

"One for the Road"

by  
Nicholas Anthony

[www.NicholasAnthony.com](http://www.NicholasAnthony.com)  
[Nick@NicholasAnthony.com](mailto:Nick@NicholasAnthony.com)

"HAPPINESS ISN'T ON THE ROAD TO ANYTHING. HAPPINESS IS THE ROAD. BE KIND, BECAUSE EVERYONE YOU'LL EVER MEET IS FIGHTING A HARD BATTLE."

- ADVICE FROM BOB DYLAN'S GRANDMOTHER

INT. MIDDLE INCOME HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUSAN BENDS, early thirties, slender, large bosom has a mane of brown curly hair. A strange noise wakes her up. She gets out of bed to investigate.

TITLE CARD: MINNESOTA - MAY 22, 1992

INT. CECIL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CECIL BENDS, a ten year old skinny kid with the same brown curly hair has a blanket over his head and the TV. He watches the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson.

CECIL  
(same time as Ed McMahon)  
Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

Johnny walks on stage to thunderous applause.

The studio audience gives him a standing ovation. Cecil's eyes are glued to the screen. Suddenly, the blanket gets whipped away...

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Ahhhhhhh!

SUSAN  
It's past your bedtime. Shut off the TV.

CECIL  
But it's Johnny's last show.

SUSAN  
Cecil--

CECIL  
I'm serious Mom, tonight's his last night.

SUSAN  
I thought that it was tomorrow.

CECIL  
No, it's right now.

SUSAN  
Fine, but you better get up in the morning.

Susan sits with her son and smiles at him.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
I can't believe this going to be it. I've  
been watch Johnny since I was younger  
than you.

Johnny tries to get the audience to sit down.

JOHNNY CARSON (V.O.)  
Thank you, thank you.

The audience keeps CLAPPING.

CECIL  
Mom, how do you get to be on the Tonight  
Show?

SUSAN  
You have to have a talent.

CECIL  
Do I have a talent?

Susan smiles.

SUSAN  
You have many talents.

CECIL  
So I can be on TV?

SUSAN  
Someday Cecil, if you choose to.

Cecil gives her a hug.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
(unimpressed)  
Give me a real hug.

He hugs her as hard as he can. Susan takes the blanket  
and pulls it back over the both of them and the TV.

CECIL (V.O.)  
My whole life all I ever wanted to be was  
a stand-up comedian.

Susan and Cecil LAUGH and LAUGH. The TV screen now  
becomes the only image.

CECIL (V.O.)  
And everything would've worked out just  
fine...

Montage of early Tonight Show performances. Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Rodney Dangerfield, etc.

CECIL (V.O.)  
If life hadn't got in the way.

INT. AUDIO KING (HIGH END AUDIO VIDEO STORE) - EVENING

CECIL BENDS, now 24, has grown into his adult body, with short hair and stubble on his face he's immaculately dressed, wearing a freshly pressed suit with a silk tie. His name tag reads AUDIO-VIDEO SALESMAN. None of the other salesman are even wearing jackets.

TITLE CARD: MINNEAPOLIS, 2006

Cecil stands, polite but impatient with an OLD COUPLE as they look for a new VCR. He looks at his fancy, expensive watch, puzzled. He taps the face of it and then puts it up to his ear.

OLD WOMAN  
I love that Ellen DeGeneres but, she's on  
at the same time as Judge Judy...

Ignoring the Old Woman, Cecil searches for a wall clock. He finds one, it reads: 5:03.

CECIL  
You know, I'm not actually the VCR  
specialist.

As he walks past, Cecil grabs DONNY WHITE, 56, skinny, small mustache, leathery skin, his suit looks like it hasn't been dry cleaned in over a year. No one hates their job more than he does.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Don here knows everything there is to  
know about VCR's.

Cecil pushes Donny in front of the Old Couple.

DONNY  
What? No. I really know nothing.

CECIL  
I'd love to stay but I'm sure Donny will  
take better care of you.

Donny, pissed, gives Cecil the finger as he coughs.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Thanks man, I gotta run.

DONNY  
(highly sarcastic)  
No, thank you! Okay folks what can we do for you?

OLD WOMAN  
You see, I love that Ellen DeGeneres but--

Cecil loosens his tie and unbuttons his shirt.

EXT. JOE'S APT - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil's used, but well maintained BMW tears around a corner and screeches to a HALT in front of a dingy, graffiti-tagged apartment building. He's now wearing a black designer T-shirt and jeans. He very carefully hangs his suit in a hanger bag.

A HOMELESS GUY, 56, bare foot, walks up and attempts to clean Cecil's windshield. His old rag leaves it dirtier. Cecil cringes and gets out of his car.

CECIL  
I appreciate your help but will you please let me do it?

Cecil gives the Homeless Guy a couple of bucks and cleans the window himself.

JOE (O.S.)  
Just let him wash your window for Christ sakes.

JOE KING, 25, a skinny, short Italian who smokes weed everyday, wears a NY METS cap and refuses to shave his sideburns, comes sauntering out of his sketchy apartment.

CECIL  
Hurry up Joe, I've already wasted enough time.

Cecil hands the rag back to the Homeless Guy.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Thank you. Sorry for being so picky.

HOMELESS GUY  
It's your car.

Joe walks up to the car and nods at the Homeless Guy.

JOE

He's not a bad guy, Ricky he's just a little O.C.D.

RICKY

No worries. You got any weed, brother?

JOE

You'll have to catch me later, I'm dryer than... What's something that's super dry?

RICKY

What?

JOE

I'll have more by next week.

CECIL

Will you get in? They pull the list in ten minutes.

Joe sticks his head in the car.

JOE

What do you care?

INT. CECIL'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil weaves in and out of traffic. Joe still manages to roll a joint. Cecil reaches in his pocket and hands Joe a piece of note paper. Joe puts the joint behind his ear and reads it. He looks at Cecil skeptically.

CECIL

I'm serious.

JOE

I don't believe you'll actually get on stage.

CECIL

I'm serious.

JOE

Trannies are like Ninjas, Puppy Toilet Paper, Smoking Penis. I love that smoking penis bit.

(pretending that he's  
smoking)

I hate condoms.

Cecil and Joe both chuckle.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Where's 'Skittle Tits'?

CECIL  
You think that's funny?

JOE  
Dude, I love 'Skittle Tits'. That bit is gold.

CECIL  
Really?

JOE  
Gold!

Cecil hands Joe a pen. Joe gives Cecil a weird look.

CECIL  
If it's not written down I'll forget it.  
Cecil swerves, nearly hitting an open car door.

JOE  
Just watch the road.  
Joe surrenders, grabs the pen and writes it down.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil and Joe hurry into the comedy club. There are THREE OPEN MIC COMICS lined up at the bar. They quickly jump in line. Out of habit Cecil looks at the watch. It's still broken. He sees an ASIAN MANAGER coming for the list.

The Three Open Mic Comics quickly sign up, then Joe.

Cecil stands alone with a list of hand-written names.

INSERT: OPEN MIC. YOU GET 3 MINUTES, STICK TO YOUR TIME. IF IT'S YOUR FIRST TIME PLEASE INDICATE.

JOE  
If you put your name on there and then flake out, they'll ban you for life.  
Cecil thinks for a moment, then signs his name.

INSERT: CECIL BENDS, FIRST TIME.

CECIL  
I'm ready.

The Asian Manager snatches up the list.

JOE  
No turning back now.

Cecil smiles.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cecil places his set list down next to the sink. He washes his hands.

CECIL  
(into the mirror)  
I can do this.

Cecil grabs a paper towel.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
I can do this.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

The crowd lets out a HUGE LAUGH. Joe sits in the back of the showroom along with the rest of the comics.

EMCEE (O.S.)  
All right, let's give it up, the next guy coming to the stage is Cecil Bends.

The crowd CLAPS. Cecil walks on stage mildly confident. The Emcee hands him the mic.

CECIL  
How are you folks doing tonight?

A few people clap. Cecil fiddles with the mic stand.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Ahhh, good.

He can't see anything, he clears his throat.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Ummm.

The audience is now silent. Cecil starts sweating. His breath is now shallow and quick.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 (trying to be funny)  
 I didn't think the lights would be so  
 bright.

The crowd doesn't laugh. Cecil searches for his set list.  
 He can't find it.

INSERT: On the sink in the bathroom is his set list.

BACK TO CECIL:

His breathing gets heavy. The lights are now blinding  
 him. He puts his hand up as a shield. That doesn't help,  
 the sweat is building. His face becomes flush, he starts  
 swaying back and forth. The audience is getting  
 concerned.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 (slurring)  
 I don't... feel... very--

Suddenly, Cecil's arm falls and he drops the mic. It  
 makes a loud THUMP.

His eyes roll back into his head and he falls limp into  
 the first row of the audience. A table FLIPS over. A  
 glass SHATTERS. Drinks and crowd members SPILL  
 everywhere.

Everyone in the club stands up. It's pure chaos.

CUT TO:

The crowd is sitting. Cecil still stands on stage. The  
 fall was just in his mind. Lost, he shakes his head.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry.

The crowd MURMURS their disappointment.

Defeated, he tries to put the mic in the stand but can't,  
 so he sets it on the stool and walks off stage.

He slams his hands on the security bar and swings the  
 back door wide open. It swings back and pins Cecil in the  
 door frame. He struggles through and exits.

INT. CECIL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Joe runs outside after Cecil.

JOE

Hey wait!

Cecil, furious, stops. Joe runs up.

CECIL

What!? Spare me the bullshit, 'It was your first time, don't be so hard on yourself'.

Cecil gets in his car, SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT and drives off. Joe just stands there confused.

JOE

(to himself)

No dude, you were my ride.

Joe lights a cigarette and head back towards the club.

INT. CECIL'S APT - MID-MORNING

Although the curtains are shut, a beam of sunlight pokes through, irritating a sleeping Cecil.

Cecil's apartment is filled with new, expensive crap. His closet is color coordinated. Fifty-inch big screen, wrap-around black leather couches, a small wine humidor, all the carpet is white and all the picture frames are black.

Suddenly his ALARM GOES OFF.

Cecil reaches over and slaps the snooze button. He rolls over in the fetal position and goes back to sleep.

INT. AUDIO KING - DAY

A MANAGER, 55, slick suit, too much gold jewelry, stands in front of ten 20-50 YEAR-OLD SALESPEOPLE. The store isn't open yet.

Cecil slouches in his chair. Donny leans over to him.

DONNY

Were you actually sick yesterday?

Cecil doesn't answer.

MANAGER

As all of you know, Bruce is leaving us next week, which means the position of assistant general manager is opening up.

(MORE)

MANAGER (CONT'D)

It should come as no surprise that I've decided the position will be filled by two-time salesman of the month... Mr. Cecil Bends.

Cecil's bewilderment is immediate. All the salespeople CLAP, except for Donny, who couldn't care less.

Cecil stands with a disconnected look and shakes the manager's hand.

CECIL

Are you sure?

MANAGER

C'mon Cecil, this is what you've been working for.

(to Everyone)

Let's open up the doors.

Cecil reluctantly shakes his co-worker's hands.

INT. AUDIO KING - LATER (COUNTER)

Cecil furrows his brow as he puts on a new name tag that reads: ASSISTANT MANAGER. Donny comes up to check a price on the computer.

DONNY

Congratulations.

CECIL

Yeah, thanks.

DONNY

So how'd the other night go?

CECIL

It wasn't really that big of a deal.

DONNY

What? At lunch you sounded pretty stoked.

CECIL

Nah, it was just something I wanted to try.

DONNY

You didn't get any laughs, did you? I told you you aren't that funny.

CECIL  
(zero emotion)  
Wow I hate you.

MANAGER (O.S.)  
(over the speaker)  
Cecil, you have a phone call on line  
three.

Cecil picks up the phone.

CECIL  
This is Cecil.  
(Beat)  
Yeah.

Cecil's face becomes pale. Donny notices Cecil's mood  
change.

DONNY  
You all right?

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Cecil runs down a hallway. He stops at a nurses station.

CECIL  
I'm looking for Susan Bends.

The NURSE looks at a clipboard and points down the hall.

NURSE  
Room 813.

He runs in the direction she pointed.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM 813 - CONTINUOUS

Cecil enters, short of breath. On the bed wearing a  
hospital gown is SUSAN BENDS, 46, still has her curly  
brown hair. A DOCTOR, 43, has a stethoscope up to her  
chest.

DOCTOR  
One last big breath.

She takes a deep breath. She COUGHS a little.

CECIL  
Mom? What's going on?

Susan turns and sees her son. Her faces explodes with a smile.

SUSAN

I'm fine. Come in, were just finishing up.

DOCTOR

Just make sure you get proper ventilation next time. You weren't exposed for too long so you should be just fine.

The Doctor closes her file and puts it under his arm.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

If you have any other questions, just ask the nurse.

SUSAN

Thank you.

The doctor exits. She COUGHS again.

CECIL

What the hell is going on?

SUSAN

I got exposed to a new chemical at work. I should have been wearing a mask.

CECIL

Why do you keep putting up with this?

SUSAN

Cecil, don't--

CECIL

You have got to find a different job.

SUSAN

You know we take all the proper precautions. Just relax, I'm fine.

CECIL

You weren't fine today. You ended up here.

SUSAN

You heard the doctor, I'm okay.

Cecil isn't convinced.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Cecil,

(waits for his eye contact)

I'm going to be all right. I'm sorry I  
scared you. Can we please just move on?

(beat)

Cecil, please?

She smiles. He lightens up bit.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Guess who's going to be in town on your  
birthday?

CECIL

John Lennon.

SUSAN

No, Andy Lewiston.

She reaches for her purse and pulls out a flyer. Cecil's  
mood changes. He doesn't respond.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

What? You love Andy.

CECIL

I did my first open mic last night.

SUSAN

You finally got on stage? Why didn't you  
tell me?

CECIL

It was awful.

Susan grabs Cecil's hand.

SUSAN

Cecil, it was your first time. I'm sure  
it wasn't as bad as you think.

CECIL

If you would have been there you wouldn't  
be saying that.

SUSAN

You've been wanting to do this for a long  
time and now you've done it. You should  
be proud of that.

CECIL

But I was terrible, maybe I'm just not  
cut out for the stage.

SUSAN

You're going to give up after one try?  
Stop being so hard on yourself.

Cecil dwells on it in his own mind.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to get you those tickets for  
your birthday. I could use a good night  
out myself.

CECIL

I'm sure we'll have a blast.

Cecil hugs his Mom.

SUSAN

(unimpressed)

Give me a real hug.

He smiles, squeezes the life out of her.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(laughing)

All right, all right.

EXT. ORPHEUM THEATER MINNEAPOLIS - NIGHT

On the marquee it reads: "A NIGHT OF LAUGHS WITH COMEDY  
STAR ANDY LEWISTON, SOLD OUT."

Cecil, Joe, and his Mom struggle through a sea of people  
trying to get into the theater.

JOE

Thanks again for the ticket, Mrs. Bends.  
I wish my parents liked seeing comedy.

SUSAN

Any time, Joey. We wouldn't have gone  
without you.

CECIL

Look what else she got me.

Cecil shows him a brand new notebook.

JOE

A Moleskin, nice. Van Gogh used those.

Joe opens the cover of the notebook and slips the set  
list in that Cecil left in the bathroom.

JOE (CONT'D)

You may need that.

Cecil looks at the set list.

CECIL

I always said I'd be doing stand-up by the time I was twenty-five, and now I'm twenty-five.

JOE

You'll figure it out, man. You gotta be patient.

Joe closes the notebook for him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Next time Gadget, next time.

Cecil smiles and puts the notebook in his pocket.

CECIL

Thanks for coming, Joe.

Cecil grabs Joe by the shoulders and gives him a friendly shake.

CECIL (CONT'D)

We're at the theater Joey,  
(over pronounced)  
...the theater!

JOE

Calm down, Shakes-queer.

Susan laughs.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Joe, Cecil and Susan are seated. The music lowers and the stage lights TURN ON.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

As a courtesy to the performers, at this time would you please turn off all cell phones and pagers.

Cecil powers down his phone and Susan puts it in her purse.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Our first performer tonight is a local legend. Some of you received a voucher for this gentlemen's comedy class.

Susan nudges Cecil. She pulls the voucher out of her purse. Cecil sees it and smiles.

ANNOUNCER

Winner of the first ever Los Angeles Comedy Festival, please put your hands together for the very funny Billy Cole!

BILLY COLE, 52, suit and tie with a red rose on his lapel. His face has been weathered by years of smoking.

DISSOLVE TO:

Cecil is smiling, he's completely in the moment. Billy walks off stage to a FEVERISH RECEPTION.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, are you ready for your main course?

The APPLAUSE gets louder.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

You have seen him on HBO, Showtime and his own sitcom, "Andy's Apartment", please put your hands together for Minnesota's own Andy Lewiston!

The excitement is palpable.

Andy enters the stage. The crowd erupts in APPLAUSE and gives him a standing ovation.

ANDY LEWISTON

Thank you. Thank you.

The crowd settles.

ANDY LEWISTON (CONT'D)

It's good to be home.

Although Andy tells great jokes, Cecil's not watching him. He's riveted the crowd's response. In awe, he stares at all the people LAUGHING and LAUGHING. He imagines himself as the one on the stage and that the laughs are for his jokes.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - LATER

Cecil, Susan, and Joe file out of the theater with the masses. Cecil is glossy-eyed and awestruck.

Joe exits to a bathroom.

SUSAN

I can't remember the last time I laughed that hard. What a great show.

CECIL BENDS

Unbelievable. I've got to do it.

SUSAN

What's stopping you?

After a pause.

CECIL

Fear.

(beat)

What stops you from quitting at the lab and doing something that you actually like?

SUSAN

Fear.

(beat)

What are we so afraid of?

CECIL

The unknown. Finding out we don't have what it takes. A lot of things... I know I'm tired of being an audience member. Tired of turning on the TV and seeing other people living their dreams.

SUSAN

How about we both agree to stop being so afraid?

Cecil smiles and she smiles back. He shakes her hand.

CECIL

Deal.

They hug. Cecil flips it on her.

CECIL (CONT'D)

(unimpressed)

Give me a real hug.

Susan smiles and hugs harder.

EXT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Cecil, Joe and Susan walk out of the theater and into the night with hundreds of other people.

JOE  
And then he said, get off the table  
Mabel, that two bucks is for beer!

Susan, Cecil and Joe laugh.

JOE (CONT'D)  
You should give some broads a call.

CECIL  
It is my birthday.  
(Beat)  
Mom.

Susan has her back to Cecil and doesn't respond.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Mom, can I get my phone?

Still she doesn't respond. Cecil looks worried.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Mom.  
(beat)  
Are you okay?

Cecil grabs Susan shoulder and turns her around. Susan is dazed. She has blood on her hand and mouth.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Mom?

Susan coughs up more blood.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Somebody call an ambulance!

Seeing her own blood, Susan faints. Cecil catches her before she hits the ground.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Mom?  
(Beat)  
Joe, go get help.

Joe sees her limp body and freezes.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Don't just fucking stand there! Call 911.

Joe comes to, and goes for help. People take notice, they help Cecil with his Mother and call 911.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Everything's going to be all right.

Cecil sees all of the blood and it overwhelms him.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
You're going to be just fine.

He cradles his Mother's body, not letting go. THE SOUND OF AN AMBULANCE gets closer and closer.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FUNERAL PARLOR BASEMENT - DAY

Cecil's eyes are blood red from crying.

He sits alone with a body covered by a sheet. He stands, his knees wanting to buckle.

His hand shakes as it approaches the sheet. Reluctant, he pulls it back to reveal his Mother's face. The color that normally gives a body life is now gone. His head drops in agony.

With one hand he holds the notebook she gave him. With the other he gently brushes her hair with the pads of his fingers.

He wipes his eyes.

CECIL  
No more being afraid.

Tears run down his face, Cecil smiles. He grabs the sheet and covers her face.

INT. AUDIO KING - DAY

Cecil walks into the store wearing shorts and sunglasses. He goes straight for the Manager's office. Donny, with a customer, sees Cecil enter.

DONNY  
(to his customers)  
Could you please give me a moment?

Donny hurries to catch up with Cecil.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Cecil?

Cecil keeps walking, ignoring him. Donny speeds up.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Cecil!

Cecil takes his glasses off and enters the office, shutting the door right in Donny's face.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Manager sits at his desk with his back to Cecil.

CECIL

You got a minute?

The Manager turns around, a sandwich in hand. He has a napkin tucked into the top of his shirt and a less than impressed look on his face.

MANAGER

Have a seat.

Cecil doesn't sit.

CECIL

I quit.

Mustard from the sandwich drips into the manager's lap.

MANAGER

You can't do that.

Cecil opens the door to leave.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

What would your mother think?

Cecil stops and turns back to the Manager.

CECIL

Fuck you.

(trying stay calm)

No one plays "TV Salesman" as a kid. This isn't something you strive towards, it's a place you end up.

Cecil, done, walks out. The Manager looks disappointed.

EXT. AUDIO KING - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil walks towards his car with a box of his stuff in his hands. Donny follows, still in his ear.

DONNY

This is hasty man, this is very hasty.  
How are you going to pay for your car and  
your apartment?

CECIL

I'll figure it out.

DONNY

Karl in cell phones walked off and he was  
begging for his job back in two weeks.

CECIL

Donny! I have to do this.

Cecil opens his car door and gets in.

DONNY

What are you going to do?

Cecil starts his car.

CECIL

I'm going to get on stage.

DONNY

Are you fucking crazy?

CECIL

Maybe. Or maybe it's crazy to spend forty-  
plus hours a week selling bullshit to  
bored housewives.

Donny shakes his head.

DONNY

This is a mistake, man.

CECIL

I appreciate your support.

Cecil SLAMS his door and drives away.

He watches Donny in his rear-view mirror wave good-bye.  
Cecil waves back through his sun roof.

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

My Mom spent my entire childhood trying  
to convince me that I was special, that I  
could do something unique with my life.

(beat)

It was time to see if she was right.

The Manager, still with napkin tucked in his shirt, comes  
outside.

Cecil keeps driving.

INT. HOTEL BAR - EVENING

A sign reads: MONDAY NIGHT COMEDY LECTURES.

INT. HOTEL BAR (STAGE) - CONTINUOUS

The bar smells like spilled booze and nervous sweat. On a  
show night the room could seat over 200 people. Tonight  
there are 20-30 people sitting in the first three rows.  
All of them have notebooks in their hands and hopeful  
expressions on their faces.

Billy Cole stands at the head of a class, handing out  
sheets of paper. He speaks very fast, like he's said what  
he's saying a million times before. He keeps a lit  
cigarette in his mouth at all times.

BILLY

For those of you who don't know me, my  
name is Billy Cole. I've been writing and  
or performing stand-up comedy for the  
past 22 years. Comedy as we know it today  
didn't get its start until the sixties,  
with comics like Lenny Bruce and Richard  
Pryor. After the--

Cecil dashes in, short on breath.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You don't own a watch?

CECIL

No, sorry I'm late.

BILLY

(annoyed)

Have a seat.

The only open chair is next to ADAM BLAZER, 26, mostly paralyzed from the neck down, sits in an electric wheel chair, long, straight, black hair and tattoos. Adam has some use of his hands and arms, which only perpetuates his functioning alcoholism.

He currently sits with a beer and what looks like a shot of whiskey at six o'clock on a Monday. Cecil looks at the shot and smiles, he nods. Adam nods back. Cecil sits.

BILLY (CONT'D)

After the twelve weeks in this course, I can guarantee you one thing. You will understand how to write and tell a joke.

(beat)

The last week of class we'll meet on a Friday night where each of you will do 3-5 minutes in front of a paying crowd.

There is a murmur of excitement.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Now, if you make it all the way through this class, which most of you won't, that night's attendance will be determined by how many friends and family you bring. The more you bring, the better you'll do, I promise. Do we have any questions?

An OLDER WOMAN, 59, raises her hand.

OLDER WOMAN

What if we work on Friday nights?

BILLY

We're not accountants. Shows happen on nights and weekends.

Billy pulls out his copy of the hand out.

BILLY (CONT'D)

On this sheet are industry terms you will all learn to be familiar with.

Insert: SET-UP, PUNCH LINE, ACT OUT, TAG, HACK, PREMISE, OPEN MICER, EMCEE, GUEST SETS, FEATURE, HEADLINER, CALL BACK, ONE-LINERS, CROWD WORK, BLUE MATERIAL VS. CLEAN MATERIAL, KILLING, EATING IT, STICKING TO YOUR TIME, BOOKING AGENTS, ROAD GIGS, OPEN MICS, SHOWCASING, TALENT VS. WORK ETHIC.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Now I asked everyone to write down twenty funny ideas. Does everyone have that?

Everyone pulls out their papers.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Good. What I want to show you first is how to take an idea, or "premise," and turn it into jokes, or "material".

The class already looks overwhelmed.

Billy draws a circle around an idea on the large dry erase board and then draws multiple spokes to other circles.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I want you to get into groups of three or four and one at a time tell each other your premises. From that, I want you to determine your best one and put it in the center of the wheel.

He turns around to see if they're with him.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Next, I want you to brainstorm some new ideas and put them into the smaller circles. Does anybody know what we would call these new ideas?

ADAM

Punchlines.

BILLY

Punchlines, very good. It would be nice if they were punchlines, but they don't necessarily have to be. They just have to be funny ideas.

(beat)

I'll give you fifteen minutes. Everyone get into your groups.

The group awkwardly divides itself. Cecil, Adam and two others get into a group. Billy, forgetting about the class, goes to the bar for a drink and a fresh cigarette.

DISSOLVE TO:

The students are now back in their seats. TONY BLANCHARD, 28, tall and athletic, stands on stage. Billy sits in a chair in front of the stage.

TONY

My buddy was complaining to me the other day that he hated fake boobs...

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

I was like, fake boobs, real boobs, they  
all look the same with real cum on them.

Half the class LAUGHS, the other half are uncomfortable.  
Cecil laughs and looks over at Adam, he's losing it.

ADAM

Now that's fucking funny.

Billy rubs his eyes. It's stupid, but he still laughs.

BILLY

Yes. Good. Very funny, but let's try to  
keep it cleaner next time.

Billy finishes his drink and then looks at his watch.

BILLY (CONT'D)

That's all the time we've got this week.  
In the e-mail I sent you there's a list  
of the open mics in the area. The only  
way you're going to figure this out is by  
doing it. Good luck, see you next week.

Everyone grabs their things and gets up.

CECIL

See you next week, man.

ADAM

Yeah, see you then.

Adam wheels away before Cecil has a chance to keep a  
conversation going.

INT. CECIL'S BMW - NIGHT

Joe smokes a joint while Cecil drives.

JOE

So how long can you pull off being  
unemployed?

Joe passes the joint to Cecil and he hits it.

CECIL

(holding in the hit)  
I've got a little savings, but I'm hoping  
to start making some money doing comedy.

Cecil exhales a huge cloud of smoke. Joe laughs out loud.

JOE  
You're fucking kidding me, right?

Cecil looks at Joe dead serious.

JOE (CONT'D)  
It took me two years before I got my first paid gig. Dude, even now I have to give blood twice a month just to pay my fucking rent.

Cecil's face sobers up quickly.

JOE (CONT'D)  
You think you're going to slide right into this? Think again. It takes time, a lot of time.

CECIL  
Look, this is what I want. I'm not worried about it.

JOE  
Well, maybe you fucking should be.

Joe offers the joint back to Cecil. Cecil is visibly rattled.

CECIL  
I'm good. I think it's done anyway.

Joe gets three more tiny hits off the joint.

JOE  
Now it's done.

They both get out of the car. Cecil grabs his video camera still looking uneasy. They walk into a dive bar.

INT. GRUMPY'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cecil drinks water out of the faucet. He looks at himself in the mirror. His mouth is still dry, he takes another drink, but still his mouth refuses to stay moist.

CECIL  
I can do this. I can do this.

Joe pokes his head in the bathroom.

JOE  
You're up next.

CECIL

Cool, thanks.

Cecil looks back at the mirror like he's never seen his own face before. He leaves the bathroom.

Immediately, he returns and grabs his SET LIST off of the counter. He's not forgetting that again.

MAIN ROOM:

From the P.O.V. of Cecil's video camera that's set-up in the back of the room, properly framed on the stage, and ready to capture his set. Cecil paces back and forth.

A WAITRESS, 22, walks by.

BACK TO SCENE

WAITRESS

You want anything?

CECIL

Yeah.

Cecil pulls out his wallet but sees he's low on funds.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Actually, can you just bring me a water?

She walks away, annoyed.

Cecil's mouth is now as dry as thirty deserts.

CHRIS MADDOX, 30, a random open micer, is on stage. He's doing well. He chugs an entire beer. For some reason unbeknownst to Cecil, the crowd is LAUGHING.

CROWD

Chug! Chug! Chug!

Cecil sees the beer and it only makes him thirstier. He licks his cracked lips. Chris finishes the beer and triumphantly puts his arms out. The crowd CLAPS.

CHRIS

Thank you guys.

Chris walks off stage and the HOST walks up.

HOST

Let's give it up for Chris, folks.

Cecil's mouth is still dry. He looks around but can't find the waitress anywhere. He tries to conjure up some saliva, but nothing.

He sees Adam. In a slight panic, he goes up to him.

CECIL

What's up, man? You mind if I grab a sip of that? I'm up next.

ADAM

Help yourself.

Cecil takes a sip of Adam's beer. Huge relief.

CECIL

Thank you.

ADAM

Anytime.

ANNOUNCER

So far, so good. Your next open micer to the stage is Cecil Bends.

The crowd CLAPS. Cecil walks on stage and grabs the mic.

His mouth is immediately dry again. He looks around for anything to drink.

The only sound that can be heard is CECIL'S DRY TONGUE, SLIDING ACROSS EVEN DRYER LIPS.

FROM CECIL'S P.O.V. (Surreal Images)

His vision is slightly out of focus. All he sees are silhouettes of crowd members.

There is silence. All that can be heard is Cecil's own frantic BREATHING.

The crowd is polite but they just stare at him. He looks at his set list and then puts it away.

CECIL

(You can tell he is speaking  
but you can't quite  
understand what he's saying)

Cecil drops the punch-line and BAM, the silhouettes erupt in laughter.

Still all that can be heard is Cecil's breath but now that he has received legitimate laughter his breathing becomes less erratic.

The crowd laughs again and again.

Cecil takes a DEEP BREATH, knowing everything is going to work out. His lips widen to reveal a satisfied grin.

EXT. GRUMPY'S - CONTINUOUS

Cecil triumphantly spills out of the bar. He can barely contain himself, his fist pumps in the air. His smile says it all.

Joe runs out.

JOE

Where the fuck did that come from?

Cecil smiles, not knowing what to say.

CECIL

I--

JOE

Holy shit, man!

(Kidding)

I wasn't sure if you had it in ya.

Cecil smiles. Joe smiles back.

JOE (CONT'D)

How'd it feel?

CECIL

It felt fucking great.

JOE

Well congratulations, you son of a bitch.

Let me buy you a drink.

Joe goes inside. Cecil opens his notebook his Mom gave him. Insert: TIMES ON STAGE: 1

He puts a second hash mark.

Cecil looks up at the clouds shimmering in the moonlight. He kisses the notebook and calmness eases over him.



EXT. DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS - MORNING

The wheel from Adam's chair is running into Cecil's head.

ADAM (O.S.)  
Cecil. Cecil, wake up!

Cecil's eyes partially open. He has no idea where he is.

ADAM (CONT'D)  
Get up.

CECIL  
Where the hell...?

Cecil's eyes fully open. He's lying on the river bed, underneath the Stone Arch Bridge downtown Minneapolis.

Suddenly, Joe MOANS.

JOE  
(slowly getting up)  
I'd like to find the homeless guy who  
shit in my mouth.  
(belches)  
Did we do sets last night?

Cecil has a mic with no cord in his hand. He holds it up.

CECIL  
I definitely remember being on stage.  
(beat)  
What time is it?

ADAM  
I don't know, but I'd like to get out of  
here before we get robbed by some gypsy.

JOE  
It's 8:15.

Cecil pulls out his wallet. It's empty.

CECIL  
Fuuuuuuuck.  
(Beat)  
Joe, there's gotta be some place I can  
make some money. I mean come on, you saw  
my set last night.

JOE  
Slow your roll, dude. It was one decent  
set in front of a great crowd. That's not  
comedy.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

If you want to get paid, you need to be able to do thirty minutes in front of a shit crowd and still dig it out. That's comedy.

CECIL

Well how do you make money when your calendar's lean?

JOE

I have my ways.

Cecil looks at him with his hands out like "well?".

JOE (CONT'D)

I just... I don't think that--

CECIL

C'mon.

JOE

You're a salesman and the best pitch you can come up with is "C'mon"?

CECIL

Are you going to help me or not?

Joe looks reluctant.

JOE

Fine, but keep this shit to yourselves. I don't need anybody else working off of my beats.

They start walking.

CECIL

Wait a minute.

(Cecil grabs Joe)

As long as it doesn't involve giving blood or selling weed.

They stop. Joe disappointedly turns around.

JOE

You're really tying my hands here.

CECIL

Nothing illegal--

JOE

Really tying my hands.

They head in the opposite direction.

ADAM  
You guys want a ride?

Both Cecil and Joe look at Adam slightly confused.

EXT. STREET (ON ADAM'S CHAIR) - DAY

Joe sits on Adam's lap and Cecil rides on the back of the chair through the streets of downtown Minneapolis.

As the three WHIZ past, people take notice.

EXT. BUSY STREET CORNER - DAY

Joe digs in a trash can.

Adam now has clothes on that make him look homeless, complete with a soiled American flag bandana.

JOE  
Almost got it.

Joe springs out of the trash can with an old used Styrofoam cup. He hands it to Adam. Joe reaches in his pocket and pulls out some change.

CECIL  
What are you doing?

JOE  
Starter change. It's more effective if it makes noise, dude.

Joe puts the change in the cup and hands it to Adam. Without missing a beat Adam starts SHAKING it.

ADAM  
Vietnam vet, spare some change?

Immediately someone gives him change.

CECIL  
You have got to be kidding me.

The cup is still SHAKING.

ADAM  
Spare some change for a down-and-out vet.

Someone else puts some money in his cup.

CECIL  
This is ridiculous.

JOE  
What are you talking about? He's probably  
already made two bucks.

ADAM  
Bet you can't hit me with a quarter.

Someone throws a quarter, it hits him in the head.

ADAM (CONT'D)  
Hey! What the fuck is your problem?

CECIL  
Joe, there's got to be another way.

Another person puts change in the cup.

JOE  
He's not doing bad.

CECIL  
What else?

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Joe and Cecil stumble up to the counter and set down a  
number of Cecil's things. A watch, snowboard,  
ridiculously large cappuccino machine. Cecil's not happy.

Adam has a trailer attached to his chair and is pulling a  
bunch of other stuff. Mini fridge, golf clubs, etc...

CECIL  
We're not selling anything for less than  
it's worth.

JOE  
Does your insurance cover fire?

CECIL  
No, I rent.

JOE  
Then this is the only way to liquidate  
your merch. Quit being so picky.

ADAM  
Liquidation can be a very lucrative  
business model.

(MORE)

ADAM (CONT'D)

During the summer of '99 I lived off of copper tubing we found in an abandoned real estate development.

JOE

I've done this before. I'll do the talking.

ADAM

Now that I think about it, I'm not sure those houses were abandoned.

A GIANT MAN, 48, English accent, walks up with a shirt that reads, FUCK YOU! With a picture of a fist giving the middle finger.

GIANT MAN

Wudda you want?

JOE

Us gentlemen were just in the neighborhood and were wondering if you would be interested in some of these choice heirlooms.

The Giant man eyeballs Cecil's things. He picks up the watch and puts to his ear, shakes it and listens again. Unimpressed he puts it down. He fiddles with the handles on the cappuccino machine.

GIANT MAN

I'll give you two hundred and fifty bucks for the lot of it.

CECIL

What? This watch alone is worth over five hundred dollars.

JOE

Cecil--

GIANT MAN

What in bloody hell do you need with a five hundred dollar timepiece that's fucking broke?

CECIL

It could be fixed.

GIANT MAN

I should kick all your asses for even coming in here... and I'll start with the cripple. Joseph, you know I don't fuck around.

JOE

It's the best deal in town, dude. Let's just take it and get the hell out of here.

CECIL

No, this is straight robbery.

JOE

Dude, seriously?

GIANT MAN

How bout you fucking wankers make up your sodding minds before you drop by next time... Now get the fuck out of my shop!

EXT. PAWN SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

They leave with the items they had when they entered.

JOE

That was money in hand. What the fuck?

CECIL

Two hundred and fifty dollars? That limey asshole was trying to rip us off.

ADAM

Does anyone feel like we just walked out of a Guy Ritchie movie?

JOE

Do you want to be the owner of a five hundred dollar watch? Or a fucking stand-up comic?

Cecil pauses.

CECIL

My Mom gave me it to me.

JOE

You still think just because (Mocking) "this is what you really want", that it's just going fall in your fucking lap? I haven't been to a dentist in three years, I don't have a 401K or a fucking BMW. I make sacrifices, Cecil, because that's how this shit works. And with all respect to your Mother, I'm not talking about some five hundred dollar watch bullshit. I'm talking about some Biblical, cutting your child in half shit.

Cecil is completely silenced.

CECIL

Just because we're creative doesn't mean we have to fucking starve. Maybe I don't fully understand it yet, but I'm trying to and I could really use your help.

JOE

I'm out of ideas.

Adam wheels into the conversation.

ADAM

What about Betty's?

CECIL

What's Betty's?

JOE

That's where I remember you from. Tuesday nights?

ADAM

Oh yeah.

JOE

Good to see you again, Johnny Five.

(they pound fists)

I don't really think Betty's fits with Cecil's M.O.

CECIL

What the hell is Betty's?

INT. BETTY'S BINGO PALACE - NIGHT

In a smoke-filled room, 120 ELDERLY MEN AND WOMEN play BINGO. A large sign at the front of the hall reads: "BI-MONTHLY SINGLE SENIOR'S SOCIAL. ALL AGES."

Cecil, Joe and Adam sit at a large table with dabbers in their hands and ten BINGO boards in front of each of them.

An ANNOUNCER, 68, uses a voice box that makes him sound robotic. He stands at the front of the room with a giant BINGO hopper. He spins the hopper and then pulls out a ball.

ANNOUNCER

(robot voice)

I-27.

Everyone dabs their boards. Joe has an ashtray with five cigarette butts.

JOE  
(while smoking)  
I walked out with three fifty one night.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
O-68.

Everyone dabs again.

CECIL  
Seriously?

JOE  
You'll notice there's not a lot of young eyes in this crowd. Half the time even if their number gets called, they don't see it.

ANNOUNCER  
B-9.

The dabbers fly.

ELDERLY MAN (O.S.)  
Wish my tumors were benign.

The Elderly Man laughs at his own joke. Cecil gives him a weird look.

JOE  
Plus, worst case scenario, you could find a sugar momma with a weak heart.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
N-42.

Everyone dabs again.

CECIL  
What was that last one?

JOE  
N-42.

CECIL  
I think I just got a BINGO.

ADAM  
Then yell it out.

CECIL

BINGO.

ADAM

Man, you gotta say it louder'n that.

CECIL

(yelling)

BINGO!

RANDOM ELDERLY PERSON

Fuck.

RANDOM ELDERLY PERSON #2

Shit.

All the old people stop and turn around with scowls on their faces.

ADAM

(to the Old Guy)

Calm down, sir.

OLD GUY

You cherry-picking sons a bitches,  
telling me to calm down.

JOE

Over here.

The Announcer comes over and checks Cecil's board.

CECIL

It's my first BINGO.

The Announcer puts the voice box up to his throat.

ANNOUNCER

(robot voice)

I'll be the judge of that.

He scrutinizes the board.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

(defeated)

We have a winner.

ADAM

Suck it, Grandpa.

The Announcer pulls out a satchel and counts out twenties to Cecil. Cecil holds up the money in a fan. Adam grabs one of the twenties and holds it in front the Old Guy's face.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Let me guess, you voted for this guy.

Joe and Cecil laugh. Cecil grabs the twenty back before things get out of hand.

INT. OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Cecil is on stage and the crowd is silent. He's pouring sweat. It's very awkward.

CROWD MEMBER #1

(audible from stage)

This guy just isn't funny.

One person in the back chuckles. Cecil meanders for a moment and doesn't know what else to say.

CROWD MEMBER #2

Say something funny.

The Open Mic Host comes on stage.

OPEN MIC HOST

Give it up for Cecil Bends.

(Takes the mic)

Let's keep that energy going for your next comedian, Ling-Ling the Lacist Panda.

Cecil walks off, embarrassed. People look at him with worried expressions, shaking their heads in disbelief.

A GIRL, 21, contorts her face awkwardly to let Cecil know how unfunny he just was. She whispers to HER GIRLFRIEND and they both LAUGH at Cecil.

Cecil shuts his camera off and furiously packs it up. He tallies another hash-mark in his notebook and storms out.

JOE

Where you going?

Cecil keeps walking.

INT. COMEDY CLASS - NIGHT

Billy stands in front of the entire class, which is already a third smaller than before. Behind him is a dry-erase board with the words: SET-UP and PUNCHLINE.

BILLY

...why did the chicken cross the road, set-up. To get to the other side, punchline. A joke should be delivered like a whip. You draw it back with the set-up and then snap it with the punchline.

Billy flips the board.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Now the key is within this very simple structure to still have a point of view. How many times have you seen a comic on The Tonight Show tell a bar joke?

WOMAN IN CLASS

None?

BILLY

That's right and why do you think that is?

Cecil's dying to chyme in.

CECIL

Because at the end of the day those jokes don't say anything about the person who's telling the joke.

BILLY

Very good. You need to find what makes you original. What makes you, you. That is what The Tonight Show is looking for, something unique and memorable.

WOMAN IN CLASS

How come you haven't been on The Tonight Show?

Billy ponders the question carefully.

BILLY

I guess it just wasn't meant to be.

Cecil furrows his brow disagreeing with that idea. Everyone else seems to be satisfied with that answer.

BILLY (CONT'D)

That's all for tonight. By the way, for the last day of class I just confirmed headliner Tony Gorki. He'll speak to you all about the business side of things.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

I know it's still eight weeks away, but  
you're not going to want to miss that.  
See you next week.

Billy packs up his things. Cecil walks up to him.

CECIL

What's going on, Billy?

BILLY

Not much.

(beat)

Everything all right?

CECIL

Actually... I was wondering if you maybe  
had time for a beer?

Billy looks up, puzzled.

INT. BAR - LATER

Billy and Cecil sit in a booth. There are ten empty beer  
bottles on the table. Cecil is laughing.

BILLY

And then, things got weird...

CECIL

Whoa, whoa, this is already pretty  
fucking weird.

Billy laughs.

BILLY

It gets weirder 'cause in the morning the  
girl wakes up and at first I think she's  
still drunk. Nope, turns out she was  
retarded.

Cecil and Billy lose it.

CECIL

No way.

BILLY

I felt horrible. She was all like...  
(Slurring His words)  
Can you take me home?

Cecil is still laughing.

CECIL  
So what happened?

BILLY  
I fucked her again and took her home.

CECIL  
No way! There is no way you fucked her again?

BILLY  
She asked me to, I swear to God. When you meet Tony Gorki, ask him.

CECIL  
I really hope I get to--

Billy interjects.

BILLY  
--fuck a handicapped girl?

Cecil smiles.

CECIL  
Get on the road, do some gigs.

BILLY  
How many times you been on stage?

Cecil opens his notebook and counts the hash marks.

CECIL  
Twelve times--

Billy laughs out loud.

BILLY  
Jesus, you're still a puppy. It took me ten years before I even felt comfortable on stage.

Cecil looks overwhelmed.

CECIL  
Ten years?

BILLY  
Stand-up comedy is the hardest thing I've ever done. If you're not going to give it at least ten, shit twenty years, then don't give it twenty minutes.

CECIL

I'm just having a hard time with the swings. One set will be great and then the next night with the exact same jokes... I'll eat shit. Is that normal?

BILLY

Yes! Even the great Andy Lewiston still eats shit from time to time.

Billy motions to the bartender for their tab.

CECIL

You know, for how good of friends you are with Andy, it surprises me that he didn't help you get on TV.

Billy stops. Cecil knows he struck a nerve and doesn't press the issue.

BILLY

It's a story for another time.

MONTAGE:

INT. OPEN MIC (POETRY READING) - NIGHT

Super arty types listening to suicidal poems. Cecil isn't sure. Joe goes up and gets everyone LAUGHING. Cecil, still unsure, goes up anyway and also kills it. The crowd CLAPS and LAUGHS. With a smile, he tallies another hash-mark in his notebook.

INT. OPEN MIC (BIKER BAR) - NIGHT

Cecil eats shit. Joe says something to piss someone off and they both get chased out of the place.

INT. COMEDY CLASS - NIGHT

Cecil is on stage. The class is laughing at his jokes. Billy also laughs and applauds.

INT. OPEN MIC (COUNTRY BAR) - NIGHT

Cecil eats it again. Joe takes off a large cowboy's hat and pours his beer into it. They barely make it out alive.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Cecil is watching the playback on his camera with ear buds in. He's deep into his notebook. He crosses off some things and circles others.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
Give it up for your next performer,  
Cedric Bond.

Cecil takes the ear buds out and walks on stage.

CECIL  
It's Cecil... Bends, but thanks for the  
effort.  
(Beat)  
How are you guys doing tonight?

The audience is hot and is listening to his every word. Their enthusiasm puts a smile on Cecil's face.

EXT. OPEN MIC - CONTINUOUS

Cecil storms out of the place, he throws his notebook in the street and kicks a garbage can.

CECIL  
Fuck!

Joe comes out after him.

JOE  
What happened, dude? You had them at the  
beginning.

CECIL  
That's the third shit set in a row.

JOE  
You just need to relax.

CECIL  
Fuck off. I don't need you right now.

JOE  
Whoa, what's my father doing here?

CECIL  
What the fuck, Joe? I mean, seriously.  
(beat)  
Be straight with me. Was that Grumpy's  
set a fluke?

JOE

Dude, don't start mind-jobbing yourself over shit crowds. I thought you said this is what you wanted.

CECIL

It is! I just want to know if I'm good or not.

JOE

Don't let these sheeple get to you.

Cecil walks into traffic and gets his notebook. It now has a TIRE TRACK across it. Someone HONKS at him.

Cecil gives him a rigorous middle finger.

CECIL

Fuuuuuuuuuck Yoooooooooooo!

The honking stops.

INT. CAR - LATER

Cecil sits in his car, alone.

He writes his set list and closes the book. On the inside cover are now thirty to forty hash-marks and a quote that reads: "IF YOU WANT IT, YOU MUST OBTAIN IT BY GREAT LABOR." - T.S. ELLIOT

He looks at himself in the rear view mirror.

CECIL

This is it. If you don't get laughs right now, you're done. There's no shame in that. At some point, enough is enough. You'll get a job at Best Buy or something... One last shot.

He gets out of his car and walks into the club.

INT. OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Cecil stands there with his set list SHAKING in his hand.

ANNOUNCER

Please help me to welcome a newcomer to the scene, Cecil Bends.

Cecil walks on stage.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OPEN MIC - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil walks out of the club with his head down.

He walks down the street with an emotionless look.

He goes past a garbage can. He stops.

A sad moment comes over him. He looks at his notebook and then tosses it in the garbage.

Cecil walks away, not looking back.

INT. COMEDY CLASS - NIGHT

Adam sits in class. Only nine students remain. Cecil is nowhere to be found. Billy stands in front of the class with TONY GORKI, 46, typical 1980's comic.

BILLY

Let's give a hand to Tony Gorki.

(everyone CLAPS)

Now don't forget, I want you all here tomorrow at seven. The show starts at eight. Bring as many people as you can. See you then. Tony, any parting remarks?

TONY GORKI

Have fun tomorrow night. You'll be excited so try not to rush. Find your pace. It's a cliché but, timing really is everything.

Billy nods in agreement and CLAPS. The class CLAPS.

INT. BEST BUY - NIGHT

Cecil looks at his wrist. He's wearing his broken watch. Realizing that it won't tell him the time, he finds a clock on the wall. It reads: FRIDAY JUNE 23, 7:43 P.M.

Cecil sits at the customer service counter and finishes filling out a job application.

He looks over and sees an UNHAPPY CASHIER, 19, with a lifeless look on his face, going through the motions of checking someone out but not actually looking alive.

A MANAGER passes by the Unhappy Cashier and forces him to give a high-five. The Cashier begrudgingly obliges.

The Manager walks over to the customer service desk.

BEST BUY MANAGER  
 Sorry about that. Man, high-fives get me jazzed!

The Manager sits and examines Cecil's application.

BEST BUY MANAGER (CONT'D)  
 With this much experience and these glowing reviews, I feel lucky to be able to hire you.

CECIL  
 Thank you.

BEST BUY MANAGER  
 If you wanna get going on this, we could start you Monday.

CECIL  
 Monday?

BEST BUY MANAGER  
 Let's strike while the iron's hot. You know what I'm saying?  
 (creepily)  
 'Cause I think you do.

Cecil glances over and sees the Unhappy Cashier slowly shaking his head 'no' with a dire look on his face.

The Manager turns to see what Cecil is looking at and the Unhappy Cashier quickly stops and keeps working.

The Manager turns back to Cecil.

BEST BUY MANAGER (CONT'D)  
 So Monday?

Cecil exhales.

CECIL  
 Yeah, Monday would be fine.

BEST BUY MANAGER  
 Fan-tastic! Welcome aboard.

Cecil forces a smile and shakes the Manager's hand.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

The club is packed full of people.

The students from the comedy class are sitting in the back of the club preparing their set lists with terror on their faces. Joe sits with Adam and helps him write his set list. Billy walks up to Adam and Joe.

BILLY  
Have you seen Cecil?

ADAM  
I left him a message about the time.

Billy shakes his head.

BILLY  
He's lucky he got out when he did.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
Please put your hands together for Billy Cole.

Billy slams the drink in his hand and rushes on stage.

BILLY  
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Minnesota Comedy Club.

Everyone CLAPS.

INT. BEST BUY - CONTINUOUS

Cecil looks at the Unhappy Cashier.

Out of the blue.

DONNY (O.S.)  
Cecil?

Cecil turns to see Donny White, wearing a University of Minnesota T-shirt, standing with his MOTHER, 72.

Donny and his Mother excitedly approach Cecil.

DONNY (CONT'D)  
Mother, this is the guy.

Donny's mother smiles. Cecil is a bit confused.

DONNY (CONT'D)

This is Cecil, the guy who quit his job to do stand-up comedy.

DONNY'S MOTHER

It's so nice to finally meet you. I always knew Donny would go back to school. He just needed some inspiration.

Cecil looks at Donny, puzzled.

DONNY

I've seen plenty of people walk out, man, but with you it was different. I knew you weren't coming back. I just couldn't lie to myself anymore. It was safe, but it wasn't how I wanted to spend my time.

Donny's mother smiles. Cecil suddenly has a disappointed look on his face.

Out of nowhere the Manager interrupts.

BEST BUY MANAGER

Cecil, I actually need just one more signature on this.

Cecil's application is laid back on the counter. Donny and his mother are confused. Cecil takes a long pause.

CECIL

I can't do this.

BEST BUY MANAGER

I'm sorry?

Cecil slides the application back across the table.

CECIL

This isn't how I want to spend my time.

Now the Manager is confused. A smile returns to both Donny and his Mother's face.

BEST BUY MANAGER

Well I must say... I...

Cecil looks at Donny and his mother. He hugs them both briefly and then looks at the wall clock. It now reads: 7:58 P.M.

CECIL  
 I'd love to stay, but I got a gig.  
 (walking backwards)  
 It was nice to meet you, ma'am.

DONNY'S MOTHER  
 You too, son.

Donny and his Mother wave good-bye. Cecil waves back and rushes for the exit. On his way out he grabs the Unhappy Cashier and drags him out of the store.

CECIL  
 (to the Manager)  
 By the way, this guy thinks you're an asshole and he quits.

The Cashier pantomimes 'whatever' and throws his name tag off.

Cecil gives the Manager a sarcastic 'air' high-five.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 High-Five.  
 (to the Cashier)  
 You like comedy?

UNHAPPY CASHIER  
 Fucking A.

Cecil leads him out of the store.

EXT. GARBAGE CAN - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil's car STOPS. He gets out and runs up to the garbage can he threw his notebook in.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - LATER

The crowd is CLAPPING. Billy walks on stage and takes the mic from Adam.

BILLY  
 Adam, everybody!

Everyone claps again. Adam wheels off stage.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
 That's all the comedians. I'd like to thank everyone for--

Suddenly, Cecil enters in the from the back.

Billy sees him from stage.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
 Actually, one last performer just  
 arrived. Can you handle one more?

The crowd rigorously APPLAUDS.

The Best Buy Cashier is behind Cecil filling out a job  
 application on a clipboard. Cecil has him take a seat  
 next to Joe.

CECIL  
 When you're finished, just give it to  
 Pete behind the bar.

The Best Buy Employee smiles and nods.

Cecil tosses his notebook with the tire mark on the table  
 in front of Joe. He smells something funny and looks at  
 the notebook.

BILLY  
 Ladies and gentlemen, please help me in  
 welcoming comedian Cecil Bends!

Cecil heads towards the stage with a huge smile.

CECIL (V.O.)  
 That was the first time anyone had ever  
 called me a comedian. It was a big moment  
 for me.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. LAUGH RIOT'S COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Cecil's face is now terrified as he is being dragged  
 through the inner workings of a sold-out comedy club by  
 the club's manager JAN NEPTUNE, 47, long red hair,  
 although time has been hard on this former hippie, her  
 youthful beauty still shines through.

JAN  
 (Not happy)  
 You're late.

CECIL  
 I'm so sorry Jan--

TITLE CARD: 3 YEARS LATER...

He has his notebook and his video camera in a bag with a strap that goes over his shoulder. She keeps dragging him.

JAN

Bret's up there right now. He'll bring you up, you'll do 25 tight. When do you want the light?

CECIL

At one minute.

The dragging continues through the office area. It's like a call center for a one-nine-hundred number. Five CALLERS wearing headsets and giving away 'free parties' to everyone they call.

YOUNG CALLER

(over zealous radio voice)

Spend your night with us cause every moment is a chuckle-fest here at Laugh Riots. (FAKE CRAZY LAUGH)

The Young Caller looks at one of his fellow callers, puts his hand in his mouth like it's a gun and pretends to blow his brains out.

Jan slaps the caller in the back of the head and she and Cecil keep walking.

The phone in Jan's hand RINGS, she answers it, still walking.

JAN

Laugh Riot's, this is Jan.

(She listens)

Tonight the show is at 7:30. Friday and Saturday we have two shows, one at 8:00 and one at 10:00.

She hangs up and hurries Cecil through the kitchen area.

JAN (CONT'D)

You get two free drinks per show. Keep it clean, stick to your time and everything should be cool.

In the kitchen grabbing a food order is CAMEO NEPTUNE, 21, beautiful like her Mom, also has red hair and freckles.

Cecil sees Cameo and stops. He stares for a moment.

JAN (CONT'D)

This is Cameo.

CECIL

Hey.

CAMEO

Hey yourself.

She smiles at him, grabs the food and walks into the showroom. Cecil is left in a daze.

JAN

She's my daughter...  
(looks Cecil in the eye)  
*Comprende mi amigo?*

CECIL

Got it, sorry.

They keep moving.

JAN

This is the greenroom.

GREENROOM:

Billy sits on the couch, disappointed. Cecil takes his camera off his shoulder and sets down.

CECIL

Sorry I'm late. The time zone thing--

Billy nods towards the stage with his cigarette.

BILLY

You've got bigger things to worry about now, kid.

BRET CLAWSON (O.S.)

Let's give it up for your feature act. He comes to us all the way from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Jan grabs Cecil right before he walks on stage.

JAN

Don't let this happen again.

Cecil knows he let both Jan and Billy down.

BRET CLAWSON (O.S.)

Please put your hands together for Cecil Bends.

Cecil walks on stage to a warm reception. Jan looks at Billy and shakes her head.

INT. LAUGH RIOT'S - NIGHT

All three of the comics stand by the exit individually thanking the audience for coming out. First it's Bret, then it's Cecil, then Billy.

Cecil sees Cameo cleaning up.

She looks up at him and smiles.

Cecil sheepishly smiles back and looks away.

Cecil tries not to look again but he does. She's still looking at him with a smile.

He smiles back again.

INT. CAMEO'S CAR - NIGHT

Cameo drives. Cecil looks through her CDs.

CAMEO

(on the phone)

I'm with the comedian.

(beat)

Was he funny?

(smiles at Cecil)

He was all right.

CECIL

I see how it is.

CAMEO

(on the phone)

Cool, we'll see you up there then.

She hangs up her phone.

CECIL

You're sure Jan is cool with this?

CAMEO

She's fine. Find us something to listen to.

Cecil knows better, but doesn't care. He puts in the 'THE BEATLES' and plays 'WHY DON'T WE DO IT IN THE ROAD'.

CAMEO (CONT'D)

So how do you like doing stand-up?

CECIL

I love it. Especially with shows like tonight. How about you? What do you do for fun in this town?

CAMEO

Nothing. Most people move away. The people who stick around drink and get prego.

Cecil laughs uncomfortably.

CAMEO (CONT'D)

The Quad Cities isn't a place you go to, it's a place you end up.

CECIL

I know that feeling.

CAMEO

I don't mean to harp on it, but if I didn't have family here I would have left a long time ago. As soon as I'm done with college I'm out.

CECIL

At least you have a plan.

CAMEO

I just don't want to be one of those girls that gets knocked up, next thing she knows she's thirty with three kids and she still hasn't gotten the hell out of here. I don't even like sex.

Cecil looks puzzled.

CAMEO (CONT'D)

Well, if it was the right guy. But we'd have to wear a condom.

CECIL

(pretending to write it down)  
Babies are bad, check.

They look at each other and smile.

CECIL (CONT'D)

This town isn't that bad.

CAMEO

Give it time... you'll see.

Cameo turns up the radio.

CAMEO (CONT'D)

(singing)

Why don't we do it in the road?

They both jam out to The Beatles.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Cameo and Cecil enter in from the back. Cameo knows everyone. Cecil glad-hands with a few of the audience members from the show.

Suddenly, a hand grabs Cecil's shoulder. It's Billy.

BILLY

Hemingway said, "An intelligent man is sometimes forced to be drunk to spend his time with fools."

(judgmentally looks around)

What'll you have?

Billy, drunk on himself, grins ear to ear.

CECIL

White Russian.

Billy turns to the bar and orders a round.

A REALLY DRUNK GUY, 35, corners Cecil.

REALLY DRUNK GUY

Great show tonight. You want to hear a joke?

Cecil's expression is anything but receptive.

REALLY DRUNK GUY (CONT'D)

Why can black guys jump higher?

CECIL

I'm sorry, do I seem like a racist?

REALLY DRUNK GUY

(points to his knee)

Because their knee-grows. Get it?

Cecil shakes his head in disgust.

REALLY DRUNK GUY (CONT'D)  
 You can use that, you should put that in  
 your little skit.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a BLACK GUY shows up.

BLACK GUY  
 What the fuck did you just say?

REALLY DRUNK GUY  
 Nothing, I just--

The Black guy PUNCHES the Really Drunk Guy right in the  
 jaw. Immediately a BOUNCER, 42, pushes the two outside.

BOUNCER  
 Get the hell out of here!

Cameo finally comes to his rescue and drags him over to  
 the dart board. Billy follows with drinks.

CAMEO  
 You play darts, Billy?

BILLY  
 Does the Pope shit in the woods?

Cameo goes to the board and pulls the darts out.

CAMEO  
 You wanna put your money where your mouth  
 is?

BILLY  
 Sweetie, you don't stand a chance.

CECIL  
 Damn. Sounds like we got a game.

INT. BAR - LATER

Billy plays 'FISHING IN THE DARK' on the jukebox.

BILLY  
 "You and me go fishing in the dark..."

EVERYONE in the bar sings along with the song.

A few people climb on the bar and start dancing.

Cecil and Cameo crawl up on the bar also and dance  
 together. The entire bar is singing along.

Billy acts it out better than anybody else. The song ends and Cecil and Cameo hug.

CECIL  
(unimpressed)  
Give me a real hug.

They hug again, but this time it is for real.

INT. DINER - LATER

Cameo, Cecil and Billy sit at the counter of a greasy spoon. Billy is still singing, kiddingly trying to seduce Cecil.

BILLY  
"Lying on our backs and counting the stars..."

Billy, still drunk, grabs Cecil by the back of the head and tries to kiss him on the mouth.

CECIL  
(laughing)  
Stop it. Knock it off.

Cameo shuffles through her hand bag.

CAMEO  
Does anyone have any change?

She finds a few quarters.

CAMEO (CONT'D)  
Never mind.

She heads to entrance of the diner.

BILLY  
(drunk)  
You did a good job tonight, kid. These are the moments you'll remember forever. Savor them, they're few and far between.

Cecil wrinkles his brow.

CECIL  
Why are you always saying shit like that?

BILLY  
When I started, I was getting flown in to emcee. Can you believe that?  
(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

Features would get paid what headliners are getting now. You know you've made it when you wake up in a hotel room and you have no idea what fucking city you're in. In the eighties doing comedy was like being a rock star. Now....

CECIL

Billy, that was a long time ago. We had an awesome show tonight and are having a great time right now.

BILLY

No offense kid, but it's just not the same. After Andy did his first Tonight Show set he was a household name. He went from being my best friend to this guy I knew who was famous.

Billy pulls out a flask and stiffens his Diet Coke.

CECIL

And during that time you never even got an audition?

Billy looks at Cecil and takes a pull off the flask.

BILLY

I got bumped.

CECIL

What do you mean?

BILLY

In '89, I win first place at the Los Angeles Comedy Festival and back in the day winning that contest meant you got to do a spot on The Tonight Show.

CECIL

Seriously?

BILLY

Yep. I got scheduled during the summer of '91. They flew me in, put me up and everything. They picked me up in a limo, brought me down to the studio and then I sat in the green room and watched Lyle-fucking-Lovett go long... so they bumped me.

CECIL

Why didn't they reschedule you?

BILLY

Shortly thereafter Leno took over and I guess he never thought I was that funny. So I never got asked back.

CECIL

Holy shit, Billy. And no other shows would book you?

BILLY

I could've done other shows, but I wanted The Tonight Show. I wanted Johnny to ask me over to the couch and say, "Okay kid, you're funny."

Cameo walks up with a bag of M&M's in her hand. Billy looks at her and then back to Cecil.

BILLY (CONT'D)

It just wasn't meant to be.

Cecil thinks about that for a moment.

CAMEO

(to Cecil)

I've got a surprise for you.

Cameo drops a few of the M&M's on the ground.

BILLY

You two go have fun.

(Billy pulls Cecil in close)

You need a rubber?

CECIL

I'm good.

BILLY

You know you're treading on thin ice.

CECIL

Thanks, Dad.

Billy gets up and pulls his wallet out. Cecil also pulls out his wallet.

BILLY

I got it.

CECIL

You don't have to do that.

BILLY

The headliner always buys the feature act  
at least one meal.

CECIL

Well thank you.

(to Cameo)

Billy bought our food tonight, say thank  
you Cameo.

Cameo is on the ground searching.

CAMEO

(from her knees)

Thank you, Cameo.

BILLY

Now don't have too much fun.

CECIL

We won't do anything you didn't do in the  
eighties.

Billy smiles and raises his flask to that idea. Cameo  
comes up with the M&M's in her hand.

CECIL (CONT'D)

You're not going to eat those, are you?

CAMEO

Five second rule, they're fine.

CECIL

You're--

CAMEO

The coolest. Yeah, I know. Come on, I  
want show you something.

Cecil smiles.

I/E. COLOR-CHANGING SKYWAY - NIGHT

Cameo grabs Cecil's hand and shows him up the stairs.  
Cecil's eyes are captivated by all of the colors.

CECIL

This is unbelievable.

CAMEO

Race ya.

Cameo runs through the skyway as it changes color. Cecil runs after her and catches her right before the end.

Cameo and Cecil look out onto the river. Cecil notices Cameo bundling up. He takes off his scarf and wraps it around her neck.

Over the speakers they hear Willie Nelson's "CAN I SLEEP IN YOUR ARMS?". Cecil uses the scarf to pull her in as they dance. A lot of eye contact. The song finishes and they both laugh nervously.

Cecil grabs Cameo's face and smooshes it together with both of his hands.

CAMEO (CONT'D)

(giggling)

What are you doing?

CECIL

(as if talking for her in a southern voice)

My name is Chubby. My Momma's chubby, my Daddy's chubby and even my dog is Chubby. One day Momma came to me and said Chubby, can you smile?

Cameo smiles with her smooshed face and both of them erupt into laughter.

Cecil leans in for a kiss.

Suddenly they HEAR something. They look down and a Security Guard is getting out of his car.

CAMEO

We should get out of here.

Cameo grabs Cecil's hand and they both run out of the skyway as it changes color.

She stops. He stops.

CECIL

You all right?

She steals a kiss from him. Cecil smiles.

CAMEO

You know, I don't normally do this.

CECIL

It's cool, I don't normally kiss guys either.

Cameo laughs. They keep running.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Billy stumbles out of a bar and staggers down the sidewalk. He tries to get passed a BOUNCER into another bar.

BOUNCER  
Sorry, buddy. We're closed.

Billy can barely speak.

BILLY  
What?

BOUNCER  
Time to go home.

BILLY  
Well, fuck you then!

Billy stumbles away, giving the Bouncer the finger.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Billy stumbles up to his car and has a hard time getting in. He finally gets in and sits upright at the wheel. He tries to put his keys in the ignition but drops them between his feet onto the floorboard.

He can't reach them.

Suddenly his stomach doesn't feel so good. He searches for the window button. He finds it but instead of opening the driver side window he opens the passenger window.

He turns to the driver side window thinking that it's open and PUKES all over the inside of the window and himself.

Now that he feels better he powers the passenger window back up, lays his head back and passes out.

INT. CAMEO'S APT - MORNING

Cecil slowly wakes. Next to him is Cameo. Not sure what happened the night prior, he lifts the sheet.

Realizing he's naked he quickly pulls the sheet down. Curiosity gets the best of him and he lifts Cameo's part of the sheet.

Cameo wakes up. He quickly pulls the sheet back down. She smiles. He awkwardly smiles back.

CECIL

Did we--?

Guilty, she smiles and goes in for a kiss.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Jan's going to fucking kill me.

CAMEO

Don't worry about my Mom.

Cecil can't help but be worried. He checks his phone.

CECIL

Shit, I've two missed calls from her.

Suddenly, Cecil's phone RINGS.

CECIL (CONT'D)

It's her again.

Cecil's BREATHING gets heavy.

CAMEO

Calm down, you don't have to answer it.

CECIL

She's already called twice...

(answers it, paranoid)

Hello?

Cecil just listens. His face goes from paranoia to flat out concern. Cameo waits, anxious with anticipation.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Is he all right?

CAMEO

(whispering)

What's going on?

Cecil motions for Cameo to be quiet.

CECIL

Yeah, let me find a pen.

Cecil frantically looks for a pen and something write on.  
Cameo helps.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Got one.  
(listens)  
It's no problem.  
(listens and writes)  
Tell him I'll take care of it.  
(still listening)  
Okay, see you tonight.

Cecil hangs up his phone.

CAMEO

What? What's going on?

Cecil rubs his hand through his hair.

CECIL

Billy was in an accident.

CAMEO

What? Is he all right?

CECIL

He's going to be fine.

Cecil stops.

CAMEO

What?

After a long pause.

CECIL

He hit a woman in a mini-van.  
(beat)  
She's in intensive care.

Cameo puts her hands over her mouth. Cecil puts on his clothes.

INT. JAIL - DAY

A SECURITY GUARD, 35, pats Cecil down.

SECURITY GUARD

Sit right there.

Cecil sits where he points.

A door opens and in walks Billy wearing an orange suit and handcuffs. They take the cuffs off and he sits.

CECIL

How are you?

BILLY

Been better. Thanks for coming. Were they cool with you at the bank?

CECIL

Yeah, I gave the cashier's check to the sergeant.

BILLY

Thanks for doing that.

CECIL

You're welcome. Is Nancy coming down?

BILLY

I haven't called her yet.

CECIL

Are you going to?

BILLY

I can't, she'll leave me.

Billy wipes the beginning of tears out of his eyes.

CECIL

What can I do to help?

BILLY

Nothing.

CECIL

There's got to be something.

BILLY

Look where I am, Cecil. There's nothing you or anybody can do for me.

CECIL

You still have options.

BILLY

Stop that, just stop! This is my life now, it doesn't matter what I want. The fucking universe has made it's choice for me. It's already written.

Cecil chooses his next words carefully.

Cecil  
I was raised to believe that we always  
have a choice.

BILLY  
God rest her soul, but if that were true  
your Mother would still be alive.

Cecil is taken back.

CECIL  
Nobody forced her to go to that job every  
day... She knew what she was being  
exposed to and still went. Why? Because  
it was all she ever knew, and she was too  
scared to try anything else.

BILLY  
If that's what you want to tell yourself.

Billy stands.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Thanks for bringing the money.  
(to the Guard)  
I'm finished here.

Cecil stands. The guard comes over and cuffs him. Cecil  
watches as the guards take Billy out of the room.

CECIL  
You're not a victim Billy, take control.

Billy looks back.

BILLY  
Control is a illusion my friend. Let go.  
Your life is going to happen weather you  
like it or not.

EXT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Joe gets out of Adam's van and helps Adam with his  
mechanical lift.

Adam slowly lowers to street level.

JOE  
You know I'm working at a deli now right?

ADAM  
Right.

Adam wheels off of the lift and waits for it as it folds back into the van.

JOE

So last night I'm just about to be done with my shift when guess who walks in?

ADAM

The Dalai Lama?

JOE

No, Keith Hernandez.

ADAM

From the 'Just for Men' ads?

Adam and Joe start towards the club.

JOE

That's right, Keith 'Motherfucking' Hernandez from the 'Just for Men' ads, and more importantly Keith Hernandez from the Mother-Fucking 1986 New York Mets.

ADAM

Does he still have that gay-ass mustache?

JOE

Oh, the caterpillar was in full bloom. Now listen to this shit. So I wait on him. You know, cup of coffee, two bismarks, nothing crazy. As he's leaving I'm all like, "Hey, '86 was a hell of a year. Thanks again." Then, I turn my hat around to show him it's a Mets cap. To which he replies...

KEITH HERNANDEZ (V.O.)

Anytime, it's always nice to run into a true fan.

ADAM

Great fucking story.

JOE

Right! So I'm on cloud nine, already going over in my head how I'm going to tell this dope-ass story when I look down to see the tip he left me...

ADAM

Oh no.

JOE

You're god damn right oh no. The bastard left me thirty-eight cents.

ADAM

No!

INT. COMEDY CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Joe and Adam enter the club through the handicap accessible entrance. There are comics everywhere.

JOE

Can you believe that shit?

ADAM

Keith Hernandez, a cheap son of a bitch. It just doesn't make sense.

JOE

Fuck, tell me about it. Next thing you'll tell me is Daryl Strawberry wasn't actually a drug addict.

ADAM

Calm down, now you're just getting out of hand.

The two grab a spot at the bar.

JOE

Have you talked to Cecil about doing that show at your Dad's bar yet?

ADAM

No, he hasn't called me back. Which is weird, he must be really busy or something.

INT. TONIGHT SHOW / BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Cecil wears a freshly pressed suit and tie. He seems older for some reason. He is being led by a WOMAN WITH A HEADSET, 33, from the greenroom to the stage.

There are PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS coming and going everywhere. Their energy is hurried but confident. The sound of a full house can be heard diffused through the curtain. The Woman looks at Cecil with a smile knowing this is a big moment for him.

WOMAN WITH HEADSET

Have fun out there.

JOHNNY CARSON (V.O.)

Please help me welcome the stage, Cecil  
Bends!

Cecil has an overwhelming feeling of pure happiness. The expression on his face is a mirror of the eight-year old boy who originally fell in love with stand-up comedy.

Cecil looks up, and suddenly the Woman with the headset has become his mother. He's surprised to see her. She smiles, letting Cecil know how proud she is of him. She pulls back the curtain and a flood of white light and DEAFENING APPLAUSE consumes Cecil. Right as he's about to walk on stage his MANAGER from AUDIO KING grabs him.

MANAGER

(ominous)

This is what you've been working for.

INT. CECIL'S APT - DAY

Cecil suddenly wakes up.

His hair is matted and his eyes are groggy. He's disoriented at first. He sits for a moment, and just thinks. He looks around his apartment. This is not where he wants to be.

INT. APT - DAY

Cecil is looking at his on-line balance.

Insert: BALANCE -\$222.13

His video camera is plugged into the front jacks of the TV. Footage of Cecil's stand-up plays on low volume.

On his desk are a bunch of his bills, CAR PAYMENT-FINAL NOTICE. He stands and puts the phone up to his ear.

CECIL

Hello, I'm looking for Tom Harris.

ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Who's calling?

CECIL

Cecil.

ASSISTANT (V.O.)  
Who?

CECIL  
Cecil.

ASSISTANT (V.O.)  
Please hold.

He waits a moment.

ASSISTANT (V.O.)  
He'll have to call you back.

She hangs up.

DISSOLVE TO:

Cecil is still on the phone.

CECIL  
I'm sure she's very busy but could you  
please have her call Cecil.  
(Beat)  
Thank you.

Cecil hangs up.

DISSOLVE TO:

Cecil is on the phone while looking through his calendar.  
Every gig has a circle. There are only three circles.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
September eighth, September eighth, let  
me look. Yes, it's open.

BOOKER (V.O.)  
My bad, actually that's already booked.

Cecil is disappointed.

CECIL  
What else you got?

BOOKER (V.O.)  
Who is this again?

CECIL  
Cecil Bends.

BOOKER (V.O.)  
Try me again in January.

CECIL  
Of next year? It's February.

BOOKER (V.O.)  
I'm booked that far out.

CECIL  
(slightly Sarcastic)  
Okay. I'll call you next year then.

Cecil frustrated, hangs up. The phone immediately RINGS and Cecil excitedly picks it up.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Hello.

BOOKER  
You got your calendar in front of you?

CECIL  
Yeah!

BOOKER  
What are you doing July 7-9?

CECIL  
Working for you.

BOOKER  
Yeah, we're going to have to cancel that.

CECIL  
What?

BOOKER  
Look, I'm sorry. We just got Pauly Shore and he's bringing his own feature. If you want we could emcee you for \$75 bucks?

CECIL  
You want me to drive from Minneapolis to Toledo for \$75 dollars?

BOOKER  
I'll make it up to you.

CECIL  
What else do you have open?

BOOKER  
I'm booked right now through the end of the year. Call me then and make sure you remind me what happened, I gotta go.

He quickly hangs up.

Cecil has the same horrified look a homeless guy has the first time he realizes he has to sleep on a park bench.

INT. CECIL'S APT - LATER

Cecil is opening more bills. The phone RINGS.

CECIL

Hello?

TOM HARRIS

Cecil, Tom Harris. Hey I was just wondering if you could be in St. Louis by tomorrow night? I just had a fall out and I need someone to fill a spot in this college show...

Cecil looks in his wallet and sees he has a little cash.

CECIL

Yeah...

(thinking)

I'd have to leave now and drive through the night but I could make it.

TOM HARRIS

Good, I'm e-mailing you the info right now. I gotta run, make sure you keep your avails updated with us.

CECIL

No problem.

TOM HARRIS

Enjoy the gig.

Super excited he hangs up and DIALS a new number. It RINGS and RINGS and then goes to voice mail.

CAMEO (V.O.)

Hey, this is Cameo, leave me a message.

CECIL

Hey, it's me again. I don't know why you haven't called me back but I have some great news... I really want to hear your voice. Call me, talk to you soon baby.

Cecil hangs up. He stops the DVD and takes it out. On it he writes: CECIL BENDS, TONIGHT SHOW AUDITION.

EXT. CECIL'S APT - DAY

Cecil is holding two suitcases, a computer bag, video camera and a garment bag. He puts the envelope marked TONIGHT SHOW AUDITION in a mail box.

He looks at it one more time and lets the package slide into the box. Cecil walks towards his car and stops. He looks around confused. Where his car should be is an empty spot.

CECIL

What the fuck?

Cecil drops all of his bags and violently punches the air.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Cecil runs his hands through his hair, gathers up his bags and starts walking. Behind him, a tow-truck with his car drives by.

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Cecil enters with his head down and his overpriced watch in his hand.

The GIANT MAN, his shirt now reads: I SAID GO FUCK YOURSELF, with a picture of a TWO fists giving two middle fingers.

Cecil lays the watch on the counter and waits while the Giant Man counts his money.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Everyone on the bus is sleeping. A FAT MAN, 47, is sleeping next to Cecil. He's snoring and drooling.

Cecil's eyes are wide open. He catches a whiff of the Fat Man and it almost makes him puke.

The bus is swaying back and forth down the icy road.

The BUS DRIVER, 58, sounds anything but capable of handling this.

BUS DRIVER

(in Spanish)

Holy fuck, holy fuck, we're all going to die. Save yourselves, we're all fucked!

Cecil controls his breathing and forces his eyes shut.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil is wearing just a towel. The clock reads: 6:03 P.M.

Cecil goes to the bathroom and TURNS THE SHOWER ON. He adjusts the temperature. Steam permeates the room.

He goes through his drop kit. He picks up his shaving cream can and something catches his eye. He chuckles.

He goes in the other room, finds his notebook and writes in an entry. It simply reads: APPLY LIBERALLY.

Suddenly, Cecil's phone RINGS. He goes to the bed and picks it up. On the caller ID is JAN NEPTUNE.

Slightly confused he hesitates...

CECIL

Hello?

JAN (V.O.)

Cecil (cuts out) Jan. How (cuts out) you?

Cecil looks at his phone and sees he has bad service.

CECIL

Jan? Can you hear me? Hello?

JAN (V.O.)

I can hear you, can you hear me?

CECIL

Sorry about that, I must not get good reception in here. How you doing?

JAN (V.O.)

Good... I was just calling 'cause I know Cameo hasn't gotten a hold of you.

Cecil's mind runs wild.

CECIL

What's going on?

JAN (V.O.)

I know you and Cameo had been seeing each other (cuts out) deserve to know...

CECIL

What? You cut of there for a second.

Jan tries to lighten the blow. She takes a BREATH.

JAN (V.O.)

She's pregnant, Cecil.

Cecil can't believe what he just heard.

CECIL

I'm sorry, what?

Suddenly Cecil's phone drops the call completely.

Panic stricken, he runs outside to get a signal. Nothing. He tries again.

Still nothing.

Completely freaked out, he goes back in and paces in the middle of the hotel room.

Suddenly his phone RINGS.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Hello. Jan?

JAN (V.O.)

Are you okay?

CECIL

Say what you just said again.

JAN (V.O.)

She's pregnant, Cecil.

Cecil face is instantly pale.

JAN (V.O.)

But don't worry, it's not yours.

Another dagger shoved in his heart.

JAN (V.O.)

Her and Ricky are going to keep it.

Cecil is speechless.

JAN (V.O.)  
 I know you have feelings for her. But  
 look at the bright side, you can always  
 be her second husband.

Jan chuckles. Cecil, numb, doesn't move.

JAN (V.O.)  
 Cecil? Are you still there?

Cecil hangs up the phone.

SHOWER:

The water from the shower falls over Cecil. Out of pure frustration, he PUNCHES the plastic walls in the shower, again and again.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER (VIDEO CAMERA P.O.V.)

Cecil adjusts the camera so that he's composed in the middle of the frame. His hair is still wet from the shower but it is combed. His eyes are red from all of his crying and he wears nothing but a towel.

He takes a DEEP BREATH.

CECIL  
 (to the camera)  
 I don't know if I can handle this. It's  
 so hard to come to grips with the fact  
 that you can't actually affect someone's  
 life, not in a night or even a week.  
 You're not real to them. You're just the  
 monkey on stage that bangs away at his  
 drum, and when you're finished you go  
 onto the next town and bang your drum for  
 a new group of complete strangers.  
 (thinks to himself)  
 It amazes me that even this, something I  
 love, can feel like a bullshit job. Well,  
 it's this, or deal with some dick-head  
 boss.  
 (crazy/silly eyes)  
 You ain't the boss of me bitch, I do what  
 I want.

Cecil sets the camera down moves around slowly  
 rejuvenating himself. He's done taking himself seriously.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 I do what I want, you can't stop me. You  
 hear me? I do what I want!  
 (MORE)

CECIL (CONT'D)  
 (looks in the mirror)  
 This is your life man. Pull it together.  
 (looks at the clock)  
 Fuck!

Cecil shuts off the camera.

MONTAGE:

I/E. VIDEO CAMERA POINT OF VIEW - VARIOUS

Cecil drives down the road.

CECIL (V.O.)  
 After that I didn't go home for over a  
 year straight. I had to make changes to  
 accommodate my new lifestyle.

Cecil drives in a used car lot with his BMW and drives  
 out of with a used Saturn.

He drives past landmarks. THE ARCH in St. Louis, THE  
 SPACE NEEDLE in Seattle.

CECIL(V.O.)  
 Sleeping in my car became a regular  
 thing.

Cecil gets out of his car wearing pajama pants rubbing  
 the sleep out of his eyes. He walks into a hotel lobby  
 and looks around to see if anyone notices him. They  
 don't, so he seamlessly blends in with the actual hotel  
 guests and enjoys the free continental breakfast.

CECIL(V.O.)  
 When I had the time I would write Billy,  
 let him know how things were going. He  
 never wrote me back but hell, where would  
 he send the letters to?

DOWNTOWN NEW YORK CITY. A GIANT LOUISVILLE SLUGGER  
 BASEBALL BAT. NOW ENTERING SANTE FE.

CECIL(V.O.)  
 Eventually things got easier. Bookers  
 started calling me back. I was paying my  
 bills on time. The gigs weren't always  
 the best, but that didn't matter to me as  
 long as I could make the drives. I was on  
 the road and I had no one to answer to  
 but myself.

Cecil looks into the camera.

CECIL  
Hey, MTV welcome to my Crib.

Cecil is wearing his PJ's. He has folded down his back seat and laying in the bed he's made in his car. He puts the camera in his face.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
I'm in Montana right now, I'm en route to Boise. I've got a nice setup and ah... this is life on the road.

Cecil smiles.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
When you tell people you sleep in your car they have pity for you. I don't understand it, I don't pity me. I'm having a ball. I pity them and their cubicles and their suburban lives, the world ends for them at the white picket fence. That I pity.

He laughs at his own ridiculousness.

CECIL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But no matter how much I loved being on the road, it was always nice coming home.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. ADAM'S WHEEL CHAIR VAN - DAY (VIDEO CAMERA P.O.V.)

Cecil has the camera on Joe as he drives.

CECIL  
(in a great mood)  
Where we headed, Joey?

JOE  
We are on our way to Darlington, Wisconsin. Home of Adam and his father's bar The Spruce Moose.

ADAM (O.C.)  
Whooooooo.

Cecil turns the camera to see Adam in the back of the van with a cocktail in his hand.

ADAM (CONT'D)  
We're going to tear it up.

Cecil puts the camera on himself.

CECIL  
And then we're going to tear up a few of  
Adam's hot sisters.

All three of them laugh.

JOE  
I like the sound of that. Get a shot of  
this.

Cecil turns the camera just in time to get the WELCOME TO WISCONSIN sign. Cecil turns off the camera.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Adam and Cecil laugh. They're sitting with people from the show, eating pizza and drinking beer. Adam is wasted. Joe shows up with beers for the three of them.

JOE  
(to Adam)  
Can you drink this? Or should I just pour  
it directly into your catheter bag?

ADAM  
(laughing)  
Fuck you.

Joe, Cecil and Adam laugh their asses off. Cecil laughs so hard he knocks his notebook off the counter, spilling its contents on the floor.

A WAITRESS comes from the back. She sees the notes on the ground and helps Cecil pick them up.

Something grabs Joe's eye and he nabs it out of Cecil's notes.

JOE  
What's this?

CECIL  
It's nothing.

Cecil tries to grab it out of Joe's hands.

JOE  
The Tonight Show? What did you get from  
them?

CECIL

It's nothing. I sent a DVD in a while back... It's just a rejection letter.

JOE

(snobbish)

You sent a DVD to The Tonight Show?

CECIL

Who knows if they even watched it. I'm sure you have to know somebody to get in.

Joe has the letter out and is reading it.

JOE

At this time we regret... blah, blah, blah. But we would like to invite you to audition for the Los Angeles Comedy Festival. Both of the bookers of The Tonight Show will be at the audition.

Joe looks at Cecil and Adam.

JOE (CONT'D)

So another road trip?

CECIL

I'm already booked.

JOE

What? This is a chance to actually get seen by real TV people.

CECIL

I'd have to spend money I don't have. They've already turned me down once. Maybe I'm not what they're looking for.

ADAM

From a DVD man, you're ready.

CECIL

Don't worry about it. I'll hit the road and get a better tape. I feel good, I just headlined for the first time. I don't mind being patient.

Adam shakes his head. Cecil picks up the check.

JOE

Wait a minute, headlined? Listen to this prick. I thought we were all co-headlining.

CECIL  
I did go last.

JOE  
Yeah, but you didn't headline shit.

CECIL  
The headliner gets the tab.

Joe shuts up, not wanting anything to do with the tab.

ADAM  
You both know I had the set of the night.

Both Joe and Cecil start laughing.

JOE  
(to Adam)  
Hold the phone, R2-D2.

CECIL  
If he's R2-D2, that makes you C-3P0...  
fag robot.  
(robot voice)  
My... nuts are loose... lube me up.

The three of them laugh and argue who was the headliner.

INT. CECIL'S APT - NIGHT

Cecil comes home with all of his bags. On the floor is a ton of mail. He sets down his bags and picks up the mail. Phone bill, insurance bill, junk mail, but then one letter sticks out. Cecil stops.

Insert: WILLIAM COLE, BETTENDORF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

He opens it.

BILLY (V.O.)  
Dear Cecil...

INT. JAIL - DAY

Billy is sitting in his cell writing a letter.

BILLY (V.O.)  
Thanks for all the letters. It's good to hear you're doing well. I'm sorry I didn't contact you sooner. You really are the closest thing to family I have left.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN IN A COMA, 33, is trying to be revived by many DOCTORS and NURSES.

BILLY (V.O.)

I've had a lot of time to think in here.

Her heart monitor BEATS.

INT. JAIL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Billy opens an official looking letter.

BILLY (V.O.)

It should come as no surprise that Nancy is divorcing me.

The letter contains divorce papers.

BILLY (V.O.)

I gave up my California dreams so she could get married and after twenty-one years she's leaving me. I don't blame her though, it's not her fault. I'm no good. Time and time again, I disappointed her. She finally had enough.

Billy looks at the papers.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Billy writes.

BILLY (V.O.)

It wasn't always like this. I used to want things, like how you want things.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

It's after a show and BILLY, 25, is shaking hands with everyone. A HOT GIRL, 19, hands him a napkin with her number on it.

BILLY (V.O.)

You're about to have the time of your life, enjoy it. The road is great but remember, if you're not careful it only gets you more being on the road. That's it. It can be a vicious circle.

(MORE)

BILLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I realize now that it wasn't about  
getting into the clubs, it was about  
getting out of them.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

A young Billy tries to give a crowd of strangers what  
they want.

BILLY (V.O.)  
I've tried to be so many things for so  
many people and now I don't even know who  
I am. I'm just a shell, filled with the  
opinions of other people.

INT. JAIL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Billy gives a large SPANISH DUDE his fruit cup.

BILLY (V.O.)  
Maybe if I wanted it more they would have  
given me another shot at The Tonight  
Show, maybe not. Trust yourself, Cecil.  
You've got the talent, now it's time to  
see what else you're made of.

The Spanish Dude gives Billy a pillow case.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Billy writes.

BILLY (V.O.)  
No matter what happens, know that I loved  
making people laugh.  
(beat)  
...and never forget, you do the shows for  
free. What they pay you for is putting up  
with all the bullshit. Good-bye, Cecil...  
Keep em' laughing, Harold William Coleman  
III.

Billy signs his name.

BILLY (V.O.)  
P.S. If you ever make it out to Los  
Angeles give Andy a call. Tell him I told  
you to look him up.

INT. CECIL'S APT - CONTINUOUS

Cecil immediately picks up the phone and dials.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The Woman in a Coma's heart monitor FLAT LINES.

The DOCTORS and NURSES take their plastic gloves off in defeat and exit.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Billy seals the letter in an envelope and discreetly throws it on the mail cart as it goes by. He waits for the man with the cart to pass. He goes under his bed and produces a pillow-case noose.

He stands, secures the pillow case noose on the top part of his bunk and puts his head through the hole.

INT. CECIL'S APT - CONTINUOUS

Cecil has his ear to the phone and a frantic look on his face.

CECIL  
Nancy, it's Cecil.

Cecil listens and can't sit still.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
No, Billy... no.

Cecil DROPS the phone. He rips the letter to pieces.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
This fucking shit.

He goes to his calendar on the wall. There are circles on the majority of every week. He TEARS it down and screams.

DISSOLVE TO:

Cecil sits in the middle of his floor surrounded by hundreds of old photos. He looks at a picture of himself and his mother. In the photo she's laughing at him because he's wearing a towel up to his armpits and another towel up in his hair.

He smiles. Emotion overwhelms him. He tries to fight back the tears.

INT. MIDDLE INCOME HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

CECIL AGE 10

Mom, how do you get to be on the Tonight Show?

SUSAN

You have to have a talent.

CECIL

Do I have a talent?

Susan smiles.

SUSAN

You have many talents.

CECIL

So I can be on TV?

SUSAN

Someday Cecil, if you choose to.

Cecil gives her a hug.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(unimpressed)

Give me a real hug.

He hugs her as hard as he can.

BACK TO SCENE:

He puts the photo down and takes a deep breath. He picks up his phone and dials.

CECIL

Joe, it's Cecil. I'm going to Los Angeles. You in?

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

I had to go. I had to prove to myself that Billy was wrong. I had to go or I would've ended up just like him... a casualty.

Cecil picks up his calendar off the ground and re-pins it to the wall.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Cecil drives Adam's wheel chair van past a sign that reads: NOW LEAVING MINNESOTA.

His van rips off into the horizon.

INT. ADAM'S VAN - NIGHT (SOMEWHERE IN THE MOUNTAINS)

Adam is asleep in the back. Cecil is driving and Joe is fiddling with the radio trying to find a station.

CECIL

Will you just leave it on something?

JOE

All I've found is people ranting about guns and Jesus.

A recognizable song gets passed by.

CECIL

What was that?

Joe goes back to it. He shakes his head knowing it's ridiculous. It's the song from Disney's Aladdin.

Cecil recognizes it and SINGS along.

CECIL (CONT'D)

*I will show you the world.  
Shining, shimmering, splendid.  
Tell me, princess, now when did  
You last let your heart decide?*

JOE

*A whole New World.*

CECIL

*A whole New World.*

Joe covers his eyes. Cecil takes Joe's hand away from Joe's face.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Don't you dare close your eyes.

JOE

Hold your breath, it gets better.

ADAM

(groggy)

What the fuck are you guys doing?

Cecil and Joe LAUGH in embarrassment.

CECIL

Nothing, nothing, just go to sleep.

Adam ignores them and lays his head back down. Cecil and Joe look at each other and can't stop laughing.

EXT. VAN - NIGHT

Now Joe is driving. He smokes a joint while Adam and Cecil are sleeping.

Suddenly the cars ahead of him are stopping. It's a check-point. He quickly throws the joint out and rolls down all of the windows. With his hands, he panics to push out all of the smoke.

He pulls up to a check point and rolls down the window.

BORDER GUARD

Do you have plants of any kind in this vehicle?

JOE

(paranoid)

Nope, it's just us.

The Guard eyes Joe incredulously. He tries to see if Joe's bluffing. He lets him sweat.

After an awkward pause.

BORDER GUARD

All right, move along.

Joe puts the van in gear and pulls away with sigh of relief.

A sign reads: WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA.

EXT. LOS ANGELES COMEDY FESTIVAL LINE - EARLY MORNING

The sun isn't even up yet.

They pull up in Adam's van and see over a 1,000 COMEDIANS OF EVERY RACE, GENDER AND AGE camped out with tents, chairs and grills, waiting in line to get into the COMEDY STORE.

All three of them stare in awe at the line as they drive past on Sunset Ave. Joe's mouth hangs open in awe.

JOE  
Holy shit, there are a lot of comics in  
this town.

They get to the front of the line and see there's a  
handicap spot and pull in.

EXT. COMEDY STORE (FRONT DOOR) - CONTINUOUS

At the front door are 6 LOW-LEVEL PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS,  
who think they are in charge of the entire world and  
today they are.

Cecil, Joe and Adam approach.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT  
The doors open at eight thirty, please  
wait in line with everybody else.

Cecil pulls out the letter from The Tonight Show.

CECIL  
A producer by the name of Dan Sizmore  
asked me to come here today.

The Production Assistant takes the letter and reads it.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT  
Hold on a sec.

He gets up and goes into the club. Adam looks at all of  
the people waiting in line.

ADAM  
This is fucking madness.

JOE  
Do you think they're going to see all  
these people today?

CECIL  
I don't see how they could.

The Production Assistant comes back.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT  
I'm sorry but nobody knows anything about  
this.

CECIL  
Are you kidding me? We just drove here  
from Minnesota.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Look sir, I'm just doing my job. I don't even know who this guy is.

CECIL

There has to be somebody I can talk to.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

If you could just wait at the end of the line, we'll try to get to you.

CECIL

This is un-fucking-believable.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Yeah well, welcome to Hollywood.

The Production Assistant quickly moves on to the next people in line. Cecil is flabbergasted. Joe and Adam are speechless.

A camera crew is interviewing a MAN IN A BABY COSTUME.

MAN IN BABY COSTUME

No, I'm not a comedian per se. I'm more of an actor, just looking to get some screen time.

Cecil shakes his head in disgust. Defeated, they trudge to the end of the line.

EXT. LOS ANGELES COMEDY FESTIVAL LINE - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil finds a moment to break from the group to make a call. He has his phone out and is dialing.

ANDY LEWISTON (V.O.)

Hey, this is Andy, leave me a message

Cecil is caught a bit off guard.

CECIL

Ah, hey Andy, my name is Cecil. Billy Cole was a good friend of mine and he told me to...

DISSOLVE TO:

Joe, Adam and huge circle of comics are standing around a JASON DOSSIER, 23, a hick comic from Atlanta. He wears a cowboy hat and is currently holding a half drunk gallon of milk. He looks like he is going to puke.

Joe stands next to him, closely looking at his watch and holding a wad of cash.

JOE  
27:31, 27:32, 27:33--

Jason tries to drink more of the milk, but then PUKES everywhere.

The crowd CHEERS AND LAUGHS. Some are happy, others are upset.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I told you, bitches.  
(Russian accent)  
Pay this man his money.

RANDOM COMIC  
Is your name really Joe King?

JOE  
What do you think?

Joe gathers money from a distraught crowd of up-and-coming comics.

JOE (CONT'D)  
It's good doing business with you fellas.  
I told you it was a bad bet.

Cecil isn't as concerned with the craziness. He watches the line. No one is getting in. He looks at his phone.

Joe comes up to Cecil counting his wad of cash.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I think I just won us gas money back to Minnesota. How's the line looking?

CECIL  
They've maybe let thirty people in.

ADAM  
I'm sweating like a fucking pig.

Joe looks at Adam and speaks up on his behalf.

JOE  
I don't mean to be that guy, but do we honestly think we're going to be seen today?

CECIL  
What else are we going to do, Joe?

JOE

Look dude, I want this as much as you do, but we need start being honest with this situation. We don't have to stay out here. We're in California, lets hit the beach for a while and then we can head home--

CECIL

I can't just go home.

JOE

Eventually, that's exactly what we'll have to do.

CECIL

This is it for me, Joe. I don't have a plan B. If this doesn't work out, I don't have the luxury of some bullshit job.

JOE

So because I have a fucking day job, I don't want this as much as you? You know what dude, you can go fuck yourself.

ADAM

Joe, come on.

Joe walks off, pissed. Adam looks at Cecil, disappointed.

CECIL

(to Adam)

I have to do this, I have to see this through.

Adam says out of it. Joe addresses the crowd.

JOE

Who wants to go double or nothing?

Cecil's phone battery is FLASHING LOW.

DISSOLVE TO:

The heat is now making them all boil with sweat. Joe sits, still pissed at Cecil. Adam also looks defeated. Cecil looks at his phone, waiting for it to ring.

The Production Assistant exits the club. Everyone in line perks up.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Number 182.

No one answers.

ADAM

Cecil, they're only going to let two  
hundred in. We're...

(He looks)

...hundreds away.

CECIL

We'll be seen.

Cecil's phone suddenly dies and POWERS OFF. He closes his  
eyes in defeat.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Number 182.

The Man in a Baby Costume chimes in.

MAN IN A BABY COSTUME

Right here, I have 182.

Cecil watches as the Man in a Baby Costume gets escorted  
towards the front of the line and then enters the Comedy  
Store.

MAN IN A BABY COSTUME

(CONT'D)

Television, here I come!

As Cecil watches the Man in a Baby Costume and his gaze  
settles and his eyes becomes clear.

He looks around at all of the comedians.

CECIL

Fuck this.

Cecil shakes his head in disbelief. He looks at Adam and  
Joe.

CECIL (CONT'D)

We're leaving.

Joe is confused.

JOE

I'm sorry, I thought leaving wasn't an  
option?

CECIL

We're leaving, Joe.

JOE

Are you going to make up your fucking mind, or what?

CECIL

It's all bullshit. They try to pass it off as something prestigious but it's not. They're just looking to exploit fame-hungry wannabes, cause it makes for good TV. I'm sorry I dragged you into this.

Cecil shakes his head disappointed in himself.

ADAM

What did you expect, man? It's reality television.

CECIL

Whatever it is, it's complete bullshit.

JOE

So what the fuck is the plan?

Cecil thinks for a second.

CECIL

We find Dan Sizmore.

JOE

Who?

CECIL

He's the producer who sent me the letter.

ADAM

Then what?

CECIL

I don't know, but we didn't come all the way out here not to at least be seen.

Joe lets out a disapproving exhale.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Look Joe, I'm sorry I was being such an asshole earlier, but I need you on my side right now.

JOE

What were you being earlier?

CECIL

An asshole, okay Joe? You want to hear me say it? I was being an asshole.

JOE

You were also kinda being a dick.

CECIL

Fine, I'm was being a huge, gapping,  
asshole and a world-class throbbing cock!  
Are we cool? Can we be friends again?

Joe looks at Adam.

ADAM

Whatever man, I'm just happy to get out  
of that heat.

Joe smiles.

JOE

We're cool,  
(they shake hands)  
...as long as after we meet this son of a  
bitch we spend some time at the beach.

CECIL

Deal. Let's roll.

As they head towards the van, a limousine drives past.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

In the limo is ANDY LEWISTON and KENT, 19, his ultra-gay  
assistant.

KENT

He's not answering his phone.

ANDY LEWISTON

Aw, well what the hell... We come all the  
way down to fucking Sunset and then he  
doesn't answer...

Kent DIALS again. He puts the phone to his ear.

KENT

Nothing.

Andy looks out the window and then leans towards the  
driver.

ANDY LEWISTON

Just get us out of here. Fucking kid, I  
guess he's on his own.

Kent could care less.

INT. VAN - DAY

Cecil drives, Joe has a map out and Adam is in the back with a cocktail.

They pull past a sign that reads: UNIVERSAL STUDIOS,  
UNIVERSAL CITY, CA.

EXT. TONIGHT SHOW WITH CONAN O'BRIEN - MOMENTS LATER

Cecil, Joe and Adam wait in line with the hundreds of other tourists.

ADAM

You really think this is going to work?

Cecil smiles.

CECIL

Of course.

Joe smokes a cigarette and shakes his head.

INT. TONIGHT SHOW (STAGE 16) - MOMENTS LATER

An NBC PAGE, 27, shows the line of people that contains Cecil, Joe and Adam through the inner workings of the studio.

NBC PAGE

This is the studio that Jack Benny used up until 1965.

Cecil looks around for an exit.

CECIL

(whispering)

We're going to need to break off from this group.

ADAM

Dump me. I can fake a seizure with the best of them.

Cecil smiles.

CECIL

We're not dumping you.

JOE

(to Adam)

But I like where your head's at.

They keep walking with the group.

ADAM  
What about this?

Cecil and Joe turn to see Adam has a door marked "DO NOT OPEN", opened.

Cecil and Joe look around, making sure it is clear. Adam doesn't go through the door.

CECIL  
(whispering)  
What's the holdup?

Adam gestures for Cecil to look, Cecil turns and sees the staircase that will keep Adam and his chair from being able to continue.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Ah, man I'm--

ADAM  
Forget about it, I'm the most likely to be missed from the tour anyway. Godspeed. If you get arrested I'm reporting the van stolen.

Joe and Cecil are a bit weirded out by how quickly Adam came to that conclusion.

JOE  
(puzzled)  
Fair enough.

Joe and Cecil quietly shut the door behind them. Adam seamlessly rejoins with the group.

The NBC Page answers a question.

NBC PAGE  
It all started with Steve Allen in 1954, then Jack Parr, Johnny Carson for thirty years, Jay Leno for seventeen and now Conan O'Brien.

INT. STUDIO HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe and Cecil sneak around trying to be quiet.

JOE  
What are we looking for?

CECIL

I suppose some sort of office area.

All of a sudden they hear SOMEONE COMING. In a panic, they both jump into a broom closet.

INT. BROOM CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

It's completely dark. They hear THE PERSON COMING who PASSES RIGHT BY THEM.

They both let out a SIGH OF RELIEF. After another moment of silence...

CECIL

I'm sorry I got heated with you earlier.

JOE

Don't worry about it.

CECIL

Being a comic isn't something I'm just trying, anymore. It's what I'm choosing to do with my life. The stakes are higher. If it doesn't work now, my life stops making sense.

JOE

That's heavy, dude.

Out of the darkness a flame appears. Cecil smells marijuana burning.

CECIL

(whisper yelling)

Joe, put that shit out. Are you fucking kidding me right now?

JOE

What, dude? This is stressful as shit. I just need to take the edge off a bit.

CECIL

Just put it away, we're already risking getting arrested.

JOE

Noooo, the worst thing they'll do is kick us off the lot.

CECIL

Just fucking put it away.

Cecil opens the door and a crack of light comes through. He sees three NBC PAGES with walkie talkies standing by a door that leads to carpeted area that has office people doing work. One of the Pages has his jacket off and it is hanging on a doorknob.

CECIL (CONT'D)

How do we get past those guys?

Joe looks and sees the Pages.

JOE

Whenever I get into a jam I always ask myself one question: What would Keith Hernandez do?

Cecil shakes his head in disappointment.

CECIL

How is being a cheap son of a bitch going to help us out right now?

JOE

My first memory as a child was September 4th, 1986. I was five years old when Keith Hernandez hit a walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth to win the game. A game that was crucial for their play-off standings and their eventual World Series win. One of my earliest memories is Keith Hernandez... touching um' all.

CECIL

What the hell are talking about?

JOE

I don't know.

(Joe focuses)

We need to create some sort of diversion and then I'll get them to chase me or something.

CECIL

What? That's not even--

JOE

Fuck it dude, we've already come this far.

Joe pulls out a giant bag of marijuana and hands it to Cecil.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Hold this for me.

CECIL  
What the fuck?

JOE  
Ah, I like what I like.  
(Beat)  
You ready?

CECIL  
Ready for what?

JOE  
You're right, Cecil, it's time for me to  
start taking action.

CECIL  
What the hell are you taking about?

Joe rolls his head back and forth cracking his neck. He takes a deep breath and then runs out, ignoring Cecil.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
(whisper yelling)  
Joe!

Joe sprints towards the three unsuspecting Pages. He runs with all his might. Suddenly they see him and motion towards their walkie talkies.

But before the first page can move Joe slaps him in the face. Continuing the motion he also slaps the other 2 Pages. None of them know quite what to think.

Joe stops and waits for them to register what just happened. All three of them immediately begin to chase him.

Joe runs with all the passion of a five-year-old seeing his first home run get hit.

JOE  
(screaming)  
Touch um' all!

The Pages are fast but Joe is faster as he B-lines it down the hallway.

The door slowly opens. Cecil walks out mystified.

CECIL  
Did that seriously just happen?

He looks and sees the hallway is now clear. He skeptically walks past the entrance to the office area. He picks up the Page jacket and cautiously puts it on.

INT. OFFICE AREA - CONTINUOUS

Cecil casually strolls into a fancy office area. He sees a random clipboard and picks it up.

A FEMALE SECRETARY, 33, gives Cecil a questioning gaze. Cecil pretends like he's doing inventory. Her gaze subsides.

Cecil keeps going. On the wall is a plaque with all the names and office numbers.

Insert: DAN SIZMORE ROOM 222

Cecil peeks at the room numbers and walks in the appropriate direction. He walks past 200, then 215.

He's at the door for 222. A mail cart sits next to the door. Cecil takes the Page coat off and lays down the clip board.

Suddenly, the door opens and out walks Conan O'Brien. Cecil is frozen.

DAN

We'll make sure to get them scheduled.

CONAN O'BRIEN

Thanks Dan, I'll see you at showtime.

Conan turns and walks past Cecil.

CONAN O'BRIEN (CONT'D)

How's it going?

Cecil, in shock, doesn't say anything.

DAN

Can I help you?

Cecil comes out of his freeze and sees DAN SIZMORE, 45, blonde hair, suit and tie.

CECIL

Yes Dan, you can help me. My name is Cecil Bends, you invited me out for an audition.

DAN

Who are you?

Dan, incredulous, peers at Cecil. Cecil pulls the letter out and hands it to Dan. He reads it.

DAN (CONT'D)

Okay, but what are you doing here?

The Female Secretary Cecil duped with the clipboard shows back up.

FEMALE SECRETARY

Dan, do you need me to call security?

CECIL

Look, we drove here 36 straight hours from Minnesota through the night. We went to the Comedy Store and said we wouldn't be seen. I showed them your letter but they didn't even know who you were. I've made a lot of sacrifices to be standing in front of you right now and I'm just asking you to be a man of your word.

Dan looks and sees the determination in Cecil's eyes. His phone starts RINGING in his office.

DAN

It's all right Vicky. I asked him to come.

(to Cecil)

Have a seat.

DAN'S OFFICE:

Cecil walks into Dan's office. Dan closes the door still hesitant.

DAN (CONT'D)

Wait, I'm still curious how you got into the building.

Cecil smiles.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

There's an open mic comedy show about to start in the other room. Tony Blanchard and all of the open mic comics are focused on a TV at the bar.

HOST (V.O.)

Tonight we're bringing you the best up-and-coming stand-up comedians from across the country in the prime time event "Live from The Los Angeles Comedy Festival." Sponsored by Toyota.

The camera pans to show the hundreds of comics that were waiting in line.

TONY

Everyone shut up.

Tony looks for the remote.

The former Best Buy employee stands behind the bar smiling, while making a martini for a pretty girl.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Comics and production staff are every where. Cecil sits with his notebook in the middle of all the commotion and writes out a set list.

A WOMAN WITH A HEADSET, 25, comes up to him.

WOMAN WITH HEADSET

You ready?

Cecil isn't ready, he looks around nervously. He puts on his sport coat and scratches a few more bits on his piece of paper.

WOMAN WITH HEADSET  
(CONT'D)

You're on.

Cecil looks concerned. Rushed, he gets up and follows her.

CECIL BENDS

Right now?

WOMAN WITH HEADSET

30 seconds.

She looks at her watch. They make their way through the backstage area to the curtain.

Cecil looks in a mirror to make sure he looks all right.

WOMAN WITH HEADSET  
(CONT'D)

5 seconds. Four, three, two and...

She opens the curtain. Cecil goes through and emerges on the stage. The lights blind him. 3 cameras and a full studio audience wait for him to say anything.

Cecil sees all the people and freezes. He looks like he's going to faint.

He looks at his set list but the lights are so bright he can't read it. Cecil's heart begins to race. His face is becomes flushed and sweaty.

Cecil, in slow motion, his body loses it's gravity and just as he begins to fall.

CUT TO:

DRESSING ROOM

Cecil shakes his head and rubs his eyes. He thinks to himself for a moment clearing his head space.

He looks at his set list.

A WOMAN WITH A HEADSET, 25, comes up to him.

WOMAN WITH HEADSET

You ready?

Cecil stands, looks at the set list one last time and then sets it down.

CECIL BENDS

Let's do this.

Cecil follows the Woman with the headset leaving the set list behind.

INT. OPEN MIC - CONTINUOUS

Tony turns the volume up on the remote.

TV HOST

When our next comedian was asked where he finds all the material for his jokes he simply said, "My act is my life." From Minneapolis, Minnesota. Please help me in welcoming Cecil Bends.

Everyone CLAPS.

INT. MORTGAGE COMPANY - NIGHT

The Audio King Manager is now selling mortgages. He seems happy. In his office is a TV and it's on.

INT. PAWN SHOP - NIGHT

"Go fuck Yourself" Guy is also watching. Making himself an espresso with Cecil's cappuccino machine. He's very pleased with himself.

INT. DARLINGTON BAR - NIGHT

Adam's dad and the whole town are watching.

INT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Donny sits with his mother and they watch the TV.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOUSE - NIGHT

Andy Lewiston watches while getting a sandwich served to him on a silver platter by his assistant Kent, who is wearing nothing but a neon green thong.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

While her TV is on in the background, Cameo laughs as she chases two small children around her apartment.

INT. BEST BUY - NIGHT

The Best Buy Manager stands in front of a wall of TVs. He's practicing giving 'high-fives' to himself. He couldn't be happier.

ON THE TV SCREEN

Cecil walks on stage. The packed crowd CLAPS vigorously.

Insert: CECIL BENDS MINNEAPOLIS, MN

The comics can't believe they are seeing their friend. Cecil's smile goes from ear to ear.

CECIL

Thanks for having me. Stand-up is the only job I was ever good at. I was in sales for a while, but it sucked because my entire sales pitch consisted of...  
Come on!

(sells it with both his hands out)

The TV crowd loves it. Everyone LAUGHS.

CECIL (CONT'D)

I really love doing stand-up cause you can find material anywhere.

(beat)

I was shaving the other day and on the can it read "apply liberally"... So as I put it on, I bitched about everything.

The crowd LAUGHS.

CECIL (CONT'D)

By round of applause how many people here buy into the five-second rule when it comes to food hitting the ground?

(people clap)

Do you honestly think bacteria buys into that?

(act out)

An M&M hits the ground and bacteria's all like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. This isn't 'Nam' (Like Vietnam) there are rules here."

(beat)

"1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi..."

People are LAUGHING, he's really starting to kill it.

CECIL (CONT'D)

I grew up around all women. Five aunts on one side of my family, seven on the other and a single mom. You would think with a female influence like that I'd be a devil with the ladies. No, all that happened was I wore my towel up to my armpits 'til I was like, fifteen.

(beat)

It's awkward, coming out of 10th grade gym class all like...

(act out wearing towel)

It didn't help that I had another towel wrapped up in my hair... Seriously fellas, cover your nipples.

LAUGHS and APPLAUSE.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
Thanks for the laughs.

TV HOST  
Give it up for comedian Cecil Bends.

BACK TO OPEN MIC:

Everyone in the bar erupts in APPLAUSE for Cecil. Tony turns and reveals Adam and Joe who were sitting there the whole time.

TONY  
(to Adam)  
So what happened?

ADAM  
Obviously neither of us made it. Cecil didn't make it past that round, but the Tonight Show people were there and they wanted Cecil to come back out for a showcase.

TONY  
That's huge. Where's he right now?

JOE  
I'm not sure...

ADAM  
He said he had a date.

EXT. CEMETERY - SUNSET

Cecil sits at his Mother's gravestone with a computer. The computer has the TV feed playing.

CECIL  
...I wore my towel up to my armpits 'til I was like, fifteen.  
(beat)  
It's awkward, coming out of 10th grade gym class all like...  
(act out wearing towel)  
I didn't help that I had another towel wrapped up in my hair... Seriously fellas cover your nipples.

LAUGHS and APPLAUSE.

Cecil eyes are flooded with tears. He smiles. He closes the computer, grabs his bag and pulls out his notebook.

He opens the notebook and pulls out the photo of himself with the towel up to his armpits. On the inside cover are now five to six, hundred hashmarks.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Thanks Mom, I couldn't have done it without you.

He sets the photo next to the gravestone. He stands, smiling. He wipes a tear from his face.

FADE TO:

EXT. JOE'S APT. - DAY

Cecil's Saturn pulls up and waits for a moment. On the bumper of the car is a sticker that reads: SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL COMEDY CLUB

Joe lumbers out of his apartment with three huge bags. Cecil gets out of the car and helps him.

JOE

What time is it?

CECIL

I think it's seven-ish.

JOE

You're on time.

CECIL

Yeah?

JOE

You're never on time.

CECIL

I'm taking you to the airport Joe, why would I be late?

JOE

Because you're always late.

Cecil helps Joe with the first bag.

CECIL

Are you done?

JOE

I'm just saying it's weird.

Cecil looks at him, annoyed. They get into the car. Joe pulls a box out of his bag.

JOE (CONT'D)

I got you something.

Joe hands the box to Cecil.

CECIL

You didn't have to get me anything.

JOE

Yeah I did.

Cecil opens the box. Inside his over-priced watch. He looks at Joe and smiles.

CECIL

How'd you get the money for this?

Joe mischievously smiles.

JOE

You don't wanna know.

Cecil puts the watch to his ear and then looks at the face. The second hand sweeps with perfect timing. He fights, trying not to get too emotional.

CECIL

Thanks, man.

JOE

You're not going to hug me, are you?

Cecil smiles and hugs him.

CECIL (V.O.)

Joe finally took my advice and moved back to New York. They get his humor a lot better on the East Coast.

Cecil drives off, smiling.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Adam Blazer has headphones on. He is 'On Air', reading the news.

CECIL (V.O.)

Adam was always concerned about travel, so he kept his humor local and got a job working on a morning radio show.

ADAM

A local man was arrested today for being drunk and naked in public.

Adam looks at his producer.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Sounds like the type of guy I'd like to party with.

Adam flips a page and keeps reading.

EXT. CECIL'S CAR - DAY

Cecil looks at a picture of Joe, Adam and himself taped to his dash.

CECIL (V.O.)

...and I hit the road for the next couple years, doing every hell gig you can imagine.

Cecil looks at a picture of him and Billy. They're both smiling. He picks it up.

CECIL (V.O.)

Some might say that what happened to me was my fate, that it was all meant to be.

(beat)

However you look at it, make sure you see it through. Because if you lie down and you're not careful, sometimes you don't get back up again.

Cecil's used Saturn tears down the road.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

From a dead sleep, Cecil suddenly WAKES UP and has no idea where he is. He looks around the room, nothing registers. He finds stationery but the sleep in his eyes keeps it from being legible. He gets out of bed and goes to the window. In one swift motion he OPENS THE CURTAINS.

There, on the bank of the Mississippi, sits the giant St. Louis Arch and a billboard promoting a Cardinal's baseball game.

TITLE CARD: 7 MONTHS LATER

He lets it sink in. His anxiety subsides.

INT. COMEDY CLUB (BACK STAGE) - NIGHT

The sound of a crowd enjoying a comedian can be heard coming from the stage. Cecil, waiting to go up next, sits in the green room with a peaceful disposition. He looks at his set list, trying to memorize it. A door OPENS. The CLUB OWNER sticks his head in.

CLUB OWNER

You ready?

CECIL

Yeah, I'm ready whenever.

The door closes and Cecil is by himself again. He looks back at his list. Suddenly, Cecil's phone VIBRATES in his pocket. He looks at the caller ID and wrinkles his face in surprise.

CECIL (CONT'D)

Hello?

DAN (V.O.)

Cecil, Dan Sizmore here. How you been?

CECIL

Good, hey I have to be on stage in like two minutes. Can I call you when I get off?

DAN (V.O.)

I'll keep this short. Cecil, the other Tonight Show producers looked at your tape from the showcase...

(beat)

They don't think you're ready yet.

Cecil doesn't say anything.

DAN(V.O.)

I'm sorry, man. I didn't want you to sit in limbo. I just found out myself. I thought it would be better if you just knew.

Cecil sits void of emotion.

CECIL

I appreciate you telling me, Dan.

DAN (V.O.)

I'm really sorry to drop this on you right before you're going on stage.

(MORE)

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

Please make sure you stay in touch and maybe we'll try to keep you in the fold for down the road. I know you gotta go. Kill 'em tonight.

CECIL

Thanks for the call, Dan.

Cecil sits in silence, He's devastated. He stands up and sees himself in the mirror. He stares. He wants to scream but he knows freaking out isn't going to behoove anyone at this moment.

RANDOM COMEDIAN (O.S.)

Thank you, good night!

The crowd APPLAUDS. The RANDOM COMEDIAN opens the curtain and enters the green room.

RANDOM COMEDIAN (CONT'D)

Man, that is a hot crowd. Enjoy yourself out there.

CECIL

Yeah, it sounded great.

The Random Comedian exits the green room.

Cecil looks at himself in the mirror not sure how to move forward. His head drops.

ANNOUCER (O.S.)

Your headliner tonight was a semi-finalist in the Los Angeles Comedy Festival. He's come along way to be with us tonight, please help me welcome Cecil Bends!

His head comes back up with a small ironic grin. He looks at himself in the mirror with pride. He opens the curtain and walks on stage.

CECIL (V.O.)

My whole life all I ever wanted to be was a stand-up comedian.

The crowd APPLAUDS. Cecil smiles.

CUT TO BLACK.

GEORGE JONES' "STILL DOIN' TIME" PLAYS US OUT...

Title Card: SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL COMEDY CLUB