

Fade in

INT. HOUSE LIVING ROOM DAY

Beneath an enormous Civil war era map of Kansas, an old bolt-action rifle rests on the mantle above a fireplace.

EXT. OLD MAN HOUSE DAY

A manicured finger presses on a spring-loaded doorbell.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE DAY

In an empty house, there is an empty living room, an empty dining room, and an empty kitchen. In the empty kitchen, a muddied glass lined with water, ash, and discarded cigarette butts stands in the hollow metal basin while the doorbell continues to ring. Crumbs lay on the counter beside it, glowing vaguely by the amber switch of the coffee machine. The black liquid sits lifelessly in the pot and a few scattered drops of condensation draw away from the steam hanging inside.

Leaning against the front door, beneath a narrow brass mailbox, is a pile of unopened mail with small, weird, matte black packages strewn amongst them. The doorbell rings again.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM DAY

The still body of a fully dressed old man stretches the length of a bed. Other than the fan spinning shadows on the ceiling, siphoning the old man's blank stare, only the face of a cheap plastic clock ticking away on the bedside dresser above his head and the auburn leaves of a maple tree swaying in the window show any sign of movement. The doorbell continues to ring but the old man doesn't move.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE LIVING ROOM DAY

The flap on the mail box swings open and a pair of lustrous blue eyes peer through: scanning the empty space, searching for motion. A plume of blue-gray smoke rises from a bulging ashtray on a small coffee table by the armrest of a well-worn leather sofa. The young woman grunts, raises her middle finger behind the slot, and flicks off the vacant room before slamming the cover shut and walking away.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM DAY

The old man is still - motionless on the bed - staring up at the ceiling when through the twisted pale void the sound of a moving train charges in, carrying with it the flicker of a rusted autumn countryside stretched by the speed of the locomotive.

INT. TRAIN DAY

A young man sits quietly in a tattered blue seat staring out the window with a stack of unopened

letters, bound with a blue rubber band, in his hands. He moves to store them in the front pocket of his half-empty backpack then leans back and glimpses a few strands of fresh-cut hair clinging to his shoulder which he casually brushes off before checking his watch (13:00).

Across from the young man sits a little boy in a faded blue hoodie, quietly reading a children's book about a small ball rolling down a big hill. His young red-haired mother rests her eyes beside him as he mouths the words to the story, but the sound remains unintelligible to the young man who imagines what sound petrichor would make.

Drifting imperceptibly away from the moment, the young man's head swivels towards the window where his mind falls into the breath-like rhythm of the metal wheels skipping and grinding along on the tracks, then descending deeper: gunfire erupts as twilight scenery threads his vision and he seeps into the night where the silhouette of a uniformed figure holding a semi-automatic rifle cuts the sky.

EXT. FIELD NIGHT

The young man stands erect on the edge of an empty field and pulls back his night-vision goggles to study the stars: a fragile moment that has him transfixed by the infinitesimal cause of a muted breath swirling elegantly above him in a nebulous cloud of primordial ooze.

A gunshot breaks through the night. Boots rampage through the field. The young man fires into a half-built concrete building where small puffs of dust pop off the exterior and a lone rusty lamp on the end of a long curved metal pipe calmly lights the entrance. A team of soldiers bursts into the building as a single

flash of gunfire reveals itself in the second floor window.

INT. BUILDING NIGHT

In a cold, narrow, corridor a squad of soldiers file through beneath a fluorescent light flickering in and out of sight, carefully tracking the aim of their assault rifles while faint cries echo in the halls and the soldiers pass - one by one - through a small puddle of standing water at the bottom of an obscure staircase.

The squad snakes their way up the stairs, splitting in two at the top. The young man, leads the second group to the left, along the banister, while the other vanishes into a large cavernous room.

The young man quickly finds a doorway and bursts through. A bullet flies past his head and embeds itself in the wall behind him. He pivots back and takes shelter behind the thick concrete wall before firing back a couple rounds. He can barely make out the shape of a person hidden behind an overturned desk.

The young man pauses for a second and overhears his enemy hurriedly reloading a weapon. He takes a series of quick, penetrating breaths then looks back towards his half depleted squad only to discover that no one is there. The empty corridor falls into focus as the sound of a magazine clips into place.

For a moment everything goes quiet - still - then the young man's breath abruptly returns and with it the sound of a battle erupting in every direction, echoing from chamber to chamber as gunfire flicks out the darkness. Nothing is close. Nothing is near.

A drop of water lands on the young man's hand and distills his focus back to the moment. He pivots forwards and moves in, firing three shots at the desk, but when he checks behind it there is no one there.

Out of the corner of his eye, through the doorway, at the far end of the other room, he catches a glimpse of something moving. He turns and fires, then tracks his shot into the next room.

Behind a crumbling concrete pillar, the young man discovers a young boy lying on the floor clutching at his throat. Blood is swelling through his fingers and tearing down his forearm, pooling at the base of his head. He searches frantically for a weapon but finds nothing. He was unarmed.

The desperate young man looks up and around for some other target that he might have hit but there is nothing there. He looks back down to find the boy staring into his eyes, mouthing something, but the young man can only make out the blood gurgling from his punctured throat through the battle that rages on in some other room - far away.

The young man pulls out what feels like a thousand pound pistol and aims it at the boy's head: conscious of forgetting to shield himself from the splatter with an outstretched palm; seeing the boy reach his little hand forward to swat it away with every last ounce of fading force.

INT. TRAIN DAY

The young man stares out of the window onto a decaying industrial suburb scattered around a

barren forest. He slowly turns back to the boy sitting across from him but he has vanished. The young man glances at the mother but she is still fast asleep. Nobody else seems to notice. The top of the passenger's heads bob along the rim of their seats and the young man checks his watch (13:04).

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM DAY

The old man is seated at the side of his bed, hunched over, watching the floor. He turns his head towards a half-open closet, half-expecting to find something waiting for him inside when the mail arrives. He sighs, presses his hands to his knees and lifts himself up - resigned to check for something that he already knows won't be there.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE LIVING ROOM DAY

When the old man reaches the front door, he arches down, digs out a stack of envelopes from the disheveled pile: only checking the return addresses as he flips through them. One by one, he lets them fall back in with the rest of the junk, accepting the futility of his search as he turns away.

A passive second look calls his attention to the torn edge of one of the matte black packages and he reaches back down to grab it: tapping it in his hand for a moment before tossing it back in with the rest.

He stands back up and lumbers towards the backyard, lighting a cigarette and flicking the matchstick into the glass in the sink along the way.

INT. TRAIN DAY

A maze of chain-link fences, corrugated iron roofs, and utility wires run along the edge of the tracks as the crackled sound of the train conductor washes over the intercom announcing their impending arrival.

The young man grabs his leather wallet. From the bill fold he pulls a torn piece of newspaper carefully stored behind a faded passport photo that reveals a neatly, nearly completed crossword puzzle with an empty answer box circled in red ink: "There's no place like it." He flips it over and on the back, written in the same ink, next to the pursed impression of a pair of lips it says: "My new Number: "1-235-813-2134."

The young man takes out his flip-phone and types in the number. The line is busy. He hangs up, checks his watch (13:10), and quickly folds the paper away - safely tucking it back into the fold of his wallet.

Careful not to disturb the young mother, the young man gets up and heads for the bathroom at the far end of the car.

EXT. OLD MAN HOUSE BACKYARD DAY

The old man sits in his garden on a weathered arm chair by the edge of the pond smoking a cigarette, intensely watching the dead leaves swirl around the water, caressing the surface and disguising the small buoyant goldfish gracefully rising and falling beneath their resting place.

A plane cuts through the sky above a web of sagging telephone lines and electrical wires as the old man's memory plays the sound of a car slowly turning on asphalt while disposable bulbs from old cameras pop and a news radio broadcast

dials in and out of tune.

The old man's gaze lands on the cascading water of the pond, then lowers onto the tiny ember burning at the tip of his emaciated cigarette which he touches to the parched skin of a dead magnolia leaf sitting on the arm rest: puncturing a hole through, then watching it nearly burn away.

INT. TRAIN DAY

The train has stopped and the young man is exiting the restroom. As he returns to his seat, he notices the same boy looking back at him through the window holding his mother's hand and walking along the train platform.

As he puts his things in order, he discovers that the book which the boy had been reading is laying on the seat in front of him. He slowly picks it up to check the cover and make sure it is the same one - flipping through the pages even though he never saw the illustrations.

The young man glances out the window but now there is no one there. He grabs his belongings, tucks the book under his arm and heads out of the train car.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM DAY

As soon as he steps onto the platform, the young man finds everyone gone, other than the conductor standing by the door checking his watch. Over in the distance near the concourse a large crowd rumbles on and a puzzled look gathers beneath the young man's eyes. He scans the platform back and forth, as if it would somehow make the passengers reappear. Oblivious to the conductor, he looks back down at the book in his hands, then discards it on the back of a

utility cart.

He reaches into his pocket, grabs his phone, and heads for the terminal. As he starts to dial the battery dies.

INT. TRAIN STATION TERMINAL DAY

From the platform above the terminal, the young man can see a steady mass of people streaming through. It is a busy workday and the commuters are focused on their ritual - immune to the spectacle - while the cops stand by keeping watch. Stashed away in the back corner, the young man sees an old payphone gathering dust and makes his way towards it.

As he picks up the receiver, he notices a sticker stuck to its arm with a yellow duck declaring "Recycling is All American." He slots in a few coins and starts dialing.

The crowd behind him ebbs and sways as the phone breathes in and out. It quickly goes to voicemail. He hangs up and disappears into the swarm.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE LIVING ROOM DAY

The old man sits in the living room flipping through an old photo album, smoking a cigarette, while a muted television plays insistently in the background. Adjacent to each page of photographs is the headline of a newspaper from the corresponding date: some world events, some weather phenomena, some discoveries, some news...

As he navigates his memories, he carefully selects a few: slowly peeling off the plastic covering and holding them between his thumb and forefinger; stacking them, one on top of the

other by the cushion at his side.

On one photograph, he sees the image of a nice-looking young boy and his dog out in a forest on a cool, fall day. He flips it over and finds a date and a location written on the bottom corner (Nov. 1997 - Ridge). A piece of ash lands on the photo and he quickly brushes it off before adding the photo to the stack and stamping out the cigarette.

The old man looks back at the album and gently runs his finger along the dusty grey outline left by the abandoned photo. He closes the plastic film, flips to the back of the album, and with the tip of his fingernail, he peels back the inside seam to reveal a secret sleeve hidden between the faux-leather cover and the endsheet.

Inside the hidden compartment is an old watermarked photo (colors bleeding out). He flips it over. A small rectangular note printed with a series of mysterious numbers is taped to the back: 2315162364. The old man takes a deep breath as he recognizes the code, then places the photo on the top of the pile, closes the album, grabs the stack, and walks away.

EXT. STREET DAY

It is a cold overcast afternoon in the city when a cab pulls up by the side of the road on a fully-parked street. The young man steps out of the car clutching his bag and quickly pays the driver. As he turns around to face the neighborhood coffee shop he is confronted by its familiarity.

He makes his way towards the entrance, each step weighing more than the last. From the outside, he can see a cue growing, and as he steps up

onto the sidewalk he recognizes a painted, pink bicycle with "Get Baked" written across its spokes. The bike is chained to a low, wiry guardrail outlining a small patch of grass around a withering maple tree. The reminder pulses through him and triggers a crushing sense of loss: although he remembers the place, it doesn't seem to remember him.

He reaches the glass door and freezes. The customers are clamoring around the shop: returning plates and silverware, lining up for orders, sitting, talking, and putting on and taking off layers of winter clothes. He notices the person at the front of the line raising their voice above the noise of the crowd. His eyes pace back and forth: up at the sign, the store hours, over his shoulder, his watch (15:25), back at the line.

He rubs his palms together and begins to gather himself when his eyes fall onto a young woman serving customers from behind the counter. She is smiling and serving each customer as if she already knew what they wanted. The young man looks awkward standing there, looking in, and he feels it.

He prepares to enter the shop when another customer yanks the door open and slips past him. The noise of the establishment drowns his ease and he glances up at the woman - one last time - with the hope that she might look back and cure his paralysis.

The door slams shut and he walks away: the wind caressing the yellowing leaves of the maple as she finally looks up at the door but rather than see what almost was she greets a regular as a friend and falls back into routine.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM DAY

The old man is crouched in front of the same closet he was staring at earlier and cautiously reaches in, gliding through the hangers and nearly disappearing into the obscure space. The wooden floor creaks as he moves his shoes aside, and eventually his hands find their way to the back baseboard.

With the tip of his fingers, he hits a seal hidden along the molding and tears it off. A small section of wall pops open to reveal a hidden chamber; light streams through and brushes the edge of a dusty old trunk.

He reaches in, grabs the rusty, metal handle, rights himself, and drags the trunk out of the closet - scraping the parquet with the brass fixtures along the way. Once it is out in the open, the old man collapses onto the floor: leaning against the wall to rest his knees as he stares at his old locker and rewinds his life.

INT. BAR DAY

Billiard balls scatter over a table and the young man, looking straight down the length of his cue, rises as they come to rest. He is alone in the bar, nursing a half filled pint while some music drones on in the background.

He pauses, takes a sip of beer, then glides around the table to prepare for his next shot. Time fades from glass to glass as the bar gets more and more full, and he eventually disappears amongst the mass, vanishing beneath the rows of bobbing heads.

The place is now packed with people snaking there way through to the bar. The young man reappears through the crowd holding his bag in one hand and quickly disappears down a stairway

to the side, beneath the glow of a welcoming,
red, neon sign.

At the bottom of the stairs, he pauses by the
entrance to cover his head with a hood and light
a cigarette before checking his watch (19:45).
He opens the door and steps out into the dark,
wet night.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT

The lights are off and the old man sits
motionless by the trunk, still staring at it
from the same position. He slowly rocks forward
and places his hand on the dusty wooden top,
feeling the grain with his fingertips.

As the old man slides his hand across the lid, a
tuft of dust kicks up and he starts coughing. He
rushes to the window, opens it, and breaths in
the rain soaked air.

A cat prowls along the empty sidewalk, weaving
in and out of the parked cars. The old man pulls
a cigarette from his pocket and takes in another
breath before lighting it, making sure to keep
an eye on the box waiting patiently at his feet.
Suddenly a door slams shut in another room -
stinging the empty house. He dismisses it as a
draft.

With the cigarette between his fingers, he
twists around, grabs the rusty latch of the
locker and swings it open: popping the lid and
breaking the seal of the trunk. Inside is a
pistol sitting on top of a carefully folded
green military uniform wrapped in thick clear
plastic next to a pair of dried out leather
service boots. He picks up the weapon and weighs
it in his right hand, recognizing its feel on
his palm. His fingers curl onto the handle and
he checks the chamber before bringing the weapon

up to his ear to listen for the hollow click of the trigger being swallowed.

He places the weapon on the seat next to him and looks back into the box. Beneath his uniform is a small case filled with tarnished medals - glistening by the street lamp hanging outside the house.

A plume of smoke rises from his mangled cigarette as he tears the gaunt filter from his chapped lips. He conjures a bit of saliva and spits on the medal, then wipes the spit into the brass with the tip of his thumb: deepening the patina as he stares into it for a brief moment before allowing the medal to slide from his hand and fall back into the box with the rest of them. He closes the lid and throws the box onto the bed.

INT. COFFEE SHOP NIGHT

The young woman is laughing as she closes the door, kindly helping out a young mother whose stroller seems to be stuck. Together they nudge it free and as the young mother opens her umbrella and swings around to depart, the young woman twists the lock, crouches down, and waves goodbye to the baby, who mimes a response.

As the mother strolls away and the young woman finishes locking up, a figure lurks beneath an awning across the street. His face glows through the rain as his cigarette breaths to life. He is watching her as she turns up the music, waters the plants, and returns to her duties. The glass facade of the coffee shop encases her in what resembles a dry blue aquarium: one that she breezes through every night to wipe away the day's fingerprints.

EXT. STREET NIGHT

The young man is beneath the awning, his bag leaning against his boots. The young mother disappears up the street with her stroller while the cigarette's ember warms his cheek, crackling with each puff. He checks his watch (20:05). He draws a last bit of smoke then flicks the butt into the small pile he has made for himself by his feet and treads forward onto the street.

INT. COFFEE SHOP NIGHT

Through the window, behind the young woman's silhouette, as the rain picks up, the young man appears. Music drowns the storm and as she cleans the store he watches her: the song is muffled by the drizzle and dampened by the glass; only the bassy murmur reverberates through the patter of raindrops. He tries tapping on the window but the music scatters his rapping and she begins to sing along.

He watches her like a predator (embracing suspense) and slowly, he raises his arm to tap again, but again she doesn't notice. She starts dancing. She seems caught in the rapture of her own little world and the young man bursts out laughing, and her voice retreats to the safest corner of silence.

She spins around, only to catch sight of some nebulous figure (hooded and obscure) laughing through the misty glass, and her heart sublimates.

As the young man peels back his hood, like a crack in a chrysalis warmth re-emerges from her face. Her eyelids flutter and from her parched breath excitement springs as she runs to the door to catch his eyes piercing hers through the glass.

It is as if she were recognizing her own face in the mirror for the first time and he knows it. She extends her arm towards it and caresses his translucent appearance refracting through the two panes of glass, tracing his lips across the clean surface with her oily fingerprints. She is smiling, acknowledging her surprise with accepting, coquettish charm. And threaded through the layers of glass and reflection their eyes are woven together into a hammock in which their love comes to rest.

The moment sways between their eyes when the young woman pulls on the door and their reflection shivers in the glass, and she realizes it is locked. She raises her index finger to her lips and mouths the words "one second" before twirling around and darting away, but before her second step she realizes she has left something behind and spins back around to plant a kiss on the window - leaving behind a pursed satin impression as she twists around again and runs off in search of the key.

His eyes melt into the texture of her crimson brand, but soon the cracks in her parched imprint swallow his thoughts: instantly draining all the color from his eyes as he recalls what has happened since the last time he touched her lips.

INT. HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT

The old man has emptied the contents of the locker onto the bed. They are laid out as if he were packing. On the edge of his uniform the medals are neatly arranged in rows and columns, and the old man's shadow rocks back and forth over them while he methodically cleans his sidearm.

Between breaths he pauses, raises the weapon and

looks down the sight line - aiming it around the room.

INT. COFFEE SHOP NIGHT

The young girl tamps used espresso grounds into a knock box, rinses off the residue with boiling water, and slots the handle back into place. The young man stands by the entrance holding his bag at his side, watching her do her thing.

She moves through the motions: cleaning away the day, wiping off surfaces and stains, and flowing with the current of every other night shift. He stands still but not straight as she drapes the room in her invisible ink, occasionally glancing back at him, thinking he too might be invisible.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's....so quiet. Are you tired?

YOUNG MAN

Huh....I'm alright.

YOUNG WOMAN

Something to eat? It's on me.

YOUNG MAN

I'm okay.

YOUNG WOMAN

Suit yourself.

She strafes by him: grazing his stomach with her free hand then squeezing his arm to make sure he is actually in the room. She glances into his eyes and as he backs away nervously she smiles to herself.

YOUNG MAN

Sorry.

He looks around the room at the different craft items for sale and as she goes back to cleaning she catches the scent of booze on him.

YOUNG WOMAN
(with a wry smile)
Have you been drinking?

YOUNG MAN
Yeah....no....well yeah. I had a couple of drinks while I was waiting - just up the street.

He points up the street but she is not looking. She is packing cupcakes and biscuits into large plastic containers.

YOUNG WOMAN
(laughing to herself)
Why? Are you nervous?

She ducks behind the counter and the young man turns away.

YOUNG MAN
(under his breath)
What's the point?

She pops back up.

YOUNG WOMAN
Sorry, what was that?

Searching for something to do, he grabs a box of artisanal dog biscuits from the shelf as she walks past him with three large containers in her arms.

YOUNG WOMAN
You should try one. They're pretty

good.

The young man fumbles the box onto the counter and she gives him a funny look as she disappears into the kitchen. He nervously tries to put everything back in its place.

With his bag in his hand, the young man walks along the counter, reacquainting himself with the space. He stops in front of a small chalkboard hanging on the wall by a doorway leading to the lounge. The surface is spread with a dusty trail of fingerprints, random overlapping notes, some sketches, and a fair bit of scribble. One note says: "How many of our days and days of our fathers have passed during your today, and have derived from it the measure and condition of their existence." Another says: "In the absence of justice what is sovereignty but organized robbery."

In the top corner of the chalkboard, a small feathered outline frames another note: "See you in 18 months." Beneath it, in red chalk, another hand has written "DO NOT ERASE!" with an arrow pointing at the outline.

The young man lifts his hand to the edge of the frame and for a moment considers erasing his message, but as he starts to wipe away the words, he hears a noise coming from the kitchen and quickly steps through the doorway into the empty lounge.

The young woman reemerges from the kitchen only to find an empty room. She looks around in search of the young man but when she hears the bathroom door slam shut it reassures her enough to return to her tasks.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT

With the tip of his two fingers, the old man draws a bullet from between his lips. He is fully dressed in his uniform, staring at the shiny object - regarding its potential with muted intent. He slips it into the magazine, clips the magazine into the handle, loads the chamber and gently places the weapon down on the bed before reaching for the box of medals.

The old man stands up, heads over to the closet and places the box on a small table beside it. He swings open the door to reveal a mirror through which the young man appears.

INT. COFFEE SHOP BATHROOM NIGHT

The young man is standing in front of a mirror looking down at his hands: hot water runs over them, releasing steam that fogs up the glass and distorts his face. When he finally looks up, he sees his blurry reflection in the glass and wipes his hand across it, leaving a long wet streak that further deforms his figure - one that he starts to recognize. He switches off the lights and walks out the door.

INT. COFFEE SHOP KITCHEN NIGHT

The kitchen is appointed with large, metal shelves, stacked neatly with long, rectangular, plastic boxes filled with cupcakes and cookies safely packed inside. The music is still playing in the other room and the young woman is rushing to finish up.

She places a box on the top shelf when the young man appears through the doorway. He leans up against the frame to watch her, and as he grows more relaxed with the diversion he places his bag down by his side.

When he notices her struggling with one of the

boxes, he steps in to assist.

YOUNG WOMAN
(at full stretch)
It's okay. I got it.

With the gentle nudge of her hip, she tries bumping him away and he stumbles, and as he falls back his fingers somehow trip open the plastic lid and it pops off. She tries to adjust her balance to keep hold of the cupcakes but his clumsy self-awareness causes his knee to buckle, clipping hers as he tries to right himself, and all the cupcakes come tumbling out.

He steps out of the way to avoid getting hit while with one free hand she snatches a cupcake out of the air and with the other manages to keep hold of the box.

YOUNG WOMAN
Fuck.

Two dozen cupcakes have left variegated trails of icing festooned around the kitchen: streaks of cornflower blue through her hair, patches of rose on his cheek, spots of dandelion on the linoleum floor, buttercream on the fridge door, and a handful of mint sitting in her palm.

The young woman places the empty box on the edge of the aluminum table and looks down at the smattering of icing in her hand like a child whose ice cream was melting too quickly.

YOUNG MAN
Sorry.

She looks up at him to commiserate but instead notices a bit of pink icing stuck to his nose and smiles. They laugh as she reaches her finger out to scoop it off, kindly offering a taste to

the tip of her tongue before slipping her finger out through her sweetened, puckered lips.

YOUNG WOMAN

Still good.

Looking straight into his eyes, she dips her finger into the icing on his cheek and then offers it to his lips, cocking her head to the side as she does. The delicate contour of an irreproachable smirk traces itself across her face as he hesitates. Slowly, he reaches out with his mouth, as if he were taking cough syrup from a spoon in his mother's hand - eyes closed.

After having swallowed it, she runs her fingernails over his cheek and through his hair, and her eyes glow as his dim, and the flicker between them sits precariously on their bated breath. She brushes her body up against his, begging to be pet. He feels the warmth of her breath brush past his ear, pleading for attention: a bite, a kiss, the firm grip of his hand sliding down her back, anything.

He is scared, caught in trauma's wake: his thoughts are towed back to the night of the battle and he tries to fight the memories popping in and out of his mind. He closes his eyes, bends down to kiss her, and their lips settle like feathers in a pillow.

Suddenly, as if something were erupting from within her, she pushes him back against the fridge door and thrusts her body against his - consuming his lips with hers. He wraps his arms around her hips as he stumbles back and they crash into a metal table - banging it against the wall - before quickly finding their bearings in each other's eyes like a compass righting north.

Her hand grazes his stomach as it slides down over his belt and onto the zipper of his jeans: cautious yet insistent; like the way a person asks for a favor to be returned. The young man grabs her hair and yanks her head back, glaring into her eyes with horror: unsure of whether he is begging her to stop or demanding her to go on. Her eyes float there - fixed on him - imploring for more with every stuttered breath while she squirms in place and feels herself getting wet.

Her moist breath caresses his cheek and her bottom lip quivers as she presses her palm deeper into his crotch. He can't help but like it. He tries yanking her head back further but she knows she has him: she can feel his surrender swelling against her palm.

With her hair pulled back in his hands, he moves in to kiss her. He is lost in the agonizing appeal of her lips and just at the moment when his are about to touch hers, she bites him: slowly peeling away her swollen lips, sucking on the supple patch of scarlet skin. He submits.

He spins her around and throws her up against the fridge: pounding his body against hers then pulling her pants down to the thickest part her thighs and slowly inching his fingers between them to rub the stitching on the sides of her damp, blue, cotton underpants. His other hand slides across her chest then up to her throat, which he grips tightly causing her to let out the faintest cry. And when his two fingers pull the cotton aside and he penetrates her, a sigh of ecstatic relief tears through her mouth. She can feel pleasure swelling from her heart and emanating from her eyes as it cascades over her body: quivering through her skin like the shiver a feather sends rippling across every tiny nerve ending; a wave that finally coalesces between

her lips and oozes from the grip of her throbbing wet pussy.

Her eyes slam shut, as if the moment had given her permission to do so, and he presses his face against her cheek, biting her ear and murmuring into it. From behind her back she grabs his cock and he pulls her pants down further: thrusting his body against hers as he slides his hand down and squeezes her breast, popping it out of her bra. The tip of her hardened nipple stands there, erect and waiting to be pinched as he moves his hand back up to tighten his grip around her neck.

YOUNG MAN

Is this what you want? Is this what
you fucking want?

He bites her earlobe as another one of her breaths escapes, and she extends her neck as if to cry out.

YOUNG WOMAN

Fuck me.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT

The old man is sitting at his desk in front of a stack of papers scribbling away. An old desk lamp casts light onto a half-filled page, barely illuminating his face. He pauses to look out the window onto the darkened alley, down which the cat is now prowling, where he finds the word he was looking for and resumes writing.

OLD MAN

(voice over)

a half filled water balloon
hanging....dangling from the faucet
and inviting the ground. Rotten
fruit held to a branch in an orchard

on a moonless night. This past:
lacquered in posterity by broad,
bright-colored brush strokes;
winding up with the mutiny of a
whimpered cry. All that
melodrama....

I wish you were here. No, I just
wish you could hear what I have to
say. Has it been the fault of
pride's ignorance, or the ignorance
of pride's faults? I'm not sure. I'm
not sure if you ever got to hear me
say "I'm sorry." Not just for my
mistakes but for the ones I forced
on you....

When I was...

INT. COFFEE SHOP NIGHT

Lying on his back - sweaty, naked, and partially
covered in icing - the young man stares through
space, content with its apparent emptiness. The
young woman peels herself off of him and the
floor, and as she walks away her bare feet slap
the linoleum.

He lifts his head off the floor, just enough to
see her silhouette carving itself out of the
cold aluminum filled room. She looks absently
down at her clothes strewn across the floor and
forgets the ground. It is as if she were not
only in a painting but the source of the color
in it, and the icing on her body lacerates her
skin with deep dried wounds of pigment that cut
through the entire space as if they were tearing
through the fabric of time.

Her hands grasp her long disheveled hair like a
child holding the rope of a swing. The curve of
her butt and the teardrop of her breast trace

their way over the maze of metal, plastic, and glass as he stares at her in awe. She absorbs the space as if it were amniotic fluid poured entirely around and in support of her existence.

YOUNG MAN

You know, right now, you may be the most beautiful women in the history of the world.

With the tip of her fingers she plucks a scab of icing from her body and tastes it, then turns towards the young man with a feral grimace (teeth covered in blue and green icing).

YOUNG WOMAN

How about now?

He laughs and slowly gets up. Once standing he is confronted by an uncomfortable feeling: it is as if his skin no longer fit. He tries to get dressed but every movement feels awkward and as he bends down to pull up his pants she walks past him carrying her apron and slaps his ass.

YOUNG WOMAN

We should get going.

YOUNG MAN

You don't want to clean up first.

YOUNG WOMAN

(jokingly)

I kinda like it like this.

He doesn't notice her leaning over his bag, holding up her apron and signaling that she wants to put it inside.

YOUNG WOMAN

You mind?

Assuming he would have said "yes," she unzips the front pouch. Strewn amongst his other belongings, she discovers a stack of unopened letters bound in a blue rubber band. Curious, she reaches in and grabs them. At that moment, the young man looks over to find her going through his bag and he darts over and snatches the letters from one hand and the bag from the other.

YOUNG WOMAN
What the fuck?

YOUNG MAN
Why you going through my bag?

YOUNG WOMAN
(laughing)
What do you mean? I asked you two seconds ago....My bag's in the car.

She reaches around him in an attempt to grab the bag.

YOUNG WOMAN
Common, let me see.

He slams his bag down on the counter and stuffs the letters back in the pouch.

YOUNG MAN
I told you not to go through my fucking bag!

YOUNG WOMAN
No you didn't, you just stood there staring at your boots like an idiot....They use Velcro in the army these days?

As he walks away carrying his bag, she tosses her apron at his back. He doesn't react. She walks by and places her hand on his shoulder, as if to comfort him for something she can't quite understand.

YOUNG WOMAN

Is everything okay?

YOUNG MAN

Just stay out of my shit okay!

YOUNG WOMAN

What the fuck's your problem?

She goes back to cleaning up their mess.

YOUNG MAN

Let's just get out of here!

YOUNG WOMAN

You know who you fucking sound like?

He cautiously puts the bag down: steeping in his thoughts and brushing off the question. She tries to salvage the moment they had shared earlier.

YOUNG WOMAN

So, how's that old hemorrhoid doing by the way?

YOUNG MAN

How the fuck should I know? Aren't you keeping an eye on him?

He scoops the apron up off the floor as she slams some cupcakes into the trash.

YOUNG MAN

Well?

YOUNG WOMAN

I guess he's alright....It
looked that way this morning.

YOUNG MAN

Why the fuck you asking me if you
saw him this morning?

She picks up a few more cupcakes as he stares
into the stained apron.

YOUNG WOMAN

Well....I kind of saw him....
sort of....He didn't mention
anything to you?

YOUNG MAN

Kind of, sort of. What the fuck are
you talking about?

YOUNG WOMAN

Will you calm down? Didn't he tell
you he told me to stop coming?

YOUNG MAN

What? When?

YOUNG WOMAN

How am I supposed to know when he
told you.

YOUNG MAN

You didn't think of telling me?

YOUNG WOMAN

To say what? That the nutcase called
me a "succubusic" slut! That he told
me that if he ever needed a "suck
off" he'd call a proper whore to
stiffen that flaccid thing.

She whips a few cupcakes into the bin, narrowly avoiding him. She is mad as hell that he isn't helping but he seems distraught.

YOUNG WOMAN

Get thee to a nunnery....Fuck you!
Go to the the fucking cobbler.

YOUNG MAN

What?

YOUNG WOMAN

"Succubusic" is that even a word?

YOUNG MAN

Wait a second. When did this happen?

Her anger is taking over and she can't seem to control it anymore.

YOUNG WOMAN

(to herself)

Who the hell says "suck off"
anyways?

YOUNG WOMAN

(mocking the old man)

"hey baby how much for a suckoff?"

He slams the apron down on the metal counter, startling her but not enough to stop her from cleaning.

YOUNG MAN

Did you see him this morning or not?

She pretends she doesn't hear him and continues cleaning - resigned to the fact that he won't help.

YOUNG MAN

Well?

YOUNG WOMAN

I saw something....It was hard to tell through the mailbox. It looked like the tail of a cigarette.

YOUNG MAN

The mail box? What the fuck!

YOUNG WOMAN

Are you kidding me? After what he said to me!

She takes a deep breath in an attempt to gather herself. Her whole body is cringing but she reminds herself that he has just returned from the service.

YOUNG WOMAN

Listen, he won't let me in. That cigarette is as near to him breathing as I've seen in weeks. What do you expect me to do?

She goes back to cleaning, assuming it's no big a deal.

YOUNG MAN

I don't know....knock on the door....ring the bell. Shit, you know how he is.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yeah and I usually wipe before I take a shit as well. Why don't you ask him? He's the one who changed the locks....He didn't mention anything to you?

The young man looks over towards his backpack and everything goes quiet for a moment. She doesn't notice where he is looking.

YOUNG WOMAN

When was the last time you spoke to him?

YOUNG MAN

Let's just get out of here.

YOUNG WOMAN

What?

YOUNG MAN

I must have forgot....He did mention something about taking better care of himself.

She makes the "jerking off" motion with her hand.

YOUNG WOMAN

He's usually so much cockier.

She wipes the last bits of cupcake off the floor then gets up and slams the soiled paper towel into the bin.

YOUNG MAN

You know....with leave and coming home....I just....I guess I never believed the old bastard would actually do it....I'm sorry.

He skims the floor with his eyes and picks the apron up as she reluctantly accepts his apology.

YOUNG WOMAN

That man is about as much fun as being fingered with a Brillo pad.

YOUNG MAN

I....ugh....thought you liked it
rough?

YOUNG WOMAN

Only around the edges.

She snatches the apron out of his hands.

YOUNG WOMAN

Thanks for the help, dick.

YOUNG MAN

First thing to go is your manners.

She switches off the lights as they head out.

YOUNG WOMAN

You've got to have some to begin
with.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE BEDROOM NIGHT

The old man's dry tongue licks shut a thick envelope. He seals it without a stamp. The mailing address is blank. As he scribbles on the date (11/22/13) the tip of his ballpoint pen pierces the paper. He puts down the pen and gently rubs the incision with the tip of his finger.

EXT. CANAL NIGHT

The young man and the young woman stroll along an old canal, down a dimly lit cobblestone path, slowly making their way to the lock. The straps of her apron hang at her side while he is looking over his shoulder at the canal's stagnant water, holding his bag like a briefcase.

YOUNG WOMAN

You know when you're watching a movie and they start asking questions about other movies. I don't know why but I always try answering them....and I'm not even thinking about it.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah.

YOUNG WOMAN

Remember in Clerks when they're talking about Star Wars....or....at the beginning of The Player? I'm not sure if I am part of the conversation or just watching it....like a bystander, overhearing something....eavesdropping....I always feel like I'm eavesdropping, you know what I mean?

YOUNG MAN

That's great.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hey....are you even listening to me?

YOUNG MAN

Huh? Yeah....you were talking about Star Wars.

YOUNG WOMAN

And?

She smacks him playfully across the chest with the apron.

YOUNG WOMAN

And?

His attention drifts back to the water.

YOUNG MAN

There were clerks in Star Wars?

YOUNG WOMAN

You know you could at least pretend.

They have reached the end of the path and as they turn onto the bridge the young woman grows concerned.

YOUNG WOMAN

What's going on with you?

The young man stops in the middle of the lock puts his bag down and rests his arm over the edge as he fishes in his pocket for a cigarette. She glances at the bag as he lights his cigarette.

YOUNG MAN

(drawing on the cigarette)

You remember...

The young woman snatches the backpack and runs up the street.

YOUNG MAN

Are you kidding me?

He starts chasing after her.

YOUNG WOMAN

You're never going to catch me!

YOUNG MAN

Seriously! Give me back my fucking bag!

She ducks behind a car to catch her breath and

they play cat and mouse around it.

YOUNG WOMAN

So what are you trying to hide from me, huh? Is it another girl?

YOUNG MAN

Give it back!

YOUNG WOMAN

I wonder, what's in this pocket?

YOUNG MAN

It's nothing, just give me my fucking bag.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why won't you tell me, huh? Maybe I should just have a look.

YOUNG MAN

Please give me back the bag. I promise, I'll tell you.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hmmmm.

She reaches over the roof of a random car with the bag in her hand and begins taunting him with it. When he tries to grab it she yanks it back and runs away, and he chases after her.

By the time the young man has nearly caught up with her, she's slowing down in front of a metallic blue Volkswagen beetle. She spins around and starts stepping backwards, the bag hidden safely behind her as he approaches.

YOUNG MAN

Are you going to give me the bag or not?

YOUNG WOMAN
Only if you ask me nicely?

YOUNG MAN
Okay.

He moves in closer, forcing her up against the side of a parking meter. The young woman shuffles the bag around behind her back as his stature looms over her and he looks down into her eyes as she lovingly smiles back at him.

YOUNG MAN
(snatching the bag)
Give me that fucking bag!

He slams the bag down on the roof of the car and quickly checks the front pocket. It's already open. He turns around to find her holding the letters in her hand, shaking her head and backing away. He steps towards her, trying to find words for the breath being sapped from their lungs.

YOUNG WOMAN
(shacking her head)
No....no.

She throws the letters against his chest, runs to the other side of the car. As he bends down to pick them up, the car door slams shut and she fires the ignition. He grabs his bag and jumps in.

INT. CAR NIGHT

YOUNG WOMAN
Get out!

The young man looks over at her then down at the

letters in his hand, unsure of what to say.

YOUNG WOMAN

Please, just get out!

With the transmission stick in one hand and the steering wheel in the other, she rocks back and forth staring through the windshield. He looks over at her and moves his mouth as if to say something but he can't utter a sound. He tries leaning in closer but quickly turns back to the letters in his hand, and as he slowly puts them back in his bag he nearly rips them apart.

The young man reaches for the door and begins to pull on the handle but as he does he decides to have one last look at her. He notices: the colorful bouquet of flowers made of pipe cleaner sitting on the dash; the indigo lighter standing in the cup holder; the stacks of receipts crumpled in the driver side door; and in the middle of the rear view mirror, tucked between the plastic frame and the glass, is a picture of the two of them goofing around in a photo booth (happy). He imagines her driving to work everyday and seeing him whenever she is looking back, but when he turns to look at her, he finds a nearly unrecognizable person planning their own heartbreak. He grabs the seat belt, puts it on, and locks the door.

YOUNG WOMAN

(exasperated)

Fine!....Fine!

She puts the car into gear and drives off.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE LIVING ROOM NIGHT

On the mantle above the unlit fireplace is a clock ticking away (as loud as a metronome). The old man stands in front of it with a drink in

his hand, waiting for the other hand to snap into place.

He walks over to the record player, bends down, and presses play. As music swells through the room, a couple of muted news anchors contort their jaws and apishly wag their tongues on an incessantly flickering television behind him. He slowly turns up the volume of the music, taking in the rising peaks before reaching over to grab the pistol on the arm rest beside him, and in the same motion he gets up and heads for the sofa.

He looks up at the overblown map of Kansas above the fireplace and then reclines in his seat, spinning the glass in his hand with the tips of his fingers, watching the amber liquid swaying around inside playing tricks with the light. He takes one final, deep breath, downs his drink, and throws the empty glass into the fireplace - shattering it into a thousand pieces.

INT. CAR NIGHT

It is quiet in the car. There is no music, no talking, nothing, other than the grumbling of the engine as it approaches a red light. The walking sign is counting down: 25, 24, 23, 22, 21... The clock on the dash reads 6 to 11. He turns to her, as if ready to say something, but before he can utter a sound she runs the light.

The blue wagon roars across the intersection, up the hill and veers onto a residential street where it stops in front of a small townhouse - no more or less conspicuous than any other house on the block.

Her hands stay glued to the steering wheel as the young man glances out the window and recognizes the house.

YOUNG WOMAN

Get out.

YOUNG MAN

(mercifully)

You don't understand.

YOUNG WOMAN

Please, just get out.

Her eyes are fixed on anger, staring through a mist of rage, while her hands look like they bent the steering wheel into shape.

The young man, unsure of what to do, reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wallet. Inside, he finds the tattered newspaper clipping with her number on it but she doesn't notice, or seem to care, as he unfolds it and places it down on the dash in the hope that she'll see. Without looking she turns to him, unbuckles his seat belt, and pushes him out the door.

YOUNG WOMAN

(hysterically)

Just get out of the fucking car!

Get! Out!

He falls onto the street and as he looks up his bag hits him in the chest. In one last, desperate attempt to change her mind, he gets up and leans in to say something but before he can get a word out she steps on the gas and tears down the street. The clipping slips from the dash and gently nestles itself in the cup holder.

EXT. OLD MAN HOUSE STREET NIGHT

The door slams shut from the force of the car's

acceleration and he watches as she hurls down the street, barely stopping at the intersection, hugging the corner, and disappearing into the night.

The young man sighs and turns to face the house - cast in the shadow of a barren tree. Music, barely audible, rises as the young woman's car fades into the night and as he steps forward to the front door, he starts to make out the sound of classical music coming from inside the house.

Once he reaches the top of the stoop, he swings the storm door open and knocks. There is no answer. He knocks again. Again, there is no answer. He puts his bag down, places his ear to the wooden door and listens for signs of movement but all he can hear is the sound of a Gregorian chant.

He knocks again - no answer. He checks his watch (10:59). He steps back, looks up at the facade of the house to make sure it is the right one, then fishes in his backpack for a set of keys, but before he reaches them he remembers that he had stored the front door key in a small fold in his wallet and reaches for it instead. He pulls his wallet from his back pocket and glances up the street hoping the young woman is there watching him.

As he is about to slide the key into place, he notices that the lock has recently been changed and he quickly glances back up at the intersection: feeling the young woman looking back at him with the "I told you so" look. He grips the key in his palm and tucks into his pocket.

In vain, the young man tries pressing the doorbell and banging on the door but, again, there is no response. The chanting swallows

every thump of his fist. He gets down on his knee to open the mail slot and as it slowly creeps open an idea pops into his head. The flap falls shut.

He stands up and heads around the side of the house, down a narrow brick laid alley covered in foliage. The storm door slowly closes behind him, squeezing his bag against the entrance.

Hopping over a wobbly wooden fence and landing in the backyard of the house, the young man finds himself next to the pond where the magnolia leaf burned away. The hollow glow of a disused streetlamp brightens the dead leaves scattered about the patio as opalescent water cascades over the rocks and into the pond. He glances at it, half expecting the fish to recognize him, then turns back to the house to find the curtains drawn on the ground floor annex. He tries the back door but it's locked.

A warped pine bench sits in front of the window and the young man slides it over to prop himself up as he climbs onto the roof - something which he hasn't done since high school.

From one ledge to the next, the young man pulls himself up the side of the house, hand over foot, prowling across the roof towards the skylight at the top, where the pale moon's reflection shaves the curved glass.

After weaving his way up and across the roof to the edge of the sill, he feels around the jamb for that tiny gap he left and unlocks the frame. Carefully, he lifts open the frame and as the parched rubber seal cracks, air rushes in, replacing the faintly audible music seeping out.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE YOUNG MAN'S BEDROOM NIGHT

The young man peers down through the open skylight - into the bedroom. It is dark and dusty inside.

He slips quietly into the house: hanging from the sill for a split second while using the edge of the bed to balance himself before dropping in, narrowly avoiding his fingers being crushed by the skylight falling back into place.

The room is cold and he looks around as he rights himself, noticing that everything from his childhood appears vaguely untouched. Everything except for a picture frame he has never seen before sitting on the dresser. Unlike the rest of the furnishings, it appears to be completely free of dust. He walks over to inspect it, sitting down on the edge of the bed with the frame in his hands trying to make out the scene. It is the picture with the coded note taped to the back, but he doesn't know it, and as he leans back to pull the chain light the music stops.

The needle of the record player loops around and around with the breathy incantation of a conch shell pressed to one's ear. He slowly gets up, tosses the picture frame onto the bed, then walks over to the carpeted staircase and disappears behind the twisted banister.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE STAIRCASE NIGHT

It is a slow descent and eventually he turns onto the second floor landing where the carpet stops. Each subsequent step causes the wooden floor to creak and he makes his way across the landing to the next set of stairs with only the familiar scratch of a needle on vinyl to keep him company.

As he descends the final flight, winding his way

down and around, the young man catches the television flicker bouncing off the adjacent wall. With each step he grows more nervous, and the flicker less faint.

When he finally rounds the corner of the last step he freezes. The dividing wall of the living room conceals his face from the TV's glare and a voice - raspy and dry - rolls in.

OLD MAN

What's the matter? You look like
you've seen a ghost.

The old man is seated in an armchair with a rifle propped against the arm rest, pointing it directly at him. Plumes of cigarette smoke rise from the edge of his mouth while the ember glows between the tips of his fingers.

YOUNG MAN

Sir?

OLD MAN

Shut the fuck up! You must be the
dumbest son of bitch to think you
could sneak up on me in my own
house.

Leaning back in his throne, the old man takes a drag of his cigarette.

YOUNG MAN

But Sir!

OLD MAN

Now being polite's a good thing....
when you've got a gun pointing at
you....but you just shut your
fucking mouth! All these years and
you're the first person...

YOUNG MAN
(cutting him off)
Sir it's m...

OLD MAN
(cutting him off)
Don't let me tell you again! Now
I've got every right to pull this
little trigger hear.

The old man nearly loses his train of thought
staring absently into the rifle.

OLD MAN
This tiny, little, trivial piece of
metal....insignificant....were it
not attached to this....meaningful
piece of machinery.

OLD MAN
Come on....step into the light.
Let's see what we can do about this
little penny right here.

The old man taps his finger on the trigger and
waves the young man over with the barrel. The
young man steps forward with his hands raised
and as the light from the television crawls over
his face, recognition grows on the old man's.
The barrel lowers and he slowly gets up.

OLD MAN
Still can't look me in the eye huh?

Looking up, the young man is relieved to drop
his hands.

OLD MAN
Has that whores pussy juice sealed
your lips up? I asked you a

question.

The young man's eyes lock onto the old man who returns the rifle to its resting place and pats the pistol tucked into his belt, checking to make sure it's still there.

YOUNG MAN
(clenching his teeth)
I hardly recognize you, Sir.

OLD MAN
(laughing)
I like that....You got some fire in you. It's good. What did they do to you over there?

The old man walks over and plants his hands on both of the young man's shoulders: staring him down, switching back and forth between each eye, checking to see which will blink first, and then grabbing him by the chin.

OLD MAN
They give you pubes too?

Yanking his chin away, the young man steps past the old man and heads for the bookcase.

YOUNG MAN
Nice suit!

While inspecting the contents of the room the young man notices a rubbish bin filled with crumpled pieces of writing paper, an overstuffed ashtray on the coffee table next to a half-empty bottle of whiskey, a leather photo album on the sofa, dust covered books lining the shelves, and a European peg solitaire board filled with marbles which he remembers from his childhood. He slides his hand across the cover of one of

the books - fingering the dust.

OLD MAN

(grabbing his uniform)

Oh this, it only looks clean.

The young man is taking it all in as the old man returns to his chair, tossing his used cigarette into the littered fireplace then fishing in his pocket for another. The young man is barely interested in what he finds but is unsure of what else to do in these familiar yet distant surroundings.

YOUNG MAN

I guess it only looks new as well?

OLD MAN

There's a difference, you know,
between lying and telling a story.

YOUNG MAN

Like between you and me.

He flips open a book lying on the counter and reads a random line: "...and imagination is to memory as time is to age, she says..." He closes the book, puts it back down, then turns around. He is immediately confronted with the image of himself in the mirror and it startles him. The old man watches him as he lights his cigarette.

OLD MAN

You'd be too young to remember.

The young man picks up the bottle.

YOUNG MAN

Or too fucking old to believe.

Staring into the old man's eyes, he takes a swig

from the bottle, screws the cap back on and tosses the bottle into a pile of cushions on the sofa before pulling out a cigarette, placing it in his mouth and warming his hands on the way over to the fireplace.

YOUNG MAN

It's freezing in here.

When he bends down to prepare a fire, he notices a few shards of glass amongst the ash and cigarette butts and he picks one up to inspect it before quickly disregarding it and tossing it back in with the rest.

From a cabinet by the hearth, he pulls out a stack of yellowed newspapers and proceeds to crumple torn pieces into balls which he then places under the wrought iron grate, careful to brush aside any broken glass in the process. The young man seems to be finding his way around the house, much to the approval of the old man, who is busy monitoring the situation with his lit cigarette.

With a ball of newspaper in his hand, the young man pats his pockets in search of a lighter (which he doesn't find) and the old man takes the opportunity to offer him his. Out of the corner of the young man's eye, he sees the invitation and turns to grab the lighter but as he reaches for it, the old man flicks it on - nearly burning the young man's hand.

The flame hangs there between them for a moment and the old man waits for the him accept the offer, which the young man does as he infuriatingly extends his arm and ignites the crumpled piece of paper.

OLD MAN

Is this what you did with my

letters?

Ignoring the comment, the young man lights his cigarette with the burning newspaper, staring into the old man's eyes as he takes his first drag before turning away and dropping the torch into the fireplace. The fire catches as he opens the flue and the budding flames warm the air in front of him. His gaze settles on the source of heat, into which it disappears for a moment.

OLD MAN

Hey! I'm talking to you!

Irritated by the disturbance, the young man slowly turns towards the old man.

YOUNG MAN

Will you just shut the fuck up!

The old man leaps out of his seat and smacks him across the face, knocking the cigarette to the ground and popping the cherry. The young man softens his jaw with his left hand: feeling the joint between his mandible and the rest of his skull with the tips of his fingers; gathering himself as his eyes creep open and he sees the cigarette laying there, fuming on the floor by the old man's feet. He leans forward, picks it up, and takes a long drag as the fire grows behind him.

Frozen in place, the old man waits for the young man to react. He does so by settling himself, gripping the cigarette with his lips, getting up and walking to the door without saying a word. Along the way he notices the mass of letters flickering in the amber light, piling up at the door, and he glances back at the old man.

OLD MAN

At least I get to watch it happen

this time.

The young man turns back and calmly unlatches each lock: the chain, the barrel bolt, and finally the deadbolt. He pulls on the door but the pile of mail is blocking its path, so with the outside of his boot he kicks at the pile and tries again. A sudden gust of air comes rushing in as the door peels off the frame, fueling the fire. There is just enough room for the young man to squeeze through.

OLD MAN

Don't you even want to know why I'm
wearing this?

The young man pauses for a second then proceeds out the door while the old man sits back down in his chair to finish his cigarette.

OLD MAN

All grown up now I see.

The door stands there - ajar - for a moment.

OLD MAN

Don't forget the...

The young man reappears holding his bag. He slams the door, walks over to the sofa and sits down. From his bag he draws the stack of letters wrapped in a blue rubber band and tosses them onto the old man's lap where they land like a ton of bricks.

YOUNG MAN

How'd you find me?

It is as if a bird with a broken wing had dropped out of the sky and fallen at the old man's feet: the first few moments are reserved

for every minute stage of grief along with a careful consideration of fate. He stares at the letters, drawing on his cigarette while the realization dawns on him, and then he carefully bends down to pick them up.

OLD MAN

Look at em....all wrapped up.

Flipping through them like a pack of cards, the old man notices that every single letter is unopened. Slowly, he pulls the rubber band off, wraps it around his wrist, then continues - one at a time.

The old man finds a letter with a slightly torn edge and runs his finger along it, chuckling to himself despairingly before dropping it back in with the rest.

OLD MAN

All these words....my words.

YOUNG MAN

How the fuck did you find me?

Squeezing the letters in his hand, the old man stands up.

OLD MAN

(to himself)

It only does stack so high.

After walking over to the fireplace, the old man props himself up against the mantle and with the letters hanging from one hand he leans in towards the fire.

OLD MAN

They've got my name on it....I guess that's me alright.

YOUNG MAN

I asked you a question.

The old man tosses the letters in the fire.

YOUNG MAN

Old man, I said "I asked you a question!"

OLD MAN

Who the hell do you think you're talking to? You have any clue what you're on about! Do you even remember who your dad is?

The young man freezes: too hurt to answer, too hurt to feel anything, but also too angry to take the bait.

OLD MAN

You don't, do you? You see a picture of him anywhere in this god damned old house....vanished.... like water on sand.

Intensely unmoved, the young man just sits there, filling the old man with pity and forcing him to turn back towards the fire.

OLD MAN

What was I supposed to tell you?

YOUNG MAN

(biting his lips)
I asked you a question.

OLD MAN

One day you just stopped asking.

The old man pinches the lapel on his uniform.

OLD MAN

He never knew about this either.

YOUNG MAN

(barking back)

And you think I give a fuck? I've
been back for a year, don't you get
it! Now tell me how the fuck you
found me!

Without paying attention, the old man leans back
and looks up towards the ceiling as if it were
inscribed with an epitaph.

OLD MAN

These tiny drops of water....

Unhinged, the young man's head drops and his
brow falls into the palms of his hands where he
grips his hair by the root and pulls.

OLD MAN

....falling incessantly on the same
spot, crawling through rock and
stone, building like a
stalactite....until finally....

YOUNG MAN

I swear to god if the world was flat
we'd put mountains in the way.

Oblivious to the young man's declaration, the
old man goes on.

OLD MAN

Can you imagine what it's like....
writing in a notebook every day
for your whole life....only to
realize that the pen never had any
ink?

YOUNG MAN

You have no idea what it's like,
what I have to live with! And I
don't say shit!

OLD MAN

(with blissful resignation)
Sometimes....regret is all we can
hope for.

YOUNG MAN

And what would you know about it?
You think you can get dressed up in
some costume and splatter platitudes
on the wall!

The young man breaks down.

YOUNG MAN

(to himself)
He was just a kid. He was just a
fucking kid.

The old man catches that last part and slowly
turns around, content to see the young man's
frailty.

YOUNG MAN

(barking back)
Now tell me how the fuck you found
me?

OLD MAN

(taking a deep, exasperated breath)
So it goes, breeding martyrs and
printing flags....It's too bad you
never met your mother.....She would
have no trouble recognizing you.

YOUNG MAN

That's fucking it, I'm out of here!

The young man grabs his bag and heads for the door, surprising the old man who suddenly pulls out his pistol, cocks it, and points it at the young man, forcing him to turn around and acknowledge the desperate move.

YOUNG MAN

What are you gonna do, shoot me!

Opening his jacket, the young man invites the old man to shoot.

YOUNG MAN

Go ahead, I'll owe you one.

Quietly hoping the trigger gets pulled, the young man waits there while the old man stands still, gauging him. Realizing he has achieved his aim, the old man flips the weapon around and offers it to the young man by the barrel. The weapon floats there between them as the young man contemplates whether to walk out the door or accept the offer. He drops his bag and cautiously reaches out to grab the weapon but as his fingers crawl over the handle, one of them settles on the trigger - tempted to pull.

He pulls the weapon in towards him and automatically checks to see if it's loaded. As he does, he catches a whiff of polish coming from the chamber and it arouses suspicion in him but that feeling quickly fades, leaving nothing behind but the weight of the gun - a vivid reminder of the last time he held a weapon.

YOUNG MAN

It's loaded.

OLD MAN

Still haven't figured out what else

it's supposed to be.

YOUNG MAN

Why the fuck do you have a loaded
gun?

Turning around and heading back to the
fireplace, the old man leaves him to figure out
what to do with the weapon in his hand.

OLD MAN

A sheath with no sword is but a
mouth with no tongue.

YOUNG MAN

What the hell are you talking about?

OLD MAN

And a dull blade is still, blunt.
What? You don't you like my old
uniform?

The young man slips back onto the sofa -
exasperated.

YOUNG MAN

Well that's one way of getting to
the point.

Turning around and ambling forward, the old man
pulls up to the edge of the coffee table.

OLD MAN

Weren't you supposed to report for
duty two months ago?

Suddenly, shock, confusion and anger writhe
their way through the young man, and the old man
revels in the transformation.

OLD MAN

Hard to stay hidden anywhere these
days....Under the auspices of
chance, I'd wager you've gone AWOL.

The young man looks up at the old man, trying
not to accept the obvious. He feverishly
reconstructs images from his life and
simultaneously watches them fall away, like wall
paper that won't stick.

OLD MAN

What do you think the pins and
medals are for?

The old man toys with the rubber band at his
wrist.

OLD MAN

(to himself)

As if it were enough.

He then pulls out a cigarette and offers the
pack to the young man, who doesn't seem to
notice.

OLD MAN

You think they forget about us just
because we're old?

YOUNG MAN

(containing himself)

Say it....I want to hear you say it.

Nonchalantly lighting his cigarette, the old man
leans back and takes a deep drag. He has the
young man where he wants him and as he heads
back to the warmth of the fire, he pulls a
letter out from his breast pocket.

YOUNG MAN

Another fucking letter! Are you

kidding me?

The young man goes apoplectic: slamming his hands down on the sofa then standing up and pointing the gun at the old man's head.

YOUNG MAN

Tell me! Just fucking tell me!

The old man glances up at the young man as if a moth were fluttering by a candlelight.

OLD MAN

Don't point that thing at me.

YOUNG MAN

And why the fuck not?

The young man's hand is shaking.

YOUNG MAN

Just tell me what the fuck is going on!

Opening the envelope and flipping through the letter's many pages, the old man searches for something specific, leaving the young man to fester with impotent rage.

OLD MAN

I don't get it. If we're the ones losing our memory, then why is it that young people stick us away in homes and forget about us?

YOUNG MAN

I want you to answer my fucking question for once!

After stumbling onto a passage, the old man takes another deep drag and mutters an excerpt

(under his breath, muffled by the smoke escaping his lips).

OLD MAN

Duty, valor, honor, bravery, those real values, branded and franchised, fed to the virtuously inclined as the noblest form of heroism so that it can be swallowed with pride in exchange for being scarified as the glorified bodyguard of a bank....No, that's not it.

The old man flips through a few more pages while exasperation begins its overwhelming assault on the young man. His arm drops down and he falls back into the sofa - beaten.

YOUNG MAN

They really do stack it that high.

The right passage seems to elude the old man and he looks forward, as if attempting to formulate a thought, but when he can't find that either he looks down at his uniform, slightly confused, and mumbles to himself while taking another drag of his cigarette.

Meanwhile, the young man has taken out a cigarette, lit it with the book of matches he found on the coffee table and has completely given up on listening to the old man. Although he can't help but hear him.

The old man glances down at the pages in his hand, then folds them into the envelope and slides it back into his breast pocket. As he does, he notices the blue rubber band around his wrist. He tucks his finger beneath it: stretching the blue band away from his wrist; feeling the rubber tug at his skin as he slips it around; gauging the pressure of the elastic

digging into his veins.

OLD MAN

Memory...is a ball of rubber bands.
No matter how you look at it, it's
always full of holes.

YOUNG MAN

Maybe somewhere along the line
you'll remember to get to the
fucking point!

OLD MAN

Maybe somewhere along the way you'll
learn to shut your fucking mouth!
How old did you say he was? Six?
Seven? Oh, I'm sorry, you didn't
say, did you? Now how would I know
that?

The young man's eyes fly open, unveiling the memory of that fateful night before him. He starts compulsively cocking and un-cocking the weapon, oblivious to the mechanical motion of his hands, transported back to the moment he shot the child. His eyes swell up with tears to dampen the fire raging through his senses, blurring the old man's silhouette, who chuckles to himself as he takes another a drag of his cigarette.

OLD MAN

Can't teach a little bitch how to
cry.

Erupting from his seat, the young man steps over the coffee table and jams the gun into the old man's back.

YOUNG MAN

What's the point in fucking crying
when you've got a gun?

Slowly, the old man turns around to face the young man standing there firmly holding the weapon in both hands now pointed directly at the center of the old man's chest. The old man calmly takes another drag of his cigarette then clears a speck of dust from his inner eye with the tip of his little finger while staring back into the young man's eyes. Everything hangs in the air - for a moment.

The old man blows smoke into the young man's face, shifts his weight to the side, grabs the young man's wrists, pulls him forward, spins around, sweeps his feet, kicks his knee, and knocks him down. As he buckles, the young man drops the weapon and falls face first onto the floor where the old man lands on top of him with the full force of gravity; the pistol slides across the floor and comes to a rest by the fire. The old man starts speaking directly into the young man's ear.

OLD MAN

Why you trying to fuck with me, huh?
Who do you think you're messing
with....you can't even deal with an
old man. I'm not some little fucking
kid....real fucking hero you are!

The young man burns with rage, breathing heavily with his cheek pressed firmly to the ground. With all his force he elbows the old man in the gut, shoves him to the side, rolls him over, twists around and lands top of him. Now he is looking down at the old man, catching his breath with his knees pinned to the old man's shoulders. He slowly reaches over and picks up the warm gun.

The horror in the young man's eyes pulses with intent, eager to rip the smirk off of the old

man's face. He leans forward and points the weapon directly between the old man's eyebrows.

OLD MAN

Come on, do it....I gotta go sometime....might as well be you! I was going to do it anyways you know....why do you think I'm all dressed up....can't you tell? The letter, sitting here in the dark....Don't you get it? I can't take it anymore....I know what I did....I accept it! Obeying orders! Yeah, you know all about that, don't you? Yeah, you remember.... just do it! Come on!

The young man's teeth are clenched and his hand is shaking. He hears the battle raging around him: the sound of boots treading through an abandoned building, blood gurgling from the boy's throat, gunfire, everything; he instinctively begins to squeeze the trigger.

OLD MAN

You can kill a little kid but not do me....you're a worthless fucking orphan you know that!

The young man cries out as he fires the weapon. The old man's head drops to the floor. The young man collapses beside him and everything goes quiet.

Their bodies lie still in front of the fire - the only thing breathing in the room.

OLD MAN

You can't even do that right, can you?

YOUNG MAN

I hate you.

Slowly, the old man gets up. Once he is standing, he reaches back down to offer the young man a helping hand.

OLD MAN

Here.

YOUNG MAN

Don't fucking touch me.

He reaches to try and help him up a second time. The young man points the gun at him. The old man brushes it aside and heads for the bottle of whiskey on the sofa.

The young man gradually lifts himself up and stumbles over to the sofa, dragging the weapon with him and snatching the bottle from the old man who has just finished taking a sip. He slumps down in the sofa and takes a swig, then starts picking pieces of broken glass from his clothes and placing them in the ashtray - one by one - as the old man looks up and stares at the map of Kansas above the mantle for a moment.

OLD MAN

You believe in ghosts?....I
do....Not the ones that take
physical form but the other ones....
you know....I wonder, how long does
it take before they start to haunt?

The young man is exasperated from having to listen to the old man but ultimately resigned to this immutable situation. He grabs the pack of cigarettes from his pocket and although it is crushed he manages to fish one out. It is bent, nearly broken, but still smokeable and as the young man lights it, the old man walks over to the fireplace and grabs the bolt-action fire

from the mantle.

OLD MAN

Do you remember when I taught you to
shoot, safely and accurately?

He holds the rifle in his arms, sliding the bolt
in and out of its place.

OLD MAN

I learned all that when I was about
your age....they taught me all that
in the army....I was an excellent
marksman....2, 3 hundred yards....
bang! I'd nail that sucker....in the
wind, in the rain....I would be out
there everyday practicing. We had
this drill sergeant....used to give
us hell....he owned this prized set
of Napoleonic coins.... must have
been a history nut or something
cause he wouldn't shut up about that
stuff.... he was always drilling us
on mapping....He used to tell us
this story of how Napoleon lost the
war cause one of his generals made a
mistake reading the map. "Right
place, right time" he used to say.
Man, we hated him....One day, the
fellas were just horsing around....
they decided to make a bet....They
bet me that I couldn't put a hole in
those coins. Now it wasn't an
impossible shot....about five
hundred yards from on top of this
hill. It was summer and we knew he
always kept his window open. We were
pretty bored I guess, so I took the
bet....We got up on top of that
hill....there was no wind at all, it
was clear, it was calm, like after
the rain before the sky turns

hazy.... I lost that bet: three shots, two hits....That night he comes storming into the hall screaming his head off "wrong place, wrong fucking time!" He was marching around, banging on a barrel.... Didn't take long before they'd figured who'd done it....I was charged with conduct unbecoming and unauthorized discharge of a firearm....got a name for everything I guess. Didn't stick though. Once they realized how good a shot I was, they forgot all about it....except the sergeant, of course.

The old man smiles at his last innocent memory, before the sight of the rifle in his hands shoots him back to reality. He dutifully reaches for his pack of cigarettes but when he opens it, he discovers that they are all crushed.

OLD MAN
(sighs)
All out.

He crumples the pack and tosses it in the fire.

The young man is half paying attention/half waiting for this interminable night to end, quietly sipping from the bottle and smoking his cigarette.

OLD MAN
You mind if I have one of yours?

The young man picks the pack up off the coffee table and tosses it at the old man like a dirty sock. The old man slowly pulls out the last mangled one and carefully straightens it. With the rifle leaning against his hip, he lights the cigarette and then nervously runs his fingers

through his hair before grabbing the weapon and taking a seat on the chair by the wall.

OLD MAN

They transferred me to some offshore base....some banana farm in Central America....They called it a test project....As soon as I got there I knew I wanted out, but they told me it was either that or prison....even tried escaping into the jungle a few times. But the more I tried to get away the better I seemed to be doing....like it was part of some process....I must have escaped six, seven times. I'd be out there for weeks, living off scraps in the jungle. I must have lost 20 pounds when they finally caught me....They brought me back, dropped me in a hole and left me there: keeping me awake, keeping me from sleep, feeding me like a dog.... breaking me. The weird thing was, whenever I got sick, they'd pull me out, fix me up, then throw me right back in....there was this noise, gnawing at me day and night....it was like a radio going in and out of tune. I have no idea how long I was in there. But one things for sure, when they finally dragged me out of that hole....I was broken....took me months to regain my strength.... The nurses, the doctors, psychiatrists even, always so patient, so articulate....rebuilding me - body and mind. But I mean....what good's glue, if it ain't ever gonna harden. Shit, even the lieutenant would come and check-up on me.... tell me what a good soldier I was....see if I was ready....see if I was fit. Man, by

the time I got out of there, I was whatever they wanted me to be. They set me up with training the new recruits.... getting them ready for whatever they wanted us to be ready for.... They would come and go, and I would train em and send em off. Every once in a while these suits would show up....we used to call them the three piece militia....They would fly in, check on the op, then fly back....I never knew why, it never even crossed my mind....I don't know how long I was in that jungle for....it doesn't even matter. The first time I got to go anywhere was for the only thing they ever asked me to do....Asked me, shit. One day, rainy like the rest of em, this suit arrives on his own, and that was odd cause they were always coming in groups. The lieutenant calls me into his office....and he's sitting there behind his desk with a folder in his hands, the three piece a bit further back.... he just sat there, smoking - never said a word, never saw his face. The lieutenant hands me the folder....asks me if I was "ready to do my duty for the American people?" If I was "ready" to stop the spread of Communism....to establish a lasting peace in the world....Ready? Shit....Sir, yes, Sir....You know there are people who crawl on their hands and knees for miles, prostrating themselves, bleeding all the way up a rocky mountainside, somewhere in distant Mexico, just to get to a church. Sir, yes, Sir. You're god damn right! In the folder is a photograph of a man held to a

file by a paper clip. He tells me that my mission represents the gravest threat to our national security.... that the man in the picture is my mark....He tells me that when tactical nuclear weapons were placed a hundred miles off the coast of the United States, this man failed to act, and as a direct result of his incompetence, our national security could no longer be assured. "He's just a politician. He can't comprehend the strategic thinking of the enemy." "We live in a time of war and we can no longer afford to live with the risk this man represents. We must assure the survival of the American way of life." Sir, yes, Sir. Sir.... yes....Sir....The next day they flew me to Dallas.... and....as for the rest, well, that's what they call history.

The young man slams the bottle down on the coffee table.

YOUNG MAN

Are you telling me you shot JFK?

OLD MAN

Sir, yes....Yeah, from on top of the hill.

YOUNG MAN

And let me guess, you've been living with the guilt ever since and now that you're all alone you've decided to come clean....I mean, where do you come up with this shit?

OLD MAN

I've lived with it every day for all these years believing....Never mind. It's all here....It's all yours now.

From his breast pocket, the old man pulls a letter out and holds it at arm's length, close enough for the young man to reach.

YOUNG MAN

And they just let you leave after that? Pat on the back, hand shake and a couple medals. Thanks for that, see you next time.

OLD MAN

Where do you think all the money came from? How do you think I raised you? Fixing cars and giving piano lessons.

YOUNG MAN

What money? Grandma's money? She hated you as much as I do.

OLD MAN

You don't believe me do you?

YOUNG MAN

Believe you!?! Are you insane?

The old man lets his arm drop. The letter lands on the edge of the coffee table and he raises the rifle up with both hands.

OLD MAN

This....is the same rifle.

YOUNG MAN

Will you just shut the fuck up! Please! Sir! Whatever you want to be called! Just stop!

Completely disinterested in the machinations of this senile old pervert, the young man closes his eyes and looks away.

OLD MAN

(as he stands up)

I thought....maybe there was a chance.

The old man looks down, leans forward, grabs the bottle off the table, removes the cap, and takes a swig. As he is about to put the bottle back he recoils, then gets up and walks over to the cabinet where he puts it away beneath the muted television still stuck on a 24hr news cycle.

The cabinet door snaps shut and the old man raises himself up: back to the wall with the rifle in his hands. He flips the weapon around, grabs the barrel with one hand, and places his thumb on the trigger. The young man turns towards him and quickly realizes what is about to happen.

YOUNG MAN

What are you doing? What the fuck are you doing?

The old man takes a deep breath before wrapping his lips around the barrel and the young man jumps up and rushes over to stop him.

YOUNG MAN

I believe you! I fucking believe you!

The young man pulls the weapon from his waistband, points it at the old man's leg, and fires, but all he hears is the hollow click of an empty chamber. And as the young man realizes that there had only ever been one bullet in the

chamber - for only one purpose - the old man pulls the trigger.

His head explodes onto the wall. The rifle drops to the floor and his body crumples beside it. The young man stands there in shock: his outstretched arm still the holding the pistol and repeatedly pulling on the trigger; staring at the empty space where the old man used to be; the muted television, covered in blood, continues to flicker away... Slowly, as the shock melts over his face, his arm drops to his side.

He takes a step forward and hurls the gun at the wall, screaming in agony as the weapon bounces off the wall and falls into the nook behind the TV. No one is there to hear him cry out, and nobody cares to.

He breaks down crying by the body: curling up at the base of the coffee table, panting wildly as he hugs his knees into his chest, paralyzed with fear and anger, reliving the moment he killed the boy, fading away from any conscious connection to the world while the old man's letter lies precariously behind his head, dangling over the edge of the table - ready to drop.

INT. OLD MAN HOUSE LIVING ROOM MORNING

The doorbell rings. The young man is still huddled on the floor. His head hangs with lifeless abandon as the television plays through a veneer of dried blood and a single beam of light crisscrosses the room. The fire is all but dead, only a few hidden embers remain.

The doorbell rings again and the young man wakes up with a jolt. He notices the light at his feet but he hasn't registered the doorbell. He checks

his watch (8:13). He is confused. It is as if he doesn't know, or remember, what happened.

As he comes to, he rediscovers the body of the old man lying next to the cabinet and he starts to wipe his eyes when the doorbell rings again. He has no idea what to do. He is trying to imagine who it might be. He scours the room hoping it will reveal something, anything that makes sense.

The doorbell rings again and he stands up, knocking the letter off the coffee table. He bends down to pick it up and considers it with both hands for a few moments before the doorbell rings again. He looks up as if forced to make a decision.

In a daze he walks over to the door, glancing back at the old man, confused and uncertain of what to do, quietly hoping the old man will wake up and tell him. When he reaches the door, he extends his hand out to twist the knob, and as he does he notices the matte black packages strewn amongst the pile of letters on the floor. He glances back at the body, then at the letter, then back at the pile. The doorbell rings again and he looks up.

The young man turns around and heads for the fireplace, where a few embers are still hidden. When he reaches it, he taps the letter in his hand as if it will help him decide what to do. He glances back at the body, at the TV, at the fire, at the letter; trying to avoid looking at the door as the doorbell continues to ring.

He flicks his wrist and tosses the letter into the fireplace where it lands on a bed of ash and slowly burns away: without a flame at first, then a bittersweet glow grows around its lightly charred edges, then the whole thing ignites in

one fell swoop.

The doorbell rings again and the young man pulls himself away from the spectacle to answer the front door.

EXT. STREET DAY

A strong wind blows down the street on a slightly overcast fall day as maple seeds descend from the sky, spinning through the air like helicopter propellers.

The young man is standing in front of the house, embracing the young woman, squeezing the breath out of her, holding something in his hands. She is in shock, holding the newspaper clipping between her fingers, unsure of what to do or what can be done, and she searches for something to say - anything - but decides to just squeeze him back. She doesn't want to let go of the young man, who looks absently out at the world - annihilated.

Citizens and pedestrians are going about their day: yuppies off to work, a lady jogging, a dude walking his dog, some kids chasing the bus, a policeman driving by... Sirens ring out in the distance as the wind rustles the leaves. The maple seeds land on the sidewalk by their feet and, without noticing, the wind confiscates the newspaper clipping from the young woman's fingers and carries it off, above their heads and through the trees, over the roofs, to the top of the city, as high as the Washington Monument - wrapped in a metal scaffolding somewhere off in the distance.