

old man Johnson

written by
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*with **REVISION** marks, though
some revisions are tiny -akw

REWRITING
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EXT. BRIDGE -- DAY

A Greyhound BUS crosses the Harvey Taylor BRIDGE over the Susquehanna River, towards the modest HARRISBURG, PA skyline.

EXT. HARRISBURG BUS/TRAIN TERMINAL -- DAY

The BUS arrives between other buses. Its DOOR HISSES OPEN. The DRIVER steps down, moving to open LUGGAGE COMPARTMENTS. PASSENGERS get off, tired and unhappy, but grateful to stretch their legs. Some look up to the overcast sky.

A YOUNG WOMAN, **ABBIE**, 21, gets off, dressed in somewhat 70's influenced vintage style. She's pretty, pensive, hefting a BACKPACK, SPIRAL-BOUND NOTEBOOK in hand.

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Abbie walks to pick up her SUITCASE, looks around. She walks, searching. She checks her WATCH, perturbed.

An OLDER MAN exits the TERMINAL BUILDING, smiling and waving as he spots Abbie. This is **HENRY**, 70, grey-haired; a thin, plain man in plain clothing.

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HENRY

Abbie... here I am.

Henry's glad to see her. Abbie smiles. Their hug is awkward, partly because Abbie still holds her suitcase.

ABBIE

Grandpa, how are you?

HENRY

Here, let me take that...
(taking her SUITCASE)
How was the bus?

ABBIE

You don't have to...

HENRY

I've got it. Not too long, I hope.
Not too uncomfortable... the trip.

ABBIE

It was fine.

HENRY

We're this way. I was inside getting a look at the trains. I used to take the train into Philly on my sales trips, did you know that?

ABBIE

Not really. Maybe you told me.

Henry shuffles down the sidewalk, struggling with the weight of the suitcase, but determined.

CONTINUED

HENRY
I've got it, I've got it.

EXT. BUS/TRAIN TERMINAL, PARKING LOT -- DAY

Beside his old, beat-up, American CAR, Henry drops the suitcase, mopping his face with his HANDKERCHIEF.

ABBIE
Can't I help you with... ?

HENRY
No, I have it. I just...

ABBIE
Don't you want to put it in the trunk?

HENRY
The trunk's broken. Been meaning to have it looked at.

ABBIE
You promised a year ago you'd trade this car in.

HENRY
Right. I know. It just didn't seem worth the trouble. I'm used to this car.

Henry lifts the suitcase, STRUGGLING to position it at the open window of the rear passenger door...

ABBIE
What are you doing?

HENRY
This door won't open. It was sticking for the longest time, and it finally gave up.

ABBIE
Can't we just take it around...?

HENRY
Not to worry, dear... the deed...is nearly...done...!

He's only managed to wedge the suitcase halfway in.

ABBIE
Henry.

Determined, Henry shoves against the suitcase with his shoulder, PUSHING it through -- a PIECE flying off.

CONTINUED

HENRY
(rubs his shoulder)
Ooof.

Abbie picks up the piece. It's the suitcase HANDLE.

HENRY
Where'd that come from?

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- IN MOTION -- DAY

Henry drives. Abbie has her NOTEBOOK in her lap, a 4-COLOR
BIC BALLPOINT PEN in the spiral. She watches scenery pass. *

HENRY
And your mother and father?

ABBIE
They're okay. They said to say
hello, before they left. *

HENRY
Where to this time?

ABBIE
Paris, then London. Then somewhere
else. *

HENRY
I got a postcard last month. Can't
remember where from.

ABBIE
Sure you don't want me to drive?

HENRY
I'm fine.

ABBIE
I don't mind driving.

HENRY
It's okay. It's your vacation.
These two weeks are for you to relax.
I'm really glad you could make it.

Abbie looks to her grandfather, smiles for him.

ABBIE
I'm glad to be here. And then, it's
off to school. So soon already.

HENRY
What did you finally decide?

CONTINUED

ABBY
Decide?

HENRY
About graduate school?

ABBY
Oh. Yeah. Business. Management.
Business management.

HENRY
Your father's footsteps.

ABBY
God. When you say it like that...

Abbie considers, unhappy, taps a finger on her window.

ABBY
I suppose so.

HENRY
Nothing wrong with business. It's a
good, sensible choice.

ABBY
That's what they said.

They look forward. Pause. Small talk's running low.

HENRY
We'll do all sorts of things while
you're here. Whatever you'd like.
I want you to have a nice time.

ABBY
I will. I mean, I always do. It's
great to see you.

They stare. Driving along.
Another silence lengthens uncomfortably.
Abbie looks out; watches sparsely peopled sidewalks.

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EXT. INTERSECTION -- DAY

Henry's car STOPS at a RED LIGHT, waiting to make a left.

IN THE CAR

Henry and Abbie wait.
For the longest time, the ONLY SOUND is the steady
TICK... TICK... TICK... of the TURN SIGNAL.

CUT TO:

INTERLUDE -- LATE DAY

-HARRISBURG GLITTERS at DUSK, reflected in the RIVER.

-FOLKS stroll across the pedestrian-only WALNUT STREET BRIDGE leading from CITY ISLAND into the city itself.

-HENRY'S 3-story, brick APARTMENT BUILDING stands at the corner of an older, residential street lined by trees.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING ROOM -- LATE DAY

Henry opens the door, letting Abbie enter. Abbie carries her handle-less suitcase in her arms.

The apartment's rather small, sparsely furnished. There are some wilting PLANTS by the window. The COUCH faces the TV. MAGAZINES and NEWSPAPERS are piled here and there.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, DINING/LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Henry wears OVEN MITTS, bringing two TV DINNERS to the DINING TABLE. Abbie gives a nod.

ABBIE

Thank you.

Henry sits, taking off the mitts.
He and Abbie eat in silence. Henry refills his GLASS of iced tea. Abbie mostly picks at her overcooked food.

HENRY

Sorry it's not so good. We can eat out tomorrow.

ABBIE

No. It's... I'm not very hungry.

Abbie nibbles. Henry chews, clears his throat, smiles. Abbie smiles back. She looks around.

ABBIE

So, what have you been up to? What do you do to keep yourself busy?

HENRY

Eeh. I read. Listen to the radio. I wish I could still go fishing, but alone it's not much fun. Mostly Johnson and I sit around. We play cards... watch a little TV...

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Johnson?

HENRY

He's this friend. Lives next door.
Johnson. Didn't I mention him? I
could have swore I did.

ABBIE

It's great he lives so close by.

HENRY

Yeah. He's alright. A little moody.

They eat. Silence. The CLICK of SILVERWARE.

HENRY

Hey...I've got a good one. Let's
see... there's this absent-minded
businessman... he's cleaning out his
desk, and he comes across a claim
ticket... a ticket for a pair of
shoes. He realizes he left these
shoes to be repaired 20 years ago and
completely forgot about them.

Abbie's trying to smile, good-naturedly.

HENRY

So, more as a joke than anything
else, he goes...the shop is still
there. He gives the ticket to the
cobbler behind the counter, tells him
he realizes it's ridiculous, but
can't help checking on the shoes
after all these years. The cobbler
goes into the back room. The
businessman waits. Finally the
cobbler returns... he hands the
ticket back to the businessman and
says, "They'll be ready Thursday."

Abbie's laugh is a bit forced, not very convincing.

ABBIE

Funny one. Funny.

HENRY

Well...maybe not. I'm not very good
at telling them.

ABBIE

That's not true.

HENRY

I don't know. Anyhow.
(more)

CONTINUED

HENRY (CONT.)
 (eats, quietly amused)
 "...be ready Thursday."

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie's seated on the edge of the BATHTUB, her 4-color pen held, reading a few PAGES in her NOTEBOOK which are filled with dense, multi-colored, cursive WRITING. *

She taps her chin with the pen, reading, dissatisfied. *

Finished, Abbie sits back, issuing a sigh. She pages back a few pages, pages forward to the end. Miserable. She tears these writing-filled pages out, balls them up mercilessly and throws them into the nearby WASTEBASKET. *

Abbie stands, drops the closed notebook on the SINK COUNTER, regards herself in the wide BATHROOM MIRROR... *

Tilting her head to one side, then the other, she forces a smile, exaggerates a frown, sticks out her tongue. She ponders her REFLECTED SELF with further dissatisfaction. *

CUT TO: *

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM -- NIGHT *

Abbie enters. Her suitcase is open on the bed beside her LAPTOP. There's a stuffed TROUT on a plaque on the wall beside a CLOCK TICKING louder than it seems like it should. Abbie exchanges her NOTEBOOK for a book-marked hardcover NOVEL from her BACKPACK hanging off the back of a CHAIR. *

Abbie goes to lie on the bed, opens the book, reads. Before too long, jaunty RAGTIME PIANO MUSIC is HEARD through the wall. Eventually, Abbie looks up, noticing, curious. *

She settles back, continues reading. CLOCK TICKS. A KNOCK is HEARD. Abbie looks to see Henry in the doorway. *

HENRY
 I clipped a few articles I thought
 you might find interesting. There on
 the dresser. *

ABBIE
 Okay.
 (pause)
 Thanks.

HENRY
 (of the music)
 That... would be Johnson. Sorry.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
He plays piano, huh?

HENRY
Not for too long usually. How's your room? Comfortable?

ABBIE
It's great.

HENRY
(pointing his thumb)
Um... there's this comedy show coming on that I watch. It's a dumb little thing, but I thought you might want to join me.

ABBIE
Actually... I think I'll keep reading, if that's okay. Probably going to sleep soon anyway. I...

*
*

HENRY
Alright. Are you sure?

ABBIE
Yeah, I think...

HENRY
No problem.

ABBIE
I'm pretty tired.

HENRY
If you change your mind, invitation's open. It's... it's a funny show.

ABBIE
Okay.

Henry gives a small wave, backing out of the doorway.

Abbie watches him go, a little sad.
She gets up and goes to the DRESSER, picks up TWO clipped ARTICLES. One's about "50 Foods for Healthy Living." The other's headlined "The Endangered Northern Grizzly."

With a smile, Abbie folds the articles.
She places them in the dresser's top drawer, shuts it.

Abbie climbs onto the bed, tries to concentrate on reading her book, attempting to ignore the RAGTIME PIANO still HEARD.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Henry sits alone in the dark, lit by the TELEVISION's GLOW.

CONTINUED

On the TELEVISION there's a SLAPSTICK COMEDY SHOW of some sort, and it makes Henry LAUGH.

He looks over to the HALLWAY where by a shaft of light shines from the crack of the door to Abbie's room.

Henry's sad. He turns back to watch the TV.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM -- NIGHT

As MUSIC CONTINUES, Abbie leans to look up at the CLOCK. Perturbed, she puts her book aside and climbs from bed.

She walks to the wall, KNOCKS with a knuckle. MUSIC STOPS. A loud POUNDING is HEARD in response. A beat, then the jaunty RAGTIME MUSIC RESUMES, to Abbie's chagrin.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, KITCHENETTE -- MORNING

Henry's making SANDWICHES on the countertop. Abbie enters, hair wet, rubbing her tired eyes.

ABBIE

Do you have a watering can?

HENRY

Hey. How'd you sleep?

ABBIE

Like a log. Eventually. You've been neglecting your plants.

HENRY

I usually use the tea pot. Let me find it for you. I, uh...spoke to Johnson this morning. Asked if maybe, just for the next two weeks, maybe he could keep the piano playing to a minimum.

ABBIE

That'd be pretty great.

HENRY

He said he'd take it under advisement.
(shrugs)

I do owe you an apology. I forgot that he and I are supposed to play gin rummy over lunch today.

Abbie sees BOWLS of PRETZELS and other snacks on the counter.

CONTINUED

HENRY

And I'd cancel, you know, except it's kind of a big deal for him since... well, other than coming by here, Johnson's mostly a shut-in.

Abbie eats a pretzel.

ABBIE

I don't mind. I'd like to meet your friend.

HENRY

That's the other thing. See... Johnson's very... he's... shy. I mean, frankly, he doesn't get along with other people. So, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind taking the car... going to a movie?

ABBIE

Oh.

HENRY

Not for long, mind you. We don't usually last more than a dozen hands or so.

ABBIE

Okay.

HENRY

I'm sorry. It really is my fault for being so forgetful, but I'd hate to disappoint Johnson.

ABBIE

No. It's alright.

Abbie comes to watch, bemused, as Henry's cutting the crusts off the SANDWICHES. Henry looks to her, a bit sheepish.

HENRY

He's...he's very particular about his sandwiches.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALL -- DAY

The large SIGN simply reads: "SHOPPING MALL."

EXT. MOVIE THEATERS -- DAY

Abbie stares up at the MARQUEE...

CONTINUED

FESTIVAL CINEPLEX

1	Horror Zone	7	Blooper: The Movie	*
2	The Slugger	8	R.P.M.	*
3	Great Amer. Monkey Adventure	9	The Tomorrow Machine	
4	Shattered Reckoning	10	Betrayal of Honor	*
5	War of the Wizards	11	Sea Babies III	*
6	Fight Troop	12	Knuckle Sandwich	*

Abbie turns, walking back to the PARKING LOT.

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING -- DAY

Abbie parks in front of Henry's APARTMENT BUILDING. *

Abbie gets out. She watches as an ELDERLY MAN seems to be approaching Henry's building. But, the Elderly Man ambles past the entrance, continuing down the sidewalk.

CUT TO: *

INT. HENRY'S BUILDING, HALLWAY -- DAY

Abbie comes from the STAIRWAY, arriving on the SECOND FLOOR. She heads for Henry's apartment, "201." *

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, DINING/LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Abbie enters. Henry looks up from the dining table.

ABBIE

I know. I'm back already. Sorry.

CARDS are on the table. A CIGAR burns in an ashtray. A walking CANE leans against an unoccupied chair.

ABBIE

Where's your friend?

HENRY

He's in the bathroom. I, uh...

(standing, nervous)

You are back sooner than I thought you'd be.

ABBIE

There wasn't anything worthwhile. *

HENRY

What? *

ABBIE

At the movies. *

HENRY

I see. Well... *

CONTINUED

ABBIE
You two go ahead. I'll be in my room.

*

HENRY
Um... alright, then. Fine. We
shouldn't be much longer anyhow.

*

As Abbie crosses...
SOMEONE'S coming down the HALLWAY...

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)
And that's another topic I've been
meaning to discuss; what is the story
with this cheap toilet paper you're
providing?! It's like a person's
rubbing sandpaper on their...

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*

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*

JOHNSON halts upon seeing Abbie. He is about Abbie's age,
but his dress and demeanor are that of an elderly man. He
holds himself slightly stooped, frowning perpetually,
dressed in baggy, brown CORDUROY PANTS, a PLAID SHIRT, BOW
TIE, SUSPENDERS and an old, mismatched CARDIGAN SWEATER.

*

JOHNSON
Helllll-o! Who's this here?

*

Abbie stares at Johnson, uncertain.

ABBIE
Hello.

*

HENRY
Um, this is my granddaughter. Abbie.
I told you about her. She's visiting
from Chicago. Abbie, this... this is
Johnson...

ABBIE
Hello.

JOHNSON
Hello again. So... you're the music
lover?

ABBIE
I... don't...

JOHNSON
Banging on my wall. Last night.

ABBIE
Oh...yeah.

JOHNSON
Yes. Right-o. Hmm.
(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

Much as I would love to stand around
basking in the glow of this
scintillating conversation...

Johnson crosses to retrieve his cane and cigar.

JOHNSON

Somewhere there's an afternoon snooze
with my name on it.

It's not that Johnson comes off as play-acting. He simply
moves slowly, deliberately, his voice a gruff and grumbly
monotone. He is a peevish old man in a young man's body.

JOHNSON

Sorry to cut the game short, Hank,
but if I sit too long all the blood
collects in my ankles, and before you
know it there's a clot making a
beeline for my cerebral cortex. We
can square it later. That's fifty
bucks I'm up.

HENRY

I know, I know.

JOHNSON

Lest we forget. Alrightie. I bid
you good day, ladies and germs.

He waggles his cane in the air as a goodbye gesture, heading
to the front door. He stops.

JOHNSON

The sandwiches were a bit on the dry
side. Tasty, but dry.

The door shuts. A PUFF of Johnson's CIGAR SMOKE swirls.

HENRY

O...kay. So. That leaves us the
whole rest of the afternoon together.

Henry hurries to busy himself, clearing the table.
Abbie's still trying to process the encounter, taken aback.

HENRY

What should we do? I thought we
could drive over to Gettysburg...
tour the battlefield. Or maybe head
on up to Hershey...?

ABBIE

Henry...

CONTINUED

HENRY
Did you bring your camera?

ABBIE
What...what was that?

HENRY
Pardon me, dear?

ABBIE
You know what I'm talking about.
I...don't even know where to begin.
You made it sound like this was some
old friend of yours.

HENRY
An old friend, yes... but, not really
an old friend, if you know what I...

ABBIE
Is he always like that?

HENRY
Like what?

ABBIE
Grandpa, please!

Henry stops clearing the table, resigned.

HENRY
He moved in, I don't know how long
ago. He kept to himself. A few
months back, I finally went to
introduce myself. He didn't want
anything to do with me, but we got to
talking through the door from time to
time. Yes, when I stop to think
about it, I guess he seems... odd.

ABBIE
Seems odd?

HENRY
Listen, I was afraid you might react
this way. What can I say? He is the
way he is. Now, why don't you and I
get started deciding where I'm taking
you for dinner? We'll paint the town
red! Wait here. I'll go look
through my coupon drawer. If we're
lucky, the Distelfink Diner's still
offering their Early-Bird 2-fer-1.

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*
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CONTINUED

As Henry retreats to the KITCHEN, Abbie sits, exasperated,
at a loss. She looks to the door where Johnson exited.

CUT TO:

INT. DINER -- EARLY EVENING

Early Bird Special is in full effect. Abbie's the youngest
patron in this semi-crowded, knickknack-adorned "classic"
DINER. Henry's enjoying SOUP. Abbie's preoccupied.

ABBIE

So, he is always like that? All the
time?

Henry looks up mid-slurp, eyebrows rising.

ABBIE

Johnson. I mean, going around...
pretending he's an old man?

Henry considers carefully, wipes his mouth with his napkin.

HENRY

Well, to be perfectly honest... it's
very hard to tell if he's pretending.

ABBIE

Great. That's just great.

HENRY

I don't see what the big deal is.

ABBIE

Don't you?

HENRY

I admit he's strange.

ABBIE

Clearly he's insane.

HENRY

He's an eccentric.

ABBIE

He's crazy.

HENRY

Well, who among us isn't a little bit
crazy?

ABBIE

He isn't. He's a lot crazy. I've
been thinking about it. What does he
want from you? Huh Haven't you even
considered that?

CONTINUED

HENRY
I'm not sure what you mean.

ABBIE
I don't know. For starters, you
never mentioned to me that you were
playing cards for money.

HENRY
Please. Nickels and dimes.

ABBIE
You owe him fifty dollars.

HENRY
I hit a bad streak. Not a big deal.

Abbie continues stewing, drums her fingers.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- NIGHT

Henry and Abbie sit on the COUCH, bathed in the GLOW off the
TELEVISION. Henry's chuckling at the show they're watching.
All we can HEAR is COMICAL MUSIC and LAUGH TRACK. Abbie's
as distracted as before, her arms tightly crossed.

ABBIE
You know what... I think I'll go talk
to him.

HENRY
Pardon me?

ABBIE
I'll have a friendly little chat with
him... find out what the hell's going
on here.

HENRY
Abbie.

Abbie's up and crossing to exit.

HENRY
You're making too much of it, I
assure you. You're concerning
yourself over nothing at all.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S BUILDING, HALLWAY -- DAY

Abbie arrives at "202." She pauses, momentarily unsure.
But then, she decides -- KNOCKS on the door.

CONTINUED

She waits, crosses her arms, then feels this isn't right somehow and holds her arms at her sides. Waits. KNOCKS again.

*
*

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)
(through the door)
Hello? Who's there?

ABBIE
It's Abbie, from next door.

A long pause.

*

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)
Who?

ABBIE
Henry's granddaughter. Abbie. I know you can see me through the peephole.

*

No reply. Abbie KNOCKS once more.

ABBIE
Hello!

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)
I'm not accepting visitors, thank you very much.

ABBIE
I'd like to speak with you a minute, if you don't mind, please.

*
*

The door slowly opens a crack. The CHAIN is on. Abbie reacts as the face of an orange CAT looks out. Then, Johnson, holding the cat, leans his pinched face into view. He comes off as rather convincingly aged, as he will always.

ABBIE
What's this all about?

*

JOHNSON
Pardon me?

*

ABBIE
What's your game? Come on. What's with this whole old person act?

*
*

JOHNSON
I'm afraid I don't follow.

ABBIE
You're walking around with a cane... dressed up like some senior citizen. Why? I'd like to know why that is.

*

CONTINUED

Johnson looks Abbie up and down.

JOHNSON
Are you a madwoman?

Abbie's fighting to contain her impatience.

ABBIE
May I come in?

JOHNSON
You're joking.

ABBIE
Do we have to talk through this door?

JOHNSON
Are we talking?

ABBIE
I'd like to speak to you face to face. All I'm asking for is two minutes.

JOHNSON
I keep this chain on to discourage an undesirable element, and right now I'm as grateful for this chain as I've ever been.

ABBIE
What, are you afraid of me?

JOHNSON
I'm man enough to admit that I am.

ABBIE
Two minutes.

Johnson sighs, reluctantly withdraws, OPENS the door...

INT. JOHNSON'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Abbie enters. The apartment is meagerly furnished. There's an upright PIANO, an old COUCH and CHAIR covered in PLASTIC, a few ANTIQUES, KNICK-KNACKS and DOILIES. Abbie is surprised to see this is definitely an old person's world.

Johnson warily keeps his distance.

ABBIE
You live here alone?

JOHNSON
We do, that's right. Now, what can I do for you?
(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

I value my empty hours of solitude,
and somehow it's just not the same
with you here.

ABBIE

I'll keep this simple; just tell me
you're up to with my grandfather.

*

*

JOHNSON

There's an implication in there I
don't think I particularly appreciate.

ABBIE

What are you? Some kind of con
man... some sort of hustler?

JOHNSON

Now that I'm *certain* I don't
appreciate.

Johnson puts his CAT down on a CHAIR.

ABBIE

How old are you?

JOHNSON

What an awfully personal question.
Why not just pry my mouth open and
examine my teeth?

ABBIE

I'd like to know your name, if you
don't mind.

JOHNSON

I believe you already have my name.

ABBIE

All I know is Johnson. Is it your
first name or last?

JOHNSON

It's the name I'm known by, and at
this time, I must inform you that
this interrogation has abruptly
reached its conclusion.

ABBIE

What possible objection could you
have to telling me your name?

JOHNSON

I suppose I'm feeling a lack of
trust. Not too surprising, seeing
how you shoved your way in here with
all the manners of a baboon.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
I think you'd better steer clear of
Henry for a while.

*
*

JOHNSON
You're giving me the willies, and
you're frightening Mrs. Grundy...

His cat, MRS. GRUNDY, actually seems placidly bored.

JOHNSON
...so may I suggest you exit the
premises immediately? The egress
directly behind you should suit your
purposes nicely.

*
*

IN THE HALLWAY

Angry and frustrated, Abbie steps out of the apartment.

JOHNSON
Farewell.

Johnson SLAMS the door. It's HEARD LOCKING. Abbie fumes.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING ROOM -- DAY

Abbie returns. Henry's on the couch.

HENRY
How'd it go?

*

Abbie comes to sit beside Henry, aggravated.

*

ABBIE
Is he borrowing money from you?

HENRY
No.

ABBIE
Does he take your medication... have
you get prescriptions for him?

HENRY
Of course not.

ABBIE
I want you to steer clear of him for
a while.

HENRY
Well now, Abbie, that's easier said
than done, I mean...

CONTINUED

ABBIE

At least until I can figure it out.

HENRY

I appreciate your concern, but you know, I might not be as helpless as you're making me out to be.

ABBIE

I'm not saying you're helpless. I just don't trust him. For obvious reasons.

*

HENRY

If you'll hear me out...

ABBIE

I don't want you to be naive about this, that's all. I couldn't stand to see you taken advantage of.

(looks to Henry)

I'm sorry, what were you saying?

HENRY

Nothing.

(smiles for her)

Nothing, dear.

Just then, RAGTIME PIANO MUSIC is HEARD faintly through the wall. Abbie looks exasperated. Henry pats her leg.

ABBIE

Just... promise me.

Henry considers.

HENRY

I promise to do the best I can to avoid Johnson, if possible.

ABBIE

Thank you.

Abbie leans to give Henry a peck on the cheek.

CUT TO:

EXT. GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELDS -- DAY

*

SEEN FROM A DISTANCE: on the wide, grassy fields of GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, Abbie and Henry stand dwarfed by a towering MONUMENT. Henry points out details.

*

*

*

Henry uses a (Polaroid) CAMERA to take a photo. Abbie's walking away, looking elsewhere.

*

*

CUT TO:

*

INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

Abbie chooses from the selection of BAGGED SALADS as Henry arrives with a large HEAD of ICEBERG LETTUCE. Abbie shows him a bag of "ORGANIC" MIXED GREENS, explaining as she puts it in their CART. She takes Henry's head of lettuce, which he reluctantly relinquishes, and she goes to put it back.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

With Abbie's LAPTOP open on the KITCHEN TABLE before them, Abbie's attempting to remain patient while giving Henry a computer lesson. Henry's frustrated and confused, but trying to follow instructions. He finally raises his hands in surrender, laughing, rising to escape. Abbie gently stops him, makes him sit back down. Lesson continues.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM -- MORNING

Abbie rolls over in BED while peacefully asleep. Daylight seeps through closed blinds. A faint cat's MEOW is HEARD. Abbie stirs. After a long moment, another MEOW is HEARD.

Abbie opens one sleepy eye. Looking. Waiting. Nothing. Abbie closes her eye, going back to sleep.

Another MEOW. Abbie's eyes pop open.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- MORNING

Abbie enters in her pajamas, looking blearily around. She stops in her tracks upon seeing...

A CAT CARRIER on the dining table, with Mrs. Grundy peering unhappily out through the bars. Mrs. Grundy MEOWS.

Just as Abbie's trying to figure out what this could mean, the door to the apartment BANGS open -- swinging wide as Johnson's UPRIGHT PIANO is slowly wheeled in with TWO worn SUITCASES stacked on top.

Henry and Johnson labor to push the piano, its STRINGS giving an off-key KER-CLANG! as its wheels clunk over the threshold. Henry and Johnson straighten, winded. Johnson's in a SEERSUCKER SUIT and PANAMA HAT.

HENRY

Oh...Abbie. Did we wake you?

ABBIE

What... what is this?

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
This is a piano.

*
*

HENRY
(to Abbie)
Uh... right. You see... I didn't get
a chance to tell you before. And,
what I wanted to tell you is... how
should I put this exactly...?

*
*
*

JOHNSON
I'm moving in.
(big FAKE SMILE)
How do you like them apples?

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING -- DAY

A POLICE CAR'S parked, lights spinning, RADIO SQUAWKING.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, KITCHENETTE -- DAY

A uniformed POLICEMAN stands holding his hat. Abbie's still in pajamas, leaning against the counter, upset. Henry's standing with hands in pockets, fretting.

POLICEMAN
I can understand your frustration,
Miss, but like I said...

ABBIE
He's insinuated himself into my
grandfather's life. We don't even
really know who he is. Now he's
going to live here.

POLICEMAN
Your grandfather invited him.

HENRY
I did.

ABBIE
Yes, because my grandfather's good-
hearted. He's trusting, to a fault.
But clearly this is a scam. There
must be something you can do about it.

*

POLICEMAN
Afraid not.

ABBIE
(POINTING to other room)
You've seen him. He's pretending to
be an old man.

*
*

CONTINUED

POLICEMAN

There's no law being broken.

ABBIE

He's mentally unbalanced.

POLICEMAN

No law against that either, unless he's a danger to someone. Your grandfather vouches for him.

HENRY

This is all my fault, Officer. I wanted to tell you, Abbie, but... I chickened out. I was hoping that once he moved in, you two would get along. He's in dire straits.

ABBIE

So he claims.

HENRY

I've been losing at cards on purpose, hoping it would help. He's a proud man and he won't take charity.

ABBIE

He's moving in!

HENRY

He's at the end of his rope, and I don't see how we can let him end up on the sidewalk. It's only till he gets back on his feet.

(pause)

Besides...a week and a half from now, it won't be anything for you to worry about anymore, am I right?

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The policeman crosses to leave, followed by Henry and Abbie.

HENRY

I'm sorry about all the ruckus, Officer.

POLICEMAN

Not a problem. You have a nice day.

The apartment door swings open and Johnson backs in, cane in hand, pointing as... the policeman's uniformed PARTNER enters carrying a large, heavy MOVING BOX.

JOHNSON

Right this way, Officer, right this way. Oh, you're a godsend.

CONTINUED

And as the first policeman's exiting...

PARTNER
Be down in a minute.

POLICEMAN
Roger that.

Abbie watches in disbelief while the partner is shown down a hallway by Johnson, heading towards Henry's bedroom.

JOHNSON
(to police partner)
Yes... that's the room there, on the right. Can't thank you enough.

Johnson makes sure to look back at Abbie, DOFFING his HAT to her just before disappearing down the hallway.

Henry's occupied following the first policeman out.

HENRY
Thank you again, Officer.

Abbie plops down on the couch, exasperated.
Mrs. Grundy, still in her carrier on the dining table, MEOWS.

ABBIE
Shut up.

CUT TO:

INTERLUDE -- NIGHT

-The brightly lit, beaux-arts DOME of the STATE CAPITAL BUILDING stands against a cloudy night.

-Dead LEAVES flutter from tall, street lamp lit TREES. *

-"FULTON BANK" glows in RED NEON from atop the towering art deco of the FULTON BANK BUILDING.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie tries to sleep, tossing, turning, kept awake by the O.S. SOUNDS of HENRY and JOHNSON'S CHATTER and LAUGHTER.

INT. LIVING/DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Some of Johnson's FURNITURE has been fitted into the room. Henry and Johnson play cards in front of the TV. They're watching Henry's favorite slapstick show, LAUGHING hard.

Abbie, in pajamas and (Henry's) ROBE, comes down the hallway.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Excuse me.

Henry stands.

HENRY

Abbie. We're not keeping you up, are we?

ABBIE

Yes, actually.

HENRY

Sorry about that. We got carried away.

JOHNSON

Yes, forgive the laughter. Heaven forbid we should briefly leave behind life's constant, joyless discontent.

HENRY

Johnson.

ABBIE

Heaven forbid I should get some sleep and try to forget today's miserable turn of events. Thank you.

Abbie heads back down the hall.

HENRY

Good night, dear.

JOHNSON

Sleep well.

ABBIE

I will.

JOHNSON

You do that.

ABBIE

Count on it.

JOHNSON

Good.

ABBIE

Great.

Henry gives Johnson a scolding look. Johnson sneers.

IN THE GUEST ROOM

Abbie enters. Mrs. Grundy is curled up on Abbie's pillow.

INT. HENRY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie enters, carrying Mrs. Grundy. A few more pieces of Johnson's FURNITURE are crowded into this room. Abbie tosses Mrs. Grundy on the COT beside Henry's bed.

ABBIE

You sleep here. Sit. Stay.

Abbie's leaving. Something catches her eye...
On the DRESSER by the door, there's a thin, worn WALLET.

Abbie considers.

IN THE HALLWAY

Abbie comes out, quietly, peering down the hall to satisfy herself that Johnson's entirely occupied in the TV show. *

IN HENRY'S ROOM

Abbie returns to grab the WALLET, hurriedly searching...

She finds a single DOLLAR BILL... a few old STAMPS... some GREEN STAMPS. A COUPON for "INSTANT SOUP." In the inner pocket, there is a dog-eared LIBRARY CARD with only "Johnson" typed in under "Name."

Abbie's dispirited. Johnson steps up behind her, watching.

JOHNSON

Looking for something?

Abbie jumps, startled, THROWING the wallet.

JOHNSON

I hadn't pegged you as a thief, but
I see now you're full of surprises.

He goes to retrieve the wallet from under Henry's bed with his cane, groaning as he slowly bends to pick it up.

ABBIE

I... I wasn't going to take anything
and you know it.

JOHNSON

Luckily for me, there isn't much to
take. Is my coupon still in here?
If you'd like, each night I'll empty
my pockets on top of this dresser so
you can rifle through everything...
satisfy your pathological curiosity.

Abbie's trying to shake off embarrassment, points at him.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
 (exasperation)
 I'm telling you now, whatever it is
 you think you're getting away with...
 you're... you're not going to get
 away with it!

JOHNSON
 You are one strange bird.

Abbie storms out. Johnson watches her go, bemused.

IN THE GUEST ROOM

Abbie retreats behind the closed door, humiliated, giving herself a moment to recover. She looks up.

Mrs. Grundy lifts her head from Abbie's pillow.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, DINING/LIVING -- MORNING

POTS and PANS are HEARD clattering from the kitchenette. CURTAINS are open, BLINDS up. Plodding from the bedroom hallway, Henry and Johnson squint into the brightness. They're still in bed clothing. Johnson wears WOOL PAJAMAS, a ROBE and a NIGHT MASK pushed up to his forehead.

The table is set. An impressive BREAKFAST awaits.

Henry and Johnson share a look of astonishment.

JOHNSON
 We're in the wrong apartment.

ABBIE'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (from kitchen)
 Good morning in there. Go ahead and
 help yourselves.

Johnson shrugs. He and Henry sit, helping themselves to PANCAKES, EGGS, BACON, TOAST and ORANGE JUICE. Happy.

JOHNSON
 (toasting with OJ)
 Over the teeth and through the gums,
 look out, Gall Bladder, here comes
 the painful cramping of over-
 indulgence.

HENRY
 This really is quite something.

Henry's taking his many daily PILLS from his plastic PILL CADDIE, lining them up on the table in front of him.

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

It would be more efficient if I just ate this on the toilet.

HENRY

Have a muffin.

JOHNSON

Yes, that's your solution for everything. A person could be laying on the ground, half-paralyzed from a massive stroke, and you'd be hunkered over them trying to administer a bran muffin.

Abbie enters, bringing WAFFLES and a POT of COFFEE.

ABBIE

How is everything?

HENRY

This is a surprise, Abbie. Not to sound ungrateful, but to what do we owe the honor?

Henry's taking his PILLS one by one.
Abbie cheerfully moves to pour coffee Henry's coffee.

ABBIE

I thought you could use a nice big breakfast. That way you'll have plenty of energy...
(pours Johnson's coffee)
...for the big day ahead.

HENRY

Big day?

JOHNSON

By "big day," I assume you mean that I spend the day curled fetal under the covers of my bed, as is my custom.

Abbie sits, begins serving herself.

ABBIE

(to Johnson)

By "big day," what I mean is today's the day you go out and get a job.

*

JOHNSON

How's that again?

*

ABBIE

You do want to help out, don't you?
You must.

(more)

CONTINUED

ABBIE (CONT.)

I mean, you can go on acting however you want, for all I care, but you don't actually plan to live here under my grandfather's roof, eat, drink, run up his bills... all without making the slightest effort to contribute?

Johnson lowers his fork.

JOHNSON

Well, I... I guess I...

ABBIE

Do you?

Johnson looks to Henry. Henry gives a shrug, pops a PILL.

ABBIE

(to Johnson)

Eat up.

Abbie takes a NEWSPAPER from the empty chair, tosses it on the table. Johnson picks it up. It's the "HELP WANTED."

JOHNSON

(exasperation)

Bless us and save us, said Mrs. O'Davis!

(puts newspaper down)

I'm letting you know straight off...
I'm not very good out there amongst
the madding crowd.

ABBIE

I'm sure you'll manage. You're not
agoraphobic, are you?

JOHNSON

Certainly not.

(to Henry)

Am I?

ABBIE

You're not afraid to go out?

JOHNSON

No. Just don't like all the people
running around in all directions.

ABBIE

Who does?

JOHNSON

It's like a...barnyard out there.
Except animals show more civility.

CONTINUED

HENRY

What if I go along? How about that?
I'll be with you every step of the
way.

JOHNSON

What choice have I got?

Johnson resumes eating, depressed.

JOHNSON

I'll look. Doesn't mean I'll find
something suitable for a man of my
particular skills.

ABBIE

Whatever.
(eating)
Oh, and one more thing...

Abbie picks up a POLAROID CAMERA from beside her, looks
through it at Johnson. Johnson's confused. The camera
FLASHES -- WHIRRRRING as it spits out the instant PHOTO.

JOHNSON

(blinking)
What the hell's that for?

CUT TO:

EXT. MALL -- DAY

Again, the large SIGN reads: "SHOPPING MALL."

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT -- DAY

Abbie stops Henry's car near one MALL ENTRANCE, dropping off
Henry and Johnson. Johnson's as slow getting out as Henry.

ABBIE

I'll be back to get you at four-
thirty. Right here.

HENRY

See you then, dear.

Abbie drives. Henry waves. Johnson's miserable, making a
face as he mockingly waves the "Help Wanted" newspaper. He
wears a BOW TIE, ARGYLE SWEATER VEST and SANS-A-BELT SLACKS,
baggy as always. He and Henry head towards the entrance.

JOHNSON

Ah... the shopping center. The
swollen teat of suburbia...bruised
and bloated by the welting, never-
ending suckle of the desperately
insecure consumer.

*

CONTINUED

HENRY
I hear there's a new Five-and-Dime.

CUT TO:

INT. COPY SHOP -- DAY -- MONTAGE

-Abbie flips open a self-serve SCANNER. *

-Abbie places the POLAROID of Johnson face down on the GLASS. *

-ON HER LAPTOP SCREEN: Abbie uses PHOTOSHOP to "cut-out" and move the now ENLARGED POLAROID IMAGE of Johnson. *

-Abbie's fingers swiftly TYPE on the LAPTOP KEYBOARD. *

-Abbie's hands place a PAGE face down on the glass of a COPY MACHINE, then shut the lid. *

-Abbie's FINGERS press buttons, and in the copy machine's LED WINDOW we see "COPY QUANTITY" being entered at "200." *

-Copier LIGHT passes back and forth across Abbie's features. *

-Abbie's seated beside the laboring COPIER, killing time by intently WRITING in her NOTEBOOK, while the copier spits out COPY after COPY into its feed tray. *

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- DAY

A thick COPY SHOP BOX is thrown onto the passenger seat. Abbie gets in, starts the car. She ponders something, drumming her fingers on the wheel. She looks at her WATCH.

Wearing a dubious expression, Abbie puts the car in gear.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALL -- DAY

Once more establishing: "SHOPPING MALL."

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT -- DAY

Stopping Henry's car, Abbie looks out the driver's side WINDOW, and we recognize the "FESTIVAL CINEPLEX" MARQUEE REFLECTED in the WINDOW with it's plethora of MOVIE TITLES.

INT. FESTIVAL CINEPLEX, LOBBY -- DAY

By the CONCESSION COUNTER, far enough away that we CAN'T HEAR what they're saying, Abbie's talking with the theater MANAGER. The manager nods, pointing across the lobby.

INT. FESTIVAL CINEPLEX, THEATER 5 -- DAY

Abbie enters, letting her eyes adjust. We HEAR the ZANY MUSIC and FLATULENCE SOUND EFFECTS of some O.S. comedy MOVIE as we FOLLOW Abbie down the aisle... to where Henry and Johnson are seated (wearing 3D GLASSES ?), drinking SODAS and nibbling POPCORN. *

Abbie sits beside Johnson. Johnson and Henry don't notice, laughing at the movie. Johnson's still laughing when he glances at Abbie, nods, facing front and gulping SODA, suddenly realizing -- doing a soda spraying SPIT-TAKE!

Henry looks, sees Abbie there, his delight faltering.

HENRY
...oh we're in trouble.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET -- LATE DAY

Weathered 8 1/2" by 11" FLYERS adorn a TELEPHONE POLE with slogans such as, "WORK FROM HOME, MAKE \$\$\$!" Both "LOST DOG" and "MISSING CAT" feature PHOTOS and PHONE NUMBERS. Abbie arrives, thumb-tacking up her own FLYER...

It features the cropped, enlarged POLAROID IMAGE of JOHNSON'S FACE. "DO YOU KNOW ME?," the FLYER reads, "REWARD for any INFO! (717) 555-9034. ASK FOR Abbie."

Abbie's pleased. Henry's car waits with BLINKERS FLASHING.

IN HENRY'S CAR

Abbie climbs back behind the wheel, drives. Henry's in the passenger seat, the BOX of remaining FLYERS in his lap. Johnson's in back, peering at one flyer through narrow-lensed READING GLASSES, perturbed. *

JOHNSON
(of the flyer)
Not a very flattering likeness, if
you ask me.

ABBIE
No one asked you.

JOHNSON
Well, I don't pretend to know what
this is all about...
(handing FLYER to Henry)
...but so long as it amuses you. *

Abbie looks to see Johnson IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR: his EYES MAGNIFIED HUGE through his reading glasses. *

CONTINUED

Abbie rolls her eyes, shakes her head in exasperation. *

JOHNSON
Wake me up when we're home. *

Johnson takes off his reading glasses, lays down across the back seat and curls up, closing his eyes. *

HENRY
Is anyone else getting hungry?

ON THE STREET CORNER

Abbie pulls over, FLASHERS ON, gets out, carrying a flyer to another TELEPHONE POLE. Henry leans out his window.

HENRY
You know, Abbie... I do want to apologize about earlier.

JOHNSON
Apologize? There's nothing to apologize for!

Johnson pops his head out the back window.

JOHNSON
(to Abbie)
So, we dared to deviate from your regimented schedule. You happened to catch us resting for one minute. Big whoop! We weren't even going to watch the whole movie.

Abbie finishes tacking the flyer up, heads back...

IN HENRY'S CAR

Abbie gets in. Johnson leans forward from the back.

JOHNSON
Anyway... it was all my idea. My fault. I'm a bad influence. *

ABBIE
No argument there.

Abbie drives.

JOHNSON
I had to drag him kicking and screaming into that theater.

HENRY
Well...not kicking and screaming exactly. Nonetheless, I promise we'll do better tomorrow.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Whatever.

JOHNSON

Tomorrow, we'll rise before the cock
crows.

HENRY

That's right. We'll be bright and
early and out the door before you
know it.

JOHNSON

Right after our enormous breakfast.

HENRY

Well... not that we would be
expecting another wonderful
breakfast, dear, or even deserving of
it, certainly...

JOHNSON

But a man can dream, can't he?!

ABBIE

If you two are finished. I'm letting
you know right now -- tomorrow we'll
be doing things a little differently.

Henry and Johnson share a dispirited look between them.

CUT TO:

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE, BREAK ROOM -- DAY

MUZAK PLAYS. A straight-laced MANAGER is seated at a TABLE
in front of VENDING MACHINES, holding a JOB APPLICATION.

STORE MANAGER

Johnson. Just... Johnson?

Johnson is seated in a FOLDING CHAIR, cane held, wearing a
polyester, one-piece, belted LEISURE SUIT and a woven GOLF
CAP topped by a large YARN POM. [When it suits him, his
OUTFITS are extra outlandish.] Abbie sits not far behind.

*
*

JOHNSON

That's about the size of it.

The Store Manager places the application down.

STORE MANAGER

(to Abbie)

And you are?

ABBIE

His ride.

CONTINUED

STORE MANAGER
Fine. Alright...
(to Johnson)
Before we start, Mr. Johnson, if you
don't mind my saying so, I can't help
noticing your...demeanor.

JOHNSON
My demeanor?

STORE MANAGER
Yes.

JOHNSON
I'm afraid you've lost me.

STORE MANAGER
Well, how should I put this? You
carry yourself in a way...in a way
one might expect from a much older
gentleman, don't you?

JOHNSON
Don't I what?

STORE MANAGER
Carry yourself... in that way.
Surely you know what I'm referring to.

JOHNSON
Can't say that I do.

STORE MANAGER
(frustration)
Okay. How you're dressed, for
example. As a potential employer, I
have to ask if there's any sort of
logical explanation.

*
*

JOHNSON
And as a potential employee, I have
to tell you, I can't imagine what the
devil it is you're jabbering on about.

Store Manager swallows his frustration.

STORE MANAGER
Moving on, then. Shall we?

Johnson smiles his big, fake smile.

STORE MANAGER
We do have several positions open,
and I'd like you to tell me...

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
If I may interrupt. We should get
something straight right off the bat,
if you don't mind.

Behind, Abbie leans forward to hold her head in her hands. *

STORE MANAGER
By all means.

JOHNSON
I'm not a very particular man, you
understand. I butter my toast one
piece at a time, like anyone else.
But I must insist, whatever job you
want me for, it's got to be something
where I'm sitting down.

STORE MANAGER
Sitting down?

JOHNSON
The whole time, not just part of the
day. Always sitting. That's a deal
breaker for me.

STORE MANAGER
A deal breaker?

JOHNSON
On account of my gouty leg.

CUT TO:

INT. MALL, DEPARTMENT STORE -- DAY

Johnson and Abbie come through a SWINGING DOOR into the
DEPARTMENT STORE proper, ushered by the Store Manager.

STORE MANAGER
Goodbye. We'll let you know.

The door swings shut as Store Manager retreats.

JOHNSON
Delightful.

ABBIE
Let's go wait by the phone.

JOHNSON
Where to now?

ABBIE
(idea dawning)
You know what... give me a minute.
I'll be right back.

CONTINUED

Abbie heads back through the swinging door.

IN THE BREAK ROOM

Store Manager's putting coins in a VENDING MACHINE. Abbie returns, clears her throat. He's not glad to see her.

STORE MANAGER

What is it?

ABBIE

Look. No amount of explaining will be enough, so I'm just going to ask. Can I see the job application he filled out?

STORE MANAGER

Whatever kind of prank this was, Miss, I don't know and don't care, but we're not in the practice here of handing out the private information of prospective employees.

ABBIE

Give me a break. This is important to me, and it can't mean anything to you. Please. Help me out here.

Store Manager softens. He crosses to get a BALL of PAPER from the TRASH. It's the application, which he uncrumples.

STORE MANAGER

Screw it.

Store Manager returns to working the vending machines. Abbie studies the application, her enthusiasm fading as...

ABBIE

(reading application)

Previous Employment... "Tinkering about. Odd jobs around town."

Previous Address... "I'll have to get back to you on that." Date of Birth... "None of your beeswax."

(still reading, despairing)

Desired Position... "Seated."

Abbie sighs deeply, re-crumpling the application, THROWS... A perfect toss back into the TRASH CAN.

CUT TO:

INT. VARIOUS MALL SHOPS -- SAME DAY -- MONTAGE

Dropping in mid-INTERVIEW, we witness each of the following from the INTERVIEWER'S P.O.V. with Johnson talking directly to us and Abbie watching from nearby, silently enduring...

-IN A BOOK SHOP BACK ROOM

In front of SHELVES overloaded with BOOKS. Johnson enthuses.

JOHNSON

It's noble work, bookselling. Every book is a journey; each sentence a step forward; each paragraph a doorway; every page...well, the pages are more like the doorways. The paragraphs are like... shiny, brass doorknobs. Maybe not. Nonetheless, books are quite wondrous indeed.

(brief pause)

Or so I'm told. Unfortunately, I'm an illiterate. Cannot read. Not one blessed word.

-IN A CLOTHING STORE BACK ROOM

In front of RACKS of CLOTHING.

JOHNSON

I'm a people person. A people-pleaser, actually. I'm also a good listener, which is important...

(cocks his head, cups

his hand to his ear)

Right? And I like to hug. I'm told if anything I hug too much... too often. That's me in a nutshell: a people-pleasing hugger who listens.

-IN A DISCOUNT STORE

Before WINDOWS overlooking a vast, busy SALES FLOOR.

JOHNSON

For me, it's the hustle. The hustle and the bustle. What would the hustle be without the bustle? It's the American Way, am I right? Grab the brass ring. Kick the other guy in the groin. Climb the corporate ladder and start crapping down on everyone. There's no greater pleasure in the world than being on the winning team!

END MONTAGE

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

Johnson, in his WOOL PJ's and NIGHTCAP, plays a RAGTIME TUNE at his PIANO. Abbie enters, in ROBE (Henry's), coming over to watch. Johnson finishes. Abbie SHUTS the KEYBOARD LID.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
Curfew's in effect. No piano. No television.

JOHNSON
Thanks for the update, warden.

Abbie walks back towards the bedroom hallway.

JOHNSON
I've come to a realization.

Abbie stops. Johnson chews a cheap, unlit CIGAR.

JOHNSON
This job search ridiculousness... well, it's ridiculous, isn't it? An exercise in futility, performed purely for your amusement and at my expense.

ABBIE
You're not for real. Don't expect to be treated like you are. It's all just one big joke to you.

JOHNSON
Not unless you mean the joke's on us.

ABBIE
You will get a job. If in the meantime it's a miserable experience for you -- bonus.

JOHNSON
Very well, dear. I can run around in circles with the best of 'em.

ABBIE
So, I'll see you tomorrow then.

Abbie exits, flicks the LIGHT SWITCH, leaving Johnson in DARKNESS. A moment, then he's HEARD playing "CHOPSTICKS."

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie enters. Henry's already in his bed, lowering his BOOK and looking to Abbie over the top of his READING GLASSES.

HENRY
Tired?

ABBIE
Exhausted.

Abbie takes off her robe, in PAJAMAS. She sits on the cot. Mrs. Grundy's already lying there. Abbie pets her.

CONTINUED

HENRY
Do you think all of this is
necessary? The curfew...

ABBIE
Yes.

HENRY
...new sleeping arrangements?

ABBIE
It's like a fraternity house when you
two share a room.

HENRY
You're right, I know.

ABBIE
He's got the guest room to himself.
We get to spend more time together.
Look at it that way.

Abbie finds her NOTEBOOK, pages through to find pages of
fresh WRITINGS, again in multi-colors with many scratch-outs. *

HENRY
There was an interesting article
about the Capital Building renovation
in The Patriot News today. *

ABBIE
Listen, Henry. Could we maybe...
hold off on the newspaper clippings,
for now? I mean... at least let me
get caught up on the one's I've
already got, right? *

HENRY
(of her notebook)
Oh. Okay. What's that you've been
working on? *

ABBIE
Nothing. It's nothing. Just...
scribbling. *

JOHNSON (O.S.)
Good night. *

Johnson's in the doorway, cigar in mouth, disgruntled.

Henry looks to Johnson, gives a sympathetic shrug. *

Mrs. Grundy looks up from Abbie's bed.

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
 (points at Mrs. Grundy)
 Traitor.

Johnson leaves and we HEAR the guest room DOOR SLAM. Abbie climbs under her covers, leaving room for Mrs. Grundy. She settles, starts looking through her notebook... unable to focus. She closes the notebook, throws it aside.

*
 *

ABBIE
 How is it you don't seem to see how
 bizarre this is? He is?

HENRY
 I don't know. Can't bring myself to
 worry about it.

ABBIE
 It's not like you're overlooking the
 fact that he's sloppy, or he's got
 poor table manners.

HENRY
 In spite of all his eccentricities...
 I do believe Johnson's basically a
 good person. Isn't that what really
 matters?

*

Abbie's dissatisfied; frustrated that Henry doesn't share
 her indignation. She rolls onto her side, facing away.

*
 *

ABBIE
 Good night.

HENRY
 Honestly, Abbie. I wonder what you
 must you think it's like for me when
 you're not around to watch over me.

*

*

ABBIE
 Can we have the light out?

Henry reaches to turn his LIGHT OUT. He settles, troubled.
 He and Abbie lie there in the DARKNESS. A long silence.

HENRY
 There are these three old ladies.
 One says, "Sometimes I find myself at
 the refrigerator with a jar of
 mayonnaise in my hand."
 (more)

CONTINUED

HENRY (CONT.)

I can't remember whether I'm putting it away or taking it out." The second old lady says, "Sometimes I'm on the stairs, and I can't remember whether I was going up or down." So the third old lady says, "Thank God I don't have that problem, knock on wood." She taps her knuckles, you know, on the table...

(KNOCKING on wall)

And she stands up and says, "That must be the door. I'll get it."

Abbie LAUGHS obligatorily, not very convincingly.

ABBIE

Another good...funny one. Funny.

Henry's well aware she's humoring him, resigned.

HENRY

Good night, dear. Sleep well.

CUT TO:

INTERLUDE -- NIGHT

-Harrisburg's CITYSCAPE is bright beneath a cloudy evening.

-Spots illuminate the sharp, Neo-Gothic steeple of downtown's GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.

-One of Abbie's "DO YOU KNOW ME?" FLYERS flutters on a street corner telephone pole.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM -- LATER NIGHT

Abbie turns over in the cot. She opens her eyes. She sits up, squinting in the dark, seeing that...

Henry's bed is empty.

IN THE GUEST ROOM

Door's ajar. Abbie KNOCKS quietly, looks in... Johnson's bed is empty.

IN THE LIVING/DINING ROOM

Abbie enters. No one here. She crosses. At the front door, she finds the CHAIN is OFF.

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING, HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Abbie opens the door of "201," peering out into the empty, fluorescent lit hallway. A breeze crosses her features. She's about to duck back inside, but stops.

Abbie comes to look UP THE STAIRWELL, her hair tousled as WIND is HEARD BLOWING gently down.

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING, ROOFTOP -- NIGHT

The door to the roof is ajar. Abbie pushes it open, looks around. HENRY and JOHNSON'S VOICES can be HEARD.

Abbie comes to look out from around the corner of the stairwell exit, peering to see Henry and Johnson in LAWN CHAIRS at the roof's edge. They're drinking BEER, looking out across the rooftops and treetops.

HENRY

What'd you think of dinner?

JOHNSON

Eeh. The meat was stringy.

HENRY

The green beans turned out fine.

JOHNSON

Sure. The green beans.

HENRY

Know what I wish? I wish I had the money to eat out at restaurants all the time.

JOHNSON

Who doesn't wish that?

HENRY

Okay. This old man's driving along when his car phone rings. It's his wife on the other end and she's frantic, warning him, "Oh, darling, please be careful, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on the interstate." So, the old man says, "It's worse than that. It's not just one car. It's hundreds of them!"

JOHNSON

Hank, I've got to say... your jokes are just awful. Every one of them.

CONTINUED

Abbie cringes, concerned for Henry's feelings.

HENRY

I know.

JOHNSON

Seriously. They're the worst kind of cornball nonsense.

HENRY

Are they? Sometimes I can't tell.

JOHNSON

Trust me. They're real stinkers.

Henry laughs. Johnson laughs.

From her hiding place, Abbie's pleasantly surprised.
Her features soften as she smiles a little.

*
*

She watches as Johnson and Henry drink.

HENRY

One of these days we'll get our act together... go fishing like we've been saying.

JOHNSON

Absolutely we will. The Susquehanna waits for no man.

HENRY

We're still on for the laundromat this weekend, aren't we?

JOHNSON

Been saving up my dirty linens in eager anticipation.

Abbie takes a moment to reassess... to appreciate that Henry and Johnson interact as peers... as good friends.
We FOLLOW as Abbie walks quietly away.

*
*
*

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)

Oh, boy. I'm a little gassy tonight.

HENRY'S VOICE (O.S.)

Thanks for sharing that.

JOHNSON'S VOICE (O.S.)

My pleasure.

HENRY'S VOICE (O.S.)

What's tomorrow? Wednesday...?

CONTINUED

Their VOICES FADE as Abbie heads back indoors.

CUT TO:

INT. VARIOUS STORES -- DAY -- MONTAGE

Again, from the INTERVIEWER'S P.O.V.: Johnson's blithely addressing us, in super-wide TIE and super-wide-lapel SUIT with bold stitching, while Abbie wearily bears witness...

-IN A TRAVEL AGENCY CUBICLE

Before POSTERS of EXOTIC GETAWAYS.

JOHNSON

The very idea of it...that I would go into a small, soiled closet, push my pants to my ankles and sit my naked rear end down. After literally dozens of men have done the exact same thing before me. It sends a chill up my spine just imagining it. And that's why I can't use public toilets. I'm not exactly sure why I'm telling you this. What was your question again?

-IN A DRUG STORE OFFICE

In front of a large, colorful PILL CHART.

JOHNSON

You know, it's funny how many failures life produces as a matter of course. How people so often expect one happy thing out of life early on, only to end up with another thing altogether, eventually. Not laugh-out-loud funny, mind you. More face-down-on-the-bed-arms-at-your-sides-sobbing-into-your-pillow funny.

-IN A SHOE STORE STOCK ROOM

With SHOE BOXES shelved to the ceiling.

JOHNSON

The death rattle is a spasm in the muscles of the voicebox, caused by the sudden acidity in the blood of the deceased. I read that somewhere. And I'll tell you another thing; it's an utter falsehood that your hair and nails keep growing even after you're dead. Don't you believe it.

END MONTAGE

INT. MALL FOOD COURT -- SAME DAY

CLOSE ON: the "HELP WANTED" covered in circles and X-outs.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

Good Lord. Look at these folks.

At a PLASTIC TABLE, Abbie's absorbed in the newspaper, checking the ads with a PEN, eating FRENCH FRIES. Johnson eats a DONUT with a plastic fork and knife, looking around.

JOHNSON

Just so many chickens with their heads cut off. Is it any wonder I never go outdoors?

Abbie keeps studying want ads. Johnson sips MILK through a straw. He stares off for a long beat.

JOHNSON

You know, the older you get, the faster everyone's flying by. That's what getting old is. Like turning invisible. Before long, people are walking right through you as they go about their business.

(pause)

You'll see. Sooner than you think. Life is this race you run thinking it's a marathon, but it turns out it's only a 100-yard dash.

Abbie looks up, something about the sincerity of that statement causing her to focus her attention on Johnson.

JOHNSON

Still... live long enough, you survive your friends. You live yourself into isolation. More stories to tell, and fewer people to tell them to.

(looks to Abbie)

Do you know what it's like to feel alone? To be really lonesome?

ABBIE

Yeah, actually. I think I do.

Johnson again stares off, true sadness in his voice. As Abbie listens, she realizes that this is a true, heartfelt expression of some inner discontent from Johnson...

JOHNSON

It's okay. Mostly. You hide inside yourself. You build up this protective shell of resentment.

(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

Resentment and silent rage. You stop giving a damn about what anyone else thinks, which is nice. That's a part of how you get out of bed every day.

(pause)

But, there are these fleeting moments...hard to describe. They feel like small windows into a sort of happiness you once knew. Brief, vivid pangs of happiness. You can't quite put your finger on them, until you realize...certain things are the same as ever; a certain street you walk or drive...a light shining through some trees... something in the weather.

Abbie's regarding Johnson with new eyes; feeling that maybe for the first time he's opening up a part of himself to her.

JOHNSON

They're the same. These ordinary, everyday things you recognize. Your misery is what's new. The familiar is this touchstone that makes you forget you're less happy that you once were, and that's a good feeling. It lightens your heart. But like I said, it only lasts a few seconds.

Johnson looks to Abbie. Shrugs. He sips his milk, looking off, lost in thought. He doesn't notice as Abbie studies him with something in her eyes approaching empathy

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- EARLY EVENING

Pale dusk. Abbie drives. Johnson's asleep. They stop at a light. Abbie takes a moment to look at Johnson.

She studies his placid features. He's handsome.

Here Johnson's face is serene. He looks his youthful age.

Abbie reaches over to brush Johnson's disheveled hair off his forehead. She gently brushes the back of her hand against his cheek. Johnson stirs.

Abbie quickly faces forward, both hands on the wheel.

The light changes. Abbie drives. Before long... something outside catches Abbie's attention. She jerks the wheel, pulling over and braking to an abrupt HALT -- startling Johnson awake.

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
Wha... what the hell...?

In answer, Abbie points...

OUT THE WINDOW, there's a plain STOREFRONT in a STRIP MALL with painted over windows and a NEON SIGN: "ADULT BOOKS."

There's a "Help Wanted" SIGN on the door.

JOHNSON
(of the SIGN)
Have you taken leave of your senses?

CUT TO:

INT. "ADULT BOOKS" BOOKSTORE -- EARLY EVENING

NUDIE MAGAZINES and VIDEOS abound. Johnson's unhappily addressing the disinterested OWNER who's seated behind the REGISTER, wearing thick glasses and a wrinkled shirt.

JOHNSON
...and furthermore, whatever job it is you're looking to fill, it's got to be something where I'm sitting down.

The Owner GRUNTS. Johnson's worried. Abbie's trying not to touch or look at anything while CUSTOMERS avoid eye contact.

JOHNSON
Sitting the whole time, not just part of the day. Always sitting.
(pause)
That's a deal breaker for me.
(pause)
On account of my gouty leg.

OWNER
When can you start?

JOHNSON
What? You haven't even had me fill out an application.

OWNER
You work register, Monday to Friday.
Pay's cash, every two weeks. You start tomorrow morning. Ten AM.

Johnson gives a wide-eyed stare of disbelief.
Abbie's overjoyed, raising her arms up. Victorious.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Henry and Johnson are seated before the TELEVISION, watching another zany COMEDY PROGRAM by the SOUND of it.

Henry laughs at what's on, greatly amused. Johnson's slumped, wearing a frown, steadfastly unamused.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie wears a dubious expression, lying in the BATHTUB (which is filled with BUBBLE BATH BUBBLES) while reading from her NOTEBOOK which she holds before her face.

Dissatisfied once again, she tears out the several pages of WRITINGS, throws them to the bathroom floor in disgust. She tosses the notebook across onto the bathroom counter and sinks beneath the water, BLOWING foaming BUBBLES.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

Johnson's still slumped, watching TV, now with the SOUND OFF.

INT. HENRY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

In DARKNESS, Abbie and Henry lie in their respective beds. Mrs. Grundy's curled by Abbie's (still wet) head, as usual.

ABBIE

Can I ask you something?

HENRY

Ask me what?

ABBIE

You never have any pictures of Grandma around. I've always kind of wondered... why not?

HENRY

Your grandmother wasn't much for having framed photos around, back when we had the house. Frankly, she didn't want anything else to dust.

(laughs)

That woman had a healthy disdain for housework, she did. The pictures are all in boxes. If you'd like, we can dig them out before you leave.

ABBIE

I'd like that. I wish I could remember her better.

CONTINUED

HENRY
I never imagined I would end up
spending so much of my life without
her.

ABBIE
I don't mean to make you talk about
it.

HENRY
No, it's alright. Hold on, hold
on... I'm going to turn on the light.

Turning his LAMP ON, Henry gets up, padding across the room
in pajamas. He retrieves something from his DRESSER drawer.

HENRY
I want to show you...

Henry sits on his bed, hands his open WALLET to Abbie...

In the wallet's PHOTO HOLDER there is an old PHOTOGRAPH of
HENRY'S LATE WIFE, a pretty woman of late middle-age.

HENRY
I've carried this every single day
since the day it was taken.

ABBIE
Look how pretty she is.
(still looking at wallet)
What's this...?

The next PHOTO is a picture of Abbie posed formally and
looking unhappy in her GRADUATION CAP and GOWN.

ABBIE
You carry a picture of me?

HENRY
Your mother sent it.

ABBIE
God. It's horrible.

Abbie starts taking the PICTURE out.

HENRY
Hold on. That's the only recent
picture I have of you.

ABBIE
Well... promise me you'll get rid of
it if I send you a better one?

HENRY
It's a deal.

*

CONTINUED

Henry accepts his wallet back, drops it on his BEDSIDE TABLE, climbs back into bed. He turns out the light.

ABBIE

Tell me about her. If you don't mind.

HENRY

Really?

ABBIE

How did you meet?

HENRY

Hmm...let's see. Now we're going back a ways. Back to our college days. I was Kappa Sig and she was in our sister sorority. You know, I can still remember the first time I ever laid eyes on her...

As we EXIT the SCENE, it's the first time we feel that Henry and Abbie's conversation will continue in our absence.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY -- DAWN

WATER'S HEARD RUNNING briefly, then Henry sleepily leaves the BATHROOM. He stops, noticing something.

IN THE LIVING ROOM/DINING

Henry comes from the hall's darkness to stand watching.

Across the room, in dim morning light, Johnson's in his bed clothing, seated at his piano. He's PLAYING, but with the MUTE PEDAL locked, so this slow, sad SONG is reduced to the faint SOUND of the HAMMERS on FELT DAMPENED STRINGS.

Johnson finishes playing. He just stares into the old RAGTIME SHEET MUSIC in front of him, hands at his sides.

Henry watches with a troubled frown, witnessing this private moment of misery; understanding perhaps for the first time just how troubled a person Johnson may be.

*
*
*

Johnson closes the keyboard lid, bending to rest his arms on the lid, resting his head upon his arms.

Henry slowly withdrawals into the darkness of the hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP -- MORNING

Cold morning. CITY BUS arrives. The PEOPLE waiting begin filing on.

CONTINUED

Johnson's amongst them, cane and BAGGED LUNCH in hand, supremely unhappy. He wears a top-to-bottom PLAID SUIT, TIE, and an ear-flap HUNTING HAT.

DOWN THE STREET, Abbie keeps hidden behind a tree, watching Johnson climb on the bus. Satisfied, she hurries away.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- MORNING

Mrs. Grundy's cornered, tail wagging furiously. Abbie closes in on her, trying to grab her, but Mrs. Grundy flees.

Abbie gives chase, across the apartment...
Mrs. Grundy scurries under the COUCH.

ABBIE
(whistles)
Here, Mrs. Grundy! What are you
afraid of? It's me, Abbie... the one
whose head you sleep on every night!

Henry watches, amused, standing by the dining table where Mrs. Grundy's CAT CARRIER awaits, its door swung wide.

HENRY
She heard her cage rattling. She
knows exactly what you're up to.

Abbie's on her hands and knees.

ABBIE
I can see her.

Abbie starts crawling around, trying to sneak up on her prey.

HENRY
What exactly are you up to?

Abbie readies, determined, then DIVES behind the couch...
Mrs. Grundy sprints out from the other side, KNOCKING a side
table... TOPPLING a LAMP...

Henry cringes as we HEAR the LAMP CRASHING O.S. to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- IN MOTION -- DAY

Mrs. Grundy's MEOWING in her carrier in the back. Abbie drives while Henry squints at the YELLOW PAGES, PENCIL held.

HENRY
I have my doubts about this plan of
yours. Not to be the pessimist of
the group.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
It's the best I've got right now, so
I'm going with it.

HENRY
I think this is Green Street coming
up, so... we should make this left.

Abbie turns. Henry returns to studying the Yellow Pages.

ABBIE
Besides... how many veterinarians can
there be around here?

CUT TO:

INT. VET'S OFFICE -- DAY

In the waiting room, Abbie's got Mrs. Grundy's carrier up on the CHECK-IN COUNTER, showing her to a gathering of SEVERAL VETERINARY NURSES and DOCTORS behind the counter.

ABBIE
Can everyone see her alright? I
realize it's a long shot, but if you
have any information... any
information at all...

Mrs. Grundy stares blankly out at everyone.

Abbie's coming off overzealous, the assembled VET STAFF regarding her as if uncertain of her sanity.

ABBIE
Her name's Mrs. Grundy. Then again,
that might not be her real name.
(realizing something)
Wait, wait! Here... maybe if see the
two of them together...

Abbie shows one "DO YOU KNOW ME?" FLYER, holding the picture of JOHNSON'S FACE close beside Mrs. Grundy...

ABBIE
Does that help? Is there anyone else
in back there who can come take a
look?

Henry comes to place a gentle hand on Abbie's shoulder.

HENRY
That's... probably enough, Abbie.
We should go.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
 (still to vet staff)
 Johnson and Mrs. Grundy. Ringing any
 bells? Anyone?

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

Abbie pushes the CART. Henry strolls beside.
 Mrs. Grundy's carrier's in the cart amongst GROCERIES.

ABBIE
 Is it possible some of Johnson's
 insanity's rubbed off on me?

HENRY
 It was a good effort. Not without
 its flaws, but a good effort.

ABBIE
 I am going to find out who he is.

HENRY
 I believe you.

Henry looks over the MANY shelves of colorful CEREAL BOXES.

HENRY
 In the meantime... there's this
 cereal I like.

ABBIE
 What's it called?

HENRY
 It's got... some sort of comical
 animal mascot on the front.

ABBIE
 They all have that.

HENRY
 Frosted something-or-other.

ABBIE
 (sarcastic)
 That narrows it down.

They share a laugh. Henry takes out his reading GLASSES,
 puts them on and picks up one BOX.

*
 *

ABBIE
 Is that it?

Henry studies the box from all angles, at varying distances,
 then... replaces it, stepping back to continue searching.

CONTINUED

HENRY
Is it me, or has the selection always
been this... dizzying?

Abbie gives up, leads the cart away, leaving him behind.

ABBIE
Next aisle.

CUT TO:

IN ANOTHER AISLE -- LATER

Abbie chooses canned FRUIT. Henry's pushing the cart now.

ABBIE
What was he like growing up? My
father.

HENRY
(smiles remembering)
A handful. Boys are, without fail.
How does it go; "...snips and snails,
and puppy dog tails?"

ABBIE
What's that?

HENRY
Never mind.

They walk on together.

HENRY
I think a lot of who he eventually
became was a result of his being an
only child, to a certain extent.

ABBIE
How so?

HENRY
He developed such a strong... self
reliance. I sometimes wonder how
good a job I did raising him.

Henry ponders as they walk.

HENRY
Once he started getting so wrapped up
in his work, I felt like maybe I had
been the same way myself.

ABBIE
I doubt that.

Henry gives an appreciative smile.

CONTINUED

HENRY

It's not always so easy, is it, being
an only child?

ABBIE

(shrugs)

You get your own bedroom all to
yourself. Don't have to share any of
your stuff.

(pause)

Guess it might've been nice,
though... having someone else to help
shoulder the parental expectations.
Other than that...

Abbie gives a little laugh, making light of it.

HENRY

Your parents are very proud of you.
You do know that.

ABBIE

Sure, I know. Hey, you made me
promise to remind you to get
toothpaste. So, I'm reminding you.
Get toothpaste.

Henry wishes he could further reassure her, but lets it go.

HENRY

Right. Thank you.

CUT TO:

AT THE CHECK-OUT -- LATER

Henry's paying. Abbie's ahead with the cart. The frizzy-haired BAG BOY, Abbie's age, BAGS ITEMS and loads them into the cart. From her carrier, Mrs. Grundy MEOWS.

HENRY

I've never said it, Abbie, but I am
sorry for the way they ship you off
to me every year or so. For how,
once you were a certain age, you
inherited their responsibility
towards me.

ABBIE

I'm not shipped off, I choose to come.

HENRY

I know you're getting too old for
this. I know it's a task, and I know
I'm a bore.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

You're not a bore. It's not a task.

HENRY

Please. You visit because you know it means a lot to me. I want you to know I appreciate it.

ABBIE

I visit because I want to see you. You're being ridiculous, and now I'm forced to ignore you.

Abbie pushes the cart through. Henry's accepting his change, slowly working it into his wallet.

BAG BOY

(to Abbie)

Thank you. Have a nice day.

ABBIE

Thanks.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON:

A SLOT dispensing FOUR connected PHOTO BOOTH PHOTOS of Abbie, black-and-white, into the booth's CATCH TRAY. And as Abbie'S HAND collects the photos, we see...

EXT. CAMERA SHOP -- DAY

The rundown PHOTO BOOTH is out in front of this old STOREFRONT. Abbie studies the PHOTOS as she walks to where Henry's waiting by his car. Abbie tears one photo off.

Henry trades his GRADUATION PHOTO of Abbie in cap and gown.

Henry slides the new b+w PHOTO of Abbie into his WALLET.

Abbie looks at the remaining PHOTOS of herself...
Tears them in half. Tears them again.

*

*

CUT TO:

INT. "ADULT BOOKS" BOOKSTORE -- NIGHT

Abbie and Henry enter tentatively. Henry looks around.

HENRY

Oh, my. Maybe I'll wait in the car.

ABBIE

You haven't even got your reading glasses on.

CONTINUED

HENRY
I can still make out a blurry nudie-
ness everywhere.

ABBIE
Try not to focus. Here he is...

They move to the REGISTER, in line behind a sweating, middle-aged NEBBISH whose MAGAZINES Johnson's bagging.

JOHNSON
(to Nebbish, of magazines)
Yep, yep ...mighty fine selection.
Got all the bases covered here,
haven't you?

NEBBISH
If you could just...

JOHNSON
Nothing to be embarrassed about.
It's natural curiosity. Be careful
your mother doesn't find them when
she cleans your bedroom in the
basement of her house.

The Nebbish exits with his porn. Henry and Abbie step up.

JOHNSON
What brings you here?

ABBIE
His idea.

HENRY
We came to pick you up. I wanted to
see how it was going.

JOHNSON
Not much to it. It's filthy
pornography. It sells itself.

EXT. "ADULT BOOKS," BOOKSTORE -- NIGHT

Henry, Abbie and Johnson exit, crossing towards Henry's car.
Johnson adjusts his ear-flap adorned hunting hat.

JOHNSON
Thanks to Abbie, I'm a smut-peddler.

ABBIE
You're welcome.

JOHNSON
A purveyor of prurient periodicals.

CONTINUED

HENRY

Still, a job's a job. You made it through your first day. I think this calls for a celebration.

ABBIE

I don't think that's what it calls for.

JOHNSON

All I want right now is to climb into an Epsom bath with a big box of "Doc Oliver's Medicinal Cookies."

HENRY

Don't be wet blankets. I insist. You name it, Johnson. Anything your heart desires; a movie... a fancy dinner, within reason, of course.

JOHNSON

Anything?

HENRY

Anything.

Johnson sets his jaw, considering.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

The SIGN reads... "Christ is the Way
BINGO TONITE! Free Snacks"

INT. CHURCH, BASEMENT -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Johnson, sweaty-faced, standing up to declare...

JOHNSON

Bingo!

In this large, smoky MEETING ROOM, where 200 SENIOR CITIZENS are huddled over BINGO CARDS at endless FOLDING TABLES, a GRUMBLING MURMUR rises. Angry looks are directed at Johnson. Abbie and Henry are at Johnson's table, dubious.

At the front, by the rotating BINGO BALL DISPENSER, the BINGO CALLER'S on a MICROPHONE and SPEAKERS.

BINGO CALLER

(into mic, amplified)

Alright, folks. Let's... let's give us a minute now...

The CHECKER wends her way through the tables. Johnson sits, proudly offering his CARD as the Checker arrives.

CONTINUED

The Checker looks the card carefully over. She looks to the front, shakes her head "no." EVERYONE ANGRILY COMPLAINS.

BINGO CALLER
(over speakers)
Okay, everyone, calm down...

Abbie's amazed by the crowd's vehemence, finds it hilarious.

BINGO CALLER
(over speakers)
For the last time, mister... one more
false "Bingo" and I'm going to have
to ask you to leave. Now...

ABBIE
(laughing)
Why do you keep doing that?

JOHNSON
I...I get over-excited.

HENRY
They're going to form an angry mob.

BINGO CALLER
(over speakers)
Same game, people. Same game...
(picking next BALL)
B-15. B as in Boy... 15.

EVERYONE'S bent, checking, Johnson, Henry and Abbie included. An OLD MAN stands, shouting out...

OLD MAN
Bingo! I got bingo!

JOHNSON
Darn it!

The CHECKER starts across towards the excited octogenarian.

Johnson's frustrated. He looks to Abbie, who tends a single CARD PAD to Johnson and Henry's SIX each.

JOHNSON
What are you hoping to accomplish
with one lowly card, rookie?

ABBIE
And you're setting the world on fire,
Mr. False Alarm?

BINGO CALLER
(over speakers)
We've got a winner, folks!
(more)

CONTINUED

BINGO CALLER (CONT.)
 This gentleman won the three pound
 bag of old-fashioned-style salt water
 taffy!

EVERYONE'S MUTTERING disappointment, simultaneously tearing
 the used BINGO CARDS from their pads to reveal fresh CARDS.

HENRY
 Lucky devil.

ABBIE
 What could you possibly want with
 three pounds of taffy?

JOHNSON
 Shhhhhh!!

BINGO CALLER
 (over speakers)
 ...new game. And, next is our
 mystery prize of the evening.

At front, a large, gift-wrapped BOX is brought to be
 displayed with an oversized PINK BOW. ANXIOUS CHATTER moves
 through the GATHERING of OLDSTERS.

JOHNSON
 Look at the size of it!

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)
 (over speakers)
 And the first number is: G-16...

JOHNSON
 (to Abbie)
 I hope you're truly appreciating this.

Abbie looks to Johnson.

HENRY
 You know, dear, if you simply didn't
 take the bait...

Abbie looks to Henry, then looks back to Johnson.
 Against her own will, she can't resist asking...

ABBIE
 Appreciating what exactly?

HENRY
 Here we go.

JOHNSON
 Look around. Look around!

Johnson and Abbie are the youngest here by 40 years easily.

CONTINUED

All the OLDSTERS are stressed, angry and fidgety, tending their many cards. They have all sorts of lucky STAMPERS, TRINKETS, DOLLS and TOTEMS on their TABLES and on NECKLACES.

JOHNSON
Humanity laid bare... in all its raw,
naked savagery.

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)
B-30... B-30.

One OLD WOMAN in a "BINGO MAMA" T-SHIRT smokes anxiously.

JOHNSON
Greed, envy, rage... in all its
splendor.

An OLD MAN in Mardi Gras BEADS gnaws his RABBIT'S FOOT.

An OLD WOMAN in out-sized STARS-N-STRIPES novelty TOP HAT rocks back and forth, cursing rapidly under her breath.

JOHNSON
Out there, in the real world; day in,
day out, indignity after indignity...
their bodies fail them. Minds,
hearts, limbs, lungs... faltering.
Shriveling.

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)
A-61... A-61, ladies and gentlemen.

JOHNSON
Did you know, every decade after
you're fifty, your brain loses two
percent of its total weight?

Abbie gives a "what-the-hell-are-you-talking-about?" look.

JOHNSON
In here, they escape. Even just for
an hour. Unrelenting reality is left
behind, for a taste of what their
lives used to be filled with --
passion. Excitement. Thrill.

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)
The next number is... F-3.

A few nearby OLDSTERS angrily SHUSH Johnson. Abbie keeps updating her CARD all the while, circling in CRAYON.

JOHNSON
Go to church. Listen to their voices
raised in song.
(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

You won't hear anything approaching
the passion in that man's voice when
he cried out...

(quietly mimicking)

"Bingo! I've got Bingo!"

Abbie laughs -- a convert, for the moment at least -- caught
up in Johnson's earnestness and exhilaration.

*
*

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)

B-46. B-46.

JOHNSON

Want religion? Don't look upstairs
Sunday. Look down here after the
Saint Pete Pot-Luck Supper Thursday
nights.

(motions with both hands)

Here is sanctuary! This is the last
hurrah! And thank God for it.

NEARBY OLD LADY

Shut up, jackass!

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)

G-74.

HENRY

Not everyone's as unhappy as you make
them out to be.

*
*

JOHNSON

Sure they are.

HENRY

I'm not unhappy.

*

JOHNSON

You only think you're not.

HENRY

What's it matter, then? What
difference does it make if I'm
honestly content or I just think that
I am?

*
*
*
*

BINGO CALLER (O.S.)

A-16. A-16.

JOHNSON

(pondering, stumped)

I'm going to have to get back to you
on that.

*

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Do you two ever actually listen to yourselves? I mean...

*
*

Abbie's circling on her card. She freezes, looking at it.

*

HENRY

It is possible to grow old without feeling sorry for yourself.

JOHNSON

Because someone doesn't feel sorry for himself, doesn't mean he doesn't have every right to.

Abbie picks up the card, eyes wide, mouth agape...

ABBIE

... b-bingo... bingo...

She stands, thrusts the card in the air, SHOUTING...

ABBIE

BINGO!

Johnson looks up in horrified disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- IN MOTION -- NIGHT

Henry drives. Johnson's beside, quiet for once. In back, Abbie's seated, self-satisfied, beside a huge, cheap STUFFED PANDA with the PINK BOW stuck on its head.

ABBIE

(to herself)

One card. And they said it couldn't be done. Just... one... card.

Abbie WHISTLES happily, annoyingly. Johnson tries to ignore.

JOHNSON

Alright. Yes. One card. You seem to forget you weren't the only winner at our table tonight.

Johnson tauntingly waves a plastic BAG of PEANUTS.

ABBIE

Oh, you can keep your ballpark peanuts. They don't impress us...

(addressing the PANDA)

...do they, Lulabelle?!

*
*

CONTINUED

HENRY
(amused)
Alright, Abbie. That's enough.

Johnson looks down at his bag of peanuts. He grips the plastic, struggling desperately with it... unsuccessfully. Even after considerable effort, he can't get the bag open.

ON THE STREET

As Henry's CAR PASSES, the BAG of PEANUTS hits the gutter.

IN HENRY'S CAR

Johnson's rolling his window up, irritable.

ABBIE
Litter bug.

JOHNSON
It's for the squirrels.

ABBIE
If you couldn't get the bag open, how will they?

JOHNSON
They'll use their teeth.

Johnson slumps, arms crossed.

HENRY
Hey, I've got one. Stop me if you've heard it, Abbie. There's this old man, who on his seventieth birthday decides to change his ways.

Abbie settles back, none too enthused.

HENRY
So, he quits smoking. He starts eating right and exercising. After a while, he looks great, feels great. He even goes out and buys a toupee. But, then one day, as he's crossing the street, he's run down by a city bus. So, he's lying there, dying. He looks up and cries out..."God, how could you do this to me?" And a voice comes down from above, and God answers, "To tell you the truth, I didn't recognize you."

Abbie actually laughs a true, honest laugh.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Hey, where'd you get that one? It's actually kind of funny.

HENRY

Well, I have to confess, it's Johnson's. He gave me some jokes... even helped me practice telling them.

Abbie looks up at Johnson, pleasantly surprised...

*

ABBIE

Is that true? Did you really?

*

JOHNSON

Certainly not. I haven't told a joke my entire life, and I'm not about to start now. Pfft!

(to Henry)

Don't blame me for your bumbling attempts at humor.

Abbie's not buying Johnson's sour-puss act.

*

HENRY

This poor woman... she's very upset at her husband's funeral. She goes to the mortician and says, "You have my husband in a brown suit. I told you I wanted him in a blue suit." The mortician says, "I'm terribly sorry ma'am. I'll take care of it immediately." And he yells to the back room, "Hey Charlie, switch the heads on two and four!"

Abbie laughs heartily. Johnson struggles to maintain his dour disposition, but he can't stop himself from laughing.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

Johnson, Abbie and Henry enter. Abbie goes to put her stuffed PANDA on the couch. Mrs. Grundy jumps up. Johnson crosses towards the bedroom hallway, tipping his cane.

JOHNSON

That's it for me, folks. Some of us have to work for a living.

HENRY

Oh, Abbie, I nearly forgot. I have a surprise for you, although... I'm not so sure anymore...

Henry glances to make sure Johnson can still hear.

CONTINUED

HENRY

See, it seems that I went and arranged a sort of, well, blind date.

Johnson disappears down the hallway.

ABBIE

What?

HENRY

A blind date. For you. Tomorrow night.

ABBIE

You're not actually serious?

At the hallway, Johnson pops his head out, listening.

HENRY

Now, before you say anything, I realize I should have talked to you first. It's just, you've had to spend all your time here with Johnson and me...

ABBIE

Henry, what were you thinking?!

JOHNSON

Did I hear you right, Hank? You set Abbie up on a date without so much as asking her?

HENRY

I thought you went to bed.

JOHNSON

You're sending her off on some...some rendezvous with a complete stranger?

ABBIE

Excuse me. I can deal with this.

She turns to Henry, but stops, turning back to Johnson...

ABBIE

What do you care anyway?

JOHNSON

Well, I don't. It's just... the principle of the thing. Other than that, I couldn't care in the slightest...

(to Henry)

But, since we're on the subject, just who the hell is this "Mystery Date?"

CONTINUED

HENRY

If you must know, he's the Bag Boy at the grocery store. His name's Keith. He's a polite young gentleman.

JOHNSON

He may very well be a polite young gentleman, but that's not the point, is it? Don't you think you're overstepping your bounds?

Abbie's taking notice of Johnson's reaction.
It's dawning on her that he might actually be... jealous? *

JOHNSON

It might not be the easiest thing for her, worrying about your feelings, to tell you the position you're putting her in.

HENRY

Well...

JOHNSON

Not that it's any of my business, but I think the best thing now is to call this Bag Boy up and tell him the whole thing's off.

HENRY

Maybe that's true.

ABBIE

Um, hold on a minute...

Johnson turns to Abbie.

JOHNSON

What?

ABBIE

Actually, maybe it's not such a bad idea.

JOHNSON

How's that?

ABBIE

(to Henry)

Your heart was in the right place, after all. You meant well.

JOHNSON

Is that...is that any excuse for meddling in your personal affairs? Not that I care, mind you...

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Oh, I know.

JOHNSON

I'm only trying to stick up for you.

ABBIE

Which I appreciate. Still...

Abbie likes the effect this is having on Johnson.

*

ABBIE

Now that, um... what's his name again?

HENRY

Keith.

ABBIE

Keith. Now that this Keith's expecting to go out, I probably shouldn't hurt his feelings, should I?

JOHNSON

How can you hurt his feelings when he doesn't even know you?

HENRY

Johnson's right. He's right. I'll phone the grocery first thing in the morning...

ABBIE

No. No. That's okay.
(looks to Johnson)
I think I'll go.

JOHNSON

Well, the whole thing's absurd, if you ask me. Nonsense.
(walking off, irritated)
I'm going to wash my hands of the both of you. Literally!

He heads down the hallway. Abbie's amazed, at a loss.

*

CUT TO:

*

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, HENRY'S BEDROOM -- LATER NIGHT

*

Henry sleeps soundly, snoring lightly.

*

Abbie lies in her bed, on her back, wide awake; unable to sleep. Mrs. Grundy's curled asleep. Abbie bites her lip as she contemplates the ceiling.

*

*

*

She shakes her head at a bemusing thought, rolls over.

*

CONTINUED

Fluffing her pillow, Abbie rests her head, shuts her eyes.
 Determined to sleep. A moment, then... her eyes pop open.
 Can't sleep. She lets out a small sigh.

*
 *
 *

CUT TO:

INTERLUDE -- DAY

-Storm clouds threaten over Harrisburg's CITYSCAPE.
 -A black CAT sprints across a quiet, residential CITY STREET.
 -Rush hour TRAFFIC passes between the TWO towering OBELISKS
 at the entrance of the MARKET STREET BRIDGE.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

Henry's sitting watching TV. Abbie enters from the bedroom hallway, in a pretty DRESS, hair up, wearing make-up.

HENRY
 You look pretty.

ABBIE
 No, I don't. Thanks, though.

*

Johnson comes from the hall, in a YELLOW PLAID SUIT and TIE, barely looking up as he collects his COAT from the closet.

HENRY
 Where are you going?

JOHNSON
 Out.

HENRY
 Where to?

JOHNSON
 Don't know yet, just going.

HENRY
 Doesn't Abbie look lovely tonight?

JOHNSON
 Sure. What do I know?

HENRY
 Keith should be here any minute, if
 you'd like to meet him.

JOHNSON
 I'll be back later.

Johnson exits. Henry seems a bit surprised, confused.

CONTINUED

Abbie seems uncertain, glum.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

A PIANO PLAYER plays PIANO. The restaurant's busy. Abbie and KEITH (the frizzy-haired Bag Boy from earlier) study MENUS, uncomfortable. Keith drinks water.

ABBIE
Not a bad place.

KEITH
Yeah. It's alright. He said maybe I should take you here. Your grandfather. He even gave me some money to pay for the food.

They both look out into the restaurant.

KEITH
This is weird, isn't it?

ABBIE
Very.

KEITH
When he came in...asked if I'd take you out. That was definitely weird. What was I supposed to say? I felt kinda sorry for him.

ABBIE
There's no reason to feel sorry for him. He tries too hard sometimes, that's all. He doesn't need you feeling sorry for him.

KEITH
I didn't mean anything by it. He seems like an alright guy.

ABBIE
He is.

KEITH
Anyway. What are you gonna eat?

ABBIE
Oh my God...

Abbie's gone slack-jawed as...
Johnson's waving from a table across the restaurant.

KEITH
What's wrong? Who is that?

CONTINUED

Johnson's up and crossing towards them, bringing his menu.

JOHNSON
What the hell are the odds of this?
Can you believe it... running into
you?

ABBIE
You've got to be kidding.

JOHNSON
Here I am out grabbing a bite. You
don't mind if I join you...?
(SITTING down)
Who's your friend? Oh, tonight's
date night, isn't it?! Nice ta meet
ya...
(extends hand)
Name's Johnson. Friend of Abbie's
grandfather.

*
*

Keith tentatively offers his hand and Johnson grips it.

KEITH
Keith.

JOHNSON
A pleasure, Keith. Have you decided
what you're having yet? I don't know
about you, but I'm famished.

Johnson makes a show of tucking his NAPKIN under his collar.

JOHNSON
And so... how are you two love birds
getting along?

ABBIE
You're not staying.

JOHNSON
Pardon me?

ABBIE
You are not having dinner with us.

KEITH
I'm, uh... gonna use the toilet.
I'll be right back.

Keith gets up, heading across the restaurant.

ABBIE
What do you think you're doing?!

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
He's handsome. Don't you think he's handsome? I think he's dreamy.

ABBIE
Leave now.

JOHNSON
I believe I'll also...
(finger quotes)
"...use the toilet," as Keith so charmingly put it.

Johnson yanks off his napkin and goes, following Keith.
Abbie rests her head in her hands, exasperated.

INT. RESTAURANT, MEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Keith at one URINAL, facing the wall. Suddenly, Johnson's beside him, his face creepily close over the DIVIDER.

JOHNSON
Hello, Keith.

KEITH
H...hello.

JOHNSON
I'd like to speak to you about Abbie. Because she means a great deal to her grandfather and me, you understand. We feel very protective towards her, and if anyone were to upset her or hurt her in any way, well... I'd hate to tell you what might happen to that person.

KEITH
I...

JOHNSON
Believe me, I know what your generation's like...

KEITH
My generation?

JOHNSON
All worked up, with a dope cigarette in one pocket and a fistful of contraceptives in the other. You're a Good-Time-Johnnie, with a smile and a wink and an overactive pituitary. Tell me I'm wrong.

BACK IN THE RESTAURANT

Johnson returns to the table, sits.

JOHNSON
Looks like it's just us.

Abbie sighs, not in the least surprised.

JOHNSON
Keith had to run. Frankly, I think
you should consider yourself lucky.
There's no mistaking the glassy-eyed
gaze of the habitual paint-sniffer.
A "Bag Boy" indeed.

ABBIE
You are a colossal ass.

JOHNSON
Don't shoot the messenger.

Johnson unfurls his napkin, tucking it in under his collar
like an adult bib. He WHISTLES, SNAPS his FINGERS to O.S. *

JOHNSON
Garcon! *

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT -- TIME CUT -- LATER NIGHT

Abbie pours WINE into her GLASS, bored.

JOHNSON
Certain days, you stand in front of
the mirror, there's not even a
glimmer of recognition on the face of
the person staring back at you.

Abbie drinks. They're halfway through their MEAL.

JOHNSON
In time...you'll find your bowels and
bladder begin making unfortunate
decisions without consulting you.
They rule over you like cruel despots.

ABBIE
You know what, I get it. You're an
old man. You're withered and
stooped. Your joints ache on rainy
days. Can we put another record on,
just this once? *

Abbie picks at her food. Johnson chews. *

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
Sure. Alright. Hank tells me you're
heading off to Secretarial School.

ABBIE
Hardly. I'm going to get my MBA.

JOHNSON
Well, whoop-dee-doo, Ms. Fancypants.
And what are you planning to do with
that?

ABBIE
Good question.

JOHNSON
Looking to become a big wig,
cutthroat, corporate money-grabber,
like Dear Ol' Dad?

ABBIE
Must we talk about this?

JOHNSON
You're the one who asked to change
the subject.

Abbie's reluctant... resigned.

ABBIE
I graduated with a double major in
English and Econ. Not that you're
actually-actually interested.

JOHNSON
I'm all ears.

ABBIE
If it were up to me, I'd go for an
MFA in Literature. But that's
typical me; holding real life at arms
length for as long as possible.

JOHNSON
Who's it up to?

ABBIE
(pointing to distance)
What am I supposed to do out there
with an MFA in Literature?
Especially nowadays.

JOHNSON
I don't know. Do you write?

CONTINUED

ABBIE

I do write, yes. Thank you for asking. I keep a journal. Always have. And I've written dozens of short stories lately. Dozens. Or I've "started" writing them, I should say, because unfortunately I hate my writing. So I've never finished one. Not a single one.

(pause)

And I've... I've never actually told anyone that.

Abbie sits back; slightly taken aback, sad.

ABBIE

Don't have a clue why I told you, but... there it is. Not that you care, or that you should. This has been fun and all, but do you mind if we split?

(waves to WAITER)

Can we get the check? Thanks.

JOHNSON

What sorts of stories?

Abbie gives Johnson a dubious look.

ABBIE

Poorly written ones. Look, I wrote in my creative writing classes. Got good grades. Doesn't make me Jane Austen. Wrote some poetry too, so am I gonna go try to be a poet?

JOHNSON

Why not, I figure, if that's what floats your boat? Why the hell not?

ABBIE

Because. Because that kind of thinking is... delusional. You've got to be realistic. Practical.

(realizing, scoffing)

Oh, but I forgot -- look who I'm talking to!

(sighing pause)

Bottom line; I just want to accept what I end up doing. Learn to live with it. Like everyone else.

JOHNSON

(sarcastic)

Don't go setting your sights too high.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

Exactly.

She means it. She accepts the CHECK WALLET the Waiter drops off, begins looking through her PURSE for a credit card while Johnson studies her, scratching his head.

JOHNSON

Does everyone buy this soap you're selling? Does anyone?

ABBIE

What's that supposed to mean?

JOHNSON

Boo hoo, is what. You're asking me to believe you're this shrinking violet? The way you stick your nose in and lord over Hank? Over me!? "Poor-poor-pitiful Abbie, marching to the beat whatever drum she's told to." I think not.

ABBIE

What do you know about it? You don't know the first thing about me!

JOHNSON

Pretend all you'd like. Doesn't even sound like you talking. But it's easier that way, ain't it? Where's the risk if you fail on someone else's terms. Better than falling flat on your face without having someone else to place the blame on, right?

Johnson turns his attention to his plate, resumes eating.

JOHNSON

For that matter, if you never finish writing a story, then you never did actually fail at it, did you? Boo hoo. Boo hoo!

ABBIE

This from you, of all people... ?

JOHNSON

God forbid you should write something bad, and have to pick yourself up and try again.

ABBIE

You're lecturing me?

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

To hear Hank tell it, Abbie's going to change the world. According to him, anything she sets her mind to, she will achieve.

ABBIE

Yeah, well, that's... that's just him wanting to believe in me.

JOHNSON

And what a fool he must be, since you're all he talks about. It's Abbie *this* and Abbie *that*. Blah, blah, blah. I'm sick to death of hearing about you, to tell the truth. If you really want know what I think...

ABBIE

I don't!

Johnson's still eating, his mouth full.

JOHNSON

How's a degree in literature any more useless than a business degree for someone who's got no interest in business? You tell me.

Not what Abbie expected; more encouragement. The wind's knocked out of her sails. Johnson keeps eating.

JOHNSON

(shrugging)

One man's opinion.

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING -- NIGHT

Abbie backs Henry's car into a space.

IN HENRY'S PARKED CAR

Johnson opens his door, about to climb out. Abbie's pensive.

ABBIE

I... I'd like to thank you. Thank you for being a friend to my grandfather.

JOHNSON

Why should you have to thank me for that?

CONTINUED

ABBIE

I'm not sure.

Abbie turns the HEADLIGHTS OFF. It's a quiet night.

ABBIE

You friendship with him... that
you've been there for him... it means
a lot to him.

(pause)

I feel like it's a glimpse of who you
really are.

JOHNSON

Who I really am?

ABBIE

All this gloom and doom you're always
preaching; your misery rant. It's
just one more of the endless
affectations you're buried beneath.
So many there's no telling where the
affectations end and you begin.

(looks to Johnson)

Why?

JOHNSON

I see your mouth moving, but it's all
jibber-jabber coming out.

Abbie grips the steering wheel wearily.

ABBIE

Promise me something.

JOHNSON

I doubt it.

ABBIE

Let me ask you three questions.
Promise you'll answer them honestly.
Will you promise?

Johnson just looks to Abbie.

ABBIE

Have you always lived here?

JOHNSON

All my life. Harrisburg,
Pennsylvania. State flower: the
Mountain Laurel. State bird: the
Ruffed Grouse.

ABBIE

Is Johnson your real name?

CONTINUED

JOHNSON
Now, what kind of question...?

ABBIE
Just, is it?

JOHNSON
Sure it is. Why wouldn't it be?

ABBIE
Where did you learn to play piano?

This one gives Johnson slight pause.

JOHNSON
Someone taught me.

ABBIE
Who taught you?

JOHNSON
I don't recall. It was a long time ago.

ABBIE
I don't believe you.

JOHNSON
I don't care.

ABBIE
I asked you to promise me.

JOHNSON
But, I didn't promise.

Abbie can't help herself... a tear rolling down her cheek.

JOHNSON
Abbie...?

ABBIE
I quit, okay? I quit. You win. I don't want to play anymore.

JOHNSON
What?

ABBIE
You win, you win, you win! I'm sick of it. I just...I just want to know who you are. Is that so much to ask? I'm only here a few more days. You can tell me...

JOHNSON
There's nothing to tell...

CONTINUED

ABBIE
I won't tell anyone else, I swear.
Just, please...

JOHNSON
This is it, Abbie.

ABBIE
Please, tell me. Please.

JOHNSON
This is me.

Abbie turns to grip Johnson's plaid lapel, pulling him into a KISS, her eyes shut tightly -- it becomes a lingering KISS that Johnson finds himself returning -- until...

Johnson pulls back, GASPING as if startling himself out of a dream; recovering, realizing...

JOHNSON
I'm... I'm sorry... it's...

ABBIE
Wait...

Johnson scrambles out of the car, flustered.

JOHNSON
Henry will be worried. We'd better
get upstairs...

ABBIE
Don't go.

JOHNSON
He'll be wondering where you are.

Johnson SHUTS the car DOOR behind him.
Abbie sits back, despairing.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERLUDE -- NIGHT

-The cooling towers of THREE MILE ISLAND nuclear plant,
rimmed by blinking RED LIGHTS, bellow steam to the sky.

-TRAFFIC SIGNALS turn RED over empty DOWNTOWN STREETS.

-Moonlight shines down upon a vast GRAVEYARD at city's edge.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Abbie, in PJ's, stares blankly in the MIRROR while brushing her teeth. Johnson, NIGHT MASK on his forehead, comes to stand in the bathroom doorway, reflected in the mirror.

JOHNSON
I was thinking...

Abbie stops brushing, looking at Johnson in the mirror.

ABBIE
Wha...?

JOHNSON
Henry'd sure get a real kick out of reading any stories you wrote. The sentimental sap would burst his buttons. There's reason enough to finish a couple of 'em, isn't it?

ABBIE
(mouth FOAMING)
Yeah, I guess...

Abbie, toothbrush still in mouth, selfconsciously realizes she's foaming, quickly bends to spit and rinse...

JOHNSON
And I, uh... myself, I might be interested in eyeballing a few also. Merely out of curiosity. Anyhow... g'night.

Abbie straightens, wiping her mouth with her sleeve, but Johnson's already made a hasty retreat.

IN THE HALLWAY

Abbie sticks her head out from the bathroom, looks down the empty HALL... to see Johnson's bedroom DOOR SHUTTING.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, HENRY'S BEDROOM -- LATER NIGHT

In darkness, Abbie keeps her EYES CLOSED as she speaks.

ABBIE
I know what I need to do.

Henry stirs sleepily in his bed.

HENRY
Did you say something?

CONTINUED

ABBIE
 I have to see him when he's alone.
 (pause)
 I have to see what he's like when he
 thinks no one's watching.

CUT TO:

EXT. "VIDEO-VIEW" STOREFRONT -- DAY

There's a large EYEBALL on the SIGN for this VIDEO STORE. Abbie exits, carrying a large SHOPPING BAG. She pulls her jacket shut to the windy day, heading off, not noticing...

One "DO YOU KNOW ME?" FLYER scuttling into the gutter, caught there briefly, then blowing away.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- MORNING

By early light, Johnson crosses, in baggy CORDUROY SUIT and FELT HAT, his coat and cane in hand. He exits, and as soon as he SHUTS the FRONT DOOR...

At the bedroom hallway, Abbie sticks her head out, looking.

IN THE GUEST BEDROOM

Abbie enters, nervous. Johnson's left his bed neatly made. Abbie goes straight to a BOOKSHELF, moving a few BOOKS to retrieve a small VIDEO CAMERA from its hidden niche.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Abbie's seated on the floor in front of Henry's TELEVISION, with WIRES trailing from the VIDEO CAMERA in her hand to the back of the TV. She's watching REWIND STATIC on the SCREEN.

Abbie pushes buttons on the camera. The TV's static is replaced by an IMAGE RECORDED from the CAMERA'S HIDING PLACE: showing the BEDROOM where JOHNSON lies asleep.

Abbie holds *FAST FORWARD*...

ON TV: JOHNSON'S seen shifting, time-lapsed, under the covers. The BEDROOM BRIGHTENS quickly as the morning sun intensifies. Johnson sits up, climbs from bed...

Abbie hits *PLAY*...

ON TV: Johnson stretches, in PAJAMAS and NIGHTCAP. With his usual stooped demeanor, he shuffles OUT OF FRAME.

Abbie *FAST FORWARDS*, impatient...

ON TV: we're watching mostly empty room, with Johnson zipping past a few times. Then, Johnson returns, in a BATHROBE, his hair wet. He's making his bed...

CONTINUED

Abbie hits PLAY...

ON TV: Johnson finishes neatening his bed. He steps O.S., then returns, laying his CLOTHING out. He slips off his robe, in a T-SHIRT and white BRIEFS. He goes to get SOMETHING from a nearby DRESSER DRAWER.

Abbie leans in, furrowing her brow.

ON TV: whatever Johnson's got, he unfolds it. It looks like another pair of underwear he's putting on... slipping them over his briefs, except they're too thick and bulky, with a wide elastic waist, and.... oh, it's an ADULT DIAPER.

Abbie deflates under the weight of realization.
Horrorified. Sad. Angry.

IN THE GUEST BEDROOM

Abbie pushes the door open, crossing to the dresser DRAWER, opening it... confirming the open BOX of ADULT DIAPERS. She throws the box, looks around. She goes to one SUITCASE on a chair, grips the LUGGAGE TAG...

It reads merely, "Johnson."

Abbie throws the suitcase open, SEARCHING through the OLD MAN CLOTHING inside, tossing a few items. She finds no answers. She turns, sees...

A SUITCASE under the bed.

Abbie gets to her knees, pulling this suitcase out, opening it. There are more SHIRTS, some RAGTIME SHEET MUSIC, and old, yellowed "LIFE" and "SATURDAY EVENING POST" MAGAZINES.

Abbie studies the magazines' SUBSCRIPTION LABELS, finding all the name and address info SCRIBBLED OVER, illegible.

She searches the SHIRTS, lifting a DIVIDER within the suitcase, halting, shocked by what she's found...

The bottom of the suitcase is lined with MONEY. Wrapped STACKS. 20's. 50's. At least a few thousand in cash.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADULT BOOKSTORE, PARKING LOT -- MORNING

Abbie SCREECHES Henry's car into a parking space.

INT. ADULT BOOKSTORE -- MORNING

Abbie steps up. Johnson looks up from pricing VIDEOS.

ABBIE
We need to talk.

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

I'm busy.

ABBIE

Right now.

EXT. ADULT BOOKSTORE -- MOMENTS LATER

Abbie comes out the front door, waiting as Johnson follows.

JOHNSON

What's the hullabaloo?

ABBIE

I found the money.

JOHNSON

Money?

ABBIE

Your money. The money you keep in the suitcase under your bed. Money, which you supposedly don't have any of, which is the reason you're staying under my grandfather's roof.

JOHNSON

You're telling me what? You went through my belongings?

ABBIE

I was right about you from the start.

JOHNSON

Why am I not surprised?

ABBIE

This whole time, you've been lying to us!

JOHNSON

What exactly are you accusing me of?

ABBIE

We trusted you. You said you couldn't pay your rent. You said you needed our help...

JOHNSON

I didn't say that, did I? Hank did. And why do you think that was? What could possibly be the reason? Why would I move in with you when I don't have to?

(waiting, angry)

Because Hank asked me to.

(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

Because I guess he thought that maybe, just maybe, I could somehow help bridge the gap between the two of you. Oh, I agree, it was half-baked...

Abbie's taken aback.

JOHNSON

An unmitigated failure! But he must have been so unhappy about his screwy relationship with his granddaughter, he didn't know what else to do! And like an idiot I went along, as a favor. This is what I get for my trouble, in addition to all my suffering! This is what I get.

Johnson heads back inside, leaving Abbie at a loss.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- DAY

Abbie's standing, arms at her sides, disappointed.

ABBIE

Why didn't you just... talk to me?

Henry's seated on the couch, hands folded in his lap.

HENRY

That was kind of the problem, wasn't it? I... I feel like I know you better now, I do.

ABBIE

Same here.

HENRY

I'm less afraid now. A bit.

ABBIE

Afraid?

HENRY

At my age, you fear certain things more than others. High on the list is the fear of looking foolish.

(pause)

Afraid to tell you how glad I am when you visit. How sad I am when you leave. How much I love you.

*

*

Abbie sits beside Henry, leaning to EMBRACE HIM...
Henry wraps his arms around Abbie, holding her.

CONTINUED

There are tears in their eyes.

ABBIE
These times with you... make me feel
like I'm worth something.

Abbie kisses his cheek. They release their embrace, sitting
there, wiping at their tears.

HENRY
The way I like looking at it; you're
my son's daughter, so I get at least
some credit for how you turned out.

ABBIE
Not much to take credit for.

HENRY
Stop selling yourself short, Abbie.
I really wish you wouldn't.

ABBIE
I'll try.

They share a smile, swallowing back sadness.

HENRY
So. What happened?

ABBIE
God, I almost can't admit this to
myself, but these two weeks with you,
and... and, yes, with him; it's the
happiest I've been in a long while.
And the problem is...
(head back, eyes shut)
I starting to care about him. Didn't
want to... don't know how it
happened, but it did. I do.
(pause, regretful)
But he's insane. No matter how much
I try to convince myself he isn't.

HENRY
This has to do with that camera...
you seeing how Johnson is when he's
alone?

(off Abbie's NOD)
Because, um... I may have fouled
things up on that count.
(off Abbie's look)
See... as good a scheme as it was,
and it was one of your better
schemes, you made one slight
miscalculation. You told me.

CONTINUED

ABBIE

What?

HENRY

I...I told him. I don't even know
why I did. Forgive me. I didn't
mean to. It just...came out, and...

*
*
*

ABBIE

You... you told him... ?

*

HENRY

I guess somehow I felt sorry for him.
Please, don't be too angry.

*
*

For Abbie, it's a heartening realization.

ABBIE

You told him. He knew... he knew I
was watching him.

She's grateful for this glimmer of hope!

*

HENRY

Maybe he's not so crazy. A big
"maybe," I admit. I don't know.
Something awful's weighing on him, I
think. I've come to see that.

ABBIE

What am I supposed to do?

HENRY

I'm not sure exactly how you feel
about him, but, maybe...

(pause)

Maybe it's not such a bad idea for
you to talk to him. Tell him.

*

Abbie stares down, considering.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR -- IN MOTION -- DAY

Abbie drives, anxious. She spots something ahead, slowing...

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

Henry's car passes Johnson, who's walking the other
direction. Johnson stares down at the sidewalk as he goes,
his cane in one hand, BAGGED LUNCH in the other.

IN HENRY'S CAR

Abbie spots him, craning her neck. She pulls over.

ON THE STREET

Abbie climbs from the parked car, looking back to Johnson. She follows, not hurrying. Following at a distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Johnson heads through the CEMETERY ENTRYWAY. It's a large cemetery. Lots of TRAFFIC NOISE from near streets. Abbie's a block away, still following.

ON A HILLSIDE STREET

Abbie comes to stand outside the graveyard's bordering IRON FENCE, looking through the bars. She can see...

Johnson across the cemetery, walking amongst GRAVESTONES.

IN THE CEMETERY

Johnson comes to one HEADSTONE, looking upon it. He sits on the grass of this grave. He opens his lunch, unwraps a SANDWICH from wax paper, eating.

DISSOLVE TO:

IN THE CEMETERY

Johnson's finished, folding his trash inside the paper bag. He sets it aside. He lays back on the grave, his head towards the headstone. Arms at his sides. Eyes shut.

ON THE HILLSIDE STREET

Abbie still watches through the fence, saddened.

IN THE CEMETERY

Johnson lies there on the grave, completely still.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY ENTRANCE -- LATER DAY

Johnson exits the cemetery, going back the way he came.

IN THE CEMETERY

Abbie arrives at the GRAVE where Johnson lay. The HEADSTONE reads...

"Emmett E. Johnson
1924 -- 2009
Remembered"

*

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- DAY

Abbie enters, hurried.

ABBIE
Grandpa. Where are you?

The apartment's quiet. Abbie crosses.

ABBIE
Hello?! Grandpa! I think I can find
out...

IN THE KITCHENETTE

ABBIE
...who he is.

Kitchen's empty. A distant SIREN can be HEARD from outside.

IN HENRY'S BEDROOM

Abbie looks in, concerned, finding no one.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Abbie returns. She halts, seeing...
The PHONE is OFF THE HOOK, RECEIVER dangling to the floor.
The SOUND of the distant SIREN is growing LOUDER.

Abbie's fearful. We FOLLOW HER quickly...
Down the HALLWAY to the BATHROOM where she starts BANGING on
the door as the SIREN gets LOUDER, like it's right outside.

ABBIE
Grandpa! Grandpa...!?

Abbie grips the doorknob, throws the DOOR OPEN...

IN THE BATHROOM

Henry's seated on the edge of the BATHTUB, pale, sweating
through his clothing, clutching his dangling left arm,
weakly lifting his head...

HENRY
I...I think I'm in trouble, dear.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

Johnson enters. It's dark. He turns on a LIGHT.

Mrs. Grundy jumps up on a chair. Johnson pets her head.

AT THE CLOSET

Johnson takes off his coat. Puts it on a hanger. Hangs it.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- NIGHT -- INTERCUT

Abbie's distraught, being talked to by a DOCTOR and NURSE. Abbie tries to move past them, but the doctor gently blocks the way, trying to calm her, reassuring her.

The nurse leads Abbie to a chair.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, CRITICAL CARE -- NIGHT -- INTERCUT

Henry lies breathing into an OXYGEN MASK, eyes shut. One NURSE changes Henry's I.V.. A young INTERN writes on Henry's chart as a DOCTOR dictates.

HENRY'S HAND reaches to grip the NURSE'S WRIST.

Henry's saying something. The nurse leans close to listen as Henry's breath fogs his mask.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- INTERCUT

Abbie dials a PAYPHONE, receiver to her ear.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM -- INTERCUT

As Johnson crosses to the kitchenette, we SEE... The telephone's still OFF THE HOOK, as Abbie had found it.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- INTERCUT

Abbie limply replaces the receiver, leans against the wall.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, KITCHENETTE -- INTERCUT

Johnson puts down a dish of CAT FOOD for Mrs. Grundy.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, CRITICAL CARE -- INTERCUT

The nurse Henry spoke to returns to Henry's side, bringing a PEN and CLIPBOARD. She leans to Henry, speaking to him.

Henry manages to open his eyes.

The nurse places the PEN in Henry's hand, holding the CLIPBOARD so he's able to bring the pen to bear on the hospital stationary ENVELOPE held there...

HENRY'S HAND shakily SPELLS OUT... "Johnson."

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY -- INTERCUT

Johnson walks toward his bedroom, halting, looking down to...

CONTINUED

A small piece of PLASTIC underfoot. He picks it up.

It's a SYRINGE CAP. Johnson regards it, confused. He looks to the BATHROOM DOOR, which is ajar, pushing it OPEN...

The BATHROOM FLOOR is littered with bits of MEDICAL TAPE and TUBING, a spent TUBE of CONDUCTING GEL, an empty I.V. BAG and other E.M.T. MEDICAL REFUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, CRITICAL CARE HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Johnson rounds a corner, distraught, hurrying down the busy corridor. It's one of the only times we've seen him without his cane. Looking ahead, Johnson slows... halting...

Abbie's sitting on the floor, her back to the wall, weeping. She looks up, seeing Johnson, trying to stop crying.

Johnson's about to speak, can't find words, his expression questioning, pleading.

Abbie's sorrow answers. She slowly shakes her head.

Johnson's numbed by realization. He looks to the closed DOOR across from Abbie, moving towards it...

At the DOOR, he looks in through the GLASS and WIRE MESH WINDOW: where a BODY lies covered by a SHEET. Henry's body.

Johnson can't believe. He turns his back to the door, closes his eyes, balling up his fists.

Abbie stands, feeling Johnson's pain and anguish join with hers. She steps towards him, reaching out.

JOHNSON

No!

With a SOB, Johnson turns and POUNDS his fist into the door's WINDOW -- SPLINTERING IT!

Down the hallway, NURSES and ORDERLIES react.

Johnson PUNCHES with both fists -- CRYING OUT his misery -- POUNDING the window over and over!

Abbie backs away, shocked.
EVERYONE'S moving away.

A SECURITY OFFICER pushes through towards the scene.

Johnson's fists BLOODY the FRACTURED GLASS and exposed WIRE!

ABBIE

Stop! Stop it, please!

CONTINUED

Johnson falters, falling against the door, going limp... He slides down to the floor, his hands leaving a terrible red trail. He lies there.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

The OFFICE and FURNISHINGS are 70's-modern, institutional. Abbie's seated, in the same clothing as before, numb, eyes red, weary from lack of sleep.

She's waiting. Waiting for what seems an eternity.

A male DOCTOR finally enters, DR. KESSLER, late-middle-aged.

KESSLER

We're going to keep him, for a few days at least.

He sits at his cluttered DESK. Abbie's despairing.

ABBIE

You want to commit him.

KESSLER

Nothing's decided. These are the first steps in a complicated process.

ABBIE

You're going to commit him.

KESSLER

We can hold him for now. He injured himself.

ABBIE

My grandfather... my grandfather was his friend. His only friend.

KESSLER

Trust me that this is in his best interest. He's uncooperative. Possibly delusional, if not dissociative. You do realize, by all appearances, he seems to believe he's... elderly.

ABBIE

He's pretending to. That's all.

KESSLER

What makes you so certain? You've spent enough time with him, from what you said. You've seen his behavior.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
He's not crazy. He's not. He can't
be.

Kessler's PHONE RINGS.

KESSLER
(into PHONE)
Kessler.
(listens)
Yes. Yes.
(hangs up, to Abbie)
Go home. Get some sleep.

ABBIE
Can I see him?

Kessler regards her, uncertain.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, PSYCHIATRIC WARD -- DAY

Johnson lies in hospital GOWN and pajama bottoms, his BED the only object in this windowless, white room. The door is opened by an ORDERLY who remains as Abbie enters.

ABBIE
Johnson?

Abbie approaches tentatively.

ABBIE
Are you alright?

JOHNSON
That's a loaded question at the moment, Abbie. Ask me some other day, I might feel up to answering.

Johnson rolls to regard her, his hands heavily BANDAGED. Abbie tries not to react to this.

JOHNSON
What do you want?

ABBIE
We have to get you out of here.

JOHNSON
I only just arrived.

ABBIE
They'll try to keep you here. Don't you understand?

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

What of it? They let me sleep. The drugs feel good. There's pudding with dinner.

ABBIE

You don't belong here.

JOHNSON

You know, I've often said... "It's not death that bothers me, so much as its inevitability." And now that the grave awaits, I take surprising comfort in it. Won't be long. Till then, this is as good a place as any.

ABBIE

You're not going to die. You're not going to die anytime soon, here or anywhere else! You've got your whole life ahead of you!

JOHNSON

What are you upset about? Don't bother yourself over me.

Johnson turns slowly, returns to facing away.

JOHNSON

Aren't you supposed to be leaving for school? Shouldn't you have left already?

A single tear falls from Abbie's eye.

ABBIE

Henry's gone. He's gone. It's just you and me.

JOHNSON

It's just you.

CUT TO:

INTERLUDE -- NIGHT

-Spotlights glow up upon the circular modernity of the STATE MUSEUM and the starkly monolithic STATE ARCHIVES.

-A rooftop CROSS and "JESUS SAVES" glow in bright RED NEON.

-The brick-faced BUS/TRAIN STATION is empty, dark and silent.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

MOVING MEN carry out Henry's FURNITURE. More MOVING MEN
pack FURNISHINGS into BOXES marked "CITYWIDE VAN & STORAGE."

ACROSS THE ROOM: Abbie's on the PHONE, bereft, miserable.

ABBIE
(listening to PHONE)
Yes, Mother, I hear what you're
saying, but --

She's interrupted, forced to listen.

ABBIE
(into phone)
I know where you are. I'm well aware
of what it would take for you to --

Abbie's listens, heartsick.

ABBIE
Are you still on the line, Dad? Is
he still there...?
(listens)
No, no...I don't understand. How can
you not be here, no matter what it
takes?
(tears in her eyes)
He was your father... your own father.
(listens)
I realize that... but...
(hardening, angry)
Okay. Whatever you say.
(listens)
Whatever you say. Sure.
(listens)
Goodbye.

Abbie slowly lowers the receiver... HANGS UP.

ABBIE
Goodbye.

CUT TO:

EXT. FUNERAL PARLOR -- DAY

Henry's car is parked in front of the MORTUARY BUILDING.

IN HENRY'S PARKED CAR

Abbie sits looking through a CIGAR BOX of PHOTOGRAPHS...

Old PHOTOS of young HENRY and his young WIFE... of their
WEDDING... of HENRY and FRIENDS holding up fish on a FISHING
TRIP... of a HENRY holding the hand his very young SON.

CONTINUED

Abbie looks beside her to...
 A plain, metal URN in clear plastic on the passenger seat.
 Abbie leans back against the headrest, closing her eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARKET STREET BRIDGE -- DAY

Against the HARRISBURG SKYLINE, Abbie walks alone on this PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE, carrying the URN.

Mid-bridge, Abbie goes to the RAILING, looking over.
 She takes the lid off the urn...

It's just pale ASHES inside. Henry's remains.

Abbie sadly steps to the rail, holds the urn out.
 She turns away, closing her eyes, upending the urn...

BELOW THE BRIDGE

Henry's ashes swirl and dissipate, falling to the RIVER.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY, REFERENCE SECTION -- DAY

CLOSE ON: the illuminated SCREEN of a MICRO-FILM MACHINE as NEWSPAPER PAGES whir blurrily past.

Abbie, still wearing black, works the MICRO-FILM MACHINE.
 ON THE SCREEN: she halts at an "OBITUARIES" section of the "PATRIOT NEWS," scrolling slowly until she finds...

"Emmett E. Johnson
 8/14/24 - 4/28/09"

*

"...Mr. Johnson, age 85, a widower..."

*

Abbie leans forward, reading...

"...having suffered drug induced respiratory failure..."

"...apparently taken his own life."

"...survived by his grandson, Charles Johnson."

Abbie sits back, absorbing this.

INT. HOSPITAL, KESSLER'S OFFICE -- DAY -- INTERCUT

Johnson's lying on the COUCH, in a ROBE, bandaged hands at his sides. Kessler takes a seat at his desk.

CONTINUED

KESSLER
Do you mind answering a few of these questions?

JOHNSON
Is that one of the questions?

KESSLER
Um, no. Try not to over-think this.

JOHNSON
You're the doctor, Doctor.

Kessler sits forward, looking over a CLIPBOARD.

KESSLER
Do you feel you're often depressed?

JOHNSON
Only appropriately. I mean, please... look around. The world's gone to Hell in a hand-basket.

KESSLER
Do you consider yourself suspicious of others?

JOHNSON
No. Why? Who told you that?

KESSLER
What one word do you feel best describes your appearance?

JOHNSON
Shrinking.

KESSLER
What one word to you feel best describes your personality?

JOHNSON
Aghast.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY -- INTERCUT

Abbie's at one TABLE, with library-copy HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOKS stacked up. She's searching their indexes.

She finishes with one yearbook, takes up another, flipping pages... running her finger down the INDEX... coming upon...

"Johnson, Charles 5, 13, 15, 44, 52, 88."

Abbie hurriedly searches for...
The individual SENIOR PHOTOS, and amongst them...

CONTINUED

A PICTURE of JOHNSON as we've never seen him; just a smiling, typical, pimply teen in a T-SHIRT and bad haircut.

Abbie FLIPS PAGES, to PHOTOS of...

-JOHNSON in a ROMAN TOGA for a CLASS PLAY.

-JOHNSON posing with the fellow NERDS of the CHESS CLUB.

-JOHNSON amongst other CAST MEMBERS in another CLASS PLAY;
a drawing room drama with Johnson in a SMOKING JACKET.

INT. KESSLER'S OFFICE -- INTERCUT

Johnson still lies gazing up at the ceiling.

KESSLER

Do you prefer to be alone rather than
in the company of others?

JOHNSON

I like people better when they're not
around.

KESSLER

Do you feel you have any problems
with substance abuse?

JOHNSON

Certainly not. That being said, I
often find comfort and escape in
sweet, sweet booze.

KESSLER

Do you feel your moods strongly
fluctuate?

JOHNSON

No. It's a fairly steady flow of
anger, tempered by an undercurrent of
bitter disappointment.

KESSLER

Where do you picture yourself in five
years?

JOHNSON

Six feet under. Long dead. Glad to
be done.

INT. HARRISBURG HIGH, SCHOOL OFFICE -- DAY -- INTERCUT

JUNIOR and SENIOR STUDENTS crowd the hallways. We remain
outside the SCHOOL OFFICE, watching through the wall of
WINDOWS as Abbie enters, hugging the YEARBOOK from the
library. SECRETARIES work behind the office COUNTER.

CONTINUED

One SECRETARY notices Abbie, coming to help her. We CANNOT HEAR what they say. Abbie opens the yearbook for the Secretary to examine, questioning while she points to a page. The Secretary ponders, examines the yearbook.

The Secretary seems unsure, begins offering advice, pointing to the hallway as she speaks, directing Abbie.

INT. KESSLER'S OFFICE -- INTERCUT

KESSLER

Have you ever contemplated suicide?

JOHNSON

Only in the last ten minutes.

KESSLER

Do you often have dreams in which you're falling?

JOHNSON

Yes, but only very short distances. Mostly tripping over rugs.

KESSLER

Have you had any recurrent dreams that seem particularly vivid?

JOHNSON

You'd probably read something negative into the one where I have to give a speech to the Kiwanis Club wearing only corrective shoes, so instead... let me tell you how, each night, I ride the winged unicorn on a mystical journey over the rainbow to the Kingdom of Smiles.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, COUNSELOR'S OFFICE -- INTERCUT

The DOOR to this OFFICE reads, "Mary Ramirez, Guidance Counselor." It's ajar, and we're looking in to see the mid-aged MRS. RAMIREZ leafing through the YEARBOOK.

*
*
*

MRS. RAMIREZ

Yes... yes, I knew him very well. He was a fine student.

*

ABBIE'S VOICE (O.S.)

Oh, I'd appreciate anything you can tell me about him.

MRS. RAMIREZ

He was a real character; Charlie. You're a friend of his, Miss...? Abbie, was it?

*
*

CONTINUED

ABBIE'S VOICE (O.S.)

Yes.

MRS. RAMIREZ

Please, sit. Make yourself comfortable.

*

Abbie crosses into view, going to sit down.

MRS. RAMIREZ

He and I kept in touch a little even after he graduated. But then, when Charlie's grandfather passed away last year, well... Charlie sort of disappeared. As I remember...

*

*

*

Mrs. Ramirez SHUTS her office DOOR, shutting us out.

*

INT. KESSLER'S OFFICE -- INTERCUT

Kessler puts the clipboard down, taps a pencil.

KESSLER

Why do you think your friend's death caused such a violent reaction from you?

Johnson just lays there.

KESSLER

Why should you have such strong feelings about getting old in general?

JOHNSON

Your body quits you, measure by measure. It throws down its arms in the face of the endless germs, microbes and specks of disease laying siege to your innards. Your joints dry up. Your teeth grind down. Did you know your maximum heart rate falls by one beat every year?

KESSLER

You anthropomorphize aging.

JOHNSON

How's that again?

KESSLER

You attribute an aggressiveness to it, as if were purposeful. But, aging is a part of the natural order, nothing more, nothing less.

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

All part of life's glorious tapestry,
eh? Try telling yourself that when
you're shopping for a truss.

KESSLER

I'd like to help you to understand
why you've been doing what I believe
you've been doing.

JOHNSON

And just what have I been doing?

KESSLER

Trying to put behind you a life you
haven't even lived yet. As if you're
somehow undeserving.

Johnson says nothing.

KESSLER

Why is that?

JOHNSON

You know, it's been nice answering
your funny, headshrinker questions
and all...

(sitting up)

But I should be going. I promised
one of the shock-therapy patients
we'd play "Patty Cake" after lunch.
If I'm not back, he starts without me.

Johnson heads to the door, where an ORDERLY waits.
Kessler watches him go, taps his pencil.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, KESSLER'S OFFICE -- DAY

THROUGH THE OFFICE DOOR WINDOW: we see Abbie and Dr. Kessler
speaking while Kessler pages through the yearbook.

Kessler closes the yearbook, hands it back to Abbie.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL, CENTRAL COURTYARD -- DAY

Abbie comes out into this large, GARDEN COURTYARD bisected
by tree-lined SIDEWALKS. She holds the yearbook. PATIENTS
wander here and there, some escorted by ORDERLIES. A few
PATIENTS in WHEELCHAIRS smoke cigarettes on the lawn.

Abbie crosses towards where...

Johnson sits on a PARK BENCH, hands in the pockets of his
robe, his head back, eyes closed, basking in the sun.

CONTINUED

Abbie stops some distance from Johnson, uneasy.

ABBIE

Charlie?

Johnson looks to Abbie, but then immediately realizes what he's done, regretting. Looking away.

ABBIE

I know who you are.

It's the same old gruff demeanor from Johnson.

JOHNSON

What now, Abbie?

ABBIE

I found you.

(of YEARBOOK)

In here.

Abbie comes to sit on the bench beside Johnson. She holds the yearbook open, points to Johnson's SENIOR PHOTO.

ABBIE

This is you. This is who you are.

Johnson takes the yearbook, regards it.

ABBIE

Charles Johnson.

JOHNSON

Handsome fellow.

(hands yearbook back)

I fail to see the resemblance.

Johnson stretches, arms out, yawning.

JOHNSON

You know, I've grown accustomed to this place. Yes, there's the constant smell of sick people, and the cold showers and nightly beatings, but it's really come to feel like home.

ABBIE

I spoke to your guidance counselor from back in school. Mr. Ramirez.

JOHNSON

Doesn't ring a bell.

ABBIE

Do we have to do this still? Can't we just talk?

CONTINUED

JOHNSON

Can't we talk? It seems like that's all I'm ever doing, talking to you. I'm tired of talking. I'm tired of the sound of my own voice.

Abbie takes a moment to decide.

ABBIE

Mrs. Ramirez told me what it's been like for you. How your parents had died when you were young. How your grandfather was the only one left to raise you... your only family.

(pause)

I found your grandfather's obituary.

Johnson stands, grim, walks a few steps, his back to Abbie. He's fighting the hurt of old wounds opening.

It's not easy for Abbie.

ABBIE

You lived your whole life with your grandfather. He sounds like a great man. He must have meant everything to you. I can only begin to imagine what it must have been like when you lost him.

JOHNSON

Why are you here?

ABBIE

How hard it must have been for you, when...when he killed himself.

JOHNSON

What do you want from me? I mean, what could you possibly want from me at this point?

Abbie stands, but keeps her distance.

ABBIE

Doctor Kessler said you can go. He's not going to try to keep you here.

(long pause)

I leave for school tomorrow. If I don't, I'll miss the semester.

Abbie looks to Johnson.

ABBIE

Come with me.

Johnson takes a breath, holds it. Abbie's voice waivers.

CONTINUED

ABBIE
Will you, Charlie? Will you come
with me?

Still with his back to her, Johnson slowly shakes his head.

JOHNSON
Can't.

ABBIE
There's no reason for you to stay
here anymore. Let's go. Let's just
go and we'll try to figure it all out
once we're gone... *

JOHNSON
Abbie, please... *

ABBIE
Somehow we'll figure it out. *

JOHNSON
Please! *

Johnson's torn, tears filling his eyes.

ABBIE
Why not?

JOHNSON
There's no place for me in your life.

ABBIE
But, there is.

JOHNSON
You don't understand. You don't know.

Abbie's trying not to let herself cry.

ABBIE
Tell me, then. Tell me. *

It's torture for Johnson as he struggles to find the words.

JOHNSON
There's such a thing...
(pause)
There is such a thing as getting so
old that it hurts just to live.

He looks down, clenching his bandaged fists.

JOHNSON
So... what do you do...?
(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

(pause)

What are you supposed to do, when the
only person you have in the world...
the one person you love, who you
can't live without...

(pause, quietly)

What do you do when they ask you to
help them end their life?

Abbie's heart is breaking for him.

JOHNSON

I'm... I'm not asking for pity. I
don't want it. I'm not asking for
anything.

Johnson sucks back his sorrow through clenched teeth,
willing it back where he harbors it.

JOHNSON

That's... that's not true. I am
asking for something. I want you to
take Mrs. Grundy when you go.

ABBIE

Don't do this.

JOHNSON

Promise you'll take her. She always
liked you better anyway...

*

ABBIE

Your grandfather would have wanted
you to go on. He'd have told you the
only worth in growing old is how you
live your life.

JOHNSON

Goodbye, Abbie.

ABBIE

Henry would have told you...

JOHNSON

I wish you and I were possible. I do.

*

ABBIE

You know he would have.

JOHNSON

I wish I were a different person...
the person you think I am. But, I'm
not. I'm just... not.

*

(pause)

Stop worrying about me.

(more)

CONTINUED

JOHNSON (CONT.)

It's too late. Worry about yourself.
Go... go live your life. Please.

Johnson walks away, heading back towards the hospital doors.

Abbie watches through tears, nothing left to say. Desolate.

Johnson reaches the doors.
Goes inside. Not once looking back.

Abbie walks away.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- NIGHT

The PILE of mostly JUNK MAIL beneath the MAIL SLOT is swept aside as the DOOR slowly OPENS. Johnson enters, dressed in the clothing he had on the night Henry died.

Johnson looks around.
He walks to stand in the center of the apartment.
With Henry's belongings gone and only the few pieces of Johnson's FURNITURE left, Johnson looks even more alone.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Johnson comes to the doorway, looking in at the emptiness.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- DAY

Chinese fast food CARTONS are on a TV TRAY beside PLAYING CARDS left in the midst of a game of SOLITAIRE.

Johnson, in BRIEFS and a white T-SHIRT, sits slumped in a worn RECLINER. He stares at the fuzzy picture of a dinky black-and-white TV, watching some sort of old CARTOON.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM -- NIGHT

Johnson turns in his small BED, restless. Unable to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING/DINING -- DAY

Johnson has returned to his seat in front of the TV, again in briefs and t-shirt. On TV, there's some sort of MARCHING BAND on PARADE. The SOUND'S OFF.

FOOTSTEPS are HEARD from the outside hallway. Someone's coming to the apartment door. Johnson turns to look.

CONTINUED

At the door, some MAIL slides in through the slot, joining what's already piled up. FOOTSTEPS are HEARD walking away.

Johnson slowly sits up in his chair. He stands.

At the door, Johnson comes to look down at the MAIL. He kicks at it, none too interested. He kicks again, but now slowly reacts... something capturing his attention...

He crouches to pick up an ENVELOPE...
The HOSPITAL STATIONARY ENVELOPE we saw the nurse bring to Henry earlier; the envelope we saw Henry write "Johnson" on, now fully addressed in another hand below that.

Johnson stares in disbelief, a flood of emotions washing over him. He runs his fingers over his name... "Johnson."

JOHNSON
(under his breath)
Henry.

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY -- DAY

At one of the many LIBRARY TABLES populated here and there with COLLEGE STUDENTS, we find Abbie seated, studying.

She uses her trusty BIC to make notes in a COMPOSITION BOOK, referring to an open ENGLISH LIT TEXTBOOK. She's got her BACKPACK nearby, along with "Benet's READER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA," "ELEMENTS OF STYLE," and "TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD." Clearly she made her choice.

Clock tower BELLS are HEARD TOLLING from across the campus. Abbie checks her WATCH, begins gathering her belongings.

CUT TO:

EXT. UNIVERSITY QUAD -- DAY

At a busy pedestrian INTERSECTION on this sprawling CAMPUS, Abbie's trudging along amidst the constant, crisscrossing CROWD of STUDENTS on their way to and from classes.

Abbie doesn't seem particularly happy or unhappy, just a woman moving on with her life. In the middle of all this humanity, Abbie passes one PERSON just standing there...

MALE VOICE
Abbie?

Abbie slows... stops, looking back...
It's Johnson. Or, we should say CHARLIE JOHNSON, because here he is finally -- stripped of all old man artifice -- standing straight, in BASEBALL CAP, JEANS and a T-SHIRT, looking startlingly like a normal young man.

CONTINUED

Abbie's trying to believe it's really him, at a loss.

CHARLIE

I found you. It wasn't easy, but I found you.

Even his voice is somewhat different now that he's himself. *
He takes his hat off, wringing it nervously in his now
lightly bandaged hands. EVERYONE'S WALKING around them.

ABBIE

Charlie? *

CHARLIE

You were right. Henry would have told me, if he could have.

(pause)

He did. He...he sent me a letter. Just before he died.

Charlie reaches into his pocket. He takes out and unfolds the ENVELOPE Henry sent him, emotion choking his voice.

CHARLIE

He sent me a letter, Abbie. Except... it wasn't a letter.

Charlie opens the envelope to show Abbie...

CHARLIE

It was just this...

From the ENVELOPE, he takes out...
The small **PHOTO of Abbie** that Henry kept in his wallet.

It takes Abbie's breath.

Charlie's eyes well up with tears this one last time.

Charlie moves to Abbie...

Abbie moves to meet him. They join hands, hesitant, each *
trying to take the lead from the other... leaning to KISS. *
They look at each other. Abbie takes his face in her hands. *

CHARLIE

I'm warning you now, in case you hadn't noticed...I've got some... issues.

ABBIE

Who doesn't? *

Abbie holds him. They EMBRACE. *
Charlie holds Abbie, eyes shut, grateful.

Here they are, together, surrounded by thronging humanity. *
Here is where we leave them, at the beginning. **THE END**