

The Dream of the Romans

By
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INT. DELLNER PUBLISHING - DAY

TERRY FRASER, (50s) a high powered literary agent, sits behind a huge desk of chrome and smoked glass. Behind him are pictures of the most famous authors on the planet. A reporter sits across the desk.

REPORTER

The New Yorker would like to do a full expose on Arlen Faber. It would coincide with the release of the twentieth anniversary of "Me and God". People want to read this story. I've read "Me and God" twelve times, for Christ's sake.

Terry holds up an admonishing finger.

REPORTER

Sorry. He listens to you Terry. If I could get five minutes with him it would mean everything. He redefined spirituality for an entire generation. It's been translated into over 100 languages. This book...

Terry raises a hand for him to stop.

TERRY

Arlen Faber isn't going to talk to you this year or any year. Arlen Faber doesn't do interviews. He doesn't, he hasn't, and he won't. He is the most reclusive and sought after author on the planet. He refused an audience with the Dalai Lama. He has turned down millions in appearance fees. What would make a man do that, you ask? Because Arlen Faber came in direct contact with the Creator Himself. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine how that would change you? He isn't even like us anymore..

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

A wonderful apartment with large jungle like plants and varnished bookshelves set deep in the walls.

TERRY (V.O.)

He has no concern for worldly
affairs or possessions.

Photos adorn the top of a grand piano. Through a bay window
the Golden Gate Bridge arches into the sky.

TERRY (V.O.)

He has been touched by the Divine
and he has given us the only thing
he could. And that is "Me and God".

The soothing sound of wind chimes is heard along with the
sound of a gong and deep monotone chanting.

TERRY (V.O.)

And if that's not enough for you,
then God help you.

In the living room ARLEN FABER (40s) sits in the lotus
position on the floor. The soothing voice is coming from the
stereo and guides him through his meditation.

VOICE

...and breathe. Breathe the breath
of the world...and let it out.
Release from within. Remember, this
is a journey. Not of the mind...but
of the heart.

There is a loud knock at the door. Arlen ignores it.

VOICE

Breathe. Let yourself go. Let your
spirit take you to a quiet
place...and center you there.

Another knock. Louder this time.

VOICE

Be at peace in this place. Savor
what is happening.

Another knock. Louder still.

ARLEN

Fuck! Fuck shit motherfucker!

VOICE

Savor letting go...

He leaps to his feet and plunges through the apartment.

ARLEN

Fucking cock monger. Dick fucking
shit machine.

At the front door he raises his arms above his head and takes
in great deep breathes. Finally, he slowly opens the door. A
Fedex man stands with one hand raised for another knock and
the other holds some boxes and a huge bag of letters.

FEDEX MAN

Oh! Tee-riffic! I sure didn't want
to leave this on the door step.
Might be important and...

He looks left and right.

FEDEX MAN

...you never know who might, you
know.

Arlen leans out and looks right and left down the obviously
expensive hallway. No thieves in this neighborhood.

FEDEX MAN

Mr. Faber sure gets a lot of mail.
Is Mr. Faber here to sign for these
today?

ARLEN

No he isn't.

FEDEX MAN

You know, ever since I took this
job I've been hoping to meet him.

ARLEN

Well not today.

FEDEX MAN

Right...uh if you would just sign
here

Arlen signs. The Fedex man looks at the signature.

FEDEX MAN

(reading)
Rance Brafton.

ARLEN

That's me.

The Fedex man hands him a large box, a small box, and a stack of letters. The box is heavy and Arlen struggles to hold it. He grimaces in pain and his hand goes to his back.

FEDEX MAN

Can I ask you a question? What's Mr. Faber like?

ARLEN

You'd hate him.

He slams the door.

Arlen walks back into the apartment. A sign above one of the rooms reads, "Mail Room". He heaves the bag inside. It lands at the base of a gigantic paper shredder.

INT. KITCHEN -CONTINUOUS

Arlen opens the box. It is filled with books. A note reads, "This is what we're sending out. Thoughts? Call me."

He opens the smaller box. It is a mint condition model of the Hydra from "Jason and the Argonauts". He takes it to the door marked "OFFICE" and disappears inside.

ARLEN (O.S.)

Look who's here boys!

INT. MARATHON RECOVERY HOME -DAY

KRIS LUCAS, (20's) sits on the edge of a bed staring at his luggage. His hair looks like he cut it himself and he has several facial piercings, nose, brow, lip, that he fiddles with nervously.

A man enters. He has a sticker on his shirt that reads "Hello! My name is Paul".

PAUL

Time to go Kris.

Kris reaches for his bag and stops, trying to get his breathing under control.

KRIS

Can't I...

PAUL

No. We talked about this remember?

Kris peels off his own sticker and sticks it on his "49ers" bag. He walks over to Paul.

PAUL
Remember what I said about fear.

KRIS
Fuck Everything And Run?

PAUL
Or, Face Everything And Relax.

Kris nods.

PAUL
Remember...

KRIS
I know. Stay sober, get a sponsor,
and stay sober.

PAUL
I'm going to miss you man.

KRIS
Oh, don't worry. You'll find some
other broken weeping freak to take
my place.

PAUL
Do you have a ride?

Kris nods.

PAUL
You're special Kris. Don't forget
it.

KRIS
Forget what?

Paul laughs and pulls him into a hug.

EXT. MARATHON RECOVERY HOME -MOMENTS LATER

Kris sits on his suitcase by the side of the road. He looks
at every driver that passes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Kris is walking down the highway. He has his thumb out.

KRIS
(singing)
"...I'm gonna sit right down and
write myself a letter. And make
believe it came from youuuu.."

INT. KRIS' APARTMENT -DAY

The door opens and Kris stands in the doorway.

KRIS
Dad? I'm home.

He walks into the shabby apartment. Every surface is cluttered and the curtains are drawn.

KRIS
Dad? Are you here?

There are beer cans everywhere and a nearly empty bottle of Scotch rests on a pile of papers on the coffee table. A man in his late sixties is unconscious on a reclining chair.

KRIS
Dad. Wake up, I'm back.

His Dad does not move.

KRIS
Dad? Are you alright? Wake up.

He bends low to check for breathing. Nothing.

KRIS
Oh my God. Dad! Dad!

Kris shakes his Dad. His father awakens with a start.

MR. LUCAS
What! What! Fuck. Oh Jesus. Kris,
it's you.

KRIS
You scared me. I thought you were
dead. Sorry.

MR. LUCAS
You're back. I didn't think you
were coming back until next week.

KRIS
It was a 28 day program.

Mr. Lucas looks confused.

KRIS
I left 29 days ago.

Mr. Lucas picks up the bottle of Scotch. Kris sees it was resting on a pile of his letters. They are unopened.

MR. LUCAS
So how was re-hab?

KRIS
Um. It was good in a sick damaged people helping sick damaged people sort of way. Sort of like church.

MR. LUCAS
Did you use my line?

KRIS
No. There just never seemed to be a good time for, "Don't judge yourself. Let me do it for you".

MR. LUCAS
Great line.

Mr. Lucas picks up the remote and turns the volume up on the TV. On top of the TV is a plaque that reads "Riley Lucas-30 years-Local 239".

KRIS
Okay. Well, I'm going to unpack my stuff, I guess, and then go down to the store and see how they managed while I was gone.

Mr. Lucas laughs at something on TV. Kris turns and heads toward the hallway.

MR. LUCAS
Kris.

Kris stops.

MR. LUCAS
It's good to have you home.

INT. KRIS'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Posters of rock bands and scary looking demon images cover the walls. His curtain is drawn as well. He throws his bags on the bed and reaches to open them. His hands are shaking.

KRIS

(to himself)

God, grant me the serenity to
accept the terrifying bullshit I
cannot change. The balls to change
the things I can. And the decency
to not whine along the way.

He collects himself and surveys his disaster of a room. He spots a poster of the band "Korn" on his wall.

KRIS

I was listening to Korn?

He throws open the curtains.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A banner hangs over the door that reads, "Speed Dating". ELIZABETH DANSON (LATE 30'S) sits at a table smoothing out her hair and trying to look brave.

VOICE (O.S.)

Two minutes. Go!

The bell goes off. Elizabeth moves to the next chair. Before her is a small bald Indian man.

INDIAN MAN

Hi. I'm Sanji but my friends call
me "Danger".

Ding. Elizabeth is across from a huge man with a tattoo of a tarantula on his face.

ELIZABETH

So what did you do after the
accident?

TARANTULA MAN

Moved back in with my mother. But
she has dementia so she doesn't
even know I'm there. It's perfect.

Ding. Elizabeth sits before a man with wild hair and tiny glasses..

ELIZABETH
I'm a chiropractor and I just
opened my own shop.

WILD HAIR
That's cute. I remember my first
million.

She rolls her eyes. Ding.

She is distracted by the man in front of her who is a
transvestite.

ELIZABETH
And..um...I love art. I
read...books. And I love...art. Did
I say that?

Ding. A handsome well dressed man in his thirties listens
attentively.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ten seconds.

ELIZABETH
And I guess what I'm looking for,
really, is someone who would be
good for my son. Alex. He's six. Do
you like kids?

HANDSOME MAN
I have six kids from three
marriages.

Ding.

ELIZABETH
Do you like kids?

TINY GLASSSES
As long as they're very, very
quiet.

Ding.

ELIZABETH
Kids. How do you feel?

INDIAN MAN
What do you mean, "feel"?

Ding.

ELIZABETH
Do you want kids?

TARANTULA MAN
(crying)
Yes.

Ding.

ELIZABETH
(exhausted)
I don't suppose you want kids.

TRANSVESTITE
Of course. I'm not really committed
to being gay.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT - LATER

ANNE (20's) sits on the couch watching "Laguna Beach". She
hears the key in the door and quickly turns the channel to
PBS. A dejected Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH
Hi, Anne. How was he?

ANNE
Good.

ELIZABETH
Did you guys eat the soy loaf I
made?

ANNE
Sort of.
(changing the subject)
How was speed dating?

ELIZABETH
They should call it "Speed Hating".
Did he...

ANNE
... practice violin, do his
homework and the extra credit, lay
out his clothes for tomorrow, and
avoid partially hydrogenated oils?

ELIZABETH
Yes.

ANNE

Yes.

ELIZABETH

Thank you Anne.

Anne opens the door.

ANNE

It'll get easier. There's somebody out there for you.

ELIZABETH

Well, he stayed home tonight. See you tomorrow.

Anne leaves.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the bed ALEX (6) is fast asleep. Elizabeth tucks the covers around him and kisses his cheek. She pulls a rocking chair next to his bed and sits, watching him sleep.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - DAY

Elizabeth is asleep in the rocking chair. The sun is shining through the window. She awakens with a start.

ELIZABETH

Get up, baby. Wake up.

Alex awakens.

ELIZABETH

What do you want for breakfast?

ALEX

Pancakes.

INT. KITCHEN -MOMENTS LATER

Alex sits at the breakfast table. Staring at a plate of what looks like eggs and bacon and toast.

ELIZABETH

MMMMM "smart bacon". Tastes just like bacon but with...

ALEX

...delicious soy protein sweetened
with cane juice and tomato pulp.

ELIZABETH

Yup. And yummy egg whites scrambled
just the way you like them.

ALEX

These aren't pancakes.

ELIZABETH

I know. I know. Now eat up,
beautiful. You've got a big day.

ALEX

OK.

She opens the fridge and pours a glass of something thick and
green. She drinks it and looks at Alex eating his breakfast
in the morning light.

ELIZABETH

Hey. Do you know how much I love
you?

ALEX

More than the sun and the stars and
everything else that's everywhere
else.

ELIZABETH

That's right, baby. More than all
of that.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CAR -LATER

Elizabeth and Alex pile into a late 80s' Volvo.

ELIZABETH

All set?

In the back seat Alex sits in a large child's seat with seat
belts that cross in front of him and lock in a large silver
disk on his chest. He looks like a tiny race car driver
buckled up for the Indy 500.

EXT. SCHOOL -LATER

Elizabeth's car pulls up in front of "Robert Frost
Elementary". Classical music plays on the stereo.

ELIZABETH

All out who are getting out.

Alex unbuckles himself from his restraint system. The sound of pressurized air escaping can be heard. He spots a group of boys who notice his seat belt situation.

ELIZABETH

Have a great day today, buddy. Give me a kiss.

He looks back at the boys. They are laughing at him. He gives her a big fierce hug and a kiss anyway.

ELIZABETH

I love you Alex.

ALEX

I love you Mom.

He gets out and she pulls away. He slowly turns to face the jury of his peers.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth weaves through traffic while trying to bang open the glove box.

ELIZABETH

God dammit! Open, you fucking bastard...

It opens and she rifles through the contents before coming up with a pack of cigarettes. She lights a match one-handed, like a pro and inhales deeply.

ELIZABETH

Aahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

She puts a CD in the stereo. Van Halen sings "Panama".

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Arlen sits by the window reading a book called, "Unlocking the Door to the Heaven Within: Part 21". He finishes the last page and sets the book down on a stack of similar books numbered one through twenty. He folds his hands and closes his eyes.

EXT. "WELL READ BOOKS" - MOMENTS LATER

Whistling and happy, Kris arrives at the bookstore. The featured book in the window is called, "I Dwell in the Now" by Sri Mantis Marigold. There is an envelope taped to the door that reads "Kris -Don't Be Mad".

He opens the envelope and takes out a note.

KRIS

(reading)

Don't be mad. Don't be mad. Don't be mad. I lost the key and (Don't be mad) I couldn't get in. I hope you're feeling better now that you've been released. Don't be mad. Dahlia.

KRIS

Released?

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Arlen is still gazing out the window. His eyes snap open.

ARLEN

That's fucking it.

He springs out and stomps toward the hall closet.

ARLEN

Total bullshit!

He opens the closet door and yanks out a chrome hand truck. He stacks the books on it and then takes even more books off the bookshelf. He stops and points an accusing finger at the books.

ARLEN

You have failed!

EXT. STREET -MOMENTS LATER

Arlen stomps down the sidewalk pushing his books before him.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS -DAY

Kris is crouched down behind the counter. His arms are wrapped around his head. Kneeling next to him is DAHLIA (20'S) wearing a dress she obviously made.

DAHLIA

Because I told you why. No key.

KRIS

Thirteen days! You lost the keys for thirteen days? How could it have been closed for thirteen days?

DAHLIA

I had no one to call so I just had to wait for you to be -

KRIS

I was not released! I am not a criminal. I was having a hard time with alcohol.

DAHLIA

You attacked my umbrella.

KRIS

What?

DAHLIA

You did. You were screaming about a "secret" and then you tore my umbrella apart. You were really drunk and it was kind of scary.

KRIS

I'm sorry that I scared you, Dahlia.

DAHLIA

I'm sorry that I lost the keys and the store was closed for two weeks Kris.

The bell on the door jingles. A man wearing a Fidel Castro T-shirt enters.

DAHLIA

(to customer)

Kris is back and he has a key!

INT. "WELL READ" BOOKSTORE - LATER

Arlen wheels his books into the store. Behind the counter Dahlia listens to a customer whose hair is pulled back and tied with a drinking straw.

CUSTOMER

I actually sat in his presence. And he actually said to me "Dominica, you are awake." I said I actually thought I was because my guru said I was. But then someone said I wasn't, so I actually wasn't sure. But now I am.

ARLEN

Hey, pretend person, if you're done hallucinating I'd love a shot at being a customer in this place.

She moves away quickly. Dahlia motions for Kris. Kris approaches the counter.

DAHLIA

(under her breath)

Welcome back.

KRIS

Can I help you?

ARLEN

Yes. These don't work and I'd like to sell them.

He wheels the hand truck to the counter.

ARLEN

If my conscience would allow it I would burn them. But instead I'll take pennies on the dollar.

Kris looks the books over.

KRIS

These are all first editions.

ARLEN

Correct.

KRIS

I'm afraid we're not able to buy anything right now...

ARLEN

Well, I'm afraid I can't have these
in my house right now so...

KRIS

If you could just come back next
month...

ARLEN

So if you could just get the
manager...

KRIS

I am the manager.

Arlen starts putting the books on the counter.

KRIS

I can't afford it right now. It's
been a tough couple of months.

ARLEN

Fine! You can have them. No charge.
My gift to you.

KRIS

That's not how we do it.

He points to the window which reads "skoob yuB eW".

ARLEN

It says Skoob Yub eW.

Arlen continues to stack books on the counter.

KRIS

Stop!

Arlen stops.

KRIS

Look, it's been a little slow,
okay? The store was closed for a
while and we're just getting back
up to speed.

ARLEN

Let me guess. You were off giving
lap dances at the Piercing
Festival.

Kris closes his eyes and begins whispering a prayer to
himself. Arlen leans in so he can hear. Kris finishes.

KRIS

I'm sorry. Maybe next month but
right now I can't afford it.

Arlen throws the books on the hand truck. Suddenly, he
grimaces in pain and his hand flies to his lower back. He
heads for the door.

ARLEN

(through the pain)
You are going to take these books.

EXT. STREET -DAY

Arlen wheels his books back down the street. He passes
"Straighten-up Chiropractic Now Open". Inside several women
sit in the reception area reading magazines. He passes. The
women follow him with their eyes.

INT. "STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE" -CONTINUOUS

As Arlen passes, the women all put down their magazines.

The curtain in the back opens and Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH

Okay guys. Five o' clock.

All the women stand.

ELIZABETH

Thanks for your help. I really
appreciate it.

One of the women (RYAN) comes over to Elizabeth. She is
dressed like a man, tie and all.

RYAN

Don't worry baby. It'll happen.

She gives her a hug. Anne, last nights baby sitter and
today's receptionist, straightens the already straightened
magazines.

ELIZABETH

It's fine Anne.

Anne doesn't stop.

ELIZABETH

Anne. It's fine. Everything is going to be fine.

Anne nods and heads out the door. Elizabeth turns to the only person left. Alex.

ELIZABETH

Good day. Great day today. I'm ready for some lessons. How about you?

ALEX

Okay.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex draws the bow across a violin making piercing shrieking noises while Elizabeth reads from a music book, "Violin at Home".

ALEX

It doesn't sound like Ol' Macdonald.

ELIZABETH

It will. It will. You're doing so well. One more time.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -LATER

Elizabeth holds a book that reads "Hi German!"

ELIZABETH

(horrible pronunciation)
Spielst du mit dem fussball?

ALEX

Speel...deem...football.

ELIZABETH

C'mon honey, you can do this. It's German.

ALEX

But you don't know German.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

One by one, Arlen kicks books off the hand truck. He kicks one all the way down the hallway.

ARLEN

Relax. I need to relax.

He walks over to his CD collection. He spots a Chet Baker CD.

ARLEN

This ought to do the trick.

He takes the CD over to the stereo, bends down and puts it in, then hits the "loop" button. He tries to stand up but can't.

ARLEN

NO! NO! Please.

He takes several deep breaths and tries to straighten up slowly. He gasps in pain.

ARLEN

No. I refuse to accept this. There is nothing wrong with me. This is bullshit and I do not accept it.

He stands up quickly, lets out a piercing scream, and slowly falls over sideways.

Chet Baker begins singing, "Isn't it Romantic".

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -LATER

Arlen lays on his side on the floor. His eyes stare into space unseeing.

Chet sings on.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -LATER

Arlen still on his side. He is laughing hysterically. Chet is still singing.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

Arlen has not moved. He is singing "Lush Life" along with Chet Baker.

ARLEN
(singing)
"...And there I'll be, while I rot
with rest, of thooose whooose lives
are loooooonely tooooooooo..."

The CD comes to an end. The living room is quiet.

ARLEN
LET'S HEAR IT...ONE...MORE...
TIME!!!

Chet starts singing "Isn't it Romantic".

INT. KRIS' APARTMENT -NIGHT

Mr. Lucas watches TV while sipping Scotch.

MR. LUCAS
Kris. It's on.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Kris does the dishes. He nervously licks his lips.

KRIS
Be there in a minute.

He moves toward the pantry door with practiced stealth.

He opens it. Inside are several bottles of Scotch. Kris' breathing is shallow as he stares at the booze. His resolve breaks and he reaches for the bottle.

MR. LUCAS (O.S.)
Kris!

Kris pulls back quickly and closes the door. He is shaking and gritting his teeth.

KRIS
Yeah, dad?

MR. LUCAS (O.S.)
What's taking you so long?

Kris goes to the sink and splashes water on his face.

KRIS
Coming, Dad.

INT. LIVING ROOM -CONTINUOUS

On TV tan beautiful contestants scream as jellyfish are laid on their naked bodies. The graphic reads, "Terror Olympics". Kris falls onto the couch. His father pats his leg.

MR. LUCAS
This is our show.

KRIS
This is our show.

Kris watches as his father takes a long pull from his glass.

MR. LUCAS
I missed watching this with you
while you were gone.

Kris tries to focus on the show.

MR. LUCAS
One night Darren from downstairs
said he might come by and say hi
but I didn't think he would because
he is always going out and...

Kris stares at the bottle of Scotch on the coffee table.

KRIS
I have to go.

MR. LUCAS
What do you mean? Go where?

KRIS
Out. Just out. I'm going to meet
some friends.

MR. LUCAS
I thought we were going to watch
"Terror Olympics". We always...

KRIS
Dad! I have to go.

MR. LUCAS
But this is going to be a good one.

KRIS

They're going to pee on each other
for money!

MR. LUCAS

I thought you liked it.

KRIS

No. You did.

Kris leaves.

EXT. STREET -NIGHT

Kris stands in front of a bar looking through the window. He takes a step toward the bar and stops. Two men walk out onto the sidewalk. One is supporting his drunken buddy.

DRUNK GUY

I'm pony...I can be pony if you
can.

Kris walks off.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arlen is still on the ground. The CD continues to play in the background. He looks to one side and sees his phone in its cradle.

ARLEN

(shouting)

Phone!

The dial tone comes on.

ARLEN

(shouting)

Terry. Home.

The phone automatically dials Terry's number and rings.

INT. TERRY'S BEDROOM -NIGHT

His ringing phone wakes him up. He answers.

TERRY

Hello.

Arlen has to shout to be heard.

ARLEN

Terry. Terry, you have to come over.

TERRY

Why are you yelling? Is that Chet Baker?

ARLEN

My back's out and I need you to come over.

TERRY

Again? Why don't you try asking God for help?

ARLEN

He doesn't take my calls. You do. I'm on the floor. Get over here.

TERRY

After seven years it might be time to get that looked at.

ARLEN

I have and it didn't help. Obviously! Are you coming over or not?

TERRY

What did you think of the books I sent over? Did you like them?

ARLEN

Not now, Terry.

TERRY

Did you like the jacket? The raised gold letters?

ARLEN

I loved the gold letters. Loved them.

TERRY

What about the picture?

ARLEN

Goddammit. It doesn't matter. It's all meaningless bullshit.

TERRY

It's not meaningless, fuckface! I won't help you if you won't help me.

ARLEN

You win. I loved the gold letters and the picture was fantastic. When are you coming?

TERRY

There is no picture and the letters are blue.

He hangs up.

Chet Baker begins singing "Isn't it Romantic".

EXT. STREET -LATER

Kris stands across the foggy street staring at a lit doorway. A group of men stand outside smoking and laughing. One of them looks at his watch and they all head in.

EXT. STREET -LATER

Kris is still watching the door as the men exit. Several of them hug each other and go on their way. One man remains. He lights a cigarette.

Kris crosses the street and approaches the man.

KRIS

How's it goin'?

MAN

It's goin'.

KRIS

Did you guys have a meeting in there?

MAN

Yeah. Are you looking for a meeting?

KRIS

Just got through having 28 in a row.

MAN

Good for you. Ross.

He extends his hand. They shake.

ROSS

Every night. Ten o' clock.

KRIS

Yeah, maybe I'll check it out or something.

ROSS

We're here if you need us.

Kris walks off.

INT. KRIS' APARTMENT -LATER

Kris walks into his apartment. The TV is on and his father is asleep in his chair. There is a note on Kris' chair that reads, "I taped it for you".

Kris kisses his dad on the cheek and turns on the TV.

EXT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

It is the dead of night. We hear the Chet Baker CD skipping.

CHET BAKER

I...I...I...I...I...I...I...I...I...
 ...I...I...I...I...I...I...I...I...I...
 ..I...I...I...I...

Arlen weeps in the background.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -DAY

The CD still skips. Arlen opens his eyes. He is on his back.

ARLEN

Please God, not another day. Not
 one more mother...I'm laying on my
 back. I'm laying on my back! I am
 not laying on my side I am laying
 on my back.

He rolls slowly onto his side. Rests. Then he rolls slowly onto his stomach. His nose is pressed into the carpet.

ARLEN

I am laying on my stomach
(with the skipping CD)
I...I...I...I..am laying on my
stomach.

He brings his hands underneath him and slowly pushes himself onto his hands and knees while sucking in air through his teeth.

ARLEN

I can do this.

He crawls over to the stereo, ejects the CD, and puts it in his mouth and crawls away.

INT. ARLEN'S HALLWAY -CONTINUOUS

Arlen crawls into his mail room. We hear a hideous grinding sound as the CD is fed into the paper shredder. He comes crawling out of the mail room.

EXT SIDEWALK - DAY

Two businessmen chat over coffee.

BUSINESS MAN #1

I think I'm ready to buy but my
portfolio is...

He stops and stares.

Arlen crawls by on all fours. They watch him pass.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Arlen crawls along the sidewalk. Pedestrians stop to look.

MAN

Hey buddy, cheer up. It's not that
bad.

A woman drops a dollar in front of him.

WOMAN

Here you go.

Arlen looks up at her from the city's floor.

EXT. STREET -MOMENTS LATER

Pedestrians stroll through a crosswalk. Arlen crawls behind.

EXT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC -MOMENTS LATER

Arlen crawls up to the door of the chiropractic office.

ARLEN

Please let this go smoothly.

He heads in.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office is abuzz with "patients" waiting to see the Doctor. Arlen crawls in. He is covered in dollar bills.

All chatter stops.

ARLEN

Any objections to me being next?

Anne walks into the waiting room.

ANNE

Next?

Everyone points to Arlen. Flustered, she quickly leafs through an appointment book.

ARLEN

Uh, do you have an appointment?

ARLEN

Does it look like I planned this?

ANNE

So you're a new patient.

She reaches for a clipboard.

ANNE

I just need you to fill out...

She trails off, realizing how absurd this is.

ANNE

Um, well, let me take your picture.
That's what we do with all new
patients.

She grabs a Polaroid. Arlen lowers his forehead to the
ground.

ARLEN

When I can stand, I will kill you.

She snaps the picture and places it on the wall among dozens
of other polaroids.

ANNE

I'm just going to tell the doctor
you're here.

She vanishes from the room. Everyone stares in silence.

Elizabeth enters and sees Arlen.

ELIZABETH

Follow me.

She walks back in and Arlen crawls after her.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM -CONTINUOUS

Arlen is still on all fours. His POV reveals he is able to
see only her feet and knees.

ELIZABETH

OK. First let me tell you...

ARLEN

Please don't tell me I need X-rays.
Don't show me that lame little
rubber model of a vertebra. Let's
just focus on me being able to walk
out of this tea party forever.
Whad'ya say?

ELIZABETH

I was going to say I can get you on
your feet today and hopefully we
can work together to keep this from
coming back.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH(cont'd)

But since you already have my
number I guess I'll just let you do
your impression of an ottoman until
you decide you might need help.

Silence.

ARLEN

Please help me.

She immediately bends down next to him on the floor.

ELIZABETH

Is the pain here?

She puts her hand on his lower back. Arlen nods. Exhausted.

ELIZABETH

Okay. I'm going to help you to the
table, alright? You can do this.

She slowly helps Arlen stand and move to the table. He
collapses on the table, face down. She walks toward the door.

ARLEN

Don't leave me here!

ELIZABETH

I'm just going to tell Anne to
clear my patients for the next
hour.

INT. WAITING ROOM -CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth closes the door behind her. All the women look at
here expectantly.

ELIZABETH

(whispering)

I got a patient!

The women explode into a silent celebration.

RYAN

(shouting)

It's a miracle!

The celebration stops dead in it's tracks.

RYAN

(whispering)

Sorry.

They exit quietly. Elizabeth composes herself and walks back into the treatment room.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ARLEN
What was that?

ELIZABETH
Happy customer.

She puts her hand on his chest.

ELIZABETH
What's your name?

ARLEN
Uh..my name is...name...

ELIZABETH
Who are you?

ARLEN
Arlen.

She leans close to him.

ELIZABETH
Arlen. I want you to know that I am going to help you. And when you leave here you may not be cured, but you're going to feel a lot better. I promise you that.

She goes to work. Arlen cries out in pain.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM -LATER

Elizabeth works on Arlen's back with slow pressing movements. Arlen is face down with his face in the "do-nut". Tears of joy run down his face.

ELIZABETH
I think we're good for now.

Arlen pretends to sneeze and wipes the tears off his face.

ELIZABETH
Let's sit up nice and easy now.

Arlen slowly pushes himself into a sitting position and places his feet on the floor.

ELIZABETH

Can you walk across the room for me?

He looks up and sees her for the first time. He is captivated. He stands rooted to the spot, staring.

ARLEN

You're so beauti...

He tries to shake it off. No luck. He walks across the room. He bends down and touches his toes. Wonder spreads across his face.

ELIZABETH

Are you Okay?

ARLEN

You're so amazing. I mean...no one's been able to do that before. No one. How did you do that?

ELIZABETH

You're still pretty out of whack but you resemble something a little farther along on the evolutionary chart.

She walks out to the waiting room.

ARLEN

How much do I owe you?

He follows.

INT. WAITING ROOM -CONTINUOUS

Anne hands Elizabeth a piece of paper.

ELIZABETH

Well, two hours.....one hundred and fifty dollars?

He gets out his wallet and grabs several hundreds and hands them to her.

ELIZABETH
No. That's too much.

ARLEN
Take it. You're a miracle worker.
When can I...I mean, should I come
back?

ELIZABETH
You should be Okay until next week.

He is disappointed.

ARLEN
Oh. Next week. Okay.

ELIZABETH
Thank you, Arlen...

ARLEN
Faber. My name is Arlen Faber.

Nothing.

ARLEN
I wrote "Me and God", and my name
is Arlen Faber.

She has no idea who he is. Anne's jaw drops.

ELIZABETH
I believe you.

Arlen just stares at her.

ELIZABETH
(coaxing)
Next week, Arlen.

He snaps out of it.

ARLEN
Thank you.

He walks out of the store as quickly as he can.

ANNE
That's Arlen Faber?

ELIZABETH
Who's Arlen Faber?

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Arlen walks down the street in a daze, Cupid's arrow wedged firmly in his heart.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - LATER

Anne and Elizabeth sit on the floor.

ELIZABETH
So, that's Arlen Faber.

ANNE
That's Arlen Faber.

ELIZABETH
Jesus Christ.

ANNE
No. But close.

EXT. WELL READ BOOKS -DAY

The sign in the window reads, "All Books 30% Off". Inside Kris and Dahlia talk behind the counter.

KRIS
And they recommend I go to meetings
and get a sponsor.

DAHLIA
A sponsor? Like Diet Coke or
something?

A small girl walks in the store. She places a book,
"Consciousness Without an Object", on the counter.

GIRL
I'd like to sell you this book.

KRIS
Wow! Third grade is a lot different
than I remember. Why do you want to
get rid of it?

GIRL
I just found...I found...

She takes a piece of paper out of her pocket and reads it.

GIRL

(reading)

I find the idea that you can use a
conscious object to consider non
objective consciousness
preposterous. This book is poison
to me.

KRIS

I'm afraid I can't buy any books
right now.

The girl turns to leave.

KRIS

What did he give you to do this?

GIRL

He said he would split the money
with me.

Kris opens the till and gives her a five dollar bill.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CAR - DAY

Alex climbs into the back seat. Elizabeth looks at him in the
rear view mirror.

ELIZABETH

Hey, champ. How was school today?

He hands Elizabeth an envelope. Elizabeth tears it open. It
reads.

ELIZABETH

(to herself)

"Alex is having some difficulty in
school. He is being disruptive in
class and falling behind in his
school work. I have contacted Mrs.
Gold and she would like to set up a
meeting with you or your husband.
I'm sure we can resolve this.
Sincerely, Dr. O'Neal"

ALEX

What does it say?

She puts the note back in the envelope.

ELIZABETH

That you're a great kid and she
can't wait to tell me about it.

His face says he doesn't believe her.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -LATER

The living room wall is sponge painted maroon and there are
little Christmas lights around the windows. Elizabeth and
Alex sit on the couch watching "Nova" on TV.

HOST

(on TV)

So, in effect it is the goal of
string theory to unify our two
existing ideas of how the universe
works.

ALEX

Can I go play now?

ELIZABETH

Don't you like this?

ALEX

No.

Elizabeth is disappointed.

ELIZABETH

Fine. I'll let you know the moment
the universe starts to make sense.

Alex jets off the couch. Elizabeth takes the note from school
out from under the couch cushion and reads it again.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Arlen throws open the door. It is the Fed Ex man.

FEDEX MAN

Forgot one.

He holds out a large manila envelope. Arlen grabs it.

FEDEX MAN

Have a good one, Mr. Faber.

ARLEN

You bet.

FEDEX MAN

Ha! I knew it! You're Arlen Faber?
I can't believe it! I've read "Me
and God" like forty times. My
mother is not going to believe
this. Oh, Lord!

The Fed Ex man stick out his hand. Arlen doesn't shake his
hand so much as he just touches it.

FEDEX MAN

I feel like I just shook hands with
God himself. Mr Faber, could I ask
you a question?...

Arlen sighs and drops his head.

ARLEN

Yes. I'll pray for you. Believe me.

FEDEX MAN

No, that's not my question. Just
one. Please?

ARLEN

One question. On the condition that
you can never, and I mean never
tell anyone that I live here. Swear
it.

FEDEX MAN

I swear it.

He suddenly gets very serious.

FEDEX MAN

Mr. Faber, Is there such a place as
Hell?

ARLEN

Good question. Yes, there is. I
think Mark Twain said it best
really, when he said, and I quote,
"Hell is other people".

He slams the door.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS- DAY

Dahlia rings up a customer as Kris walks up.

KRIS

I'm going to go out and get some
printer ink. Do you need anything?
Like printer ink?

DAHLIA

I'd love some printer ink.

KRIS

Great! I'll go get some.

He opens the front door and leaves just as Elizabeth walks in. Elizabeth walks to a community posting board and puts up a flyer for "Straighten Up Chiropractic". On her way out she stops and walks up to Dahlia.

ELIZABETH

Do you have "Me and God"?

Dahlia gives her a blank stare.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth stands in front of a section marked "Me and God". Arlen's book is prominently displayed as are dozens of books about "Me and God" by other people. "Understanding Me and God- A believers guide", "Unlocking the Secrets of Me and God" etc.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Elizabeth curls up on the couch and opens "Me and God".

INT. KRIS' APARTMENT - DAY

Kris hums as he makes breakfast in the kitchen. Mr. Lucas comes out of his bedroom looking like hell.

KRIS

Hey Dad. I'm making breakfast
burritos. Want one?

MR. LUCAS

No, thanks. Just coffee.

Kris pours coffee into a giant mug and carries it to his Dad. He gets his burrito and they sit at the table. His Dad takes a long pull on the coffee.

MR. LUCAS
Ah, Peet's. Garuda blend. Like
liquid angels.

His eyes clear a bit and he looks at Kris.

MR. LUCAS
You look pretty good these days.

KRIS
I feel pretty good. I'm sleeping a
lot better. I'm a little worried
about the store but I'm not
panicked yet.
(under his breath)
Probably because I'm sober.

MR. LUCAS
Things aren't going well at the
bookstore huh?

KRIS
No. And I don't know what to do
about it.

MR. LUCAS
Bunch of feel good crap if you ask
me. But hey, I love TV. Everybody's
got their vices. But you look good
son. I'm glad.

Kris smiles like it's Christmas.

MR. LUCAS
Are you still going to those A.A.
classes?

KRIS
Um...a couple. It's good
sometimes...I don't know. A lot of
whining, I guess.

MR. LUCAS
Do you think I should go to
something like that?

Kris mouths the word "Yes" but no sound comes out.

MR. LUCAS
Probably a waste of time.

Mr. Lucas gulps his coffee and shrugs. Kris takes a deep
breath.

KRIS

Well, if you want, I could scout it out, you know? Check out a couple and find one that maybe, you know, you might like or something. I could do that. I mean, if you want.

MR. LUCAS

Maybe. We'll see.

He pats Kris on the shoulder. Kris glows.

KRIS

Okay, Dad.

He takes a huge bite of his burrito.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Elizabeth is still on the couch, reading "Me and God". She finishes the last page. She sits, stunned, as the book tumbles from her fingers.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Arlen hides behind a newspaper. He sees Elizabeth's car pull up in front.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Arlen walks to her office but stops just before the window. He gets on his hands and knees and crawls the rest of the way to the front door.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Arlen crawls in.

ARLEN

Oohh... God it's bad. Bad.

ANNE

Elizabeth will be with you in one minute.

ARLEN

I think I can sit.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - LATER

Elizabeth works on Arlen. He is in Heaven. His head is turned to one side so he can see her reflection in the mirror.

ELIZABETH

You really are carrying a lot of tension in your upper back.

ARLEN

That's what they told Atlas. He did Okay.

She lays several hot packs on his back.

ELIZABETH

Just rest there for a few moments.

She walks toward the door. He sneaks a glance at her.

ARLEN

Stay and talk to me.

ELIZABETH

What would you like to talk about.

ARLEN

Let's talk about you.

ELIZABETH

I don't really think that's appropriate.

She quickly sits behind him.

ELIZABETH

I moved to San Francisco two years ago. I like to listen to music and read crime novels.

She chews on her nail.

ELIZABETH

And I have a 6 year old son.

ARLEN

A son?

She nods.

ARLEN

I love kids. They're short, highly emotional people that don't know anything. So, they rely on their creativity and imagination to get by in the world. A world, might I add, filled with giants. An amazing feat.

ELIZABETH

That's...so lovely. I never thought about it like that.

She floats up and drifts to the door again.

ARLEN

Hey, what about me? I'm the one wearing the back oven here. Don't you want to know my story?

She sits.

ARLEN

Thank you. I moved to San Francisco twenty years ago. I am trying to write a book on the history of monsters in movies and literature. One day I hope to find a cure for people who listen to techno. And I hate wind.

ELIZABETH

I read your book.

Arlen whips around on the table. No back problem here.

ARLEN

That's great. I mean, thank you.

ELIZABETH

It was beautiful. You have these amazing conversations with God. You asked all the big questions. But it was the small ones that caught my attention.

Arlen looks a little nervous.

ARLEN

Oh yeah? Why's that?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. Because God answered them I suppose. Like no question was too small for Him. It was comforting.

Arlen lets out a tiny sigh.

ELIZABETH

Can you still talk to God?

She leans close to him. She looks so beautiful. So hopeful.

ARLEN

Yes, Elizabeth. Yes I can.

INT ARLEN'S APARTMENT -CONTINUOUS

There is a knock at the door. And another. And another. Arlen through the peephole. Black. He flings open the door. It is the Fed Ex man.

And his entire family.

FEDEX MAN

Hello, Mr. Arlen Faber. Just wanted to stop by and drop off this letter.

He hands him an envelope.

ARLEN

What are you doing? Who are these people?

FEDEX MAN

Oh, I hope you don't mind. I was out with my family and I remembered that I had this so I...

ARLEN

...told! You told. Liar. You swore!

FEDEX MAN

Don't worry, we just want a moment of your time.

ARLEN

I can't help you. Do you understand? Go away now.

His family doesn't flinch. They radiate something approaching rapture. The Fedex man pulls out a harmonica and plays a "C". The family hums the note to get their pitch.

ARLEN

You've got to be fucking kidding.

FAMILY

(singing)

"The blood of the lamb anoints
us..."

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

At the register Kris talks to a man with a long beard.

KRIS

A lot of people have been asking
for Joseph Campbell but I won't get
any in for two more weeks. Maybe
three.

CUSTOMER

I don't know if I can stay centered
until then.

Kris stares at him blankly. He notices a man enter the store wearing a hat, an overcoat, a fake moustache and carrying a stack of books.

KRIS

Excuse me sir, but you are not
allowed to bring books into the
store but I can hold them for you
up here.

The man pretends not to hear and disappears down an aisle.
Kris comes out from behind the counter.

INT. BOOKSTORE -CONTINUOUS

As the man streaks down an aisle marked "Transcendentalism"
his overcoat billows behind him and his hat flies off. It's
Arlen. Kris closes in behind him.

KRIS

Sir! Sir!

Arlen is frantically putting his books on the shelf. He
places the last book, "Peace is a Promise", then takes off
running.

Kris pushes one of the rolling stools into his path. Arlen hits it full steam and goes sprawling. Kris grabs his overcoat and Arlen spins out of it and heads for the door.

Kris looks down at the overcoat. The label reads, 'Tailored exclusively for Arlen Faber'.

KRIS

No way.

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

Arlen, still wearing the fake moustache, walks through Chinatown. He stops in front of an old brick church.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Arlen enters the church. The sanctuary is lit with hundreds of candles. A handful of people sit in the pews. He drops a five dollar bill in the offering plate and takes a seat.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Arlen moves from row to row. Sitting for a moment, then moving on.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Arlen has now systematically worked his way up to the first pew. He sits with his eyes closed. Waiting.

Nothing. He opens his eyes.

He exits the church then comes back in and snatches his money back from the plate.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Arlen is placing all the books from the hand truck back on the shelf.

The phone rings once. And stops.

A moment later the phone rings twice and stops.

A moment later it rings three times. Arlen answers.

ARLEN

Terry.

INT. TERRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Terry sits at his desk and holds a single piece of paper with handwriting on it.

TERRY

Arlen. Do you make everyone go through that secret phone ring thing or just me? Don't tell me because both answers are bad.

ARLEN

Just you. I'm busy right now, Terry. Can't talk.

Another stack goes on an empty shelf marked, "Mysticism".

TERRY

It's time, Arlen.

ARLEN

No! It is not time! No, it isn't.

TERRY

Yes. It is. We both knew this day would come, and it has. You promised.

ARLEN

I lied to get you to leave me alone and now I want you to go away forever.

TERRY

You promised me a foreword.

ARLEN

I already sent you something.

TERRY

Yes, you did.

Terry holds up the piece of paper.

TERRY

You wrote, "Get your own imaginary friend". Followed by a multiple choice question about Tom Selleck.

ARLEN

Write whatever you want and I'll sign it.

TERRY

Just ask the Big Guy for a couple of words.

ARLEN

He doesn't talk to me! Do you think if God was talking to me I would be talking to you?

TERRY

Who cares! Listen, it's me, Terry. You have ten percent of the God market. Ten percent! And I, the only person alive who loves you, am asking you, Arlen, to please write a couple of pages about the book that you, Arlen, wrote about Him, God.

ARLEN

I've said all I can say.

TERRY

If that's all you have to say then you will be in breach of our contract and you will forfeit all royalties from the sale of "Me and God" from this point on.

He has Arlen's full attention.

ARLEN

You can't do that to me.

TERRY

I am not doing it Arlen, you are. We have let you out of every responsibility, every appearance, every book signing for 25 years! All we're asking for is a couple of pages on the subject. What's so hard about that?

ARLEN

Try it sometime and find out.

He hangs up.

Arlen slams home some books in the "Relationships" section. One catches his eye. It is titled, "101 Ways to Sweep Her Off Her Feet".

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE -DAY

Anne sits behind the desk as Arlen strolls into the office and plops down in a chair. He looks at the magazines and picks up an issue of "US".

ARLEN

I've been thinking about it and I want to give you my phone number.

ANNE

I have a boyfriend.

ARLEN

Not for you! In case...you know, you guys are too busy and have to cancel my appointment. That's the reason.

Anne looks around the empty waiting room.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

It's 415-631-0433.

Anne writes it down in the book.

ARLEN

Do you really have a boyfriend?

ANNE

No.

ARLEN

If you did, would you like to go on walks with him?

ANNE

Yes?

ARLEN

Good.

Elizabeth walks in. He sees her and beams.

ARLEN

Want to walk around?

EXT. WHARF - DAY

Arlen and Elizabeth stand on a pier and look out at the Bay. An elegant clipper ship is anchored just offshore.

ELIZABETH
You don't strike me as the tourist type.

ARLEN
People come from all over the world for this view. I'm just a tourist who stayed.

ELIZABETH
I guess I've gotten used to it already.

Arlen points toward the sky.

ARLEN
Well, you know what He says?

ELIZABETH
What?

He looks into her eyes.

ARLEN
"For you and you alone I have made this place. A kaleidoscope of wonder for you to keep your eye upon, as I turn, turn the world."

She tears her eyes away, breaking the spell.

ELIZABETH
I like that. But, it makes me feel kind of dizzy.

ARLEN
You know what? Me too.

Arlen starts weaving and spinning like a drunk man in a sea storm.

ARLEN
Make it stop! Stop the "kaleidoscope of wonder".

Elizabeth laughs. People stare at Arlen's antics.

ELIZABETH
I should really get back.

Arlen rights himself and they walk toward the city.

EXT. KRIS' APARTMENT -DUSK

Kris stands at the apartment door listening to his father yelling and swearing inside. Drunk. Kris sits on the floor of the hallway and covers his ears with Arlen's coat.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - LATER

Arlen and Elizabeth have arrived back at her office.

ELIZABETH
We're here.

ARLEN
Thanks for going on a walk with me.

ELIZABETH
Thank you, Arlen Faber.

Arlen turns and walks up the street. Every few feet he staggers a little or leans way off to one side. She laughs.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

Kris walks the street holding Arlen's overcoat. He spots a FedEx guy.

KRIS
Do you know where Arlen Faber lives?

FEDEX MAN
Yes!

He points dramatically at a luxury apartment building.

FEDEX MAN
Eighth floor. Corner. Bridge side.

KRIS
Thanks.

FEDEX MAN
He threw water on my family.

KRIS
I'm sorry, what did you say?

FEDEX MAN
We were singing to him and he threw
a bucket of water on us.

Kris hides a smile.

FEDEX MAN
Be careful with him. Maybe he wrote
"Me and God" but he sure as Hell
didn't read it.

INT ARLEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Arlen peers through the peephole and sees his name on the
overcoat label.

He opens the door.

KRIS
So you're Arlen Faber?

ARLEN
You had no idea I'd be this
handsome, did you?

KRIS
I really liked your book....

ARLEN
I know...

KRIS
...but I need to be straight with
you right now.

Arlen sees this kid is dead serious.

ARLEN
Shoot.

ARLEN
I can't accept any books right now.
And it seems you really want to get
rid of some books.

ARLEN
Noticed, did you.

KRIS

I'm willing to make you a deal. I could use a little advice now and then. Even from someone as obviously crazy as yourself. So here's what I propose. I will let you trade me books for questions.

ARLEN

I have a question. Can you guess how much I hate this idea?

KRIS

More than you would hate every single new age patchouli oil smelling yoga practicing fanatic who comes into my store knowing where you live?

Silence.

KRIS

At one point in your life you seemed to have a handle on things and I might hear something I could use. And right now I could use anything. C'mon, three books per visit and no one knows you're here. Except for the guy whose family you drenched.

Arlen leaves Kris standing at the door. He returns carrying a small stack of books.

ARLEN

Five books and you don't get to argue with me. You ask. I answer. That's it.

He hands the books to Kris.

KRIS

Deal.

ARLEN

Now, if we've completed our little Faustian bargain I would like to go back inside and weep for the life I used to have.

KRIS

But I didn't ask -

ARLEN
Yes, you did.

He slams the door.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Arlen lays on the table as Elizabeth works her magic.

ELIZABETH
How are we doing today?

ARLEN
Good. Good. I mean, a little stiff
but better. You?

ELIZABETH
I'm great.

ARLEN
Yeah? How's that?

ELIZABETH
My son got a four on his paper
yesterday and I am great.

ARLEN
Whatever happened to an "A"? Why
isn't a one perfect? Four?

ELIZABETH
He'll be here in a few minutes and
you can ask him yourself.

INT. WAITING ROOM -LATER

Arlen and Elizabeth enter from the treatment room. Alex is
sitting in a chair reading.

ELIZABETH
Alex, this is Arlen. Arlen, this is
my son Alex.

She is nervous. She wants this to go well.

ARLEN
Word on the street is you got a
"four"? Any truth to that?

ALEX
Yes.

ARLEN
 Congratulations.

Arlen sticks out his hand for Alex to shake. They do.

ARLEN
 It was very nice meeting you.
 Elizabeth walks Arlen out the door.

ARLEN
 Great kid.

ELIZABETH
 Thank you.

ARLEN
 Hey, you want to know something
 nice about shaking hands with
 little people?

ELIZABETH
 Um...okay.

ARLEN
 They see us shaking hands but they
 don't know we squeeze the other
 person's hand. So, they just hold
 hands with you for a couple of
 seconds.

ELIZABETH
 That's cool.

ARLEN
 Yeah, it really is. See you soon.

He walks off. Elizabeth watches him go.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth walks up to Alex and sticks out her hand. Alex
 takes it.

ELIZABETH
 That's so cool.

ALEX
 Why is everybody shaking my hand?

INT. HALLWAY -MORNING

Arlen is wearing his pajamas and drinking coffee. He bends down to get his paper and sees Kris' shoes.

KRIS

Why can't I do the things I want to do? There is so much I feel I am capable of but never actually do. Why is that?

ARLEN

The trick is to realize that you are always doing what you want. Always. No one is making you do anything. Once you get that you see that you are free and that life is really just a series of choices. Nothing "happens" to you. You choose.

Arlen walks back into the apartment and comes out with several books which he hands to Kris.

KRIS

Hey! There's seven books here!

ARLEN

Pre-coffee penalty. Two extra books.

He slams the door.

EXT. HALLWAY - DAY

Arlen opens the door.

KRIS

If God made everything then why are some things bad? Like, for example, the whole pain and suffering thing.

ARLEN

Opposites. Without things that suck you would have no idea what "good" was and therefore be directionless. You smell shit and you walk the other way.

He hands a stack of books to Kris and slams the door.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

KRIS

Do I have a destiny or is it all
free will?

ARLEN

Do you have any idea how difficult
it is to try and answer these
questions, given the time
constraint that I have, because I
want you to go away?

KRIS

Destiny, or free will?

ARLEN

Free will moving toward or away
from a purpose.

Books. Door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kris has a bad cold and blows his red nose.

KRIS

...so she said that I must have
wanted to get a cold from her. So I
gave this cold to myself.

ARLEN

That would mean that you gave her
her cold so you could catch it from
her.

Kris stares uncomprehending.

ARLEN

Oh! Too fast for you?

Kris nods.

ARLEN

Too bad.

He throws some books on the floor and slams the door.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE -DAY

Elizabeth unlocks the front door. She looks down and sees a package on the sidewalk. She opens it. It is a kaleidoscope.

Elizabeth leafs through the appointment log. She finds what she is looking for and picks up the phone.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arlen watches "An American Werewolf in London". On the screen David Naughton is screaming as he goes through the transformation. The phone rings. He answers it, keeping his eyes glued to the screen.

ARLEN

Hello.

ELIZABETH

Can I speak to Arlen Faber please?

ARLEN

Gone. Packed everything he owns.
Something about "trouble in
Liberia".

ELIZABETH

Oh.

Arlen grimaces along with every cracking bone.

ELIZABETH

Could you give him a message for
me?

No response from Arlen. She hears the screaming from the movie.

ELIZABETH

This is Elizabeth, his chiropractor
and...

Arlen snaps off the TV.

ARLEN

Hey! It's me. I'm here, I'm here.

ELIZABETH

Hey, what was all that screaming?

ARLEN

New yoga tape. Extreme transformational yoga from London.

She takes a big breath and squeezes her eyes shut.

ELIZABETH

What are you doing for lunch?

ARLEN

I have some things to finish up here...working on a new foreward for the book you know..and then I'll come down.

ELIZABETH

How's the foreward going?

ARLEN

It's..divine.

EXT. FISHERMAN'S WHARF -DAY

Arlen and Elizabeth stroll along the far end of the wharf. It is more deserted here. Arlen is looking at a caricature of the two of them drawn by a sidewalk artist.

ARLEN

(off drawing)

That looks like you but I look like an ad for fiber.

ELIZABETH

I like it. Get back to the Dalai Lama story.

ARLEN

Oh right. So, after we're done his Holiness the Dalia Lama, looks at me and says, "Tell Him I said Hi."

ELIZABETH

That's amazing. I can't believe you met him.

She sees something in the distance.

ELIZABETH

Let's do something fun.

EXT. THIRD EYE PSYCHIC -MOMENTS LATER

Elizabeth has his hand and is trying to drag him in the door.

ARLEN

These people just make up arbitrary generalized bullshit. They're the Fox News of the spiritual world.

ELIZABETH

C'mon. It won't be so bad. You said, and I quote, "It is important for us to be open to the mystery and therefore acknowledge that we are a part of it."

ARLEN

Oh. Right.

INT THIRD EYE PSYCHIC -CONTINUOUS

Arlen and Elizabeth enter a waiting room with candles and scarves hanging on all the walls.

ARLEN

Call the police. I think somebody blew up Stevie Nicks.

A beaded curtain parts and a beautiful Middle Eastern woman comes out.

PSYCHIC

Are you here for a reading?

ELIZABETH

Yes. I'd like a palm reading.

PSYCHIC

Ah, yes. Many couples come to learn about the other.

Arlen looks a little alarmed. The psychic motions for Elizabeth to follow.

ELIZABETH

No. Not me. Him.

ARLEN

What! No way.

ELIZABETH

Why not?

ARLEN

It um...conflicts with my beliefs.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't think.

(to psychic)

I'm sorry. We have to go.

PSYCHIC

Some other time then.

EXT. THIRD EYE PSYCHIC - MOMENTS LATER

Arlen and Elizabeth are on the street.

ELIZABETH

Hey, listen. We should get back.

ARLEN

You go ahead. I have some things to do.

ELIZABETH

Oh. Okay. So I'll see you soon, I guess.

ARLEN

Yep.

Elizabeth walks off, a little hurt. Arlen watches her go and then walks away. Fast.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Arlen makes his way back to Third Eye Psychic. He looks around like he's being followed before ducking in the door.

INT. THIRD EYE PSYCHIC - CONTINUOUS

Arlen walks into the waiting room.

ARLEN

Hello?

Nothing. He moves toward the beaded curtain and sweeps it aside. The psychic sits at the table waiting for him. She gestures at the empty chair. Arlen takes a seat..

Arlen reluctantly holds out his hand. She studies it saying "Ooh", "I see", and "tch tch".

ARLEN

Is it cancer? It is, isn't it?

She is engrossed in a line on his palm. She looks from his palm and back to him several times.

ARLEN

Is this part of the five minutes or does that begin when you start talking?

She sets his hand down.

PSYCHIC

You do not need to know your future.

ARLEN

What kind of cop out is that?

PSYCHIC

You do not need to know your future because you have no future.

ARLEN

It is cancer! Oh my God!

PSYCHIC

No. You live in the past. Your path is empty. This loop.

She points to a whorl on his hand.

PSYCHIC

You have been hurt. You are angry. And now you only go in a circle.

ARLEN

That's ridiculous. Not true. Not true at all.

The psychic looks at him for a long moment.

PSYCHIC

I'll tell you something else, if you want to know.

Arlen nods.

PSYCHIC
Do you like her?

He shrugs. Nods.

PSYCHIC
You will hurt her. You can't help it.

ARLEN
No I won't.

She leans in.

PSYCHIC
You already have Arlen.

At the mention of his name he jumps up.

ARLEN
How do you know my name? I'm not going to hurt her. I'm not. And I'm not going to pay you either.

PSYCHIC
I know.

He backs out of the seance room.

INT. A.A. MEETING - NIGHT

The room is lit by small votives that sit on the table. Kris sits in a dark corner by himself. A man (TY) is speaking.

TY
It's been hard. Sometimes I take it a day at a time and sometimes it's five minutes at a time. It all just seems so overwhelming, you know?

Kris has his defenses up, but Ty is getting through.

TY
So many times I wanted to stop but it was like I didn't have any defense against it, you know? I hated it but I couldn't stop. And now I kinda' feel like that about life. I want to stop it. To step out. To get out of my body.

(MORE)

TY(cont'd)

But I'm stuck here. I'm here all the time and I have to find a way to make that bearable. So, I take care of my body, my heart and my mind. And I'm not going to stop because I'm not sure which one is keeping me sober. That's all from me.

Everyone claps. Kris is gone.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arlen stares at the phone. He snatches it up and dials. He waits for the answering machine to finish.

ARLEN

Hello Straighten Up Chiropractic.
This is Arlen...

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Elizabeth and Anne are listening to Arlen's message.

ARLEN

(on machine)

...Elizabeth, I'm sorry I didn't walk you back today. I don't usually go for walks with people and ...I forget the protocol.

(faraway)

What the hell am I talking about?

(back on machine)

I know that there is no walk protocol per se. I mean, what would that be? What could that be?

Long silence. In the back ground Arlen can be heard swearing.

ARLEN

(back on machine)

I hate answering machines for this very reason. They're like life. You can't take anything back. I would like to...go out with you. I would like to go out with you. Did I already say that? Tomorrow night. And I hope that you will call me back...on my phone...the one here...at my home...Fuck!

He hangs up. Elizabeth picks up the phone and dials.

ANNE
That was...

ELIZABETH
(on phone)
Yes.

ANNE
...weird.

ELIZABETH
Play it again.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -DAY

Arlen, in an ornate robe, sits in the lotus position on the floor. Sweat pours down his face as hundreds of candles blaze all around him. A meditation CD plays on the stereo.

VOICE
Are you ready to take control of
your life?

ARLEN
Yes.

VOICE
There is one who has all the
answers. All you have to do is
ask....ask....ask.

ARLEN
What if I fuck up this-

VOICE
Ask. The answers are inside of you.

ARLEN
I want her to like me but-

VOICE
Peace is your birthright. Ask and
you shall receive.

ARLEN
Why do you keep interrupting-

VOICE
Wisdom is like a fox in winter and
the ice is where he dances.

ARLEN
You're a prick in any season and
this is where I check out.

He reaches for the stereo and the sleeve of his robe bursts
into flame.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Arlen is dressed in a black suit and ready to go. He throws
open the door and finds Kris, hand raised, ready to knock.

ARLEN
Kris. I'm going out. I can't tell
you why we dream or help you
"manifest" sanity. Gotta go. Maybe
tomorrow.

Arlen starts to close the door.

KRIS
I'm trying to stay sober and I live
with my Dad who won't stop
drinking. How can I love him even
though he is selfish and scaring
me?

Arlen stops. Not what he was expecting.

ARLEN
Um...man that's hard. I guess what
is getting in the way is your
expectations. If he would do X then
you would be happy. Doesn't work
that way. I think you have to let
go of that and maybe what you want
will happen and maybe it won't.
Either way you're better off. And
you should go to A.A. meetings.

Kris nods his head slowly.

KRIS
It's hard.

ARLEN
Yes, it is.

They stand there for a long beat.

KRIS
Don't you have some books you want
to give me?

ARLEN
Oh, yeah. Okay.

He leaves and comes back with the books. Kris turns to go.

ARLEN
Hey, I'm sorry about when we met.
That lap dancing piercing festival
comment. I didn't know you were
having such a hard time.

KRIS
So you're only awful to people who
don't have problems? Good to know.

He walks away leaving Arlen alone in the doorway.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

Arlen is at the door. Preparing himself to knock.

ARLEN
(to himself)
I am ready to take control of my
life.

He closes his eyes and raises his arms in the touchdown
position just as Elizabeth opens the door.

ELIZABETH
I thought I heard you. What are you
doing?

ARLEN
Stretching. I stretch before I...
knock. It's an old sports injury
from when I played...a sport.

He lowers his arms. Elizabeth steps back and Arlen enters.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -CONTINUOUS

Arlen looks around her modest apartment. She has done a nice
job of decorating. He takes in the sponge painted wall, the
Christmas lights.

ELIZABETH
Anne, we're going.

Anne and Alex come around the corner.

ALEX
Hi, Arlen.

ARLEN
Hi, Alex.

Alex sticks out his hand for Arlen to shake. They do.

ARLEN
Hey, Anne. You wear a lot of hats.

ANNE
I'm sorry did you just say "You
care a lot for cats"?

ARLEN
No.

They all stand in an awkward silence.

ELIZABETH
(to Alex)
Okay baby. Mommy's going out now.
Don't forget to brush your teeth.
I'll give you a kiss when I come
home, which won't be late.

Alex nods.

ELIZABETH
(to Anne)
He needs to brush for at least one
minute. Make sure his bedroom
window is closed and locked. If he
wants a late night snack he can
have an apple but make sure you
wash it first. He can watch TV for
thirty minutes but only the
channels that aren't blocked. Call
me if you need anything. And
there's just a couple more things I
jotted down.

Elizabeth hands Anne a long list, black with print.

ANNE
Thank you.

Elizabeth gives Alex a hug.

ELIZABETH
I love you, Alex.

ALEX
I love you too, Mom.

Arlen watches this display with growing discomfort.

ARLEN
The Air Force should be dropping
supplies in the next couple of days
so just try and hold on till then.

Elizabeth shoves him out the door.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth looks torn.

ARLEN
Hey, I like the wall in the living
room. Looks like a dream of a
sunset Van Gogh might have had.

ELIZABETH
Yeah. I guess it does. Take me out,
Arlen.

Arlen offers her his arm and they walk down the hall.

INT. JAZZ AT PEARL'S -NIGHT

Arlen and Elizabeth sit at a booth while a piano player plays
a heartfelt version of "On the Street Where You Live".

ELIZABETH
This is nice. I haven't been out on
a date in forever.

Arlen registers the word "date" and beams.

ARLEN
How did you become a chiropractor?

ELIZABETH
I was at my chiropractor's and he
was adjusting me and he slipped on
something on the floor. I'm not
sure what it was.

ARLEN
Medical waste?

She laughs.

ELIZABETH
Probably. So he goes down hard and he can't get up. So I bend down and I start rubbing his shoulder to loosen the knot up and he says that I have magic fingers and I should think about it as a career.

ARLEN
And a legend is born! It's helping people that brings true joy.

ELIZABETH
I like that we have that in common.

They clink glasses.

ARLEN
Tell me about Alexander.

ELIZABETH
Well, first he hates being called Alexander. Alex. Just Alex. He's great. He's a great kid. He keeps me together just by being around, you know?

ARLEN
What happened to his Dad?

ELIZABETH
His Dad took him for a walk in the park and told him he had to go away and that he would be back in two weeks. Two weeks! Before I knew it two weeks turned into three years. Alex missed him a lot at first but I think he has gotten over it. I don't think he even remembers.

The piano player begins playing "Isn't It Romantic". Arlen screams.

ARLEN
Oh No! Fuck No!

ELIZABETH
Oh my God! Are you alright?

ARLEN

Don't move.

Arlen walks over to the piano player.

ARLEN

If you don't stop playing that song
I will chew through my wrists.

He puts a hundred dollar bill in the jar.

Arlen turns and sees Elizabeth waiting for him in the candle light. She is fiddling with her napkin. Nervous and beautiful. He walks back to the table.

ARLEN

Where were we?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. I feel funny...

ARLEN

It's Okay. I'm listening.
(pointing upward)
"He's" listening.

She gathers herself.

ELIZABETH

It's just that having a kid
is...I'm so freaked out all the
time that I'm not doing everything
that I'm...freaked out all the
time! I'm afraid that feeling like
I'm not doing enough is turning me
into someone I don't want to be.
And I don't know how to stop it.

Tears fill her eyes.

ELIZABETH

You don't know what it's like to
have something pulling at you all
the time. Not Alex. But the idea
that you're not doing enough. That
you're not enough.

She laughs.

ELIZABETH

Don't tell "Him" I said that Okay.
I feel stupid enough already.

Arlen takes her hands in his and leans toward her.

ARLEN

He knows. And He wants you to know
that you are enough and so much
more. You have no idea. You are
here so God can experience the
world through your eyes. See what
you see. Feel what you feel.

It is clear that Arlen is talking about himself now.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

Everyday God can't wait to see what
you'll do. What makes you laugh.
What moves you. He can't wait.
You serve such an important
purpose. Everyday, through you, he
falls in love with the world all
over again. Elizabeth, you're His
muse.

For Elizabeth, the world fades away.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -LATER

Arlen and Elizabeth enter the apartment. Arlen flips the
light switch and the room takes on a soft glow. The
twinkling lights of the Golden Gate Bridge are framed in the
windows.

ELIZABETH

Oh my God. It's so beautiful.

ARLEN

Yes, it is.

ELIZABETH

I bet you could have some great
parties here.

ARLEN

No parties.

ELIZABETH

What do you mean?

ARLEN

What do you mean?

ELIZABETH

Parties. Here. Great.

ARLEN

No one has been in here for five years...

ELIZABETH

Five years!

ARLEN

...since my father died.

ELIZABETH

Oh. I'm so sorry.

ARLEN

Me too.

She walks around the living room stopping to appreciate each piece of art. She touches the pillows, runs her hand across picture frames, and opens the lid on the piano and reaches for the keys.

ARLEN

Don't touch that!

Startled, she closes the lid.

She goes to the telescope by the window and looks through it. She slowly realizes she is looking at her office.

ELIZABETH

Arlen, do you watch me go to work?

ARLEN

Would that be creepy?

ELIZABETH

It might be.

ARLEN

Then I don't. Hey, I want to show you something.

He walks down the hallway and after one more look at the bridge, she follows.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -CONTINUOUS

Arlen stands in front of his office door.

ARLEN

This is my office.

ELIZABETH
I can read the sign.

She points to the sign above the door that reads "Arlen's Office" He opens the door. In the darkness the only thing visible is the head of the monster from "Alien". Elizabeth screams.

ARLEN
No, it's cool. It's cool. They're just models. See?

He turns on the light. Elizabeth steps slowly in.

ARLEN
I kinda' collect them.

She reaches out to touch one then pulls her hand back.

ELIZABETH
Can I...

ARLEN
Oh, yeah. Go ahead.

She picks up a pristine werewolf model and stares at it.

ARLEN
So, you know, I kept my models from when I was a kid and over the years I would pick up another one at a garage sale or a...
(under his breath)
...science fiction expo. And I really like them and I think I have a pretty good collection. If...you like that...sort of thing. Maybe not. You know, it's not for everybody. It's dumb, I guess. We should go.

She is touched by his sweetness. She puts a hand on his shoulder.

ELIZABETH
I love them. I think they're wonderful.

ARLEN
You do?

Arlen swells with pride.

ELIZABETH

But, why are they all crammed into this little room. Why don't you spread them around. God knows you have the space.

ARLEN

Don't you think it would look silly to have the demon from "PumpkinHead" next to an original Erte?

She walks out with the werewolf.

ARLEN

Woah! Where are you going?

He follows her out to the living room and sets the model on the piano.

ELIZABETH

There. That's better.

Arlen begins to panic.

ARLEN

But I don't want it there. I want it back with the other monsters.

ELIZABETH

Just leave it here for a while. Consider it an experiment.

Arlen looks worse. Elizabeth slowly moves toward him.

ELIZABETH

Arlen. Can I ask you a question?

Arlen doesn't take his eyes off the werewolf but nods.

ELIZABETH

Why are there signs above all the doors?

ARLEN

Because my Dad had Alzheimer's and in the end it was hard for him to remember things. The signs helped. For a while.

ELIZABETH

Oh. I'm sorry. Can I ask you another question?

Arlen looks very uncomfortable but nods.

ELIZABETH
Am I the first girl to see your
monsters?

Another nod. She moves closer until they are face to face.
The soft light of the room dances in her eyes.

ARLEN
What are you doing?

ELIZABETH
You caught me off guard tonight.

She is so close their lips are almost touching.

ELIZABETH
Thank you for bringing me here.

She kisses him. He kisses back. Then...

ARLEN
I'm sorry. Just give me one second.
Don't go away.

He scurries over to the werewolf, picks it up, heads down the hallway. Suddenly he stops and turns slowly back toward Elizabeth.

ARLEN
I'm blowing it, aren't I?

ELIZABETH
No. I love it when I'm kissing
someone and they leave me to
protect a plastic toy.

Arlen gathers himself, sets the model down, and goes to her.

ARLEN
But I kiss so much better knowing
they're safe.

He pulls her into his arms and kisses her passionately. In the distance a fog horn rings out.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Arlen stands at the front of the church singing "My Way" at the top of his lungs.

ARLEN

(singing)

"And through it all when there was
doubt. I ate it up and spit it out.
The record shows, I took the blows,
and did it my waaaaayyyyyy.
My Waaaaaayyyyyyyyyy."

He bows to the empty pews.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS - DAY

Kris walks by the community posting board and spots
Elizabeth's flyer. He takes it down, studies it, and walks
out the door.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - LATER

Kris stands by the table. Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH

Hi. I'm Elizabeth.

KRIS

Kris.

ELIZABETH

What can I do for you today?

KRIS

I don't really have a back problem
I was just hoping this might...do
something.

ELIZABETH

Open the channels.

KRIS

Yeah, that.

She goes to work.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - LATER

Kris gets off the table.

ELIZABETH

You really have a lot of knots in
your neck.

She reaches for an appointment book.

ELIZABETH

I recommend...

Kris is gone.

INT. A.A. MEETING HALL - DAY

A dozen or so men sit at cafeteria tables in an old hall. Through the high windows shafts of light pierce the darkness.

Kris sits in the back and looks at the people in the meeting. There is a man with a large ratty beard. A pretty woman with a lot of tatoos. A guy in a wheelchair. A man in a suit. A motley crew. An older man (ROY) is speaking.

ROY

I've gotta' just remember to let
that shit go, you know what I mean?
I mean it's just a car, right? It's
not life or death.

Several members nod.

ROY

It wasn't that long ago if somebody
cut me off I would go on a three
day binge. And now, I just pray
silently for their death.

One of the men shouts, "Progress". Everyone cracks up. A thin man wearing glasses stands.

PERRY

My name is Perry and I am an
alcoholic.

GROUP

Hey Perry / Hi Perry / Perry

PERRY

That's all the time we have unless
anyone has a burning desire?

No one raises their hand.

PERRY

What about you? The newcomer.

He points at Kris.

KRIS

Nope.

PERRY

You sure? Nothing?

The group turns its attention to Kris.

KRIS

Fine. You want me to say something?
How about this? I fucking hate
this. I fucking hate that I have to
be here. And I fucking hate all of
you and your pathetic little
stories. I can't believe that this
is where I've ended up. It's
fucked! I'm fucked. And you're
fucked too!

Silence.

GROUP

Right on / Yep / I hear that

Kris looks around and sees nothing but smiles and
understanding. Disgusted, he storms out.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Arlen is walking Elizabeth and Alex to their car. They can't
take their eyes off each other.

ARLEN

Listen, I've got a great plan. I
think what I'll do is run around at
night tripping the locals, thereby
throwing their backs out of
alignment. Tough work, but the Lord
needs soldiers.

ELIZABETH

I love it . When can you start?

They hold hands for a split second out of Alex's view as
Elizabeth opens the back door. Arlen looks on in horror as
Alex straps himself into his complicated car seat.

ARLEN

Gee, are you sure he's safe?

He leans in the car.

ARLEN

Good luck on the moon. We always
knew you could do it.

Arlen gives Alex a salute and Alex giggles. Elizabeth shuts
the door and whirls around.

ELIZABETH

Are you making fun of my son?

ARLEN

No, I'm making fun of that
Inquisition holdover of a car seat.
One more strap and I think you can
get him to confess.

ELIZABETH

It protects him.

Arlen holds his hands up in the "I surrender" position.

She gets in the car and slams the door. As the car pulls out
Alex smiles and gives Arlen a salute. Arlen salutes back.

INT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

Elizabeth is finished setting the table and walks to Alex's
room. She hears him talking and peeks inside. Alex is sitting
on the floor. His toys are in a line and facing him.

ALEX

No, no, no. You're playing too
hard. You'll get hurt. You can do
better.

He places a band-aid on one of the trucks.

ALEX

You can do better.

Elizabeth runs back to the kitchen. She is upset.

ELIZABETH

Alex. Dinner.

INT. HALLWAY -MORNING

Arlen and Kris sit in the hallway drinking coffee.

KRIS

And what's the deal with Heaven and Hell anyway?

ARLEN

I've seen Hell. And it's name is Reno, Nevada.

They clink mugs.

KRIS

I can't believe that God would punish people for not believing in him.

ARLEN

Ah, the Rapture.

KRIS

What's that?

ARLEN

I like to think of it as a monster movie. The monster destroys some people and spares others.

KRIS

Who is the monster?

ARLEN

God. God is the monster.

EXT. STREET -DAY

Arlen walks down the street. He is humming to himself when he spots something. A look of disgust crosses his face.

ARLEN

Oh, no way.

Anne is standing on the street corner handing out flyers. She is dressed as a giant spine. Her face sticks out from between two vertebra. Arlen approaches her. She can't meet his eyes.

ARLEN

What are you doing?

ANNE

Elizabeth said that we needed to get the word out.

ARLEN

Nobody wants to talk to a spine!

ANNE

We're offering a discount.

ARLEN

A spine?

ANNE

I don't mind.

Arlen walks into "Straighten Up" as Elizabeth is coming out of the treatment room with a patient.

ARLEN

A spine?!?

PATIENT

(to Arlen)

Did the spine make you come in here too?

ELIZABETH

I'll see you next week, Mr. Mankowicz.

She hustles him out the door. Arlen points at Anne.

ARLEN

She looks like a pinata at a mortician's convention.

He points out the window.

Anne has fallen on her side and is struggling to get up but can't. People cut her a wide swath. Most of them are laughing. Arlen and Elizabeth rush out to help her.

They try to help her up but she can't get her feet underneath her because the costume is too tight around her ankles. They end up dragging her into the store.

Once inside they set her on a chair.

ARLEN

Hang in there, Anne. I think we have a bone saw around here somewhere.

Elizabeth laughs in spite of herself. They start to pull the costume off over her head.

ELIZABETH

Be careful not to hyperextend the fifth vertebra.

They are both laughing now. Finally, still cracking up, they pull the costume off.

Their laughter stops. Anne's face is crimson with embarrassment and her eyes are filled with tears.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Anne. Oh sweetie, I'm sorry.

Anne can't look at them and tears roll down her cheeks. Elizabeth reaches for her but she pulls back.

ANNE

(a whisper)

I think I'd like to go home now.

ELIZABETH

But who will watch the...

Arlen makes a face, "Come on".

ELIZABETH

Okay honey-

A sob breaks loose from Anne and she bolts up and runs out the door.

ARLEN

That sucked.

ELIZABETH

What am I going to do with Alex ?

Alex walks in and sees the giant spine costume on the floor. His eyes bug out in horror. She rushes over to him.

ELIZABETH

No, honey. Not real, not real.
Honey, you're going to have to hang out here by yourself for a while.
Mommy's got a few more patients so just do your homework Okay?

Without a word, Alex quietly gets his books out and sits at the reception desk. Arlen walks to the door. He stops.

ARLEN

He can come with me for a bit.

ALEX
I want to go with Arlen, Mom.

ELIZABETH
NO!

ARLEN
Why did you say it like that?

ELIZABETH
Did I yell that? I meant to say it softly.

ALEX
Let me go, Mom.

ELIZABETH
Alright. Just to the park.

Alex jumps up and heads for the door.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Don't take your eyes off him.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Kids play and scream. Arlen and Alex sit on a bench. Alex watches the kids play.

A long beat.

ALEX
I don't ever want to step on a nail.

ARLEN
Got it.

A long beat.

ALEX
In your house do you have a favorite towel?

ARLEN
Yes.

A long beat.

ALEX
I can read upside down.

ARLEN

Hey, I've got something for you.

He hands Alex a tiny model of the space shuttle. Some letters have been added so it reads, "USAlex".

ARLEN (CONT'D)

A proper vehicle for future missions.

Alex looks at it with wonder.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

Are you waiting for something? Go play already.

ALEX

Can I?

ARLEN

Yes. Get out of here.

With a cry of joy Alex shoots off the bench like a rocket.

ARLEN

(calling after him)

I don't really have a favorite towel.

ALEX

Me, neither.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arlen and Elizabeth are kissing on the couch.

ARLEN

Remind me to thank Ryan for baby-sitting.

He leans in for another kiss. The phone rings once. Arlen ignores it.

The phone rings twice.

ELIZABETH

Aren't you going to get that?

ARLEN

No.

The phone rings three times.

ELIZABETH

Sounds important. I'll get it.

Arlen rises to stop her. There is a knock on the door.

ELIZABETH

Popular.

Arlen opens the door a crack. It is Kris.

ARLEN

(whispering)

Now is not a good time.

Kris doesn't move.

ARLEN

I said now is not a.....

KRIS

My Dad died today.

Arlen is speechless. Elizabeth comes to the door.

ELIZABETH

Kris?

KRIS

Elizabeth?

ARLEN

You can't know each other.

ELIZABETH

Sort of. Kris came into the office.

ARLEN

You can't know each other.

KRIS

My Dad died today.

ELIZABETH

Oh, my God.

KRIS

I didn't know where else to go so I came here. I know it's not our regular time so you can give me extra books if you want.

ELIZABETH

What's he talking about?

ARLEN
Nothing. Kris, now is not a good
time. We were just...

KRIS
I need to sit down. Can I come in.

ELIZABETH
Of course.

ARLEN
No!

Elizabeth gives Arlen a shocked look and opens the door for
Kris.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

KRIS
I'm so thirsty.

ELIZABETH
Arlen, will you get him some water
please?

ARLEN
Yeah, alright.

ARLEN
Have a seat. I'll be right back.

INT. KITCHEN -CONTINUOUS

Arlen holds a glass under the faucet. His hand is shaking. He
takes the water out to the living room and hands it to Kris.

KRIS
Thank you.

He drinks it all in one long gulp.

KRIS
I came home and found him. He had
been sitting at the table doing a
crossword puzzle. He never does
crossword puzzles.

Arlen sits.

KRIS (CONT'D)

I needed someone to talk to and I came...here.

ARLEN

Kris just got out of re-hab.

ELIZABETH

Are you Okay?

Kris shrugs.

ARLEN

Let's not talk. Let's just sit here. That's a good idea.

Elizabeth ignores him.

ELIZABETH

What did you mean about "extra books"?

KRIS

I own a little book store, "Well Read Books".

ELIZABETH

(to Arlen)

That's where I bought your book.

ARLEN

Perfect.

KRIS

Arlen tried to sell back some books but I couldn't afford to buy them so he freaked out and now I go to his house and exchange books for questions.

Arlen shakes his head "don't say that".

ELIZABETH

He makes you pay for your questions with books?

ARLEN

Totally fair.

Elizabeth looks at Arlen like he's a stranger.

ELIZABETH

No, it isn't. It's awful.

ARLEN

You haven't heard the questions.

KRIS

Arlen, I can't feel anything.
Nothing. I should feel something,
shouldn't I?

Arlen freezes. Elizabeth waits for him to say something.
When she realizes he isn't going to respond she takes Kris' hand and turns her back to Arlen.

ELIZABETH

Do you like working at the bookstore?

KRIS

I love the bookstore. All those ideas that somebody cared enough about to put all that work into. I could never do anything like that.

She starts to massage his hand.

KRIS (CONT'D)

Sometimes I like to stand in the middle of the store at night and imagine that I am surrounded by all those authors. I close my eyes and pretend they are trying to tell me something.

Elizabeth moves up to his arm now, hitting all the pressure points. She is listening intently.

ARLEN

They are. They're saying "Give me your money".

Elizabeth ignores him.

ELIZABETH

What else, Kris? What else do you love about it?

And now she is massaging Kris' shoulder with deep kneading movements.

KRIS

I love that I feel safe there.

ELIZABETH

Safe from what?

Elizabeth moves closer to Kris. Her hands now work on both shoulders, his neck, his back. His eyes have a faraway look.

KRIS
I don't know.

ELIZABETH
Yes, you do.

KRIS
No.

ELIZABETH
You can tell me. Safe from what.

KRIS
Safe from being scared all the time. All the time. I get so tired of it. I get so tired of being scared. I just...I...

Elizabeth rubs his back with a swirling motion with her left hand. Her right hand rests on his chest directly over his heart. Kris looks at her with desperate heartbroken eyes.

KRIS
My Dad died today.

ELIZABETH
I know, baby.

Kris starts sobbing and Elizabeth holds him. On the other side of the room Arlen watches.

ARLEN
(with awe)
Isn't that something.

EXT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT- LATER

Kris is leaving and all three of them stand on the sidewalk in front of Arlen's apartment building.

KRIS
Thanks Elizabeth. That was amazing.
You're amazing.

ELIZABETH
Are you going to be Okay?

He nods.

ELIZABETH

And come by this week. Free adjustment.

Arlen looks nervous. Kris and Elizabeth hug. Kris then hugs Arlen. Arlen's hands hang in the air. He sees Elizabeth looking at him and he wraps his arms around Kris.

ARLEN

Hey! I'm around you know. If you need anything. You can come by.

KRIS

We'll see.

He walks off leaving Arlen and Elizabeth at the door.

ARLEN

Hey, do you want to...

ELIZABETH

I need to go.

She walks a few steps, then stops.

ELIZABETH

You said the biggest joy in your life was helping people.

ARLEN

Um... it is.

ELIZABETH

Kris needed help tonight and you wanted to send him away.

Arlen searches for an explanation.

ARLEN

Great job, by the way. Incredible.

ELIZABETH

But Kris didn't come here to see me. He came to see you.

She walks away.

Arlen turns around and watches Kris walk down the street until he can't see him anymore.

INT. KRIS'S APARTMENT - DAY

Kris has cleaned the place up. It looks nice. He scrubs the floor like a man possessed. His eye falls on the pantry. He opens it and inside is a bottle with a couple of inches left in it. It begins to cast its spell on him.

KRIS
(breaking it)
And then what?

He slams the door and leaves the kitchen. He collapses in his fathers chair.

He notices his reflection in the TV.

KRIS
(off his piercings))
I look like a bike rack!

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Arlen waits by the door with two cups of coffee. He periodically peers through the peephole looking for Kris. He opens the door and looks down the hall. Empty.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth is on the phone.

ELIZABETH
I know I've left a lot of messages,
but if you would please come back I
promise you'll never have to dress
like a spine again.

She looks up and sees a clean cut good looking man in the lobby.

ELIZABETH
(to man)
I'll be with you in one moment.
(back to phone)
No bone costumes of any kind.

A strange look crosses her face. She puts the phone down and looks at the man. It is Kris.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE - LATER

Kris is on the table getting adjusted.

KRIS

Sorry I skipped out on you before.

She gives him a smack.

KRIS

So, how do you know Arlen?

ELIZABETH

He came crawling in here one day.

KRIS

Funny. I think that's how he feels about me.

Crack.

ELIZABETH

What do you think of him? Really.

KRIS

It's funny. I mean here's a guy who talked to God and he's a disaster.

ELIZABETH

Really? How so?

Crack.

KRIS

It's like he knows all this stuff that can help everybody but him.

Elizabeth has forgotten about Kris' back.

KRIS

All done?

ELIZABETH

Oh, yeah. All done. Hey, I'll come by the bookstore this week.

KRIS

Better hurry. I lost a lot of money by going to re-hab.

(MORE)

KRIS(cont'd)

My dad's funeral is going to cost me all I've got. It might be "Going out of Business Sale" time.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - LATER

Elizabeth and Kris stand in the waiting room. Kris looks at all the pictures on her wall.

KRIS

(off photos)

Wow. You have a lot of clients.

ELIZABETH

I'll let you in on a secret. Most of these are from my photo album. I just put them up here so I'll look busy and popular.

She takes one down.

ELIZABETH

This is Louis Kiffiak. I loved him. We were in biology together and one day he accidentally stabbed my hand with his pencil. I wore that bandage like a medal and prayed it would never heal.

She grabs another.

ELIZABETH

This is Melody Hartson. She was my roommate until I was 28. When I married...I lost touch with her then. I don't know why I never called her. I just didn't.

Kris notices Arlen's photo. He is on all fours with his head hung low.

ELIZABETH

Told you he came crawling in here.

KRIS

I like him. And if you come after 9 AM and sit in his hall he's a pretty good listener.

She can tell Kris is trying to sell Arlen to her a little. She moves him out the door.

ELIZABETH

I think I need more than that. I'm thirty seven years old and I feel like I've spent most of my life searching for something. Someone. I'm tired of it. It be nice to find out that someone had been searching for me.

KRIS

Everyone's searching for you. They just don't know it.

She pulls Kris into a hug. He starts down the sidewalk and turns back making a massaging motion with his hands.

KRIS

First one's free. Then they own you.

She laughs and then it dawns on her.

ELIZABETH

First one's free.

TELESCOPE POV - CONTINUOUS

Kris walks out of Elizabeth's office.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arlen screams and runs for the door.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Arlen bursts through the door, out of breath and looking like a maniac.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

Now that he is there he realizes he has nothing to say.

ARLEN

My back...adjustment...out of whack.

ELIZABETH

I can't right now, Arlen. I'm sorry.

Arlen looks around. The place is empty.

ARLEN

Fine, I'll wait. Have you seen
Kris? What did he say...if you've
seen him.

ELIZABETH

Been looking through your
telescope?

Busted.

ARLEN

How is he?

She turns to go back in the treatment room.

ARLEN

Hey! Wait! This is rude. What
you're doing is rude.

He storms out to the sidewalk. She follows.

ELIZABETH

Alright! I'm sad. Happy?

ARLEN

Is this because of Kris? What did
he say?

ELIZABETH

Yes. It's because of Kris but not
for the reason you think.

ARLEN

Then why are you sad, for Christ's
sake?

She faces him.

ELIZABETH

How come God tells you all these
amazing things when you're with me
but when a poor broken down kid who
has lost his Dad needs
help...nothing.

ARLEN

It's complicated.

ELIZABETH

I watched you as we were talking
and...

ARLEN

I stayed out of it!

ELIZABETH

You had no idea what to say. You
just sat there. Watching.

Busted again.

ELIZABETH

So I'm sad. I'm sad so that I don't
have to feel how angry I am that
Arlen Faber and his God only seem
to talk when they're on a date.

A small crowd has gathered. Arlen looks around nervously and
motions for her to keep it down.

ELIZABETH

(off his motioning to be
quiet.)

Why? Why, Arlen. Why don't you want
people to know who you are? What do
you have to hide?

ARLEN

Nothing. I just don't...

She walks back inside.

ARLEN

You can't do this.

She closes the door.

ARLEN

I showed you my monsters!

He looks at the crowd.

OLD WOMAN

Are you really Arlen Faber?

ARLEN

No. And neither is Arlen Faber.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Arlen sits in the Chinatown church. His fists are clenched and his foot taps out an impatient rhythm.

ARLEN
(shouting)
Come on!

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

The store is dark and Kris stands at the counter opening bills.

KRIS
(reading)
"Hello Mr. Lucas. Attempts to contact you in the past have failed and so we are forced to result to this final action. If you do not respond to our requests for full payment we will have no other choice but to blah ...blah..red words...Hate...blah...rescind... blah sincerely One Nation Bank, Celebrating 150 years of your success."

He grabs a pen and starts marking on the letter. Crossing out words. He holds up the finished product.

KRIS
(reading)
"Dear Mr. Lucas, you have failed. We have no other choice but to celebrate 150 years of your success." Much better.

There is a pounding at the window. It is Arlen banging on the glass. Kris unlocks the door and lets him in.

ARLEN
Fucking People! This is what happens.

KRIS
Are you mad at me about something?

Arlen looks at him as if noticing him for the first time.

ARLEN

Not everything is about you. This is bigger than that. This is about me.

KRIS

Oh. Sorry.

Arlen sits on a rolling stool.

ARLEN

Do you ever feel like you've forgotten something? Something important? Like a song you can almost remember. You walk around feeling like you've got it and then it skips away. It will drive you crazy, this little melody that stays just out of reach. It's like that, but bigger. And there are people...I feel if I can just be around them...I could remember.

KRIS

What did you forget?

Arlen looks at Kris.

ARLEN

I honestly don't know.

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC - DAY

Elizabeth grabs her purse and heads for the door. At that moment Ryan comes through the door. She has her arm around her girlfriend (VIVIAN) who is in excruciating pain.

RYAN

Help! Help her, Elizabeth.

VIVIAN

Put me down.

Ryan slowly lowers Vivian to the ground. She looks up at Elizabeth through her tears her own.

RYAN

Help.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arlen sits at the kitchen table reading a book called, "My Heart Hears You". The phone rings and Arlen answers.

ARLEN

Hello.

ELIZABETH

It's Elizabeth.

Arlen throws the book out of the kitchen.

ARLEN

Calling to apologize?

ELIZABETH

I need to ask you a favor.

ARLEN

Word on the street is that I don't help anyone.

ELIZABETH

Anne isn't here and I am supposed to meet with Alex's teacher today.

ARLEN

So cancel.

ELIZABETH

I already have. Three times. His teacher is also in charge of the advanced program.

ARLEN

I'm not hearing a favor in here.

ELIZABETH

I can't believe I am going to say this...will you please go and pick up Alex for me and tell his teacher that I had a medical emergency. Bring Alex back to your house and I'll come and get him. Do not talk to her.

ARLEN

That is a mistake.

ELIZABETH

I know. But I'm stuck.

ARLEN

You were supposed to say "It'll be fine".

ELIZABETH

Just pick him up and bring him back. Tell Mrs. Gold that we have to reschedule and I'll just pray that Alex gets in.

ARLEN

Pick him up. Bring him back. Do not talk. Got it.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Arlen is outside Alex's classroom doing deep breathing exercises and trying to talk himself down.

ARLEN

Breathe....breathe the breath of the world....let it take you to a quiet place...fucking breathe...

Mrs. Gold opens the door.

MRS. GOLD

Are you here for Alexander?

ARLEN

Yes. Alex.

MRS. GOLD

I was expecting his mother.

ARLEN

Well. She had a medical emergency. I'm just going to take Alex home now.

MRS. GOLD

This will just take a minute.

She walks back in the classroom.

ARLEN

Shit.

INT. MRS. GOLD'S CLASSROOM -CONTINUOUS

It is a typical classroom with children's paintings on the wall and number lines above the blackboard.

Mrs. Gold sits in her chair at a table and motions for Arlen to sit in a tiny orange child's chair. He sits and tries to get comfortable. He crosses and uncrosses his legs. He spins the chair around "interrogation style" but his knees end up on the floor. Finally he sits normally, holding his knees together.

MRS. GOLD
I don't believe we have met.

ARLEN
I'm...Zebulon. I'm a friend of
Elizabeth's.
(with a flourish)
Ta-dah!

Mrs. Gold releases a tight little smile.

MRS. GOLD
Well. Alexander. First let me say
what a joy he is to have in class.
He is a very creative child and
makes friends with everyone. When
one of the other children is hurt
or upset Alexander is always the
first to comfort them. He is
empathetic and empathetic is good.

ARLEN
Agreed.

MRS. GOLD
And he likes to be in front of
people. Just the other day he
brought in a book to read to the
class. He's actually a very good
reader.

ARLEN
Great!

He stands.

MRS. GOLD
But in other areas...

He sits.

ARLEN

What other areas? Empathy. Reading. Friendship. I think that about covers it.

MRS. GOLD

Well, he has a very difficult time with math. He is far behind the other students. He is still struggling with arithmetic while the other students have moved onto multiplication.

ARLEN

Well, you're the teacher. Aren't you supposed to find a way to teach it to him?

MRS. GOLD

I have twenty six students. I can't devote all my time to one student. Alex still needs to learn our first lesson.

She points to a cartoon of a large lion with a bubble over his head that reads, "I Am Responsible".

MRS. GOLD

And he is also, how can I say this, immature.

ARLEN

He's six!

MRS. GOLD

Yes, but he often makes jokes to his seatmates during a lesson or while we are having "Peaceful Time". All the students need to learn the same lesson and Alexander often makes this difficult.

Arlen rolls his eyes and spots a wall of artwork by the kids. They are paintings of their families. Most have two parents and brothers and sisters. He finds Alex's picture of his Mom. It is sunny and radiant.

On the bottom Mrs. Gold has written "Alexander".

MRS. GOLD

I think if Alexander...

ARLEN

I'm going to have to stop you right there. Let me tell you a couple of things. All kids develop in different ways at different times and in different directions. I am confident that at some point he will be able to tell time and make change. Which, let's face it, just about covers it.

MRS. GOLD

I don't think you're hearing me.

ARLEN

What I am hearing is that Alex is not a good candidate to be a robot in your clone army.

MRS. GOLD

Zebulon!

ARLEN

We'll work with him on the math Okay? In the meantime..

He stands.

ARLEN

...try not to make him feel like being who he is, is the problem. That's what happened to you and me remember?

Her mouth drops open. He walks toward the door.

ARLEN

And by the way. His name is Alex. He fucking hates being called Alexander.

He leaves.

EXT. MRS. GOLD'S CLASSROOM -CONTINUOUS

Arlen steps into the hallway to find Alex waiting for him on the bench. Alex looks up tentatively.

ALEX

How'd it go? Am I in trouble?

ARLEN

I think we've got her right where we want her. She says you're a great kid but maybe you could not tell jokes while she's talking.

ALEX

Okay.

ARLEN

Oh, and by the way, if she asks, your Mom's friend's name is Zebulon. Zebulon. Hebrew name. Means exalted.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -LATER

Arlen and Alex enter the apartment.

ARLEN

Um...so I guess if you want to watch TV, you can. And, I have food.. Are you hungry?

ALEX

I guess.

ARLEN

Let me know when you're sure.

ALEX

I'm hungry.

Arlen leaves and walks toward the kitchen.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT -LATER

Arlen and Alex sit at the table. They each have a hamburger on their plate. Alex eyes his cautiously.

ARLEN

What's up?

ALEX

My mom says that meat is poisonous and it can make you sick.

ARLEN

And I say, if that's not the best
hamburger you ever had in your life
I'll change my name to Denise and
run into the sea.

Alex grabs his burger and takes a huge bite. Arlen watches him eat.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Arlen whistles while he does the dishes. He hears piano playing.

ARLEN

Oh, that's nice.

He realizes that Alex is playing his father's piano.

INT. ARLEN'S LIVING ROOM -CONTINUOUS

Arlen races into the living room. He rounds the corner and opens his mouth to yell when...

He sees Alex sitting at the piano. Just a small boy delicately pressing the big keys with tiny fingers. Arlen walks over to him and sits next to him on the bench.

ARLEN

What are you playing?

ALEX

I don't know.

Alex stops playing the piano. He touches the keys but does not play them.

ALEX

This is a nice piano.

ARLEN

Yes it is.

ALEX

Can you play it?

ARLEN

A little.

ALEX

Will you play me something?

ARLEN
No.

ALEX
How come?

ARLEN
I don't want to.

ALEX
How come?

ARLEN
It was my father's, and he died,
and playing it reminds me of him.

ALEX
Was he nice?

ARLEN
Yes he was.

ALEX
Do you miss him?

ARLEN
Very much.

ALEX
Me too.

Arlen realizes that they are no longer talking about his father, but Alex's. Alex is very still.

ALEX
Can I ask you a question?

ARLEN
Yes.

Alex looks at Arlen. A tear spills down his cheek.

ALEX
How long is two weeks?

Arlen struggles to find the answer to Alex's real question. Alex searches Arlen's face with heartbroken eyes. Finally, he looks away.

ALEX
It's Okay. I don't know, either.

There is a knock at the door. Arlen hurries over to it. Happy for the distraction.

He opens the door. It's Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH
Hey, buddy.

Alex runs into her arms and hugs her fiercely.

ELIZABETH
Wow! Big hug.

She turns to Arlen and makes a face that says "How did it go?" Arlen nods "Okay" and gives a tight smile.

ELIZABETH
Thanks for watching him. It won't happen again.

ARLEN
No, it was fine. We ate and...we ate hamburgers.

ELIZABETH
Let's go, buddy. I'm sure Arlen has better thing to do than baby sit you.

ARLEN
It's no problem, really.

Alex has his stuff.

ALEX
Bye, Arlen.

He runs out the door.

ARLEN
Bye.

ELIZABETH
I apologize for the imposition.

ARLEN
We had a good time.

She turns to leave.

ARLEN
Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Yeah?

It's on the tip of his tongue.

ARLEN

Nothing.

She leaves.

The door closes leaving Arlen standing in a void. He tries to shake it off and takes several deep breaths.

ARLEN

Not my problem. Not my problem.

He walks across the living room when suddenly his legs give out and he falls to his knees. He looks around the apartment frantically. His eyes land on the signs above the doors, "Office", "Mail", "Kitchen". His breath pants in and out.

His hand flies to his mouth and he chokes back a sob.

INT. KRIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kris sits in his father's chair and watches the tape of "Terror Olympics". He ejects it and grabs it from the VCR. He starts pulling the tape out of the cassette. He pulls faster and faster, the tape pooling at his feet.

INT. ARLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arlen opens his door. Elizabeth is standing there.

ARLEN

Hello.

ELIZABETH

Hello, Arlen. Or should I say Zebulon?

ARLEN

It means exalted.

ELIZABETH

What did you say to her?

ARLEN

Nothing. You know, kids develop...friendship and reading...maybe something about robots.

ELIZABETH

Mrs. Gold said she is going to recommend Alex for the advanced program.

ARLEN

That's totally amazing.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Just when I give up on you..

ARLEN

Advanced what?

ELIZABETH

What?

ARLEN

Program of advanced what?

ELIZABETH

Advanced placement and learning.

ARLEN

Learning what?

ELIZABETH

I'm not sure what you mean?

ARLEN

I mean Mrs. Gold is an uptight little control weasel and that school you love so much is bullshit. I would keep my kid away from people like that. What that kid needs is confidence.

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry, how did this go from me thanking you, to you attacking me?

ARLEN

I'm sorry. You're welcome. I'm glad you got what you wanted.

ELIZABETH

Are you saying Alex doesn't have any confidence?

ARLEN

I'm saying he's just a little guy and all this pressure is going to fuck him up, or turn him into a salesman of some kind.

ELIZABETH

Since when did you become an expert on raising children?

ARLEN

Hey! I'm not the one who straps him into some death harness or buys pretend food that is supposed to be better than the real thing. You're trying to turn him into your idea of who he should be instead of looking at who he is and that...

ELIZABETH

He is everything to me and I want to give him the very best, can you understand that?

ARLEN

Yeah? Well while you're giving him your "best", you might want to tell him his Dad's not coming back.

He realizes he has gone too far.

ELIZABETH

What did you say to him?

Arlen is at a loss for words.

ELIZABETH

(shouting)

What did you say to him!

ARLEN

Nothing. He asked me how long two weeks was.

Tears run down her face.

ARLEN

I didn't say anything. He knows the truth but he needs to hear it from you.

ELIZABETH

Let me guess, God told you that? He said "Arlen they're having a rough time. Go and help them out?"

Arlen shakes his head "No".

ELIZABETH

Of course not. Because you don't want to help anyone. Or know anyone! You sit up here and watch the rest of us try to work it out through your telescope. Must be hilarious. You and God, hoarding all the answers and passing judgement on all us fools.

ARLEN

It's not like that.

ELIZABETH

I feel more alone than I did before I met you.

ARLEN

But I...

ELIZABETH

Stay away from us.

And she is gone.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS - NIGHT

Arlen enters the bookstore through the front door which is ajar. The lights are off..

ARLEN

Kris? Kris are you there?

KRIS. (O.S.)

Go away.

Arlen tip toes around the dark store. Arlen looks down one of the aisles and sees a figure in the shadows. It is Kris wearing a suit and smoking a cigarette.

ARLEN

So this is the smoking section.

Arlen sits down right next to him and notices the large unopened bottle of Scotch on the floor in front of Kris.

KRIS

My Dad's funeral was today. I was the only person I knew.

ARLEN

Well, I'm sure...you know, some people couldn't make it. It's...

Kris looks him in the eye.

KRIS

Don't. Please don't lie to me.

ARLEN

What's up with the bottle?

KRIS

Don't worry, Arlen. I'll ruin my life quietly without intruding on your privacy.

ARLEN

That's not what I meant.

KRIS

I've been sitting here for about two hours trying to think of a really good reason not to drink it. You said everyone is either moving toward or away from a purpose. Maybe my purpose is to drink. It's the only thing I'm good at. When I came to you I really thought you could help me. And you know what? You did. You helped me to realize that all my worst fears were true. I mean, you had The Man on the phone. And this...

(pointing at Arlen)

...is what it did for you. So thank you. You helped me to see that He can't help us and that it's never going to get any better than the shitty little roles we get to play out. So I might as well go ahead and drink.

ARLEN
That's not what I meant..

KRIS
Congratulations. You can have your
life back now. Isn't that what you
want?

Arlen doesn't move.

KRIS
GET OUT!

Arlen walks away.

KRIS
Hey, I'll even have a toast to you.
To Arlen, the guy who taught me
that nothing mattered and that
we're all alone.

Arlen leaves.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The street is thick with fog. Arlen emerges out of the mist and walks to the door of the psychic. He knocks. The door opens and Arlen hands the psychic a wad of bills. She rests her hand on his shoulder then closes the door.

Over his lonely walk home we hear haunting poignant piano music.

MONTAGE:

- Kris crosses the street and stands by the door of the A.A meeting. He takes a deep breath and walks in.
- Elizabeth takes down the polaroids one by one and places them in a box.
- Arlen sits in his mail room. He reaches for a letter and opens it.
- Kris enters the meeting room and slides along the back wall. The meeting is already in progress.
- Arlen sits in the church. Eyes closed tight.

- Kris scans the people in the meeting. A man waves to him. It is Ross, the man he met on his first night back. Ross motions for Kris to take the chair next to him.
- Elizabeth stands on the "kaleidoscope" pier looking out at the bay. She tosses her pack of cigarettes in the trash.
- Arlen sets a model of Hellboy on the piano.
- Kris sits at the table looking at his father's unfinished crossword puzzle. He grabs a pencil and erases a word, fills in the right one. Erases. Fills in.
- Arlen sits in the mail room reading another letter. There are hundreds of opened letters around him
- Alex is asleep in his bed. Elizabeth sits in the rocking chair and removes the band-aids from his toys.
- Arlen takes the signs down from above all the rooms. He feeds them into the paper shredder.
- Kris stands on the sidewalk after the meeting with the other guys. He is talking and laughing.
- Arlen sits at the piano playing with great feeling. It is his music we have been hearing all along. Hellboy sits on the bench next to him. With a delicate touch Arlen finishes the piece.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS - NIGHT

Kris and Dahlia sit on the counter drinking coffee. Kris is using his father's Peets mug. Behind them, on a shelf, sits the unopened bottle of Scotch.

DAHLIA

What do you think will happen?

KRIS

I don't know. They'll probably tear it down and build a Starbucks just to spite me.

DAHLIA

Remember what's her name with the pink hair?

Kris laughs.

KRIS

Eden? Yeah. I heard she was dating
a color wheel.

She looks at Kris. He looks like a different guy. No piercings, a little color on his cheeks, and some weight on him.

DAHLIA

You look great. Are you going to be
Okay?

Kris thinks about that seriously for a moment.

KRIS

Yeah. I'm going to be great.

Dahlia holds up her mug.

DAHLIA

To tomorrow then. San Francisco's
last chance to find inner peace and
serenity.

They clink mugs and drink.

EXT. CHINATOWN - NIGHT

A dejected Arlen exits the church. He stops to watch some street performers break dancing. They are whirling and spinning and laughing. A look of recognition crosses Arlen's face. He staggers back a few steps.

ARLEN

(softly)

Oh!

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Alex drags his feet and his backpack toward the car where Elizabeth is waiting. He opens the back door. No car seat.

ALEX

Mom?

ELIZABETH

Wanna' ride up here with me?

His face splits with joy. He slams the door. Hard. He opens the front door with care and wonder and sits in the seat.

ELIZABETH

Do you know...

ALEX

More than the sun and the stars and
everything else that's everywhere
else.

They drive off.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Kris rounds the corner to the bookstore.

The sidewalk is lined with people and it stretches around the
block. The line goes right into the bookstore. He fights his
way toward the front door. A man grabs his hand and starts
shaking it.

MAN

You must be Kris. Terry. Terry
Fraser. Arlen's agent.

KRIS

What's going on?

TERRY

How did you get him to do it? Wait.
I don't want to know. I don't care.

KRIS

What's going on?

TERRY

You don't know? Arlen is coming
here to speak for the twentieth
anniversary of "Me and God". It's a
miracle. He called me in the middle
of the night and told me to get the
books down here. Said he had
already sent the word out to all
the websites. All of them!

Terry looks like he might faint. Kris muscles his way inside.
Behind the counter Dahlia is frantically ringing up copies of
"Me and God-The Twentieth-Fifth Anniversary Edition". She
sees Kris.

DAHLIA

Get over here.

He fights his way to her, stepping over empty book boxes on the way.

KRIS
What's going on?

Dahlia continues to ring up the books throughout.

DAHLIA
This Terry guy shows up this morning with all these boxes of books and says that your pal Arlen is speaking here today and that I better get busy.

KRIS
We don't have the money to buy these books.

DAHLIA
He said they were a gift.

Kris looks at the register receipt that spills all the way to the floor. Now he might faint.

KRIS
Where is he?

DAHLIA
He's coming.

Kris turns and heads for the door.

DAHLIA
Where are you going? Who's going to help me ring these up?

INT. STRAIGHTEN UP CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Elizabeth stands in a full waiting room. The window is painted to read, "The First One's Free!". Anne is frantically taking polaroids.

ELIZABETH
I will get to all of you. I promise. If you would just...

Kris bursts through the door. He is out of breath.

KRIS
What are you doing right now?

ELIZABETH
Adjusting half of Northern
California. You?

KRIS
Arlen is going to speak at the book
store.

Kris notices Anne who is staring at him. Something passes
between them. The flash goes off on the camera.

CLIENTS
Arlen who?

ANNE
Arlen Faber.

The office empties. Leaving Elizabeth and Kris and Anne.

KRIS
Are you coming?

ELIZABETH/ANNE
Yes.

INT. WELL READ BOOKS" - MOMENTS LATER

Kris, Anne, Elizabeth and her clients, cram into the
bookstore. Everyone holds a copy of Arlen's book. Some are
praying. Some are meditating.

CUSTOMER
I see him!

Arlen is making his way down the street. The crowd reverently
parts to let him by. Some reach out and touch his sleeve.

Inside the store Terry climbs atop one of the book boxes.

TERRY
Ladies and gentlemen. This is a
very special occasion for us all.
One we have been waiting twenty
years for.

Arlen enters the store. He sees Elizabeth and Kris and gives
a self-conscious nod.

TERRY (CONT'D)
The man who spoke to God and showed
us all a glimpse of Heaven...Arlen
Faber!

The crowd erupts in applause. Arlen walks to Terry's box. Terry gets down and hugs him. And hugs him. Arlen steps up.

The crowd goes silent.

ARLEN

Thank you for coming. I'd also like to thank Kris Lucas and Well Read Books for allowing me to use their store today.

(an obvious plug)

This is the best bookstore in San Francisco!

Everyone nods in agreement. Kris glows. Arlen puts up his hands to quiet them.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

I hope that my book provided you with...comfort. I think that's what we seek. Comfort from the uncertainty of things. Comfort from the horrors of the world and the fears we face. And ultimately we seek to be comforted by each other. I hope that I have been a small part of that. Now I know that many of you have questions...

The crowd starts shouting out their questions. "Where have you been?", "What does He say now?", "When will I die?" "Is there a Heaven?", "Where are my keys?".

ARLEN (CONT'D)

...but I don't have any answers.

ELIZABETH

Why not? I thought you could talk to God?

The crowd looks at her as though she is Judas.

ARLEN

I can't. And He doesn't talk to me.

The crowd stands still as stone. No one breathes. A Berkeley type hippie breaks the silence.

HIPPIE

It's called, "Me and God".

ARLEN

God didn't speak to me. I wish He did, but He didn't.

Kris looks like the bottom just dropped out of the universe. He shoves his way to the front of the crowd.

KRIS

I want an answer. A real answer.

ARLEN

A little over twenty years ago I found out that someone I loved very much had an illness. Everything we meant to each other would fade until one day I would just be a stranger. The awful things we said to each other and the moments we would never take back. Even the regret you feel when you wish you could take something back...

Arlen looks directly at Elizabeth.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

...is a memory you want to keep. All that would be lost.

He speaks directly to Kris.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

I got this news and I begged for His help. Pleaded. Nothing. I had questions and I wanted answers. Needed them. You know what that's like.

Kris nods.

ARLEN

So I started writing and that's how "Me and God" came to be. I don't know if I made it up. Or, if it was divine intervention. I don't...I don't know anything.

KRIS

So it's just a bunch of feel good crap, is that it?

ARLEN

No Kris. It was just all the things that I wished God would say.

Terry is panicked.

TERRY

But you can tell them something,
right? Something?

ARLEN

Yes.

The crowd cranes forward.

ARLEN

Yesterday I remembered something
that I had forgotten. Right now, at
this very moment, all over the
world, millions of people are
dancing. At weddings. On stages and
in clubs. In front of the mirror or
with their friends and families.
Millions. And right now millions of
people are singing. In their
showers, along with thousands at a
concert or singing their children
to sleep. Floating on a raft in the
middle of Lake Tahoe singing to the
blue sky. While we stand here
millions of people all over the
world go on dancing and singing. I
had forgotten that. And if we can
hold onto that, I think we might
have a shot.

Everyone is moved. No one more so than Kris. Elizabeth runs
out of the bookstore.

ARLEN

I'm sorry. I have to go now.

The crowd parts in silence to let Arlen pass. Kris blocks his
way

KRIS

So, you're just like the rest of
us.

ARLEN

Not yet. But I'm trying.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Arlen sees Elizabeth up ahead and he hurries to catch her.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Arlen is closing in as Elizabeth in the park where he took Alex. She is passing the playground when she whirls around.

ELIZABETH
(shouting)
Stop following me.

The kids on the play equipment stare and giggle.

ARLEN
Stop for a minute, will you? This
is dumb.

She does.

ELIZABETH
Go away, Arlen. Just go away from
me. I don't need this. You are
angry and weird and crazy. Did I
mention crazy? Alex and I don't
need crazy in our life right now.

ARLEN
Yes, you do.

ELIZABETH
I've heard you talk like that
before. That was just more made up
garbage to get you out of trouble.

ARLEN
No, it wasn't.

ELIZABETH
I don't believe you.

ARLEN
That's Okay. I want to tell you
what I believe.

ELIZABETH
No.

She turns.

ARLEN
Listen. You can leave after this,
but first listen.

He sits her on a park bench and stands before her. Composing himself.

ELIZABETH

If you're just trying to make up
something you can forget it because
I'll know and...

ARLEN

SHUT UP!

She does. He kneels in front of her and holds her hands in his.

ARLEN

Elizabeth, everything I said to you
was true. I believe now, in a plan
because someone like you is no
accident. I believe that you were
knit together by the same hand that
made the stars. I believe that the
answers to thousands of questions
are in your smile. I believe that
when I'm with you I'm the person
I'm supposed to be. I'm in love
with you and I've been looking for
you my whole life. I just didn't
believe in angels.

Elizabeth leans down toward him, a little unsteady. He leans
up toward her and kisses her softly on the lips.

He cups her face in his hands.

ARLEN (CONT'D)

Angel.

He sweeps her into his arms. They kiss.

INT. A.A. MEETING - NIGHT

KRIS

My name is Kris and I'm an
alcoholic.

A.A. GROUP

Kris / Hi Kris / Welcome

KRIS

I want to thank my sponsor for
asking me to share tonight.

He nods at Ross who smiles back.

KRIS

I'll close with this. You know how we dream about people in the future, like two thousand years from now, and imagine what they'll be like? "They'll fly in little air cars", or "they can cure any disease" or "They will have left earth and gone to a new planet". Well, two thousand years ago I'm sure the Romans were doing the same thing. Imagining what we'd be like and the things we would have. Dreaming about what we'd be able to do and accomplish. What would we be afraid of? What would our hopes be? How would we'd treat each other. The things we would try. And would we give up.

Kris takes a long look around the room at he faces of the men and women around him. The bearded guy, the pretty woman with the tatoos, the guy in the wheelchair.

KRIS

It's us. They were dreaming about us.

THE END

