down the hall together.

LARRY

Headed to lunch?

(David nods)

How about joining me? Outside. We'll grab a couple sandwiches. Get some fresh air...

(David wavers)

It's on me.

DAVID

Um... Alright.

Larry and David sit on a bench overlooking a bucolic lake. A little oasis of calm in the middle of the city.

A few HOBBYISTS sail their model boats on the lake: it's the same place we saw Larry and his son in the FLASHBACK.

LARRY

I come here for the quiet.

DAVID

Yeah. It's pretty quiet.

In fact, there's something creepy about the lack of ambient noise throughout the scene, as if Larry and David were in a vacuum chamber, cut off from the world.

David chews his sandwich. Larry sips his drink.

LARRY

You like working the phones?

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

(shrugs)

It's a job.

LARRY

You're a good listener. I can hear it in your voice.

David shoots him a strange look.

LARRY (CONT'D)

There's space between your words. You don't string them all together like most people who just like to hear themselves gab on and on...

That would be Brenda. David nods uncertainly. Larry looks out at the water, thoughtful. We TIGHTEN on his face as he speaks...

\*

LARRY (CONT'D)

Yeah, most people are afraid to listen, to really listen. They think if they do they might hear what's behind all the noise: silence.

(beat)

Silence scares them. Like if noise is the sound of life, then somehow silence must be the sound of...

Larry pauses. Can't bring himself to say the word.

LARRY (CONT'D)

So what do they do? They surround themselves with more noise, noises on top of noises - TV's, cell phones, their own voices gabbing away endlessly -

He shakes his head in disgust.

LARRY (CONT'D)

They think that the more noise they make, the more alive they are. But you know what? *They're* the ones who are living on an island of denial. Because they refuse to listen. To really listen. You understand?

\*

\*

This is the most Larry's spoken in a LONG time. He turns. Looks over at David. But where David sat, now sits --

(CONTINUED)

**HIS SON.**

The seamlessness of the transition is spooky. Are we in a FLASHBACK? Is this Larry's HALLUCINATION? Maybe some combination of the two?

Larry's son nods at his father. The model boat rests on the ground at his feet. \*

LARRY (CONT'D)

Good. 'Cause if you really listen. \*  
I mean *really, really* listen, then  
you know what happens?

His son turns to him, eyes wide with wonder.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Something amazing! You understand  
that silence is the only thing  
that connects us all. Me and you.  
You and mom... It connects all of  
us. Forever and ever and ever. \*

CLOSE ON Larry's hand grasping his SON'S KNEE.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I never want you to forget that,  
'kay?

His son nods.

LARRY (CONT'D) \*

Good boy. Now let's just sit here  
a bit longer. Deal?

His son obediently shuts his eyes. Larry smiles, and  
shuts his eyes too, listening.

A long beat.

DAVID (O.S.)

Um. I oughtta get back.

Larry opens his eyes. Looks over at:

**DAVID.**

We're back in the PRESENT. An awkward tension lingers in  
the air. It's not exactly clear what transpired during  
this FLASHBACK. But David seems real uncomfortable. Larry  
doesn't seem to register it. He nods.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Y'know, I have a boat. A day sailer. Did most of the work on her myself. Nothing fancy. But she's fun to take out for a spin. Would you like to come out with me? This weekend?

Nothing unseemly about this invitation. Still...

DAVID

Thanks. But I have plans.

Larry smiles, disappointed.

LARRY

Well. Maybe another time. It's great when you get way, way out...

ON LARRY, staring out at the lake wistfully.

LARRY (CONT'D)

There's almost no noise at all.

\*

CUT TO:

**INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

A couple goldfish swim lazily in an AQUARIUM that rests on a side table. A novelty treasure chest aerator opens and closes, releasing bubbles. Each time it CLACKS open a plastic skeleton pops out, bony fingers grasping --

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

AT THE DINING ROOM TABLE -

Larry glances at the offensive noise maker as he lowers himself into his chair. Brenda sits down opposite. She watches him closely as he starts to eat. She's anxious.

\*

BRENDA

Larry?

\*

LARRY

Mm?

BRENDA

I have some news --

\*

LARRY

Oh. I met a Tech today at work. Young guy. Real nice.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LARRY (CONT'D)

I'd like to ask him over for  
dinner one of these nights.

BRENDA

Larry.

LARRY

I was thinking maybe Tuesday or --

BRENDA

Larry!

He looks at her, eyebrows raised.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

You aren't listening.

LARRY

What is it?

Her face contorts into a weird, bashful smile.

BRENDA

Larry. I'm pregnant.

BEEEEEP!

The smoke detector... Larry's jaw muscle tightens. He  
stares at her for a long moment, fork poised over his  
plate. She grabs his hand.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Isn't it wonderful!

LARRY

Brenda...

BRENDA

I told you my dreams were speaking  
to me. It's like each one was a  
little offering of hope, y'know, a  
little sign, like an angel telling  
me, "Everything will work out.  
Just have faith." At first I  
didn't want to believe it, was too  
worried we'd be disappointed  
again, but then this morning --

LARRY

Brenda. It was only two days ago --

BRENDA

-- something wonderful happened.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

-- that we made love.

Beat. In the lull they stare at each other. She's smiling. But her eyes are eerily vacant and lifeless.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Brenda. It was *two* days ago. How could you possibly know? \*

BRENDA \*

Larry. I felt it. I felt it move. Inside.

Larry swallows. Chilled.

CLACK! CLACK! The little skeleton pops in and out...

LARRY

(hoarsely)

What do you want me to say?

BRENDA \*

Say you're happy. It's a boy, Larry. We're having another boy!

CLOSE ON Larry pacing back and forth, a caged animal.

He's murmuring under his breath, a bundle of tics, totally thrown by Brenda's odd behavior -- \*

SKREEESKREESKREEEEEESKREEEEEEE!

A high pitched SQUEALING pierces the dark space.

Larry winces, covering his ears.

*Where's it coming from!* He looks down at the floor, over to a wall baseboard -

He drops to his knees. Pries at a small hole above the baseboard, ripping at the sheetrock, overcome by a crazed, manic zeal.

Sweating, he finally opens a hole in the wall, revealing:

A NEST OF NEWBORN MICE

Larry stares aghast. Their quivering pink flesh. Their high pitched MEWLING.

(CONTINUED)

It's more than he can bear...

Something goes dead in his eyes. He rises. Goes to his workbench.

And grabs a hammer...

CUT TO:

HISS! Elevator doors open. And we are --

40 INT. MALLEUS SOFTWARE - HALLWAY - DAY

40 \*

Larry steps from the elevator with other EMPLOYEES.

We FOLLOW him in SLO MO as he walks past the OFFICES that line the hallway -

VOICES

*...heard he made a pass at the guy...*

Larry walks on, head down. We get glimpses of EMPLOYEES behind closed door, whispering. Larry HEARS it all -

VOICES (CONT'D)

*...that's why they keep him up in that office all by himself...*

\*

The VOICES grow and grow, becoming a WALL OF NOISE.

VOICES (CONT'D)

*...always was a weirdo... give him a break, he's damaged goods...*

\*

41 INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

41

SLAM!

Larry leans against his door, gasping, a besieged look in his eyes.

He drops his briefcase. Moves to the observation window. Looks out over the PHONE FLOOR:

Cubicle 11, David's cubicle, is empty.

\*

RIIIINNG!! RIIIIING!

He spins to the phone. Steps over. Picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED:

41

LARRY

Hello?

42 **INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY**

42

Larry sits across from the grim MANAGER.

MANAGER

... a Tech quit yesterday. Nothing new in that. You know the kind of turnover rate we're up against. Nature of the job. Thing is, before he quit, he gave this to human resources.

He passes a document to Larry.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

\*

It's a complaint, Larry. He claims you harassed him. Made some inappropriate... overtures.

Larry stares at the paper, stunned.

MANAGER

Now, I'm inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt Larry, especially since he didn't have the guts to confront you personally.

(beat)

But, then Doctor Hemmer calls and tells me your session didn't go over so well...

(beat)

Larry. You've been with us six years. You're an important part of our team here--

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

Larry blinks. The noise is loud, like high heels on a marble floor. The MANAGER continues, oblivious:

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

\*

But there is protocol I have to follow in situations like this...

Larry sees something move on the window behind his desk --

A FLY. All six feet moving as it crawls across the glass -

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

(CONTINUED)

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

\*

I need to put you on probation.  
You can still come to work...

The fly's wings abruptly start to vibrate -

BUZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!

We GO IN ON LARRY, eyes hypnotically fixed on the bug.

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

\*

But one more misstep, and I'll  
have to let you go.

The sound getting louder, an awful, ominous BUZZZZZ --

SHOCK CUT:

43 INT. HOSPITAL I.C.U. - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

-- the electric BUZZ of an EKG MONITOR.

Larry's SON lies comatose in a bed connected to a scary  
array of noisy, life-sustaining machines.

Larry is kneeling before the bed. Behind him Brenda  
sleeps in a chair. They've been here for days, holding  
vigil.

\*

Larry's exhausted eyes stare at his son's drawn, but  
beatific face.

Now a BEEPING sound joins the BUZZING. Other noises join  
in: DRIPPING, WHIRRING.

The agonizing pulse of a machine-given life.

Each sound hits Larry like a punch to the gut. He shuts  
his eyes, pleading.

LARRY

Please... No more... Be still.

He repeats the phrase like a mantra.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Be still... be still...

And slowly, one by one, all the sounds FADE OUT. Until  
there is only -

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

And the sound of Larry's own ragged BREATHING...

A MOVEMENT in the room makes Larry open his eyes --

CUT TO:

LARRY'S P.O.V. - PLAYED IN SLO-MO AND IN DEAD SILENCE

Brenda is now standing over the bed, SCREAMING. A NURSE and DOCTOR are rushing in. His son's EKG has gone flat-line.

\*

BACK TO:

Larry, stumbling back from the bed, horrified. A medical TEAM vainly tries to revive his son.

Yet all we HEAR is Larry's racing heart --

BACK TO:

**INT. LARRY'S CAR - MOVING - PRESENT - DAY**

Larry stares straight ahead, numbed by this memory of his loss. There is something ominous in his gaze...

All we HEAR is his breathing. Measured. As if he's struggling to stay calm. He clicks on the radio --

BLOOD CURDLING SCREECHES, like two people being skinned alive, fill the car! He snaps off the radio --

BANG!

He lurches back in his seat.

A single drop of rain has fallen on the windshield.

BANG! BANG! BABANG! BABANGBANGBANG!

A downpour! Like lead shot crashing onto a metal barrel.

Larry's shrinks under the clamor --

**EXT. CITY STREET - SAME**

Larry's car lurches to a stop. Other cars HONK as he tumbles out into the rain, hands covering his ears.

46

**EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY**

46

Panicked, Larry slams past PEDESTRIANS, assaulted on all sides by NOISES, noises he shouldn't hear --

Rivulets of rain THUNDER off an awning like Niagara Falls.

PEOPLE on cells ROAR like crowds at a football stadium.

Two tiny PUGS BELLOW like rabid wolves.

A street VENDOR'S grill SIZZLES like the pits of hell.

FOLLOWING LARRY, drowning in a sea of noise.

47

**INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY**

47

Larry rushes past a big sign reading: "Quiet Please".

At a table he yanks out a chair. Nearly falls into it. People sit at other tables, everyone reading quietly.

Larry takes a big breath. Recomposes. Settles. He'll be okay. He's found a little oasis of calm in the madness --

CRACK! CARACK!

Larry jolts. A MAN next to him is turning the pages of his book, each page turn an earsplitting THUNDER CLAP.

Larry cringes at the SCREEEECH of fingernails on a blackboard - a STUDENT is marking a page with a yellow highlighter.

CRUNCH! CRUNCH! - a WOMAN absently chews on her pencil.

BOOM! BANG! BOOM! - the LIBRARIAN taps out artillery fire on her keyboard!

OFF LARRY, leaping up, a wild look of doom in his eyes.

47A

**EXT. LARRY'S HOME - NIGHT**

47A

Larry runs to his front door, passing the WHIRLIGIG that's spinning wildly now, making a horrendous racket -

KACHAK! KACHAK! KACHAK! KACHAK!

48

**INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

48

He flies in, drenched. Takes a breath. Hits the light switch -

BUUUZZZZ! A dozen light bulbs explode in his ears.

No refuge here. We FOLLOW as he stumbles through his house, assaulted now on all sides by noise --

The electric BUUUZZZZ of lights bulbs.

The TOCK TOCK TOCK of the wall clock.

The DRIP DROP of the kitchen faucet.

The RATTLE of the air conditioner.

A maddening SYMPHONY OF NOISE! Driving him crazy! He scans the room for a solution. Sees a flimsy FIRE POKER near the hearth. Grabs it. Tests it's weight.

*Not bad...*

Then he sees it. Displayed over the mantle - his trophy BASEBALL BAT. He drops the poker, grabs the bat. Smiles.

*Better.*

Larry winds up, SMASHES a buzzing lamp across the room. CRASH! That felt good. He spins, SMASHES another.

FOLLOWING LARRY now, on a rampage, "terminating" all sources of noise --

CUT TO:

Larry pulverizes the ticking WALL CLOCK.

CUT TO:

Larry destroys the dripping KITCHEN FAUCET. Then pushes over the buzzing REFRIGERATOR for good measure.

CUT TO:

Larry pummels the rattling AIR CONDITIONER into silence. He hears a CLACK! CLACK! He spins --

In the AQUARIUM the little skeleton pops in and out of the treasure chest --

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED:

48

Larry steps over. Winds up. Aiming at the glass. And stops.

The two GOLDFISH stare out dolefully...

Larry looks at the fish. The fish look at Larry.

OFF LARRY, torn --

49 **EXT. LARRY'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR - SECONDS LATER**

49

CLOSE on the glass-bulb ELECTRIC METER, the disk gauge spinning slowly. Here the electric BUZZZ is overwhelming -

SMASH!

Larry's wails on the meter. Glass shatters. Sparks fly. But the thing keeps BUZZING.

50 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - SAME**

50

The remaining lights flicker.

51 **EXT. LARRY'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR - CONTINUOUS**

51

He drops the bat, kicks the meter. Finally he grabs it with both hands, yanks it. The connecting electric cables POP and CRACK and, finally, SNAP --

52 **INT. LARRY'S HOME - SAME**

52

ZZZZ! All remaining lights go out.

CLOSE ON THE AQUARIUM - the treasure chest aerator stops bubbling. The little skeleton drops back inside.

53 **EXT. LARRY'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR - CONTINUOUS**

53

Winding up like a discus thrower, Larry wings the METER into the darkness...

54 **INT. LIVINGROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

54

Larry enters. Spent. He stops in the center of the room, sweating, breathless, surrounded by debris.

The place is dark. Destroyed. But quiet.

(CONTINUED)

BEEEEEP!

Larry cranes back his head. He's standing directly under it, it's little blinking red light taunting him -

The fucking smoke detector!

With a last effort Larry winds up the bat. And smashes it to smithereens.

Larry drops the bat. Finished.

It is quiet.

Then, barely detectable in the thick silence, we HEAR:

...shlurp... shlurp... shlurp...

A gruesome, alien NOISE. What the hell is it?! Larry cocks his head. It's coming from upstairs...

54A

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

54A

Larry moves cautiously toward the master bedroom.

55

**MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT**

55

The door opens. And Larry steps in.

...SHLURP!... SHLURP!... SHLURP!...

Larry covers his ears, disgusted. He approaches the bed.

Brenda is in a deep, Somnopam-induced slumber. He leans in closer. He studies her face:

\*

Her eyeballs twitch back and forth in an active R.E.M. state. Each twitch makes that revolting noise:

...SHLURP!... SHLURP!... SHLURP!...

He leaps back. Appalled. Brenda, *his wife*, is making this monstrous racket!?

\*

And now it's joined by the SHRILL WHISTLE of air through her nostrils. The DRY CRACKLE of her twitching tendons.

Then he sees it: the smile on her face. She's having a pleasant dream! He's being tortured by her awful noises while she basks in some lovely, peaceful dream!

He grabs a pillow from the bed. Covers his ears.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY  
(whispering)  
Be still.

But the NOISES only get louder.

CRAACCCKKKLLEE SHRREEEEEEE SHLUUURRP!

The horrendous din of her autonomous bodily functions. He steps closer, holding the pillow before him.

LARRY (CONT'D)  
Please. Be still.

\*

Closer. The awful NOISE so loud now it nearly drowns out his final plea:

LARRY  
Be.... still...

He looms over her. Raises the pillow up...

CUT TO:

Blackness.

And absolute silence.

A long beat.

Then, slowly emerging out of the silence, we HEAR --  
knock...Knock...KNOCK!

CLOSE ON Larry's eyes, opening. He's laying on --

-- his couch. Morning light plays on the ceiling.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Someone is at the front door.

Larry groggily rises. He approaches the front door. Opens it, squinting in the bright light.

Jim stands there in his sweats and tank top, grinning.

JIM  
Oh. Hey, Larry.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Jim.

JIM

Thought you'd be at work. Didn't  
wake you, did I?

LARRY

Not at all...

Larry glances at his watch, frowns. Jim shoots a look in  
the trashed house. Larry notices, closes the door a bit.

JIM

Found this on my front lawn.

He hands him the trashed ELECTRIC METER. Larry takes it.

LARRY

Thanks.

Awkward beat. Jim does his best to sound casual.

JIM

Oh, hey, how's your's and Brenda's  
Thursday night looking? \*

LARRY

Uh, not good.

JIM

Oh. Everything alright?

LARRY

Brenda's a bit... under the  
weather. \*

JIM

Sorry to hear that. Well, hey,  
maybe next week then. Yeah,  
there's definitely some kind of  
bug going around. Sarah's feeling  
kinda crappy too... 'course, maybe  
it's morning sickness, but...

Jim's VOICE fades out as Larry stares out beyond him at --

Some KIDS playing catch, the soft pleasing CRUNCH of the  
ball hitting their mitts.

The WHIRLIGIG spinning on the lawn, WHIRRING quietly.

Larry shuts his eyes, listening.

(CONTINUED)

To the distant COOING of morning doves.

To the soft HUSH of the breeze in the trees.

The calming, normal sounds of the breaking day.

JIM (O.C.) (CONT'D)

...fire up the grill, throw on a couple rib eyes? We'll pop a few PBRs. Make it a night. How's that sound?

(beat)

Larry? Larry?

Larry opens his eyes. A peaceful smile on his face now.

LARRY

Sounds great.

**INT. LARRY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY**

Showered, dressed for work, Larry somehow looks more refreshed than we've seen him thus far.

He cautiously reaches for the radio. Clicks it on --

A breezy MUZAK bossa nova song plays.

Larry smiles, relaxing, settles in for the drive.

**INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Larry is monitoring calls. He glances out the window. Sees that another TECH has replaced David at CUBICLE 11. \*

He presses the switchboard to listen in:

CALLER

-- You did it! Thank you so much.  
It worked!

Larry switches through more calls:

VOICES

-- Problem solved! -- Won't have to worry about *that* one any more --  
You're a certifiable life saver!

Dozens of gratified callers, all expressing their appreciation for jobs well done.

WE GO IN ON LARRY, beneficent smile growing on his face.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED:

58

It's like they're thanking him.

59 **INT. CAFETERIA - DAY**

59

The normal ambient sounds of a lunch room.

Larry stands in line to pay. He looks down and notices a FLY crawling on his tray -

E.C.U THE FLY - this time we hear nothing extraordinary.

CASHIER (O.S.)

Hey mister! Yo!

Larry snaps out of it. The CASHIER glares, annoyed.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

I said it's \$8.59.

LARRY

Sorry. I didn't hear you.

He reaches for his wallet and stops, astonished by what he just said. So he says it again, to himself.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I didn't hear you.

ON LARRY, smiling. Maybe the curse has been lifted...

60 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

60

Several CANDLES illuminate the darkness. We FIND Larry cleaning up the mess he created the night before.

He replaces the afghan on the couch, and notices something crumpled up behind a pillow. He pulls it out --

It's the SWADDLING BLANKET Brenda has been knitting. He stares at it for a moment.

\*

Then folds it back up. Opens a drawer and puts it inside.

CUT TO:

LATER -

Larry lays on the couch, relishing the quiet. He yawns. After a moment he instinctively reaches for his EAR PLUGS on the side table. Begins to put them in...

Then stops.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED:

60

The house is quiet. One might even say peaceful.

Larry chuckles. Looks at the EARPLUGS. He won't need them tonight. He goes to put them back on the table --

A HISS slices through the silence like a sharp knife.

Larry freezes. *What was that?*

61 **KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

61

Larry trains a FLASHLIGHT on stares at the broken faucet. A tiny stream of pressurized water leaks from it, making the HISS.

Larry smiles. No problem here. He Simply covers the leak with his thumb, killing the HISS --

\*

But in the silence he hears another sound now, barely audible, less high pitched, more gravely then the HISS --

*...crrrrraaaaackkl11111le...*

He shuts his eyes, listening intently. *Is it coming from inside the house?* He can't tell. He slips his thumb off the leak, the watery HISS cuts in, drowning out the other noise. He covers the leak with his thumb again --

But now the CRACKLING sound is gone...

*Did he imagine it?*

62 **INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY**

62

Larry sits at his desk, monitoring calls. He switches to TECH 3's station. Listens in:

TECH 3 (V.O.)

... you may have some bugs in your graphic convertor. So here's what I want you to do. Restart your computer while pressing Control C.

CALLER (V.O.)

Okay. I'm -- *crrraackk11le* -- going to restart it now.

Larry blinks. Did he just here that? Was it static interference? Or...?

There's a lull in the conversation. Larry raises the volume, trying to discern anything in the white noise.

(CONTINUED)

62 CONTINUED:

62

Buried in the background noise, a faint, familiar sound --  
...crrrrraaaaackkl11111le...

OFF Larry, spooked.

63 **EXT. LARRY'S HOUSE - DAY**

63

Jim is washing his car as Larry pulls in. Jim waves to him. Larry doesn't wave back.

\*  
\*

64 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY**

64

Larry enters quickly. Shuts the door. Stops. Listens --  
Crrrrraaaaackkl11111le!

His shoulders sag. It's there alright. Only louder than before. And it's coming from upstairs...

65 **UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY**

65

Larry steps before the door to the MASTER BEDROOM.

The crispy, CRACKLING noise is coming from inside --

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER -

Larry grunts with effort as he stuffs towels around the door frame. He stands ups. Listening.

The CRACKLING noise is certainly more muted.

But it's still audible...

66 **INT. GARAGE WORKSHOP - NIGHT**

66

A twelve-foot SAIL BOAT rests on a trailer next to Larry's car. We watch Larry climb into his car --

67 **INT. LARRY'S CAR - SAME**

67

He lies in the back seat. A cocoon of silence. For extra measure he presses in his EAR PLUGS.

(CONTINUED)

67 CONTINUED:

67

And shuts his eyes...

FADE OUT:

67A EXT. LARRY'S HOME - NEXT MORNING

67A

A few GIRLS play jump rope on a nearby driveway.

68 **INT. GARAGE WORKSHOP - SAME**

68

CLOSE ON the car door cracking open. Larry cautiously steps out. He cocks his head. Listening.

But it's only muffled silence in the garage...

69 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - MORNING**

69

FOLLOWING Larry as he walks through his house, ears pricked.

But everything is startlingly quiet.

There is no CRACKLING sound anymore.

Visibly relieved, Larry steps into the -

KITCHEN -

He pulls a juice out of the demolished FRIDGE. Strolls over to the front door...

69A EXT. LARRY'S HOME - FRONT DOOR - DAY -FLASHBACK

69A

...and steps outside. Pauses on the stoop, takes a long swig of juice, taking in the quiet day --

CUT TO:

LARRY'S P.O.V. - across the street a NEIGHBOR mows his lawn. The GIRL'S jump rope slaps against the pavement.

But something's wrong.

There's no sounds....

LARRY'S P.O.V spins to next door: as usual Jim plays hoops. His ball bounces up and down on the pavement -

(CONTINUED)

But makes no sound.

BACK TO:

Larry, going pale with dread. We ANGLE ON his ears as he suddenly realizes why it's so quiet:

*He still has his ear plugs in!*

He reaches up. And pulls them out --

Noises flood in: the ROAR of the mower; the SLAP SLAP of the jump rope; the THUMP THUMP of the basketball. And loudest of all:

CRRRRAAAAAAACKKKLLLLLLLLLLE!!

The awful NOISE fills the house!

Larry cringes, terrified.

CUT TO:

70 **INT. MALLEUS SOFTWARE - HALLWAY - DAY**

70 \*

SOMEONE'S P.O.V. - played in odd, muffled SILENCE

Moving down the hall, passing amused EMPLOYEES, who step out of their OFFICES, pointing and staring.

CUT TO:

The someone is Larry. He's wearing a thick wool hat pulled over a set of industrial size, noise-cancelling HEADPHONES (the one's airport workers use)

He looks like some alien freak.

His fellow workers snicker and laugh as he passes...

71 **INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY**

71

Larry takes off the headphone contraption. Listens.

Thankfully, it's nice and quiet in his office...

He slumps at his desk. Stares at his SWITCHBOARD. Every single switch glows. It's a busy day down on the floor...

He takes a breath, Settling in for the day, he pushes a switch, listening in on the call:

(CONTINUED)

CALL 1

-- okay, you want the truth? The truth is you got a *real* problem on your hands --

CLICK. He switches to another call:

CALL 2

-- sir, you deleted a file you shouldn't have and now your whole operating system is corrupted --

CLICK.

CALL 3

-- you can't ignore this, okay? Your whole system is on the verge of crashing. Do you understand what I'm saying, Larry?

CLICK! Larry gasps. Chilled. He takes a moment, tries to shake off his dread. He switches to another call:

CALL 4

It's gonna come back to haunt you -

CLICK!

CALL 5

-- livin' on an island of denial --

Frantic, Larry bangs on switch after switch:

CALL 6

-- what have --

CLICK!

CALL 7

-- you --

CLICK!

CALL 8

-- DONE?!

CLICK!

BRENDA'S VOICE

You talk about him like he's alive.

\*

Larry leaps up. Stares in disbelief at the switchboard.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

No...

All the call switches glow ominously, daring him to listen in. But he will not. In one fell swoop he drags his fingers across the board -

TERMINATING all the calls.

CUT TO:

ANGLE OUT the observation window onto the PHONE FLOOR --

A commotion among the TECH ASSISTANTS as they look around, confused, pulling off their headsets...

BACK TO:

Larry, eyes shut, needing, *demanding* the silence.

RIIIINNNG!! RIIIIING!

He opens his eyes. He looks at his phone. Dreading it, he reaches over, and picks up the receiver:

PHONE

CRRRRAAAAAACKKKLLLLLLLLLE!!

CUT TO:

72 **INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

72

FOLLOWING LARRY, moving fast toward the exit. The angry MANAGER intercepts him. Grabs him by the shoulders.

MANAGER

Hey! What the hell is going on!

He spins Larry around. Gets right in his face. Larry stares at him dumbly.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

You even listening to me!? Larry!?

CUT TO:

LARRY'S P.O.V. - THE MANAGER'S MOUTH OPENING AND CLOSING.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

CRRRAAAAACKKKLLLLLLLLLE!!

BACK TO:

(CONTINUED)

72 CONTINUED:

72

Larry rips himself away, flees for the stairs.

73 **INT. LARRY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY**

73

Larry clutches the wheel in a white knuckle panic, weaving through traffic. He glances at the radio. A perverse urge overcomes him. He clicks it on.

RADIO

CRRRAAAAACKKKKLLLLLLLLLE!!

ON LARRY, haunted resignation in his eyes, knowing there's only one place he can find peace --

CUT TO:

74 **EXT. CEMETARY - SON'S GRAVE - DAY**

74

Larry hurries to his son's grave.

He collapses onto it, resting his head on the grass.

A gentle breeze murmurs in the trees. Distant birds.

But otherwise, deathly quiet.

Larry takes a deep breath. Thankful for the reprieve.

LARRY

I knew... you'd understand...

FROM HIGH ABOVE, we see only a grieving father, at peace in the quiet desolation of his son's grave...

MOVE IN ON LARRY, his ear, pressed into the grass.

A SQUISHING noise.

His eyes open. He jerks his ear away. Looks at the grass.

It's moving.

He rises to his knees. Reaches out. Plunges his fingers into the damp earth. Rips out a clot. Lifts it up:

DOZENS OF EARTHWORMS SLIP AND WRITHE THROUGH HIS FINGERS

SQQQUIIIIISSSSHHHH!

He grabs another handful. Worms. He claws at the grass. Fat, slick worms! The plot is infested, the SQUISHING noise louder than anyone should ever have to bear.

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED:

74

ON LARRY, cornered, no place to run.

75 **EXT. JIM'S DRIVEWAY - DAY**

75

Jim concentrates as he lines up his ball for a shot. He aims, he throws -

SCREEEEEECH!

- and misses by a mile. He watches Larry's car peel into his driveway, plow over the mailbox, and rocks to a stop.

Larry stumbles out, a man crazed. The two men lock eyes. Before Jim can react, Larry disappears into his house.

OFF JIM, freaked by his neighbor, the psycho.

76 **INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY**

76

Larry rushes to the door. Behind it the NOISE thunders:

CRRRAAAAACKKKLLLLLLLLLE!!

He stomps in little circles, freaking out. He shoots a look out the window. Sees Jim on his cell phone. He turns back to the door, desperate.

LARRY

Stop! They'll hear you! Be still!!

Crazed, he smashes a PHOTO in the hallway. CRASH!

LARRY (CONT'D)

STOP IT! STOP IT!

\*

He smashes more PHOTOS: his wedding day; his son's birthday; a family vacation --

He fixes on one of a younger Brenda, in happier times --

\*

LARRY (CONT'D)

STOP IT! PLEASE! MAKE IT STOP --

\*

All at once the CRACKLING NOISE stops.

Larry stands there, panting. Hands bleeding. He slides down the wall onto the floor. Overcome. Weeping.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I just... want him back.... I just want him back...

\*

(CONTINUED)

Then, in the thick silence, a NEW SOUND. Barely audible, coming from down the hallway...

Larry rises. Shuffles toward his son's room.

The sound is coming from behind the door. He leans in. And hears --

A CHILD'S GIGGLING

Larry covers his mouth. Overwhelmed. It's like something breaks inside him. He grasps the door knob. Pushes in --

Dark. Airless. As pristine and unchanged as a museum diorama. A sailboat mobile rotates slowly above a small, neatly made bed...

Larry steps in. Pauses, listening.

Soft giggling. *But from where...?*

The closet door is ajar. He steps over. Pushes it open. Peers inside. Nothing but neatly folded kids clothes...

More LAUGHTER. Closer. More insistent. Beckoning him...

LARRY

I hear you. I can hear you now.

He scans the room. Something MOVES behind the drapes that cover the window. The GIGGLING is coming from there...

He steps to the window. Hopeful tears well in his eyes.

LARRY (CONT'D)

It's okay. I'm here now...

\*

He reaches out. Slowly. And pulls back the drapes --

Outside, a single branch moves in the breeze. It scrapes against the window pane, creating a SQUEAKING noise that -

SOUNDS LIKE LAUGHTER

Larry clutches his head, let's out a groan of mortal terror. He drops to his knees, devastated.

The CRACKLING NOISE fades in again. Getting louder, mocking him.

LOUDER, LOUDER! LOUDER!

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED:

77

Larry looks up. SEES his reflection in his son's mirror. Mouth open in a scream. But all he hears is CRACKLING --

CUT TO:

78 **EXT. STREET OUTSIDE LARRY'S HOUSE - DAY**

78

Two COPS climb out of their CRUISER. Jim is standing on Larry's lawn. He helpfully points to Larry's front door.

The COPS knock on the door. Locked. They go around back.

79 **INT. BASEMENT SHOP - DAY**

79

SPARKS strobe on Larry's grim, determined face. He looms over a spinning grindstone, sharpening a LARGE KNIFE.

80 **INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

80

The COPS carefully push through the open back door. It's spooky quiet. Nothing moves. They glance down --

On the linoleum: a trail of BLOOD DROPS.

81 **INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY**

81

The door opens. A wedge of light cuts through the gloomy darkness. Larry stands back-lit in the doorway, holding the KNIFE. He wears a GARBAGE BAG like a butcher's apron.

Inside the room, the CRACKLING NOISE is almost unbearable now. Larry steps inside.

82 **INT. STAIRWELL/HALLWAY - DAY**

82

In total SILENCE the COPS follow the blood trail up the stairs. The trail leads down the hall to the bedroom...

83 **INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY**

83

... where Larry stands next to the MAKE-UP TABLE, staring at the bed where we can just glimpse Brenda's prone form.

\*  
\*

CLOSE ON LARRY, scared. But resolute.

CLOSE ON the KNIFE. Larry raises it up...

(CONTINUED)

THE CRACKLING NOISE growing louder, Louder, LOUDER!!

CUT TO:

BANG! THE BEDROOM DOOR FLIES OPEN!

The two COPS burst in, crouch down, guns aimed...

The room is DEAD SILENT. And empty.

Larry is long gone.

{NOTE: we should now realize prior sequence cut between LARRY in the near past and the COPS in the present.}

The COPS cautiously approach the bed. The YOUNGER COP covers his mouth, backs up, appalled at what he sees:

BRENDA. Mouth frozen in a rictus scream. Her body perfectly intact. But swarming with MAGGOTS, creating a noise that - for anyone except Larry - is barely audible.

\*

CUT TO:

E.C.U. of MAGGOTS: the source of the CRACKLING NOISE is now disclosed: thousands of tiny larval mouths. Chewing.

BACK TO:

The YOUNGER COP stumbles back into Brenda's make-up table, knocking the bloody KNIFE to the floor. He spins. Looks down. And almost pukes at what he sees on the table.

\*

TWO EARS.

CUT TO:

LARRY'S FEET, walking. We HEAR loud screaming, yelling.

The commotion builds as BLOOD DROPS hit the pavement, making a trail down the middle of the road...

We PULL BACK to REVEAL Larry. The blood is coming from the two jagged holes where his ears once were.

In his arms he clutches the small SAIL BOAT. Up ahead the road leads to the ocean. That's where Larry is going.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

LARRY'S P.O.V. - PLAYED IN SLO-MO AND IN DEAD SILENCE.

As he passes HORRIFIED SPECTATORS, SCREAMING KIDS,  
BARKING DOGS. The police cruiser SQUEALS to a stop behind  
him. Cops leap out, guns drawn, YELL for him to stop.

BACK TO:

Larry, who hears none of it. He just keeps walking toward  
the sparkling water. A smile growing on his face. At last  
he's found what he's sought all along.

Pure silence

FADE OUT.