

Straight On Till Morning

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"Straight On Till Morning"

FADE IN:

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY (1993) - DORSET AVENUE BRIDGE - DAY

A small but heavily traveled bridge spanning the back bay's narrow channel. Wearing bathing trunks and little else, TOM, HENRY, BIG MAC, and THE GENERAL run to the high point of the causeway.

Voices can be HEARD over the action. They belong to the older, reminiscent versions of the four teenaged boys.

HENRY (V.O.)

It was the last day of Senior Week.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

What the hell were we drinking?

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

Mad Dog, Colt 45, and somebody named Jose Cuervo.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

Look at this guy with the memory power.

As cars rumble by in the b.g., they hop the railing -- all except Tom.

TOM (V.O.)

The General was sober. That's how he remembers.

HENRY (V.O.)

Then how come he jumped and you didn't?

Big Mac jumps first, followed by Henry and the General.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

Because he was scared.

TOM (V.O.)

I wasn't scared. I was... wary.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

Did you know there was a guy in that booth?

The bridge operator, an old man in blue coveralls, erupts from a booth not ten feet from where Tom is standing.

TOM (V.O.)
I didn't even know there was a booth. He came out of nowhere.

HENRY (V.O.)
What'd you think he was gonna' do: accost you?

The man lunges toward Tom with arms outstretched, eyelids peeled and dentures bared.

TOM (V.O.)
How was I supposed to know? You saw how fast he was moving.

Tom panics, seizing the man by the shoulders and tossing him over the railing.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)
He was moving pretty fast when he hit the water.

The man lands in a belly-flop. When he surfaces, he begins flailing and gasping for air, barely able to keep his head above water.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
Stinkin' bridge operator and he couldn't even swim.

Realizing what he's done, Tom flees.

TOM (V.O.)
They shouldn't have had him working so close to the water. I've always said that.

Henry swims to the aid of the floundering man, dragging him to a nearby dock where he gallantly performs CPR.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)
If not for Henry, that man would've died.

The General watches seriously as Henry administers mouth-to-mouth. Big Mac sports a kinky smile.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
 Dude, I forgot about the CPR. You
 were going at it with that guy like
 Karen Delvechio.

HENRY (V.O.)
 Yeah, but it was much less
 embarrassing.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM (1989) - NIGHT

The gymnasium is decorated for a school dance. Various couples slow dance to "SEASONS CHANGE," the final song of the night.

Henry makes out with a black-haired girl in spandex pants, the aforementioned KAREN DELVECHIO.

TOM (V.O.)
 You're not the one who should be
 embarrassed.

In the b.g., Tom sways with a gangly blonde six inches taller than him. Great is the distance between their pelvises.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
 Don't even start with that shit,
 Tom...

Big Mac and the General loiter by the bleachers eating pretzels and drinking soda, watching Henry's labial display. Their expressions are unchanged from that moment on the dock: the General grave, Big Mac salacious.

BIG MAC (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ... I did what any good friend
 would do.

A girl passes by and Big Mac pinches her ass. The girl smacks Big Mac's retracting hand, stomping away mad but proud.

TOM (V.O.)
 It was a middle school dance and
 you created anarchy.

From the shadows, heavy metal hooligan TOM CHEW creeps up behind Henry and pulls down his sweat pants.

HENRY (V.O.)
 Tom Chew created anarchy.

To heighten the effect, Tom pulls down Henry's underwear and lifts up his shirt.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
He got pantsed in front of the whole school. The principal saw his dick. I couldn't just stand there.

Furious, Big Mac hands the General his pretzel, then hauls over and socks Tom Chew in the face.

TOM (V.O.)
You could've showed some restraint.

Tom falls backward into MISS BELFIGLIO, the 7th grade Math teacher, and they both topple to the ground.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
I had like twelve sodas in me. He's lucky I didn't break him in half.

The General's pacifism keeps him sidelined.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)
His friends almost broke you in half.

Chew's long-haired cronies move across the hardwood like one big Cousin It, engulfing Big Mac in a cyclone of concert tees.

HENRY (V.O.)
Big Mac did a noble thing.

TOM (V.O.)
I'm not saying he didn't. I'm just saying he ruined my chances with Mary Rosenberger.

Though everyone has stopped dancing to watch the fight, Tom still grips his partner's waist.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
You weren't gettin' anywhere with her. You should've just fought.

CLOSE ON Tom's perspiring face.

TOM (V.O.)
I couldn't. I had a boner.

HENRY (V.O.)

So did I.

Karen at his side, Henry double-knots the drawstring on his sweat pants, oblivious to everything but his shame.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

I didn't.

The General guards Big Mac's pretzel with his life.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

Have you ever?

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

Yes.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

When?

EXT. DARBY CREEK (1985) - DAY

The four friends, now ten years of age, emerge from the mouth of a sewer tunnel, entering a world of endless green. Suffused with wonder, the General leads the pack.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

1985. When we discovered Monkey Island.

HENRY (V.O.)

God, I loved that place... but I never understood why we called it Monkey Island.

Using the rocks as stepping stones, Henry makes an athletic show of crossing the creek.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)

We didn't. It was called that before we found it.

BIG MAC (V.O.)

Then you can't say we discovered it.

Big Mac dislodges a porno mag from the mucky bank. Tom stands by the water's edge, eager to embark though quite unsure of himself.

THE GENERAL (V.O.)
 Yes you can, because it was the
 first time any of us had seen it...

The General hangs upside down from a tree branch.

THE GENERAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ... But if you must know, monkeys
 lived there thousands of years
 before the age of man. That's where
 the name comes from, or so I'm
 told.

TOM (V.O.)
 Is there any way we can steer this
 conversation back into the age of
 man?

INT. HENRY'S SHED - DAY

Henry, Tom, Big Mac, and the General, in present-day, thirty-two-year-old form, stand shoulder to shoulder in the darkened shed.

BIG MAC
 Yeah. Enough with the reminiscing.
 Let's get this party started.

Henry claps his hands and rubs them together.

HENRY
 What do you got?

Big Mac reaches into his pocket and takes out a bag of pills.

BIG MAC
 Twelve Percocets.

He gives three each to his compatriots.

TOM
 Are you sure we should do this
 many?

BIG MAC
 Positive.

THE GENERAL
 Are they chewable?

HENRY
 (a soft authority)
 They're not Flintstones, General.
 They're painkillers.

BIG MAC
 We ready?

Tentative nods and a muffled "Yep."

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
 To new memories

ALL
 New memories!

The pills are thrown back with a swig of beer -- or, in the General's case, wine cooler.

An anticipatory beat, then:

HENRY
 Here we go.

EXT. HENRY'S BACK YARD - DAY

The four men exit the shed, stepping out into the carnival atmosphere of HENRY JR.'s 8th birthday party.

Kids jump in the rented moon bounce, climb on the wooden jungle gym, dance around the hutch in which cowers Peter, Henry Jr.'s pet rabbit.

Friends and family mill about with drinks in their hands. Some sit chatting at a pair of picnic tables.

The birthday boy genuflects before a shrine of presents, joined by his awestruck cousins. A large, unwrapped box directs their curiosity.

THE COOLER

where Henry reaches for another beer.

LIZ (O.S.)
 You better start grilling.
 Everybody's starving.

Henry shuts the lid and looks at his wife, the pugnacious LIZ. She is setting down bowls of macaroni and potato salad on a nearby picnic table.

HENRY

Relax, honey. I'm on it.

LIZ

What is that, your fifteenth beer?

HENRY

They're ponies.
(he unscrews the cap)
You want one?

LIZ

Just grill, Henry. And remember:
this is your son's birthday party,
not yours.

THE GENERAL

standing on the side-lines of a conversation between two
middle-aged men.

MAN #1

You gotta' put your money in the
market. It's the only way.

MAN #2

Yeah, but aren't bonds safer?

MAN #1

You want safe, buy a dog. You
wanna' make a killing, play the
market. That's how I bought my
second house.

MAN #2

You have a second house?

MAN #1

And a third one on the way.

The General walks off without the men having even noticed
him.

TOM AND BIG MAC

chatting with KATE, Tom's radiant wife.

BIG MAC
(pointing)
Who's that?

He indicates a woman stationed by the jungle gym.

KATE
It's Margie Pierce.

BIG MAC
Is she single?

KATE
I believe so.

BIG MAC
Lock and load.

Big Mac heads toward his unsuspecting prey.

TOM
Doesn't she have a kid?

KATE
Yeah. It'll give him someone to
talk to.

She finishes her glass of wine.

KATE (CONT'D)
So, what were you guys doing in
there?

TOM
Nothing.

O.S., a neighbor's dog BARKS. Tom hearkens to the sound as if he himself were a canine and could divine the bark's meaning.

KATE
Don't even think about it.

TOM
Too late.

Entranced, he starts off in the direction of the neighbor's yard.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Henry stands at the counter opening a large jar of pickles. He takes one out and slides it into his mouth: ecstasy.

Liz enters carrying their other son, ten-month-old ERIC. She stares gimlet-eyed at Henry.

HENRY

Have you tried these pickles?
They're phenomenal.

Liz does not answer. Angrily, she opens the fridge and takes out Eric's bottle. Then she starts taking out packages of hot dogs and hamburgers.

Chewing with his mouth open, Henry looks on.

MOON BOUNCE

The General watches the children jumping up and down, their cheeks flushed, their socks flapping.

He begins slipping off his shoes when Tom passes by en route to the dog.

TOM

Don't even think about it.

This stops the General cold.

JUNGLE GYM

Big Mac extends a hand to MARGIE PIERCE.

BIG MAC

Hey, I'm Big Mac. How ya doin'?

MARGIE

(shaking his hand)
Margie. Fine, thanks.

A stocky boy climbs down from the jungle gym and nuzzles up to Margie.

BIG MAC

Does this guy belong to you?

MARGIE

Yes, this is Jonathan.

BIG MAC
Put 'er there, Johnny. I'm Big Mac.

They shake hands.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
(feigning pain)
Ow! What do you got this kid on
steroids? He's strong as shit.

Margie and JONATHAN aren't amused.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
(realizing his faux pas)
Sorry.

MARGIE
It's okay. He's heard it before.

BIG MAC
From who? This guy over here?

He points to a harmless boy swooshing down the slide.

MARGIE
No. He heard you at the wiffle ball
game earlier.

BIG MAC
Yeah, but that was a bullshit call.
(again realizing his faux
pas)
Sorry.

MARGIE
It's all right.
(pause)
Do you want another beer?

BIG MAC
That'd be great.

MARGIE
You and Jonathan can get better
acquainted. Just watch that potty
mouth.

BIG MAC
Don't worry. I will.

As Margie turns away, Big Mac leers at her ass. Jonathan
takes note of this.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S YARD - DAY

Tom approaches the dog, a black schnauzer. It growls at him, but Tom is unflinching.

TOM

Hey, fella'. Wanna' go to a party?

The dog barks in the affirmative, and Tom begins untying his leash.

MOON BOUNCE

The General looks around to see if the coast is clear, then crawls into the moon bounce.

The kids acknowledge him with quizzical faces.

JONATHAN

suffering in silence as Big Mac, a seasoned construction worker, inspects the jungle gym.

BIG MAC

Whoever put this thing together
either didn't care about
construction, or didn't care about
kids.

HENRY

flipping burgers, to which the grill reacts volcanically. He reels back, almost knocking over his four-year-old NEPHEW.

NEPHEW

Look, Uncle Henry, I have a wiener,
too.

He proudly holds up a plastic hot dog from Henry Jr.'s Fisher-Price grill.

HENRY

That's nice, son.

Without even looking, Henry takes the bogus dog between his tongs and adds it to the logjam of sweltering franks.

His nephew is delightfully confused.

JUNGLE GYM

Big Mac continues to wax blue collar:

BIG MAC
You see. Look at this.

He removes a loose nail from one of the supports.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
Look at this nail...

Trailing off, he peers over Jonathan's head.

BIG MAC'S POV

of a busty brunette with teased hair and spandex pants giggling her way through the party. This is ANDREA.

BACK TO SCENE

BIG MAC
Aw, fuck. It's my ex-wife.

TOM AND THE DOG

It's plain to see who has the upper-hand here. Despite Tom's efforts to rein him in, the dog plows ever forward.

At the party's fringe, a two-year-old boy on a kiddie leash barks at the schnauzer. Tom responds in kind.

MOON BOUNCE

The General bounces conservatively, making sure not to jump too high. It pains him, though; he wants to let loose.

JUNGLE GYM

Big Mac squats, eye-level with the insouciant Jonathan.

BIG MAC
Let me tell you what happened. I'm
on Percocets, so bear with me.
(pause)
I met this chick when I was twelve-
years-old.
(MORE)

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
 That's two years older than you.
 Can you get your mind around that,
 Johnny?

Johnny obviously cannot.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
 She was my middle school
 sweetheart, and I married her on
 the eve of my twenty-first
 birthday. What the hell was I
 thinking? She was crazy as all hell
 -- but God could she fill out a
 pair of pants.

He glances over at Andrea.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
 Still can.
 (unctuous)
 Not as well as your mom, though.

JONATHAN
 My mother can fill out a pair of
 pants?

BIG MAC
 What're you blind?

THE GRILL

Henry assigns the not-dog to its bun, and places it in a
 basket with its "real" brethren.

PICNIC TABLE

Tom and the dog besiege Kate. The excited animal paws at her
 skirt.

KATE
 Get that thing away from me. You
 know I'm allergic.

Tom yanks him away.

TOM
 How could you be allergic to
 something so sweet?

He bends down and gives the dog a big wet kiss.

MOON BOUNCE

Letting loose, the General jumps higher and higher. He sends tremors through the moon bounce, reducing kids to rag dolls.

JUNGLE GYM

Margie returns with drinks. She hands Big Mac a beer.

BIG MAC

Thank you very much.

MARGIE

(handing Jonathan a soda)
And for you.

He opens the can aggressively, a sign of discontent.

BIG MAC

Let me tell you, Margie. You did a great job raising this kid. He doesn't have ADD or anything.

PICNIC TABLE

Amid a gathering of kids, Tom and his furry friend hold court.

TOM

Children are animals: savage, unpredictable. Dogs are people: compassionate, understanding.

KID #1

What's his name?

KID #2

Can I pet him?

The dog begins barking.

Liz passes through, spiriting the basket of hot dogs.

LIZ

What is our neighbor's dog doing here?

TOM

Everybody stand back. You're making him nervous.

The dog continues barking, but then stops suddenly when he catches sight of

THE RABBIT

frozen in his cage, helpless, doomed.

THE DOG

barking now with ferocious purpose, pulling madly at his leash.

JUNGLE GYM

Margie wraps an arm around Jonathan.

MARGIE

(to her son)

So what do you say we invite Big Mac over for dinner this weekend?

JONATHAN

I don't think that's such a good idea, mom. He's still hung up on his ex-wife, and plus he's on drugs. He's dad all over again.

Big Mac is incredulous. Margie takes her son by the hand.

MARGIE

(to Big Mac)

Enjoy the rest of the party.

As they walk away, Jonathan edges behind his mother to block her ass from view.

BIG MAC

(calling out)

I may be on drugs, but I am *not* hung up on my ex-wife.

He waves to someone O.S.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)

How ya doin', Andrea? You look great. How's my house?

HENRY JR.

sitting at the picnic table, biting into his hot dog. However, instead of yielding under his teeth, it clings to his lip. He screams -- for he is the unfortunate recipient of the Fisher-Price wiener.

TOM AND THE DOG

Startled by the scream, Tom loosens his grip on the leash. The dog takes off, charging

THE BUNNY CAGE

where Peter's eyes bulge at the rushing beast. The schnauzer knocks over the hutch, cuffs the rabbit into his maw, and snaps its neck.

HENRY JR.

his screams starting anew.

THE PARTY-GOERS

reacting in stunned silence. Some of the children are whimpering.

MOON BOUNCE

Slap-happy, the General jumps so high his head bumps the ceiling. When he comes down, his foot punctures the lunar floor, deflating the moon bounce in record-time.

THE GRILL

As the schnauzer makes its escape, Henry feeds him a hot dog.

JUNGLE GYM

Big Mac, still holding the nail from his workman's lecture, watches Liz and Andrea tend to Henry Jr. His eyes fixed on his ex-wife's ass, he returns the nail to its jagged hole.

INT. HENRY JR.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry Jr. lays in bed under the covers, a band-aid on his upper lip. His cheeks are streaked with tears.

Liz sits beside him, stroking his hair.

LIZ

I'm sure Peter has already crossed the Rainbow Bridge, and is hopping around in bunny heaven.

EXT. HENRY'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Henry, Tom, Big Mac and the General stand around a shallow grave, at the bottom of which is Peter's CARCASS. Despite the General's party hat, the mood is somber.

THE GENERAL

Don't you have a plastic bag to wrap him up in?

HENRY

I'm sure we do, but I don't know where Liz keeps them.

Taking up his spade, Henry begins the burial.

TOM

I'm really sorry, Henry. I can't help but feel somewhat responsible for the death of your son's rabbit.

HENRY

(shoveling)

Don't worry about it. It was probably the most exciting thing that's ever happened to him. For a split second, he was finally out of that cage.

TOM

I don't know what it is. Whenever I see a dog, I lose it. I've been that way since I was a kid.

THE GENERAL

Everybody makes mistakes.

Tom levels eyes at the General.

TOM

Take off that ridiculous hat. This is a funeral.

The General removes the hat and places it over his heart.

BIG MAC

Do you guys think I'm still hung up on Andrea?

HENRY

No, you just need to get laid.

Henry tops off the burial mound and drives the spade into the dirt by his feet.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Here lies Peter Rabbit.

THE GENERAL

He was a good rabbit.

HENRY

No, he wasn't. He was a worthless rabbit who did nothing for seven years but eat, shit, and sleep.

TOM

Rabbits make horrible pets. I've always said that.

BIG MAC

We shouldn't have done those Percocets.

THE GENERAL

No, we shouldn't have done so many. Right, Tom?

Again Tom hits him with the arctic eye.

HENRY

Hey, at least we did something. At least we tried.

BIG MAC

Today was the first time the four of us have been together in over six months. I just wish things could've gone a little different.

HENRY

Me, too.

THE GENERAL

Me, three.

TOM

Me, four.

HENRY

Yeah, we messed up pretty bad. And God knows we're gonna' pay for it.

Henry glances up at his son's bedroom window. The light is still on.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But don't let it get you down. Our execution was bad, but our intentions were good. That's what matters.

(pauses to look at his friends)

Our time will come again. Of that I can assure you.

THE GENERAL

Amen.

EXT. HENRY'S SIDEWALK - THE NEXT DAY

An anonymous delivery truck pulls up to the curb. The side door opens and a bale of newspapers is heaved onto the driveway...

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

...jolting Henry out of a deep sleep.

From his bed on the couch, he turns and looks at the clock: 4:52 a.m.

He throws off his blanket, maneuvering through the maze of Henry Jr.'s yet-to-be-assembled presents.

INT. HENRY AND LIZ'S BEDROOM - DAY

Liz and the kids are asleep in the queen-sized bed. So not to wake them, Henry dresses by flashlight.

INT. HENRY'S STAIRWELL - DAY

Half-asleep, Henry sits on the bottom step, wrapping each newspaper in a blue plastic sleeve.

INT. HENRY'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Henry slings papers onto front lawns and sidewalks. He attempts to throw one out the passenger-side window. It has the right speed and the right trajectory, but it never leaves the car. Reason: the window's rolled up.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Henry feeds oatmeal to the baby. He wears a short-sleeved button down and khakis for his nine-to-five gig at the insurance firm.

Liz peels the band-aid from Henry Jr.'s lip.

HENRY JR.
Mommy, it hurts.

The burn is only slightly less gruesome than Peter Rabbit's death-mask.

LIZ
Don't complain to me. Talk to your father.

As if on cue, the baby spits up on Henry's cuff.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Tom concludes his speech to the board members of Mercer Bank. He manifests a corporate cool.

TOM
There are some people who believe that the customer and his money are two different things. I'm proud to say: Not at this bank, Mister.

The suits applaud and Tom takes his seat next to Mercer's Vice President.

V.P.
Thank you, Tom, for your words of wisdom. Always illuminating.
(MORE)

V.P. (CONT'D)

(pause)

Now here's Leroy Jenkins with this month's lay-offs.

A sharply dressed black man with a nerdy voice strides to the front of the room.

LEROY JENKINS

All right, chums. Let's do this.

Immediately, Tom's right leg begins shaking beneath the table.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Two workers, TEDDY and JOEL, shoot the breeze on their coffee break. In the b.g., a makeshift table supports a Box-o-Joe and two dozen donuts.

TEDDY

So what'd you do this weekend?

JOEL

Nothing really. How 'bout you?

TEDDY

Did some yard work. Watched a movie.

JOEL

Oh, yeah. Was it any good?

TEDDY

I don't know. I fell asleep.

Big Mac approaches the table for a refill of coffee. Joel and Teddy grow excited.

JOEL

Awww, shit. Here he comes.

TEDDY

Man of La Muncha.

BIG MAC

(tepidly)

Hey, fellas.

TEDDY

Eats so much pussy he's gotta' go to the dentist to get a haircut.

JOEL

I heard he brushes his teeth with a lint roller.

To listen to them, you'd think Big Mac was Bachelor Man. He alone knows the truth, but is not at liberty to say.

TEDDY

How many chicks did you bang this weekend? And don't even tell me five.

BIG MAC

It wasn't five.

TEDDY

What? More than five! That's it: I'm gettin' a divorce.

INT. THE GENERAL'S BATHROOM - DAY

His face dotted with blood, the General shaves in a mustache that looks like a greasy parenthesis.

INT. THE GENERAL'S BEDROOM - DAY

For that morning's job interview, the General has laid out his only suit: a gray number three sizes too small.

With considerable pain, the General gets dressed. Each piece of clothing doubles his discomfort, the tie and shoes especially.

When he's buttoned his suit jacket, he looks at himself in the mirror. Staring glumly back at him is a man in the grips of a torture device -- a pillory of polyester, rayon, and wool.

The General begins to cry.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DEPARTMENT OF COMPLIANCE - DAY

Henry sleeps against the wall of his cubicle. A BOY dressed in a well-tailored suit monitors him.

Sensing a spectator, Henry awakens. He turns and scans the boy, startled by his presence.

A CO-WORKER saunters up and puts his arm around the little superintendent.

CO-WORKER
Hey, Henry, where's your son?

HENRY
Where's my son?

CO-WORKER
(giving the boy a squeeze)
Yeah, it's Take Your Kid To Work
Day.

Three boys streak by in the f.g. Beyond them, a girl executes an Olympic cartwheel. Still farther back, in the strait between the cubicles, double-dutch is in full swing.

BOY
Maybe next year.

A beat.

HENRY
Maybe.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

The lunch crowd is buzzing. Tom sits at a table by the window, punching numbers into his palm pilot.

The General enters and sits across from him. There is grease on his lapel.

TOM
Well?

THE GENERAL
I start tomorrow.

Such confidence can only breed suspicion.

TOM
You didn't get the job, did you?

THE GENERAL
I never made it to the interview.

TOM
And your reason?

THE GENERAL
I had car trouble.

The WAITRESS rescues the General from Tom's harangue.

WAITRESS

What can I get for you guys?

TOM

I'll have the Chicken Cordon Bleu
and a martini.

THE GENERAL

I'll have a hamburger.

WAITRESS

How would you like that?

The General doesn't know how to answer this question.

TOM

(to the waitress)

Medium-well... and a Shirley
Temple.

The waitress takes their menus and darts off. The General hangs his head.

THE GENERAL

I embarrass you.

Tom unfolds his napkin and drapes it over his lap.

TOM

Not as much as you think you do.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Henry arrives home from work, utterly exhausted. A plate of last night's leftovers sits on the kitchen table.

From upstairs comes the sound of laughter and splashing. Liz is giving Henry Jr. and the baby a bath.

Henry looks at the plate of leftovers. In no mood for hot dogs, he opens the refrigerator and grabs a beer. Then he walks into the family room and flips on the T.V.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

It is College Night, and the co-eds are dancing to R. Kelly's latest.

Big Mac enters and flashes the DOORMAN his I.D.

DOORMAN

I don't need to see that.

Leave it to the doorman to start the night off right. Still determined, Big Mac weaves through the crowd, marveling at all the "stray tail" the place has packed in.

He orders a Red Bull and vodka and stands with his back to the bar, drinking in the scene.

Making her way to the dance floor, a SOPHOMORE accidentally steps on Big Mac's shoe.

SOPHOMORE

Sorry, sir.

The word "sir" rings in the air like a death knell.

Big Mac gulps his drink and tries to ignore it.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tom sits at his paper-strewn desk, talking to Kate on the phone. His left leg shakes as he talks.

TOM

Dr. Kiley said it could be stress-related, but I'm not totally convinced. I'm getting a second opinion.

KATE (V.O.)

So, can we have sex tonight?

TOM

I don't know. It depends on what time I get home. We might have to reschedule.

KATE (V.O.)

Maybe you can pencil me in for tomorrow.

TOM

I'll see what I can do. Gotta' go, honey. Love you.

KATE (V.O.)

Love you, too.

Tom hangs up and looks out his inter-office window to the main room's encampment of cubicles.

Shadow permeates, but on the room's margins, silhouetted by a brightly lit hallway, two MEXICAN JANITORS play soccer with a roll of toilet paper.

Tom's first impulse is to scold them, but when he sees how much fun they're having -- laughing and smiling -- he thinks better of it.

To stop his leg from shaking, he plants his right foot firmly on his left, pinning it down.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT

Wearing pajamas and slippers, the General stuffs his suit into a washing machine.

The MANAGER looks up from his magazine.

MANAGER

That's dry clean only.

THE GENERAL

(smiling)

Thank you.

Heedlessly, he starts the spin cycle.

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT - TOY STORE - NIGHT

The General stands with his laundry sack slung over his shoulder, the damp suit crumpled up inside. On his tippy-toes, he peers through the store's front window.

The store is in shadow, but there is light in his eyes.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

It's closing time, and the place is clearing out.

Big Mac sits at the bar playing Megatouch. His jowls are heavy with drink. The DJ sits next to him, sipping a whiskey and water and chatting with the bartender, a busty blonde.

DJ

Thursday I'm doing Oldies Night.

That's always a fun crowd.

BARTENDER

There you go, Big Mac. Oldies night.

BIG MAC

Fuck you, and Fuck Motown.

DJ

Don't let them hear you say that on Oldies Night.

Big Mac swivels to face the DJ.

BIG MAC

Who said I was going to Oldies Night?

The DJ flashes his palms.

DJ

Hey, man. I just play the music.

BIG MAC

Yeah, well, you better just drink your drink.

DJ

Are you gettin' fresh with me?

BARTENDER

No, he's gettin' a six pack to go. What do you want, Big Mac?

BIG MAC

Suck my dick.

BARTENDER

Sorry, we're fresh out of that.

BIG MAC

Yeah, you and every other chick in here.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Henry sits on the couch watching T.V. There is a cluster of empty beer bottles on the table in front of him.

Liz appears in the archway.

LIZ
Can you turn that down? You woke
the baby up.

Henry fumbles for the remote and turns the volume down.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Do you plan on sleeping tonight?

HENRY
When I'm drunk.

LIZ
And when's that gonna' be?

HENRY
When I pass out.

Liz looks around at all the unopened boxes.

LIZ
I see you've made a lot of progress
with your son's birthday presents.

HENRY
There was a game on.

LIZ
Till two o'clock in the morning?

A beat.

HENRY
(patting the cushion next
to him)
Why don't you come over here and
sit next to me?

LIZ
You have to deliver the paper in
three hours, and you want to have
sex.

HENRY
Who said anything about sex?

LIZ
I did. Now go to bed.

She turns to leave.

HENRY
I would if I had one.

LIZ
 (pausing)
 What's that supposed to mean?

HENRY
 I don't know. Ask your sons. Oh,
 wait, they're asleep in my bed.
 Here, I'll wake them up.

He rips the loudest fart.

LIZ
 I was gonna' sit down, you know.

Henry flips off the T.V., pulls the blanket over his legs,
 and stretches out on the couch.

HENRY
 I have to deliver the paper in
 three hours, and you want to have
 sex. Go to bed, Liz.

He rolls over on his side, leaving one cold shoulder exposed.

INT. TOM AND KATE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom tip-toes into the darkened room. He slinks from bureau to
 closet, undressing. He slips into bed, trying not to awaken
 Kate.

It turns out she was never asleep. She rolls over and
 immediately starts nibbling on his ear.

TOM
 I thought we were gonna' do it
 tomorrow.

KATE
 It is tomorrow.

Tom looks at the clock on the night stand. It reads 12:18
 a.m. He heaves a sigh.

BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Tom and Kate are having sex missionary style.

KATE
 What do you say you take the condom
 off?

TOM
(shocked)
What?

KATE
Take it off.

TOM
I can't. I'm about to go.

KATE
Please.

TOM
(as he is ejaculating)
Noooooooooooooooooooo!

BEDROOM - A FEW MORE MINUTES LATER

Kate is sound asleep.

Tom lies awake, his legs shaking uncontrollably.

EXT. TOM'S FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Wearing a V-neck and boxers, Tom paces back and forth, pausing every now and then to stare at his legs.

A passing motorist looks at Tom with furrowed brow. He continues pacing.

Under his bushes, he spots a bouncy ball belonging to the kids across the street. He fishes the ball out and attempts to juggle with his feet, imitating the Mexican janitors. The ball gets away from him, but he chases it down and kicks it across the street.

The ball hits the lamp post at the foot of his neighbor's walk, shattering a small pane of glass.

Suddenly, Tom has stopped pacing.

INT. THE GENERAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The General sits on the edge of his bed, gazing at a cardboard box in the center of the room. The box is heavily fortified with duct tape.

FLASHBACK - INT. THE GENERAL'S MOTHER'S HOUSE (2005) - DAY

Furious, the General marches up the stairs to the third floor. His mother, SHEILA, follows, pleading with him.

SHEILA
Don't go up there, honey.

THE GENERAL
Why? What did he do?

SHEILA
Your father just wants what's best for you.

THE GENERAL
He's not my father.

INT. THIRD FLOOR - DAY

What was once the General's attic lair has been converted into a crassly appointed exercise room.

The architect of this sudden conversion, the General's step-father, RUSS, jogs on a treadmill in his underwear. He is a towering lummoX of a man.

THE GENERAL
(bleating)
Where's my room?

RUSS
(booming)
Landfill!

SHEILA
Not all of it. Some went to Purple Heart.

The General is in a complete state of shock.

THE GENERAL
Does this mean I have to move out?

SHEILA
Well, you are thirty-years-old, dear.

THE GENERAL
How could you let him do this?

SHEILA

You know how Russ is when he sets his mind to something. He's like a Sherman tank.

She pulls a cardboard box from the corner of the room.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

But I did manage to save a few things I knew you'd want.

END FLASHBACK

THE GENERAL'S BEDROOM

He pulls the box closer, tears away the duct tape, throws back the flaps, looks inside, and...

... Hasbro! The room is transformed into a G.I. Joe commercial, complete with ZIP LINES, VEHICLES, and a host of ACTION FIGURES.

Down on his hands and knees, the General plays hard, providing sound effects and dialogue for a heated skirmish.

When the battle is through, he lays on the floor amid guys and guns, whispering to one of the action figures.

THE GENERAL

Do you really think so? Do you really think they'd want to?

ACTION FIGURE

Absolutely. Those grunts are dying to get back in the trenches.

THE GENERAL

But they have jobs and families. Where would they find the time?

ACTION FIGURE

They'll make time. But you've gotta' convince 'em it's worth it.

THE GENERAL

How?

ACTION FIGURE

You've gotta' make 'em believe that the only way to go on, is to go back. Do that, and they'll follow you to the ends of the earth.

THE GENERAL

The ends of the earth, huh?

ACTION FIGURE

If that's where you wanna' go.

The General nods.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Doing her best octopus impression, Liz feeds the baby while getting Henry Jr. ready for school.

Henry lopes into the kitchen dressed for work. He stands on the margins of this matriarchal whirlwind, not sure whether to risk a cup of coffee or just stay put.

LIZ

My Aunt Kay died this morning.

HENRY

I'm sorry to hear that.

Liz hands Henry a comb.

LIZ

Do me a favor and comb your son's hair. I'm gonna' get the camera.

Liz exits and father and son are left alone. Neither quite knows how to proceed.

HENRY

(to Liz)

What do you need the camera for?

LIZ (O.S.)

Because it's his first day of school and I want to get a picture.

Henry Jr. touches the band-aid on his lip.

HENRY

It's his first day of second grade. We took pictures last year.

Liz returns with a digital camera. The baby has begun to fuss.

LIZ
(fiddling with the camera)
Are you coming?

HENRY
Where?

LIZ
The funeral. It's this weekend.

HENRY
I can't. I have the papers.

LIZ
Shit, that's right.

HENRY
(hoping the answer is
"yes")
Are you taking the kids?

Putting the camera down, Liz grabs the comb and starts raking it through Henry Jr.'s hair.

LIZ
Do I have a choice?

Henry picks up the telephone.

HENRY
What's the number at the church?

LIZ
Why?

HENRY
I want to get the prayer chain going.

Liz's face softens.

LIZ
610-352...

INSERT - CORDLESS PHONE

as Henry is dialing a different series of numbers.

BACK TO SCENE

LIZ
 ... 7419. Make sure they pray for
 my mother.

Henry nods and walks outside with the cordless.

Liz stops up the baby with a pacifier, and continues untangling Henry Jr.'s hair. Through the kitchen window, she watches Henry talking on the phone. He smiles at her sympathetically. She smiles back.

EXT. HENRY'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Brimming, Henry fights to keep his voice down.

HENRY
 They'll be at my mother-in-law's
 all weekend. We got the house to
 ourselves.

In his neighbor's front yard, twelve-year-old MICHAEL CROOK is lifting weights.

BIG MAC (V.O.)
 I'll call Tom and the General.

Henry waves to Michael but he does not wave back.

HENRY
 Tell 'em Saturday, twelve noon. And
 bring your 'A' game.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Liz and the kids are gone. Henry, Tom, and Big Mac hang out waiting for the General. The sunless room has all the charm of a casket.

Tom sits on the couch reading *Men's Health*. His legs shake, but not conspicuously.

Big Mac plays darts. He throws one and it misses the board by three inches.

BIG MAC
 I can't even beat myself.

TOM

Watch where you're throwing those things.

Henry enters with a plate of crackers and a tub of low-fat spread.

HENRY

So, which movie do you guys wanna' rent?

THE GENERAL (O.S.)

Movie!?

The General climbs through an open window and lands clumsily on the floor.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

On a day like today, you guys wanna' rent a movie?!

The General stands and brushes himself off. He wears a hat, and appears to have spent the last few days in the woods. He is possessed of a rabid whimsy.

HENRY

What the hell're you doing?

THE GENERAL

The door was locked.

HENRY

Why didn't you knock?

THE GENERAL

No time for that. Listen, I have something really important to tell you guys.

TOM

Where've you been? You were supposed to be here over an hour ago.

THE GENERAL

I was outside. Where you three should be right now instead of cooped up in here like a bunch of vampires.

HENRY
 We're not vampires.
 (popping a cracker into
 his mouth)
 We're indecisive.

BIG MAC
 I think I'd rather be a vampire

HENRY
 I was always partial to the
 wolfman.

TOM
 Frankenstein. Now that's a monster.

THE GENERAL
 (exasperated)
 Hey!

The chatter ceases.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
 I *said* I have something really
 important to tell you.

To emphasize the word "important," he snatches Tom's
 magazine.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
 Now, are you gonna' shut up and
 listen to me, or am I gonna' have
 to throw a fit?

TOM
 Can I have that back, please?

THE GENERAL
 No!

The General throws the magazine out the window.

HENRY
 We're listening.

THE GENERAL
 Thank you.

As best he can in his disheveled state, the General composes
 himself.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

Whenever we get together, which isn't that often anymore, all we do is talk about the past. Remember this. Remember that. Well, I'm tired of just talking about it. I'm ready for action.

TOM

What exactly are you proposing?

THE GENERAL

I'm proposing we go back.

BIG MAC

Go back where?

THE GENERAL

To a place in time before.

TOM

Before what?

THE GENERAL

Before jobs. Before women. Before family.

Henry stops applying spread to his cracker.

HENRY

You mean go back to when we were kids?

THE GENERAL

(igniting)

Yes. When all that mattered was having fun, when your only responsibility was getting dirty, when everything was a game, and everyone was a character, and every time you played, you won -- even when you lost.

(pause)

We were so much happier then. Why not go back?

BIG MAC

Because we're trying to make new memories. That's why we're here.

Big Mac walls another dart.

THE GENERAL

There are no new memories. We stopped making them a long time ago.

Feigning interest, Tom leans forward.

TOM

How do you intend on transporting us to this "place in time before"?

BIG MAC

Yeah, where's your time machine?

THE GENERAL

We don't need one.

BIG MAC

Then how about four kids we can switch souls with? That's usually how it works, right?

THE GENERAL

We don't need four kids. We've already got them. We've been them. *They were us.*

TOM

Were us.

THE GENERAL

All we have to do is make them us again, and we're there. It's that easy.

TOM

(shaking his head)
Where is all this coming from?

The General says nothing.

TOM (CONT'D)

You didn't open that box of toys, did you?

Still nothing.

TOM (CONT'D)

(angrily)
How many times have I told you to throw that shit away?

HENRY

So he played with his toys. What's the big deal?

TOM

It's not about the toys, Henry. It's the principle of it. It's just another thing standing between him and maturity.

THE GENERAL

(snapping)

Maturity is a sickness, and it's killing our friendship. Can't you see? Look at us: we're pathetic.

The group takes stock of itself: the shelves are empty.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

If we don't go back, it's gonna' be birthdays and funerals for the rest of our lives. I don't know about you guys, but I need more than that.

(pause)

This thing is just too important to me.

Breaking a pensive silence:

HENRY

(to the General)

What did you wanna' do?

THE GENERAL

(reigniting)

I have it all planned out.

Henry turns to Big Mac, making a "What do you think?" gesture.

BIG MAC

Before women, huh? Doesn't sound so bad.

All eyes are on Tom.

TOM

Cujo.

HENRY

Cujo?

TOM

Yes. That's what movie we should rent: *Cujo*.

The General takes Tom by the hand and leads him to the window.

THE GENERAL

What's the one thing you've always wanted, but could never have?

TOM

A Swiss bank account.

Outside, a stray PUPPY sits on the pavement, gnawing the spine of *Men's Health*.

THE GENERAL

My gift to you.

Tom's smile leaves no room for doubt: he is sold.

(NOTE: The following eight scenes, beginning with the GRASS HILL and ending with the TREETOP, will likely be set to music, and take the form of a MONTAGE.)

EXT. GRASS HILL - DAY

The General stands atop the hill, arms akimbo, chin thrust outward.

The others, including the dog, sprint up the hill towards him.

The General looks down -- and his expression changes from pride to fear. This is what he asked for, remember.

Henry grabs him by the shirt collar and throws him down the hill, knocking over Tom and Big Mac as if they were bowling pins. Victorious, Henry pumps his fist and roars.

EXT. BIKE TRAILS - DAY

The men-cum-boys weave through the woods on commandeered dirt bikes. They choose a particularly gnarly jump, known for its height and trajectory.

Henry is the first to launch. He goes over the jump and crosses his handlebars to the right. He keeps them cocked for a sweet second, then straightens them just before he lands.

Next to go over is Big Mac, who hits the jump at break-neck speed. To one-up Henry, he crosses over to his left, hitting the ground smoothly and safely, much to Henry's delight.

Tom is right behind Big Mac, taking the jump with more grace and control than the others. Soaring as if in arrested motion, he kicks out his back tire, holding the pose for added effect. The dog, nestled in a basket on the handlebars, approves.

The General is last. He does not pedal as he approaches the dirt mound; he coasts, his arms and legs frozen in fear of wrecking the bike, a pink Huffy. He catches no air as he rolls over the jump, almost stalling at its apex.

EXT. STEEP GRASS SLOPE - DAY

Big Mac has the General's bike; Tom has the General. Big Mac holds the bike by the seat, and with a great shove, ghost-rides it down the slope.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

The boys and their dog, "Rufus," run across the field. Their smiling faces suggest that at any minute they might up and take flight.

The General brings up the rear, of course. It's not clear whether he's chasing the others. If so, his pursuit is joyous.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

The four friends stand in a circle playing Potato. In the b.g., the entrance to the sewer tunnels beckons.

INT. SEWER TUNNELS - DAY

Armed with flashlights, the brave explorers pass the famed "18th Light."

EXT. MONKEY ISLAND - DAY

They exit the tunnel and bound into the arms of their childhood haunt. Not much has changed -- except there's a lot more trash.

Big Mac fishes a soggy porno mag from the creek, while Tom and Rufus play fetch with a giant stick.

Using the rocks as stepping stones, Henry makes an athletic show of crossing the creek.

The General runs to the tallest tree and begins climbing.

EXT. TREETOP - DAY

Each crew member perches on a limb overlooking the town, serenely reflecting on the day's events.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

The coffee table is strewn with paper plates and empty Hugs. Remnants of chicken tenders and French Fries evidence a less than fancy feast.

For dessert, Big Mac is drinking his twelfth Yoo-Hoo. The General sucks on a javelin-sized Freezie-Pop. Henry stuffs his cheek with a wad of Big League Chew. Tom and the dog share a pouch of Fun-Dip.

Big Mac finishes the Yoo-Hoo, letting the bottle roll from his fingers onto the floor. He rests a hand on his stomach and moans.

THE GENERAL

Feels good, doesn't it?

HENRY

Do you guys wanna' sleep over?

THE GENERAL

I was planning on it.

Drowning in a sea of chocolate drink:

BIG MAC

You expect me to drive home like this?

Again, all eyes are on Tom.

TOM

Let me call my mom... I mean, let me call Kate.

Tom dials the wife on his cell phone.

TOM (CONT'D)
 (cocksure)
 Hey, honey.
 (pause)
 It was good. We had a lot of fun.
 (pause)
 They're fine. No restlessness at all. Listen, Henry's really broken up about his mother-in-law's sister. I'm gonna' stay here tonight, just so he has someone to talk to.
 (pause)
 Tomorrow night we can do that.
 (pause)
 I know you are, but what am I supposed to do? I can't just leave him. You know how sensitive he is.

Henry fires a stream of grape-colored spit into a tall plastic cup.

TOM (CONT'D)
 (less confident)
 All right. If that's what you want. Whatever makes you happy.
 (pause)
 Love you, too.

Tom hangs up and stares at the floor. With bated breath, Henry, Big Mac, and the General await his answer. There can be no sleep-over without Tom, and judging by his puss-face, it doesn't look good.

Tom heaves a sigh, then, coming to life:

TOM (CONT'D)
 I'M ALLOWED!

INT. HENRY'S KIDS' PLAYROOM - NIGHT

To celebrate, everyone dances to "MACHO MACHO DUCK."

EXT. HENRY'S NEIGHBOR'S FRONT STEPS - NIGHT

Taking the last drag of a cigarette, Michael Crook watches the silhouettes dancing to the song.

MICHAEL

Faggots.

He flicks his butt toward Henry's house.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

A marathon game of RISK is in its final throes. Tom and the General are the only ones still playing, Henry and Big Mac having been knocked out in the early rounds.

The General wears Henry Jr.'s dress-up army uniform: a green plastic helmet and matching coat. For medals, he has pinned a strip of paper candy to his breast pocket.

THE GENERAL

Armies of the territory of
Mongolia... do you surrender?

TOM

You won. Don't rub it in.

Tom scoots into his sleeping bag, inside of which Rufus is already sleeping.

The General moves his armies across the board.

THE GENERAL

(to Tom's vanquished
troops)

I promise to treat you with
civility and respect. Now drop your
weapons!

Seeing that the others are falling asleep, the General takes off his helmet and places it in his lap.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

What do you guys wanna' be when you
grow up?

TOM

Go to sleep, General.

THE GENERAL

I wanna' be the President of outer
space, so I can be in charge of the
Martians, the Jupiterians, and the
sun people. How about you, Big Mac?
What do you wanna' be?

BIG MAC
Gynecologist.

THE GENERAL
Come on. Seriously. That's gross.

BIG MAC
Tow-truck driver.

THE GENERAL
Now we're talkin'. Tom?

TOM
Veterinarian.

THE GENERAL
You'd be good at that. Henry?

HENRY
What do I wanna' be when I grow up?
That's a tough one.

(pause)

Well, I'll tell you what I don't
wanna' be: I don't wanna' be a
double employee. I don't wanna'
work two jobs. Hell -- I don't
wanna' work one job.

(pause)

I don't wanna' be a husband,
either. Don't get me wrong: I love
women; I just think marriage is
gay.

(extended pause)

And I don't think I wanna' be a
father. I don't wanna' be
responsible for somebody else's
happiness, if I can't even be
responsible for my own.

(pause)

Maybe I'm crazy for saying this,
but after just one day of being who
I was...

THE GENERAL
A boy.

HENRY
... I don't think I can go back to
being who I am.
(pause)
So, to answer your question,
General, when I grow up... I wanna'
be a kid.

The SOUND of the papers hitting the driveway solemnly punctuates Henry's confession.

THE GENERAL

What was that?

HENRY

That's who I am.

Henry sits up and starts putting on his shoes.

INT. HENRY'S STAIRWELL - TWENTY MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

Half-asleep, Henry sits on the bottom step, wrapping each newspaper in a blue plastic sleeve.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

By now, the sun is almost up. Outside, Henry can be heard starting his car.

Tom, Big Mac, and the General are fast asleep on the floor. The engine doesn't wake them, but the ensuing CRASH does.

They spring from their sleeping bags and hurry out the door.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The front of Henry's '79 Bonneville is wrapped around a telephone pole.

INT. HENRY'S CAR - DAY

A semi-conscious Henry sits slumped over the wheel.

His buddies appear at the driver's side window, confused but concerned.

TOM

Are you all right?

HENRY

Yeah. I think so.

BIG MAC

What the hell happened?

HENRY

I don't know. I must've dozed off.

The General is peering into the back seat.

THE GENERAL

How are you gonna' deliver all
these papers?

CUT TO:

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

mounted on their bikes, each with a canvas sack bulging at his hip, tossing papers left and right, watching as they skitter across lawns and porches.

INT. BROTHERS PIZZA - LATER THAT DAY

The four amigos sit in a booth, piling pizza crusts, ice cubes, crumpled napkins, potato chip crumbs, half-eaten French Fries, regurgitated ketchup, and whatever else they can think of onto a paper plate in the center of the table.

As each new item is added to the plate, they chant:

ALL

Mow Mow Mow, Mow Mow Mow.

The couple in the booth next to them complains to the waitress, and she goes off to tell the proprietor, VINCE.

The General adds a leaf of soda-dipped lettuce to the teetering amalgamation... and the Mow Mow plate tumbles to the floor.

Vince throws open the kitchen door.

VINCE

Get outta' here, you old punks. You
ruin my pizzeria.

The crew darts for the exit, still chanting:

ALL

Mow Mow Mow, Mow Mow Mow.

EXT. SELLERS LIBRARY - DAY

A heated game of step ball is in progress. Suddenly, a cop car swings into the parking lot.

BIG MAC
 Shit! Five-0. Play it cool. Play it cool.

No one moves as the cop parks alongside them.

Big Mac strolls up to the window.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)
 What's the problem officer?... RUN!

The lost boys scatter in four different directions, leaving their tennis ball behind.

Unruffled, the cop steps out with a LIBRARY BOOK in his hand, the novelization of "ROBOCOP 2." He plunks it into the return slot, picks up the tennis ball, and gets back into his car.

EXT. PRIVATE SWIMMING POOL - DAY

The pool skirts the edge of a golf course, where country clubbers pace the fairway.

Clad in bathing trunks, the Fab Four climb over the fence into the pool area.

Once inside, they perform belly-flops and cannon balls, disturbing not only the golfers, but the

CROCHETY HOMEOWNER

who dodders out wielding a 12-gauge shotgun.

HOMEOWNER
 If I told you once, I told you a thousand times: this ain't no swimming hole.

With frightened agility, the men hop the fence and...

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

...tear across the fairway. One of the GOLFERS notices Tom from work.

GOLFER
 Tom, is that you?

Running by, Tom glances at him perplexedly.

A report from the geezer's shotgun sends the man ducking behind his golf bag, sparing Tom any further scrutiny.

INT. TOM AND KATE'S CARPORT - DAY

Kate unloads groceries from her SAAB. She reaches across the driver's side for one last bag.

Stealthily, Tom grabs her by the waist, pulls her out of the car, and begins planting kisses on her lips and neck.

KATE

Tom?!

Tom continues the onslaught.

KATE (CONT'D)

(between breaths)

Do you wanna' go to the bedroom?

He loosens the string on his bathing suit.

KATE (CONT'D)

What about the condoms?

He hikes up her skirt. There is just no stopping him.

Submitting, Kate frees an arm and presses the button for the garage door.

As it shuts the lovers in, the same passerby from the night of Tom's pacing motors through again -- his expression unchanged.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

It's quitting time. Big Mac pretends to pore over a set of blueprints spread out on the hood of his truck. Teddy, Joel, and the rest of the hard hats AD LIB goodbyes as they pass.

The ruggedly attractive CONNIE stays behind.

CONNIE

Another day at the office.

Big Mac smiles.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Wanna' get a drink?

BIG MAC

I would love to, Connie, but I gotta' go over these prints for tomorrow. We don't wanna' fall behind.

CONNIE

That's too bad. I was gonna' let you titty-fuck me.

She walks away and gets into her car, as Big Mac considers the sexual gravity of what's just been said to him.

Connie drives off, and for a moment it appears as if Big Mac might go after her. But his mind is elsewhere.

When the car is out of sight, Big Mac folds up the prints and tosses them into his truck. Then he takes a quick look around.

Assured he is alone, he runs over to a pile of building materials and starts loading pre-fab windows onto the bed of his truck.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom feeds Snausages to Rufus, who sits quietly (secretly) in a cage beneath his desk. A co-worker, MEGHAN, pops her head in the door.

MEGHAN

(holding an envelope)
Mail, Tom.

Realizing he still has the Snausage in his hand, Tom begins eating it as if it were a Slim Jim.

TOM

Thank you, Meghan.

Meghan hands him the envelope and backs out curiously.

Tom continues eating the Snausage as he opens the envelope. Inside is a blank sheet of unlined paper.

Rufus whimpers for his snack.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh.

He gives the dog what's left of the Snausage. He overturns the envelope and shakes out a thin orange marker. The words "USE THIS" are written in black along the shaft.

He scribbles back and forth across the page until the encrypted message appears: MEETING IN THE WOODS 6 P.M. FRIDAY.

Meghan pops her head in again.

MEGHAN

Don't forget about today's meeting.
Four o'clock.

Tom salutes her and she ducks out. He immediately feeds the message into the paper shredder.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Three men sit along the wall, reading magazines while they wait. A radio plays Connie Francis.

The General sits in the barber's chair. The barber, an old Italian man, buttons his cape.

BARBER

So what'll it be today?

The General produces a PICTURE of himself circa 1985.

THE GENERAL

I want to look just like this.

The barber takes the picture and shuffles over to a table where his comb and scissors are laid out. With his back to the General:

BARBER

(in Italian with English subtitles)

My God. This town's full of pedophiles.

EXT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

The General walks out looking like a bona fide third grader.

Big Mac pulls up in his truck and honks his "DUKES OF HAZZARD" horn.

The General leaps onto the running board.

THE GENERAL

Do it again!

Big Mac obliges and lays wheels out of there.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

One of the three men is now sitting in the barber's chair.

BARBER

So what'll it be today?

MAN

(innocently)

Just a trim.

The barber shuffles over to the same table.

BARBER

(in Italian with English
subtitles)

God damn pedophiles.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Liz stands at the window, bouncing the baby on her hip. In the b.g., Henry Jr. sits in a chair watching T.V.

LIZ'S POV

of Henry pulling up in the mini-van.

INT. MINI-VAN - DAY

Henry takes one large pizza from a stack of three on the passenger seat. A Playmate cooler is visible on the floor beneath the glove compartment, as is a Family bag of potato chips.

When Henry gets out, he leaves the engine running and the door open.

EXT. BACK DOOR - DAY

Liz meets Henry at the threshold. She looks beyond him to the open car door.

LIZ
What, you're not eating?

HENRY
I gotta' go back to work.

LIZ
It's Friday night.

HENRY
Tell me about it.

LIZ
You can't just stay for a slice?

HENRY
I can't. It's an audit.

LIZ
I wish you had told me. We could've gotten the pizza ourselves. Save you the trip.

HENRY
No. I wanted to see you guys.

He steals a glance at Henry Jr., then quickly checks his watch.

HENRY (CONT'D)
I gotta' go. I told 'em I'd be back by six.

He kisses the baby on the forehead.

HENRY (CONT'D)
(to Liz)
Save me some crust.

He hustles back across the lawn, looking every bit the pizza delivery man.

Liz remains on the threshold, more puzzled than pissed.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Henry, Tom, and the General stand side by side in a small clearing. Everyone is blindfolded -- even the dog.

THE GENERAL

Come on, Big Mac. The suspense is killing me.

Big Mac, the only one who isn't blindfolded, stands in front of them with his pants around his ankles, flourishing his flaccid member.

BIG MAC

Hold on.

After one more good shake, he pulls up his pants.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)

All right. Take 'em off.

Tom, Rufus, and the General remove their blindfolds. There, in the middle of the clearing, is a Plywood fort, the most outstanding features of which are the door and windows Big Mac stole from the job site.

THE GENERAL

(open-mouthed)

It's beautiful.

BIG MAC

It could use some paint.

THE GENERAL

Can we go in?

Big Mac throws him a key.

TOM

Go ahead, boy.

Tom gives Rufus a pat on the butt. The dog scuttles past the General and hurtles through the built-in doggy door.

As he passes Big Mac, Tom lays a hand on his shoulder.

TOM (CONT'D)

(slyly)

Nice bird.

Encumbered by pizzas, the cooler, and the bag of potato chips, Henry has been trying to remove the blindfold with his shoulder. He finally gives up.

HENRY

Can somebody give me a hand?

INT. FORT - DAY

The inside of the fort is bare. No furniture, no wall coverings; just an empty space.

Henry reaches into the cooler for another Hug. There have to be twenty-five of them sitting in the packed ice. He hands it to the General.

The General peels off the lid.

THE GENERAL

I'd like to propose a toast.

The others stop munching their pizza and listen.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

To Big Mac, for building the greatest fort I've ever seen.

Big Mac raises his Hug.

BIG MAC

No. To you, General, for inspiring us.

TOM

No. To Rufus.

HENRY

No. To all of us, for making life worth living again.

The Hugs come together in a splashing toast. HOLD on the toasted Hugs.

MATCH DISSOLVE
TO:

THE HUGS - ONE MONTH LATER

being drawn away. Each man begins gulping his in what is obviously a chugging contest.

Tom and Big Mac fall behind early, leaving Henry and the General to quaff it out. It's a photo finish.

THE GENERAL

I win!

HENRY

No, I win.

THE GENERAL

I finished first. I win!

HENRY

No, you finished second. *I* finished first. I win.

BIG MAC

You know who won?

His question mutes the feud.

BIG MAC (CONT'D)

This guy right here.

With his thumb and forefinger, Big Mac imposes a circle on his chest.

Neither Henry nor the General looks at the circle. They know better than to fall for this trick.

Thinking fast, Tom thrusts a finger through the circle.

Big Mac throws back his head and sighs. He knows what's coming.

Tom winds up and punches Big Mac's arm.

Big Mac winces in pain, then gooses Tom good, causing him to double over.

Catching his breath, Tom lunges after Big Mac. The gooser eludes him and the chase is on.

As they make their way around the room, the fort's interior presents itself: dinosaur POSTERS; a Styrofoam SOLAR SYSTEM suspended from the ceiling; shelves lined with BOOKS and BOARD GAMES; CLAY MODELS and ACTION FIGURES of all stripes; colorful DRAWINGS pinned to the wall; RACE TRACKS crisscrossing the brightly carpeted floor; LEGO sets in various stages of development; SLEEPING BAGS rolled up in the corner, and COMIC BOOKS scattered atop an old kitchen table.

Finally, Tom tackles Big Mac into an elaborate LEGO set.

THE GENERAL

Hey! I spent sixteen hours on that space castle.

Tom picks Big Mac up off the floor.

TOM

Your *mom* spent sixteen hours on that space castle.

HENRY

Let's go to the roller rink.

The response is an overwhelming "Yeah!"

In their sweat pants and ball caps, the boys bid farewell to Rufus and head to Spinning Wheels.

INT. ROLLER RINK - DAY

They stride through the entrance, all smiles.

The place is swarming with kids and parents. A number of birthday parties are in progress.

SKATE COUNTER

The CLERK sets four pairs of roller blades on the counter.

TOM

(grimacing)

Do you have any roller *skates*?

The clerk frowns. He reaches beneath the counter and pulls out a box of quads.

CLERK

It's all yours.

LOCKERS

The men rummage through the box of skates, jostling for the best pair. While the others find desirable skates, the General gets stuck with a pair of metal strap-ons.

SKATE FLOOR

The General acts as the wobbly caboose of a four-man train. Notwithstanding his lack of form, the train moves adroitly through the packs of skaters.

Children make various attempts to derail the train -- cutting it off, harassing it from behind -- but it stays on track.

The train curves around a woman, TRACY, skating hand in hand with her nieces. She smiles wryly at Big Mac, the third car in line. He smiles back, pulling unconsciously to the left. The General holds on for dear life to Big Mac's shirt tail.

THE GENERAL

Watch where you're going.

Big Mac breaks free. Tom and Henry skate on ahead. The General, now with nothing to clutch onto, veers to the right. Groping the air in front of him, he disappears O.S.

BIG MAC AND TRACY

skating side by side, trading flirtatious glances.

DJ (O.S.)

Okay, folks. It's time to slow it down for the couples skate.

Though not holding hands, Big Mac and Tracy continue skating together.

TOM AND THE GENERAL

sitting opposite one another in a snack bar booth. The General holds a napkin to his bleeding nose.

TOM

(pointing)

Look.

The General turns around and sees Big Mac and Tracy joining hands.

Henry rolls up with hot dogs and sodas.

HENRY
Where's Big Mac?

TOM
Girlfriend City.

Henry catches sight of the aspiring lovers.

HENRY
I thought we said no girls.

THE GENERAL
We did.

The General removes his hot dog from its bun. With the eyes of a sniper, he follows Big Mac and Tracy as they come around the bend. When they're within range, he takes aim and fires.

A blur of pork, the wiener flips end over end until it lands square beneath Big Mac's chassis, felling him.

BIG MAC AND TRACY

Big Mac sits up, rubbing his elbow. Tracy kneels next to him.

TRACY
(reaching for his elbow)
Let me see that.

Big Mac recoils.

TRACY (CONT'D)
Trust me. I'm a pediatrician.

Tentatively, Big Mac offers Tracy his injured elbow. As she tends to him, he looks over at

THE GENERAL

regarding him predatorily, as if at any minute he might spring from the booth and pounce.

EXT. ROLLER RINK PARKING LOT - DAY

Big Mac and Tracy stand next to her car, talking.

Tom, Henry, and the General hide behind an adjacent car, spying on them.

Big Mac and Tracy begin making out. Their technique is amateurish at best.

The tonsil-hockey nauseates the General; for Tom and Henry, it is nothing short of inspiring.

EXT. HENRY'S BACK YARD - DAY

Liz and the baby play in the sandbox. Boredom-ravaged, Henry Jr. idles in the b.g.

HENRY (O.S.)
(a hearty whisper)
Liz.

Liz looks behind her: Henry stands half-hidden on the other side of the fence. Curious, Liz gets up and walks over to him.

LIZ
What are you doing?

HENRY
Come out here for a second.

She opens the gate and stands with Henry in the shadow of a tree. He begins kissing and fondling her.

LIZ
(shoving him away)
Stop. We have neighbors.

Henry doesn't care. He dives in again, and again she rebuffs him.

LIZ (CONT'D)
What's wrong with you?

HENRY
(mockingly)
What's wrong with you?

LIZ
Oh, grow up, Henry.

HENRY
Why don't you make me.

He cups her breast and she smacks his hand. They stare at one another strangely. The baby begins crying and Liz returns to the yard. Henry's lusty panting does not abate.

INT. TOM'S KITCHEN - DAY

Tom stands at the counter drinking lemonade. Between sips, he talks to his wife, who is somewhere O.S.

TOM
Honey, you won't believe what happened at the roller rink. The General threw a hot dog and...

Kate struts into the kitchen wearing a sexy teacher's outfit. She indicates Tom with a swish of her pointer.

KATE
Mr. Tom

TOM
Yes, Miss Kate.

KATE
I have an assignment for you.

She holds out a book: "THE KAMA SUTRA."

KATE (CONT'D)
I want you to read this, and when you're done, I want an oral report on everything you learned.

TOM
But, Miss Kate, I already read that book.

KATE
In that case...

She tosses the book and the pointer aside.

KATE (CONT'D)
... let the report begin.

They press together in a pornographic kiss.

INT. THE GENERAL'S APARTMENT - DAY

There is a knock on the General's door. He looks through the peep hole at CHRISTINA, the landlord's daughter. He opens the door and they greet one another awkwardly.

CHRISTINA
I tried calling you, but your
number's disconnected.

THE GENERAL
Yes.

CHRISTINA
You're two months behind on your
rent. You know that, right?

THE GENERAL
Yes.

CHRISTINA
My father says you have a week to
come up with the money or you're
out of here.

THE GENERAL
One week. Got it. Thanks.

Christina begins to say something else, what almost sounds
like a come-on, but the General shuts the door before she can
even get going.

INT. THE GENERAL'S MOTHER'S KITCHEN - DAY

The General sits with his mother at the kitchen table.

THE GENERAL
I need \$1300.00, or I lose my
apartment.

Russ lumbers into the room wearing nothing but a pair of
dingy briefs.

RUSS
Well, look who flew in to pay us a
visit: Peter Pan himself... nice
haircut.

SHEILA
Please, dear. He's facing eviction.

Russ shakes Tabasco sauce into a steaming cup of coffee.

RUSS
That happens sometimes when you
don't have a job.

SHEILA
 (to the General)
 Don't mind him, honey.

She opens her purse and takes out her check book.

SHEILA (CONT'D)
 I'll write you a check. I can't
 have you living on the streets.

RUSS
 And the streets is where he'll be,
 because he's not coming back here --
 not if I have anything to say about
 it.

SHEILA
 You've said enough already. Just
 leave him be.

Russ leans back on the counter, scoffing at the General.

INT. ORTHODONTIST'S OFFICE - DAY

The General peruses a catalogue of braces.

The orthodontist ponders him obliquely.

The General turns the catalogue around and points to a
 picture in the center of the page.

THE GENERAL
 I want these.

ORTHODONTISIT
 (looking)
 They're nice.

THE GENERAL
 What? Should I not get those?

The orthodontist chooses his words carefully.

ORTHODONTISIT
 Are you sure you want braces,
 because there's nothing to indicate
 that you need them?

THE GENERAL
 Don't try to talk me out of it,
 doctor. My mind's made up.

ORTHODONTISIT

I understand that, but as a man of good conscience, I can't allow you to go through with an operation that obviously isn't necessary, and may be harmful to you in the future.

The General takes out his mother's check and places it on the desk.

THE GENERAL

I have a check for \$1300.00 that I'd like to use as a down payment.

A beat.

ORTHODONTISIT

I may have an opening some time next week.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

The titles of two films, "US WALKING," and "THRILLBEAST," are mounted on the marquee.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Big Mac and Tracy sit in the back row of the darkened theater. The movie has not yet begun.

Big Mac reaches down and pulls two items of smuggled candy out of his sock.

BIG MAC

What do you want: Gummi Worms or Goobers?

TRACY

I can't eat that stuff. I'm diabetic.

BIG MAC

You are?

Tracy lets Big Mac suffer a moment in his shock and embarrassment, then:

TRACY

Syke. Give me those Goobers.

She snatches the box away from him.

Big Mac watches dreamily as she pops a few into her mouth.

TRACY (CONT'D)
 (chewing)
 I think I'm gonna' need a soda.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY - DAY

On his way to the concession stand, Big Mac is spotted by Teddy, his co-worker.

TEDDY
 What the fuck're you doin' here?

He butters a large tub of popcorn at the self-dispenser.

BIG MAC
 Hey, Teddy.

TEDDY
 Ain't there a happy hour you should
 be at?

BIG MAC
 Not today.

TEDDY
 You by yourself?

BIG MAC
 Nah. I'm here with my girlfriend.

Teddy stops buttering.

TEDDY
 Your what?

BIG MAC
 Yeah.

TEDDY
 What the fuck is wrong with you?
 Didn't you just get divorced? What
 are you doin' with a girlfriend?

BIG MAC
 (shrugs)
 She's actually pretty cool.

TEDDY
They're all cool at first, until
you put a ring on their finger.

 BIG MAC
I'm not marrying her.

 TEDDY
You don't think, huh? Then why the
fuck are you at the movies with
her?

A beat.

 BIG MAC
I'll see you at work, Teddy.

 TEDDY
Yeah, I'll see ya'.

Big Mac walks over to the concession stand. The roundish girl
behind the counter reads a dog-eared paperback.

 BIG MAC
Can I have a small Diet Sprite?

In the b.g., Teddy pumps and curses the self-dispenser.

 TEDDY
 (to the girl)
This thing's kicked.

He wheels away, butter drooling from the base of his tub.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Henry, Tom, and the General lay on their stomachs in the hot
sand. Beside them, a boogie board supports a gallery of
sculpted sand meatballs.

 THE GENERAL
What would you rather eat: A crusty
booger from the nose of a ninety-
year-old guy with AIDS, or a bucket
of totally long-ass earthworms?

 TOM
That's easy. The booger.

 THE GENERAL
Ewwwww. You're gonna' get AIDS.

TOM
You can't get AIDS from a booger.
The stomach acid would kill it.

HENRY
This game sucks without Big Mac.

THE GENERAL
(snapping)
Don't say that name.

HENRY
He was the king of "What Would You
Rather Eat?".

TOM
What was that one he came up with?

THE GENERAL
Who cares?

HENRY
The blood-soaked turd in the piss
with the pubes, or the used tampon
sandwich.

Tom shakes his head.

TOM
I still can't decide.

HENRY
What do you think he's doing right
now?

TOM
Slidin' into third.

HENRY
Head first?

TOM
You know it.

THE GENERAL
This is just great. We have a major
crisis on our hands and you guys
are talking about baseball.

He gets to his knees, sand sticking to his chest and stomach.

THE GENERAL

Three times in a row Big Mac
has stiffed us for that...
"pediatrician." Well, I'm not
gonna' stand for it any longer,
and neither should you.

He stands.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)

We end it... tonight!

And with that he kicks the boogie board. Sand meatballs
catapult into the air, some of which land on Tom and Henry.

The General runs down the beach and throws himself into the
water.

Tom and Henry remain prostrate. A look of sweet release
washes over their faces.

TOM

You peein'?

HENRY

Yeah.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Liz washes dinner dishes, staring at Henry Jr. through the
window above the sink. He sits in the sandbox outside,
disengaged, listless.

O.S., the baby starts crying. Liz leaves the sink to tend to
him.

EXT. SANDBOX - DAY

The shadow of a looming figure passes over Henry Jr. It
belongs to Michael Crook.

Henry Jr. turns to look up at him. The tough smiles through
the smoke of his cigarette.

MICHAEL

Lookin' for a friend, little dude?

INT. BIG MAC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Big Mac enters his dark apartment and switches on the light.

THE GENERAL (O.S.)
Good evening, Big Mac.

Big Mac nearly leaps out of his boots. Standing in his living room are Tom, Henry, and the General, still in their beach wear.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
Long time no play.

BIG MAC
How did you guys get in here?

THE GENERAL
Don't worry about it.

Looking over the General's shoulder, Big Mac sees a screen missing from one of his windows.

BIG MAC
(jittery)
How was the beach?

THE GENERAL
Sit down.

The foreman does as he's told.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
The way I see it, you have two choices: either you break up with Tracy, or you break up with us. What's it gonna' be?

Addressing Tom and Henry:

BIG MAC
Does the General speak for everyone?

TOM
You know the rules.

HENRY
No girls allowed.

BIG MAC

But what about you guys? You have wives.

HENRY

(regrettably)

There's nothing we can do about that.

ANGLE ON Big Mac as the SOUND of Teddy's voice echoes in his head.

TEDDY (V.O.)

What are you doin' with a girlfriend?... They're all cool until you put a ring on their finger... This thing's kicked...

Then, softly:

TRACY (V.O.)

I think I'm gonna' need a soda.

Big Mac knows what he must do, but that doesn't mean he wants to do it.

BIG MAC

Fine. I'll break up with her tomorrow.

THE GENERAL

No. Do it now.

Sighing, Big Mac gets up and calls Tracy on his landline.

BIG MAC

Tracy, it's Big Mac. I don't like you anymore. I'm sorry. Goodbye.

As soon as he hangs up, the phone rings.

To further prove his allegiance, Big Mac rips the phone out of the wall and smashes it on the floor. This display of recklessness is cheered by all.

Tom and Henry exit, but the General tarries behind.

THE GENERAL

I'm proud of you, Big Mac. You did good.

Big Mac detects something odd about the General's face.

BIG MAC
(squinting)
Are you wearing make-up?

Indeed, he is: a layer of foundation to hide his manly stubble.

INT. BIG MAC'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Big Mac sits on the sofa, channel-surfing.

He lands on a pair of lip-locked lovers in a black and white movie. A pang of longing registers on his face.

He quickly flips to a "GIRLS GONE WILD" commercial, thus adding a sexual note to his longing.

Frustrated, he turns to a commercial for Pyro Palace, the 24-hour fireworks emporium. The images on-screen tap into a far more influential pleasure center. Who needs love when you've got Lady Manhattan?

INT. PYRO PALACE - NIGHT

Wearing a yuletide grin, Big Mac pushes two carts full of legal explosives down the aisle.

INT. FORT - NIGHT

Alone in his new home, the General dances to "MACHO MACHO DUCK." It's a flamboyant routine, all arms and legs. At the climax, the General loses his balance and goes careening through the fort's back wall.

In the darkness, the General lies on his back, a look of terrible joy contorting his face.

EXT. HENRY JR.'S SANDBOX - DAY

During a routine sweep, Liz finds a cigarette butt sticking out of the sand. Needless to say, she's intrigued.

INT. MERCER BANK CORPORATE CAMPUS - MEETING ROOM - DAY

The monthly meeting is about to commence. Board members and executives betray not an ounce of joy.

MR. VANMORDEGAN, a distinguished-looking gentleman in a three-piece suit, eyeballs the V.P.

The V.P. looks at his watch, then at the empty seat next to Vanmordegan. He picks up the inter-office phone.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom is drawing a picture in Microsoft Paint: dogs flying planes over the beach, dropping bones to other dogs running in the sand.

His inter-office phone rings. He pushes the Speaker button.

TOM
This is Tom.

V.P. (V.O.)
It's five after. What's the hold-up?

TOM
(pleasantly puzzled)
I'll be right in.

MEETING ROOM

Tom sits next to Mr. Vanmordegan, listening smilingly to the V.P.'s introductory comments.

V.P.
I'd like to thank Mr. Vanmordegan for flying in from Toledo to be with us today.

Mr. Vanmordegan smiles politely.

V.P. (CONT'D)
He's very interested in hearing about the upcoming acquisition, as are all of you. Here with a status report is our very own Tom Willoughby. Tom, what's the good word?

The V.P. sits and crosses his legs. Mr. Vanmordegan shifts in his chair so he is facing young Willoughby. The executives lean in with hungry faces.

Tom does not move. Nor does he say a word. He is paralyzed, much like he was on the Dorset Ave. bridge.

It is obvious he has forgotten all about the status report, as he had forgotten all about the meeting.

He clears his throat.

TOM

Um.

Beneath the table, his left leg (the one closest to Vanmordegan) begins shaking.

EXT. LUMBERYARD - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

The General walks into the yard, passing between two great towers of wood before he is nearly run over by a whizzing fork lift.

INT. RUSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Russ sits behind a metal desk, slurping hot coffee from a Thermos.

RUSS

And what would *you* want with a sheet of plywood?

The General fawns by the door.

THE GENERAL

It's not for me. It's for a friend.

RUSS

Which one of your *friends* is it for? Henry, the paper boy. Or Tom, the yuppie fag.

The General doesn't like this at all.

RUSS (CONT'D)

No, don't tell me. It's the one named after a hamburger.

THE GENERAL

His name's Big Mac.

RUSS

Whatever. He's a bum.

Russ stands, revealing his de riguer skivvies. He walks over to a clothes tree to fetch his pants.

THE GENERAL
(meekly)
Can I have the wood?

RUSS
Can I have the wood, what?

THE GENERAL
Can I have the wood, please?

RUSS
Can I have the wood, please, what?

THE GENERAL
Can I have the wood, please... Dad?

The General's voice trembles at the utterance of "Dad," giving Russ a mordant satisfaction.

RUSS
That's my boy. Now, let's get you squared away.

EXT. LUMBERYARD - DAY

Russ and his crew HECKLE the General as he staggers past, the sheet of plywood teetering on his back.

As he nears the exit, he buckles under the weight of the wood, almost dropping to his knees. This sets the men to whooping and cheering.

Tears form in the General's eyes, as much from the strain as from the ridicule.

EXT. FORT - DAY

Crying, the General hammers nails into the new wall.

INT. FORT - DAY

The General sits at the table eating a banana. There is a bushel of bananas on the table, along with a piece of construction paper and a colored pencil.

When he finishes the banana, the General drops the peel into a back pack at his feet.

CLOSE ON the construction paper's heading: THE GENERAL'S REVENGE.

The colored pencil comes into frame. Pressing down hard, the General draws a crude outline of his mother's house.

INT. TOM'S V.P.'S OFFICE - DAY

For the first time ever, the V.P. is upbraiding his star employee.

V.P.
You picked the wrong day to space out. You knew Vanmordegan was coming.

TOM
I know. I'm sorry.

Tom's left leg is shaking. The V.P. takes notice.

V.P.
Are you all right? Do you need some time to de-frag?

TOM
No. I'm fine.

V.P.
Good, because this acquisition is in two weeks. Whatever you got going on, work it out. In the meantime, I want that status report on my desk by tomorrow morning.

TOM
No problem.

V.P.
(pointing at Tom)
That's my ace in the hole.

Tom smiles and nods.

V.P. (CONT'D)
Now get outta' here before I fire you.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom works feverishly to get the report done. Feeling neglected, Rufus gives out with a whimper.

TOM
Shut up!

The dog retreats further into his cage as Tom continues working.

INT. TOM AND KATE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom lies on the bed in his suit. His socks are off; both legs are shaking.

TOM
I almost got fired today.

Kate walks out of the bathroom wearing a pink slip.

KATE
I guess my pink slip is in bad taste then, huh?

TOM
You didn't know.

She curls up next to him on the bed.

KATE
What can I do?

TOM
Tell me to stop acting like a child and start taking care of my adult responsibilities.

Kate kisses Tom's ear.

KATE
The only adult responsibilities you need to be taking care of are right here in this bedroom.

TOM
Can we please talk about this.

KATE
(pulling away)
Talk about what?
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)

How in three years you've never once been late for work? How you've made more money for that company than any other employee in their history? How you went from Customer Service Rep to Assistant Vice President within six months of being hired?

(pause)

You have nothing to worry about.

TOM

Yeah, but...

Kate puts a finger to Tom's lips.

KATE

You have *nothing* to worry about.

TOM

Yes, Miss Kate.

KATE

Now, where was I?

She resumes kissing his ear, then gently squeezes his crotch, bestowing upon his crazy legs a temporary sanity.

INT. FORT - DAY

The timer goes off on the Easy Bake Oven. Henry opens the door and takes out a pan of brownies.

The General sits at the table, drinking a glass of milk.

HENRY

Give these a minute to cool. I don't want you burning your mouth.

He sets the brownies on the table, then crosses over to empty the wastebasket.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Who's been making all this trash?

The General fidgets. His eviction is not yet public knowledge. To bail him out, Big Mac kicks open the door. He is holding a wooden crate full of fireworks.

BIG MAC

Who wants to blow shit up?

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Big Mac performs a last-minute check on his fireworks. Henry and the General watch from a safe distance.

Shortly, Tom appears in the clearing.

HENRY

Just in time.

THE GENERAL

Where's Rufus?

TOM

In the car. I didn't want the sound to freak him out.

Big Mac produces a pack of matches from his pocket.

BIG MAC

He's still gonna' hear it. Dogs from here to London are gonna' hear it.

THE GENERAL

They're gonna' see it, too.

BIG MAC

If they got eyes.

Big Mac strikes a match and touches the flame to the first wick. It sizzles for a moment and then goes out.

HENRY

Boo.

THE GENERAL

Dud.

Waving off the peanut gallery, Big Mac strikes another match and holds it to the wick. Again it takes, and again it fizzles out.

BIG MAC

What the fuck?

He yanks the firework out of the ground. That, of course, is when it explodes.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM FAST TRACK - DAY

Big Mac sits solemnly on the edge of the bed with a volleyball-sized bandage on his hand. Tom, Henry, and the General are at his bedside.

The DOCTOR is writing Big Mac a prescription slip.

DOCTOR
This is for Percocet.
(hands him the slip)
Don't mix with alcohol.

Big Mac nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
As for the dressing, change it once
a day.

Big Mac nods again.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I want you on bed rest for the next
couple of days. No work. No play.
Got it?

HENRY
Wait a minute. You're discharging
him?

DOCTOR
Yes.

HENRY
But he just lost a finger.

DOCTOR
And we wrapped it up. What else do
you want us to do?

THE GENERAL
Can't you give him a bionic finger?

A beat.

DOCTOR
Not at this hospital.

He swiftly exits.

HENRY
Unbelievable.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

The low-key foursome shambles along, Big Mac and Henry in front, Tom and the General in back.

THE GENERAL
(sotto voce)
You're still coming tonight, right?

TOM
What time?

THE GENERAL
Midnight sharp.

TOM
And what are we doing again?

THE GENERAL
That's for me to know, and you to find out.

As the group turns the corner, Big Mac sees a framed PHOTOGRAPH of Tracy hanging on the wall. She is wearing a white doctor's coat, and is joined by a troop of convalescent kids.

Mesmerized by yearning, Big Mac continues looking over his shoulder long after he's passed the photo.

EXT. HENRY'S BACK PORCH - DAY

Liz sits in a deck chair, reading a romance novel.

Henry, having just got home, walks up the steps.

HENRY
Where's the baby?

LIZ
Sleeping.

She puts her book down.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Did you happen to see your son?

She gestures with her chin at something across the street.

Henry turns and sees Henry Jr. and Michael Crook in the latter's front yard. Michael is bench-pressing 250 pounds; Henry Jr. spots him.

LIZ (CONT'D)
He's been over there all afternoon.

HENRY
How old is that kid?

LIZ
Twelve. He has a mustache.

Michael Crook gets up off the weight bench and struts over to his front steps. He picks up a firecracker, lights it, and throws it in the grass: BOOM!

HENRY
(shrugging)
He seems all right.

EXT. TRACY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Big Mac knocks on Tracy's door. She answers in her robe. They look at one another in silence. Then she notices the bandage.

TRACY
(half-interested)
What did you do?

BIG MAC
I blew my finger off with an M-80.

TRACY
Serves you right.

She abandons him on the threshold -- but leaves the door open. Big Mac follows her into

THE FOYER

as she is making her way upstairs.

BIG MAC
I'm sorry.

From the second floor hallway:

TRACY
Not now.

Desultory, Big Mac wanders into the living room and sits down on the love seat. For the first time since being released from the ER, he looks at his dressing: blood spots the outermost layer.

EXT. THE GENERAL'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom and the General hide in the bushes, waiting for Russ to come home from the bar.

The General finishes a banana and stuffs the peel in his back pack. He takes another from a paper sack and offers it to Tom.

TOM
I don't eat bananas.

THE GENERAL
More for me then.

He starts peeling the banana.

TOM
What time is it?

The General checks his glow-in-the-dark watch.

THE GENERAL
Ten after two. Any minute now.

TOM
I don't know if I mentioned this,
but I have work tomorrow.

Russ's Cadillac swings onto the street.

THE GENERAL
Here he comes.

From his back pack, the General scoops handfuls of banana peels and spreads them over the walkway.

TOM
(incredulous)
That's your prank? Banana peels.

THE GENERAL
Just you wait. He's gonna' fall
flat on his ass.

Russ slams his door and lumbers up the walkway. He steps on every peel without missing a beat.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
 (disbelief)
 It didn't work.

Incensed, the General springs from the bushes and leaps onto Russ's back. As if shooing a fly, Russ flips him over onto the grass.

RUSS
 I'm gonna' do what your mother
 never could. I'm gonna' beat you
 like a dog.

He takes off his belt and his pants fall down. In his signature underwear, he FLOGS the General mercilessly.

Activated by the word "dog," Tom creeps up behind Russ, grabs the waist of his briefs, and yanks skyward. The wedgie rides so far up Russ's crack, it RUPTURES his hemorrhoid, steeping the world in blood.

Tom helps the General to his feet and the pair make tracks.

The wincing Goliath drops his belt, slips on a banana peel, and, just like the General predicted, falls flat on his ass.

INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tom wakes up. The clock on the nightstand reads 9:48.

TOM
 Shit! The dog!

He throws off the covers and looks down.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Aaawwwgh.

Russ's hemorrhoid blood is still caked on his pants.

EXT. MERCER BANK CORPORATE CAMPUS - DAY

Tom runs across the parking lot toward the main entrance.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Breathless, Tom fixes his tie. The elevator doors open and he steps off. He drops his briefcase when he sees

THE MAIN OFFICE

in shambles. Computer monitors lie face-up on the ground, their screens smashed; disjointed cubicle walls lean against one another; stuffing from chairs mingles with flakes of mouse pad. There are even light bulbs missing from the ceiling.

Tom's co-workers sift through the rubble, searching for pictures of loved ones.

Though he doesn't want to, Tom glances over at the window to his office. There is a Rufus-shaped hole in the glass.

At that moment, the dog scampers up and sits at Tom's feet.

A sullen, bewildered crowd encircles the mongrel and its master. From the knot of faces emerges the V.P., bearing his ink blotter, a DOG TURD coiled neatly in the center.

INT. ORTHODONTIST'S O.R. - DAY

CLOSE ON the General's gaping mouth as the orthodontist applies the top strand of flourescent green braces.

INT. TRACY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Big Mac sits on the love seat, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Tracy walks into the foyer wearing her white doctor's coat. She inspects Big Mac.

TRACY

You better change that dressing.

Not waiting for him to respond, Tracy exits, shutting the door with a careless finality.

The patient reaches for a Percocet.

EXT. BAR - DAY

Former Assistant V.P. Tom Willoughby ties Rufus to a telephone pole. Stapled to the wood is a LOST DOG flier with the puppy's picture on it. In his eagerness to start swilling, Tom overlooks this.

INT. HENRY JR.'S BEDROOM - DAY

Liz replenishes Henry Jr.'s sock drawer. Something catches her eye at the back of the drawer. She reaches in and takes out an issue of PENTHOUSE. Stickers and drawings adorn the cover.

LIZ
(sighing)
Jesus Christ.

EXT. MICHAEL CROOK'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Michael does curls with a fifty-pound dumbbell. He watches Liz as she crosses the street. She stops at the edge of his lawn.

LIZ
I want you to stay away from my son.

MICHAEL
Sure thing, baby.

After a pause:

LIZ
Shouldn't you be at school?

MICHAEL
I dropped out.

LIZ
Where are your parents?

MICHAEL
Ain't got no parents.

LIZ
Who lives here with you?

MICHAEL
You sure do ask a lot of questions.

He sets down the free weight.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Why don't you come inside and let
me ask you some.

LIZ
You're sick.

MICHAEL
You love it.

He gives her some Gene Simmons tongue.

LIZ
I mean it: Stay away from my son.

She starts back across the street.

MICHAEL
Hey, tell him to give me that
Penthouse back when he's done with
it. There's some good letters in
there.

Liz flips him the bird.

EXT. BAR - DAY

A boy on a bike stops to play with Rufus. He sees the missing
dog flier and immediately makes the connection. He takes out
his cell phone and calls the contact number.

INT. BAR - DAY

Tom drinks with purpose, staring angrily at something a child
can't see.

The door opens and three businessmen saunter in on their
lunch break.

Tom orders another.

INT. TRACY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tracy arrives home from work. Big Mac is still sitting on the
love seat, in much the same position as he was before.

TRACY
What did you do all day?

BIG MAC
Percocet.

She looks at his hand: the bandage is brown.

TRACY
You can't leave it like that.

BIG MAC
I know. It's starting to smell.

TRACY
When did they say you could go back
to work?

BIG MAC
They didn't.
(pause)
I'm sorry for breaking up with you
the way I did. It's not something I
wanted to do.

TRACY
What? Break up with me, or break up
with me over the phone like a
twelve-year-old?

BIG MAC
Both. I was feeling a lot of
pressure... from my friends.

TRACY
You broke up with me because your
friends told you to?

BIG MAC
We made a pact.

TRACY
A pact?

BIG MAC
No girls allowed.

TRACY
You are a twelve-year-old.

BIG MAC
Not anymore. I'm not going back
there.

TRACY
Not going back where?

By this point Tracy is flummoxed.

BIG MAC
Maybe it's best if I showed you.

EXT. BAR - DAY

Tom exits the bar, drunk as a Russian.

Before him on the sidewalk a reunion is taking place. Rufus's rightful owners toss him up in the air and lavish him with kisses.

A LITTLE GIRL embraces the puppy, explaining to the joyful spectators:

LITTLE GIRL
A wild man stole him from me.

Tom makes eye contact with Rufus one last time -- then staggers out of his life forever.

INT. THE GENERAL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

Tom bangs on the General's apartment door.

TOM
General. General! Open up.

A LITTLE BOY with a bowl cut answers the door. Tom does a double take.

TOM (CONT'D)
Where's the General?

The boy's MOTHER appears behind him.

MOTHER
Can I help you?

TOM
Do you know where the General is?

MOTHER
Excuse me?

TOM
The General. He lives here.

MOTHER
I don't know anyone by that name.

Now Tom gets it.

TOM
Sorry to bother you.

INT. HENRY JR.'S BEDROOM - DAY

Henry Jr. stands by the window, watching his father get out of the family mini-van.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Liz struggles to feed the baby roast beef puree. Henry enters and she greets him with the *Penthouse*.

LIZ
I found this in your son's dresser.

HENRY
It's not mine. It's Big Mac's.

LIZ
I know it's not yours. He got it from Michael Crook.

Henry opens the refrigerator and takes out the jar of pickles. Liz snatches it away and puts it back on the shelf.

HENRY
Look, Liz, it was bound to happen.

LIZ
He's *eight*-years-old.

HENRY
They start young these days.

LIZ
Bullshit! If you spent more time with him, he never would've gotten his hands on this in the first place.

INT. FORT - DAY

Big Mac gives Tracy a tour.

TRACY
It's cute. Weird, but cute.

Her eyes fall on an old Marvel comic book, circa 1986. In block letters at the top of the cover page is the apocalyptic heading, "THE FALL OF THE MUTANTS."

Big Mac's eyes wander to the table, whereupon an empty Hug and a half-eaten Pop-Tart exhibit themselves guiltily.

HENRY'S KITCHEN

The two sides have dug trenches.

LIZ
I'm not stupid, Henry. I know
what's going on.

HENRY
Oh, you do, do ya'?

LIZ
Yeah, I do. You haven't been
working overtime. You've been
hanging out with your friends...
playing.

Henry blinks.

LIZ (CONT'D)
But I didn't say anything, because
I thought it might be good for you.
Pick up your spirits.

HENRY
It has.

LIZ
Well, I'm glad you enjoyed
yourself. But enough's enough. It's
time to come home. I can't hold
down the fort anymore.

THE FORT

Fresh from his trip to the orthodontist's, the General barges in on Big Mac and Tracy.

THE GENERAL
What's she doing here?

BIG MAC
I was just showing her around.

THE GENERAL

I thought you broke up with her.

Big Mac squints at the General.

BIG MAC

Are those braces?

HENRY'S KITCHEN

The battle rages on.

HENRY

When I'm with them, I know who I am. I feel like I belong. When I'm with you and the kids, I'm lost. I don't know how to act.

LIZ

It's not that hard, Henry, really.

HENRY

Yes it is.

LIZ

Well, if it is, you made it that way; not us.

This salvo goes over Henry's head.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Was it me who took those Percocets? Was it the baby who crashed your car? Was it Henry who lied about the prayer chain?

Henry blinks again.

LIZ (CONT'D)

No. You did those things, Henry. You.

She begins trying to feed the baby again.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Somewhere in that big, stupid body is a man, a husband, a father. You better find him soon, because God knows I'm sick of waiting.

The phone rings and Henry picks it up.

HENRY

Hello.

INT. TOM'S AUDI (MOVING) - DAY

The car swerves as Tom slurs into his cell phone.

TOM

I just wanted to let you know that
I'm going to the fort to kill the
General. If you wanna' stop me,
leave now.

He ends the call, nearly side-swiping a parked car.

HENRY'S KITCHEN

Henry hangs up the phone and looks at Liz.

LIZ

Don't.

HENRY

I have to.

He exits, his face betraying the slightest admission of guilt.

After a moment of calm, Liz HURLS the bowl of roast beef puree at the door, eliciting a squeal from the baby.

THE FORT

The General sits on the floor, tinkering with his LEGO set.

TRACY

That's a really cool space castle.
Did you build it?

THE GENERAL

Did you hear something, Big Mac? It
sounded like a girl, but that's
impossible, because girls aren't
allowed in here.

TRACY

Maybe I should go.

THE GENERAL

Yes. Go.

Tracy angles out. Big Mac grabs her hand.

BIG MAC
Don't leave.

THE GENERAL
Big Mac and Tracy sittin' in a
tree, F-A-L-L-I-N-G.

With his fingers, he imitates two people plummeting --
noisily, violently -- to the ground.

TRACY
This is too much.

She exits.

BIG MAC
(to the General)
What the hell's wrong with you?

THE GENERAL
My teeth hurt a little bit, but
besides that I'm fine.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Tracy and Tom cross paths.

TOM
(huffing past her)
Big Mac loves you. Give him a
second chance.

Tracy pauses, head half-cocked, then continues on her way.

THE FORT

Tom throws open the door and points an accusatory finger at
the General.

TOM
You.

He kicks the space castle clear across the room. It breaks
into a hundred little pieces.

TOM (CONT'D)
You stole that dog, General. You
lied and told me it was a stray.

The General backs into a corner.

BIG MAC
(to the General)
You stole Rufus?

TOM
His name's not Rufus. It's Peepers.
And the General took him... from a
little girl.

Tom throttles the General, pinning him hard against the wall. Big Mac tries to wrestle Tom away, but Tom shakes him off. It takes the swooping heroics of Henry to quell the raging drunk.

HENRY
Calm down, Tom.

TOM
Calm down? I just lost my fucking
job.

BIG MAC
You did?

TOM
Yeah. And it's all because of him.

Again Tom throttles the General, but this time the General fights back. Henry and Big Mac try to separate the two, but merely add to the entanglement of limbs. Through their gritted teeth:

TOM (CONT'D)
You ruined my life.

THE GENERAL
I saved your life.

TOM
From what?

THE GENERAL
From you.

TOM
I was perfectly fine until you flew
us off to Neverland.

THE GENERAL
You were a coward and you know it.

TOM
Yeah, well at least I had the balls
to grow up and be a man.

The General breaks loose and scowls at Tom.

TOM (CONT'D)
What are you gonna' do... hit me?

THE GENERAL
No.

Instead, he kicks him in the balls. Tom drops to the floor,
nearly imploding from the pain.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
Now how's it feel to be a man.

The caved-in Tom emits a moan.

The General glares at Henry and Big Mac. His eyes are wild
and wary at the same time.

THE GENERAL (CONT'D)
Anybody else want some?

BIG MAC
General, take it easy.

He reaches for the General's arm.

THE GENERAL
Don't touch me!

The General turns and runs straight into the replacement
wall, knocking it down with the force of his escape. This
major structural collapse doesn't faze him in the least. He
hops on his bicycle and takes off.

Henry tends to Tom while Big Mac marvels at the wall's sudden
demise.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

With a dangerous exhilaration, The General races through the
woods on his bike.

INT. HENRY'S MINI-VAN (MOVING) - DAY

Henry scours the streets, looking for the General.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - NIGHT

As dusk becomes night, the General pulls up to the back steps of the school. A group of kids loiters on the steps, Michael Crook among them.

THE GENERAL
What's happenin', guys?

One of the kids laughs out loud.

MICHAEL
Nice bike. Mind if I take it for a spin?

THE GENERAL
Sure. Go ahead.

CUT TO:

THE TOP OF THE STEPS

The other kids restrain the General as Michael Crook ghost rides his bike down the steps.

The General squirms free of his captors, but they surround him like wolves. They tear at his shirt and knock him to the ground. They just don't make kids like they used to.

Fearing for his life, the General retreats.

INT. HENRY'S MINI-VAN (MOVING) - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Henry nears the back steps of the elementary school. He locates

CROOK AND HIS BAND OF MISFITS

smoking cigarettes and cursing loosely. Crook spots the slowing mini-van.

MICHAEL
(to his associates)
Aw, man. This guy's gonna' give me shit. I lent his kid a Penthouse. We might have to fight him.

HENRY (O.S.)
Hey, Michael. How ya' doin'?

MICHAEL
I'm all right.

HENRY
(behind the wheel)
You didn't happen to see a guy pass
by here on a children's bicycle,
did you?

MICHAEL
Yeah. He's up on the playground.

Henry leaves the car running, taking the steps two at a time.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Henry stands in the middle of the empty playground. A regretful silence descends upon him, only to be punctured by the SLAMMING of car doors.

Henry runs to the top of the steps and watches helplessly as Crook and Company PEAL out in his mini-van. Adding insult to injury, one of the joy-riders ejects the baby seat.

Looking around, Henry spies the General's bike lying in the grass. Its front rim is bent and the handlebars are loose, but it's rideable.

SIRENS can be heard in the distance. Henry mounts the bike and heads toward them.

EXT. CHUCK E. CHEESE'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Two cop cars and an ambulance are parked outside.

Henry barely makes it to the door; the General's bike is literally falling to pieces beneath him.

He ditches the bike and hurries inside.

INT. CHUCK E. CHEESE'S - NIGHT

The General, wearing nothing but a pair of Underoos, thrashes in the ball pit. His body is completely shorn of pubic hair.

Two humorless cops monitor the situation, their tasers at the ready.

In the f.g., EMTs tend to a boy with a broken arm, apparently a casualty of the General's warpath.

Henry runs toward the ball pit, zig-zagging through the audience of parents and kids.

One of the cops raises his taser.

HENRY
(crying out)
Don't shoot him. He's just a kid.

Ignoring this plea, the cop shoots the General in his belly button, shocking the life right out of him.

INT. POLICE STATION - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

After spending the night on a wooden bench, Henry wakes suddenly. A PENCIL-PUSHER walks by on his way to the bathroom.

HENRY
Where's the General?

P.P.
Who?

HENRY
My friend. The guy from Chuck E. Cheese.

P.P.
Oh, yeah. The wackadoo. They're taking him to Fitzgerald Mercy. Psychiatric evaluation.

He points down the dark hallway.

Three cops escort the General out a side door into the parking lot. Swaddled in a blanket, his eyes all but shut to the newly risen sun, he looks more like a baby than a boy.

INT. FORT - DAY

Tom wakes from a dreamless sleep. He has passed the night cocooned in the General's sleeping bag.

He rises and looks at himself in the mirror: he is a mess. He begins straightening his tie, then stops. There's no use dressing up a dead man.

He sits at the table and picks up a pile of the General's drawings. The first is a picture of the banana peel scheme. Tom shakes his head.

The second portrays the four friends playing King of the Hill. Tom smiles. The third is a drawing of Rufus. This one brings a tear.

Tom looks again at the second picture. An idea takes shape in his clouded brain.

ACTION FIGURE (O.S.)

Do it.

Startled, Tom glances down at the floor. The action figure who first counseled the General stands next to a green Army jeep.

ACTION FIGURE (CONT'D)

Do it!

He gets into the jeep and drives off, leaving an enchanted Tom in his wake.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

As Henry is getting a drink of water, an OFFICER hauls in Michael Crook.

MICHAEL

Come on, man. I didn't do anything.

OFFICER

You broad-sided my patrol car with a stolen mini-van.

MICHAEL

I didn't steal it.
(regarding Henry)
This guy lent it to me.

The officer indulges the collar.

OFFICER

(to Henry)
Is that true?

Henry's demeanor is marked by an agitated serenity.

MICHAEL

Of course it is. I was comin' here to pick him up.

Henry takes a moment to study Michael Crook, perhaps trying to glimpse Henry Jr. in the softer recesses of his face. Finally:

HENRY

I don't know this kid.

Satisfied, the officer drags Michael through a swinging door.

MICHAEL

(throwing a tantrum)

What do you mean, you don't know me? We're neighbors... I'm your son's best friend...

Henry, acting on pure paternal instinct, sets out for home on foot.

INT. BIG MAC'S APARTMENT - DAY

Big Mac walks into the kitchen. His putrid bandage has begun to unravel.

Tracy stands in the living room wearing her white doctor's coat. She carries a small black bag with a stethoscope sticking out of it.

BIG MAC

How'd you get in here?

TRACY

Don't worry about it.

She sets her bag on the kitchen counter and begins undressing Big Mac's hand.

He watches her dreamily.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Henry strides past Brothers Pizza. Vince, hosing down the sidewalk, gives him the eye.
- B) Picking up speed, Henry passes in front of the barber shop. The barber watches him through the plate-glass window. He, too, gives Henry the eye.
- C) Henry powers by Russ's lumberyard. It is infused with a graveyard quiet.

EXT. HENRY'S STREET - DAY

Henry motors down the middle of the street, eyes focused squarely on his house.

Behind him, the men of his block scan their yards and doorsteps, looking in vain for the paper.

INT. HENRY'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Henry goes directly to the large, unwrapped box in the corner of the room. He opens it noisily and dumps the contents onto the carpet: hundreds of parts for what appears to be a bicycle.

He rummages for the instruction manual, but cannot find it. Over swishing plastic and tumbling bolts, Henry HEARS pajama feet scuffing the kitchen tile. He spins around and sees Henry Jr. standing in the archway.

With palms upturned in a supplicant gesture:

HENRY
Can you help me?

Henry Jr. kneels next to his father.

PAN UP TO REVEAL a few of the neighborhood men looking through the window at the two Henrys.

EXT. WINDOW

The mood is one of reverent curiosity.

NEIGHBORHOOD MAN #1
What's going on?

NEIGHBORHOOD MAN #2
They're bonding.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - WIDE SHOT - DAY

More neighborhood men -- some in suits, some in robes -- peel papers from the bundle in Henry's driveway. They stand in their slippers and loafers, reading and talking.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: SIX MONTHS LATER

A REAL ESTATE AGENT walks Big Mac through the upstairs rooms.

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Up here we have the master bedroom.
The carpeting is all new, as you
can see.

Big Mac is not impressed.

TRACY (O.S.)

Honey, look in the back yard.

Big Mac peers out the window.

A fort -- not unlike his erstwhile stronghold -- sits neatly under a tree. Riding a flurry of wind, the General's ghost knocks one of its walls down.

Tracy enters the bedroom smiling.

BIG MAC

(to the agent)
We'll take it.

EXT. BIKE TRAILS - DAY

Henry and his family ride through the woods. Henry Jr. leads on a shiny red bike. Henry Sr. follows on a beach cruiser.

Breaking rank, Liz and the baby approach a rather terrific jump on their 3-speed Raleigh.

Father and son watch proudly as Mom flips backward over the channel. She is airborne for a very long time.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Tom and Kate march across the field. He wears a dark blue windbreaker and gray dress pants. She wears a tight-fitting sweater, black skirt, and pumps. They more resemble boss and secretary than husband and wife.

KATE
(reading from a clip
board)
The quarterly numbers are in: we're
up twenty percent.

TOM
Good, good.

KATE
We have three new hires starting
tomorrow.

TOM
Good, good.

KATE
A writer from Forbes called. He
wants to do a profile of you for
the May issue.

TOM
Good, good.

Tom unzips his jacket and hands it to Kate.

INSERT - THE CREST OF TOM'S POLO

which reads, in white stitching, BOYS CLUB INC., KING OF THE
HILL, TOM W.

BACK TO SCENE

At the edge of the field the grass cuts away sharply; Tom and
Kate stand at the summit of a large hill.

KATE
And one more thing...

Tom turns to look at Kate.

KATE (CONT'D)
... I'm pregnant.

A beat.

TOM
(happily serious)
Awesome.

Tom takes a step forward.

HIS POV

of twenty grown men charging up the hill, all wearing T-shirts with "BOYS CLUB" emblazoned on the front.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Two bespectacled doctors stand outside the door to a padded room. They gaze through the window built into the door.

INT. PADDED ROOM

The General sits in the center of the room, propped up Indian-style like a catatonic kindergartner.

BESPECTACLED DOCTOR #1 (V.O.)
What's this one's story?

BESPECTACLED DOCTOR #2 (V.O.)
This is the General. He suffers
from an extreme case of Peter Pan
Syndrome -- among other things.

The General stares off into space, his eyes fixed on something the doctors cannot see.

BESPECTACLED DOCTOR #2 (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He's on a number of psycho-tropics,
and attends therapy sessions twice
a day, but he doesn't seem to be
making any progress. In fact, we
believe he's getting worse.

HALLWAY

The doctors walk off down the hall.

PADDED ROOM

The General's face is blank, but then a smile skips across his lips, revealing a hint of braces.

Suddenly, an EFFULGENCE of LIGHT erupts from his eyes, rendering the General's mind and the padded room synonymous.

Onto the room's gray canvas he projects his fancy, a Monkey's Island of RAINBOWS and FIREWORKS and cross-seasonal FOLIAGE.

Creatures and characters both mythic and modern stoke this vibrant landscape -- the imaginary love-child of Stan Lee and L. Frank Baum.

The General's corporal body remains moored to the spot, but his astral body roams free. The puckish boy in tatters trails pixie dust behind him, running to join the childhood versions of his three best friends: Tom, Henry, and Big Mac.

Together again, they rush headlong into this fantasy of the past.

FADE OUT.

THE END