

THE LESSER ROAD
(AKA THE HOT DOG MOVIE)

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INT - BEDROOM *(with flashes of other interiors)*

Darkness, indistinct shapes form and dissolve. A corner of light, a piece of something solid. The sound of breathing. An eye blinks, glistening and wet. A few scenes flicker and vibrate, an older woman at a counter, a man sitting watching television, yet another man at a desk.

A man lays in his bed in the dark. He watches as much the features of the room as the various things in his head. He makes an effort to see, to realize what's going on. He's not pleased with waking up this morning. Fed up with the same ritual every day. He holds his head, frowns, looks around and mutters indistinctly at the early hour,

ALLEN
(VOICE-OVER)

[Note: overlaid sentences, shifts, unclear and warped audio...]

I'm a blur. just a blur. To myself. And to others. Others, who are those? Noises. Sounds. A creaking in the floor. Is that the neighbor I hear calling, is it my mother? I'm in bed. I'm awake. I'm sleeping. Maybe both I don't know. I feel blurry, in between places. How long have I been here? I'm I still sleeping, I must be dreaming. What's that sound? It's just a dream, please tell me it's just a dream. There's got to be more, right? There's more than this. More than this.

Allen tosses and turns in his sheets.

ALLEN
This place smells like potatoes, I don't feel good.

Allen tosses in bed. He pulls up from the bed. He looks around the apartment, the bedroom, empty, no one there to assist him with any answers. He feebly lifts the curtain by the window some light comes in. The room goes from a very dark environment to one with clear, bright light. The sounds of cars, of people, are heard. He smiles.

ALLEN

More.

Sitting in bed with eyes closed, Allen moves the white sheet around him. One moment he is wrapping it around himself, tight and comforting, the next moment he's using it like wings, arms extended and slowly swaying

ALLEN

I want that. The intensity, the contact, that was so nice, that was really nice, I really appreciate it, you've been great, the love, the hand on my shoulder, the eye in the eye, I've been wanting to tell you this, man, you've always been there for me, I really yes, yes, I got it, don't mention it, I'll always be there. Yes, yes, I'm so glad you could make it, I've always wanted to meet you, the heads turning, the smiles on the faces, happy, happy to see you, so very happy.

INT - BEDROOM, MOMENTS LATER

The happy dreamy mood has left Allen, he stands in the middle of his room getting dressed. He buttons his shirt, puts on a tie, then his jacket. He gives himself a quick look in the mirror, and makes sure that his hair is ok. He is the portrait of the young office worker. Pale, beige, sugar-free.

INT - OFFICE, AT ALLEN'S DESK

Allen sits at his cubicle. He drums his fingers on the desk, intermittently checking his watch. He looks around the room. After a moment of this, he grabs the mouse, and with a few gestures shuts down his computer. He swiftly gets up, places his chair at the desk, and is out of there.

EXT - CITY SIDEWALK, STREET CORNER

Late afternoon, early evening on a city sidewalk. There is a street vendor, JIMMY, selling hot dogs from his cart. Some people come and go getting food.

We see Jimmy interact with his customers, warm and genial. They banter smile and laugh. Jimmy's movements are grand and exaggerated, a great big swift gesture to put on mustard. His whole demeanor is that of a man at the summit of energy, of positivity. His ballet of movements is accompanied by a sly and over the top sense of the theatrical.

Allen approaches the scene and observes from a safe distance.

JIMMY

Hot dogs! Hot dogs! come and get
your hot dogs! Hot dogs to fill
your stomach and sing in your
mouth! Rejuvenate your outlook on
life! Four Dollars!

With so many condiments you get
the whole world in a bun! The
cornucopia promised at the
beginning of times right here,
right now, in the palm of your
hand! Four Dollars!

The great American Maccaw!
Replenish your electrolytes as you
soar on the Chinook! The spark of
life, The vim, the vigor. The
dreams of youth! Right here!

Hot dogs! Come and get your hot
dogs, the best, the very best hot
dogs in the world, the best you'll
ever taste, come and get them
while they last, hot dogs!

Jimmy is at his cart finishing up making a hot dog for one of his clients.

JIMMY

I will take care of your hunger,
your poor, your tired!

He chuckles.

JIMMY

Eat and the future will be yours!

He hands a newly made hot dog to his client, WERNER, a quiet and thoughtful man.

JIMMY

Four dollars Werner.

Werner, having done this before is ready with his money. He hands Jimmy the cash.

WERNER

Thank you!

JIMMY

This is fuel for your soul Werner,
fly to the moon, my friend.

At this point, the people around the cart have dispersed, and Allen slowly approaches the vendor. But before Allen, makes his introduction Werner begins:

WERNER

You know, I been thinking about
what we have here, all the
stories, the energy, that you give
out...

JIMMY

Every day, rain or shine!

WERNER

Yes! Exactly, one could almost say
that you hold the corner together,
it just wouldn't be...

JIMMY

Without me the city would fly to
pieces, holding valiantly the very
mortar, the cement holding us!

WERNER

I like that, yes, I've just been thinking that...

JIMMY

Go on, go on, just give me a second.

Jimmy walks to the side of his cart, from a little door he pulls out a small plastic case. It is a small portable typewriter. He quickly sets up, getting some semi-battered papers into the machine. As he hurries, and because of his grand gestures, some of the papers flutter to the ground - which Werner and Allen dutifully pick up from the ground. Jimmy dramatically puts a sheet of paper in the machine and like a virtuoso piano player starts typing. He does so for a few seconds, he looks at his page with a critical eye, not quite sure he likes his output. He begins anew this time looking up and addressing Werner.

JIMMY

So, you were saying?

Jimmy gets up from his typewriter setup and approaches Werner who is valiantly trying to make himself clear while being of the upmost politeness.

WERNER

Well yes, the corner, all the people, we all talk and interact and such, and we love your hot dogs. In the last few months...

JIMMY

Well thank you Werner, I put a lot of time and effort in giving you the whole experience, the whole show as it were.

WERNER

Yes, yes, I just wanted to say keep going! Keep it up, as it were, as they say. I always remember the first time I saw your stand, it was a revelation, really, never experienced anything like it...

Jimmy's gaze moves from Werner to Allen standing behind him.

JIMMY

And what might I do for you, young man? You've been hanging in there - good for you - Werner, my man, business calls, it was good to talk to you.

He politely, not so politely, puts his hand on Werner's shoulder and sends him off.

JIMMY

So, you're looking for some nourishment? I'm just about to close up for the day.

Jimmy starts busying himself with the items around the cart. Picking up some items, tidying things up.

ALLEN

Actually, I'm not really hungry, I was more just curious to see what was going on here. You put on quite a show!

JIMMY

Not really hungry? You dead? Depressed?

ALLEN

No, no.

Still tidying up, Jimmy takes a few steps from the cart and picks up, one by one, the little plastic stools on the ground.

JIMMY

Don't you want the brotherhood of man! A future that you can believe in?

ALLEN

I don't see what this has anything to do with...

JIMMY

You're new aren't you?

ALLEN

Not that new.

Jimmy places the plastic stools neatly by the cart.

JIMMY

Yes, but you've never ventured out, I can see it in your face, a potato eater, the scent of fresh cut grass, well maintained drain pipes, a smile to the neighbor in the morning, but beyond that? Nothing! Nothing!

ALLEN

I'm sick of potatoes. I'm tired of what I've got.

JIMMY

I know! I know!

He starts to walk around Allen, speaking softly.

JIMMY

Hot dogs. Hot dogs. Come and get your hot dogs.

Encouraged by Allen's smile Jimmy presses on, gently but consistently. Still pacing around:

JIMMY

You don't need to be hungry to eat these. These, my boy, are summit of the tubed meat landscape. The very best.

He now faces Allen, making his closing statements as convincingly as he can.

JIMMY

You can finally sink your hungry
little teeth into something that
will sing for you. Sweet, sweet,
music you can believe in.
Four dollars

Allen proceeds to get his wallet, but his words go in a
different direction:

ALLEN

Out of curiosity, what's in them?

JIMMY

Dreams and hopes! Visions of a
better place, where a man can
stand and look you in the eye and
be who he is. That's what's in my
hot dogs.

Allen stares. Jimmy takes the four dollars from Allen's
hand and walks back to the cart to prepares the hot dog.

JIMMY

You're an unbeliever. You have no
idea. It's much more than just a
hot dog, it's the story that goes
with it. It's the energy. Very
important the energy. You hand
them the blessed dog and look into
their eyes, into their very soul!
You see that tremor, their wishes,
all their dreams. These delicate,
fragile people.

Mustard?

Allen nods.

JIMMY

What's your name?

ALLEN

Allen.

JIMMY

Allen, I believe in them. When they eat the fucker, they light up. They fucking light up. Brings out the best in them.

Onions?

Allen nods.

JIMMY

You'll see. You'll drop everything my boy, my soft feminine little friend, this will expand your mind, like a supernova exploding in your solar plexus.

The light that sets the world ablaze!

As he hands him the finished hot dog:

JIMMY

These are very special hotdogs - very special.

Allen takes his first bite, and immediately makes a sound of pleasure, of deep appreciation.

JIMMY

Hot dogs make people happy - that's the bottom line.

Allen eats his hot dog. Jimmy, settles himself by his typewriter and enjoys the sight of his client eating. Like a mother feeding a child. He looks at the sheet that he was previously typing. He looks at it critically while listening and typing.

ALLEN

You know this is nice. For a while now I've just been coasting along. There's been nothing really to be happy or sad about. It leaves me all the same, you know? This is a special thing that you've got here. We're kind of all looking for this.

Jimmy, quietly typing away:

JIMMY

When your 'here' just won't do anymore. I get it, believe me I get it. Anyway you found me, enjoy!

ALLEN

This is delicious by the way.

Jimmy smiles at this and finishes typing and begins packing up. As he packs up his tiredness begins to slightly show.

ALLEN

What do you have there?

JIMMY

Smith Corona 1972 baby blue model with two-tone tape. Red and black, a Corsair Deluxe; when you talk, I use red.

ALLEN

Right on.

Well thank you, that was great.

Allen is not quite sure how to make his exit. Jimmy just stares at him. He finally speaks:

JIMMY

It's the damnedest thing isn't it. That little flicker that lets you know that there's a whole lot more to this place, and it's all right there for you. You can't quite put your finger on it. The bank man won't let you deposit it, but it's there.

He continues to pack up the cart, he is almost done.

JIMMY

Exciting times, my friend.

He begins to push the cart again, a crumpled piece of paper falls off the cart, Jimmy notices but makes no effort to retrieve it.

JIMMY

I am the spark that lights the way
and you are the arms that lift the
world!

Allen smiles at his unabashed drama. And when Jimmy's too far to hear:

JIMMY

There's so much darkness. Vast,
vast darkness..

EXT - CITY SIDEWALK, EVENING

Jimmy walks off into the distance and Allen is left on the sidewalk by himself, with the darkening skies and the lights coming on the buildings all around. He is invigorated by this meeting, he dreams and feels a power and energy that he has not felt before.

ALLEN

Lift! Lift the world!

He looks at the store fronts all lit up with their merchandise, everything is beautiful. He hurries to cross the street, continues to marvel at what's out there and what's inside of him.

He chuckles and hums to himself.

ALLEN

Ta Ta Ta Tatata.

EXT - CITY SIDE WALK, DESOLATE, NIGHT

He turns a corner, the city seems far, and the lights are flickering out one by one. Ultimately, he is left in the dark. He doesn't like it at all. He slows down his walk and realizes that he's not quite sure where he is. He looks around him trying to recognize some landmark. He turns back to observe the direction he's just come from. He starts to

get worried. He was full of confidence and hope and suddenly it has all vanished. He notices a man quietly sitting at the edge of the crossroads. Allen approaches him.

CROSSROAD MAN

You're lost.

ALLEN

I guess I am.

CROSSROAD MAN

Well it's not that complicated,
It's a crossroad: there's this way
and there's that way.

ALLEN

I'm trying to get back to the West
End.

CROSSROAD MAN

The West End! The shops, the
banks! the lights!

ALLEN

People live there too, you know.

CROSSROAD MAN

Of course, of course, People put
up with all sorts of stuff. Well,
there's a price..

Allen sighs and pulls out his wallet.

CROSSROAD MAN

That's not what I had in mind. Do
I look like I need money?

Allen says nothing and the Crossroad Man smoothens the wrinkles in his overcoat.

CROSSROAD MAN

To be young, to be blind. What I
would like, more than anything... is
for you... to take some time... and
tell me your story... As simple as

CROSSROAD MAN (CONT'D)
that, then I'll tell you where, o
where, is the West End. Have a
seat.

He sits on a cut piece of wood and indicates another one a few feet away. Ultimately Allen sits. For several seconds, he stares at the night saying nothing, then:

ALLEN
I work in an office. I graduated two years ago. I rent out a little apartment by myself. I look at a screen all day long, then I go home. I can't order out because I don't have much money. My work is fine but it's not what I had in mind when I was in school.

CROSSROAD MAN
Interesting. I wouldn't have guessed that. I saw a certain energy in you, something stronger than what your telling me about.

Allen watches with distrust.

ALLEN
Yeah, Tonight I feel good. I feel like things can happen. Good things. It's been a while.

CROSSROAD MAN
Go on.

ALLEN
Today something changed. You see I've never had great talent, I've never had tons of friends. I've always been kind of living in my thoughts. All the great stuff, that was just dreams...

ALLEN (CONT'D)

...Well, today that changed, I saw something that makes me feel like I want to do something. Something exciting, it's still hazy and I'm not sure how to go about it, but it's there.

CROSSROAD MAN

Ha yes, you've peeked through the little door.

Allen just looks silently.

CROSSROAD MAN

It's like this: you walk around all day. Everything's normal, predictable, boring, and there it is! You open it up a crack and lo and behold on the other side there's this huge beautiful world that you never knew was there. You blink and you're back in your old world, and then you try to find that fucking door again.

ALLEN

I can find it. I know I can. And I can make it mine. Well, put a little bit of me in there anyway.

The Crossroad Man looks at Allen with amusement, and perhaps even tenderness. He gets up from his log, shuffles in his pocket and retrieves a pack of cigarettes, puts one in his mouth.

CROSSROAD MAN

You've seen the world with a little more light.

The Crossroad Man reaches into his bag and pulls out a little notebook and some matches. He gives the notebook to Allen.

CROSSROAD MAN

Here, have it.

Allen flips through the pages as he takes it

CROSSROAD MAN

You capture light with it. You'll
have to get your own pen.

He lights up a match. He angles the light to illuminate his face. Lifting his chin in the direction of one of the streets:

CROSSROAD MAN

It's that way. Quickest way to the
West-End.

He blows out his match and takes a puff of his cigarette.

CROSSROAD MAN

But there's nothing like knowing
your way in the dark.

The street corner returns to its darkness. Allen is on his way.

EXT - THE HOT DOG CART STREET CORNER - DAY

Allen stands near the hot dog cart. Jimmy is there preparing a hot dog for one of his regulars, FRANCESCO. Allen observes the scene, the few people gathered around, their camaraderie. He holds in his hands the little notebook. He is writing some notes and thoughts as he observes. Another of the regulars, HUMBERT, comes to see him.

HUMBERT

Wonderful, isn't it?
You know Jimmy?

ALLEN

Oh, I've been coming over every
now and then over the last couple
of weeks.

Holding a soft drink, and hotdog Werner arrives from behind.

WERNER

He's still new at this. You'll see there's depth.

HUMBERT

So much more. I wake up in the middle of the night wanting some of his food. I lay there in my bed, no thoughts of my marriage, no thoughts of my work, just this man and his cart, funny isn't it. It's like I need it.

Taking on airs like the vendor does.

HUMBERT

Like we need a toaster, or a vacuum, or a reason to live!

Francesco having received his hot dog makes his way towards the group.

WERNER

For a reason to live it's better than most.

HUMBERT

Better than most.

FRANCESCO

Like an extra lung.

Nobody listens.

Nodding towards the notebook that Allen is holding.

HUMBERT

That's fire that you're holding there.

FRANCESCO

Listen to me. like an extra lung.

WERNER

Take your notes. We need an archivist. All sort of people come and don't know what they have.

Out of the blue, from his cart.

JIMMY

Yes! lately it's men in suits
moving like holograms on the
sidewalk! Are they even here?
Fucking Christ! I think they might
be elsewhere! There needs to be a
place, right? They need to eat,
two or three square meals a day.

A static crackling when they pass
by, white eyes and with that
alarming little space between
their lips, that gap, mouth
breathers, built out of something
Momma never knew about.

WERNER

See!

HUMBERT

What did I tell you! He does it
again.

A woman approaches to buy a hot dog. Jimmy spots her, and
sighs.

He theatrically holds his palm up as she approaches.

JIMMY

Don't tell me, you want a hot dog.

She gives him a smile. He goes on talking, and making her
hot dog simultaneously. Holding one of the hot dogs aloft:

JIMMY

This! This is what we can be, this
is the measuring stick of our
greatness. Not the moon, not the
stars not even the mighty sun can
outshine the light that we make
together when bound with these hot
dogs. This, the ruler that we are
measured by. Piping! Gleaming!
Glistening!

Jimmy puts on the finishing touches and wraps the hot dog.

JIMMY

(TO ALLEN)

Hey, man fetch me a Coke for her.

He turns to the woman:

JIMMY

Five bucks for the dog, one fifty
for the drink.

While Jimmy attends to the cash tin, Allen opens the ice box, gets a beverage and hands it to Jimmy with a reluctant look on his face. Done with the cash, Jimmy turns back to her holding the drink and hotdog in his hands:

JIMMY

And here for a limited time, a
special offer. A fabulous once in
a lifetime deal. A dream of petty
crimes, a life on the run,
intensity that you feel between
your shoulder blades. It takes a
hold on you, changes your
breathing. Your mouth opens wet
and wide, and you close your eyes
and shove the dog in. An explosion
of the senses.

Jimmy chuckles, the woman chuckles, everyone else is in disbelief. Jimmy hands the drink and dog to the woman, he touches her shoulder.

Off to the side.

ALLEN

(TO HUMBERT)

Does he even know her?

Humbert all smiles nonchalantly shakes his head no.

JIMMY

My hot dog will take you places,

She smiles and returns the gesture to him. Allen sees this and is amazed.

WOMAN

Well, if I'd only known. I would
have brought my passport.

JIMMY

Ha!

WOMAN

My bikini and my toothbrush!

The woman laughs, everybody joins in the mirth, Allen can't
believe his eyes.

EXT - CITY STREET - BUS STOP AREA

Allen leaves the area of the hot dog stand, all told he is
in good spirits. Like last time he looks around in wonder.
He sees a couple of people waiting at a bus stop; A young
man and a young woman, oblivious to each other standing
side by side waiting for the bus. He arrives and sticks
himself right next to the woman. She is amused, it seems to
him, by his mood. She looks at him with curiosity.

He gently clears his throat and turns towards her:

ALLEN

Buildings and taxis, the light
from a thousand windows, the
sidewalk gives way and I'm given
to thoughts of flight and fancy.
With you there an unexpected jolt,
I wonder what providence..

She just stares at him. This is not good, she is not
enjoying this.

ALLEN

...brought me here, standing at the
crossroad..

Allen stumbles a bit, hesitates.

ALLEN

...and I choose to leap, maybe I can
fly.

She cranes her neck to see if the bus is arriving. She gives him one last glance, reaches into her pocket for her phone, moves away from Allen, and begins to talk on the phone.

INT - INSIDE THE BUS

Allen sits on the bus looks outside of the window. Lost in thought. The sky is growing darker and the lights from the shops and street lamps illuminate his face as they go by.

ALLEN
(AS V.O.)

And the sidewalk returns hard, and
whispers to me that these were
lies, all lies that I wanted so
desperately to believe.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT - CITY SIDE WALK, HOT DOG STAND

Allen leaves work. He comes out of a building with a serious look on his face. He is a bit tired. As he walks, he pulls out his notebook from his pockets and inspects the various entries. He walks slowly while reading not paying any attention to the others around him. He arrives to the hot dog cart, slows down and stops next to Humbert.

Humbert stands silently next to him absorbing the moment. Patrick and Francesco who have just received their meal come by and:

PATRICK

Are you taking this down, man? The
oral tradition is great, but
you're absolutely right, the
written word is...

FRANCESCO

I tell you the dog man, he's got a
way with words. It gives you such
a strong feeling.

PATRICK

We all love his words, the
stories...

He tries to find his words. In the background, Jimmy leaves
his post with the food and begins setting up his
typewriter.

PATRICK

...I'd say that the word he leaves
you with, and you may have
experienced this yourself - is
"yes"

FRANCESCO

He smells like "yes"!

PATRICK

If you stick with him, he makes
you feel like everything you may
ever want is going to be met with
'yes'.

FRANCESCO

Phenomenal business model.

PATRICK

He's not in this for business!

FRANCESCO

No, no, no, the man's a magician
and I'm a true believer!

Allen squints at this last remark - it makes no sense, but
he dismisses it.

ALLEN

Actually, I'm just jotting down
some thoughts.

HUMBERT

Your thoughts?

ALLEN

Yes...

FRANCESCO

Interesting. Your own words.

ALLEN

Yes...

Visibly uncomfortable, Werner casts some glances towards Jimmy at his typewriter.

PATRICK

Jimmy knows about this?

ALLEN

Well...

FRANCESCO

You know who would be interested in this? The Oracle. He gives out advice.

The others give Francesco a dark look. But Francesco either does not care or doesn't notice and carries on.

ALLEN

The oracle?

FRANCESCO

Profound advice.

PATRICK

It's just a name, man, He's a retired business man who's got nothing better to do.

ALLEN

I think I might have met him, actually.

HUMBERT

He spends his days sitting on a big rock saying hello to people.

ALLEN

Maybe it was someone else, my guy was talkative.

Allen puts away his notebook back into his pocket. Takes out his wallet counts the money and pulls a few bills to purchase a hot dog.

HUMBERT

"Hello", that's all I've ever heard him say.

PATRICK

He does chit chat every now and then.

HUMBERT

He's a friendly guy. Maybe one day you'll meet him.

PATRICK

He's fine, harmless really.

FRANCESCO

He's on a different wavelength.

Pointing at the hot dog cart.

PATRICK

But this, this is where things are truly happening.

ALLEN

Yeah, let me get a dog.

Allen begins to move closer to the cart. The whole group continues the conversation as they move. Jimmy is head-down typing away.

HUMBERT

(INDICATING JIMMY)

He's the man, he sets the direction.

Jimmy has a wild grin at Humbert's words, he pulls out a pen and writes on a piece of papers, he then redoubles his typing efforts. Allen looks around tries to catch Jimmy's eye to put in his order.

FRANCESCO

I was lost, so lost.

Jimmy finally notices Allen, without pausing his typing:

JIMMY

Give me a second, I'll be right
there.

WERNER

It's all about the intangibles.

FRANCESCO

But no more! Now I shine!

While Jimmy types, operatically, grandly, with happiness

JIMMY

A spark, a light in the distance.
The kid lies in his bed and looks
at the car lights slowly migrating
across his night wall. He wants
that light, the bigness of the
world on the other side of the
wall. Before falling into dreams,
he vaguely wonders what will
tomorrow bring? Before flickering
away the light whispers: "Burn
with me".

A man walks towards the cart, obviously about to order some
food.

JIMMY

Jesus!

Jimmy is frustrated about all this business interfering
with his writing. He runs a hand in his hair, cast a quick
glance at the new patron.

JIMMY

[To Allen]

Can you take care of this for me?

ALLEN

Me?

JIMMY

Thanks, I appreciate it.

Allen scrambles a bit and looks at the new patron.

ALLEN

Hi! What can I do for you?

CLIENT

I'll just have a hot dog, mustard
and onions.

ALLEN

Any drink with that?

CLIENT

Just the dog.

Allen begins putting the hot dog together. Concentrating on
the task.

ALLEN

Alright! Nice day today! Not a
cloud in the sky!

The patron is deep into looking at his phone and does not
reply. Allen continues his work while giving occasional
glances at the man. He wraps the finished hot dog as best
as he can.

ALLEN

Alright then, here it is Sir.

JIMMY

That's 6 bucks.

The patron casts a quick look at Jimmy at his typewriter,
reaches for his wallet and pulls out a five and a one. He
hands these out to Allen and walks away.

Allen puts the money away in the little cash box and looks
at Jimmy at his typewriter. Jimmy does not acknowledge the
concerned look. Without even looking up from her
typewriter:

JIMMY

A great service, a great service,
Ask not what you can do..

Then finally looking up to Allen:

JIMMY

If you're famished, just take something! That's what I say!

Be free! Eat! Fly!

Allen fumbles with a bag of chips but puts it back. Ultimately, he doesn't take anything and moves away from the cart towards the guys on the sidewalk. Jimmy continues typing a few more words, intense!

JIMMY

I tell you, it is so nice when it happens. Not easy to get there these days.

Looking at Francesco:

JIMMY

Like a newborn taking in that first gulp of oxygen.

Jimmy gets up from the typewriter, unrolls the page from the machine and walks to the group page in hand.

JIMMY

We live for those moments, those little moments of clarity.

He shakes the page over his head.

JIMMY

(TO ALLEN)

My man, you serve me well.

Allen does not like this choice of words, he is quietly hurt.

PATRICK

Can we hear it?

JIMMY

Are you up for it! It's getting late! Maybe you can't take it!

THE GROUP
(but not Allen)

Jimmy!!

JIMMY
Gentlemen, you push me. That's a
good thing.

ALLEN
(to Humbert next to him)
I got to go, see you.

(to everyone)
alright guys, I'll see you later.

Jimmy follows Allen with his eyes as he exits.

JIMMY
So without any further ado, my
latest, my greatest...

They keep talking and laughing as Allen walks away.

INT - OFFICE SPACE - CUBEVILLE

Allen sits at his desk, he types, moves his mouse around. The sound in the air is a muffled quiet workplace efficiently working. He looks around at the vast room, cubes with partitions just high enough not to be able to see anyone.

INT - OFFICE SPACE - COPY ROOM

Allen stands with some sheets stacked on a table. A light sweeps over and over. He is making copies. He holds a notebook in his hands and reads, and smiles, while the copies print.

FADE OUT TO BLACK

FADE IN FROM BLACK

EXT - CITY SIDEWALK, THE HOT DOG STAND - COLD WEATHER

Allen stands off to the side and enjoys the action around the hot dog cart. People around are cold but happy, smiles and laughter. Jimmy looks a little frayed.

JIMMY

What was it again? Mustard and Ketchup?

HUMBERT

Mustard and relish

JIMMY

Right, right.

Humbert laughs.

HUMBERT

You knew that, I always get the same thing.

Jimmy has a bit of an uncertain laugh.

JIMMY

Just making sure you don't want a fucking slice of pizza.

Jimmy gives Humbert his change. A little sluggish, a little tired, his movements are not as grand. Some of the wrapping papers fall to the ground, he mutters a curse under his breath and makes no effort to retrieve the papers. Allen picks the paper up. Patrick, one of the regulars, hot dog in hand, approaches the cart as Humbert steps away with his food.

PATRICK

Jimmy, tell us what's the mood of the day?

Jimmy gives a wry smile, appears to rev up, and comes up short. Patrick just stands there a little flummoxed. He looks around at the others by the cart, with that "I've-seen-this-before-just-you-wait" kind of look.

Jimmy draws a blank, rubs his head in mild panic, He puts out his hand in a 'nothing to worry' gesture. He goes to the typewriter and clumsily moves things about, shuffles some of his papers and gets one sheet out. He lets out a satisfied sound, and loosens up before his delivery.

JIMMY

Forgive me but I need someone to hold me. A moment, a truce from the swords of wit. I haven't caught my breath in such a very long time, in this stream of ever stronger words.

As Jimmy recites Humbert turns to Werner and whispers:

HUMBERT

(TO WERNER)

We've heard this, don't you remember. Was it last year or something?

WERNER

Yes, yes, be quiet.

JIMMY

I miss the softness of my lover's breath. I miss the sound of my boots on snow. I miss the quiet friend by my side. Think of me like the mountain yearns for the valley...

HUMBERT

(TO WERNER)

This is nice and sensitive but I like the newer stuff, it's more punchy...

Francesco starts coughing, Jimmy looks around irritated.

JIMMY

You want a glass of water, I'm in the middle of something here.

PATRICK

But Jimmy, we've heard this before.

JIMMY

But not like this! I'm refining it.

FRANCESCO

It would be nice if it were more new...

...maybe...

JIMMY

More new? What the fuck Frank! Pay attention! It is new! There's subtleties! You've got to feel it. Jesus!

Allen wanting to salvage the situation pipes up. He walks towards Jimmy who has picked up the cash tin and is emptying the contents of his pockets in it.

ALLEN

I've been coming here for more than 8 months now.

JIMMY

Is that so.

Allen pulls out his little notebook from his pocket.

ALLEN

You're great, you bring all this good energy and I've been wanting to share with you a few things that...

The few people gathered around the hotdog cart hear the approaching sound of an ambulance, siren blaring away. With Allen in mid-sentence, Jimmy puts his fingers up to listen more carefully.

JIMMY

Ah, yes. Yes.

Now addressing the group:

JIMMY

You hear this?

They think he is talking about Allen's notebook and await the expected anger. They look around not knowing what to do. But Jimmy is talking about the sound of the ambulance.

JIMMY

What a wonderful noise!

Is he serious? What's he saying? Many are visibly relieved.

JIMMY

There's nothing quite like the sound of the siren ripping its way through the city streets. A hunk of metal weaving and insistently pushing its way, aggressive. An angel of noise and steel in our midst!

Do you know what it says?

I want to live! That's what it's saying. A fucking hard and desperate scream, heard everywhere, bouncing off the tall buildings, I want to live. And we bow down as it passes, frightened and soft.

He turns to the cart and from the typewriter's container he pulls out a gun. He turns triumphant, holding it as one would hold a holy relic. Werner puts himself in front of Allen, He shoves him lightly, giving him the not-so-subtle message that it is time to leave.

JIMMY

So easy to take it all away! I am Shiva the destroyer of worlds, Ha, Ha!

To the distant ambulance:

JIMMY

And you come to patch it all
together again! Good luck! Ha, Ha!

The others have also suddenly decided that they needed to be elsewhere, most leave in different directions. Werner stays, albeit at a little distance. As they depart:

JIMMY

The tide comes, the tide goes.

What a day!

Jimmy begins to tidy up his work space

JIMMY

You know I used to be the king of
this place.

WERNER

You still are.

JIMMY

I don't think so, not the king
anymore. I'm the emperor. Totally
different. It's harder to love an
emperor.

This sinks in. Jimmy continues cleaning up, he shuts the cash tin closed, shakes it a bit.

JIMMY

Alright, man better be off, Adios.

INT- CAFÉ INTERIOR

A bit out of breath, Allen sits down in a nearby café. He is tired and beat. He pulls out his pen and pad of paper and sets them on the table.

WAITER

Hey, how can I help you?

ALLEN

I'll just have a coffee, an
Americano. No milk. Do you have
decaf?

The waiter nods as he writes down the order.

ALLEN

I can't handle the caffeine right
now.

WAITER

You got it.

He settles to write but does not get very far. He settles
at just looking out the window at the passers-by. The
waiter returns:

WAITER

Still writing that stuff?

Allen is perplexed, not knowing how this waiter could
possibly know about his writing.

WAITER

I was at the bus stop a few weeks
ago when you were trying to
impress a girl.

ALLEN

Yeah, didn't go so well.
I write, but not usually like
that. I never really wrote like
that. I thought it would be better
than what I normally do.

WAITER

And what do you normally do?

He lets out a long sigh.

ALLEN

...well, it's just little
observations, quiet stuff. Nothing
grand.

WAITER

That's fine. Most people are ok with "not grand". Want to read me some?

He flips through some of the pages.

ALLEN

Here. It's just something I noticed, it doesn't mean much. Alright. Home Depot. The middle of the afternoon. Out buying house paint for the apartment. The shopping carts are giant and this other guy's cart blocks the aisle. As I approach builder man, with his builder shirt and builder cap, he shifts his cart out of the way.

Effortless...

...While I walk past, he gives me that silent nod that men give other men at home depot. I nod back. I'm a tough guy, an insider. Why the hell did I just nod?

There you go.

WAITER

That's great! I know exactly the feeling. You should have read that to the girl.

ALLEN

I've got like a dozen of these notebooks.

Turning away to take care of the other customers:

WAITER

You should do something about that. It's good stuff.

Smiling, Allen takes a sip of his coffee. Looks out the window and continues looking at the people outside.

INT- CITY SIDEWALK, THE HOT DOG CART

Intoning very precisely

JIMMY

Nanosecond, NA-no-second.

Tuberculosis, Tu-BER-cu-lo-sis

Jimmy is cleaning up the cart with a rag, tidying things up a bit. Allen and Humbert sit at some of the little plastic stools on the sidewalk.

A man in a business suit approaches the cart with a resolute pace.

BUSINESS MAN

Hey! Give me some of the good stuff.

JIMMY

You want a dog or a sausage?

BUSINESS MAN

Give me some of the stuff you can't touch.

JIMMY

Just like that.

The business man slaps a small pile of bills on the cart.

BUSINESS MAN

Yeah, give me one of those stories.

JIMMY

My dear man, I can't just produce, like gamma rays spewing from a black hole.

BUSINESS MAN

That's your problem man, I give you good money.

Allen hearing that things are heating up at the cart gets up and tries to iron things out.

ALLEN

Listen, man, get a hot dog, for health, for the future!

BUSINESS MAN

What?!

ALLEN

Give the man a break.

BUSINESS MAN

I'm trying to get a story. He does it all the time, right?

ALLEN

He does. Mostly. Here listen to this.

He pulls out his notebook from his pocket flips around the pages

ALLEN

Here. I think you'll like this one.

The fast taxi winds its way through the traffic, accelerating to the red light.

The business man rolls his eyes.

ALLEN

I bounce around in the back seat, listening to his talk radio. He came from half way across the world to spend his days in this little yellow metal box with strangers. And however much I'd like to start a conversation all I do is listen to the 1-800-insurance man talk to me about something I don't need.

The business man is not enjoying this, he raises his hand:

BUSINESS MAN

No disrespect man, but this sucks.

JIMMY

(FURIOUS AT ALLEN)

What in the hell are you trying to do! What is this! Usurping my power. You come to my corner and you think you can do this! You think that you can get your ideas accepted?

Nobody's ever going to give you a second glance. You understand? What you do isn't worth anything because this place, this time, it's mine, I set it up and it all goes through me. The good stories, the bad stories, it doesn't matter...

Turning to the business man.

JIMMY

...no one gives a shit if it's any good. Isn't that right?

You don't need this potato-eater,
You don't even need a story!

Approaching the business man and looking intensely at him.

JIMMY

You need the energy, the noise.
That I can give you. I'll give you
so much noise, so much action,
that you'll forget who you are!

He leads him to one of the little plastic benches by the cart. The business man sits.

JIMMY

Have a seat mister suit.
You'll get every fucking penny's
worth.

Filled with anger and energy Jimmy lets it rip.

JIMMY

With a reptilian squint of the eye
the world fades replaced by the
glowing diodes of action plans,
profit and losses, collateral
damage for those whose eye is not
on the proverbial ball.

Whatever the time may be, the man,
on his toes, ready to pounce, Pin
striped messiah parting the sea of
'm' and 'a' of 'r' and 'd'. The
mahogany desk, the doing fuck all
as the money rolls in.

The man makes you sing, makes you
dance, the sway the hop and the
skip with girls in baby blue cut
offs. The man prioritizes the man,
Bow down to the power of the pink
slip.

Raise the bar. Seizes the day.
Twin engine cam upshifting fist
down your throat. Can't breathe
cry baby keep the scraps and I
don't care.

'Cos the man has more. More the
man, more the driver's seat. The
shots, the race, the ducks in a
row, the dotted line.

Behold the man!

He's the one!
The one, the only.

The man!

As Jimmy's "story" crescendos he become more animated and in a move that a pastor or Elvis would approve, he suddenly collapses in a near faint. The business man still sitting at his little plastic stool slowly claps his hands in

appreciation while Humbert and Arthur approach Jimmy on the ground.

HUMBERT

Wow, holy shit Jimmy.

Humbert crouches down towards Jimmy, he is frazzled, not really knowing how to proceed.

ARTHUR

I have no idea what just happened.

Humbert gives little taps on Jimmy's cheeks.

HUMBERT

You weren't paying attention.

ARTHUR

I have no idea what he just said.

HUMBERT

The words don't matter.

Jimmy makes a few sounds. Both Arthur and Humbert begin to gently prop him up. Allen approaches them, trying to lend some support.

ARTHUR

Oh...

HUMBERT

The man was not talking to your head. He was talking to your spine. You understand now?

ARTHUR

Um...

Jimmy is coming to. He uses Allen's shoulder for support as he slowly gets into a sitting position. Werner arrives with a glass of water.

WERNER

To the amateur this may have sounded like pure gibberish, mere words just flying around. But to us what words!

ARTHUR

A kind of reflection on the
crumbling all around us?

HUMBERT

No, no Arthur. A deeper, more
pure, immediate communication.

Jimmy gets back to his feet with some difficulty. Allen steadies him. Werner picks up a few pieces of paper that have fallen to the ground.

ARTHUR

Well ain't that something. I'll
have to give this some thought.

HUMBERT

No, no Arthur, no thinking!

ARTHUR

Right, right.

Now Jimmy is back on his feet. All the 'helpers' give him a great big hand. He modestly, not modestly, accepts the praise.

Allen puts the stool that tipped upright, and generally tries to busy himself. He feels uneasy about how things are developing.

He turns around and heads off.

EXT- CITY SIDEWALK, SHOPS AND CARS

Allen is shaken by the recent events, he walks, muttering and shaking his head.

ALLEN

Who are these people? I can't do
this anymore. I'm going to go back
to my room, fuck all of them. I'm
just going to write for myself.

He notices a red light, he stops walking at the crosswalk. He looks around. Off to the side behind him he sees a young

couple saying goodbye to each other. They have a hard time leaving each other. They take a few steps away, come back, give one final kiss, leave, turn around, have a few words. Inch back together, get something out of a side bag give it to the other, one more kiss, a few steps back. Outstretch their arms towards each other, more goodbyes...

While watching, moved by the sight of the young couple, Allen has drifted across the sidewalk.

A man nearby that he has not noticed says:

THE ORACLE

Hi.

He comes out of his reverie and looks at the man for a few seconds, inspecting him. The man sits on a large rock on the sidewalk, an old-fashioned briefcase is set down to the side of it.

ALLEN

Hey!

Allen waits but nothing else comes out of the Oracle.

ALLEN

So, it's true then. You, um, say 'hi' to people.

The oracle nods.

ALLEN

Nice evening.

The Oracle laughs.

THE ORACLE

You're trying hard.

ALLEN

Well, I've just heard about you, that's all, some people call you 'The Oracle' so, naturally that conjures up all sorts of things...

THE ORACLE

Indeed.

ALLEN

I've heard that you maybe give advice to people, or maybe you don't and you just say 'hi'. Depends on who you talk to.

THE ORACLE

People say all sorts of things, don't they?

ALLEN

So then, you just sit here and say 'hi' to people? That's kind of weird no?

THE ORACLE

It's not weird to me. But it's true, I used to give advice, all sorts of advice, my point of view on romantic matters, on business opportunities, on all sorts of things. I used to sit here all day and people would come and go, stop by to ask me all sorts of things.

ALLEN

So what happened?

THE ORACLE

I learned and I got wise. You see I wasn't just giving advice. I would sometimes see the people I had talked to cross the street specifically not to talk to me. I didn't like to see that. So, I came to the conclusion that all the best advice in the world is often less effective than a simple 'hello'.

People don't want to hear advice - even if they go out of their way to ask for it. They just want you to be there for them or they just

THE ORACLE (CONT'D)

want to hear you reinforce the story that they already have in their head.

ALLEN

I think that's the problem, I don't really have a story for myself, in my head. I've kind of just coasted along all these years.

THE ORACLE

Socrates would not be pleased with you.

Blank stare.

ALLEN

I'd like to ask you for advice.

THE ORACLE

I don't do that anymore.

ALLEN

What's the worst that can happen, I don't take your advice? I misunderstand what you say?

The oracle smiles. He knows that much worse could happen.

THE ORACLE

I've seen you a few times. You're new here. How do you like it?

ALLEN

I don't know. I don't know if this is for me. I mean, it can be so ugly and yet at the same time I've been seeing all this... beauty... I want to find a way, you know some sort of path where I could...

Allen is at a loss for words.

...I wish I could find a way.

THE ORACLE

I tell you, we all wander, even those that have a plan, those that appear to walk in the straightest line, they wander. All over the place.

It seems like you got to a place in life where you started to notice things. You get to a place and you feel that the world is getting bigger.

It can be a really a lovely time, full of this feeling of potential. Then, just as you're filled with this great sensation you realize that the world, it doesn't stop growing, it just gets bigger and bigger.

And you stand, at the intersection of all these voices, all these stories coming from every direction, and it becomes hard to make them all out. The world loses its nice crisp edges, things become uncertain, and you begin to feel lost even though just a few moments before you were on top of the world.

ALLEN

You're right, I should have just taken the 'hello'.

THE ORACLE

Let me put it this way.

He slowly gets up from his rock and stands next to Allen.

EXT - CITY-FOREST

The cityscape blurs, dims and is ultimately replaced by a forest scene. Large trees, sun shining.

THE ORACLE

It's like you're taking a walk. At first your parents are holding your hand.

They begin to walk together, and the city fades away and gives rise to a forest.

THE ORACLE

Then you've got a bunch of buddies around you and that's nice. You keep walking and with time you've got singers, authors, sports heroes that join you on your walk. You go on your merry way and have these great discussions with all of them.

There comes a point when you look around and you notice that some of them are missing, your parents, that author that you no longer read, that friend that moved away.

Little by little there are fewer people around you. The trees begin to look frightening, it's like someone's been removing the light around you.

You might come to a point where no one is around at all, no one to give you any support, any suggestions, not even a 'hello'.

At this point The Oracle stops walking and Allen continues on his own.

THE ORACLE

A lot of people, when they reach this place, they run back and frantically try to find the people they were just with. What they don't seem to realize is that this is their forest, no one else's.

THE ORACLE (CONT'D)

And for the first time, the point that they've just reached is truly theirs.

Light shines on Allen in the dark forest.

THE ORACLE

Free from anyone else's influence or opinion. From this point on you set the path. Every next step is yours, really yours. It might be a bit scary but this is where things truly start, which is funny because when people get to this point they think they've reached the end.

The Oracle begins walking back to Allen, He grabs a giant curtain that he drags with him, it covers all the scenery. On the other side of the screen begin to materialize the shapes of people in silhouette.

ALLEN

It's just the beginning, isn't it?

The oracle nods

ALLEN

And it doesn't need to fit with anything out there.

THE ORACLE

That's right. The interesting thing is that it's all curtains. It's all stories. All of it. It's the reverse from the fairy tales - Reality doesn't hide behind the curtain, fantasy does, but there's nowhere else to go.

EXT - CITY SIDEWALK

Allen pulls open the curtain, Jimmy is a little ways off, arms in the air, brandishing the gun, a few of his regulars around him frantically trying to diffuse the situation.

Allen gives the Oracle one last look and goes to join the chaos around the hot dog cart.

CLIENTS

...you don't have to do this.

JIMMY

Like hell I don't, don't you want this? I thought you wanted this!

CLIENTS

No no no no no.

Pointing the gun alternatively at someone else then pointing it to his head.

JIMMY

You don't like this? How about this? You like this better?

CLIENTS

No, no, no, please.

JIMMY

(mocking)

please, please.

Allen makes his way through the people around the vendor.

JIMMY

Oh look who's just showed up! Like the new and improved show?

ALLEN

Jimmy, you're freaking everybody out. Put the gun down.

JIMMY

They love it.

CLIENTS

No, no, no.

JIMMY

Assholes.

ALLEN

Please Jimmy
(pause)
I'd love a hot dog.

JIMMY

Death does make one hungry doesn't
it. It's unfortunate because I'm a
little busy right now!

ALLEN

You pick the toppings, put
anything you want. Please.

Jimmy looks at Allen in the eye

JIMMY

I'm tired.

ALLEN

I know. It's ok.

Jimmy puts the gun down on the cart.

JIMMY

I'm not the man I used to be.

ALLEN

Take a break for a while, come
back refreshed.

JIMMY

My fine young friend. That's not
how it works.

ALLEN

You just feel down right now, But
you've still got it inside.

Jimmy looks at the people around the cart. He is amused by
this last remark. In a theatrical gesture, he climbs on the
little plastic stool by the cart.

JIMMY

Inside? And I can just reach in
and trot it out again. Make it do
backflips and twirls!

ALLEN

You know what I'm saying.

JIMMY

(looking to the people around him)
It's not inside of me. It's
between you and me, and you and
me, and you too, all of you. You
all wanted more, more, more all
the fucking time. Make us laugh,
make us cry! What about make it
end?

WERNER

I'm so sorry Jimmy.

JIMMY

I wanted to make you laugh, Wern,
I wanted to make you cry.

I am the spark that lights the
world! Right? I show you the
beauty and how high we can go. I
feed your soul, remember?

Jimmy comes down from his stool and sits on the ground.

JIMMY

You make me so tired.
You sucked me dry.

Jimmy still sitting on the ground in front of the hot dog
cart with the guys standing tentatively at a safe distance,
rubs his head, points towards the city around them.

JIMMY

You had nothing before I showed
up. We got to that place in the
road and I said: "come with me,
and you said "yes, yes!" I made
the dream. This is my road and you
all loved it!

Exhausted, Jimmy reclines all the way down on the ground.
As he lays there, Allen approaches.

ALLEN

If that's the road that you took
and you and you don't like it, you
can take another one. Take the
lesser road. And you can be a man
instead of being a king..

JIMMY

An emperor.

ALLEN

Whatever..

JIMMY

There's a difference.

ALLEN

But you don't need to burn out
like that. The guys will
understand.

Jimmy just stares at Allen incredulously. Like "you just
don't get it". He can't believe that he's in the presence
of such innocence. He closes his eyes.

JIMMY

My boy, I can't take the lesser
road. I won't.

Are you out of your mind! Look at
them, they need to be shown the
light.

ALLEN

Can't they see it for themselves?

JIMMY

They see rules and regulations,
exploratory committees, official
commissions, bylaws.

ALLEN

I don't believe that. I see you
stealing their words their
thoughts..

JIMMY

What!

ALLEN

"I use red when you talk!" Half of what you say was said by them first!

JIMMY

You do the same with your fucking little booklet! You ingrate little thief! Don't you see, they need to be told. They don't even realize when they have gold in their hands. If I don't show them the way they'll never see it! They'll be lost, hands in their pockets.

ALLEN

You don't know that! I'm sure they all feel the whatever-it-is.

I think that they can see the way, but you won't let them. You've gotten them so used to listening, they don't feel like they can talk. Let them talk, maybe they'll be inspired. They'll look at the stars and...

JIMMY

The stars! You want me to tell you something about the stars? They're far! Millions of miles away! Billions of miles! And for what? They burn, they explode, they live for fucking eons, and here we are, fucking dirt scratchers, making shit up where it's totally meaningless...

With a grunt, Jimmy gets up and sits again.

JIMMY

They live for a million years and we're gone in the blink of an eye!

ALLEN

That's pretty bleak, Jimmy.

JIMMY

We've got this tiny window to make
some light, if I leave it to you
amateurs we'll never get anywhere.

Allen takes a few steps back and looks at Jimmy sitting on the ground. As Jimmy is slowly getting up, and dusting his clothes with his hands:

ALLEN

I used to love to come here. how
you'd get on top of your stool and
say the most wonderful, ridiculous
things. It made me smile, it made
me think that things were
possible. That you could say
anything, and we'd be in this
together and it would be fun. I
never thought that I needed a
leader, I just wanted someone to
walk with. But it's ok, you do
what you do, I can walk on my own,
I know that now.

Allen gets up, looks at Jimmy, looks at the hot dog cart.

ALLEN

Nobody makes them like you do.
Take care Jimmy.

Allen walks away. By now everybody has left the area. Jimmy sits there on the stool alone for a few moments, he slowly gets up, and begins, voice still angry, still full of sadness and emotion, on the verge of tears.

JIMMY

Hot dogs, come and get your hot
dogs, the best, the very best hot
dogs in the world, the best you've
ever tasted, come and get them
while they last, hot dogs.

A client arrives, Jimmy heads to the cart and Allen leaves.
FADE TO BLACK