

THE TENDER BAR

Screenplay by
William Monahan

Based on the book by JR MOEHRINGER

BLACK SCREEN

ON SOUND:

A HIT OF THE SEVENTIES (ideally something underwatery here and not upbeat)

FADE UP ON:

INT. MOM'S TERRIBLE GREMLIN/EXT. MEMORIAL FIELD, MANHASSET, NY. DAY (MOVING)

PULLING BACK FROM THE CAR RADIO, we see that we are tooling through period Manhasset and that a Mom (MOM) and her young son (YOUNG JR) are on a drive the purpose of which is explained by the CAMERA moving back through the piles of boxes, suitcases, lamps and trashbagged gear in the seatless rear of the Gremlin...

REVERSE TO SEE that

YOUNG JR and MOM are on one of their terrible pining drives, pining for stability in the American stand in for stability, the automobile. MOM is pretty, tired, in her twenties, a member of the pioneer generations of single moms...

YOUNG JR, who, head against the window, is as ever watching out over the moving world for father figures, maybe his father... and he sees (as the car radio plays a hit of this very day...)

YOUNG JR'S POV (AND THEN VARIOUS):

MEMORIAL FIELD

NINE MEN IN ORANGE SOFTBALL UNIFORMS (a practice team) are racing around a diamond at Memorial Field. The shirts have THE SILHOUETTE OF CHARLES DICKENS silk-screened in black on the backs, and the shoulders.

The Practice is transacted in beautiful light.

YOUNG JR in the loaded car is transfixed by the beauty of the field, the heroic stances of the men (various, with time ruptures) spitting, drinking beer, hitting someone in the nuts with a hotdog, actually playing, etc. One bald player stands fiercely and majestically at bat...

YOUNG JR
(to MOM)
Wait wait! I think that's Uncle
Charlie!

YOUNG JR (who can be and will be anywhere from 6-8 during the YOUNG JR parts of the film) is not an exclamation points kinda kid, but more an optimistic observer, daring to be disappointed.

UNCLE CHARLIE takes his swing....

An "oh Jesus" eye roll from MOM, who looks like she has been crying, but MOM pulls over dutifully, parks, blows her nose, and nods: go see him: go. As the song stops, MOM, in a precautionary way, remembers to bash the radio off ...and glance over as...

EXT. MEMORIAL FIELD. CONTINUOUS

YOUNG JR as in a state of pure idolatry gets out of the car and looks at his heroes, backlit, heroized as hell, despite their vast guts, miserable shanks, scant hair, and almost complete lack of athletic ability. They are practicing--no need to dress another team.

UNCLE CHARLIE, the chief GOD, now patrols the infield like a flamingo, his sunglasses following first a pitch and then a hit, and then the ball as

STEVE (beer-bellied God of liquor) parks one, lit like Achilles, shrouded in his own divine American light.

YOUNG JR watches the ball go.

LATER

MOM joins YOUNG JR on the bleachers but he is (maybe) irritated by her, he wants to watch his gods, the men.

MOM understands this: that you lose your baby by a million such cuts: (this is a thing that here can be played): she puts her handkerchief away in her bag.

YOUNG JR watches in adoration as we hear various voices off:

GUYS FROM THE BAR (O.S.)
Is that all you got, you
cocksucker, come on... Oh fuck you,
Charlie...

With equal adoration YOUNG JR spies:

THE BEER BARREL, filled with ice, canned beer, lit like the Holy Grail itself in this childhood magic hour. One Magician is drinking from a dripping can.

TWO SHOT JR AND MOM ON BLEACHERS

YOUNG JR
Why are those men so happy?

MOM
They're wasted.

YOUNG JR looks at her. Wasted?

MOM (CONT'D)
Drunk!

YOUNG JR
Oh.

MOM
Come on. We're going home. We're
going
(a long beat of distaste,
defeat, and in CU)
'home'. Again.

She drags away JR by the hand as he is still staring back at the men, and lifting a a wave to:

The silhouetted magnificent figure of UNCLE CHARLIE, who insofar as we see his features in the backlighting due an Aztec god, looks querulous...

MOMENTS LATER

As MOM AND YOUNG JR head to the car we again and more so see how loaded it is, the roof has a mattress and box spring piled on it and tied through the windows, and sticking out of the open Gremlin hatch. And though MOM has YOUNG JR by the hand he stares back at the fabulous drunks...

And UNCLE CHARLIE, not sure who he is seeing, stares after the terrible rust-scabbed car. Then he returns to the game. His sister returning home is not an unusual thing.

And as we go to black and the real opening (as Eighties music plays) we

FADE UP ON:

A TERRIBLE HOUSE ON LONG ISLAND—"THE HOUSE"—a dilapidated Cape in a color unknown to nature, its post-war living room picture window presiding over lushly grassed swamp above the cesspool. It is the Eighties, but it feels Seventies: the many cars in the driveway (as many cars as one would find at a medium sized apartment building) are mostly from the Sixties, and now another one is added, as we MOTOR right, and land on a jalopy (the terrible Gremlin) with its scurfs of panel rust and a smoking tailpipe.

In the silence after the engine clatter dies off we hear suburban birdsong, a radio baseball game, somewhere a lawn mower and somewhere further off a dull roar of traffic on the LIE.

TOYS from kids of various ages lie everywhere, from scooters to a crapped out MINIBIKE with no back wheel sitting on a milk crate.

CLOSER ON THE HOUSE, AT THE FRONT DOOR, as we hear two car doors close, hear the trunk open and close....

The FRONT DOOR OPENS and we see GRAMPA, the don't give a fuck owner of this don't give a fuck house.

What remains of his hair is a wreck, he is dressed like a 1940s bad ass auto mechanic, and he stands following the progress of his visitors with his eyes.

REVERSE onto GRAMPAS POV:

It is MOM, and beside her...

We MOTOR OVER and TIP DOWN (POV approximation):

Her son, a second grader, the perpetually seeking but optimistic YOUNG JR

REVERSE ON GRAMPA

Who wordlessly leaves the door open and retreats into the house: his form of welcome.

MOM and YOUNG JR now follow him, and MOM, her face suffused with all the regret of *another* return home, comes back from within to close the door behind she and YOUNG JR and here we see the PINEAPPLE DOOR KNOCKER, the caked paint, the metal stick on sign that says "NO PEDDLERS". And here we

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE. LATER

DETROIT IRON at its finest becomes first audible and then visible as UNCLE CHARLIE pulls up to the house, in a Chuck Berry class Cadillac convertible. He emerges in his uniform, looks at MOM's crammed car: here it is again.

YOUNG JR is looking out the window. UNCLE CHARLIE, flipping his KEYCHAIN, notices him, and gives a thumbs up to the solemn boy.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY

CLOSE DETAILS as a HUGE EXTENDED FAMILY formed by larger world failures and marriage collapses commences to feed itself around a huge dining room table so long that it needs two different table cloths.

The MEAL is what we are on first: it is a watery version of what here in America we call Chop Suey, except with bouys of halved hotdogs in it and sticking out of it, accompanied by WONDER BREAD and MARGARINE.

YOUNG JR is sitting uncertainly and it is through his eyes (handheld and responsive to action) that we see the energy and violence of the feeding as all adults, all of them smoking, feed the two toddlers, while everybody else (Kids ranging up to high school age, displaced from various aborted families with their mothers and back at the grandparents) lays in on the mismatched plates, eating, snuffling, salting heavily.

YOUNG JR scans the KIDS but he is most interested in UNCLE CHARLIE (mid thirties, hung over, dramatically entirely bald, still in his Dickens shirt), and GRAMPA, as previously described.

GRANDMOTHER does not sit, but, smoking, emerges in her housecoat with another package of WONDER BREAD, drops it and returns to the kitchen.

YOUNG JR and his mother eat (the mother as if she is born to it, as she is, and YOUNG JR being observant). No one remarks their presence. It is evidently very usual for refugees to arrive.

UNCLE CHARLIE, loading his plate again with the hotdog chop suey, fixing his eye on YOUNG JR, winks at him, and hands him 5 dollars.

GRAMPA has observed this inexplicable act, but keeps eating, saving his comment for later.

GRANDMOTHER (O.S., AND CU WITH A CIG
IN HER FACE)
(throwing dialog away
unheard as she potters
and totters around
kitchen...)

I guess you two will be in the
whereisit, maybe in there with the
older ones or maybe you can take
him in your room...I don't know.

GRAMPA

Everybody needs to know he cesspool
is not taking it so whoever can
take a leak outside do it but don't
let any son of a bitch see you
especially whats his name.

Points with a fork, vaguely, at neighbors.

But when YOUNG JR follows the eye-line indicated by the FORK
his POV lands on a crooked picture of JESUS indicating his
glowing SACRED HEART.

To the immediate left of Jesus (do this with a move) is a
HAGIOGRAPH OF JFK. TILT DOWN to the SIDEBOARD below these
main pictures and we see that the top of the sideboard is
LOADED with marriage pictures, army pictures, pictures of
kids, kids with kids, old people in hats beside jalopies or
wagons, the sideboard is groaning with photos, some of them
knocked over, or displaced by hand tools, baseball glove,
Readers DIGESTS, schoolbooks from various kids at various
ages. We are still without conversation, still in the clatter
and slurping (again MOM has settled right in, resentful and
silent as the trapped teenager she not long ago was), and
since there will be no expository dialog whatsoever here at
this point in the multigenerational Alamo let us say that the
house is inhabited by:

Uncle Charlie, Aunt Ruth, Aunt Ruth's five daughters and one
son, Grandpa, Grandpa, and now MOM and YOUNG JR who is
watching everything bug eyed, as the one alien attendee -and
an alien especially good at observation.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Put it in your pocket!

YOUNG JR realizes he means the 5 bucks still in his fist.

GRAMPA

(chewing)

Whyn't he put it towards the
'lectricity I would ask if it did
any goddam good.

YOUNG JR confusedly holds the 5 towards his grandfather.
GRAMPA stares at him. With outrage:

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

Who do you think I am.

Then he ignores YOUNG JR.

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

Like I said, all males, if you take
a leak, take it outside.

DOGS skirmish around the table and CAT now picks its way
across the sideboard. Via the progress of the cat YOUNG JR
notices:

A PICTURE OF MOM, and YOUNG JR as a baby. A FIGURE HAS BEEN
CUT OUT OF THIS PICTURE. We are on it tight when a hand as
if routinely tips the picture over on its face. This is
GRANDMA, who delivers to the table a SARAH LEE cake.

THE MALE COUSIN is staring evenly at YOUNG JR and holding a
Hamster.

LATER (THE HOUSE, VARIOUS, HANDHELD)

Little YOUNG JR looks into various rooms. Furniture dating
from the Roosevelt Administration, litters of toys, a Sears
sofa with a print of American Eagles and liberty bells, a TV
with some cousin working the rabbit ears, crawling babies,
another one screaming in a play pen and ripping at the
railing, MOM and RUTH bickering about something off in the
Kitchen, and now we are down the hall with YOUNG JR looking
into various rooms and then into (as kids run and screen
doors bang) the sanctum sanctorum...UNCLE CHARLIE'S ROOM, the
cell of a drinking monk with a book problem. A TRANSISTOR
RADIO (always close on the radios in this picture, and we
will find out why) broadcasts a horse race while UNCLE
CHARLIE lies biered on his Sunday hangover, wearing an eye-
mask, reaching blindly for a BUDWEISER, unaware of the nephew
looking at him somberly.

YOUNG JR continues down the hall and looks into a room where
he sees that his MOM has half unpacked and is sitting and
leaking tears. She holds out her arms:

He heads towards her. As she holds him and after a long beat:

YOUNG JR

I like it.

MOM

Do you?

YOUNG JR

It's people. I like to have people.

She hugs him, happy for that, but in shame and disappointment
that it's these people, *again*.

MOM

Tomorrow is another day.

YOUNG JR

I like it.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM (YOUNG JR AND MOM'S BEDROOM). NIGHT

And it's not continuous night. It's later. (Stuff has been unpacked). YOUNG JR is wakeful in bed, with his also wakeful MOM. They lie in bed like the world's strangest married couple. And MOM in fact is twisting the skin where her ring should be.

YOUNG JR

Why does Grampa say we should all clear out?

MOM

Because he's a selfish old prick who resents taking care of his family.

Long beat:

YOUNG JR

Like Dad?

Longer beat, and complicated.

MOM

No, honey. Grampa *resents* taking care of his family. Your father has never taken care of anybody at all.

YOUNG JR

Oh.

ANOTHER ANGLE

YOUNG JR, stained by light from streetlamp coming through nylon curtains, turns his head and looks at:

THE BEDSIDE RADIO, a big bakelite one in midcentury green, with a dial that is probably radium. He just stares at it and has not even reached for the radio when his mother (anticipating his compulsive action) says:

MOM

No.

YOUNG JR is used to this thing with the radio (being asked not to turn it on) and he lies back philosophically. On a music cue from the song that is to follow and JR'S face we

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN. DAY

WE are on the KITCHEN RADIO (another post WW2 number) as Aunt Ruth does dishes and various perhaps all members of the household go back in forth in the giant Altman film that is every crowded working class house.

The RADIO is playing "Working my Way Back to You." YOUNG JR is sitting at the table eating cereal with his cousins. All is normal until the song ends and...off the alarmed eyes of MOM, and GRANDMOTHER...

AUNT RUTH lashes out with soapy hand and cracks the off button a good one *just as a low, awfully good, very Seventies male radio voice says...*

THE VOICE

This is Johnny Michaels, The Voice,
and that was Workin...

CRACK! THE RADIO is off, perhaps even destroyed, and the whole FAMILY is silent, pretending this incident never happened, returning to its activities of washing, pouring milk, scratching, eating smoking and not communicating.

YOUNG JR sits over his cereal, spoon poised.

YOUNG JR

That was my father.

THE RADIO hits the floor.

Everyone continues eating.

AUNT RUTH (OS)

No, that was a radio.

UNCLE CHARLIE, more alert than the rest, is staring through his hangover at JR.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Eat your cereal.

UNCLE CHARLIE eats his.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BACK YARD. LATER

UNCLE CHARLIE, smoking, has a deck of CARDS and is teaching YOUNG JR some game or other, dealing from a buckled deck.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(shuffling and squinting
through cigarette smoke)

You were very young when your father left, so you probably don't know that your father is an asshole. But your father is an asshole.

(holding up a lectorial
finger)

Not just because he *left*, because people can leave *without* being an asshole, no one knows what is in the human fucking heart or any given fucking relationship, *trust* me, but I'm saying your father's an asshole not because of any specific action but *because he's an asshole. Even in repose.*

(speaking now around
fuming cigarette and
dealing)

One of the ways he's an asshole is *he can't handle his liquor.*

YOUNG JR listens gravely. *This could be serious male information.*

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Can't. Handle. His liquor.

(deals)

That's the base, root, and cause of many accidental assholes. If you can't handle your liquor you can be an asshole *accidentally*. However, your father was not an asshole *accidentally*. He's an asshole who can't handle his liquor. *Also*. Listen, if you're not going to be any good at cards I *will* stop teaching you.

YOUNG JR

Don't stop teaching me. Please.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Two rules: I don't let you win. If you beat me, you beat me, *but I don't let you win.*

YOUNG JR nods.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That way you get a jump on life. By tasting defeat. You don't suck at sports but. I was watching you out in the yard. You're not very good at sports and won't get better so I suggest other activities, to avoid disappointment, tears, above all, delusion. What do you like to do most?

YOUNG JR

Read.

UNCLE CHARLIE

I read. However, I can also play sports. Listen, here's the thing about the radio. You're gonna look for your father in the radio. You think your father is *in* the radio. He is at least *on* the radio. But he is an asshole who is on the radio. Don't try to play sports and don't think your father is going to save you. You'll do fine. That's all I have to say. The game is 5 card stud.

YOUNG JR looks at him, and we

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM. NIGHT

We are CLOSE ON:

AND CLOSER ON

THE BEDSIDE RADIO, until it fills the screen.

YOUNG JR, face lighted by the radio, reaches out and turns the dial. One of the old bandaaid-colored earphones is in his ear, and we are hearing what he is hearing" the squelching search between stations of varying strength, as he looks for THE VOICE. He hears someone coming and smashes the radio off and pulls the covers up and pretends to be sleeping.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

MOM is looking for THE VOICE in her own way. Dressed for her (new) secretarial job, she rummages in the MAILBOX, then bends and looks deep into the MAILBOX, then closes the MAILBOX deliberately. These are things that a single mom can play. She exits the shot and we hear her car start.

INT. MOM'S CAR. CONTINUOUS

MOM starts to reach for the RADIO. Then doesn't. Son of a bitch. She puts the crap car into gear and heads off to work.

INT. THE BEDROOM. DAY

YOUNG JR lies on his bed with hands propping his chin. He is staring at the RADIO. *The radio isn't on.*

YOUNG JR
(To dead RADIO)
Mom could use some money.

There is strange raking light effect.

YOUNG JR (CONT'D)
She's really tired after work.

CLOSER ON THE RADIO.

YOUNG JR (CONT'D)
(a long beat:)
I'm starting Little League.

CLOSER until we dissolve THROUGH the RADIO, and we

CUT TO:

INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN CAR. DAY

On the face of a young man (JR in his twenties, dressed for INTERVIEW DAY), rocking North towards New Haven, lost in a study of the past. His books and coat and backpack and gear and some books and notebooks are spread out. He pulls in his legs and sits up as A PRIEST looms.

PRIEST
Is this seat taken?

JR moves to accommodate him.

The PRIEST removes his Homburg and sits down and licks a thumb to turn a page of his newspaper.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

What are you thinking about, young man?

JR

The past.

And we cut to MOMENTS later (leaving the Priest place-set and JR losing himself in memory again) and as JR looks out the window again we

CUT TO:

INT. UNCLE CHARLIE'S ROOM. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE has a blinder of a hangover and is lying in bed in heroic endurance of light, pain, dehydration there in his book-filled bachelor's flop. He rips a Gatorade, with a grunt, from a bag that YOUNG JR, and then holds out his hand for the change.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You tell your cousin I said you could ride his bike. It's not his bike anyway. It's a *house* bike. I found it at the dump and fixed it for all you little assholes. And they're going to Colorado. It's *your* bike. Oh holy Jesus mother of God.

YOUNG JR

How did you get sick?

UNCLE CHARLIE reopens one eye, like the wall eye of a whale.

UNCLE CHARLIE

I'm not *sick*. It's Saturday morning. This is the way it is. For men. This is Saturday morning. As it is for men.

He sits up wretchedly.

YOUNG JR

Oh.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Take this money back, go get me cigarettes at the bar.

THE PHONE RINGS

UNCLE CHARLIE stares at it warily. Pop eyed.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Get the phone before your
Grandmother gets it! I'm not here!

What?

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
That means you say I'm not here
even if I am. Oh Jesus!

YOUNG JR
(answering)
Hello?

Crackling silence. And then the 1970s forced, complacent basso Ted Baxter voice with that affected and region-less TV/Radio accent and false forced bass that characterized minor players in USA broadcast media decades ago:

THE VOICE
Hey! I know there are plenty of rug
rats there at su casa is not mi
casa but I'm wondering if this is
JR.

Long crackling silence.

YOUNG JR
Dad?

UNCLE CHARLIE opens an eye warily.

UNCLE CHARLIE
The fuck.

THE VOICE
That's right, buddy. If this is JR,
I'm your father!

UNCLE CHARLIE
Gimme the phone.

YOUNG JR
Mom's not here, she has another job
on Saturdays and Sundays. She works
all the time.

UNCLE CHARLIE
That's right, stick it to him.

THE VOICE

I'm not calling for your *mother*,
kiddo, I'm calling for *you*. How'd
you like to go to a ball game with
your old man.

We hear ice tinkling in a glass, smoking.

YOUNG JR

Really?

THE VOICE

Sure! Ball game (drinks) with your
old man!

YOUNG JR

(a grave exciting matter)
Mets or Yankees.

THE VOICE

Whatever you like.

YOUNG JR

Uncle Charlie says the Yankees are
assholes. But the Mets drink at the
Dickens.

THE VOICE

Have you been to The Dickens?

YOUNG JR

No.

THE VOICE

How is your uncle Charlie?

YOUNG JR

(to Uncle Charlie)
How are you? He wants to know.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Tell him still short thirty bucks.
(gives up)
Tell him Mets. Mets play the Braves
tomorrow night.

YOUNG JR

Mets play the Braves tomorrow
night.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Doesn't mean he'll show up. Oh
Jesus go get me some cigarettes.

THE VOICE

Tell you what, Sport, I'll get a couple of tickets and pick you up there at your grandfathers at six thirty.

YOUNG JR

Wow. OK. Great. Thank you.

THE VOICE

We have a lot to catch up on, you and me.

JR nods.

YOUNG JR

OK.

THE VOICE

Bye now. Remember, six thirty.

The VOICE has a coughing fit and we hear a girl asking where her other shoe is as THE VOICE hangs up.

YOUNG JR replaces the receiver. UNCLE CHARLIE stares at him somberly. Starts to say something. Then: fuck it, not his business. He goes off on his own business.

YOUNG JR is in a rapture.

UNCLE CHARLIE

The cigarettes.

CUT TO:

INT. A METRO NORTH TRAIN. DAY

JR is remembering this, in pain, looking out the window, his forehead on the glass as he was as a child with the car with Mom.

JR (V.O.)

He said be ready at 6.30. I was ready at 4:30. So as not to fuck up. You always remember fucking up. So you don't want to fuck up.

PRIEST

Are you reading this, young man?

JR shakes his head, mouths no. Indicates take the paper. When the PRIEST takes the NEWSPAPER it reveals:

A half drunk PINT of RUM.

JR and the PRIEST meet each other's eyes

JR
(as if it explains it)
Interview at Yale.

and we

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

YOUNG JR has his METS CAP on, he has his Dave Cash mitt, and he is watching every car that approaches the house – and then passes by.

JR (V.O.)
The thing is that day I felt like I had fucked up. That's the thing to remember about a kid. The kid thinks that he has fucked up.

YOUNG JR scans the street, watches in both directions, watches cars that do not stop, already losing heart but not wanting to go there yet.

JR (V.O.)
My mother hadn't saved any pictures of my father, and he was cut out of the pictures they had at the house, so I didn't know what he looked like, and I hadn't been to New York City yet to see his face on billboards and buses. I couldn't have picked him out of a crowd. But I wondered if it was like a thing you would always know. As if you would always know your father instantly. It was *possible*.

YOUNG JR as the light fades keeps watching.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE. EARLY EVENING

YOUNG JR is still sitting there, and a light has come on in the house. GRANDMA looks out, decides to leave the boy alone.

ON SOUND, on the summer air, we hear that the Mets game has started and that it is playing on the radio. We hear it from several houses.

YOUNG JR sits there, his face covered with tears, and then we DO hear a car, and we hear it shut off, and we hear footsteps, and we stay on YOUNG JR until the right moment to reveal that MOM is standing and looking at him.

There's nothing to say. The boy with the hat and the glove whose father hasn't come.

She sits beside him. Stay on him.

MOM

We're the two musketeers. Right?
We're the two musketeers.

He nods, crying silently.

CUT TO:

INT. A METRO NORTH TRAIN. DAY

JR looking out the window, head against the glass. More than ten years later he sniffs, rubs his eye, looks philosophical: the same optimism of the tiny boy.

UNCLE CHARLIE (V.O.)

(over bar sounds)

Because what are you gonna do.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE, bartending at The Dickens, is behind the bar, *owning* the bar, in motion, polishing glasses, pouring drinks.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Shit or wind your watch. Call it a day or run for fuckin president? I ask you.

NO STEAMBOAT CAPTAIN OR KING has ever been more resplendent than UNCLE CHARLIE behind the bar, with its dazzling glassware and bottles, its carved masculine wood, its central shield with the silhouette of Dickens on it.

UNCLE CHARLIE is laughing with friends, and now he notices something, makes a Coke from the gun, pops two cherries into it...

And SLIDES IT COWBOY FASHION DOWN THE BAR (we are on the glass) to...

To YOUNG JR, who is right there at the bar, up on his knees on a stool, doing his schoolwork— a bit— but mainly watching UNCLE CHARLIE... and the thing about the Dickens (revealed as UNCLE CHARLIE moves) is that the shelves have as many *books* as bottles. In fact BOTTLES AND BOOKS compete for *shelf space*...

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Yeah there are books. Bar is called the fuckin' Charles Dickens. OK so what do you need me to do?

YOUNG JR

Mom can't go to something.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(very seriously)

Can't go to what?

INT. SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE, pissed off, sits there holding his hat. YOUNG JR beside him on the psychologist's couch.

PSYCHOLOGIST

How can, do you think, I can help.

This is a weird question, since he called the meeting.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Someone said he was having tantrums. I think you said he was having tantrums. His mother's at work, she's a secretary, she's busy, why don't you tell me what this is about.

PSYCHOLOGIST

The boy won't tell me what his name stands for.

UNCLE CHARLIE

His name is JR. It doesn't stand for anything. Deal with it.

The PSYCHOLOGIST makes a note.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Look, this is a weird time for me to say I'm not a Psychologist...

PSYCHOLOGIST

Why do you say that?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Because I'm sitting here with a Psychologist who maybe knows I'm not a psychologist. *What are you, inert?* OK I get it, you have this thing going on where nothing is face value and no one is as smart as you, and you sit there and wait for errors of fuckin baseline perception or something, I get it. We all have our jobs. This is yours. Knock yourself out.

He looks at his watch.

PSYCHOLOGIST

JR, those are his initials.

YOUNG JR sits there.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Or the contraction for Junior. What the fuck's the difference.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Well there's a very big difference if it is being concealed from him that he is a Junior because there is no Senior in his life.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Listen...He Might not have ever thought that until you decided to unveil your fucking bullshit on the subject. That's what I think. Listen, do you want the Socratic method from me, on you and all your works? Cos I'll do it, I'll tell you what I think, and you'll be strapped to a stretcher.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Can you explain that?

UNCLE CHARLIE

What I said is what I meant. Are you out of your fucking mind?

PSYCHOLOGIST

It is my belief that the uncertainty about the meaning of his name and the continual questions about it have left him without identity.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Oh! He has no identity! Hence an identity *crisis*.

PSYCHOLOGIST

He has no identity, which causes rage.

UNCLE CHARLIE

He has *dubiety* about his identity supposedly. Seems like a normal kid to me. Seems like a normal person. Are you sure about your identity?

CLOSE ON UNCLE CHARLIE:

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

The absence of his father seems to really interest you. You cast it as a negative, but let's be serious...You're having a kid in her, traumatizing him. And you've been asking his mother to dinner.

The PSYCHOLOGIST, trapped:

PSYCHOLOGIST

I...I...I...

UNCLE CHARLIE

You'll scare and traumatize a kid so you can hit on his mother?

Long silence.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

OK, we're leaving.

And he gets up and before he does the next thing (which is probably hitting the psychologist), we

CUT TO:

INT. THE HOUSE. DAY

MOM is making tuna fish sandwiches from a bowl on the table, staring intently at YOUNG JR. GRANDPA is shuffling back and forth.

GRANDPA (O.S.)
Winstons taste good like a
cigarette should.... Apricots!

He farts OS.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)
(as ever when farting)
I didn't do that.

MOM creates sandwiches on Wonderbread, fast, never taking her eyes off YOUNG JR, who looks for his part over at the table RADIO, and MOM puts a napkin over it and puts a stray pack of Christmas decorations on top of the radio.

MOM
Your grandfather has a photographic memory. He knows Greek and Latin. But he here is this, the furniture is held together with duct tape, he's doing this. Farting and saying he didn't do it and saying "apricots" for no reason. That's what he did with going to college.

GRANDPA
Survey guy calls up says what's the best thing about Manhasset. I say proximity to Manhattan. Survey guy says whats proximity. I say you stupid foolish bastard. Proximity for example is when your family never leaves your proximity.

YOUNG JR is flashing on this, his MOM.

MOM
You are a stingy, crazy old bastard. You are not stingy with money...

GRANDPA
Haven't got any!

MOM
You are stingy with love!

GRANDPA burps and leaves the kitchen, saying:

GRANDPA
I didn't do that.

MOM frisbees the plate with a sandwich down in front of YOUNG JR, who catches it.

MOM
Girls become wives and mothers was his point of view....

GRANDPA (O.S.)
You became *one* of em!

MOM
Shut up you old turd.
(to YOUNG JR)
Because he is stingy with love and understanding is why I have no education. That's why you, I swear to God, I have no idea how, are going to Harvard or Yale...

SOUND OF A HUGE FART OS.

INTERCUT GRANDPA

He is his chair and has a beer.

GRANDPA (O.S.)
I didn't do that.

MOM
You are going to Harvard or Yale.

YOUNG JR is wondering now if he can eat his sandwich.

UNCLE CHARLIE
(coming through in his underwear to get a coke)
What to make up for your disappointments?

MOM
Harvard or Yale.

GRANDPA (O.S.)
Harvard or Yale! This from a woman who earns thirty bucks a day.

MOM
And after college, at Harvard or Yale, *you're going to law school.*

GRANDPA (O.S.)

So you can sue you father for child support!

MOM

So he can help you with your fines about the septic tank!!!

She kisses YOUNG JR lingeringly on the head. Then grabs her stuff and heads out to work.

UNCLE CHARLIE sits down, drinks his coke reflectively, lights a butt, and mumbles over it:

UNCLE CHARLIE

She's wrong about college but we can't tell her. She needs to believe it. Simple people need to believe in college. They're vulnerable. Look at him in there. Is there any difference if he didn't go to Dartmouth. I ask you.

GRANDPA

Apricots.
(farts)
I didn't do that.

The BACK SCREEN DOOR OPENS

UNCLE CHARLIE looks up.

UNCLE CHARLIE

What the *fuck*.

Standing there, against the blazing light...

Is

THE VOICE. He is a well muscled boozier in a tight white t-shirt, jeans, cowboy boots, shades.

UNCLE CHARLIE gestures at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Give your father a hug. What the fuck else are we to do. What you do, come over the back fence after his mother left?

The VOICE sits at the table, arm around a stunned YOUNG JR.

THE VOICE (O.S.)

How's it hanging, Charlie?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Like an Irish Catholic.
Metaphysically and to the right.
(drinks his beer)
You still got the Clap, asshole?

THE VOICE

Your Uncle Charlie's a card.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Where's my thirty bucks.

CUT TO:

INT. THE VOICE'S CAR. DAY

It is something expensive and not paid for. Nips roll up and down the dashboard. THE VOICE drives Long Island streets. Unreadable eyes behind mirrors. Smoking ceaselessly.

THE VOICE

So, you like living at your
grandfather's house?

YOUNG JR

Yes. I mean, no.

THE VOICE realizes that this might be weird territory where he might be asked to step up in some way.

THE VOICE

Yes or no?

YOUNG JR

I mean I like it but Mom doesn't.

THE VOICE

Your grandfather's a good man.
Marches to his own drummer. I like
that about him.

YOUNG JR

Mom says he might have lost his
mind.

THE VOICE

Well, there's that also! Sometimes
your own drummer is a bad idea.

YOUNG JR

It makes Mom sad having to keep
going to Grampa's house.

THE VOICE

And blames me?

No answer from YOUNG JR.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Women sometimes don't think things through about cause and effect. They want freedom, but they get it and they blame you for dispensing it. That's my experience! One swinging dick to another. I can give that to you.

(with narcissistic pleasure)

Your mother says you listen to your old man on the radio a lot.

YOUNG JR

She says I listen too much. Or try to find you. You change stations a lot.

THE VOICE

Ah, you know, Management.

Lights a cigarette and while puffing:

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Would you like to be a disk jockey when you grow up?

YOUNG JR

I'm going to be a lawyer.

Spit take.

THE VOICE

Jesus! Why?

YOUNG JR

Mom says.

THE VOICE

They say a lot of shit. Believe anything. OK!

YOUNG JR looks around. They have arrived back in front of the house.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

(coughing fit)

Good to see you young man, I have to go to a barbecue meeting with a sponsor.

YOUNG JR

Can I come?

THE VOICE

(quite simply)

No.

He reaches in the glove compartment, starts to give an ENVELOPE of money to YOUNG JR, then thinks a minute, and then takes out half the money and *then* hands the envelope to YOUNG JR.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Tell your mom not to spend it all in one place and as for you, keep listening to the radio!

He chucks YOUNG JR on the chin.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

See you soon, Junior.

YOUNG JR

A doctor at school says I have no identity.

THE VOICE

Well! Jesus. Prove him wrong. See you on the flip side.

He reaches and opens the passenger door. He waits for YOUNG JR to get out. And smiles the dazzling THE VOICE film star smile. YOUNG JR gets out. UNCLE CHARLIE replaces YOUNG JR in the frame.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Hey, asshole. Nice day with the kid.

THE VOICE

Don't go there, Charlie! You know what happens when we go there.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Thirty bucks or get out of the fuckin' car.

INT. A METRO NORTH TRAIN. DAY

YOUNG JR is still heading North to New Haven, the PRIEST is snapping through the broadsheet paper, and eyeing the troubled young man periodically.

JR (V.O.)

A little while later, after being arrested while on air for non payment of child support, The Voice paid a fraction of what he owed and fled the state. Years later I learned that it was about this same period that he called up drunk and said he had put a contract on my mother's life. He also threatened to kidnap me, but Uncle Charlie thought this was a less serious threat, as kidnapping comes with responsibilities. Still, I was warned to never go with my father, if I ever had the chance.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE has a shiner and cut lip and cut knuckles.

UNCLE CHARLIE

I believe in full disclosure. Your father kicked my ass. Your father kicks almost everybody's ass. He can't drink. At his own wedding, he pushes your mother, he kicks my ass, and then when the cops come he's running up and down the sidewalk assaulting passersby. He kick's a cop's ass. He gets loose, they go on their honeymoon. Listen to this. It turns out the trip to Scotland they went on, and God the fuck knows what happened over there, was supposed to be a prize from a Scotch company given out by his radio station. *He fuckin stole it.* The trip to Scotland. When reproached, he kicked the shit out of the general manager.

YOUNG JR

Am I really a Junior?

A long beat.

UNCLE CHARLIE
I'm afraid you are. Initially.

INTERCUT:

YOUNG JR in a darkened living room watching LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. The scene in which:

LAWRENCE
Ali. My father didn't marry my mother.

ALI
I see.

LAWRENCE
I'm sorry.

ALI
It seems to me that you are free to choose your own name then.

LAWRENCE
Yes, I suppose I am.

ALI
"El Aurens" is best.

YOUNG JR watches with shining eyes as ALI burns the British uniform of the sleeping Lawrence.

BACK IN THE BAR:

A CUSTOMER (O.S.)
Charlie I kinda feel myself getting sober over here.

UNCLE CHARLIE
That's your wife. She put a spell on you. She cast this spell so maybe once a week you can speak English and your dick works. She wants to know what it's like.

A CUSTOMER
Ah fuck yourself.

YOUNG JR adores this, is warmed by it, he loves the men.

INT. THE BEDROOM. NIGHT

YOUNG JR AND MOM lie in bed. Clock ticking.

YOUNG JR
Why did you marry him?

MOM
I was young. I was dumb.

YOUNG JR
I don't want to be a Junior. I
don't want to have the same name.
Can we not tell anybody who doesn't
know?

She nods, blinking tears. Holds him.

MOM
You can have any name you want.

JR (V.O.)
I started being all right with The
Voice being the biggest dick in the
universe, plus psycho, because,
after all, there were men to look
up to, and, like Uncle Charlie, the
men were at the bar.

INT. THE DICKENS. NIGHT

The DICKENS is in full cry. UNCLE CHARLIE is not working, he
is drinking, holding forth, and arm wrestling.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Ok the bet is if you lose you have
to wear a red sox cap in your seats
at Shea for nine games *non-*
negotiable.

UNCLE CHARLIE wins: the crowd of Patrons scream.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Say good bye to him, and collect
any money he owes now, you'll never
see him again.

He picks up YOUNG JR and puts him on a bar stool.

A CUSTOMER
Get that kid out of here.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Fuck you, this is Manhasset.
Everybody comes to the bar. The bar
is life.
(to YOUNG JR)
(MORE)

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Watch the game, I have heavy timber
on this game. Watch the Knicks.

YOUNG JR is just delighted by this.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I gotta watch him, where else am I
gonna take him. His mother is
working. His father is a douche.

(to YOUNG JR)

Ok, look, these are the Male
Sciences. This is your drink, and
this is your pack of butts. They go
here, and there. See that guy's
money over there on the bar? The
way he's putting it in his pocket?

YOUNG JR looks. We see it.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You don't keep your money like
that. That's keeping your money
like a drunk. That's not correct.
You know what you also do?

YOUNG JR waits.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You take care of your mother. You
take care of, if you have one,
women. And if you do this, if you
drink, you keep your shit together.
If your shit is not together, you
don't drink. You don't want to be
one of the crybabies down in the
place, talking like Jesus came down
and made them late for work, took
all their money, made them drink
Old Hammerhead with a vanilla coke
back for thirty years, you with me?
This is about being a man. You have
your cigarettes here, your drink is
there, you don't keep your money
like a drunk. Here in your wallet,
in the secret compartment, this is
where you keep your stashie,
hundred bucks, five, whatever the
economy dictates, *and you don't
drink that.*

YOUNG JR nods. OK.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Let's see. You hold doors, you take care of your mother. I can show you to change a tire and jump a car...that's about it! You go to work, you take care of your mother, you don't drink your *stashies*, you can change a tire, jump a car. And that's it. Bang you're done. Male sciences. Also you don't hit a woman, ever, *up to and including* she has stabbed you with scissors. OK that's it. Male sciences. Done.

YOUNG JR is looking at the books behind the bar.

YOUNG JR

Can people read those books?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Are you soft?

YOUNG JR

No I mean can *I* read them.

UNCLE CHARLIE

What's the name of this bar?

YOUNG JR

The Dickens.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Do you know who that is?

YOUNG JR

The Owner?

UNCLE CHARLIE

(giving up)

Read as many as you like. Take em back in the poker room. Take em *all*. You read enough, you fill up, and it starts to come out the other end. Then you're a writer.

(in a kinder, quieter, way)

You're always looking for something that might be relevant in the long run. I think you're looking for higher meaning out of all this shit, which, as a resident of Long Island, creeps me out.

(MORE)

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(to Customer)

Yes, what can I get you.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON:

A 1940s TYPEWRITER. In a holy, choring, fall of light from an attic window.

YOUNG JR pokes at one key, then another.

JR (O.S.)

I discovered the attic, and a typewriter that had belonged to Grampa back when he gave a shit. Soon I was writing The Family Gazette.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

YOUNG JR sits tensely as the family reads THE FAMILY GAZETTE, which is pretty much what it ought to be, at breakfast. Each present member of the family (director's choice, but definitely UNCLE CHARLIE, MOM, GRANDMA, GRANDPA) reads their copy with an intensity of attention, or lack thereof, that reflects their characters. Reckon there is a range from "reading anything at breakfast" to crapulous objection. YOUNG JR watches from a distance with an artist's anxiety.

MOM

This is wonderful, JR.

GRANDPA

"Family Gazette". This is no family.

GRANDMA

Not with you in it.

GRANDPA

This is like seagulls on my paycheck.

Uncle Charlie decides to take THE FAMILY GAZETTE seriously. He decides perhaps that the work in itself is serious enough to take seriously. Then he throws the Family Gazette down into a plate of egg yolk.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK. I'd avoid the drawing. Just leave that out. Here it is. I know a lot of people who think they are writers. In most cases—you will find this in life—they are *not*. You don't wanna be one of those guys trust me. There are seven, eight at the bar. Everybody has a pen, everybody has some paper, everybody had to write *something* at *some* point, so they think, oh if I had TIME, if I fuckin knew somebody, etcetera. How do I phrase this, don't be one of those guys. Like Bob at the bar.

GRANDMA

Who's Bob?

UNCLE CHARLIE

A man tied to a sled of self delusion and illiteracy going down a hill of irrelevance. OK, first you have to have "it" whatever it is. You have to have it immediately or you don't have it. I say you have it.

MOM

See?

UNCLE CHARLIE

I'm not saying you're good, I'm saying you could be.

YOUNG JR looks ravenously interested in this possibility.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Come with me.

CUT TO:

INT. UNCLE CHARLIE'S ROOM. MOMENTS LATER

The cheap sliding closet doors are stuck. UNCLE CHARLIE takes the doors completely off the tracks, revealing to YOUNG JR'S widened eyes...

BOOKS stacked floor to ceiling, back three deep. We see: every college English standard, plus everything that derives from successful exposure to same.

YOUNG JR gasps.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK. What you do is read all those.
If you don't read all those, I
don't want to talk to you. However,
I also don't want to talk to you
about those. What you do is...you
Read all those, until it comes out
the other end. That sounds
disgusting. But there it is.

UNCLE CHARLIE leaves for the day—carrying the doors. They are
no longer needed. The books have been exposed.

YOUNG JR stares at the pirate treasure.

UNCLE CHARLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(to MOM)

Don't look at him when he's having
a private personal moment, Jesus,
it's pathetic. Mom used to look at
me when I was shaving. You know
what I did? I grew a beard!!!! So
she wouldn't look at me with
"wonder" and "love" when I was
fucking shaving!

YOUNG JR reaches and picks up DAVID COPPERFIELD. The
silhouette on the book is the logo of THE DICKENS. He alerts
to this. He opens to a plate with the caption: "My first
purchase in the Public House".

He glances over at:

Detail:

UNCLE CHARLIE'S RADIO.

But the attraction to the radio has competition....THE BOOKS.

He next takes down "Great Expectations" and off the title and
his wondering eyes we

CUT TO:

INT. A METRO NORTH TRAIN. DAY

THE PRIEST is now staring beadily at JR, having noticed,
perhaps, his crying.

PRIEST

Where are you bound.

Whoah: true Barry Fitzgerald. [This is maybe not real.]

JR
Yale interview.

PRIEST
To get *into the place*?

JR nods.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Your mother must be trilled.

JR
It's all she ever wanted.

PRIEST
In my official capacity I have to say is the only thing to concentrate on in this world is the desire to see the face of God the Father.

JR, a wobbly nod. OK.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
However: the Church is on her last legs. Three people come to my mass. I had four but Mrs Cafferty took a fall changing a light bulb *because she did not have a good son. Be a good son.*

JR
That's why I'm going to the Interview.

PRIEST
When is the last time you made a good confession.

A lot of thought:

JR
Not in my Yale essay.

PRIEST
Well, you want to get *in*. Truth may not be your friend in college applications.

JR turns and looks out the window.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

YOUNG JR is reading, UNCLE CHARLIE is tending bar.

OTHER CUSTOMER
Hey, whose kid is that?

UNCLE CHARLIE
My sister's.

OTHER CUSTOMER
What sister. The hot one or the
crazy one.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Do you want to die?

YOUNG JR zones out, drifting. He watches female customers flirting with male customers, and vice versa. It is happy hour, daylight still streaming in, igniting the scene as if on the softball field at the beginning of the film. This is also a ritual, the man thing that has to be learned.

BOBO (O.S.)
Get that kid a drink on me.

UNCLE CHARLIE delivers a Coke with a cherry. Now YOUNG JR has two Cokes.

UNCLE CHARLIE
You're backed up on Bobo.

"Backed up". Wow. A male sciences watershed.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I got a feeling you didn't come here to come here. You came here with a reason and then forgot.

YOUNG JR
A pack of Old Golds for Grampa.

UNCLE CHARLIE
He's probably climbing the walls. He's gonna come in here and say weird shit. Never keep a man from his cigarettes.

Puts down OLD GOLDS.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Buck eighty.

YOUNG JR pays.

YOUNG JR
(holding change from the
five)
I'd like to back up Bobo.

UNCLE CHARLIE
With your grandfather's money?

YOUNG JR looks uncertain.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
All right.

BOBO
This kid is all right.

UNCLE CHARLIE backs up Bobo.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Bobo, you're backed up on the kid.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

YOUNG JR is pitching a tennis ball against the garage door, aiming at a TAPED SQUARE. Very serious, like a pitcher on TV. Spitting, scuffling mound.

UNCLE CHARLIE watches hungover from the stoop. Wearing sunglasses.

MOM runs out, gets past UNCLE CHARLIE (who doesn't move for her), kisses YOUNG JR, kneels with him.

MOM
What did you do in school today?

YOUNG JR
We all signed a paper saying we
would do our best.

MOM
Did you?

YOUNG JR
Yes.

MOM
You know it's hard to be best
sometimes but it's easy to do your
best.
(far too emotionally)
Do you think I do my best?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Oh Jesus.

MOM

Go to hell, Charlie.

UNCLE CHARLIE

We're all having a rough time on this planet. Don't ask him questions like that. This is human existence. Not whatever's in your brain.

MOM kisses YOUNG JR, glares at UNCLE CHARLIE, gets into the terrible car and heads off.

UNCLE CHARLIE pops a Budweiser.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

They're different. They want to talk about shit. BUT. What they want to talk about is never...appropriate. It's about FEELINGS, which is not a productive subject. It's very hard to get into.

YOUNG JR sits with him.

YOUNG JR

I have feelings.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Of course you do, you just don't fucking say it. You have a drink, you punch somebody in the head, you just don't have a conversation. All anybody wants you to do is a man is you shit shower shave and show the fuck up.

YOUNG JR absorbs this. OK.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

If you stop letting 'em see you worry at recess, they'll leave you alone with the shrink nonsense. Just pretend nothing bothers you. You'll be fine.

YOUNG JR

Nothing bothers you?

UNCLE CHARLIE thinks, and drinks, and then by way of an answer:

UNCLE CHARLIE
Men don't have feelings.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

YOUNG JR is being hit from behind by spitballs blown by a HOOLIGAN. He is deep into nothing bothering him.

Oblivious MRS WILLIAMS, the Sixth Grade Teacher, is in front of the class.

MRS WILLIAMS
Today we are going to take a break from our studies, and make invitations, hand made invitations...

HOOLIGAN
As if there's a machine, right?

MRS WILLIAMS
For the Father-Son breakfast.

MOVE IN ON YOUNG JR.

In his mind he imagines waiting outside the Father Son breakfast, watching the road for THE VOICE.

In the dream, THE VOICE drives past, swigging from a pint.

IN THE CLASSROOM:

MRS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
We'll make our own invitations and you'll bring them home to your fathers after school. Saturday morning we'll cook our fathers breakfast and read to them from our schoolwork and everyone will get a chance to know each other better.

LATER

YOUNG JR stands at MRS WILLIAMS' desk

MRS WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
Yes, what is it, Jr?

YOUNG JR
I don't have a father.

MRS WILLIAMS
Oh. Did he pass on?

YOUNG JR
I don't know. Maybe. I just don't
have one.

MRS WILLIAMS
"Passing on" means "dead".

YOUNG JR
No, he's not dead, he's on the
radio.

MRS WILLIAMS
Is there an uncle?

YOUNG JR
He might not come. He doesn't have
feelings.

MRS WILLIAMS
OK.

YOUNG JR
Can I please just not come to the
breakfast?

MRS WILLIAMS
I'm going to call your mother.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

GRANDMA is making some American chop suey and hacking hotdogs
into it.

GRANDMA
Don't they know how the world is
these days?

YOUNG JR is in his mother's lap.

MOM
It's hard to tell people about your
father, JR, because it's hard to
know where to begin.

YOUNG JR
Maybe the police can make him go?

GRAMPA

(looking for a screwdriver
in a junk drawer)
Police can't make him pay support!
Think an elective breakfast might
be tough.

GRANDMA

You take him, you son of a bitch.

GRANDPA stands there is stained chinos, fly open,
cliffhanging socks, wrecked T-shirt. And like a Duke, after a
pause:

GRAMPA

Of course.

UNCLE CHARLIE glances over. Starts to say something: doesn't.
Reads his sports pages. But he's *pissed*.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK, go with him. Maybe he'll be
sane.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM. MORNING

Everybody sits and waits. They hear footsteps above, and the
footsteps on the stairs, as GRANDPA descends. The suspense is
unendurable. YOUNG JR has a bungled Windsor knot on his tie.
All eyes turn as —

GRANDPA appears in the doorway.

And he looks like what he really is: a well traveled man with
a knack for the classics. He is BRILLIANTLY turned out, his
hair combed back. He looks like a gray temped movie star of
the Stewart Grainger class.

MOM

Holy shit.

GRAMPA sits on the couch and indicates: come on.

YOUNG JR stands in front of GRANDPA, and GRANDPA addresses
the tie problem.

MOM (CONT'D)

Maybe he doesn't need a tie.

GRANDPA expertly knots the tie, straightens YOUNG JR'S
jacket.

MOM starts crying.

MOM (CONT'D)
You look so HANDSOME.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Why don't you go do your Scarlett
O'Hara thing.

MOM
Shut up.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Yeah yeah yeah. I'm the one who
can't read the room.

MOM
When you know what's going on.

UNCLE CHARLIE remembers what's going on and wishes he was
dead.

MOM kisses YOUNG JR and hugs him and leaves the room.

GRANDPA
Let's go.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA. DAY

MOVE ALONG the row of FATHERS AND KIDS being served from a
trolley by Mrs Williams and some kid trustees or kapos, and
land on the tense YOUNG JR and GRAMPA. GRAMPA unfolds his
paper napkin as if it is Irish linen: YOUNG JR, watching him
closely, does the same.

The fare is Mouse-eared pancakes.

MRS WILLIAM settles directly across. She seems to have a
crush on GRANDPA.

MRS WILLIAMS
We expect big things from JR.

GRAMPA
Our educational system and indeed
our society as a whole was
destroyed in the 19th Century by
the German influence.

MRS WILLIAMS
Really.

GRAMPA

Ability, as a concept, turned into a mechanical, empirical construct. You may be a beneficiary of this system.

YOUNG JR

We have a failed system.

MRS WILLIAMS looks fascinated.

MRS WILLIAMS

Gosh.

GRAMPA

He means the septic at the house.

Points with plastic fork at YOUNG JR.

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

In my view, *regardless* of the system in place, he's the likeliest to be able to leave my house on his own abilities.

Some kid somewhere farts.

GRANDPA

I didn't do that.

He continues eating, like the Duke of York.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAMPA'S TERRIBLE CAR. LATER

They are sitting in the driveway in the car. Where Americans tell each other things.

YOUNG JR

Thank you so much.

(a beat)

You were really good. When you're out...You're like Uncle Charlie.

GRAMPA

Well, I'm his father. He's like me.

GRAMPA cringes, glances over. But YOUNG JR has gotten it. GRAMPA makes it worse:

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

He's my s--

A beat.

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

Don't tell anybody I'm a good
grandfather. Everybody will want
one.

GRAMPA says what he has to say.

GRAMPA (CONT'D)

Your mother has a tumor on her
thyroid and is going in to have it
out. It might be malignant. Be nice
to her.

GRAMPA gets out of the car and goes into the house taking off
his tie.

UNCLE CHARLIE is looking out the window unobserved. He lets
the curtain fall.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

YOUNG JR sits on the stoop as he did on the day that THE
VOICE didn't take him to the ball game, waiting. After a
while, a car comes:

UNCLE CHARLIE'S CAR, and UNCLE CHARLIE helps his damaged
sister out of the car.

MOM is bandaged around the neck, pale and unsteady.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Help your mother.

MOM squeezes JR'S hand.

MOM

I'm fine.

They all go up the steps together.

INT. THE BEDROOM. NIGHT

YOUNG JR sits looking at his mother, who is in between sleep
and consciousness. PAIN PILLS in a large bottle before the
radio. He reaches for the radio, then stops. YOUNG JR sits
tensely. This is a significant act. Not turning on the radio.
Turning to his mother.

MOM is awake. Hard to talk, hard to swallow.

MOM

You work hard and you don't get
anywhere and then you get cancer.

YOUNG JR

Everybody?

MOM

As far as I can tell. On Long
Island anyway.

YOUNG JR

Do you want some water?

MOM

I want you to succeed.

MOM (CONT'D)

We're the two musketeers.

YOUNG JR nods.

MOM (CONT'D)

(high)

He beat me up. Once he put a pillow
over my face.

YOUNG JR

Mom?

MOM

I'm sorry.

YOUNG JR

(tear streaked)

What if I'm like him.

MOM doesn't say anything.

YOUNG JR (CONT'D)

You're going to be all right. They
said you were all right. The
doctors.

MOM

I *am* all right honey. They got it
all.

They sit there.

MOM (CONT'D)

I need you to succeed.

YOUNG JR leaks tears.

YOUNG JR
What if I can't?

MOM just lies there: then gestures, come. YOUNG JR snuggles close and she puts her arm around him.

MOM
As God is my witness you're going to Yale.

YOUNG JR
Grampa says a reasonable estimate of the total cost of a year at Yale is eleven thousand three hundred and ninety dollars.

MOM
Did he also say I'm just a medical secretary with maybe cancer?

YOUNG JR
No.

MOM
Mind if your momma believes in you?

YOUNG JR
No.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

YOUNG JR is there with his usual pile of books. He is working on THE FAMILY GAZETTE in the longhand draft.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Can't think straight today.
Goddamned Wordy Gurdy has me stumped.

YOUNG JR
What's Wordy Gurdy.

UNCLE CHARLIE
They give you a half assed clue and the answer is two words that rhyme. Like this one. "Jane's vehicles" is easy. Fonda's Hondas.

BOBO

Life is hard enough without
puzzles.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Do puzzles you don't get
Alzheimers. This one is bullshit:
Richard's Ingredients. Richard is
Nixon?

BOBO has no idea. JOEY D and COLT sit with their drinks.

YOUNG JR

Nixon's fixins.

EVERYBODY stares at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Terrific Gary.

INTERCUT JR on the NEW HAVEN train as he murmurs:

JR

Super Cooper.

The men stare respectfully. UNCLE CHARLIE comes to a
decision.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Kid's earned his spurs, we're gonna
cut cards to see who gives him
their seat at the Mets Phillies.

To YOUNG JR, who is thrilled but nervous:

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(shuffling)
Double header. Cut cards.

CUT TO:

INT. UNCLE CHARLIE'S CAR. VARIOUS. DAY

Doing pickups as on beach day. BOBO gets in, and JOEY D.
YOUNG JR sits in a Met's hat.

UNCLE CHARLIE

One more.

YOUNG JR

Who else is coming?

UNCLE CHARLIE keeps his counsel.

BOBO

Pat.

YOUNG JR

Who's he?

BOBO

She. Your uncle's girlfriend.

Wow.

UNCLE CHARLIE

We all make mistakes.

CUT TO:

INT. UNCLE CHARLIE'S CAR. MOMENTS LATER

PAT gets in, pretty, working class, obviously kind of a drinker. She homes on YOUNG JR.

PAT

You must be young JR. What are you doing with these bums?

YOUNG JR

Going to the Mets cause I did the Wordy Gurdy.

PAT

You must be the apple of your mother's eye.

YOUNG JR

I hope so because she's sad.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK that's enough.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHEA STADIUM. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE is on it. This is his scene. He barely looks at anybody. They are three rows behind home plate.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(not looking at YOUNG JR)

OK, if you need the bathroom, feel free, but take not of where we are sitting and don't stay away long.

(MORE)

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(to BEER GUY, as he takes
cups and pays)

Take note of where we are sitting
and don't stay away long. Jesus. My
head says Mets, my bankroll says
the brotherly lovers.

As the METS AND PHILLY take the field.

BOBO

PHILLY SUCKS!!!!

PAT

(to YOUNG JR)

So how's your mom doing, with the
cancer?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Jesus, right now?

YOUNG JR starts to leak tears.

UNCLE CHARLIE puts his arm around him and looks with bright
rage at PAT.

Then to the guys:

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

My bankroll says Philly but I took
the Mets three times.

A beat.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Don't ever do that. Don't think
with your optimism: this happens.

PAT

What???

UNCLE CHARLIE

We'll talk later. For a *minute*.

PAT folds her hand on her lap. Sits stiffly as if she would
say a great deal if the kid wasn't there. Uncle Charlie
glares at her for a moment and then:

Reaches in his coat and hands YOUNG JR a BASEBALL.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I was saving it. That's for you
right now.

YOUNG JR is impressed, through tears.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Turn it over.

DETAIL:

The ball turns until it reveals the signature:

"TOM SEAVER"

YOUNG JR is very impressed.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Right?

He pats YOUNG JR on the back.

PAT lunges away.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
There you go. And your mother's
fine. And we will not see Pat after
this.

YOUNG JR
She's not bad.

UNCLE CHARLIE
It's a last straw situation. That's
not the first blot on her copybook.
You gotta be able to do without
people and they gotta know it. The
only way to play is all in. But you
gotta need nobody to have anybody.

He burns this in on the oblivious JR.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Watch the game.

EXT. YALE CAMPUS. DAY

JR, dressed in the clothes he wore on the train, stands under
an oak, his hand on the tree for support.

JR
Provisional
Strident
Bucolic
Fulcrum
Inimical
Behemoth
Jesuitical
Minion

(MORE)

JR (CONT'D)

Eclectic
Esthetic

He clutches the tree. Looks like he is going to vomit. Shoves off to his interview.

INT. THE KITCHEN. DAY

A YALE APPLICATION lies on the table. MOM is sitting smiling. UNCLE CHARLIE is finishing reading the essay.

UNCLE CHARLIE
(after a long beat)
Not bad.

Chucks it down as if it is the FAMILY GAZETTE of yesteryear.

MOM
What do you mean. It's very good.

UNCLE CHARLIE
It's not bad.

He reaches into his pocket, and takes out a checkbook. Writes a check, tears it out.

MOM
What's that?

UNCLE CHARLIE
(indifferently)
Application Fee. What the fuck else.

He departs.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S CAR. DAY

MOM and JR sit in her terrible car. They are parked beside two blue post boxes.

MOM takes up the application envelope and kisses it, and hands it back to the somewhat mortified (high school) JR.

JR
Mom!

MOM
It's okay, I don't have lipstick.

JR
I won't get in.

MOM
Yes you will.

JR
Uncle Charlie says to go all in.

MOM
Your uncle is talking about
gambling and that's why he lives at
home.

JR
Isn't this gambling?

She nods: maybe.

MOM
It's better than not gambling. I
never gambled. That was my problem.

JR
What about Dad?

MOM
Well. Yeah. But was it taking
chances?

JR
Yes.

MOM
I'm talking about career.

EXT. THE TERRIBLE CAR. MOMENTS LATER

JR is standing at the mailboxes. One says LOCAL, and the other says OUT OF TOWN. He opens the mailbox that says LOCAL, and drops the envelope in. The door clangs shut. He stands there, and then turns to the car.

INT. THE METRO NORTH TRAIN. DAY

Very CLOSE on JR, who has his head against the glass, thinking.

EXT. THE HOUSE. INT. UNCLE CHARLIE'S CAR. MANHASSET. VARIOUS.
DAY

YOUNG JR is throwing a rubber ball against the garage door. The screen door squeaks and bangs and UNCLE CHARLIE comes out, Marlboro in face, wearing shorts and regular dress shoes, untied to be casual.

UNCLE CHARLIE
You got shorts on. Good. Get in the car. We're going to the beach. Get in the back.

YOUNG JR does.

As Charlie gets in and starts the car we see the DISTINCTIVE KEY RING, which strangely enough is a book with wings.

He backs out, expertly, through his hangover.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
We're gonna have passengers.

He clunks into drive.

YOUNG JR
Thank you for taking me.

UNCLE CHARLIE looks into the rearview.

UNCLE CHARLIE
We have to have a talk sometime. When I'm cooking food and you ask if you can have some food, what do I say?

YOUNG JR
"Of course you can have some food, I'm making fucking dinner."

UNCLE CHARLIE
Process that.

LATER

UNCLE CHARLIE parps the horn, in front of an LI working class house, and BOBO comes out, in indescribable beachwear.

BOBO
Hi kid. Charlie, fuck did I drink last night.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Everything.

BOBO

I'm dying.

Beer from Charlie's floor cooler.

BOBO (CONT'D)

Jesus.

LATER

JOEY D gets in.

JOEY D

Gimme a Bud.

BOBO

We drank em.

JOEY D

Need to get some pickinick baskets.
Chaz is this the usual same kid?

UNCLE CHARLIE

That's the kid.

LATER

CHIEF gets in, while at the door of his house his wife flips him the bird.

JOEY D

Need to get some pickinick baskets.

LATER

JOEY D emerges from a liquor store, laden, with red party cups and ice and a box of booze and mixer. BOBO staggers under several cases of beer.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(engages transmission)

Beach.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BEACH. DAY

THE CADDY is parked by a deserted beach on a maybe warm enough but not visually spectacular day, and JR and the men from the Dickens march across the sand, the men all laden with ongoing drinks and burdens of intoxicants, and YOUNG JR tagging after like a baby elephant.

CAMP is made by chucking the booze and ice down in a kind of circle. Dress shoes and boots come off, working class farmer tans are put on display.

BEERS are handed around without comment, slugs are poured into red party cups, and without comment, as one of the guys, YOUNG JR is given a COKE.

BOBO

What are you doing on the Mets tonight? Koosman's on the hill.

JOEY D

I'm always on the wrong side with that prick.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Bet Koos, you lose.

UNCLE CHARLIE looks at the sea with the expression of a romantic visionary.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Let's go in.

LATER

In a WIDE SHOT we see the men wading into the water, holding their beers and red party cups high.

YOUNG JR, barefoot in the wave wash, watches adoringly.

UNCLE CHARLIE turns, and looks at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Come on. Bring your drink. This looks like it happens every day?

YOUNG JR steps forward and we

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN. DAY

The LETTER FROM YALE lies on the Formica table. Everybody is there: GRAMPA, GRANDMA, MOM, UNCLE CHARLIE, JR.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Open it.

JR

I want to open it alone.

MOM

Oh, open it, JR.

JR

No, you open it.

UNCLE CHARLIE

That's a call. That's a call right there. She's the most invested. Frankly she's kinda unhinged on this thing, and we're talking since you were a baby.

GRAMPA

I told her not a dime.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You don't have a dime. However, his mother doesn't have a nickel.

JR

I can't open it.

UNCLE CHARLIE

It's not like it's gonna kill everybody if it says no.

JR

Not the planet.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Give it to me.

He takes the envelope. Puts on the reading glasses that he needs now. He stops as:

MOM comes in the back door, exhausted, in a waitress uniform, and sees what the men are looking at.

MOM

Let JR open it.

JR

Uncle Charlie is the gambler.

UNCLE CHARLIE

I paid the application.

GRANDMA goes on her knees.

GRANDMA

Holy Mary, Mother of God.

UNCLE CHARLIE opens the envelope with his butter knife.
Unfolds the letter. He compels himself to be indifferent.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Dear Mr Maguire. It is a great
pleasure to inform you that the
Admissions Committee has voted to
offer you a place in the Yale Class
of 1986.

MOM starts leaking tears.

UNCLE CHARLIE continues to pretend to not give a shit and
that his throat doesn't hurt.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I am also pleased to notify you
that your financial need has been
met.

UNCLE CHARLIE folds the letter back up.

MOM

If you're tricking me I'll kill
you.

UNCLE CHARLIE hands her the letter.

UNCLE CHARLIE

There you go.

JR

Should I tell Dad?

No answer.

UNCLE CHARLIE stares at him with a strange kind of look.
Disappointment?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Yeah why not.

He gets up and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BACK YARD. LATER THAT WEEK

UNCLE CHARLIE is looking through some of the yale packet
materials. MOM and JR are looking at the CATALOG.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You have to get cracking now.
Plato, The Republic, right away.
Aeschylus. Antigone, The Birds.
Thoreau, Emerson. Gimme that
catalog.

JR hands it over.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

"The Craft of the Writer". What is
this shit, no one can teach
writing. You can already write.

JR

You said my essay was OK.

UNCLE CHARLIE glares at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE

That's only what I *said*.

(a beat)

OK, this is what you want.
"Directed Studies". Immersion in
the canon. Open to a select number
of freshmen. Aeschylus, Sophocles,
Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle,
Thucydides, Virgil, Dante,
Shakespeare, Milton, Aquinas,
Goethe, Wordsworth, Augustine,
Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke,
Rousseau, Tocqueville. There it is,
bang.

MOM

I don't want him biting off too
much too soon.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You want him to be *five*. Are you
gonna let him live? Isn't that the
point?

MOM

OK, fine.

She leaves.

JR

What's good for law.

UNCLE CHARLIE looks at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Fuck that shit. Do you or do you not read and write all the fucking time. Do you read Blackstone? Are you reading fuckface on Negotiable instruments?

JR

She needs me to be a lawyer.

UNCLE CHARLIE

She needs you to pick some appropriate electives.

JR

What about "Human Learning and Memory"?

UNCLE CHARLIE

(absently)

No that's bullshit. Let me go through this.

(seizing and marking up catalog)

Always take a philosophy. You always do well in philosophy because there are no right answers.

(a beat)

By the way when your mother tries to give you money you're not gonna take it. I'll handle it. ONCE. Did you call your father?

JR

No.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE'S CAR is idling, and JR stands at the top of the stoop with MOM.

JR

I'll come home a lot.

MOM

This isn't home. This is where you go when you fail.

JR

No it isn't.

MOM

Go, JR. Go. Please just go.

They hug.

JR

Listen, Mom, Yale can't fix everything. Maybe it won't fix anything.

She just gives him a kiss and says:

MOM

Go.

INT. WRIGHT HALL. VARIOUS

JR is lumping his gear up the creaking staircase of the dilapidated residence hall. It is move-in day, and the place is full of parents, other students. He comes to a 5th floor door, checks the number against his paper:

The DOOR is pulled open and an UPPER MIDDLE CLASS COUPLE emerges, and go past him without saying a word, but the Mother looks at him suspiciously.

JR musters his courage and goes into the room—and it is just that—a room. Three beds, three desks, three chairs. Another young man returning from the bathroom down the hall, stands beside him. It is BAYARD, a kind of louche prep school kid.

BAYARD

I was expecting a kinda Brideshead Revisited thing. This is bullshit. I'm Bayard.

JR

I'm JR.

They shake hands.

BAYARD'S MOTHER

And who is this?

JR

My name is JR, Ma'am.

BAYARD'S MOTHER

Are your parents with you?

JR

I'm kinda flying solo.

He goes to the not-taken bed, BAYARD helping, putting the typewriter on the desk.

BAYARD'S FATHER. A very self regarding man of the middle management classes. Sitting on the couch. Meanwhile a CHINESE MOTHER AND FATHER are settling their son.

BAYARD'S FATHER
So what does JR stand for?

INTERCUT

UNCLE CHARLIE at the backyard table.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Above all know when to give the stick if they start with the social bum sniffing.

JR
Something proletarian.

BAYARD
(sotto voce)
Awesome.

BAYARDS FATHER
We're on Long Island ourselves.
Great Neck. Maybe you and Bayard
can socialize on breaks.

Socialize?

BAYARD'S FATHER
And what secondary did you attend?

JR
Manhasset High School.

JR summons his inner Uncle Charlie.

JR (CONT'D)
Where did you go?

ROOMMATE'S FATHER
Me? Why would you ask where I went?

JR
Because you seem to think it's
important.

A long pause.

ROOMMATE'S FATHER

Bayard went to Andover.

JR

So he's a legacy from his mother's side?

BAYARD'S FATHER, after opening and closing his mouth, decides to do something else.

BAYARD discreetly raises a thumb to JR.

JR has won his first dogfight but he's not always going to be good at it.

CUT TO:

INT. LITERATURE SEMINAR. DAY

PROFESSOR VAN DYKE is wan, tired, hands clutched on table.

PROFESSOR VAN DYKE

You will be making the acquaintance of Satan, not in your own worst impulses, or among your friends, *though you will*, in each case, but in Paradise Lost. For the time being, in this class, though I beat against barbarous current, I still teach Western literature, in which everything derives from two epic poems—the Illiad, and the Odyssey. Handily contained, for you, in one book, edited and translated by — me. The Illiad and the Odyssey are the two seedlings, the *poyims*, three thousand years old, from which all literature grew.

BAYARD

What's a "poyim"?

JR

Somebody who's not Jewish.

PROFESSOR VAN DYKE

The Illiad and the Odyssey are universal: they are stories about going *home*. You will start by reading half the Illiad, and write me a ten page paper.

BAYARD
A paper on what?

PROFESSOR VAN DYKE
(fiendishly)
The first half of the Illiad.

BAYARD
But on what subject?

CLOSE ON THE PROFESSOR

PROFESSOR VAN DYKE
The first half of the Illiad.

BAYARD
He's throwing down.

JR is not paying attention, because he has noticed, across the room—

SIDNEY, slumped in a barn coat, chewing a pencil, foot cocked in a clog of the period. Imagine the most unattainable woman you ever saw.

JR is transfixed.

JR
Who is that?

BAYARD
She goes out with Stinky.

JR
Stinky.

BAYARD
He's wealthy. His parents got chopped. Various people have fooled around with her when he's laid up after lacrosse injuries.

INT. JR'S ROOM. NIGHT

The ILLIAD is there, spine cracked, flat on desk. The OLD SMITH CORONA is humming. JR stares at the BLANK PAGE in the typewriter. He starts typing. He stops. He turns in his desk chair to BAYARD, who is picking his feet. JIMMY, the other roommate, is reading in bed.

JR
Everything I see is unattainable.

BAYARD

That's because you are probably a pussy.

JR

If you are made to read the greatest things ever written, that you couldn't do, and make you feel like shit, how are you supposed to be a writer?

JIMMY

Socrates says you learn more from a bad book than a good one.

JR

Aristotle.

JIMMY glares, goes back to studying.

JR (CONT'D)

I think.

BAYARD

If you go to Yale but don't have balls, how are you supposed to be a student at Yale?

JR

I'm here on a lucky break. It's just a lucky break. I can do Wordy Gurdy but I can't figure out what the fuck they are saying in Henry V.

BAYARD

Everyone is here on a lucky break, douchebag. I'm lucky sperm club, or ovum, and no one ever noticed I'm an idiot, which is also luck. Everybody's lucky. Jimmy over there is lucky he wasn't a girl and got drowned in a bucket or strangled behind a shed over there in China. Chinese can only have one kid, they want a boy, and Jimmy was as close as his parents could get.

JIMMY

Fuck you.

BAYARD

Everybody alive is lucky, and they are descended from the lucky.

(MORE)

BAYARD (CONT'D)

Our ancestors were all either fast, smart, or had really fuckin good immune systems. LUCK, asshole, is why we're all here.

JR

I never thought of that.

BAYARD

You believe society's bullshit interpretation of you, and everything else. And that's why you can't write. Not because Homer makes you feel like you suck.

JR

I'd really like you to meet my Uncle Charlie.

BAYARD

What's he do?

JR

He has a bar.

BAYARD pays attention.

BAYARD

I'd really like to meet Uncle Charlie.

JIMMY

Where is Uncle Charlie?

JR

I think that to do well at Yale, you have to have a foundation, you have to have roots.

BAYARD

You have to have balls. When you have luck, run with it.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE is drying a highball glass and watching the Knicks. He turns and sees at the bar, JR, BAYARD, and JIMMY.

UNCLE CHARLIE

What are you guys doing here.

JR holds out a driver's license. UNCLE CHARLIE looks at it.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ. What about these
rejects.

Inspects LICENSE, and in Jimmy's case a CHINESE PASSPORT.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Welcome to our shores, Jim.

Holding JR'S LICENSE he goes and rings the BAR BELL.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Attention! Attention. I would like
to announce that according to the
laws of the sovereign state of New
York, my nephew is a man today. And
his friends are also legally men.

SOMEONE
Then the law is fucked.

BOBO
The law is the law.

JOEY D
I guess we have no choice. Let me
buy these assholes a drink.

UNCLE CHARLIE
First one is MINE. MIYEN. After
that you guys are backed up on Joey
D.

JR
Wow. I don't know what to have.

BAYARD
For fuck's sake Maguire.

UNCLE CHARLIE
I think a Yale man should drink
gin.

Holding the BOTTLE:

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Big decision, Chief. Whatever you
assholes pick now is what I pour
when you come through the door.
Forever. You have to have a drink.
Your drink.

BAYARD
Gin makes me crazy.

UNCLE CHARLIE

We'll take care of you. We can handle anything. I make an excellent gin martini. The finest. The secret recipe is you add a few drops of Scotch.

JOEY D

No, you don't give gin martinis to these *children*.

UNCLE CHARLIE

How's it going at Yale?

JR

I'm not smart enough and my background is wanting.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You need a martini. You also need a kick in the dick.

BAYARD

That's what I've been saying, Uncle Charlie. He's being a pussy.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Grave and disturbing news, Bayard.

BOBO

Bayard?

UNCLE CHARLIE

Gin martinis.

He structures these martinis as a sacrament. Serves them with a twist in ice cold and sweating glasses.

JIMMY

When I drink I get red and fall down.

UNCLE CHARLIE

The house isn't far. I'm sure they're gonna love to have you.

BAYARD

I know some people on Shelter Rock road.

UNCLE CHARLIE

That's not where the house is.

FAST EDDY

Get these boys one on me.

CHIEF

Get them one on me.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Guys you're backed up on Fast Eddy
and Chief. Fasten your fuckin'
seatbelts.

LATER

The boys are wasted at a table, sitting with CHIEF.

BAYARD

(wasted, to CHIEF)

You went to war?

CHIEF

'Nam. Second Division, Quang Tri,
67-69. You fuckers will never know
such things. All props to the 82nd
but ytour little fuckin airdrop on
Grenada is not a war.

JIMMY

We didn't airdrop on Grenada.

BAYARD

How long were you in the Army?

CHIEF

One year, seven months, five days.

BAYARD

And how long were you in Vietnam?

CHIEF

Eleven months, twelve days.

JOEY D

Chaz says you're insecure at Yale.

JR

No, no.

JOEY D

It's same as prison. Anywhere is
same as prison. Find the main guy,
who's a problem, and kick his ass.
That's it.

JOEY D departs.

BAYARD

Kinda is. Except you're the problem. Are these the guys in your stories?

JR

(hunched and furtive)

Yeah.

BAYARD

Uncle Charlie is your old man basically.

JR, oblivious:

JR

No, he's my uncle Charlie. My old man is in a radio.

CUT TO:

INT. DICKENS. LATER

BAYARD and JIMMY are collapsed unconscious in the snug by the ruins of a card game. WAITRESS collecting glasses.

UNCLE CHARLIE locks the bar and switches off the front lights.

He comes back behind the bar and his movement reveals JR. JR is slumped on the bar with an empty glass in front of him.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Sambuca?

Speechless assent from JR who is failing to light a cigarette.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Your insecurity.

(pouring)

Your problem is, you started with a seven-two, two different suits.

(incomprehension from JR)

A seven and a two, different suits, worst poker hand possible. Who's nephew are you. You had a bad hand. Your friend Bayard over there owns the casino.

JR

I'm just a fish out of water.

UNCLE CHARLIE

The first rule is if someone is an asshole, and puts you down, never take it seriously. If somebody makes a big thing about social position, it means they don't have it. They're *nervous*.

JR

Like Bayard's father! I asked him where he went to high school because of the way he asked *me*, and he like shit himself. I said it the way you would have. Sssh. Bayard knows his old man's a dick, though.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Perfect riposte. If people are making you nervous, trying to make you nervous, ever wonder if it's possible you make them nervous? Ever wonder what a legacy at Yale *really* feels, deep down? When they see a man like you? Good looking kid, threat to their women, their positions, no advantages, seven-two, there on ability only?

JR is briefly intrigued by that.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

A seven and two, as the worst hand in poker, is almost impossible to recover from. But what cards do you play? If you're dealt the seven and two?

JR

The seven and two.

UNCLE CHARLIE

The idea of social classes is for unmarried women, closet drinkers, with lots of cats. They buy those books about being ravished by noblemen. Scott Fitzgerald was kind of a cat lady in his own way, he believed all kinds of shit. Anyway.

(MORE)

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

If I see you down at the mouth again because someone with the name of like a fuckin Labrador Retriever like Tucker or Tad or Kai made you made you feel like shit because your mother is a medical secretary, I'm going to throw you out of the fuckin bar.

JR

Throw me out of the bar?

UNCLE CHARLIE

I'll 86 you. Like that. What do you have to read this weekend.

JR

(banging head on bar)
Aquinas. Jesus Christ.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Aquinas, if you accept his initial proposition, is a Scholastic progression of the self evident. What's your problem.

JR

I don't wanna.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(grabs JR by the collar)
You get into Yale on a seven and two and you "don't wanna"?

JR stares at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That's when you bet everything. When you got nothing.

He takes away JR's drink.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You guys are not going to the house. Stay here. Make coffee.

Throws a book at JR. ORWELL, THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Read Orwell on the lower upper middle classes. They're the ones that suck. The sooner you realize that you can operate in America. If you also have a car.

EXT. A HOUSE PARTY. NEW HAVEN. NIGHT

JR and BAYARD are standing on the sidewalk finishing either or nine beers. They are finishing them by shotgunning them.

BAYARD

I just can't believe we got to sleep in a bar, that was awesome. Uncle Charlie is excellent.

JR

He likes you. He thinks I'm a dick. And a pussy.

BAYARD

No, he thinks you're in *danger* of being a dick and a pussy. Two different things. So are a dick and a pussy.

JR

I'm not *pretending* I'm inadequate. I am inadequate. I'm unequal..I don't understand Henry the Fifth Part one. I don't know what they are *saying*.

BAYARD

Don't be a fucking knucklehead. Watch the movies until you can understand it. Read it aloud.

JR looks at him as if he is an oracle.

BAYARD leads the way on towards into the party. Then he stops:

SIDNEY is there. The GIRL FROM CLASS.

SIDNEY is beautiful, an undergrad, and for college well dressed: cashmere, leather coat. She is leaving the party out of disinterest.

BAYARD (CONT'D)

Sidney! How are you. Is Stinky inside?

SIDNEY

I don't know where Alex is. I don't see much of him.

For BAYARD, open mouthed, this is Opportunity knocking...he Starts to say something..

but SIDNEY has turned civilly to JR. JR is in the depths of thinking he is a dick and a pussy who can't understand Shakespeare...but he rallies, and extends his hand.

JR

JR.

SIDNEY

Sidney.

He takes her hand.

JR

(voice too high)

You're in my...

Sidney nods.

SIDNEY

Class.

JR

Oh, that's what we were talking about.

SIDNEY

That you're in my class?

He freezes. Unable to convert on the double meaning thing, especially since she seems to be adding a triple meaning.

JR

It's weird that you know who I am.

SIDNEY

What's wrong with you.

JR

Not so good in there? The party.

She shakes her head. Looking at him steadily and politely.

SIDNEY

No.

JR

(out of some internal
resource he did not know
he had)

I'll walk you home.

BAYARD'S *what the fuck* expression is priceless.

She nods.

BAYARD looks on with horror.

JR and SIDNEY gain the sidewalk and head off.

BAYARD sits on the steps of the party house, knives open a Bud and shotguns it. JIMMY joins him.

JIMMY
Where's JR.

BAYARD
I think he's going to date Sidney.

JIMMY can't process this.

JIMMY
No, he feels too inadequate.

BAYARD
Yeah but they stop you from feeling inadequate. Until they want you to feel inadequate.

EXT. NEW HAVEN. LATER

They are walking past a line of student tenements. All drinking porches and chained bicycles.

SIDNEY
So what does JR stand for?

JR
That's a complicated thing, a complicated thing. I'll tell you when I know you better?

SIDNEY
(taking his arm)
Is there some trauma?

JR thinks about that. Then emphatically:

JR
Yes.

SIDNEY
Father-based?

He stares at her, stunned.

JR

I'm named after my father but I've only seen him a couple of times, but he was always on the radio in New York, he's Johnny Ace, or Johnny Michaels on the radio...And my name kinda means "Junior", but junior to what?

SIDNEY

Are you in search for your father? Obsessed in any way?

JR

No, of course not.

SIDNEY

This is me.

She means the apartment house they stand in front of. As he fumbles with cigarettes and remembering to offer her one (which she takes):

JR

Asking details about people is all wrong. I've frequently made that mistake. Excuse me if I haven't asked enough questions. People have been asking me to stop.

SIDNEY

It's ill-bred to ask a lot of questions... but it's all right to ask some.

JR

Yeah but everybody tells me to calm down.

She directs him to sit on the stoop, and then sits beside him.

SIDNEY

Feeling NOCD?

JR

What's that?

SIDNEY

Not our class, Darling.

JR

How am I doing?

SIDNEY
(smoking, and casually,
not looking at him)
Good.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)
Good questions are ok. Such as do
you fear and hate the absent father
or do you long for him and his
guidance?

JR
Both?

SIDNEY
If you have a real father complex,
that's kind of a red flag. Women
with father complexes tend to eat a
lot. But men get really fucked up.
if your father leaves you you very
often become famous.

JR
REALLY.

SIDNEY
He isn't god.

JR
There was one time he didn't take
me to a...

He looks down at the stoop, remembers another stoop.

JR (CONT'D)
A baseball game.

They look at each other.

SIDNEY
Do you want to study together
tomorrow?

He nods.

JR
OK.

SIDNEY
Here.
(she stands up)
I'll make dinner.

JR

OK.

She goes off and into her house. He stands there long enough to see a light come on in the second floor.

JR (CONT'D)

Sevens and twos.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY

ESTABLISH.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

MOM is looking at JR with rapture and love. He is uncomfortable.

MOM

You think you're in love.

JR

Yes. I think I'm in love.

MOM

She's a lucky girl.

JR

I don't know about that.

MOM

Are you being careful?

JR

Jesus! Mom! Fuck. She's clever.
She's perceptive.

MOM

About what?

JR

...Never mind.

MOM

She's rich?

JR

Probably lower upper middle class.

UNCLE CHARLIE

That's my boy.

MOM

I don't know what that means. Lower middle upper...

UNCLE CHARLIE

It means the people you think are rich. Nobody sees the actual rich. They fuckin hide so nobody kills them.

He leaves the kitchen.

JR

With Uncle Charlie gone, I can tell you. I feel like Sidney is so up here. And I'm so down here.

MOM

You have so much to offer.

JR

No money, no clue what I want to do.

MOM looks troubled.

JR (CONT'D)

I mean, besides being a lawyer and suing my father...

MOM

That's not why I want you to be a lawyer. That would be pathological. JR, it's not the worst thing if the man puts a woman on a slight pedestal.

UNCLE CHARLIE (O.S.)

SLIGHT.

MOM

Falling in love is a blessing. Try to enjoy it.

JR

What if I get my heart broken? Like sitting on the steps waiting for dad.

UNCLE CHARLIE (O.S.)

Talk about pathological.

MOM

Shut up, Charlie!

UNCLE CHARLIE is in an armchair, coffee, tabloid, cigarette, underwear.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Leave him alone! Let him sink or swim. Jesus!

He gets up and goes.

MOM
If you get your heart broken, you'll live.

JR
I have to ask your permission for something.

MOM, ready to have her heart broken:

MOM
What?

JR glances over at a tiny, crappy, NATIVITY SCENE. He looks back at his mother.

JR
I need to go to Sidney's for Christmas.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

No customers. It is decorated for Christmas. JR is reading Freud's TOTEM AND TABOO.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Oh Jesus.

JR
What?

UNCLE CHARLIE
Do not forever seek thy father in the dust.

Hiding book:

JR
Don't be *ridiculous*.

UNCLE CHARLIE
So. How many dates before you scored.

INTERCUT:

SIDNEY'S APARTMENT STUDY SESSION. She whips off her sweater, revealing white bra: REVERSE ON JR staring wide-eyed.

JR
It's not basketball.

UNCLE CHARLIE
It's more like a Bobby Orr
breakaway if your description of
the girl is accurate.

JR
I can't talk about things like
these guys in here do.

UNCLE CHARLIE
You tell your mother you're away
for Christmas?

JR
What are you, psychic?

UNCLE CHARLIE
(not looking at him)
What did she say?

JR
She wants me to be happy... She
likes that I'm in love.

UNCLE CHARLIE
(still not looking at him)
OK. You're gonna miss your train.

JR heads.

JR
OK, tell me.

UNCLE CHARLIE
When you meet her family, ask
yourself what they really think
about someone who ditches his
mother on Christmas. You can fix it
next year. I want you to get laid
while it's happening. But for now
remember this:

JR
What?

UNCLE CHARLIE

If someone is worth your time,
they're there. You don't have to
chase them.

(somberly)

Remember that.

JR processes this.

JR

Merry Christmas.

He goes.

OUTSIDE, he feels in his coat, finds his PINT, to check if
it's there, puts it back. Our JR may have a problem.

INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN CAR. NIGHT

JR gets a seat, and Jesus Christ, sure enough, THE PRIEST is
a few cars down, and waves at him. He sits down and hunches,
hoping not to have another quasi-metaphysical run in.

THE PRIEST

It's almost like you made me up!

JR hunches.

EXT. METRO NORTH STATION. WESTPORT. NIGHT (SNOWING)

As the train pulls in, JR standing in the door the way you
used to be able to, SIDNEY is visible on the platform, hair
and eyelashes sprinkled with snow. This is full Love Story
shit. They kiss, look at each other, and she takes his hand
and runs with him to...

A VOLVO station car. JR looks at the Volvo, and around the
high end station and town. He looks back at SIDNEY.

As the TRAIN pulls out we see the PRIEST staring interestedly
and a bit beadily out the window at the young couple. *What?*

SIDNEY

What?

JR

It's Christmas, in Connecticut,
with a Volvo, with you.

INT. THE CAR. CONTINUOUS

SIDNEY is behind the wheel.

SIDNEY

I'll never train you out of it,
will I.

JR

Train me out of what?

SIDNEY

Thinking things are more than they
are.

JR

Do you mean, what, us, my Scott
Fitzgerald credulity about the
class system, that I can't really
get trained out of, or do you mind
that I'm happy and think that I
shouldn't be?

SIDNEY

If you're going to read into
things, trouble, read better.

She drives.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

What I'm saying is that you're just
going somewhere for Christmas.
That's all it is.

JR

But I never have before. The shit I
haven't done is amazing. I haven't
done anything.

She looks at him, drives.

SIDNEY

My parents have a few bucks. It's
not like being presented at court.
It's not Brideshead. It's not a
novel.

JR

OK, I'm just...

He reaches for his pint, decides against it.

SIDNEY

JR?

He looks at her. And she is so delicate, so beautiful, so Hepburn, so above him....

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

Do you mind if we pull over and fuck in the snowy woods like wild animals?

CUT TO:

INT. SIDNEY'S PARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Only the tree is lighted. She takes him up the stairs by the hand.

JR

Is it your room or a guest room?

SIDNEY

You have a room. Whatever it is, they don't MIND.

JR

(not sober and being lower middle class instead of lower upper middle)
If I were a *father* I would mind.

SIDNEY

How do you think he got to be a father? Bonking some drunk chick in a guest room like everybody else.

JR

Oh.

They get into the room and SIDNEY immediately starts throwing her clothes away, unhooking her bra. JR has disturbed an elderly Labrador who rises, tail beating, from a tartan dog bed. By the time he turns around, SIDNEY has whipped into the bed. He keeps taking his clothes off, and gets in under the covers, the happy dog still after him. She switches off the light.

SIDNEY

The woods wasn't enough like animals. Try this.

As she rolls onto him, we

CUT TO:

INT. THE NEXT ROOM OVER. MOMENTS LATER

SIDNEY'S DAD, in full pajamas and bathrobe rig-out, responds to the sound of wild fucking by glancing over at his sleeping wife, and then grimly closing his civil war history and turning off his own light.

INT. THE GUEST BEDROOM. MORNING

SIDNEY, in soft focus, holding a steaming mug of coffee.

SIDNEY
Morning, sport.

He takes the cup away and tries to get her into bed.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)
My parents!
(a beat)
They've already heard you. They
want to meet you.
(a beat)
I think I should take you to the
train.

JR
Why?

SIDNEY
It's very complicated. I'm feeling
weird.

She looks around at him.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I brought you for
Christmas. I think I'm seeing
someone else.

CUT TO:

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM. LATER

An actual "morning room" with an actual breakfast in chafing dishes on a sideboard. JR looks at it all, stunned. He is already shattered, holding his bag.

SIDNEY'S DAD
Call me Phil. Tuck in, no ceremony
here.

SIDNEY'S MOTHER seems to think that this is an idiotic thing to say, but just sets her teeth.

SIDNEY'S MOM

Since you can call him Phil, I suppose you can call me Mrs. Lawson.

JR double takes on this. He waits for Sidney's Mom to make a joke, but she doesn't.

JR

I'm sorry, I thought there was another part.
(a stare)
To what you were going to say.

SIDNEY'S MOM

...No.

SIDNEY delivers JR coffee, and, haphazardly, a plate with a muffin on it.

SIDNEY'S MOM (CONT'D)

Let's get to know each other. We are the Lawsons. We are passionate about Italian opera, hothouse orchids, and cross-country skiing. Those things, and only those things.

SIDNEY'S DAD

(reading the TIMES)
Nonsense.

SIDNEY'S MOM

Do you have any questions about those things?

JR looks at SIDNEY. SIDNEY is oblivious, attacking a muffin.

JR

I understand from Sidney that you are both architects.

SIDNEY'S MOM

Some people build houses. We build dwellings.

JR

What's the difference except the word?

DAD lowers the paper and eyeballs JR.

JR (CONT'D)

I mean I just failed an English exam, but a dwelling is a house, unless it's a cave, and a house is a dwelling.

SIDNEY

They also run the magazine "Dwelling".

JR

What?

SIDNEY

A magazine called Dwelling.

JR

Ah, some people don't "dwell". They just fart in houses? And live in them. Without having lists of enthusiasms?

SIDNEY'S MOM

I don't think you should dwell on it.

JR

No.

SIDNEY'S MOM

I understand you have an absconded father who is nothing more to you than a voice on the radio.

JR looks at SIDNEY. SIDNEY shrugs.

JR

In effect, yes.

SIDNEY'S MOM

Are you in psychotherapy? I should think you would be.

SIDNEY'S DAD

What does your mother do, JR?

JR pulls out his pint and pours into his coffee.

JR

She dwells in Manhasset. In a house. She's a secretary. She lives with her parents, who are kinda nuts.

(MORE)

JR (CONT'D)

One of the things she always liked to do was drive around and look at houses like this and wonder what life is like in them. Now I can tell her.

A GORGON stare from SIDNEY'S MOM.

SIDNEY'S MOM
Please go ahead.

SIDNEY'S DAD
What do you study?

JR hits on the right answer.

JR
People. I think I've always studied people. And this is great.

SIDNEY
JR is a writer.

SIDNEY'S DAD
I mean at Yale.

JR
Ah, the usual fuckin' bullshit. My mother wants me to be a lawyer.

SIDNEY'S MOM
She sounds like a very intelligent woman, if a trifle optimistic.

UNCLE CHARLIE appears above one of JR'S SHOULDERS.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Tell her to fuck herself.

JR
Is there a taxi service?

INT. TAXI. LATER

JR is in the taxi, clutching his bag on his lap, ignoring SIDNEY, who has had a change of heart, and is trotting alongside the car streaming tears.

DRIVER
What's all that about?

JR

What that's about is--Jesus, I don't know. About twenty minutes ago she said she was seeing someone else.

DRIVER

Psychos do that as a test.

JR

Don't stop or anything, we gotta go.

Looks back through rear view mirror and SIDNEY is now giving him the finger and walking back into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. SIDNEY'S APARTMENT. DAY

We don't need to get to far in on it but in another part of the apartment a headboard is banging.

JR and SIDNEY fall apart from each other.

JR

You really had me going.

SIDNEY

About what.

JR

I mean, I had a whole half year, year and a half, of, well, hell, frankly.

SIDNEY

About *me*?

JR

Yes.

SIDNEY

What do you want from me?

He can't say, but she knows it.

JR

Well, we're seniors.

SIDNEY

I'm getting agita.

She goes into the bathroom, water splashes, she comes out getting dressed.

JR

Is agita the root of agitation?

SIDNEY

No. Men who want things are. I need fresh air, Trouble. We have to sign up for classes.

She looks around at him.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

Yale, life, remember?

JR

(while dressing)

I think you think I want something I'm not thinking. Unless you want me to think it. That doesn't imply neutrality!

She puts her coat on and turns and looks at him. As if it just occurred to her:

SIDNEY

I'm seeing someone.

CUT TO:

INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN CAR. DAY

JR is slumped in his seat, possibly not sober, a NOTEBOOK open, a regular composition book, and he is scribbling in it.

THE PRIEST is staring at him.

JR

What?

PRIEST

Have you ever thought much about the existence of angels?

JR

No.

PRIEST

To you an angel would be subject matter. Something good.

JR
It would be.

PRIEST
What subject matter have you had?

JR
Yale. My father.

PRIEST
You want reconciliation with him.
He will admire and appreciate you.

JR
Yeah there's that. It's not
pathological or anything. My mom.
Her struggles. The bar.

PRIEST
The bar?

JR
I was raised in a bar.

PRIEST
Are you any *good* at writing? I fear
that sometimes the question is too
little asked.

JR
I don't know. I have stuff in the
Yale paper.

PRIEST
A lot of people don't.

JR
A lot of people do.

PRIEST
I always love to see you on this
train. What's your main trouble?

JR
I'm a poor boy who wants a rich
girl.

PRIEST
That's been done.

JR thinks about that very carefully.

JR

She's not really rich. She's lower upper middle.

PRIEST

Well you never see the real rich. They're invisible. Do you have plans in your head to make something of yourself and go and sweep her away?

JR

(cautiously)
Maybe.

PRIEST

If she loved you she'd take you poor. Heard it here first.

JR

No, I've heard it from someone else. Also the Gatsby thing.

PRIEST

What's your real theme? Since it isn't really that one.

JR

The absent father. You know that one?

PRIEST

How else do you think people become priests?

(JR stares.)

You either want to worship him or kill him. You have to decide. It's very similar to deus absconditus.

JR

I don't know any Latin.

PRIEST

Learn.

PRIEST goes back to his paper.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

JR gets onto the stool.

JR

I'm off gin. How about Scotch?

UNCLE CHARLIE
You can't change your drink.

JR
No, that's not right. People get to
decide.

UNCLE CHARLIE looks unclear on that.

UNCLE CHARLIE
I've heard of it.

Pours Scotch.

JR is despondent.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
OK what the fuck is wrong with you.
I hope it's something new.

JR
Girl trouble! OK?

UNCLE CHARLIE
Lay it on me.

JR
We get back together, for months,
it's great, and then she says she
has *agita* and throws me out.

UNCLE CHARLIE
The word *agita* is used for
digestive upset but I know what you
mean. You got on her nerves!

JR
No! Maybe!

BOBO
Hey, punk, how goes the war.

UNCLE CHARLIE
His girlfriend has *agita*.
(BOBO blanks)
They have it at Yale.

JR
She knew, atmospherically, that I
was going to ask her to marry me...

UNCLE CHARLIE turns wide-eyed.

UNCLE CHARLIE

And live at your grandfather's?

JR

Oh come on.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Does she have money?

JR

Not in a money sense. They have display of money. Lower upper middle. I would say dentist money.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Pot to piss in. *Have one. What did I tell you. No pot to piss in, no car, no girls for you.*

BOBO

Broads come, broads go, they all have angina.

BAYARD rolls in.

BAYARD

About nine people said you were going to kill yourself so here I am *because I have a car.*

UNCLE CHARLIE

Unlike some.

CHIEF

Gotta have a car, man. Minimum.

BOBO

They can't even ever see you walking, except into a store or something. Nobody. Not in America. That's why the guys who exercise wear weird uniforms so no one thinks they just don't have a car.

BAYARD

I have keys to my brother's place. He's in Finland. Let's get hammered.

EXT. A PORCH OR TERRACE, GREAT NECK. NIGHT

If it's not a bit thick, across the water from Great Neck winks a green light. JR is staring at this green dock light and drinking. Heavily, and thinking heavy thoughts.

BAYARD

She gets agita, whatever that is...

JR

It's Yiddish for nerves...

BAYARD

And she needs TIME, and her SPACE, and all that, right? So I have a question.

JR turns and looks at him.

BAYARD (CONT'D)

What do *you* need?

JR stares.

BAYARD (CONT'D)

I'm not a genius, it's an obvious question.

JR

What do I want? I want to be a writer, it's clear enough that a guy on the train is pretending to be a character, but I suck.

BAYARD

If you suck at writing, that's when you become a journalist.

JR drinks.

JR

I'm NOT going to law school.

BAYARD

Neither am I.

JR

You're not the only son of a needy single mother.

BAYARD

Your mom wants you happy?

This hits JR hard.

JR

Yeah she does. Neither of us...know how. And nobody really thinks they *should* be. Because that's the way it is. In the lower, lower middle classes, when your father is an fucking asshole...

JR starts to lose it.

JR (CONT'D)

And leaves a mother, and a kid, and is just a voice on the fucking radio.

BAYARD

Hey cool it brother this is not Primal Scream time. Let's get wasted and then go back and get graduated.

JR

All right.

INT. THE ROOM AT WEBSTER HALL. DAY

JR, bags packed, stands at the window looking out at the campus. And he sees:

SIDNEY, walking away past the oak where he used to sit. NOT meeting a guy, just off and away.

Finis. Simple as that.

JR turns into the room, and lies on the stripped bed. The ROOM PHONE rings, and he answers it:

JR

(apprehensively)
Hello?

THE VOICE.

THE VOICE

HEYYYYY.
(a big, deep, 70's radio
HEY)
It's your old man, remember me?

CLOSE ON JR

JR

Hi Dad.

THE VOICE

I couldn't make it, as you know.

JR has no reaction to this. He listens.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

No surprise. We'll have a visit soon, a good visit, and I want you to know...

What?

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

...that I've stopped drinking and I've been here and there, ha ha ha, *apologizing* to people...

JR waits, pathetically.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

And you made the list!

JR

Wow.

THE VOICE

Don't fuck with me. So lets catch up soon. Glad you made it, I was worried. College isn't for everybody.

JR

It was for Mom, but you got her pregnant in it.

Silence.

THE VOICE

We all have to paddle our own canoe. I think your mother has you paddling hers a little bit?

JR

Maybe.

THE VOICE

Maybe. OK, I'm on air in 15 and change, I gotta run.

JR

Where are you?

Click. Dial tone.

JR lies back on his stripped mattress. He looks over at his bags by the door. He closes his eyes and remembers:

INT. SIDNEY'S APARTMENT. DAY (THE PAST)

SIDNEY is tracing his chest hair.

SIDNEY

What are your stories about?

JR

The bar. My family. A dumb rube and the beautiful girl who crushes his heart.

SIDNEY

Move on.

EXT. YALE GRADUATION. OLD CAMPUS. DAY

ESTABLISH THE CEREMONY AND SETTING

MOM and UNCLE CHARLIE are in the crowd, the latter in a blue suit, and the latter completely aghast with hangover. MOM is in a kind of delirium.

UNCLE CHARLIE

OK, OK. I realize it's big. I'm here. But Jesus.

MOM

Do you.

MOM (CONT'D)

He graduated from YALE.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Your father went to Dartmouth and he's farting in front of the television saying he didn't do it. I'm not dashing your dreams, I'm injecting proportion.

(a beat)

This is all right. I'd be happier if he had a car.

JR is marching with the other grads in his gown and mortarboard, as the bells ring from Harkness: the GRADS take their seats.

INT. THE ROOM AT WEBSTER HALL. DAY

JR looks up and sees:

MOM, standing there in her new blue suit, looking terrific, looking at the room in wonder.

MOM

We did it.

She examines him.

MOM (CONT'D)

Why do you look like you were in a car accident?

JR

I'm alive on planet earth.

He sits up on the bed. She sits beside him.

MOM

What law schools are you looking at?

JR

None.

MOM thinks about that, and then thinks that maybe it's time not to say anything.

JR (CONT'D)

I'm going to be a novelist.

MOM

And where will you live? A garret?

JR

Grampa's. Like everybody. We all go to Grampa's. I know you think this is supposed to change everything, but...

MOM

You have to have a job.

JR

I will have a job. Writing a novel.

MOM

Publishing is going more towards memoir...

He keeps hearing this!

JR

Mom, listen, I love you. Now that this is over, can you not put me into your dreams? And dream for yourself?

MOM

You're making me sound pathetic. Frankly you might be more pathetic for assuming I'm pathetic.

JR

That's kinda what I needed to hear. I sometimes don't know very much and have kinda generic assumptions. I'm not sure how this goes with writing...

MOM

If it's really turning towards Memoir, at least you don't have to make stuff up!

JR sits up, sits there beside his Mom on the bed, and reaches into his coat, and takes out a small blue velvet ring box.

He hands it to MOM.

MOM (CONT'D)

Is this for Sidney?

JR

No. Open it.

She opens the box. Inside is a female-sized YALE CLASS RING.

JR (CONT'D)

It's a Yale ring. I don't like male jewelry, but I thought, since the Musketeers actually did this together...

MOM takes out the ring.

JR (CONT'D)

...It's for you.

INT. THE DICKENS. NIGHT

JR is shattered, with BAYARD.

BAYARD

So you closed the circle with one parent. MAYBE. What about The Voice.

JR

I don't even know where he is.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(passing)

The VOICE: Downward spiral. Since the Carter administration.

BAYARD

Jesus, the ring, fuck, symbolically you just married your mother...

JR

Oh for fuck's sake. No it isn't! It's more like an independence slash finality thing with a nod to a former situational interdependency.

BAYARD

This is all Freudian as fuck. You know that.

CHIEF settles in on a stool.

CHIEF

So both you assholes graduated?

They both nod.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Back em up on me.

UNCLE CHARLIE produces the drinks.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

So how much do they get for a Yale education these days?

UNCLE CHARLIE

(pulling Guinness pints)

Sixty grand. JR got grants and scholarships, I think Bayard here was full ticket.

CHIEF

What year was the Magna Carta signed?

BAYARD JR
I don't know. I don't know.

UNCLE CHARLIE
1215.

CHIEF
Foundation of English law.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Bulwark against tyranny.

BAYARD
I don't give a shit.

CHIEF
I just don't want you in the Ruling
Classes.

BAYARD
Too late, Chief.

UNCLE CHARLIE answers the ringing phone. JR looks up to see
UNCLE CHARLIE handing him the RECEIVER.

CUT TO:

INT. A BRUNCH RESTAURANT IN MANHATTAN. DAY

SIDNEY settles into shot. She looks more beautiful than ever.

SIDNEY
JR.

JR is wearing sunglasses and torturing his latest bloody
mary.

JR
I was kinda into the clean break
idea.

SIDNEY
We can be friends, just not
romantic or sexual.

JR
That's so appealing.

SIDNEY
I apologize if that hurts you.

JR
OK.

SIDNEY

So what are you doing?

JR

I'm on Long Island. I'm at the bar a lot. I'm working on my novel. About the bar.

SIDNEY

Who wants to read a roman a clef about a bar in Manhasset?

JR

Everybody. You'll be surprised.

SIDNEY

Publishing is heading towards memoir.

JR

People have been saying that. The traditional first novel, which is about all your personal shit, is now memoir. I think it's honest.

SIDNEY

How many pages do you have?

JR

(lying)
Many.

SIDNEY

Have you applied to newspapers? You have clips. Have you contacted the New York Times?

JR

Would you like it, if I was at the Times?

SIDNEY

I love you anyway, I just don't want a relationship.

JR

But you have a relationship. It's just not sexual or romantic.

SIDNEY

There are no rules. People change.

JR knows its going nowhere right now but there is a glimmer here, a glimmer...

JR

Look, the Times is way out of my league.

SIDNEY

Was Yale out of your league?

JR

Can we go to your place?

SIDNEY

No, of course not. I live with him.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DICKENS. NIGHT

The bar is packed. JR is a drunken mess.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You saw Sidney. In your reduced condition.

JR nods.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

She's checking in on you, seeing if you've gotten your shit together.

JR

I don't even have any shit to get together.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Do you remember what I told you about the Male Sciences?

JR stares at him sullenly.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Have a job and a car with all your shit in it? Be independent so that someone might want you? And so you can get away if they don't?

JR nods.

JR

I can give my clips to the NY Times. I'm gonna give my clips to the New York fucking times Times.

(MORE)

JR (CONT'D)

That's very big in lower upper middle, the New York Times. Like Yale.

UNCLE CHARLIE

You're learning. I throw The Times across the room but knock yourself out. It's held in a certain regard.

JR

Sidney took my heart from my chest and ate it in front of me.

UNCLE CHARLIE

In the Male Sciences there are two choices. You can drink or get even.

INT. TIMES PERSONNEL OFFICE. DAY

THE TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN closes a folder.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

We all like your clips from New Haven. Where are you working now?

JR

I'm writing fiction, I think, and I work ...at a family business.

A raised eyebrow.

JR (CONT'D)

A hospitality business.

A look of interest.

JR (CONT'D)

A bar on Long Island.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Your clips are good, Mr Maguire.

JR

They are?

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

The editors feel they need to see more before they make a decision.

JR

You want to see more?

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Yes.

JR

Is that good?

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Yes.

JR

I don't have more.

A pause.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Let me tell Brian that.

She gets up and goes. JR sits, head bowed, having the agita. Looking into the black pit of failure before him.

A moment later the door opens.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN (CONT'D)

Would you like to come and see the newsroom?

JR's honesty is compelling here, to the Personnel Woman, us, and himself.

JR

Not if I don't have a job.

A beat.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Come and look at the newsroom.

INT. NY TIMES NEWSROOM. MOMENTS LATER

A city block long. And in those days there are still some typewriters, and you can smoke.

JR stands looking at it all, taking it all in.

TIMES PERSONNEL WOMAN

Come and meet your editor.

JR, instead of bursting into tears:

JR

...OK.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE is being very serious.

UNCLE CHARLIE

This has to be about you, it can't be about the girl. Where is she.

JR

She's in the village...She has an apartment. With...him.

UNCLE CHARLIE

In the list of things that you don't have that she has, what do you also don't have now.

JR

An apartment in New York.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Don't write to the girl that you've improved yourself! Whatever you do. You'll blow the power and majesty of her finding out.

Head in hands:

JR

I already did!

UNCLE CHARLIE

Jesus God, will you come to me about these things? Don't let her know you want her back! Did you say that?

JR nods hopelessly.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Have you gone and stared at her fucking building? In the rain and shit?

INTERCUT:

JR staring at SIDNEY'S BUILDING. In the rain and shit.

JR

No.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Listen. JR. She's abandoned you *how*
many times?

JR looks at him.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Don't you look at me. If someone
abandons you...what does that mean?
You of all people?

JR

She's just needs Time.

UNCLE CHARLIE

I think that you've missed the
point that girls decide. If they
want something, or don't want
something, it becomes very obvious
very fast.

JR

But.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Girls decide.

JR

I know but.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Girls decide. When she met you, who
decided.

JR

...She did.

UNCLE CHARLIE

There you go. Numb nuts? Standard
pattern obvious to all? Do you see
a pattern?

(after it has sunk in:
shouts to bar)

JR got hired by the Times!!!

CHEERS go up along the whole bar.

JR

I'm a copyboy, I get sandwiches. I
separate carbons, it's nothing,
it's nothing...

But the DRINKS come anyway. The guys start pummeling his back. And then they lift him in his bar stool throne. He is riding up there when he sees, coming through the crowd, MOM.

The guys put him down.

JR (CONT'D)

Yeah. I got hired by the New York Times.

They embrace, and the whole bar cheers.

CUT TO:

INT. TIMES EDITORIAL OFFICE. DAY

The EDITOR is a Timesman through and through.

EDITOR

So, your first byline presents a problem. Initials cannot be used without periods.

JR

I've done some research. Harry S Truman did not use a dot after his middle initial.

EDITOR

It is not called a "dot".

JR

And ee cummings, no...periods.

EDITOR

By God, the Times gave them periods anyway. And do you know why? Because it looks like we *forgot*. Times style is Times style, and you are J period R period Maguire -

JR

Period.

EDITOR

There is no period after a last name.

Gazes at JR.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

Allow me to convey my compliments
on this fine work. You have a
byline in the New York Times.

The editor scratches a note in a folder. Puts the corrected
copy into the OUT tray, where it is snatched up...

And then looks at JR.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

Good day.

JR

Oh.

He leaves in a daze.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR. DAY

Noise. Trains being announced. BAYARD is three sheets to the
wind.

BAYARD

So you're promoted.

JR

No, I'm promoted when I become a
full-fledged reporter.

BAYARD

And Sidney will be sorry.

JR

When my byline appears every day...

BAYARD

And you still don't have the
background she's looking for...

JR takes that on.

BAYARD (CONT'D)

And are mainly blossoming as a
barfly....

(a beat)

Genetics is tough. Incidentally,
where is the Missing Link now? The
deus absconditus.

JR
Somewhere South...

BAYARD
You're being like your mother about Yale. You think the Times means something.

JR
So what does mean something?

BAYARD
A book. With a book you can go years before you realize that doesn't mean anything either. Nothing means anything, either immediately or eventually. And whatever you do, Sidney will still never call out of the blue to get you back. Do you know why?

Oddly enough, THE PRIEST is visible in the crowd below. JR watches him go. For some reason, the Priest, who sees him, HOLDS UP HIS WRIST AND TAPS HIS WATCH FACE. After this scrap of metaphysical (which may be just drinking):

JR
Why won't Sidney ever call? Genius who knows everything.

BAYARD
Because she doesn't love you. Because she dumped you like nine times. Because she's getting married on Memorial Day.

The WAITER comes up.

BAYARD (CONT'D)
In retrospect, what you do next is going to be important.

JR
Four gin martinis, up with a twist, made with a tiny drop of Scotch.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DICKENS. SAME NIGHT

JR is at the bar, and he has a copy of the Times with his byline in it.

He smashes it up in his hands, into a ball, and lofts it into the trash bin behind the bar, under the DICKENS PORTRAIT.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Two.

JR sucks down a huge part of his ongoing drink, and claws open the book he is reading now, A FAN'S NOTES. He looks at the PIC of Exley, who even looks drunk in his Author photo. He starts reading.

WELL DRESSED PERFECTLY OK STRANGER

What are you reading?

JR shows the cover, as if it is a challenge.

WELL DRESSED PERFECTLY OK STRANGER (CONT'D)

What's it about?

JR

It's never what it's about. It's how it's about it. If you don't know that, don't ask people what they are fucking reading. What a book is about is the same thing that life is about. Love, and pain, and death, and disappointment.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(wary of the pending fight
but deciding to ignore
it)

Fred Exley was forced to use the subtitle a fictional memoir, I think after his publisher went looking for character clearances.

WELL DRESSED PERFECTLY OK STRANGER

Do you want to step outside?

JR

I'm not gay.

He is clubbed off the bar stool with one right hook, and then is on the floor among his books and papers.

UNCLE CHARLIE comes over the bar in a practiced way.

THE WELL DRESSED PERFECTLY OK STRANGER leaves by the main door.

JR'S MSS papers and notebooks are everywhere, and he gathers them together, bleeding onto them, from his fauceting nose.

UNCLE CHARLIE
(with bar rag)
Stand up and put your head back.

JR
(still bleeding on the
floor)
Sidney's getting married.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Expect nothing, and never be
disappointed, and you'll always be
surprised. What do I always tell
you? Don't try to be on a team
that's not picking you.

CHIEF
That guy had every right to clock
you.

JR
I know he did.

JR sits back on his stool, holding the bar rag to his nose.

CHIEF
You acted like your father.

JR looks at him over the bloody rag.

UNCLE CHARLIE lays BLOODY MANUSCRIPT and NOTEBOOKS ON THE
BAR.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Pop quiz. First line of "The Ginger
Man."

JR
"Today a rare Sun of Spring."

UNCLE CHARLIE
Second question. Is it a good
opening line.

JR
...It's a Joyce knockoff. Not very
good. Really.

JIMBO
I have read The Ginger Man. Not
impressed.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(pouring a pint)

Dunleavey goes over to fuckin
Ireland, starts dressing like
Victor McLaglen in The fuckin Quiet
Man, has a blackthorn stick, is
writing in Joycean fuckin pastiche.
Strangely it's big with the Irish.
And nowhere else. Who the fuck
knows about anything. You can never
tell.

GIVES JR another bar rag, this one a bundle of ice.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

If she's getting married, take the
win. It's over with.

JR nods.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

People write best when their
heart's are broken. It's
scientific.

CUT TO:

INT. TIMES NEWSROOM. DAY

JR is still a copyboy, still separating carbons. And one of
the carbons is:

"In Westport, CT, Sidney Lawson and Robert Devereaux
Hollingshead"

Fuck.

He throws it away. Then picks it up and is holding it when:

COPYGIRL

He's looking for you.

JR looks over at the EDITOR visible behind his glass wall. He
adjusts his tie, retucks his shirt. Hesitates. Stares at the
floor. Then heads over. Momentous, momentous...on this of all
days...

COPYBOY

(passing)

Could be it, lucky bastard. Byline
boy.

JR keeps heading towards the bumf-crammed aquarium of the editorial office. EDITOR gestures at him to enter, and he does. EDITOR gestures at him to close the door, and he does. EDITOR gestures at him to sit, and he does.

EDITOR

As you know, the editors have had a chance to carefully review your work, and it's terrific. Truly, some of the pieces you have done have been outstanding.

(a beat)

Though many of them have been about people in bars on Long island.

JR nods.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

Some of the pieces have, indeed, been truly outstanding.

JR waits.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

That's why I wish I had better news.

MOVE IN ON JR

EDITOR (CONT'D)

...As you know, when the committee meets to consider a trainee, some editors voice support, some do not...

JR

Is it based just on writing? Or is it a lower upper middle class thing.

EDITOR

(evading this—confused by it?—still benign)

A vote is taken, and I can't tell you who voted how, or why, but the end result is that I cannot offer you a position as a reporter.

JR

Thank you.

The EDITOR looks a bit taken aback, as if he was not clear.

EDITOR

The feeling is that you need more experience. A smaller newspaper, perhaps, where you can learn and grow.

JR

No. Thank you.

AS JR heads back to his station, taking off his tie he sees the COPYGIRL holding out the receiver of a phone.

CUT TO:

INT. A HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

JR sits, listening to the beeping of Monitors, and looking at: UNCLE CHARLIE. Uncle Charlie is asleep, gray and terrible.

UNCLE CHARLIE opens one eye.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Don't look at me like that. They say it's minor.

JR

It's a *heart attack*.

UNCLE CHARLIE

It's probably *possible* to kill me but it's not easy. What's up.

JR

They didn't offer me a position.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Pure gold. All that means is all those assholes are now characters.

JR

I guess so.

UNCLE CHARLIE

And this itself is a dramatic incident. You can inflate it.

JR

OK. What if I made it where I realize something important.

UNCLE CHARLIE

(ignoring this)

I'm not a hundred percent sure you should go memoir, but we have to be conscious of the trend.

(a beat)

If there's gonna be any structure, you know what you have to do.

JR

He's in North Carolina, doing a talk show.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Your father once came to Manhasset to talk to your mother. Seeking a rapprochement. He came on the train, he didn't have a car. By the way, in America, you can't have a rapprochement with any chick whatsoever if you don't have a car. You can't do anything. You know that.

JR

You've told me, yes. And stashies in the wallet.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Maybe things are different in the future of transportation or in Holland or some shit, but in America: *have a car*. Your mother had already told him to fuck off. He comes in the bar, he drinks well scotch, neat. Never drink well scotch, and never drink it neat. It's a signal that you are nearing the end, and in his case that was 20 years ago. I loaned him thirty bucks. Which I have not seen to this day. As I get older all I can remember about him is that voice. That set of pipes. And I always wondered about him, if he was really, underneath it all, a good guy.

After a long, scared beat, JR:

JR

Do I remind you of him?

UNCLE CHARLIE thinks about that one, and what to say, good and hard.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Lighten up on your drinking.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA. DAY

Establish a low-rent chain restaurant near an active airport.

INT. CHAIN RESTAURANT. CONTINUOUS

JR is sitting reading, making notes in a book, and suddenly, sensing something, he looks up at:

THE VOICE

THE VOICE still looks great, barely gray-templed. He has made an entrance and knows it.

THE VOICE
(whole registers deeper
than natural)
Give your old man a hug.

JR does, and perhaps, perhaps, THE VOICE finds real emotion in it. They sit back down and THE VOICE stares at his kid.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
Well. Thanks for making the trip.

He is looking for the waitress. JR looks at him looking for the waitress.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
I don't know if I told you on the phone but I allow myself to have a cocktail from time to time.

JR
I thought you were...

THE VOICE
Are you?

JR has no real answer to that: he wants a drink himself.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

(to waitress)

Double Scotch, whatever the well
is, couple rocks, splash of water,
no fruit.

He looks at his son. His son looks at him. JR looks at the
WAITRESS.

JR

I'm fine.

THE VOICE

Don't fuck with me, he'll have what
I'm having.

JR

What do you mean?

THE VOICE looks at him as the WAITRESS goes and we are
allowed to think here that THE VOICE is really, at base, or
has become, a really scary, degenerate fucker. There are
things wrong in the show-biz presentation. A bit of matter at
the corner of his mouth. Eyes yellowish, color bad. A little
bit of not-all there. Something crazy in the machismo
presentation.

THE VOICE

I make the rules unless you can
take me.

JR

What?

THE VOICE

You wanna take me on for being a
shitty father I'll give you first
shot.

He lights a cigarette and has a coughing fit.

JR

Mom is good.

THE VOICE for a moment doesn't seem to process who that might
be.

THE VOICE

(very much looking for the
waitress and his drink)

Yeah I'm letting myself enjoy a
cocktail from time to time.

He has begun breaking BREADSTICKS.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

I forgot to tell you on the phone.
I'm letting myself enjoy a cocktail
from time to time. See, I realized
I'm not really an alcoholic. Yeah.
It's good. When the mood strikes
me, now and then, I can enjoy a
cocktail.

The drinks arrive, and some demon in THE VOICE makes him
wait, and watch, as JR picks his up first.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

You can enjoy a cocktail with your
old man.

He touches glasses, and watches JR take the medicine before
taking his own.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

So what are you doing.

JR

I'm a writer, I have a job at the
Times...

THE VOICE

How's your mother?

JR

She's all right.

THE VOICE drains the glass. Then sits there as if waiting for
the fizz effect, as if with a science fair volcano.

THE VOICE

We're gonna eat over at Kathy's,
she's the new poontang.

JR stares, evenly, jaw set.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Her daughter's twelve, not entirely
sure it matters down here...

Coughing fit, gesture for another drink.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

That's a joke. Come on.

EXT. A NORTH CAROLINA ROAD. DAY

THE VOICE is driving a genuine piece of shit car, the car of a man at the end of his radio voyage.

INT. THE CAR. CONTINUOUS

JR's feet are up to the ankles in empty beer cans and pints in the foot well.

JR
How's the talk show?

THE VOICE
Well, you know the Talk Show as it is down south, it's all about saying nigger without actually saying nigger.

JR cannot believe he heard that.

THE VOICE looks at him.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
Lighten the fuck up. Sometimes you don't pick the tune you sing for your supper, SPORT.
(a beat, and then from some suddenly accessed memory)
They say best men are molded out of faults/ And, for the most, become much more the better/ For being a little bad

He holds out his working PINT. JR takes it, and unable to stop himself, has a drink.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
Maybe you never sang for your supper.

JR
No, my mother was singing for it.

THE VOICE
Oh, it's one of THOSE. Maybe one of these days I'll tell you about your mother.

JR
And what would that be.

And unexpectedly:

THE VOICE
How much I loved her.

Is this craft? Is it real, is it situation management? JR
stares forward.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
Here we are! As a Yale graduate,
you'll love this. As you swan
around as a Yale man, I hope you
always remember you come from a
long line of scumbags, and a house
that needed to be donated to
science.
(a VERY COMPELLING GRIN)
Only fucking with you.

He turns into a side dirt road, and pulls up, in a cloud of
dust, at a shotgun shack made as nice as it could be which
isn't very. A GIRL'S BICYCLE leans against the porch steps.
THE VOICE finishes his pint as if it is medicine, necking it.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
I allow myself to enjoy a cocktail.

JR looks and sees that KATHY has come out on the porch, a
poor southern woman, painfully thin, and troubled. Her
daughter, very plump, stands beside her in the door. KATHY is
white, and the daughter biracial.

EXT. THE YARD. CONTINUOUS

THE VOICE gets out of the car, more than half in the bag.

THE VOICE
Hello, Honey!

KATHY
I see y'all started the party
without me.

THE VOICE
Honey, I started the party long
before I met you, just as your
party started long before you met
me, but now I just enjoy the
occasional cocktail. This is my
son.

Arm around JR.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

This is my son, JR.

KATHY prods her daughter behind her and inside.

KATHY

What's the JR stand for?

The eternal question.

THE VOICE

Junior.

JR would rather be anywhere, and anyone, else.

KATHY looks for alliance in his eyes. Sees if anything only regret and trauma and apology. She stands aside and opens the door wide for whatever next is going to happen.

KATHY

Very pleased to meet you, JR.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SHOTGUN SHACK. LATER

It is pin-neat, and poor. But KATHY who is probably no slouch of an alcoholic herself is fixing drinks. THE VOICE is off having a slash. JR sits at a linoleum table admiring the Daughter's ongoing JIGSAW PUZZLE, which is from, of all things, a Canaletto painting.

DAUGHTER

Momma shellacks them and puts them up.

Indeed there are Fine Art jigsaws framed along the walls, each of them a longing for somewhere else.

JR

That's Venice.

DAUGHTER

I know. It's on the box. Have you ever been there?

JR

Not yet.

A very serious question:

DAUGHTER

How do you get to go places?

JR
(looking around
helplessly)
Well...Do well in school. Do very
well in school. That's the first
thing. I had to. I couldn't see
anything else...Sometimes it's all
there is.

DAUGHTER
I am good at school.

JR
If you do very well at school...no
one...

He looks like he is going to burst into tears. He looks at
his drink.

THE VOICE, holding a finished drink, is staring at him.
Something flushed and dark. He is unsteady.

JR (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

THE VOICE
(not ready to "go" yet)
...Nothing.

But he turns.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
You probably write like nuns fuck.

He goes into the kitchen. As it "starts" we stay on JR, as
THE DAUGHTER gathers up her PUZZLE on its board and the box
of pieces and leaves the room.

THE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Let me cook, honey.

KATHY
I already cooked. Can't you smell
it? It's a chicken.

Rattle of ice, glug of liquor.

KATHY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I don't need any of your mood
swings after the day I had.

THE VOICE (O.S.)
What kinda day do you have.

PUSH IN ON JR

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Really what kind of day could you possibly have.

THE VOICE is cutting limes with a back woods kind of kitchen/skinning knife.

KATHY

I don't want no mood swings with your son here.

THE VOICE

(low so as not to be heard, though he is heard)

Sucking cock behind the WashnFold to pay for your fuckin chicken?

JR stands up.

He hears:

KATHY (O.S.)

Don't touch me. Leave that alone.

JR walks towards the door. He gets to the door, and sees: his father, looking at him, deliberately, and clumsily, almost falling, sweep the chicken off the stove, it crashes to the floor in hissing grease, and for the first time JR sees: An OLD WOMAN looking out of a back bedroom, with terrified eyes.

THE VOICE Looks at JR with that belligerence from earlier, but now worse, more insane.

THE VOICE

(advancing on him)

You look like you had a breakthrough of some kind. You look like everything's falling into place.

JR

Shut the fuck up and get ready to go.

THE VOICE

Nowhere to go, this is where it happens.

(really having forgotten from just a second ago)

What did you say to me?

JR

I told you to shut the fuck up.

THE VOICE

Can't shut me up. I'm The Voice.
I'm a broadcast professional.

THE VOICE shoves JR.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Didn't want to shut me up when you
were looking for me on the radio
dial.

Shoves him again.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Can't shut your daddy up. What
would you do without the wisdom
that you need to be you, because
you are me—

Shoves him.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

And I am The VOICE, and I know...I
know...the apple...*don't fall far
from the tree.*

He starts to shove JR one handed, and JR catches the right
wrist with his left, and

With every ounce of strength, *hits THE VOICE.*

There is a sucking sound of a dislocated jaw, but the VOICE
for a moment doesn't react. He stares in wonder for a moment.
Then a thread of blood runs from the corner of his mouth.
Then he staggers and falls, trying to hold onto JR's shirt,
various other objects, and then he is *down.*

JR

I said, shut the fuck up.

He picks up his drink, and gets down on his knees by his
insensible father.

JR (CONT'D)

See this? You have it. You have all
of it.

He pours the drink into the mouth of the choking, half
conscious VOICE.

JR (CONT'D)

You have all of it. You can enjoy a cocktail these days.

He picks the bleeding and now old man up by his shirtfront.

JR (CONT'D)

I'm not your son.

KATHY

He won't hurt nobody, he can stay.

JR

Do you even know if a drunk throws a chicken on the floor, and starts trouble, you can call the police? Do you even *know*?

KATHY just stares at him.

JR (CONT'D)

Well, you *can*. You don't have to take people like him. You *don't*.

EXT. THE MAIN ROAD. DAY

BLUE LIGHTS are sparkling through the trees as JR comes out on the main road, holding the old man's CAR KEYS, which he throws into the woods. A COP CAR comes out, THE VOICE slumped in the back of it. THE VOICE is carried away to god knows where. JR walks the main road. A second COP CAR pulls up beside him.

COP

Where you going?

JR

The airport.

COP

Get in.

JR does.

COP (CONT'D)

Sorry about your father.

JR

That's not my father.

COP

You don't get to pick.

JR

Maybe.

A beat:

COP

I think she saved the chicken.

JR

...Good.

INT. THE AIRPORT. NIGHT

It's after the last flight. Shops are shuttered. The floor is being cleaned by a kind of Zamboni driven by an old man. JR sits on one chair of an empty row of them, staring into space, thinking about *everything*.

EXT. THE DAY AT THE BEACH. REPRISE

UNCLE CHARLIE, wading chest high, with his drink, looks back at JR, standing on the beach, oblivious. He stares back at his nephew with a greater degree of consideration than we have ever seen him do. He seems to be planning something. We have never seen UNCLE CHARLIE look at the boy with concern. But he is.

YOUNG JR surges through the sparkling water towards the happy, floating, men of the bar.

INT. THE DICKENS. DAY

UNCLE CHARLIE is back at work, a little grayer, a little slower, still smoking a Marlboro. But he looks at it and puts it out.

UNCLE CHARLIE

Your mother's settled. She's selling insurance. Somebody has to sell insurance, and some of them are happy. Probably.

JR is sitting at the bar.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I think Yale kinda took care of her anxieties. It's not up to me to judge what she's looking for. But. I'd say...she's all right.

JR nods, barely, staring at the bar.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Why's all your stuff here?

JR looks around at what UNCLE CHARLIE has indicated.

And it is all there, all his stuff, a couple of suitcases, a duffel, the typewriter.

JR
Manhattan. It's time. Bayard has a place.

UNCLE CHARLIE
Manhattan's stupid. You need somewhere to get a job so you can write.

JR seems to agree that this might be right but has no ability to deal with it, as shattered as he is.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
It's America. Pick something.
(nods at gear)
Is that everything?

JR nods.

UNCLE CHARLIE holds something out.

We see:

THE VERY DISTINCTIVE KEYCHAIN, wings and book with the Cadillac keys.

UNCLE CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Don't say I never gave you anything.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DICKENS. DAY

JR, puts all his gear into the capacious trunk of THE CHUCK BERRY CADDY.

We see it in its Uncle Charlie detail: Funeral suit, tools, bags, everything.

And in JR'S instance , the TYPEWRITER CASE.

JR closes the trunk. THE DICKENS SIGN sways over the door of the bar.

Watching from the window are: BOBO, CHIEF, THE PRIEST,
everybody.

JR gets into the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. A HIGHWAY SOMEWHERE. LATER

JR is driving, with the top down, TYPEWRITER and gear piled
in the back, sunglasses on, off into whatever will be.

Music matching the song from SC 1.

THE END

"THE TENDER BAR"