

WHITE NOISE

From the Novel by Don DeLillo

Screenplay by Noah Baumbach

A blank movie screen.

A man, Murray Suskind, 50's, appears in front. He's stooped shouldered with a professorial goatee.

MURRAY  
OK, roll film.

A whirring sound. CLOSE on film going through a projector.

A soft white light illuminates, shadowing him against the screen.

He exits frame.

A montage of car crashes from movies and TV plays on the screen. The images are intercut with students watching, fascinated, taking notes, and Murray delivering his lecture.

MURRAY  
Don't think of a car crash in a movie as a violent act. No, these collisions are part of a long tradition of American optimism. A reaffirmation of traditional values and beliefs. A celebration.

Front end collisions. Rear end smashes. Cars sailing off bridges. Trucks with buses. Motorcycles with cars. Cars with helicopters.

MURRAY  
Think of these crashes like you do Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. On these days, we don't mourn the dead or rejoice in miracles. No, these are days of secular optimism, of self-celebration.

Trucks with trucks. Cars skidding into crashes. Cars smashing into poles. Cars breaking through supermarket windows.

MURRAY  
Each car crash is meant to be better than the last. There is a constant upgrading of tools and skills, a meeting of challenges.  
(MORE)

## MURRAY (CONT'D)

A director of an American film says, "I need this flatbed truck to do a midair double somersault that produces an orange ball of fire with a thirty-six-foot diameter." The movie breaks away from complicated human passions to show us something elemental, something fiery and loud and head-on. It's a wish-fulfillment, a yearning for naïveté. We want to be artless again. We want to reverse the flow of experience, of worldliness and its responsibilities. We will improve, prosper, perfect ourselves. Watch any car crash in any American movie. It is a high-spirited moment like old-fashioned stunt flying, walking on wings. The people who stage these crashes are able to capture a lightheartedness, a carefree enjoyment that car crashes in foreign movies can never approach. You might say, "But what about all that blood and glass, the screeching rubber, the crushed bodies, the severed limbs. What kind of optimism is this?"

(pause)

Look past the violence, I say.

The images connect like dance moves--gestures, big and small.

## MURRAY

There is a wonderful, brimming spirit of innocence and fun.

At the moment of impact of the final grand collision we CUT TO:

WHITE NOISE

EXT. COLLEGE-ON-THE HILL. DAY

From above: A long line of shiny station wagons ease their way around an I-beam sculpture and toward the dormitories. Blue, green, burgundy, brown. The roofs loaded down with carefully secured suitcases.

Part I: WAVES AND RADIATION

Jack (40s) watches from his office window. He wears an academic robe, a sleeveless tunic puckered at the shoulders. Tinted sunglasses on his face.

JACK (V.O.)  
 Let's enjoy these aimless days  
 while we can.

We see kids and parents unloading cars. Students greeting each other with comic cries and gestures of sodden collapse. The parents stand sun-dazed near their vehicles. The first day of school.

JACK (V.O.)  
 You should have been there.

BABETTE (V.O.)  
 Where?

The distant sound of traffic on an expressway.

INT. THE GLADNEY'S HOME

Babette, late 30's, descends the stairs as Jack enters.

JACK  
 It's the day of the station wagons.

BABETTE  
 Did I miss it again? You're  
 supposed to remind me.

JACK  
 It was a brilliant event. They  
 stretched all the way past the  
 music library and onto the  
 interstate.

BABETTE  
 You know I need reminding, Jack.

A quick kiss hello.

JACK  
 They'll be back next year.

BABETTE  
 I hope so.

JACK  
 I realized, I've witnessed  
 this event now for sixteen  
 years.

They pass through the foyer, Babette retrieving Jack's discarded jacket and hanging it in the closet.

JACK  
 It was 1968 I started the Hitler  
 Studies program.

BABETTE

I don't care about the station wagons, I wanted to see the people. What are they like this year?

JACK

The women wear plaid skirts and cable knit sweaters.

BABETTE

I knew it! And the men are in hacking jackets. What is a hacking jacket?

JACK

They've grown comfortable with their money. They genuinely believe they're entitled to it.

JACK

They glow a little.

BABETTE

I have trouble imagining death at that income level.

JACK

Maybe there's no death as we know it, just documents changing hands.

They enter the kitchen. Denise, 16, Steffie, 10, are getting food from the refrigerator, making sandwiches, mid-conversation.

STEFFIE

How do astronauts float?

DENISE

They're lighter than air.

HEINRICH

There is no air. They can't be lighter than something that isn't there.

Heinrich, 14, is seated at the breakfast table and stares at a chessboard mid-game while everyone else sets about making lunch. Utensils drop and are tossed in the sink. A period of chaos and noise as everyone moves and speaks at once.

BABETTE

Not that we don't have a station wagon.

(to the kids)

I thought space was cold.

JACK

It's small and metallic gray, it has a whole rusted door.

STEFFIE

Space?

JACK

Our station wagon.

DENISE

It's called the sun's  
corolla. We saw it the other  
night on the weather network.

STEFFIE

I thought Corolla was a car.

HEINRICH

Everything's a car.

BABETTE

(suddenly)

Where's Wilder?

(calling out)

Wilder!

Jack scoops the four-year-old boy up off the floor and places him on the counter among the open cartons, crumpled tinfoil, shiny bags of potato chips. Babette smiles.

BABETTE

(to Wilder)

Are you hungry?

The child nods. Heinrich plots his next move, hovering a knight in mid-air above the board.

JACK

You still playing the fellow in  
prison?

HEINRICH

(nods)

I think I've got him cornered.

JACK

Who did he kill again?

HEINRICH

He was under pressure.

Babette regards her plate: a large sandwich and chips.

BABETTE

This isn't the lunch I planned for  
myself. I was thinking yogurt and  
wheat germ.

DENISE

Where have we heard that before?

STEFFIE  
Probably right here.

JACK  
How many people did he shoot?

HEINRICH  
Five.

JACK  
Five people?

HEINRICH  
Not counting the state trooper,  
which was later.

A smoke alarm beeps somewhere in the house.

DENISE  
(to her mom)  
You keep buying stuff that you  
never eat!

STEFFIE  
Because Babette thinks if she keeps  
buying it, she'll have to eat it  
just to get rid of it.

DENISE  
But then we end up throwing it out.

Babette opens the newspaper in front of her and starts to  
read everyone's horoscope using a story-telling voice.

JACK  
We love her habits. If anyone here  
has to show discipline in matters  
of diet, it's me.

DENISE  
What's that beeping?

Amidst the activity, Babette cracks open an amber pill bottle  
and slips a small white pill into her mouth. She chases it  
down with orange juice. Denise watches this intently.

BABETTE  
It's the smoke alarm.

STEFFIE  
Is there a fire?

DENISE  
There's either a fire or the  
battery is dead.

HEINRICH  
Most fires in buildings start  
because of faulty wiring.  
That's a phrase you can't  
hang around for long without  
hearing. Faulty wiring.

JACK  
I'll replace it.

BABETTE  
(eating a strip of  
bacon)  
OK, Jack, Virgo... You've  
been swimming against the  
tide for the better part of a  
year now, but--

Jack grabs a banana and leaves the room.

HEINRICH  
He tries not to listen. Although I  
think he secretly wants to too.

STEFFIE  
It's like love slash hate.

Babette gets up and surreptitiously drops something into the  
garbage can beneath the sink on her way out of the room.

BABETTE (O.S.)  
I'm going to take a shower and then  
we'll go to the mall.

DENISE  
(to the room)  
Didn't she already shower today?

Steffie and Heinrich continue talking about Heinrich's chess  
partner. Denise goes to the garbage and reaches inside.  
Denise makes a face as she feels around the muck. She pulls  
out an amber pill bottle. The label reads: Dylar.

DENISE  
(to herself)  
Dylar.

BABETTE (V.O.)  
What do you want to do?

INT. JACK AND BABETTE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Jack, in striped pajamas, embraces Babette, in a big  
sweatshirt and underwear. They roll onto the bed. Their  
conversation has a deeply intimate tone.

JACK  
Whatever you want to do.

BABETTE  
I want whatever's best for you.



JACK

What's best for me is to please you.

BABETTE

But you please me by letting me please you.

They reposition themselves, trying to kick the sheets off their ankles. The radiator gurgles and clanks.

RADIO (O.S.)

This creature has developed a complicated stomach in keeping with its leafy diet.

JACK

Is it wrong for the man to be considerate to his partner?

BABETTE

I'm your partner when we're playing tennis, which we ought to start doing again by the way. Otherwise I'm your wife. Do you want me to read to you?

JACK

First-rate.

Jack leaps up and opens a drawer at the bottom of a dresser. There's a stash of erotic books. He leafs through them.

BABETTE

Please don't choose anything that has men inside women or men entering women. "I entered her." "He entered me." We're not lobbies or elevators.

JACK

Got it.

BABETTE

"I wanted him inside me." As if he could crawl completely in, sign the register, sleep, eat, and so forth.

TV (O.S.)

...until Florida surgeons attached an artificial flipper.

BABETTE

I don't care what these people do  
as long as they don't enter or get  
entered.

Jack selects a book with raised lettering and a muscular man  
and busty woman on the cover. He holds it up to her. She  
nods.

They fall into each other.

LATER

Dark. We barely make out the faces of Jack and Babette lying  
in bed, intertwined. The book discarded onto the floor.

BABETTE

Life is good, Jack.

JACK

What brings this on?

BABETTE

I just feel it ought to be said.

She turns over. He embraces her from the back.

BABETTE

(almost romantic)  
I want to die first.

JACK

(withdrawing)  
You sound almost eager.

BABETTE

Life would feel unbearably sad and  
lonely without you. Especially if  
the children were grown up and  
living elsewhere. Right now, we're  
safe. As long as the children are  
here. They need us.

JACK

It's great having these kids  
around, but once they get big and  
scatter, I want to go first.

BABETTE

No, Jack.

RADIO (V.O.)

MasterCard, Visa, American Express.

JACK

Your death would leave an abyss in my life. I would be left talking to chairs and pillows.

BABETTE

Your death would be more than an abyss--

JACK

What's more than an abyss?

BABETTE

It would be a...yawning gulf.

JACK

Your death would be a...profound depth...a *void*.

She turns back to him, their faces almost touching in the dark.

BABETTE

(angry now)

Don't be an ass. Your death would definitely leave a bigger hole in my life than mine would leave in yours.

JACK

You'll be fine! You'll travel and have a new and exciting life. I'll just sit in that chair in the suit that I wore to your funeral forever.

BABETTE

You're wrong.

(turns back around)

And you don't really want to die first. You don't want to be alone but you don't want to die more than you don't want to be alone.

Jack says nothing.

JACK

I hope we both live forever. Doddering, toothless, liver-spotted, hallucinating.

(pause)

Who decides these things?

A din of Nazi propaganda, crowds, speeches, etc.

JACK (V.O.)

Who is out there? Who are you?

CUT TO: A projected montage of Nazi propoganda films, scenes shot at party congresses, outtakes from mystical epics featuring parades of gymnasts and mountaineers. Edited together impressionistically and scored to the sounds of chants, songs, arias, speeches, cries, cheers, accusations, shrieks.

INT. SEMINAR ROOM. DAY

Jack sits next the projector in the booth in the back of the room. The movie images reflected on the glass.

CUT TO: Lights are up. The movie has ended. Jack walks down the center aisle.

JACK

When people are helpless and scared  
they're drawn to magical figures,  
mythic figures, epic men who  
intimidate and darkly loom.

A male student confidently raises his hand.

STUDENT

Could you talk about the  
Stauffenberg July 20 plot to kill  
Hitler?

Jack stands in a shallow light at the front of the two-hundred seat theater. Kids, of means, in poplin shorts, polos and rugby stripes shuffle papers, whisper. Jack hits a button on a slide projector. Hitler's face superimposes over his body.

JACK

All plots move deathward. This is  
the nature of plots. Political  
plots, terrorist plots, lovers'  
plots, narrative plots--

INT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH BASEMENT. DAY

Babette teaches posture to a group of mostly older adults. She stands, turns, assumes various poses while referencing yoga, kendo, trance-walking in relation to posture.

The older folks nod and listen reverently. Some trying to mirror her gestures.

JACK (V.O.)

--plots that are part of children's  
games.

## INT. DEN, GLADNEY'S HOUSE

The family watches a sit-com on TV while eating Chinese food. Steffie moves her lips attempting to match the words as they're spoken. Denise reads *The Physicians Desk Reference*.

JACK (V.O.)

We edge nearer death every time we plot.

Steffie grabs Denise's book. Denise protests.

JACK (V.O.)

It is like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as the targets of the plot.

## INT. BOARDING HOUSE ROOM

A mild-looking man tucks his head into his trunk, narrows his eyes and suddenly makes grimacing humanoid faces, like he's having a seizure. This is Howard Dunlop.

DUNLOP

Study my tongue.

He gapes, he croaks.

DUNLOP

Tomorrow is Tuesday.

*Morgen ist Dienstag.*

(irritated)

Tomorrow is Wednesday, but tomorrow is Tuesday.

JACK

Tomorrow is Tuesday...

(realizing)

Well...

DUNLOP

I am eating potato salad.

*Ich esse Kartoffelsalat.*

On Jack now as he repeats the facial gestures and noises as best he can. It's a tortured, over-articulation of what he just heard. They sit in a dark crowded room. An ironing board unfolded at the window. An exposed radiator, an army-blanketed cot.

JACK (V.O.)

I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention these lessons to anyone.

CUT TO: After the lesson, Jack counts out cash. Dunlop shrugs.

JACK

You probably don't know, but I'm maybe the most prominent figure in Hitler studies in North America. I'm J.A.K. Gladney. I teach Advanced Nazism over at the College-On-The-Hill.

(silence)

So, as you can understand, it's a great source of embarrassment for me that I don't speak German. Maybe it explains the dark glasses, but...best not to analyze it.

Dunlop nods. Jack hands Dunlop the cash.

JACK

I've made several attempts in the past to learn it, but with very little success. As you can probably see, something happens between the back of my tongue and the roof of my mouth...

Dunlop nods and opens the door to a narrow second floor hallway. An old man grasping a toothbrush and a tattered towel shuffles toward the bathroom.

JACK

After all, I require my students to take a minimum of one year of German.

The old man knocks on the bathroom door. Someone shouts, panicked, "Occupied!" The old man turns and shuffles back to his room, his slippers scuffing against the wooden floor.

JACK

The urgency is...the Hitler conference is coming here, to the College On-The-Hill, in the spring. And scholars from all over Germany will be in attendance. Do you think you could get me up to speed on the basics of the language by then?

Dunlops shrugs.

DUNLOP

I also teach sailing.

INT. SUPERMARKET, BLACKSMITH. DAY

ANNOUNCEMENT

Kleenex Softique, your truck's  
blocking the entrance.

Jack and Babette approach a banner: Butcher's Corner and  
Bakery Coming Soon!

JACK

(re: the sign)  
This is exciting.

MURRAY (O.S.)

We have them in New York.

Murray Suskind, (recognizable to us from the opening lecture  
on car crash movies), appears, a basket under one arm.

MURRAY

The oven aroma of bread combined  
with the sight of a bloodstained  
man pounding strips of living veal  
*is* very exciting.

Murray's basket is full of non-brand items in plain white  
packaging and simple labeling. CANNED PEACHES. BACON  
(without a plastic window). IRREGULAR PEANUTS. (Murray has  
a habit of sniffing various products as he gathers them.)

JACK

Murray Suskind. This is Babette,  
my wife.

Murray removes a glove and they shake. Wilder reaches for  
the cereal. Jack lifts him out of the cart so he can touch  
the lower boxes.

JACK

Murray came to College On The Hill  
this year from New York. His  
specialty is American icons.

MURRAY

(nodding)  
You have a very impressive husband,  
Mrs. Gladney. Nobody in any  
university in this country can so  
much as utter a word about Hitler  
without a nod in J.A.K.'s  
direction. Literally or  
metaphorically.

BABETTE  
He's Jack in real life.

MURRAY  
Hitler is now Gladney's  
Hitler. I marvel at what  
you've done with the man. I  
want to do the same with  
Elvis.

Denise tries on a green visor, the tag hanging. Steffie nods in approval.

MURRAY  
Who are all these children? Yours?

Babette appears to pause.

BABETTE  
There's Denise, of course.

She trails off, looking at other items on the shelf as a distraction.

BABETTE  
(murmuring)  
We need more Glass Plus.

Jack watches Babette carefully. He answers for her.

JACK  
(identifying each kid)  
That's Heinrich and Steffie, mine  
from wives one and three. And  
there's Denise, Babette's from  
husband two. Wilder is ours.  
We're each other's fourth.

The kids, as they're identified in the aisle.

HEINRICH  
Did you know there are more people  
dead today than in the rest of  
world history put together?

STEFFIE  
We have to boil our water. It said  
on the radio.

DENISE  
(to Steffie)  
On Neptune it literally rains  
diamonds.

HEINRICH  
They're always saying boil your  
water.



MURRAY  
 (observing the kids)  
 Family is the cradle of the world's  
 misinformation.

JACK  
 There must be something in family  
 life that generates factual error.

MURRAY  
 It's because facts threaten our  
 happiness and security.

BABETTE  
 (returning to drop items  
 in the cart)  
 It's the overcloseness, the noise  
 and the heat of being.

Babette goes to look for gum. Murray struggles to open a  
 filmy plastic produce bag, his fingers failing to find the  
 opening.

MURRAY  
 Your wife's hair is a living  
 wonder.

JACK  
 Yes, it is.

MURRAY  
 She has important hair.

JACK  
 I think I know what you mean.

MURRAY  
 I hope you appreciate that woman.

JACK  
 Absolutely.

MURRAY  
 Because a woman like that doesn't  
 just happen.

JACK  
 I know it.

Jack takes the produce bag from Murray and opens it, and  
 hands it back. Murray nods in thanks.

ANNOUNCEMENT  
 Dristan Ultra, Dristan Ultra.

CUT TO: Babette passes Denise and Steffie who try on the plastic sunglasses and hats, tags hanging in their faces. Babette puts a multi-pack of chewing gum in the cart.

DENISE

That stuff causes cancer in laboratory animals in case you didn't know.

BABETTE

You wanted me to chew sugarless gum, Denise. It was your idea.

DENISE

There was no warning on the pack then. Then they put a warning, which I have a hard time believing you didn't see.

BABETTE

Either I chew gum with sugar and artificial coloring or I chew sugarless gum that's harmful to rats. It's up to you.

STEFFIE

Don't chew at all. You ever think of that?

BABETTE

Look, Denise...  
(correcting)  
Steffie. Either I chew gum or I smoke.

DENISE

Why not do both? That's what you want, isn't it? We all get to do what we want, don't we?

Steffie grabs the visor from Denise.

STEFFIE

Unless we're not allowed to because of our age and height.

BABETTE

You're making a fuss over nothing.

DENISE

I guess you're right. Never mind. Just a warning on the pack.

STEFFIE

Just rats.

DENISE

Just useless rodents. Plus I'd like to believe she chews only two pieces a day, the way she forgets things.

BABETTE

What do I forget?

DENISE  
It's all right. Never mind.

BABETTE  
What do I forget?

DENISE  
Go ahead and chew.

A middle-aged Woman falls into a spindly rack of paperback books at the front of the store.

ANNOUNCEMENT  
Sunny Delight, Sunny Delight.

A heavysset man emerges from the raised cubicle in the far corner and moves warily toward her.

CHECKOUT GIRL  
Leon, parsley.

STORE MANAGER  
(heading for the fallen  
shopper)  
Seventy-nine.

ANNOUNCEMENT  
Cheerios spill in aisle three.  
Sorry, aisle four.

CUT TO: Produce section. Denise passes and grabs the visor back from Steffie and runs down the aisle.

DENISE  
That's my visor!

Steffie takes her Dad's hand. They stroll by the fruit bins that extend all along the aisle in a sea of shape and color.

JACK  
Tell Denise you're sorry.

STEFFIE  
Maybe later. Remind me.

JACK  
She's a great girl and she wants to be your older sister and your friend--if you'll let her.

STEFFIE  
I don't know about friend. She's a little bossy, don't you think?

JACK

And aside from telling her you're sorry, be sure to give her back her book.

STEFFIE

It's a medical journal and she reads it all the time. It's weird.

JACK

At least she reads something.

STEFFIE

It's lists of drugs and medicines. And do you want to know why she reads it?

JACK

Why?

STEFFIE

Because she's trying to find out the side effects of the stuff that Babette uses.

JACK

What does Baba use?

STEFFIE

Don't ask me, ask Denise.

JACK

How do you know she uses anything?

STEFFIE

Ask Denise.

JACK

Why don't I ask Baba?

EXT. HIGHSCHOOL SPORTS STADIUM

Babette runs up and down the stadium steps. She wears an oversized track suit that ripples in the wind. Jack watches from across the field on a set of stone steps.

STEFFIE (V.O.)

Ask Baba.

She alternates running and walking with her hands on her hips.

BABETTE (V.O.)  
I know I forget things, but I  
didn't know it was so obvious.

Jack greets her at the bottom of the steps. Thirty girls in bright shorts run past, the overlapping rhythms of their footfalls pattering.

They embrace. He slips his hand in the waistband of her gray cotton pants.

JACK (V.O.)  
It isn't.

CUT TO: Jack and Babette walk home through town. They pass two-storied dry cleaners and pharmacies and banks. Pre-war detail surviving in the upper stories, in copper cornices, the amphora frieze above the dime-store entrance. Greek revival and Gothic churches.

BABETTE  
I dial a number on the phone and  
forget who I'm calling. I go to  
the store and I forget what to buy.

JACK  
We all forget.

BABETTE  
Sometimes I call Steffie, Denise.  
I forget where I parked the car. I  
don't care what the girls say, it  
can't be the gum I chew, that's too  
farfetched.

JACK  
Maybe it's something else.

BABETTE  
What do you mean?

JACK  
Maybe you're taking something  
besides chewing gum.

BABETTE  
Where did you get that idea?

JACK  
I got it secondhand from Steffie.

BABETTE  
Where did Steffie get it from?

JACK

Denise.

She hesitates.

BABETTE

What does Denise through Steffie say I'm taking?

JACK

I wanted to ask you before I asked her. We always tell each other everything.

BABETTE

To the best of my knowledge, Jack, I'm not taking anything that could account for my memory lapses. These are the days that I want to remember.

JACK

Everybody forgets things, there's a lot going on.

BABETTE

My life is either/or. Either I chew regular gum or I chew sugarless gum. Either I chew gum or I smoke. Either I smoke or I gain weight. Either I gain weight or I run up the stadium steps.

JACK

Sounds like a boring life.

BABETTE

(tears suddenly in her eyes)

I hope it lasts forever.

INT. GLADNEY'S DEN. EVE

Denise reads her medical journal on the couch. Heinrich and Steffie play Mouse Trap. Wilder lingers at the piano bench.

HEINRICH

Do you drink coffee?

STEFFIE

No.

HEINRICH

Baba likes a cup when she comes  
back from class.

The sound of a car door closing. Denise reacts.

STEFFIE

Her class is demanding. Coffee  
relaxes her.

HEINRICH

That's why it's dangerous.

STEFFIE

Why is it dangerous?

HEINRICH

Anything that relaxes you is  
dangerous.

INT. LIVING ROOM/EXT. STREET

Through the bay window, Denise, in her visor, her knees  
planted on the cushions of the couch, watches Babette back  
the station wagon into the street and pull away.

INT. BEDROOM

Jack studies a book on German. He badly says words aloud.

JACK

--*ich bin, du bist, er ist*  
*wir sind, ihr seid, Sie sind*--

DENISE (O.S.)

What are we going to do about Baba?

Denise enters and sprawls across the foot of the bed, her  
head resting on her folded arms. She faces away from Jack.

DENISE

She can't remember anything with  
those pills she takes.

TV (O.S.)

And other trends that could  
dramatically impact your portfolio.

JACK

We don't know for sure she's taking  
something?

DENISE

I saw the empty bottle buried in the trash under the kitchen sink.

JACK

How do you know it was hers?

DENISE

I saw her throw it out. It had the name of the medication. Dylar.

JACK

(sitting up)  
Dylar.

DENISE

"One every three days." Which sounds like it's dangerous or habit-forming or whatever.

JACK

What does your book say about Dylar?

DENISE

That's just it: It's not in there. I spent hours. There are four indexes.

JACK

It must be recently marketed. Or go by different names? Do you want me to double check the book?

DENISE

I looked. If we could get an actual pill, maybe you could get it analyzed?

JACK

I don't want to make too much of this.

DENISE

We could call her doctor.

JACK

Everybody takes some kind of medication, everybody forgets things occasionally.

DENISE

Not like my mother.

JACK

I forget things all the time.



DENISE  
What do you take?

JACK  
Blood pressure pills, stress  
pills, allergy pills--

DENISE  
--eye drops. Aspirin. I  
looked in your medicine  
cabinet. I thought there  
might be a new bottle.

JACK  
No Dylar?

Denise turns and faces her step-father.

DENISE  
No.

JACK  
Well, maybe she's done taking it.

DENISE  
Why don't you want to believe  
something might be wrong?

JACK  
(hesitates)  
We have to allow each other to have  
our secrets. Don't you think?

DENISE  
She hides books on the occult in  
the attic. I found them.  
(Jack starts to say  
something)  
Also, I don't think she went to her  
posture class tonight.

JACK  
Why do you say that?

DENISE  
I don't know, but she went right  
instead of left at the Stop sign.

JACK  
Maybe she's taking the scenic  
route.

DENISE  
That's left too.

Heinrich bursts into the room.

HEINRICH  
Come on, hurry up, plane crash  
footage.

Denise is off the bed in an instant.

INT. DEN

Close on the TV screen: A puff of black smoke.

HEINRICH  
It was a jet trainer in an air show  
in New Zealand. They're going to  
show it again.

The crash is shown multiple times, once in stop-action replay  
and once in regular motion. An analyst tries to explain the  
reason for the plunge.

Jack joins the kids. The family watches in awe. Finally:

JACK  
Let's watch a sit-com or something--

HEINRICH/DENISE/STEFFIE  
No!

INT. BEDROOM. LATER NIGHT

The radiator sizzles and groans, water leaking from the  
temperature knob.

Jack opens his eyes. He's lying in bed. The room is dark.  
He turns to look at the pillow next to him. No one is there.  
A white light from the street flickers on and falls through  
the window revealing the torso of a shadowed figure sitting  
in a chair in the corner of the room next to the radiator.

JACK  
Baba?

Close on the figure's hand. Long bony fingers. A winding  
scar on the top. (We've seen this hand before.) The fingers  
pull idly on a loose string on the arm of the chair.

Jack lies there, afraid. A light moves across the ceiling as  
we hear the steady rattle of a car, outside, going over a  
loose manhole.

The hand slowly recedes, pulling the thread, and then the  
figure stands up and walks into the bathroom. Jack waits in  
terror. We hear the sound of peeing. Then a toilet flush.  
The figure reappears. The sound of the bowl refilling. The  
figure walks over to the bed and casually sits at the edge.

Jack watches, motionless. Then the figure climbs under the sheets and into the bed where Babette usually lies. Jack's breaths can be heard in the silence.

The sheet rises up suddenly, a face outlined in the folds. It looms over Jack. His face locked in terror. It wraps itself around Jack, enveloping him in the material like a body on a slab in the morgue.

CUT TO: Jack opens his eyes. He's tangled in sheets, sweating, paralyzed. His eyes slowly adjust to the dark.

The digital clock on his bedside glows green: 3:51. He falls back down on the pillow.

Someone is wrapped in the bedding next to him. Jack slowly pulls the sheet down revealing Babette's sleeping face.

JACK

I felt like I was falling through myself.

(pause)

Like a heart stopping plunge.

JACK

Someone was here with us. Or some *thing*.

ALFONSE (V.O.)

It's natural, it's normal that decent, well-meaning people find themselves intrigued by catastrophe when they see it on television.

INT. COLLEGE CAFETERIA

Jack sits at a table with Murray and a group of professors, mostly New York emigres. Alfonse, husky with a furious beard, also dressed in a robe, sits at the head. He's accompanied by teachers in his department, Nicolas Grappa, Elliot Lasher, and the very large Dimitros Cotsakis. A sole female professor sits at an adjacent table. This is Winnie Richards, 30's, a spindly woman drinking a small carton of chocolate milk.

LASHER

Because we're suffering from brain fade.

ALFONSE

We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information.

GRAPPA

The flow is constant. Words,  
pictures, numbers, facts--graphics,  
statistics, waves, particles.

LASHER

Only a catastrophe gets our  
attention. We want them. We need  
them.

Jack leans across the table to get Winnie's attention.

JACK

If I were to get you a pill--

WINNIE

A pill. Like a...*pill*?

Cotsakis, an enormous man and former body guard, crushes a  
can of Pepsi and throws it at a garbage pail.

ALFONSE

This is where California comes in.

JACK

Yes, a pill. Could you analyze it?

WINNIE

Jack, there's a dolphin's  
brain in my inbox--

ALFONSE

Mud slides, brush fires,  
coastal erosion, earthquakes,  
mass killings, et cetera. We  
can relax and enjoy these  
disasters because in our  
hearts we feel that  
California deserves whatever  
it gets. Californians  
invented the concept of life-  
style. This alone warrants  
their doom.

JACK

But in theory.

WINNIE

Why do you ask me?

JACK

You're brilliant.

LASHER

For most people there are  
only two places in the world.  
Where they live and their TV  
set. If a thing happens on  
television, we have every  
right to find it fascinating,  
whatever it is.



COTSAKIS  
 Forgetting my toothbrush is a  
 fetish with me.

LASHER  
 I brushed my teeth with my  
 finger after the Ali-Foreman  
 fight in Zaire. That's the  
 southernmost point I've  
 brushed my teeth with my  
 finger at.

Murray leans over to Jack and says quietly.

MURRAY  
 Jack, I need your help. I've been  
 having trouble establishing an  
 Elvis Presley power base in the  
 department.

JACK  
 What does Alfonse say?

MURRAY  
 He seems to feel that Cotsakis has  
 established a prior right.  
 Cotsakis was in Memphis when the  
 King died. He interviewed members  
 of the entourage and family...  
 For Cotsakis, Elvis is just Elvis.  
 But for me, Elvis is my Hitler.

JACK  
 (aside to Murray)  
 How can I help?

MURRAY  
 I thought you might drop by  
 my lecture this afternoon,  
 informally, and lend a note  
 of consequence to the  
 proceedings. Your prestige,  
 your physical person would  
 mean a lot.

GRAPPA  
 Did you ever crap in a toilet  
 bowl that had no seat?

LASHER  
 A great and funky men's room in the  
 old Socony Mobil Station on the  
 Boston Post Road the first time my  
 father took the car outside the  
 city.

WINNIE

The station with the flying  
red horse.

MURRAY

These are the things we don't  
teach. Bowls with no seats.  
Pissing in sinks. The  
culture of public toilets.  
I've pissed in sinks all  
through the American West.

ALFONSE

I pissed in a sink in Utah when it  
was twenty-two below. The coldest  
I've ever pissed in a sink in.

LASHER

I've slipped across the  
border to piss in sinks in  
Manitoba and Alberta.

GRAPPA

Did you ever have a woman  
peel flaking skin from your  
back after a few days at the  
beach?

LASHER

Cocoa Beach, Florida. It was very  
tremendous. The second or third  
greatest experience of my life.

GRAPPA

Was she naked?

LASHER

To the waist.

GRAPPA

From which direction?

We CUT TO: BLACK

A white crescent shape appears.

It's the light at the end of a tunnel. A speeding train  
exits out of the tunnel, pulling a series of tank cars behind  
it labeled: "TOXIC CHEMICALS"

EXT. SIDE ROAD, BLACKSMITH. SAME

INTERCUT with a truck barreling along a side-road. We can  
hear the driver singing along to "Rubbernecking" by Elvis  
Presley.

The driver reaches for a bottle of Jack Daniels on the  
passenger seat. The truck lurches onto the shoulder. The  
driver quickly grabs the wheel and steers the giant vehicle  
back on the road.

On the back of the truck in big red letters: "FLAMMABLE"

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY/MURRAY'S SEMINAR ROOM

Jack steels himself outside the door. He wears his robe and tinted glasses. He enters.

MURRAY (O.S.)

Did his mother know that Elvis  
would die young?

There are twenty-five or thirty young men and women in many fall colors. They sit in armchairs, and sofas and on beige broadloom. Murray walks among them, his right hand trembling in a stylized way.

MURRAY

She talked about assassins, she  
talked about the life, the life of  
a star of this type of magnitude.  
Isn't this life structured to cut  
you down early? This is the point,  
isn't it? There are rules,  
guidelines.

He spots Jack and nods. Jack stands against the wall in the back, attempting to loom, his arms folded under the black gown.

MURRAY

Now, I have a feeling about  
mothers. Mothers really do know.  
The folklore is correct.

JACK

Hitler adored his mother. He was  
the first of Klara's children to  
survive infancy.

There's a surge of attention, unspoken, among the students. Murray, still moving, interrupts abruptly.

MURRAY

Elvis and Gladys liked to nuzzle  
and pet. They slept in the same bed  
until he began to approach physical  
maturity. They talked baby-talk to  
each other.

On impulse, Jack abandons his place at the wall and starts to pace the room like Murray. He stops occasionally to gesture, listen or gaze out the window.



JACK

Hitler was a lazy kid. His report card was full of unsatisfactorys.

MURRAY

Gladys worried about his sleep walking. She lashed out at any kid who tried to bully him. Gladys walked Elvis to school and back every day. She defended him in street rumbles.

JACK

Klara loved him, spoiled him, gave him the attention his father failed to give him.

MURRAY

Elvis confided in Gladys. He brought his girlfriends around to meet her.

Jack and Murray approach each other near the center of the room, almost colliding.

JACK

Hitler wrote a poem to his mother. He took piano lessons, made sketches of museums and villas.

MURRAY

When Elvis went into the army, Gladys became ill and depressed.

JACK

Hitler was what we call a mama's boy.

MURRAY

Elvis could hardly bear to let Gladys out of his sight when her condition grew worse. He kept vigil at the hospital.

JACK

When his mother became severely ill, Hitler put a bed in the kitchen to be closer to her.

JACK  
 He cooked and cleaned. Hitler wept at the grave and fell into a period of depression and self pity.

MURRAY  
 Elvis fell apart when Gladys died. He fondled and petted her in the casket. He talked their baby talk.

The door opens and Alfonse, the chairman of the department, enters followed by Grappa, Lasher and other students. News of this dual lecture having reached other classrooms. They all find places to stand or sit.

JACK  
 For the rest of his life, Hitler could not bear to be anywhere near a Christmas tree.

MURRAY  
 It seems fairly certain that Gladys' death caused a fundamental shift at the center of the King's world view.

JACK  
 Years later, in the grip of self-myth and deep remoteness, Hitler kept a portrait of his mother in his Spartan quarters at Obersalzberg.

MURRAY  
 Elvis began to withdraw from the real world, to enter the state of his own dying.

JACK  
 ...He began to hear a buzzing in his left ear.

Jack and Murray, their movement now like a dance, circle each other and head off in opposite directions, without even sharing a look.

MURRAY  
 Elvis fulfilled the terms of the contract. Excess, deterioration, self-destructiveness, grotesque behavior, a physical bloating and a series of insults to the brain, self-delivered.

Cotsakis watches from outside the glass doors. He scoffs, turns and walks away.

MURRAY  
 His place in legend is secure. He bought off the skeptics by dying early, horribly, unnecessarily. No one could deny him now. His mother probably saw it all, as on a nineteen-inch screen, years before her own death.

Murray arrives at the corner of the room and sits on the floor. Everyone's eyes on Jack as he takes the stage.

JACK

Picture Hitler near the end,  
trapped in his führerbunker,  
beneath the burning city. He looks  
back to the early days of his  
power.

We CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. SAME

The speeding train exits a tunnel, pulling a series of tank cars behind it.

JACK (V.O.)

When crowds came--mobs of people  
overrunning the courtyard, singing  
patriotic songs, painting swastikas  
on the walls, on the flanks of farm  
animals.

CUT TO: Crowds at Nazi rallies.

EXT. SIDE ROAD, BLACKSMITH. SAME

INTERCUT with a truck barreling along a side-road. We can hear the driver singing along to "Rubbernecking." He animatedly does the hand claps along to the record. The bottle of Jack Daniels sloshing back and forth on the passenger seat.

INTERCUT with Jack continuing his lecture. The crowd rapt.

JACK

Crowds came to his mountain villa,  
so many people that he had to stay  
indoors.

We INTERCUT more rapidly the three: train, truck, and Jack. The truck driver now singing full throated, reaches for the bottle of whiskey next to him.

JACK (V.O.)

Crowds came to hear him speak,  
crowds erotically charged, the  
masses he once called his only  
bride.

CUT TO: Crowds scream at an Elvis concert.

The train whistles.

Black smoke coughs out of the truck's pipes.

The driver strains to reach the whiskey bottle, while glancing back periodically at the road. The truck lurches and he has to quickly right the wheel.

On Jack, intense.

JACK

Crowds came to be hypnotized by the voice, the party anthems, the torchlight parades.

Jack, his back to the class, stares at the carpet and counts silently to seven, mouthing the words.

JACK

But wait. How familiar this all seems to us, how close to ordinary.

The driver grabs the bottle. Elvis singing.

JACK

Crowds come, get worked up, touch and press - people eager to be transported. Isn't this ordinary? We all know this. We've been part of those crowds. There must have been something different about these crowds. What was it? Let me whisper the terrible word, from the Old English, from the Old German, from the Old Norse. Death. Those crowds were assembled in the name of death.

The driver looks up--

The railway crossing arm dropped down in front of him. Bing bing bing. The truck blasts through, the arm shattering. A siren rings.

CLOSE on the driver's wide eyes--

On Jack.

JACK

They were there to attend tributes to the dead. But not the already dead. They were not mourning brothers, fathers, husbands, those who had fought and died. But the not yet dead. The future dead. The living dead amongst us.

The train brakes. The mammoth engine sliding, metal screeching--

JACK (V.O.)

Processions, songs, speeches,  
dialogues with the dead,  
recitations of the names of the  
dead.

--as the truck collides directly with the train tank. Train cars topple as the truck is pushed down the track. Shrieks and roars come from the mechanical beasts. The truck and train soar off the track, ripping through the grass and dirt. Dark smoke and fire bursts into the air.

JACK (V.O.)

They were there to see pyres and  
flaming wheels, thousands of flags  
dipped in salute, thousands of  
uniformed mourners.

Close on Jack.

JACK

They were ranks and squadrons,  
elaborate backdrops, blood banners  
and black dress uniforms. Crowds  
came to form a shield against their  
own dying. To break off from the  
crowd is to risk death as an  
individual, to face dying alone.

CUT TO: Another small explosion, then fire and smoke erupts from the wreck.

Jack finishes big.

JACK

To become a crowd is to keep out  
death. Crowds came for this reason  
above all others. They were there  
to be a crowd.

The students and faculty break into applause.

The applause and "Rubbernecking" and the fiery crash sounds spin together into one distorted, dark din.

People have gathered around Jack, students and staff creating a crowd themselves. Jack's momentum now blurred as his breaths grow ragged, joining the growing dissonant soundtrack, as people jostle and touch him.

CUT TO: Fires rage from the crash site, billowing smoke into the air and toward the horizon.

A door slides open and men in silver Mylex suits jump out. Wide to reveal the van, the men heading toward...

Part II: THE AIRBORNE TOXIC EVENT

We're moving backwards down a neighborhood street.

JACK (V.O.)

May the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to a plan.

EXT. GLADNEYS' STREET, BLACKSMITH. EVENING

The atmosphere is clear and still. An evening light casts a glow on the neighborhood. A distant siren.

Jack drags a large garbage bag to the bin at the curb. In the stillness of the night, we can hear a woman in a neighboring house on the phone.

WOMAN

A decongestant, an antihistamine, a cough suppressant, a pain reliever--

The sound of a baseball hitting a mitt. A father and son play catch across the street. A couple talks on their porch. Kids play a game in the driveway. The neighbor waves. Jack responds.

A siren moves closer. Jack's attention follows the sound. We ZOOM to a small ledge outside the attic window of the Gladney's house. Heinrich, in a camouflage jacket and cap is crouched peering through binoculars. He looks somewhere off to the east.

A low rumble of thunder in the distance.

INT. GLADNEY'S ATTIC. EVENING

The room is cluttered by abandoned possessions. Exposed beams and posts and fiberglass insulation pads. Jack enters. Heinrich is now inside, standing by the open window, still looking through the glasses.

JACK

Hey, what do you see out there?

HEINRICH

The radio said a tank car derailed.  
But I don't think it derailed from  
what I could see.

JACK

What did you--

HEINRICH

I think it got rammed and  
something punched a hole in  
it. There's a lot of smoke  
and I don't like the looks of  
it.

JACK

What does it look like?

Heinrich hands his father the binoculars and steps aside.  
Jack brings the binoculars up to his eyes--

His POV: A shapeless black mass hangs in the air above the  
river. Lights blink on a radio tower in the foreground.

JACK

You see fire engines or--?

HEINRICH

They're all over the place. But it  
looks to me like they're not  
getting too close. It must be  
pretty toxic or pretty explosive  
stuff, or both.

Jack's POV shifts down and follows a small emergency vehicle,  
the siren flashing, heading toward the site of the cloud.  
Jack puts down the binoculars and hands them back to his son.

JACK

(reassuringly)

It won't come this way.

HEINRICH

How do you know?

JACK

It just won't. The point is you  
shouldn't be standing on slippery  
ledges. It worries Baba.

HEINRICH

You think if you tell me it worries  
her, I'll feel guilty and not do  
it. But if you tell me it worries  
you, I'll do it all the time.

JACK  
Shut the window.

INT. KITCHEN

Jack is paying bills at the table. Steffie looks through the brightly colored mail, separating coupons, lotteries and contests. The sound of blue jeans tumbling in the dryer down the hall.

RADIO (V.O.)  
Available for a limited time only  
with optional megabyte hard disk.

JACK  
Did you finish your homework  
already?

STEFFIE  
Can you see the feathery plume from  
the attic window?

JACK  
It's not a plume.

STEFFIE  
But will we have to leave our  
homes?

JACK  
Of course not.

STEFFIE  
How do you know?

JACK  
I just know.

STEFFIE  
What about that time there  
was that leak at our school?

STEFFIE  
And we had to evacuate.

JACK  
That was inside. This is outside.

Police sirens come and go somewhere in the area. Steffie's lips soundlessly form the siren sequence: "Wow, wow, wow." She sees her father watching her and smiles, caught in her own reverie.

DENISE (O.S.)  
They're using leaf-blowers to blow  
stuff onto the spill.

Denise enters the room, wearing her green visor and wiping her palms on her jeans.



STEFFIE  
What kind of stuff?

DENISE  
I don't know, but it's  
supposed to make the spill  
harmless, which doesn't  
explain what they're doing  
about the actual plume.

JACK  
They're keeping it from getting  
bigger. When do we eat?

STEFFIE  
I don't know.

DENISE  
(concerned)  
If it gets any bigger it'll  
get here with or without a  
wind.

JACK  
It won't get here.

DENISE  
How do you know?

JACK  
Because it won't.

Heinrich enters with a portable radio and a highway map.

HEINRICH  
The radio calls it a feathery  
plume. But it's not a plume.

STEFFIE  
That's what Dad said.

DENISE  
What is it?

HEINRICH  
Like a shapeless growing thing. A  
dark black breathing thing of  
smoke.

STEFFIE  
Why do they call it a plume then?

JACK  
Air time is valuable. They can't  
go into long tortured descriptions.

DENISE  
Have they said what kind of  
chemical it is?



JACK  
It won't. Why should it?

Heinrich, the radio pressed to his ear:

HEINRICH  
They just closed part of the  
interstate.

JACK  
They would want to do that, of  
course.

HEINRICH/DENISE/STEFFIE  
Why?/Why?/Why would they?

JACK  
They just would. It's a sensible  
precaution.

Babette enters the kitchen, on a cordless phone.

BABETTE  
H--hold on Helen, Jack is here...

JACK  
(finishing his thought  
to the kids)  
It's a way to facilitate  
movement of service vehicles  
and such. Any number of  
reasons that have nothing to  
do with wind or wind  
direction.

BABETTE  
(holding her hand over  
the mouth-piece)  
The Stovers say the spill  
from the tank car was thirty-  
five...

We hear Helen faintly through the phone repeating with  
variation, "thirty-eight thousand..."

BABETTE  
...thousand gallons. She says her  
girls were complaining of sweaty  
palms.

HEINRICH  
There's been a correction. Tell  
them they ought to be throwing up.

Heinrich heads out of the room with his radio. The rumble of  
a helicopter passes over them and disappears. Denise looks  
at her palms, blows on them and follows her brother. Steffie  
lingers in the kitchen, unsure what to do with her anxiety.

Jack finishes paying a bill. He periodically glances up at Babette, who is still on the phone, and who is watching him, studying his face.

BABETTE  
(into the phone)  
Is anyone nauseous? OK...OK.  
Thanks Helen...Yeah, stay in touch.

She hangs up.

BABETTE  
The Stovers spoke directly with the weather center outside Glassboro. They're not calling it a feathery plume anymore.

STEFFIE  
What are they calling it?

BABETTE  
A black billowing cloud.

JACK  
That's more accurate which means they're coming to grips with the thing. Good.

The grinding sound of the disposal in the sink startles him. Steffie washes her hands vigorously in the kitchen sink.

BABETTE  
It's expected that some sort of air mass may be moving down from Canada.

JACK  
There's always an air mass moving down from Canada.

BABETTE  
That's true. There's certainly nothing new in that.

JACK  
And since Canada is to the north, if the billowing cloud is blown due south, it will miss us by a comfortable margin. When do we eat?

Sirens pass by again. A larger sound this time. An air raid siren? Steffie, having finished washing her hands, hurries upstairs, water dripping in her wake.

BABETTE

Maybe we ought to be more concerned about the billowing cloud. I know we don't want to scare the kids--

Babette starts taking things out of the refrigerator.

JACK

Nothing is going to happen.

BABETTE

I know nothing is going to happen, you know nothing is going to happen. But at some level we ought to think about it just in case.

Jack grabs her thigh as she passes him at the table. She falls into his lap, wrapped around him in such a way that he can read the box of corn niblets in her left hand.

BABETTE

It's just, when do we know when this is real?

JACK

These things happen to people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up, I mean sadly, in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters.

BABETTE

It is sad.

JACK

Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods?

BABETTE

(smiles)

Why do you want dinner so early?

JACK

I missed lunch.

BABETTE

Shall I do some chili-fried chicken?

JACK  
First-rate.

BABETTE  
Where is Wilder?

He tries to undo her bra through her blouse with his teeth.

JACK  
I don't know.

BABETTE  
I ironed your gown.

JACK  
Thank you.

CLOSE on Jack's POV of the corn serving suggestions.

BABETTE  
Did you pay the phone bill?

JACK  
I can't find it. I paid the gas  
and electricity though.

BABETTE  
(standing)  
Let's think about the billowing  
cloud just a little bit, OK? What  
if it's dangerous?

She goes to the freezer.

JACK  
Everything in train tank cars is  
dangerous. But the effects are  
mainly long-range--

BABETTE  
So, we die later?

JACK  
We don't die. Not from this. All  
we have to do is stay out of the  
way.

BABETTE  
Let's just be sure to keep it in  
the back of our mind.

She smashes the ice cube tray repeatedly on the rim of the  
sink, dislodging the cubes.

INT./EXT. ATTIC. SAME

Jack reenters. Heinrich listens to the radio. Wilder hoists himself up on an old Christmas tree stand.

JACK  
Here's Wilder. Baba's making chili-fried chicken.

HEINRICH  
They're calling it a black billowing cloud now.

JACK  
That's what the Stovers said. It's good.

Jack opens the window, taking the binoculars from around Heinrich's neck.

HEINRICH  
Why is it good?

JACK  
(climbing out on the ledge)  
I told your sister: they're looking the thing more squarely in the eye. Can you spot me--

Heinrich grabs the back of Jack's belt and holds him against the building to prevent him from slipping. Jack places the glasses up to his face.

The radio continues muffled now from Jack's earshot.

His POV: The cloud is larger and closer than before. The radio tower, previously in the foreground, is swallowed up in darkness. Floodlights sweep across the horizon. Army helicopters hover. Colored lights from police cruisers crisscross the wider beams.

Jack lowers the glasses.

JACK  
OK.

Heinrich clutches his belt as Jack crawls back inside.

JACK  
(trying not to display anxiety)  
Well...it's still hanging there.  
(pause)  
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Looks rooted to the spot. Make sure Wilder doesn't get into that insulation there.

Heinrich hurries to lift up Wilder away from the exposed silver and pink cushions.

HEINRICH

So you're saying you don't think it will come this way?

JACK

I can tell by your voice you know something I don't know.

HEINRICH

Do you think it will come this way or not?

Heinrich places Wilder on the other side of the room from the insulation. Wilder immediately starts wobbling back.

JACK

You want me to say it won't come this way and then you'll attack with your fistful of data. What did they say on the radio while I was out there?

HEINRICH

It doesn't cause nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, like they said before.

JACK

What does it cause?

HEINRICH

Heart palpitations and a sense of deja vu.

JACK

Deja vu? Come on.

HEINRICH

It affects the false part of the human brain or whatever.

JACK

I don't believe that.

HEINRICH

That's not all. They're not calling it the black billowing cloud anymore.



JACK  
What are they calling it?

Heinrich looks at his dad carefully.

HEINRICH  
(dramatically)  
The airborne toxic event.

JACK  
(hesitates)  
Names are not important. The  
important thing is location. It's  
there. We're here.

HEINRICH  
A large air mass is moving down  
from Canada.

JACK  
We already knew that.  
(noticing)  
Wilder!

Wilder is crawling backwards out the door and out of sight.

HEINRICH  
That doesn't mean it's not  
important.

Jack kneels down to Wilder's level and watches him carefully  
climb down the steep attic steps.

JACK  
Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.  
Depends.

Jack looks up, Heinrich now standing over him.

HEINRICH  
(plaintive)  
The weather is about to change.

INT. DINING ROOM

The family eats dinner. The meal, the fried chicken, looks  
delicious. Everyone tries to establish a normal, cozy vibe  
despite faraway sirens and the general anxious mood.

DENISE  
Aren't we eating a little early  
tonight?

The sirens get closer until they're upon them, wrapping the house in sound, and then moving ahead and further away.

BABETTE

What do you call early?

Denise and Steffie meet eyes.

DENISE

Is it because we want to get it out of the way?

BABETTE

What do we want to get out of the way?

STEFFIE

In case something happens.

BABETTE

Like what?

The girls share a solemn look again.

JACK

This is delicious, Baba.  
(to Denise)  
You're not eating, honey.

Denise claps a hand to her mouth and runs from the table.

BABETTE

Honey, are you OK?

They hear her retching incompletely in the bathroom off the hall.

HEINRICH

She's showing outdated symptoms.

They go on eating, exhibiting excessive politeness in the process. The family din diminishing as the sirens and squawks escalate.

JACK

Baba, could you pass more of the corn?

BABETTE

(handing it to her husband)

Sure.



JACK

(eating a sliced peach)  
In other words, you didn't have an  
opportunity to notice the subtle  
edges of intonation.

HEINRICH

BABETTE

The voice was screaming out.      Due to the sirens.

HEINRICH

It said something like, "Evacuate  
all places of residence. Cloud of  
deadly chemicals, cloud of deadly  
chemicals."

Steffie starts crying. Jack puts his hand on her shoulder.

JACK

It's OK baby.

Denise pushes her chair back and runs upstairs. Heinrich  
follows her. Babette heads to the kitchen.

Denise runs from room to room throwing clothes into bags.

DENISE

Has anyone seen my ski mask?

Heinrich climbs the attic stairs two at a time. He grabs the  
binoculars, his camouflage hat, the highway map and radio.  
As he takes the radio, it reveals Jack's discarded banana  
peel and a stack of books on the occult.

Babette grabs tins and jars from the pantry. (Items/brands  
we recognize from their shops at the supermarket.)

Jack, confused, balances plates somewhere between the dining  
room and kitchen.

BABETTE (O.S.)

Jack, just leave it!

EXT. GLADNEY HOUSE/STREET

A light rain falls. They all head out into the night,  
hurriedly throwing the bags and other random things they  
packed into the car.

DENISE

(wearing her visor)  
I couldn't find my ski mask.



STEFFIE

Was this a mild winter or a harsh winter?

BABETTE

Compared to what?

STEFFIE

I don't know.

RADIO VOICE

People from the west end--

HEINRICH

This is us--

DENISE

Shh!

RADIO VOICE

...of town should head for the Boy Scout camp on Highway-10 called Camp Daffodil, where Red Cross volunteers will dispense juice and coffee...

JACK

OK, we have a plan.

They turn a corner, and Jack slams on the brakes.

JACK

Shit.

They all thrust forward and back. Cars are lined up in front of them, slowed to a brutal crawl as traffic getting onto the main route is at a standstill. Denise leans forward and hands her dad a cassette tape.

Heinrich looks out the back window: The world of sycamores and tall hedges left behind. A helicopter circles.

WIDE of the line of cars and lights, snaking onto the main route past a gauntlet of used car lots, fast food chains, discount drugs and quad cinemas. An ambulance squawks stuck in the endless traffic.

In the car: The kids scan the faces of people in adjacent cars.

JACK

Things should pick up some miles ahead where it turns into four lanes.

STEFFIE

They don't look scared in the Crown Victoria.

DENISE  
Yeah, they're laughing.

HEINRICH  
These guys aren't laughing.

STEFFIE  
Where?

HEINRICH  
In the Country Squire.

DENISE  
They look devastated.

JACK  
What does it matter what they're  
doing in other cars?

STEFFIE  
I want to know how scared we should  
be.

BABETTE  
I think we just don't know at this  
point, Stef.

STEFFIE  
That makes me more scared.

BABETTE  
Don't be scared.  
(aside to Jack)  
Nobody is coming in the opposite  
direction.

JACK  
Police must have halted  
traffic coming this way.

STEFFIE  
Where are the police? Did  
they just leave us to figure  
this out on our own?

JACK  
(vaguely)  
They're around.

CUT TO: The rain falls harder. They pass a home furnishing  
mart with sale signs, lit up from the inside. People inside  
staring out the huge window at the slowly passing cars.

DENISE  
Why are they shopping for furniture  
during an airborne event?

HEINRICH  
There's a sale.

BABETTE  
Maybe they know something we  
don't.

Jack hits more buttons on the radio.

DENISE  
Maybe there's no way out.

HEINRICH  
Maybe it's raining Nyodene D?

STEFFIE  
Is that possible?

RADIO VOICE  
People indoors are being  
asked to stay indoors.

BABETTE  
Why would they say that?

DENISE  
We were told to leave.

They slowly approach an overpass, people, on foot, march along. They carry boxes, suitcases, blankets. They cradle pets and small children. Some children are pulled on sleds and wagons. There's a family wrapped completely in plastic, walking in lock step.

RADIO VOICE  
Convulsions, coma, miscarriage.

They move beneath the overpass. Some cars mount the grassy incline at the edge of the road creating a third lane of severely tilted traffic.

STEFFIE  
They're passing us, Dad.

JACK  
Technically, that's illegal.

As Jack turns back to his family, up ahead, a car skids off the grassy incline, its nose hitting the pavement as it flips over and crashes into a car in their lane. Jack brakes and everyone screams.

The traffic now funnels into one lane. A helicopter above them shining a white beam down on the mass of collapsed metal. Dazed occupants look out from both cars. Rescue workers swarm the scene. Heinrich watches with his binoculars.



HEINRICH

Baba cooked chili-fried chicken for dinner. Dad's favorite. Dad said not to worry, the plume will not come to us. But it wasn't a plume it was an airborne toxic event.

Blood on a smashed window.

HEINRICH (O.S.)

We packed in a hurry. We ran to the car only to realize we were latecomers to an evacuation...

Blood soaked through a white coat. Drops of blood on a tan handbag.

And then the scene in WIDE of injured people, smoking steel, washed in an eerie white light. (These images are almost beautiful in composition.)

JACK

(to Babette)

Is this just everything that happened?

BABETTE

Shh...

Jack realizes his family, wife and daughters, Wilder even, all pay close attention to the story. They look riveted.

HEINRICH

(with spirited enjoyment)

The rain pelted the roof of our station wagon. Pip pip pip. We hit traffic as we left the comfort of sycamores and hedges.

He goes on about the people in other cars, the crash they just saw.

HEINRICH

Dad searched for information on the radio. Traffic lined up on the freeway like lighted up dominos. We passed people in distress. An unspoken bond with our fellow journeyman formed, and then a crash.

They pass a Winnebago and a tractor intertwined. Rusty smoke coming from the scrap-metal.

BABETTE

Oh, those poor people.

HEINRICH

A car flipped on the road, people ran to their aid, we were waved by, only able to watch with sympathy and awe.

As they finally pass the accident, Jack looks across Babette, in the passenger seat, to the crash site. In the foreground, Babette, out of focus, slips something into her mouth. Slowly she comes into focus as she swallows whatever it was she placed in her mouth.

JACK

What's that?

BABETTE

Drive the car, Jack.

JACK

I saw your throat contract. You swallowed something.

BABETTE

Just a Life Saver. Keep your eyes on--

JACK

You place a Life Saver in your mouth and you swallow it without an interval of sucking?

BABETTE

Swallow what? It's still in my mouth.

She thrusts her face at him using her tongue to make a small lump in her cheek.

JACK

But you swallowed something. I saw.

BABETTE

That was just saliva that I didn't know what to do with. Drive the car, would you?

Jack finds Denise's eyes in the rearview mirror and decides to leave it for now. He turns the wipers on a higher speed as the rain increases.

JACK  
What's he want?

A Mylex-suited man is waving them to merge to avoid another huge wreck.

They pass a sign for the Most Photographed Barn in America.

HEINRICH  
We're running out of gas.

Jack looks at the dial quivering on E.

BABETTE  
There's always extra.

HEINRICH  
How can there be extra?

BABETTE  
That's the way the tank is constructed so you don't run out.

HEINRICH  
There can't be always extra. If you keep going, you run out.

BABETTE  
You don't keep going forever.

HEINRICH  
How do we know when to stop?

JACK  
(smiling)  
When you pass a gas station!

STEFFIE  
Look.

Their station wagon drives into the deserted and rain-swept plaza with a gas station and pumps standing beneath an array of multicolor banners.

Jack leaps out of the car and runs around to the pumps with his head tucked under the raised collar of his coat. A door from the office swings open and shut.

JACK  
Nobody's here!

Nobody hears or reacts from the car. He checks the nozzle, it's unlocked. He seizes the hose from the unleaded pump. The banners smacking in the wind.

JACK  
It's working!

Headlights from the road slowly creep by in the darkness. He regards his family through the rain-streaked windows, the kids horsing around, Babette laughing. He waits while the tank fills. The gas station sign on stilts is lit up behind Jack in the night sky.

We see, but he doesn't: The presence of a wide dark shadow as it passes over the tall Shell gas station sign. The banners suddenly stop flapping. The rain slows to a drip. The door stops swinging. Jack hesitates.

And then the Shell icon reappears out of the black. The wind picks up, the flags wagging, the rain falls again. The nozzle clicks: Full.

RADIO VOICE  
...dogs trained to sniff out  
Nyodene D are en route to the area  
from a chemical detection center in  
New Mexico.

STEFFIE (V.O.)  
You didn't pay, Dad.

CUT TO: They're back on the road.

JACK  
There was nobody there.

STEFFIE  
You could have left some money on  
the counter.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| JACK                                      | DENISE                                     |
| I was in a hurry. I'll send them a check. | What happens if the dogs get contaminated? |

STEFFIE  
Yeah, but you probably won't do that.

BABETTE  
Nothing happens to dogs.

DENISE  
How do you know?

BABETTE  
Ask Jack.

JACK  
Ask Heinrich.

HEINRICH  
(probably bullshitting)  
It could be true. They use rats to  
test for things that humans can  
catch so it means we get the same  
diseases, rats and humans.

BABETTE  
Besides, they wouldn't use dogs if  
they thought it could hurt them.

DENISE  
Why not?

BABETTE  
A dog is a mammal.

DENISE  
So is a rat.

BABETTE  
A rat is a vermin.

HEINRICH  
Mostly what a rat is is a  
rodent.

BABETTE  
It's also a vermin.

STEFFIE  
A cockroach is a vermin.

BABETTE  
A cockroach is an insect. You  
count the legs is how you know.

STEFFIE  
It's also a vermin.

JACK  
(to himself)  
Family is the cradle of the world's  
misinformation.

Jack drives slowly up an incline in the road. The sky is  
strangely dark.

DENISE  
Does a cockroach get cancer? No.  
That must mean a rat is more like a  
human than it is like a cockroach,  
even if they're both vermins, since  
a rat and a human can get cancer  
but a cockroach can't.

HEINRICH

In other words, she's saying that two things that are mammals have more in common than two things that are only vermins.

As the car climbs further, Jack can see that the dark sky is moving up against a blue night.

BABETTE

Are you telling me that a rat is not only a vermin and a rodent but a mammal too?

JACK

Oh shit.

Suddenly, lit up in the sky ahead of them is--

--the black billowing cloud itself.

As the family looks, their car is hit with bright white light. A helicopter flies with a spot above them, dragging its spot across the traffic and up into the air revealing:

The airborne toxic event, lighted by the clear beams of seven army helicopters, a roiling bloated slug-shaped mass. There are cracklings and sputterings, flashes of light, long looping streaks of chemical flame. It seems to be generating its own inner storms.

The helicopters throb like giant appliances. The cloud is silver-tipped in the spotlights as it moves horribly through the night.

The family watches from the car in humble awe. Heinrich fumbles to load his camera with film. Jack starts to say something but can't. Babette grabs his hand. He startles, then takes it.

HEINRICH

You can look at it and look at it.

Denise and Steffie fight over the binoculars.

BABETTE

Come on kids, share please!

Other drivers honk. Adults and children crowded at their windows, pink hands pressed against the glass. Cars have pulled up on the median, people outside watching.

WIDE as flares come swooning from the helicopters, creamy bursts of red and white light.

The traffic, lead by the streaking headlights in the rain snakes off to the right leaving the remarkable billowing cloud in the background.

DISSOLVE TO: Lights speckled through a water streaked window. It's an hour or so later. The rain has stopped. Steffie and Wilder sleep. A single lane funnels into the Boy Scout Camp. Mylex suited men, surrounded by Day-Glo pylons, wave flashlights directing them to a packed parking lot, and onto an athletic field.

MAN IN MYLEX SUIT

Welcome to Camp Daffodil.

The car bumps along dirt paths, over ruts and mounds. Near the main buildings there is a group of men and women, not wearing Mylex suits, who carry clip-boards and walkie-talkies. Denise, Heinrich, Babette look out their windows, glancing periodically at the night sky. Lights passing over their reflections in the glass.

INT. BOY SCOUT BARRACK

A large, gray area, dank and bare and crowded with people, some on beach chairs brought from home, others on designated camp folding chairs. It's lit with overhead flood lights as well as small kerosene lamps. The Red Cross has set up cots and portable heaters, and volunteers come around with sandwiches and coffee. Nurses tend to some elderly people.

Many radios go at once with talk and some music. Certain people hold court to smaller gatherings. We hear various theories in the air:

"I hear we'll be allowed to go home first thing in the morning." "The government knows much more than they're saying." "A helicopter entered the toxic cloud and never reappeared." "The dogs are here from New Mexico. They parachuted into a meadow in a daring night drop." "The town of Farmington will be uninhabitable for forty years." "There are nine evacuation centers." "The governor is on his way to the capitol in an executive helicopter."

We find Jack drinking coffee from a styrofoam cup.

We hear Babette's voice. She's seated some distance away reading from a tabloid magazine to many elderly people from her posture class.

## BABETTE

...a researcher at the world-renowned institute has used hypnosis to induce hundreds of people to recall their previous-life experiences as pyramid-builders, exchange students, and extraterrestrials...

Jack walks among the evacuees, more theories abound. He hesitates as he hears:

## VOICE

The stuff they sprayed on the big spill was probably soda ash. But it was a case of too little too late.

Jack hovers at the outside of the small group. It is in fact, Heinrich at the center speaking in an enthusiastic tone. Relishing, in his way, runaway calamity.

## HEINRICH

My guess is they'll get some crop dusters up in the air at daybreak and bombard the toxic cloud with lots more soda ash which could break it up and scatter it into a million harmless puffs. Soda ash is the common name for sodium carbonate, which is used in the manufacture of glass, ceramics, detergents, and soaps. It's also what they use to make bicarbonate of soda, something a lot of you have probably guzzled after a night on the town.

Laughter. The group grows, Jack getting shoved further back.

## HEINRICH

What you're all probably wondering is what exactly is this Nyodene D. we keep hearing about? Well, I'm glad you asked that...

More laughter. As he continues, Jack retreats so as not to be seen.

Steffie and Wilder are asleep in one of the cots. Denise lies on her cot reading the Physicians Desk Reference. Babette goes through a canvas bag full of jars and cartons from their refrigerator and pantry. Denise looks up.



JACK (O.S.)  
Heinrich seems to be coming out of  
his shell.

Jack takes a seat on a cot.

BABETTE  
Where is he? I haven't seen him.

JACK  
See that knot of people? He's  
right in the middle. He's telling  
them what he knows about the toxic  
event.

BABETTE  
What does he know?

JACK  
Quite a lot, it turns out.

BABETTE  
Why didn't he tell us?

JACK  
He probably doesn't think it's  
worth his while to be funny and  
charming in front of his family.  
We present the wrong kind of  
challenge.

BABETTE  
Don't you think you ought to go  
over there? Show him that his  
father is there for his big moment.

JACK  
He'll only get upset if he sees me.

BABETTE  
What if I went over?

JACK  
He'll think I sent you.

BABETTE  
Is that so awful?

Jack leans in even closer. Their heads almost touching.

JACK  
Just a Life Saver.

BABETTE

What?

JACK

Just some saliva that you didn't know what to do with.

BABETTE

It was a Life Saver.

She makes an O with her thumb and index finger.

JACK

Give me one.

BABETTE

It was the last one.

At the front hall of the structure, a woman is saying something about exposure to toxic agents. Her small voice is lost in the shuffling roar of the barracks.

JACK

What flavor--quick.

BABETTE

Cherry.

Jack, frustrated, breaks the intimate moment and stands up, his attention caught by the woman's half-heard announcement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

...and if you believe you've been exposed to the airborne toxic event for any amount of time, longer than ten seconds, please proceed to the--

Denise now appears at her Dad's side.

DENISE

Didn't you hear what the voice said?

JACK

Something about exposure?

DENISE

That's right.

JACK

What's that got to do with us?

DENISE

Not us. You.

JACK

Why me?

DENISE

Aren't you the one who got out of the car to fill the gas tank?

JACK

But the airborne event wasn't on top of us then.

DENISE

It was ahead of us. Remember, you got back in the car and then there it was in all those lights.

JACK

Beautiful.

DENISE

Yes.

JACK

You're saying when I got out of the car, the cloud may have been close enough to rain all over me?

DENISE

It's not your fault, but you were practically right in it for two and a half minutes.

CUT TO: Two lines form at the front of the barracks. A to M and N to Z. At the end of each line is a folding table with a micro computer on it. Technicians mill about, men and women with lapel badges and color coded armbands.

A gaunt young man with a khaki jacket, the word SIMUVAC on his armband, talks to Jack. He types as Jack gives his name etc.. A family of four in bright orange life-jackets talks to a female technician (the woman with the small voice) in the N to Z line. She seems to be giving only good news to people.

TECHNICIAN

How long were you out there?

A woman behind Jack starts sobbing.

JACK

Denise said two and a half minutes. Is that considered long or short?

He regards Jack with a grimly superior air.

TECHNICIAN

Anything that puts you into skin and orifice contact with the actual emissions means we have a situation. This is Nyodene D.. A whole new generation of toxic waste. State of the art. One part per million can send a rat into a permanent state.

JACK

What about people in the car? I had to open the door to get out and get back in.

TECHNICIAN

I'd say their situation is they're minimal risks. It's the two and a half minutes standing right in it which makes me wince.

JACK

(nods)

What does SIMUVAC stand for?

TECHNICIAN

It's short for simulated evacuation. A new state program they're battling over funds for.

JACK

But this evacuation isn't simulated. It's real.

TECHNICIAN

We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model.

JACK

Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?

TECHNICIAN

We took it right to the streets.

JACK

How is it going?

TECHNICIAN

The insertion curve isn't as smooth as we would like.

(MORE)

## TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

We don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There's still a lot of polishing we have to do, but that's what this exercise is all about.

## JACK

What about the computers? Is that real data you're running through the system or is it just practice stuff?

## TECHNICIAN

You watch.

He taps on the keys and studies the codes and responses on the data screen. He frowns and types some more. This goes on longer than is comfortable. In the other line, the life jacketed family laughs and thanks the female technician warmly and walks away. They look at Jack sympathetically. Jack folds his arms and tries not to feel self-conscious.

## JACK

(idly)

I was only out there two and a half minutes. That's how many seconds?

## TECHNICIAN (O.S.)

I'm getting bracketed numbers with pulsing stars.

## JACK

(his attention returning)

What does that mean?

The man makes a silencing gesture as something grabs his interest on the screen. The female technician chats amiably with another family.

## JACK

I mean...am I going to die?

## TECHNICIAN

Not as such.

## JACK

What do you mean?

## TECHNICIAN

Not in so many words.

JACK

How many words does it take?

TECHNICIAN

It's not a question of words. It's a question of years. We'll know more in fifteen years. In the meantime, we definitely have a situation.

JACK

What will we know in fifteen years?

TECHNICIAN

If you're still alive at that time, we'll know much more than we do now. Nyodene D. has a life span of roughly thirty years. You'll have made it halfway through.

JACK

So, to outlive this substance, I will have to make it into my seventies. Then I can begin to relax.

TECHNICIAN

(looks at Jack carefully)  
I wouldn't worry about what I can't see or feel. I'd go ahead and live my life. Get married, settle down, have kids. There's no reason you can't do these things, knowing what we know.

JACK

But you said we have a situation.

TECHNICIAN

I didn't say it. The computer did.

JACK

And what the computer says is not a simulation despite that armband you're wearing. It is real.

TECHNICIAN

It is real.

EXT. BARRACKS

Several groups of people stand around fires burning in fifty-gallon drums. Some people sleep in their cars. Or in makeshift camps and tents.

A man sells soft drinks and sandwiches from an open-sided vehicle. Parked nearby are buses, motorcycles, ambulettes. Beams of light swing slowly through the woods.

RADIO VOICE

Hog futures have declined in sympathy, adding bearishness to that market.

Jack passes a carload of prostitutes from Iron City. The interior light is on illuminating their faces at the windows. A man leans against the front door on the driver's side, speaking through a small opening in the window and taking notes.

Jack smiles. The man is Murray.

JACK

Murray!

MURRAY

All white people have a favorite Elvis song.

JACK

(greeting him)

I thought you were going to New York for the holiday.

Murray removes his glove to shake Jack's hand.

MURRAY

I stayed to look at car crash movies.

(re the car of women)

I heard a rumor about painted women and came out to take notes. One of them says she has a snap-off crotch. What do you think she means by that?

JACK

Well, they don't seem busy.

MURRAY

I don't think this is the kind of disaster that leads to sexual abandon. We might get one or two fellows skulking out eventually, but there won't be an orgiastic horde, not tonight anyway.

Murray takes Jack's arm and they stroll past clusters of people around the oil drums.

More rumors are overheard: "Three of the live deer at Kung Fu Palace are dead." "The governor is dead, his pilot and co-pilot seriously injured."

MURRAY

Any episodes of deja vu in your group?

JACK

No.

MURRAY

(pause, again)

Any episodes of deja vu in your family?

Jack hesitates.

MURRAY

Why do we think these things happened before? Simple. They did happen before, in our minds, as visions of the future.

JACK

Super natural stuff.

MURRAY

(gently)

Maybe when we die, the first thing we'll say is, "I know this feeling. I was here before."

(Murray hesitates, taking in his friend)

How are you doing?

Jack hesitates.

JACK

I'm dying, Murray. I spent two and a half minutes exposed to the toxic cloud.

Murray squeezes Jack's arm.

JACK

Even if it doesn't kill me in a direct way, it will outlive me in my own body. I could die in a plane crash and the Nyodene D. would be thriving as my remains were laid to rest. A computer told me.



He stops and looks sadly into Jack's eyes.

MURRAY

I am truly sorry, my friend. But computers make mistakes. Carpet static can cause a mistake--

JACK

It was in the barrack, there was no carpet--

MURRAY

Lint or hair in the circuits! Was the man behind the computer bald?

(Jack nods)

Was he wearing a sweater?! Jack, there are always mistakes.

JACK

(emotional)

Thank you, Murray.

MURRAY

It's hard to make friends as adults and it's all the more special when it happens.

JACK

Not a word to Babette about any of this. She'd be devastated.

MURRAY

Of course.

JACK

Sometimes I actually think I see it coming for me. At night usually. The thing I've always feared. And now it's here.

MURRAY

We're all aware there's no escape from death. And how do we deal with this crushing knowledge? We repress, we disguise. But you don't know how to repress.

The fires have burned down in the drums. The sandwich vendor shuts down his van.

JACK

I wish there was something I could do. I wish I could out-think the problem.

MURRAY

You thought Hitler would protect you. Some people are larger than life. Hitler is larger than death. I understand completely.

JACK

Do you? Because I wish I did.

MURRAY

It's totally obvious. The overwhelming horror would leave no room for your own death. It was a daring thing you did, a daring thrust. Daring but dumb.

JACK

If I could just lose interest in myself. Is there any chance of that happening?

MURRAY

None. Better men have tried.

"Widespread looting by men in plastic sheets." "I've seen at least two more billowing clouds."

Murray looks around making sure they're not being watched.

MURRAY

Here, take this. I have another one at home. In the drawer under my hotplate.

Murray removes a dark object from the pocket of his jacket.

MURRAY

Heft it around. Get the feel. It's loaded.

He places the small gun in Jack's palm.

MURRAY

It's an itty bitty thing, but it shoots real bullets. It's a 25-caliber Zumwalt automatic. German-made. Up your alley.

JACK

I don't want it.

MURRAY

(sad wisdom)

What we are reluctant to touch  
often is the very fabric of our  
salvation.

JACK

What do I do with it?

Murray walks into the half-light of a flickering flame coming  
from a nearby drum. For a moment his face looks sinister.

MURRAY

I believe, Jack, there are two  
kinds of people in the world.  
Killers and diers. Most of us are  
diers. We don't have the  
dispositions, the rage or whatever  
it takes to be a killer. But think  
how exciting it is, in theory, to  
kill a person. If he dies, you  
cannot. To kill him is to gain  
life-credit. Who knows, maybe  
violence is a form of rebirth.

(pause)

And maybe you can kill death.

Jack pockets the gun. A shadow puppet show plays for  
children on a sheet. Two musicians sing and play a song,  
"The Cloud is Coming." It plays over the following:

INT. BARRACKS

WIDE of the room. We slowly move in to find Babette walking  
back to her camp. Wilder, Steffie and Denise sleep on their  
cots. Heinrich, finished with his lecture, is making  
notations on a road map.

The larger flood lights start to go out. The individual  
camps lit by the kerosene lamps. Babette sits down, as we  
come in closer all the way to her hand, which she opens,  
revealing a white pill.

She places it in her mouth. BLACK.

DENISE (V.O.)

Jack!

CLOSE: Jack opens his eyes. A hand presses down on his  
chest. He gasps. His eyes widening to reveal:

DENISE

Jack, wake up!

Denise pounds on his arms and shoulders. The overhead lights are bright. Sound is muffled.

DENISE  
We have to leave.

Denise starts battering her mom now to wake her. Sound returns: Sirens from outside. A voice shouting instructions through a bullhorn. Car horns and a clanging bell somewhere.

BABETTE  
Five more minutes.

DENISE  
No more minutes!

Babette is hoisted by her daughters who start to pack.

BULLHORN (O.S.)  
The wind has changed. Wind change.  
Cloud has changed direction.  
Toxic, toxic, heading here.

Jack manages to sit up: People are hurriedly dressing and packing. Wilder is eating a cookie.

BULLHORN (O.S.)  
Proceed to your vehicles, proceed  
to your vehicles.

DENISE  
Why does she have to say everything  
twice? We can hear her the first  
time.

HEINRICH  
She just likes to hear herself  
talk.

EXT. CAMP SITE. MORNING

A woman with an armband hands out gauzy white surgical masks that cover the nose and the mouth. She counts out six and hands them to Jack and Babette who run by with their family.

A scene of panoramic disorder. Cars bleat, trying to escape. Cars trapped in mud, cars stalled, cars crawling along the one-lane escape route.

A car screeches, nearly hitting a running man. The man freezes with his hands braced on the hood. The car behind it tries to stop but rear-ends the first car, now hurtling it into the man who flips up into the air.

The Gladneys run wearing their masks. Babette looks up at the sky. A doll bounces out of Steffie's open backpack.

Cars careen into the woods, looking for shortcuts. Cars hemmed in by trees, boulders, other cars. Sirens call and fade, horns blare in desperation.

People running. Tents wind-blown into trees, families abandoning their vehicles and heading on foot for the parkway. Incoherent cries.

Babette and the kids arrive at the station wagon.

DENISE

Steffie lost her bunny!

They call for Jack. Jack, nearly hit by a car, approaches.

BABETTE

Get Steffie's bunny!

Jack, confused, looks around and then sees the stuffed animal lying amidst the fleeing evacuees. He tosses Babette the keys and runs back in the opposite direction, against the tide of people. A man clips Jack's shoulder. Jack falls down. Feet trampling past his head. The doll lies a few feet away. He reaches for it. A hand reaches down and picks it up just before Jack can grab it.

Jack stands. The man, also masked, hands the doll to Jack.

CLOSE on the hand, the long fingers, the thin red scar.

JACK

Thank you.

The man bows strangely, winks then turns and disappears into the throng. Jack turns back. His family shouts and waves from the station wagon across the lawn. Jack runs.

Jack arrives and unlocks the doors. As his family dives in, he watches a group of men proceeding calmly to a Land Rover. They have lean frames, short haircuts, and boxy heads. Their bumper sticker reads: GUN CONTROL IS MIND CONTROL. They rev up their vehicle.

Jack quickly gets inside and starts the engine. The Land Rover drives straight into dense underbrush, away from the dirt road and away from all the other cars attempting shortcuts.

Jack follows in their wagon, jouncing badly in the brush, dangling up inclines, over hidden stones. He glances up, searching the sky for clues.

BABETTE  
Where are you going?!

DENISE/STEFFIE  
Jack!/This isn't a road!

JACK  
I have a feeling this Land Rover  
knows how to stay alive.

The tail lights of the Land Rover get further ahead until they disappear out of sight.

HEINRICH  
Headlights at four o'clock.

Jack clocks another set of faraway lights and heads in that direction.

JACK  
On it.

The car heels like a toboggan.

DENISE  
The lights aren't getting any  
closer.

Babette turns on the radio. It's fuzzy.

RADIO VOICE  
...the evacuees are to head in the  
direction of Iron City.

Horns blow from somewhere. And then rotors. Jack looks up at the sky poking between the trees.

DENISE  
Now they're over there!

Lights appear in an entirely different direction. Jack turns now toward these shining yellow spots.

He hits the accelerator, jerks the wheel and arm-wrestles the car through a thicket of white pine--heading in the direction of lights.

The car barrels through brush and branches, bouncing up and down. Steffie turns and looks out the back window. The Rover is driving away in the opposite direction.

STEFFIE  
They're behind us now!

Jack hits the brakes. Jack backs up.

DENISE  
(to Steffie)  
Do it, do it.

Steffie barks convincingly like a dog.

DENISE  
(impressed)  
That is good.

HEINRICH  
(pointing)  
Fourteen-hundred o'clock!

Jack jerks the wagon down another path. They bounce forward, car sinking slightly. Water spraying the windows.

STEFFIE  
We're in the water, Dad!

JACK  
I realize that now.

Jack struggles to get the car over to the opposite bank of the creek. Rain falls thickly through the high beams. Exhaust billows through the pipes as the vehicle sinks.

HEINRICH  
Dad, turn off the engine.

Jack does.

STEFFIE  
Do sheep have lashes?

BABETTE  
Ask your father.

STEFFIE  
Dad, do sheep have lashes?

JACK  
Doesn't anyone want to pay attention to what is actually happening?

BABETTE  
Your Dad wants credit for fording the creek.

JACK

I don't want credit! Forget it, go back to your conversation.

STEFFIE

Do sheep have lashes?

HEINRICH

We're going sideways.

They all look around and discover this is true. Babette turns to Jack.

WIDE: The car drifting down the creek.

Back inside the car. On their faces. Drifting.

DENISE

What if there was a waterfall?

STEFFIE

Dad, is there a waterfall?

Jack tries steering the car like a boat. Everyone is screaming now. For a moment, the creek seems to get more shallow and a wheel touches down on the rocky ground beneath.

HEINRICH

Turn it back on!

Jack quickly turns the key. The car starts.

HEINRICH

Floor it.

Jack hits the gas. The car sputters and lurches forward and skids through the water, swinging wildly left and right as it reaches land and climbs the opposite bank.

Jack twists the car through more brush, up onto an incline, which angles the vehicle's nose upward. In an instant, he revs it, sending the car sailing momentarily through the air, blasting through branches--

Everyone screams.

--and into an open field. They land on the grass with several bounces.

WILDER

Again!

The screams subside and everyone goes silent. Up ahead is a corn field.



CUT TO: Cars sit in bumper to bumper traffic on a winding road. A family waits, bored in their vehicle. Suddenly, the Gladney's station wagon breaks out of the corn and merges into the line.

JACK  
 (waving to the friendly  
 family that lets him in)  
 Thank you!

A long line of traffic.

LONG DISSOLVE

Close on Steffie as she slides across the wall. Her exposed pale green eyes above her mask, watching. She passes a poster breaking down the six striking surfaces of the human hand.

RADIO VOICE  
 The cloud continues to travel west  
 as residents are now being asked to  
 relocate to Iron City, where local  
 businesses have opened their doors  
 to shelter evacuees...

INT. KARATE STUDIO, IRON CITY. DAY

A group of kids, including Heinrich and Denise, practice karate moves. The Gladneys and about forty other families are in the abandoned studio. Besides Steffie, a few people still wear their masks.

VOLUNTEER  
 (shouts through his hands)  
 No one is allowed to leave the  
 building! If somebody comes up to  
 me and says can I leave, I am just  
 going to say the same thing I am  
 saying now. No one is allowed to  
 leave the building!

Jack and other volunteers set up air mattresses and cots, some food and coffee. We overhear (as before at the Boy Scout camp) more rumors.

Jack finds Babette who gazes solemnly out the window. He takes a styrofoam cup of a coffee and a wrapped Twinkie over to her.

JACK  
 How is Babette?

She takes the coffee and raises it to her lips but doesn't drink. Her eyes remained fixed on the streaked window.

BABETTE

I don't like the latest rumor.

JACK

Tell me.

BABETTE

They're lowering in technicians from army helicopters to plant microorganisms in the core of the toxic cloud.

JACK

What don't you like about it?

BABETTE

I don't know, it's like the greater the scientific advance, the more scared I get.

Jack looks up at the sky.

MAN WITH TV (O.S.)

There's nothing on network.

A middle-aged man wearing a fur-lined cap with lowered flaps, and carrying a tiny TV set, walks slowly through the studio.

MAN WITH TV

Not a word, not a picture. On the Glassboro channel we rate fifty-two words by actual count. No film footage, no live report. Does this thing happen so often that nobody cares?

Murmurs of ascent from the crowd.

MAN WITH TV

We were scared to death!

SOMEONE ELSE

We still are!

MAN WITH TV

We left our homes, drove through a rainstorm, we saw that deadly specter. That death ship that sailed across the sky. Are they telling us it was insignificant?

(MORE)

## MAN WITH TV (CONT'D)

Do they think this is just television? Don't they know it's real? Shouldn't the streets be crawling with cameras and reporters? Shouldn't we be yelling out the window at them, "Leave us alone, we've been through enough already!" Haven't we earned the right to despise their idiot questions? Look at us in this place. We are quarantined. We are like lepers in medieval times. Everything we love and worked for is under serious threat. Even if there hasn't been great loss of life, don't we deserve attention for our suffering, our terror? Isn't fear news?

The group bursts into applause. Babette nods her head solemnly, moved by the speech. The man turns one more time, displaying the TV to the audience. As he completes his turn, he comes face to face with Jack who claps.

We see Jack reflected in the TV. A change comes across the man's face.

## MAN WITH TV

(afraid)

I saw this before.

## JACK

Saw what before?

## MAN WITH TV

You were standing there, I was standing here. Your features incredibly sharp and clear. It all happened before. Steam hissing in the pipes. Tiny little hairs standing out in your pores. That identical look on your face.

## JACK

What look?

## MAN WITH TV

Haunted. Ashen. Lost.

On Jack reflected in the man's TV.

## JACK (V.O.)

It was nine days before they told us we could go back home.

INT. SUPERMARKET, BLACKSMITH. DAY

ANNOUNCEMENT  
Welcome back, shoppers!

Part III: DYLRAMA

Jack pushes the cart, Murray ambling next to him, a basket of generic goods around his arm.

MURRAY  
It's comforting to know the  
supermarket hasn't changed since  
the toxic event.

A line waits as a bloodstained man pounds at strips of meat and another pulls a few loaves of bread from an oven.

MURRAY  
In fact, the supermarket has only  
gotten better. Between the  
unpackaged meat and fresh bread...  
It's like a Persian bazaar.  
(nods to himself)  
Everything is fine and will  
continue to be fine as long as the  
supermarket doesn't slip.

A cleaver cuts into a rib. A speck of blood hits the face of the woman waiting.

MURRAY  
Do you know, the Tibetans believe  
there is a transitional state  
between death and rebirth. That's  
what I think when I come here. The  
supermarket is a waiting place.  
It recharges us spiritually, it's a  
gateway.

And now we rise up and see the market in all its glory.

MURRAY  
Look how bright. Look how full of  
psychic data. Waves and radiation.  
All the letters and numbers are  
here, all the colors of the  
spectrum, all the voices and  
sounds, all the code words and  
ceremonial phrases. We just have  
to know how to decipher it.

SOMEONE (O.S.)  
Tegrin, Denorex, Selsun Blue.

MURRAY  
 (and then)  
 How is that lovely woman of yours?

JACK  
 She's been different somehow since  
 the event.

MURRAY  
 We've suffered a collective trauma.

JACK  
 She wears her sweatsuit all the  
 time, she stares out of windows and  
 cries for no reason. I don't know  
 how to help her.

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| JACK  | MURRAY        |
| And I've been distracted<br>myself, preparing for the<br>Hitler conference and... | And the kids? |

JACK  
 Back in school. Steffie no longer  
 wears her protective mask.

MURRAY  
 (pointedly)  
 And you?

JACK  
 I've got another doctor's  
 appointment tomorrow.

MURRAY  
 What does he say about your status  
 as a doomed man?

JACK  
 I haven't told him. And since he  
 hasn't found anything wrong, I'm  
 not going to bring it up.

MURRAY  
 I lie to doctors all the time.

JACK  
 So do I. But why?

MURRAY  
 You know the Elvis struggle you  
 helped me with? It turns out,  
 tragically, I would have won  
 anyway.

JACK  
What happened?

MURRAY  
Cotsakis, my rival, is no longer in  
the land of the living.

He's-- JACK MURRAY  
Dead. Lost in the surf off  
Malibu. During term break.  
I found out an hour ago and  
came right here.

MURRAY  
I'm sorry to tell you.  
(whispers so others can  
hear)  
Particularly because of your  
condition.

JACK  
Poor Cotsakis, lost in the surf.  
That enormous man.

MURRAY JACK  
He was big all right. Enormously so.

JACK  
He must have weighed three hundred  
pounds.

MURRAY  
Oh, easily.

JACK  
Dead. A big man like that.

MURRAY  
(picking up a Tabloid  
magazine)  
It's better not knowing them when  
they die. But it's better them  
than us.

JACK  
To be so enormous. Then to die. I  
can picture him so clearly.

MURRAY  
Maybe once we stop denying death,  
we can proceed calmly to die. We  
simply walk toward the sliding  
doors.

Jack's face is suddenly emotional. Sounds begin to isolate themselves.

The drone of maintenance systems, the rustle of newsprint, the whispers of elderly women. The beeping of the holographic scanners at check-out. And the sad shuffle of everyone's steps.

Finally we focus on the airy movement of the automatic doors opening and closing like abrupt breaths. People check out and exit into the white light of the parking lot. Amidst the exiting bodies, a narrow, blurry figure, blown out by the sun, enters the store. He comes toward Jack, taking a cart as he proceeds.

JACK

What if death is nothing but sound?  
You hear it forever. Sound all  
around.

MURRAY

Uniform, white.

Jack's cart rams into another with a clank. The scarred hand clutches the handle of his cart. Jack looks up, but the man has turned, only his back visible as he disappears down another aisle.

MURRAY

It's strange in a way, isn't it?  
That we can picture the dead.

CUT TO: Malibu horizon. A big hairy man rides a giant wave on a surfboard.

DOCTOR LU (V.O.)

(cheerful)

Why so many checkups, Mr. Gladney?  
In the past, you were always afraid  
to know if anything was wrong.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. DAY

The whizzing sound of a dot-matrix printer. Jack dresses across from Doctor Lu, 50's, who unwraps and looks at the accordion print-out.

JACK

I'm still afraid.

Doctor Lu smiles broadly, waiting for a punchline that doesn't come.

DOCTOR LU

Well, I'm glad you're finally taking your status as patient seriously.

JACK

My status?

DOCTOR LU

Yes. Once people leave the doctor's office they tend to forget that they are patients. But a doctor doesn't cease being a doctor at close of day. Neither should patient. I don't think I like your potassium very much at all.

JACK

(concerned)

What's that mean?

DOCTOR LU

There isn't time to explain. We have true elevation and false elevation. That's all you need to know.

He stands and heads toward the door indicating the appointment is ending.

JACK

Exactly how elevated is my potassium?

DOCTOR LU

It's gone through the roof, evidently.

JACK

Could this potassium be an indication of some condition just beginning to manifest itself, some condition caused perhaps by an ingestion, an exposure, an involuntary spillage-intake, some substance, say in the air or rain?

DOCTOR LU

(pointedly)

Have you come in contact with such a substance? Were you exposed to that cloud?



JACK

Why, do the numbers show some sign  
of possible exposure?

DOCTOR LU

If you haven't been exposed, then  
they couldn't very well show a  
sign, could they?

JACK

Then we agree.

DOCTOR LU

And you would have no reason to lie  
to me.

Jack says nothing. The doctor looks at Jack carefully. Then  
he makes a note on the chart.

DOCTOR LU

I'm going to send you to Glassboro  
for further tests. They have a  
brand new facility called Autumn  
Harvest Farms. Have you heard of  
it?

(Jack shakes his head)

They have gleaming new equipment.  
It gleams, absolutely. Tell them  
to send you back to me with sealed  
results. Together, as doctor and  
patient, we can do things that  
neither of us could do separately.

Jack nods and passes the doctor at the doorway.

JACK

Doctor Lu, have you heard of Dylar?

DOCTOR LU

Is that an island in the Persian  
Gulf?

JACK

No, it's a medi--

DOCTOR LU

One of those oil terminals  
crucial to the survival of  
the West.

JACK

--it's not...it's something  
that comes in a little white  
tablet.

DOCTOR LU

Never heard of it.

EXT. GLADNEY'S HOME

We move up to an upper window of the house. Babette stares out from the bedroom. She sobs.

INT. AUTUMN HARVEST FARMS

Jack moves slowly into a giant MRI machine.

INT. BEDROOM

Babette wears a loose gray sweatsuit. Her hair piled on top of her head. She sobs at the window. A radiator rattles. We STAY with her as she turns and enters the bathroom. She crouches down and lifts up the radiator cover. She stashes something underneath and then replaces the cover.

She walks through the hallway, crying.

RADIO VOICE

Life is slowly but surely returning to normal here in Blacksmith and the surrounding areas. I'm told German shepherds have sniffed out only a very low level of toxic material on the edge of town. But there is no more danger posed to humans or animals. The last of the emergency personnel are packing up and taking the dogs with them...

She picks up clothes left in the hallway, toys. She enters the laundry room, takes wet clothes out of the washer and tosses them in the dryer.

Inside the dryer: The jeans flop around. The sound of the studs hitting the metal sides.

We pick up Babette walking and begin to HEAR Heinrich from downstairs:

HEINRICH (O.S.)

The real issue is the kind of radiation that surrounds us every day. Your radio, your TV, your microwave oven, the power lines outside the door. Forget clouds. It's the electrical and magnetic fields.

Babette comes down the stairs to the kitchen.

STEFFIE

Is Wilder talking less now?

HEINRICH

If they released the true findings,  
there'd be billions of dollars in  
law suits.

JACK

That's a little extreme isn't it?

HEINRICH

What's extreme, what I said or what  
would happen?

We see the family now setting the table for dinner. Jack  
looks over at Babette.

STEFFIE

Why are mountains upstate?

DENISE

Mountains are always upstate.

STEFFIE

Say more.

DENISE

This way the snow melts as planned  
in the spring and flows downhill to  
the reservoirs near the cities,  
which are kept in the lower end of  
the state for exactly this reason.

JACK

(to Heinrich)

Is that true?

HEINRICH

(to Jack)

What do you think?

JACK

I honestly don't know.

BABETTE

Kids, listen to me. Hold hands  
when you cross the street. OK? Be  
careful around swimming pools. If  
you think someone is a kidnapper,  
they probably are.

The kids look back at her blankly.

JACK

(to Babette)

Where are you going?

BABETTE

They gave me a new class at the church.

JACK

In what?

BABETTE

Eating and drinking.

STEFFIE

Isn't that kind of obvious?

DENISE

What's there to teach?

JACK

And isn't it kind of late? It's almost night.

BABETTE

What is night? It happens seven times a week. Where is the uniqueness in this?

DENISE

Jack, can you help me with my homework after dinner?

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Denise leads Jack, their feet making soft padding sounds on the carpet.

DENISE

The homework was a canard. I want to show you something.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM. LATER

Denise kneels down and lifts the radiator cover and reaches underneath.

Taped to the bottom of the radiator cover is a pill bottle.

Jack crouches down next to her.

TV VOICE

They're not booing, they're saying Bruce.

CLOSE on the amber bottle. Through the crinkled transparent tape, the word: Dylar

JACK

(simply)  
Dylar.

They look at one another. Jack removes the bottle and opens it into his palm. 4 pills remain.

DENISE

There are four left. Take one for proof. We need physical evidence.

Jack takes one of the pills and puts it in his pocket. He slides the remaining three pills back in the container, tapes it back and then carefully replaces the radiator cover.

TV VOICE

Bruce, Bruce, Bruce!

DENISE

We say nothing to Baba.

JACK

All right.

DENISE

She'll only say she doesn't remember why she put it there.

JACK

I'll go to the drug store first thing in the morning and ask the pharmacist about Dylar.

DENISE

I already did that.

JACK

When?

DENISE

Around Christmas. I went to three drugstores--

JACK

What did they say?

DENISE

Never heard of it. It's not on any list.

JACK

Unlisted.

DENISE

We have to call her doctor.

JACK

I'll call him tomorrow.

DENISE

Call him now. This is serious, Jack. Something is wrong with her.

JACK  
 (convinced)  
 I'll call him now. I'll call him  
 at home.

DENISE  
 (ruthless)  
 Surprise him.

JACK  
 (getting excited about the  
 plan)  
 If I get him at home, he won't be  
 screened by a receptionist.

DENISE  
 Call him at home! Wake him up.  
 Trick him into telling us what we  
 want to know.

JACK  
 I'll call him at home. Wake him  
 up. Trick him into telling us what  
 we want to know.

DOCTOR'S VOICE  
 Hello?

INT. KITCHEN

Jack, a phone book open on the counter, talks on the wall  
 phone. Denise huddles nearby, making sure no one is coming.

JACK  
 Doctor Hookstratten, this is Jack  
 Gladney, you treat my wife,  
 Babette.

DOCTOR'S VOICE  
 OK.

JACK  
 I'm sorry to call you at home, but  
 I'm concerned about Babette. And  
 I'm pretty sure the medication you  
 prescribed is causing the problem.

DOCTOR'S VOICE  
 What problem?

JACK  
 Memory lapse.

He winks at Denise.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

You would call a doctor at home to talk about memory lapse. If everyone with memory lapse called a doctor at home, what would we have? The ripple effect would be tremendous.

JACK

They are frequent. The lapses.

Denise is pouring them both glasses of milk. She hands one to Jack.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

Frequent. You would call a doctor in his home after ten o'clock at night. You would say to him, "Memory lapse." Why not tell me she has gas? Call me at home for gas?

DENISE

(whispers)

Frequent AND prolonged.

JACK

Frequent and prolonged, doctor. It has to be the medication.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

What medication?

JACK/DENISE

Dylar./Dylar.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

Never heard of it.

JACK

A small white tablet.

DENISE

(whispers)

Comes in an amber bottle.

JACK

Comes in an amber--

DOCTOR'S VOICE

You would describe a tablet as small and white and expect a doctor to respond, at home, after ten at night. Why not tell me it is round? This is crucial to our case.

JACK

It's an unlisted drug.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

I never saw it. I certainly never prescribed it for your wife.

DENISE

Tell him I went to three  
pharma--

JACK

OK, thank you, doctor, sorry  
to have bothered you at home.

He hangs up.

JACK

I'm never in control of what I say  
to doctors.

They look at each other, grimly.

JACK

I'll take the tablet and have it  
analyzed by someone in the  
chemistry department at the school.

(pause)

Unless you've already done that  
too?

Denise shakes her head slowly.

CUT TO: Close on the white tablet held delicately between two  
narrow fingers.

INT. CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT, COLLEGE-ON-THE HILL. DAY

It's rotated a couple of times.

WINNIE (O.S.)

It's not a tablet in the old sense.

On Winnie Richards. She's tall and gawky with bright and  
excited eyes. (We met her previously in the cafeteria.) She  
lopes around the room rapidly circling her cluttered desk  
which includes a small, open chocolate milk carton. Jack  
tries to follow.

WINNIE

I've never seen anything quite like  
it.

JACK

What can you tell me about it? Try  
not to be too brilliant. I haven't  
eaten lunch yet.

She blushes.



WINNIE

The medication in Dylar is encased in a polymer membrane. Water from your gastrointestinal tract seeps through the membrane at a carefully controlled rate.

JACK

What does the water do?

WINNIE

It dissolves the medication encased in the membrane. The medicine then passes out of the polymer tablet through a single small hole.

JACK

It took me a while to spot the hole.

WINNIE

That's because it's laser-drilled. It's not only tiny but stunningly precise in its dimensions.

JACK

(shakes his head)  
Lasers, polymers.

Winnie exits the room, folders pressed to her chest. Jack follows her down the hall.

WINNIE

I'm not an expert in any of this, Jack, but I can tell you it's a wonderful little system.

JACK

What's the point of all this precision?

WINNIE

The drug is delivered at specified rates for extended periods. This system is efficient.

JACK

I'm impressed. I'm even dazzled. Now tell me what the medication is designed to do? What is Dylar?

She enters another small room full of bottled brains. The table is fitted with a sink and small note pads and lab instruments. She turns around dramatically.

WINNIE

I don't know.

JACK

Of course you know. You're brilliant. Everyone says so.

WINNIE

What else can they say? I do neurochemistry. No one knows what that is.

She unlocks a back door to the room and opens it onto the campus.

WINNIE

Jack, all I can tell you for certain is that the substance contained in Dylar is some kind of psychopharmaceutical. It's probably designed to interact with a distant part of the human cortex.

Jack starts to follow but she indicates for him to stay.

WINNIE

I wish I knew more. But I can tell you this. It's not on the market.

JACK

I found it in an ordinary prescription vial.

WINNIE

I don't care where you found it. This is unknown.

INT. GLADNEY'S HOME. NIGHT

Babette enters. She hangs up her coat, drops the car keys in a dish. A light clicks on in the corner of the living room. She startles.

Jack sits in arm chair illuminated dramatically by the floor lamp. The light has come on too bright so Jack has to click the switch a couple of times more for it to dim down.

JACK

It's time for a major dialogue. You know it, I know it.

Babette says nothing.

JACK  
We found the Dylar.

BABETTE  
What Dylar?

JACK  
Come on, Baba. It was taped to the radiator cover.

BABETTE  
Why would I tape something to the radiator cover?

JACK  
That's exactly what Denise predicted you would say.

BABETTE  
She's usually right.

She heads toward the stairs. Jack gets out of the chair and follows.

JACK  
You'll tell me all about Dylar. If not for my sake, then for your little girl's. She's been worried - worried sick. Besides, you have no more room to maneuver. We've backed you against the wall.

Babette turns around, stares at Jack.

JACK  
I had one of the tablets analyzed by an expert. Dylar is almost as ingenious as the microorganisms that ate the billowing cloud.

She continues up the stairs and down the upstairs hallway, Jack following.

JACK  
We know something else, something crucially damaging to your case. We know Dylar is not available to the general public. As you well know, I don't have the temperament to hound people. But Denise is a different kind of person. If you don't tell me what I want to know, I'll unleash your little girl.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

She'll come at you with everything she has. She'll hammer you right into the ground. You know I'm right, Babette.

They've arrived in their bedroom. Babette removes her watch and bracelets and places them on the bureau. She takes her hair down and puts the bungee next to her bed. She disappears into the closet. We hear her changing her clothes. Jack waits. Finally:

BABETTE (O.S.)

(in a small but decisive voice)

Just let me tell it in my own way.

JACK

Take your time. We've got all day. I'll be right here for as long as it takes.

Babette reappears in a baggy pink sweatshirt and underwear.

BABETTE

I don't know exactly when it started. Maybe a year and a half ago. I thought I was going through a phase, some kind of watermark period in my life.

JACK

Landmark. Or watershed.

BABETTE

A kind of settling-in-period, I thought. Middle age. Something like that. The condition would go away and I'd forget all about it. But it didn't go away.

JACK

What condition?

BABETTE

Never mind that for now.

JACK

I've never seen you like this. This is the whole point of Babette. She's a joyous person. She doesn't succumb to gloom or self-pity.

BABETTE

Let me tell it, Jack.

JACK

All right.

BABETTE

You know how I am. I think everything is correctable. Given the right attitude, a person can change a harmful condition by reducing it to its simplest parts. So, when I realized this condition was not going away, I set out to reduce it to its parts. I went to libraries and bookstores, watched cable TV, made lists and diagrams, talked to a holy Sikh man in Iron City and even studied the occult, hiding the books in the attic so you and Denise wouldn't find them and wonder what was going on.

JACK

All this without my knowing. The whole point of Babette is that she speaks to me, she reveals and confides.

BABETTE

This is not a story about your disappointment at my silence. The theme of this story is my pain and my attempts to end it.

JACK

OK.

BABETTE

I did all this research, but I was getting nowhere. The condition hung over my life. Then one day at the supermarket, I was reading a tabloid on line. There was an ad. Never mind exactly what it said. Volunteers wanted for secret research. I answered the ad and was interviewed by a small firm doing research in psychobiology. Let's call the company Gray Research, although that's not the true name. Let's call my contact Mr. Gray. Mr. Gray is a composite. I was eventually in touch with three or four or more people at the firm.

JACK

One of those long, low, pale brick buildings with electrified fencing and low-profile shrubbery.

BABETTE

I never saw their headquarters. Never mind why. The point is, I took test after test. Emotional, psychological, motor response, brain activity. Mr. Gray said there were three finalists and I was one of them.

JACK

Finalists for what?

BABETTE

We were to be test subjects in the development of a super experimental and top-secret drug. Code-name: Dylar.

JACK

(dryly)

Aha.

BABETTE

He'd found a Dylar receptor in the human brain and was putting the finishing touches on the tablet itself. I felt hopeful for the first time in so long. But there were many dangers in running tests on humans. Among other things it could cause death.

(Jack raises his eyebrows)

Or I could live, but my brain could die. I could not distinguish words from things, so that if someone said "falling plane," I would fall to the floor and take cover.

(sadly)

In the end, it just made me forget things.

JACK

And they let you go ahead anyway, a human test animal?

Babette gets into bed, pulling up the covers.

BABETTE

No, they didn't. They finally said it was all too risky - legally, ethically and so forth.

JACK

Well, that's good--

BABETTE

No. I refused to accept this. I want you to try to understand what happened next. If I'm going to tell you the story at all, I have to include this aspect of it, this grubby little corner of the human heart. You say Babette reveals and confides.

JACK

This is the point of Babette.

BABETTE

Good. I will reveal and confide. But you don't want to know what happened. You think you do, but you don't.

Jack hesitates.

BABETTE

Mr. Gray and I made a private arrangement. We would conduct the experiments on our own. I would be cured of my condition, he would be acclaimed for a wonderful medical breakthrough.

JACK

OK.

BABETTE

It involved an indiscretion. This was the only way I could get Mr. Gray to let me use the drug. It was my last resort, my last hope. First I'd offered him my mind. Now I offered my body.

Jack feels a sensation of warmth creeping up his back and radiating outward across his shoulders. Babette looks away. Jack studies her features. Finally:

JACK

How do you offer your body to a composite of three or more people? This is a compound person.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Let's concentrate on the genitals.  
How many sets are we talking about?

BABETTE

Just one person's, Jack. A key  
person, the project manager.

JACK

So we are no longer referring to  
the Mr. Gray who is a composite.

BABETTE

He is now one person. We went to a  
grubby little motel room. Never  
mind where or when. It had the TV  
up near the ceiling. This is all I  
remember. I was so ashamed I wore  
a ski mask to cover my face.

JACK

(struggling with his  
anger)

You call this an indiscretion? You  
traded sex for pills.

BABETTE

Jack--

JACK

You walked barefoot on the  
fire retardant carpet. Mr.  
Gray put the car rental keys  
on the dresser and then he  
entered you.

BABETTE

Don't use that term. You know how  
I feel about that word.

JACK

(furious)

He effected what is called entry.  
In other words, he inserted himself  
inside you.

BABETTE

No one was inside anyone. That is  
stupid usage. I did what I had to  
do. I was remote. I was operating  
outside of myself. It was a  
capitalist transaction. You  
cherish your wife who tells you  
everything. I am doing my best to  
be that person.

Jack paces, trying to harness all his different emotions. A  
sadness shows in her eyes.



JACK

I'm only trying to understand. How many times did you go to this motel?

BABETTE

More or less on a continuing basis for some months. That was the agreement.

Jack watches her carefully.

JACK

Did...did you enjoy having sex with him?

BABETTE

I only remember the TV up near the ceiling, aimed down at us.

The white light shining from the streetlight outside flickers for a moment through the window. Babette begins to cry softly. Jack goes into the bathroom and splashes water on his face. The only towel available is small and pink with a tic-tac-toe design.

JACK

Did he have a sense of humor? I know women appreciate men who can joke about sex. I can't, unfortunately, and after this I don't think there's much chance I'll be able to learn.

BABETTE

It's better if you know him as Mr. Gray. That's all. He's not tall, short, young or old. He doesn't laugh or cry. It's for your own good.

He exits the bathroom through the other door into the hallway. He hesitates.

Babette cries softly. Jack reenters the bedroom.

JACK

You have to tell me who he is. I need to know.

BABETTE

No. How do I know you won't kill him?

JACK  
Because I'm not a killer.

BABETTE  
You're a man, Jack. We all know about men and their insane jealous rage. This is something men are very good at. When people are good at something it's only natural that they look for a chance to do it.

JACK  
I'm not good at that. I twirl garbage bags and twist-tie them. I get startled by joggers.  
(pause)  
Is this still going on?

BABETTE  
No.

JACK  
Why not?

BABETTE  
Because the drug didn't work!  
At least on me.

Babette starts to cry again. Jack shakes his head, turns aimlessly again.

JACK  
Maybe I should go. Get a hotel room. I don't know. I don't know.

Babette continues to weep. She shakes. Jack regards her then slowly moves to the bed. His anger clouded with sympathy, he places a hand on her heaving back.

His eyes are full of tears. She turns around, looks at him, and embraces him. He doesn't respond. And then she's kissing him. Finally he kisses her back and succumbs. They grab each other with desperation. Their bodies clenched in an embrace of love, grief, tenderness, sex and struggle. Babette starts to unbutton Jack's shirt and suddenly he withdraws.

He stands and starts buttoning up his shirt.

JACK  
You've taken me this far, put me through this much. I have to know. What's the condition?

Babette's face is sorrowful and pale, her eyes showing a helpless desolation.

BABETTE

I'm afraid to die. I'm afraid of my death.

JACK

You? You're still young, you run up and down the stadium steps. It's not a reasonable fear

BABETTE

I can't believe we're all marching toward non-existence. All of us. It haunts me, Jack, and it won't go away.

Jack moves around the room.

JACK

Baba, everyone fears death. There's no one who has lived past the age of seven who hasn't worried about dying.

BABETTE

But Mr. Gray said I was extra sensitive to it, that I fear it right up front. That's why he was eager to use me.

JACK

Baba, I am the one in this family who is obsessed by death. I have always been the one.

BABETTE

What do you want me to say? Your fear is older and wiser than mine?

JACK

(hesitates)  
Yes!

BABETTE

I love you. I just fear death more than I love you.

She raises the comforter over her head.

BABETTE

(under the blanket)  
And I really really love you.

Jack stares at the hilly terrain.

JACK

There's something I promised myself  
I wouldn't tell you.

BABETTE

(through the covers)  
Can it wait until morning?

JACK

I'm tentatively scheduled to die.  
It won't happen tomorrow or the  
next day. But it is in the works.

Babette slowly emerges from the covers.

JACK

So, we are no longer talking about  
fear and floating terror. This is  
the hard and heavy thing, the fact  
itself.

Jack starts telling her what happened. Other sounds take over. The hum of the thermostat. The running of the water in the walls. The clang of the radiator. The movement of the dryer. All blurring into white noise.

We HOLD on Babette's tear streaked face. DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLLEGE CAFETERIA

Alfonse, Grappa, Lasher at the table with Murray and Jack. Winnie sitting behind them as before at an adjacent table.

ALFONSE

Imagining yourself dead is one of  
the cheapest, sleaziest, most  
satisfying forms of childish self-  
pity.

GRAPPA

How much pleasure did you take as a  
kid in imagining yourself dead?

LASHER

I still imagine my death. Whenever  
I'm upset about something, I  
imagine all my friends, relatives  
and colleagues gathered at my  
casket. They are very, very sorry  
they weren't nicer to me while I  
lived.

We STAY on Jack's face. We hear the professors continue.

WINNIE

Children are very good at self-pity  
which must mean it's natural and  
important.

ALFONSE

But there is something even more  
childish and satisfying than self-  
pity, something that explains why I  
try to see myself dead on a regular  
basis.

MURRAY

I feel I'm learning important  
things every day here. Death,  
disease, afterlife, outer space.  
It's all much clearer here. I can  
think and see. I bought this tie.

GRAPPA

When you bite dead skin off your  
thumb, do you eat it or spit it  
out?

LASHER

Chew it briefly then propel  
it swiftly from the end of  
the tongue.

ALFONSE

It is a way of punishing  
people for thinking their own  
lives are more important than  
mine.

MURRAY

That's what it all comes down to in  
the end. A person spends his life  
saying good-bye to other people.

ALFONSE

Yes, but how does he say good-bye  
to himself?

DUNLOP'S VOICE

Show me your tongue.

Jack sticks out his tongue.

CUT TO: Babette stares straight ahead. She appears to be in  
a motel room. Blurry gray figures crawl over her, picking at  
her face.

CUT TO: Dunlop's face saying something in German.

CUT TO: Babette reaches her hand up to her face. The hand is long, bony and masculine with a long pink scar rising and falling between the tendons and veins. She tugs and pulls at her skin. Her fingers burrowing into her cheeks and chin. Gloom moves in around the gray-sheeted bed, a circle slowly closing, swallowing up the room.

Her face remains as darkness closes in. Her long fingers dig deeper into her face as she opens her mouth and whispers:

BABETTE

Panasonic.

She rips the skin off of her cheek.

CUT TO: Jack opens his eyes. He's sleeping on a pull-out couch in the family den. The TV is on, silent, a flickering white light. Jack blinks his eyes adjusting to the dim light. The Panasonic clock reads 3:47.

INT. BEDROOM/MASTER BATHROOM

Babette sleeps alone in their bed. Jack slips by quietly.

Jack kneels down, lifts up the radiator cover and sticks his hand underneath. The bottle of Dylar is gone.

INT. DENISE'S ROOM. NIGHT

Denise wakes up. Someone is in her room. Her eyes adjust. Jack stands, half in and half out of her closet, rummaging through things.

DENISE

What are you doing?

JACK

Don't worry, it's only me.

Something topples off a shelf in the closet with a thud.

DENISE

I know who it is.

He keeps searching.

DENISE

I know what you're looking for.

JACK

What did you do with the bottle?  
There were three tablets left.

DENISE  
How do you know I took it?

JACK  
I know it, you know it.

The gas meter makes a particular noise.

DENISE  
If somebody wants to tell me what  
Dylar really is, maybe we'll get  
somewhere.

JACK  
Your mother no longer takes the  
medication. Whatever your reason  
for holding the bottle, it's not  
valid anymore.

DENISE  
Tell me what it does and I'll give  
it to you.

Jack hesitates.

JACK  
OK.

He moves out of the closet and sits on her bed.

JACK  
I've had a recent scare. I thought  
something awful was about to  
happen. It turned out I was wrong,  
thank goodness. But there are  
lingering effects.  
(pause)  
I need the Dylar.

DENISE  
What's the problem?

JACK  
Isn't it enough for you to know  
that a problem exists?

DENISE  
I just don't want to be tricked.

JACK  
There's no question of tricking. I  
just need the medication.

DENISE

You'll give them to my mother who I think stole my ski mask by the way. Is she a drug addict?

JACK

You know that's not true.

DENISE

You two aren't going to get divorced, are you?

JACK

Why would you ask that?

DENISE

You're sleeping on the pull-out. It's uncomfortable.

JACK

(relenting)

We are talking about death. I fear it. And the tablets probably don't work. But maybe they will in me. And even if they don't... It doesn't matter what they are. I'm eager to be humored.

DENISE

Isn't that a little stupid?

JACK

(nods)

This is what happens to desperate people.

(hesitates)

You remember you heard on the radio that the billowing cloud caused sweaty palms and then your palms got sweaty, didn't they? The power of suggestion makes some people sick and other people well. If I think it will help me, it will help me.

DENISE

I threw the bottle away.

JACK

No, you didn't? Where?

DENISE

I put it in the garbage compactor.



Jack leaps up.

JACK

When?

DENISE

(getting upset)

A few days ago. Compacted it.

CUT TO: The garage. He empties the garbage cans.

The compressed bulks sit there like an ironic modern sculpture. He takes the butt end of a rake and jabs at them, spreading the trash across the concrete floor.

From ABOVE: He picks through, item by item. Dots of shape and color. The colors recall a dark underbelly of the supermarket.

Jack begins carefully and then his search grows more desperate. The stench hits him. He recoils.

Individual items:

A crayon drawing of a figure with full breasts and male genitals. A banana skin with a tampon in it. Clotted masses of hair, soap, ear swabs, crushed roaches, strands of frayed dental floss, ballpoint refills, shredded undershorts with lipstick markings.

Jack pauses over these.

No Dylar.

Sweating, matted with debris, out of breath, he slumps over, distraught. His attention shifts. A crushed, torn newspaper catches his eye. He reaches for it. It's a supermarket tabloid. Jack opens it, matting down the pages. His fingers picking up the gray newsprint. His eyes scanning each page.

We see bits of headlines, the content of sensational articles about aliens and strange births. All reminiscent of what Babette was reading in the barrack.

CLOSE on an ad in the corner of the page:

**Afraid of Death?**

We move up to reveal Jack amidst the trash.

CUT TO: A ladder appears. Then Jack's face emerges. He reaches around a high shelf retrieving a Reebok shoebox hidden high above buckets and pails.

Inside is the automatic Zumwalt gun. Jack removes the gun. He then retrieves three bullets from an old Folger's coffee can.

INT. PHONE BOOTH, IRON CITY. DAY

Jack dials the number from inside the glass booth. An iron bridge and smokestack in the background.

A VOICE

Hello?

JACK

I'd like to buy some Dylar.

A VOICE

Rid the fear.

JACK

Rid the fear. Clear the grid.

A VOICE

The Roadway Motel in Germantown.  
Room 8.

Click.

INT. CHAPEL, COLLEGE-ON-THE-HILL

The chapel is starkly modern. At the podium, Jack reads from notes. He speaks in very basic German.

JACK

(in German)

*Hitler hatte viele verschiedene  
Hunde. Er liebte seinen Hündchen  
Wulf. Blondi war ein Gift von  
Martin Borman--*

CUT TO: The reception afterwards. Jack enters. The German delegates laugh and eat sweets and spit as they talk. Jack finds Babette and the kids through the crowd.

DENISE

Great speech, Jack.

STEFFIE

You drank a lot of water, Dad.

Jack reaches Babette.

JACK

Don't wait up for me tonight.

BABETTE

I need the car. I have my class.

JACK

You take the car. I don't need our car.

(hesitates, leans in  
close)

There's a chill in the air. You know what a chill in the air means?

BABETTE

What does it mean?

JACK

Wear your ski mask.

Jack passes Murray and the other professors on his way to the door. We hear Jack's breaths and footsteps.

MURRAY

Jack, I never knew there was so much to say about Hitler's dog.

ALFONSE

In the psychic sense a forest fire on TV is on a lower plane than a ten-second spot for Automatic Dishwasher All. The commercial has deeper waves, deeper emanations. But we have reversed the relative significance of these things.

MURRAY

Elvis loved dogs too. Let's see there was Woodlawn and Muffy Dee and Champagne--

LASHER

Did you ever spit in your soda bottle so you wouldn't have to share your drink with the other kids?

GRAPPA

It was an automatic thing. Some guys even spit in their sandwiches.

MURRAY

Also, Muffin. And Wendell, of course, but he was a cat.

JACK

Murray, I need your car keys.

MURRAY

OK.

He places them in Jack's palm.

EXT. COLLEGE PARKING LOT

Jack opens the door to Murray's Datsun.

It's littered with gum wrappers, ticket stubs, lipstick-smearred tissues, crumpled soda cans, popsicle sticks. Jack puts the key in the ignition.

INT. CAR/EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT. NIGHT

On Jack driving.

JACK

Steal instead of buy, shoot instead of talk.

BABETTE (V.O.)

You're a man Jack, we all know about men and their insane jealous rage.

On a red light, we tilt down from overhead and swing around with Jack speeding through in Murray's car.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Maybe violence is a form of rebirth. And maybe you can kill death.

EXT. OVERPASS/ROADWAY MOTEL. NIGHT

The low rumble of trucks on an overpass. The car parked under the bridge. Inside the car, Jack loads the gun. His eyes shut tightly, his nerves rattling.

He gets out of the car.

A one-story building set against the roadway. The motel has nine or ten rooms. The rain-soaked lot is empty.

In the wide, Jack walks toward the motel.

An aluminum awning over the check-in door. The drip of water hitting the metal. Jack peers into a dimly lit office, which looks empty. On the door are little plastic letters arranged in slots to spell out a message:

NU MISH BOOT ZUP KO.

We dolly with Jack as he makes his way along the wall, looking peripherally through windows.

The sound of trucks rumbling overhead.

In the next to last unit, there is the scantest flicker of light.

Jack stands at the edge of the window. He listens. He swivels his head to look into the room out of the corner of his eye.

A figure sits in a low armchair looking up at the flickering light.

Jack grips the doorknob.

He turns it.

It opens. He slips into the dark of the room. A low hum. The walls are a sad color of green, the ceiling cracked. His feet shift on the grimy industrial carpet.

A crackling sound as his foot comes down on a small white pill.

A TV floats in the air, encased in a metal brace, pointing down at man sitting sprawled in the short-legged chair. The sound is off. He wears a Hawaiian shirt and Budweiser baggy shorts. Torn stockings as socks. His hair greasy, his eyes half-closed. His long fingers wrap around the arm-wrest. The scar across his hand.

The man speaks without taking his eyes off of the TV.

MAN

Are you heartsick or soulsick?

The door falls closed behind Jack with a click. He hesitates.

JACK

I know you.

MR. GRAY

Yes, I've been around. I'm the chick and the cheese. I'm the...where was I?

After a moment, Mr. Gray looks at Jack.

MR. GRAY

What do you want?

JACK

I want some Dylar.

MR. GRAY

What do you want?

JACK

I want to live.

MR. GRAY  
But you're dying.

JACK  
(voice cracks)  
But I don't want to.

MR. GRAY  
Then we agree. To enter a room is to agree to a certain kind of behavior. It isn't a street or a parking lot, for instance. The point of rooms is that they're inside.

JACK  
Good point.

MR. GRAY  
There is an unwritten agreement between the person who enters a room and the person whose room has been entered. A room is inside. This is what people in rooms have to agree on, as differentiated from lawns, meadows, fields, orchards...

JACK  
That makes perfect sense.

The hum of the room seems to shift tone.

MR. GRAY  
To convert Fahrenheit to Celsius, this is what you do.

Jack nods. Mr. Gray reaches into his pocket, and produces a handful of white tablets which he tosses in the direction of his mouth. Some enter, some fly past.

MR. GRAY  
I wasn't always as you see me now.

JACK  
That's what I was thinking.

MR. GRAY  
I was doing important work. I envied myself. Death without fear is an everyday thing. You can live with it.

JACK

You're saying there is no death as we know it without the element of fear. Without fear, people would adjust to it, accept it.

MR. GRAY

Dylar failed reluctantly.

JACK

With everybody?

MR. GRAY

With all bodies. But it will definitely come. Maybe now, maybe never.

JACK

There will eventually be an effective medication, you're saying. A remedy for fear.

MR. GRAY

Followed by a greater death. More effective, product-wise.

Mr. Gray throws more pills in the direction of his open mouth. He sucks them like sweets.

MR. GRAY

Just between us chickens, I eat this stuff like candy.

JACK

I was just thinking that.

MR. GRAY

How much do you want to buy?

JACK

How much do I need?

MR. GRAY

You're a big man. Middle age? Does this describe your anguish? I see you as a person in a dark brown jacket, champagne colored pants. Tell me how correct I am.

Silence. There are cracked Dylar tablets all over the fire retardant carpet. Trod upon, stomped. Mr. Gray lies down on the bed.

MR. GRAY

I learned English watching American TV. I barely forget the times I had in this room before I became misplaced. There was a woman in a ski mask, but her name escapes me at the moment. American sex, let me tell you, this is how I learned my English.

Jack's gaze lingers sadly at the TV. The set has a walnut veneer with silvery hardware. The picture rolls badly.

In the reflection he sees Babette sitting on the bed with Mr. Gray. She slowly climbs on top of him, her body dissolving into his.

Jack turns around to face Mr. Gray. He swallows, his ears clearing, sound shifting in his head. Jack becomes hyper-conscious of every object, every sound. The buzz of a light above the stove, the dripping faucet in the sink, how water strikes the roof in elongated orbs, splashing drams. The room tone seems to shriek momentarily and then hums. White noise everywhere. Jack advances two steps toward the middle of the room.

BABETTE (V.O.)

I could not distinguish words from things, so that if someone said "falling plane," I would fall to the floor and take cover.

JACK

Falling plane.

Mr. Gray flails on the bed.

JACK

Plunging aircraft.

Mr. Gray kicks off his sandals, folds himself over into the recommended crash position, head well forward, hands clasped behind his knees.

Jack watches him slumped, trembling. He takes another step toward the bed.

MR. GRAY

Why are you here, white man?

JACK

To buy.



MR. GRAY

You are very white, you know that?

JACK

It's because I'm dying.

MR. GRAY

This stuff fix you up.

JACK

I'll still die.

MR. GRAY

But it won't matter, which comes to the same thing.

Jack advances into the area of flickering light, out of the shadows, seeking to loom. He puts his hand in his pocket, gripping the firearm. Mr. Gray watches the screen again.

JACK

(hand in pocket)

Hailing bullets.

Mr. Gray hits the floor, and begins to crawl toward the bathroom, looking back over his shoulder, childlike, showing real terror. Jack follows him into the toilet.

JACK

(whispers)

Fusillade.

Mr. Gray tries to wriggle behind the bowl, both arms over his head, his legs tight together. Jack looms in the doorway. He raises the gun and points it at the trembling man.

JACK

My name is Jack Gladney and I'm here to kill you. I'm a former dier who is now a killer. You know my wife, Babette. She wore the ski mask.

Mr. Gray puts his hands over his crotch, and tries to fit himself under the toilet tank, behind the bowl. Jack swallows again.

MR. GRAY

She wore the ski mask so as not to kiss my face, which she said was un-American. I told her a room is inside. Do not enter a room not agreeing to this.

(MORE)

MR. GRAY (CONT'D)

This is the point, as opposed to emerging coastlines, continental plates.

He climbs up onto the toilet seat. He seems to be going to the bathroom. Jack lowers the gun, unsure suddenly.

MR. GRAY

Or you can eat natural grains, vegetables, eggs, no fish, no fruit. Or fruit, vegetables, animal proteins, no grains, no milk.

Sound all around.

MR. GRAY

Or lots of soybean milk for B-12 and lots of vegetables to regulate insulin release, but no meat, no fish, no fruit. There are endless workable combinations.

Mr. Gray grabs more tablets from his pocket, and hurls them toward his open mouth. He tears open his shirt pocket to find more pills. Jack raises the gun again.

MR. GRAY

Did you ever wonder why, out of thirty-two teeth, these four cause so much trouble? I'll be back with the answer in a minute.

Mr. Gray flushes the toilet. Jack fires the gun. The sound snowballs in the green tiled room.

Blood squirts from Mr. Gray's midsection. A delicate arc. Jack watches it in awe. The flow diminishes to a trickle, spreading across the tile floor.

Jack fires a second shot, the jolt traveling up his arm. The bullet strikes Mr. Gray just inside the right hipbone. A red stain appears on his shorts and shirt. Mr. Gray sits wedged between the toilet bowl and wall, one sandal missing, eyes totally white. Blood seeping.

The trucks rumble overhead. Jack approaches the sitting figure, stepping around the blood. He takes out a handkerchief and wipes the weapon clean, kneels down and places it in Mr. Gray's hand, cautiously removing the handkerchief, painstakingly wrapping Mr. Gray's bony fingers, one by one, around the stock, delicately working his index finger through the trigger guard. Mr. Gray foams at the mouth and his eyes drop out of his skull.

Jack steps back to survey the scene. Behind him, Babette enters the motel.

BABETTE  
(quietly)  
Jack?

Mr. Gray's eyes gleam, briefly. He raises his hand and pulls the trigger, shooting Jack.

Jack reels, hurt and stunned. Blood covers his forearm, and hand. He looks; the bullet has made a shallow penetration in his wrist.

Jack turns around and sees Babette standing in the center of the motel room.

JACK  
Baba.

Suddenly, red streams through her coat which falls over her right leg.

JACK  
You've been shot.

BABETTE  
So have you.

Blood drips from the tips of Jack's fingers.

JACK  
I'm sorry.

MR. GRAY  
(mumbles)  
And this could represent the  
leading edge of some warmer air.

Jack looks at Mr. Gray. He's alive. His lap a puddle of blood. Snapped with a jolt into the moment, Jack stumbles over to Babette.

JACK  
It must have ricocheted off my  
wrist.

BABETTE  
And hit my leg.

Jack wrestles his belt off of his waist, and manages with his right hand and teeth to tie it firmly just above the bullet hole in Babette's leg. While he does this:

JACK  
How did you know I'd be here?

BABETTE  
(shrugs)  
Men are killers.

Jack sucks on his wrist and spits out the blood and pulp. She grabs a pillow case, shaking it off a pillow, and ties it around Jack's wrist. Jack looks back at Mr. Gray.

BABETTE  
He needs help.

JACK  
Come on, let's get him out of here.

BABETTE  
We need help.

EXT. ROADWAY MOTEL. NIGHT

The rain has stopped. Jack kicks open the front door. Babette, limping, and Jack, one good arm, drag Mr. Gray behind them on a bedsheet, blood striping the sheet and the sidewalk. Mr. Gray's gun hand drags along the pavement.

BABETTE  
Why did you give him a loaded gun?

JACK  
I was thinking I'd shot him three times but it was only twice and my plan was... I don't know, I clearly fucked that up...

They reach the Gladney's station wagon (which Babette parked outside the motel).

JACK  
I'll come back and get Murray's car later.

Mr. Gray kicks free, involuntarily, his body flopping and spinning, fishlike. He makes gasping noises, short of oxygen.

BABETTE  
He's choking.

Jack leans over him and clothes-pins Mr. Gray's nose using his thumb and index finger in an attempt to give him mouth-to-mouth. Mr. Gray's eyes follow Jack down to his face. It's awkward and intimate.

Mr. Gray's mouth is awash in regurgitated Dylar foam, half chewed tablets. Jack kneels over the wounded man, exhaling rhythmically into his mouth. His knees in the wet and littered street. Babette watches sadly.

Mr. Gray starts to come around, and take regular breaths. Jack removes his mouth, but hovers just above his face. Their mouths almost touching.

MR. GRAY  
Who shot me?

JACK  
Um...I...

BABETTE  
(jumping in)  
You did. You shot you.

Jack looks at Babette, grateful, then back at Mr. Gray and nods.

MR. GRAY  
Who shot you?

BABETTE  
You did. The gun is in your hand.

MR. GRAY  
What was the point I was trying to make?

BABETTE  
You were out of control. You weren't responsible.

JACK  
We forgive you.

MR. GRAY  
Who are you, literally?

JACK  
We're passersby. Friends. It doesn't matter.

MR. GRAY  
Some millipedes have eyes, some do not.

BABETTE/JACK  
Sure./OK.

With much effort, and many false starts, Jack and Babette wrap him in the sheet and get him into the back of their station wagon. Mr. Gray stretches out, moaning.

INT. STATION WAGON

Jack, moaning, drives one-handed through the empty streets, looking for a hospital. Babette moaning in the passenger seat. Mr. Gray moaning in the back. The streets are empty save for a milk truck coming from the other direction.

MR. GRAY

You are on the air.

They pass a three-story former Pentecostal church with a neon cross over the entrance. Jack hits the brakes, screeches to a halt and backs up onto the curb.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Jack and Babette drag Mr. Gray by the feet up a wheelchair ramp. Mr. Gray holds one hand at his midsection to stanch the flow. The gun hand drags behind.

MR. GRAY

Tennis anyone? Anyone tennis?

Babette rings a bell. A shadowed cloaked figure appears behind the smoked glass. The door opens.

A nun, black-habited, black-veiled, leans on a cane.

BABETTE

We're shot.

NUN

(a German accent)

We see a lot of that here.

She turns back inside. Jack and Babette drag Mr. Gray across the entranceway.

INT. CLINIC

There are waiting rooms, screened cubicles, doors marked X-Ray, Eye Test. They follow the old nun into the grand space. Two orderlies appear, great squat men with sumo physiques. They push two gurneys. The nun, irritated, calls out something else in German.

Another nun comes racing, pushing a shopping cart. The orderlies lift Jack and Babette onto each gurney. The nun barks something in German. They lift Mr. Gray and put him in the cart.

MR. GRAY  
Inflated-adjusted real income.

More nuns arrive, rustling, ancient, speaking German to each other. They carry transfusion equipment, wheeled in trays of glinting implements. An orderly removes the gun from Mr. Gray's hand. He tosses it in a desk drawer that holds about ten other hand guns and half a dozen knives.

The three of them, Jack and Babette in gurneys and Mr. Gray between them in the cart, are pushed through the space. Mr. Gray is then pulled away and the couple on the two gurneys is pushed together.

MR. GRAY  
No one knows why the sea birds come  
to San Miguel.

Jack smiles, almost fond of him in that moment. Babette sees this. Mr. Gray is wheeled one way. Jack and Babette the other. The original nun follows Jack and Babette into a cubicle to work on their wounds.

NUN  
Such a violent country.

More nuns walk by, heavy rosaries swinging from their belts. The image comforts Jack and Babette.

BABETTE  
What's your name?

NUN  
Sister Hermann Marie.

JACK  
(German)  
Gut, besser, best.

She smiles.

JACK  
(German)  
1, 2, 3, 4.

He points to various objects in the room and says the name in German. The nun nods happily while she cleans and wraps Babette's leg in sterile pads. Babette laughs.

Two more nuns appear, wizened and creaky. The nun says something to them. They smile, nod and look at Jack and Babette, addressing their bullet wounds. They all count to ten together, recite colors, items of clothing, and parts of the body in German.

There's a picture on the wall of Jack Kennedy holding hands with Pope John XXIII in heaven. Babette elicits a small smile.

BABETTE

What does the Church say about heaven these days? Is it still the old heaven, like that?

The nun turns to glance at the picture.

NUN

Do you think we are stupid?

Jack is taken aback by the force of her reply.

NUN

We are here to take care of sick and injured. Only this. You would talk about heaven, you must find another place.

BABETTE

Then why do you have that picture on the wall?

She draws back, her eyes filled with contemptuous pleasure.

NUN

It is for others. Not for us.

JACK

You don't believe in heaven? A nun?

NUN

If you don't, why should I?

JACK

If you did, maybe we would.

NUN

If I did, you would not have to. Someone must appear to believe.

BABETTE

Is death the end then? Does anything survive?

NUN

Do you want to know what I believe or what I pretend to believe?



JACK

I don't want to hear this. This is terrible.

BABETTE

You're a nun!

JACK

Act like one!

NUN

You would come in from the street, married, dragging a body by the foot and talk about angels that live in the sky. Get out from here.

She presses her face toward theirs and continues forcefully in German.

NUN

(in German)

Anyone who comes in here talking about Angels is a numbskull. Show me an Angel. Please! I want to see one. Show me a saint. Give me one hair from the body a Saint! It is our task in the world to believe in things no one else believes. If we abandon such beliefs, the human race would die out. That is why we are here. A tiny minority. If we didn't pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse! Hell is when no one believes.

The words growing harsher, wetter, more guttural. Her eyes show a terrible delight in their incomprehension.

Babette's fingers find Jack's.

NUN (CONT'D)

We pray, lighting candles, asking statues for good health and long life. But not for long. You will lose your believers.

The nun stops her rant and taps her cane for emphasis, then walks away.

NUN

(then in English)

So maybe you should try to believe in each other then.

The doctor comes in wearing his hearing aid.

JACK  
Herr Dokter. Will he be alright?

HERR DOKTER  
Not for a while, but he will survive.

Jack and Babette are now alone, holding hands.

BABETTE  
I wish I hadn't told you about my condition.

JACK  
Why?

She starts to cry.

BABETTE  
Then you wouldn't have told me you're going to die first. The two things I want most in the world are for you to not die first and for Wilder to stay the way he is forever.

JACK  
Once, I almost asked you to put on legwarmers before we made love.

BABETTE  
Why didn't you?

JACK  
I thought you might suspect something was wrong.

A celestial light slowly illuminates them. It rises through the circular window at the front of the church. Jack and Babette are awash in heavenly light.

INT. GLADNEY KITCHEN. MORNING

Babette pours Jack coffee. They clearly haven't slept, still in the clothes and bandages from the night before. One by one the kids enter in their sleep clothes. Denise brings Wilder and places him on the counter.

DENISE  
What is it camels store in their humps? Food or water?

They move around the room, making cereal, toast, drinking orange juice, talking over each other, the familiar sounds of a family in the morning.

HEINRICH

It depends which kind you're talking about. There are one hump and two hump camels.

DENISE

Are you saying a two-hump camel stores food in one hump and water in the other?

HEINRICH

The important thing about camels is that camel meat is considered a delicacy.

DENISE

I thought that was alligator meat.

STEFFIE

Who introduced the camel to America?

HEINRICH

Are you sure you're not talking about llamas?

Jack and Babette find each other across the table.

BABETTE

Murray says we are fragile creatures surrounded by hostile facts.

DENISE

The llama stayed in Peru. Peru has the llama, the vicuna and one other animal.

STEFFIE

Bolivia has tin.

DENISE

Chile has copper and iron.

STEFFIE

I'm the only person I know who likes Wednesdays.

Jack grabs the milk and turns it over his coffee. Empty.

JACK

We're out of milk.

RADIO VOICE

A California think-tank says the next world war may be fought over salt.

JACK (V.O.)  
There is just no end to surprise.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT

We start wide, high and as the Gladney's station wagon pulls into an outlined space, we start to head down--

JACK (V.O.)  
I feel sad for us and the queer  
part we play in our own disasters.

As the family exits the car, we pick up with them and follow them.

JACK (V.O.)  
But out of some persistent sense of  
large-scale ruin, we keep inventing  
hope.

INT. SUPERMARKET

The Gladney's walk through the sliding doors.

JACK (V.O.)  
And this is where we wait,  
together.

A shopping dance has developed throughout the store. The dance is exuberant.

Joyous music accompanies them.

The credits roll as the shoppers dance.