

SEEING THROUGH BLINDNESS

Adapted by

Matt Harris

Based on,

Seeing Through Blindness

Written by

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SEEING THROUGH BLINDNESS

FADE IN:

1970

MATT (O.S.)
Seein' ain't always believin'.

EXT. ST. CLEMENT'S SCHOOL - MORNING

A sign posted on a threadbare, chain-linked fence leading into the school's playground reads: "Property of St. Clement's Catholic School No Trespassing."

EXT. PLAYGROUND - MORNING

MATT HARRIS, a wiry, hyperactive fourth grader, with blonde hair, shoots hoops in a fenced in basketball court surrounded by classmates playing kickball. JOSEPH SEAR, a stocky, dark haired boy, starts to harass Matt about being colorblind.

JOSEPH
Hey, blind as a bat, Matt, what
color's this?

Joseph points to a blue button on his Baltimore Colt's jacket. Matt ignores him and keeps shooting the basketball.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Okay, Matt, I know you ain't deaf,
now. Are you?

Joseph steals the ball away from Matt, while some of his classmates swarm around him like wasps. Joseph works his audience, yanking a pink scarf from a girl's neck, then twirls it in Matt's face.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
What color's this?

Joseph keeps flicking the scarf at Matt like a whip, while inciting his audience to chant.

AUDIENCE
What color's that blind as a bat
Matt? What color's that blind as a
bat Matt? What color's that blind
as a bat Matt?

Matt's face reddens from embarrassment, then tightens with rage.

MATT
I ain't colorblind! Shut up!

Matt steps toward Joseph and punches him square in the nose. Then he points to the blood dripping from Joseph's nose.

MATT (CONT'D)
What color's that?

INT. SCHOOL NURSE'S STATION - MOMENTS LATER

A model of a human skeleton stands in the center of the room. Here, the SCHOOL NURSE attends to Joseph's nose, while SISTER AGNES MARIE questions him about his fight with Matt.

SISTER AGNES MARIE
So, you're telling me that Matt hit
you for no reason, Mr. Sear?

JOSEPH
We were playing basketball, and
when I stole the ball from him, he
hit me. And he said he wasn't
colorblind.

The school nurse squeezes Joseph's nose with a thin piece of gauze.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Ouch! That hurts!

SCHOOL NURSE
It's okay, honey, just keep your
head down, until it stops bleeding.

Sister Agnes Marie adjusts the headpiece to her habit and gives the nurse a disdainful look.

SISTER AGNES MARIE
Mr. Harris is on file as being
colorblind. I make special
accommodations for him in my lesson
plans where color is an issue.

INT. HALLWAY, ST. CLEMENT'S SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Hundreds of kids horse around and hurry to their next class.

INT. SISTER AGNES MARIE'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

While some of Matt's classmates chat, others toss spitballs. Matt fidgets at his desk, chewing on the cap of his pen. As he stares at the bulletin board filled with multicolored hot-air balloons, made from construction paper, the bell sounds.

SISTER AGNES MARIE
Good morning class. All rise for
prayer, now.

CLASS
"Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord
is with thee. Blessed are thou
among women and blessed is the
fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary
Mother of God, pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen!"

SISTER AGNES MARIE
Everyone may be seated now. Except
for you, Mr. Harris.

Sister Agnes Marie wipes sweat from her face with a handkerchief. Glaring at Matt through thick glasses, she snatches her wooden pointer and waddles over to the bulletin board, then begins to tap it on one of the hot-air balloons.

SISTER AGNES MARIE (CONT'D)
What color is this one, Mr. Harris?
And don't lie to me!

The class starts laughing, as Matt's face tightens and his ears turn red with anger.

CLASSMATE
(shouting)
What?! Are we back in preschool,
learning our colors again?

SISTER AGNES MARIE
Put a lid on that laughter, class!
Nothing funny going on here.

The class quiets down, and we hear the steady tapping of Sister Agnes Marie's pointer, while Matt stands by his desk, chewing on his lip and wringing his hands.

SISTER AGNES MARIE (CONT'D)
Well, Mr. Harris, we haven't got
all day.

Tears stream down Matt's face.

MATT

Joseph was teasing me about bein' colorblind. That's why I lied and socked him in the nose.

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - EVENING

At the stove, Matt's mother, MARY, stirs Irish Stew. At the kitchen table, Matt sips iced tea, while his father, JACK, eats a plate of piping hot chocolate pudding. His sister, CINDY, meanwhile, gives her Mrs. Beasley doll a swig of milk.

MOM

Go to war, Jack! You're not gonna have any room left for Irish Stew after eatin' all that puddin'.

MATT

I'll eat dad's portion. I'm starved.

MOM

Yeah, I bet you did work up quite an appetite today, bloodying that boy's nose.

MATT

He made fun of me, mom, for being colorblind.

MOM

That's why I told that dang nun not to tell a soul about the matter. She swore by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph that she'd keep her mouth shut.

Dad looks up from his pudding at Matt.

DAD

Did he slip any punches in on ya, boy?

MATT

No.

MOM

Well, I promised Sister Agnes Marie that I'd give ya a good talkin' to. So, I guess I kept my word. Now, here's some more stew for ya.

Mom plops a giant spoonful of stew on Matt's plate, then turns and looks at Cindy.

MOM (CONT'D)
For cryin' out loud, Cindy! Put that darn Mrs. Beasley doll to bed, will ya? Eat your dinner, now.

CINDY
But, mom, she's not tired yet.

Matt gets up to put his dish in the sink and trips over his sister's book bag. Dropping the plate on the floor, it shatters into dozens of pieces.

MOM
Go to war, Matt! Watch where your goin', will ya? Ya need to pay attention better, boy. Now, get a broom and get this mess cleaned up.

FOUR YEARS LATER

1974

EXT. MATT'S NEIGHBORHOOD, BALTIMORE MD - AFTERNOON

Matt is 14 years old now, and his hair has grown from a crew cut to shoulder length. He pulls a wooden wagon through his Lakeland neighborhood loaded with newspapers that he delivers to scores of red-bricked row homes cramped on their streets.

MATT
News American! News American!

While Matt plunks down his newspapers on tiny, cement porches, his best friend, JEETER JONES, a tall, skinny ninth grader, with long dirty blonde hair, approaches him with a shopping cart filled with *Baltimore Sun* newspapers.

JEETER
News American wouldn't even start a good fire!

MATT
Yeah, my dog wouldn't even take a crap on that rag you deliver.

Jeeter lights up a Winston and tosses the match into Matt's wagon filled with newspapers. It extinguishes.

JEETER
See. I just proved my point.

MATT
Yeah, if I had my dog with me, he'd prove my point. Ya moron!

JEETER
Hey, we play you guys Saturday. Opening day, I can't wait. Rita'll be there. Now, that's a fox!

MATT
And I'll be ready for the hunt.

JEETER
More like a duck hunt, you mean. Why the heck people calling you Duck, doofus?

MATT
Missed a few pop ups, that's all.

JEETER
A few pop ups, huh? I heard you were playing second base and more than once ducked when the ball was hit to left field. So, Duck, what you got to say for yourself?

MATT
Sun got in my eyes. That's all, jerk. I gotta get goin'. Don't wanna be late for dinner. See ya, Saturday, moron.

EXT. BALLFIELD - SATURDAY AFTERNOON

As opening day festivities begin, armies of families muster at the neighborhood park with charcoal grills, lounge chairs, and coolers filled with soda and Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - AFTERNOON

Matt sits alone at the end of the bench, looking lost and forlorn, as he holds his Phillie's cap, nervously tracing its letter "P".

CUT TO:

EXT. OPPONENT'S BENCH - MOMENTS LATER

Jeeter has his whole team cheering and giving the thumbs-down to Matt's team.

JEETER
Matt, we're gonna kick some Phillie
butt today!

BACK TO:

EXT. MATT'S BENCH - SECONDS LATER

Matt ignores Jeeter, puts his cap back on his head, and slips his sweaty fingers inside his brand new baseball glove. Then, he pounds the glove's pocket and puts it to his nose to get a whiff of leather.

COACH
Matt, since Chester ain't here,
you'll be starting in right field
and batting ninth.

The coach walks over to Matt and puts his hand on his shoulder.

COACH (CONT'D)
Just keep your eyes on the ball,
and you'll be okay. Now, hustle on
out there.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND, RIGHT FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands in right field, armed to the teeth with four fresh pieces of Bazooka Bubble Gum. As bubbles bloom and pop from his mouth, he watches the bleachers fill with hundreds of spectators, many of whom have cans and bottles of beer in their hands.

MATT (V.O.)
Maybe I'll see the ball better
today. I'll just try and pay
attention like mom always tells me.

EXT. HOME PLATE - AFTERNOON

The umpire brushes the dirt off of home plate with a tiny hand-size broom.

UMPIRE
Plaaayyyy Baaallll!

EXT. RIGHT FIELD - SECONDS LATER

Matt positions himself and gets ready, as their pitcher, KIRBY SCOTT, throws another wild pitch to the batter.

MATT
Come on, Kirbeeee...Kirbeeee!
Throw the ball over the plate!

CUT TO:

UMPIRE
Low, ball four. Take a base.

SHIFT TO:

PHILLIES' COACH
(to the outfielders)
Bases loaded, guys. Back up,
Louie's batting.

Left handed Louie, batting clean up, lumbers to the plate.

BACK TO:

MATT
Dear God, please don't let him hit
the ball my way.

EXT. HOME PLATE - SECONDS LATER

Louie's aluminum bat introduces itself to the "butterfly" that Kirby throws to the plate.

CUT TO:

FIRST BASE COACH
Leg it out, Louie. All the way
home. Go! Go!

BACK TO:

EXT. RIGHT FIELD - SECONDS LATER

The blast sails over Matt's head. He never sees it, not even a glimpse. He hears it, though, rattle the rusty fence.

With squinty eyes, he scans its grassy bottom, as NICHOLAS, the first baseman, runs passed him to retrieve the ball.

NICHOLAS
You moron! What the heck's your problem, Matt?

MATT
Wish I knew.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLEACHERS - SAME TIME

Spectators shout, laugh, and boo.

BACK TO:

EXT. RIGHT FIELD - SECONDS LATER

Nicholas finds the ball easily. But, before he can even hurl it home, the bases have emptied; four runs have scored. Nicholas then strikes Matt in the head with his gloved hand.

MATT (V.O.)
That didn't hurt as much as the laughter from the stands. I'm all alone now like a blade of grass about to me mown. I'm afraid more than a baseball got lost today.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

As Matt lies on his bed, posters of Peter Rose, Hank Aaron, and Brooks Robinson stare down from the wall at him. While looking at a banner above his headboard, that says "Baltimore Orioles World Series Champions 1970," Matt starts to pray.

MATT
Dear God, I'm so scared...

EXT. MATT'S BEDROOM DOOR - SAME TIME

Matt's mom is about to knock on his door. But when she hears him praying, she stops and presses her ear to the door and listens.

MATT (O.S.)
Why, Lord, can't I see right? I'm
so freakin' frustrated, God! I
hate life!

Matt's mom pulls her ear slowly away from the door and then shakes her head, as she walks down the hall.

MOM (V.O.)
Go to war, God! What's goin' on?

CUT TO:

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Matt pulls the covers over his head, as he hears hammering.

EXT. MATT'S FRONT YARD - MORNING

Matt's father, Jack, hammers a Doyle Realty for sale sign right smack in the middle of their small front yard.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

The hammering draws Matt to the window, where he sees the "For Sale" sign. He punches Pete Rose in the mouth, bloodying his knuckles, and then flops back onto his bed.

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - DAY

Matt and Cindy sit at the kitchen table, eating bologna sandwiches and potato chips. While mom grunts, straining to break open the metal ice cube trays, the smell of gas from the stove still lingers from where dad cooked his pudding.

CINDY
What's that smell?

MOM
It's gas from the stove. For cryin' out loud, Jack! You're gonna blow up the place.

DAD
Relax, Mary, it'll be okay.

Dad hunches over the kitchen counter eating his pudding. He then turns toward the table with pudding on his chin.

DAD (CONT'D)
We'll be movin' real soon to
Pasadena, Maryland.

MATT
Pasadena is in the boondocks. I
don't wanna live there. I like
Baltimore.

Matt slams his sandwich down on the table.

MATT (CONT'D)
Besides, I thought you promised we
wouldn't move for several years.

MOM
For Pete's sake, Matt. Take a good
look around ya. The neighborhood
is fallin' apart. Look at the
crime rate. Just the other day,
Joey Baker got busted for sellin'
drugs. We've known him since first
grade. And the Spacey's, just two
doors down, were burglarized last
week. And aren't ya tired of
seein' those God forsaken "Beware
of Rats" signs posted everywhere?

Dad sinks his plate into some sudsy dishwater, then grabs a
six pack of Pabst from the refrigerator.

DAD
Chuck, Hank, and me are goin'
fishin'. I don't know when I'll be
back. But, Matt, I expect your
chores to be done before I get
home. Ya been slackin' lately, boy.

Matt keeps pinching off little pieces of bread from his
sandwich, while Cindy grabs a soccer ball and chases after
dad through the back door.

MOM
Matt, honey, ya gotta get over what
happened yesterday at little
league. It's no big deal.

MATT
Maybe to you, it's no big deal.
And, now, we're movin'? I can't
deal with everything, mom. I'm
gonna crack!

MOM

I know, sweetie. Dad and I are gonna make an appointment for ya at Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins. It's one of the best eye clinics in the country. Maybe that'll be an answer to your prayers.

MATT

I'm done prayin'!

ONE MONTH LATER

INT. WILMER EYE INSTITUTE, DR. MAHORN'S OFFICE - DAY

Matt reclines in the examination chair, his eyes dilated from the drops that DR. MAHORN'S assistant administered. Then, the doctor enters.

DR. MAHORN

Good morning, I'm Dr. Mahorn.

He extends his hand to Matt for a handshake, but Matt doesn't respond.

MOM

Aren't ya gonna shake the doctor's hand, Matt? He's holdin' it out.

Matt shakes the doctor's hand.

MATT

Sorry, I didn't see ya. These drops are makin' my eyes a little bit blurry.

DR. MAHORN

That's quite alright, young man. Now, what brings you here today? Are you having any specific problems?

MATT

I have problems seeing a baseball sometimes when it's hit from a bat.

DAD

He runs into things quite a lot, too. A bit accident prone, I guess.

Dr. Mahorn shines a light into Matt's eyes to get a better look at what might be going on behind them.

DR. MAHORN
Blink for me now a couple of times.
Will you, Matt?

After Matt blinks several times, Dr. Mahorn shows him a card with a circle having a multitude of colored dots inside its border.

DR. MAHORN (CONT'D)
Can you tell me what the number is
inside the circle, Matt?

It's clearly the number 8.

MATT
I don't see any number at all.

DR. MAHORN
You're definitely colorblind.
That's for sure.

Dr. Mahorn writes something on his note pad, then hands Matt a six-inch stick with a dark circle on it, about two inches in diameter.

DR. MAHORN (CONT'D)
Okay, Matt, I want you to place the
circle over your right eye, and
look at the top line of the eye
chart for me, and tell me what you
see.

MATT
An E

DR. MAHORN
Okay, the next line?

MATT
HN

DR. MAHORN
Next?

MATT
PTXZ

DR. MAHORN
Great! Anything on the next line?

MATT
UZDTF

DR. MAHORN
Next one?

MATT
DFNPTH

DR. MAHORN
Anything on the next line?

MATT
PHUNTDZ

DR. MAHORN
Excellent! How about the next
line?

MATT
No. It looks like a bunch of dots.

Matt repeats the process holding the dark circle over his left eye with the same results.

DR. MAHORN
You have 20/20 vision. And other than being colorblind, and having some tunnel vision, your eyes seem fine.

DAD
What's causin' his tunnel vision?

DR. MAHORN
His eyes are healthy. But I would like to order a CAT SCAN to rule out any possibility of a brain tumor.

TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. MATT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Matt and Cindy relax on bean bag chairs watching Captain Chesapeake on television. Mom and dad then enter.

MOM
Good news, Matt. I just got off the phone with the doctor, and he said your CAT SCAN didn't show any signs of a brain tumor.

CINDY
Did they find a brain?

MATT
They'd find crap for yours!

MATT (CONT'D)
I almost wish they'd found
somethin'. I know somethin' is
wrong with my eyes. And it's
drivin' me crazy not knowin' what
it is.

DAD
You'll just have to grin and bare
it for now, Matt. We've done all
we can. If Wilmer Eye Institute
can't find anything wrong with ya,
no one can.

NEXT DAY

EXT. PATAPSCO AVENUE, LAKELAND - DAY

Matt sits on his wheelie bike, waiting to cross Patapsco Avenue. Because of the heavy traffic, he's extra cautious in crossing.

MATT (V.O.)
I am so afraid to cross. Pay
attention. It might be clear, but
I don't know. I may not be seeing a
car that's there. It sounds clear.
Help me, God!

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - MINUTES LATER

Matt chains his bike to a post that holds a "No Loitering" sign. He then shoulders his way through the front door of 7-Eleven.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - DAY

Matt stands just inside the door, looking as if he's lost.

MATT (V.O.)
Come on, eyes, adjust, will ya?
Why is that every time I go into a
place, I can't see anything. It's
as if my eyes take a "time out" for
several minutes, till they adjust.
(MORE)

MATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Nobody else seems to have this
problem.

Matt finds his way to the counter.

MATT
Gimme a pack of Salems, please, and
some extra packs of matches.

CASHIER
That'll be forty-two cents.

Matt hands the guy a dollar bill. And then he doesn't see
the guy handing him back his change.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
What the heck's your problem? If
you don't want your change, I'll
keep it.

MATT
Sorry, I didn't know ya were
handin' it to me.

CASHIER
Something the matter with your
eyes? They're red. When you came
in, I saw how you shuffled over
here, as if you were walking in a
dark forest at midnight.

MATT
I see fine! My eyes are just a
little tired. That's all.

Matt snatches his cigarettes and matches, then pushes his way
through the front door and stops.

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands on the front sidewalk, smoking a cigarette.

MATT (V.O.)
Come on eyes, adjust, will ya? Why
is that every time I come out from
a place, it's like looking into a
"whiteout" for several minutes,
until my eyes adjust to the sun.
It doesn't happen to anyone else I
know. Why God?

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

On a day more clear than plain English, Matt flies across the parking lot on his bike. Suddenly, his handlebars rock him in the rib cage, crashing into a concrete wheel stop at the edge of a parking space.

MATT

Ugh! What the heck was that?

After Matt's bike catapults him headlong onto the sultry asphalt, his face, hands, and legs sizzle from road burn, as a customer walks by with a toddler in tow.

CUSTOMER

You need to watch where you're going, young man. You're going to hurt someone.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - SAME DAY

Matt drifts onto the basketball court, parking his bike next to the sign that reads "Beware of Rats." There, KIRBY SCOTT, an eight-grader, who pitches for Matt's baseball team, and Jeeter Jones are shooting a basketball into a net-less hoop.

MATT

Hey Kirby, ya play basketball almost as good as ya pitch.

KIRBY

Yeah, if I had a better right fielder, maybe my pitches wouldn't look so bad.

MATT

Pass me the ball, Jeeter.

JEETER

What the heck happened to your face?

Jeeter passes the ball to Matt.

JEETER (CONT'D)

Did you forget to duck again.

Kirby roars with laughter, high-fiving Jeeter, while Matt banks in a jumper from 20 feet.

MATT

Still better lookin' than your mug.

Jeeter grabs a rebound and tosses the ball to Kirby.

JEETER

I suppose that's why I'm with a hottie! And you're with that skank named nobody.

MATT

If ya think Cathy's a hottie, ya need glasses because she has no body.

KIRBY

Before you girls get into a cat fight, any of you gotta match for this joint?

MATT

Right here.

Kirby hands Matt the joint. Matt then strikes a match, lights the joint and draws hard on it.

EXT. NORLAND ROAD, LAKELAND - ONE HOUR LATER

After getting stoned, Matt, Jeeter, and Kirby ride their bikes, spotting a crowd gathered on Norland Road, who's listening to a blind street preacher with a white cane, who looks more like a hippie than a man of God.

BLIND PREACHER

Chapter ten, from the Book of Mark, reads, "As [Jesus] went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

The preacher bends down and feels for his coffee mug, takes a drink, then sits the cup back down, and then stands back up.

BLIND PREACHER (CONT'D)

And Jesus did indeed have mercy on blind Bartimaeus. In fact, Jesus healed him of his blindness and Bartimaeus followed Him.

A close up on Matt shows him closing his red eyes and bowing his head.

MATT
Jesus, can ya heal me, too?

KIRBY
What did you say, Matt?

MATT
I said you're the son of...

The preacher's voice booms like thunder, interrupting Matt.

BLIND PREACHER
But folks, please understand that
blind Bartimaeus' problem wasn't
his physical blindness. You see, a
person with spiritual blindness
dwells in a deeper darkness than
any ever experienced by a blind man
with a cane.

The blind preacher pauses and holds up his white cane.

JEETER
Gimme a cigarette, Matt.

MATT
Shut up and listen!

JEETER
We're Catholic. We don't need to
listen to this horse crap. We've
been confirmed for God's sake.

Matt glares at Jeeter and gives his attention back to the preacher.

BLIND PREACHER
Spiritual blindness is a condition
that we're all born with. But just
like how Jesus cured Bartimaeus,
when He said, "Go your way; your
faith has made you well," He can
cure you, too. If you're willing to
repent from your sin and believe
the gospel. And this is the
gospel, that Jesus died on the
cross for our sins. And, then,
God, His Father, raised Him from
the dead.

Kirby rolls his eyes.

KIRBY

I gotta serious case of the
munchies. Come on, let's go to
Gino's. I've got three coupons for
three free Gino Giants. You guys
buy the fries.

EXT. PATAPSCO AVENUE, LAKELAND - MINUTES LATER

Cars whiz through the busy street, changing lanes and beeping horns. Kirby and Jeeter have already crossed the street, while Matt still waits to cross. They poke fun at Matt for being too cautious crossing.

KIRBY

Come on Matt! It's clear.

JEETER

You're worse than an old lady, who
needs help crossing a street.

After five minutes, Matt finally meets up with them on the other side of the road.

INT. GINO'S RESTAURANT - MINUTES LATER

After ordering their Gino Giants, French fries, and courtesy cups of ice water, Matt, Kirby, and Jeeter find a booth and slide in to munch out.

KIRBY

Nothing cures the munchies like a
Gino Giant.

JEETER

Who did you get your weed from? I
need to get me some of that.

KIRBY

Peter Patterson.

JEETER

Pitter Patter's selling dope, now?

Kirby devours his Gino Giant in three bites.

KIRBY

Matt, wake up! If you ain't gonna
slay that Giant, send it my way.

Matt surrenders his Gino Giant to Kirby.

MATT
I'm ready to nod.

Both of Kirby's cheeks are bulging with Gino Giant.

KIRBY
You guys wanna find Pitter Patter?

JEETER
Matt, you wanna pitch in for a dime bag?

MATT
Sure, why not.

INT. PITTER PATTER'S BASEMENT - DAY

Matt, Kirby, and Jeeter smoke some pot with PITTER PATTER, a junior in high school, who failed twice. He is lanky, with long, scraggy, brown hair and pock marks all over his face. He passes the pipe to Matt, who doesn't see it.

PITTER PATTER
Ya gonna take the pipe, nimrod? Or are ya gonna leave me hangin'?

MATT
Maybe ya ought to turn a light on so people could see when you're handin' somethin' to 'em.

Jeeter picks up on Pitter Patter's glare, that Matt misses.

JEETER
Chill out, Matt! It's light enough in here.

Jeeter takes the pipe from Pitter Patter.

JEETER (CONT'D)
(to Pitter Patter)
That blind street preacher freaked him a bit. That's all.

PITTER PATTER
Yeah, he's a freakin' buzz kill.
Tellin' that Bartimaeus story on that street corner every few months must be his gig when he's not sellin' pencils!

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

"You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" plays in the background, while Matt hides the weed that he and Jeeter just bought between the pages of some old newspapers. He then gets in bed and pulls the covers up to his chin and stares up at the ceiling.

MATT

"A person with spiritual blindness
dwells in a deeper darkness than
any ever experienced by a blind man
with a cane." What the heck was
that man talkin' about?

INT. REEDS DRUGSTORE - DAY

Matt and Jeeter stand by a display filled with Buck Knives. Matt, meanwhile, places two of them in his shopping cart.

MATT

I swear, Jeeter, I ain't leavin'
here till I steal these two knives.

JEETER

You're nuts! I'll wait for you
outside. I'm in no mood for
getting busted today.

MATT

Ya wuss!

Matt pushes the shopping cart toward the men's room.

EXT. MEN'S ROOM, REEDS DRUGSTORE - DAY

Matt grabs the Buck Knives from the cart. Then, he pushes open the door to the men's room, ignoring the sign that reads: "No Items Permitted Beyond This Point."

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Matt enters a stall and closes the door behind him. Stuffing the Buck Knives into his pockets, he pulls the bottom of his T-shirt from inside his pants to cover his pockets.

EXT. REEDS DRUGSTORE - MINUTES LATER

Matt exits Reeds, then lights a cigarette and waits on the sidewalk.

MATT (V.O.)
 I hope no one saw me, because I
 can't go anywhere until this dang
 "whiteout" clears from my eyes.

Jeeter is walking toward Matt.

JEETER
 Did you get 'em.

Matt points to his pockets.

JEETER (CONT'D)
 Come on, let's get outta here
 before we get caught.

MATT
 I'm havin' a victory smoke first.

Matt takes a deep drag from his Salem and makes smoke rings.

MATT (CONT'D)
 Ya know what, Jeet? I'm gonna take
 what I want from now on. Catch me
 if ya can!

Matt runs off, as Jeeter follows.

SIX MONTHS LATER

NOVEMBER 1974

EXT. MATT'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Matt and Jeeter stand by the Doyle Realty sign that now has a "Sold" decal on it. Matt stares at the picture of the pretty woman on the sign. Then he flicks his cigarette at her, and sparks fly from her broad, toothy grin.

MATT
 At least I still got good aim.

JEETER
 Don't take it out on her. It's not
 her fault you're moving.

Jeeter wipes the ashes from the woman's teeth.

JEETER (CONT'D)
 Yeah, my dad seen her a few times
 bringing people by to look at your
 house.
 (MORE)

JEETER (CONT'D)
He said that "her skirts are like
good sermons, short enough to
arouse interest but long enough to
cover the essentials."

MATT
Ronald Knox

JEETER
What?!

MATT
That's a quote from Ronald Knox.
He was a Monsignor. I learned it
from a priest in church the other
day.

JEETER
Yeah, that's probably where dad got
it from. He's always at mass.

Jeeter begins to peel off the "Sold" decal.

JEETER (CONT'D)
Dang, that sucks, bro!

MATT
What?

JEETER
Starting a new school in the middle
of the year.

MATT
I know. I've been really frettin'
about it.

Matt helps Jeeter pick off the "Sold" decal from the sign.

MATT (CONT'D)
Hey. Tomorrow we're gonna visit
our new place in Pasadena. Ya
wanna come?

JEETER
A Saturday in the boondocks? Nah.
I'll have to take a rain check on
that one. Sorry, bro.

INT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - DAY

Matt, Cindy, Dad, and Mom sit in Dad's Ford Galaxie, as it
warms up.

It is parked curb side several houses down from their row home. They intend to visit their new house in Pasadena, Maryland.

MATT
I've seen the place enough times.
We just went there last weekend. I
remember what it looks like!

Dad doesn't say a word trying to free his car from the parking spot.

MATT (CONT'D)
I wanna play basketball here today,
dad. Come on! And besides, we'll
be livin' there soon enough.

Dad finally frees the car, where it was wedged between a Chevy Nova and a Ford Maverick.

DAD
Ya can play basketball later.

Dad drives away while Matt watches Lakeland disappear through the rear window.

EXT. GRAYS CREEK, PIER - DAY

Matt and Cindy dangle their feet over the edge of the pier, that sits one block away from their new split-foyer home. Cindy is intrigued by a curious smell that perfumes the air.

CINDY
What's that odor? It smells good
in an icky sort of way.

MATT
It's creosote and salt air.

CINDY
What is creosoda?

MATT
Not creasoda! Crap for brains!
Creosote. It helps preserve these
pilings.

Matt points to one of the pilings.

MATT (CONT'D)
Now, stop askin' me stupid
questions!

Matt climbs on top of one of the pilings to get a better view of the creek and lights up a Salem. He hears a basketball bouncing somewhere from across the creek, then hears an argument break out.

MATT (CONT'D)
Hear that argument, Cindy?

CINDY
Sounds like Lakeland.

EXT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt and Cindy see dad's car driving down the boat ramp adjacent to the pier. Dad has his head hanging out of the window.

DAD
Matt, Cindy! Come on. Time to go.
We gotta a lot of packin' to do.

Matt jumps down from the piling and hurries to the car, not seeing the cable festooned between the pilings that run alongside the boat ramp. Tripping over it, he scrapes his hands which help brake his fall, as he lands in the gravel.

MOM
(from the car)
Go to war, Matt! Be careful, will ya?

NOVEMBER 29, 1974

EXT. BUS STOP - AFTERNOON

Matt waits with several other people for the 28 Lakeland bus.

MATT (V.O.)
I need to see Baltimore one last time before we move tomorrow.

INT. 28 LAKELAND TRANSIT BUS - AFTERNOON

Matt enters the bus, and his eyes go into "time out" mode. He moves gingerly. Groping for the fare box, he finds it and fumbles to put his money in.

MATT (V.O.)
Come on, "time out," cut me some slack!

Trying not to run into anyone on the packed bus, he "looks" for a seat. He sits down on what he thinks is an empty one. But instead, he lands on the bony lap of an elderly woman.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Ugh! What on earth are you doing,
young man?

Fearing the cracking he heard was one of her bones breaking, Matt springs up from her lap.

MATT
Ma'am, I'm so ...

A passenger interrupts Matt, hollering at him.

PASSENGER
What the heck's wrong with you,
jerk? Did you not see her sitting
there? Open your eyes next time!

EXT. NORLAND ROAD, LAKELAND - NEXT DAY

A U-Haul truck sits in front of Matt's house. Dad and UNCLE SHERMAN, who volunteered to help them move, open the container door in the back of the truck and slide its ramp out onto the ground to transport their possessions on.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE - SAME DAY

Matt and his family pack up the last of their belongings. And when Matt lights up a Salem, his mom dashes over to him.

MOM
How many times have I told ya,
Matt? Do not smoke in this house!

MATT
Uncle Sherman does! And besides,
it's our last day here. So what's
all the fuss about?

EXT. FRONT SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Matt's mom stands on the sidewalk supervising Dad and Uncle Sherman, as they lug her large hutch through the front door.

MOM
Go to war, Jack! Be careful with
my hutch. Ya guys almost hit the
top of the doorway!

DAD
So, Mary, ya wanna do it yourself?

MATT
I'm goin' for a bike ride, dad.

DAD
Don't be long, Matt. I wanna be
gone by dark.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - AFTERNOON

Matt stops on a hill overlooking the park. He looks one last time at the ball diamond and grabs his ball glove from his handlebars, then leans his bike on a telephone pole with a sign posted to it that reads "Beware of Rats."

MATT (V.O.)
I've played here for 11 years. I'm
gonna miss ya.

Tears stream down Matt's face.

MATT (V.O.)
(holding ball glove)
I won't be needin' this where I'm
goin'. That's for sure.

Matt slings his ball glove like a Frisbee down the brittle hill, watching it cartwheel to a stop.

MATT (V.O.)
I wonder where Jeeter is. I never
even said good-bye to him.

EXT. U-HAUL TRUCK, NORLAND ROAD - EVENING

Matt pedals his bike up the plank and parks it in the back of the U-Haul. While his dad shuts the door, Matt takes one last look around his street. Then, he follows Cindy, who's dragging her Mrs. Beasley doll behind her, into the cab.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

While nighttime deepens in Pasadena, Matt carries a box toward the front door of his new house. After running into one of the pillars beneath the front awning, he smashes his fingers, then drops the box and clutches his injured fingers.

MATT
Dang, if it ain't dark here. Don't ya think?

UNCLE SHERMAN
I hadn't really noticed. Are you okay?

MATT
Yeah.

Uncle Sherman hands Matt the box he dropped. He carries it gingerly through the front door, where his mom is standing on the stairs looking down at him.

MOM
Go to war, Matt! Take your shoes off before ya come in here. You're gonna track mud all over my brand new carpet!

DECEMBER 2, 1974

EXT. MARYLAND AVENUE, MATT'S NEW STREET - DAY

Matt's first day at his new school has arrived. Classes at George Fox Junior High start at noon and end at 5:15 p.m. He lumbers down Maryland Avenue toward the bus stop, when a tall, skinny TEENAGER, with long brown hair, approaches him.

TEENAGER
Hey, you moved into that new house up the street, didn't you?

MATT
Yeah.

TEENAGER
I saw you Saturday in your front yard. You looked lost.

The teenager takes his bandana off and shakes out his hair.

TEENAGER (CONT'D)
But anyway, we were hoping that, since your family room now sits on one of our favorite former partying trails, some pretty girls might move in to compensate us for our loss. No offense, buddy, but we've been screwed again, I see.

The teenager ties his bandana back around his head.

TEENAGER (CONT'D)
You kinda quiet, aren't you?
You're Matt, right?

MATT
How did ya know that?

TEENAGER
I have to go back home to get my
"Paradise Lost" book. Ninth grade
has to write a paper on it. Hey
you have a cigarette?

Matt tosses him a Salem.

TEENAGER (CONT'D)
What's this? Menthol? It'll do
till I get some Marlboros. I'm
Nathan Carlyle, by the way.

Matt continues toward the bus stop.

MATT (V.O.)
That guy tied his bandana too tight
around his head. Dang, if only I
had some pot to caulk the seams of
my nerves.

EXT. BUS STOP - MINUTES LATER

When Matt arrives at the bus stop, he sees a GIRL with dark, ratty hair balancing her butt rather delicately on a metal cable, festooned between two pilings, her hands on a book that absorbs her face.

MATT
Whaddya readin'?

GIRL
Milton's "Paradise Lost."

She keeps her eyes screwed to its pages.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Who are you?

MATT
Matt Harris, the new kid in town.
Just moved in up the street.

She unfastens her eyes from the book and looks at Matt.

GIRL
I'm Liz Knowles. Your first day,
huh?

MATT
Yep.

LIZ
That must suck. You gotta smoke?

Matt lights up a Salem and hands it to her. Then Liz gives her attention back to Milton.

MATT (V.O.)
Does anyone around here own their own cigarettes? After today, I'll let 'em know I'm not the neighborhood cigarette machine!

EXT. GEORGE FOX JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Matt exits the bus, as glare from the noontime sun reflects from the concrete, piercing his eyes. He walks very hesitantly.

MATT (V.O.)
These sunbeams are like needles piercing my eyes. Pay attention, ya idiot. Don't run into anyone.

Matt walks cautiously toward the front door but still bumps into a guy.

MATT
Excuse me.

GUY
Don't worry about it, man!

Matt makes it to the front door, but then steps on the back of a girl's heel.

GIRL
Ouch, you jerk! Why don't you watch where the heck you're going?

Matt lowers his head in shame.

MATT
I'm sorry. Are you okay.

The girl turns her back on Matt and strolls away.

INT. GEORGE FOX JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands like a statue inside the front door.

MATT (V.O.)
Hurry up, "time out!" Hurry up!
Come on. Come on!

A tall girl, with long, dirty blonde hair, named JENNY YOUNG, introduces herself to Matt.

JENNY
Hi, I'm Jenny Young. I live down
the street from you. I saw ya on
the bus.

MATT
Hi, I'm Matt Harris. It's my first
day.

Jenny extends her hand to shake Matt's. And when he doesn't respond, she withdraws her hand and looks at him quizzically.

JENNY
Yeah, you look a little lost.
What's your first class?

MATT
English, Room 147.

JENNY
That's where I'm goin'. Come on,
I'll show ya.

INT. ENGLISH CLASS - MINUTES LATER

Matt approaches his TEACHER sitting at her desk and introduces himself.

MATT
Hi, I'm Matt Harris, and this is my
first day.

TEACHER
Let me see. Yes. There you are in
my roll book.

She marks him present in her roll book.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Nice to meet you. My name is Mrs.
Czyrwiezki. But call me Mrs. C.

Mrs. C hands Matt a copy of Milton's "Paradise Lost."

MRS. C
Here, take this book. It's
"Paradise Lost," by John Milton.
The class is reading it. Are you
familiar with the poem, Matt?

MATT
I know it's long, and Milton was
blind.

MRS. C
That's right, Matt. Very good!
Milton wrote it after he went
blind.

Mrs. C points in the direction where she wants Matt to sit,
but his peripheral vision doesn't pick up her finger.

MRS. C (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Now, you can take a seat, right
over there behind Gregory Kilmer.
He's that gentleman in the green
jacket.

Matt looks confused and hesitates.

MATT (V.O.)
Green is as foreign as Greek to me.

Matt wanders off in the opposite direction from where Mrs. C
pointed.

CLASSMATE
You stoned or something, dude?
Greg's over there.

Matt's central vision picks up where the boy points. He
finds his seat and hides his face inside the pages of Milton.

EXT. GEORGE FOX JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - 5:15 P.M.

The final bell rings, ending Matt's first day. Darkness,
meanwhile, has already descended on the parking lot, loaded
with buses and kids, as Matt walks slowly on the sidewalk.

MATT (V.O.)
What is this phantom that now
harasses me in the dark? Why is it
so much darker here than it is in
Baltimore?
(MORE)

MATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I can barely see, but the darkness
doesn't seem to bother anyone else.
Why? Why?

While looking up at the buses, trying to find #249, impact to Matt's shins causes him to toss his notebook so he can use his hands to brake his fall.

MATT (V.O.)
What the heck?

GUY
(passing by laughing)
Hey, nimrod, you need to watch
where you're going! Duh!

Matt lands on his hands and knees inside the giant flower planter that he fell into. He feels around on the ground trying to collect the papers that had fallen from his loose leaf binder. He hears Liz shout from their bus.

LIZ
Over here, Matt. Hurry!

Matt walks timidly toward the bus with his head held low, most of his papers still lying in the planter.

ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - EVENING

Boulevard Park is the name of Matt's neighborhood in Pasadena, Maryland, aka The Park. Part of it is a beach that stretches into Grays Creek. It's nearly dark, as Matt approaches the neighborhood drug dealer's yellow Toyota. RALPHIE NELSON, with zits dotting his face, and long greasy, black hair, rolls down his window.

MATT
What goodies ya got today, Ralphie?

Ralphie doesn't look up from rolling a joint.

RALPHIE
Ya seen Nathan?

MATT
No.

RALPHIE
He's supposed to get me some PCP
flakes. Keeps promising but don't
deliver.

Ralphie starts rolling up his window.

RALPHIE (CONT'D)
Let's ride. We're wasting heat!

INT. RALPHIE'S TOYOTA - EVENING

As soon as Matt gets in, Ralphie cranks up Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water," lights the joint, inhales deeply, then, as he pulls away, passes it to Matt, and exhales into a creaking cough.

RALPHIE
Red Mexican!

Matt takes a hit, but not too deeply, then passes it back.

MATT
A bit coarse.

Ralphie's coughing clashes with his sales pitch.

RALPHIE
After a few hits, it'll taste as
smooth as a Marlboro.

MATT (V.O.)
Nighttime's got me, dang! I can't
see. Just pay attention and try to
keep your eyes on the flame.

MATT
This crap will turn your lungs
inside out.

Ralphie drifts to a stop back at The Park, pulls Deep Purple out of the 8-track player, while Matt digs out ten dollars from his pocket to buy a dime bag of Ralphie's Red Mexican.

MATT (V.O.)
My sense of touch tells me it's a
good count, and my sense of smell
tells me it's pot. And that's all
I really need to know.

INT. JENNY YOUNG'S BASEMENT - DAY

Matt and Jenny play 500 Rummy. As Jenny sips her Budweiser, Matt loads his bong with some Red Mexican. "Dream On," by Aerosmith, plays in the background.

MATT
So, how long ya lived here?

JENNY
All my life. Just me and mom
against the world.

Jenny gathers the cards and slides them to Matt.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Your deal.

Jenny's mom, dressed in a waitress' outfit, rushes into the room, ignoring the weed, bong, and beer.

MS. YOUNG
I'm running late for work. My
shift at the diner starts in ten
minutes. You gotta extra pack of
smokes, Jenny?

Jenny tosses her an opened pack of Marlboros.

JENNY
That's all I got, Ma.

MS. YOUNG
Thanks, hun. That'll git me
through my shift. I'll pick us up
some after work.

Ms. Young grabs a can of hair spray from the table. But when she sprays her hair, nothing comes out.

MS. YOUNG (CONT'D)
Oh, by the way, Matt, here's my
shopping list. Put hair spray on
it, too, for me. Will ya?

EXT. ANGELS' MARKET - DAY

Angels is a store located one mile from Matt's house. Matt pushes a shopping cart down the front walk and through the front door.

INT. ANGELS' MARKET - MOMENTS LATER

Matt navigates the cart through the aisles, placing items from Ms. Young's shopping list in it. Then, just as calmly as if he'd bought these items, he drives the cart passed the front check out and through the front door.

EXT. ANGELS' MARKET - MINUTES LATER

Matt stops with the cart at the end of the front walkway.

MATT (V.O.)
Come on, "whiteout." If ya don't
stop harassin' me, you're gonna get
me busted.

EXT. ANGELS' PARKING LOT - DAY

Matt heads across the parking lot and disappears in the woods on a path called "Dead Man's Trail."

INT. DEAD MAN'S TRAIL - DAY

Matt unloads the loot and puts it into a bag.

MATT (V.O.)
I take what I want. Catch me if ya
can!

INT. JENNY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ms. Young and Jenny sit at their kitchen table, while Matt divides the spoils among them.

MS. YOUNG
Any problems?

MATT
Piece of cake!

MS. YOUNG
I see ya got everything.

She adds up the items on a calculator.

MS. YOUNG (CONT'D)
\$41.22. I love a great bargain.
I'm just afraid you're gonna get
caught. I couldn't live with
myself if ya did.

She hands Matt a twenty-dollar bill.

MATT

Thanks. The key is not to tell people about it. The less people know about your business the better. I've been swipin' stuff for years. I'm not gonna get caught. But if I do, don't worry, I won't drag ya into it. I know how to keep my mouth shut.

INT. JENNY YOUNG'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Jenny opens the front door for Matt.

JENNY

Ya know, mom really appreciates what ya do for her.

She scoops up a queen of hearts and a joker from the floor.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Ya wanna play rummy later?

MATT

Nah, I'm more in the mood for solitaire tonight.

ONE YEAR LATER / MAY 1977

EXT. MATT'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Seated at the dinner table, Matt and his family are about to eat. Matt stabs a hunk of meatloaf with his fork and brings it to his mouth.

DAD

Matt, let's pray before we eat.

Matt lowers his fork and rolls his eyes.

DAD (CONT'D)

Father in heaven, we thank You for this food You provided. And for giving us Your Son, Jesus. Amen!

MOM

Matt, we rarely see ya anymore. I know your dad and I work a lot of hours, and our commute is longer now. But even when we are home, you're never here. For Pete's sake, boy, what's goin' on?

MATT

Nothin', mom!

CINDY

Can I have some more macaroni and cheese? Please.

Mom plops some mac & cheese on Cindy's plate.

MOM

How are your grades? Your last report card wasn't so good. You were failin' four classes. And ya had a lot of absences that we never knew about.

MATT

Everything's fine, mom!

Matt crams a chunk of meatloaf between his cheek and gum. His protruding cheek gives the impression of someone gnawing on a wad of chewing tobacco.

MATT (CONT'D)

I got the job at the Farm Store. I start next week.

DAD

I've been prayin' you'd git that.

MOM

Picture day is tomorrow at school. Why not let your dad take ya to git your hair cut tonight? It's halfway down your back, for cryin' out loud.

CINDY

Why not get 'em all cut?

Cindy busts a gut laughing.

MATT

Shut up, mush for brains!

MOM

At least promise me that you won't
 wear that hideous "Put Your Pedal
 To The Metal" hat, when ya get your
 picture taken tomorrow.

EXT. DEAD MAN'S TRAIL - NIGHT

Matt and his friend, CLAWS, lumber through the woods on their way to Angels' Market. While passing a bottle of Old Grand-Dad back and forth, Matt trips and falls over a limb.

MATT (V.O.)

No matter how hard I try to
 memorize these dang trails, and
 follow sounds from the movements of
 my friends when we walk at night,
 why is it I still crash into stuff?
 I hate this phantom blindness that
 trips me up all the time!

CLAWS

(trying to be helpful)
 If ya look down at the trail better
 while ya walk, ya might not run
 into stuff so much.

Matt gets up, brushes himself off, and passes the bottle of Old Grand-Dad back to Claws.

MATT

At least, I didn't spill any.

CLAWS

I still can't believe Angels burned
 down.

MATT

I'm just glad that the ashes and
 brimstone have settled enough for
 us to pay her a visit.

CLAWS

I wonder what kind of spirits we
 can exorcise from fallen Angels
 tonight.

MATT

I think we need to pay dear Old
 Grand-Dad another visit tonight.

CLAWS
 Yeah. We lifted twenty bottles
 last night, and we know right where
 he's sittin'.

Claws hands Matt the bottle. And when he doesn't respond,
 Claws taps him on the arm with it.

MATT
 (singing)
 Twenty bottles of Old Grand-Dad on
 the wall; twenty bottle of Old
 Grand-Dad, ya take one down, pass
 it around, nineteen bottles of Old
 Grand-Dad on the wall!

INT. ANGELS' MARKET - NIGHT

Claws switches on his flashlight. As he and Matt tiptoe
 through debris, they snatch two cases of Old Grand-Dad.

CLAWS
 Come on, let's get outta here,
 Matt. This way. Follow the
 flashlight beam.

EXT. ANGELS' PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Matt and Claws trudge through the parking lot, weighed down
 by their booty.

CLAWS
 Cops!

A squad car appears on a road that overlooks Angels and its
 parking lot, then shines a searchlight on the store.

CLAWS (CONT'D)
 Over here, Matt! Follow my voice.

Matt and Claws dive into some tall weeds and lie as still as
 corpses.

MATT
 They're shinin' the light our way!

CLAWS
 We're busted!

MATT
 Shh!

The cops extinguish their searchlight and drive away.

EXT. DEAD MAN'S TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Matt and Claws stoop in the safety of some undergrowth in the woods, burying these Old Grand-Dads with the other Old Grand-Dads they rescued the night before.

MATT
I thought they had us. I almost
wet myself.

CLAWS
Yeah, me too. I can't believe they
didn't see us.

MATT
They must be blind!

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - DAY

Matt reclines on a grassy hill that overlooks Grays Creek. Sipping from a bottle of Old Grand-Dad, he watches several speedboats racing in the creek. Jenny approaches Matt, as soft footed as a hunter, and stands five feet beside him.

JENNY
Boo!

Matt stiffens and gives her a startled look.

JENNY (CONT'D)
You're the easiest person in the
whole world to sneak up on.

MATT
I wasn't payin' attention. That's
all.

JENNY
Ya don't pay attention much. Do
ya?

Matt takes a long draw from his bottle of Old Grand-Dad.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Stop hoggin' Old Grand-Dad, and
give me a sip. Will ya?

Jenny snatches the bottle and takes a swig, then her eyes and mouth both open wide.

MATT
Ya look like ya just seen a ghost.

JENNY
Ugg! That crap's horrible. How
can ya drink that rat poison?

MATT
Ya can get used to anything.

Jenny settles onto the grass next to Matt and removes her sandals.

MATT (CONT'D)
But I must admit. I'm havin' a
hard time gettin' used to my dad's
newfound religion.

JENNY
What do ya mean?

MATT
When we first moved here, he
started goin' to Lake Shore Baptist
Church, right up there on Mountain
Road.

JENNY
Yeah, mom used to go to A. A.
Meetings there. Helped her out a
lot. But we never went to the
church. We're Catholic.

MATT
Me too. That's how my mom raised
me and my sister. Dad kept his
nose out of religion, until we
moved here.

Jenny pries a pipe from her back jean pocket, then wrestles a film cannister with a huge hunk of black hash from her front pocket. She breaks a piece of hash from the chunk, then drops it in the bowl and lights it.

MATT (CONT'D)
Now, he carries a Bible around and
tells everyone about Jesus.

Jenny holds the pipe out for Matt to grab; but when he doesn't respond, she taps it on the back of his hand.

JENNY
That must be embarrassin'.

MATT
 Yeah. He stopped drinkin' and cussin', too. And last week, he was ordained as a deacon, for God's sake!

Matt takes a hit from the pipe and wheezes out a cough.

MATT (CONT'D)
 I don't know who he is anymore.

EXT. A SIDE STREET IN MATT'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Matt squats, leaning against an oak tree, as he munches on some Doritos. AUGGIE BELL, one of the neighborhood teenagers, strolls up to Matt.

MATT
 Hey, I hear Sonny Roberts keeps hittin' on your gal, Annie.

AUGGIE
 Yeah, and I'm gonna be hittin' on him in a few minutes.

Auggie punches the air with his fist.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
 He's been messin' with her quite a bit. We're gonna get it straight right here at 4:00. Ya wanna back me up? Nathan promised to pitch in. But, as usual, he'll probably be late.

MATT (V.O.)
 O great, lucky me, in the right place at the right time, again.

MATT
 Sure, I'll help ya out. I ain't been in a brawl for a while.

SONNY ROBERTS and his friend, DONNY SHORES, swagger up to Matt and Auggie.

AUGGIE
 (looking at his watch)
 Right on time.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
 Hey, look, Matt, it's Sonny and Cher.

Sonny takes off his shirt.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
Why don't you sing "I Got You Babe"
to each other?

SONNY
How about I give you my rendition
of I got you, Annie.

Sonny licks his lips and shoves Auggie; fists fly between them, as Matt and Donny eye each other like prizefighters.

DONNY
What are you lookin' at, moron?

MATT
The biggest pile of crap in
Pasadena.

Donny unloads a right hand that crashes into Matt's nose. Matt's knees buckle a bit, but he stays on his feet.

MATT (V.O.)
(in his father's voice)
Ya wouldn't have seen that one,
even if ya would've had perfect
vision. Don't let 'em hit ya
again, boy.

Matt's nose bleeds like a ketchup bottle in the hands of a glutton at a French fry feast.

MATT
That all ya got, sea Shores?

Matt, keeping his head out of the way, lands solid snap kicks and side kicks to Donny's torso and legs, as Donny throws several wild punches that hit nothing but air.

MATT (CONT'D)
Ya shadow boxin', sea Shores. You
slow!

Matt has Donny in a headlock and bleeds all over his back. And when he notices that Sonny and Auggie have stopped fighting and have become spectators, he releases Donny, then plops to the ground, holding his T-shirt to his nose.

INT. MATT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Matt's mom dusts the furniture, as he relaxes on the couch, red-eyed, watching "I Dream of Jeannie."

MOM

Ya really should try and take your
driver's test again.

MATT

(staring at the TV)
I already tried twice and failed.

MOM

Go to war, Matt! The red light
that ya ran through was on the side
of the road. They're supposed to
be hangin' overhead.

MATT

And what about the wall I backed
into on my second test?

MOM

Could a happened to anyone. No
need to give up. I didn't raise no
quitter.

MATT

Maryland ain't gonna give some kid,
who can't even see straight, a
driver's license!

MOM

You've been to Wilmer Eye
Institute, for Pete's sake, and
even a couple of doctors since
then. And not one of 'em found
anything wrong with your eyes.

MATT

I know, mom. I was there. But I'm
tellin' ya, there's somethin' wrong
with 'em, and it's drivin' me crazy
that no one can find out what's the
matter with 'em!

Mom turns off the television, then begins dusting the screen.

MATT (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll take the stupid test
again! But even if I do pass the
drivin' part, I'll never pass the
eye test.

MOM

All ya can do is try.

MATT
 Besides, I already got the drivin' course memorized by now. But if I hear that instructor one more time say, "Pull it over and put it in park, son," I'll never take it again. I swear!

EXT. FARM STORE - NIGHT

Matt works the cash register, ringing up customers at the neighborhood convenience store.

MATT
 That'll be \$2.98, sir.

CUSTOMER
 Did ya get the gum?

MATT
 No sir. I forgot, sorry. That'll be \$3.12 instead.

MATT (V.O.)
 I hate it when I don't see an item. It's like I'm back in right field, losing that dang baseball all over again!

Matt puts the man's items into a bag.

MATT
 (to another customer)
 Will that be all, sir?

Matt rings up his items but doesn't enter them into the system until he's certain that the customer doesn't give him exact change.

CUSTOMER
 Yes.

MATT
 That'll be \$3.01.

The man hands Matt three one-dollar bills. Matt puts the bills on the cash register's ledge, while the man roots through his pocket for a penny.

MATT (CONT'D)
 Don't worry about the penny, mister. I don't think the Farm Store's gonna miss it.

CUSTOMER
Thanks. Have a good day.

As the man leaves, Matt pockets the three dollars and clears the register.

MATT (V.O.)
Catch me if ya can!

JANIE GRABER and her friend, KATIE LATZMAN, hurry through the front door, Janie dressed up in a skirt and sweater, and Katie in a pair of wranglers and an Ocean City sweatshirt.

MATT
Hey, Janie, Katie, how's it goin'?

JANIE
I'm running late for my Job's Daughters' meeting. Are you familiar with them, Matt?

MATT
Somethin' to do with the masons, aren't they?

JANIE
That's right. Not too many people know about them.

Janie puts a piece of gum in her mouth, then pushes her way through the gate of the check out counter, ignoring the sign attached to it that says "Employees Only," and tosses the gum wrapper in Matt's wastebasket.

MATT (V.O.)
Dang, ya smell good, girl!

MATT
Ya make yourself right at home.
Don't ya, girl?

JANIE
You don't want me to be a litterbug, now. Do you?

Matt focuses on her skirt.

MATT (V.O.)
If Jeeter's dad were here, he'd probably say, "Janie's skirt is like a good sermon, long enough to cover everything but short enough to keep your attention." I would have to agree.

JANIE
What's that stupid grin on your
face for?

MATT
Oh, I just thought of somethin' one
of my old neighbors from Baltimore
once said.

JANIE
Hey, do you sell hair spray?

MATT
Aisle three.

MATT (CONT'D)
(to Katie)
Why ya so quiet today?

KATIE
Billy and I just broke up. I'll
wait outside for you, Janie.

Janie slaps a can of hair spray and a can of Coke on the
counter, then puts her Mounds Bar on top of the Coke can.

JANIE
Give me a pack of Marlboros, too,
Matt.

Matt tosses her cigarettes on the counter and rings up her
items.

MATT
That'll be \$1.85.

JANIE
Did you get the Mounds Bar, Matt?

MATT
I forgot, sorry. \$1.95

MATT (V.O.)
Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Of all
times for me not to see somethin'.

Janie faces Matt, and flashes a smile, while batting her
brown, puppy dog eyes at him, the left one peeking through a
wisp of stray, dark hair that dances on her cheek.

JANIE
(in a whisper)
No need to be sorry.
(MORE)

JANIE (CONT'D)

I just don't want you to get in
trouble with your boss. I hear
she's an ogre. Here's \$2.00. Keep
the change.

Matt lays the two-dollars on the cash register ledge,
fastening his eyes on Janie as she sashays toward the door.

MATT

Enjoy your Job's Daughter's
meetin'.

Janie turns sideways and glances over her shoulder with a
broad smile, revealing a slight overbite that punctuates her
face with uniqueness.

JANIE

I'm gonna be their next Honored
Queen. You watch.

MATT (V.O.)

I'll be watchin', even with my bad
eyes. That's for sure. I know
it's probably wishful thinkin' to
even consider that her frequent
shoppin' sprees might in some way
be a ruse for her to come in and
talk with me. And besides, isn't
she friendly with everyone, not
just me? And, yet, how can I
resist the way she carries her
scrawniness, or her sweet words, as
they pour through her ruddy lips,
that her tongue always nervously
licks. No weapons of war can
withstand that battle! It is as if
she's the sea's floor, and someone
tied cinder blocks to my legs and
hurled me into the ocean's depths.

EXT. SMOKING AREA, CHESAPEAKE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Matt is smoking a cigarette, when Janie runs over and pokes
him in the arm.

JANIE

Hey, Matt, give me a light. You
forgot to give me matches yesterday
when I bought my smokes.

Matt lights her cigarette.

JANIE (CONT'D)
I'm going to tell that dragon lady
you have for a boss on you!

MATT
You're gonna get me fired, girl,
and then who's gonna only charge ya
for a small coffee when ya buy a
large one?

JANIE
Touche! But don't let it happen
again, mister!

MATT
How was Job's Daughters last night?

JANIE
I can't wait to become Honored
Queen next year. It'll make my
daddy proud. He's a mason.

MATT
So is my father. He's a past
master.

JANIE
Really? That's so cool. Maybe you
can go to one of our functions
sometime.

MATT
Isn't purity one of the
requirements for becomin' Honored
Queen?

Janie gives Matt a wink and a devilish smile.

JANIE
Yep.

INT. RALPHIE'S TOYOTA, THE PARK - NIGHT

"Cat Scratch Fever," by Ted Nugent, blasts in the background,
while Matt and Ralphie drink Budweisers and smoke a joint.

RALPHIE
Where did ya get this weed?
Nothing like that around here!

MATT
Jeeter Jones. He's a friend of
mine from Baltimore, calls it Gungi
Weed.

RALPHIE
Ya need to plug me in to that
source.

MATT
He bought a boat load,
metaphorically speakin' of course,
from a Jamaican dude new to the
neighborhood.

There's a bang, bang, bang on Matt's window. It's Nathan
Carlyle, who just snuck up on them.

NATHAN
Busted!

As Matt rolls down his window, all he sees is blackness.

RALPHIE
Nathan! Ya must have mush for
brains!

MATT
More like crap!

RALPHIE
I ought to whoop up on ya for
givin' me a dang heart attack. Ya
buzz kill!

Nathan starts jerking on the car door handle.

NATHAN
(to Matt)
Open up, burnout!

Matt pulls the back of his seat forward, and Nathan squeezes
into the backseat.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Here's a surprise for you, Ralphie
boy!

Nathan hands Ralphie a baggie bulging with flakes--parsley
treated with PCP. Ralphie opens the bag and sniffs.

RALPHIE
It took ya long enough. Ya been
promisin' me forever.

NATHAN
 Stop exaggerating, Nelson. And
 thank your lucky stars that I
 scored for you.

Ralphie fills a pipe with the parsley flakes treated with PCP, then lights it and takes a hit.

RALPHIE
 Oh, and by the way, moron, I didn't
 mean Frosted Flakes.

Matt and Ralphie bust out laughing.

MATT
 I hope Tony the Tiger didn't bite
 ya!

Ralphie hands Matt the bowl.

MATT (V.O.)
 Thank God I see the flame from the
 pipe.

RALPHIE
 They're Grrrrreat!

Matt gulps his Budweiser and chokes while laughing, as Nathan, seething in the backseat over being the butt of their jokes, smacks Matt hard in the head. Matt instantly twists in his seat toward Nathan and faces the darkness.

MATT
 (to Nathan)
 Ya ever touch me again, I'll bash
 ya real good.

RALPHIE
 (chuckling)
 If you're gonna whoop up on him,
 Matt, just don't bloody up my car.
 I just had it cleaned.

Matt turns back around and sits in his seat.

RALPHIE (CONT'D)
 I gotta go find me a tree to water.

Ralphie slams the door shut.

NATHAN
 I wish he'd take a bath sometimes.
 He always smells like a litter box.
 You know what I mean, Matt?

MATT (V.O.)
Yeah, I know what ya mean. But you
smell like Judas to me.

MATT
Not really, Nathan.

Ralphie returns and replaces Nugent with Black Sabbath. As the flake bowl makes its rounds, the voice of Ozzy Osbourne drowns out everything.

MATT (CONT'D)
What's that sizzlin' sound? Bacon!
Can ya hear it?

No one hears Matt.

MATT (CONT'D)
Are they souls sizzlin' in hell?

Matt takes another hit from the pipe.

MATT (CONT'D)
Stop diggin' my grave, you fiend!
No pearls? There ain't no pearls
on that gate!

EXT. MARYLAND AVENUE - MINUTES LATER

Matt is stumbling up the street toward his house.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matt sleeps in his bed, as his mom bangs on his door and enters his room.

MOM
Go to war, Matt! It's noon. Are
ya gonna sleep all day, or what?

Mom strikes the side of Matt's bed with a broom.

MOM (CONT'D)
Go help your dad with the paneling
in his den.

INT. DEN - DAY

Dad nails a piece of paneling to the wall, as Matt enters like a zombie, still half stoned from last night.

MATT
How's the den comin' along, dad?

DAD
Just hammered my last nail. I gotta go to the hardware store for more. Ya wanna ride along?

MATT
Sure. I gotta get some smokes, anyway.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MINUTES LATER

As Matt gets into his father's car, he hears Ralphie and his DAD laughing uproariously from their front yard, ignoring Matt when he waves.

INT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - SAME TIME

As they pull out of the driveway, Matt waves again to Ralphie and his dad, and still no response.

MATT
That's odd. I waved twice to Ralphie and his dad and neither waved back.

DAD
I invited Mr. Ralph to church.

MATT
Oh, great! That's probably why they're laughing and ignored us.

MATT (V.O.)
If dad only knew that Ralphie was my drug dealer.

MATT
So, what did Mr. Ralph tell ya?

DAD
(in a lamentable tone)
He said he don't believe in fairy tales.

MATT

Dang, Dad! Ain't it hard enough
 for me to fit in around here
 without ya tellin' the whole
 neighborhood about Jesus? Couldn't
 ya have taken up golf or somethin'?

DAD

Matt, listen, will ya? In the
 Bible, John 3:16 says, "For God so
 loved the world, that he gave his
 only begotten Son, that whosoever
 believeth in him should not perish,
 but have everlasting life."

MATT

Ya know I'm...

His father interrupts him.

DAD

Now, hear me out Matt. God doesn't
 want anyone in hell, tormented in
 its flames forever. But it's your
 sin and mine that put us there.
 That's why God sent Jesus, His Son,
 to die on the cross to forgive us
 of our sins.

A close up on Matt's face shows that he's about to bite a
 hole in his lip.

DAD (CONT'D)

Jesus is God's gift to us, the
 greatest gift ever given! And all
 we have to do is receive it, by
 grace through faith, repenting from
 our sin, and by believing in the
 Lord Jesus Christ.

Dad's car rumbles into the hardware store's parking lot.

MATT

But I'm Catholic, dad!

DAD

And Catholic boys need Jesus, too,
 son.

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - SUNDAY MORNING

Matt sits with his family at the kitchen table, hands folded,
 and anxious to eat breakfast.

DAD

Father in heaven, we thank You for
 Your bountiful provisions. Please
 bless this food and help it to
 nourish our bodies. In Jesus'
 name, I pray. Amen!

Matt dips a sausage link into a pool of maple syrup that's
 oozing away from his stack of pancakes.

DAD (CONT'D)

Why don't ya come to church with us
 today, Matt?

MATT

Not today, dad. I gotta go to the
 store for some smokes. Then, I'm
 goin' fishin'.

EXT. ANGELS' MARKET - ONE HOUR LATER

Matt strolls across the parking lot toward the front door.

MATT (V.O.)

Thank God, they finally rebuilt
 this place. It took 'em long
 enough.

Matt stops when he sees a boy pull up and park his Schwinn
 bicycle against the wall. After he enters Angels, Matt looks
 around to see if anyone is watching.

MATT (V.O.)

(looking at the bike)
 Ya can get forty bucks for that
 one. Take it.

EXT. MARYLAND AVENUE - MINUTES LATER

Matt pedals the Schwinn like he's racing in the Tour de
 France. A close up shows a backwards baseball cap on his
 head, while his blonde hair flaps in the breeze behind it.

MATT

(out loud)
 Catch me if ya can!

EXT. WOODS, BEHIND MATT'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt lies the bike flat in some underbrush, then covers it
 with fallen leaves.

EXT. MATT'S BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Matt plops down on the picnic table, then shock shakes him as he watches an Anne Arundel County POLICE OFFICER stride toward him.

POLICE OFFICER
What's your name, son?

MATT
Matt Harris.

POLICE OFFICER
Well, Mr. Harris, we have a problem. You see, a red Schwinn ten-speed bicycle was just reported stolen. And a very reliable witness saw you take it.

The cop removes his mirrored sunglasses and puts his hands on his hips.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Now, you can make things real easy on yourself, if you tell me what you did with the bike.

Matt bows his head in shame.

EXT. MATT'S DRIVEWAY - MINUTES LATER

The cop cuffs Matt's hands behind his back, then puts him in the cruiser, and places the Schwinn in his trunk. Mr. Ralph leans on his fence, smirking, as he watches the police car drive away.

ONE WEEK LATER

INT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - MORNING

Matt and his dad have just left the commissioner's office after Matt's hearing on his larceny charge.

DAD
Well, it's a blessin', I suppose, that ya only got unsupervised probation, until you're eighteen.

Dad puts his hand on Matt's shoulder.

DAD (CONT'D)
 The commissioner was clear about
 what will happen if ya mess up
 again before ya turn eighteen.
 Wasn't he?

MATT
 He'll reinstate the larceny charge.
 But if I keep my nose clean, until
 then, the larceny charge won't
 appear on my record.

Dad pulls into their driveway, as Mr. Ralph looks on, perched on his front porch.

MATT (CONT'D)
 Dad, I'm really sorry about
 everything, but especially about
 Mr. Ralph goin' to church that day
 to tell ya about me gettin'
 arrested in front of all your
 friends.

DAD
 I don't give a rat's crap about
 what people think. Ya know that.
 I only care about your welfare.
 That's all.

Dad looks over and waves to Mr. Ralph, who doesn't respond.

DAD (CONT'D)
 But at least ya did somethin' that
 I was unable to do.

MATT
 Yeah. What was that?

DAD
 Ya got Mr. Ralph to go to church.

EXT. LAKE SHORE BAPTIST CHURCH - EVENING

Matt's stands unsteadily in front of the empty church, holding a bottle of Old Grand-Dad in one hand and a bag of Doritos in the other, having a heart to heart with God.

MATT
 (out loud)
 Tell me God. Tell me! When did I
 ever ask to be born? Tell me!

Matt gulps from the bottle.

MATT (CONT'D)
(out loud)
Why, God? Why can't I see
straight? Why do I have to go
through life like this. Always
worryin' about what I'm not gonna
see! Always tryin' to crack this
mystery. I'm tired, God. I'm
tired!

Matt crams a handful of Doritos in his mouth and washes them down with a final swig of Old Grand-Dad. After tossing the bottle like a football in the woods, Matt lights a Salem.

MATT (CONT'D)
Well, God, what do Ya have to say
to me? Dad tells me Ya love me. I
don't believe it! But I want to.
Help me!

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - NEXT MORNING

Matt, graced with a beaten up sleeveless jean jacket, with "Born to be Wild" emblazoned on its back, sits with Janie Graber, Katie Latzman, and Donny Shores at the lunch table, eating cold cut submarines and pork 'n' beans.

JANIE
(to Matt)
So, you decided to grace us with
your presence today? What's the
occasion?

MATT
I missed your smilin' face.

JANIE
Ha, Ha! You probably ran out of
Old Grand-Dad.

Janie pretends to guzzle from an invisible bottle.

JANIE (CONT'D)
You know, my dad's always looking
for someone to work in his machine
shop. Maybe I could put in a word
for you.

MATT
Yeah, that might be nice. I don't
know how much longer I'll stay in
school.

DONNY
(to Matt)
When ya gonna get that nose fixed?

MATT
Don't make me have to bleed to
death all over ya again, Shores.

KATIE
That's so sweet how you guys became
friends after that fight you had.

DONNY
Sweet? I don't know that I'd call
it that. Ya gonna eat the rest of
that sub?

Donny points to Katie's half-eaten sub lying on her plate.

MATT
You're a scavenger, Shores!

DONNY
You're just jealous 'cause I saw it
before you did.

JANIE
Now, boys, let's not get into
another spat.

MATT
A spat? It was a fisticuffs. A
fight to the death brawl.

JANIE
A fisticuffs? Jeeze, I could kick
both your butts with one hand tied
behind my back.

DONNY
Maybe if Katie helped ya. Ya might
have a chance!

KATIE
Don't drag me into your spat.

They laugh, and then, while Matt grabs a handful of Doritos
from his bag, something splatters on the side of his cheek.

MATT
What the heck?

As Matt wipes the glob of mayonnaise from his face, he hears
laughter from the table of jocks sitting beside them.

As Matt loads his spoon with beans and catapults them into the jocks' huddle, Janie chokes on her milk laughing.

DONNY
Holy crap, Matt! Ya just hit Craig Myerson.

MATT
Tit for tat. And that's that.

JANIE
I don't think you're gonna git a tit for that, Matt.

MATT
What? Are ya a poet, now?

KATIE
I'm going to the little girls' room, now. Are you coming with me, Janie?

JANIE
No way! Are you kidding me?

EXT. JOCKS' TABLE - SAME TIME

CRAIG MYERSON, a 200-pound linebacker, wipes beans from his football jersey, while he glares over at Matt, who goes about 140 soaking wet.

EXT. SMOKING AREA, CHESAPEAKE HIGH SCHOOL - MINUTES LATER

Matt smokes a cigarette in the outside smoking area, his "whiteout" not completely clear yet, as Craig Myerson swaggers toward him.

CRAIG
Why did you hit me with pork 'n' beans, punk? Look what you did to my jersey.

Matt blows smoke in Craig's face.

MATT
Someone threw mayo in my face first, jock strap!

Craig tries to rub the bean stain from his jersey.

MATT (CONT'D)
Get your mommy to put a little bit
of Tide on it. That should get
that stain right out.

Craig plants a punch just below Matt's left eye, sending him down to the concrete for a moment.

MATT (V.O.)
Courage. Be brave. Git up!

Matt springs to his feet, while Craig just snickers and belts him in the forehead. Undaunted, Matt peppers him with punches to the face and body, when two teachers grab Matt from behind.

MATT
(yelling)
Hey, what are ya doin'? Get off of
me!

As the teachers hold Matt, Craig swings at him. Matt jumps up and kicks Craig in the throat, freeing himself from the teachers' clutches. Craig staggers backwards, as Matt pursues him.

CRAIG
You're nuts!

MATT
And you're a jock strap!

Matt suddenly tastes concrete, as a gym teacher grapples him to the ground from behind.

INT. MATT'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Matt and his family watch television in the living room, when he whips out his brand new driver's license and slaps it down in the middle of the coffee table.

MOM
Ya got 'em. Great!

Mom picks it up and looks it over.

MOM (CONT'D)
Wish ya woulda got your hair cut
first. What's this? No
restrictions for your eyes?

MATT

Maryland's got crap for brains for
givin' a driver's license to me.
Somethin' is wrong with my eyes. I
don't give a crap what anyone says,
even the State of Maryland!

MOM

Ya saw well enough to get yourself
suspended from school for five days
for fightin'. Didn't ya?

DAD

Well, that explains the bruisin' on
your forehead. Ya told me ya ran
into the flagpole.

MATT

I wanted to get the driver's test
out of the way first.

DAD

Did he get any other shots in on
ya, boy?

MATT

Of course!

INT. CHESAPEAKE HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Matt ambles down the hallway, as Janie, Donny, and Katie approach.

DONNY

(to Matt)

Looks like Myerson straightened out
your nose for ya.

MATT

Heck, ya hit me harder than he did.

DONNY

I know ya bleed a lot more when I
hit ya.

JANIE

Next time, why not pick on someone
your own size.

MATT

Nah. Donny's my size and look what
he did to my nose.

SIX MONTHS LATER

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Matt appears a bit antsy while sitting at the dinner table with his family.

MATT
Mom, dad, I need to tell ya
somethin'.

MOM
Don't tell me that Janie girl's
pregnant!

MATT
No, mom! Nothin' like that.

Cindy mops up the last of the ketchup on her plate with a French fry.

CINDY
Pass me the ketchup, Matt.

MATT
Are ya seein' things? It's not
out! And I ain't gettin' up to get
it from the fridge either.

CINDY
It's right in front of ya, mush for
brains!

Matt ignores her, and she reaches across the table to snatch it.

MATT
Anyway, I quit school, and I'm
gonna work at Graber's Machine Shop
full time startin' next week.

MOM
So, what? Ya gonna throw your
education on the scrap heap? Ya
ain't no quitter, Matt!

MATT
Only when it comes to smokin' and
drinkin' I'm no quitter!

INT. GRABER'S MACHINE SHOP - MORNING

Matt sits at his workbench punching bolt holes in asbestos gaskets with a hammer.

MATT

Ouch!

Matt hits his finger with the hammer. It draws blood, and he looks around to make sure no one notices.

MATT (V.O.)

That's the third time I've smashed my finger already. I can't see right with all these dang machines squealing and whining all the time.

MR. GRABER appears and leans against Matt's workbench. And when Matt finally notices him, he jumps, a bit startled.

MATT (V.O.)

I wonder how long he's been standin' there.

Mr. Graber inspects a pile of gaskets that Matt punched out.

MR. GRABER

How's your first day on the job going, Matt?

MATT

Good. So far, I've punched bolt holes in over 100 gaskets.

MR. GRABER

Janie said you'd be a good worker.

Mr. Graber answers the phone.

MR. GRABER (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Okay, I'll send him right out.

Mr. Graber hangs up the phone.

MR. GRABER (CONT'D)

A tractor trailer just pulled in out back with a load of compressed asbestos. I need for you to go help Bruce unload it. He'll show you what to do.

EXT. GRABER'S LOADING DOCK - MINUTES LATER

BRUCE, one of Matt's coworkers, and the truck driver talk, as Matt walks out into the sunlight. Bruce tosses Matt a single key on a ring which hits Matt in the chest and bounces to the ground.

BRUCE
Good hands!

MATT
What the heck was that?

Matt doesn't see the key on the ground. Bruce picks it up and pokes Matt gently in the chest with it.

BRUCE
This key is for the storage room.
After you unload the truck, put
these rolls of compressed asbestos
in there.

Matt doesn't see Bruce pointing to the rolls of asbestos on the truck.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Don't think you're gonna get a free
ride around here just because
you're riding the boss's daughter.
You ain't no different than the
rest of 'em

A close up on Matt shows a spear-like glare aimed at Bruce, with his head cocked to one side and his fists clenched.

MATT (V.O.)
Don't bash him, yet, Matt. Wait.

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - SATURDAY NIGHT

Matt's pride and joy, his '68 black Mustang, haul's Jeeter Jones, Katie Latzman, Janie, and Matt on a double date.

MATT (V.O.)
I hate havin' to make up excuses
about not drivin' at nighttime. I
never admit that I have night
blindness. It's never been
diagnosed, and I can't explain it.
So why bother? In fact, I never
admit that I can't see good to
anyone.

MATT
(to Janie)
Since I don't mind drinkin', I'm
glad ya don't mind drivin'!

JEETER
So, when did you become such an
upstanding citizen who would care
about drinking and driving?

KATIE
Ever since Janie wouldn't get in
the car with him when he's
drinking.

JANIE
No offense, sweetie, but even in
broad daylight, when you haven't
been drinking, your driving is
enough to gray my hair.

MATT
I just don't always pay attention.
That's all. Besides, ya ain't even
gotta driver's license, so you're
lucky I even let ya drive my black
beauty.

JEETER
You ain't been paying attention
ever since I've known you. You
just whipped, boy. That's all.

MATT
Better to wear out than rust out,
moron!

EXT. MATT'S MUSTANG - SATURDAY NIGHT

Matt's Mustang maneuvers through the dirt road leading to the parking area in front of the large outdoor movie screen. A sign reads: "Now Playing Saturday Night Fever."

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG, DRIVE-IN MOVIE - MOMENTS LATER

The gang watches "Saturday Night Fever," while drinking Budweiser and snorting some of Jeeter's cocaine.

JEETER
John Travolta's such a dork.

KATIE
You're just jealous.

JEETER
Jealous? You might be able to get away with crap like that where you live. But if I pranced around in a suit like that in my neighborhood, they'd be burying my butt in it!

Jeeter digs in his pocket for a vial of cocaine.

JEETER (CONT'D)
(to Katie)
You got a mirror, hun?

Katie hands Jeeter a mirror from her purse. Then he skillfully measures out four lines of cocaine on it.

MATT
Where did ya get the coke, Jeeter?

JEETER
Pitter Patter.

MATT
I'm surprised that fool ain't got himself locked up by now.

Jeeter pulls out a one-hundred dollar bill, and rolls it width-wise into a tube-like shape.

JEETER
The buzz is always sweeter when you snort blow through a one-hundred dollar bill.

MATT
Comin' from you, it's probably Monopoly money!

After Katie snorts her lines, she passes the vial of cocaine to Janie, who declines, then passes it to Matt, who, with his Buck Knife cuts a McDonald's drinking straw in half, then turns on the overhead light while measuring out his lines.

MATT (CONT'D)
Here's your hundred dollars, Jeet.
A two-cent drinking straw works just fine for us workin' guys.

JEETER
If you play smart, you don't have to work.

The Bee Gees blast through the movie speaker hanging on the car window.

JEETER (CONT'D)
Do you really need that light on?
You're gonna get us busted, moron!

EXT. KATIE LATZMAN'S HOUSE - LATER THAT EVENING

Jeeter and Katie exit Matt's Mustang. Everyone but Janie is wasted. She and Matt watch Jeeter and Katie, bathed in porch light, stumble to her front door.

EXT. JANIE'S DRIVEWAY - SAME EVENING

Janie pulls Matt's Mustang into her darkened driveway.

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - EVENING

JANIE
My parents went to Ocean City for
the weekend with the Latzman's. Do
you want to stay over tonight?

INT. JANIE'S FRONT DOOR - NEXT MORNING

Sunbeams drench Janie and Matt, as they stand by her front door. She tightens the belt around her robe.

JANIE
I can cook us some breakfast. Mom
and dad won't be home until
tonight.

MATT
I'm supposed to meet up with
Ralphie this morning to buy some
black hash.

Matt kisses her.

MATT (CONT'D)
I'll call ya later.

SIX MONTHS LATER

INT. GRABER'S MACHINE SHOP - DAY

Matt smashes his hand with a hammer, while punching bolt holes in some gaskets.

MATT
Dang! If I ain't done it again!

Matt holds his injured hand, as Bruce looks on.

BRUCE
Boy. You'll do anything to get out of work. You lazy sack of crap!
Now, who do you think's gotta finish your work?

MATT
One more word, and I'll bash ya so hard with this broken hand.

Matt lifts up his swollen hand.

MATT (CONT'D)
That you'll beg for my right hand!

INT. DR. SNYDER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Matt reclines on the examination table, while DR. SNYDER reads his x-ray.

DR. SNYDER
This is the second time in six months that you've fractured your hand with a hammer, son. You might want to consider making a career change.

MATT
I just need to pay attention more.
That's all.

TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Matt relaxes on a chair, while blowing pot smoke out of his bedroom window. He rests his bong beneath a poster of Farrah Fawcett, looks up at her and smiles. Then, the phone rings.

MATT
Hello.

INT. JANIE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Janie slumps on a stool in her kitchen with tears streaming down her face, oil slicked with mascara.

JANIE
It's me.

MATT (O.S.)
What's up? And don't tell me heaven like ya always do.

JANIE
Will you come over and pick me up?
We need to talk.

EXT. JANIE'S DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Janie is waiting for Matt, as he pulls into her driveway. Her face still stained with mascara.

MATT
What's the matter?

Janie gets in the passenger's side and slams the door.

JANIE
Let's go to Fort Smallwood Park.

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - MINUTES LATER

They drive in silence while "Dust in the Wind," by Kansas, plays on Matt's 8-track player. They enter the park, and Matt drifts into a spot overlooking the Patapsco River.

JANIE
I'm pregnant.

Matt turns off the ignition but keeps his hand on the key and looks out on the river as if it has an answer. Finally, he turns and hugs Janie in silence.

MATT (V.O.)
If only I'd stopped at the liquor store before pickin' Janie up.

Matt still looks shocked as they dis-embrace.

JANIE
I wanted to become Honored Queen for Job's Daughters. I was next in line.

She cries uncontrollably. Matt tries to comfort her with another hug, but she pulls away.

JANIE (CONT'D)
But Honored Queens are supposed to
be virgins!

Janie blows her nose on a tissue.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Since pregnancy opposes their moral
code, if I keep this baby, I'm
disqualified.

Matt looks Janie dead in the eye.

MATT
If ya keep the baby? What do ya
mean, if? A life is more important
than some club!

Matt takes a deep breath.

MATT (CONT'D)
Please, Janie, tell me ya believe
that, too. All I know is that I
love ya and want this baby. We can
get married, and I can start
working' my way up in your dad's
company.

MATT (V.O.)
I won't let my blindness mess that
up. I swear!

JANIE
You're right, Matt. But my parents
think otherwise. You know how
involved my father is with the
masons and how important it is to
him that I become Honored Queen.

Matt's irritation boils over.

MATT
But it's hypocritical, Janie!
Can't ya see that? Even if ya
weren't pregnant, you're still not
a virgin! And that fact alone
disqualifies ya anyway.

JANIE
Yeah, but what they don't know
won't hurt them!
(MORE)

JANIE (CONT'D)

And besides, I'm only 17, and my parents think I'm too young to have a baby. They want me to get an abortion, Matt!

Janie sobs some more. And when Matt gently touches her forearm, she stops and stares out through the front windshield.

JANIE (CONT'D)

I'm so confused and scared. I never told you this. But last year, after I broke up with Chucky, I had an abortion. And I'm afraid if I have another one, I won't be able to conceive again.

Matt stares dumbfounded, soaking up this new revelation like kitty litter absorbing cat pee.

MATT (V.O.)

Had she aborted her other baby to maintain her status of "purity" for this club I now hate. Think before ya speak, moron. Only if I had a Budweiser right now!

Matt takes Janie's hand.

MATT

Look, sweetheart, the past is the past. Let's get married and have this baby together. We've already talked about marriage. We'll just wed sooner rather than later.

Janie kisses Matt and smiles.

JANIE

How about October?

THREE WEEKS LATER

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - AFTERNOON

"Money," by Pink Floyd, oozes from DANNY DUMAS' Ford Falcon, while he, Matt, and Auggie Bell sit on its hood, sipping Old Grand-Dad. Auggie loads a bong with parsley flakes treated with PCP.

MATT
I can't believe it! She told me
she wanted to keep our baby and get
married in October.

With tears rolling down his cheeks, Matt grips the Old Grand-Dad bottle like a lifeline.

MATT (CONT'D)
Then she calls and tells me that
she's gettin' an abortion, claimin'
that her parents are makin' her. I
told her I'd have no part of it,
and that the blood of our child was
on her hands.

Danny Dumas snatches a hand full of Doritos from Matt's bag.

DANNY
You're taking this situation way
too serious, dude. Get over it,
buzzkill!

Auggie passes the bong filled with flakes to Matt.

AUGGIE
You're better off without her. At
least you didn't have to pay for
it. I had to pay for Annie's
abortion. And I still swear it
wasn't even mine. I believe it was
Sonny Robert's kid.

MATT
For me, it was never about money.
It was about principle. How could
I pay that "hit" man, with MD
behind his name, to suck the life
from my own flesh and blood?

INT. JENNY YOUNG'S BASEMENT - EVENING

Led Zeppelin's Kashmir plays in the background, as Matt enters Jenny's basement with two grocery bags filled with items from his latest shopping spree for Jenny's mother. Jenny sits painting her tanned face with makeup at the table.

JENNY
Where ya been, stranger?

MATT
Been shoppin' for your mom.

Jenny puts a bandana around her long, dirty blonde hair.

JENNY

That's not what I meant, moron! Ya
can put the bags by the fridge.
And while your at it, grab us a
couple beers.

Matt puts the bags by the fridge, grabs two beers, hands one to Jenny, and sits down across the table from her.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Ain't even gonna open it for me?
Here's your twenty bucks from mom.

Matt takes the money, and then snatches the beer back from Jenny, opens it, and slides it back to her.

MATT

Ya want me to drink it for ya, too,
princess?

JENNY

Don't confuse me with Janie. Your
little Honored Queen may have a
tiara on her head, but you'll not
find one on mine.

Jenny puts her lipstick on and smacks her lips.

JENNY (CONT'D)

So I hear ya been gettin' fried
lately.

Matt digs a pipe from one pocket and a baggie of flakes from the other, then loads the bowl.

MATT

I'm just takin' a vacation from
reality.

JENNY

I think ya been on vacation from
reality.

Matt lights the bowl, takes a long draw, then passes it to Jenny, who dumps the bowl out into the ashtray.

JENNY (CONT'D)

PCP is nothin' to fool with. It's
a pit filled with darkness.

Matt pockets his pipe and baggie of flakes, then heads toward the door.

MATT
 When your mom needs me to go
 shoppin' again, give me a holler.

SIX MONTHS LATER

INT. DANNY DUMAS'S FORD FALCON - EVENING

As Danny drives his Ford Falcon through Annapolis, MD, Auggie, seated in the front passenger seat, has flakes to sell, while Matt slouches in the backseat behind him, wasted on flakes and Tango.

AUGGIE
 Unbelievable! I thought for sure
 they'd show up.

MATT
 They were probably narcs.

AUGGIE
 I wouldn't be sellin' dope to no
 narc.

MATT
 Attitude like that gets ya busted!

Danny reaches back to hand Matt a pipe burning with flakes, but Matt doesn't respond.

DANNY
 What the heck's your problem, Matt?
 You never take the bowl when I hand
 it to you. Maybe you're a freakin'
 narc.

MATT
 You're paranoid, Dumas. Maybe ya
 should shut your mouth and watch
 where you're drivin'.

Auggie grabs the steering wheel and jerks the car back into its lane after Danny wanders into a lane of oncoming traffic.

AUGGIE
 What the heck, Dumas?

Matt finishes off the bowl.

MATT
 My brain's itchin', Auggie! No.
 Stop the beasts! Stop 'em!
 They're clawin' my mind.
 (MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)
Shut up Cerebus! Shut up. No!
Quit barkin'. I'm not goin' there.
Get off! No.

Rather than the rock group, Styx, it sounds like a fiend singing "Renegade" in a demonic tone.

FIEND
(in a demonic tone)
"The jig is up, the news is out.
They finally found me. The
renegade who had it made retrieved
for a bounty. Never more to go
astray. This'll be the end today
of a wanted man."

Matt tries to load another bowl of flakes, as Danny turns the wrong way onto Taylor Avenue.

AUGGIE
Watch the guardrail!

Tires screech and metal scrapes and crunches, as Danny slams his Falcon into the guardrail to avoid oncoming traffic. The back of the front passenger seat tackles Matt, forcing him to fumble his pipe brimming with PCP.

EXT. DANNY'S FALCON - SECONDS LATER

The accident only shakes up the boys a bit, but the crash severely damages the front end and side of Danny's car.

MATT (V.O.)
Toss the dope! Run, Matt, run.
But toss my dope? Nope. I don't
think so.

MATT
I wanna run, but I can't see!

Matt loiters by the wreck, flicks his BIC Butane several times to get a flame, lights a Salem, then places the flame above his watch.

MATT (CONT'D)
My Timex still tickin' reads 2:10
a.m.

Auggie runs around frantically, while sirens scream in the distance.

MATT (CONT'D)
My brain's cracklin' like a fire
log.

Matt brushes himself off like he's on fire.

MATT (CONT'D)
Wretched flame! No! Get off!

AUGGIE
(to Matt)
Shut up!

INT. DANNY'S FALCON - SECONDS LATER

Danny keeps turning the ignition key.

AUGGIE (O.S.)
What are you doing, Dumas?

DANNY
Gotta get it started.

Matt gets in the passenger's side front seat and looks at Danny.

MATT
Ain't gonna start, Satan!

EXT. ACCIDENT SCENE - SECONDS LATER

Auggie disappears on top of a hill for several moments, then returns, as several Annapolis police cars barrel down onto the scene with sirens blasting and lights blaring. Stepping out from their squad cars, the police survey the scene.

OFFICER
Is anyone injured?

The officer shines his light on Danny, who's still trying to start his car.

DANNY
No officslur.

The Falcon wrecks from booze, pot, and flake smoke. When an officer shines his light through the interior of the car, he finds Matt's bowl and some flakes on the floor, that he had dropped upon impact. The boys are then placed under arrest.

INT. ANNAPOLIS POLICE STATION - EARLY MORNING

We hear an echo from a police officer's boots, as he escorts Matt down a corridor leading to his jail cell.

EXT. MATT'S JAIL CELL - MOMENTS LATER

The officer opens the cell door and directs Matt inside, then closes the door.

OFFICER
Sweet dreams, burnout!

Matt splashes cold water from the sink onto his face, then kneels by his bunk to pray.

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - DAY

Matt, Auggie, and Danny sit in Matt's car drinking beer and listening to the Rolling Stones.

MATT
(to Auggie)
I was so wasted I didn't know what was happenin'. But when I sobered a bit in my cell, I just figured we also got busted for what you were sellin', too. I figured we weren't gettin' out for a long, long time.

AUGGIE
I ditched the flakes on top of the hill but forgot about the stash I had in my pocket.

Auggie finishes rolling a joint, then twists each end between his lips.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
Since they separated us before we got a chance to get our stories straight, I kept worrying one of you morons might say something to the cops about the flakes I was selling.

DANNY
Yeah, but our lawyer said we still might be facin' two years in prison for the possession charges. Plus, I got drivin' charges I'm facin'.

AUGGIE
You're lucky you didn't kill
someone, or you'd be facing
manslaughter charges. You jerk!

MATT
But like the lawyer said if we
don't get that drug analysis report
from the States Attorney's office,
at least one week before our trial,
the judge might throw our case out.

THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. ANNAPOLIS COURTHOUSE - DAY

Matt, Danny, and Auggie confer with their attorney, SEAN MARIS, at the defendant's table, as the prosecutor presents his case.

PROSECUTOR
I think the evidence in this case
is clear and proves overwhelmingly
that these defendants are guilty of
their crimes. We request a two-
year prison sentence for their PCP
possession charges. And now, the
state rests its case, your honor.

Mr. Maris smiles and stuffs the drug analysis report into its envelope postmarked three days before the trial.

MR. MARIS
Permission to approach the bench,
your honor.

JUDGE
Permission granted.

Mr. Maris hands the judge the drug analysis report, pointing out the postmark on the envelope, then returns to his seat.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Case dismissed.

MATT
(to Mr. Maris)
Does that mean we can leave?

MR. MARIS
Get out of here!

TWO YEARS LATER

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - MORNING

Before work, Matt sits in his Mustang corralled in the woods behind his parents' house. "Stairway to Heaven" plays lowly in the background, while Matt munches on Doritos.

MATT (V.O.)
I don't care what the doctors say.
I'm goin' blind. I know it.
That's why I ain't driven my black
beauty in two years. No one else
knows why but me. That's my
secret. Well, at least my Mustang
and I have this in common. Our
luster continues to tarnish like a
corpse rottin' in a casket!

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Matt strolls into the kitchen, where his dad is eating a plate of hot chocolate pudding.

MATT
I think Bruce forgot that he was
supposed to pick me up today. Can
I catch a ride to work with ya?
Mr. Graber hates when I'm late.

DAD
Sure. I'll be ready in a few
minutes.

INT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt turns the radio on to a rock station.

DAD
Well, tomorrow's the big day, huh?

MATT
Yeah. I feel like a defendant
waitin' for a verdict.

DAD
Well, Dr. Miller's a good
Ophthalmologist. I think he might
be on to somethin' with his
prognosis of...What's it called
again?

MATT
Retinitis Pigmentosa--or RP for short. I ain't gettin' my hopes up until he tells me that the tests confirm it.

As "Tom Sawyer," by Rush, plays, Matt hangs his arm out the window. And while foul breath belches from Curtis Bay's industrial throats, and humidity oppresses them on this August morning, Matt sings along with Rush.

MATT (CONT'D)
(singing softly)
"My mind is not for rent to any god or government."

Dad lowers the volume on the radio.

DAD
I wannna tell ya a little bit about a book in the Bible that we're studyin' at church. It's called Revelation.

INT. GRABER'S MACHINE SHOP - LUNCHTIME

Matt and a coworker named CARLOS relax at their workbench eating lunch. After Matt crumples up an empty bag of Doritos, and tosses it into the trash can, he downs the rest of his Coca-Cola from a bottle and lights up a Salem.

MATT
Do ya believe in God, Carlos?

Carlos finishes chewing a hunk from his roast beef sandwich.

CARLOS
I'm Catholic.

MATT
My dad's a religious man, and I never listen to him. But today he gave me a ride to work, because that moron, Bruce, forgot on purpose to pick me up.

CARLOS
He's such a butt wipe.

MATT
Anyway, while en route, dad sat behind the wheel of his pulpit...

Matt pretends to be steering a steering wheel with a pious look on his face, as Carlos chuckles.

MATT (CONT'D)
...preachin' about God, the gospel,
and some book in the Bible he
referred to as Revelation. Ya ever
heard of it?

CARLOS
Nah. When I go to mass, the
priests say everything in Latin.
It's all Greek to me.

MATT
Yeah, well, dad kept spinnin' on,
like a Michelin down Curtis Avenue,
explainin' how in the future seven
years of Great Tribulation would
plague our planet, God pouring out
judgment from his cup of wrath on
populations, who, at that time,
will have turned away from Him to
follow Satan, His False Prophet,
and Beast.

CARLOS
You been sharing some of your wacky
weed with your dad, dude?

MATT
It makes no sense. I know. But it
still fascinates me! The way I
think about Jesus has changed,
Carlos. I'm intrigued how the
Bible speaks of Christ's Second
Comin' and other future events it
says will happen. I never knew
about these things until today.

CARLOS
Fiction!

MATT
I'm not so sure, Carlos. But Dad
also told me, and not for the first
time, that Jesus loves us so much
that He died on the cross to save
us from our sins.

Carlos shakes his head, looking dumbfounded.

MATT (CONT'D)

Dad also said that God promises to save us from hell and give us eternal life if we repent from our sins, which means to agree with God that we sinned against Him, and then turn away from them, and ask His Son, Jesus, to forgive us, and believe the gospel, which is to believe that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead by God His Father.

Carlos does the sign of the cross.

CARLOS

Holy Mother of God, Matt! You sound like a mad man!

MATT

You're just as mad as I am, or else ya wouldn't be drinkin' booze and smokin' weed every day just like I do.

Carlos tugs on his crucifix necklace.

MATT (CONT'D)

Look, Carlos, I'm a born and bred Catholic boy, just like you, baptized with holy water, made my first communion, and was careful not to hurt Jesus when I chewed the wafer.

Carlos lets go of the crucifix and busts out laughing.

MATT (CONT'D)

I went to confession, got confirmed, and was an altar boy with eight years of Catholic education! And yet emptiness overflows inside my soul.

Matt peers into Carlos' eyes.

MATT (CONT'D)

Is it because Catholic boys need Jesus, too, Carlos?

AUGUST 21, 1981

INT. DR. JOHN MILLER'S WAITING ROOM - MORNING

Matt slouches in a chair in the waiting room of DR. JOHN MILLER'S ophthalmology office, his face buried in a Sport's Illustrated magazine.

RECEPTIONIST

Matthew Harris, Dr. Miller can see you, now.

She leads Matt back to Dr. Miller's examination room.

INT. DR. JOHN MILLER'S EXAMINATION ROOM - MORNING

Dr. Miller greets Matt at the door.

DR. MILLER

Hi, Matt. Here, have a seat.

Dr. Miller guides Matt to the examination chair.

DR. MILLER (CONT'D)

Your test results confirm what we discussed on your initial visit with me.

Dr. Miller places Matt's chart on his desk.

DR. MILLER (CONT'D)

You have Retinitis Pigmentosa--or RP for short. The disease is incurable and progressive. And, so far, it has carved 82 degrees from your visual field, which puts you in the legally blind range. Your acuity, though, is still 20/20.

MATT

Thank you, Dr. Miller, for finally solvin' this mystery that has haunted me since I was eleven years old. You diagnosed in ten minutes what a dozen doctors in the past decade had missed.

EXT. DR. JOHN MILLER'S FRONT DOOR - MORNING

Matt shoulders his way through Dr. Miller's front door and pauses until his "whiteout" subsides. His dad toots the horn to get his attention. Matt walks gingerly toward the car and gets in.

INT. DAD'S FORD GALAXIE - MORNING

Dad snacks on a peanut butter sandwich, while Matt lights up a Salem and hangs his arm out of the window.

DAD

Well?

MATT

The jury came back with a verdict.
And they've found me guilty of
Retinitis Pigmentosa--or RP for
short.

Matt takes a long drag from his cigarette and blows three smoke rings.

MATT (CONT'D)
It all makes sense now. I'm not
crazy.

Tears well up in Matt's eyes.

MATT (CONT'D)
I feel relieved more than anything.
I just don't feel like talkin'
about it.

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - LATER THAT DAY

Matt slips a Steppenwolf tape into his 8-track player, and "Born to be Wild" blasts forth. He snatches a Budweiser from his cooler, then loads his bong with weed, strikes a match, then takes a hit.

MATT (V.O.)
Lack of money is the excuse I use
to tell people why my Mustang has
sat sinkin' in leaves and twigs in
the woods behind my parents' house
for the past two years...

Matt lights up a Salem, puts it in the ashtray, then takes another hit from his bong.

MATT (V.O.)
The truth is I could not lie
anymore, at least not to myself,
about the fact that my eyes had
become like sponges, and some
phantom had been wringin'
peripheral vision from their field.

Matt replaces Steppenwolf with Fleetwood Mac and spaces out on the smoke that rises from the half inch of ash that quivers on his Salem lounging in the ashtray.

MATT (V.O.)
For the first time in ten years, I
know what my problem is. I'm a
freakin' paradox, a legally blind
man with 20/20 vision!

Matt's passenger-side door creaks open. It's WILLY AUSTIN, dressed in a Beatles' T-shirt, with greasy brown hair that covers a pair of sunglasses--except for the lenses.

WILLY
Your door hinges need oil.

MATT
What's up, Willy? Outta weed
again?

WILLY
It's been dry, man. Do you have
any?

MATT
Were ya not just engulfed in a
cloud of it, when ya opened my car
door? Have a seat. But don't sit
your fat butt on my Doritos.

Matt fires up a joint, then passes it to Willy.

WILLY
Gotta cigarette?

Matt hands Willie a Salem.

WILLY (CONT'D)
When are you going to start smoking
Marlboros, Matt? I can barely
stomach these nasty menthols of
yours.

Willy lights the Salem and takes a drag anyway.

MATT
Ya been bummin' cigarettes from me
for seven years. Don't ya know by
now, I only smoke Salems to tick
your dumb, redneck butt off? Ya
moronic, mooch! And, by the way,
here's your map to the Marlboro
store!

Matt points his middle finger at Willy.

WILLY
Can I have one of your Budweisers?
This pot's given me cotton mouth.

MATT
Aren't ya a Miller man?

WILLY
No, Matt, I like Budweiser. You
know that.

MATT
Then grab me one, too, ya jerk!

Willy chugs about half of the beer.

WILLY
How about selling me a joint's
worth of weed?

MATT
I don't sell pot to no narc.

WILLY
I'm not a narcotic's officer, Matt.
You know that. I don't want people
thinking that.

MATT
Lighten up! It was a joke,
buzzkill.

Willy opens the door to leave. But before he does, he reaches in Matt's cooler to snag a beer.

WILLY
Can I take a Bud for the road?

MATT
No! And don't let the door hit ya
in the rear on your way outta here!

MATT (V.O.)
Willy could have taken one of my
Buds, and, of course, I'd never
have been the wiser. And the
stupid pun is intended.
(MORE)

MATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But since he's in the dark about my blindness, he doesn't know how my lack of sight offers much more speed to his hand, when considering this adage: The hand is quicker than the eye.

Matt scoops a handful of Doritos from their bag.

MATT (V.O.)

I cling to secrecy about my blindness for protection. But for how long will this armament shield me? Or is it a delusion, and, perhaps, already as clear as a cloudless sky to the outside world? Is the joke on me?

Matt turns the radio on and bashes the dash to get rid of the static. A real estate commercial is playing and puts Matt to sleep. Moments later, Jenny Young, dressed in a pair of cut-off jean shorts, sandals, and halter top, bangs on the roof.

JENNY

Hey, Matt. Wake up! Ya okay?

Matt awakens with a startled look on his face.

MATT

Just nodded off a bit. What's up?

JENNY

I gotta get mom some stuff from the store. Ya wanna walk up with me?

MATT

Nah. I just wanna stay here and catch a buzz.

JENNY

Looks like you're already buzzed. Somethin' wrong?

MATT

Just thinkin' about some things. That's all.

JENNY

Looked like ya wuz snoozin' more than thinkin'.

Jenny snitches a cigarette from Matt's shirt pocket.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Remember when ya used to shop for
mom?

MATT
Of course, I remember. I'm not
senile.

JENNY
Keep smokin' that wacky weed and ya
will be.

MATT
Ya smoke it way more than I do,
girl.

JENNY
Yeah, but I have more brain cells
to burn than you!

Jenny turns and walks away.

MATT
Hey! Bring me back a bag of
Doritos, will ya?

Matt watches Jenny move through his yard toward the road.

MATT (V.O.)
I'm clueless about your eye color,
girl, but I love the way they
flicker when ya laugh. And I know
I'm a pig to agree with all the
guys around here who say ya fill
out your Levi's rather nicely. But
what I like most about ya is how we
talk effortlessly for hours. And,
yet, as easily as we converse, I
still can't share my ordeal with
ya.

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Matt hunches, red eyed, over the kitchen counter as he chows down on some cold macaroni and cheese. His sister enters.

CINDY
Hey! Mom said I could have the
leftover mac and cheese. You know
that's my favorite.

MATT
Shut up, crap for brains!

Matt shovels a large bite of mac and cheese into his mouth.

MATT (CONT'D)
Besides, ya gonna deprive your
poor, legally blind brother some
mac and chesse?

CINDY
What are you talking about, moron?

MATT
I got RP.

INT. MATT'S MUSTANG - MOMENTS LATER

As Matt cracks open another Budweiser, Jenny opens his passenger side door and sinks into the black bucket seat. She hands Matt his bag of Doritos, and he doesn't respond.

JENNY
Here! Take your Doritos. Why do
ya do that?

MATT
What?

JENNY
When I hand ya stuff, ya don't
respond.

MATT
I don't always pay attention, I
guess.

JENNY
Well, pay attention. It's
annoyin'!

Matt hands Jenny the bong and a baggie of weed.

MATT
Here, load up the bong, will ya?

Matt opens his Doritos and starts munching, as Jenny reaches into his shirt pocket and snatches his lighter. She fires up the bong, then reloads and takes another hit and coughs through her nose.

JENNY
That's good stuff.

She gives Matt back the bong and baggie of weed, and he takes it from her.

MATT
See, I'm payin' attention this time.

She giggles and starts rooting through Matt's 8-track tape collection. When the Eagles' "Hotel California" catches her eye, she plugs it into the 8-track player, and "Life in the Fast Lane" races through the speakers.

JENNY
Why aren't ya workin' today?

MATT
I felt like partyin', so I took off.

JENNY
Liar!

Jenny backhands Matt on the shoulder.

JENNY (CONT'D)
How can ya stand workin' in that sweatshop with your ex's father?
Are ya masochistic or somethin'?

MATT
When did ya start speakin' in ten dollar words? Ya don't even know what "masochistic" means, girl.

JENNY
Shut up and answer me this, moron.
Do ya see her there?

MATT
Every day.

JENNY
Ya still love her. I know ya do.

Jenny pulls out a checkbook from her purse and starts to write.

MATT
What are ya doin'?

JENNY
I'm writin' a check for ya. What's today's date?

MATT
August 21, 1981

JENNY
It's for the \$25.00 ya loaned me
last month to help pay for my
tires.

MATT
I don't take checks. Put it away,
Jenny. Besides, it wasn't a loan.
It was a gift. Now, I gotta go
find me a tree to water. I'll be
right back.

When Matt leaves, Jenny chugs the last half of her beer, then opens another one, as Matt returns from doing his business.

JENNY
Ya never should have gone back to
Graber's, Matt.

MATT
Believe me, darlin', when I tell
ya, I'm not gonna receive some gold
watch for havin' worked there for
25 years!

Matt puts his hand on Jenny's shoulder.

MATT (CONT'D)
Look, Jenny, after Janie, and my
drug bust and everything else, I
needed some time to tune out alone,
to get my head screwed on straight
again. So after I got my act
together, if ya even wanna call it
that, I went back to work there
because I needed to redeem myself
for messin' things up. I was lucky
Graber even took me back, after all
the crap that happened with Janie.

Jenny kills another can of beer and cracks open another one.

JENNY
I should've kicked Janie's butt for
ya, Matt. That would've been one
bruised up Honored Queen.

Jenny laughs and starts shadowboxing Matt's windshield.

MATT
Don't be bustin' out my windshield,
Sugar Ray. That's the Budweiser
talkin', girl.

JENNY
I got your Budweiser right here!

Jenny playfully smacks Matt in the side of the head.

JENNY (CONT'D)
I'm so fast ya didn't even see it
comin'. Did ya, mister?

A smirk appears on Matt's face.

MATT (V.O.)
If only ya knew.

JENNY
I gotta get mom's groceries home to
her before she sends a search party
out after me. See ya around.

ONE WEEK LATER

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Matt sits at a table in his bedroom with his head in the Bible. A passage has him baffled.

MATT (V.O.)
Lord, what does it mean in John
16:8, where Ya say, "And when He
has come, He will convict the world
of sin...?"

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Matt steps into the kitchen where his dad is reading the newspaper at the table with a half-eaten plate of chocolate pudding next to him. He plops in the chair across from him, then taps on the newspaper to get his attention.

MATT
What does it mean in the Bible,
where it says, "He will convict the
world of sin?"

Dad sets the newspaper aside.

DAD
That's a good question, Matt. The
"He" who Jesus is speakin' of is
the Holy Spirit.

Dad pulls a small Bible from his pocket and opens it up.

DAD (CONT'D)
 The Holy Spirit is One of the three Persons of the Godhead. The other two are God the Father, and God the Son.

Dad takes a swig of ice water from a glass.

DAD (CONT'D)
 One of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to let people in the world know that we've sinned against God. And He also let's us know that, because God the Father loves us, He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to save us from our sins.

Matt opens a bag of Doritos and starts to munch, while listening intently.

DAD (CONT'D)
 But the amazin' thing is that Jesus didn't stay dead because God, His Father, raised Him from the grave. This is the gospel. And God promises that if we repent from our sins, and believe the gospel, He will give us eternal life.

MATT
 I've been convicted.

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - DAY

Matt loiters by the boat ramp smoking a cigarette, as Ralphie and Nathan pull up alongside him in Ralphie's Toyota.

RALPHIE
 Ain't seen ya around for a while.
 Where ya been hidin'?

MATT
 Been workin' a lot.

NATHAN
 Ain't seen you get high in a while.
 You turn narc on us?

MATT
 If I were a narc, you'd already be the Queen of cell block C.

RALPHIE
Yeah, Nathan would look mighty fine
in a tiara.

Nathan flips Matt the middle finger.

NATHAN
You know where you can go, Matt!

MATT
Yeah, home! See ya, Ralphie.

EIGHT MONTHS LATER

EXT. LAKE SHORE BAPTIST CHURCH - EVENING

Matt stands in front of Lake Shore Baptist church smoking a Salem, eating Doritos, and talking to God.

MATT (V.O.)
Lord, I know Ya love me. I feel
it, and I know I'm a sinner.
That's obvious. But if I receive
Ya as Savior, I'm afraid my friends
will think I'm weak. So I'm torn,
Lord. Please help me! And, as Ya
know, I still like to smoke weed
and drink beer.

EXT. BOULEVARD PARK - NIGHT

Matt approaches Auggie Bell and Danny Dumas, who are standing on the corner under the street light. They both are obnoxious and wasted on Tango, a mixture of Vodka and orange juice.

AUGGIE
(to Matt)
Haven't seen you around in a while.
Do you have any weed? It's as dry
as the Sahara around here.

MATT
Not on me.

DANNY
Yeah, that figures. You ain't
nothin' but a chump.

MATT
 What the heck's your problem,
 Dumas? Ya momma forgot to breast-
 feed ya today?

DANNY
 My problem is you! Because if you
 would've been smart enough to pick
 up that bowl of flakes you dropped
 in my backseat, we never would've
 been busted. And I wouldn't have
 lost my driver's license for a
 year.

MATT
 Ya moron! We got busted because
 your dumb butt turned the wrong way
 on Taylor Avenue. And you lost
 your license because you had prior
 drivin' convictions. You're the
 only person I know who drives worse
 than I do!

Danny gives Matt a hard shove to the chest.

MATT (CONT'D)
 My sister shoves harder than that.
 Ya wuss!

Matt turns away and heads for home.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matt's poring over a passage of Scripture from the Book of Matthew that strikes at his heart.

MATT
 (reading out loud)
 "Therefore whoever confesses Me
 before men, him I will also confess
 before my Father who is in heaven.
 But whoever denies Me before men,
 him I will also deny before My
 Father who is in heaven" (Matthew
 10:32-33).

Matt squints out the window and gazes up to heaven.

MATT (CONT'D)
 (out loud)
 Ya answered my prayer, Lord! I've
 been afraid to confess Ya before
 men. I know now I gotta do it!

DECEMBER 12, 1982

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Matt's family eats breakfast, but he's not hungry today. Dad butters pancakes, while Cindy pours a glass of milk.

MOM
Ya don't want any pancakes today,
Matt?

MATT
Not hungry.

Cindy drenches her pancakes in syrup.

MOM
Go to war, Cindy! That's enough!
Ya poured half the dang bottle on
'em. Save some for the rest of us.
Will ya?

CINDY
I have a sweet tooth today.

MATT
Well, come over here, and I'll pull
it for ya!

CINDY
Very funny!

DAD
We're goin' to church in a few
minutes. What are ya up to today?

MATT
I'm gonna take a walk to the store.
I need a few things.

MOM
We can give ya a ride.

MATT
Nah, that's okay. I like trudgin'
in the snow.

MATT (V.O.)
I believe today is the day of my
salvation, and yet I just lied.
That's because if I get saved, then
that proves my father's right. My
pride won't let me admit that.
(MORE)

MATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So I'm goin' to another church
today. Dad don't need to know if I
get saved. Was it any of his
business, anyway? I'm goin' to
Galilee Lutheran. Their service
starts earlier than Lake Shore's.
I'll go there, get saved, and come
back before dad ever gets home.

EXT. MATT'S FRONT DOOR - SUNDAY MORNING

For a few seconds, the focus is on the snow covered ground and Matt's front door. Six inches of snow has fallen so far, and it's flurrying. Then we see Matt come out and light up a Salem.

EXT. MARYLAND AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt lumbers up Maryland Avenue toward Galilee Lutheran Church, while snowflakes gather on his hat-less hair that dances six inches below his shoulders.

MATT (V.O.)
I don't have a cane yet, but I know
now what that blind preacher back
in Lakeland meant when he said, "A
person with spiritual blindness
dwells in a deeper darkness than
any ever experienced by a blind man
with a cane."

As Matt trudges toward Galilee Lutheran Church, a blue Chevy Vega approaches and then stops. It's Nathan Carlyle.

NATHAN
Hey, burnout, what's up?

MATT
Goin' for a walk.

Matt keeps walking while Nathan drives along beside him.

NATHAN
Wanna pitch in for a six pack?

MATT
Not today.

NATHAN
You don't come around much.

MATT
Been busy.

Matt trips over a sled lying partially on the shoulder of the road and partially in the road. Nathan bursts out laughing.

NATHAN
I think you already been drinking.
You better watch where you're
going, burnout.

Matt watches Nathan drive away and disappear.

EXT. GALILEE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MORNING

Matt stomps the snow from his boots, opens the door and enters the church.

INT. GALILEE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MORNING

Matt stands in the hallway of the church. As he waits for his eyes to transition from "timeout" mode to the inside lighting, he looks out of place dressed in an old green hunting jacket and his long hair drenched from the snow.

CHURCH MEMBER
Good morning, young man.

MATT
Hello.

MATT (V.O.)
Stick your hand out, moron. He's
probably already extending his.

Instead of a handshake, Matt is surprised by a church bulletin instead.

INT. SANCTUARY - MOMENTS LATER

Matt slouches in a desolate pew, as far away as possible from the pulpit.

PASTOR
Everyone please rise and turn in
your hymnal to "Amazing Grace" on
page 435.

MATT (V.O.)
I love Ya, Jesus. But I don't know
if I'll ever love church.

CONGREGATION
(singing)
"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me...I
once was lost but now am found, Was
blind, but now, I see...."

The song ends; the congregation sits, and Matt fidgets, while
the pastor begins his sermon.

PASTOR
Many years ago on a snow covered
hillside, we spent many an hour
sleigh riding...

Matt slips out through the sanctuary door.

EXT. BATHROOM DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Matt puts his hand on the sign that says "MEN" and then
pushes the door open.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Matt stares in the mirror drying off his hair with a paper
towel.

MATT (V.O.)
I didn't come here to listen to
some pastor's sleigh ridin'
experience. I wanna get saved!

INT. SANCTUARY - MORNING

Matt looks back and forth on the pew rubbing his hands. He
looks at his watch.

MATT (V.O.)
Come on! Come on! Get to the
invitation. I wanna get saved!

INT. SANCTUARY, PULPIT - MINUTES LATER

A close up shows the pastor behind the pulpit, smiling broadly, having just finished his sermon.

PASTOR

Thanks for coming out to worship with us in the snow today. Have a safe trip home.

EXT. MATT'S DESOLATE PEW - DAY

Matt grips the pew in front of him with a look of defeat.

MATT

(out loud)

What?! No invitation to get saved?

Matt notices a woman gathering her belongings two pews in front of him.

MATT (CONT'D)

Excuse me, ma'am?

WOMAN

Yes.

MATT

I wanted to get saved today. Ya know, receive Christ as my Savior. Don't your church have an altar call after the service?

The lady looks at Matt in bewilderment.

WOMAN

Uh, no, we don't do anything like that here. We're Lutheran.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - MINUTES LATER

Matt hustles up Mountain Road toward Lake Shore Baptist Church, which is a 1/4 mile away. The snow continues to fall and hinders Matt's mobility. He has to walk in the road because the shoulder is filled with snow. He begins to pray.

MATT (V.O.)

Dear God, please don't let any of these cars run me over before I get a chance to receive Your Son as Savior.

Matt slips and slides across the slush laden street leading to Lake Shore Baptist Church.

EXT. LAKE SHORE BAPTIST CHURCH, PARKING LOT - SUNDAY MORNING
Only several cars are parked in the lot.

MATT (V.O.)
Are churches allowed to close? If
they do, I hope it's not today!

As Matt nears the building, he hears scraping sounds echoing from the brick wall of the church from a man shoveling snow.

EXT. FRONT OF THE CHURCH - MINUTES LATER

The man shoveling snow stops and, with steam issuing from his mouth like cigarette smoke, greets Matt.

MAN
Good morning, son.

MATT
How's it goin', sir?

MAN
I'm getting a good work out
shoveling all of this snow today.

MATT
Do they ever close church?

MAN
We wanted to close today, but the
pastor said he believed God wanted
us opened. So enjoy the service.

MATT
I will.

INT. SANCTUARY - MOMENTS LATER

Matt finds another desolate pew in the back of the church. As the congregation sings, he spots his parents sitting up front.

MATT (V.O.)
I don't care if they know about my
salvation or not. Dad was right.
I can admit that now.

INT. SANCTUARY, PULPIT - SECONDS LATER

The pastor begins his sermon.

PASTOR

All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. It doesn't matter if you're a soccer mom from the suburbs, or a prostitute working Baltimore Street, or an executive on Wall Street.

The pastor pauses for a moment and takes a sip of water from a glass sitting on the ledge of his pulpit.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

O dreaded death where shall we hide from you?: In the philosophies of this world? Or in the promises of politicians? Or in the theories of almighty science? Or in carousing? Or in comfort foods? Or in a career? Or perhaps in a bank account? Or a hobby? Or in the cares of this life? Or in the arms of a forbidden lover? Or even in the arms of one who's not? Or in watching sports? Or, perhaps, behind a bong or bottle of booze?

Silence has stilled the church, as the pastor pauses again, and looks out at the congregation.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

No! Only the Blood of Jesus will secure a place for us in heaven forevermore!

The pastor closes his Bible and takes another sip of water.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

Sing with me now, in closing, on page 377. "Just as I Am." And before we begin, if there's someone here this morning who has never received Jesus as their personal Savior, I urge you to come forward and get right with God. Today is the day of salvation!

CONGREGATION
(singing)
"Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thy bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!"

INT. SANCTUARY, MATT'S DESOLATE PEW - SECONDS LATER

Matt edges his way toward the aisle.

MATT (V.O.)
Whoever confesses Jesus before men,
him He will also confess before His
Father in heaven.

INT. SANCTUARY, CHURCH AISLE - SECONDS LATER

Matt hurries to the front of the church, his long wet hair
bouncing on his shoulders.

INT. SANCTUARY, FRONT OF CHURCH - SECONDS LATER

Matt stands with the pastor.

MATT
I wanna get saved, pastor!

PASTOR
What's your name, young man?

MATT
Matt Harris.

The pastor motions for a deacon, WAYNE FOY, who comes over
with an angelic smile, shakes Matt's hand, then leads him to
a quiet place where they can talk.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Wayne has a Bible in his hand, as he and Matt sit at a table
talking.

WAYNE
So you want to get saved, Matt, is
that right?

MATT
Yes sir.

Wayne leafs through the pages of his Bible until he finds the passage he's searching for.

WAYNE

In Romans 3:23, it says that
"....all have sinned and fall short
of the glory of God." Do you
believe you're a sinner?

MATT

Most definitely!

WAYNE

The Bible also tells us in Romans
6:23 that "...the wages of sin is
death; but the gift of God is
eternal life through Jesus Christ
our Lord." We all die because of
sin. And because we all have
sinned, we're all under the penalty
of death. Are you with me so far,
Matt?

MATT

I'm with ya.

WAYNE

What death means here is to be
separated from God for all of
eternity in hell. And that is what
it means to perish.

Wayne thumbs through the Bible looking for another passage.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

But John 3:16 tells us that "God so
loved the world that He gave His
only begotten Son, that whoever
believes in Him should not perish
but have everlasting life."

Wayne closes his Bible.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Do you believe Jesus is the Son of
God?

MATT

I believe Jesus is the Christ, the
Son of the livin' God!

WAYNE

Do you also believe, then, that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and that God, His Father, raised Him from the dead?

MATT

Yes sir!

WAYNE

Good. Because that is the gospel, and Jesus promises us that if we repent from our sins and believe the gospel, we will have a place in heaven with Him for all of eternity. And to repent simply means to acknowledge that you have sinned against God and are willing to turn away from them and ask His Son, Jesus, to come into your life and forgive you.

Wayne writes something on a piece of paper and hands it to Matt.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Here are some Scripture verses for you to look at later. So, are you ready now, Matt, to repent from your sins and ask Jesus to come into your life and save you?

MATT

That's what I've been waitin' for all day, Mr. Foy.

WAYNE

That's what I love to hear! Now, pray with me and mean it in your heart.

Matt folds his hands, closes his eyes, and bows his head, then repeats the prayer after Wayne Foy.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Dear Jesus, I know I'm a sinner; and without You, I'd be lost in hell. I'm turning away from my sins. Please forgive me, and come into my life. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, and that God, Your Father, raised You from the dead.

(MORE)

WAYNE (CONT'D)
 Thank You, Jesus, for giving me
 Your free gift of eternal life.
 Amen!

TWO WEEKS LATER

EXT. MATT'S BACK YARD - CHRISTMAS EVE

Jeeter Jones parks his Ford Pinto in the woods behind Matt's house next to his Mustang.

INT. JEETER'S PINTO - CHRISTMAS EVE

Jeeter fills a bowl with flakes, while "Imagine," by John Lennon plays on the radio.

MATT
 Remember when John Lennon said that
 the Beatles were more popular than
 Jesus Christ?

JEETER
 Yeah. When he said it, they
 probably were.

MATT
 I imagine he regrets sayin' that
 now. Pun intended, by the way.

Jeeter lights up the bowl and hands it to Matt. Matt doesn't respond, not because he doesn't see it, though, because he picks up on the flakes twinkling like little stars in the bowl, which he is able to do from time to time.

JEETER
 Are you gonna take that dang bowl,
 or are you gonna leave me hanging?

MATT
 I gotta leave ya hangin', bro.

JEETER
 What's up with you?

MATT
 I got saved.

JEETER
 What the hell did you get saved
 from?

MATT
Actually, it was hell that I got
saved from--through the blood of
Jesus Christ.

JEETER
We're Catholic, nimrod!

MATT
Catholicism can't save ya, only
Jesus can.

JEETER
You're a buzzkill!

MATT
Jesus doesn't want me to get high
anymore. I'll see ya around, Jeet.

Matt gets out and closes the Pinto's door.

EXT. MATT'S BACK YARD - SECONDS LATER

As Jeeter pulls away, Matt tramps through the darkness toward his house, then smacks face first into an oak tree.

MATT (V.O.)
Dang, if it don't hurt sometimes
when ya walk by faith and not by
sight.

EXT. MATT'S BACK PORCH - SECONDS LATER

The back porch lamp turns on, and Matt's mother steps out into the beam of light. With a hand in a salute, to shield her eyes from the brightness of the light, she squints out into the darkness.

MOM
Go to war, Matt! Where ya been?
We're gonna be late for church.
Are ya comin' or what?

EXT. MATT'S BACK YARD - SECONDS LATER

Matt shakes off the effects of his bout with the oak tree and starts walking toward the light.

MATT (V.O.)
Some things never change.

MATT

Yeah, I'll be right there, mom.

WRITTEN ON DARK SCREEN

"I am the light of the world. He
who follows Me shall not walk in
darkness, but have the light of
life" (Jesus Christ).

THE END