

KILLING CHARLIE KAUFMAN

Written by
Wrick Cunningham

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FADE IN:

A BIG YELLOW BALLOON

Fills the frame, shiny and perfect. As we PULL BACK, it's:

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - DAY

The balloon is handed to a LITTLE GIRL by a VENDOR. The girl smiles at her MOTHER, joyous. A SECOND GIRL walks by, holding her MOTHER'S hand. The second girl scowls.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL
I want that pretty balloon, Mommy!

SECOND GIRL'S MOTHER
That's hers, dear. You can get your own.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL
I don't want another balloon! I want that one!

SECOND GIRL'S MOTHER
I'm sorry, sweetie, but....

The second little girl breaks free from her mother's hand.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL
Give me that balloon!

The second girl grabs the string above the shocked first girl's clutching hand. The first mother looks down, daunted.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL
It's my balloon!

They struggle -- the balloon slips from their hands and rises.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)
Oh, Mommy!

The four females watch the yellow balloon float away.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL
Look what you did!

FIRST LITTLE GIRL
You can have the stupid old balloon now!

The second little girl smiles big.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL
I can? Oh, thank you! See my yellow balloon, Mommy? Aren't I so very lucky?

The second girl's mother gazes down at her daughter, bewildered.

THE YELLOW BALLOON

Floats high above the ocean. As WIND BLOWS:

DISSOLVE TO:

"FADE IN:" ON A COMPUTER MONITOR SCREEN

PULLING BACK, the screen is empty... until we see "FADE OUT" in the bottom right corner. We are in:

INT. TARZANA HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

Pulling back fully, we see a MAN in his 30's sitting at a desk. He peers through wire-frame glasses at an open dictionary as he struggles to tie a heavy ROPE into some knot.

CLOSE SHOT ON DICTIONARY PAGE

The ILLUSTRATION is for "NOOSE," depicting a tied rope.

ON HIS HANDS AND ROPE

RICK CUNNINGHAM finally shapes the rope into a passable noose, lays it on the desk and contemplates it solemnly.

CLOSE ON NOOSE

The TITLE FADES UP framed inside the rope's ominous loop:
"KILLING CHARLIE KAUFMAN."

WIDER

Rick SIGHS, stands and holds up the rope -- the noose unravels to nothing.

CUT TO:

THE YELLOW BALLOON

Drifts high above the Santa Monica mountains, the ocean beyond. WIND HOWLS with a lonely whistle.

CUT TO:

INT. TARZANA HOUSE/GARAGE - DAY

Standing on a ladder, Rick ties one end of the rope to a rafter over the cement floor. He examines a knotted mess of a loop, nothing like a noose. Rick SIGHS and slips the tangled rope around his neck. He turns ceremoniously, ready. He starts to jump off the ladder, but hesitates. He braces himself....

ANGLE ON GARAGE WINDOW

Overlooking a swimming pool in the backyard.

THE YELLOW BALLOON

Eases down from the sky and lands in the pool.

RICK

Gets a curious look. He slips off the noose, hops off the ladder and goes to the window.

CLOSER ANGLE ON POOL THROUGH WINDOW

The yellow balloon eddies lazily.

RICK

Watches the balloon and shakes his head, peeved.

RICK
Goddamn birthdays.

WIDER ON GARAGE

Rick turns, climbs back up the ladder, slips the lousy noose over his head and readies to jump -- again, hesitation. A PHONE RINGS. He listens. A SECOND RING. A THIRD RING.

Rick SIGHS, frustrated, reaches behind him and produces a CORDLESS PHONE that was apparently clipped to his hip pocket.

RICK (CONT'D)
Hello?

ANDREW (V.O.)
Hey, Rick. Andrew and Darrell.

DARRELL (V.O.)
What're you up to?

RICK
(slight beat)
Just hanging around the garage.

ANDREW (V.O.)
I wouldn't guess you to be the handy type. We've got good news and bad news.

Rick feels the tangled rope at his neck pensively.

RICK
Did you say "bad noose?"

DARRELL (V.O.)

Yes, but the good news first -- we got a show picked up and we want you to write on it.

Rick smiles, the rope around his neck still.

ANDREW (V.O.)

The bad news is that out of our four pilots, the one the network boneheads picked was the Donny Most Show.

DARRELL (V.O.)

Dead silence, they heard. Got any better offers?

Rick gazes up and tugs the rope tied to the rafter playfully.

INT. TARZANA HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Rick enters from the garage, excited. Standing at the counter, a pretty WOMAN in her 30's, SUE CUNNINGHAM, looks up from cutting the tops off of carrots.

SUE

Sorry I couldn't get the phone. What're you doing out there?

Rick grabs her shoulders, smiling.

RICK

I got a show!

Sue smiles and they kiss.

SUE

I knew that yellow balloon landing in our pool was a good omen.

Rick gazes out the sliding door, realizing how close he came to missing his phone call. He smiles, intrigued.

RICK

Maybe it was.

ANGLE ON POOL

The yellow balloon swirls around, then POPS.

RICK AND SUE

Both stare at the pool, shaken.

RICK (CONT'D)

Omens are bullshit.

ANGLE ON POPPED BALLOON SHREDS

Sinking fast into the water.

CUT TO:

A DONNY MOST HEADSHOT PHOTO

He smiles big, older than we last saw him. WIDER REVEALS:

INT. SITCOM CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

EIGHT WRITERS sit around a long table, most with coffee, CHATTING; TWO WOMEN and the rest MEN, including Rick. The Donny Most photo is taped to a wall at the room's center. TWO MEN enter with folders, amiable and in their 30's. Everyone turns as they sit at the end of the table.

ANDREW

Morning, people. Welcome to the Donny Most Show.

Everyone CHUCKLES ironically.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Now we all know we'd rather be doing something else than writing on this show, but the network has promised not to cancel it for the whole twenty-six episodes.

DARRELL

Rumor has it that the top bitch suit is secretly Donny's sister or has banged him for years or both.

Everyone LAUGHS.

ANDREW

Whatever the ugly reason, you guys have a job for a full year, if you can stand it, and as we all know, that's pretty rare. We'd like to introduce everyone.

DARRELL

First, as I'm sure you all realize, we have Richie Cunningham.

Everyone LAUGHS or smiles except Rick.

ANDREW

There was no way we could resist hiring Richie C. to write for Ralph Malph.

The chuckles die down as everyone watches Rick's humorless face.

RICK
Ralph Malph?

Darrell and Andrew eye Rick, thrown.

ANDREW
You know. "Happy Days?"

Rick stares, stiffening up. Darrell peers at Rick, unsure.

DARRELL
The television show?

Rick looks panicked and embarrassed.

RICK
I don't watch TV.

Everyone has stony faces.

DARRELL
Are you fucking kidding? You don't watch
TV and you're working in sitcoms?

Clearly nervous, Rick gazes at Darrell blankly.

RICK
What's a sitcom?

SILENCE hangs over unsettled faces.

ANGLE ON ONE GUY

Who breaks into a smile, watching the embarrassed Rick.

INT. RICK'S SITCOM OFFICE - DAY

Rick sits at a computer, staring at the screen.

ANGLE ON MONITOR

"FADE IN:" is the only thing on the screen.

BACK WIDE

The writer who smiled at the conference table leans in.

CHARLIE
Am I disturbing you?

Rick looks over.

RICK
No, come in.

CHARLIE KAUFMAN enters, smiling slyly. In his 30's, he's an unimposing, smaller-framed man.

CHARLIE
Charlie Kaufman.

Charlie reaches over the desk. Rick stands, reaching.

RICK
Rick Cunningham.

Rick and Charlie shake, then Rick sits back down. Charlie sits in a chair, grinning.

CHARLIE
So all that about not watching television was an act, right?

RICK
I never watch TV shows, ever. But I sure as hell know about "Happy Days."

Charlie smiles more.

CHARLIE
Yeah?

RICK
Ever since that accursed show hit the air, I haven't had a week go by without some cretin calling me Richie C. or asking me how the Fonz is.

CHARLIE
It is sort of funny then for you to be writing for Donny Most.

RICK
I guess. Are you the guy who wrote on the Chris Elliott show?

CHARLIE
That would be me.

RICK
That's my favorite show of all time.

CHARLIE
I thought you didn't watch TV.

Rick eyes Charlie, stone-faced, and shrugs.

RICK
I don't even know who Chris Elliott is.
But since you're the only one in the room
(MORE)

RICK(CONT'D)

who knew I was full of shit, I want to
get on your good side.

Charlie smiles at the straightforwardness of Rick.

RICK (CONT'D)

So what was this Chris Elliott like?

CHARLIE

He's a pretty strange guy.

RICK

I like him already.

Charlie smiles, then Rick finally does.

INT. DONNY MOST SHOW SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

A run-through is in progress. SUITS sit together in the stands, watching stiffly. On the other side of the aisle, the writers sit slumped, bored. Present-day DONNY MOST moves around a sitcom living room set, surrounded by his apparent SITCOM WIFE, his wacky NEIGHBOR, LANCE, and a sitcom TEENAGE BOY and GIRL. They all read their lines from scripts.

DONNY

So you mean no one mentioned my birthday
all day because everyone actually did
forget it?

SITCOM WIFE

Sorry, honey, but things have been so
hectic.

SITCOM TEENAGE SON

You wanted me to clean my room, remember,
Dad? If you only had a birthday cake
right now, boy, you could eat it off of
my floor!

SITCOM TEENAGE GIRL

And I was at the gas station like you
asked, taking off my top.

Donny drops his mouth open, feigning shock.

DONNY

I said to top off your tank!

The sitcom daughter gives a coy, sexy look.

SITCOM TEENAGE GIRL

Oops!

ANGLE ON STANDS

The executives all CRACK UP.

BACK ON SET

LANCE

Besides, who wants to be reminded they're another year closer to cuddlin' up with a nice, cozy dirt blanket?

(signature line with gesture)

Not me, nooooooo siiiiiiiiir-eeeeeeeeee!

THE EXECUTIVES

CRACK UP again, one guy slapping his knee.

THE WRITERS

Roll their eyes, agonized. All the writers except Charlie lean over, put their index fingers to Rick's head and pretend to shoot him.

BACK ON SET

DONNY

Well, if a fella ultimately has no choice but to die, is it so much to ask once a year for a little yummy cake and a few cheery balloons to make up for that impending demise?

Donny drops his script, shaking his head.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Jesus, this is terrible. It's so depressing.

Darrell and Andrew are on the floor.

ANDREW

It's bucking the obligatory surprise birthday episode every sitcom ever made has done.

DARRELL

We can be the first show to twist that idiotic convention on its ear.

DONNY

This isn't all-star wrestling, guys. It has to be funny!

(turns to stands)

Which fucking quote-unquote "writer" squeezed out this piece of shit?

Rick raises his hand.

RICK
That'd be me.

DONNY
You who? What's your name?

Everyone waits on pins and needles, fighting grins.

RICK
Richard Cunningham.

Everyone CRACKS UP, SNICKERING. Donny nods, fuming.

DONNY
Yeah, real fucking funny. And I'm the Fonz.

DARRELL
That really is his name, Donny.

ANDREW
Seriously.

Donny stares, taken aback.

DONNY
Really?
(slowly smiles)
You mean Richie C. is writing for Ralph Mouth? That's kind of funny, you know.

No writers smile.

DARRELL
We've all known that for three weeks 'cause we look at the fucking staff lists.

Donny loses his smile, angry again.

DONNY
Having Richie C. is the only thing funny about this show so far. This script needs a total rewrite! That's lunch!

All the writers roll their eyes. The DIRECTOR glares at Donny.

SHOW DIRECTOR
Donny, I'm the director -- I call lunch.

DONNY
Oh, bite me. Who do you think you are, Ron Howard?!

Donny marches off the set and the director flips him off.

INT. SITCOM OFFICES HALLWAY - DAY

Rick passes a FEMALE WRITER, LISA, in the hall.

LISA
(teasing)
Nice going, *Richie*. You should be writing
for "Un-happy Days."

RICK
Aren't I?

Rick knocks on a closed door as he opens it.

RICK (CONT'D)
Hey, Charlie....

INT. CHARLIE'S SITCOM OFFICE

Rick stops as he sees Charlie has red eyes, looking upset.
Charlie wipes tears from his cheek, embarrassed.

RICK
(backing out)
Jesus, I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
It's okay, come in.

RICK
You sure?

CHARLIE
Yeah, just shut the door.

Rick enters, shutting the door, and sits.

RICK
Want to talk about it?

Charlie shrugs, shakes his head, then SNIFFS.

CHARLIE
My marriage is... kind of messed up.

RICK
I'm sorry to hear that.

Charlie tries to smile, but can't pull it off.

RICK (CONT'D)
Is it hopeless?

Charlie looks at Rick, getting an extremely sad face.

CHARLIE

I think so.

Charlie swivels his chair away. Rick stares at the back of Charlie's head, thinking of what to say.

RICK

I'm not exactly great with these kinds of situations, but if you ever need to talk to somebody, there are people all up and down this hall.

Charlie's back shakes as he chuckles silently.

RICK (CONT'D)

And if you decide the bitch simply has to die, get her hired here and tell Donny she's me. You'd be single in a week.

Charlie swivels back around, smiling with red eyes. Rick smiles.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

Rick starts up his car, which is a piece of crap, and turns to look as he backs out of his parking space. He shifts gears and starts down the road past parked cars, picking up speed.

DONNY MOST

Darts in front of Rick's car from between two vans -- turns with frightened surprise as RICK'S CAR HITS HIM, knocking him down.

DONNY

Augh!

WIDE AGAIN

Rick gets shocked eyes as the car bounces up -- Donny SCREAMS out and Rick brakes.

RICK

Uh oh.

INT. SITCOM CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The writers sit around the table glaring angrily into space -- except for Charlie and TOM, gruff-looking and older than the others, who have faint smiles.

TOM

You gotta admit, it's sort of funny that Ralph the Mouth got run over by Richie C.

Most people glare at Tom. Tom smiles, deflated.

TOM (CONT'D)
I think it's funny.

The conference room door opens -- in the hall, THREE COPS are parting from Rick.

COP 1
If we have any more questions, we'll contact you.

RICK
Sure thing. Good night.

The cops leave and Rick enters the room, slowing as he sees the angry faces.

RICK (CONT'D)
Hi, guys.

No answer. Finally:

TOM
So did they get the name of that sleazebag who dove under your car?

Tom smiles at Rick, who tries to smile back.

RICK
Look, it wasn't my fault. Otherwise, those cops would be carting me off to jail for my second honeymoon. Right?
(uncomfortable silence)
There was a witness and they said Donny was completely to blame. The cops were laughing about it!

Andrew and Darrell enter the room, downcast. Everyone looks up.

ANDREW
Hey, everyone. Donny's legs are going to take about twelve weeks to heal.

Several people GASP. A WOMAN WRITER, JULIE, drops her head to the table with a THUNK.

DARRELL
(restrained anger)
So the show is cancelled.

About half the writers say:

SEVERAL WRITERS
Fuck!

Julie stands, grabs her things and walks huffily out of the room. Lisa stands and leaves, glaring at Rick. At the door, Lisa gives Rick the finger. The guys stand up, one after another, and leave, all with looks of hate at Rick. One man stops and peers into Rick's face.

ART

I just bought a new house, asshole.

Darrell glares at Rick, his jaw clenched.

DARRELL

I don't know if you're a good writer, but you sure can't drive for shit.

Darrell storms out, trying to contain himself. Andrew musters a smile and holds out his hand.

ANDREW

Great working with you -- the whole darn month. Let's try two next time.

Rick lifelessly shakes Andrew's hand, then Andrew exits. Tom stands, stretching.

TOM

Well, Richie C., nice knowing you. And the next time you see the Fonz, tell him to get the fuck out of your way.

Tom pats Rick on the back and exits. Charlie remains seated.

RICK

You wouldn't happen to have a can of gas and a match, would you?

CHARLIE

I want to thank you.

Rick looks surprised.

RICK

Why?

Charlie stands and wanders over.

CHARLIE

I've hated every second working on this show. I'm thrilled to be put out of its misery. So thanks.

RICK

You're so very welcome.

CHARLIE

(grins)

I wish I could have seen his face when it happened.

Rick smiles slightly.

RICK

It was pretty damn funny, between you and me. He was like a freckly, red-faced deer in headlights.

Charlie holds out his hand and they shake.

CHARLIE

You're a very weird, screwed-up guy.

RICK

Thanks.

CHARLIE

Let's keep in touch.

Charlie heads for the door.

RICK

Good luck with your marriage.

Charlie turns around with a cynical look.

CHARLIE

Can you get that cancelled, too?

RICK

I'm afraid that's your job.

Charlie smiles and exits. Rick turns and looks at the empty room. He spots the Donny Most photo on the wall, glances out the door, goes over and grabs a MARKER off an easel.

ANGLE ON RICK

He marks something on the photo. He stands back, smiles, tosses the marker.

RICK (CONT'D)

See you later, Ralph.

Rick exits the room.

ANGLE ON PHOTO

BLACK MARKS in the zigzag pattern of TIRE TREADS cover Donny's smiling face.

DISSOLVE TO:

A THINLY-TREADED TIRE

Rolls forward to a stop. CAMERA RISES to see Rick at the wheel of the same crummy car. He gets out and shuts the door, the camera rising to reveal it's:

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT SOMEWHERE - DAY

Over the widest shot, the words FADE IN: "TEN MONTHS LATER."

INT. SITCOM PRODUCER'S OFFICE - DAY

The MAN and WOMAN sitting across from Rick are asshole Hollywood types with stylish clothes.

RON

So, Rick, we absolutely adored your sample scripts.

RAE

Fucking adored them.

Ron lazily scoops up a script and taps it.

RON

I practically busted a gut reading your "Roseanne."

RICK

I don't have a Roseanne script.

Embarrassed, Ron flings the script and searches in a messy pile.

RAE

A Larry Sanders, right?

RICK

I don't have HBO.

RON

(flustered)

What's your, uh, last name, Rick?

RICK

Cunningham.

Ron stops shuffling scripts and looks up, grinning.

RON
You mean, like Richie Cunningham?

Rick doesn't even faintly smile.

RICK
Yes, like.

Rae smiles big.

RAE
Oh. I didn't notice that. It would've been priceless if you could have worked on that short-lived Donny Most show!

RICK
(flatly)
As a matter of fact, I did.

Ron looks up from script-searching.

RON
You did?
(loses smile)
Wait. You weren't the one who killed him and got the show cancelled, were you?

Rae gets a worried look. Rick eyes them cynically.

RICK
He didn't actually die, but, yes, I ran over him.

Ron immediately stops looking for the script and smiles curtly.

RON
You know, I just remembered why I can't find your samples. We made two stacks and your scripts are in the shit pile -- no offense. Guess our assistant fucked up calling you in. Sorry.

Ron smiles. Rae catches on and smiles also.

RAE
But don't worry, her bony ass is history.

RON
Thanks for coming.

They smile stiffly at Rick, who eyes them, fuming.

INT. RICK'S CAR/STREET - DAY

Rick drives along, talking on a CELL PHONE.

RICK
Please say you're kidding, Lucy.

LUCY (V.O.)
Ron didn't want me to tell you, but
they're nervous about your reputation for
being a star-killer.

Rick shakes his head in complete disbelief.

RICK
Star-killer? That's the seventh meeting
where they've used that excuse!

LUCY (V.O.)
That's right. And I don't have any more
lined up for you.

RICK
Christ, I'm trapped in a nightmare.

LUCY (V.O.)
Maybe taking a year off is not such a bad
idea. Let this all die down.

Rick stares lifelessly.

RICK
I'll talk to you later.

Rick hangs up the phone, SIGHS emotionally.

EXT. DISNEY STUDIO - DAY

Rick walks along. He gets a panicked look as he spots:

HENRY WINKLER

The Fonz himself is walking toward Rick.

WIDER

Rick looks down at the ground, acting oddly. Henry eyes him
curiously. Rick veers far away as he passes Henry.

HENRY WINKLER
Wait, don't I know you from...?

RICK
(looking down)
Nope, run for your life.

Henry watches Rick hurry away. Henry shrugs and heads on.

INT. DISNEY BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Rick wanders, unsure, checking door nameplates. He stops at one and KNOCKS. From inside:

CHARLIE (O.C.)
Come in.

Rick opens the door and enters:

INT. CHARLIE'S DISNEY OFFICE

Charlie sits behind a desk at a computer. He smiles.

CHARLIE
Hi. How's it going?

RICK
Fine.

Rick sits, defeated. Charlie glances at his monitor and nonchalantly clicks it off. Rick sulks, upset.

RICK (CONT'D)
Actually, everything's fucked. I just had another meeting die when they figured out I'm the guy who killed Donny Most.

CHARLIE
Thanks to this.

Charlie points to his wall, grinning.

ANGLE ON FRAMED "VARIETY" ON WALL

The top headline reads:

RICHIE C. RUNS DOWN RALPH MOUTH; "DONNY MOST" D.O.A.

BACK ON OFFICE

Charlie tries to control his gleeful smile. Rick stares at the paper, then shuts his eyes, anguished.

RICK
Holy shit.

CHARLIE
Too bad no one noticed those crucial quotation marks.

RICK
I hate to think of the trouble poor Donny is having getting work.

CHARLIE

It's a bummer, Rick. But a funny one.

RICK

Enough about my hell -- how's your development deal going?

CHARLIE

They wanted me to work on an awful show, but I weaseled out of it. I'm working on a screenplay right now.

RICK

Jesus, it must be nice to get work and not be a star-killer.

Charlie studies Rick a moment.

CHARLIE

If you don't get on a show, are you still thinking about going back to Texas?

Rick looks at him, unhappy.

RICK

Maybe. For awhile.
(indicates computer)
So are you going to let me see what you're working on?

CHARLIE

Not yet. It's pretty weird.

RICK

Well, I hope so. Have you tested it on any of your other friends?

Charlie looks at Rick uncomfortably.

CHARLIE

I don't have too many friends.

Rick gazes back at Charlie.

RICK

Me either. I ran over them all.

They both smile as a moment of silence passes.

RICK (CONT'D)

Whenever it's ready, I'd love to read it.

CHARLIE

Okay.

Rick stands up. Charlie stands, too.

RICK

I'd better go. Traffic's bad already and I still haven't told Sue the news.

CHARLIE

Call me before you run off to Texas.

RICK

I will. Good luck with that mystery script. Just remember, these Hollywood honchos say they want weird, but when it comes down to it, they always wuss out.

CHARLIE

Probably.

Rick smiles and exits. Charlie waits a beat, shuts the door, locks it, sits down, then turns back on his computer monitor. He gazes at the screen and grins to himself.

INT. TARZANA HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

Boxes are stacked around the room. Rick looks at an OPEN BOOK:

CLOSE ANGLE ON BOOK

It's the DICTIONARY, open at the NOOSE ILLUSTRATION.

BACK WIDER

Rick smiles, shakes his head and closes the dictionary, setting it into a box. The DOORBELL sounds. Rick looks up.

INT. TARZANA HOUSE/ENTRY

Sue opens the door. Charlie stands there.

SUE

Charlie, come in.

Charlie smiles and enters. Boxes are stacked everywhere.

CHARLIE

Hi, Sue.

A TODDLER BOY, CHRIS, runs up and hides behind Sue, shy.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Hi, Chris.

Chris answers from behind Sue.

CHRIS
Hi, Charlie.

Rick enters from the hall.

RICK
Hey. Glad you could stop by.

Charlie surveys the boxes and general disarray, smiling.

CHARLIE
You sure have a lot of stuff to pack.

Chris holds out his hands in imitated exasperation.

CHRIS
Jesus, what a mess!

Charlie and Sue LAUGH. Rick looks off guiltily.

EXT. TARZANA HOUSE/PATIO - DAY

Rick and Charlie stroll alongside the pool, the view of hills beyond, sipping beers.

RICK
In case I don't talk to you for awhile,
how are things with Carla?

There is a long pause.

CHARLIE
I think we're getting divorced.

RICK
Well, shit.

CHARLIE
It's for the best, believe me.

Rick SIGHS, tries to change the subject.

RICK
So you never told me anything about your
screenplay.

CHARLIE
I can't talk about it yet.

Rick leans on the rail, looking out.

RICK
Come on. Give me something to grin about
while I drive to Texas.

Charlie SIGHS and leans on the rail, too.

CHARLIE

Well... it's about a guy who gets this terrible job. And the offices are so crummy, they're actually between floors, so you have to bend over to walk around.

RICK

That sounds funny.

CHARLIE

This guy ends up finding a little door behind his file cabinet and it turns out to be a way into John Malkovich's mind.

Rick has a strange, skeptical look.

RICK

No shit. Why John Malkovich?

CHARLIE

I don't know. I really like him as an actor, I guess.

RICK

(CHUCKLES)

Well, at the least, it'll be a good sample for any offbeat assignments that come along -- especially if they happen to star John Malkovich.

CHARLIE

I guess.

Rick grins and takes a sip of beer.

RICK

Jesus, Charlie. You may be weirder than me. You poor creature.

They exchange smiles and gaze out at:

ANGLE ON TARZANA VIEW

Golden hills below blue skies.

DISSOLVE TO:

AUSTIN HILL COUNTRY PANORAMA

A view of green hills with a river weaving its way through. We pan around until we come to stop on Rick sitting in shorts on a deck, a notepad and pen in his lap. It's:

EXT. AUSTIN HOUSE/DECK - DAY

A PHONE RINGS from inside. Rick sets down his pad and enters:

INT. AUSTIN HOUSE/FAMILY ROOM

The house is nicer than the previous house. Rick grabs a phone on the snack bar.

RICK

Hello.

LUCY (V.O.)

Hi, it's Lucy. Listen, they're interested in you at a new Dana Carvey sketch show.

Rick's face lights up agreeably.

RICK

Sounds good. I like Carvey.

LUCY (V.O.)

There's one catch. It's in New York. Are you willing to move there?

Rick looks into the adjacent living room -- Sue is very pregnant, walking, holding a sleeping toddler Chris.

RICK

I need the work.

LUCY (V.O.)

I think you'd like New York. So I'll tell them you're interested. By the way, your friend Charlie Kaufman is already working at the show.

RICK

Really? Wow, that would be great. He's from New York, he could show me around.

LUCY (V.O.)

It wouldn't hurt to call him. Maybe he can help get you in. I'll call back with the number, I can't find it right now.

RICK

Talk to you then.

Rick hangs up the phone. He smiles big.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AUSTIN HOUSE/DECK - SUNSET

In a chair, Rick observes a beautiful sunset, the cordless phone on his lap. Sue rocks Chris in a swinging chair. The PHONE RINGS. Rick answers it cheerfully.

RICK
Hello?

LUCY (V.O.)
It's Lucy.

Rick grabs a notepad and pen on the deck.

RICK
I'm ready. What's the number?

LUCY (V.O.)
I've got bad news.

Rick's face falls.

LUCY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You didn't get Dana Carvey.

Rick shuts his eyes, crushed. Sue's face falls, too.

LUCY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A couple of the guys really pulled for you, but the head writer wanted somebody else. Sorry.

RICK
Thanks for calling.

LUCY (V.O.)
So when are you coming back?

RICK
After the baby's born, I guess.

LUCY (V.O.)
Let me know when you're coming and I'll line up lots of meetings. You wouldn't like New York anyway.

Rick hangs up.

SUE
You didn't get it?

Rick shakes his head. Sue picks up Chris and opens the door.

SUE (CONT'D)
Sorry, Ricky. Something will come up.

Sue goes inside with Chris and shuts the door.

ANGLE ON SUNSET

The view is quite dark, mist forming on the river below.

CLOSE ON RICK

He stares, obviously undone. The PHONE RINGS. Rick answers instantly with hope.

RICK

Hello?

CHARLIE (V.O.)

It's Charlie. I just heard. Sorry.

RICK

Oh well.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Let me tell you, it's actually a blessing. The head writer is a total maniac. You'd hate New York anyway.

RICK

That's what I hear. Good luck with the show.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Actually, I don't think I'll be here much longer.

RICK

It's already cancelled? I didn't run down Carvey, I can prove it. Why are you leaving?

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I don't know if it's a good idea to tell you right after you got your bad news.

RICK

I'm a tough guy.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

It looks like "Being John Malkovich" might actually happen.

RICK

Are you serious?

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I am. Believe it or not, John Malkovich called me the other day -- from France

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

where he lives. My agent got the script to him and he's interested in it.

Rick watches the darkening sky, stunned.

RICK

Jesus, Charlie. That is unbelievable.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I'm pretty excited.

Rick stares out, fighting emotion. A long pause from Charlie.

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

Listen, I have a feeling I'll be back in Los Angeles within a couple weeks.

RICK

We're, uh, we'll have to go back soon ourselves. I've got to get some work.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I still have my place, so when you're back, call me. Okay?

RICK

Sure. Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yeah?

RICK

I'm really happy for you.

VOICES are heard in the background. Charlie speaks distantly:

CHARLIE

Oh, okay.

(into phone)

Listen, Rick, I've got to go to a meeting. We'll talk soon.

Rick clicks off the phone and lifelessly goes inside.

EXT. AUSTIN HOUSE/FRONT - DUSK

The front door light turns on, illuminating the front of the large, extremely nice house.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WEST HILLS HOUSE - DAY

A small, modest, old tract house -- many notches down from the Austin home. The yard has very patchy grass.

INT. WEST HILLS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM

Boxes are stacked everywhere. Chris the toddler wanders around. Sue passes through with a three-month-old BABY NICKY in her arms. Rick is unpacking boxes as the PHONE RINGS. Sue answers the phone.

SUE

Hello? Hi, Lucy. Yes, it's Nicky. Thanks.

Sue hands the phone to Rick.

RICK

Hello.

LUCY (V.O.)

So, glad you're back in town?

RICK

As long as I can land a job tomorrow.

LUCY (V.O.)

Actually, your meeting's cancelled.

Rick slumps, deflated.

RICK

Because they died, I hope.

LUCY (V.O.)

The show-runner they hired yesterday worked on Donny Most and still blames you for his ruined marriage. So you're out.

Rick SIGHS heavily.

RICK

Let me know when something else comes up.

LUCY (V.O.)

I will. And you'll never believe this -- your friend Charlie sold that dumb script of his.

Rick listens intently.

RICK

"Being John Malkovich?"

LUCY (V.O.)

Yep. I'm just glad it's not my money they're using. Might not hurt to call up and congratulate him. You've lost a lot of contacts. Maybe taking a year off wasn't such a good idea.

Rick stares, feeling quite damned.

INT. WEST HILLS HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

It's a cramped room stacked with boxes. Rick enters with the phone and shuts the door. He goes to a small box on an empty book shelf, sifts through loose scraps of paper.

RICK

Here we go.

Rick sets down a note, sits in a chair and dials the number. He CLEARS his throat as we hear the line RING a few times. The phone is answered:

PHONE MESSAGE (V.O.)

We're sorry. The number you have dialed has been disconnected.

Rick stares into space, stunned.

PHONE MESSAGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If you believe you have reached this message in error, please hang up and dial again.

The ugly "ERROR" TONE SOUNDS again and the message starts over. We MOVE IN on Rick's eyes until they fill the frame.

PHONE MESSAGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We're sorry, so really very, very sorry, but Charlie's number you have dialed has been disconnected because he probably moved into some killer place in the Hollywood Hills and you'll never hear from that lucky son of a bitch again for as long as you live, Rick, you unemployed star-killing loser.

The "ERROR" TONE sounds again as Rick's crazed eyes fill the frame and we:

FADE TO BLACK.

"3 YEARS LATER"

FADE IN:

EXT. WEST HILLS HOUSE - DAY

The house is older and uglier, the yard more bare. Rick's same crappy car sits in the driveway, but it's uglier. The front door opens and Rick shuffles out in his robe and flips flops. He ambles down the sidewalk, reaches down and picks up a fat SUNDAY PAPER. When he straightens back up, he grabs his back, wincing.

RICK
 Jesus. Gotta switch to the online
 edition.

Rick turns and shuffles back in.

INT. WEST HILLS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rick sits on a broken-down sofa. FIVE NOISY KIDS run around, knocking things over and fighting. Rick somehow tunes it out and sifts through the LA Times. He pulls out the "Calendar" section, flips through pages, then stops. He gets a stunned look.

ANGLE ON PAPER

Rick turns back one page -- it's a FULL-PAGE AD for "BEING JOHN MALKOVICH." The top reads: "STARTS FRIDAY."

CLOSE ON RICK

He looks like he's having a stroke. His cheeks quiver as his skin flushes red, teeth clenched.

RICK
 Sue!

ANGLE ON KITCHEN DOORWAY

A rough-looking, 200 pound Sue steps into view with a scowl.

SUE
 What is it? I don't wanna burn the
 bologna!

RICK

Looks sick and pale.

RICK
 Charlie's movie... starts this Friday.

WIDER ANGLE ON BOTH

Sue shakes her head, disgusted. She looks about Fifty years old, even though Rick is under Forty.

SUE
 So the hell what? It'll be gone next
 Friday.

RICK
 You're probably right. Poor Charlie.
 Guess I'll go see it Friday.

SUE
I'd take a book if I were you.

Smoke wafts in around Sue's head -- she turns, angry.

SUE (CONT'D)
There goes our goddamn breakfast!

Sue stomps into the kitchen.

ANGLE ON RICK

He looks back down at the ad, looking sicker by the millisecond.

EXT. CENTURY CITY THEATERS - DAY

Rick stands in a line, studying the film information marquees.

ANGLE ON A MARQUEE

It reads: "BEING JOHN MALKOVICH" with show times.

WIDER

It's Rick's turn. He steps up to the window.

RICK
One adult, for the Malkovich thing.

The female TICKET SELLER gawks at Rick, aghast.

TICKET SELLER
You mean "Being John Malkovich?"

RICK
(daunted)
Yeah, that one.

TICKET SELLER
Be respectful. Say it.

Rick looks at her like she's crazy.

RICK
One adult for "Being John Malkovich,"
please.

The ticket seller smiles, satisfied.

TICKET SELLER
Sorry, all showings today are sold out.

Rick's eyes bug out, dismayed, and he turns away.

TICKET SELLER (CONT'D)

Hey, mister -- you'd better buy your ticket for tomorrow now. You do want to see it, don't you?

Rick turns back to her.

RICK

I sort of have to.

Rick produces money from his wallet.

TICKET SELLER

If you want to be cool, yeah.

Rick weakly sticks money in the slot.

INT. CENTURY CITY MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Rick watches a flickering screen with a nauseated face. We PULL BACK from him to reveal the AUDIENCE around him. Everyone is LAUGHING. Not one seat is empty.

EXT. CENTURY CITY THEATERS - DAY

At mall level, Rick steps off the escalator, looking ready to throw up. Everyone around him is LAUGHING and chatting.

MOVIE GOER 1

That was the best film I've ever seen.

MOVIE GOER 2

It was fucking genius!

MOVIE GOER 3

That writer is totally trippin'.

Rick flinches. He plods aimlessly, overwhelmed by misery. Into frame wanders ART, a "Donny Most" writer. Art stares, shell-shocked, holding his stomach. They spot each other.

ART

Hey, you're....

RICK

Rick. And you're....

ART

Art. Have you seen...?

RICK

Just did.

ART
 (smile attempt)
 So. What'd you think?

RICK
 Funny, huh?

ART
 Oh yeah. Weird, huh?

RICK
 Oh, sure. Did you... like it?

Art struggles for a long time, trying to do what he must do. Finally, he gets out, like painful burps:

ART
 I... thought... it was...
 (extra long hold-up)
 ...brilliant.

Art looks to Rick to see if it worked.

ART (CONT'D)
 You?

Rick eyes Art for a long time, starts to say something. Then:

RICK
 I'll see you around, Art.

ART
 Yeah, later.

Art limps away. Rick walks in another direction, coming to a poster for "Being John Malkovich." He cringes as he passes.

EXT. RICK'S CAR/SANTA MONICA BLVD. - DAY

Rick drives his car onto Santa Monica Boulevard and stops at a red light. He turns and looks at the BUS STOP -- multiple POSTERS for "Being John Malkovich" adorn it. Rick SIGHS sickly, then drives forward.

EXT. RICK'S CAR/SANTA MONICA BLVD. BY 405 - DAY

Waiting for a light, Rick looks left and sees the entire SIDE OF A BUS ADVERTISING "Being John Malkovich." Rick jerks his eyes away and steers into the long line at the on-ramp light.

EXT. RICK'S CAR/405 ONRAMP

Rick looks over to see a ragged HOMELESS MAN holding a crudely-printed SIGN: "Will work for Bean John Malkavith tickit ."

The man's hollow eyes plead to Rick, who looks forward, aghast. In front of Rick sits an unoccupied TAXI -- the trunk bears an AD DISPLAY for "Being John Malkovich." TEN CARS sit ahead of the taxi -- it's going to be a long wait.

Rick gets panicked eyes and floors it, swerving around the taxi into the carpool lane -- a car SCREECHES to a stop behind him. Rick races onto the freeway with wild eyes. A COP is parked, waiting for carpool lane violators -- the COP CAR LIGHTS go on and the SIREN WAILS once.

EXT. RICK'S CAR/SHOULDER BY 405 ONRAMP - DAY

The cop smiles into the passenger window.

COP 2

Did you know you need two or more passengers to be in the carpool lane?

RICK

Yes, officer, I just... I'm... I know it's two.

COP 2

You do? Well, you were in the carpool lane, but I only see one person in your car. That is, unless you've got some other folks who crawled inside of you through a tiny little door.

ANGLE ON RICK

He stares, transfixed, seemingly having a stroke.

BACK ON COP

The cop smiles cheesily.

COP 2 (CONT'D)

You know, that hilarious new movie?

ANGLE ON RICK

His eyes tell us he's going over the edge -- Rick SHRIEKS insanely as we surge past his head, rocket into the sky above a jam-packed 405 and face the Sepulveda pass, over which SIX ROARING THUNDERBIRD JETS just finish SKYWRITING:

WE ALL LOVE CHARLIE'S MOVIE!

Rick's SHRIEK reverberates horrifically.

DISSOLVE TO:

"FADE IN:" ON A COMPUTER MONITOR

A shot so close that the font is distorted and ugly. We're in:

INT. WEST HILLS HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

Rick sits at the computer, staring out the dirty window at a horrible unkempt yard. A stereo plays CLASSICAL MUSIC, which ends. An ANNOUNCER comes on.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next, as promised for this Film Day
Friday, we're going to hear selections
from that fabulous Oscar-nominated film,
"Being John Malkovich...."

Rick scrambles to grab the remote.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...written, of course, by my new favorite
scribe, Charlie Kauf--

Rick clicks the STEREO OFF, breathing fast with wild eyes. He sets down the remote and turns his gaze back out the window.

RICK

Okay, I have to clear my head, just let
images flow.

Rick shuts his eyes, attempting to relax. As his mind frees up:

DISSOLVE TO:

A LIMBO SET

Charlie Kaufman sits in an elegant overstuffed chair, wearing a pure white suit with red sneakers. Into frame walks Rick, wearing an old T-shirt, shorts and white socks, no shoes. Charlie looks up, smiling warmly.

CHARLIE

If it isn't Rick Cunningham. Great to see
you.

Charlie holds out his hand, but doesn't stand up. Rick reaches down and shakes Charlie's hand.

RICK

Charlie.

CHARLIE

Have a seat.

Charlie motions with his hand... Rick turns -- there's a DIRTY COMMODE sitting behind him. Rick smiles curtly, sets down the lid, FLUSHES and sits on the toilet.

RICK

Thanks.

CHARLIE

So what've you been doing with yourself?

RICK

Not much. You?

CHARLIE

Oh, I'm sure you're well aware of what I've been up to -- unless you've been living in a cave.

RICK

Not yet.

CHARLIE

It's been one wild roller coaster ride, let me tell you.

RICK

I can just imagine.

(odd beat)

Of course... I can imagine this even better.

Rick stands and swings a BIG AX into ready stance, grinning. Charlie squirms in his chair, SHRIEKING.

CHARLIE

No, no, Daddy!

Rick pauses with ax raised, looking about, baffled. Charlie peers around confused, too.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Daddy. Daddy.

Rick looks upwards, puzzled.

CUT TO:

RICK AT THE COMPUTER

Snapping out of his fantasy, turns to:

WIDER TO INCLUDE CHRIS

Six-year-old Chris watches Rick, unsure.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Can you help me get on Lego-dot-com?

Rick stares at him a moment.

RICK
Uh, sure. Just let Daddy finish his
thought, okay?

CHRIS
Okay.

Rick turns forward and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

LIMBO SET

Rick stands, waiting, leaning on the ax, bored. Charlie reads a trade paper. Rick looks upwards:

RICK
Okay? Good.

Rick swings the ax back into position. Charlie ditches the trade paper under the cushion and resumes cringing and SHRIEKING.

CHARLIE
Don't kill me! I have a meeting today
with Scorsese!

RICK
Well, it's cancelled!

Rick lunges forward and plants the ax in Charlie's chest -- Charlie SCREAMS as blood sprays everywhere. Rick tugs the ax out of Charlie and strikes again. Charlie SCREAMS and drops to the floor, limp.

ANGLE TO ONLY SEE PART OF CHARLIE'S BODY

Rick hacks viciously at Charlie's neck with the ax, heaving with each chop. Rick drops the ax and, looking down with a grin, lifts up CHARLIE'S DECAPITATED HEAD, blood dripping from the neck. Charlie's eyes are open in shock.

CHARLIE'S HEAD
Marty will be so disappointed.

Rick hoists the head high.

RICK
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!

CUT TO:

RICK AT HIS DESK

He opens his eyes, smiles and turns to Chris, who still waits.

RICK (CONT'D)
 (relieved SIGH)
 Ahhhh. Okay, sweetie, let's get on Lego-dot-com.

Rick stands and exits with Chris happily.

EXT. VIDEO STORE - DAY

Rick locks his crummy car and enters through the doors.

INT. VIDEO STORE

Rick comes immediately to a giant DISPLAY for "Being John Malkovich" on video and DVD. Rick stops just inside the door, appalled. He looks over -- the CLERK grins knowingly at Rick.

CLERK
 Bet you're here for "Malkovich." They're going fast.

RICK
 Uh, no, actually... I wanted a good movie.

Rick pretends to peer around the entire store without moving from his spot, then finally turns back to the clerk.

RICK (CONT'D)
 Damn -- seen 'em all.

Rick exits the store. The clerk watches him, baffled.

INT. WEST HILLS HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Rick sits at the table, the phone to his ear.

RICK
 Yes, I want to cancel my movie channels.
 (pause)
 Because some of them are showing a film I don't care to see. No, it's not offensive -- it was just written by a great big piece of dog shit. Hello?

Rick realizes he's been hung up on.

EXT. PARK PLAYGROUND - DAY

Rick sits in the sand with his three-year-old son, Nicky, who shovels sand into a pail. A cute GIRL TODDLER waddles over, her

MOTHER on a bench in the background. The girl plops down cutely next to Nicky and starts playing with sand.

TODDLER GIRL
Hewwo. I'm Paige.

Rick smiles at the darling scene.

NICKY
I'm Nicky. Do you like playing in the sand?

TODDLER GIRL
Uh-huh. Do you wike "Being John Malkovich?"

Rick's eyes bug out, horrified.

TODDLER GIRL (CONT'D)
It's bwilliant!

Rick snatches up Nicky and hurries away, Nicky CRYING. The girl's mother rushes over, upset.

GIRL'S MOTHER
Did she say a bad word?

Rick storms across the grass, Nicky dangling from his arm.

RICK
She said three bad words!

The mother looks at the sweetly-smiling girl, appalled.

EXT. WEST HILLS HOUSE - DAY

The front door opens and Rick wanders out in his robe, looking worse for the wear. He approaches the fat SUNDAY PAPER lying on the sidewalk. Rick stops, gazing down at the paper, petrified. He slowly reaches down, hesitates with his hand in the air, then picks it up.

ANGLE ON RICK

Rick regards the newspaper with grim, cautious apprehension. After a long beat, Rick drops the paper to the ground, stepping back to clear it. Rick stares at the paper, wondering if he's just avoided catastrophe. He turns back towards the house --

ANGLE ON HOUSE

The house has TRANSFORMED INTO AN EVEN WORSE HOUSE -- much smaller, much uglier. His family has evidently moved to:

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK

It looks no bigger than four rooms total. Ugly, bare trees and pieces of trash litter the yard. Rick numbly regards the tiny house, utterly perplexed. Unable to understand, Rick finally plods up to the house, defeated.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rick is watching TV by himself in the dark. He picks up the remote and starts channel-surfing. He comes to:

Some John Malkovich movie. When his face comes on, Rick clicks the remote angrily. The next channel shows:

A John Cusack movie. Rick sees him and hits the remote button:

A Cameron Diaz movie. Rick changes the channel:

Another John Malkovich movie. Change:

"Being John Malkovich" -- a scene with John Cusack. Rick raises the remote, ready to change, when ROGER EBERT comes on:

ROGER EBERT

Well, now Cusack, director Spike Jonze and screenwriter Kaufman re-team for the incredible new "Adaptation." This film is up at most film festivals in the world, competing with yet another Charlie Kaufman film, "Human Nature." Too bad Jim Carrey and George Clooney were too busy to film their Kaufman projects sooner or Charlie'd have four films out around the same time. The freshest thing about "Adaptation" is that it's largely about writer Charlie Kaufman himself trying to write the movie; in fact, he's the main character. Can you fucking believe that, Rick?

(beat, looking at camera)

Oh, Ri-ick. Rick Cunningham, you there?

CLOSE ANGLE ON RICK'S FACE

His vacant eyes don't blink as saliva drips down his chin.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/BEDROOM - DAY

Waking in bed, Sue's bloated face gets a confused look and she SNIFFS. She sits up and SNIFFS again. She looks Fifty-five years old and 225 pounds.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/HALL AND LIVING ROOM - DAY

With a HISSING SOUND in the background, tubby Sue creeps down the hall and peers into the living room.

ANGLE INTO LIVING ROOM

Rick sits cross-legged in front of the TV, his back to us, SPRAYING BLACK PAINT back and forth on the TV SCREEN. The black paint strays here and there onto the TV cabinet. The paint runs out and Rick SPRAYS AIR back and forth.

SUE

Stares, shocked.

SUE

Rick? Are you... feeling okay?

RICK

Turns around -- the LENSES of his glasses are PAINTED BLACK. Rick smiles enthusiastically.

RICK

I feel great! No more Charlie.

SUE

Regards him, dumbfounded.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

A RECEPTIONIST is filing something. She turns around and GASPS.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh! Can I help you?

ANGLE ON RICK

His glasses are covered with odd streaks of black paint. He can barely see out of them.

RICK

I'm here to see Dr. Eschbacher.

WIDE

The woman eyes Rick, scared, and looks down at her book.

RECEPTIONIST

Name?

RICK

Richard Cunningham.

The receptionist looks up with a timid smile.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh? Seen the Fonz lately?

Rick glares at her. She grows very flustered.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Not with those glasses, I guess.

Rick SIGHS, annoyed, and signs in. He turns and heads for a seat. He stops to pick a magazine, reaching down --

ANGLE ON MAGAZINE TABLE

Most magazines are entertainment-related -- and most have FACES or MOVIE STILLs from Charlie Kaufman films on the covers, along with related HEADLINES. Even a Golf magazine features a PHOTO of a goofily-dressed John Malkovich swinging a club with the headline: "GOLFING JOHN MALKOVICH."

RICK

Gets a sour look, retracts his hand, walks over and takes a seat. He turns away from the magazine table in distaste.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

An amiable PSYCHOLOGIST sits in a chair.

DR. ESCHBACHER
So are you here to talk about problems or to get new glasses?

The doctor smiles good-naturedly. Rick sits in a chair, uncomfortable, looking strange in his black-smearred glasses.

RICK
I had sort of a paint accident.

DR. ESCHBACHER
Your wife told me about that.

RICK
I tried paint thinner, but it ran out. And I couldn't go to the hardware store for more because it's next-door to a video store and I might accidentally see....

Rick realizes he's about to sound crazy and looks down.

DR. ESCHBACHER
Might accidentally see what?

RICK

Nothing.

DR. ESCHBACHER

A poster for a Charlie Kaufman film?

Rick shyly nods.

RICK

Or... see someone leaving with a tape or DVD of his... or pass a billboard ad... or hear customers talking about one of Charlie's films....

(looks at doctor)

I know it sounds crazy. That's why I'm here, I guess. Is there any hope for me?

DR. ESCHBACHER

Absolutely, Mr. Cunningham. There is no doubt whatsoever that you are suffering from "Charlie Envy."

The doctor smiles. Rick sits up and stares in disbelief.

RICK

What?

DR. ESCHBACHER

"Charlie Envy." It's the fastest-growing mental disorder in Southern California -- and it's popping up globally. It afflicts not just screenwriters, former coworkers and ex-friends of Charlie Kaufman, but total strangers who wish they were as smart, hip and successful as him.

RICK

(stunned)

And I thought I was the only one.

DR. ESCHBACHER

The good news is that a helpful new drug is about to be approved by the FDA. It's called the "Being Charlie Kaufman" drug -- "BECK" for short.

Rick looks sick to his stomach.

RICK

I don't think it's for me.

DR. ESCHBACHER

Why, it's tailor-made for you. It simulates in the user the feelings of success and confidence they'd have if

(MORE)

DR. ESCHBACHER (CONT'D)

they were Charlie Kaufman. Between you and me -- it's supposed to be quite a buzz.

The doctor winks. Rick stares, more baffled than ever.

RICK

So not only has that little bastard given me a mental problem, but he got it named after him -- and -- the cure is named after him, too -- based on his own film's title. Who the hell is his agent?

DR. ESCHBACHER

Unfortunately, this wonder drug won't be available for a few weeks. And to be perfectly honest, I won't be much help to you, really.

RICK

'Cause it's such a unique, elusive problem to pin down?

DR. ESCHBACHER

No -- I'm a huge Kaufman fan. As far as I'm concerned, he's God, and I would have no choice but to crush any man who dared defame his great genius. I know that's not professional, but I can't help it.

RICK

(blankly)

We're only mortal, you and I.

Rick stares at the smiling man, who grabs a pad and writes.

DR. ESCHBACHER

However, I can recommend a group of like-minded people that gathers weekly where you might be able to sort out some of your issues.

RICK

Okay. Maybe.

Dr. Eschbacher rips off the page and hands it to Rick.

DR. ESCHBACHER

Good luck. And to help you feel back to normal, you really should get some new lenses.

RICK

Can't. My optician's next to a multiplex showing a Charlie movie.

The doctor shrugs understandingly.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

A SIGN in front reads: "SHERMAN OAKS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL." Adults straggle in through the main doors.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - NIGHT

About 25 MEN sit around on chairs, pillows and the floor. At the center of the room, a chalkboard has been written on with: "HATING CHARLIE KAUFMAN SUPPORT GROUP." Most of the men look nerdy and meek -- they must be writers.

Rick sits on a rug off from the others. His glasses have been cleaned of all black paint. He gazes around and spots:

ART

Who he saw outside the movie theater, who worked on "Donny Most." Art waves with a defeated smile. Next to him sits another "Donny" writer, STEVE. He waves at Rick and smiles in the same downtrodden way.

RICK

Stares at them, not smiling, unsure of being here.

WIDE ON ROOM

A FRAGILE-LOOKING MAN, GERALD, goes to the podium.

GERALD
Evening, everybody. Tonight....

GROUP MEMBER 1
Psst.

Gerald looks at the guy who said "Psst." The guy points at something behind Gerald. Gerald turns to:

A BOOKSHELF TOP DISPLAY

With a sign reading: "STUDENT VIDEO PICKS." Among the five standing TAPE CASES is "BEING JOHN MALKOVICH."

WIDE AGAIN

Gerald gets indignant eyes, steps over, lays the offending tape down flat, then returns to the podium.

GERALD
The things they teach kids these days.
Before we begin, I have an exciting
announcement. A satellite chapter of the
(MORE)

GERALD (CONT'D)

"Hating Charlie Kaufman Support Group"
has just started meeting in New York.

Everyone exchanges nods, impressed.

GERALD (CONT'D)

As we all know, Charlie lived in the Big Apple a number of years, so you can bet he shit all over plenty of folks there. Let's hope our East Coast friends will benefit from their get-togethers, even if they are New Yorkers.

(smiles for punctuation)

As always, we want to welcome new members, and I see a new face here.

Gerald turns to Rick.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Can you tell us your name, how you knew Charlie Kaufman and how specifically he shit all over you?

Gerald smiles warmly. Everyone listens. Rick speaks uncertainly.

RICK

My name is Rick Cunningham.

GROUP MEMBER 2

Hey, how's the Fonz?

Everyone CHUCKLES. Rick doesn't smile.

RICK

I met Charlie on the "Donny Most Show." I guess we became fairly good friends before the series was abruptly cancelled.

Art and Steve glare at Rick fiercely.

RICK (CONT'D)

After the show, we kept up for a couple of years.

Art and Steve exchange "Hey, not me" looks.

RICK (CONT'D)

That's really about it.

GERALD

(expectantly)

And what happened after he sold "Malkovich?"

Everyone waits for the answer. Rick looks around, unsure:

RICK

Well, he changed his number and didn't give me the new one.

Everyone nods, completely satisfied.

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS

There you go! See? Same old story. Prick!

Gerald nods enthusiastically.

GERALD

Welcome, Rick. I think you're going to feel right at home. I know we're all ready to begin, so without further ado --

Everyone simultaneously pulls out notepads and pens, getting ready to take notes. Rick looks around, puzzled. A FAT, SAD-FACED GUY, KIP, raises his hand.

KIP

Can I go first?

GERALD

You always have wonderful things to share. Take it away, Kip.

KIP

Well, I had a new one.
(clears throat, settles)
I'm walking in the woods, just enjoying nature and what-not.

Everyone listens intently. Kip's depressed face comes to joyful, vibrant life as he speaks.

KIP (CONT'D)

I decide to see what's making this big whooshing sound. I go down and find this river, and I think, well, that's a lot of noise for such a meager river. So I go further along and I finally come to a breath-taking waterfall plunging a hundred feet to a lovely valley below. I'm standing there, truly awestruck, beholding this gorgeous panorama when I look over and happen to notice, of all people, Charlie Kaufman.

Everyone nods, grinning weirdly, many guys scribbling notes. Rick eyes them all dubiously.

GERALD

Go on!

KIP

He's sitting on this boulder, of course yakking on a cell phone with De Niro or somebody. So I pick up this... canteloupe-sized rock, I sneak up behind Charlie -- and I smash his skull in!

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS

Yes! Yes!

Everyone's worked up, some with sweat on their foreheads.

KIP

And I smash it and smash it and smash it and smash it until there's nothing left to smash. Then --
 (smiles bigger)
 -- after I decapitate what's left of his head, I pick up his lifeless body --

Kip raises his arms and acts out the motion he describes:

KIP (CONT'D)

And I fling that rich little motherfucker over the waterfall! He plummets down the raging water and rips to hideous chunks on the jagged rocks below!

Everyone breaks into APPLAUSE, cheering Kip, who takes a proud bow, breathing fast and sweating.

GERALD

As always, Kip, beautiful. Next?

Everyone waves their hand excitedly like schoolchildren. Rick stares around the faces in utter disbelief.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - LATER

The "Donny" writer, Steve, speaks with a deeply serious face, absorbed in his thoughts.

STEVE

I take all ten severed fingers and saute them in olive oil with various spices so it doesn't stink so much like cooking human flesh. Then the timer bell goes off and I remove his baked head from the oven....

Everyone listens pleasantly, some taking notes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - LATER

Sitting on the floor, DANA CARVEY speaks animatedly:

DANA CARVEY

So here I am waiting in the closet and you-know-who opens the door to get a shirt and I say "Remember me?!" and I crank on my flame thrower! Ha ha!

A familiar voice speaks:

CHRIS ELLIOTT (O.C.)

Don't forget the earth tiller.

SHOT PANS to include CHRIS ELLIOTT sitting next to Dana.

DANA CARVEY

(aside)

No, Chris, the water first.

CHRIS ELLIOTT

(thinking)

Oh, right.

(grins)

So then as Charlie blazes, screaming like a girl, I throw a pot of scalding salt water on him! Hee hee hee hoo!

DANA CARVEY

(points at Chris)

Then we pull out the soil tiller we previously hid in the linen closet and churn Charlie's torso into pea soup!

Dana and Chris LAUGH heartily as the rest of the room joins them. Chris gets an odd look, stops laughing.

CHRIS ELLIOTT

Wait a darn minute -- a linen closet isn't big enough to stick a tiller.

DANA CARVEY

Charlie's is -- Spade's been over and he told me about it.

CHRIS ELLIOTT

(smug)

If you say so. I doubt it, though.

Dana shakes his head, indicating Chris is stupid.

DANA CARVEY

Anyway, then, of course, we cut off his fucking head.

CHRIS ELLIOTT
With the tiller.

DANA CARVEY
No -- the shovel.

CHRIS ELLIOTT
And where was a shovel stashed, smarty?
In a humongous sock drawer, I suppose?

As the two bicker:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - LATER

Everyone listens attentively to Rick.

RICK
And then Charlie offers me a seat, but it
turns out to be a filthy toilet.

Everyone reacts with sympathetic anger.

KIP
That son of a bitch.

RICK
So I sit on it, just to bide my time....

The group listens, smiling and nodding expectantly.

DISSOLVE TO:

A WALL CLOCK

It reads: 1:30.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - LATER

Everyone looks weary, yet happy. A rather BIG MAN speaks:

DANNY
And after I bathe in the torrent of
Charlie's spurting blood, I take a movie
poster of "Malkovich" and I whiz all over
it.

Everyone SIGHS fondly. Kip stares at Danny, astonished.

KIP
You don't decapitate him?

DANNY

Oh yeah -- then I, well, you know. And I whiz all over that.

Everybody nods, relieved.

GERALD

Sorry I forget, Danny, but where did you work with Charlie?

DANNY

Oh, I never met the guy. I just fucking hated "Being John Malkovich."

People nod, a few CHUCKLE. Lots of YAWNS. Everyone starts putting away their note pads and pens.

GERALD

Well, if that's everybody....

BRAD (O.C.)

Can I add one thing?

Everyone turns to see a TALL, LANKY GUY emerging from darkness between bookshelves.

GERALD

You bet, Brad. Just maybe keep it brief, considering the hour.

BRAD

I don't have a death fantasy to share this week.

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS

Aww.

BRAD

Actually I haven't been for several weeks. I've been feeling... differently since... well, I was a test subject for the BECK drug.

Everyone sits up, alert.

GERALD

My God! How was it?

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS

Yes! How was it?!

Brad looks down, thinking a long time. He slowly smiles and looks up -- a beaming grin.

BRAD
Really good. Yeah.

Everyone reacts knowingly.

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS
I knew it.

BRAD
(looks off)
I felt really... confident... talented...
and happy -- a bittersweet Charlie kind
of happy.

Most people nod, understanding what that means.

BRAD (CONT'D)
But then the tests ended... the drug wore
off. And there I was, just Brad, not
feeling a bit confident or talented or
happy, bittersweet or otherwise.

Everyone stares off as they contemplate this dilemma. Rick
watches Brad intently.

KIP
But once it's on the market, we can just
take it all the time, right?

Brad is lost in his thoughts, his eyes not meeting anyone's.

BRAD
The reason I brought this up is that as I
kept taking the Charlie drug, feeling the
way he does, supposedly, I started
realizing that I don't think he ever
intended to make any of us feel bad.

STEVE
Then how come he shit on us?

BRAD
I don't know. Maybe if I could take the
drug longer -- if all of us could -- we'd
understand. I just sensed that not only
did Charlie not intend for anyone to feel
miserable on his account, but that if he
could, he'd stop that feeling in us. But
he can't. Only we can fix that, I guess.

Everyone is quiet, reflecting on this.

RICK

Studies Brad:

RICK
I say "Fuck Charlie."

BRAD

Flinches and gazes at Rick, bewildered.

WIDE AGAIN ON ROOM

RICK (CONT'D)
Nobody has to shit on people. Not even
the great and powerful Charlie Kaufman.

BRAD

Eyes Rick strangely, almost venomously.

RICK

Watches Brad, smiles faintly.

WIDE AGAIN

Most people join in on this sentiment change.

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS
Yeah, fuck him.

Brad silently slips out the door -- Rick watches him.

GERALD
And on that uplifting note, I bid you all
a good night.

Everyone stands, stretching, saying good night to each other.
Rick rushes out of the library. Gerald turns and, using a
tissue, picks up the "Malkovich" videotape and restores it to
its display stand. He makes a repulsed face and turns.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Rick rushes outside, looking around. He spots Brad walking down
the sidewalk. Rick jogs after him.

RICK
Excuse me.

Brad looks back, but doesn't stop. Rick gets to him.

RICK (CONT'D)
Hi, Rick Cunningham.

BRAD
Can I help you?

RICK
I'm extremely interested in this Charlie
pill.

Brad studies Rick's face.

BRAD
Why? You'd never want to feel like him.
You said "fuck Charlie."

RICK
Yes -- as a test.

Brad gets confused eyes. Rick smiles.

RICK (CONT'D)
It sure did bother you to hear Charlie
put down.

Brad peers at Rick, looking cornered.

BRAD
Listen -- I lied. I didn't test the drug.
I just hate violence, so I never have
anything to say. I came up with all that
garbage so I'd have something to add.

RICK
Come on, you took it. When you were
talking, I felt like I was watching and
listening to Charlie -- but wearing 38
Longs.

Brad looks at him, shocked.

BRAD
You're saying... I was acting like
Charlie?

RICK
(nods)
It was kind of creepy, to be honest.

Brad is lost in his thoughts.

BRAD
My girlfriend insists I've been different
ever since the testing.

RICK
Have you talked to any other guinea pigs?

Brad shakes his head slowly.

BRAD

Do you realize the hellish implications,
if you're right? The only true relief
from this Charlie envy slowly mutates
your personality until you're just
another version of him.

Rick is mulling this over. Brad stares numbly.

BRAD (CONT'D)

It means there's no way out.

RICK

That's quite a Catch Twenty-Two.

Brad looks at Rick with frightened eyes.

BRAD

Good night, fellow inmate.

Brad turns as Rick holds out a piece of paper and pen.

RICK

Look, give me your number. I'd like to
talk more. Okay?

Brad eyes him stonily, then grabs the pen and paper and writes
something. Brad thrusts it at Rick.

BRAD

I sleep 'til ten.

Brad turns and walks off, an eerie figure.

RICK

Sure thing, ten.

Rick watches, unsettled, as Brad walks into darkness.

RICK (CONT'D)

(to self)

Well, this meeting actually did help. Now
I know I'm only really fucked up.

Rick tries to laugh off Brad as he heads for his car.

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick sits at his computer, CLASSICAL MUSIC playing. It ends.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Our Film Day Friday now continues with
music from the newest Char--

Rick has reflexively picked up the remote and CLICKED OFF the stereo, like a ninja catching a fly. Rick looks down at:

A PIECE OF PAPER

With a wildly-scribbled but legible phone number.

WIDER AGAIN

Rick picks up the phone and dials the number. We hear the phone RING a few times. Then:

PHONE MESSAGE (V.O.)

We're sorry. The number you have dialed has been disconnected.

Rick stares into space.

PHONE MESSAGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If you believe you have reached this message in error, please hang up and dial again.

Rick hangs up the phone and stares, thinking.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - NIGHT

Rick enters the room. He stops.

ANGLE ON ROOM

Everyone is sitting as before; however, everyone is solemn. Rick lets the door ease shut and sits on the floor. Gerald stands at the podium, his eyes red.

GERALD

My first impulse was to cancel the meeting, but upon further reflection, I decided that we all might do better together than on our own.

RICK

What happened?

Everyone looks at Rick. Gerald can barely speak.

GERALD

Brad, uh, hung himself. Four days ago.

Gerald steps away from the podium, slips behind a bookshelf.

ART

His girlfriend just found him today.

STEVE
That's not the worst part.

Rick waits for the worst part.

KIP
He signed his suicide note "Charlie Kaufman."

Rick grimaces, devastated.

DANNY
He did it the day the news came out.

RICK
What news?

Gerald emerges from behind the bookshelf with redder eyes.

GERALD
The FDA turned down BECK. Too many side effects.

RICK
Yeah, like suicide.

Rick stands up and heads into the hall. Everyone in the room stares blankly, lost souls.

KIP
What are we going to do now?

The answer seems to be "Wait" since they all sit in silence.

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/BACKYARD - DAY

Rick reclines in a rusty lawn chair in the dirt yard by a kiddie pool with not enough air, the dirty water full of leaves -- a sad fifth cousin to the Hollywood dream. Rick has eyes closed behind sunglasses. At the SOUND OF WIND, Rick opens his eyes to see above him --

A VULTURE

Perching on an ugly bare tree branch. The vulture gazes down at Rick as A SECOND VULTURE lands in the tree. Then THIRD and FOURTH VULTURES arrive.

ANGLE ON RICK

He can't help but grin.

RICK
Hi, guys. What's kept you?

WIDE TO INCLUDE RICK AND TREE

Several OTHER VULTURES flutter onto branches, which bend forcefully with their weight.

CLOSE ON RICK

He smiles up at the birds.

RICK (CONT'D)

Brad, you were right. We're all goners. There's only one road out of Charlie-ville, but it steals your soul -- and now it's not even an option. No way out. No way out. No way out. Right, guys?

WIDE AGAIN

There are TWO DOZEN VULTURES perched in the tree above Rick. The vultures speak in unison:

VULTURE CHORUS

No way out, Rick.

INT. GUN SHOP - DAY

Rick stands at the counter, the display case filled with revolvers. The clerk hands Rick a CLIPBOARD with FORMS.

GUN CLERK

Just fill out these forms, send 'em in and you'll get your permit in about ten days.

RICK

(disappointed)
Ten days?

The clerk looks at him, wary.

GUN CLERK

Yeah, you know -- the "Cooling Off Period." So you can't shoot somebody just 'cause you're pissed at them.

RICK

How about if you're pissed at yourself?

The clerk studies Rick cautiously.

GUN CLERK

Either way, cool off, I guess.
(sly grin)
Or else stay pissed for ten days.

RICK
I can do that.

Rick starts filling in forms.

CUT TO:

A SHINY HANDGUN

Lying on a desk top. WIDER REVEALS:

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick sits at his desk, staring down at the gun. His computer is on, showing "FADE IN" and "FADE OUT." Rick turns and types on the keyboard.

ANGLE ON COMPUTER MONITOR

Inserted just below "FADE OUT" appears "THE END," centered.

WIDE AGAIN

Rick gazes at the monitor for a moment, then turns and picks up the gun. He gingerly sticks it up to his mouth and closes his lips around it. A beat, then Rick grimaces, pulling out the gun.

RICK
Jesus -- bleck.

Rick smacks his lips, repulsed. He raises the gun and holds it to his forehead. He tries to look up at the gun, going cross-eyed. He moves the gun to his temple. His finger moves, ready to pull the trigger. He closes his eyes, determined. Rick's eyes suddenly pop open wide.

RICK (CONT'D)
Why am I doing this to me?

Rick thinks as he lowers the gun to the desk.

RICK (CONT'D)
I'm not the one who made me feel
worthless. This is all Charlie's fault.

Rick grins intensely at the `gun.

RICK (CONT'D)
I'm killing the wrong guy.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL/LIBRARY - NIGHT

Most of the group is there. Rick stands at the podium, a notepad before him.

RICK

If nobody ever gets together with him,
does anybody at least know where he hangs
out... or eats a lot... washes his Jag?
Anything?

Gerald eyes Rick curiously.

GERALD

Why are you so wound up about finding
Charlie?

Rick is flustered, tries for nonchalance.

RICK

I just... feel like saying "Howdy," you
know. But I don't know how to get ahold
of him, so I figure the best approach
would be to appear to just run into him.
You know.

Rick looks around the faces nervously, hoping they bought it.

ART

Why bother? He'd just blow you off and
you know it.

DANNY

Can we get on to regular business? I have
a beauty involving a trash compactor.

Everyone stares at Rick, no answers.

RICK

Oh well. Thanks for your help.

Rick starts for the door.

GERALD

Aren't you staying for the sharing?

RICK

No time. I'm working on a new project.

ART

You mean writing?

Rick smiles mysteriously and exits. Gerald goes to the podium.

GERALD

Well, then let's begin with....

Gerald stops as Kip points at something. Gerald turns to see the
"STUDENT VIDEO PICKS" DISPLAY -- not only "Being John Malkovich"
is there, but labelled with "NEW!" sit VIDEO TAPES OF

"ADAPTATION" and "HUMAN NATURE," along with a couple "MAKING OF" TAPES. A prominent SIGN reads: "LOVING CHARLIE KAUFMAN MONTH."

Gerald stares at the display, breathing fast, then suddenly swings his arm furiously, knocking tapes all over the place, a couple BANGING into the wall. Gerald turns to the group with a satisfied smile.

GERALD (CONT'D)
Trash compactor time.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick stares out the window.

ANGLE OUT WINDOW

A DOZEN VULTURES sit in the bare tree in the backyard.

BACK ON RICK

Rick's face reveals that he has an idea. He opens a drawer, rummages through junk, pulls out a scrap of paper. He smooths out its wrinkles, grabs the phone and dials a number. After RINGING, a MAN answers:

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)
This is David.

RICK
Hello, David. Answering your own line these days?

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)
Everyone's at lunch and I... who is this?

RICK
Rick.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)
Rick who?

RICK
Rick Cunningham.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)
(beat)
The "Happy Days" actor?

This is not making Rick feel great.

RICK
The writer -- your client.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

Oh. Right.

(pause)

Listen, Rick -- I think your contract ran out, like, two years ago.

Rick is surprised at this.

RICK

Really? Well, I've been busy.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

Yeah? You got a new script?

RICK

Um, actually, no.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

Uh-huh, now I remember you.

RICK

I wanted to see if you can get me a meeting.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

With who? Manpower?

RICK

With Charlie Kaufman.

David LAUGHS -- for quite a long time, actually.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

You are hilarious! Why can't you write this funny?

RICK

You may not remember, but Charlie and I used to be friends.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

Right. Okay, Cunningham.

RICK

I'm serious. If my name doesn't ring a bell, remind him we worked on Donny Most. If that doesn't work, remind him I ran down Donny.

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)

Okay, listen -- since you have such incredible gall, I'll give Kaufman's company a call, but I wouldn't bet five bucks on it.

RICK
That's all I ask. Tell him I have a great
pitch for a film, whatever. Just get me
in there. Thanks.

Rick hangs up the phone, hoping against hope.

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/BACKYARD - DAY

Rick is mowing the dirt, huge dust clouds all around him. He
stops, looking down in disgust.

ANGLE ON GROUND

A few huge WHITE MOUNDS sit on the dirt.

BACK WIDE

Rick looks up into the tree above him, peeved. Several VULTURES
sit, peering at Rick. Rick turns off the mower.

RICK
There are other yards, you know.

SUE (O.C.)
Rick!

WIDE TO INCLUDE HOUSE

Looking Sixty and 250 pounds, Sue stands in the open sliding
doorway -- TEN filthy KIDS are gathered around her abundant
flesh. She holds out the phone.

SUE (CONT'D)
Says he's your agent.

Sue shrugs as Rick runs over and snatches the phone.

RICK
Hello?

AGENT DAVID (V.O.)
Well, guess I would've lost five bucks
because Kaufman wants to meet with you.

RICK
Thank you!

Rick reaches down, picks up a rock and hurls it into the tree --
the vultures scatter, flying off.

EXT. WARNER STUDIOS GATE - DAY

Rick drives his crappy car up to the security window. The GUARD
inside asks:

STUDIO GATE GUARD

Name?

RICK

Richard Cunningham.

The guard types on the computer, turns with a smile.

STUDIO GATE GUARD

Your pal, the Fonz, drove on just yesterday. Nice fella.

Rick nods, unamused.

INT. WARNER STUDIOS PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

Rick eases into a parking spot and turns off the engine. He sits a moment, then opens his glove compartment -- in it sits the gun. Rick looks at it a long time, then takes it and sticks it in his jeans' waist. He covers it with his sweater. He feels it, looking down to make sure it's discreet. He takes a deep breath and SIGHS, then opens the door.

EXT. WARNER STUDIOS/CITY SETS - DAY

Rick walks stiffly down a city set street, gazing around, dazed, at actors, suits, writers, crew people and everyone else.

CLOSE ON RICK

He mutters to himself as he walks.

RICK

This is for you, Brad. This is for me.
This is for everybody who's not Charlie Kaufman.

Someone walking by says "Hi" like they know Rick. Rick ignores them and keeps walking.

EXT. CHARLIE'S PRODUCTION COMPANY OFFICES - DAY

Rick comes to a stop, gazing at the SIGN by the walk. He thinks he sees someone peering through mini-blinds -- the crack in the blinds snaps shut. Daunted, Rick heads for the door.

INT. CHARLIE'S PRODUCTION COMPANY RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Rick sits nervously in a chair. The hall door opens and a sexy WOMAN opens the door with a smile.

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT

Mr. Cunningham? Charlie's ready.

Rick stands, nervous, adjusts his waistband where the gun is, smiles at her oddly, then follows her.

INT. CHARLIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rick is led into the office by the woman. Sitting at a desk, Charlie smiles.

CHARLIE
Well, if it isn't....

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT
(aside)
Rick Cunningham.

CHARLIE
Rick Cunningham.

CLOSE ON RICK'S FACE

He is utterly crushed. He slowly sinks into the seat for him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
It's been a long, long time, Rick. What was that show?

Rick stares into space. Charlie looks to his assistant. She rolls her eyes with a shrug.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Our show, it was...?

RICK
(numbly)
Donny Most.

Charlie gets a puzzled look.

CHARLIE
You sure? I think he died.

The door opens as SPIKE JONZE enters.

SPIKE
Hey -- oh, sorry.

Rick turns to him -- TOM HANKS peeks over Spike's shoulder.

TOM HANKS
Meeting over, Charlie? I'm starving.

WIDE ON ROOM

Rick stares as Charlie looks to Spike and Tom.

CHARLIE
I'll just be a minute.

TOM HANKS
One minute, now promise.

CHARLIE
Um, this is Tom and Spike.

Rick stares at them stonily. Spike forces a smile.

SPIKE
Nice meeting you....

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT
Rick Cunningham.

SPIKE
Rick.

TOM HANKS
Hey, like on "Happy Days."

Spike and Tom grin at this. Rick stares blankly.

RICK
Yes.

TOM HANKS
I can't wait to tell Ron I met Richie
Cunningham. Ha!
(realizes Rick seems
"civilian")
Ron Howard, I mean. The director?

Rick stares. Spike, Tom and Charlie exchange unsure grins.

SPIKE
Well then. Bye.

TOM HANKS
Bye, Richie. Charlie --

Tom gestures eating with a fork and motions Charlie to hurry. Charlie smiles with a nod. The door shuts and Charlie turns back to Rick, who still stares.

CHARLIE
So, Rick -- you have an idea to pitch?

Rick feels his sweater where the gun sits. He looks to the assistant, who watches warily.

RICK
I, uh -- I just wanted to say "hi."

Charlie smiles somewhat condescendingly.

CHARLIE
Okay. Hi.

RICK
And... to....

Rick clutches the hidden gun tightly.

RICK (CONT'D)
...to congratulate you. On your success.

CHARLIE
Well, thanks so much....

Charlie looks to the assistant -- she mouths "Rick."

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Rick. That means a lot to me.

Charlie watches Rick, who stares.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Well, if that's it... I've got --

RICK
I won't take any more of your time.

Rick stands, looks at Charlie once, then wanders out of the office. Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT
Fuuuuck. Did you really know that freak?

Charlie smiles, thinking.

CHARLIE
Once upon a time, yes. Maybe he'll make a
weird character, who knows.
(remembers)
Those guys are going to kill me.

Charlie grabs a cell phone and heads out.

EXT. WARNER STUDIOS GATE - DAY

Rick's car creeps along so slowly, there's a line of five cars behind him. Someone blasts their HORN. The guard watches Rick approach, unsure. Rick finally reaches the gate window.

STUDIO GATE GUARD
Can I have the pass, sir?

Rick stares ahead like a zombie.

STUDIO GATE GUARD (CONT'D)
 Say, Richie, I need that pass.
 (beat)
 I'll have to tell Mrs. C. on you.

Rick snaps out of it, looks at the guard, looks at the pass on his dashboard, takes it and hands it to the man.

STUDIO GATE GUARD (CONT'D)
 And don't just have a good day, Richie --
 have a happy day!

The guard CHUCKLES at himself. Rick stares at him blankly, then drives off. The guard loses his smile.

STUDIO GATE GUARD (CONT'D)
 Gotta be a writer.

The man shakes his head and waves to the next car's driver.

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/BACKYARD - DAY

Rick sits in a rusty lawn chair, legs crossed, gazing at:

ANGLE ON TREE

A ROPE with a perfect NOOSE is tied to a branch. A FEW VULTURES wait perched above it.

ANGLE ON RICK

RICK
 (muttering)
 I blew it. My one miracle of a chance and
 I blew it. I'll never get within a
 hundred yards of him again. And I'll just
 have to live with this misery for the
 rest of my life. At least I have control
 over one thing -- how long "the rest" is.

The MUFFLED SOUND of a RINGING PHONE. The sliding door opens and Sue leans out:

SUE
 It's for you.

Still holding at Sixty and 250, Sue spots the rope and gets a strange look.

SUE (CONT'D)
 What's the rope for?

Rick walks over to get the phone.

RICK
I've been promising the kids a swing.

SUE
(unsure)
Oh. Nice.

Sue hands Rick the phone and shuts the sliding door, wary.

RICK
Rick here.

ANDREW (V.O.)
Hey, it's Andrew and Darrell. You'll
never believe this.

Rick gets an odd expression of uncertainty.

CUT TO:

A PROFESSIONALLY-DESIGNED PLACARD

Reading: "**Happy Days R Here Again!**"

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Several WRITERS sit around the conference table, Rick included. Andrew and Darrell sit at the head like before. Tom and Steve from the "Donny Most Show" are there, but older.

ANDREW
Now I imagine most of us would rather be
doing something other than writing on a
"Happy Days" rehash, but the network has
promised not to cancel it for the whole
twenty-six.

RICK

Stares wildly, not believing his deja vu.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS CONFERENCE ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Everyone is dispersing into the hall. A YOUNG WRITER stops by Darrell and Andrew:

YOUNG WRITER
So I already got a great idea -- let's
hire the old Ralph Malph to play the new
Ralph's dad!

ANDREW
He's been dead for years.

Rick starts to correct Andrew, but gives up.

DARRELL

Ask Richie here about it sometime.

The writer regards Rick curiously -- Rick glares back stonily. Daunted, the young writer exits.

ANDREW

Welcome aboard, Mr. C.

RICK

So how come the network was willing to hire the star-killer on a show eerily connected to my past crime?

DARRELL

The new brass are younger than that kid who just left. They only started reading period a few years ago, much less the trades.

ANDREW

But when they saw your name on our writer list, they thought it would be just hilarious to hire you. You can thank the God of Reruns.

DARRELL

We're going to the commissary, want to come?

RICK

Thanks, but I want to look around the studio. I haven't been on a lot... a lot lately.

Andrew and Darrell smile curtly.

DARRELL

Just write us jokes better than that one.

ANDREW

I think Charlie's production offices are around here somewhere. Maybe drop by and say hi.

RICK

Maybe.

Rick smiles as they leave.

EXT. WARNER STUDIOS/CITY SETS - DAY

Rick wanders down the same street he was on days earlier.

EXT. CHARLIE'S PRODUCTION COMPANY OFFICES - DAY

Rick stands behind the corner of an adjacent building, watching. The entrance door opens.

CHARLIE (O.C.)
If Soderbergh calls, put him through to
my cell.

Rick steps back, hiding, as Charlie starts down the walk. His assistant steps out.

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT
You're going to the soundstage?

CHARLIE
I'm going on my walk, just like every
day.

CHARLIE'S ASSISTANT
Oh, right. Enjoy.

The woman returns inside. Charlie looks around --

RICK

Presses against the wall.

CHARLIE

Starts heading down the drive.

RICK

Watches, glances around, then follows Charlie.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OLD WEST TOWN SET - DAY

Charlie strolls along as CREW GUYS unload props from a truck.

ANGLE ON RICK

He gingerly follows, glancing around nervously, ducking behind a building or vehicle whenever Charlie turns his head.

WIDER

Charlie heads into a woodsy area.

EXT. WOODS AREA - DAY

Charlie strolls around a pond used for lake scenes. He gazes around the trees.

RICK

Darts out from behind a tree, ducks behind a bush just as --

CHARLIE

Turns, hearing something. He stops and slowly gazes around. He listens, then starts walking again.

WIDE ON WOODS AREA

Charlie leaves the woods area back towards the studio buildings. Rick emerges from behind the bush and watches Charlie's back as he walks away.

CLOSE ON RICK

He has a serious, concentrated look on his face.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick stands at his desk, packing his briefcase. A couple scripts go in, then a notebook. Rick glances at the door, then reaches behind books on a shelf -- he pulls out the gun. He sticks it in his briefcase and latches it.

INT. RICK'S SANTA CLARITA SHACK/LIVING ROOM - DAY

The ten filthy children are literally tearing up the place as a KID SHOW blares. Rick shakes his head, disgusted, opens the front door and calls out:

RICK
So long, Susie.

Sue steps into the kitchen doorway, looking Sixtyish and edging on past 250.

SUE
Aren't you going to say goodbye?

RICK
I did.

SUE
Not like that, like this.

Old Sue wraps her flabby arms around Rick, hugs him roughly and gives him a sloppy kiss -- Rick struggles in vain.

SUE (CONT'D)
Don't get dried up and old on me already.

Old Sue glances at the kids and grabs Rick's rear on the sly. Rick flinches, startled, then looks into her eyes.

RICK

Just remember, whatever might happen -- I love you.

SUE

And I love you. Of course, I'd love you more if you could do as well as Charlie.

Rick gets a look of amused surprise.

RICK

Thanks. That just helped me a lot.

Rick smiles at Sue and exits the noisy house.

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

The LIVING ROOM SET is DARK. The front door opens, a back light casting a NEW RICHIE CUNNINGHAM in silhouette.

NEW RICHIE

I guess Mom, Dad and Joanie forgot.

The LIGHTS GO ON as twenty-five CAST MEMBERS jump out from behind furniture around the room.

WHOLE CAST

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Richie smiles as everyone gathers around him.

NEW RICHIE

Gee, and all day long, I've been feeling terrible because I thought everyone forgot my birthday!

NEW RALPH

You don't think we'd forget the birthday of our best pal ever, do you?

NEW FONZIE

Forget your birt'day, Richie? Why, I'd sooner give up chicks, get me a brown robe and join one of them homo-steries!

GARRY MARSHALL steps out, shaking his head, holding a script.

GARRY MARSHALL

Cut! No, no, never.

Garry goes up to Andrew and Darrell, upset.

GARRY MARSHALL (CONT'D)

Listen, guys -- we gotta change that homo-stery line. Has to go, has to.

ANDREW

Well, this is the new "Happy Days."

DARRELL

Let's keep it for now. See what the suits say.

GARRY MARSHALL

Fuck the suits. Even if it somehow slips through and gets on the air, we not only get the gays all over us, but we get the Franciscans and every other religion with goddamn monks breathing down our necks. Change it, please, now.

Garry marches off, shaking his head. Andrew and Darrell turn to the writers. Rick is sitting at the back, off from the others.

ANDREW

Well, it was a foolishly gallant yet doomed attempt and we had our fun, folks. Any ideas?

Everyone is mulling over possibilities. Rick looks at the wall clock, stands quietly, starts up the aisle with his briefcase.

TOM

How about "I'd sooner give up chicks, get me a brown robe and join one of them monasteries where I'll go through a dozen oral dams weekly."

Everyone CRACKS UP. Andrew smiles.

ANDREW

Thanks, Tom. Problem solved.

Rick slips out of the stands.

EXT. OLD WEST TOWN SET - DAY

On his walk, Charlie slows to check out a CIGAR STORE INDIAN with a TOMAHAWK raised, set up outside the General Store. He rubs his finger along the edge of the tomahawk, grinning.

RICK

Peers from behind the blacksmith's barn door. He unlatches his briefcase and pulls out the gun. He gazes at it, unsure.

DOWN OLD WEST STREET

Charlie turns from the wooden Indian and resumes his walk.

RICK

Takes a deep breath and starts walking, gun in hand.

WIDE ON OLD WEST STREET

Rick creeps down the dirt street, faster with each step. He gets within forty feet of Charlie, then stops. Rick raises the gun, aims at Charlie's back, his arm shaking.

CLOSE ON RICK'S FACE

Coming undone with fear. Finally:

A BIG YELLOW BALLOON

Floats down from the sky, drifts in front of Rick and lands in a WATER TROUGH, a few feet away.

RICK
Jesus Christ.

Rick slumps and chokes up, drops the gun to his side.

RICK (CONT'D)
What am I doing?

ANGLE ON CHARLIE

He heads into the woods, not having turned around.

BACK ON RICK

RICK (CONT'D)
This isn't me. Killing Charlie won't fix anything.

Rick walks over and stares at the yellow balloon in the water trough. He can't help but smile.

RICK (CONT'D)
Once again, you've saved me.

Rick holds the gun over the trough and lets it drop -- it sinks into the water. Rick hears a noise and looks over --

ANGLE DOWN OLD WEST STREET

Donny Most approaches, aiming a GUN at Rick. Donny glares wildly, his hair a mess, stubble on his face.

WIDER ON BOTH

Rick tenses with panicked eyes.

DONNY

Well, if it ain't the tender-lead-foot
Richie C. Reckon maybe you heard Dirty
Ralph the Mouth is back in town.

RICK

Donny... what's going on? Working on this
western they're shooting?

Donny shakes his head, intense.

DONNY

No. I haven't worked in seven years. Ever
since you killed me, you stinking son of
a bitch.

Rick starts walking backwards, away from Donny.

RICK

But... you're not dead, are you?

DONNY

Try telling that to Hollywood. No one
even considers me for anything. When my
agent calls up for an audition, they say,
"Nice try! Donny Most died!"

RICK

(still backing up)
Hardly seems fair.

DONNY

And it's all your lousy fucking fault!
Well, here's the headline in tomorrow's
Variety: "Ralph Mouth Shoots Richie C."
And it won't be a misprint!

Donny FIRES THE GUN -- Rick doubles over and collapses. Donny
stares down and aims to shoot Rick again.

THE YELLOW BALLOON

POPS in the water trough.

WIDE AGAIN

Startled, Donny drops the gun and darts off.

ANGLE ON OLD WEST BUILDING

Donny races around the corner -- he CRIES OUT as:

A STUDIO TRUCK

RUNS OVER DONNY. The truck, full of Old West props, jerks to a stop, the TWO CREW GUYS inside stunned.

ANGLE ON RICK

A large pool of blood collects around Rick in the dirt street. Rick stares in shock, not moving. Blood drips from his mouth.

RICK'S ROTATED P.O.V. DOWN STREET TOWARD WOODS

Charlie rushes up from the woods area, alarmed. He slows, seeing Rick on the ground. As he approaches:

CHARLIE
Rick? Rick Cunningham?

CLOSE ON RICK'S EYES

Rick stares vacantly, fading away.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Unconscious, Rick lies on a bed, IV's in his arms and tubes up his nose. MONITORS BEEP. The room is dark and dreamlike.

ANGLE ON DOOR

The door handle slowly turns and the door cracks, light forming around the sides.

ANGLE ON RICK'S FACE

His eyes open wide and stare.

ANGLE ON DOOR

The door eases open and a FEMALE NURSE in silhouette gently enters the room, as if trying to not wake Rick.

ANGLE ON BED

The nurse drifts up to the bed and looks down at Rick. We see her back as she speaks in a WHISPERY VOICE.

NURSE
You're alive. Don't try to talk.

Rick's eyes gaze up at her.

RICK'S P.O.V. UP AT NURSE

Her face is shadowed so that we can't see her features.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You've been unconscious for three months.

RICK

Widens his eyes with revelation.

WIDER ON BOTH

Her face still dark, she moves around the medical equipment, adjusting things, making sure IV bags are full, etc.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Your assailant was apprehended and put in an institution so he can no longer try to harm you. However, Charlie's attacker is still free.

RICK

Tenses with shocked eyes. He tries to speak:

RICK

How...?

THE NURSE

Puts her finger to her lips.

NURSE

Shh. You're not a killer, Rick -- you're a writer.

WIDER ON BOTH

Rick gazes up, almost glad she knows.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You're incapable of killing to ease even the worst pain. But you are capable of writing about killing. Perhaps that might soothe your soul.

The nurse pulls a NOTE PAD from a uniform pocket, then produces a PEN and sets them on the night stand.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Write down everything that comes to you.

The nurse pulls from another pocket a SMALL FLASHLIGHT and switches it on, softly ILLUMINATING HER FACE -- she looks like

CAMERON DIAZ in "Being John Malkovich." Her NAME TAG reads: "THALIA." She smiles warmly.

NURSE (CONT'D)
All of your troubles can be solved by writing.

The nurse clicks the LIGHT OFF and sets it by the note pad and pen. She smooths back Rick's hair from his forehead.

NURSE (CONT'D)
Now sleep. Or write -- you need both.

Rick somehow manages to get out:

RICK
Thank... you.

NURSE
(enigmatic smile)
Just doing my job.

The nurse seems to float toward the door, which opens magically. She drifts out the door and it shuts itself behind her.

ANGLE ABOVE RICK

We drift in on his face. His eyes are shining, coming to life.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON DOOR

A different NURSE enters the room, looks over at the bed and stops, startled:

NURSE 2
Well, goddamn! You're out of your coma!

ANGLE ON RICK IN BED

Rick looks at her, the pen in one hand and the notepad on his chest. His bed is littered with DOZENS OF TORN-OFF NOTE PAGES that are covered with handwriting.

RICK
Can I get some coffee?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The door flies open -- an elderly, rotund Sue enters, followed by FIFTEEN CHILDREN, all noisy and ugly. Looking Seventy years old and 300 pounds, Sue opens her baggy arms wide, smiling.

SUE
You're alive!

All the kids bark out in unison:

FIFTEEN KIDS
We love you, Daddy!

ANGLE ON RICK

He hasn't even looked up as he frantically writes on the last page of the note pad.

RICK
Hang onto that thought.

WIDER ON THE FAMILY

Elderly Sue gets a deflated look and the homely children stare at Rick. Even Chris now resembles a troll.

CHRIS
I thought you said he'd be better.

Rick finishes writing, rips off the page, leaving only the cardboard backing. The detached pages are organized into stacks all over his bed. Rick smiles.

RICK
Okay then. Hello, honey. Hello, kids.
(to Sue)
Can you bring my laptop?

SUE
(thrown)
Uh... sure. We'll be coming back tonight when we....

RICK
No, now. Please?

Sue glares at Rick like this is worse than the coma.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Rick has an open LAPTOP COMPUTER on his lap, notes still stacked around the bed. He stares at:

THE LAPTOP MONITOR

Shows "FADE IN" at the top.

RICK

Stares at the screen, thinking. He finally smiles and types:

CLOSE ON LAPTOP SCREEN

Under "FADE IN," the words appear: "A BIG YELLOW BALLOON."

WIDER ON RICK

He types in a burst of energy, an IV still stuck in his arm.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

With only the overhead bed light on, Rick types ceaselessly on the laptop. A NURSE 3 enters the room and approaches Rick.

NURSE 3

They invented this new thing while you
were in your coma -- it's called "sleep."

Rick holds up his finger, absorbed in thought. The nurse frowns and clasps his wrist to take it.

NURSE 3 (CONT'D)

Can you stop long enough to lose the IV?

Rick continues typing one-handed as he holds out his arm for the nurse. She shakes her head and starts ripping off tape.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Rick sits in bed typing furiously on the laptop. The door opens and Nurse 2 pushes in a wheelchair with a YOUNG MAN of Twenty in it. Rick looks up, horrified.

NURSE 2

I'm afraid your private room just got
semi-private. Need the space.

RICK

So the parking lot's full?

The nurse sneers at Rick, who frowns, annoyed. The nurse helps the young man onto the bed. He instantly picks up the TV REMOTE, switches it on and starts channel surfing.

NURSE 2

Hope you two get along -- you have to.

The nurse LAUGHS unprofessionally and exits. Rick peers over as the young man clenches his fist at the TV.

JASON
All-fucking-right!

RICK
What, just remember they give you drugs
in hospitals?

JASON
Naw, my favorite fuckin' flick is on.

Rick cringes.

RICK
Don't tell me --

They say it at the same time:

RICK/JASON
"Being John Malkovich."

Rick nods as Jason looks over, amazed.

JASON
Hey -- yours, too?

Rick eyes Jason, his face searching for a reaction.

RICK
Not exactly.

JASON
Well, if it totally makes you go postal,
I can change it. I have seen it about a
thousand fuckin' times.

Rick thinks it over.

RICK
You know, if you really think it's that
great, leave it on.

JASON
Suit yourself, old man.

Rick glares at Jason nastily. Jason holds the remote speaker
next to his ear, grinning. Rick looks up at the TV: some scene
from the movie.

ANGLE ON RICK

Rick watches a moment, then looks back down at the laptop
screen. He breaks into a smile and starts typing again.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Rick plops into a wheelchair as Nurse 2 starts to push it.

RICK
Whoa, hang on.

Rick reaches and takes his laptop from the night stand. He hugs it to his chest possessively.

RICK (CONT'D)
Can't forget this.

As the nurse resumes pushing Rick, he grabs the plastic hospital water pitcher, hugging it, too.

RICK (CONT'D)
Or this.

The nurse makes a face and wheels Rick across the room. Rick looks at Jason, watching TV.

RICK (CONT'D)
See you later, Jason. Good luck with your abscessed navel ring hole.

The nurse pauses pushing Rick, irritated.

JASON
I'm cool. The doc says plenty of people live a long time with half a liver.

Rick's eyes register this news.

RICK
In that case, goodbye.

JASON
Too bad you can't stay -- "Malkovich" just started again!

RICK
That's life.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY/NURSE STATION - DAY

As Nurse 2 wheels Rick along, he glances around.

RICK
You know, I never saw that first nurse again to thank her for the note pad -- and the advice.

NURSE 2
What's her name?

RICK

Thalia.

NURSE 2

Nurse *Thalia*? Nobody by that name works here. You must've dreamed her up.

As she pushes him on, Rick stares, mystified.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick hooks the laptop up to the printer as a piece of CLASSICAL MUSIC comes to an end.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next on Film Day Friday, we're in for a musical feast as we continue with our all-day Charlie Kaufman soundtrack festival.

Rick grabs the remote, aims it at the stereo and hesitates.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Let's crawl through our own little cosmic portal and travel back to the beginning with the entire score of "Being John Malkovich," composed by Carter Burwell.

Rick sets down the remote without clicking it off. He punches a couple keys and the printer starts cranking out paper. Rick leans back in his chair, listening as the MUSIC starts up. He watches the pages mounting in the printer.

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/OFFICE - DAY

Rick slips brads through the script's holes, bends them down and flips it over. He looks at:

CLOSE ON TITLE PAGE

The full frame reads: "KILLING CHARLIE KAUFMAN."

WIDE AGAIN

Rick smiles, slips it into a manila envelope and seals it. He sits back and looks immensely relieved.

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

The cast is running through a scene. The writers sit in the stands, bored. Rick wanders around the corner with his briefcase. Everyone notices him.

ANDREW

Hey, everybody. It's Rick.

EVERYBODY

Hey! Welcome back! Look great!

Rick smiles, nodding. The new Ralph steps forward.

NEW RALPH

Rick, I give you my solemn word, I will never try to shoot you, so relax.

Everyone LAUGHS. The new Richie puts his arm around Rick.

NEW RALPH (CONT'D)

As the fictional Richie C., I want to welcome the real Richard Cunningham back to the show!

Everyone CHEERS.

NEW FONZIE

Like the name says, "Happy Days Are Here Again" -- especially for you, Richie.

Everyone CHEERS. Rick smiles shyly.

NEW FONZIE (CONT'D)

Ayyyyyyyyyy!

Everyone LAUGHS as the New Fonz gives Rick pretend punches.

EXT. OLD WEST TOWN SET - DAY

Rick sits on a hitching post next to a water barrel, gazing at the spot where he got shot. Around the corner of a building strides Charlie. He sees Rick and smiles as he approaches.

CHARLIE

Well, you're looking a bit more chipper since the last time I saw you.

RICK

I sure feel better.

Charlie gestures to the middle of the dirt street.

CHARLIE

They didn't get your blood stain fully covered for weeks. I had to switch to another route for awhile.

RICK

Sorry to gross you out.

Rick smiles. Charlie gets a funny look.

CHARLIE

Listen. I've been feeling pretty shitty about that whole incident in my office.

Charlie looks embarrassed. Rick watches him.

RICK

Forget it.

CHARLIE

It took seeing you lying in blood for it to hit me how it must have felt to you.

Rick watches Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I have no excuse, but I really am sorry about it.

RICK

Thanks for saying it.
(long beat)
I understand, I think.

Charlie looks at Rick, hopeful.

RICK (CONT'D)

Ever since I came out of that coma, I've seen things differently.

CHARLIE

Yeah?

RICK

I'm no better than the guy who shot me. Do you know what I was doing on this Old West street when Donny got me?

Charlie eyes Rick, faintly smiles.

CHARLIE

Maybe you shouldn't tell me.

RICK

Let's just say, I suddenly realized I had been mad at the wrong person.

CHARLIE

I think I'm glad you had that realization.

Rick and Charlie both smile.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

So I heard you're working on the new
Happy Days show.

Rick nods his head, not proud.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You know where I am, drop by any time.

RICK

I'll definitely schedule an appointment
so I don't step on Tom Hanks' toes.

Charlie smiles, uncomfortable.

CHARLIE

And if there's anything I can do to make
that ordeal up to you, let me know.

Rick smiles slyly.

RICK

Actually --

Rick lifts the MANILA ENVELOPE from the top of the water barrel
by him and holds it out to Charlie. Charlie gets a troubled
smile and reluctantly takes the envelope.

CHARLIE

Look, Rick -- I can't promise I'll have
time, but at the very least, my assistant
will look at it, not a reader.

RICK

I understand, Charlie. Thanks.

CHARLIE

Gotta go.

Rick nods as Charlie walks off towards the woodsy area. Rick
slips off the hitching post and ducks behind a building corner.
He secretly watches Charlie walk away.

ANGLE ON CHARLIE'S BACK

Charlie sticks his finger in the envelope, rips it open and
pulls out the script. He obviously reads the title page, stops
and turns with a CHUCKLE -- sees Rick is gone.

RICK

Watches from behind the corner.

CHARLIE

Turns and, very slowly, starts walking, flipping pages.

RICK

Smiles and starts down the Old West street the other way.

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

As the new Fonzie steps through the front door into a DARKENED SET, the LIGHTS GO ON and the WHOLE CAST jumps out from behind furniture around the room.

WHOLE CAST
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Fonzie smiles as everyone gathers around him.

NEW FONZIE
Geez, and all day long, I been so bummed
'cause I thought you's all forgot my
birt'day!

NEW RALPH
You don't think we'd forget the birthday
of our best pal ever, do you?

NEW RICHIE
Forget your birthday, Fonzie? Why, I'd
sooner give up self-manipulation!

Garry Marshall steps out, shaking his head:

GARRY MARSHALL
Cut! Christ, people, it still means
jerkng off!

Andrew and Darrell go up to Garry grimly.

IN THE STANDS

The writers sit, bored. A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT GIRL comes up to Rick and hands him a note. Rick looks down at:

CLOSE ON NOTE

It reads: "Call Charlie. Urgent" with a studio extension.

INT. NEW HAPPY DAYS SOUNDSTAGE/PHONE AREA - DAY

Rick speaks into a phone:

RICK
Charlie. Rick here.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
I finished your script.

RICK
You did?

CHARLIE (V.O.)
You're out of your mind, you know.

Rick slumps, on the verge of disappointment.

RICK
Maybe I was. Writing it helped a lot.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Well, I thought it was great. In fact, I love it.

RICK
Yeah?

CHARLIE (V.O.)
There are a few changes it needs.

RICK
Oh, I'm sure.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
For instance, my ex-wife's name was Diane, not Carla.

RICK
Sorry. Couldn't remember.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
I think I'd like to help get it produced.

Rick stares in disbelief.

RICK
You're not just joking to twist the knife?

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Not at all. I hope I'm not speaking prematurely, but I think you can consider this project green-lighted.

Rick is so amazed, he can't even smile.

RICK
Sounds great. Really great. That is so great. Charlie?

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Yes?

RICK

That is great, just so great... Rick,
hello?

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Are you okay?

RICK

Yes, I'm okay, Rick... great, okay?
Charlie?

CHARLIE

Rick?

Rick's eyes roll up in his head and he collapses, dropping the phone and hitting his head on the corner of a table.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The same room, apparently, as before. Rick lies in a bed with every possible monitor hooked up to him.

CLOSE ON RICK

His eyes blink and open. He struggles hard to turn his head --

ANGLE ACROSS ROOM

Jason sits on the other bed watching TV, LAUGHING like a nitwit.

CLOSE ON RICK

His eyes widen in terror. Rick MOANS in misery.

WIDER ON ROOM

Jason looks over at Rick and smiles.

JASON

Ricky, my man! Welcome back to town!

Jason hops off his bed and crosses to Rick, grinning.

JASON (CONT'D)

You been catching a little R and R on
Coma Beach!

Rick struggles to speak.

RICK
How... long?

JASON
They said you've been out for six months.

Rick stares, stupefied.

RICK
Six?! What... happened?

JASON
I don't fucking know. I just checked in
two days ago.

RICK
(weak grin)
Bellybutton relapse?

JASON
Naw, bad sack tattoo.

ANGLE BEHIND JASON

Jason lifts his hospital robe to expose himself. Rick writhes to
back away from Jason, grimacing in disgust.

RICK
I'm awake now.

EXT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK - DAY

The crummy car sits in the driveway, TWENTY CHILDREN somehow
crammed into the backseat. A 400 pound, Eighty year-old Sue
waddles up to the passenger door and helps Rick get out. Rick
grimaces at the horrible house and ugly dirt yard.

RICK
Gee, it's wonderful to be home.

SUE
Let's get you inside before you enter
another coma.

Sue glances about skyward, as if she might spot a trigger-happy
deity lying in wait.

ANGLE INCLUDING CAR

A rear car door pops opens and the twenty children literally
pour out onto the cement, then race past Rick and Sue inside.

SUE (CONT'D)
Stampede!

INT. SANTA CLARITA SHACK/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rick glumly sits on the crappy sofa. Sue waddles over and sits by Rick -- the sofa sinks to the floor with SOUNDS OF SEVERE SPRING DAMAGE. Rick surveys Sue's elderly bulk apprehensively.

RICK
 Boy, you look...
 (arms gesture hinting at
 "wide")
 ...great.

Sue takes Rick's hand in her wrinkled yet porky hand, smiling.

SUE
 Thanks. And I actually don't mind that
 you're still alive.

Rick regards Sue, uneasy.

RICK
 So what was the big news you made me wait
 until now to hear?

SUE
 It's for the whole family to hear.
 (turns to call out)
 Get in here, you shitbags!

The twenty kids thunderously race in, unruly, unkempt and ugly. They pile onto every available piece of furniture. Rick watches this chaos with grave misgivings.

SUE (CONT'D)
 Now remember how Mommy has some news to
 tell Daddy? Well, that means shut the
 hell up 'til I'm done.

Sue turns to Rick with a fat, elderly smile.

SUE (CONT'D)
 A lot's happened in six months, sweetie.

RICK
 What else besides the eating?

Sue glares at Rick.

SUE
 Well, your script sold.

Rick sits up straight, thrilled.

RICK
 Really?

SUE
 Yep. A million bucks. Or was it two?

Rick breaks into a big smile.

RICK
 That's great!

ANGLE ON SUE

She MAGICALLY TRANSFORMS from her 80's to her 50's in the span of two seconds. She's a much younger mountain of flesh.

WIDE AGAIN

Rick smiles, enthralled.

RICK (CONT'D)
Wow. Things look... better, already!

SUE
 They finished production on the movie last month.

Rick's face fills with more joy.

RICK
 You're kidding!

SUE

SLIMS from 400 pounds down to about 180 -- a loud SUCKING SOUND is heard. Sue looks pretty damn good.

WIDE AGAIN

Rick smiles bigger, exhilarated.

RICK (CONT'D)
 That's unheard of, to produce and release a film so fast!

SUE
 Supposedly, the studio loved it.

SUE

REGRESSES from her 50's to 40 while her BODY EVAPORATES to 130 pounds. Sue looks fabulous. Rick gapes at her, enraptured.

RICK
 I can't get over... any of this!

KIDS DISAPPEAR like BUBBLES POPPING. There go one, two, three kids. A pause, then four more. Rick watches happily until there are only six kids. Rick smiles in pure elation.

RICK (CONT'D)
(hopeful)
Is that it?

SUE
The movie comes out in two weeks.

Rick smiles as one last kid POPS, leaving five.

RICK
Any more news at all? A low electric bill maybe?

SUE
The premiere is next week.

Rick pleasantly watches the remaining KIDS TRANSFORM from beasts INTO CUTE CHILDREN.

RICK
(jubilant)
Well, gosh, I can't ask for more than that, I guess.

SUE
On Saturday we move to Encino.

Sue's BREASTS INFLATE to a very healthy size. She smiles shyly. Rick nods zealously, smiling ecstatically.

RICK
My God, I love good news!

From Rick's blissful face, we BACK OUT of the living room, through the front window and PULL OUT to see the front of:

EXT. ACTUAL SANTA CLARITA HOUSE

It is no longer the depressing shack we've previously seen. Rather, the "true" house we now see is a decent, ATTRACTIVE TWO-STORY HOME with a nicely landscaped, well-kept yard. Perfectly DECENT CARS sit in the driveway instead of junkers.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ENCINO MANSION - NIGHT

A fabulous place with lush landscaping.

INT. ENCINO MANSION/MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rick slips on a tuxedo coat, looking polished. An elegant DOORBELL sounds.

RICK
There's the limo, Sue.

SUE (O.C.)
Okay.

Sue steps around the corner -- slim and beautiful in a stunning gala dress.

SUE (CONT'D)
How do I look?

Rick smiles, spellbound.

RICK
Somehow, you really have just gotten fabulously better.

SUE
Oh, you silly man.

Sue steps back around the corner.

RICK
(to self)
I'm talking just gotten.

TWO HANDSOME BOYS run in, both in tuxedos, excited.

CHRIS/NICKY
The limo's here!

Sue re-enters the bedroom, smiling at Chris and Nicky.

SUE
Are you ready?

CHRIS/NICKY
Yes!

Rick watches the boys, uncertain.

RICK
Are your brothers and sisters ready?

Sue and the boys stare at Rick, perplexed.

NICKY
What brothers and sisters?

Rick looks to Sue -- she looks back warily.

CHRIS
What are you talking about, Daddy?

RICK
We just have... two kids?

SUE
I just have two. Got some big news to tell me?

Rick stares, confused -- puts on a cheesy smile.

EXT. PREMIERE THEATER - NIGHT

It's a big premiere event at a Westwood theater. KLIEG LIGHTS dance across the sky. Entertainment PRESS is set up doing reports and interviewing arriving stars. The theater MARQUEE reads: "KILLING CHARLIE KAUFMAN."

ANGLE ON ARRIVAL AREA

A limo eases up and stops. ATTENDANTS open the back door and out steps Sue, followed by the boys, then Rick. FLASHES go off and cameras tape them. Rick and Sue smile and walk in the entrance.

INT. PREMIERE THEATER - NIGHT

The theater is packed with elegantly-attired big-shots. They all watch a flickering screen.

CUT TO:

THE MOVIE

Which is a scene at:

INT. MOVIE VERSION OF CHARLIE'S PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Rick is played by STEVE BUSCEMI with glasses. Charlie is played by TOM CRUISE in a CURLY HAIR WIG. Tom Cruise-Charlie is backing out of his chair, afraid, as Steve Buscemi-Rick approaches him with a purring CHAIN SAW.

TOM CRUISE-CHARLIE
But you wouldn't kill me, really, would you, Rick? We were friends -- I mean, are friends! Right?

Steve Buscemi-Rick just steps forward menacingly. Tom Cruise-Charlie has nowhere to back up into. Steve Buscemi-Rick REVS the chain saw. Tom Cruise-Charlie cringes desperately.

TOM CRUISE-CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Friends don't kill each other, now, do
 they? Rick? Rick? Answer me, Rick!

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK
 (mockingly)
 "The number you have dialed has been
 disconnected."

Tom Cruise-Charlie SCREAMS as Steve Buscemi-Rick swipes the
 chain saw once -- blood splatters everywhere and the body drops.
 Steve Buscemi-Rick leans over and REVS the chain saw below frame
 as he speaks over the loud noise --

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK (CONT'D)
 "If you believe you have reached this
 message in error, please hang up and dial
 again!"

Blood sprays all over Steve Buscemi-Rick's grinning face. He
 turns off the chain saw and tosses it. With gleeful eyes, Steve
 Buscemi-Rick reaches down and raises into view:

THE DECAPITATED HEAD OF TOM CRUISE-CHARLIE

Steve Buscemi-Rick throws back his head and LAUGHS maniacally.

CUT TO:

BACK IN THEATER

ANGLE ON SUPPORT GROUP

Sitting together, they all CHEER and APPLAUD.

KIP
 Yeah!

ART
 (clenching fist)
 Yes!

Dana Carvey and Chris Elliott "high-five" each other.

DANA/CHRIS
 Woo hoo!

ANGLE ON RICK'S FAMILY

Rick and Sue shield Chris' and Nicky's eyes with flattened palms
 -- Chris peeks at the screen, grimaces horrifically, then
 presses Rick's hand tight over his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

IN MOVIE AGAIN

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

A packed courtroom rises as the JUDGE enters, the BAILIFF rambling off the "all rise" jargon. When the judge sits, everyone sits.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

Smiles contentedly, wearing prisoner's clothes, sitting at the front with his ATTORNEY.

WIDER ON FRONT OF COURTROOM

JUDGE

We will now hear the case of the State Of California versus Richard Cunningham.

The judge smiles at Steve Buscemi-Rick.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Like on "Happy Days," huh?
(losing self)
Boy, I love that show.

The judge catches himself and returns to his solemn tone.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Richie -- I mean, Richard Cunningham -- you are charged with the premeditated murder of the formerly quirky and offbeat Charlie Kaufman. How do you plead?

The lawyer at Steve Buscemi-Rick's side stands.

RICK'S LAWYER

The defendant -- Richie C. --
(smiles at his ploy)
-- would like to enter a plea of Not Guilty, by reason of insanity.

The lawyer sits down.

JUDGE

Does the prosecutor have any opening remarks before we call the first witness?

A familiar voice says:

PROSECUTOR (O.C.)

I do, your Honor.

Steve Buscemi-Rick leans over to look at the man standing up. The PROSECUTOR turns around --

JOHN MALKOVICH

Glares at Steve Buscemi-Rick venomously.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

Goes pale, sinking in his seat.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

Uh oh.

CUT TO:

BACK IN THEATER

ANGLE ON SUPPORT GROUP

Danny says for all to hear:

DANNY

Well, he's fucked.

Nearby people LAUGH. Gerald "shushes" him.

DISSOLVE TO:

BACK IN MOVIE

EXT. PRISON GATE - DAY

Dawn colors the sky. The metal door opens and Steve Buscemi-Rick steps out, taking in the freedom that lies before him. A PRISON GUARD steps out beside him and extends his hand.

PRISON GUARD

Good luck, Rick.

Steve Buscemi-Rick smiles, shaking his hand. The guard starts back inside, then turns.

PRISON GUARD (CONT'D)

And say hi to the Fonz for me.

The guard shuts and locks the door as Steve Buscemi-Rick smiles and sets down his bag.

BIG CHRIS/BIG NICKY (O.C.)

Daddy!

A WIDER SHOT

Reveals a JULIA ROBERTS-SUE running up with TWO FAMOUS YOUNG MEN ACTORS playing Big Chris and Big Nicky.

JULIA ROBERTS-SUE

Rick!

Julia Roberts-Sue throws her arms around Steve Buscemi-Rick. Steve Buscemi-Rick looks at the older young man.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

You must be Chris?

Big Chris nods and speaks with a seriously deep voice:

BIG CHRIS

Yes, sir.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

Then you have to be little Nicky.

Big Nicky answers with an even deeper voice:

BIG NICKY

Hello, Father.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

You're still my boys -- come here.

Steve Buscemi-Rick hugs the two grown men.

BIG CHRIS

Dad, I just have one question. Was it worth fifteen years in prison... for what you did?

BIG NICKY

(looking down, unsure)

You know, killing that way cool screenwriter Charlie Kaufman.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK

Was it worth fifteen years to never again fear opening the Sunday paper? Was it worth fifteen years to be able to leave the house and not worry that I'll hear strangers raving about the newest Charlie film? Was it worth fifteen years to enjoy sitting through movie previews without a barf bucket? Was it worth fifteen years to kill Charlie Kaufman and then decapitate him? You betcha!

Sue and the boys throw their arms around Rick.

JULIA ROBERTS-SUE

I'm so proud of you!

BIG CHRIS
I love you, Dad!

BIG NICKY
I want to be just like you!

RICK
You mean writing scripts?

BIG NICKY
No, killing friends who shit all over me.

They hug lovingly and start toward a car.

STEVE BUSCEMI-RICK
Mind if we stop at a video store on the way home? I've got one hell of a lot of browsing to catch up on.

A CRANE SHOT RISES as the family walks down the street next to the prison, the sun on the horizon. Over this FADES IN: "THE END." As APPLAUSE erupts:

CUT TO:

BACK TO THEATER

The audience stands, APPLAUDING wildly. The MOVIE SOUND FADES DOWN as credits roll by on the screen.

Everyone around Rick turns to him. A smiling BUXOM BLONDE in a glittery gown comes up the aisle and holds out her hand to Rick. Everyone motions to Rick to go. Rick kisses Sue and makes his way to the aisle.

As everyone keeps applauding, the Buxom Blonde leads Rick by the hand to the front of the theater. She motions him up steps onto a stage. Rick reluctantly goes up, turns and faces the audience. The applause gets LOUDER. Rick smiles, then finally takes a bow.

INT. PREMIERE THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

Reporters and crews run everywhere as the audience pours into the lobby. FLASHES go off rapidly.

RICK AND FAMILY

Enter the lobby, beaming. Near the doors, Rick slows, spotting:

CHARLIE KAUFMAN

Stands outside, looking in, smiling. A very HIP-LOOKING WOMAN waits with him by the ticket booth.

BACK IN LOBBY

Rick turns to Sue:

RICK
I'll be right back.

Sue looks out at Charlie, smiles to Rick and nods. Rick buttons his tuxedo jacket and steps outside.

EXT. PREMIERE THEATER BOX OFFICE FOYER - NIGHT

Across the blocked street, the press stands ready to capture the exodus. Rick approaches Charlie, smiling. Charlie holds a rolled-up program of some sort. The woman smiles at Rick and heads inside. The door eases shut and it's quiet.

CHARLIE
Mind if I get an autograph?

Charlie unrolls a SCRIPT and holds out a pen.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
It's a shooting script of "Killing Charlie Kaufman."

Rick smiles, flattered, as he takes the pen and script.

RICK
I feel silly, but what the hell.

Rick scribbles a signature and hands the script to Charlie, who glances at it, smiles and rolls it up again.

CHARLIE
It was pretty funny, didn't you think?

RICK
Yes, thanks. Maybe I'm not such a bad writer, after all.

Charlie gets an other-worldly smile.

CHARLIE
You say that as if you wrote the movie.

Rick looks at Charlie blankly, forces a LAUGH.

RICK
Well... I did, of course.

Charlie has a strange, almost sick smile.

CHARLIE
Is that the way you remember it?

Rick stares at Charlie, baffled.

RICK
What are you talking about?

Charlie smiles and unrolls the script for Rick to see:

CLOSE ON THE SCRIPT COVER

"KILLING CHARLIE KAUFMAN," then "Written by Charlie Kaufman."

BACK ON THEM

Rick glares at the script, stunned.

RICK (CONT'D)
I wrote it, I know it.
(thinking)
Not only do I remember writing the entire
thing in the hospital on my laptop, I
distinctly remember typing my name on the
title page.

CHARLIE
Like how you signed this?

Charlie points at:

THE AUTOGRAPH

Which reads: "Charlie, Thanks for the help!" followed by a
flowing signature:

Charlie Kaufman

BACK ON RICK AND CHARLIE

Rick stares, utterly undone. He looks to Charlie.

RICK
Something tells me you can explain this.

CHARLIE
To a certain extent, but you'll have to
make some leaps of logic.

RICK
What's logic?

Charlie CHUCKLES as he takes Rick's elbow and they start
strolling around the ticket booth.

CHARLIE

I remember that "sitcom" line of yours,
the day we met. Well, enough reminiscing.

It's dawning on Rick -- he turns.

RICK

It was the Charlie Kaufman drug.

Charlie smiles at Rick's quick connection.

CHARLIE

I'm afraid so.

RICK

But BECK was pulled by the FDA.

CHARLIE

Until the pharmaceutical company prepared
a modified formula.

RICK

Still, I never took it.

CHARLIE

Donny told the police that when he was
following you, you were following me, and
that you aimed a gun at me.

Charlie smiles as Rick stares into space.

RICK

That's why he's Ralph the Mouth.

CHARLIE

Based on that scenario, your doctors and
Sue opted to try the new BECK on you. It
was approved for testing a week or so
into your coma.

Charlie pats Rick's arm as they circle the box office.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

So they dripped the revised Charlie
Kaufman drug into you while you drifted
in the abyss, slowly turning into me. The
week before you came out of the coma,
BECK was pulled again -- more disturbing
cases of confused identity -- so you
never knew what hit you.

Rick is thinking, trying to follow this.

RICK

So I woke up, wrote the script, signed it as you and voluntarily handed it to you.

CHARLIE

(nods)

Then you conveniently had a rather lengthy coma due to BECK withdrawal. I sold the script and got it quickly produced. You got the money, which is only fair, I think, and I got the credit, which was your own doing, let's be honest. By the way, you'll keep signing my name for another few weeks. So odd, don't you think?

Rick looks ready to explode. Suddenly, he grins.

RICK

Wait a minute. If I signed your name, somebody would've seen it and told me before tonight.

CHARLIE

Remember those leaps of logic I warned you about? This is one. Actually, what you're experiencing right now is the movie about you seeing the movie you just saw about the movie you wrote about you writing a movie about trying to kill me.

Rick stares at Charlie blankly. One eye twitches.

RICK

Goddammit! Just stop it with that crap, would you?!

Charlie smiles faintly.

CHARLIE

Ironically, during coma number two, I was brought in by the studio to rewrite my own screenplay.

Rick is really trying to follow, nodding.

RICK

Well, sure.

CHARLIE

Once I really got into your script, I noticed that you established the thread about Brad signing my name on his suicide note because of the BECK, but then you dropped the ball and did nothing with it.

Rick eyes Charlie with another shade of disbelief.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

So I put in the Charlie signature twist at the end, then went back to the hospital sequence and had BECK pumped into you without your knowledge. And I had to throw in coma number two so the movie could be produced.

RICK

(dazed)

And also so you could rewrite the script... so you could throw in coma number two... so you could rewrite the script, throw in coma number two....

Charlie CHUCKLES, shaking his head.

CHARLIE

I know -- it got nearly impossible for me to keep straight.

Rick stops walking with a determined look of defiance.

RICK

Wait. Then how come I didn't see your changes in the movie just now? Ha!

CHARLIE

"Leap time" again -- because you're in the layer of reality where I've rewritten your character so that you never suspected anything until this scene where I reveal the mind-fuck to you outside the theater.

Rick stares at Charlie, numb.

RICK

So you mean... us standing here, right now -- you wrote everything each of us is saying? This is all your doing?

Charlie is thinking back sincerely.

CHARLIE

To be fair, I think you did have a confrontation scene after the premiere... but it sort of went nowhere. So I guess it's based on your idea. Feel better?

RICK

No.

Charlie smiles good-naturedly. Rick stares a long time, trying to understand. Rick finally shrugs, giving up.

RICK (CONT'D)

Well, I guess you really are God. Who the hell is your agent?

Charlie smiles, then remembers:

CHARLIE

Oh, and I took the liberty of rewriting your name. In order to lessen the Richie Cunningham cracks -- in the movie and in real life -- I started "Rick" with a "W." I'm surprised it never dawned on you to try that.

Rick stares at Charlie blankly for a long beat. Finally:

RICK

Rewrite this, God!

Rick viciously grabs Charlie's throat, choking him as hard as he can. They tumble to the ground, struggling.

CLOSE ON CHARLIE

Shock and fear fill his face, which flushes a deep red.

CLOSE ON RICK

His eyes are wild and crazed. He jerks, tightening his grip.

ANGLE ON LOBBY INSIDE

Somebody sees Rick and Charlie on the ground -- they point and yell, muffled from inside. The entire lobby full of people turn and look -- everybody rushes out the doors.

RICK

Keeps his hold on Charlie's neck, grunting with effort.

CLOSE ON CHARLIE

Charlie's tongue hangs out, his eyes vacant, no longer struggling.

WIDE ON AREA OUTSIDE THEATER

The entire audience gathers around Rick strangling Charlie, utterly silent and shocked.

ANGLE ON MEDIA PLATFORM

Talent and crew all stand watching. A LIGHTING MAN switches off the camera light he holds.

ANOTHER ANGLE ON SCENE

Everyone watches in silence as Rick finally lets go his grip. Rick gazes at Charlie's still face, then stands. He gazes around the crowd, dishevelled and breathing hard.

Rick starts to edge between people -- they stand apart, letting Rick pass. The rest of the crowd parts, as if by instinct, allowing Rick to walk toward the street.

DANNY (O.C.)

Say, Rick.

Rick turns to see Danny with the rest of the support group. They watch Rick warily.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Aren't you gonna cut off his fuckin' head?

Rick regards the support group and shakes his head.

RICK

I'm happy.

Rick notices Sue, Chris and Nicky at the front of the crowd. Sue and Rick exchange faint smiles. Chris and Nicky watch blankly.

ANOTHER ANGLE ON THEATER FRONT

Rick turns and wanders into the empty street. A CAR silently rolls up alongside Rick and stops.

ANGLE ON CAR

The passenger window rolls down. Rick bends to peer in, but the DRIVER sits in darkness.

MYSTERIOUS DRIVER

Want a lift?

Rick thinks a moment.

RICK

Why not? Film's over.

Rick opens the passenger door and gets in. Rick turns, smiles and waves to the crowd as the car rolls silently down the street. A moment of silence, then a HOARSE, RASPY SOUND....

ANGLE ON THEATER FRONT

Everyone turns and looks down -- Charlie SUCKS IN AIR and COUGHS, stirring. Everyone lights up, hopeful.

VARIOUS ONLOOKERS

Charlie!

Sue, Chris and Nicky look happiest of all -- tears of joy spill down Sue's face. TWO FAMILIAR MEN push through the crowd and kneel next to Charlie. MARTIN SCORCESE pats Charlie's chest, smiling big.

SCORCESE

He's alive, folks!

The crowd CHEERS. FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA SIGHS, happily relieved. JOEL and ETHAN COEN approach and kneel beside Charlie.

ETHAN COEN

Charlie came back to us?

JOEL COEN

Thank God -- or whatever your sad idiosyncratic conception of universal consciousness is.

ANGLE STRAIGHT ABOVE SCENE

Francis Ford Coppola raises his arms high and calls heavenward:

COPPOLA

Cinema can live on!

The camera rises above this joyful group of people.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MYSTERIOUS CAR/WESTWOOD BLVD. - NIGHT

The car rolls down Westwood Boulevard.

ANGLE INSIDE CAR

Rick stares out the windshield pleasantly.

RICK

Thanks for the ride. By the way, I'm Richie Cunningham.

MYSTERIOUS DRIVER

What do you know -- I'm Ralph Malph.

They drive past a well-lit store which LIGHTS UP THE DRIVER'S FACE -- Donny Most, grinning with almost no teeth. Rick smiles in an ironic and defeated way.

RICK

I know.
 (uneasy beat)
 I think.

ANGLE BEHIND CAR ON WESTWOOD BLVD.

THREE GUNSHOTS sound off, the car swerving slightly. As the car passes through the next shop's light, we see only the driver inside the car.

ANGLE INSIDE DONNY'S CAR

Donny looks down at the passenger seat and smiles. Donny lets out a deep SIGH, immensely relieved.

ANGLE ON WESTWOOD BLVD./SANTA MONICA BLVD. INTERSECTION

The car rolls through Santa Monica Boulevard on a RED LIGHT --

A CITY BUS barrels down Santa Monica Blvd. and, blaring its HORN, completely FLATTENS DONNY'S CAR. The side of the bus is a huge AD for "HAPPY DAYS R HERE AGAIN!" The new Ralph stands with the cast, holding his head with a comical surprised face. SMOKE pours out from under the bus.

FADE TO BLACK.

BACK TO THEATER

The audience stands up, APPLAUDING. The credits roll by.

ANGLE ON AISLE

A BUXOM BLONDE in a breath-taking dress walks up and gestures to someone -- everyone turns to:

CHARLIE KAUFMAN

Smiling shyly. People motion him to go. He makes his way to the aisle and is lead by the Buxom Blonde to the front.

ANGLE ON FRONT

Charlie steps onto the stage and smiles. The crowd goes wilder. He reluctantly takes a bow.

INT. PREMIERE THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

The roar of APPLAUSE abruptly goes MUFFLED as we see:

A WIDE SHOT OF LOBBY

With no people in it, looking ghostly and lonely. Into frame, a PUSH BROOM eases forward, sweeping trash on the floor, followed by the SWEEPER -- Rick in an USHER UNIFORM.

The door behind the concession counter opens and Donny Most in an USHER UNIFORM steps out with an armful of popcorn tubs. He kicks the door shut and sets the tubs on the counter.

DONNY

Boy, they're going crazy in there.
Must've been a good flick, huh?

RICK

Hm.

Rick keeps sweeping. We hear a MUFFLED VOICE in the background, obviously Charlie speaking into a microphone in the theater.

DONNY

The boss says you're doing great, Rick.

RICK

(lifeless)
Thanks for helping me get the job.

DONNY

Hey, it's the least I could do after shooting you and all. Boy, that's all behind me now.

Rick stops and leans on his broom.

RICK

You do seem a lot more mellow these days.

Donny smiles enthusiastically.

DONNY

Oh, I feel fantastic! I'm taking that new Ron Howard pill.

Donny nods a bit too joyously. Rick eyes him, cynical.

RICK

I see.

DONNY

Yeah, works great -- but there are side effects.

RICK

(suspiciously)
Like what?

Donny lifts his paper hat -- he's BALDING terribly. Donny returns the hat, then resumes his busy work.

RICK (CONT'D)
Bittersweet's better than bitter.

DONNY
(grins)
Hey, that's pretty good. You should try writing! Maybe be another Charlie Kaufman!

Rick glares at Donny for a long beat, then sweeps trash into a dustpan. Donny smiles as he stacks cups.

DONNY (CONT'D)
I can't wait to see this new one. I love all of Kaufman's films! Did you see his last one?

Rick empties the full dustpan into a trash can.

RICK
I don't really bother with things like that anymore.

Donny's mouth drops open, astonished.

DONNY
Are you kidding? You work in a theater and you don't go to movies?!

Rick resumes sweeping trash on the floor, expressionless.

RICK
What's a movie?

Rick and Donny look over as A BIG YELLOW BALLOON bounces unrealistically across the lobby floor, then out of frame. Rick drops his broom -- he and Donny race after the balloon.

FADE OUT.

THE END