

WHERE THE HART IS

"Pilot Episode"

by

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WRITERS' NOTE: SET IN SUBURBAN AMERICA, CIRCA 1961, "WHERE THE HEART IS" WILL BE SHOT IN BLACK AND WHITE, SINGLE CAMERA, IN A SIMPLE, STRAIGHT-FORWARD FASHION THAT DUPLICATES THE LOOK AND FEEL OF CLASSIC SITCOMS FROM THE PERIOD.

FADE IN:

EXT. MULBERRY STREET - DAY

Suburbia, circa 1961: neat little houses, manicured lawns, CHIRPING BIRDS. WOODROW "WOODCHUCK" HART, 10, pedals his Schwinn as he delivers newspapers, PLAYING CARDS clothes-pinned to his front fork, SNAPPING IN HIS TIRE-SPOKES.

(NOTE - The following is shot ON STAGE, UTILIZING REAR-SCREEN PROJECTION)

The Woodchuck has a cherubic, freckled face and short red hair tucked under a COONSKIN CAP. He cheerfully flings folded newspapers left and right at high velocity onto lawns, driveways and porches.

EXT. WILKINS HOUSE - DAY

HAROLD WILKINS, late-50s, paunchy, balding with a thin mustache and round, horn-rimmed glasses, examines one of his precious Negro lawn jockeys. CANNED LAUGHTER as we see that someone has painted its face like a French whore.

He cocks his head as he hears the telltale sound of RIFFLING PLAYING CARDS. He looks up, sees The Woodchuck riding by.

MR. WILKINS

Woodrow! Woodrow, I'll have a word with you!

A newspaper BULLETS INTO FRAME. It catches Mister Wilkins flush in the jowls with A HOLLOW SMACKING THUD, knocking him off his feet. CANNED LAUGHTER.

WOODCHUCK (O.S.)

(cheerfully)

Hi, Mister Wilkins!

Wilkins slowly sits up, one hand covering his mouth. BLOOD streams down his chin, spots his bow-tie, his sweater-vest. He watches the Woodchuck ride off, eyes dazed with shock. Slowly pulls his hand from his mouth, looks down at

HIS OPEN PALM - A BURST OF EXPOSIVE, CANNED LAUGHTER as we reveal A BROKEN FRONT TOOTH swimming in blood and spittle.

EXT. MULBERRY STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Woodchuck slows to a stop, sees something that attracts his rapt attention.

HIS POV - A PANEL TRUCK is parked next door to Woodchuck's house. Emblazoned on the side is a caricature of, slick-looking man tending a barbecue: "RAY BUCKINGHAM'S BARBECUE PALACE. A DELIVERY MAN in white overalls and a milkman's cap is dollying a big empty cardboard box back to his truck.

WOODCHUCK

Jeepers.

EXT. HART HOUSE - SIDE YARD - DAY

BOBBY DARIN'S "BEYOND THE SEA" plays on a phonograph (O.S.).

VICTOR HART, 40ish, Montgomery-Ward-Catalogue-Model handsome, dressed in slacks, cardigan and a tie, smokes a cigarette as standing on a ladder, he cleans the roof gutters. A POPPING SOUND of a SMALL MOTOR makes him look down at

UNCLE CHUBB - a curmudgeon in his late 50s, short and stocky. Under a two-bit bowl-haircut, his grizzled face is branded with a perpetual scowl, an unfiltered Lucky dangling from his lips. He struggles with the pull-cord of a power-mower...

UNCLE CHUBB

(mutters)

Stupid gook-bitch piece of crap...

VICTOR

(calls down)

Sounds like that carburetor needs priming, Uncle Chubb.

UNCLE CHUBB

(under his breath)

Yeah, yeah, mister know-it-all.

Uncle Chubb reaches for a nearby can of gasoline, slops some over the carb. He SNARLS at an upstairs window.

UNCLE CHUBB

Fer Pete's sake, Darla, turn down that racket!

INT. DARLA'S BEDROOM - DAY

DARLA HART, 16, a petite brunette sporting a pair of pearlescent cat-eye glasses, a modest gingham halter and a white skirt, is immersed in a textbook.

DARLA

(absently)

Sorry, Uncle Chubb.

Typical teen-girl-dream-bedroom: a grotesquerie of white furniture with antique gold accents, canopy bed piled with stuffed animals and frilly everything.

Darla crosses to her record-player, DIALS DOWN THE VOLUME A TICK. She picks up a framed photo of John F. Kennedy, spins a pirouette and lays a kiss on it. Spots something from the corner of her eye and skips to the window.

HER POV - Across the street, DOUG STOLEMEYER, mid-40s, and his "ward," TAB JANSSEN, 20s, are hosing off their matching Cream-White Karmann-Ghias. Muscled, athletic, crew-cuts.

Darla's eyes glaze over with pre-pubescent adoration. Breathless, swooning just a little, she puts down Kennedy's head-shot and begins carefully primping in front of her vanity.

EXT. HART HOUSE - SIDE YARD - DAY

Victor continues cleaning his rain-gutters.

ED (O.S.)  
Hey Vic!

Victor bristles at the sound of the voice, slowly turns.

ED KING peers over the fence. A suntanned, bantam rooster of a man, perfect teeth and a shock of thick black hair that's always Brylcreemed to perfection. Ed proudly considers himself a ladies man and business mogul, and seems completely oblivious to the fact that he stands only 4'11".

VICTOR  
What do you want?

ED  
Come on over. I got somethin gonna  
knock your socks off...

Victor SIGHS. What is it now?

EXT. KING HOUSE - DAY

The Delivery Man glances around as he talks to The Woodchuck. Pale complected, rheumy eyes and a thin mustache, he vaguely resembles Steve Buscemi.

DELIVERY MAN  
Say, do you like candy?

WOODCHUCK

Who doesn't!

DELIVERY MAN

Me too. Hey, I think I got some in my truck!

INT. THE TRUCK - DAY

The Woodchuck climbs up in the cab, searching around as he bounces around in the passenger seat. Manic and excited Woodchuck frenetically pulls on the parking brake, pushes buttons, rolls the window down and up, down and up.

The Delivery Man slides behind the wheel, gazes at Woodchuck like a starving man eyeballing a pork chop.

WOODCHUCK

Hey! Where's the candy?

DELIVERY MAN

Aww, gee. I uh... I musta left it at my place.

(pauses for effect)

Hey! I gotta idea! What say we go for a little ride. I'll take you there.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

WOODCHUCK

Boss-keen! Let's go!

The Delivery Man grins, FIRES UP the engine. As he puts it in gear, he's startled by A TAPPING SOUND on his window. Victor Hart peers into the truck. The Delivery Man nervously rolls down his window.

VICTOR

Where do you think you're going?

DELIVERY MAN

(stammers)

I, uh... I wasn't... I didn't mean--

ANOTHER BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

VICTOR

(disarming smile)

Oh. I'm sorry. I was talking to my boy over there.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
 (to The Woodchuck)  
 Well?

WOODCHUCK  
 This man was gonna take me for a  
 ride and give me some candy.

VICTOR  
 No time for that, young man.  
 You've got chores to do.

WOODCHUCK  
 Aww, jeepers...

Sullen, The Woodchuck climbs out of the cab.

VICTOR  
 (to Delivery Man)  
 That's awful friendly of you  
 mister. I hope the boy hasn't been  
 too much of a bother...

DELIVERY MAN  
 No, uh... not at all. He was real  
 polite.

CANNED LAUGHTER as, still shaken, the Delivery Man throws the  
 truck into gear, pulls away. Victor and The Woodchuck wave.

VICTOR  
 Come on by some other time. We'll  
 be happy to take a raincheck!

As the truck RUMBLES AWAY, Victor steers The Woodchuck up the  
 driveway toward the Ed King's rear gate.

WOODCHUCK  
 What's up, Pop?

VICTOR  
 That darn Ed King wants to show off  
 his latest toy.

WOODCHUCK  
 Neato!

At the gate, Victor crouches, places both hands on The  
 Woodchucks's shoulders, meets his eyes.

VICTOR  
 Son, I need you to promise me  
 something...

WOODCHUCK  
 (suddenly solemn)  
 Sure thing, Pop.

VICTOR  
 No matter what it is, don't act too  
 impressed, understand?

The Woodchuck nods. Victor opens the gate and the boy's face explodes into a monster smile, eyes lit up with naked awe.

WOODCHUCK  
*Holy-cow-super-zowie!!!*

Ed King, wearing a chef's hat, an apron that reads "Hail to the King," and a smug, thousand-watt grin on his annoying mug, stands alongside his latest acquisition:

A BRAND NEW BARBECUE - TWO-TONED IVORY AND AQUA PAINT on a finned surface offset by generous amounts of POLISHED, CHROME TRIM AND BAKELITE KNOBS.

ED KING  
 Feast your eyes, gentlemen, on the  
 spanking new Grillmaster 2000!

INT. HART HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM

BETTY HART, mid-30s, graceful, sensibly pretty, nice figure, dark-blond bob. Her polka-dot dress tastefully accessorized by a short string of pearls. HUMMING "BEYOND THE SEA," she opens her Maytag top-loader, looks inside.

HER POV - The wet laundry evenly distributed in the tub.

Betty heaves a SIGH, reaches into the machine and begins redistributing the laundry. DARLA rushes through, opens the back-door.

BETTY  
 Where are you off to in such a  
 hurry?

DARLA  
 The guys across the street are  
 washing their cars. Oh my, that Tab  
 Janssen is a dreamboat!

BETTY  
 Darla, boys don't like it when you  
 throw yourself at them.  
 (MORE)

BETTY (CONT'D)

You need to stay cool and collected  
- play hard to get, so to speak.

DARLA

Honestly Mother, do you think I  
don't know that by now? I'm sixteen  
for goodness sake!

Darla exits. Betty SIGHS, shakes her head and smiles good-naturedly as she returns to positioning the laundry.

HER POV - The clothes are now BUNCHED ON ONE SIDE OF THE TUB.

Satisfied, Betty closes the lid. Searches a moment for something, then pulls a KNOTTED DISH TOWEL from a basket on the dryer. She glances around as if to make sure the coast is clear, then jabs the START BUTTON.

A LOUD THUMPING. The RED "UNBALANCED LOAD" LIGHT on the washing machine's VIBRATING CONSOLE flickers.

Betty bites down on the dish-towel. CANNED LAUGHTER as she firmly plants her pelvis against the corner of the SHUDDERING MAYTAG, biting back a MOAN OF PLEASURE.

EXT. KING BACK YARD - DAY

Ed, Victor and The Woodchuck have been joined by LITTLE ED, King's hulking 11 year-old son. Little Ed is half a foot taller than his father and weighs 230 pounds.

ED

The wife sez "But Ed, can we afford it?" And I sez "Baby, how can Ed King not afford it?" Only the best for my tribe, right Little Ed?

LITTLE ED

Right, Big Ed.

Father and son beam at one another. Ed opens the top revealing the shimmering grill. He knocks on the lid...

ED

Titanium alloy. Tough enough to withstand a Soviet H-bomb.

Ed's wife, DAWN, steps out and joins them. Early 30s, Dawn is a long-legged, sexed up cross between Jackie Kennedy and Audry Hepburn.

DAWN

Hello there, boys. Isn't it something?  
 (kisses Ed on the cheek)  
 Why don't you join us for dinner?  
 We're having a few friends over...

WOODCHUCK

Oh boy! Can we, Pop? Please?

VICTOR

Afraid not son.  
 (adds, with pride)  
 We've already got a big barbecue of our own planned.

EXT. MULBERRY ROAD/STOLEMEYER HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

We hear DELL SHANNON'S "MY LITTLE RUNAWAY" playing on the radio as Darla walks up the driveway where Doug and Tab wash their coupes.

DARLA

Hiya Doug. Hi Tab. Whatcha doin'?

They guys shoot each other a look. Next dumb question?

DOUG

(droll)  
 We're washing our cars.

DARLA

Neat.  
 (eager)  
 Hey, I'm trying out for cheerleader this year. Wanna see one of my routines?

TAB

We're busy right now.

But there's no stopping her. She CRANKS UP THE RADIO and begins to kick, shimmy, bump and grind.

UNCLE CHUBB - stares hungrily at her from across the street as he RUNS OVER A BED OF TULIPS WITH THE LAWNMOWER.

DARLA - Hands on her knees, she sways her butt back and forth as she looks back at Tab over her shoulder.

MR. WILKINS - gazes feverishly next-door, LOPPING OFF THE HEADS OF HIS PRIZE ROSES with a pair of hedge-clippers.

DARLA - lifts her skirt up to her waist and does the pony, wagging her finger at Tab as if to say, "You can look, but don't touch."

DOUG AND TAB - utterly stunned and totally unmoved by the little performance that is driving all the other neighborhood men crazy. They share an awkward glance.

DARLA - A moment of eye-darting panic as she realizes her charms aren't working. She spots the hose.

DARLA

Oh, golly. All that cheerleading  
sure can work up a girl's thirst!

She picks up the hose and, peering coquettishly over the top of her glasses at Tab, raises the nozzle to her lips, cold water bubbling into her mouth, spilling down her chin and the front of her halter.

ED KING - ogling her as he unloads groceries from his wife's Roadmaster wagon. The damp bottom of the bag falls out, SPILLING LINKED FRANKFURTERS on his Hushpuppies.

THE HOSE BIB - as Doug decisively shuts off the valve. "MY LITTLE RUNAWAY" abruptly stops with a NEEDLE-SCRATCH.

DARLA - The water stops, the hose suddenly going limp in her hands.

Doug takes the hose from her with a friendly smile.

DOUG

(flat)  
Thanks Darla, that was cute.

TAB

(flat)  
Charming. Great fun.

DOUG

But we really need to get back to  
work.

On that, Doug and Tab trade a meaningful smirk to A BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

DOUG

Best you run home and dry off.

TAB

Wouldn't want you to catch a nasty  
cold.

Stricken, Darla looks at one, then the other. Suddenly, she bites back a sob, turns and does a girly-run across the street. Doug and Tab shake their heads.

EXT. HART BACK YARD - DAY

Wearing a grease-smudged apron, VICTOR smokes a cigarette as he flips burgers on a cheap, dime-store barbecue. One of its spindly legs is shorter than the other two, causing it to wobble every time a burger hits the grill.

Next door (O.S.), PARTY SOUNDS--HAPPY CHATTERING, SQUEALS AND LAUGHTER, SPLASHING from the pool, TINKLING ICE-CUBES AND PAT BOONE ON THE HI-FI.

UNCLE CHUBB - steps outside, sniffing the air, mouth watering.

UNCLE CHUBB

What the hell?

He peers at the small, unappealing burgers on Victor's grill with surprised eyes.

UNCLE CHUBB (CONT'D)

My nose is never wrong. I smell chicken...

(sniffs)

and shrimp. Roasted pork... and big t-bone steaks.

Victor SIGHS and throws a slight nod in the direction of the King's place. Curious, Chubb and moves toward the fence, peers over.

CHUBB'S POV - An idealized white suburban paradise: Verile, exuberant YOUNG COUPLES dance, dive, play grab-ass, swim and sip umbrella-cocktails--

Sporting his chef's hat, a beaming Ed King mans the Grillmaster 2000, flipping CHICKEN, SHRIMP AND T-BONES. A SUCKLING PIG slowly turns on THE ROTISSERIE.

ON CHUBB - looking despondent as he turns away from the party and looks back at Victor and his pathetic, crippled barbecue. Ed King CALLS OVER:

ED KING

Hey you guys, sure you don't wanna come over? Got a steak with your name on it, Chubb.

Chubb is about to jump at the offer but Vic cuts him off at the pass, somehow managing to sound cheerful...

VICTOR  
 (waving his spatula)  
 Thanks Ed, but we've got enough  
 meat on the grill to feed an army.

Chubb can't help but look down at the measly burgers... he feels like weeping.

INT. HART HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A PLATTER OF HAMBURGERS is set on the table--TINY BLACK PATTIES ON BIG WHITE BUNS. A BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

Betty, Darla, Uncle Chubb and The Woodchuck stare at the miserable fare. They can't hide their disappointment. Victor stands over them, a swipe of grease on his forehead, dish-towel draped over one shoulder. A cigarette dangles from his lips.

VICTOR  
 I had a little trouble controlling  
 the fire.

For a long moment, there's only the MUTED SOUND OF THE PARTY NEXT DOOR. Finally, Betty looks up, forces a smile.

BETTY  
 Don't be silly dear, they look  
 delicious. Right, Woodrow?

WOODCHUCK  
 (unconvincing)  
 Uh... yeah, right, Pop! Delicious!

UNCLE CHUBB  
 I, uh... I always did like my meat  
 well-done.

Darla looks at Chubb as if she's gone insane.

DARLA  
 Oh honestly Uncle Chubb!  
 (looks to the others)  
 Doesn't anyone in this family ever  
 tell the truth?

VICTOR  
 The truth? And just what *is* the  
 truth, young lady?

She stands, one of her melodramatic brat moments coming on in full force.

DARLA

This family is so dull! So deadly dull! I'm sick and tired of being a Hart! I wish I was a King!

A BURST OF HYSTERICAL, CANNED LAUGHTER.

BETTY

Darla!

Weeping hysterically, Darla turns and runs upstairs. Victor stares after her, trembling with fury.

VICTOR

*You haven't been excused, missy!*

Betty places a hand over Victor's, gives him a subtle shake of the head. Furious, Victor whips the dish-towel from his shoulder, SMACKS it down on the table.

VICTOR

That does it. Betty!  
(through grit teeth)  
We're going to The Palace.

EXT. RAY BUCKINGHAM'S BARBECUE PALACE - NIGHT

Establish. An impressive 50s-Moderne building fronted by a majestic fountain.

INT. BARBECUE PALACE - NIGHT

The GRILLMASTER 2000, the twin to Ed King's new barbecue, stands on the display floor. MUZAK fills the air, giving the place a strangely dream-like ambiance.

BETTY

Is this it?

Victor and the Woodchuck give her a mute nod, their eyes glazed over at the sheer beauty of it.

VICTOR

That's the barbecue I want.

BUCKINGHAM

Nah. That's not the barbecue you want.

They all turn. RAY BUCKINGHAM, 40s, a dead ringer for Alec Baldwin, wears an expensive, dark blue double-breasted suit and sports a solid gold Rolex. He glances around, as if letting them in on a secret.

BUCKINGHAM  
Come on, folks.  
(wrinkles his nose)  
Let me show you a *real* barbecue...

INT. BARBECUE PALACE - MOMENTS LATER

A GOLD LAME CURTAIN. Buckingham pulls a cord. The curtains slide open. A CHORUS OF ANGELS SWELLS UP as the Harts stare, transfixed, faces lit by ETHEREAL LIGHT.

BUCKINGHAM  
Ladies and gentlemen, The Hudson  
International Grillmaster 5000.

Ray and the Harts stand before a REVOLVING DAIS, upon which stands the Holy Grail of barbecues. Its polished, stainless-steel finish sparkles under the SPOTLIGHTS, draped by a smiling SWIMSUIT MODEL.

VICTOR  
(awed whisper)  
Holy Mother of God...

BUCKINGHAM  
Some call her the ultimate grilling machine. But I say that doesn't do her justice. She just may be the ultimate machine of any kind...

The Swimsuit Model gestures gracefully to various features as Buckingham slides melodiously through his spiel.

BUCKINGHAM (CONT'D)  
If she was a car, she'd crush the sound barrier. If she was a fighter-jet, she'd bend the speed of light...

The Woodchuck mouths a silent "WOW." Buckingham leans in, speaks to Victor "confidentially".

BUCKINGHAM  
Friend, I'll fill you in on a little secret. I keep hoping no one'll buy her.  
(MORE)

BUCKINGHAM (CONT'D)

I don't know how I'd feel if I had  
to say good-bye to her. So I'm...  
(dramatic pause)  
... *real* choosy about who I'd allow  
to take her home. Take that guy  
over there?

He gestures out in the showroom. Victor follows his gaze.

HIS POV - A swarthy LATINO in a blue work-shirt with HIS  
DUMPY WIFE and a GAGGLE OF KIDS checks prices on some  
hibachis.

BUCKINGHAM

Not a chance.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

BUCKINGHAM

That fat lady in the corner looking  
at the smokers?

Again, Buckingham points, this time to a BLACK WOMAN peering  
inside some wood-smokers. He shakes his head sadly.

BUCKINGHAM

(shakes his head)  
Forget it.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

BUCKINGHAM

But a nice family like yours? Good  
folks? Decent folks?

Buckingham looks them up and down as if carefully assessing  
their suitability.

BUCKINGHAM

You wouldn't let me down, would  
you. You'd take good care of my  
baby, right?

Victor and Betty look at one another, beaming from the  
compliment. Victor nods.

VICTOR

We sure would try, Mr. Buckingham.

BUCKINGHAM

(winks)  
Call me Ray.

WOODCHUCK (O.S.)

*Jee-ZO!*

THE ANGELS STOP SINGING. They all turn. The Woodchuck has joined the Swimsuit Model up on the dais, staring agog at the PRICE-TAG. Buckingham gives a STRAINED CHUCKLE.

BUCKINGHAM

Come on down, son.

But the spell is broken and Betty has already climbed up on the platform. She takes the price-tag from The Woodchuck. She looks at it and goes pale as if gut-shot.

BETTY

Ohh my...

She shakes her head in disbelief. Impatient, Victor marches up and takes the tag from her hand.

VICTOR

It can't be that expens--

But he's suddenly rendered mute when he sees that it is. HUGE CANNED LAUGHTER. Suddenly, without a sound, Ray Buckingham is BEHIND HIM, peering over his shoulder at the tag. His tone is DRIPPING, UNCTUOUS:

BUCKINGHAM

I'm so sorry, sir.

Victor starts. How the hell does Ray move so damn fast?! Buckingham places a hand on his shoulder.

BUCKINGHAM

It seems I misjudged you.

(shrugs)

It happens...

(steers Victor off the platform)

We have some economy models right over here that grill quite adequately. Perhaps that's more your style.

VICTOR

*Wait!*

Victor stops, unwilling to give up his barbecue dreams, still gazing longingly back at his cherished Grillmaster 5000. Betty FRANTICALLY WHISPERS:

BETTY

Victor, it costs more than you paid  
for my car!

CANNED LAUGHTER.

BUCKINGHAM

She's right, Victor. It would  
appear this beauty is, sad to say,  
out of your league.

(a dramatic pause)

Unless...

VICTOR

(suddenly hopeful)

Unless...?

BUCKINGHAM

(leaning forward, quietly)

We do offer a variety of payment  
plans to certain *qualified*  
individuals.

The expression of hopeful expectation on Victor's face slowly  
clenches to one of utter indignation.

VICTOR

Now wait just a minute - what the  
hell makes you think I'd need a  
payment plan?!

Buckingham and the Swimsuit Model pointedly look down.  
Victor follows their gaze.

VICTOR'S WINGTIPS - scuffed, in sore need of a polish.  
Victor makes a pathetic attempt to cover one shoe with the  
other. A BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

Victor looks up at Buckingham, incensed.

VICTOR

Let me tell you something buddy...  
Ray. Victor Hart doesn't need some  
commie "payment plan" to buy a  
stupid barbecue!

Buckingham and the Swimsuit Model trade a saddened look.  
This is really pathetic. Victor grabs Betty's hand.

VICTOR

Come on, Honey...

He snatches The Woodchuck's arm, marches toward the exit, dragging them along. At the threshold he turns, raises one, trembling fist at Ray Buckingham.

VICTOR  
(shouts)  
When Victor Hart decides to buy, he  
*pays cash on the barrel!*

EXT. HART HOUSE - NIGHT

Establish. Lights blaze upstairs.

INT. HART HOUSE - THE WOODCHUCK'S BEDROOM

The Woodchuck--dressed in cowboy pajamas, still wearing his coonskin cap--is tucked into his bed by Betty as Victor stands by. Betty gives him a kiss.

BETTY  
Sleep tight, son.

They start out. Victor reaches for the light switch.

WOODCHUCK  
Pop?

VICTOR  
What is it, son?

WOODCHUCK  
I was thinkin' about that barbecue  
guy. He was a bad man, wasn't he.

Victor's face tenses.

VICTOR  
Yeah. A first class creep.

WOODCHUCK  
You got enough money to buy that  
barbecue, right?

Victor sits on the corner of the bed.

VICTOR  
If I wanted to, I could buy that  
whole store.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

WOODCHUCK

Really?

VICTOR

Why, sure. Scout's honor.

The Woodchuck appears conflicted. He reaches under the bed and pulls a small CAST-METAL TREASURE-CHEST BANK, the lid emblazoned with a gaudy portrait of CAP'N KIDD OVER A PAIR OF CROSSED, GOLDEN CUTLASSES.

WOODCHUCK

I wanna chip in.

Victor gazes at the bank, then his son. VIOLINS SWELL as tears well up in his eyes. He's deeply touched and, yes, ashamed.

VICTOR

I - I can't do that boy.

WOODCHUCK

I got plenty of nickels, dimes and quarters saved up.

For a brief, dark moment, Victor's actually tempted to take it... before visibly shuddering and pushing the chest away...

VICTOR

No, son. I just... can't.

WOODCHUCK

Please, Pop. Take it. I don't want it anymore. I just want you to get that keen barbecue and be happy again.

Victor shakes his head, stands and forces a smile.

VICTOR

Don't you worry about barbecues, little fella. You just get some sleep.

He SWITCHES OFF THE LIGHT.

WOODCHUCK

G'night, Pop.

VICTOR

Good night, son.

INT. HART HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Victor eases The Woodchuck's door shut, closes his eyes, face etched with pain and self-loathing. A BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HART HOUSE - NIGHT

All the windows are dark. An OWL HOOTS.

INT. HART HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Betty tosses and turns in her twin bed. She pushes herself up, unable to sleep, glances at

THE ALARM CLOCK - reads 3:15

Betty notices that Victor's twin bed is empty, turns and sees him standing in front of the window, gazing down as he quietly smokes a cigarette...

BETTY

Victor?

No reply. He draws on the cigarette.

BETTY

Honey, what's wrong?

VICTOR

(monotone)

How could anything possibly be wrong?

Betty crosses to the window, looks down.

HER POV - Next door, Ed King's barbecue GLITTERS UNDER THE MOONLIGHT.

BETTY

It's that damn barbecue, isn't it.

VICTOR

You wouldn't understand.

BETTY

No, I don't. I'll admit it. I'm just a woman.

(MORE)

BETTY (CONT'D)  
 (hugs him)  
 But I *want* to understand, Victor, I  
 really do!

She looks at him with pleading eyes. He tears free of her embrace, turns away.

VICTOR  
 Stop torturing me, Betty.

CANNED LAUGHTER. Spurned, angry, Betty looks down at the barbecue, eyes slowly filling with murderous rage. HISSES:

BETTY  
 That's right, Victor. Go ahead.  
 Blame me. You always do.

She picks a pack of Breeze cigarettes off the window-sill, lights one up. He still refuses to face her, his body growing rigid as she BITTERLY CONTINUES:

BETTY  
 After all, it's not *your* fault you  
 can't play with the big boys  
 downtown. Just another "bad  
 break," right, lover?

VICTOR  
 (quietly)  
 Shut up.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

BETTY  
 Too bad you got passed up for that  
 promotion. We could've really used  
 the money. What's it been, Victor?  
 Five years now at the same desk?  
 At the same salary? Or is it six?

VICTOR  
 (clenched teeth)  
 I said... shut up.

MORE CANNED LAUGHTER.

BETTY  
 You think a *man* like Ed King waits  
 for a promotion? You think a guy  
 like him *waits* for a raise? You  
 think a *real man* waits for life to  
 hand it to him on a silver platter--

Victor explodes, grabs her by the shoulders.

VICTOR  
*Shut up! Shut up, damn you! SHUT  
 UP!*

A BIG BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER.

BETTY  
 What're you going to do, Victor?  
 Hit me? Think that'll make you  
 feel like a real man? Go ahead,  
 Victor! *Hit me!*

Victor's eyes bug out. For a moment it appears he is, indeed, going to hit her.

Suddenly, with an ANIMAL SOB, he casts her aside, staggers to his bed and grabs his blanket and pillow, reels out of the room, SLAMMING the door behind him.

Betty stares after him, defiant tears in her eyes. Coolly takes a hit off her cigarette and turns to stare down, once again, at Ed King's barbecue.

EXT. HART HOUSE - BACK YARD

Angry, Victor squirms on a banana-lounge for a comfortable position. A SHADOW slides across his prone form. Victor senses the presence, looks up, cuts an involuntary GASP, startled by a HULKING FIGURE standing over him.

VICTOR  
 What the... who--

UNCLE CHUBB  
 Settle down, chief. It's just me.  
 Old Uncle Chubb.

Uncle Chubb's grizzled features are momentarily lit by the flare of his Zippo as he fires up a cigarette.

UNCLE CHUBB  
 In dutch with the missus, huh?

Victor opens his mouth to reply. Chubb holds up a hand.

UNCLE CHUBB  
 Don't bother denyin it. I was in  
 the hallway, listening.

Victor looks at him, vaguely creeped-out.

UNCLE CHUBB  
Tough situation. Real tough.

VICTOR  
I suppose.

UNCLE CHUBB  
Reminds me of a time. Chosin  
Reservoir, December 3rd, nineteen-  
hunnerd-and-fifty...

VICTOR  
Chubb, I'm... I'm real tired--

UNCLE CHUBB  
(without missing a beat)  
... We took Hawkawoo-ri that  
morning. We was outnumbered by the  
Chinks six-to-one. Six-to-one, by  
God, but we took it.  
(contemplates his  
cigarette a moment)  
They had chickens in Hawkawoo-ri.  
Scrawny ones, yeah, but they still  
laid eggs. And I got me one-a them  
eggs. Hard-berled. Worth more'n  
gold, it was. The only thing is, I  
didn't have no salt.

VICTOR  
(nods)  
So?

UNCLE CHUBB  
That's when I remember Butch  
McDuff. Silk stockings, bubblegum,  
girlie magazines? You want it,  
Butch got it. So I start crawlin,  
five-hunnerd yards through mud,  
blood and guts, Chinese tracer-  
rounds rakin just inches over my  
head...

Victor listens intently.

UNCLE CHUBB  
Finally, I make it to Butch. "Hey,  
Butch," I sez. And he don't say  
nothin. "Hey Butch, I sure could  
use a pinch of salt fer this here  
egg I got." And he still don't say  
nothin.

(MORE)

UNCLE CHUBB (CONT'D)

So I reach out, thinkin maybe old Butch is catchin hisself a nap. And my hand just sorta sinks into somethin warm and wet. And just then is when a flare lights up overhead, and I see Butch McDuff's face. Only it ain't a face. Just a big pile of steamin red goo...

A BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER. Eyes glazed, Uncle Chubb sadly shakes his head.

UNCLE CHUBB

And you know what?

VICTOR

What?

UNCLE CHUBB

I never did get no salt fer that hard-berled egg.

(heaves a SIGH)

Ya get what I'm sayin, chief?

Victor slowly nods, as if experiencing a mild epiphany.

VICTOR

Yeah. Yeah, Uncle Chubb. I think I do...

EXT. HART HOUSE - DAY

Establish. BIRDS SING.

INT. HART HOUSE - KITCHEN

Betty serves Darla and The Woodchuck a hearty breakfast of cereal, pancakes, eggs and bacon. The kids pour orange-juice and milk from glass pitchers. Victor enters, freshly dressed in a suit and tie, briefcase in one hand.

WOODCHUCK

(bright eyed)

Mornin, Pop!

DARLA

(dispirited)

Good morning, Father.

VICTOR

Morning, kids!

Betty approaches him a little cautiously, giving him a peck on the cheek.

BETTY  
I'll get you some breakfast.

VICTOR  
No time for that, honey. Gotta scoot!  
(to the kids)  
As they say, the early bird gets the worm!  
(to Betty)  
Or, should I say, the promotion!

BETTY  
Victor--

VICTOR  
--No, Betty. You were right. It's high time I seized the bull by the horns! I'm going to walk right into Frank McClintock's office and ask--no! I'm going to *demand* that promotion *and* a raise.

BETTY  
(bursting with joy)  
Oh honey!

She gives him a kiss on the lips, kicks up a heel. The Woodchuck covers his eyes.

WOODCHUCK  
Eew! Mush!

Surprised, Victor and Betty look at him and LAUGH. Victor takes a quick slurp of coffee as he moves for the door.

BETTY  
Victor...

He pauses. She goes to him and straightens his tie, arranges his collar.

BETTY  
Go get em, Tiger.

Victor GROWLS, turns and walks out. Betty watches him go - *that's* the man she married!

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a nondescript office building. A sign out front identifies it as the AMALGAMATED TOBACCO CO.

INT. AMALGAMATED TOBACCO CO.

Mahogany double-doors swing open and Victor strides down a HAZY corporate hallway to the MILITARISTIC BEAT OF FIFE AND DRUMS. He passes A DOZEN SECRETARIES seated at typewriters, all whom are smoking cigarettes.

Victor passes through a door marked "MARKETING DEPT."

INT. AMALGAMATED TOBACCO CO. - MARKETING DEPT.

TRACK VICTOR IN PROFILE as he marches down a hallway. As he passes OPEN DOORS AND INTERIOR WINDOWS, we glimpse:

TWO GUYS - at a piano working on A NEW CIGARETTE JINGLE;

MARKETING EXECS - ties loose, sleeves rolled up, discussing a SALES GRAPH;

A BOB FOSSE TYPE - bearded and balding, choreographing THREE FEMALE DANCERS dressed up as TAP-DANCING PACKS OF BREEZE CIGARETTES.

Victor approaches a door at the end of the hall emblazoned:

FRANK McCLINTOCK  
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

He hesitates only a moment, then plunges through.

INT. AMALGAMATED TOBACCO CO. - OUTER OFFICE

Several EXECUTIVES sit in chairs waiting to see the boss, smoking cigarettes, noses buried in trade publications. McClintock's SECRETARY fields calls in a NASALLY VOICE as she puffs on a Breeze.

SECRETARY

Mr. McClintock's office, please  
hold...

(snaps a button)

Mr. McClintock's office, please  
hold...

(snaps a button)

Mr. McClintock's office, please  
hold...

Victor marches right past the startled Secretary into McClintock's office. Tied to the phone, she half-rises.

SECRETARY  
 Hey! Hey, Mistah--

INT. AMALGAMATED TOBACCO CO. - MC CLINTOCK'S OFFICE

THE FIFE AND DRUM MARCH ABRUPTLY STOPS as Victor shuts the door behind him and pointedly turns the dead-bolt. Ominous, dead silence.

MCCLINTOCK, a beefy, tough looking corporate brute in his mid-fifties doesn't even look up from his advertising budgets. A half-smoked cigarette dangles from the corner of his mouth.

Victor's heart is beating through his chest. His mouth is dry, his head ringing. This is the moment of truth and he feels future prospects of any real happiness are on the line.

His eyes nervously wander to a PICTURE OF AN OLDER, WHITE-HAIRED LADY on McClintock's desk.

MCCLINTOCK  
 (completely disinterested)  
 Yeah? Whadda you want, Hart?

McClintock is still looking down at his budget.

VICTOR  
 (re: portrait on the desk)  
 I... was just thinking sir... how lovely your mother looks.

McClintock snaps his head up, glaring at Vic with mean, beady eyes.

MCCLINTOCK  
 That's my wife.

VICTOR  
 Oh.  
 (pause)  
 Lovely... lovely woman.

MCCLINTOCK  
 She died six months ago. Lung cancer.

CANNED LAUGHTER.

VICTOR  
 Oh.

Horrible, awkward, dead silence. McClintock's eyes are burning a hole in Victor.

MCCLINTOCK  
You're wasting my time. Now  
what... do... you... want?

The moment of truth. Victor utterly folds.

VICTOR  
I thought... you called me.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COCKTAIL LOUNGE

A SHOT GLASS - is filled with whiskey.

Depressed, Victor raises it to his lips, knocks it back in one, practiced swallow. He motions to the BARTENDER, who pours him a fresh one. Victor looks down the bar.

HIS POV - A WOMAN in her late-40s. Too much make-up, but then there's not enough make-up in the world to cover the miles of hard highway this broad's bounced down. CANNED LAUGHTER as she gives us "the eye."

Victor just stares at her, his face a deadpan mask.

EXT. DOWNTOWN

Victor drives by behind the wheel of his faded 1958 CHRYSLER WINDSOR SEDAN.

INT. VICTOR'S CHRYSLER - MOVING

(NOTE- This sequence is shot ON-STAGE, UTILIZING REAR-SCREEN PROJECTION)

Victor, an intense look in his eyes, drives down Main Street, knuckles white on the steering-wheel, jaw taut. After a long moment, he shudders, relaxes.

A beat.

Suddenly, The Woman from the bar lifts her head from his lap under the steering-wheel. CANNED LAUGHTER as she moves over, pulls a handkerchief from her pocketbook, dabs her lips.

They drive in awkward silence a beat. Finally:

WOMAN  
You can drop me off here.

VICTOR  
You sure?

WOMAN  
I just said so, didn't I?

Victor pulls over. For a long moment, they sit there.

WOMAN  
Well...?

For a moment, Victor's at a loss. Then it occurs to him what the woman's waiting for.

VICTOR  
That was real nice.

Victor clumsily leans toward her, gives her a glancing kiss on the cheek. She looks at him like he's from Mars.

WOMAN  
Where's my five bucks?

VICTOR  
What?

WOMAN  
Five bucks, Casanova.

BIG CANNED LAUGHTER. It takes Victor a few seconds to realize she's a prostitute. He looks at her, crestfallen, and STAMMERS:

VICTOR  
I'm sorry. I didn't know...

WOMAN  
What? You thought I did that cuz I  
*liked* you?

CANNED LAUGHTER. Victor fumbles for his wallet, pulls out a five and hands it over. The Woman gets out, SLAMS the door behind her. Victor looks horrified, physically ill.

EXT. HART HOUSE - DAY

Victor pulls his Chrysler into the garage.

INT. HART HOUSE - GARAGE

Victor sits for a moment behind the wheel, the ENGINE RUNNING, a blank, despondent look on his face. The Tokens "LION SLEEPS TONIGHT" plays on the RADIO.

Victor looks at the radio, then out the windshield. For the first time in his life, it seems, he knows just what to do.

RADIO

*In the jungle, the mighty jungle,  
the lion sleeps tonight...*

He slowly reaches up, presses the button on the REMOTE clipped to his visor. The GARAGE DOOR CLOSES behind him.

RADIO

*In the jungle, the mighty jungle,  
the lion sleeps tonight...*

The garage begins to RAPIDLY FILL UP WITH DEADLY EXHAUST FUMES. As the clouds envelope him, Victor begins to feel a dreamy, sleepy sensation...

RADIO

*Awinga-wap, awinga-wap, awinga-wap,  
awinga-wap...*

He closes his eyes, drifts off as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HART BACK YARD - COLOR - DAY

We're now in a world of BRILLIANT COLOR! Vivid, saturated shades of red, yellow, blue and green.

Victor lies in a hammock, soaking up the sun, enjoying a gentle breeze, smoking a cigarette. It's a perfect day. Dawn King approaches, holding two martinis, dressed in white heels, hose, panties and a bullet bra.

VICTOR

Thank you Dawn.  
(takes a sip)  
Perfect.

She gives him a lingering kiss.

DAWN  
 Double olives - just the way you  
 like it, Victor.

Victor smiles, looks around.

VICTOR  
 Say, where's my wife?

BETTY (O.S.)  
 I'm right here, darling.

CANNED LAUGHTER as we find Betty, also wearing white heels,  
 hose, panties and bullet bra. She waves a spatula as meat  
 SIZZLES on a familiar, stainless steel barbecue.

BETTY  
 I'm cooking you up the fattest,  
 juiciest, yummiest steak you ever  
 had, on our new Grillmaster 5000!

Dawn strokes Victor's hair.

DAWN  
 Your barbecue is so much better  
 than the pathetic, outdated  
 Grillmaster 2000 that my husband Ed  
 bought. He's so humiliated and he  
 wants to apologize.

VICTOR  
 (nonchalant)  
 Oh? What for?

DAWN  
 For being half the man you are.

Victor turns and sees

ED KING - dressed stupidly in a too-tight Hawaiian shirt and  
 shorts, black shoes and socks with garters.

Betty joins Victor and Dawn, all of them pointing at Ed and  
 and LAUGHING.

VICTOR  
 Go ahead, ladies...  
 (looks down at his crotch)  
 ... give it a squeeze.

The women look at one another with expressions of "do you  
 think we should?" They reach down, GIGGLING, their hands  
 closing on

A CAN OF CHARCOAL-LIGHTER FLUID - nestled in Victor's crotch. They give it a squeeze, ejecting a THIN STREAM.

ED KING - suddenly BURSTS INTO FLAMES! CANNED LAUGHTER as he begins HOWLING INHUMAN SHRIEKS OF AGONY, writhing and ineffectually beating at the flames.

WOODCHUCK (O.S.)

Pop?

A SLOW PUSH on Victor as he ROARS WITH CRUEL LAUGHTER like a vengeful god.

WOODCHUCK (O.S.)

*Hey Pop! Wake up!*

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. HART HOUSE - GARAGE

BLACK AND WHITE. Victor MUTTERS AND CHUCKLES as The Woodchuck leans in the car, shaking him awake. The garage door stands open, the exhaust fumes dissipating.

WOODCHUCK

Come on, Pop! Let's go inside.  
Hurry! Everybody's waitin!

VICTOR

Huh?

The Woodchuck scampers out the garage door. Still groggy, Victor frowns and rubs his eyes, not at all pleased to have his wonderful back-yard hallucination interrupted. An AD for RAY BUCKINGHAM'S BARBECUE PALACE PLAYS OVER THE RADIO.

RADIO

Hey, folks! Looking for a  
barbecue? Hibachi or back-yard  
smoker? Come on down to Ray's  
Barbecue Palace--

Victor angrily SNAPS OFF THE RADIO.

INT. HART HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Dazed, disheartened, Victor trudges through the front door.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

SURPRISE!

Betty, Darla, The Woodchuck, Eddie, Dawn and Little Ed King, Doug and Tab, Mr. Wilkins, his wife, MAUDE and a DOZEN OR SO NEIGHBORS cradle a white sheet-cake decorated with the word "CONGRATULATIONS!"

Stunned, Victor stands in front of the open door, streamers and confetti slowly drifting down onto his slumped shoulders. He instinctively searches for an escape route, but a dozen hands guide him into the house.

BETTY

I knew you could do it!

MR. WILKINS

Congratulations, Hart! Good show!

(pulls him aside)

We need to have a word about that "boy" of yours--

DARLA shoves past Wilkins, gives Victor a huge hug.

DARLA

Oh Daddy! You're tops!

ED

(pumping his hand)

I must admit to being surprised, big fella. Would never have guessed you had it in ya!

And, suddenly, there's The Woodchuck, looking up at Victor. Really looking up at Victor. The Woodchuck's smile slowly fades, his penny-bright expression replaced by one of confusion.

WOODCHUCK

Pop? You *did* get the raise, right?

Total PIN-DROP SILENCE. All the guests freeze for a moment, staring expectantly at Victor, waiting for him to answer The Woodchuck's question. A LONG BEAT, then:

VICTOR

Of course I did, son.

EXPLOSIVE CANNED LAUGHTER. Smiling, Victor draws his family about him, bursting with false pride.

VICTOR

And I couldn't have done it without my perfect family!

The HAPPY, CONGRATULATORY BABBLE picks up where it left off. Someone hands him a drink. He downs it quickly--not in celebration, but to ease the pain. Betty gives him a kiss. Tears of happiness fill his eyes.

VICTOR

I guess you could call me the luckiest guy in the whole, wide world!

WOODCHUCK

And the bestest Pop, too!

Betty lovingly runs her fingers along the side of his face, right next to his frozen smile...

BETTY

Well honey, I guess there's just one thing left to do...

His smile fades as he realizes what she's referring to.

EXT. RAY BUCKINGHAM'S BARBECUE PALACE - NIGHT

Establish.

INT. RAY BUCKINGHAM'S BARBECUE PALACE - NIGHT

Ray Buckingham stands at a desk, reviewing some paperwork. The swimsuit model lingers behind him, eager to be in on the moment.

VICTOR - sits in a small, uncomfortable chair in front of the desk. The Woodchuck stands behind him, a big, excited grin on his freckled face.

With two, manicured fingers, Buckingham slides a form across the desk with a friendly smile.

BUCKINGHAM

Congratulations on your brand new barbecue, Mr. Hart.

WOODCHUCK

Hot dawg!

THE FORM - headed "FINANCIAL AGREEMENT: PAYMENT PLAN."

Victor SIGHS, hesitates... then signs on the dotted line. He looks up, a grim expression on his face, just in time to catch...

BUCKINGHAM AND THE SWIMSUIT MODEL - as they trade satisfied, knowing smiles. Buckingham smoothly takes the gold Cross-pen back from Victor and slips it into his suit-pocket.

BUCKINGHAM

Now then, Mr. Hart. There's just the small matter of a down-payment...

Victor frowns, turns to The Woodchuck and hands him the car keys...

VICTOR

Son, run along out to the wagon and clear out a big space in the back. You know how to fold down the rear seat?

WOODCHUCK

Sure thing, Pop!

The Woodchuck scampers out the front door. Victor waits until he's out of sight, opens his briefcase and pulls out an object, sets it on the desk.

VICTOR ED

This should about cover it.

Buckingham looks down at

THE WOODCHUCK'S CAP'N KIDD BANK

sitting on top of the signed FINANCIAL AGREEMENT. AN EXTENDED BURST OF CANNED LAUGHTER takes us out as we...

FADE TO BLACK

THE END