

LANDSCAPE WITH INVISIBLE HAND

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Based on the Book by
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Plan B / MGM / Annapurna

Introduce a MUSICAL THEME -- stately, baroque classical music. Ornate, weighty, and imposing.

This continues over a sequence of static shots: ARTWORK, hanging on a packed dining room wall.

First, a marker drawing: a happy family of four stick figures standing in front of their house. Labeled "Mom," "Dad," "Natalie" (baby girl) and "Me" (young boy).

Next, a crude painting: the same family, five years older, opening presents in front of a Christmas tree. They're a multiracial family: the mother Black, the father white. Living a comfortable suburban life.

The paintings progress through the years, getting better, more refined:

Group scenes, individual portraits, still-lives. Some framed, others thumb-tacked onto the wall. Eventually the young painter's attention seems to drift away from his own family, and he starts rendering LANDSCAPES.

First they're lush and warm: sun-dappled hills, apple orchards, suburban blocks evoking Norman Rockwell.

Then a boutique clothing store with an "Everything Must Go" sign...

An entire shopping mall, shuttered...

An overflowing dump, with foragers picking through garbage under a smog-filled sky...

And finally, a CHARCOAL SKETCH of a crappy little SOUP STAND, with a line of tired, slouched customers waiting in front of it. A sign reads, "HEATHER'S BUCKET OF BROTH."

A HAND erases a line on the drawing and re-sketches the curve of a man in line's shoulder, making him look more stooped and defeated.

As music concludes, we hear a voice:

BETH (O.S.)

I really think I have a good shot
at this one. Fifty-fifty, or maybe
better. Sixty-forty.

(pause)

Adam, are you listening?

EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

ADAM CAMPBELL, 17, a quiet observer with a bone-dry sense of humor, stands holding a sketching tablet in one hand while he draws with the other.

ADAM

Sixty-forty. That's great.

His mother, BETH CAMPBELL (early 40s, Black, with an anxious energy hidden behind a winning smile) stands beside him with a resume. They're near the back of a long soup-stand line.

BETH

Could you put that down? Nobody wants to hire someone whose child has dirty hands.

ADAM

It was your choice to bring me.

BETH

Because I wanted moral support.

ADAM

And I'm giving you moral support.

BETH

You're drawing.

ADAM

I can multi-task. And this is a good exercise. See look, I have to convey emotion through posture, without including the faces.

BETH

Well I hope you're including the piles of bullshit you heap all over the place.

ADAM

I'm saving those for last.

BETH

Now if all these people would just order and go, maybe this line would move.

Up ahead in line, a gruff, stocky MAN IN A SUIT (40s, Indian-American) turns:

MAN IN SUIT

We're all waiting just like you,
ma'am.

BETH

Oh, excuse me. It's just that I'm
not here for soup. I'm here to
follow up about a job.

A GAUNT WOMAN behind them chimes in:

GAUNT WOMAN

We're *all* here about the job.

Just then, a SOUP STAND EMPLOYEE in an apron shouts from the
counter to the line:

SOUP STAND EMPLOYEE

Folks, listen, we haven't filled
the position yet, but if you're
here to pester me about it then
I'll throw away your resume. They
just doubled our electric bill, and
we can't afford another employee.
We need CUSTOMERS. So unless you're
actually here for the broth, GO
HOME!

The ENTIRE LINE disperses, grumbling.

3

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY - MINUTES LATER

3

Adam and his mother walk home. The man in a suit lopes
alongside them, making conversation.

The town, once a charming suburban enclave, is freefalling
into disrepair. They turn down a quiet alleyway.

MAN IN SUIT

Six years ago I had fifty employees
on my payroll. You believe that?

ADAM

You'll both find something. It's
like my mom always says: you've
gotta be a self-starter, in this
economy.

BETH

(despondent)
I do say that, yes.

MAN IN SUIT

Ma'am, would you mind if I took a peek at your resume? I could use some formatting tips.

He takes one before she can respond.

BETH

That's fine.

MAN IN SUIT

Law degree, eh?

BETH

Mm hm.

MAN IN SUIT

Wow. *Fancy* law degree. And here we are together competing to serve soup.

BETH

I wouldn't say "competing." We're all in this together.

The man glances behind them to make sure no one is watching, then without warning, he GRABS BETH BY THE NECK AND THROWS HER AGAINST A BRICK WALL.

MAN IN SUIT

Listen to me, bitch: this *is* a competition for some of us. I got a pair of starving kids and a mountain of medical bills at home. And you're not gonna come in here with your brand-name JD and take this job.

Adam is absolutely frozen, shaking his head numbly as this unfolds.

BETH

Please let go.

MAN IN SUIT

I have your address, now. And if I come back here next week and I see you spooning broth behind that stand, I will come to your house, and I will hurt you.

He lets go of her and turns to leave, just as Adam comes out of nowhere with a LIMP SPAGHETTI OF A PUNCH.

The man CATCHES his arm and SLAPS HIM in the face, sending him to the ground.

Then he re-adjusts his jacket, panting from the exertion and a bit ashamed of himself, and walks quickly away.

Beth, catching her breath, and Adam, grasping at his eye, look at one another.

ADAM

I should have stopped him.

BETH

It's alright honey. It all happened
so fast.

4

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BACKYARD - LATER THAT DAY

4

Adam sits on a folding chair in front of an easel, staring at the late-afternoon sun as it approaches the horizon, holding a package of FROZEN PEAS over his eye.

The peas have an inscrutable LABEL, in a blocky, graphic script that belongs to no human language.

NATALIE (O.S.)

Are you gonna paint, or are you
gonna stand there staring at the
sky?

WIDER: the family's in-ground SWIMMING POOL has been emptied of water. And in a depressing patch of dirt at the bottom of it, NATALIE, 14, is on her hands and knees planting tomatoes.

Behind them, a two-story house. Once an aspirational upper-middle-class home, now with a few windows boarded up and its brick walls choked with weeds.

ADAM

I'm waiting for the right
conditions.

NATALIE

(glances up)
Only a depressive loser like you
would stare at a perfectly blue sky
and hope for clouds.

ADAM

Not clouds. It's a study of the
light. I'm waiting for sunset.

NATALIE

Well could you at least help me
with the garden in the meantime?

ADAM

I'm not eating anything that comes
out of that dirt.

NATALIE

(offended)
Why not?

ADAM

Because spending an hour reading about plants on the internet does not make you an actual gardener. Your basil from last week reeked of chlorine.

NATALIE

So you'd rather eat food that comes out of a meat-printer in orbit somewhere?

ADAM

Lesser of two evils.
(noticing something)
Okay, here we go...

He gets up: indeed, the sun is starting to set, and the light in the clouds is gauzy and perfect. Adam rapidly begins dabbing paint on canvas in practiced strokes.

NATALIE

So how'd you hurt your eye?

ADAM

(focused on painting)
Shaving.

NATALIE

Shaving? Do you have hair growing out of your eyeballs, now?

ADAM

That's right, Nat. Yours will start coming in soon. It's the Campbell family curse. Nobody warned you about this?

NATALIE

Very funny. Also mom looked upset. Did something happen while you were out job-hunting?

ADAM

She's just tired.

NATALIE

Did she find anything?

ADAM

She will.

NATALIE

It's been a year of this.

ADAM

She will. Now just plant your
vegetables, I'm trying to focus.

Adam pauses, as he notices something: the ground begins to
shake, and a distant humming noise becomes audible.

He puts down his paintbrush, and he and Natalie look off into
the distance.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You're kidding me.

NATALIE

Look at that. Perfect timing.

A huge SHADOW slowly glides in over his and Natalie's heads.

ADAM

I thought this one was heading
east.

NATALIE

I think it's a different one.

Finally we see its source: an enormous FLOATING PLATFORM, a
marvel of advanced technology built out of some unfamiliar,
quicksilver metal alloy and resplendent with softly blinking
lights and steering fins.

Adam stares up in resigned disbelief.

SUPER-WIDE SHOT: It parks there in the sky.

Whatever's on top of this huge thing we can't see: all we see
is its underside, the entirety of which is filled with an
obscenely vast ADVERTISEMENT FOR UPSCALE CONDOS.

"AFFORDABLE INTERSPECIES LUXURY! LIVE ALONGSIDE THE VUVV,
STARTING AT \$8,000/MONTH."

A BANNER that's been trailing the moving platform ("FIRST
MONTH FREE") falls limp as the platform drifts to a stop, and
gets TANGLED up in a POWER LINE. Suddenly lights POP OFF all
over the now twilit neighborhood.

People YELL angrily from neighboring houses -- "FUCK YOU!"
"GET OUT OF HERE" -- and someone chucks a half-empty beer can
up toward the platform.

The beer can spins toward the hovering monstrosity until it
runs out of momentum and comes spinning back down, landing in
the same yard from which it was thrown.

SUPERIMPOSED TITLE CARD: LANDSCAPE WITH INVISIBLE HAND

5

INT./EXT. HOLOGRAM - DAY

5

CLOSE on an opaque, photorealistic HOLOGRAM of earth, floating in space.

TEACHER (O.S.)

...And in 1953, when the Vuvv scouting fleet reached Earth, they were delighted to find a species that, like their own, had achieved dominance over their planet.

We PULL BACK from the hologram, which hangs in midair, a point of light within an endless BLACK VOID. The image changes from earth to moving images of 1950s American life: little league baseball, factory lines, Thanksgiving dinner.

Reveal a TEACHER, eerily pretty, in a sweater and pencil skirt, looking like she stepped straight out of 1953 herself.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Fearing the humans' distrust of outsiders, the Vuvv sat in wait for the next seventy years, and watched with sorrowful compassion as human culture declined, and humanity began to destroy itself.

PULLING FURTHER BACK: Twenty-odd high schoolers sit in desks within the black void, watching the teacher, bored.

The hologram changes from the planet earth to a fast-cycling set of violent images: war, pollution, hunger.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

By 2026, they could no longer allow the suffering to continue. And so on April 15, in solemn observance of the sacred human holiday "Tax Day," they landed one of their ships in Wrigley Field and introduced themselves.

We settle on Adam, in the back row, doodling.

CLOSE on the sketch: Adam is drawing a girl, viewed from behind, her long hair obscuring her face and her chin resting on her palm.

TEACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 And indeed, exactly five years ago
 on this day, humanity at last
 joined the Vuvv Interplanetary Co-
 Prosperity Alliance...

ADAM'S POV: The GIRL he's drawing (17, white) is two desks
 ahead of him, and doesn't seem to be listening. She's wearing
 a loose school-issued sweatshirt.

TEACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 ...emerging from their dark age of
 isolation to embrace their
 visitors' more advanced technology.

CLOSE, from behind: she aimlessly stretches out a string of
 chewing gum from her mouth, then gobbles it back up.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
 That concludes today's lesson.
 Happy First Contact, and you may
 now remove your nodes.

The students begin reaching for their temples, and Adam pulls
 a tiny blinking NODE off his forehead.

The moment he does, the elegant black void DISAPPEARS.

6

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - SAME

6

And now we see the BROKEN-DOWN CLASSROOM onto which the
 hologram had been VIRTUALLY SUPERIMPOSED. The teacher
 vanishes as well.

A slumped, weary-looking real teacher, MR. STANLEY (male,
 white, 60s) emerges from the corner and addresses the class.

MR. STANLEY
 So yeah. There's your new
 curriculum. No more English Lit:
 the new mandate from the district
 is Vuvv Culture and History. And
 yes, that.... woman...thing....
 whatever she is....she's gonna be
 your new teacher.

A few sympathetic noises from the class. Not many.

MR. STANLEY (CONT'D)
 (re: noises)
 Save it, please.
 (MORE)

MR. STANLEY (CONT'D)

(beat)

Apparently my microscopic salary is too much of a burden on the school. I've been underbid by the little boxes on your foreheads. So congratulations, folks: you're finally all rid of me.

7

INT. ART CLASS - DAY - AN HOUR LATER

7

CLOSE on Adam's finished painting of the sunset, from the previous day. At the bottom of the wide landscape, a tiny rendering of Natalie and her vegetable garden. She has an impudent look on her face that captures her essence well.

Standing over the painting are Adam and MR. REILLY, a gentle, bespectacled man in his 40s.

After a moment:

MR. REILLY

You put a little less detail right here, didn't you?

He points: indeed, the center of the painting is sketchier, lacking in richness.

ADAM

One of those floating developments parked itself right there. Didn't move til this morning.

MR. REILLY

And you didn't paint it?

Adam looks up at him, confused.

ADAM

Well you told me to draw the sky.

MR. REILLY

And?

ADAM

And I wanted it to be impressionist-y. I was going for kind of a Monet vibe.

MR. REILLY

...And?

ADAM

And I don't remember seeing any floating city-blocks in Monet.

MR. REILLY

Because his skies didn't have them. Yours, for better or worse, do.

Adam, feeling gently reprimanded, gathers up the canvas.

ADAM

I'll do better next time.

MR. REILLY

(pointing)

This part is excellent. Your sister. Your familiarity with the subject shines through.

ADAM

She's just there for scale. And thanks, but the whole thing sucks.

MR. REILLY

Adam? It's good. And one of these days you're gonna give up this cool-kid negativity and learn to take a compliment.

A beat. Adam is disarmed.

ADAM

Thanks.

MR. REILLY

Now go join the others.

We FOLLOW Adam through the art classroom, to a circle of EASELS, where students are sketching a FIGURE MODEL with charcoal.

The model, standing on a platform, is BUDDY, a 17-year-old with the frame and bearing of a defensive end. He wears a TOGA over his sweatpants and t-shirt, and models with a large wooden dowel, like a bro-y Roman emperor, mugging a little for his friends.

Adam notices the GIRL he was watching in his previous class, still chewing gum, working at one of the easels. She draws, quite intently.

Adam chooses an empty easel next to her.

As he circles toward her, we see what she's sketching:

A CARTOON DRAWING OF A PENIS.

Adam stares at it. Blinks.

He looks at the girl: she absentmindedly shades in the foreskin, blithely unconcerned with being caught.

Adam watches for a moment, puzzled. Then leans in:

ADAM
(to the girl)
You really captured his essence.

She glances at Adam, clocks him, then returns to her drawing without a response.

ADAM (CONT'D)
I feel like his face could use a little more detail, though.

In response, she draws a SMILEY-FACE on the head of the cartoon penis.

She glances at Adam, cracks the smallest of smiles.

ADAM (CONT'D)
See? It's uncanny, now. The resemblance.

GIRL
Like a photograph.

ADAM
Exactly.
(pause)
You're new here?

GIRL
Just started today.

ADAM
I noticed. You're in my home room.
Mr. Stanley.

GIRL
The hologram formerly known as Mr.
Stanley.

ADAM
Right.

A COMMOTION makes them look up: one of Buddy's jock FRIENDS is chucking pieces of charcoal at him, while Buddy violently SWINGS at them with his dowel, as though taking batting practice.

MR. REILLY
Mr. Matthews! Cut it out!

BUDDY
I'm just posing! It's an "action pose!"

MR. REILLY
Well choose a pose that won't decapitate your classmates, please!

BUDDY
Don't limit my freedom of expression, man!

The new girl finally turns to face Adam.

GIRL
Is everyone at your school like this?

ADAM
Nah, Buddy's a unique specimen.
(pause)
I'm Adam, by the way.

GIRL
Chloe.

8

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

8

In a hall crammed with students, Adam speaks with Chloe as she gathers her books from her locker.

CHLOE
We had a perfectly decent house upstate, until the Vuvv built a Gorging Complex right above it.

ADAM
That sucks.

CHLOE
Yeah. They bought out all the lots around us. My dad was the last holdout. But the debris got so bad, we had to sell last week. For one dollar.

ADAM

Well shit.

We FOLLOW them as they walk out the double-doors:

9

EXT. SCHOOL - LATE AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

9

Students mill about the entrance, drifting toward the parking lot and pickup line.

ADAM

So where you staying now?

CHLOE

Um... we're moving around.

ADAM

What do you mean?

CHLOE

Well, we were at my uncle's, for a minute. Now we're over on South Orange.

Out of focus in the background behind them, MR. STANLEY, the just-fired English teacher, has walked into frame. He stands there for an eerily long moment, unmoving.

ADAM

South Orange?

CHLOE

Yeah.

ADAM

But that's not a residential street. You mean the, um... the *shelter*, on South Orange?

CHLOE

(a little embarrassed)
Well it's slightly nicer than a "shelter." Like each family gets their own room, and they have showers, so --

Without warning, Mr. Stanley, still out of focus in the background, pulls a HANDGUN from his belt, puts it to his head, and FIRES.

The LOUD GUNSHOT makes the whole crowd of students JUMP and SCREAM.

Mr. Stanley's blood SPLATTERS all over the brick wall of the school.

Chloe and Adam reflexively GRAB ONE ANOTHER, out of shock.

10

EXT. SCHOOL - EARLY EVENING

10

Twenty minutes later, the glow of police lights illuminates what has become a crime scene.

A group of students and teachers stand murmuring and crying around the yellow-tape border. A gruff POLICEMAN tries to get everyone to clear out.

We FIND Adam and Chloe in the crowd, staring, stunned.

CHLOE

Was he a good teacher?

ADAM

I guess. Always seemed like he absolutely hated his job. But it must have meant a lot to him.

CHLOE

It's getting way too common, this sort of thing.

ADAM

I know.

Chloe turns to Adam, notices a speck of BLOOD on his forehead.

CHLOE

Do you mind if I....

ADAM

Go ahead.

Gently, she wipes it away with her sleeve.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Hey Chloe?

CHLOE

Yeah?

ADAM

About your housing situation.

CHLOE

What about it?

ADAM

...I've got kind of a crazy idea.

11

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - THE NEXT NIGHT

11

In the run-down formal dining room of the Campbell house, under a wall covered in Adam's paintings and drawings, a big family dinner, with TWO FAMILIES:

Adam, Natalie, and Beth sit alongside Chloe, MR. MARSH (50s, bearded, stocky), and her older brother HUNTER (21, with a face that looks like it was made to spit).

MR. MARSH

Really can't tell you how grateful we are. It's unbelievable how little you're charging.

BETH

Oh, well.... We're not exactly experienced landlords.

ADAM

It's not about the money. I just wish you could stay in the guest rooms.

BETH

If we can get caught up on heating bills, we can move you up there without you freezing to death.

CHLOE

Trust me, a furnished basement's a big upgrade for us.

MR. MARSH

And as soon as Hunter gets a job, we'll start contributing to utilities.

HUNTER

Or as soon as *you* get a job, dad.

MR. MARSH (CONT'D)

Shut up.

MR. MARSH (CONT'D)

(straight back to Beth)

We just caught word there's a new Manufactory in town. Hunter's gonna drop by tomorrow to see if they need anyone on the line.

NATALIE

I thought Vuvv tech didn't need any humans to operate it. Isn't that the point?

HUNTER

It doesn't.

MR. MARSH

But it's "chic" to employ a real human. That's what I heard.

CHLOE

Hard to believe even an alien would find Hunter "chic."

Hunter throws a dinner roll at Chloe.

Adam giggles.

Mr. Marsh is not amused: he reaches out and GRABS Hunter roughly by the collar, bellowing at him.

MR. MARSH

You think that's appropriate at the dinner table? Huh? The fuck is wrong with you?

Beth coughs nervously, uncomfortable with this kind of rough discipline.

MR. MARSH (CONT'D)

Is that the kind of people we are, Hunter? Is it?

HUNTER

No.

CHLOE

Dad, relax.

MR. MARSH

Apologize to the Campbells.

HUNTER

I'm sorry, Mrs. Campbell.

Beth clears her throat.

BETH

It's -- it's quite alright, Hunter.

12

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - AN HOUR LATER

12

Adam is doing dishes. Chloe brings him a fresh stack.

CHLOE
Need a hand?

ADAM
Sure.

CHLOE
That was a weird dinner.

ADAM
Yeah.

CHLOE
Sorry.

ADAM
Not your fault.
(pause)
I blame the dining room, honestly.
We never use it.

Chloe puts her hand to her chest.

CHLOE
Oh my God, I thought I was the only
one who felt that. It has a dark
energy to it, that room. Is it
haunted, do you think?

ADAM
They all are. Dining rooms are like
the vermiform appendix of American
architecture. Everyone still has
one, even though we no longer
require them to digest.

Chloe smiles, then laughs.

CHLOE
Hey: what's your plan for the
weekend?

13

EXT. GARBAGE PILE - THE NEXT DAY

13

Another FLOATING REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT looms over an
abandoned lot in town.

Below, in its shadow, a pile of discarded furniture and
garbage.

Adam and Chloe climb through it, scavenging.

Chloe holds up a dented, ornate teapot.

CHLOE

A lot of this stuff would be perfectly useable, if it hadn't been dropped from a thousand feet.

ADAM

Well, you know rich people.

CHLOE

I *don't*, actually. What do you mean?

ADAM

I mean they'd rather have their shit destroyed than let someone poor use it.

He sits on a once-very-nice armchair, which COLLAPSES further as he does.

ADAM (CONT'D)

It's like its value is retroactively lowered by the fact that it ends up in a pleib's living room.

CHLOE

Didn't you all used to be rich?

Adam hesitates.

ADAM

I don't know about "rich."

CHLOE

You've got the nicest house I've ever been in. Or at least it used to be nice.

ADAM

Yeah, well: "used to". My dad "used to" make a lot of money. Before First Contact. But he didn't have the sense to invest in Vuvv tech.

CHLOE

(re: floating city)
You could be living up there now. If he had.

ADAM
 (makes a face)
 Guess so.

CHLOE
 So what happened to him?

ADAM
 My dad? His business fell apart.
 Until he couldn't take it, and ran
 off to Florida two years ago with
 some floozy he met online.

CHLOE
 That's so fucked up.

ADAM
 Just couldn't handle not being the
 "provider" anymore, I guess. And
 honestly, good riddance. We're all
 better off without that asshole.

Chloe, now holding a half-shattered lamp, is looking at Adam
 with an expression of beneficent concern.

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Hold on a sec. Don't move.

CHLOE
 Huh?

ADAM
 That expression, that pose -- just
 hold everything right there.

MOMENTS LATER:

CLOSE on an artist's notebook. Adam is sketching Chloe,
 rendering her as the center of a stylized landscape, full of
 shattered objects, with the floating development looming
 overhead.

Beautiful, ornate MUSIC, as Adam loses himself in the lines.

CHLOE
 How am I doing?

Adam, deep in concentration, biting his lip, looks up at her,
 and smiles.

ADAM
 You're perfect.

14

INT. SCHOOL - ART CLASSROOM - DAY

14

Back at school on Monday, Adam is painting an extra-large CANVAS, working off his charcoal sketch to make a sumptuous full-color painting of Chloe in the dumping-grounds.

The art classroom is empty. Mr. Reilly is eating his lunch at his desk, and letting Adam use the space during his free period.

Without looking away from the painting, Adam speaks:

ADAM

You worried you're gonna get laid off?

A beat.

MR. REILLY

Of course. It's just a matter of when. Soon as they develop a module for art lessons, I'm redundant. We all are, sooner or later.

ADAM

You don't seem too bothered.

Mr. Reilly puts down his sandwich.

MR. REILLY

I have a second job. Actually.

ADAM

You do?

Mr. Reilly nods.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You never mentioned it.

MR. REILLY

Because it's not the most glamorous work.

ADAM

What do you do?

MR. REILLY

I'm a doorman.

Adam's brush pauses on the canvas.

ADAM

...Doorman?

MR. REILLY
Weekends and evenings. I stand by
the door at a condo complex and I
sign in visitors and receive
packages and things like that.

ADAM
Where?

Mr. Reilly simply points UP.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Oh. Do you like it?

MR. REILLY
Of course not. But it's a paycheck.
They don't pay me shit to do this.

ADAM
Then why do you?

MR. REILLY
Teach?

ADAM
Yeah.

MR. REILLY
Because I actually like it. Believe
it or not.

A beat.

ADAM
What's it like, up there?

MR. REILLY
Come visit some time.

ADAM
Really?

MR. REILLY
Really. I'm not exactly proud of
it, but I think you'd get a lot out
of seeing how life goes, up top.
Might help your painting.

ADAM
How so?

MR. REILLY
 Because a really good painter's not
 just a technician. He's a
 chronicler. A witness.

He gets up and walks toward Adam.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)
 Just tell me if and when you want
 to come up. I'll put you in the
 system, and we'll find a way to
 sneak you past security.

As he stands beside Adam, he sees the painting of Chloe.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)
 That's the new girl in our class,
 isn't it?

ADAM
 Maybe.

Mr. Reilly smiles at Adam, in a way that says: "none of my
 business, but good for you."

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Her family is lodging with mine.
 We're just friends.

Mr. Reilly raises his eyebrows, not sure he buys this last
 bit, as he returns to his sandwich.

15

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - CHLOE'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

In the basement of the Campbell house, Chloe has created a
 "bedroom" for herself by walling off a section of furnished
 basement with a brightly-patterned CURTAIN.

ADAM (O.S.)
 You ready?

CHLOE
 Yes.

ADAM
 You promise you won't make fun of
 it?

CHLOE
 Yes!

Adam stands across from her, in front of his finished canvas, which he's covered with a bath towel.

He starts to remove the towel, then hesitates:

ADAM

No, it's too much build-up now.

CHLOE

Adam!

ADAM

Can we re-do this, without the towel, and the whole...

CHLOE

Just show me!

Finally, he removes the towel.

The COMPLETED CANVAS is objectively impressive, painted with both skill and visual wit: the whole thing has the 2-dimensional stylization of a medieval devotional painting, with Chloe rendered as a kind of secular saint, holding up a broken teapot like a sacred object, her eyes gazing heavenward in a look that is a mix of religious ecstasy and teenage eye-roll.

Chloe covers her mouth in delight.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Oh my God!

ADAM

Is that a good "oh my God" or a bad "oh my God?"

CHLOE

Very good! Very very good!

She gets up and looks at it more closely.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

It's hilarious! But it also really kind of looks like me.

She's right: despite the stylization, Adam has somehow really captured her personality.

ADAM

You like it? Really?

CHLOE

I love it.

ADAM
Well I want you to have it.

CHLOE
Seriously?

Adam nods.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
This might be the nicest thing
anyone's ever done for me.

ADAM
Stop it.

CHLOE
Maybe second-nicest.

ADAM
What's the first?

CHLOE
Well I don't want to make you
jealous, but there's this kid in my
class who let my entire family stay
in his house.

ADAM
Whatever. He sounds like a real try-
hard, that guy.

CHLOE
He's actually extremely kind. And
smart.

ADAM
Oh. Well then I am jealous.

CHLOE
You should be. I hate to tell you
this, but he's also pretty
handsome.

Adam smiles, looks away.

ADAM
He probably just has a crush on
you. That's probably why he's
trying so hard.

CHLOE
...You think?

A beat. Chloe pulls closer to Adam, and they KISS.

It's a rather innocent kiss: tentative, full of inexperience. But nice.

MR. MARSH (O.S.)

Chloe?

Mr. Marsh's voice makes them both jump apart.

CHLOE

Yeah?

Mr. Marsh pulls aside the curtain. He sees Adam, who's standing beside his canvas, working a little too hard to look casual.

MR. MARSH

...Hey Adam.

ADAM

Hi, Mr. Marsh.

CHLOE

What's up, dad?

MR. MARSH

You do something with my toothbrush?

CHLOE

Nope.

MR. MARSH

I can't find it.

CHLOE

Well: good luck!

Mr. Marsh nods, a little annoyed, and walks away, pointedly NOT closing the curtain behind him -- in fact, he nudges it slightly further open: a reminder that they're being monitored.

ADAM

I should probably get going.

CHLOE

Sure. See you at breakfast?

ADAM

For sure.

He starts to go.

CHLOE
Adam?

ADAM
Yeah?

CHLOE
That was nice.

16

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

16

CLOSE on a lunch tray: a chunk of 3D-printed MEATLOAF in the shape of a human child holding hands with a squat, four-limbed alien. It's extremely unappetizing.

Adam is just starting to saw into it, severing the alien from the child, when Chloe sits down across from him with a tray.

CHLOE
I have an idea.

ADAM
Yeah?

CHLOE
To make us money.

ADAM
Oh. Okay.

CHLOE
Fifties-dating.

ADAM
...Sorry?

CHLOE
Fifties-dating. Some of the kids were talking about it in the lunch line. You set the school-issued node to broadcast instead of receive. And then they watch you while you go on dates.

ADAM
Who watches me?

Chloe points, with a spork, to the four-paddled alien on Adam's meatloaf.

CHLOE

The Vuvv. Obviously. It wouldn't be *fifties*-dating if it was just regular people watching. Apparently all the most popular streams for Vuvv are of kids our age. Kids *fifties*-dating.

Adam is slightly taken aback: he's very interested in Chloe, and so not entirely sure what to make of this proposal.

ADAM

Let me think about it.

CHLOE

Why?

ADAM

It just might be kind of awkward, right?

CHLOE

Which, the *fifties* part or the dating part?

ADAM

Both, I guess. I don't really know anything about the *fifties*.

CHLOE

I mean, neither do I.

ADAM

But I do know that someone who looks like me wouldn't be dating someone who looks like you in the *fifties*. At least it wouldn't be just some chill, casual thing.

CHLOE

Fair.

ADAM

I don't think I would have had a super great time in the *fifties*, honestly.

CHLOE

But we're not going to the actual *fifties*. We're just doing *fifties* drag for a bunch of creatures that happened to discover earth in 1954 or whatever and got that idea of us stuck in their head.

ADAM

Sure, but --

CHLOE

And as much as I appreciate the sofa, I'd love to actually buy a real mattress.

ADAM

Or, like, turn the heat on.

CHLOE

So, Adam Campbell....

She takes his hand, in the manner of a joking marriage proposal.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Will you.... fifties-date me?

Adam looks at her, considering, as "Put Your Head on my Shoulder" by Paul Anka begins to play....

17

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

17

FAST-CUT CLOSE-UPS of on a milkshake being prepared in a tall fancy glass: ice cream is POURED IN, whipped cream is SPRAYED, and a cherry is placed on top.

A hand slides the shake across a counter to CHLOE, who's wearing a tight pink blouse and cat-eye glasses.

CHLOE

Yum. Thank you sir.

REVERSE ANGLE: Adam, visibly uncomfortable in a diner uniform and a greasy pompadour, wipes sweat and hair spray away from his brow, careful not to knock off the METAL NODE sitting there.

ADAM

You're welcome. You new in town?
Don't think I've seen you around.

WIDER: Adam and Chloe have sloppily converted their broken-down kitchen into a 50s-style "soda counter."

The Paul Anka song plays tinnily, now, on a old boombox.

Natalie, in a hand-me-down retro dress, is sulkily eating ice cream next to Chloe, visibly annoyed at having been dragged into this.

CHLOE

Why yes. We just moved in down the street. I've been looking for someone to show me around town.

ADAM

Well ya know, I get off at 5.
(making this shit up as he goes)
And my dad's got a souped-up T-Bird I've been meaning to take for a spin.

CHLOE

You don't say. I'm Chloe, by the way.

ADAM

I'm Adam.

Suddenly, Hunter, in sweatpants and a WWE T-shirt, crosses blithely through the "set" and begins noisily preparing himself a bowl of cereal.

Adam and Chloe do their best to ignore him.

CHLOE

You been working here long?

ADAM

I been, uh --
(rubbing elbows with Hunter)
You know, I --

CHLOE

(breaking character)
Hunter would you get the fuck out of here?

HUNTER

I'm getting cereal. It's my kitchen.

CHLOE

No it's not your kitchen, it's the Campbell's kitchen, and right now it's our "set," and you're fucking up the suspension of disbelief.

NATALIE
(getting up)
I'm gonna go check on the garden...

ADAM
Hold on, Nat....

HUNTER
This is some whack shit, man. This
is some seriously whack shit.

CHLOE
We're trying to get some money,
Hunter. Just like you are.

HUNTER
I plan to make money by earning
their *respect*, is the difference.

CHLOE
Maybe that's why you're still
unemployed.

HUNTER
Well I'm also not whoring myself
out on a node, so there's that.

Without warning, Chloe **THROWS** the milkshake in Hunter's face,
splattering all over him.

He **LUNGES** for Chloe, but Adam puts a warning hand out to stop
him.

ADAM
Hey! Hey, hey, both of you. Come
on. We're still broadcasting here.

Hunter and Chloe stare one another down. Finally, Hunter
flips the bird and goes to take a shower.

Chloe turns back to Adam, without missing a beat, and leaps
right back into character.

CHLOE
Geez, Adam, your town sure is full
of bullies. Thank you so much for
defending me.

ADAM
Least I can do.

The sound of a **CHAINSAW REVVING** carries us into:

EXT. BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE on another charcoal sketch: Adam's hand quickly renders a garage on a suburban street, and a human figure in front of it, with some kind of menacing-looking tool in his hand.

WIDE: on another crappy block, we see Buddy, the goon from art class, shirtless, muscles gleaming and bad tribal tattoos on full display.

He's using a CHAINSAW to carve a half-scale WOODEN STATUE of the Virgin Mary.

He pauses, wipes sweat, and turns to Adam and Chloe, who are sitting on the curb.

Chloe, perched beside Adam, has her chin on his back and watches lovingly as he sketches Buddy.

They both have their 50s clothes and nod on: this is another "date."

CHLOE

Can I try?

ADAM

Sure, hon.

He hands Chloe the charcoal and lets her draw for a moment. Buddy watches them, weirded out.

BUDDY

So why're you guys drawing me, anyway?

CHLOE

Adam likes to draw all kinds of things. He's a documenter of the world.

BUDDY

Thanks, but I asked him.

ADAM

Because I think what you're doing is poignant.

BUDDY

Poignant?

ADAM

Yeah.

BUDDY
Stop making up words.

ADAM
No, I mean I think it's like a metaphor. You're using whatever tools you have to keep our artistic traditions alive.

Chloe suppresses a giggle a little at this and nods along, very seriously.

BUDDY
It's also gonna make me a fuck-ton of money.

ADAM
Oh? How do you figure?

BUDDY
The Vuvv love human religious shit, right? And if it's from down here, instead of up there, they'll think it's more authentic.

SUDDEN CUT to a SUPER-WIDE BIRD'S EYE VIEW: on the roof of the adjoining house, Buddy has spray-painted "HUMAN RELIGIOUS ART: CHEAP!!!" on his roof, with an arrow pointing to his garage.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
That's why I'm advertising it to them.

BACK TO THE GROUND:

CHLOE
Interesting. Can we see the rest of them?

Buddy walks over to the garage door and wrestles it open. Inside, several dozen statues: a wild menagerie of different deities and devotional objects.

Adam's gaze falls on one in particular: a CRUCIFIED BUDDHA.

ADAM
(points)
What's that one?

BUDDY
(glances)
That's Buddha, man.

CHLOE
On the cross?

BUDDY
Yeah.

Chloe and Adam look at one another.

CHLOE
Isn't that kind of...

ADAM
Yeah -- offensive?

BUDDY
Nah, the Vuvv don't give a fuck.
It's two religions. That shit's
twice as religious, right there.

Adam and Chloe aren't sure what to say to this.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
So this is all you guys do? You put
on the node and walk around
complimenting each other in fifties
clothes?

Chloe pulls the node off Adam's forehead.

CHLOE
Please don't talk about it on-node.
It breaks the suspension of
disbelief.

BUDDY
Well it's super boring. Super PG.
I'm already bored. Nobody wants to
watch that shit.

ADAM
I appreciate the feedback. You're
not really our target demo.

BUDDY
Hopefully you've got at least a few
of 'em viewing, and they'll see the
product that way. How much money
you getting off this, so far?

CHLOE
Plenty.

BUDDY
Somehow I doubt that.

CHLOE

Well how many of these units have
you moved?

She gestures to the garage full of un-sold statues.

BUDDY

Touché.

And with that, he revs up his chainsaw and gets back to
carving.

Chloe puts the node back on Adam's forehead, the ANKA SONG
from before swells, carrying us into a MONTAGE:

18

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

18

Adam and Chloe walk through the halls of the high school, in 50s garb: Chloe in a boxy summer dress, Adam in a greaser jacket and tight jeans. He wears his NODE.

Students stare and giggle.

Adam looks uncomfortable.

Chloe is unflappable.

They pass another young COUPLE, walking in the opposite direction, also in fifties garb.

The BOY, in his sweater-vest and Buddy Holly glasses, glares at Adam and Chloe: his competition.

19

EXT. FIELD - DAY

19

CLOSE on Adam's face, sideways, as he lies in tall grass beside Chloe.

ADAM

I've never felt like this before.
With anyone. I didn't know I could.

NODE'S POV: Chloe's smiling face, as Adam gently threads a daisy into her hair.

CHLOE

I know, baby. I feel the same way.

ADAM

I just want to hold onto this
forever.

CHLOE

Do you think we'd have cute kids?

ADAM

Kids?

CHLOE

I don't mean we're gonna have them
tomorrow. But when we do, do you
think they'll look more like me, or
more like you?

ADAM

I don't know. But I hope they have
your eyes.

CHLOE

I hope they have your smile.

WIDER: a camp of homeless SQUATTERS in tents, on the muddier half of the field, watch the two weird kids in retro clothes, non-plussed.

ADAM (O.S.)

No, I hope they have *your* smile.

CHLOE (O.S.)

Shut up! You're making me blush...

20

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

20

CLOSE on a grainy projection of "Rebel Without a Cause." James Dean leans in and kisses Natalie Wood.

PULLING BACK: We realize that the projection screen is a wrinkled BEDSHEET that's been hung inside of the Campbell's garage.

PULLING FURTHER BACK, through the windshield of a beat-up 2018 mid-size minivan...

...we find Adam and Chloe kissing in the back seat of the car, framed by the flickering faces of Dean and Wood.

PULLING BACK further still... as everything -- the screen, the faces, the van -- begins to FLICKER....

....and now we're watching a HOLOGRAM of the two kids kissing in their scrappily simulated "drive-in theater."

The hologram stands in the center of a nearly pitch-black, eerily dripping cave of some kind.

By the light of the hologram, we can just make out a dozen or so coffee-table-sized ALIENS, their contours hidden in shadow, jostling one another and rubbing their paddles together, making strange, sandpaper-y sounds....

Abruptly, BLACK.

23

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - SHUTTLE - THE NEXT DAY

23

Adam and Chloe, in regular clothes, sit on a packed SHUTTLE.

It feels like a subway car, but VIBRATES violently, rattling like a tin can.

Through a small window behind them, we see that we're RISING UP RAPIDLY through the sky.

Adam squeezes her leg.

ADAM

You seem nervous.

CHLOE

Not nervous. I'm excited.

ADAM

Good. Cuz you said you wanted to see what it's like up here.

CHLOE

For sure.

ADAM

So I thought it would be a nice thing to do, for our first, like, real date.

CHLOE

I know! It's a really nice idea.

She smiles, then looks out the window, and chews her fingernail.

24

EXT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

24

Now we're looking at Chloe from the other side of the window. We slowly ZOOM OUT from the shuttle as it climbs up past the scuzzy underside of the ship...

Until finally we begin to glimpse its top-side, a huge CIRCLE OF GLASSY BUILDINGS, their glinting surface forming an unbroken curve, ringed by row after row luxurious balconies.

Thousands of upscale homes and office spaces, each exactly identical, each with its own view out onto the clouds, which conveniently block out the earth's blighted surface far below.

The circular arrangement of these condos blocks out whatever's deeper inside the development from view.

EXT. FLOATING CITY - DOCKING PLATFORM - MOMENTS LATER

Adam and Chloe stand nervously in front of a thick glass pane.

Behind them, the last of the workers disembark from the shuttle, which has docked at the lip of the station, an expanse of clouds behind it.

Adam puts his drivers' license up against the glass, on top of a a rectangle marked in black for just that purpose.

ADAM

Apartment cleaning, Building 10,
Unit 6D. We should be in the
system.

REVERSE: a SECURITY GUARD, mid-40s, wearing a NODE like Adam's on his head, looks at the ID with bored eyes.

The tiny light on his node FLASHES twice, in confirmation.

He waves them through with a tiny nod of the head.

SECURITY GUARD

Next time, uniform needs to be on
before you board. They're
tightening up on dress code for
domestics.

ADAM

Will do. Thanks.

25

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - APARTMENT BUILDING - ATRIUM - DAY

The vast ATRIUM of one of the many interconnected buildings.

Mr. Reilly stands in a prim red uniform behind a front desk.

He lights up as he sees Adam approach.

MR. REILLY

You made it!

ADAM

Mr. Reilly, you remember Chloe from
class?

MR. REILLY

Of course. Nice to see you.

CHLOE

You too.

MR. REILLY
(to Adam)
What do you think of it, up here?

ADAM
It's interesting.

CHLOE
Interesting? It's incredible. Look
at this.

Chloe turns and points to a huge window, which faces onto the inside of the floating development.

Through it, we see an enormous central GOLF COURSE, landscaped to within an inch of its life, full of dramatic rolling hills and dotted with enormous SAND TRAPS.

She turns to Adam:

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Why don't we go for a walk out there?

MR. REILLY
I'd be careful. They're much tighter about security on the lawn.

ADAM
Why?

MR. REILLY
Because that's where the Vuvv live.

Adam, puzzled, looks out, scanning the lawn for Vuvv, or signs of them, and sees nothing.

The sound of LAUGHTER makes him turn:

From the far side of the atrium, a gaggle of RICH KIDS are approaching the front desk.

There are four of them, and they wear chic, semi-transparent JUMPSUITS, inspired by vintage space-suits. They push and shove one another playfully as they approach the stand.

As they come closer, we realize their heads, and eyebrows, have all been SHAVED.

Their leader, STAN, with a lollipop hanging out of his mouth, shouts out to Mr. Reilly:

STAN
Yo Mike -- any mail?

Mr. Reilly glances apologetically at Chloe and Adam, then puts on a cheerful smile:

MR. REILLY
Yes sir, your package came in this morning. I'll grab that for you.

He bends down to pull a package out from under his desk.

Stan turns to Adam and Chloe.

STAN
Who are you?

CHLOE
Oh, we're um --

ADAM
We're friends of Mr. Reilly's.

STAN'S FRIEND
Who?

MR. REILLY
They're my students, Eric. From my other job, on the surface.

The three rich kids fall silent and stare at Adam and Chloe.

STAN'S OTHER FRIEND
The surface?

STAN'S FRIEND (ERIC)
I thought it was way too dangerous. You still live down there?

CHLOE
Yeah. I mean... most people do.

The two guys continue to stare at Chloe as Stan begins opening the package Mr. Reilly has just produced.

STAN
Don't stare. It's rude.

STAN'S FRIEND (ERIC)
Sorry.

STAN
(to Chloe)
Forgive these idiots. We're not
used to seeing people from outside
the development. Especially not
ones that look like supermodels.

Adam, repulsed by this lazy and graceless line, laughs harshly and turns to Chloe.

To his surprise, she's looking back at Stan, smiling a little. She looks over at Adam and tells him, with his eyes, to be cool.

Stan finishes opening the package that Mr. Reilly has produced: inside a standard cardboard shipping box sits a sleek, sculptural curved-metal container.

STAN (CONT'D)
Hell yes.

STAN'S OTHER FRIEND
What is that?

STAN
It's the *sauce*, man. The stuff they
rub on their bodies. So they don't
dry out in this atmosphere.

STAN'S FRIEND (ERIC)
No way.

He slides the canister open, revealing a quivering, jello-like mass of translucent liquid.

STAN
My dad had to make like seven calls
to orbit to get it. Who else do you
know that has this?

ADAM
So what do you do with it?

Stan looks up at Adam, annoyed.

STAN
You put it on your skin.

ADAM

But we don't need it, right? Us humans? We're just fine in our own atmosphere.

A beat.

STAN

What kind of an ignorant-ass question is that?

ADAM

I'm just trying to understand.

STAN

Why are you talking to me right now?

(to Mr. Reilly)

Why is he talking to me right now?

ADAM

You know it wouldn't kill you to treat him with a little respect. He's not your servant.

MR. REILLY

Adam, it's fine.

(to Stan)

My apologies, sir.

ADAM

Don't call him "sir." He's younger than me!

STAN

(to Stan)

Are these two permitted to be up here? Do I need to call your supervisor?

STAN (CONT'D)

He didn't mean any offense, sir. Adam, why don't --

ADAM

You know what? Fuck it, we were just on our way out.

EXT. SHUTTLE - SURFACE DOCKING STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Back on earth, Adam and Chloe trudge together down the street.

Behind them, the return shuttle that just dropped them off rises back up into the sky.

It's a little awkward between them now. Adam tries to lighten the mood:

ADAM
Super fun date, huh?

CHLOE
(awkward, obliging laugh)
Yeah.

ADAM
I'm sorry about that.

CHLOE
It's fine. I'm still glad we went.

ADAM
You are?

CHLOE
Yeah. It's good motivation.

Adam looks at her, puzzled.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
If we commit to doubling our audience every week, then by the end of the year we might be able to afford starter condos up there.

ADAM
You wanna move up there?

CHLOE
...Of course. Don't you? Doesn't everyone?

ADAM
I'd rather live in a cardboard box.

CHLOE
And at the rate things are going down here, that might literally be the choice.

A beat.

ADAM
So is that why you were smiling at that creep?

CHLOE

Wait: are you jealous of him?

ADAM

What if I am?

CHLOE

I don't *like* him, I was just trying to be nice to someone who'd probably pretty connected.

ADAM

I don't know. He wasn't bad-looking.

CHLOE

He doesn't even have eyebrows!

ADAM

But that's the style up there, isn't it? How do I know that when we move up there you won't dump me for some rich, hairless douchebag?

Chloe pauses and wraps her arms around him.

CHLOE

Because I really, really like you.

A beat.

ADAM

I really, really like you too.

They kiss.

Chloe pulls back and looks at him, touching his eyebrows.

CHLOE

Plus, you know...you could always shave yours.

She smiles playfully and keeps on walking home.

Adam stands there for a second, unable to detect if she's kidding or not.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Come on! We're gonna be late for dinner!

28

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - ROOF - DAY - CONTINUOUS

28

MR. MARSH, along with four burly CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, are replacing roof tiles on Beth's roof.

Far below, she gets out of the car and shouts up at them:

BETH
Excuse me? Excuse me!

They all look down at her.

BETH (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

MR. MARSH
Oh hey! I thought you'd be out for a few more hours. This was gonna be a surprise!

BETH
What's the surprise?

MR. MARSH
Well you mentioned the roof's been leaking. And I happen to have a couple buddies that can fix that right up for you.

The "buddies" wave. A beat.

BETH
Could you come down here for a moment?

29

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

29

Mr. Marsh and Beth are arguing, with the three sweaty workers sitting on the edge of the roof in the background, watching.

BETH
And how do you plan to pay for this?

MR. MARSH
I figured we'd split it 50/50.

BETH
Oh you did? Out of what money?

MR. MARSH

Well, my part comes out of Chloe's earnings from the node. And yours can come out of Adam's.

BETH

All of Adam's earnings are earmarked for the groceries I just bought. And I'm still waiting on your family's share of the utilities bills.

MR. MARSH

Look, it won't be bad. That's my brother-in-law, up there, he's gonna give us a great rate. Just five thousand. Normally he'd charge fifteen.

BETH

I don't have five thousand dollars! How much do you think these kids are making?

NEW ANGLE: Chloe and Adam walk up the driveway to see their parents arguing.

CHLOE

What's this?

ADAM

I don't know...

From a distance, Adam sees their body language escalate, and speeds up the driveway....

ADAM (CONT'D)

Hey, hey, what's going on?

BETH

Ron is treating us like his personal piggy bank.

MR. MARSH

Now that's a hell of a way to put it! I'm helping out both of us, plus some folks that need the money a lot more than we do.

BETH

You didn't clear this with me. So you're going to pay for this entirely yourself.

MR. MARSH

I'm gonna pay for repairs to your house?

Hunter has wandered out into the mix, with a extra-large bag of chips.

BETH

I have never seen anything like this in my life.

MR. MARSH

Well let me introduce it to you. It's called sharing the wealth.

BETH

It's called *theft*.
(turning to Hunter)
And those are not your chips, Hunter.

HUNTER

I thought they were everybody's chips.

BETH

We've been over this: our groceries are for our family, yours are for your family.

HUNTER

Well then you need to mark them or something.

MR. MARSH

(to Hunter)
Would you shut up a minute? We're in the middle of something.

HUNTER

She needs to mark them or something! How am I supposed to know?

A rage is quietly building in Beth, and with effort she holds it down, and speaks quietly but forcefully to the whole group:

BETH

You know what? I think we need a new set of very simple, very clear House Rules.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

In the cruddy, mildewed basement of the house, the three Marshes sit huddled around a collapsible card table, eating TV dinners straight out of the packaging.

For a moment, stony silence. Then:

HUNTER
(quietly)
Bitch.

CHLOE
I swear to God, Hunter, if I hear
another word out of you --

MR. MARSH
Leave it alone, Chlo.

CHLOE
Seriously, dad! It's his fault that
we're stuck down here now. And
yours, for that shit with the roof.

HUNTER
It's hers! She set the stupid
rules.

CHLOE
Yes, and when you take a family
into your home, you can do that.

HUNTER
This isn't charity. We're paying
rent.

CHLOE
No, *I'm* paying rent. You haven't
made shit.

MR. MARSH
(weary)
Both of you, please....

HUNTER
This shit is degrading. We gotta
get out of here.

CHLOE
We're not gonna find a better
situation than this.

HUNTER

You mean kissing that ugly rich boy
all day?

CHLOE

Maybe I don't think he's ugly and
maybe I *want* to kiss him, Hunter.
You consider that?

HUNTER

I think you do, and I think that's
the worst part of the whole thing.

CHLOE

What do you mean?

HUNTER

That you're willingly playing lovey-
dovey with a kid who's locking you
and your family up in his basement.

MR. MARSH

Shut up! Both of you!

Mr. Marsh angrily turns on a tiny TV, and turns the volume
way up to drown them both out.

Chloe stares angrily at Hunter, then down at her plate, the
ugliness of what he's said beginning to sink in.

31

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - SAME

31

Upstairs, the three Campbells sit around an equally tense
table, cutting up blocks of unnaturally square CHICKEN.

They faintly hear the RUCKUS from downstairs, and say
nothing. After a silence:

NATALIE

Are we gonna make it?

A beat.

BETH

What do you mean?

NATALIE

I just mean, sometimes it feels
like we're not gonna make it.

BETH

You mean, are we going to *survive*?

NATALIE

I mean, if we do, is it gonna be a
life worth living?

She looks up at Adam, who looks down at his food.

BETH

What a question, Nat.

NATALIE

I just look around the world now
and less and less of it seems like
a place anyone would want to be.

Beth, overwhelmed, gets up and clears her plate to the
kitchen. As she goes:

BETH

Well Jesus, honey. Sometimes you
make it hard to keep hope alive.

Natalie begins to tear up.

ADAM

Hey. Nat?

She looks at him, wipes her eyes.

ADAM (CONT'D)

We're gonna be fine.

NATALIE

(not convinced)
...Okay.

ADAM

You remember how much you hated
that first day of middle school?
And how I bet you that within a
week you'd be fine?

NATALIE

Yeah.

ADAM

How long did it take you to be
fine?

NATALIE

...Two days.

ADAM

Yep. Because your older brother is a genius, and he always knows what he's talking about.

NATALIE

I've never heard mom talk like that.

ADAM

Don't worry about mom. I've got you.

IN THE NEXT ROOM: Beth, putting her dishes in the sink, hears this conversation through the doorway.

NATALIE (O.S.)

Promise?

ADAM (O.S.)

Promise.

32

INT. SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - THE NEXT DAY

32

An energetic SURF-ROCK LICK plays on an old boombox.

Adam and Chloe, in tattered, ill-fitting "prom" clothes, are going through an energetic HAND-JIVE routine. The node is humming on Adam's temple.

All around them, other STUDENTS they've dragged into this watch them, wearing half-hearted attempts at period clothing.

Chloe is nailing the choreography. Adam, not so much.

ADAM

(in character)

You're so good at this, honey-bunch!

CHLOE

(passive-aggressively
grinning)

Yes, Adam! It's almost like I've actually *practiced* the routine, like we both said we would!

ADAM

(likewise)

Well, sweet thing, if you'd actually let me practice with you, maybe my moves would be sharper.

CHLOE

Well, sugarcakes, maybe if your mom
let my family come upstairs...

MALE VOICE

Hey!

WHIP-PAN to the far end of the gym, where the RIVAL BOY AND GIRL we briefly saw earlier, also dressed in 50s attire, also holding a node, and surrounded by their gang of fellow-students, have just entered.

One of their gang unplugs the speakers and the music stops.

RIVAL BOY

We booked the gym for 12:30.

REVERSE ANGLE: seen WIDER, we can tell that Adam and Chloe's gang of "extras" is quite paltry.

CHLOE

Fuck that! For what?

RIVAL GIRL

For "prom."

CHLOE

Oh, so you're stealing our date
ideas, now?

RIVAL BOY

I'm sorry: did you invent "prom?"

RIVAL GIRL

Also, the front desk wanted us to
give you this.

She holds up a LETTER.

FAST CUT IN ON THE LETTER: it has Vuvv script on the front.

33

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

33

Adam and Chloe, now seated at a cafeteria table and surrounded by their gang of morbidly curious "extras," rip open the envelope.

Inside, a very long letter, in Vuvv.

ADAM

What is this?

CHLOE
 Anyone here taking Vuvv
 Communication?

One of the extras, a geeky FRIEND, takes the letter and squints as he slowly reads and attempts to translate.

ADAM
 What is it?

FRIEND
 Umm....

CHLOE
 Just admit it if you can't read it.
 We'll get someone else.

FRIEND
 No, it's not that. I think...

ADAM
 What?

FRIEND
 I think you two are being *sued*.

34

EXT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - DOCKING AREA - THE NEXT DAY

34

As before, Adam places his drivers' license on the glass window of the security stand, the shuttle departing behind him.

The SECURITY GUARD looks at the ID, and his node FLASHES three times, fast.

SECURITY GUARD
 A driver is waiting for you on the
 central lawn.

ADAM
 ...A driver?

EXT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

In the center of the development, surrounded on all sides by looming glass buildings, we TRACK with a retro MINI-MOKE vehicle as it bounces along across the eerily pristine grass of the perfectly-landscaped golf course.

Adam and Chloe sit in the back. A CHAFFEUR, in an avant-garde version of a midcentury driver's outfit, sits up front.

ADAM

How long you been working for,
ah....

CHAUFFEUR

How long have I been with [strange,
two-syllable Vuvv word that sounds
like sandpaper rubbing against
itself]?

ADAM

Right. That...name.

CHLOE

(trying)
"Hewooo-wheee?"

CHAFFEUR

[condescendingly repeats proper
pronunciation, with emphasis.]

CHLOE

(trying)
"Hwooo-hweee?"

CHAUFFEUR

It answers to "Shirley," for those
who can't handle proper
pronunciation. And: just over a
year.

CHLOE

Huh?

CHAFFEUR

Your friend asked how long I've been working for it. Just over a year.

CHLOE

You like it?

CHAUFFEUR

Best decision I ever made.

ADAM

Did you drive humans before that?

CHAUFFEUR

(laughs, offended)
Of course not.

ADAM

Sorry. Didn't mean to be rude.

CHAUFFEUR

It's alright. No, I was a neurosurgeon, before this.

CHLOE

You're kidding.

CHAUFFEUR

Used to be very prominent in the field. That's why I qualified for this position: it's fashionable to have a powerful human as your driver.

CHLOE

Huh.

CHAUFFEUR

It's all about status, with them. They don't need drivers: they don't need cars. They could be zooming around on self-piloting hover-spheres like they do in other systems. But, you know: when in India, why not ride an elephant to work? It's "cool."

CHLOE

I'm not sure there's all that much elephant-riding in India. But point taken.

ADAM

So did you run out of business,
then? As a surgeon? You couldn't
find enough wealthy humans to
operate on, up here?

The mini-moke JERKS TO A STOP, and the chauffeur finally
turns all the way around, looking Adam in the eye.

CHAUFFEUR

I don't appreciate your
assumptions, my friend.

ADAM

...Sorry.

CHAUFFEUR

Of course I still had people to
operate on. But my starting salary
with [same Vuvv word] is five times
what I ever made in my best years
as a surgeon. And I have kids to
look after.

A beat. Adam takes this in.

CHAUFFEUR

Anyway. We're here.

WIDER: the mini-moke has stopped in front of a huge SAND-TRAP
carved into the side of a hill. Its clean white sand has been
raked into an elaborate pattern, evoking a zen garden.

The chauffeur steps out.

CHLOE

Wait -- where?

The chauffeur gestures to a small, dark OPENING in the sand,
like the entrance to an oversize anthill.

Reluctantly, Adam and Chloe bend over and begin to climb
inside...

36

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - SHIRLEY'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER 36

An antique clock TICKS.

In a room that resembles a 1950s executive office, but at
exactly HALF-SCALE, Adam and Chloe are crammed uncomfortably
into two miniature chairs, their heads nearly grazing the
ceiling.

The office is underground, its walls carved out of sand.

REVERSE ANGLE: across a half-scale desk, atop a kind of booster seat, sits a very odd creature that looks like a fleshy albino cube, about the size of a small coffee table.

It has no head, no discernible face. Four retractable appendages, like muscular tentacles that end in flat, rough-textured PADDLES, protrude from its squat, squarish body. Two VISION-STALKS, like chopped-off antennae, wiggle at the front of its body.

This is "SHIRLEY," a Vuvv.

A SECRETARY, dressed in 50s style (save for her COMPLETELY BALD head) is rubbing a kind of translucent gooey SAUCE onto a patch of dry, flaky skin on the creature's paddles.

After a very long, uncomfortable moment of this, the secretary finishes applying the sauce.

Shirley RUBS its newly-free paddles together, creating a sandpaper-like linguistic sound.

A small TRANSLATOR-BOX attached to its body flashes and translates its vocalizations into a Siri-like female electronic voice, calm but loud enough to make Adam and Chloe jump.

SHIRLEY
(via translator)
Leave us.

The secretary NODS and opens a HATCH in the ceiling, into which she clambers awkwardly, her high heels disappearing last.

A nub-like sensory appendage on Shirley's body sways toward Adam and Chloe.

CHLOE
So, um... we got your letter --

SHIRLEY
(interrupting)
For a period of time, your
broadcast was quite enjoyable.

ADAM
Oh.... Thank you.

SHIRLEY
My own offspring, in fact, began
watching it regularly.

ADAM
Wow.

CHLOE
That's fantastic.

SHIRLEY
However, it has recently become
obvious that you are deceiving your
viewers.

CHLOE
Excuse me?

SHIRLEY
The title of your broadcast is
"Adam and Chloe in Love."

ADAM
That's -- yeah, that's right.

SHIRLEY
And yet you are not in love.

Adam and Chloe look at one another.

ADAM
I'm not sure that's true.

SHIRLEY
It is fully true.

CHLOE
How do you know? You don't know
what's in our hearts.

SHIRLEY
Ms. Marsh, I am an expert not only
in human law, but also in human
mating customs. I have been
studying them since before you were
born. You may have been in love at
the beginning of your series, but
you are no longer.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Your biology betrays you: your cheeks no longer fill with blood in the other's presence. Your palms no longer produce fluid. Your central blood-distribution organ no longer pumps at shorter intervals when holding one another's hands.

CHLOE

Well what do you want us to do?

SHIRLEY

I want you to repay all funds you have received.

CHLOE

Wait--

ADAM

We can't possibly do that. We've already spent all our earnings just to survive.

SHIRLEY

Then I will take you to court.

A pause.

ADAM

But we can get that "love" back. I know we can. Just give us a little time to work on our relationship, and --

CHLOE

What if I fifties-dated someone else?

A silence.

Shirley's vision-stalk sways to Chloe.

Adam stares at her too, blindsided.

37

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - SHUTTLE - DAY - AN HOUR LATER 37

On the shuttle ride home, boxed in on all sides by tired LABORERS, Adam and Chloe are arguing.

ADAM

Well clearly you had someone in mind!

CHLOE

No! I told you, I'm just exploring
all options.

ADAM

Including an option that involves cutting me out?

CHLOE

Not necessarily. You could find someone else too.

ADAM

But I don't want to date someone else. I want to date you.

CHLOE

Yeah, and that would be great, but that thing is right. Our chemistry is off. It's gone.

ADAM

It doesn't have to be!

CHLOE (CONT'D)

And I just think I might have more luck starting fresh with Buddy.

ADAM (CONT'D)

...Buddy? *Buddy?*

CHLOE

Sorry, I didn't mean to --

ADAM

Buddy? Who you yourself constantly make fun of? *That* Buddy?

CHLOE

Look: he approached me the other day, said he'd been watching our broadcasts and he could tell I was sad. Offered to help out.

ADAM

What a gentleman.

CHLOE

I know this is hard, but please try not to take this personally. I'm not in love with Buddy. Not at all. It's just that he's a very straightforward person who I think will be easy to do this with. He's a colleague.

ADAM

Just like I was.

CHLOE

Yes. And a friend. And I do want to keep being your friend.

ADAM

I don't know if we ever were friends. I think I was a rung on a ladder to you. One more head to step on as you climb.

A beat. Chloe stares at him.

CHLOE

Have you ever lived on the street, Adam?

ADAM

No, but what does that --

CHLOE

Have you ever had to take turns staying up all night to make sure a bum doesn't run off with all your possessions?

ADAM

No. But you don't think I've been through shit? I --

CHLOE

Have you ever had to treat your sibling's hacking cough with soup-kitchen broth and sympathetic back-pats, because you can't afford to see a doctor?

ADAM

...

CHLOE

Look, I'm just like any other kid: I want to grow up and fall in love and be swept off my feet. But that's a higher-order need. I'll figure it out *after* I manage food and shelter. Okay?

A silence.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Just give it time. You'll start thinking this way too. I promise.

Then Chloe offers her seat to an elderly woman:

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Ma'am, would you like my seat?

Chloe stands out of frame, and a very frail and poor older woman, in a dirty parka, comes and sits beside Adam.

He stews silently.

38

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

38

CLOSE on a computer screen, a word-processing document.

Beth selects a line of her resume and changes the font and size, obsessively micro-managing the appearance of this painfully useless document.

Nearby, Adam sits on a couch, and draws a colored-pencil sketch, from memory, of Shirley sitting behind its desk.

Natalie has her node on, with a thousand-mile stare, pantomiming interactions with unseen VR objects.

A sound of giggling makes Adam look up, just in time to see CHLOE, in fifties clothes, running flirtatiously up the stairs from the basement, pursued by a node-wearing BUDDY.

She glances at Adam very briefly, before throwing open the front door and sprinting out, giggling. Buddy sees Adam:

BUDDY
Sorry, man.

Then he runs out after her.

Adam just stares, quietly stewing.

NATALIE
So are you performing fifties-cuckoldry for the Vuvv now, Adam?

He turns to her.

ADAM
You shouldn't know what that word means. Also, I thought you were in your VR.

NATALIE
I am. But this one just superimposes stuff on top of the real world. So unfortunately I had a clear view of that shameful display.

She slaps some unseen object violently.

ADAM

What is it, Whack-a-Mole?

NATALIE

It's an industrial-efficiency simulator. Right now I'm breaking a strike at my factory. It's Vuvv-designed, so the graphics are amazing.

ADAM

(disgusted)

...Why are you playing that?

NATALIE

(still whack-a-mole-ing)

Mom, why aren't we kicking the Marshes out of the house?

BETH

Because they're paying rent.

NATALIE

But couldn't we find someone else who can pay, and isn't actively cheating on your son?

ADAM

It's more complicated than that. She's got a lot going on. And look: it doesn't bother me, so it shouldn't bother you.

Natalie finally pulls off her node.

NATALIE

Seriously? I'm the only one that has a problem with this? After what dad did to us?

BETH

(suddenly furious)

What did I tell you about mentioning him, Nat?

NATALIE

...

BETH

You do it one more time, and *you'll*
be the one on the street.

A beat.

Natalie goes silent, and her lip begins to tremble.

ADAM

Come on, mom. You didn't have to --
she didn't mean it.

BETH

I'm sorry, honey. I didn't --

But Natalie has already run out of the room, extremely upset.

Adam covers his eyes, despairing.

ADAM

You sure you don't know anyone who
could defend us in court?

BETH

No one that can match up against
the kind of legal teams those
things hire.

ADAM

Then what am I supposed to do?

BETH

Convince it to take pity on you and
drop the charges.

ADAM

I tried, mom. It doesn't understand
things the way we do. I don't think
"poverty" is a concept for them. Or
"empathy."

BETH

But they have hearts. Buried deep
down in there, I know they do.

ADAM

No, I mean I literally think they
don't. I don't think they have
circulatory systems, period.

BETH

I don't know what else to tell you,
then.

ADAM
 Could you defend us?

A little beat.

BETH
 Please. I haven't done any
 litigation in twenty years. It
 would be a bloodbath.

ADAM
 So we give up?

BETH
 We repay what we can. If you fight
 them, we'll just be in a deeper
 hole. That's how these things work.

Adam doesn't respond: instead he just leaves the room in a
 depressed huff, heading off the same way Natalie went.

Beth, alone, stares at the resume.

She begins to get a notion in her head. She takes a deep
 breath...

39

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - SHIRLEY'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

39

Shirley's SECRETARY, bald in a pencil skirt, sits at her
 desk, tapping a pen impatiently. She looks across the
 room....

SECRETARY
 Ma'am, I'm really not sure when my
 boss will next be available.

...to Beth, sitting in a tiny chair, waiting patiently.

BETH
 That's alright. I'm in no hurry.

The secretary goes back to her work.

Beth taps her foot impatiently: she's dressed up fancier than
 we've ever seen her before, with lipstick on, and a pair of
 high heels, one of them held together with glue.

Suddenly, the TRAPDOOR on the floor, leading to the office,
 opens. Beth watches it anxiously.

A PADDLE emerges from the opening...then another....

A SMALL VUVV comes out from behind the door, clambering quickly and with surprising fluidity on its paddles, like a tall spider, or a person on stilts.

This Vuvv looks exactly like Shirley, but is even smaller: roughly half of Shirley's size, about the size of a pug. In its own strange way, it's a bit cute.

It clammers quickly past the secretary and Beth, its paddles making moist *squishes* on the tile.

It pauses for a moment to look silently at Beth.

She looks back, and SMILES, like one does to a baby or small dog.

It stares back. Then it goes, through a Vuvv-sized opening in the wall.

Beth watches it go, then looks up: the secretary stands over the open platform:

SECRETARY

It'll see you now.

40

INT. FLOATING DEVELOPMENT - SHIRLEY'S OFFICE - DAY - MOMENTS
LATER

Shirley sits behind the desk, manipulating a group of HOLOGRAPHIC SYMBOLS that float above its desk, with its paddles. Some kind of impenetrable fifth-order-derivative financial data.

Beth awkwardly clammers down from the platform, and approaches it cautiously. She's wearing a translator device.

BETH

(accompanied by Vuvv
translation)

Hello, sir. My name is Beth
Campbell, and I'm --

SHIRLEY

(via translator)

Sit.

She does so.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You are the Campbell-mother. I am
aware. My entire brood and I have
watched the deceitful broadcast of
the Campbell-boy and the Marsh-
girl.

Beth isn't sure whether to be flattered, offended, or what.

BETH

Well I'm glad to hear it. And I'm
very sorry to hear you found it
"deceitful" --

SHIRLEY

Romantic love is the most unique
and poetic of all human love-modes.
It should never be faked.

BETH

I, um -- I agree.

SHIRLEY

Then you understand why your child
must be taken to court.

BETH

Sure.

SHIRLEY

Then our business here is
concluded.

Beth bites her fingernail anxiously, considering her
approach.

BETH

Could I ask you a question?

SHIRLEY

Briefly.

BETH

The little one that just left your
office: was that a member of your
"brood?"

SHIRLEY

That is my latest offspring.

As Shirley says this, its bizarre anatomy very subtly
rearranges itself. In a strange, perhaps accidentally way --
like how a dog's open mouth can resemble a human smile -- it
looks content....almost *proud*.

Beth clocks this.

BETH

That's a form of love too, isn't
it? Love for one's offspring.

SHIRLEY

We don't call this "love." "Love"
is a human phenomenon, a bizarre
offshoot of your collaborative
reproductive process.

Beth smiles gently, and tries a small joke:

BETH

Well Shirley, I can tell you that the reproductive process isn't always "collaborative." One sex tends to bear the burden of that process.

SHIRLEY

I am well aware of human mating practices.

BETH

Well then you know what I'm talking about when I say that there's one very unique type of human love, and it's even stronger than romantic love.

SHIRLEY

...Continue?

BETH

It's a mother's love for her children.

Shirley doesn't respond.

BETH (CONT'D)

I think you know exactly what I'm talking about, because... and I'm going out on a limb, here, but... I think you feel it yourself. I think you feel that kind of love for your own offspring.

Again, Shirley rearranges itself... its demeanor seems to loosen -- soften.

Beth's eyes begin to well up with tears.

BETH (CONT'D)

And right now, Shirley, my children are suffering, and they've lost faith in me, as their parent and their protector. And so I am coming to you, doing something I really don't like to do: I'm begging you. From one parent to another, I am *imploring* you to find a way to release my child from his debt.

A long silence hangs in the air, as Shirley considers this...

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Adam and Natalie, working in the bottom of the empty pool on their hands and knees, tending Natalie's garden, are both frozen in shock.

Beth, standing above them on the lip of the pool, has just broken them some difficult news.

ADAM

You *what*?

BETH

It's just for one year. Think of it as a study-abroad semester. A homestay. It's a chance for Shirley's child to immerse itself in human culture.

NATALIE

By *being your husband*?

BETH

My *pretend-husband*. Just like Chloe was Adam's pretend-girlfriend. It gets to play-act having its own earthling family.

ADAM

Why would it even want that?

BETH

I guess it watches a lot of human node-broadcasts and old TV. And Shirley thinks this will help "open its mind."

NATALIE

Do you have to *have sex with it*, mom?

BETH

Don't be disgusting, Nat, it doesn't even have the proper equipment for that.

ADAM

But it's gonna sleep in your bed?

BETH

It wants the full experience of being the head of a human household. Where else would it sleep?

They stare at her.

BETH (CONT'D)

Anyway, they're dropping the lawsuit, and paying off our mortgage.

ADAM

Can we at least evict the Marshes, then?

BETH

No, because they're not covering utilities. We still need that income stream.

NATALIE

So it'll be con artists in the basement and a bug at the head of our dinner table.

Anger wells up in Beth, who is not pleased with this arrangement herself. But she holds it in. Smiles.

BETH

I get that you're not comfortable with this, and you're not *going* to be comfortable with it. But one day when you're my age, you'll understand that I'm doing this for you, and you'll be grateful.

And with that, she turns and goes inside.

Adam turns to Natalie. She looks back at him. They say nothing.

PRE-LAP: somber, classical music played on a crappy Casio keyboard. A pathetic little *adagio*.

42

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - ADAM'S BEDROOM - DAY - DAYS LATER

42

We PAN across the walls of Adam's bedroom, filled with prints of famous and less-famous painting of all eras and styles. Impressionist and neoclassical paintings dominate.

We finally land on Adam, standing in an ill-fitting suit, two sizes too big for him. He adjusts his tie in a floor-length mirror, sighs.

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Adam walks outside: a small white TENT has been set up, for a humble WEDDING and reception.

An elderly HOMELESS MAN has been given a few dollars to play a broken-down keyboard, while a meager crowd of friends and neighbors in formalwear are making small-talk.

Among them are the MARSHEs, who are still living downstairs.

Hunter, in a tuxedo t-shirt, is aggressively digging into a small buffet. His hair is now tightly buzzed.

Chloe, looking painfully beautiful in a nice dress, holds hands with Buddy, in a tight button-up that hugs his biceps.

His node is on: they're turning this wedding into one of their "dates."

Adam grits his teeth and grimaces: in a life full of humiliation lately, this shit is hitting a new high.

MR. REILLY (O.S.)

Hey Adam.

He turns: Mr. Reilly is standing alone at the outskirts of the party, nursing a pigs-in-a-blanket.

Adam is surprised to see him, and relieved.

ADAM

Mr. Reilly! I didn't know we'd invited you.

MR. REILLY

Your mom asked me.

ADAM

Did she really.

MR. REILLY

I have a feeling I'm here as moral support. For you.

He gives Adam a friendly shoulder-grab.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)

Doing okay?

Adam looks out at the crowd: Chloe catches his eye, then looks away.

ADAM

I think I need to go inside for a second.

MR. REILLY

For sure. Take your time.

ADAM

Will you come with me?

44

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

44

Adam and Mr. Reilly escape the stress of the wedding momentarily.

ADAM

I'm a little embarrassed you're seeing this, to be honest.

MR. REILLY

Don't be.

ADAM

But Shirley required us to get a crowd of at least fifty people for that "real-wedding feel," so you're helping us out.

MR. REILLY

Hey -- I got you something.

He holds out a small wrapped package: Adam is surprised.

Mr. Reilly watches him unwrap it:

It's a set of weathered, well-loved but still perfectly useable PAINTBRUSHES.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)

It's my old set I've been using since art school. Natural hog-hair, not like the synthetic stuff you get now. Takes a little extra maintenance, but it's worth it: my old professor used to say that animal-hair brushes made you paint "with soul."

Adam looks up, touched.

ADAM

I can't take these.

MR. REILLY

I want you to. I barely touch a canvas anymore. I'd much rather they get put to good use.

ADAM

...Thank you.

MR. REILLY

Now let's get out there. We've got a wedding to catch.

45

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

45

Beth, in a wedding dress pulled straight out of the attic, walks down the aisle arm-in-arm with Adam.

"HERE COMES THE BRIDE" is being played on the keyboard.

Their POV: we scan the crowd, full of nervous half-smiles, stony looks from Mr. Marsh and Hunter, and Chloe's sad, sympathetic eyes.

As we push further through the crowd, we realize that the entire front two rows of folding chairs are taken up by VUVV, standing on their chairs atop their paddles. Many of them are flanked by human BODY-GUARDS and ASSISTANTS, many bald, a few wearing "sauce" on their hairless skin.

Finally our gaze falls on the center, where a PREACHER stands waiting, beside Natalie, a reluctant "maid-of-honor."

...and at his feet, surreally wearing a BOW-TIE, is Shirley's tiny Vuvv-like offspring.

Music SWELLS, and we jump-cut to:

46

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

46

The new "family" sits around the dining room table: Adam, Natalie, Beth, and the TINY VUVV, sitting on a booster seat at the head of the table.

For a moment, they all eat in silence. It's incredibly strange, and they all keep eyeing the alien at the table, as it prods its steak dinner ineffectually with its paddle.

BETH

(to the Vuvv)

Do you need me to cut it up for you?

TINY VUVV
 (via translator)
 Yes, wife. Cut it.

(Unlike Shirley's calm Siri-like translator, this Vuvv translator-box voice is almost cartoonishly deep and masculine -- a bizarre contrast to its tiny soft body).

Adam and Chloe look on in horror as Beth cuts up a tiny piece of steak and places it into a wet compartment that opens up on the Vuvv's body.

NATALIE
 I think I'm gonna go finish this in the other room if everyone's cool with that.

BETH
 I'm fine with that.

ADAM
 Yeah, I might do the same.

TINY VUVV
 (via translator)
 The small one may go. The large one must stay.

Adam and Natalie look at one another. Adam nods to Natalie, and she gets up to leave.

BETH
 Um -- honey, they do have names you can use. They're Adam and Natalie. These are my -- *our* -- children.

TINY VUVV
 Yes.

BETH
 Is there a name that you'd like us all to call you?

For a long, strange moment, they stare at the tiny Vuvv as it digests.

Finally, it rubs its paddles in response:

TINY VUVV
 "Father" will do. That is your name for this position, yes?

ADAM

That's the *title*, I guess. There's usually also a name that goes with it.

Another excruciating pause.

FATHER

"Father" will do.

47

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - AN HOUR LATER

47

Adam, feeling like a captive in his own home, is doing the dishes.

He peeks around the corner, into the living room....

...where Beth sits beside "Father."

The television glints eerily off the alien's fragile, damp albino skin.

Adam goes back to scrubbing.

48

INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - THE NEXT DAY

48

Inside another VR "black void," like before, Adam's class is getting another lesson on Vuvv culture and history.

TEACHER

...and in this sense, the Vuvv's greatest strength as a civilization is their ability to synthesize: to absorb technology, culture and traditions from other species, and incorporate them into a whole that is exponentially greater than the sum of its parts.

Chloe, seated near the back of the class, catches sight of Adam, with his head on his desk. Is he asleep?

TEACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where other galactic empires have styled themselves conquerers and subsequently collapsed under the weight of their own violent ambitions....

CLOSER: she can see that Adam is softly, repeatedly banging his forehead against the desk in despair.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

...the Vuvv have thrived due to their endless openness, and their ability to see less-advanced peoples not as enemies to be subjugated, but as less fortunate friends, to be helped and enlightened.

Chloe looks concerned.

49

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY - AN HOUR LATER

49

Adam is sitting alone, pushing around peas on a plate, when Chloe comes up and stands over him, with her tray.

ADAM

Hi.

CHLOE

Hey.

ADAM

Interesting that we live in the same house and only talk at school.

CHLOE

I know.

(pause)

Are you okay? You didn't look too hot in class.

Adam looks up at her, surprised to find himself getting emotional: the simple fact of someone he still cares a lot about checking in on him has a strong effect.

ADAM

Hanging in there. What about you?

CHLOE

Same.

A beat.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

I feel bad about the note we ended things on.

ADAM

Me too. I shouldn't have taken it personally. You've gotta do what you've gotta do.

CHLOE

Well look: if you ever need a break from things up there, you can come visit. Buddy only comes by a few times a week, and I'll make sure my dad and Hunter stay on their best behavior.

ADAM

...Thank you. That means a lot. And if you ever need anything, or my mom's being a jerk...

CHLOE

I'll let you know.

A beat.

ADAM

You wanna pull up a seat?

Chloe sits across from him, smiles, and the two begin to eat in familiar silence for a long moment, slowly beginning to rebuild their friendship.

50 **INT./EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - THAT EVENING** 50

Adam lets himself in the front door, with his backpack on.

He hears a vacuum cleaner, and walks into the living room, to see:

51 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING - CONTINUOUS** 51

A strange woman with bright blonde hair is VACUUMING the carpet.

ADAM

Hello?

She turns: it's BETH, wearing an eerily blonde wig and fifties clothes.

BETH

Hey. School's out already?

ADAM

What are you wearing?

BETH

Oh, this? One of Chloe's old fifties-wigs.

(MORE)

BETH (CONT'D)

(off Adam's blank look:)

The thing wants me to wear it.

ADAM

Why?

BETH

I don't know. It saw it lying around, I guess, and it asked for it.

ADAM

You just vacuumed yesterday, didn't you?

BETH

I did. I think it has an idea in his head that wives clean, a lot.

ADAM

...Gross.

BETH

Don't worry about it. It passes the time, and I don't have to talk to it, that way.

FATHER (O.S.)

You are not wearing the requested hair.

The translator is so loud that they both jump. Adam turns:

Father has just come in, and stands, tiny and ridiculous, by the door.

ADAM

You're right, she's not. And she's not going to. You can live here, but you don't order us around. You understand? No costumes. Right, mom?

He turns back to his mom, who's put the wig back on.

BETH

It's fine.

ADAM

No it's NOT fine. It's --

BETH

Adam?
 (quiet but firm)
 It's fine.

Adam looks back at father, and back at his mom.

ADAM

Whatever. Have a good night, I'm
 going to see the Marshes.

FATHER

You will not speak to your father
 that way, son.

Adam just laughs, joylessly. He turns to leave, and on his
 way out:

ADAM

I *don't* speak to my father that
 way. I *don't* speak to my father at
 all. Now turn your translator down.
 It's not like you're saying
 anything useful, you bug.

He leaves.

Beth, holding the wig, silently bites her lip.

52

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

52

CLOSE on a TV screen: a news/debate show.

Video footage shows an Art-Deco style bronze statue, similar
 to the graphic we saw on Adam's 3D-printed meatloaf, of a
 stylized human child holding hands with a friendly-looking
 Vuvv.

Trash has been strewn over it, and someone has painted: "GO
 HOME, ASSHOLES."

A Chyron reads: "First Contact Monument Vandalized."

PUNDIT (O.S.)

I think the anger is
 understandable, Jen.
 (MORE)

PUNDIT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ordinary Americans just want to *work*, and they feel increasingly cut out of the wealth generated since the landing.

SECOND PUNDIT (O.S.)

And to those people I would say: go get your piece of the pie! The Vuvv want to trade. They want to work with humans. Their technology didn't win out by force -- we wanted it, because it's *better* than ours! And I think this is a uniquely exciting time for those with entrepreneurial instincts....

REVERSE: Adam and Mr. Marsh, sitting onto a ratty couch, sip beers together.

Chloe, slumped on an armchair, rolls a joint.

MR. MARSH

Only a matter of time until there's a revolution.

ADAM

You think?

MR. MARSH

Oh yeah. It's 'cus those things are still too far away from ordinary people, hiding behind their human assistants up in their floating cities. Once they start getting into our homes -- like your little friend upstairs -- people will start realizing how disgusting those bugs are.

CHLOE

You don't have to be ignorant. They're awful, but they're not *bugs*.

Adam winces, recognizing a word he just used himself in anger.

MR. MARSH

Yeah, that's too generous a name for 'em.

CHLOE

Please don't make Adam think that he has to listen to a xenophobic tirade every time he comes down here.

ADAM

It's not what they *look like* that I have a problem with. It's what they've done to the world.

MR. MARSH

Nah, that's nothing new. People like your mom were doing that shit to people like me *long* before some flying saucer landed.

Adam looks at him, bristling silently at the insult to his mother.

ADAM

Oh, it was people like *my mother*? Doing things to people like *you*?

MR. MARSH

That's what I said.

ADAM

Oh so you must have taken a different version of U.S. History than I did, then.

MR. MARSH

I quit high school before we got to that, fancyboy.

ADAM

Yeah. It shows.

CHLOE

Slow down on the beers, dad. You're getting drunk and saying stupid shit.

(to Adam)

Sorry, Adam.

Suddenly, a sound from the other room: a LANGUAGE-LEARNING TAPE begins to play, way too loud.

LANGUAGE-LEARNING TAPE (O.S.)

How much is this hotel room, sir?
[scratchy Vuvv translation].

CHLOE
 (shouts)
 Hunter, will you turn that shit
 down!

LANGUAGE-LEARNING TAPE
 Does the buffet include eggs?
 [Scratchy Vuvv translation].

Chloe's hands are full.

CHLOE
 Soon as I finish this I'll go tell
 them to stop.

ADAM
 (getting up)
 It's fine. I got it.

He opens a door to Hunter's room...

53

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - HUNTER'S "BEDROOM" - NIGHT 3
CONTINUOUS

...where the language-learning tape continues to blast, brutally loud, inside a leaky storage room Hunter's turned into a bedroom.

Hunter is CROUCHED ON THE FLOOR, on all fours with his stomach facing the ceiling, imitating the shape of a Vuvv. He's wearing gym shorts, and is now completely waxed and eerily hairless.

Two of his blue-collar FRIENDS (20s) are in similar positions.

ADAM
 ...What are you doing?

HUNTER
 None of your business, asshole. Get
 outta here.

LANGUAGE-LEARNING TAPE (O.S.)
 Why yes, I love art. [Scratchy Vuvv
 translation]

Hunter and his friends use their mouths to make Vuvv-like sounds along with the tape.

Adam closes the door on this bizarre scene.

54 INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Adam looks into his mom's bedroom through a cracked-open door.

Inside, she lies peacefully on her bed.

FATHER lies on top of her, enfolding her gently with its paddles. A distressing image: something reminiscent of the anime tentacle porn you find in the weird corners of the internet. At least they're clothed.

55 INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - ADAM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - TWO HOURS LATER 55

Adam lies in bed, sleepless, feeling increasingly alone in his horrific fun-house of a home.

He glances at the clock: it's 2:17 AM.

He rolls back onto his other side and hopes desperately for sleep to come.

It's finally dark and silent, just the crickets chirping outside.

Until he hears the sound of a KEY TURNING IN A LOCK, downstairs.

Adam's eyes narrow: everyone is home -- who could that possibly be?

56 INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER 56

Adam tiptoes carefully down the steps, holding a BASEBALL BAT.

He sees a light on in the kitchen, and walks toward it, bracing himself for conflict, when....

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Adam?

He spins and raises the bat...the immediately begins to lower it. He recognizes the voice.

There's a MAN standing in the dark living room. He switches on a lamp, and we see him, still half in shadow:

He's in his late 50s, white, in a grubby windbreaker, with a striking resemblance to Adam. His face, once extremely handsome, is now worn and haggard.

ADAM

...Dad?

Adam immediately feels a dense tangle of emotions at his father's sudden appearance. Is he dreaming?

He rubs his eyes, but his father doesn't disappear.

ADAM (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

His dad puts a finger to his lips: "shhhh."

MR. CAMPBELL

I don't want to wake your mother. I was headed east, and ended up passing through town. Still had the key, and I couldn't resist stopping by.

ADAM

You can't -- how...
(composes himself)
You didn't think to *call*, maybe?
Let us know about this?

MR. CAMPBELL

Would you have let me? If I'd asked?

ADAM

...No, probably not. But that doesn't mean you can just --

Mr. Campbell again gently "shushes" him.

MR. CAMPBELL

I'm sorry, Adam. For coming over unannounced but for a lot more than that, too.

ADAM

You should be.

MR. CAMPBELL

I should be. I am.

Adam doesn't know what to say. A silence.

In the lull, Mr. Campbell takes a cautious step into the light. We can see his eyes begin to tear up, a bit. He smiles, sadly, as he wipes them away.

MR. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)
You grew up.

ADAM
Not really.

MR. CAMPBELL
(laughs)
You did. Trust me.

ADAM
I look the same. I'm only two years
older.

MR. CAMPBELL
But you're a man now. I can see it.

Adam is profoundly confused: he isn't sure whether to punch his dad or pull him into a hug. So he does neither.

MR. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)
How's Nattie?

ADAM
She's alright. But she doesn't like
that anymore. It's either "Natalie"
or "Nat."

MR. CAMPBELL
I thought "Nat" used to be
unacceptable.

ADAM
She changes her mind a lot.

MR. CAMPBELL
I know she does.
(pause)
And your mother?

ADAM
...She's okay.

MR. CAMPBELL
Has she, uh....

ADAM
Found someone else?

Mr. Campbell nods.

ADAM (CONT'D)
It's a long story.

Mr. Campbell looks saddened by this.

MR. CAMPBELL
Serves me right.

ADAM
I thought you had....

MR. CAMPBELL
Oh, no, no, no. That was a fling. A terrible, stupid idea, that ended a long time ago, but long after it should have. I'm alone now, on the road. It's been a tough couple years.

(pause)
I'm sure it has been for all of you, too.

ADAM
You have no idea.

Adam puts down the bat. A silence.

ADAM (CONT'D)
So you're just... what, just passing through, then?

MR. CAMPBELL
I don't know.

ADAM
What do you mean you don't know?

MR. CAMPBELL
I mean I don't know what you and your sister and your mom will let me do.

ADAM
If we'd let you stay?

MR. CAMPBELL
I don't know if it would be fair for me to ask that. After how wretchedly I've acted.

Adam hides how choked up he's getting. Finally he manages:

ADAM
I don't know. I'd have to check with Natalie. And --

MR. CAMPBELL

Do you think I could see her? Even
if just for a minute.

ADAM

Um... yeah. I think she'd like
that.

MR. CAMPBELL

I hope so. Don't wake your mom yet,
but I'd love to see Nattie.

ADAM

Nat.

MR. CAMPBELL

(chuckles)

Nat. I'd love to see her.

Adam thinks, then nods.

ADAM

Stay right here.

57 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - MOMENTS** 57
LATER

Adam, his heart jumping, pads quietly upstairs and approaches
Natalie's door.

Just as he's about to open it, he hears a noise downstairs:

A car engine revving.

He pauses, his eyes widening....

58 **EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS** 58

Adam sprints out the front door just in time to see Mr.
Campbell, in the driver's seat of the old family minivan,
ROARING AWAY FAST down the darkened street.

Adam sprints after the car as long as he can.

ADAM

Motherfucker! You thief!

But soon the car is well out of reach.

He picks up an entire TRASHCAN and THROWS it at the car, but
it clatters to the ground a mere few feet in front of him.

Adam, feeling betrayed, hurt, and hopeless, slumps down onto the sidewalk and just lies there on the pavement.

Dogs bark, and lights blink on in neighboring houses, as people react to the commotion.

Adam tries in vain to sink into the pavement and disappear forever, swallowed up by concrete.

59

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

59

Adam stares at his bowl of soggy cereal the next morning. The individual pieces of cereal are Vuvv-shaped.

We're in the middle of an argument:

NATALIE

But that makes no sense: how could a thief get into the garage without a single broken window or anything?

Around the table: an animated Natalie, a worn-out-looking Beth, and a silently pulsing "FATHER."

ADAM

I don't know. There's been tremendous developments in the field of breaking-and-entering. Lots of new talent pouring in lately.

NATALIE

And you didn't get any sort of look at the guy who stole it?

ADAM

Nope. By the time I got out he was gone.

NATALIE

And seriously, we're not even gonna call the police?

BETH

(weary)

Honey, trust me, we don't want the police. And they don't care about this sort of petty crime anyway.

NATALIE

Unless a Vuvv is involved.

BETH

Sure.

NATALIE

And...

She points emphatically at "Father" with a fork.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

A Vuvv is involved.

After an awkward silence, the creature rubs its paddles together:

FATHER

(via translator)

I will purchase a new automobile for my family.

NATALIE

...Okay, great. How soon? Because someone needs to drive us to school.

FATHER

I must first request funds from my parent.

ADAM

Why do you have to request funds? Don't you have some yourself?

FATHER

I am not old enough to control my own funds. This is a sacred privilege in our culture, earned at a coming-of-age ceremony.

NATALIE

How old are you?

FATHER

By your human measurements, I am three months old.

A beat. Everyone human at the table feels grossed out.

ADAM

(getting up)

C'mon Natalie. We'll take the bus.

On her way out, Natalie gives her mother a long, disappointed look.

The two kids get up and clear their plates, leaving Beth alone with "Father."

60 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - AN HOUR LATER** 60

Beth sits beside Father on the couch, rubbing sauce into its flesh: their new routine.

FATHER

Apply more on the underside. Your weak air makes me dry.

BETH

Yes, honey.

She continues rubbing the sauce in: we ZOOM in, slowly, on her hands touching its slimy flesh.

We keep zooming in on this, for a long time. Too long.

Then the same slow zoom on Beth's eyes... until they're all we can see...

The squishing sound of her hands rubbing the sauce intensifies, louder, louder, unrealistically loud....

61 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - HOURS LATER** 61

Close on a PHONE RINGING SHARPLY, jolting us out of this morass.

Beth comes into the kitchen, looking worn-out, and picks it up.

BETH

Yes?

A voice speaks quietly, on the other end.

BETH (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

This is she.

More talking. Beth's expression gradually begins to shift.

BETH (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Of course. How soon?

(more talking)

Absolutely. Give me half an hour.

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - HOURS LATER

Father sits on the couch, utterly still, staring at the TV, one of its paddles draped languidly over the edge of the pillow. Something about the posture suggests a spoiled little prince, trying on peasant-life for the day.

Its eye-stalks turn: Beth comes bustling in from the other room, suddenly full of a new energy, dressed nicely in business-casual, her wig off. She gathers her purse and other things.

It rubs its paddles together to speak:

FATHER

Where are you going?

BETH

Out. I'll be back in a few hours.

FATHER

What is "out"?

BETH

I just got a job.

FATHER

Explain this.

BETH

(as she looks for keys)
Work. A job. One that I interviewed for a long time ago. They just called back. They need me to start immediately.

She finishes gathering her things, and looks up to see Father standing rather pathetically in front of the door, blocking it.

FATHER

My wife does not need a "job." My wife tends to the home. I provide.

BETH

Except that you don't. It's your parent that pays me. And frankly it doesn't pay me nearly enough for this shit. And so --

FATHER

My wife will --

BETH
(sharply)
Paddles down, honey, I'm not done yet.

Father, taken aback, stares at her.

BETH (CONT'D)
And so I am gonna take this job. Because it's not a great salary, but it's enough to scrape by, and I'd rather scrape by and keep my kids' respect than continue being your paid sauce-rubber. So if this pisses you off, and you need to waddle back home and get your mommy to sue us, then go ahead. Because your "wife" has a law degree, and graduated top of her class. And you may be able to outspend me, but you will not outwork me.
(pause)
Now I'm gonna have to ask you to please move.

It just sits there, in front of the door.

BETH (CONT'D)
Did you hear me?

It just sits there.

BETH (CONT'D)
Move, or I will have to move you.

FATHER
Sit down, wife.

Beth walks over to Father, picks it up in her arms very easily, and carries it to the couch.

It SLAPS HER WILDLY with its paddles. But this is merely an irritation, like a baby weakly pawing at its parent.

Beth, undeterred, carries it across the room.

In the scuffle, it SLAPS at its own TRANSLATOR BOX, and suddenly a LOUD ALARM begins to sound, and a light on the translator box FLASHES WILDLY.

Beth puts it down on the couch and rears back in shock.

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Beth, hands cuffed behind her back, is stood up against a POLICE CAR.

Two COPS stand beside her, talking to Father, who looks on from the curb.

MALE COP

Our apologies for not arriving sooner, sir.

FEMALE COP

Do you need any medical attention?

FATHER

No. Simply remove the criminal.

Adam and Natalie stand near the front door. Natalie, freaked out, is recording this on her cell phone.

ADAM

You can't do this! She barely touched it!

FIRST OFFICER

Sir, I'm gonna have to ask you to calm down.

ADAM

She's a lawyer! When this goes to court you're both losing your badges.

BETH

Adam? You're not helping things.

ADAM

Fuck you both. You know this is wrong, and you're doing it anyway.

FEMALE COP

(to Father)

Are these two going to be a problem, sir? Will you need some additional security in your home?

NATALIE

It's not its home! It's ours.

ADAM

You should be taking that thing away!

MALE COP
(to Father)
Do you need us to detain these two?

BETH
Please, Adam. Stay calm.

The cops open the door and begin to push Beth inside.
She looks one last time at Adam.

ADAM
They can't do this. Mom?

BETH
We're gonna get through this. Take
care of your sister.

NATALIE
Mom...

BETH
I'll be back soon.

They shut the door of the police car. Adam and Natalie's
terrified faces are reflected over their mother's in the
glass of its window.

65

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - FRONT ENTRYWAY - DAYS LATER

65

Adam opens the door to find Mr. Reilly, holding a big bouquet of flowers.

MR. REILLY

How you holding up, champ?

66

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - MINUTES LATER

66

Mr. Reilly stands a little awkwardly in the kitchen as Adam gets him a glass of water.

ADAM

No jobs, no healthcare, sewage in the streets, and now school's closed, permanently. But the police department seems to be going strong.

MR. REILLY

It's horrible. Do you know how long she'll be gone?

ADAM

Ten years. Half that with good behavior.

Mr. Reilly shakes his head. He hears the sound of the television, and looks around the corner into the adjoining living room...

...to see FATHER, with its paddles bandaged, sitting in its usual spot on the couch.

MR. REILLY

(quietly)

It's still here?

Adam nods, comes to hand him the glass of water.

ADAM

They changed the arrangement, as part of the sentencing. It gets to stay here as long as it wants.

MR. REILLY

Ugh.

(a pause)

What do you think it gets out of this?

Adam shakes his head, pointedly looking away.

Mr. Reilly notices that Adam is starting to cry. He looks at Adam, unsure of what to say.

Suddenly Adam EMBRACES HIM, squeezing him hard.

Mr. Reilly holds him, like a small child.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)

I am so sorry Adam. I'm so sorry.

ADAM

I don't know what to do now.

MR. REILLY

Hey, hey, sit down. Take a breath.

Adam sits, wipes his eyes, breathes.

ADAM

Mom always says the key to surviving -- the *only* key -- is not to lose hope. But what is there to *hope for*, now? What does any of this mean?

Mr. Reilly doesn't have the answers to these questions, so he just lets them sit in the air, looking Adam straight in the eyes. Finally:

MR. REILLY

Have you been painting?

ADAM

No.

MR. REILLY

No?

ADAM

What's the point?

MR. REILLY

What's the *point*? It's your gift. In fact I'd go further than that. I'd say it's your *duty*.

ADAM

My only duty is to provide for my sister.

MR. REILLY

Well definitely that too. But you also owe it to the long line of artists that came before you, building on top of one another's work, to keep that lineage alive through this fucked-up chapter of history.

ADAM

I mean... sure, that's a nice idea. But what might be more helpful is if you could ask your boss at the condo if they might need another doorman, or --

MR. REILLY

I can't. I got let go.

ADAM

...They fired you?

Mr. Reilly nods.

MR. REILLY

Just today.

ADAM

I'm sorry.

MR. REILLY

Hey: I'll survive. I'll eat the shittiest 3D-printed chicken I can find and mend my own socks. Same for you. We're not gonna starve. It's a different kind of death I'm more worried about.

Adam begins to nod, slowly coming around.

MR. REILLY (CONT'D)

So let's channel that grief into something that matters. Something big.

ADAM

Okay.

MR. REILLY

Good. And now that I've got some free time on my hands, you've got a highly qualified studio assistant.

ADAM
A collaborator.

MR. REILLY
No, I had it right the first time.
An assistant.

ADAM
Don't insult yourself.

Mr. Reilly comes to sit beside him.

MR. REILLY
My own painting never went
anywhere. I never settled down,
never started a family. But I made
peace with that a long time ago.
Because I've learned that I get
more out of helping people I like
achieve things than I do achieving
them myself. Maybe that makes me a
loser, but it's true.

ADAM
I don't think it makes you a loser.

MR. REILLY
No?

ADAM
No. I think it makes you one of the
only people I know who's actually
an *adult*. Instead of just old.

Mr. Reilly laughs a sad little laugh.

For the first time in quite a while, Adam cracks a smile.

...as our MUSICAL THEME again begins to play.

67

EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - THE NEXT DAY

67

Adam and Mr. Reilly stand together, holding buckets of paint,
in front of the huge, looming, abandoned HIGH SCHOOL
BUILDING.

Mr. Reilly mixes gallons and gallons of paint, his paint-
stick whipping around the lips of the cans.

They begin slowly covering the entire front of the building
with a white base-coat.

A rusty ladder CLANKS against the wall: Mr. Reilly tests its stability.

DAYS LATER: Adam, up on the ladder, begins free-handing the black outlines of a MURAL on the new blank-canvas front of the home.

We see only pieces of it at first: his SOUP STAND sketch, with the line of people curling artfully around a first-floor window... Chloe, standing like a saint in the center of the dumping-grounds, hovers over the front door...

68 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT** 68

Inside at night, the family routine has changed: Natalie and "Father" sit at the dinner table, while Adam, wearing a frilly 50s housewife apron, brings them food...

69 **EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - DAY - WEEKS LATER** 69

As rain begins to lash the mural-in-progress, Adam and Mr. Reilly continue to paint, wearing tattered ponchos....

70 **EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - DAY - WEEKS LATER** 70

And now the weather begins to change to spring, as others get roped into the project:

Several of Adam and Chloe's former EXTRAS work on a section.

Adam guides Natalie's arm as she fills in a section of the outline with a paint-roller....

71 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - DAYS LATER** 71

Adam, now wearing the 50s dress his mother had previously been forced to wear, brings "Father" a bourbon.

Natalie watches from the next room, repulsed.

72 **EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - DAY - DAYS LATER** 72

Chloe and Buddy stand modeling for Adam and Mr. Reilly, as they work on the details of each of their respective drawings' faces, with smaller brushes.

Adam's sketch of Buddy's "statue emporium" blends seamlessly into a hundred other vignettes...

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

...and now we're watching as Adam uses a tiny brush to minutely shade his mother's face: a painfully realistic drawing of her facing off against Father: the last and largest section of the painting.

We pull back from the image, to the nearly-completed MURAL, which is massive in scope and ambition.

The entire huge school has been covered in detailed paintings, which form a kind of pictographic history of Adam's family, a socio-anthropological record of this strange, sad time and place.

Adam takes a breath, wipes his brow, and stands back to take it all in.

He backs up into the street, getting a wider and wider view.

It's all there: the awkward dinners of the Marsh/Campbell family, and Mr. Stanley splattering his brains on the school wall, and Beth punching Hunter as the workers on the roof look on, and Beth's funeral...

Suddenly Adam, backing up, TRIPS over something at knee-height.

Lying in the road, Adam looks to see what's tripped him:

It's FATHER, who's grown slightly bigger by now, standing in the road.

ADAM

What are you doing here?

FATHER

(via translator)

I could not find my wife at home.
The miniature woman told me I could locate you here.

Adam gets to his feet.

ADAM

Yeah. I, um, I'll be back soon.

FATHER

You're not wearing the requested clothing.

ADAM

I thought that was only required inside the house.

Father falls silent.

Its eye-stalk is swaying slowly across the breadth of the mural, taking it all in.

Adam watches it looking.

FATHER

This is what you've been working on.

ADAM

Yeah.

FATHER

What is its purpose?

ADAM

...Well, that's a good question. Hard to explain.

(pause)

Anyway, it's close to done. What do you think of it?

A long pause. Then:

FATHER

It is nearly time for dinner.

ADAM

Yep. I'll get on that. Meet you back home in a little bit?

Father takes one last look at the mural, then begins softly padding down the sidewalk, back toward home.

Adam, not sure what to make of this, takes a swig of water and gets back to work.

74 **INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - ADAM'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING** 74

Adam, lying in bed the next morning, is woken by Natalie's voice shouting from the adjoining room:

NATALIE (O.S.)

Adam?

He covers his face with his pillow.

ADAM

I'm sleeping!

NATALIE (O.S.)

My friend just called! There's something happening at the school?

He sits up, groggy, rubbing his eyes.

ADAM

What does that mean?

75 **EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - DAY - MINUTES LATER** 75

Adam and Natalie, looking bewildered, approach a small CROWD of ragged-looking humans that's formed outside of the mural-covered school.

Chloe and Buddy are close behind them.

As they draw closer, we realize they're not looking at the mural. No, they're all BEGGING, holding out cups and cupped hands toward some unseen figures at the center of the crowd.

Adam muscled his way through and finds Father at the center. Beside it stands Shirley, who's gesturing at the mural with its paddles and rubbing them together, speaking in untranslated Vuvv paddle-speak to an even LARGER VUVV, who sits regally beside it, listening to Shirley and exchanging a few paddle-rubs of its own.

An overwhelmed human SECURITY GUARD, bald and covered in sauce, tries his best to keep the crowd of human beggars at bay.

As Adam takes in this strange scene, Chloe and Buddy muscle through the crowd beside him.

CHLOE
What is this?

ADAM
I... I don't know.

NATALIE
The Vuvv that's staying with us saw your mural yesterday -- right, Adam?

ADAM
Right...

NATALIE
And it must have brought its friends.

BUDDY
(a little jealous)
Whoa. Congratulations, I guess.

ADAM
I mean, I think that's a little premature. We don't know what's going on....

Shirley turns to Adam, and begins to speak again, this time with its translator working:

SHIRLEY
(to Adam)
Campbell-boy...you are the creator of this Human Art?

ADAM
Yes, I am.

SHIRLEY
This is one of our most important experts in, and collectors of, Human Art.

The LARGE VUVV barely raises its paddle, in haughty acknowledgement.

The human crowd has died down and stand, a collective silent mass, staring at this unfolding human-Vuvv interaction.

ADAM

Oh. Hi. I'm Adam.

SHIRLEY

It is very impressed with the sincere humanity of your work, and it is prepared to reproduce your piece and share it across our Interplanetary Co-Prosperity Alliance, with a generous profit-sharing arrangement.

BUDDY

Holy fuck, dude.

CHLOE

Adam. Oh my God.

Adam looks at a happily stunned Natalie, then back at Shirley.

ADAM

I....I don't know what to say.

SHIRLEY

Perhaps you might tell your patron how and why you created such a unique piece.

ADAM

Of course! Of course! I, um....

Adam looks at the large Vuvv, who stares back at him tenderly with its gentle, dopey eyestalks.

A wave of relief is beginning to wash over Adam, a sense that this has all happened for a reason, and his words catch in his throat.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Well I guess... I guess I've just been through a lot, this year. And I wanted to just let it all flow out of me.

The whole crowd watches him, moved.

Natalie HUGS him from the side, supporting him as he goes on. He's tearing up.

ADAM (CONT'D)

And to put away nostalgia, and face the world, not as I want it to be, but as it is. Because we've lost a lot, in the last five years. All of us have. But we've learned something about ourselves, too. And that's what this is, I guess. It's my monument to human resilience.

The large Vuvv seems to NOD. Then it slaps at the leg of the assistant, who fixes a second translator-unit on it.

It rubs its paddles, and its translator-box produces a gentle, elderly British voice:

LARGE VUVV

Why did you choose to use this crude mechanical carving-tool?

ADAM

(confused)

...Mechanical carving tool?

The large Vuvv gestures with its paddle, and Adam looks where it's pointing...

And for the first time, Adam realizes which specific part of the mural they're staring at: it's his rendering of Buddy carving his crucified Buddha with a chainsaw.

LARGE VUVV

It is difficult to discern with this primitive and unskilled two-dimensional rendering, but it appears you are using a mechanical carving tool to create your small masterpiece, yes?

For a long, horrible second, everyone is silent. Then Buddy speaks.

BUDDY

Holy shit! Holy SHIT! You're talking about -- Wait a second --

Natalie glances sadly at Adam.

Buddy fishes in his pocket and pulls out a small-scale, KEYCHAIN version of his crucified Buddha statue. He puts it down in front of the Vuvv.

A little pause, then the three Vuvv all begin rubbing their paddles together excitedly.

Buddy pumps his fist in the air.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Fuck yes! I TOLD you this was gonna be big! Didn't I TELL YOU this was gonna be big! WOOWOOWOOWO!

He grabs Chloe and kisses her.

Chloe catches the despondent Adam out of the corner of her eye and mouths "sorry."

LARGE VUVV

I understand, now. Your face does resemble the one depicted here more convincingly. Often it's hard to tell the difference, with humans.

SHIRLEY

(touching the statue)

Even more impressive in three dimensions. All human religions, successfully merged together.

BUDDY

There's a bunch more where this came from....we could do a whole line of them....

Adam, deflated, quietly slips away.

76

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BATHROOM - THAT NIGHT

76

Adam looks at himself in the mirror: he's still 17, but there's a disillusioned 50-something-year-old man in there. He's been through some stuff.

Adam looks down into his hands, holding the WIG his mother used to wear at Father's request.

He puts it on his head.

A strange sight, indeed. A teenager forced to inhabit the ghost of his dead mom.

77

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER 77

Wearing the wig and his mother's dress, Adam carries a bourbon to the couch, and sits beside Father: their regular evening routine.

He helps Father "drink" the Bourbon, pouring it into a strange compartment on its body.

FATHER

Thank you. I am pleased to see the hair I requested.

ADAM

Sure.

For a moment, they sit there staring at the television: it's "Happy Days," now. The Fonz, cracking a joke.

After a long moment, Father's eye-stalks sway from the TV to Adam.

FATHER

Are you "sad?"

ADAM

...Huh?

FATHER

Your biology indicates that you may be "sad" at this moment.

ADAM

...Yeah. I think that's fair to say.

FATHER

Why is this?

Adam sighs, rubs his eyes. Where to begin?

ADAM

I'm sad because you're here.

FATHER

Me?

ADAM

Well, yes. But also: all of you. I'm sad that your civilization came to earth.

FATHER

I don't understand.

ADAM

Really? You're super-intelligent, aren't you? All of you? A lot smarter than us. So I'm sure if you think hard enough you'll be able to understand how you've made my species sad.

A long beat.

FATHER

No.

ADAM

No? Really?

FATHER

We have never tried to hurt you. We have not conquered you, as the Sh'Klatch or the Frvoo-Froh-Shliek would have.

ADAM

I don't know who that is, but yes. It's true.

FATHER

All we have tried to do is share our bounty with you. To invite you into our economy.

ADAM

But that's the problem. Look at the conversion rates between our currency. One *ch'ch* is what, ten thousand US dollars right now?

FATHER

Closer to twenty.

ADAM

Right. There's more purchasing power in the poorest Vuvv household than in some American cities.

FATHER

Of course. It's not our decision: it's a reflection of the markets.

ADAM

But with those sorts of numbers it's not *trade* anymore. It's *dominance*. Your money has a gravitational power.

(MORE)

ADAM (CONT'D)

It's a black hole. It deforms our society. It swallows up our lives. At a certain point it doesn't matter how gentle your intentions are. The gulf between your wealth and our wealth is killing us.

A long beat.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Do you understand? Does that make any sense at all?

Another long beat.

FATHER

You are still young, Adam. One day you will become more like The Fonz. The Fonz is never sad.

Adam leans back, deflated.

ADAM

That's right. Good point.

They sit and watch in silence.

INT. PRISON - VISITING AREA - DAYS LATER

CLOSE on a smartphone screen: Adam's beat-up, ancient-looking iPhone 11. A finger flicks through images of his mural.

WIDER: Adam sits across from his mother in a deeply depressing, nearly-empty prison visiting area.

After a moment:

ADAM

Anyway. It's better in person, obviously.

BETH

It's incredible.

ADAM

It's fine. There's still too much empty space. Every time I see it I find another part I want to redo --

BETH

Adam.

He looks up: there are tears in his eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)

I'm your mother and you could smear paint on a Kleenex and I'd think it's beautiful. But I'd think this was a masterpiece even if I'd never met you.

ADAM

Thank you.

(a pause. Mumbles:)

Too bad nobody's ever gonna see it.

BETH

Quit that. Someone will. And you picked paint that won't fade for a long time, right?

ADAM

Yeah...

BETH

Then I don't care if no one sees it. I'll sleep better just knowing it's standing there.

ADAM

Why?

BETH

Because one day history's gonna judge us. And I don't want the conquerors writing our only records.

A beat. Adam thinks about this. After a moment, he takes a deep breath and broaches a difficult topic.

ADAM

So I talked to Chloe.

BETH

About?

ADAM

They're moving up to a condo in the floating city. With her whole family, and Buddy. And I asked them if they'd take Natalie with them.

Beth leans back, taking this in.

ADAM (CONT'D)

She'd have her own room with them. We found a private school that'll take her. Teach her Vuvv language, get her introduced to the right people.

BETH

Can't you both go?

ADAM

Someone needs to stay in the house with Father. I asked it, and it said she could go, but I'd need to stay.

BETH

So you'd be alone with that thing?

ADAM

Until it gets sick of our house.

BETH

When do you think it will?

ADAM

Who knows. I would have thought a long time ago. But it seems to really like the TV. Maybe life on the mothership is stressful. I guess it's having a nice time.

Beth shakes her head.

BETH

I'd be worried about you. It's getting worse and worse down here.

ADAM

I know. It's why I want to get Nat out.

Beth reaches out to take his hand.

A CORRECTIONS OFFICER nearby yells, and their hands recede, just before their fingertips touch.

BETH

You're a very good man for even thinking about doing this.

ADAM

It sounds weird, you calling me a "man."

BETH

It's what you are now.

ADAM

I'm still a minor for another four days.

BETH

Sure. But you're a grown-up if there ever was one. Listen to yourself.

ADAM

Guess so.

Beth looks at him.

BETH

So have you talked to her about it, yet?

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY - TWO HOURS LATER

Natalie picks a grubby-looking tomato from her garden: it's shriveled and crawling with bugs, which have eaten a hole into it.

She and Adam are in the middle of a difficult conversation.

ADAM

Look, I know it's a lot to take in.

NATALIE

What if it's horrible up there?

ADAM

I mean, I'm sure it will be. I've been. The people are awful. Worse than awful.

NATALIE

So you're gonna send me to live with a bunch of awful people?

ADAM

I am. Cuz there's nothing left down here.

NATALIE

You're down here. Mom's down here.

ADAM

Only for another five years. By then, you'll be working some fancy job and you can pay for us all to move up.

A beat.

Natalie turns back to her tomatoes, and begins crushing one to pulp in her hands.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Hey, hey. Come on. Don't destroy those.

CHLOE

They're inedible.

ADAM

Yeah, but you worked so hard on them.

She drops the pulp into the dirt.

NATALIE

What if I change? What if I end up like Hunter, crawling around on my hands and knees for those things?

ADAM

I don't see that happening.

NATALIE

But you said yourself, everyone up there is --

ADAM

Horrible, yeah. But you're so far in the opposite direction of horrible that I'd put money on you changing the whole place for the better faster than it changes you even one inch for the worse.

NATALIE

What will you do down here, by yourself?

ADAM

I'll find something to do.

A little beat.

NATALIE

(looking down at the dirt)
It'll be weird without you.

ADAM

Yeah. Good-weird. Soon as you arrive up there you'll realize that's actually the best part of this whole thing. Not having to look at my stupid face every day.

She looks up at him, cracks the smallest of smiles.

NATALIE

It is an unusually stupid face.

Natalie sudden EMBRACES ADAM, hard. Taking him by surprise.

ADAM

Hey now. You're getting tomato all over me.

NATALIE

Deal with it, dumbass.

WIDE: The two siblings, seated at the bottom of their gross little dirt-filled swimming pool, embracing.

Our MUSICAL THEME begins to play: full orchestra blaring its regal, ominous chords now. As we cut to....

80

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - DAYS LATER

80

Outside the house, the Marshes, Buddy, and Chloe are all preparing to depart for the shuttle, having packed their things into the trunk of a broken-down TAXI.

They finish their goodbyes: Adam hugs Chloe, things still a little strange between them, but an understanding there.

He shakes hands with Mr. Marsh, and with Hunter, who now looks truly insane, hairless and his face covered in what looks like Vaseline -- his cheapo approximation of the sauce.

He gets to Buddy, and they fist-bump, awkwardly.

INT. / EXT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE on Natalie's face looking out the back window the departing cab.

Her POV: Adam stands there on the curb, waving, growing smaller and smaller as he's swallowed up by the ruined neighborhood.

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - NIGHT - A FEW DAYS LATER

Adam sits across the dinner table from Father, with two empty seats. He's no longer wearing his wig.

There's a pathetic little cake in front of Adam, with a single birthday candle.

As Adam BLOWS OUT the candles, the music abruptly stops.

A CLAPPING sound.

He looks up: Father is slapping his paddles together, weirdly imitating applause.

After a moment of this, it stops.

FATHER
You are a human Man, now.

ADAM
Yes.

FATHER
And so I have decided that you are no longer my Wife.

ADAM
...That's good news.

FATHER
Instead, you are now my Best Friend.

A long silence. Adam's expression is blank.

ADAM
...Got it.

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Adam lies in bed.

Father lies beside him, seeming to sleep.

Adam turns over, restless. Unable to drift off.

A silence.

Quietly, so as not to wake Father, he gets up from bed.

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Adam watches television, alone on the couch.

Flipping channels. The light flickering on his face.

Television has gotten weird: it's all old reruns, and lonely public-access stations, and many channels just static.

He turns it off.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Adam, bundled in a jacket against the cold, trudges through the burnt-out neighborhood. He wears a heavy backpack and carries a can of paint in each hand.

In the distance, a camp of homeless people clustered around a fire.

Faintly, from the fire, the sound of someone crying, wailing.

Adam trudges on.

EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - NIGHT

Adam reaches his destination:

The huge old school, standing completely empty in the night.

A cold wind whips his face.

CLOSE-UPS:

Adam wedges the flashlight between two rocks, propping it up to aim its beam.

He mixes paints together on a palette.

He pulls Mr. Reilly's brushes from their case, flicks his finger across their bristles.

MEDIUM SHOT: Adam sits on one of the paint cans, filling in an empty corner of the mural with a small new image: himself, blowing out a birthday candle, across the table from Father.

WIDE SHOT: Adam continues to paint, adding to the enormous mural.

VERY WIDE SHOT: Adam is the only living thing on the campus of the deserted school.

SUPER WIDE SHOT: We can see the whole neighborhood now. A desolate expanse. Adam toils quietly away, his tiny flashlight the only point of light in the darkness.

End credits.