

CARTOON GIRL

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Start in ANIMATION.

Almost a flip-book, as though careening through the pages of a graphic novel.

EXT. VIENNA, AUSTRIA - NIGHT

Fat snow glints through amber streetlights.

We push through bridges and spires until we reach:

THE GOLDEN HALL - Home to the Vienna Philharmonic.

Elegant people snake into the baroque structure's bosom.

INT. THE GOLDEN HALL

The venue is aptly named. Iridescent.

The audience settles.

The orchestra warms up. Even when disjointed, the sounds of the instruments are lush and welcoming.

An excited HUSH sweeps through the auditorium as the CONDUCTOR takes to the stage.

We will register as unusual what the audience does not: The conductor is a GIRL OF NOT MORE THAN TWELVE YEARS OLD.

She owns the stage in a fitted tuxedo with tails. She reverently bows to the audience, and turns to the orchestra.

As she raises her BATON, the HUSH begets a resonant SILENCE.

The orchestra snaps to attention at its master's presence.

Our conductor begins her elegant motions, and with it, the sound of music. Bach or Ravel or Mozart or whatever.

We scan the rapt audience. Pair after pair of eyes glazed with moisture at the immensity of the sound.

Until we reach one COLD SOUL. His eyes are dry and thin, as though aged in a meat smoker.

ON STAGE

Our baby conductor pantomimes the music as if her body were creating it at this very moment...

When something - a sense - breaks her trance. Her eyes go wide.. and then narrow.

She subtly tilts her head to the right, employs peripheral vision.

She looks back toward the orchestra, which is none the wiser to her distraction.

Three.

Two.

One.

The conductor PIVOTS, DROPS TO ONE KNEE, and brings her CONDUCTING BATON TO HER MOUTH. She BLOWS INTO IT, projecting a small DART, which splits the air and lodges directly in the jugular of our smokey-eyed villain.

His eyes twitch. His life ends.

We will now notice the MILITARY-GRADE PISTOL in his limp hand. Silencer. Laser-scope.

The orchestra stumbles into silence. A violin string snaps.

Chaos.

The audience flees.

Our pre-teen maestro looks to the wings of the stage in time to see TWO HENCHMEN descending on her.

She wields her baton:

Blowdart. HIT. Henchman 1 down.

Blowdart. MISS. HENCHMAN 2 PURSUES.

The girl BARREL-ROLLS off the stage with such grace that the floor wouldn't even know it was touched.

She disappears through an EXIT DOOR to a back alley, empty and dark.

BACK ALLEY

The Henchman appears behind her, his GLOCK trained on her head of honey-brown hair.

Our conductor steels herself.

In an instant, the blowdart/baton is to her lips.

She fires.

The DART hits its intended target - DIRECTLY INTO THE BARREL of the Henchman's Glock.

His timing is unfortunate as he pulls the trigger, the dart causing the pistol to BACKFIRE, erasing a majority of his dumb ugly face.

Our conductor smiles. Not at his demise, but at her own mad fuckin skills. Her smile is a little scary and a lot cute.

She scales a nearby fence and disappears with an agility that would make a cat blush.

The FLIP-BOOK ANIMATION NOW SLOWS. And slows. Until it STOPS on a FREEZE FRAME of the deserted Viennese alleyway.

Our focus shifts, and we realize that we are in fact ON THE PAGE OF A BOOK. A graphic novel, as this one would be labeled.

A HAND enters frame, not animated, but rather very real. It is that of a young boy. He dog-ears the page.

The boy SIGHS. The sigh of longing.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Populated only by two sullen STUDENTS and one disinterested TEACHER. Clearly the nether-realm of DETENTION.

We are on the BOY with his GRAPHIC NOVEL.

This is JOE ST. CLAIR (11). His height is more Simon than Garfunkel. Be patient, young Joe. Puberty will come. But not yet.

Two desks behind him is LAURA (11). Aggressive, but it can't be her fault. Sometimes you can just look at a person and know that their parents are jerks.

The teacher is MR. MCINNISH (late 30's). He would be the result of a bitter Scottish man eating an angry Scottish man. He is fat.

Mr. McInnish is half asleep, wearing cheap headphones. Those grey plastic ones that came with a Walkman.

Joe is still immersed in the world of his book. This is soon to end.

Laura gets up from her desk, walks over, and KNOCKS THE BOOK OUT OF JOE'S HANDS, onto the floor.

Joe's eyes go wide with fury.

He picks the book up so quickly you'd think the floor was made of lava. But now his voice is made of lava:

JOE
Explain yourself.

LAURA
Why are you reading a girls' book?

JOE
It is not a girls' book.

LAURA
The binding is pink.

JOE
This one is. Other volumes are..
there's a teal one. An orange one.

LAURA
Yea. It's a book for girls.

JOE
It's a book about a girl.

LAURA
Exactly.

JOE
Is Anne Frank a girl's book?

LAURA
(clearly fucking with him)
Yup.

JOE
(actually compassionate)
Oh. You are dumb.

Laura sizes him up.

LAURA
I bet you've screwed a guy in the
ass.

Joe jolts to his feet. He is three inches shorter than Laura.

JOE
I'VE NEVER SCREWED ANYONE IN THEIR
ANYTHING.

This gets fat Mr. McInnish's attention. Barely. He glowers.

MR. MCINNISH
Sit.
(clears his fat throat)
Both 'a you.

Laura and Joe stare each other down. If they were just a year closer to puberty, this would be chemistry. But for now, it is a duel.

Laura SWIPES JOE'S BOOK OFF THE DESK AGAIN.

On Joe: That's it.

Joe PUSHES LAURA IN THE CHEST. SHE FALLS BACKWARDS AND BRINGS JOE DOWN WITH HER.

Joe lands on top of her, HIS RIGHT HAND ACCIDENTALLY DIRECTLY ON HER ALMOST-THERE LEFT BOOB. Laura's eyes bug out.

LAURA
RAPE! HE RAPED ME!

Mr. McInnish finally stands up.

Joe rolls off of her, terrified.

JOE
I DID NOT!

Joe then looks at his offending right hand.

JOE (CONT'D)
Shit.. Did I?

MR. MCINNISH
No, Joseph. You did not rape her.
But pushing a girl is still not-
cool!

Then to Laura.

MR. MCINNISH (CONT'D)
As is vandalizing someone else's
precious property!

Mr. McInnish has way too high a voice for so low a belly.

MR. MCINNISH (CONT'D)
You two can't be bad! You're
already here for being bad! You
can't be bad! I gave up my Saturday
because you two are always so bad!

He has broken a sweat.

MR. MCINNISH (CONT'D)
Sit in your assigned seats. Your
parents are both getting a call.
(a beat)
You're bad!

Joe picks his book up off the floor. It is open to a full page action shot of our KID-CONDUCTOR. A graphic beside her tells us that her name is ZOEY ROUSSEAU. Of course it is.

The cartoon girl makes eye contact with the reader. Makes eye contact with Joe.

Joe looks back at her, almost apologetically for letting her hit the ground.

Joe gently - you could say lovingly - brushes Zoey of dust and dirt.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Joe rests his chin on his forearms like a puppy in a foul mood.

Laura has her feet up on her desk. Even though it looks uncomfortable.

A MAN enters the classroom. He wears a TUXEDO, but no jacket. An untied bowtie hangs around his neck.

Joe looks up.

JOE
Hey dad.

Dad nods to Joe, frustrated. This is ALEX ST. CLAIR (34).

Quick math: He had Joe at 23.

Alex looks like he aged ten years in the first five years of his twenties. There are not-quite-closed holes in his ears from gauged earrings. He did the late 90's both right and wrong.

ALEX
(to McInnish)
I thought you were keeping him
until five.

MR. MCINNISH
That was the idea, but they were so
bad!

ALEX
So he's being released for bad
behavior.

MR. MCINNISH
In this case, yes.

ALEX
What'd he do?

MR. MCINNISH
Well, he retaliated inappropriately
to Ms. Blitz vandalizing his book.

ALEX
Yea she shouldn't touch the book.

MR. MCINNISH
I think she knows that now.

LAURA
(chiming in)
It's a girls' book.

ALEX
It's... a book about a girl.

JOE
Thank you.

MR. MCINNISH
Well, I think they've learned their
lesson.

ALEX
That contradicts everything I'm
seeing and being told.

MR. MCINNISH
(pointed)
Your son is free to go.

Alex calls all of McInnish's actions into question with a
single look.

ALEX
(to Joe)
I have a gig, bud. You'll have to
come with.

Joe's eyes light up!

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - PARKING LOT

Joe changes into a TUXEDO beside Alex's well-used but well-loved Subaru Outback.

Joe ties his own bowtie.

There are several GUITAR CASES in the Subaru's back seat.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING

It is now that we realize we are in NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

Some landmarks cruise by. Grand Ole Opry. Ryman Auditorium.

JOE
I feel like Mr. McInnish has heart
attacks and doesn't even know it.

Alex nods, agreeing.

ALEX
You have to be undercover today,
alright? Blend in, be cool. And
don't eat the food.

JOE
But I'm hungry.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING - LATER

Joe rips through a bag of Wendy's. An unfolded paper napkin is neatly tucked into his collar above the bowtie.

Joe offers a fry. Alex takes it.

They arrive outside of a FIRE STATION SOCIAL HALL. The parking lot is packed.

JOE
I didn't know Jews marry in fire
halls.

ALEX

Not Jewish this time, Italian.

JOE

Oh, bummer. I like the whole chair business.

ALEX

Marry a Jewish girl and you can have the chair at your wedding.

Joe considers.

JOE

I think I will.

EXT. FIRE STATION SOCIAL HALL - PARKING LOT

Joe and Alex put on their tux jackets in unison.

Joe grabs his ZOEY ROUSSEAU BOOK from the front seat.

ALEX

Leave that in the car please.

JOE

Have you seen the neighborhood we're in? We just passed a K-Mart. Not even a Walmart. A K-Mart.

ALEX

Well then the criminals won't be educated enough to want a book.

Joe thinks.

JOE

Yea you're right.

Joe puts the book in the glove compartment.

PRE-LAP: Stevie Wonder's "For Once In My Life"...

INT. FIRE STATION SOCIAL HALL

... as sung by ALEX ST. CLAIR.

Alex leads a FIVE-PIECE BAND. He plays a gorgeous blonde-wood hollow-body Gibson. And he is very, very good.

Alex has an energy onstage that he just lacks off of it. He sings his heart out, but not without a faraway stare. Must be something about the lyrics of this tune..

INT. FIRE STATION SOCIAL HALL - CONTINUOUS

This is a real party, with lots of really Italian people being jovial, drunk and awesome.

We find JOE, lurking around. He observes the scene as though it's an aquarium.

Joe spots a MAN (40's) sitting alone at a table, eating a salad. The man is round but muscular. Joe approaches him.

JOE
Mind if I sit?

The man gives a friendly nod, "be my guest."

Joe takes a load off. He looks around, almost conspiratorially. There's something on his mind.

The round man notices this.

ROUND MAN
I'm Vince.

JOE
I'm..
(his attempt at seeming
Italian)
Joey.

VINCE
How ya doin Joey.

Joe tenses his left cheek, tilts his head, "not so good".

JOE
I've got a situation.

VINCE
What kinda situation.

JOE
A person.

VINCE
What kinda person.

JOE
A bad one.

VINCE

Huh.

JOE

Yea.

VINCE

What'd he or she do. This person.

JOE

He married my mother.

VINCE

And he's not your father?

JOE

There's the rub.

Joe stands up and moves his chair directly next to Vince's.

Joe motions for Vince to lean down toward him. Vince complies.

JOE (CONT'D)

I hope I won't offend you or your people when I ask this, but...

(deep breath)

This guy. The bad one. I'd like for him to swim with the fishes, if you catch my meaning.

(a short chuckle)

Which would be funny too because he loves to scuba dive.

Vince is not offended. But he is amused. He whispers back in Joe's same conspiratorial tone.

VINCE

I'd like to help you Joey.

Unfortunately, I am not a contract killer.

(pause)

But I am an oral surgeon.

(shrugs)

I could.. I don't know.. give 'im a bunk root canal or something.

Joe sighs. Considers.

JOE

That might have to do.

LATER

Alex plays a beautiful JAZZ STANDARD onstage. People slow dance, blissed-out by the tune.

We are with Joe, wandering aimlessly around the party.

Something catches Joe's eye: A group of THREE GIRLS HIS AGE standing in a cluster, chatting and giggling.

Joe gathers some courage and approaches them.

JOE (CONT'D)
Girls, hi.

GIRL 1
(a bitchy pause)
Hey.

GIRL 2
Who are you.

JOE
I'm.. Vince's son.

GIRL 1
Vince is gay.

GIRL 2
I think gay people have kids.

Girl 3 thinks.

GIRL 3
Not all of them, but some of them
do.

A long awkward pause. This is on Joe.

JOE
Wish there was the Jewish chair
thing, right?

Girl 1
The what?

JOE
You know...

Joe motions hoisting a chair in the air. He looks like a crazy person. The girls certainly do not know. They GIGGLE cruelly at his expense.

JOE (CONT'D)
Please excuse me.

Joe walks off, humiliated.

LATER

Alex gets the energy of the room back up with some Peter Frampton-esque soloing. People love it.

Joe stands adjacent the stage, watching his dad with unabridged pride and admiration.

Joe shakes his head as if to say wow.

Alex looks down, sees his son staring at him with adulation.

Alex hardly thinks he's deserving of that, so this worries him.

He manages a smile for Joe's benefit.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING

Alex and Joe cruise through Nashville suburbs. The nothing-fancy part. Bowties untied.

Joe is very present. Alex is somewhere else.

JOE
I really think that was some of
your best playing.

Without considering his words,

ALEX
My best playing happened before you
were born.

That statement kind of breaks Joe's heart. Alex can tell.

ALEX (CONT'D)
But it was a solid gig. I agree.

He roughs up the back of Joe's hair.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Must have been someone in the
audience.

JOE
(excited)
A girl?

ALEX
No, dummy. You.

JOE

Oh. There were some cute girls
there though. Not the ones my age.
They sucked. But your age.

Alex is not interested in having this conversation..

ALEX

Mm.

..But Joe is.

JOE

Haven't seen many ladies around the
house lately.

ALEX

Focusing on work bud.

JOE

You're a rock star. Ladies are part
of your work.

ALEX

I am not a rock star.

JOE

Well, I guess I disagree.

The car is now a locked chamber of tension.

ALEX

I need a little quiet time until we
get home. Migraine.

JOE

I should drive then.

ALEX

You're eleven.

JOE

I know.
(asshole)
Dad.

Joe puts the window down, stares out.

EXT. ALEX AND JOE'S HOUSE - LATER

A single-level bungalow, painted a cheery sky blue. Needs a
fresh coat.

Alex and Joe get out of the car and head inside. Not talking.

INT. ALEX AND JOE'S HOUSE

What this place has plenty of: music equipment.

What it has not enough of: a woman's touch.

ALEX

We'll eat in an hour.

(trying to reconcile)

Got one of those pizzas you like.

JOE

(cold)

Thanks.

Joe heads back towards his room.

KITCHEN

Alex starts to prep their simple dinner.

It is a lonely pursuit.

A big glass of red wine keeps him company the best it can.

JOE'S ROOM

Joe flops onto his bed.

The room is sparsely decorated. There's an overstuffed bookshelf, books stacked horizontally atop the vertical ones.

Also: a BIG POSTER of Joe's beloved, animated, Zoey Rousseau.

Joe stares at the poster. It brings him some comfort.

He opens his Zoey Rousseau book and begins to read.

A KNOCK at the bedroom door. Alex pops his head in.

ALEX

Hey.

JOE

(a beat)

Yo.

ALEX
(an apology)
Forgot to tell you that the author
of those books you like was on NPR
this morning. There's a podcast.

Joe is excited but doesn't want to show it.

JOE
Thanks.

Alex starts to close the door.

JOE (CONT'D)
Dad?

Alex reenters.

JOE (CONT'D)
I think your best days are still
ahead of you.

A strange thing to hear from any kid, let alone your kid.
Alex is touched.

ALEX
Thanks bud. So do I.

Alex softly closes the door.

Joe immediately grabs his iPod Touch from his bedside table.

He finds the podcast.

Joe plugs the iPod into a speaker dock.

Joe hops back onto his bed, reclines.

TERRY GROSS (O.S.)
This is Fresh Air, I'm Terry Gross.
My guest, David Archembault, is a
Professor of Classics at McGill
University in Montreal, and the
author and illustrator of the
popular young adult graphic novel
series, "Zoey Rousseau", about a
wunderkind orchestra conductor, who
is also an international spy. David
welcome to Fresh Air.

ARCHEMBEAULT (O.S.)
Thanks for having me Terry.

TERRY GROSS

Your books really seem to resonate with modern young girls. Why do you think that is?

Joe scoffs at the particular phrasing of that question.

ARCHEMBEAULT

It's really an issue of healthy aspiration. I have a daughter, and I wanted to provide her with literature that would be good for her developing mind, but also provide a space for excitement and risk. So, orchestra conductor. Spy. Bases covered.

Terry laughs.

TERRY GROSS

And what does your daughter think of the final product. Does she read the books?

ARCHEMBEAULT

Well Zoey Rousseau *is* my daughter, essentially. The character is based on my daughter Zoey. Save for the spy part. Though she is an accomplished violinist. I actually sketched her when I was creating the series. The hair, the eyes. The freckle near her chin. The disposition. The attitude, for sure. It's much easier to create a character when you live with them.

On Joe... Did he hear that right?

TERRY GROSS

Then I *really* hope she likes your work.

ARCHEMBEAULT

She does, she does. She is a fan.. of herself.

Joe's vision becomes pixilated. He goes over to the iPod and REWINDS.

ARCHEMBEAULT (CONT'D)

Well Zoey Rousseau *is* my daughter, essentially. The character is based on my daughter Zoey.

(MORE)

ARCHEMBEAULT (CONT'D)
 Save for the spy part. Though she is an accomplished violinist. I actually sketched her when I was creating the series. The hair, the eyes. The freckle near her chin. The disposition. The attitude, for sure. It's much easier to create a character when you live with them.

TERRY GROSS
 Then I *really* hope she q pokansl
 akljaskoh h jklh h shkma...

Terry's voice fades into gibberish as a COLOSSAL REALIZATION courses through Joe's entire being:

JOE
 She's real.

INT. KITCHEN

Alex sits at the kitchen table with his wine and a stack of music composition books.

Joe enters. He is possessed by some strange brand of mirth.

JOE
 Hey dad.

ALEX
 (noticing Joe's odd mood)
 .. Hey.

JOE
 I was thinking, what if we go to
 Montreal, Quebec. In Canada.

ALEX
 .. Canada. Why?

JOE
 No reason.

ALEX
 .. Well, you need a reason to do
 things like that.

JOE
 Let me start over. I'm gonna go to
 Montreal, Canada. I would love for
 you to join me.

Alex massages his forehead, hoping that might somehow truncate this conversation.

ALEX
That sounds more like a threat than an invitation.

JOE
It's a promise and an invitation.

ALEX
We're not going to Montreal Joe.
You have school.

JOE
It's Spring Break. That's why Mr. McInnish was in a rush. He's going to fat camp in Key Largo.
(then, offended)
Do you really not know my school schedule?

ALEX
I have work, Joe.

JOE
Barely.
(then instantly)
Sorry, I didn't mean that. It's true but I didn't mean it.

ALEX
Why do you want to go. Speak to me.

JOE
(tentative)
You know those books I like? Zoey Rousseau?

ALEX
Of course I know.

JOE
She lives there. I mean the author lives there.

ALEX
Which is it? Because she's a cartoon, she doesn't live anywhere.

JOE
Maybe, maybe not. Anyway I'd really like to meet the author.
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
David Archembault is his name. I
feel he has something important to
tell me.

ALEX
What's that?

JOE
I intend to find out.

ALEX
You can't show up in this man's
country and track him down. It's
stalking.

JOE
You have to be at least fourteen to
be capable of stalking. I'm just
being proactive.

Alex sighs. Joe might have a point.

ALEX
It's been a long.. long day Joe. We
can talk about this tomorrow.

JOE
Great. I'll be in my room packing.

ALEX
Don't pack, Joe.

JOE
I'll be in my room packing.

Joe heads to his room. To pack.

ALEX
(calling out)
Don't you want dinner?

JOE
(yells back)
I'll have it for breakfast.

INT. JOE'S ROOM - LATER

Joe sits at his desk. He drafts a LETTER.

We hear Joe NARRATE the content of the letter in VO:

Dear Zoey,

Big fan. I'm sorry this is the first letter I've written to you, but I only just found out that you exist. Forgive me. Anyway, good news. I am coming to Montreal! I have never been but it looks nice online. Is it nice? Anyway, my dad is going to come with me since it's just easier to have an adult sometimes. I haven't told him the real reason for the trip because he is not a romantic so he wouldn't understand and would probably try to stop me. He used to be a romantic but I'm not sure what happened. Maybe he's just tired. I'll be in Canada in a few days. Would you like to go for a walk or something? Also my name is Joe and I'm eleven and American.

Sincerely,

Joe

Joe turns to the TITLE PAGE of one of his Zoey Rousseau books and transcribes the address of the publisher onto an envelope. He then writes: URGENT, CARE OF ZOEY ROUSSEAU.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Alex cleans up his dinner for one.

There's a KNOCK at the front door. Alex was expecting it.

LIVING ROOM

Alex enters with IKE (30's, redneck with really expensive cowboy boots).

Alex and Ike take a seat on separate couches.

IKE

Boy, I haven't gotten weed-high in three days. Not cause I didn't want to. Cause I was busy. Too busy to get down with smoke as is my right. You believe that?

ALEX

(keep it down)
Joe's sleeping.

IKE

Wake 'im up! He's strange.

Ike takes a MASSIVE spliff out of his coat pocket. He looks like Bugs Bunny with a carrot.

IKE (CONT'D)
Let's get all weed-high and have
'im say strange shit.

ALEX
He's my son, Ike. He is not a
jester.

IKE
Who's to say he can't be both?

ALEX
Me. I'm to say that.

IKE
Whatever.

Ike picks up a UKULELE that is leaned against the wall. He
noodles around on it. He is a professional.

IKE (CONT'D)
(re: the weed)
Here or front porch?

EXT. FRONT PORCH

They're halfway through the spliff.

Ike still plays around on the ukulele.

ALEX
How's it going at the studio?

IKE
Goin. Ms. Taylor Swift cut a single
last week. Got to look at the small
of 'er back for like eight or nine
minutes. Heaven brother.

Alex nods, his face conceding that there are worse ways to
spend eight or nine minutes.

But his mind is elsewhere. He weighs whether or not to bring
something up.

ALEX
Made a new demo.

IKE
That right.

ALEX
It's good.

IKE

That right.

ALEX

I thought you might get it to
someone..

IKE

(interrupting)

You punched Warren Mitchell in the
kidney, St. Clair. Punched 'im!

ALEX

In the stomach.

IKE

Reckon that's where the kidney
resides.

ALEX

He was sleeping with my wife.

IKE

She's his wife.

ALEX

Not then, asshole.

IKE

That is true. Hey, I'm on your side
man. Me I'd-a strangled 'im with a
piano wire while whispering "shhhh"
into his ear. But you being a
pleasant man, you just punched 'im
in the kidney or the stomach or
whatever.

(then)

I'll get the demo in. Assuming it's
good. If it sucks I WILL BE upset
with you.

ALEX

It's good.

IKE

(nods, hopeful)

That right.

Ike puffs on the joint but it is clearly out. He doesn't
seem to notice. Finally he notices and relights it.

Some idle / kind of tense moments pass.

ALEX

Joe is in love with a cartoon character and I think he thinks she's real. I'm concerned he's crazy. I tried to raise him to be passionate but I think I raised him to be crazy instead.

IKE

That ain't crazy. Sane's what that is. Ariel, man, she's my squeeze. To this day.

Ike buffs a smudge off his fancy boots.

IKE (CONT'D)

Granted she's a fish, or at least half 'a one. Not sure where the vagina might be.

(btw he pronounces it "vuh-guy-nuh")

Maybe it's on her back, or her neck? Like gills? Maybe she breathes through it?

ALEX

I don't think she breathes through it.

IKE

Who's to say. All I do know is that we have much to learn about mermaid reproductive slash respiratory organs, and until we find out for certain I am happy to speculate.

On Alex as he realizes that he needs new friends.

INT. JOE'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Joe is sound asleep.

Alex opens the door to Joe's room. He sees a packed suitcase on the floor. It makes him more sad than angry.

Alex knocks gently at the door. Joe stirs.

ALEX

Farmer's market?

Joe shoots out of bed as though he's been up for hours.

JOE
We'll get kale chips for the plane
to Canada. Good call.

Alex decides to ignore this.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS

Joe and Alex ride bikes.

Alex swerves in front of Joe's bike, playfully.

JOE
Watch it asshole!

Alex shoots Joe a glare that, for them, is shorthand for "language".

JOE (CONT'D)
Assface?

ALEX
Still no.

JOE
Asshead.

ALEX
How about dad.

JOE
Yea alright. How much do I get at
the market?

ALEX
(thinks)
Five bucks.

JOE
Can I get whatever I want?

ALEX
Um NO. Last time you bought five
dollars worth of honey sticks.

JOE
How bout one dollar of honey sticks
and the rest on other stuff.

ALEX
Fine.

Alex has something on his mind..

ALEX (CONT'D)

I thought you might visit your mom this week. She wants to spend time with you.

Joe looks thoroughly offended by this suggestion.

JOE

Two things. First, we'll be in Montreal Quebec. Second, I don't want to see her ever again.

ALEX

We're not.. Quebec.. Don't say that, Joe, about your mom.

JOE

She left you. So she left us.

ALEX

It doesn't have to work that way.

JOE

I'm making it work that way.

(pause)

Do you know she has an infinity-pool now? The kind that doesn't end?

Alex did not know that.

JOE (CONT'D)

If I do ever go there again, I'm gonna take a big shit in that pool.

Alex wants to reprimand Joe's language but instead he laughs.

Joe laughs too.

JOE (CONT'D)

(shakes his head)

And Warren has his Grammy's on the mantel next to his kids' karate trophies.

Alex does not laugh at this.

EXT. FARMER'S MARKET

Alex pays a farmer for a whole bunch'a chard.

Joe walks up, holding a massive bundle of HONEY STICKS.

Alex starts to react.

JOE

Before you say anything. It's one dollar of honey sticks. And four dollars of agave.

Joe can't hide a mischievous smile.

Alex can't hide that he's impressed by the loophole.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS

Back on bikes. Their front baskets loaded with a bounty of green things.

Joe has a honey stick hanging from the corner of his mouth.

JOE

Sunday Fuddrucker's tonight?

ALEX

Of course dude.

INT. FUDDRUCKER'S - NIGHT

For the uninitiated, Fuddrucker's is a standard issue family burger restaurant.. which also has a wall of arcade games, making it *amazing* to an eleven-year-old.

Alex sits at a table with Ike.

IKE

Not sure why it never occurred to me before, but it hadn't. Fellatio and a pedicure, same time. Polish the knob, polish the toe. The ol' clear coat.

ALEX

(a beat, intrigued)

Was it the same woman doing both?

IKE

Was it the same woman doing both. NO! Sicko. My wife ain't no acrobat. We had assistance.

Alex abandons this line of conversation.

ALEX

I was reading up on Joe's..
condition.

IKE

He got pink eye?

ALEX

The cartoon character thing. It's called a para-social relationship. Essentially it means that only one party in the relationship is aware that the relationship even exists. With a human and a non-human, in this case.

IKE

(like he knows all too
well)

Mm hm. Mm hm.

ALEX

I'm worried about him. I feel like it's my fault.

Ike, ever the straight-shooter,

IKE

It is. He's just defecting to imaginary peoples cause his real ones are unreliable.

ALEX

Excuse me?

IKE

By my observation, you are a good dad. But you're not great. So he'll grow up good, not great.

(sloppy swig of beer)

Joseph's baby life was on the road with a rock 'n roll mom and dad. Tumultuous. But now instead of reaping the benefits of that, such as a monied upbringing of privilege, goin to private school with Thom Yorke's kids, if he has 'em, young Joe has you leaving him with babysitters while you're out making shit money playing shit gigs. So do better, is all I mean. Then Joseph won't be such a weirdo, tryin-a stick his little shmeckle in a two-dimensional girl.

(MORE)

IKE (CONT'D)
(a long tense beat)
That's Yiddish, shmeckle. For cock.

Alex both wants to hit Ike in the face, and hug him. Such is the case when we're told the truth.

IKE (CONT'D)
I know this is tough to hear, cause it's tough to say. Not as tough as it is to hear, but tough. His mom's got her shit together, and sooner or later Joseph will realize that and spend his time with her. So maybe if you get *your* shit together, focus on the boy's mental-health, spend some more time with him, he'll be less of a weirdo. Be good for you too. And I want what's good for you.

Alex takes this in.

We see Joe returning from the arcades.

ALEX
(imploring)
Do not tell him I told you about this.

INT. FUDDRUCKER'S - LATER

They eat.

JOE
So, Ike. How do you find Fuddrucker's so far?

IKE
It is delightful, Joe. Think I should open a franchise.

JOE
You totally should.

Ike eats. Without looking up,

IKE
Got spring break plans Joseph?

JOE
Nothing firm yet.

IKE

You and your daddy should do
somethin fun. That's what daddy's
are for.

Alex looks to Ike. Joe looks to Alex.

JOE

Yea. We should.

Awkward beats.

IKE

Joseph, how you think a mermaid
breathes?

JOE

(considers)

I don't know.

IKE

Do you think they're real?

JOE

No. They're myths.

IKE

You never seen The Little Mermaid?

JOE

That's a cartoon.

IKE

Cartoon can't be real?

ALEX

Ike.

IKE

(calmly, to Alex)

This is going to happen now.

(to Joe)

I think a cartoon can be real. Like
your imaginary friend from the
book!

Joe sees what's going on. He looks to Alex, incredulous.

JOE

What are you telling people? That
I'm nuts?

ALEX

No, Joe..

JOE

(loud)

I'm not nuts. I just have to go to Canada to find something out.

ALEX

We should go.

JOE

No. Let's talk about this. I finally care about doing something, and that makes me a crazy person. But YOU. You don't care about doing anything. You just play in a wedding band and complain about it, and hang out with *this* guy.

Ike looks thoroughly wounded.

JOE (CONT'D)

You're a rock star who doesn't even rock any more. And you don't even want to. What is that about? *That* is nuts. You think mom left you cuz she caught you drinking whiskey at lunch that one day? No, man. She left you because you stopped rocking.

Joe grabs Alex's CAR KEYS from the table.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'll see you at home.

Alex grabs Joe by the shoulder. Joe hands over the car keys. Then jerks his shoulder free of Alex's hand.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'll be by the car.

Joe storms out.

Alex is rattled.

IKE

Damn. Kid sized you up.

Alex leaves, dazed.

IKE (CONT'D)

Dinner is my treat.

INT. JOE'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Joe is asleep. He wears a grumpy expression.

There's a KNOCK at his door. Joe wakes up.

Joe's door opens a crack.

JOE

What.

Alex sticks ONLY HIS HAND in through the door, waving a small novelty CANADIAN FLAG. Like he's waving a white flag.

Alex's hand retreats. He closes the door.

Joe gets out of bed. He is ass naked. Kid sleeps ass naked.

He quickly puts on some shorts.

Joe runs over and opens the door, but Alex is gone.

Joe sprints out into the

LIVING ROOM

To find Alex drinking coffee. His PACKED LUGGAGE by the door.

JOE

(excited but tentative)

Really?

ALEX

We'll drive. I have to see somebody
in New York on the way.

JOE

Who?

ALEX

An old friend.

JOE

Old friend have...

Joe motions in front of his chest, indicating breasts. But, like, of the size that would topple even the largest human.

Alex is back to being amused.

ALEX

She does.

JOE

Nice.

(then)

That'll be good for you.

ALEX

We'll leave early tomorrow, truck
it to DC for the night.

JOE

Ok. I'm gonna finish packing and
learning French Canadian.

ALEX

Good idea.

Joe heads back towards his room. He's already around the corner so we can't see him.

JOE (O.S.)

Dad?

ALEX

Yea?

JOE (O.S.)

You have to want to rock, it
doesn't just happen.

ALEX

(a beat, appreciative)

I know.

EXT. ALEX AND JOE'S HOUSE - DAWN

Alex finishes packing up the Subaru.

Joe is sound asleep in the front seat.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING - LATER

Tennessee whips by in a haze of green. A sun-glittered river traces the distance. It's a spring day.

Joe has a plastic Barnes And Noble bag on his lap. He takes out a Montreal Lonely Planet Guide. Starts flipping through.

JOE

Says there have been five major riots in Montreal due to hockey.
Hope we see one.

ALEX

Doesn't make you sick to read in
the car?

JOE

No I'm good.

EXT. GAS STATION

Joe vomits into a trash can.

Alex leans against the Subaru, patiently waiting with a
bottle of water for Joe.

Alex stares at a neon Marlboro sign. Perhaps longingly.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING

FLAMENCO GUITAR MUSIC plays through the car speakers. This is
Alex St. Clair's driving jam!

Joe is trying to hide something with his right hand. Alex
looks over.

ALEX

What are you doing?

JOE

Nothing.

ALEX

You're reading! Dude!

JOE

What choice do I have?

ALEX

You have a choice.

JOE

I got it all out. Even stuck my
finger down to make sure.

ALEX

(gross)

Man.

Joe keeps reading.

JOE

Montreal means "Royal Mountain".

ALEX

If you have to puke it's happening
in that bag.

JOE

(not listening)
Or "Royal Hill".

The Flamenco Music PLAYS US OUT of the Subaru for a quick
scan of the land.

EXT. TENNESSEE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Lush. Wide. The kind of immense terrain that would have
stopped a Union soldier for a brief moment of appreciation..
before loading his musket.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING - LATER

Different Flamenco guitar music plays. Though Alex is
probably the only one who could tell the difference.

JOE

Do we have to listen to this?

ALEX

Nope. What would you rather?

Something catches Joe's eye.

JOE

DAD!

Alex is startled.

ALEX

What?!

Joe points to one of those roadside signs that list
restaurants at the coming exit.

This one reads McDonald's, Subway.. and FUDDRUCKERS!

ALEX (CONT'D)

You just threw up. You want to eat?

JOE

Of course. I just threw up.

Alex puts his right turn signal on.

EXT. FUDDRUCKER'S

Alex and Joe stand by the Subaru outside the Fuddrucker's, which is CLOSED. And from the looks of it, permanently.

JOE
What maniac would close a Fuddrucker's?

ALEX
I don't know.

JOE
(bewildered)
What maniac.

INT. DINER - LATER

Alex and Joe sit in a red pleather booth at a nondescript roadside diner.

Joe scans the menu with a librarian's focus.

Alex taps his fingers anxiously on his phone.

ALEX
I'm gonna make a call.

JOE
(immersed in the menu)
K.

EXT. DINER

Alex is on his phone. We hear it ring on the other end. Someone answers.

ALEX
(tentative)
Hi.

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

A WAITRESS approaches Joe. She is cute and seventeen, max.

WAITRESS
Something to drink while you wait for your brother?

JOE
That's my dad.

WAITRESS

Really? Seems young.

JOE

He's old enough to be my dad.

EXT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

ALEX

Should be there Friday.

Then.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Probably that Sheraton on West Broadway.

Then.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Really?

(a beat)

Sure. I mean. If it's not a problem. What about..

(a rare spaz)

whatever his dumb fucking name is.

Then.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(surprised. and encouraged.)

Really.

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Joe is chatting up the waitress.

JOE

He plays the guitar. And we have a xylophone, but I don't think he really knows how to play it.

The waitress is entertained by Joe.

WAITRESS

Xylophone is tough.

JOE

Yea, I tried it. His band was in Rolling Stone. April '98. Page forty-three.

Alex comes back inside and sits at the booth.

JOE (CONT'D)
Dad this is... I'm sorry I didn't
get your name.

WAITRESS
Cynthia.

JOE
Cynthia.

Alex smiles politely.

ALEX
Alex.

CYNTHIA
I'll grab his OJ.

She walks off.

JOE
You should get her number. She
likes you.

ALEX
I would go to jail for getting her
number.

Joe looks over at Cynthia. Considers.

JOE
Might be worth it.

I/E. - SUBARU - LATER

The sun sets. Washington, D.C. rises.

Joe has his HEADPHONES on. He listens to the NPR INTERVIEW
with David Archembault, which we HEAR in VO:

TERRY GROSS
Was there a moment with your
daughter, or an event that made you
say, this is the kind of person I
want to write? To dramatize?

ARCHEMBEAULT
There was, it was the first time my
wife and I took Zoey to see the
Montreal Symphony Orchestra.
(MORE)

ARCHEMBIAULT (CONT'D)
And when we left Zoey said, "That was badass". She was eight, so I can't speak to where she gathered that particular jewel of verbiage. Anyway I realized then that she sees the world in a specific way. In a cool way. And that's what I ask of my characters.

Joe nods. He gets it.

EXT. MARRIOTT SPRINGHILL SUITES - NIGHT

A resolutely generic hotel on the outskirts of DC.

Alex and Joe trudge in.

INT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - ALEX AND JOE'S ROOM

They enter, exhausted.

Joe perks up at the sight of the room. Kids don't notice when hotels suck.

Joe flops greedily onto one of the two floral-print quilted queen beds.

JOE
This bed is HUGE.

ALEX
That's the same size you have.

JOE
Feels huge.

Alex, taking Joe's lead, flops onto his bed. Nothing like a good bed flop.

ALEX
TV?

JOE
(big time)
Yes.

LATER

Joe is a million miles asleep.

Alex watches a cooking show.

CHEF (T.V.)
And we'll just use a little white
wine...

Which reminds Alex.

He goes to the MINI-BAR. Opens it. And it's not a mini-bar at all. It is an empty refrigerator.

Alex looks over at Joe, fast asleep.

Alex jots a NOTE for Joe and leaves it on the bedside table.

INT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - LOBBY LOUNGE - LATER

The fact that it's called the "Lobby Lounge" tells us all.

Alex sips a gin martini. Not his first or his second.

A YOUNG WOMAN approaches and sits at the empty bar stool next to him. She is drunk. She is DANIELLE.

DANIELLE
Uhg sorry that took so long I
literally thought I was gonna be
peeing until tomorrow.

A beat as Alex erases that from his memory.

ALEX
Where'd your friends go?

DANIELLE
They're being stupid.

Alex wonders if that was an answer.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Sh've get another drink?

ALEX
(thinks. briefly.)
Yea.

INT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - ALEX AND JOE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe stirs awake. He looks at Alex's vacant bed, still made.

JOE
Dad?

Joe does not see the note.

INT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - HALLWAY

Joe exits his hotel room, still in pajamas.

Joe starts down the hallway, concerned.

When something catches his ear.

The scary sounds of SEX!

GRUNTS pour forth from an adjacent HOTEL ROOM, its DOOR SLIGHTLY AJAR.

Joe walks towards the door in a tractor-beam of curiosity.

INT. LOBBY LOUNGE

Alex and Danielle talk close to each other's faces, trying their best not to hook up in public.

DANIELLE
(bites on her lip)
What's your room look like?

ALEX
I.. my son is up there.

DANIELLE
You have a son?
(breathy)
You're hot.

ALEX
I told you like two whole stories
about him.
(then)
How bout your room.

DANIELLE
Oh I'm not staying here. I live
close. Wanna go?

Alex sighs a drunk sigh.

ALEX
I can't leave the hotel.

EXT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - PARKING LOT

Alex and Danielle fuck in the Subaru. It's not subtle.

INT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - STRANGERS' ROOM

Joe is IN THE ROOM WHERE THE SCARY SEX SOUNDS CAME FROM.

He stares at the copulating couple, both of whom wear leather vests and nothing else.

They are backlit only by a single dim lamp.

Joe is somewhere between amazed and terrified.

Can't look away.

Suddenly THE DOOR CLOSES BEHIND JOE.

The shagging couple halt their activity and look over.

The woman SCREAMS.

MAN
The fuck?!

Joe hurries out of the room.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe sprints down the hallway. For his life.

The MAN exits the room. He is a beast. He is ass naked, save the vest.

MAN/BEAST
Get back here you fuckin perv! You
fuckin perv!!

The man/beast and his floppy dick are gaining on Joe!

Joe senses demise. He is numb with adrenaline.

We go CLOSE ON JOE'S FACE as we witness a MOMENTOUS DECISION:

Joe stops in his tracks.

He plants his feet.

Turns.

And just as the man is about to grab him or god knows what,

Joe PUNCHES THE MAN SQUARE IN THE COCK.

For the sake of the comedy world, we must see this occur in EXTREME SLOW MOTION.

Joe's FIST connects square on.

Picture, if you will, a collision between a Moray eel and a granite boulder.

The man/beast collapses in a heap of leather and agony.

INT. LOBBY LOUNGE

Alex and Danielle are back at the bar. Sex hair.

We hear faintly in the background, growing louder,

DAD DAD DAD DAD DAD **DAD**

And Joe finally bursts into the bar.

JOE

DAD!

ALEX

Joe?

JOE

I just punched a man in the dick!

Hard!

Alex struggles to process that.

ALEX

You what?!

(then)

It was hard?!

JOE

Not the dick. The punch!

ALEX

Joe please tell me what you're talking about.

JOE

We gotta jet! He's coming for me.
And he's ugly.

DANIELLE

(realizing, excited)

Oh, that's your son!

Alex looks at her.

ALEX
(you are a dummy)
Yes.

JOE
(focus!)
Dad. I punched a man. In the dick.

EXT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - PARKING LOT

Alex rushes to the Subaru with their suitcases.

Joe pops up from his hiding place behind the car.

They quickly get into the Subaru. Alex turns the car on.

INT. SUBARU - CONTINUOUS

JOE
It smells in here. Like a weird
gym.

Alex opens the windows a crack. Too bad shame doesn't
ventilate.

Alex puts the car in drive. Then back into park.

ALEX
(realizing)
Shit.

JOE
What?

ALEX
I can't drive.

JOE
Why?

ALEX
I had.. a drink.

JOE
(no big deal)
Oh. I'll drive.

INT. SUBARU - MOVING

Joe is behind the wheel. Driving!

EXT. SPRINGHILL SUITES - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

And we realize that he is only driving to a vacant corner of the parking lot.

Still, a thrilling moment for Joe.

He parks with a jolt.

INT. SUBARU - CONTINUOUS

ALEX

Good job.

JOE

It's as easy as it looks.

ALEX

We probably didn't have to leave.

JOE

(sarcastic)

Yea, let's go back and get our dicks punched by a monster. Good idea. I bet you he's going door to door, punching people in their dicks just to make sure he gets his revenge. I bet you. The guy looked like Wreck-It-Ralph but without kind eyes.

ALEX

(exhausted)

Well let's not risk that. We can take a cab to a hotel or sleep in the car.

JOE

(duh!)

Sleep in the car.

Alex takes off his jacket, folds it into a pillow and hands it to Joe.

In unison, they fully recline their seats.

INT. SUBARU - PARKED - MORNING

Alex and Joe asleep.

Joe is still in the driver's seat.

The sun starts to beam through the windshield.
Alex wakes first. He cringes, head full'a molasses.
Alex looks over at his awesome son.
A tear emerges in Alex's eye.
Followed by a considerable sniffle. Which wakes Joe.
Joe looks up at his dad.

JOE
(groggy)
You crying? Or just hungover.

Alex puts his full weight behind these words:

ALEX
I am so sorry I left you alone in
that room Joe.

JOE
You can leave me alone. All good.

ALEX
No I can't.

Joe shrugs.

JOE
Up to you I guess.

Alex and Joe put their seats upright.

ALEX
Let's get to New York.

They both get out of the car, walk around, swap seats.

They buckle up.

JOE
What does a hangover feel like?

Alex thinks.

ALEX
Like trying to drive on a highway
with a flat tire.
(a hungover beat)
Sometimes two.

Joe processes.

JOE
That sounds really difficult.

Alex nods. It's really difficult.

EXT. SUBARU - INTERSTATE 95

Cruising.

INT. SUBARU - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Alex toggles between some Flamenco tracks.

When we notice that the passenger seat is EMPTY.

Alex drives for a bit as we wonder what's up, then

ALEX
Why are you back there?

Reveal that Joe sits behind Alex. Entranced by the passing landscape.

JOE
You're my chauffeur.

ALEX
I am not your chauffeur.

Joe is getting a kick out of this.

JOE
To the butcher shop, Juan.

ALEX
Juan?

JOE
My driver, Juan. He's Catalan.
You're Juan, you're Catalan.

ALEX
(mock pissed)
I'm Irish and I'm about to be
fightin' Irish. Get up here, I want
company.

Joe squirms his way up into the front seat.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Seatbelt.

JOE
(offended)
I know.

Joe puts on his seatbelt.

JOE (CONT'D)
How long did you live in New York?

ALEX
Six years. Seven.

JOE
Jennifer Lawrence college?

ALEX
(laughs)
Sarah Lawrence.
(sotto)
But I would go to Jennifer Lawrence
college.

JOE
Huh?

Alex shakes his head, "nothing".

JOE (CONT'D)
Does your friend have a nice place?

ALEX
(thinks)
Probably not. She's my age but
she's not really a grown up. You're
more mature than her.

JOE
Then why are we staying with her?

ALEX
Because it's free.
(then)
And I'm not being fair, she's
great. She's a friend. She'll have
cool books for you.

Joe likes the sound of the books, but he's not sold.

JOE
I read online about a place called
the Mandarin Oriental. Central Park
views. Spa. We should stay there.

ALEX
Yea. Next time.

A beat.

JOE
I'll hold you to that.

EXT. SUBARU - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The Freedom Tower glints in the distance.

EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

Alex parallel parks on West 10th Street. Prettiest street in the world.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING

The kind that would have been called a tenement in the '60s, but is now beyond the fiscal grasp of just about everyone.

Alex and Joe carry their suitcases up four flights of stairs.

They reach the top. Catch their breath.

JOE
(panting)
At least. If you date a girl. Who
lives in a walk-up.
(big breath)
She'll have a good butt.

Alex laughs through a deep breath.

ALEX
It's true.

They compose themselves.

Alex knocks at the door...

Answered by ROBIN (34). The kind of person who spent a year in India in her early twenties, and never quite came back. Pretty in an unwashed way.

ROBIN
My men arrive.

It is immediately clear that there is history between Alex and Robin, of the adult kind.

INT. ROBIN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Kind of like a sexy pirate's den. One bedroom. For such a small place, there is a lot to look at.

Joe walks around the apartment like it's a museum.

ROBIN

Joe I don't think I've seen you since you were three.

Joe stares at some kind of PAINTED SKULL.

JOE

I didn't know you've ever seen me.

ALEX

(don't be rude)

Joe.

JOE

(sorry)

It's good to meet you. See you I mean. Thanks for letting us stay.

ROBIN

Of course honey. The couch is made up for you. I got that blanket in Phuket. Emu hair, really soft.

JOE

Where's dad sleeping?

Robin let's Alex take that one.

ALEX

I'll stay in the bedroom.

A weird beat.

JOE

Oh.

And another. Broken only, at long last, by,

ROBIN

You guys hungry?

JOE

(YES)

Yes.

EXT. WEST 10TH STREET - DAY

Brownstones and Cherry Blossoms. CHERRY BLOSSOMS!

Joe is a good ten paces ahead of Alex and Robin. He looks around wondrously, enamored with the city.

Joe sees a gleaming BROWNSTONE with a FOR SALE sign.

JOE
(yells back to Alex)
We should sell our house, move
here. This one's smaller than ours
so you'll save a few bucks.

EXT. BAR PITTI

Alex, Joe and Robin sit outside at this Village institution.

Alex and Robin drink prosecco. Joe goes to town on the bread.

MAN (O.S.)
Look who the fuck it is!
(then)
Shit your kid's here.

The MAN sits at the table's fourth seat. This is CRAIG. Craig is a grown-up with an Adderall prescription.

CRAIG
Good. GOD it is good to see this
crew.

Craig tousles Joe's hair. Joe does not care for this.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
How you doing little buddy?

Joe does not care for that either. He eats his bread.

ALEX
Good to see ya man.

ROBIN
(barely tolerant)
Craig.

Craig takes a sip of Robin's prosecco.

CRAIG
So what brings you back?

ALEX
I'm not really back.

CRAIG
But you're here.

ALEX
Yes.

CRAIG
So why are you back? Here.

ALEX
Pit stop, headed to Montreal.

CRAIG
Sin city, yes! A gig?

Alex looks to Joe.

ALEX
Joe's on a mission. He can tell you about it if he wants.

Joe casually shakes his head No.

CRAIG
Cryptic. Nice.

Craig reaches for Robin's glass again but she pulls it away before he can get to it.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
So what've you been up to? Still weddings?

ALEX
Mostly.

CRAIG
Right on, keeping you afloat?

JOE
(mouthful of bread)
He makes spa music.

Alex wishes Joe hadn't mentioned that.

CRAIG
(amused)
Spa music.

ALEX
(not amused)
Spa music.

CRAIG
Like crickets chirping? You put
your finger in a cricket's asshole
to make it chirp?

Alex's tolerance of Craig is a function of history.

ALEX
I get Celtic ballads from the
Ethnomusicology department at
Vanderbilt, transpose them with
synthesizers, sell the tracks to
spas.

Craig is actually impressed by this. And kind of jealous.

CRAIG
Damn. Good idea St. Clair.

Alex leans back, looks at some tree or another. He asks this with no concern for its answer:

ALEX
How're you?

CRAIG
Solid, mostly doing session gigs.
Played djembe on a track on Lorde's
album but she cut it.

ALEX
(wholly disinterested)
Mm.

CRAIG
She's seventeen, what the fuck does
she know.
(then)
Dude! I'm playing with some guys at
55 Bar tonight! Sit in!

Alex is intrigued.

ALEX
Oh. I can't. Joe.

JOE
I'll sneak in.

ROBIN

I can watch Joe tonight. You should

play, it'll be good for you.

(to Joe, playfully coy)

You wanna go on a date with me
tonight?

Joe's heart actually kind of flitters from this.

JOE

I would do that.

Alex is unsure about this.

JOE (CONT'D)

You should play, dad.

Alex is still unsure about this.

EXT. 55 BAR - NIGHT

Alex, Joe and Robin stand outside the stairs to the subterranean jazz club. Robin holds Joe's hand. She can tell that Alex is apprehensive.

ROBIN

We'll be fine Al.

(re: Joe)

I'm in good hands.

JOE

We'll be fine dad. Rock out.

Alex kisses Joe on the top of his head, nods his thanks to Robin, and heads down the stairs.

ROBIN

(to Joe)

Where should we go?

JOE

(thrilled by the city)

Anywhere!

EXT. MANHATTAN - NIGHT

We get a Joe's-eye-view of the glowing night. Any number of things capture his gaze.

- Homeless guys playing chess in Washington Square Park.
- Some drunk NYU kids being just that.

- A person walking two dogs: one is the biggest dog you've ever seen, the other is the smallest you've ever seen.

JOE
(re: dogs)
I don't know how the small one sleeps at night.

ROBIN
It probably thinks it's big.

JOE
(looks at the small dog)
Poor idiot.

ROBIN
You hungry yet?

JOE
Yea.
(then)
I can cook for us.

ROBIN
(impressed)
What's your specialty?

JOE
Fancy Ramen. It's just ramen noodles but with stuff.

ROBIN
Ooh sounds good. Let's make a stop.

EXT. JAPANESE GROCERY STORE

A neon kaleidoscope of sushi and bottled teas and mysterious packaged foods. Bathed in bright light from every angle.

Joe has never seen anything like it.

INT. JAPANESE GROCERY STORE

Joe wanders and wonders. Robin follows.

JOE
It's like a grocery store for aliens.

Joe of course does not get the double meaning there.

ROBIN
Maybe don't say that too loud.

Joe picks up some kind of candy. The translucent wrapper features a unicorn with giant eyes and doughnuts on its horn.

JOE
(amazed)
Alien food.

INT. BAR 55

A small jazz club, old and great.

Sound check. Just the musicians and people readying the bar.

Alex tunes a borrowed hollow-body Gibson. There's something about a guitar around his neck that makes Alex stand straighter, like a knight's chainmail or something.

Craig is behind him, tightening a snare drum.

A hip Korean chick is to Alex's right with a stand-up bass, and some dude who looks like George R. R. Martin is seated to his left with a pedal-steel guitar and a lip of chewing tobacco.

CRAIG
She good enough for you?

Alex processes the question.

ALEX
.. Robin?

CRAIG
No, dipshit. The guitar.
(then, as concerned as he's
capable of)
Damn. You're all mixed up, huh?

Alex tries to pave this one over.

ALEX
Strings are kind of old.

CRAIG
You're telling me. But enough about
Robin. At least the strings on the
guitar are new!

Craig laughs at his own dumb cruel remark.

Alex gives Craig a look that shuts him up.

Alex returns to his task. Plays a few liquidy jazz chords. Seems satisfied.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Nervous?

ALEX
No.

He is a little, but the good kind.

CRAIG
When's the last time you played for
a crowd?

ALEX
Last week.

CRAIG
By crowd I mean people who could
leave if they wanted to. All due
respect to the wedding band.

Alex is about to do what he shouldn't, react, when thankfully he is distracted by

VOICE
Hey.

Alex looks up to see a COCKTAIL WAITRESS, about his age. And dressed like a cocktail waitress.

Alex tries to place her.

MARNEY
Marney.

It can be assumed that these two know what each other's genitals look like.

ALEX
Marney. Of course.

MARNEY
Surprised to see you here.

ALEX
Surprised to see you here.

MARNEY
No you're not.

ALEX
Happy to see you here.

MARNEY
(sultry)
That I believe.

She walks off. Parades her ass.

On Alex: He likes what this guitar does to him. Always has. He raises an eyebrow and plays a jaunty riff.

Alex's gaze is broken by the George R. R. Martin guy, who nods back toward Craig, and says sotto to Alex,

R.R.
If that fool weren't gettin me work, I'd hold him by his ankles from the Chrysler Building til his own shit dripped in his eyes.

R.R. spits a wad of tobacco on the ground.

Alex likes R.R.

INT. ROBIN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - LATER

Joe unpacks the Japanese groceries.

ROBIN (O.S.)
Just getting changed, k?

JOE
Yea.

If it's possible to register this, we will: Joe thinks about trying to sneak a peek. Then decides that's disrespectful.

Joe looks through kitchen drawers. He takes out a ladle.

Then he roots around the cabinets looking for a pot.

Joe opens one large cabinet that just serves as storage. Some old rollerblades, an opened can of tennis balls, and...

A HAT. It's a baseball hat with the Led Zeppelin "ZoSo" logo.

Joe picks up the hat, confounded.

JOE (CONT'D)
Robin?

Robin appears at the door to the kitchen wearing a t-shirt and loose yoga pants.

ROBIN
Find everything, chef?

JOE
Why is my dad's hat in this cabinet?

ROBIN
Oh that's right I need to give that to him.

JOE
Why's it in the cabinet?

She is absentmindedly twirling her hair into a ponytail, so she absentmindedly says,

ROBIN
It's from last summer.

JOE
My dad wasn't in New York last summer.

It is now that Robin realizes the very big and very bad mistake that she has made.

Her face betrays the truth. Even to an eleven-year-old.

ROBIN
(timid. almost apologizing)
Maybe I'm mistaken.

JOE
My dad only took one trip last summer and it was to Austin for music.

Joe is DESTROYED.

ROBIN
Joe.

The ugly facts all settle in Joe's mind.

JOE
My dad was married last summer.

ROBIN
Joe.

JOE
(cutting)
And not to you.

She takes a step towards him.
Joe wields the ladle like a knife.
He sees the hurt on Robin's face,
And he puts the ladle down.

JOE (CONT'D)
(dazed)
It's not your fault.

And the big realization.

JOE (CONT'D)
And it wasn't my mom's fault.

And the biggest realization.

JOE (CONT'D)
It was my dad's fault. He's a
cheater. A lying cheater.

ROBIN
(feebley)
Joe I think your parents were
having a really difficult time.
Your dad just needed an old friend
to talk to.

JOE
That's what phones are for.

Joe takes a deep breath.

There's a heavy silence in the room.

JOE (CONT'D)
(distant and stunned)
It's okay, let's just cook dinner.
I'm hungry.

Robin steps forward and puts her hand on the back of Joe's neck, a maternal embrace. Joe wants to resist but he can't.

JOE (CONT'D)
I gotta go to the bathroom. Can you
boil water and chop the carrots and
celery? Wash them first. And put
the eggs in the fridge please.

Robin nods.

Joe exits the kitchen.

Robin sets to work, feeling like a guilty pile of shit.

The Zeppelin hat sits on the counter. It is now an evil hat.

Robin tosses the hat back into the storage cabinet.

We stay with her as she washes and chops. A tear forms in her eye. She snuffs it out with a paper towel.

She pours a glass of red.

Robin finishes chopping. She leaves the kitchen into the,

LIVING ROOM

To find that the DOOR TO THE APARTMENT IS OPEN.

As we might have expected, but she certainly did not, JOE'S SUITCASE IS GONE.

Robin panics. She sees a TORN OUT SHEET OF PAPER on the coffee table, weighed down with a chunk of crystal.

Robin reads. We hear a pissed off Joe in VO:

"Dad. I know you came to New York last summer to stay with Robin, which means you lied about going to Austin, which means you cheated on mom and you lied to me. I can't believe you let me hate mom. I'm going to Montreal to find Zoey. If I come home, I will come home when I feel like it."

Love,

Joe"

On Robin: FULL FREAK OUT MODE.

EXT. WEST 10TH STREET

Robin bursts out of the apartment building.

Joe is nowhere to be seen.

INT. 55 BAR

And a very different vibe. Jamming!

Alex is having the time of his life.

Until,

He sees ROBIN appear in the back of the crowd.

And she is crying.

Alex's face drops. An unintentional C-minor escapes from his guitar.

EXT. 55 BAR

Alex and Robin exit in a hurry. Robin clutches Joe's NOTE.

ALEX

Shit. Shit.

ROBIN

I was so stupid. I didn't think.

ALEX

No. It was stupid of me to come see you.

This breaks Robin's heart.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Did you call the police?

ROBIN

I thought maybe you'd know where he would go.

Alex loses it a bit. He grabs the note from her hand.

ALEX

I DO. MONTREAL.

(a beat, calmer)

Joe means what he says.

Then, realizing,

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wait. He doesn't even have money.

ROBIN

No, he does. He took a hundred and sixty dollars from my wallet.

Alex laughs for the briefest moment. "That's my boy".

ALEX

Well the furthest he'll get is the border.

ROBIN

Why?

ALEX

I have his passport.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL

Joe wheels his suitcase through this big scary hub.

A purposeful march.

He approaches a Greyhound ticket counter.

JOE

Montreal Quebec, please. Canada.

The sassy Caribbean ticket-taker with a heart of gold just looks at him like, "Are you serious, young thing?"

TICKET TAKER

Next one's tomorrow. How old'a you?

JOE

Is there a bus North at least?

TICKET TAKER

You could go to Lake Placid tonight, transfer.

(then)

You have a signed Unaccompanied Minor form? No form no ticket.

On Joe: Shit.

JOE

I'll have to get back to you.

CUT TO:

Joe is at a DIGITAL TICKET KIOSK. Loophole. But one problem.

JOE (CONT'D)

Credit card only?

(of course)

Credit card only.

Joe looks around.

He sees a YOUNG WHITE GUY with thick DREADLOCKS.. but also with a really nice Tumi duffel and Dre Beats headphones. This is the TRUSTAFARIAN (Trust fund / Rastafarian).

Joe approaches.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hey, man.

The Trustafarian removes his headphones.

TRUSTAFARIAN
Hello!

JOE
If I give you twenty extra bucks
can you buy me a ticket to Lake
Placid with your credit card?

TRUSTAFARIAN
Um. I guess. Your parents cool with
that?

JOE
My parents died. In a speed-boating
incident.

TRUSTAFARIAN
(guilty)
Oh. Sure little man, no service
charge necessary though. We'll
leave that to the marauding thieves
at Ticketmaster.
(then)
Headed to Placid myself. I'm
Mickey.

Mickey extends a hand that smells of patchouli and Kiehls.

JOE
Joe St. Clair.

They shake hands, firmly, like a partnership has been formed.

INT. POLICE STATION

Alex and Robin sit across the desk from an OFFICER (Xing).

Officer Xing is a Chinese-American with a Texas drawl,
because why not.

OFFICER XING
And he stole one hundred and sixty
dollars from you?

ROBIN
He didn't steal it, he.. took it.

Xing nods. Writes that down.

ALEX
The point is that he has enough
money to leave the city.

Xing nods. Writes that down.

OFFICER XING
Describe the boy.

ALEX
Light brown hair. Light brown eyes.

Xing nods. Writes that down.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(hurried)
He's a white eleven-year-old boy,
they kind of all look the same.

Xing nods. Writes that down.

OFFICER XING
He fat? Overweight so to speak?

ALEX
No.

Xing writes that down. Alex is growing impatient with Xing.

OFFICER XING
How else would you describe him.

ALEX
Kind of short. ROBIN
Preternaturally intuitive.

Xing looks at Alex. Then at Robin. And writes that down.

Xing taps his pen on the desk twice, then says with the
utmost sincerity,

OFFICER XING
I will find your boy.
(now with derision)
Before those Mounties get their
sticky maple paws on 'im.

INT. GREYHOUND - MOVING - LATER

Joe and Mickey sit together.

JOE

So the speed-boat was going fast, you know, it's a speed boat. And all of a sudden this dolphin jumps out of the water and hits the driver in the face. And the driver falls out of the boat and like splits in half 'cause they were going so fast. And my parents were in the back of the boat. And then there was no one driving so it fell off a waterfall and they died.

Mickey, it seems, has gotten high since we last saw him. He listens intently..

..And then he catches up with those facts.

MICKEY

Wait. So there was a dolphin. And a waterfall?

JOE

Yea.

MICKEY

There was a dolphin in a river.

JOE

It was a river dolphin.

Mickey might be onto Joe's bullshit. But he's also significantly high so he needs to give it further thought.

MICKEY

I'm sorry little man. That's rough.

(then)

Are you sad?

Because Joe doesn't seem sad.

JOE

Well my dad was a lying cheater. But before I knew that I liked him. I thought my mom was the cheater so I hated her. Now I don't miss my dad. But I miss my mom.

EXT. POLICE STATION

It is late. Alex paces outside the precinct. Mostly just cabs and trucks zoom by, a staccato of yellow and grey blocks.

Alex stares at his phone, deliberating. Or delaying.

He makes a call.

ALEX

Hi.

(a beat)

I lost our son.

INT. GREYHOUND - MOVING - LATER

Close on Joe.

JOE

... She scales a nearby fence, and disappears with an agility that would make a cat blush. The alleyway is now deserted but for the Henchman with half a face.

We shift to realize that Joe is READING TO MICKEY FROM HIS ZOEY ROUSSEAU BOOK. Mickey is entranced.

Joe shows Mickey the illustration, as a Kindergarten teacher would to a class of kids. Mickey nods, pleased.

MICKEY

It's even more exciting knowing that she's real.

JOE

I agree.

Joe turns the page, continues.

JOE (CONT'D)

Chapter Eight: Restitution.

(clears his throat)

The metal detector idles, oblivious to Zoey's wooden baton and its arsenic-laced darts. Zoey braves forth. In her tuxedo and tails, she is effortlessly absorbed into the gala. The visiting Prime Minister is visible in the distance, holding elegant court.

EXT. GREYHOUND - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The bus is gradually enveloped by the Adirondack High Peaks. Mountains both snow-capped and not. North country in Spring.

INT. POLICE STATION - WAITING ROOM

Alex storms back in. It appears his phone call did not go well.

Robin is half asleep in a hard plastic chair.

ALEX
(devastated)
She's suing for custody.

ROBIN
Al.

ALEX
She'll win. And she's right. I can't handle him. Emotionally. And physically it would appear.

ROBIN
Yes you can.

ALEX
He's more of an adult than I am.

ROBIN
He's just imitating an adult. He's imitating you.

XING enters the room.

ALEX
(something good, please)
Officer Xing.

INT. POLICE STATION - XING'S OFFICE

They lean over two MONITORS. On one is a FREEZE FRAME of Joe and Mickey talking in the Port Authority. On the other is a frame of Joe and Mickey boarding the bus together.

OFFICER XING
The accompanying man is a hippie,
I'm afraid.

ALEX

Yea. That's the kind of friend he would make.

OFFICER XING

We have an APB out on the bus but they're likely at the destination, or close to. I've been in touch with Lake Placid Police.

(then)

Good folks. Wouldn't hurt a hockey puck, unlike their Mountie neighbors to the north with their blood-red costumes.

EXT. WEST 10TH STREET - LATER

A cab deposits Alex and Robin by the Subaru.

Alex starts to hurry into the driver's seat, when he realizes a question needs to be asked:

ALEX

You're coming, right?

She is not, he sees it on her face.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Why.

ROBIN

His life is complicated enough. Without another complicated person in it.

ALEX

What about me?

ROBIN

What about you.

ALEX

(just now realizing)

I think I'm lonely.

She looks at him.

ROBIN

(tough love)

It will pass.

(then)

Let me know he's safe?

She smiles sadly and heads inside.

On Alex: All alone.

INT. SUBARU - MOVING

Middle of the night.

No Flamenco music. The noise is all inside Alex's head.

CUT TO:

INT. GREYHOUND - MOVING

Mickey has fallen asleep. Leaving Joe, too, all alone.

The bus begins to look like a more sinister place.

Some guy a few rows up COUGHS a plague-ey cough.

Joe grits his teeth. He looks outside to see a SIGN nearing:

"WELCOME TO LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK

HOME OF THE 1932 AND 1980 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES"

I./E. GREYHOUND / BUS STATION - STOPPED

Everyone on the bus gathers their belongings, stand crouched under above-head storage racks.

MICKEY
So it's off to Canada?

JOE
Finally.

MICKEY
Well, let Ms. Rousseau know that
she has a new fan in Mickey.

JOE
Yea I'll tell her. Why are you
going to Lake Placid?

MICKEY
Visiting my parents before I move
to Mexico. I'm either gonna teach
English, or learn Spanish. Haven't
decided which yet.

EXT. LAKE PLACID BUS STATION

People file off the Greyhound.

We switch to JOE'S POV as he exits the bus..

..to see TWO POLICE OFFICERS WAITING.

The Officers consult a photo, and walk towards Joe.

Joe looks to Mickey.

JOE
(quietly)
Jig's up. Goodbye.

And Joe SPRINTS AWAY.

He gets all of twenty feet before the running-back of a Police Officer has him in his grasp.

Joe writhes.

JOE (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Get off me!

MICKEY
(to Joe)
Don't cross the fuzz dude! Trust me.

Joe has exhausted himself. He involuntarily calms down.

OFFICER 1
We need to call your father, Joe.

Joe looks up at Mickey, who is not at all surprised re: Joe's father.

JOE
(apologizing)
My parents aren't dead.

MICKEY
That became clear.

JOE
River dolphins exist though.

MICKEY
(genuine)
I believe you.

OFFICER 1

Let's go make that call, Joe.

Joe nods, resigned. He looks to Mickey.

JOE

I'll stop at nothing.

MICKEY

(a reassuring nod)

I know.

Thus concludes the ballad of Mickey and Joe.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING

Alex is just one tense nerve.

He smokes a cigarette. We haven't seen this before. He handles the cigarette expertly.

Alex's PHONE RINGS. It's like a balloon popped in the car.

Alex DROPS THE LIT CIGARETTE to the floor. He tries to grab the cigarette, answer the phone, and steer. Not working.

The Subaru VEERS violently.

Several CAR HORMS blare at him.

Alex manages to get the cigarette and steady the car.

Nearly a disaster.

He answers the phone, on speaker.

ALEX

(panicked)

Hello. Hello.

IKE (O.S.)

(cheery)

Hello! Hello!

ALEX

Can't talk now. Bye.

He's about to hang up, when

IKE

Bye? Listen! I got you a gig!

Alex is listening, kind of.

ALEX

What?

IKE

I spoke to Warren Mitchell and we both agreed: Him fucking your then wife was a greater offense than you punchin' him in the kidney or stomach or whatever.

ALEX

(edge of tears)

I lost Joe.

Ike hears the gravity in Alex's voice, drops his redneck shtick a bit.

IKE

How did you lose Joe, Alex?

ALEX

He ran away. From me.

IKE

Well. Go find your boy.

(then)

Session's next Wednesday. Kellie Pickler album. Do right by her, maybe she takes you on tour. That's how it starts.

ALEX

Thanks Ike.

IKE

Let me know if I can help. With Joe. He's crazy, your boy. Good crazy. But good crazy can be bad.

ALEX

Right.

IKE

Gotta run.

(then, satisfied)

Getting a pedicure.

Alex cringes at what that could also mean.

ALEX

Bye Ike.

IKE

Bye now.

Alex hangs up.

LATER

The Subaru is a torpedo through dark waters.

The PHONE RINGS again. Alex answers.

ALEX
(hopeful)
Hello.

OFFICER 1 (O.S.)
Mr. St. Clair this is Officer
Grandy with the Lake Placid Police
Department. Your son is in our
custody. I'll put him on now.

Alex nearly faints with relief. He holds it together.

JOE (O.S.)
Hi.
(bitter disbelief)
They got me.

ALEX
Where are you. Be specific.

Alex's voice betrays any particular emotion. Kind of scary.

JOE
Lake Placid, New York. Home of the
1932 and 1980 Winter Olympic Games.
They still have the ski jumps.

ALEX
Are you at the Police Station?

JOE
Yes.

ALEX
(wrecked)
If you move from there. Or you try
to move from there. I will throw
you off a ski jump.

Joe can hear what he's done to his father. Feels awful.

JOE
I'll be here.

EXT. LAKE PLACID POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAWN

The Subaru peels into the parking lot.

INT. LAKE PLACID POLICE DEPARTMENT

Alex enters. He aged a year in the past ten hours.

The receptionist can tell from the look on Alex's face who he is, and she simply points to an office.

INT. OFFICE

Joe and Officer Grandy watch Nick-At-Night on a small, circa 2003 plasma television.

Alex enters the office. Grandy turns off the TV, stands.

OFFICER GRANDY
Mr. St. Clair yes?

Alex DOES NOT EVEN LOOK AT JOE, WHICH IS SCARING THE SHIT OUT OF JOE.

Alex and Grandy shake hands.

ALEX
Thank you.

OFFICER GRANDY
Credit goes to my esteemed
colleague Officer Jing. Zing.
(he's just trying to
pronounce it)
Zjing. Jing.
(gives up)
You met him.

ALEX
I need a favor.

Alex STILL hasn't laid a direct eye on Joe, who is trembling.

OFFICER GRANDY
Sir.

ALEX
Do you have an interrogation room?

INT. LAKE PLACID POLICE DEPARTMENT - INTERROGATION ROOM

Joe is in the perp's chair, behind a large steel table.

Alex paces before him, hands clenched behind his back.

Joe opens his mouth to say something, then Alex looks at him - in the eyes for the first time here - and Joe shuts right up.

ALEX

Why did you do it.

JOE

Why do you think.

ALEX

Don't get fucking fresh with me Joseph. You could have died. You are eleven. The world is designed to kill eleven-year-olds.

Alex's hard-ass veneer breaks for a moment.

ALEX (CONT'D)

And if you die, I die. Don't you see how that works?

Joe does.

Alex recomposes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I know I shouldn't have left you with Robin. But just because you have the opportunity to get into trouble, *does not mean you should take it.*

JOE

Trouble?! I wasn't looking for problems, dad. I was looking for solutions.

ALEX

To what?!

JOE

To you.

Alex stares a laser-beam at Joe.

Joe is unfazed this time. He gets out with it:

JOE (CONT'D)
You're a liar. And a cheater. I
know you didn't go to Austin last
summer to play music. You went to
New York to have sex with Robin.
And you were married to mom. So
screw you, I'm going to Montreal.

Joe starts to stand. He gets about an inch off the chair
before Alex puts a thousand threats into just two words:

ALEX
Sit down.

Joe complies.

Alex finally takes a deep breath.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You're only half right.

JOE
You cheated.

ALEX
No. But I lied. Not to your mother,
but to you. And it's the worst
thing I've ever done.

JOE
What do you mean.

Alex sits down on the floor, exhausted. He leans his back
against the wall. Joe now holds higher ground.

ALEX
I did go to New York. I did stay
with Robin.

JOE
You left your hat.

ALEX
(nods)
But I didn't cheat on your mom. We
were already divorced.

JOE
No you weren't.

ALEX
(I'm telling you)
Yes, we were.
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
(then)
For almost a year before that.

Joe's mind is blown.

JOE
I was living with divorced parents
for a year without knowing it?

ALEX
We thought it would be best to keep
it from you until you finished your
first year of middle school. Middle
school is hard enough.

On Joe: Yea that's true.

ALEX (CONT'D)
But the fact that we're in a police
interrogation room might suggest
that my strategy was flawed.

JOE
(so relieved)
You didn't cheat.

ALEX
Of course not.

A long heavy beat as Joe recalibrates his feelings towards
his parents. Once again, poor kid.

JOE
I'm tired, dad. Let's just get to
Canada.

ALEX
We are going *home* Joe. Your mother
is *freaked* out. She needs to see
you.

JOE
She needs to see me as much as she
needs me to shit in her never-
ending pool.

ALEX
Joe, relax man.

JOE
I'll relax when I get to where I'm
going.

ALEX

You're not going anywhere without
me.

JOE

Oh yea?

ALEX

Yea.

Alex reaches into his jacket pocket, produces Joe's PASSPORT.

Joe realizes. And he's humiliated. This one moment might show him that, for all his grand design and ambition, he's kind of still just a dumb kid. As we all were.

JOE

Oh.

Alex nods. It's not gloating. He sees Joe's innocence, and the pain that accompanies it.

JOE (CONT'D)

I guess that puts you in charge.

ALEX

It does. And we're going home.

Joe realizes that his own speedboat nears the waterfall, so to speak. He decides to get out with it.

JOE

She's real, dad.

ALEX

Who?

JOE

Zoey.

ALEX

She's a cartoon.

JOE

I was previously under that
impression.

ALEX

.. And what changed your mind?

JOE

The interview with the author.. He
based the character on his
daughter. Even her freckle, dad.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
She's real. It's like Pinocchio
becoming a real boy. Except now
it's a super cute girl.

Alex absorbs this, sees what it means to Joe.

ALEX
Why didn't you tell me that before?

JOE
You never tell me about the chicks
you're into.
(shrugs, a little
embarrassed)
It's personal.

EXT. LAKE PLACID - DAY

A paved local mountain road. The sun is up.

There are two EXITS ahead:

- Interstate 87 SOUTH
- Interstate 87 NORTH

The Subaru cruises into view.

And enters the Northbound ramp.

EXT. SUBARU - MOVING - LATER

87 North and its majesty. Driving this road reminds us that
we live on a planet, and maybe one that wants us here.

INT. SUBARU - MOVING - LATER

Joe is happy. So Alex is happy.

The FLAMENCO MUSIC makes its return.

JOE
It smells like cigarettes.

ALEX
I smoked a cigarette. It doesn't
mean you're allowed to, and it
doesn't mean I'm allowed to.

That settles that.

Alex hands his PHONE to Joe.

ALEX (CONT'D)
It's dialed. Just hit send.

Joe takes a resigned breath. He hits send. It rings.

JOE
Hi.

We just hear YELLING from the other end. A flood of vitriol.

Joe holds the phone slightly away from his head.

The yelling finally abates.

JOE (CONT'D)
(soft)
I know mom. I love you too.

I./E. SUBARU - LATER

The Subaru idles towards the front of a line of cars at the US / CANADIAN BORDER.

Up ahead, Alex sees Border Patrol Officers, but also a few MOUNTIES. In their blood-red costumes. He laughs to himself.

Joe stares plaintively out the window.

ALEX
You okay?

JOE
Huh?

ALEX
You alright?

JOE
Oh. Yea. Well..

Joe doesn't elaborate.

ALEX
What's up?

JOE
(a beat)
What if she doesn't like me? Or worse, what if she's on vacation?

ALEX

Of course she'll like you. And if
she's on vacation, we'll.. stay
until she gets back.

JOE

(skeptical)

Really?

ALEX

You didn't punch a guy in the dick
for nothing, right?

JOE

(damn straight)

That's right.

They are next in line at the border.

Alex pulls up, rolls down the window. A Border Patrol Officer
approaches. Alex hands him their passports.

BORDER PATROL

Morning gentlemen.

ALEX

Officer.

BORDER PATROL

What brings you to Canada?

Alex starts to speak but Joe chimes in.

JOE

I'm here to find a girl.

BORDER PATROL

You've come for our women?

Alex puts his hand on Joe's leg, "let me do the talking".

To no avail.

JOE

Yea her dad is a professor at
McGill University in Montreal
Quebec. He wrote these books and
she's a character in them, but
she's also real as well.

BORDER PATROL

Oh. I see.

ALEX

You do?

Border Patrol gives a shrug/nod.

BORDER PATROL

How long will you be staying in
Canada then?

JOE

Depends if she's on vacation. And
if she likes me.

ALEX

About a week, Officer.

JOE

Yea about a week.

Border Patrol glances through their passports.

BORDER PATROL

Any drugs or illegal firearms in
the vehicle?

JOE

My dad smoked a cigarette.

BORDER PATROL

(confused)

Well. That's his prerogative I
suppose.

Border Patrol stamps the passports, hands them back to Alex.

EXT. MONTREAL - OLD CITY - DAY

Alex and Joe traverse a cobblestone street, flanked by
buildings that date to the mid-1600's.

JOE

We'll need new clothes and
haircuts. And you could use a
shave.

ALEX

I thought you like my beard.

JOE

I do but this is a different
culture. Cleaner.

(then)

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
I have a hundred and ten dollars left. I can pay for our haircuts and your shave but I don't think I have enough for clothes. The French know style so the clothes have to be good.

ALEX
(knowing)
Where did you get money?

JOE
.. I brought it from home. When I sold my squash racquet at the garage sale.

ALEX
You got a hundred and ten dollars for a used squash racquet?

JOE
Mm hm.

A brief tense silence.

ALEX
You owe Robin an apology.

JOE
No, I owe her a hundred and sixty dollars.

ALEX
And an apology.

JOE
One or the other.

Alex gives a disapproving, if not quite stern look. He decides not to press the point.

What follows is, in essence, a makeover sequence:

INT. BARBER SHOP

Joe gets a haircut. Alex gets a shave.

EXT. MONTREAL - OLD CITY

The boys are back on the street. Looking fresh.

Joe has a bit of confidence in his step and maybe a cocky facial expression.

INT. MEN'S CLOTHING SHOP

Alex looks through a rack of LEATHER JACKETS.

Joe looks through a boys' rack of TWEED SUITS.

EXT. MONTREAL - OLD CITY - STREET

Alex and Joe exit the clothing shop.. both wearing leather jackets.

INT. NOVELTY GIFT SHOP

Joe looks through a rack of rub-on tattoos. He chooses one of a red electric guitar. Alex approves.

EXT. MONTREAL - OLD CITY - STREET

Joe admires the tattoo. It's on the inside of his left wrist.

ALEX
(the big question)
Ready to head over?

Joe suddenly looks nervous.

JOE
I think we should eat first.

ALEX
We ate an hour ago.

JOE
(clearly stalling)
I feel weak. I need protein and carbohydrates.

INT. POUTINE SHOP

Alex and Joe eat poutine.

JOE
Looks like poop. Sure doesn't taste like it.

Alex nods, agreeing. He stands.

ALEX
Bathroom. Be right back.

Then, realizing he needs to say this,

ALEX (CONT'D)
Don't go anywhere.

Alex heads off.

Joe works at his poutine like a connoisseur.

Alex's PHONE is on the table. It RINGS. Screen reads "Ike".

Joe answers.

JOE
This is Joe.

IKE (O.S.)
Joseph! How goes your quest of
romance and adventure?!

JOE
Pretty good.

IKE
Your daddy there?

JOE
No.

IKE
Well tell im to get his ass back to
Nashville. Tell him the gig got
bumped up to Friday. He'll know
what that means.

JOE
I think anyone would know what that
means.

IKE
Yea you're right.

JOE
I'll tell him.

IKE
Good man. Adios brave warrior.

JOE
Bye Ike.

Joe hangs up. Returns to his poutine. Makes a decision.

Alex returns. Joe neglects to mention something..

EXT. MONTREAL - OLD CITY - DAY

They walk off the poutine.

Alex looks back at Joe. Notices that Joe looks some brand of concerned. Alex figures he's just nervous. Offers this,

ALEX
Ya look sharp, Joe.

JOE
(tentative)
Yea.

Alex removes a tourist map from his back pocket. He is preoccupied with it so he doesn't notice that Joe is acting somehow strange.

We are tight on Alex as he scans the map. Joe is below frame.

ALEX
We can take a cab to McGill or we can take the Metro which might be faster. It's up to you.

No response from Joe.

Alex is still walking, face in the map.

ALEX (CONT'D)
What'll it be?
(still nothing)
Joe?

Alex turns back, and we see at the same time as him:

JOE IS A COLLAPSED HEAP ON THE SIDEWALK.

INT. AMBULENCE - MOVING

With one of those weird woo-woo European sirens.

Joe is prostrate on a gurney. He wears an oxygen mask. His eyes are open but spooked.

Alex is by his side. He holds Joe's hand.

A Paramedic is crouched by Joe, taking his vitals.

JOE
(through the mask)
I had hoped.. this trip.. would not
be exciting.. until the end.

On Alex. In an ambulance. His tight-lipped face reads
clearly: WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON IN MY LIFE RIGHT NOW.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Alex walks down a hospital corridor holding a large STUFFED ANIMAL CAMEL.

He gets to a room just as a DOCTOR is exiting. The doctor is a dude, mid 50's, white-ish, doesn't really matter.

DOCTOR
Mr. St. Clair.

ALEX
How is he.

DOCTOR
He's fine. Suffered a minor panic attack.

ALEX
He's eleven.

DOCTOR
It can happen. It usually doesn't, but it can. Has he been under an undue amount of stress lately?

ALEX
(far away)
I have, yea.

DOCTOR
Not you, sir. Your son.

ALEX
Oh. I.. guess, yes he has.

DOCTOR
You'll want to follow up with an American doctor for insurance purposes.

ALEX
Right.

DOCTOR

We'll have to release him this afternoon, but.. just keep an eye on him, he's a little loopy from the Valium.

ALEX

(fuck)

Great.

INT. HOSPITAL - JOE'S ROOM

Joe is watching a French Canadian soap opera on an old wall-mounted TV.

And Joe looks like he is HIGGHHHH. Comfortably numb.

JOE

(stoned)

Dad!

ALEX

How we doin bud?

JOE

Awesome! I feel like Felix the Cat in the Macy's parade. Like a float. I need to get more of this medicine they gave me.

ALEX

No you don't.

JOE

Is that a.. camel?

Alex hands Joe the stuffed camel.

ALEX

It was the only animal left.

JOE

I love it! Camels are *funny*.
(laughs hysterically)
It's a.. desert donkey!

Alex laughs too. Joe's unhinged glee is goofy and charming.

Joe gets a few more druggy laughs out and then sighs. He comes back to Earth a bit.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I collapsed.

ALEX

Me too.

(then)

I know you're nervous. We don't have to do this if you don't want to. To see her.

Joe looks like he's contemplating bailing for the first time.

JOE

No. I think we do have to see her.

(more resolved)

We have to see her.

Almost a mantra at this point:

JOE (CONT'D)

I will not have punched a guy in the dick for nothing.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY - LATER

A hillside campus dotted with Gothic structures.

They face a tough winter here, so the campus is particularly alive on this warm Spring day. Beware a flying frisbee, Molson bottle, or condom both new and used.

Alex and Joe stroll, take in the scene.

JOE

(amazed)

College.

Alex checks on Joe with a sideways glance about every two seconds.

Joe notices.

JOE (CONT'D)

Dad I'm fine.

ALEX

I know.

JOE

Then stop looking at me like I'm a dog with three legs. I have four.

ALEX

I know.

JOE

He's an Associate Professor of
Classics. We have to find his
classroom.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Alex and Joe approach the imposing "Arts Building".

INT. ARTS BUILDING

Alex reads from a directory by the entrance.

ALEX

David.. Archembault. 109.

JOE

(ecstatic)

That's him!

(then tentative)

That's him.

ALEX

You ready?

JOE

(a long beat)

No. I have to tell you something.

ALEX

That I have a gig in Nashville on
Friday and you decided not to tell
me about it.

JOE

Yea. That exactly.

(then)

I thought you'd make us go home.

ALEX

Why would I do that?

JOE

Cause you need work.

ALEX

I play a mean guitar. There's
always work.

Joe nods, agreeing.

Alex gives Joe an affectionate, if firm slap on the head.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Next time make sure I get my
messages.

ROOM 109

Alex and Joe stand outside the closed door of an office.

They are completely deflated and we'll soon learn why:

JOE
What does.. sabbatical mean?

Alex looks at a NOTE typed on McGill stationary and carefully affixed to the door of Archembault's office.

ALEX
(kills him to say it)
It means vacation.

JOE
In French?

ALEX
Latin I think.

JOE
Why's he talking in Latin.
(then)
It doesn't matter.

Joe's eyes begin to well up.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm an idiot. I was an idiot to
come here and I came here cause I'm
an idiot.

Alex thinks.

ALEX
Just because he's on vacation
doesn't mean she is.

JOE
I guess.

Alex will not let Joe feel any more pain. They're gonna find this girl.

ALEX
And, frankly, my translation is
off.
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
It doesn't mean vacation, it just
means not working. He could be here
too, in Montreal. We'll find them.
We'll find her.

Alex and Joe exchange a casual fist-bump.

FOOTSTEPS near. A college guy rounds the corner in a hurry,
his arms piled high with text books.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Excuse me?

The guy slows but doesn't stop.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We're looking for David
Archembault. Professor Archembault.

GUY
Haven't seem him sorry.

JOE
We're actually looking for his
daughter, specifically. Do you know
where there's maybe a middle school
around here?

GUY
Her office is on the third floor.

The guy continues his rush and he's gone.

Joe and Alex both process what he just said.

JOE
She has an office? That's..
impressive. I only have a bedroom.

Alex is putting it together.

ALEX
(worried)
She has an office.

THIRD FLOOR

Alex and Joe walk down the hall, checking name plates on
doors.

Joe is ahead of Alex.

JOE
(a gasp)
Dad.

Joe is pointing to a name plate that reads "ZOEY ARCHEMBault"

THE DOOR TO THE OFFICE IS OPEN A CRACK. THE LIGHT IS ON.

Joe's muscles seem to liquefy inside his body. But he keeps it together.

Alex nods reassuringly to say, "go ahead".

Joe steels himself, both thrilled and terrified at the prospect of what's on the other side of that door.

Joe knocks.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mm hm?

Joe is frozen in place.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come in.

Joe slowly opens the door to the office,

To find a WOMAN sitting at a desk, her gaze deep in a computer screen.

This is ZOEY ARCHEMBault (early 30's). I'll wait to describe her until Alex sees her. Because it's how Alex sees her that will matter going forward.

JOE
(confused)
Hi.

Zoey is surprised to see a young boy standing there.

ZOEY
Oh. Hi. Can I help you?

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With Alex. He hears that it's a woman's voice. He knows it's not the cartoon girl Joe was looking for. It tears him up.

OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JOE
Are you Zoey?

ZOEY

I am.

JOE

Rousseau?

ZOEY

(shakes her head no)
Archembault.

She sees what's going on.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

Ah. Rousseau. You're a fan of the
books?

JOE

Yea.

ZOEY

(warmly)
Me too.

JOE

Did your dad base Zoey off of you?

ZOEY

So he says.

JOE

Not.. your younger sister around my
age maybe?

ZOEY

It's just me I'm afraid.

JOE

(mounting disbelief)
You're not a kid.

ZOEY

That's true. I sure was though.

Joe is very slowly, but very surely starting to lose it.

JOE

I came from Nashville in America to
see you. But you're not you.

And Joe starts to CRY. Really, really cry. But with his eyes wide open. A hysteria, almost like he finds this funny. But he doesn't find this funny.

Alex hears the crying and rushes into the office.

And Zoey, simultaneously, stands up and walks over to comfort Joe.

What happens is this:

ALEX and ZOEY reach for Joe at the same time, nearly bumping into each other with Joe right in the middle.

They're both startled.

They look into each other's eyes.

And it's now that Alex cannot help but notice that Zoey is something of a stunning creature. The auburn of her hair and porcelain of her skin and azure of her eyes bring to mind the meeting of land and sand and surf. Her delicate glasses like a sailboat. (Alex's hyper-poetic observation, not mine.)

If that weren't enough, Alex immediately notices what adorns the walls of Zoey's office: Framed VINTAGE POSTERS from the MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL. Rad chick.

Alex is impressed, intrigued, all of these things.

Alex almost says hi, but instead looks down and says to Joe,

ALEX
Everything's okay.

Joe is just essentially in shock.

Alex is too, in a different way.

He looks back to Zoey.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. He thought.. you were
real.

ZOEY
..I am?

ALEX
(in awe)
I know.

Joe cries into Alex's leather jacket.

ALEX (CONT'D)
He's emotional from the Valium.

ZOEY
What?

ALEX
I should take him home.

Zoey smiles sadly at Joe.

ZOEV
He's sweet.

ALEX
Yea.
(then)
I'm his dad.
(say your name dude!)
Alex.
(then)
You're.. Professor Archembault?

ZOEV
Yes. And Zoey.

They shake hands. Alex quickly glances down. No ring.

One dictionary definition of *chemistry* is simply, "sympathetic understanding". Or, all anyone can ever ask for, in other words. Alex and Zoey have chemistry.

ALEX
Good to meet you.

Alex gently leads Joe out of the room.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Come on bud, let's go calm down.

Joe gradually regains composure.

JOE
(sniffles. to Zoey,)
You should tell your dad to be more
specific in interviews. So that
people don't go on unnecessary road
trips.

Zoey has no way to respond to that but for a heartbroken smile.

Alex needs to say something. All he's got is a loaded,

ALEX
Bye.

She offers a complicated smile.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY - CONTINUOUS

From high above. Alex and Joe exit the Arts Building.

PRE-LAP: Clanking glasses and gruff chatter.

INT. BAR - LATER

Alex and Joe sit at a high-top table adjacent the bar.

Alex nurses a LaBatt's. Joe has a root beer.

They both sport thousand-yard stares, which do not intersect.

Alex takes a sip of beer, the last in the bottle. This breaks his trance. He motions to the barkeep for another.

Alex looks at Joe. Concerned.

ALEX

Anything you want to see before we head home?

No response.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We have the room another night.
Might as well explore.

A beat.

JOE

I want to go to a strip club. A burlesque as these French weirdos call it.

ALEX

No you don't.

Then, just legitimately curious,

ALEX (CONT'D)

Do you actually?

A beat.

JOE

No.

(then)
Girls suck.

ALEX

It can seem that way, but it's not true.

JOE

It's been my experience that they suck.

Alex isn't winning this argument.

And Alex says this cautiously, because it's a bit of a landmine,

ALEX

Zoey seemed nice though.. don't you think?

JOE

(shrugs)

Yea.

EXT. MONTREAL - HOTEL

Alex packs their suitcases into the trunk of the Subaru.

I./E. SUBARU - DRIVING

The Subaru snakes through the Old City's narrow streets.

Joe stares out the window at nothing in particular.

ALEX

You sure you don't want to.. say anything to her? We came all this way. Maybe she'd introduce you to her dad, that might be cool.

JOE

No thanks.

Alex is short on tactics at this point.

ALEX

Did you see those posters on the wall in her office? From the jazz festival they have here? Kind of like the New Orleans one we have at home.

JOE

*Why do you keep talking about her?
I'm over it.*

Neither of them are over it.

ALEX
I guess we'll drive in silence.

JOE
Good idea.

Alex looks over at Joe. He experiences that unique parental duality of wanting to comfort his kid because he's hurt, but also punch him in the face for being an inconsolable prick.

EXT. SUBARU - DRIVING - LATER

The Subaru makes its way South through the flat land between metropolitan Montreal and the US border. Green mountains line the distance.

INT. SUBARU - DRIVING

Joe puts his feet up on the dashboard.

ALEX
Take your feet off the dashboard
please.

JOE
(real fuckin testy)
The car's dirty anyway.

ALEX
(not having it)
It's for your safety, not for the
car.

A long beat, then

ALEX (CONT'D)
It isn't my fault, you know?

This gets heated fast:

JOE
I know.

ALEX
It doesn't seem like you do. So it
didn't work out. I'm sorry.
Sometimes women are disappointing.
And sometimes they're not. So you
keep at it until it works out.

JOE

Like you and mom? That worked out.

ALEX

Yea it did until it didn't. That can happen too. All kinds of things can happen and it's out of our control.. mostly.. so all you can do is do what's in your control. Like not being mean to your dad when all he's trying to do is help.

JOE

(fuming)

I just want to go home.

ALEX

What do you think we're doing.

A long shitty silence.

JOE

I should stay with mom for a few nights.

(then)

She's probably worried about me.

ALEX

(crushed)

Okay.

They drive.

EXT. US / CANADIAN BORDER

The Subaru is stopped in a long line of cars.

INT. SUBARU - CONTINUOUS

The tense silence persists. Though they seem to have cooled off some.

Joe offers this apology,

JOE

How was the gig in New York. Before you had to find me.

ALEX

Oh. It was actually great.

(remembering)

Great.

JOE

Nice.

Joe stares out the window.

JOE (CONT'D)

Did you feel like a rock star?

Alex thinks, realizes,

ALEX

For a moment.

JOE

(as if it's obvious)

You are.

Alex and Joe take in the reconciliation.

JOE (CONT'D)

Can I put my feet up? We're not moving.

ALEX

Sure.

Joe puts his feet up on the dashboard.

Then Alex moves his seat back. He contorts himself, and puts his right foot up on the dash as well.

This pleases Joe to no end.

Joe looks down at the floor where Alex's seat has gone back, now exposed, and sees his ZOEY ROUSSEAU book.

Joe reaches under Alex's leg and picks up the book.

JOE

There it is.

(he looks at cartoon Zoey)

I can't believe she's not real.

ALEX

That's not exactly true.

JOE

What do you mean?

ALEX

She's real. We met her.

Joe considers this.

JOE
I guess we did.
(embarrassed)
I cried like a fool.

ALEX
So what.

JOE
Yea I was on drugs. I'll write her
a letter of apology.

Joe tosses the book in the back seat.

Meanwhile, Alex can't stop thinking about the fact that,

ALEX
She was kind of pretty, huh?

Joe shrugs.

JOE
Yea. In a mom way.

ALEX
In an everything way.

Joe looks over and squints at Alex.

JOE
Wait a second.

ALEX
What?

JOE
Wait a second.

ALEX
.. I'm waiting.

JOE
You like her.

ALEX
.. No I don't.

JOE
You. *Like* her.

ALEX
I said she's pretty.

JOE
In an everything way. You like her.

Finally,

ALEX
.. Would that be a problem?

JOE
Why would that be a problem?

ALEX
I don't know. We drove to Canada
because you like her. Well a
version of her. You know what I
mean.

JOE
The her I like isn't real. The her
you like is real! We have to go
find her!

ALEX
I think it's a little late for
that.

JOE
No you don't. Turn around. We're
going to Canada.

ALEX
We're in Canada.

JOE
Not for long! Turn around!

ALEX
Joe..

JOE
Don't tell me you're not gonna turn
around. You like her! Are you nuts?

ALEX
She lives in Canada.

JOE
What if you got married? I'd have
dual citizenship like I've always
wanted!

ALEX
(acknowledging)
That was on your Christmas list.

JOE
Dad. She's real. You said so
yourself.

A thrill courses through Alex as he considers this.

Alex takes his foot off the dashboard, and moves his seat up.

He looks to Joe,

ALEX
Feet down.

Joe gamely obliges.

Alex puts on his left signal and PEELS OUT IN A U-TURN.

Alex and Joe sport the same giddy expression.

Until a POLICE CRUISER lights up behind the Subaru.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Oh. Fuck.

JOE
Yea. Shit.

INT. SUBARU - STOPPED

A Police Officer approaches. Alex puts down his window.

And it's the SAME BORDER PATROL OFFICER from when they first crossed into Canada.

ALEX
Afternoon officer.

JOE
We met you before! At the border!

Border Patrol could give a shit.

BORDER PATROL
You gentlemen in a hurry?

JOE
Yea.

ALEX
No officer.

BORDER PATROL
Forget to discard of your drug
paraphernalia, decided to pull a
quick U?

ALEX
No officer.

JOE
We..

BORDER PATROL
(interrupting)
I'll do the talking, son.

Border Patrol just looks around. He does not do the talking.

JOE
We..

BORDER PATROL
(interrupting)
I'LL. Do the talking. Son.

ALEX
(please be quiet)
Joe.

And for a few long-ass beats, Border Patrol still does not do the talking. As long as is funny. Then,

BORDER PATROL
Any drugs or illegal firearms in
the vehicle?

ALEX
No officer.

BORDER PATROL
What brings you gentlemen to
Canada?
(then)
You may now do the talking.

Joe jumps right in.

JOE
We came to find a girl. Her dad is
a professor at McGill University in
Montreal Quebec. He wrote these
books and she's a character in
them, but she's also real as well.
But it turns out she's not a real
girl. She's a real woman.
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
And that's exactly my dad's type so
we're going to go find her.

That pretty much sums it up.

EXT. SUBARU - DRIVING

Northbound.

EXT. MONTREAL - LATER

The Subaru crosses the bridge into the city.

The sun sets, turns the sky to colors.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Alex and Joe lay on respective queen beds, watching nothing in particular on TV.

JOE
I really think we should find her tonight.

ALEX
She won't be at school now. And girls generally don't like when you find out where they live and show up.

JOE
I feel like they would like that. Like you're making an effort.

ALEX
There's such thing as too much effort. Remember that.

JOE
I will.

Joe absentmindedly flips through channels on the TV.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hey.

ALEX
Yea.

JOE

I'm gonna be your wing man
tomorrow.

ALEX

(amused)

You know what that is?

JOE

At first I thought it was some kind
of mutant human with hawk wings.
But I looked it up and it means
someone who helps someone else have
sex. Well not actually have it.
That's your responsibility. You
know what I mean.

ALEX

I do.

Joe is starting to doze off.

JOE

Anyway, I'm here to help.

ALEX

I know bud. Thank you.

Joe seems immensely uncomfortable with what he's about to say.

JOE

Why do you think mom left us?

ALEX

She left me. Not you. I keep
telling you that.

JOE

(whatever)

You see it how you wanna see it.

It bangs Alex up that Joe sees it that way.

ALEX

Well you already said it. It's
because I "stopped rocking."

JOE

No that's not it. You never quite
stopped. You just slowed rocking.

(then)

Sorry I said you stopped.

ALEX
It's fine.

Alex says the following as though he's figuring it out / explaining it to himself for the first time. Which he is.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I think she left because for her,
music was a means to an end. Money
and that stuff. Whereas for me it
was just an end.
(then)
But I'm starting to think she might
have had the right idea.

Joe considers this.

JOE
Nah. I think you're the right one.
Anyway she's sad all the time, so
what does she know.

This is news to Alex. It gives him a... complicated feeling.

ALEX
She is?

JOE
Yea. You're just pissed, which is
better than being sad.

Alex cracks a smile.

ALEX
I agree.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Early morning.

We're on Alex, sound asleep.

Until Joe lightly slaps him in the face a few times.

Alex wakes with a start. He makes a groggy inquisitive grunt.

JOE
It's day.
(beat)
And you need another shave.

INT. BARBER SHOP

Alex is reclined in a barber's chair, getting a shave from the same guy as the first time.

Joe sits in an adjacent chair, observing.

JOE

What are you gonna say to her?

ALEX

I actually don't know. What do you think I should say?

JOE

I'll think of something. You just stay focused and don't get nervous. The doctor told me panic attacks run in the family.

On Alex. Maybe a little nervous.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY - LATER

Alex and Joe cross the campus toward the Arts Building.

EXT. ARTS BUILDING

They stand at the precipice.

Alex has something to say. He can probably sense that this means as much or more to Joe as it does to him.

ALEX

Hey.

JOE

Yea?

ALEX

Just be prepared for it, ya know, not going as we'd like.

JOE

What do you mean.

ALEX

She could have a boyfriend.

JOE

I saw the way she looked at you. If
I were her boyfriend, I would not
want to be her boyfriend.

(then)

Stop procrastinating.

Joe hoists the heavy door open for Alex.

Alex regards his awesome weird son, and walks in the door.

INT. ARTS BUILDING

Alex and Joe head down the third floor hallway towards Zoey's office.

But before they get there they HEAR HER VOICE.

And follow it to a

LECTURE HALL

Where Zoey presents before a class of fifty or so rapt students.

Alex and Joe peer in, captivated.

ZOEY

...throughout antiquity as the
conduct of affairs at Athens and
Thebes often took opposite
directions...

Time morphs around Alex and Joe as they look on. Learning.

INT. ARTS BUILDING - LATER

Students stream out of the lecture hall.

Alex and Joe wait patiently beside the classroom.

After the last of the students have left, Alex and Joe surreptitiously peek into the lecture hall.

Zoey is erasing a white board.

Joe, ever-brazen, just walks in.

ALEX

(hushed)

Joe.

Joe nods at Alex, like, "man up, follow me."

LECTURE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Alex timidly follows Joe in.

JOE
Ms. Rousseau? I mean Archembault?

Zoey turns, kind of startled.

ZOEV
Oh! Hello. You again.

She looks up at Alex. Pleased but still confused.

Alex manages a reserved wave.

JOE
I wanted to apologize for losing it
in front of you yesterday. I was on
drugs.

Zoey looks concerned.

ALEX
Prescription drugs.

JOE
They make you float but they also
make you cry.

ZOEV
It's fine.

JOE
We enjoyed your lecture. I didn't
know most of those things.

ZOEV
Consider it your first college
credit.

An awkward / charged beat between Alex and Zoey. Alex needs to say something. But he's not doing a great job of that. Joe steps in.

JOE
Um. I was actually also wondering
if you would sign my Zoey Rousseau
book. That would be really cool.

ZOEY
Sure, of course.

Noticing that Joe is empty handed,

ZOEY (CONT'D)
Do you have it?

JOE
It's back at the hotel but I can
bring it to dinner.

ALEX
(be cool)
Joe.

ZOEY
Dinner..

JOE
Yea me and my dad are here alone.
(lays it on thick)
His ex-wife is not with us. And
he's a musician of some note. He
was in Rolling Stone. April '98.
Page forty-three, not sure if you
read that one.
(then)
Do you want to have dinner with us?
Or just him? I can sit this one
out, up to you guys.

Zoey looks to Alex. Teenage romantic tension here.

Alex summons the courage.

ALEX
Would you like to have dinner with
us tonight? We're hapless Americans
in a foreign land.

ZOEY
I can't tonight. I have an event
for this retiring provost.
(then)
Tomorrow I'm free.
(re: Joe)
He seems too sweet for you guys to
be murderers.

JOE
That's what would make me a good
murderer.

ZOEY
That's true.

JOE
But I promise I'm not.

ALEX
He's not. We're not.

ZOEY
I believe you.

Alex wears his nerves on his sleeve. It makes for an awkward beat, which Zoey gracefully paves over.

ZOEY (CONT'D)
So tomorrow?

ALEX
Yes. Great.

And this is the first time he's held this opinion in a while:

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tomorrow is great.

ZOEY
Perfect.
(then, to Joe)
You want a little tour of the
campus? I'm heading across the
quad.

Joe definitely wants that.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Alex, Joe and Zoey cross the bright green quad.

And as they do, we FADE BACK INTO ANIMATION.

As when we started. It is pastel and vivid.

Alex and Zoey have an inch between their shoulders.
Completely at ease.

Joe walks just ahead of them.

Joe glances back, thrilled at the sight of his dad and the
real cartoon girl.

THE END