

THE HUNCHBACK OF BROOKLYN HIGH

by

Geoffrey Falk

EXT. BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL (1981) - DAY

It is mid-September at a Collegiate-Gothic high school in Brooklyn.

INT. BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/CLASSROOM

At a desk for two halfway up the left side of the 30-seat classroom, 15-year-old JIM SALK sits reading "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," waiting for class to begin.

The German exchange student MITCH fidgets in the seat next to his.

SHELLEY sits at the back of the room, at a desk-for-four, wearing a Minnie Mouse babydoll t-shirt and bluejeans. She is blue-eyed and blond, with her hair in ringlets down to her shoulders--naturally cute to die for, even without makeup.

She chitchats happily with her friends CANDACE (a pretty brunette), ROBYN, and YVETTE, at the same desk.

At the other back desk, four immature boys sing their morning-ritual song, off-key:

PETE, BRIAN, DUANE, AND JERRY
(singing)
Good morning to you
Good morning to you
We're all in our places
With sunshiny faces

Jim turns and grimaces at them, annoyed; then returns to his book.

PETE, BRIAN, DUANE, AND JERRY (CONT'D)
(singing)
Good morning to you
Good morning to you

Shelley and her friends laugh.

The math teacher, MRS. HENSON (40s) enters from a door in the front of the room, carrying a stack of papers to her desk.

MRS. HENSON
I've finished marking your
diagnostic tests. There was a high
score of 90, and a couple of 60s.
If you scored five or lower, you
probably shouldn't be in this
class. Mitch.

MITCH

Grüss ["groose"] Gott.

PETE

Who got the top mark?

MRS. HENSON

Jim Salk.

Jim half-smiles to himself--pleased at being the best, but disappointed that his mark wasn't higher.

SHELLEY

(to Jim, playfully)

You don't look smart.

Jim turns around, surprised; then grins at her, flattered to be the focus of her attention.

INT. BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

Students walk to and fro past the doors of the school cafeteria.

Jim stands uncertain, studying the activities inside through the smoked-glass, floor-to-ceiling windows.

He takes a deep breath, and heads for the open entrance doors, into the

CAFETERIA

Jim walks up to the hot-food section of the cafeteria line.

HELEN (40s) serves up greasy food from behind the line.

JIM

I'd like the fries, please. What are the options, for sizes?

HELEN

Small, Regular, and Large.

JIM

Is Regular the same as Medium?

HELEN

Close enough.

JIM

Okay, I'll take the Medium fries.

HELEN

Regular.

JIM

I thought you said they were the same.

HELEN

They are.

JIM

(confused)

So they're equal, but not identical?

HELEN

Huh?

JIM

Equal only for certain values of x ?

HELEN

Where's your tray?

JIM

I didn't know I needed one.

HELEN

You need one.

JIM

Okay. Where are they?

HELEN

At the start of the line.

JIM

Which way is that?

Helen indicates to her right, barely helpful.

JIM (CONT'D)

Okay. Thanks.

He starts walking in that direction, bumping immediately into RUSS (17) and KEVIN (17).

RUSS

You're going the wrong way, fag.

JIM

Sorry.

He fumbles his way around them.

Russ looks after him.

RUSS

Idiot.

CAFETERIA - DAY

Friends and cliques eat at their tables.

Jim walks from the checkout to an empty table, with his regular-sized plate of fries on a plastic tray, and a paper receipt.

He sits down, takes a pen out of his back pocket, and begins making notes on the back of the receipt.

Shelley approaches his table, with her own tray of food.

SHELLEY

Mind if I join you?

JIM

(awkward)

No. Of course not.

Shelley sits down across the table from him.

SHELLEY

What are you writing?

JIM

Just some ... notes. So I know how the processes work, for next time.

SHELLEY

Haven't you eaten in a cafeteria before?

JIM

Of course I have. But not in this one.

Shelley looks at him quizzically.

JIM (CONT'D)

They have certain general principles and parameters in common. But the details vary, from one location to the next.

Shelley gazes at him, amazed.

SHELLEY
How did you get to be so smart?

JIM
Oh, I guess I--

Russ and Kevin approach the table, holding only soft drinks.

RUSS
Mind if we sit here?

He sits down next to Shelley, and Kevin sits next to Jim, jostling him, without waiting for a reply.

Russ sees Jim's receipt.

RUSS (CONT'D)
What's this?

He snatches the paper swiftly away from Jim, across the table.

JIM
No, I--

RUSS
(reading)
Line starts at far left. Need tray.
Fry options: Small, Regular (same
as Medium) ... Large?
(to Jim)
You need instructions for ordering
at a cafeteria? How stupid are you?

SHELLEY
(firmly)
Give him his receipt back.

RUSS
Right, 'cause he might need it
for...?

KEVIN
Taxes.

RUSS
Yeah. He can get your dad to do his
taxes, when he's rich and famous
... for being a retard.

He crumples the paper up, and throws it to the floor.

He and Kevin rise and walk away with their drinks, their mission accomplished.

SHELLEY
(to Jim)
Don't let them get to you, okay?

BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

In near-empty halls, Jim takes several books out of his opened locker.

From behind him, a hand reaches in and shuts the locker door hard, nearly slamming it down on his fingers.

He turns around to see Russ and Kevin crowding in on him.

RUSS
Going somewhere?

JIM
Uh, home?

BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/GYM - DAY

In gym class, a dozen grade-ten girls in gym shorts play basketball.

Shelley sinks a basket.

SHELLEY
Nothing but net!

The phys. ed. teacher, KIRK CHAMBERLAIN, blows his whistle.

KIRK
Alright, girls: hit the showers!

Shelley corrals the basketball.

Candace walks over to her, out of breath.

CANDACE
That was way too much exercise for first thing in the morning.

SHELLEY
It's just two days a week. You'll get used to it.

Candace heads for the showers.

Deftly dribbling the basketball, Shelley approaches the closed doors to the equipment storage room.

A plastic (squirt) water bottle rests on the floor against the wall, beside the dual doors.

With her free (left) hand, she opens the door, and throws the ball expertly into the darkened room, aiming for the equipment rack on the far wall.

The ball hits, causing a great clatter.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)
Nothing but ... net?

She shrugs, picks up her water bottle, and reaches to close the door with her free hand.

As the noise inside dies down, a boy's voice calls out weakly.

BOY (O.S.)
Help.

Shelley freezes.

SHELLEY
What?

BOY (O.S.)
Help me. Sanctuary.

SHELLEY
Who's there?

She reaches into the opened door, and nervously flips the light switch on.

Behind a metal shelf laden with sports items on the far wall she sees two hands, and glimpses of a boy's head, all tied to the rack with flag-football flags and jump ropes.

BOY
Water.

Shelley rushes into the

EQUIPMENT ROOM

She hurries over to the rack, pushes the equipment aside, and recognizes the pilloried boy as Jim.

SHELLEY

Omigod, Jim! What have they done to you?!

JIM

Water.

SHELLEY

What have those ... monsters done to you??!

JIM

Water.

SHELLEY

Here.

She squirts some water into Jim's mouth.

He coughs, gagging.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

Sorry! Here.

She squirts water into her cupped free hand, and offers it to Jim.

He slurps it up, greedily.

She squirts more water into her cupped hand.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

I'll untie you, okay?

The class bell rings.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DR. YOUNG'S OFFICE - DAY

An alarm clock rings, signaling the end of the older, 48-year-old Jim Salk's weekly therapy session with Dr. Ernest Young, Psychiatrist.

Jim wears shabby clothes, with medium-length unkempt hair and several days of stubble.

He sits in the patients' armchair with his eyes closed, while Dr. Young sits behind an imposing desk in his well-appointed leather armchair, taking a minimum of disinterested notes.

The alarm clock is on the desk, squarely facing Jim.

JIM
(nodding, his throat
parched, speaking faintly
to the Shelley of his
imagination)

Okay.

DR. YOUNG
Our time's up, Mr. Salk.

JIM
(still parched)
Okay.

DR. YOUNG
I'm on vacation in Thailand,
starting tomorrow. How's your
Relanax prescription?

Jim opens his eyes.

JIM
Oh, I ... I think I've got ...
three weeks left--

DR. YOUNG
I'll only be gone for two. We can
top that up when I get back.

JIM
Could I get a glass of wa--

DR. YOUNG
There's a vending machine in the
hall.

JIM
Right. You told me that--

DR. YOUNG
Last time.

JIM
Right. Last time. I should write it
--

DR. YOUNG
Write it down, yes.

Beat.

JIM

It feels good to talk. My father
never let me finish a--

DR. YOUNG

See you in three weeks.

JIM

Right.

He rises from the chair.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'll write it down.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/RECEPTION - DAY

The office is on the second storey of a three-storey
Victorian building. It has a front reception area, with a
heavy wooden door leading to a back room.

A student-film crew shoots improvised scenes featuring a
Victorian male character, WERNER SCHNITZEL (20), and his
fetish-garbed female love-interest, EVA (19).

The film crew is all college kids: STEVE directs the action
from a folding chair while BARB films the scene, and GORD
handles the lighting.

Eva is heavily tattooed, with black hair. She wears fishnet
stockings, high-heeled boots, a corset, and an eyepatch over
her left eye.

Werner, in character, is a cross between Sigmund Freud and
Dr. Strangelove. He wears a prominent fake mustache and a
Victorian-era tweed suit, holding an unlit cigar in his hand.

They both speak with faux-German accents--rolling their r's
and pronouncing all w's as v's, th's as sz's, st's as scht's,
etc.

Eva sits cross-legged on the edge of the reception desk,
filing her nails.

Gord holds a clapperboard.

GORD

Ready, Eva? Take one.

He claps the board shut.

STEVE

Action!

Werner enters from the stairs, sauntering up to the desk through the open office door.

WERNER

Ja, I've come to arrange a holiday
... on ze Rhine.

EVA

Would you like to come upschtairs?

WERNER

Vee are upschtairs.

EVA

Relative to ze first floor, ja
["yah"]. But zere's anuzzer floor
higher up.

STEVE

Cut! Derivative. And blocking.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET

Jim walks briskly eastward along the sidewalk away from Dr. Young's office, toward the subway.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/BACK ROOM

Steve, Barb, and Gord continue filming improvised scenes with Werner and Eva, in an office with an expensive couch and leather armchair, surrounded by bookshelves.

Werner plays the cuckolding male, with Eva acting the part of the adulterous femme fatale, trembling nervously in his seductive arms.

GORD

(with clapperboard)
Take two.

He claps the board shut.

STEVE

Action!

EVA

But Doktor Schnitzel! My husband
Adolf vill be home any minute, und
["undt"] he absolutely hates--

WERNER

Jews?

EVA

No.

(she gazes pleadingly into
his eyes)
Psychiatrists. He has nussing
against ze Jews. He likes zem.

STEVE

Cut!

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET

Jim continues walking briskly eastward along the sidewalk,
passing Dr. Schnitzel's Victorian office building.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/BACK ROOM

Werner sits in the armchair, with Eva reclining on the couch.

GORD

(with clapperboard)
Take three.

He claps the board shut.

STEVE

Action!

WERNER

Has anyvun ever told you, you
remind me of my muszer?

Eva sits up on the couch, excitedly.

EVA

Ja, und you remind me of my son:
Oedipus!

WERNER

Ze son you'd like to fuck?

EVA

Ja, after he killed his faszer, und
zen gouged his own eyes out.

STEVE

(annoyed)

Cut! What the hell was that?

EVA

(without accent)

Greek mythology.

WERNER

(without accent)

You don't like it?

(with accent)

Alright, vee von't do it Greek,
zen.

INT. SUBWAY STATION/PLATFORM - DAY

The subway station's platforms are separated by the tracks
for northbound and southbound trains running side-by-side.

On the southbound platform, several tightly-packed rows of
commuters, including the German tourists HANS and MONIKA
(40s), wait for the next train.

Box-screens suspended from the roof show the clock time
(12:53) and time until the arrival of the next train (5
min.).

Jim waits behind the rows of passengers.

SUBWAY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Service along the Nostrand Avenue
Line is being delayed due to a
personal injury at track level.

HANS

(to Monika)

Ein jumper. Springen. Er ["Air"]
ist tote.

MONIKA

Grüss Gott.

Farther south in the front row, a handsome businessman
(RANDALL, late 20s) in an expensive, fitted suit checks his
Rolex, impatiently.

RANDALL
(to himself)
Has to be on the afternoon I've got
a presentation to C-level. Loser
couldn't wait for the next train.

Across the tracks, on the northbound platform, Jim spots a conservatively dressed blond SUBWAY WOMAN in her mid-forties-- immaculately attired, with her own timeless sense of style.

JIM
Shelley?

He pushes his way through the rows of waiting passengers.

JIM (CONT'D)
Excuse me. Excuse me.

SUBWAY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Service along the Nostrand Avenue
Line has resumed. We apologize for
the inconvenience.

A southbound train approaches in the tunnel.

Jim reaches the edge of the platform, straining to see across the tracks.

JIM
(squinting at Subway
Woman)
Is that you?

From behind Jim, Monika points at him.

MONIKA
Ein jumper!

Randall springs into action: He pulls his sleeve down to cover his valuable watch, then steps forward and rushes across the platform to tackle Jim from the side, driving Jim's head and left shoulder hard into the tile-covered concrete.

He holds the struggling "jumper" down as the approaching train slows to a stop.

RANDALL
(menacingly, under his
breath)
I'm not gonna be late because of
you. Loser.

The commuters burst into admiring applause, at Randall's "heroic action."

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Jim, restrained by straps, lies in a hospital bed, in a common area with a dozen other beds, separated by vertical sheets of linen.

The TV on the wall is tuned to a local news channel, and currently shows an attractive, young female reporter (JASMINE) interviewing Randall on the subway platform.

RANDALL

(on the TV)

I'm not really a hero. I just did what any concerned citizen would have done.

JASMINE

(on the TV, speaking to the camera)

Hero or not, Mr. Ross says he's already received several new job offers, as well as a couple of marriage proposals. Better get him while he's hot, ladies.

A female doctor (NORAH SHANKAR, early 30s) comes over to Jim's bed, holding his medical chart.

She sits down on the side of his bed.

DR. SHANKAR

Mister Salk, how are you feeling?

JIM

My shoulder hurts. And I've got a headache.

DR. SHANKAR

Is that why you were trying to harm yourself?

JIM

No. I wasn't!

DR. SHANKAR

But you were going to jump--

JIM

No! It's all a misunderstanding! I saw a girl I used to know! Besides, if I was going to kill myself, I wouldn't jump in front of a train.

DR. SHANKAR

(concerned)

How would you do it?

Beat.

JIM

I'd have to research that. Can I get back to you?

Dr. Shankar suppresses a smile.

DR. SHANKAR

Sure. Whenever you like.

She rises from the bedside.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM/INTAKE DESK

A couple of standing NURSES (30s) shuffle papers and receive new patients behind the intake desk.

Dr. Shankar walks up to the desk, with Jim's chart.

DR. SHANKAR

I'm releasing Mr. Salk. He's not a danger to himself, he's just ... unusual.

EXT. BOOKSTORE/FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Jim walks up to the front doors of a small bookstore, and enters.

INT. BOOKSTORE

Jim browses through the shelves, for books on the subject of suicide.

He takes a paperback off the shelves, and reads the title out loud:

JIM
Killing Yourself Softly: The No-
Stress Guide to Assisted Suicide.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/BACK ROOM

The tired film crew (Steve, Barb, and Gord) continues shooting scenes improvised by Werner and Eva.

Werner sits in a wheelchair, without his cigar.

GORD
(with clapperboard)
Take eighty-nine.

He claps the board shut.

STEVE
Action!

Werner rolls in the wheelchair toward Eva and stops, smoldering in his impotence.

WERNER
Sometimes a penis is just a penis,
ja?

EVA
Und sometimes "Yes" means "No."

Werner rolls closer.

WERNER
I want to invade you, like Poland.

EVA
I want you to invade me ... like
Russia! Mother Russia!

Werner rises from his wheelchair, shaking on his infirm legs.

WERNER
(staring at Eva's breasts)
Mein Führers! I can valk!!!

As his right arm reflexively raises into a Strangelove-like salute, he restrains it, grabbing his right wrist with his left hand, and directs his right hand to grab and squeeze Eva's left boob tightly instead.

Eva winces.

WERNER (CONT'D)
(beat; to Steve, without
accent)
Cut?

STEVE
(resigned)
Ja, might as vell.

Werner separates from Eva.

STEVE (CONT'D)
(to Barb)
We'll find a story in the editing.
It worked for Annie Hall.

WERNER
Und Schpinal Tap, ja?

STEVE
(to All)
Okay, that's a wrap.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Carrying the "Killing Yourself Softly" book in an opaque plastic bag, Jim walks westward along the crowded sidewalk, exhausted.

Passing the same three-storey Victorian office-building as before, he sees the passably archaic signage in the door:

"Dr. W. Schnitzel
Psycho-Analyst."

He stops, doubles back, opens the door inquisitively, and enters into a

STAIRWAY

Energized, Jim strides up the creaking stairs with his plastic bag.

Descending the same stairs in single-file are Steve with his folding director's chair, Barb with her camera and tripod, and Gord carrying a couple of lightstands.

STEVE
Funny or Die, here we come.

The film crew exits to the

EXT. STREET

The door closes behind them.

BARB
Better get rid of that sign, before
someone takes it seriously.

STEVE
Good idea.

He opens the entrance door and removes the sign from inside,
then lets the door close again behind him.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/RECEPTION

Eva sits at the desk, snacking on a cherry cupcake.

Werner enters from the back room, leaning in the doorway,
holding his unlit cigar.

EVA
(without accent)
Last week I was a private eye, this
week I'm a secretary.

WERNER
Vell, it pays ze bills, ja?

He shows a half-dozen \$20s in his hand.

EVA
Barely.

STAIRS

Jim (with his plastic bag) reaches the top of the stairs, and
the open door to Dr. Schnitzel's office.

He pokes his head into the

RECEPTION AREA

JIM
Doctor Schnitzel?

WERNER
Zat's vhat it says on my sheepskin,
ja. Vhat can I do for you?

JIM
(agitated)
I need to talk to someone. My
regular therapist is on vacation.
Is there any way you could squeeze
me in today? Please?

WERNER
(to Eva)
Fräulein ... Kirschtorte: What's my
schedule ziss afternoon?

JIM
I can pay in cash--if that's
alright? What's your rate?

WERNER
Vell--

Jim pulls a handful of bills out of his pocket.

JIM
Is eighty enough? For an hour?

WERNER
Vell, zat's....

JIM
A hundred?

WERNER
I sink vee could make zat verk, ja.
(to Eva)
Cancel my oszer appointments,
fräulein.

JIM
Thank you, Doctor!

He fumbles the bills over to Eva, and then follows Werner's
cigar-gesture invitation into the back room.

WERNER
Zo, vhat seems to be ze trouble?

JIM
I saw a girl I used to know, from
high school.

WERNER
Ah. Vimmin.

Werner closes the door behind them.

BACK ROOM

Werner motions, with his cigar, for Jim to sit down on the couch...

WERNER

Have a seat.

...while he (Werner) moves toward the armchair and sits down on it.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Zo, you saw ziss mädchen....

Jim puts his bag down on the floor, and sits down at one end of the couch.

JIM

Uh, yeah....

He shifts around on the furniture, trying to find a comfortable position--first with his right arm on the armrest, and the other arm free; then lying down, restlessly, his head at an awkward angle; then sitting up in the middle with both arms at loose ends, finally spreading them across the top of the sofa; then lowering them to his sides again.

JIM (CONT'D)

Would it be okay if I sat in the chair?

WERNER

Vell, zat's a bit ... unusual.

JIM

I think better when I'm sitting up.

WERNER

You can sit on ze couch, ja?

JIM

It makes me feel ... unbalanced.

He leans slightly to his right, as if to demonstrate.

WERNER

Vell, alright. But ziss vill cost extra, ja?

JIM

Okay, sure!

They get up and switch places, with Jim now sitting in the armchair, and Werner lying down on the sofa.

WERNER

(gesturing with his cigar)
Zo, tell me about ziss mädchen.

Jim drifts back in memory.

JIM

She was the prettiest girl in all
the teenage world.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY (1981)

Outside the physics classroom, with a row of lockers along the opposite wall, 15-year-old Shelley hands out photocopied flyers in support of Dave Lane, for the student-president elections.

Wearing tight bluejeans, she has a red, circular "Vote for Dave" sticker pasted onto her right butt-cheek, designed to attract attention.

Approaching her from behind with his physics textbook, Jim can't help but notice, and grin.

Shelley spots Jim as he passes her, and hands him a flyer.

SHELLEY

Who are you voting for?

JIM

Uh, Terry Bowman.

SHELLEY

You should vote for Dave!

Candace walks up to a nearby locker--shared with Shelley--unlocks the combination lock, and opens the door, taking out her purse.

JIM

I have to vote for Terry. He's from
my old school.

Shelley pouts briefly, then crosses the hall and reaches into the (lower) shelf in the locker she shares with Candace, retrieving a chocolate bar.

SHELLEY

You want some chocolate?

JIM

Okay. Sure.

Shelley breaks off a piece and puts it into Jim's mouth, as he carefully closes his teeth around it.

SHELLEY

(playfully)

Don't bite my finger off!

JIM

(smiles)

Sorry.

He hesitates, trying to find something more to say to her, past the chocolate in his mouth.

The class bell rings, and Jim leaves awkwardly, walking into the adjacent classroom, opening his textbook as he exits.

Shelley looks after him, disappointed, then turns to put the chocolate back in her shared locker.

Russ walks up toward Shelley from behind.

As he passes on her left, he deftly pinches her right butt-cheek with his right hand.

She whirls around to her right.

SHELLEY

Hey!! Who did that?!

PHYSICS CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher (JOHN GRIENKE) stands by the blackboard with a piece of chalk. On the desk in front of him is an inflated helium balloon, moored to the desk with a piece of string.

Jim sits at a student desk, paying complete attention.

The basic equation relating velocity to frequency and wavelength ($v = f * \lambda$) is written on the blackboard.

MR. GRIENKE

(pointing to the equation
with his chalk)

(MORE)

MR. GRIENKE (CONT'D)

The frequency of a sound produced by a resonator of a particular length is proportional to the speed of sound in the gas that fills the resonator.

He puts down the chalk, and unties the balloon from his desk.

At a desk across the room from Jim, an effeminate blond boy, SHELDON, steals a glance at Jim, and then whispers excitedly to his deskmate.

MR. GRIENKE (CONT'D)

Just a few more minutes, Sheldon.
(to the class)
Suppose the gas is helium. What does that do to the frequency, if the resonator is your vocal cords?

He unties the string from the balloon's end, being careful not to let the gas inside escape.

MR. GRIENKE (CONT'D)

Don't try this at home.

He exhales completely, and then inhales as much helium from the balloon as he can, deflating the balloon in the process.

When he next speaks, his voice is three times higher than normal, similar to the voice of Mickey Mouse.

MR. GRIENKE (CONT'D)

Here Pluto, here boy!

The students laugh.

The bell rings, signaling the end of class.

The students rise from their desks.

MR. GRIENKE (CONT'D)

That's Pluto, the planet!

He steadies himself against the desk, slightly dizzy.

Jim exits the classroom, with his closed textbook, out into the

HALLWAY

He looks around for Shelley, but she's nowhere in sight.

BACK TO PRESENT

Jim sits in Dr. Schnitzel's armchair, with Werner still reclining on the couch lazily, unlit cigar in hand.

JIM

I saw her on the subway today. I'm sure it was her. What do you think I should do?

Werner sits up.

WERNER

Vell, what do you sink, I sink, you should do?

JIM

I hadn't thought of it like that.

(beat)

I think, you think ... I should try and find her.

WERNER

Vell, zat is ze szeory, ja?

JIM

I never even found out her last name.

WERNER

Zat sounds like a good place to schtart, ja?

RECEPTION AREA

Eva sits behind the desk, her legs crossed, filing her nails ironically, playing a stereotypical secretary, with the front door to the office now closed.

The door to the back room opens from inside, and Jim (with his plastic bag) enters the reception area, followed by Werner.

JIM

That was amazing, Doctor. Can we have another session next week ... if you're accepting new patients?

WERNER

Ja, I sink zat could be arranged. Same time next veek?

JIM

It feels good to ... talk.

He smiles, opens the front door, and exits down the stairs, out the front door.

Eva takes off her eyepatch; she and Werner drop their accents.

EVA

(to Werner)

You know we only rented the room for today.

WERNER

When does your sister need it?

EVA

Tuesdays and Thursdays.

WERNER

So we'll use it Wednesday afternoons. It's just for an hour.

EVA

I'll ask her.

She partly unzips her boot, and takes the cash from Jim out.

She divides the bills, and hands half to Werner.

EVA (CONT'D)

This is a bad idea.

WERNER

This covers our food for a week. And a new toy for Gilda.

He walks into the back room.

EVA

(to herself)

How many toys does that damn cat need?

INT. BROOKLYN HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

Clean-shaven and dressed to look almost like a substitute teacher, 48-year-old Jim walks through the halls of his old high school.

He passes a wall with a trophy case.

JIM

That's where my locker used to be.

He walks past the gym doors and recoils, suddenly anxious.

He reaches the library door, and enters the

LIBRARY

Jim walks over to the librarian's desk and its middle-aged occupant, DOROTHY (40s).

JIM

Hi, where do you keep the yearbooks?

Dorothy looks him over, suspicious.

JIM (CONT'D)

I used to go to school here.

DOROTHY

Don't you have your own copies?

JIM

Uh, no. I didn't ... graduate. Here.

DOROTHY

How long were you a student?

JIM

For a month? In 1981?

DOROTHY

So you're not even in the yearbooks. Why do you want to see them?

JIM

I'm looking for ... a friend?

DOROTHY

What's his name?

JIM

Uh, her. Her name was Shelley.

DOROTHY

What's her last name?

JIM

I don't know. That's what I'm, uh,
trying to find out.

DOROTHY

Do you think she wants you to know?

JIM

I don't, uh ... I don't know. I
think I saw her the other day, and
I just want--

DOROTHY

Get out. By the time I count to
three. Or I'll call the police.

JIM

No, I just--

DOROTHY

One!

JIM

You don't understa--

DOROTHY

Two!

JIM

I was crazy about her, and I think
she liked me t--

DOROTHY

Three!

JIM

Alright!!!

He exits.

DOROTHY

Stalker.

INT. MCJAGGER'S RESTAURANT - DAY

In a fast-food restaurant, Jim waits by the order counter with his receipt in hand, standing beside the restaurant's full-size porcelain mascot: A half-clown, half rock-star figure, with a face halfway between Ronald McDonald and Mick Jagger.

Behind the counter, an obese young woman (BECKY, early 20s) assembles his order.

She adds a bag of french fries to the burger and Coke already on a plastic tray.

JIM
Can I get five ketchups, please?

Becky gives him a dissatisfied stare; he thinks she just hasn't heard his polite request.

JIM (CONT'D)
Five ketchups?

BECKY
I heard you the first time.

With chubby fingers, she grudgingly adds four ketchup packets to the tray.

JIM
Good. I'm glad for you.

As he takes his tray, Becky gives him another look, still dissatisfied with his unusual request for "too much."

Jim sits down at an empty table, glaring back at her.

He takes a pen out of his back pocket, and writes on the back of his receipt ("FB - 4 ketchup"), sneering intermittently at Becky.

JIM (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Fat Bitch.

He underlines the "FB" he has written, then checks his wristwatch:

JIM (CONT'D)
Twelve thirty-five!

He wolfs down the rest of his burger and fries.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - DAY

With his large McJagger's soft drink in hand, Jim walks down the concrete stairs onto the northbound platform.

The overhead box-screens show a time of 12:49--just before the time of day when Jim had previously seen the Subway Woman.

Jim finds a good vantage point, against the outside wall, and keeps his eyes peeled for any sign of Subway Woman.

Gaggles of young teenage students in uniform from an all-girl school wait in front of him, for the next train.

Jim watches around them, intently, sipping on his soft drink through its straw.

A security guard (MARK, mid-20s) walks over to him.

MARK

Can I help you, Sir?

JIM

No, I'm just looking for a ... girl.

MARK

What kind of girl?

JIM

When she was fifteen, she was the prettiest girl in all the teenage world.

Mark looks him over with narrowed eyes, suspicious.

MARK

How old is she now?

JIM

Oh, no--she's my age! I'm not a ... pedophile!

Mark steps up closer to him, threateningly.

MARK

You listen to me, Sir: If I see your ugly face on this platform again, I'll arrest you. I don't care what the charge is. I'll make one up. Do you understand me?

JIM

Uh, yes, I'm ... yes. Sorry. Yes.

He scurries away, up the exit stairs, glancing futilely across the tracks.

MARK

Pervert.

EXT. NIETZSCHE'S PUB & CLUB - DAY

In the window of the low-key college nightclub and lounge, neon signs alternately flash the messages:

"We should consider every day wasted"

"On which we have not danced"

A neon outline of Friedrich Nietzsche and his impressive mustache accompanies the message.

INT. NIETZSCHE'S

Werner and Eva, in their normal (non-fetish, non-Victorian) clothes, without their fake mustache or eyepatch, sit at a table for two in the lounge, with their drinks.

A bartender (KELLY, 21) polishes glasses behind the bar.

Werner has a biography of Freud opened on the table in front of him.

The TV behind them broadcasts a press conference for the upcoming mayoral election, with the liberal Julie Rudyani announcing her candidacy, surrounded by colorful, elongated, helium-filled balloons.

JULIE

(on the TV)

If I'm elected, I'll work
tirelessly to defend the rights of
the downtrodden, the less
fortunate, and the disenfranchised.

WERNER

(to Eva)

Yeah, if I ever run for mayor,
that's how I'll announce it: At a
kids' birthday party, surrounded by
floating condoms.

He directs his attention down to the biography of Freud.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Listen to this.

(reading)

(MORE)

WERNER (CONT'D)

To break the ice upon meeting Freud in 1922, a recent graduate recounted how he had met a boy on the train to Vienna who was afraid of getting dirty. He refused to sit down near anyone dirty, despite his mother's reassurances.

(to Eva)

You know what Freud said?

(reading)

Und was zat child you?

Jim enters the bar, agitated.

Werner sees him.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Oh-oh.

(to Eva)

Hide.

He turns away, trying to remain unnoticed.

Jim walks rapidly toward the bar, passing Werner and Eva's table.

He stops, turns back, and looks them over.

JIM

(to Eva)

You don't normally wear fishnet stockings ... with an eyepatch?

Eva shakes her head, deer-in-the-headlights.

JIM (CONT'D)

(to Werner)

You're not a German psychiatrist.
With a mustache.

Werner looks down/away and shakes his head silently, covering the book with his hands.

Jim proceeds toward the bar.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'm going crazy.

(to Kelly)

Can I get a glass of water? For my medication?

As he takes out his plastic Relanax bottle, he looks back toward Werner and Eva's table, seeing it now deserted.

Kelly puts a glass of water on the bar.

JIM (CONT'D)
(shakes his head)
Crazier and crazier.

He takes the water, washes down the pills, and puts the empty glass back on the bar.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT BUILDING/LOBBY - DAY

A low-rent, mid-rise apartment block, just high enough to require an elevator.

A student tenant (Byron, 20s) takes his mail out of his mailbox, and enters the building.

The entrance doors open from outside, and Jim enters the apartment block, walking over to the mailboxes.

He takes out his keys, opens the box for unit 314, and retrieves a letter from it.

JIM
(reading the return
address)
Harvey Snider, Probate Attorney?

He weighs the option of opening the letter, but then drops it, unopened, into the open-top recycle box.

He closes the mailbox door, fighting with it to get his key out of the lock.

As he walks away from the mailboxes he has second thoughts.

He returns to fetch the letter out of the recyclables, and opens it, tossing the empty envelope back into the recycle bin.

JIM (CONT'D)
(reading)
Dear Mr. Salk: We represent the
estate of your late father, William
Salk, who ... passed away on
September 5th.... Following the
upcoming funeral, we will be
conducting a reading of the Last
Will and Testament....

He pauses, folds the letter, and puts it in his back pocket.

JIM (CONT'D)
The undiscovered country.

He walks toward the elevators, as TRUDIE (50s) enters and opens her own mailbox.

EXT. JIM'S APARTMENT BUILDING/HALLWAY - DAY

Jim approaches apartment 314, takes out his keys, opens the door, and enters.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT

The tiny, 180 sq. ft. dilapidated bachelor unit contains one piece of real furniture: A ratty old armchair.

Next to it is a wooden TV tray with a cheap land-line phone, and Jim's "current reading" stack of a half-dozen books, including the "Killing Yourself Softly" book on top, and an anthology of the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

The armchair is additionally surrounded by five three-foot-high stacks of used/library books, grouped by subject, each sorted in alphabetical order.

The "kitchen" area consists of a dorm fridge with a few utensils and plates on top, plus some tin cans of food. Next to it is another TV tray with a retro, whistling stainless-steel kettle on a hot plate, and a NYU-logo ceramic mug.

In the corner opposite the entrance door are half a dozen bankers boxes, in two stacks, with the lid being left off one of the top boxes.

Farther into the narrow apartment, past the armchair, is a small chest of drawers, and an inflatable camping bed on the floor, with half an unzipped sleeping bag for a blanket.

Exhausted, Jim walks over to the bankers boxes, and tosses his McJagger's receipt into the open one.

He then flops down into the armchair, picks up the "Killing Yourself Softly" book from the TV tray, opens it at the bookmark a third of the way through, and sighs.

JIM
(reading)
Chapter Six: Planes, Trains, and
Automobiles: The Pros and Cons of
Vehicular Suicide.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/RECEPTION - DAY

Wearing a black latex, long-sleeved catsuit (with eyepatch), Eva flips through a fetish magazine, killing time.

She looks around, at the closed door to the back room.

EVA

Good work, if you can get it.

BACK ROOM

Jim sits in the leather armchair.

Werner is sprawled leisurely across the sofa, with his unlit cigar.

JIM

Do you smoke?

WERNER

Ziss? Nein ["nine"]. It gives me somesing to do viss my hands, ja?

JIM

(ironic)

You want to hear something funny?

WERNER

Sure.

He puts the cigar in his mouth.

JIM

Back at NYU, there was this guy who just hung around the bookstore. Never went to classes, just wandered around the books. Turns out, he used to be their top math student. But one year, during exams, he cracked. The faculty felt guilty, even though it wasn't their fault. So they kept renewing his scholarships and TA stipend, just so he had enough to live on. And for ... therapy.

Werner takes the cigar out of his mouth.

WERNER

Ha-ha. Ja. Und vas zat schtudent you?

He puts the cigar back into his mouth.

Jim turns slowly to look at him, years of pain in his eyes.

JIM

Yes. It was.

Werner's jaw drops slowly open, and the cigar falls into his lap.

WERNER

(quietly)

Grüss Gott.

(beat)

Zo, how is it verking out, for finding your high-schkool dream-girl, ja?

JIM

Not so good.

(beat)

Hey, didn't your secretary used to be a private eye?

WERNER

Eva? Vell, she vas--

JIM

Yeah, I heard her say she was!

Maybe she can help us find Shelley!

He leaps up from the armchair.

RECEPTION AREA

Eva sits with her feet up on the desk next to the closed magazine.

She taps idly at her stiletto boots with a riding crop.

EVA

Giddyup.

Jim flings open the back-room door and bursts in.

JIM

Where would you start looking for someone you went to high school with?

EVA

Uh, classmates.com?

JIM
Okay, let's go!

EVA
Where?

JIM
(Batman-like)
To the library.

He opens the door to the stairs.

JIM (CONT'D)
Come on!

He exits rapidly, down the stairs.

Werner indicates with his cigar, for Eva to follow.

She rises from her chair, walking toward the door.

WERNER
After you, Catvoman.

As Eva passes, she snaps Werner sharply in the groin, with her whip.

WERNER (CONT'D)
MmmfffVienna!

He follows her down the stairs, hobbling awkwardly.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Jim and Werner (with unlit cigar) sit on either side of Eva (still in her catsuit and eyepatch), at a computer in a public library branch.

EVA
Which school?

JIM
Brooklyn High.

Eva enters the school into the classmates.com website search.

EVA
Graduation year?

JIM
Nineteen eighty-four.

WERNER

Ze class of Orvell. Und Bowie, ja?

EVA

All the Shelleys who graduated from
Brooklyn High in 1984.

JIM

Right.

Eva scrolls down the list.

EVA

Shelley Butterfield. Sound
familiar?

JIM

I don't know.

Eva clicks onto the next web page, and scrolls down some
more.

EVA

Shelley Handcock?

JIM

Hancock?

EVA

Handcock.

WERNER

Ja, I have a szeory about--

EVA

And Shelley Mann. No relation to
Aimee.

WERNER

I'm vit schtupid, ja?

Eva gives him an annoyed look, and then scrolls down to the
end of the last page.

EVA

That's all. Three Shelleys.

JIM

What do we do next?

EVA

Run these names through myLife and
insta-P-I. What order do you want
to do them in?

A patron (GWEN, late-30s) at a nearby computer takes
exception to their noise level, giving them a dirty look.

JIM

Alphabetically!

GWEN

Shhh!

EVA

(hushed)

I'll do it from home. I'll let you
know what turns up.

JIM

When?

EVA

Come by the office Friday. One
p.m.?

JIM

(hushed)

Thank you, Eva!

(beat)

She's out there somewhere.

WERNER

Like Bigfoot, und ze aliens, ja,
Schkully?

EVA

Shut up.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim unlocks the door and enters from the hallway, eating
happily from a container of fast-food french fries.

He bounces down into his reading chair, and eyes the "Killing
Yourself Softly" book atop his TV tray.

Instead of picking it up, he puts his fries down on the tray.

Then he gets down onto his knees on the floor, searching
through the alphabetized fiction stack.

JIM
R ... S ... T!

He rescues a book from partway down the vertical stack: "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

He gets back up into his armchair, smiling excitedly; then pulls his legs up to cross them on the chair, as a child, and looks around the quiet room.

JIM (CONT'D)
Sanctuary.

He begins eagerly re-reading the book from the beginning, for the nth time--snacking on fries by feel, without taking his eyes off the printed page.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM

The room has a couch, TV, coffee table, and a radiator beneath a small outside window.

Werner (in normal clothes, without his fake mustache) sits on the couch, teasing GILDA with a cat toy.

WERNER
(loudly, to Eva, O.S.)
If you're using my Mac, don't forget to plug it in. Last thing I need is a dead battery.

KITCHEN

Eva (normal, without eyepatch) sits at the kitchen table with a Mac laptop, plugged into the wall outlet.

EVA
(to herself, directed at Werner)
No, the last thing you need is a hole in the head. Clichéd, but true.

WERNER (O.S.)
(loudly)
Have you seen Gilda's squeaky bumblebee toy?

EVA
(correcting herself)
Another hole.
(MORE)

EVA (CONT'D)

(loudly)

Is it inside the squeaky beehive
toy? Or pollinating the squeaky
flower toy?

WERNER

Huh?

Eva opens a browser, and surfs to instaPI.com.

EVA

Shelley Butter ... cup?
(beat)
Butterfield.

INT. UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE - DAY

Jim browses the shelves of general trade books, alphabetizing titles that are out of order.

JIM

Heidegger before Hegel? Don't they
even teach these kids the alphabet?

An attractive Jewish woman (REBECCA) in her late twenties, wearing 2-inch heels, browses from the opposite direction.

Jim glances briefly at her, then pulls a book off the shelves and begins leafing through it, sneaking a glance at her backside.

A bookstore employee (TODD, 22) approaches Rebecca.

TODD

Can I help you find something?

REBECCA

I'm looking for the latest Steven
Pinker. "The Philosophy Instinct"?

TODD

I think there's a few copies left.

He finds the title, and takes a copy of the 800-page tome off the shelves.

REBECCA

Actually, I need five. For a
reading group.

Todd hands the 2-pound brick of a book over to her; she nearly drops it...

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Ugh!

...then cradles it in her arms like a baby.

TODD

Five?

REBECCA

Yes.

Todd piles a second, third, and fourth copy on top of the first, in Rebecca's arms.

TODD

Are you okay?

REBECCA

Yeah. Hit me again.

Todd places a fifth copy on top of the stack.

Rebecca loses her balance, on her heels, and staggers backward into Jim.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

Jim smiles politely at her...

JIM

No problem.

...and then goes back to his reading.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/BACK ROOM - DAY

Werner and Eva sit side-by-side on the leather couch.

Eva holds a handful of papers--printouts of the PDF reports she's run.

Jim sits in the armchair, leaning forward, waiting eagerly for the news.

EVA

Shelley Butterfield ... works at a specialty chocolate store.

JIM

She fed me chocolate once in high school.

WERNER

Zat vould exschplain it.

EVA

I couldn't find any pictures of her on Facebook or Google.

JIM

We grew up before social media. If you wanted a picture of yourself, you had to plan ahead. We didn't have cell phones, or iPods, or search engines. All we had was libraries, Playboy, and classic rock.

EVA

(charmed by the retro)

Cool. So when do you want to check out the chocolate shop?

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - DAY

On a crowded sidewalk, Jim walks toward the subway station.

He wears his best clothes--such as they are--and a fresh haircut.

He checks his watch, and considers entering the building.

As he approaches the entrance, a group of young teenage GIRLS exits, followed by an unrelated private-company SECURITY GUARD, still in his work clothes after a shift.

Jim changes course, and walks hurriedly past them on the sidewalk.

INT. MALL - DAY

Werner (in his suit and mustache) and Eva (with eyepatch) sit at a food-court table for three, several dozen yards away from a Laura Godiva specialty chocolate shop.

A very chubby, forty-something woman busies herself behind the counter--wiping the shelves behind her, and intermittently sneaking chocolates from an opened box next to her purse on the back counter.

This is SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD.

Werner munches on an apple, from a near-empty 3-pound plastic bag on the table.

EVA

Another apple? How many is that today?

WERNER

Twelve? Or fifteen? It's for the vitamin B-17. Laetrile. Prevents cancer.

EVA

You're gonna give yourself diarrhea.

WERNER

Pectin. Stops diarrhea.

Jim hurries up to them, and sits down beside Werner and Eva.

JIM

Sorry I'm late, the subway was ... off-limits, for me.

(he looks over to the chocolate shop)

Is that her? Shelley Butterfield?

EVA

Looks like it.

JIM

I remember her being ... slimmer. I guess she let her body go ... and I lost my mind.

WERNER

Vell, opposites attract, ja?

EVA

She could still have a heart of gold.

WERNER

Gold, und arterial plaque, ja.

JIM

What should I say to her?

EVA

Tell her you're buying a gift, and ask her to recommend something.

Werner finishes off his apple core.

JIM

Good idea.

(to Werner)

You can commit suicide with apple seeds.

WERNER

You can?

(he remembers his faux-German accent)

What? How?

JIM

They're only poisonous if you chew them.

WERNER

Ja, zat's vhat I've been doing.

JIM

You'd have to eat a whole cupful of seeds. Around eighteen apples.

WERNER

Ja, und ... und vhat happens if you do?

JIM

Cyanide poisoning. Headache, nausea, fatigue, lethargy, vomiting, convulsions.

(beat)

Okay, here goes. Wish me luck.

He rises from the chair, and walks toward the chocolate shop.

EVA

Good luck.

WERNER

(to Eva)

I sink I should lie down.

CHOCOLATE SHOP

Jim walks up to the counter.

JIM

Hi.

The woman turns around to face him; he sees her nametag.

JIM (CONT'D)

Shelley?

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD

Hi!

JIM

I'm looking for some chocolates.
For a gift?

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD

Is it for a man or a woman?

JIM

Uh....

He glances back at Werner and Eva.

Werner has turned a nauseous shade of green, trying to keep his apples down.

JIM (CONT'D)

Both.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD

The chocolate strawberries are
really good. I can't stop snacking
on those. And the truffles.

She pops another chocolate into her mouth.

JIM

It must be tough keeping in shape,
with all this food around.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD

I lost a hundred pounds last year.

JIM

You lost a hundred pounds. Wow.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD

Yeah. You want to see a picture of
what I used to look like?

JIM

I don't need to--

Shelley B takes a photo out of her purse, and hands it to Jim.

Behind Jim, Werner vomits into his apple bag, as a concerned security guard (CRAIG, mid-20s) comes over to their table.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
I wasn't happy with how I looked,
back then. I ate a lot after the
divorce.

JIM
Divorce?

He hands the picture back to her.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
Yeah. But now, I can fit into some
of my old jeans from high school!

JIM
Wow, that's really ... something.
So where did you ... where did you
go to school?

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
Brooklyn High.

JIM
You weren't in ... Mrs. Henson's
math class. Grade ten?

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
No.

JIM
(relieved)
Oh.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
My cousin Mitch was. The German
exchange student?

She sneaks another chocolate.

JIM
Okay. I guess I'll just take a gift
box. Whatever you recommend. You're
the expert.

SHELLEY BUTTERFIELD
Would you prefer dark chocolate, or
light?

Jim turns around...

JIM
Doctor Schnitzel: Dark chocolate
or....

...and sees Werner being strapped onto a stretcher by a team of PARAMEDICS.

JIM (CONT'D)
Doctor Schnitzel!

He rushes toward their table, as Werner begins convulsing on the stretcher.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

On an otherwise-perfect early autumn afternoon, a small group of MOURNERS stand around an open grave. There is a dense grove of trees in the mid-distance.

ALEX, the forty-something son of the deceased, reads a passage from a leather-bound book of Shakespeare's plays, as the coffin is lowered.

ALEX
Of all the wonders that I yet have
heard,
It seems to me most strange that
men should fear;
Seeing that...

NEARBY GROVE

From behind the trees, Jim takes a step forward, out of the shadows, toward the funeral party, and joins in the distant recitation of the memorized passage.

JIM & ALEX
...death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

Alex closes the book.

JIM
Rest in peace ... dad.

He turns and walks back into the shadows.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT BUILDING/LOBBY - DAY

The entrance doors open, and Jim enters his apartment block somberly, walking in his well-worn route to the mailboxes.

He takes out his keys from his pocket, opens the box for unit 314, and retrieves a letter.

JIM
(reading the return
address)
The IRS?

He tears open the letter.

JIM (CONT'D)
(reading)
Dear Mr. ... Walk? In order to
process your 2014 income tax
return, we require documentation
from you for all claimed
expenses.... We have scheduled your
audit for 2 p.m. on ... September
24th....

He sighs, and closes the mailbox.

JIM (CONT'D)
What would I rather do on my
birthday?

As usual, he has to fight with the lock to get his key out, finally succeeding.

He then checks the name on the letter again.

JIM (CONT'D)
Jim Walk?

He walks toward the elevators, shaking his head.

JIM (CONT'D)
A rose, by any other name....

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim opens the door and enters his apartment from the hallway.

He crumples up the IRS letter into a ball, and tosses it awkwardly into the open bankers box.

JIM

Nothing but net ... income.

He flops down into his reading chair, defeated again by life.

He picks up the "Killing Yourself Softly" book from the TV tray, and opens it to the bookmark.

JIM (CONT'D)

(reading)

Chapter Ten: Speeding Bullets: How
to Blow Your Brains Out Safely ...
and Reliably.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/RECEPTION - DAY

Eva (with eyepatch) sits at the reception desk, with her ideas-notebook open on the desk in front of her, and a pen in her hand.

The front door is closed, and the door to the empty back room is open.

EVA

(thinking out loud)

Idea for a sketch: A near-sighted
woman, without her glasses ... at
the info booth in a mall, tries to
follow directions to the
optometrist's office.

She makes a few brief, point-form notes in the notebook.

Footsteps come up the stairs.

Eva closes the notebook as Jim opens the door, and enters.

JIM

Hi, Eva.

He cranes his neck into the back room.

JIM (CONT'D)

Where's Doctor Schnitzel?

EVA

He's still recovering from--

JIM

The apple--

EVA
Overdose, yeah.

JIM
Did they ask him if he was trying
to harm himself?

EVA
Yep.

JIM
What did he tell them?

EVA
He said he wasn't, it was all a
misunderstanding, and he was just
trying to find a girl.

JIM
What did they say?

EVA
That he was "unusual, but not
unique."

JIM
Hmm. So I guess there's no therapy
this week.

EVA
I didn't know how to get in touch
with you, to cancel.

JIM
Normally there's an intake form.

EVA
I don't think Doctor Schnitzel
thought that far ahead. Here.

She turns to the back page of her notebook, and hands it
across to Jim on the desk, along with her pen.

EVA (CONT'D)
Write down whatever you want us to
know.

JIM
Okay.

He writes down his name, phone, and apartment address.

EVA

If you just want to talk, I can listen. I'm not a therapist, but ... I could pretend to be one.

JIM

Yeah, sure! That'd be ... a nice change.

Eva rises from her chair, and they enter the

BACK ROOM

Jim sits straight down in the psychiatrist's chair.

Eva looks puzzled.

JIM

It makes me feel like I'm at home. Doctor Schnitzel usually sits on the couch. Or lies down.

Eva sits down in the middle of the sofa, crosses her legs, and puts her hands in her lap.

EVA

So how was your week?

JIM

I'm getting audited.

EVA

By the IRS? Or, Scientology?

JIM

The IRS.

EVA

Why would they audit you? You don't look like you make a lot of money. No offense.

JIM

Maybe someone with the same name as me is on a no-fly list, and they think I'm funneling money to Afghanistan. Or my Social Security Number is off-by-one from a former Enron accountant, and their million-dollar software can't tell the difference. Who knows.

EVA
What else happened?

JIM
I've been reading up on ways of
committing suicide.

EVA
You're not thinking of--

JIM
No. I'm not depressed ... except
about my anxiety. I just need to be
prepared. If I'm ever suffering
intolerably, with no hope of
recovery....

EVA
To die with dignity?

JIM
(shrugs)
Just to die.
(beat)
It's not as easy as you'd think.
The Golden Gate Bridge is a 250-
foot drop. One guy jumped, and
survived, but then got attacked by
a shark!

EVA
Ouch. Did he live?

JIM
I hope not. Overdosing on sleeping
pills doesn't work either.

EVA
They don't?

JIM
They're not barbiturates anymore.
You've heard of Heaven's Gate?
Barbiturates in apple sauce? You
know who died in that? Nichelle
Nichols' brother.

EVA
Nichols, from Star Trek? Uhura's
brother??

JIM

He really thought he was going to wake up on a spaceship.

EVA

Wow.

JIM

To do it with carbon monoxide, you need an older car--the emissions standards for the new ones are too high.

EVA

(ironic)

Damned environmentalists.

JIM

Throwing yourself under a subway train only works two-thirds of the time. And cutting your wrists is just six percent.

He glances at Eva's upturned, scarred wrists, visible in her lap, amid the tattoos.

Eva self-consciously turns her forearms to hide the undersides.

JIM (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk about it?

EVA

I used to cut myself.

She openly shows Jim her "emotional crucifixion" scars.

JIM

(sympathetic, concerned)

Why?

EVA

To take away the pain inside by putting it on the outside? It's like crying: You feel better afterwards.

JIM

Maybe I should try it. I used to cry all the time when I was a kid.

EVA

What about?

JIM

Oh, if I wanted a telescope more than anything for Christmas, and my parents gave me a cheap wood-burning set. Or when my favorite uncle gave me a joke birthday present: Five boxes wrapped inside each other, like Russian dolls? You get your hopes up opening each one, 'cause it's your favorite uncle and you know he's giving you something amazing. And each time your heart sinks farther into your stomach, and you have to try harder to hold back the tears, and you tear open the next one even more frantically, 'cause you're still desperately hoping that it'll be ... everything you're hoping for. You know what was in the last one, under a bunch of crumpled paper? A Brazilian dollar.

EVA

(quietly)

Wow.

A sympathetic tear forms in her eye. She wipes it away.

JIM

He said someday it might be worth a lot of money.

EVA

Is it?

JIM

Forty-four cents. Like my dad used to say: If you expect the best, you'll always be disappointed. But if you expect the worst, it usually turns out better than you hoped.

EVA

He really said that?

JIM

(checks his watch)

Oh, sorry: Our time's up! I didn't mean to go over--

He starts rising from the chair.

EVA

Your watch must be fast. What happened next?

Jim sits back down and collects himself.

JIM

He died last week. My dad. I hadn't spoken to him for eight years.

EVA

I'm sorry.

JIM

He flunked out of engineering 'cause he spent all his time writing Shakespearean sonnets when he should have been studying. His sister was the really brilliant one, until she cracked, and wound up teaching kindergarten. So his way of not putting pressure on me was that whenever I aced a test ... or a course ... he'd tell me he never expected me to succeed.

EVA

(quietly)

Really?

JIM

He meant it as a compliment.

(beat)

It destroyed me. Compared to that, high school was nothing.

(beat)

I didn't hate him. It just hurt too much to keep ... loving him.

He holds back tears, then gives in to the pain and begins weeping, increasingly deeply.

Moved by Jim's pain, Eva too begins crying, then sobbing in sympathy.

They spontaneously rise from their seats, cross the divide, and cling to each other, weeping uncontrollably on each other's shoulders.

When they're all cried out, they slowly compose themselves.

Eva takes a box of Kleenex off the bookshelves, lets Jim grab a handful, and grabs a handful herself.

They dry their tears and blow their noses.

JIM (CONT'D)
Our time must really be up by now.

EVA
(sniffles)
I guess we could call this a
breakthrough?

JIM
(faux lightly)
Like my dad used to say: If it's
not a breakdown, it's a
breakthrough.

Eva opens the office door; they walk out into the

RECEPTION AREA

EVA
Oh, I almost forgot! I got the
reports for Shelley Handcock.

JIM
What did they say?

EVA
After high school, she lived for a
couple of years on Cougar Mountain.
Then she worked at a club in
Atlantic City. Now she manages it.

JIM
A night club?

EVA
Strip club.

JIM
Oh. She was beautiful enough, she
could have been a ... stripper. As
soon as Doctor Schnitzel's feeling
better....

EVA
Road trip?

JIM
Atlantic City!

EVA

It probably won't be 'til next week. He's a bit of a whiner.

JIM

I'll keep busy 'til then.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Couples stroll around and lounge on the grass in the bright autumn sun.

Jim walks toward an empty park bench sheltered under a tree, carrying his "Killing Yourself Softly" book.

He squints up at the sun, and then sits down on the bench, marveling at the natural beauty all around him.

He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath of the dry, fragrant autumn air.

Then he opens the book.

JIM

(reading)

Chapter Fourteen: Up, Up and Away:
Going to The Great Beyond with ...
Helium

His attention rivets on the text, devouring its information.

JIM (CONT'D)

(reading)

When breathing pure helium inside a
plastic bag, unconsciousness
follows after about five breaths.

He closes his eyes and breathes in and out several times, deliberately and deeply, gauging how long it would take to pass out.

INT. PARTY STORE - DAY

A perky blond salesgirl (CYNDI, 18) rings in a purchase for a customer (WAYNE, late-20s) at the cash register.

She hands him his merchandise, in a plastic bag with the store's "Party On!" name printed on the side.

CYNDI

Party on!

Jim enters from outside, as Wayne exits.

Jim walks down the first aisle, past cardboard cutouts of Marilyn Monroe and Rehab wigs, etc.

He stops at the end of the aisle, his gaze lingering over a display of Minnie Mouse costumes, hats, and party favors.

Cyndi approaches Jim from the front of the store as he rounds into the next aisle.

CYNDI (CONT'D)

Hi! What are you looking for?

Jim gazes past her, with awe, at a giant, inner-tube sized floating donut, decorated with painted sprinkles.

JIM

Is that a ... donut?

CYNDI

You better believe it!

JIM

I had a near-death experience like that. I'm just looking for helium. For blowing up balloons. Or ... donuts.

Cyndi directs him to the appropriate area on the shelves.

CYNDI

We've got tanks that do thirty balloons, or fifty. All depends on how much fun you want to have!

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim opens the door and enters from the hallway carrying a large "Party On!" plastic bag with a balloon-time helium canister in a cardboard box, inside it.

He puts the bag down on his armchair, opens the box, and takes out the tank and a package of balloons.

JIM

With my beautiful, my beautiful balloons.

With a set of pliers from the TV tray, he unscrews the regulator and its attached rubber fitting from the helium tank, playfully excited to be wrapped up in this new project.

A knocking comes on his door.

JIM (CONT'D)
(quoting Poe's "The
Raven")
As of someone gently rapping
Rapping at my chamber door.

He puts the regulator and its fitting down on the TV tray,
and walks to the door.

He opens it, revealing a USPS delivery man (TED, 30s),
holding a medium-sized, square parcel.

TED
I've got a package here for a Mr.
Jim Salk.

JIM
I'm a Mr. Jim Salk, waiting for
exactly such a package.

He takes the parcel from Ted...

JIM (CONT'D)
Thank you, Mr. Postman.

...and closes the apartment door.

He grabs a knife from on top of his fridge, to cut the
packing tape from the box.

JIM (CONT'D)
I know what's not inside this: A
Brazilian dollar bill.

Opening the box, he lifts out a fragile item covered with
tissue paper.

He removes the paper to reveal a vintage, porcelain '70s
clown head, in the likeness of Roland McJagger. The item is
designed to fit over the top of a helium cylinder, for
children's birthday parties, to make it look like the clown
is blowing up the balloons.

He holds the head up, a la Hamlet with the skull of Yorick.

JIM (CONT'D)
Alas, McJagger: You want fries with
that? You want ketchup with those
fries? You want more ketchup than I
think you should want? Fat Bitch.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

In a small mom-and-pop store, a university-age employee (BRAD) in a franchise shirt and nametag helps out a customer (LANA, mid-20s).

He hands her a small package of rubber furniture feet.

BRAD
These will fit most barstools.

At the front doors, Jim enters, carrying the helium-tank regulator and rubber fitting.

He wanders down the unfamiliar aisles, not sure what he's looking for.

Brad comes up to him.

BRAD (CONT'D)
Can I help you?

JIM
Hi, I need to find a replacement for this, from a helium tank.

BRAD
Sure, what'll you be using it for?

JIM
Uh, I'm doing a science project. With my kid? We need to fill several large trash bags with helium.

BRAD
Sure thing. First, you'll want a fitting to screw into the regulator, that you can connect a hose to, and a clamp. These should work.

He selects a brass fitting and half-inch hose clamp off the shelves, and hands them to Jim.

BRAD (CONT'D)
Then you'll need some clear plastic tubing. Will six feet be enough?

JIM
I think so.

Brad measures out six feet of tubing.

BRAD

I'll give you a little extra, just so you don't come up short.

JIM

That's very ... generous, of you.

Brad cuts the tubing, winds it up into a ring, and secures it with a piece of tape.

BRAD

We should get you some thread sealer, too. To be sure there won't be any leaks. That's over in Plumbing.

JIM

Okay.

He leads Jim over to the Plumbing area, selects a stick of thread sealer for him, and hands it over to the increasingly amazed customer.

BRAD

Is there anything else I can help you find?

JIM

This is the best service I've ever received. Anywhere. If there were people like you working at McJagger's, I wouldn't be afraid to order there! Is there some award I can nominate you for? Employee of the Month?

BRAD

(laughs)

I'm just helping my mom and dad out between classes. I'm the only employee. Every month.

JIM

What are you taking?

BRAD

Math double-major. I should really be studying for a test tomorrow, but ... I guess I'll just hope for the best.

A lump forms in Jim's throat, seeing a younger version of himself in a different, much less pain-filled life.

JIM

Thank you. For everything.

He turns toward the checkout area.

BRAD

Oh, Sir: Be sure to do your experiment in a well-ventilated area. You don't want anyone to get hurt by inhaling too much gas.

Jim laughs softly at the irony.

JIM

We wouldn't want that. Thank you again. Sir.

He carries his items toward the checkout and puts them down by the till, still amazed.

At the checkout Brad's mother, ELLEN (50s), rings the items in.

JIM (CONT'D)

(to Ellen)

If I ever use any of this ... I'll miss him.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A Greyhound bus travels along the Interstate, bound for Atlantic City.

INT. BUS (MOVING)

Jim, Eva and Werner (in character) sit together.

Eva wears a blouse with a shoulder cutaway showing part of her bra strap. Plus her eyepatch.

Jim eats from a bag of McJagger's fries.

EVA

You eat a lot of french fries.

JIM

Not just french fries. Sweet potato fries. Curly fries. Frings. Poutine.

EVA
What's that?

JIM
Fries with gravy, and cheese. From
Quebec.

WERNER
Ethnic food, ja?

JIM
Crinkle cut, or shoestring. Hand-
cut, or by machine. With white
vinegar, or malt. All the
combinations and permutations.

WERNER
Ze vhat?

JIM
Say you've got all the different
types of fries, in three sizes. But
you're hungry, so you order two.
But not two different sizes of the
same one. So how many different
ways can you choose two items out
of six, when the second one can't
be from the same group as the
first? And they can't both be
large.

WERNER
I don't ... eat out zat much.

JIM
It's just factorials. You took this
in high school.

WERNER
I sink vee vere all busy schtareing
at ze girls' bra schtraps, ja?

JIM
I couldn't do that. She sat behind
me.

WERNER
Ze Miss America pageant is next
veek, ja?

JIM
Shelley could have been a model.
She was the prettiest girl in all
the teenage world.

WERNER
To you, ja.

JIM
No. Objectively.

WERNER
By what criteria?

JIM
Symmetry. Neonatalism.
Gracilization. She was everything a
15-year-old boy could wish for, in
a 15-year-old girl.

WERNER
Like Taylor Schvift, ja?

Beat.

JIM
(sings, softly)
'Cause when you're fifteen

JIM & EVA
(singing)
Somebody tells you they love you
You're gonna believe them

EXT. HIGHWAY

The bus rolls along the Interstate.

JIM & EVA (singing)	WERNER (O.S.) (singing)
When you're fifteen	Ja when you're fünfzehn
And somebody tells you they love you....	Und somebody tells you zey leeb dear....

The bus disappears into the distance. Beat.

JIM (O.S.)
I never told her.

EXT. STRIP CLUB - DAY

Jim, Werner, and Eva walk up to the T&C Strip Club, looking up at the signage.

JIM
Terms and Conditions?

EVA
Tits and Clits.

JIM
It's a whole different ... culture.

They enter the club.

INT. STRIP CLUB

As the music plays, a stripper (ABBIE, early-20s) dances around the main pole.

Jim walks up to the bar, followed by Werner and Eva.

The bartender (SHANE, mid-20s) comes over to them.

SHANE
What can I get you?

JIM
Hi, uh, three ... three....

WERNER
Budweisers?

JIM
And could we speak to the manager?

SHANE
Is there a problem?

As they talk he grabs three bottles of beer from the fridge, opens them, and places them on the bar.

JIM
No.

WERNER
Nein.

EVA
Not at all.

JIM
We'd just like to see the ...
manager. Shelley?

SHANE
Does she know you?

Beat.

WERNER
Nein.

EVA
Maybe.

JIM
We don't know. That's what we came
here to find out. From Brooklyn.

Shane motions subtly to the hardbody bouncer, CHIP (mid-20s).

Chip approaches the odd trio.

WERNER
I sink ve'll just vatch ze show.
Ve'll run a tab, ja?

He grabs the beers from the counter, and leads Jim and Eva to
a table in the corner.

They sit down: Jim on one side of the table, Werner and Eva
on the other.

WERNER (CONT'D)
If she verks here, vhat vas she
doing on a subway in Brooklyn?

JIM
Visiting her mother?
(beat)
We should settle up, for so far.

He takes a handful of \$20 bills out of his pocket.

The music stops, Abbie exits the stage, and a new stripper
(BRANDI, 19) comes onstage.

BRANDI
For the next five minutes: Lap
dance special! Twenty bucks!

She walks off the stage, down among the patrons.

BRANDI (CONT'D)
Just a Jackson, for all this
action.

She shows off her sensuous wares, to the onlookers.

JIM
(to Werner)
Eighty for the bus trip?

He pushes four bills toward Werner and Eva.

EVA
Call it sixty.

She pushes \$20 back to Jim, on the table.

WERNER
Eighty is good, alzo.

He reaches for the orphaned \$20.

Eva pushes it farther toward Jim, decisively.

EVA
Sixty.

Jim picks up the bill and holds it up in the air.

JIM
Are you sure?

Brandi comes up from behind them.

BRANDI
Lap dance special!

She grabs the \$20 out of Jim's hand, and stuffs it into her
thong.

The music blares.

JIM
No, that's for my ... therapy!

As the music plays, Brandi rubs her body all over Jim's
thighs and abdomen.

Jim reaches for the \$20 bill.

BRANDI
Don't touch!

She continues dancing seductively near and against him.

JIM

That's my money! I was just paying
Doctor Schnitzel ... and Fräulein
Kirschtorte ... for their ...
services!

His eyes roll back in his head, as Brandi grinds her crotch
against his.

He gropes blindly around her groin and butt for the \$20 bill.

Across the room, in a dark corner behind the stage, Chip paws
at the willing Abbie.

A late-40s, man-eating cougar/businesswoman who worked her
way up from being a stripper herself, into management,
descends the stairs from her upstairs office/lair.

This is SHELLEY HANDCOCK.

BRANDI

Don't touch!!

She slaps Jim hard across the face.

SHELLEY HANDCOCK

Chip!

She puts two fingers into the corners of her mouth and
whistles sharply, as if calling a dog.

SHELLEY HANDCOCK (CONT'D)

Chip!!

Chip detaches himself and his paws from Abbie...

JIM

Shelley? Is that you? From math
class?

...and barrels toward Jim's table.

SHELLEY HANDCOCK

Who the hell are you?!

JIM

(horrified, to Werner and
Eva)
That's not her!

They jump up from their table, and race for the doors.

SHANE

They haven't paid for their drinks!

SHELLEY HANDCOCK

(to Chip, fiercely)

Get them!

Jim, Eva and Werner scramble for the front doors.

As they reach the doors, Werner calls back over his shoulder, toward Shelley Handcock:

WERNER

Cougar Mountain! Right at ze top!

He gets out the door just as Chip lunges for him, barely escaping the bouncer's grasp.

EXT. BUS - DAY

Jim, Eva and Werner rush to board the return bus to NYC, breathing heavily and glancing behind them to ensure they're not being followed.

INT. BUS

They walk down the aisle, find three available seats, and sit down together, catching their breath.

The bus front-doors close, and the vehicle moves forward.

JIM

I don't think she was ever fifteen.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Werner and Eva (eyepatch in hand) enter their small but artsy one-bedroom apartment, after the bus ride.

Eva still wears the blouse with a shoulder cutaway showing part of her bra strap.

They walk toward the

LIVING ROOM

WERNER

Do you think he's autistic?

He sits down on the couch, peeling off his fake mustache.

Their cat, Gilda, leaps up on the sofa beside him.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Gilda. Sweetie. How was your day?

He strokes her affectionately.

Eva picks up her hardcover ideas-notebook, and a pen, from the kitchen table.

EVA

He's not autistic. How do you think the world would look if you spent all your time playing with ideas, so every interaction with people was something new? And to solve any problem, you had to look at it in a dozen different ways, to find the one way that no one else had ever thought of looking at it before?

Werner ignores her, instead directing his full attention to Gilda on the couch--teasing her with his mustache, as she goes crazy playing with it.

EVA (CONT'D)

Am I invisible?

Tired of waiting for a response in the conversation, she takes a step toward the bedroom.

WERNER

He's the Rain Man of junk food.
(he riffs, as Dustin Hoffman's character)
Babe Ruth ate twelve hot dogs between games. Played twenty-five hundred and three games. That's, uh....

EVA

Twenty-five thousand and thirty, plus five thousand and six.

WERNER

Huh?

Eva walks to behind the sofa.

EVA
Thirty thousand and thirty-six hot
dogs.

Werner takes out his cell phone, calls up a calculator app,
and does the math.

WERNER
I call bullshit on ... how did you
know that?

EVA
Twelve is ten plus two.

WERNER
Yeah.

EVA
Twelve is ten. Plus. Two.

WERNER
I know.

EVA
Addition is distributive.

WERNER
Huh?

EVA
You took this in high school!

She whacks him on top of his head with her notebook.

WERNER
Ow!

Eva glances down at her own shoulder.

EVA
Oh, look: A bra strap.

Werner twists around to see.

Eva pulls on her strap, releases it to snap on herself, and
then walks away toward the bedroom with her notebook and pen.

WERNER
(shakes his head)
Vimmin.

INT. DR. SCHNITZEL'S OFFICE/BACK ROOM - DAY

Jim sits in the armchair, relating his near-death experience in high school.

Werner relaxes on the couch, shuffling a set of ink-blot cards.

JIM

It was a huge ... donut ... tunnel. With sprinkles. I felt myself being drawn into it, and at the end, there was a brilliant white light ... and I saw my mother, who died when I was twenty.

WERNER

Your muszer?

JIM

Yeah. She offered me a homemade jambuster.

WERNER

Vell, zat's certainly ... um....

JIM

Doctor Schnitzel, can I ask you a question?

WERNER

Ja, sure. Why not?

He puts the cards away.

JIM

How do you know what to say to people? To girls. Do you practice?

WERNER

Nein, it's mostly ... improvised, ja?

JIM

So how do you know what to say?

WERNER

Vell, in life, when vee improvise, vun of ze sings vee say is "Ja, und."

JIM

"Ja, und"?

WERNER

It means "Yes, and." Zo for everyzing I say, you agree viss it, und zen you add somesing.

JIM

Oh, alright. Really?

WERNER

Ja. Zo if I say, "It's a beautiful, zunny day," you say?

JIM

Um, yes, and, I nearly got sunburned on the way over here.

WERNER

Oh, you sunburn easily? Zat must be difficult.

JIM

Yes, it is. And once, at a shawarma place, I stood too close to the rotisserie, and wound up with heatstroke.

WERNER

You see? Und now ve're talking about heatstroke, und ... ethnic food, ja?

JIM

Huh! I had no idea it worked like that.... That life worked like that.

(beat)

Doctor Schnitzel: Would you come with me to Nietzsche's? I want to practice talking to women. For when I meet Shelley. The real one.

WERNER

Vell, if it's billable....

JIM

Of course.

WERNER

Why not? Your ving-man, ja? Reminds me of my schtudent days at ze Putsch Beer Hall.

JIM
(uncertain)
The Beer Hall Putsch?

WERNER
Nein, ze Putsch Beer Hall. Ein club
in Vienna.... Alright. Oktoberfest,
here vee kommt.

JIM
But it's only September.

WERNER
I'll set my vatch a month ahead,
ja?

He rises from the couch.

Jim gets up from the armchair.

JIM
Oh! Doctor Schnitzel: I'm just
about out of my anti-anxiety
medication. Relanax? Could you
refill my prescription?

WERNER
Ja, I'm not really big on
prescribing drugs. I like to take a
more natural approach viss my ...
patients.

JIM
Do you think I should try to ...
get by without them?

WERNER
Vhat do you sink, I sink, you
should do?

JIM
(beat)
I think, you think, I should try to
get off the meds.
(doubtful)
I've been on them since high
school.

WERNER
Vell, zat is exactly ze point, ja?

JIM
(nervously)
Alright. I'll try.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eva (in normal clothes, without eyepatch) sits on the couch, watching a parody news show on TV, with DAN CURTIN as the anchor.

DAN
(on TV)
Conservative mayoral candidate Paul Robson today acknowledged having experimented with hallucinogenic mushrooms in his youth. In response, his liberal opponent, Julie Rudyani, admitted to having dropped acid, and invited Robson to join her on the "magic carpet ride of groovy social spending," unquote.

Gilda walks over on the couch, meowing, looking for attention.

EVA
Just you and me, Gilda. Girls' night out.

Gilda meows, rubbing against Eva's leg.

Eva pushes her away.

EVA (CONT'D)
Correction. Homo sapiens' night in.
If you're lonely, go lick yourself.
I would if I could.

Gilda meows again; Eva ignores her, deliberately looking away.

EVA (CONT'D)
Sucks being invisible, doesn't it?

INT. NIETZSCHE'S PUB & CLUB/LOUNGE

Werner (in character) and Jim stand by the lounge bar with a couple of beers.

WERNER

Zo how are you doing vissout ze pills?

JIM

The alcohol helps. It takes the edge off.

He lifts his bottle, with a mildly shaking hand, and takes a sip.

Werner surveys the girls around the room.

WERNER

Check out ze set of B-52s on zat vun. More like Double-D 52s, ja?

The DJ (early-20s) off the dance floor starts scratching a beat.

Rebecca approaches Jim.

REBECCA

Didn't I bump into you at the bookstore?

JIM

Uh, if you mean that literally: yes.

REBECCA

Do you want to dance?

JIM

Yes. I wish I could.

REBECCA

(beat)

Was that a yes, or a no?

WERNER

(prompting, to Jim)

Ja, und....

JIM

Oh.

(to Rebecca)

Yes! And ... you've got a great set of B-52s.

REBECCA

Forget it.

She turns on her heel and walks away, disgusted.

WERNER

Ja, viss ze Jewish vimmin, I would
lay off ze bomber jokes until maybe
ze second date, ja?

JIM

Second date, right. Got it.

(beat)

I should probably head home. My tax
audit's tomorrow, and then we need
to find Shelley Mann. I should try
and relax.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT/KITCHEN

Eva sits at the kitchen table, writing in her ideas-notebook.

Gilda jumps up onto an empty chair, then onto the table, and
walks right over Eva's notebook, with her butt in Eva's face.

Eva picks the cat up by the scruff of its neck, and puts her
back down on the floor.

EVA

He'll be back soon enough. Feline
American Princess.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Next to the dorm-fridge on a TV tray, as usual, is the
stainless-steel kettle on a hotplate, plus a new box of
chamomile teabags, and the NYU mug with a dry teabag already
in it.

The porcelain McJagger head sits atop the short stack of
"current reading" books on the armchair's TV tray.

As the morning sunlight streams in, Jim kneels on the floor
and sifts through his boxes of receipts, with shaking hands.

JIM

I wonder if I should try to
alphabetize these.

The electric kettle boils, and whistles.

Jim pours the boiling water into the mug, with the kettle
shaking in his hand.

JIM (CONT'D)
Nothing like chamomile for ...
relaxing.

He puts the kettle down, and lifts the too-full mug by its handle. He brings it up to his mouth, but his tremors cause it to shake too much for him to drink from it, spilling drops of tea on the boxes of receipts.

JIM (CONT'D)
I can't live like this.

He puts the mug down on the TV tray, clumsily.

He then picks up his phone from the armchair's TV tray, and dials--the receiver shaking in his hand.

JIM (CONT'D)
(into the phone)
Hi. Is Doctor Young back from
Thailand? It's an emergen.... A
tsunami? When will he be...? Oh....
I'm sorry, for your ... loss.

He puts the phone down, and stares down at his mug, then at the box of teabags.

JIM (CONT'D)
Better add another ... teabag.

He reaches for the box and opens it, with trembling hands.

INT. IRS OFFICE - DAY

An obese IRS auditor, ANGELA (40s), sits behind her desk, with a single tax return in front of her, and two empty chairs in front of the desk.

Jim enters very nervously through the open office door, almost shaking. He is wearing a light autumn jacket, and carrying three bankers boxes stacked atop each other, their height blocking his view.

He puts the boxes down on the floor in front of Angela's desk.

JIM
The rest are outside, in the ...
waiting room.

He sits down in one of the chairs.

ANGELA

You're Mister ...
(she checks the return on
her desk)
Jim Walk?

JIM

Walk? Uh, nnn ... I mean, yes! And
you can also spell it with an "S".
My grandfather invented the polio
vaccine.

She gives him a governmental "who cares" look, then eyes his
income tax return.

ANGELA

You claimed over thirty thousand
dollars in deductions, as a writer.

JIM

I did? I mean--

ANGELA

I'll need to see receipts for each
of the claimed items.

JIM

Oh.

He looks helplessly at his boxes, then opens the top one and
fishes a receipt out at random, as if drawing for a lottery
ticket.

JIM (CONT'D)

Here's one.

He hands it to her.

JIM (CONT'D)

And the winning number is....

ANGELA

(reading the chit)
Nine dollars and twenty-two cents,
for a large fries, burger ... and a
Coke?

JIM

That sounds about right.

She turns the paper over, and reads the handwriting on the
back: "FB - 4 ketchup."

ANGELA

What does "FB" mean?

Jim smiles weakly.

EXT. HUDSON RIVER - DAY

On the windy banks of a polluted river, Jim stands forlorn, with his half-dozen bankers boxes stacked beside him.

JIM

Yes, and ... Fuck. My. Life.

He takes the top box, removes its cover, and empties its contents slowly into the waters--as if scattering the remains of a loved one.

JIM (CONT'D)

Ashes to ashes. Death and taxes.

He watches the receipts float downstream--thirty years of his life, carried away on the current.

EXT. ALLEY - DUSK

Eva and Werner (in character) stand around the corner from a brownstone apartment building in Greenwich Village, hidden from the building's line of sight, in an alley just off the sidewalk.

Eva wears a pink cardigan on top of her corset and sweater; Werner is without his customary tweed jacket, rubbing his arms to keep warm, his unlit cigar in hand.

WERNER

It was supposed to be varmer.

EVA

It's late September. In New York.

WERNER

Vell, I'm chilly! Look at zees goosebumps!

Jim approaches, wearing his autumn jacket, his chronic anxiety barely under control.

EVA

Jim! How did your audit go?

JIM

I owe more money than I've made my entire life.

EVA

How is that possible?

JIM

(shrugs)

It's the IRS.

WERNER

Vell, at least you're varm, ja? I can't stop shivering.

JIM

Why didn't you bring your jacket?

WERNER

It's at ze cleaners. You try getting cat vomit out of tveed.

EVA

(annoyed)

Here.

She pulls off her pink cardigan, and hands it toward him.

EVA (CONT'D)

Take it!

Werner takes the sweater and puts it on, reluctantly.

JIM

See, that's what love is: When you care so much about someone that you don't even mind being uncomfortable, if it makes them happier.

EVA

(pointedly)

It's not that cold.

JIM

That's true.

They both turn to look at Werner, resplendent in his hot-pink sweater.

WERNER

Vell, sometimes a cardigan is just a--

A gay male couple (GLEN and BRUCE, 20s) walks by, on the sidewalk.

GLEN
(to Bruce)
You'd look good in that sweater.

They continue past.

WERNER
I can't vear ziss. Not in ze
Village.

He takes off the cardigan, and pushes it back at Eva.

She takes it from him.

EVA
Better hide the cigar, too.

WERNER
Ja, good idea.

He sticks it into his front pocket, producing a conspicuous bulge.

Eva rolls her eyes.

WERNER (CONT'D)
Vhat?
(he glances down at
himself)
Ach!

He hurriedly pulls the cigar back out, and stashes it on a nearby ledge.

Jim and Eva poke their heads around the corner.

In the distance, SHELLEY MANN steps out of her apartment-block entrance, wearing a tasteful pencil skirt, high heels, nylons, and a short fur-trimmed coat.

She turns around, primping her curly blond hair and checking her makeup in the reflection from the entrance door's glass.

JIM
(hushed)
There she is!

EVA
Do you think it's her?

JIM

It has to be. There's no one else left.

(to Eva, with barely suppressed desperation)
Hope for the best!

He walks nervously, on weak, shaking legs, toward Shelley Mann.

EXT. SHELLEY MANN'S APARTMENT BUILDING/FRONT ENTRANCE

Shelley Mann bends over to smell the flowers planted outside her building entrance.

Jim approaches her from behind.

JIM

Shelley? I don't know if you remember me, but I think we went to high school together.

She straightens up, turns around, and looks Jim in the eye.

SHELLEY MANN

I do! You're Jim ... Jim Salk!

It's clearly not Subway Woman, and not the Shelley that Jim was looking for.

JIM

Uh, you weren't ... you weren't in Mrs. Henson's grade-ten math class.

SHELLEY MANN

No. But we were in Mr. Grienke's physics class together!

JIM

I don't think--

SHELLEY MANN

We were!

JIM

No, I'd remem--

SHELLEY MANN

Back then, I was called Sheldon. But I was always a girl trapped in a boy's body.

Jim notices her prominent Adam's apple, and lets out a quiet scream.

SHELLEY MANN (CONT'D)

I had such a crush on you!

JIM

No....

SHELLEY MANN

I could hardly pay attention in class, with you there! And now you've looked me up, out of nowhere!

JIM

(panicking)

No....

SHELLEY MANN

Whatever happened to you? One month you were sitting there, so cute and quiet, and the next: Poof! Gone!

JIM

(trembling)

I had ... issues.

SHELLEY MANN

(sympathetic)

Ohhh. I'd love to hear about them. Why don't we grab a coffee?

She touches his arm.

Jim whimpers.

JIM

No.... No.... No....

He walks away hurriedly, panicking and panting, his limbs twitching uncontrollably.

EXT. ALLEY

Around the corner, Eva and Werner continue arguing.

EVA

It's a good thing you're not the one having a period every month.

(imitating Werner)

Ach, zees cramps und chills!

(MORE)

EVA (CONT'D)

I sink I'm dying! Bring me a hot
vater bottle und zum Tylenol, ja?

WERNER

I can't help it, I'm sensitive to
ze cold! Ve're not Eschkimos!

EVA

Stop talking in that stupid accent!
You sound like an idiot.

WERNER

Vell, I'm rubber, und you're glue,
und whatever you say--

EVA

Shut up.

WERNER

...bounces off me--

EVA

Shut up!

WERNER

...und schticks to you, ja?

EVA

Shut-up-Shut-up-Shut-up!!

She looks around the corner, toward Shelley Mann's building,
but sees no sign of her or Jim.

EVA (CONT'D)

Where's Jim?

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT BUILDING/HALLWAY - EVENING

Jim walks shakily up to his closed apartment door, fighting
to get his keys out of his front pocket.

He moves the key toward the lock, his hands and head shaking
and twitching uncontrollably, Katharine Hepburn-like.

JIM

I can't ... live ... like this.

He opens the apartment door, and enters.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM

Gilda lies on the windowsill, above the radiator, breathing softly, but not moving.

ENTRANCE

Werner (without his cigar) and Eva open the door and enter from the hallway.

Eva rips off her eyepatch.

EVA
You told him to what?!

WERNER
Stop taking his meds.

EVA
Which meds?

WERNER
Uh, Relanax?

They walk to the

LIVING ROOM

EVA
What's his taper?

WERNER
Huh?

EVA
How fast is he decreasing his dose?

WERNER
It's cold turkey.

EVA
Are you crazy? He can't go off Relanax like that! My sister tried to get off it too fast, she wound up in an ambulance with seizures!

She grabs her ideas-notebook from the coffee table, and turns to the back page for Jim's phone number.

She takes her cell phone, and dials.

On the windowsill, Gilda meows pitifully.

EVA (CONT'D)
He's not answering.

Werner ignores Eva, focusing on Gilda.

He dangles a fancy string-toy in front of the cat, but she doesn't respond.

WERNER
(concerned)
Gilda's sick again.

EVA
How many apples did she eat?

WERNER
This isn't funny.

EVA
Damned right it isn't.

WERNER
I'm taking her to the vet.

EVA
What about Jim?

Werner ignores her, examining Gilda.

Eva waits pointedly, glaring at Werner, then throws up her hands.

EVA (CONT'D)
Invisible!

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT

Shaking and twitching, Jim places the helium tank (with attached hose) beside his chair on the floor, and then surveys the room, with mock dissatisfaction.

JIM
Either those curtains go, or I do.
(beat)
Or both.

INT. WERNER & EVA'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM

Werner carefully lifts Gilda from the windowsill and places her into a cat carrier on the floor.

Eva tears the back page out of her ideas-notebook, for Jim's address.

EVA

If that damned cat is more important to you than another decent human being, I can't deal with you anymore.

WERNER

She's part of our family!

EVA

I won't fight you for custody.

She strides out of the apartment with the torn page, slamming the door behind her.

Werner visibly vacillates, torn between his two favorite pussies.

WERNER

Women!

He breaks for the door, running after Eva.

INT. JIM'S APARTMENT

Sitting in the armchair, Jim pulls a nylon-aluminum oven bag out of a small box, still shaking and twitching uncontrollably.

He puts the box back down on the TV tray, next to the small package of balloons from the balloon-time kit, and an elasticized headband. (The porcelain McJagger head still sits atop the stack of "current reading" books.)

He opens the nylon-aluminum bag, puts it on his head, and pulls the open end over his hair, down to his ears.

JIM

Just cooking a turkey.

He pulls the sweatband over the bag and down to his ear-level, then squeezes the air out of the bag, and reaches for the free end of the hose.

He pauses, and looks with affection at his stacks of books.

JIM (CONT'D)
I'll miss you. Friends.

A knocking comes on the apartment door.

Jim sighs, pulls off the oven bag, and rises from the chair, shaking Hepburn-like.

He opens the door to reveal a young black man (KEENAN, mid-20s), wearing the colors of the liberal mayoral candidate, Julie Rudyani.

KEENAN
Sir, have you decided who you be votin' for mayor? Julie Rudyani be representin' the rights of the downtrodden, the less fortunate, disenfranchised people like you an--

JIM
I don't vote.

KEENAN
You want some brochures?

Jim looks at the brochures in Keenan's hands.

JIM
There's no point.

He closes the door, and returns to his chair.

He again puts the bag and headband on his head, and squeezes out the air, with uncontrollably shaking hands.

He takes the free end of the hose, and inserts it into the bag.

He leans over and opens the valve on the helium-tank regulator, slowly inflating the bag.

He exhales deeply, expelling nearly all the air from his lungs, then whispers with the last of his breath:

JIM (CONT'D)
Sanctuary.

He pulls the inflated bag down completely over his head, bringing the open end and headband down to his neck.

He inhales the helium, finally relaxing as he takes several slow, deep breaths.

Ten seconds away from passing out, a lighter knocking comes on his apartment door.

He pauses, then takes another breath, ignoring the visitor.

The person in the hallway knocks again.

Jim pulls the bag off his head.

He bends over to close the helium-tank valve, and then rises from the chair, now more dizzy than shaking.

He opens the door.

The Subway Woman stands outside his apartment, dressed in conservative party colors and holding brochures for her choice of mayoral candidate, Paul Robson.

She has a "Vote for Paul" button pinned on her chest.

In her late forties, with flawless skin, and having not gained a pound since high school, she could still pass for thirty, even without makeup.

Jim's jaw drops.

JIM (CONT'D)
(in a high-pitched, Mickey
Mouse-like helium voice)
Shelley!

SUBWAY WOMAN
What? No! I mean ... no.

JIM
It's you!!

SUBWAY WOMAN
No one's called me that since high
school. How do you...?

JIM
You used to wear a Minnie Mouse
shirt!

SUBWAY WOMAN
(suspicious)
How do you know that?

Jim breathes forcefully in and out several times, trying desperately to clear the helium from his system.

The pitch of his voice drops a little.

JIM

You sat in back of Mrs. Henson's class, with Candace and Robyn! You voted for Dave Lane for student president!

SUBWAY WOMAN

(fearful, backing away)
How do you know that??!

Jim takes a step out into the

HALLWAY

JIM

You saved my life. You gave me water.

She looks him over, disbelieving.

SUBWAY WOMAN

Jim? The math genius?

Jim nods enthusiastically.

JIM

I've....

He shakes his head, inhaling and exhaling violently again, finally dropped his voice down to its normal pitch.

He looks deep into her searching eyes, and pours his heart out.

JIM (CONT'D)

I've loved you since high school.

SUBWAY WOMAN

I thought I wasn't smart enough for you.

JIM

You were too beautiful. I didn't have enough ... receipts. Now I don't have any.

He half-laughs, unsettlingly.

JIM (CONT'D)
Maybe it's not too late....

SUBWAY WOMAN
I'm married.

She shows the ring on her left hand.

Jim pauses, then a crazy-hopeful half-smile crosses his face.

JIM
Happily?

SUBWAY WOMAN
I should ... go.

She steps toward the elevators.

Jim takes a half-step, following her.

JIM
You're not Shelley anymore?

SUBWAY WOMAN
I changed my name in university.
There was a ... stalker.

JIM
What's your name now?

She hesitates, then sees the harmlessness and deep caring in his eyes.

SUBWAY WOMAN
Esmeralda.

They share an eternal, silent moment, for what might have been.

The elevator doors open.

Eva (in fetish clothes, but without her eyepatch) and Werner (in costume, but without his jacket or cigar) rush out past Esmeralda, as she steps into the elevator.

EVA
Jim! You're ... alive!

The elevator doors close.

JIM
Yes. Yes I am.

WERNER

Ja, vee vere vorried, because ve're
not--

EVA

German. We're not German.

Jim looks them over, censuring.

JIM

(to Eva)
Not even half?

EVA

(embarrassed)
No.

JIM

Ein bissyen?

Eva giggles with relief, then looks past Jim into the apartment, spotting the porcelain clown-head's reflection in the curved surface of the stainless-steel kettle.

EVA

Is that ... Roland McJagger?

JIM

You want to inflate some balloons?
It's my birthday.

EVA

(smiles)
I'd like that.

Jim ushers her toward the open apartment door, then grabs her upper arm.

JIM

Wait: What's your real name?

EVA

Amy.

He releases her arm.

JIM

Don't change it without telling me.

Eva smiles affectionately at him, and walks inside.

JIM (CONT'D)
(after Eva)
Grab a balloon!

As Werner follows behind Eva, Jim steps in front of him and extends his hand, to shake.

JIM (CONT'D)
Thank you, Doctor. For everything.

They briefly shake hands.

Jim turns and enters his apartment, leaving Werner alone in the hallway.

WERNER
Ja, vell, sometimes a balloon...

The apartment door closes in his face.

FADE TO BLACK.

WERNER (V.O.)
...is just a balloon. Ja?