

CHASING TRUTHS

For every 12-year-old who ever wanted an EZ Bake Oven and got
something heavy instead.

Written by

Dennis J Manning

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NOTE ON MUSIC

I HAVE EMBEDDED INTO THE SPINE OF CHASING TRUTHS SO MUCH MUSIC BECAUSE THAT IS ME — I CANNOT SEPARATE THE MUSIC FROM THE LINES, FROM THE LIES, FROM THE TRUTHS.

*Song selections (Miley Cyrus, Elton John, Madonna, Depeche Mode, Janis Ian, Sister Janet Mead, etc.) are used as **temp score references** to communicate tone, emotional resonance, and character perspective. Final music is subject to licensing, or may be replaced with original compositions inspired by these artists.*

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From the Writer:

[H] = Hospital (Present Reality)
[M] = Memory (Truth in Progress)
[S] = Surreal (Truth Under Pressure)

A NOTE FROM THE WRITER

This is not a coming-out story.

It's a **coming-through** story.

Chasing Truths is memory as movement, confession as color, pop music as prayer.

It's a film about survival — told through dance, dreams, hall passes, and chocolate chip cookies.

It's about what we carry when the people we love didn't always know how to carry us.

The story bends time, memory, and reality, just like grief and love do.

This isn't one person's biography.

It's a shared memory.

At some point, we've all been the last one on the bench, waiting to be picked.

Tired. Fierce. Flawed. And full of grace, we never expected.

- Dennis J. Manning

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT [H]

DENNIS (60), average build, white male, lies in a hospital gurney.

He wears a sea-green hospital gown, IV band visible under the cuff.

A faint monitor tone. Oxygen mask fogs with each breath.

SFX: HEARTBEAT—slow, deliberate.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. UNKNOWN DIMENSION - NIGHT [S]

Dennis wears neutral void white that takes on color from lighting.

The white fabric ripples as tunnel light stains it crimson.

A red tunnel pulses off to the right. Organic. Alive. It twists and dips like a rabbit hole of blood and light.

Dennis enters.

The tunnel turns. Tightens. It opens into a vast field of dark burgundy.

Above and around him, branches. Blue. Green. Black. Scribbled by a child's hand. They surround him.

He pushes forward. Thorns tear at him. His skin peels off in watercolor shards. No pain.

DENNIS

Beautiful. I am not afraid.

Rain begins—heavy and relentless. The branches dissolve into strings, vibrating as he walks through.

The strings kiss his skin—leaving behind trails of rainbow light. An eagle cries above.

The strings melt into feathers—soft, sacred. They brush his face, gently wiping away the color.

DENNIS (V.O.)
I thought I was dying.
Maybe I was. I want to see it. All
of it. One more time.

A bright light overtakes the frame. Waves begin to rise
beneath the soundscape.

EXT. BEACH - SUNRISE [M]

Dennis' adult, bare feet in the sand. The crash of surf
overlaps the hospital monitor's beep.

This is a memory, not the afterlife yet.

Waves lapping. Soft light. A hush of peace.

DENNIS (V.O.)
This was never just about coming
out. It was about being let go.

INT. HALLWAY OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL [M]

ON SCREEN:

OUR LADY OF LOURDES REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, 1976

Dennis (63) wearing a sweater vest, shirt and tie (1970's
look).

He walks down the hall. Odd though, it is a time warp back to
1976.

Girls in their plaid uniforms. Boys in shirts and ties.
Cheerleaders rush by. The lockers are still the same, a drab
olive. The overhead lights buzz and hum.

A nun walks by, the "Chem Nun" she smiled

CHEM NUN
Mr. Manning, wonderful job with
your exam yesterday.

DENNIS
Thank you, Sister.

BUZZ

A buzzer goes off and for a few moments it's like a twister
kids were swirling about, cutting me off, rushing voices
calling out

STUDENTS

I need lunch money...Are you going to gym...did you get that assignment finished...did you see the way Dwayne looked me....no he was looking at me....SCORE!

A senior knocked a kid's books out of his hands. The kid sighed and bent to pick them up. I went to help him. He didn't look. Didn't seem bothered. Didn't seem like, anything phased him.

He kneels to help. The boy looks up—his own 14-year-old face.

DENNIS

Kid you ok?

KID

Yes, Sir. All good.

DENNIS

Has this happened before?

KID

(hesitates)

It's ok, they're just books, they can't be broken.

MR. McKay, the head gym teacher comes up. Still the whistle around his neck. Still the jet black hair and athletic build. Still smells of cigarettes.

DENNIS

(sniffs. somewhat to himself)

I always thought that was odd.

MR. MCKAY

(stern)

Mr. Manning.

DENNIS AND KID

Yes sir?

Mr. McKay looks. His eyebrow goes up.

MR. MCKAY

Mr. Manning—should you be in class?

KID

Yes, sir. Heading there right now.

MR. MCKAY
(softer, but still firm)
Well then...
(beat)
Get to it.

INT. HOSPITAL[H]DENNIS'S HAND

A hospital wrist band is visible.

Dennis's hand twitches—heartbeat syncs with monitor.

SFX: A heart monitor begins—slow, steady. Muffled voices stir.

SFX: Heart monitor beeping. The hallway pulses—once, twice—like breath finding its rhythm.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
He's back.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL HALL [M]

Dennis stands alone.

The kid walks down the hall, books in hand. Disappears into a classroom.

The frame blisters at the edges—memory overexposed.

DENNIS
What the hell is happening?

MR. MCKAY
(deadpan)
Mr. Manning—language.

DENNIS
(confused, desperate)
What?

A fluorescent light buzzes, louder now. Time slows. A locker slams behind him—sharp, final. Reality bends. He feels something pulling—subtle but forceful.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
(echoes from far away)
Mr. Manning... should you be in class?

DENNIS
 (slow, measured)
 I never said this before but—God,
 you smell like smoke. (smiles)
 And you're the head gym teacher.
 Isn't that... ironic?

MR. MCKAY
 (ice-cold)
 You getting wise with me?
 You should be in class. Or do you
 want to run laps after school?
 Which is it, boy?

DENNIS
 (still, steady)
 Mr. McKay...
 (beat)
 I passed that already.
 And as far as running laps—

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MIND [S]

NOTHING.

SFX: HEARTBEAT morphs into the THUMP of newspapers hitting a porch.

A grey void. Endless. Featureless.

Weightless.

SFX: Heartbeat. Slow. Steady.

DENNIS
 Where the hell did the school go?

MR. MCKAY V.O.
 Language.

EXT. STREETS OF SUNBURY PA 1970 [M]

ON SCREEN:

SUNBURY PA, 1970

Dennis (63) in plain sneakers, faded jeans, a NY JETS t-shirt.

He looks down.

DENNIS

What?

Dennis is holding a dozen newspapers, tri-folded in his hands. He is at the front door of a house.

BIG DOUG

Dennis, come on just drop the paper
and let's go. Eighty more houses,
let's move!

He looks down, confused to be in this moment.

DENNIS

How the hell do I know its 1970?
What the fuck?

BIG DOUG

Language. Mom won't like that.
You 8 years old saying the "F-
Word", Jesus you better not do that
at home.

He is dazed.

DENNIS

What are we doing?

BIG DOUG

Drop the paper and lets go.

He hands me 10 more papers.

BIG DOUG (CONT'D)

Here go do these and I will meet
you at the next block.

The papers all fall to the ground then disappear.

NOTHING. [S]

White space

Yanni is playing in the background.

INT. HOME IN NEW ENGLAND 1995 [M]

ON SCREEN:

REHOBOTH, MA 1995

Dennis in khaki pants, fall shirt and sweater.

DENNIS

God I haven't seen this room for
years. I have no idea what is going
on, it's 1995.

The camera pulls back to a room in New England. It's Fall
and the leaves out side have all changed colors.

RON V.O.

Den, dinner is almost ready.

INTERNAL [S]

DENNIS

(Yelling easy)

Ok be right there. (beat) Now where
is it.

Dennis finds the bible, letter drops.

SFX. Breathing machine whirring. Heart beat is slow.

VOICES V.O.

"The lord is my Shepard"

He looks and the weight of a memory is felt in his hands. He
holds the Bible close — like a weight and a wound. The weight
of Catholicism hangs like a shroud. He holds the bible like
it is filled with cherished memories.

VOICES V.O. (CONT'D)

*No one lights a lamp and puts it
under a basket. Matthew 5:15*

DENNIS

There it is.

He picks it up. The letter is stamped. Unopened. Addressed
to:

Mom — Somewhere in Heaven

MOM V.O.

(tender)

You never sent this.

DENNIS

It never went, you were not here
anymore.

MOM V.O.

Open it.

DENNIS

I can't even remember what I wrote?

The Yanni music swells. He opens the letter. The pages have faded. He looks at them and then pauses.

These pages, they are all blank.

He shuffles through them, looking. His face furrows.

MOM V.O.

Such beautiful words.

But, there's nothing here. The pages are blank?

He breathes in. Slow intake. Slow decompression. He looks again and as he looks words starting writing on the page.

SFX: HEARTBEAT increases.

Words write across the blank pages.

Words begin to scribe themselves... slow, sure, sacred The camera elegantly reveals the words as they flow.

The words appear.

*"Wet leaves and misty days, make up
my longing ways."*

DENNIS

(reads aloud with fond
ease)

*A bird flies to the east leaving me
behind. (his voice cracks)*

MOM V.O.

(taking over the reading)

*Run to try and catch the wind.
Stand apart let no one in.*

The words continue to fill the page.

Pause. Tears are gentle tears rolling down his face.

DENNIS

(humble and empty)

*I'm a solitary man. Playing all
alone.*

SFX: HEARTBEAT lowers. Hospital ER sounds in the background.

RON V.O.
Den, dinner's all set.

Pause. He looks at the pages and the words start to fade away.

The Yanni song fades and like the leaves outside wisps away in the wind.

The feeling of longing is caught in his eyes.

He walks out of the room. Pieces of the walls and windows streak like watercolors in the rain. The hallway starts to peel off. His footsteps get louder and sound heavy-muffled voices in the distance.

VOICES V.O.
Come on! Run! It's not that cold!

SFX: waves rolling in. Distant laughter from children. Heart beat starts to increase.

INT. HOSPITAL [H]

Heart monitors beeping. Skin pale. Breathing is ragged.

NURSE V.O.
(worried)
Doctor his pulse is weak.

EXT. BEACH [M]

He looks down and the sound of his feet soften. The air is lighter. The light is warm. Now his bare feet are in the sand. He looks up and in the distance a beach.

DENNIS
(his warmth matching the
surroundings)
Oh I have missed this place.

He exhales. The breeze carries it forward – like a prayer.

SILENCE.

DARKNESS. Then the upper left corner has a faint and slow red light blinking. No sound. The light is muted as if behind a curtain.

INTERNAL [S]

A red pulse behind gauze. A breath catches.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

Let's chase the truth a little
farther – with air in our lungs,
ink in our veins, and no promises
but the ones we whisper to
ourselves in the dark.

The light glows redder.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY [H]

SFX: wheel, metal, footsteps. Muffled voices.

The POV shake, bump, or roll, creating a feeling of being
thrown around.

Dennis (63) post accident.

Mickey mouse t-shirt cut up and bloody. Shorts stained with
blood.

Arms and legs bruised and battered. His face bruised and
distorted after the car crash.

AN oxygen mask covers the screen. THE SOUND OF HEAVY
BREATHING.

The situation is stressful and unexpected, triggering
feelings of fear, anxiety, and panic.

DENNIS

I don't know what is happening.

SLOW MOTION

A close up of in IV goes into his arm. He jerks.

VOICE V.O.

Hold on.

Blood seeps like syrup and spurts on to the screen.

DENNIS

(slow motion voice)

Wait. What is happening?

REAL TIME

The second attempt to put in the IV works.

Rapid-fire actions and sounds.

VOICES V.O.

Hold him! Mr. Manning, calm down!

Several hands reach in to firmly hold Dennis to the table. He jerks and moves.

DENNIS

I just want to breathe.

CAMERA POV — his eyes. Blink. Slower. Slower. Closed.

DARKNESS. SILENCE. (FIVE-SECOND HOLD)

VOICE V.O. (LOUD)

NOW!

A thin veil of light. CAMERA jolts, up-down.

VOICE V.O. (LOUDER) (CONT'D)

NOW!

CAMERA jolts harder.

DENNIS

Fuck me.

EYES OPEN — CAMERA follows his blinks.

INTERNAL [M]

Wardrobe: hospital gown still on beneath a soaked windbreaker; color from [S] light stains the fabric.

Rain. Grey, black, relentless.

SWISH... SWOOP. Wipers. POV inside an old VALARIE station wagon.

SFX: SWISH... SWOOP.

Glass, water, light. The windshield explodes—then silence.

UNDER WATER.

CAMERA glides like a dolphin. Shapes clarify. Chlorine blue. We're in a YMCA POOL.

SPLASH! — CAMERA bursts through the surface.

INT. YMCA INDOOR POOL - DAY [M]

****Wardrobe:**** 14-year-old Dennis in a green team swimsuit; older Dennis, same age face, wears a 1970s coach tee and trunks—memory merged.

ON SCREEN: SUNBURY, PA YMCA 1974

Crowd noise. Echoed cheers.

BIG DOUG
Den, you ready? Break the record
today.

CAMERA pans record board:

"14 & Under - 50 Yard Freestyle - D. Manning."

KID DENNIS
I know. I know.

Big Doug slaps his back.

SFX: In the distance - Elton John's *Rocket Man.*

REFEREE
On your marks - set -

BANG!

POV underwater: Stroke / Kick / Turn.

No breaths. Only heartbeats.

He hums - off key, half underwater, half awake.

DENNIS (WHISPERS)
I'm a... rocket... man...

DENNIS (V.O.)
I did win that day.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

****Wardrobe:**** sea-green gown; oxygen mask fogging.

POV from gurney.

NURSE V.O. (URGENT)
He's fighting it!

DAWN (45) Niece of Dennis. Her hands are on his shoulder.

DAWN V.O.
Uncle Dennis, come on!

Light flares, then darkness.

Breathing slows. Exhale → sound of surf.

EXT. FRANCISCAN SEMINARY - DAY [M]

Wardrobe: simple black novice robe, rope cincture, sandals.

ON SCREEN: FRANCISCAN SEMINARY 1981

MOM V.O.
Just string together your memory-
moments like beads on a rosary.

Feet crunch gravel. Beads sway at waists.

Twelve friars walk in rhythm.

VOICES V.O. (CHANTING)
Hail Mary, full of grace...

MOM V.O.
Were you happy here?

DENNIS
(pause)
How are we back at the Seminary?

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
Always knew you had a calling.

The friars walk along the path. The prayers fade out.

DENNIS
(faintly Singing Elton
John)
When are you gonna come down...

WIDE SHOT - Friars ascend the hill. One lags behind: Dennis.

White light halo on his robe's edge.

DENNIS (SOFTLY SINGING) (CONT'D)
I should have stayed on the farm..

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
You never listened. You had your
own song.

MOM V.O.
It took so long to listen for it.

SMASH CUT:

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL HALL [M]

Wardrobe: same sweater vest and tie from page 1; symbolic
loop.

BELL RINGS. Students swirl past.

MR. MCKAY
Mr. Manning? We've been through
this once already.

DENNIS
Yes sir - I should get to class.

MR. MCKAY
You're lost, aren't you?

DENNIS
You always picked on me. Never
gave me a break.

MR. MCKAY
No - I was protecting you.

FLASHBACK WITHIN MEMORY [M]

Wardrobe: teen Dennis in uniform, blood on collar.

Three seniors slam him into olive lockers.

McKay watches, arms folded.

He steps in.

MR. MCKAY
Gentlemen - to my office. Now.

The boys scatter. McKay offers his hand. Dennis takes it.

SMASH BACK TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

****Wardrobe:**** gown, IVs visible, sweat.

DOCTOR V.O. (URGENT)
Come on, Dennis – work with me!

DENNIS (V.O.)
Wait – finish what you said!

Heart rate drops. Wave sound rises.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
You know where I am when you're ready.

NURSE V.O.
Doctor, we're losing him!

DENNIS
(singing dark Elton John)
'Cause I'm the Rocket Man...

INT. FAMILY HOME [M]

****Wardrobe:**** jeans and faded band tee.

CAMERA rushes through rooms: dinner, music, laughter.

Breaks through wall–tumbles onto grass.

DENNIS
(laughing)
My God, I used to love to tumble.

BIG DOUG
Till you'd throw up. Always car sick.

MOM V.O.
You always looked back – that's what made you sick.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

****Wardrobe:**** hospital gown, streaks of blood, monitors flashing.

Kaleidoscope of color. Drums, amps, feedback. Blur → focus on a MICROPHONE.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO BOOTH [M]

Wardrobe: 1980s denim shirt, sleeves rolled, headphones on.

ON SCREEN: SUSQUEHANNA SOUNDS RECORDING STUDIO 1982

TECH (V.O.)
"Solitary Man" - take one.

Acoustic guitar intro.

DENNIS (SINGS, SOFT AND STEADY)
*Wet leaves and misty days make up
my longing ways...*

MOM V.O.
You just had to pause and listen
for the sound.

DENNIS (SINGS)
*I'm a solitary man, playing all
alone.*

VOICES V.O. (OVERLAP)
Mr. McKay - Did they ever pick on
you again?

BIG DOUG
Drop the paper.

CHOIR
Hail Mary full of Grace...

DENNIS (SINGS)
(voice weak)
*I play for no one and no one plays
for me.*

SMASH CUT:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

Low heartbeat. Machines beep out of sync.

SILENCE. DARK. (4-second hold)

SFX: Waves lapping.

INTERNAL [S]

****Wardrobe:**** white linen, faintly glowing.

MOM V.O.

Just string together your memory-
moments like beads on a rosary...

A hand – his – slides each bead through light.

In. Out. In. Out.

EXT. 81 ELM STREET – WESTERLY, RI [M]

****Wardrobe:**** khaki pants, rolled sleeves; sun-faded blue shirt.

ON SCREEN: WESTERLY, RI – SEPTEMBER 1991

MISS ANNE (45) moves boxes into a duplex.

Her 12-year-old daughter watches a ladybug.

MISS ANNE

(to the ladybug)

Well, look at you bringing us luck
on our first day here.

Dennis approaches, carrying a jar of *Marge's Peaches.*

DENNIS

A jar of Marge's peaches.

They meet eyes – recognition of souls.

MISS ANNE

Hi. I'm Anne.

DENNIS

Is that with an "e"?

MISS ANNE

It is. The "e" makes it complete.

DENNIS

Then I'll call you Miss Anne.

She smiles, seeing through him.

MISS ANNE

You're an old soul. I can see that.

DENNIS (V.O.)
Her name was Miss Anne from that
moment on.

INT. MAY'S DRIVE-IN - ICE CREAM COUNTER [M]

ON SCREEN: MAY'S DRIVE-IN, 1978

WARDROBE: Teen Dennis in white apron over thrift tee;
forearms smeared with dried ice cream.

A scoop cuts chocolate, then strawberry. A teen boy's hand
works fast.

CINDY (O.S.)
You've got tax in your head, right?
Do the math as you hand it over.

KID DENNIS
(confident)
Yes, Cindy. Six percent. Got it.

He passes the cone.

DENNIS (KID)
That'll be two-twelve.

He wipes his arm with a towel.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
You were so proud of that job. No
one smiled more.

DENNIS
Jesus, Big Doug. I didn't die.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
Not yet.

SMASH CUT:

INT. ALLENTOWN DISCO - NIGHT [M]

ON SCREEN: ALLENTOWN, 1990

WARDROBE: Adult Dennis in black jeans, loose white shirt;
sweat-darkened collar.

Strobe. Heat. A sea of men. The room moves to a 90s house
pulse.

Dennis hums along – off-key, happy – then the sound drops to room tone.

Dennis smiles, tries the hand-frames for VOGUE. He's clumsy, happy.

DENNIS
I loved that song.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
Why'd you stay away?

MUSIC CUTS.

SMASH CUT:

INT. LOURDES HIGH – EMPTY HALL [S]

WARDROBE: Dennis in neutral white; light stains the fabric with hallway sodium amber.

A hard spotlight pins him in darkness.

DENNIS
I didn't stay away.

MR. MCKAY (O.S.)
You never came back.

DENNIS
What was there to come back to?

MR. MCKAY
(now next to him, smiles)
I wanted to meet the man you
became.

A hand settles on Dennis's shoulder.

EXT. BEACH – DAWN [S]

WARDROBE: White linen, barefoot.

Soft morning haze.

Two sets of footprints trail the tide line.

Two heartbeats – one steady, one slowing.

DAD (V.O.)
Easy does it.

DENNIS
(laughs)
You always said that.

DAD (V.O.)
Keep the faith—

One heartbeat fades.

DENNIS & DAD (V.O.)
—spread it gently.

Dennis keeps walking, not seeing the second set of prints vanish behind him.

Only his heartbeat remains, faint but present.

DENNIS
Remember when you heard me sing in college?

He turns, searching the empty beach.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Dad?

MOM (V.O.)
Listen for your own beat.

We hear you.

OFF: SWIM STARTER (V.O.)
Swimmers to your marks. Set—

BANG!

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT [H]

WARDROBE: Sea-green gown; IV, O2 mask; skin pale.

POV from the gurney. Blinks open/shut. Breathing slows.

FAR, MUFFLED — A pop hook (Madonna) ghosts the air.

DENNIS
(faint)
I just need to wake up.

He lurches upright, panicked. People blur.

VOICES (V.O.)
Hold him! Mr. Manning, calm down!

DENNIS
I just want to breathe.

His head eases back. Eyes close.

DARK. SILENCE. (5-second hold)

A whisper from the club:

WHISPER (VOGUE)
"Vogue... vogue... vogue..."

SFX: Thunder rolls. Heavy rain.

The rhythm of the rain softens—each drop slows, thickens—
until the downpour *changes form.* Rain becomes snow.

The camera drifts upward, as if escaping the storm,
until we're looking down through the falling flakes—
a tiny apartment glows below, warm light flickering inside
like a heartbeat.

INT. APARTMENT - SECOND FLOOR - ALLENTOWN [M]

ON SCREEN: ALLENTOWN - NOVEMBER 27, 1989 - DUSK

WARDROBE: Dennis (27) in flannel and jeans; Penny (32) in
leggings, oversized sweater.

We're *looking in*—as though the world were a snow-globe,
freshly shaken, flakes still swirling.

Dennis and Penny wrestle a too-big Christmas tree through the
doorway, laughing.

WIDE — as if seen through glass.

Snow flurries drift outside the window. The scene *floats*,
like we're looking down into a snow globe that's just been
shaken — flakes still settling.

Soft hum of "Deck the Halls." Laughter bubbles beneath it.

Dennis and Penny wrestle a too-big Christmas tree through the
doorway, bumping walls, laughing.

DENNIS (27)
Perfect. It's perfect, right?

PENNY

I don't know how we got it
upstairs!

The laughter muffles – as if we're outside, watching through
the frost.

The phone rings. The world pauses.

Dennis wipes his hands on his flannel, picks up.

DENNIS (27)

(light)

Happy Holidays! Holiday Inn!

From above, their movements are slow, slightly weightless –
flakes still circling.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)

(calm, urgent)

Den—where've you been? Been calling
all afternoon.

DENNIS (27)

We got a tree! You should see it.

PENNY

Best tree.

The snow outside thickens. Their voices distort, soft, like
trapped inside glass.

DENNIS (V.O.)

He has no idea.

SFX: Heartbeat begins under – faint, like a pulse heard
through water.

NURSE (V.O.)

Doctor, we need to calm him down.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)

Den—listen.

DENNIS (27)

Deck the halls! Did you get yours
up yet?

The snow globe world trembles – flakes swirl harder.

DENNIS (V.O.)

This'll kill him. No one told him.
Why didn't they?

MOM (V.O.)
We weren't sure what you'd do.

DENNIS
(frustrated)
What I'd do? That wasn't right.

Penny opens a bottle of wine. Dennis nods – pour.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
You need to come home. Now.

DENNIS (27)
I was just home yesterday. Work
tomorrow. I can pop in Friday–

DENNIS (V.O.)
They won't say it.

A faint hum of *Rocket Man*, distorted, plays as the snow
slows – flakes suspended midair.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
Would you just listen?

DENNIS (27)
Okay. I'm listening. Penny–yes,
wine.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
Dad's in the hospital.

DENNIS (V.O.)
And still they don't say it. Irish
Catholics – call it protection. It
isn't.

The flakes drift faster again, spiraling upward now – gravity
reversed.

DENNIS (27)
What happened? Which hospital?

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
(beat)
Sunbury Community.

DENNIS (V.O.)
And just like that – a little lie.

The snow-globe turns slowly in the light. Dennis hangs up.
Beat.

PENNY
What happened?

DENNIS (27)
Doug says my father's in the
hospital.

PENNY
You going?

DENNIS (27)
He said come now. I'll grab clothes
and head out. He was fine
yesterday.

He dials again. From above, we see him small beneath the
halo of the lamp.

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)
Operator, Sunbury Community
Hospital, please... the switchboard?
Thank you.

To Penny, with a half-smile:

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)
Top me off.

He listens.

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)
Yes - checking on David Manning...
I'll hold.

The snow begins to settle again - until the words that change
everything:

NURSE FRANKLIN (V.O.)
Mr. Manning died at 9:30 this
morning.

PENNY
Oh my God.

NURSE FRANKLIN (V.O.)
Are you there?

DENNIS (V.O.)
Of course I was there. I felt
everything slip.

He hangs up. Vacant. Breath heavy. He dials again.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
Mannings.

DENNIS (27)
I know. I called the hospital. See
you soon.

A low Elton phrase, barely air:

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(faintly Elton John
"Daniel")
"I miss him so much..."

The room turns slowly.

EXT. CEMETERY - SUNBURY - DAYS LATER [M]

WARDROBE: Black coat, dark scarf; December breath.

The family gathers in cold wind around DAVID J. MANNING, JR.

DENNIS(V.O.)
(off key singing Mike +
The Mechanics)
"Say it loud. Say it clear--"

DENNIS (V.O.)
We felt it. We didn't talk it. The
day wouldn't end.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
You got a speeding ticket driving
back.

DENNIS (V.O.)
Told the cop we'd buried my father.
He still handed me the ticket.

SMASH CUT:

INT. LOURDES HIGH - GYM [S]

WARDROBE: Dennis in white; the court bleeds red from exit
signs.

He shoots. Misses. Again. Miss.

MR. MCKAY
Didn't you ever feel it? You had
the height, the hands. You could've
run circles.

Dennis shoots—clanks. They share a laugh.

DENNIS

See?

MR. MCKAY

Yep. Stick to swimming.

BLACKNESS.

STARTER (V.O.)

Swimmers—on your marks. Set—

BANG!

SFX: SPLASH. Water roars around us.

The camera dives beneath the surface — arms slicing past, bubbles rising like silver coins.

Each stroke builds speed, rhythm, pressure— until the water begins to *bend.*

Ripples harden into metal.

Reflections turn fluorescent.

The blue deepens—darkens—then becomes the tiled tunnel of a subway.

The motion never stops.

A blur of limbs becomes a blur of commuters.

Bodies jostle as the camera pushes through them — faces turn, reacting as if someone unseen just brushed by.

The sound of rushing water morphs into the thunder of wheels on track.

SMASH CUT:

INT. NYC SUBWAY — #1 DOWNTOWN [M]

ON SCREEN: NYC — PRIDE DAY, 1992

WARDROBE: Dennis (30) in white tee and denim jacket; Miss Anne (45) in cropped pants and light blouse.

They stand shoulder to shoulder in the packed car, holding straps, the carriage pulsing with color and life.

MISS ANNE
Never been downtown for this.
Always an adventure with you, D-Man.

DENNIS (30)
Weekend at Marge's—no sleep, too many memories.

MISS ANNE
The kids adored it.

DENNIS (30)
Dawn's such a tomboy. I asked if she wanted kids one day—

MISS ANNE
(as 9-year-old)
No way! Not getting married. No kids!

DENNIS (V.O.)
She married. Three kids.
Effortless—like her mother.

The car jolts. Laughter. Doors open: CHRISTOPHER STREET.

MISS ANNE
This is going to be so much fun.

They step into a river of color.

TIME-LAPSE: Pride crowds. Flags. Sun flares.

INTERNAL [S]

WARDROBE: White linen; shadows of rainbow wash his chest.

DENNIS (V.O.)
I thought she knew. How could she not?

MOM (V.O.)
You never told her. Or us.

DENNIS (V.O.)
But you knew.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
We knew.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
We always knew.

DENNIS (V.O.)
God, she was hurt.

MOM (V.O.)
It was your truth to tell.

EXT. ROCKEFELLER CENTER - FOUNTAIN [M]

WARDROBE: Same as subway; jackets off in the heat.

Miss Anne and Dennis (30) sit by the water.

MISS ANNE
(voice tight, hurt)
You should've told me.

DENNIS (30)
I thought you knew.

MISS ANNE
You should've trusted me with your
truth. Now it feels untrue.

DENNIS (V.O.)
There it is—untruth.

Thirty seconds of silence. Then Miss Anne reaches, takes his hand.

MISS ANNE
(tearing, soft)
I'm not sad you're gay. I'm not
ashamed. You're my best friend.
I feel like we've known each other
for lifetimes. I have your heart.
Always. You can tell me anything.

A street performer with an electric guitar and an amp plays
the riff from "Rocket Man." Drifts by, no words.

DENNIS (30)
We need a word. If we meet
again—another life—we'll know it's
us.

MISS ANNE
(thinks, smiles)
Raspberry.

SFX: Waves rolling in.

EXT. BEACH - DUSK [S]

WARDROBE: White linen, single set of footprints.

DENNIS (V.O.)
I'd break her heart one more time.
Thought my pain was mine to keep.

INT. LOURDES HIGH - GYM [S]

WARDROBE: White. The hoop glows.

MR. MCKAY
Let me show you a basket.

DENNIS
Coach, I was never good.

MR. MCKAY
I know. Awkward as hell. I liked
that about you.

A faint teen chorus:

VOICES (V.O.)
It's common these days to be hip..

They laugh. Dennis takes the ball.

MR. MCKAY
See the shot. Feel it.

DENNIS
I feel it.

MR. MCKAY
No, you don't. I can see you
bluffing.
You want to run laps?

Dennis dribbles. Exhale. Shoots.

The ball arcs—holds at the rim—

CUT TO BLACK.

DENNIS
(Laughs)
There is NO WAY I am gonna run
laps.

MR. MCKAY
Try me. I dare you. I will
embarrass you.

DENNIS
Coach, that line never worked on
me.

MR. MCKAY
You were always different. Now take
the shot. Steady. Feel it.

Dennis stills.

The noise drops out.

The ghosts hush.

It's just him.

Him and the rim.

He breathes.

Shoots. Rim shot. The ball misses the hoop. Falls to floor.

THUD

The gym echoes softly.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
You didn't need to prove anything.
Not then. Not now.

CUT TO:

A gentle hand cradles a rosary bead. Slips past another bead.

VOICE V.O.
Hail Mary, full of grace...

DENNIS
(trying to be bright sings
Mike + The Mechanics)
You can listen as well as you hear.

INT. HOSPITAL [H]

SFX: Muffled voices, wheels on hard tile floor.

CAMERA looking up at a ceiling as the lights flash by.
Turning down a hall. The sounds of wheels on the floor
getting louder.

Breathing sound increases.

The sounds and the visuals slow. The breathing slows.

The screen is dull white like under a sheet.

A thumping like a bass is heard. From under the "sheet" the lights change colors. The sheets rips off.

SPLIT SCREEN - HAND ON ROSARY BEADS [S] / DENNIS IN THE YUKON BAR - NIGHT [M]

ON SCREEN:

PROVIDENCE, RI YUKON BAR 1993 [M]

The song "*PERSONAL JESUS*" by Depeche Mode blares.

The lighting is blues and black.

DENNIS
(sings off key a bit)
Your own, personal Jesus.

VOICES V.O.
(Rosary)
Oh my God I am heartfully sorry for
having offended you.

BAR CUSTOMER MAN
Hey I've been watching you.

DENNIS
(singing)
*Someone to hear your prayers
someone who cares.*

VOICE V.O.
(Rosary)
And I detest all my sins because of
your just punishments.

Dennis and a MAN move together on the dance floor. Their mouths meet - freeze-frame.

SILENCE.

Dennis breathes.

DENNIS (V.O.)
That was the first time I gave in.

It wouldn't be the last.

FLASH WHITE.

INT. OFFICE OF MR. MCKAY [S]

Smoke. Basketballs. A trophy glints.

Hard spotlight. Feels like confession.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

When did you

Basket balls in a rack. Championship trophies for Basketball.

Banners. Flags. COACH MCKAY is the best.

Dennis is in a chair. Mr. McKay behind his desk feet up. He is smoking a Marlboro. The room is a mixture of smoke and athletics.

HARD SPOT LIGHT ON - feels like an interrogation.

DENNIS

Know what?

McKay studies him - coach mode, father mode, something in between.

MR. MCKAY I could always see you, Manning. You just never saw me.

Dennis looks away. The fluorescent hum swells.

MR. MCKAY

You ready to talk about the oven?

DENNIS

DENNIS (CONT'D)

(faint and hoarse Elton
John)

When are you going to land?

CUT TO:

The parents are there, Dave and Marge. The siblings: Madonna (22), David (20) and Big Doug (18). Dennis is 12.

Christmas presents are being opened by all.

Dave opens a Pipe.

Marge an envelope of 5 scratch tickets.

David, a JETS jersey.

Madonna, a powder blue sweater.

Big Doug, the Elton John album, *"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road."*

There is a large box under the tree.

DAVE

Go ahead, Den, open the box.

DENNIS (12)

That's for me?

BIG DOUG

I think you are gonna love this.

DENNIS (12)

Big Doug can we listen to that album together?

BIG DOUG

Sure we can. Now open your gift.

Madonna and David share a glance. Dave and Marge have a smile of anticipation.

Dennis (12) goes to get the box.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

A twelve-year-old Dennis rips paper from a giant box. Laughter. Tinsel. The glow of colored lights.

Reveal: an EZ BAKE OVEN. Pink. Plastic. Perfect.

DENNIS (12)

(awed whisper)

I can make cakes for everyone.

His brothers exchange a look. Dad shifts in his chair.

DAVE

(covering discomfort)

Guess we'll need some weights next year, huh?

(chuckles)

Laughter that doesn't quite land.

Mom forces a smile. Dennis freezes — smile cracks.

He traces the oven logo with one finger.

The sound fades; heartbeat replaces it.

INT. GYM - LATER [S]

The echo of a basketball bouncing. Each bounce timed to that heartbeat.

Dennis, adult again, sits under the hoop. McKay shoots free-throws, each swish answering the thump.

MR. MCKAY

That's not the truth, is?

DENNIS

So if you know, why are you making
me say it?

MR. MCKAY

Its your truth we are chasing.

ON SCREEN: SUNBURY, PA - CHRISTMAS 1974

The parents are there, Dave and Marge. The siblings:
Madonna (22), David (20) and Big Doug (18). Dennis is 12.

Christmas presents are being opened by all.

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Marge an envelope of 5 scratch tickets.

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Big Doug can we listen to that
album together?

BIG DOUG
Sure we can. Now open your gift.

Madonna and David share a glance. Dave and Marge have a
smile of anticipation.

Dennis (12) goes to get the box.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

A twelve-year-old Dennis rips paper from a giant box.
Laughter. Tinsel. The glow of colored lights.

Reveal: A set of weights, barbells and a bench press.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GYM - LATER [S]

Dennis finally looks up - eyes wet, jaw tight. McKay Shoots
the basketball.

DENNIS
(quiet)
Weights.
They got me weights.

The ball hangs mid-air, spinning. He repeats it - disbelief,
pity, pride all tangled.

MR. MCKAY
Weights?

Silence. Only the echo of the bounce.

Mr. McKay has gentle tears. The gym is heavy with silence

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
They tried

DENNIS
I know that they tried. They
weren't out to hurt me or shame me.

MR. MCKAY
Did you tell them this story?

DENNIS
No.

DAD V.O.
We didn't know what to get you

BIG DOUG V.O.
We did our best.

Dennis exhales – the kind that empties years.

DENNIS (V.O.)
That's how you learn to lift.
Not iron. Shame. Expectation.
Silence.

The gym lights dim until it feels underwater again.

Heartbeat slows. McKay fades into shadow.

BIG DOUG V.O.
Dad always said, "Never let them
see you sweat."

SFX. Ocean waves rolling in. The office starts to slip away.

DENNIS
Did you know?

MR. MCKAY
Always. You are fine man. Look at
you. How is Connie?

SMASH CUT

INT. THE YUKON GAY BAR, PROVIDENCE, RI [M]

Bar music thumps. The bar is full of men dancing.

DENNIS
Wait, Mr. McKay you didn't finish.

Through the crowd the camera finds The BAR MAN and DENNIS
(31)

BAR CUSTOMER MAN
(yelling above the crowd
noise)
I said I like the way you dance!

BLACK.

SFX. Heavy breathing. A kiss. Heavy breathing.

SILENCE.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM [S]

MR. MCKAY, red shorts, white polo, white socks and sneakers, shoots free-throws.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

Each one clean. Effortless.

He hums, Perry Como - "Home for the Holidays."

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

Dennis (63) - pale, wired, oxygen mask - watches ceiling lights flash by.

The hum drifts in. Perry Como through the static.

The ER clamor softens... fades... slows.

Back in the gym, McKay's voice steadies the rhythm.

MR. MCKAY

(humming)

"Oh, there's no place like home for
the holidays..."

Dennis's eyes flutter. The monitors flatten into a single tone that stretches - becomes the echo of a basketball bounce.

He opens his eyes in the gym now.

The ER drips away - literally - tubes sliding off, dissolving like water.

His blood-stained clothes pale and dry into an off-white jogger suit, sneakers.

The floor beneath him gleams like varnished ice. He crosses toward McKay.

DENNIS

(quiet, tentative)

Why do I keep coming back to you?

MR. MCKAY

Why do you think? I'm alive.

Dennis glances back - sees himself still on the gurney, nurses pressing, doctor shouting.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Come on, Manning – fight for me!

MR. MCKAY
(shrugs)
I'm not so sure.

The sound of the gym swells – *SWOOSH... SWOOSH...* McKay keeps shooting, calm, unbothered.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
(singing lightly)
"I met a man who lived in Tennessee
and he was heading for Pennsylvania
and some homemade pumpkin pie..."

They laugh – two ghosts sharing breath.

The gym lights flicker – heartbeat and hoop syncing.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
In health class we talked about sex
and you were so quiet about that.
It was just boys and you didn't say
anything.

DENNIS
I haven't thought about that in
years. God, you said, "sex is
between a man and a woman" why
didn't we talk about it.

MR. MCKAY
I should have, but that was 1979.

DENNIS
(now a bit stern)
You know damn well who I was.
Nobody else in that room was gay.
How could I be the only one.

MR. MCKAY
When did you really know?

DENNIS
(pause, looks down)
Sigh.

MR. MCKAY
Mr. Manning, you are avoiding the
question.

DENNIS
Seems like you already know the
answer.

MR. MCKAY
(he smiles)
Be your own kind of beautiful.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH

DENNIS
What did you say.

MR. MCKAY
Be your own kind of beautiful. You
always did. No matter what they
did to you, you still, flowered.

DENNIS
(easy)
I did.

MR. MCKAY
(singing)
"When you want to be happy in a
million ways... for the holidays..."

DENNIS
Okay... so I knew. Always.
I just didn't have a name for it.
I knew what caught my eye—
and what didn't.
Everyone else stayed in their lane—
and I just couldn't.

MR. MCKAY
Go on.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS
I never told anyone.

MR. MCKAY
So why tell me now?

DENNIS
You feel safe.
You never did.
You always felt... threatening.
But now?

MR. MCKAY
(grins)
Just acting. I'm a teddy bear.

DENNIS
(laughs)
With claws.

MR. MCKAY
(chuckles)
With claws.

They both laugh, the sound echoing through the empty gym.
The basketball rolls to a stop between them—
a heartbeat finding rest.
Dennis looks off — like a stone skipped across memory.

DENNIS
There was this guy — a senior. I
was a freshman.
Captain of the wrestling team.
Thick, everywhere.
He used to body slam me into
lockers.
Called it "SCORE" — like knocking
the air out of me was a game.

MR. MCKAY
Tony Lupo?

DENNIS
Bingo.
In 2019, he hits me up on Social
Media. Lives in Chelsea now.
Gay. Wants to "connect."

MR. MCKAY
And?

DENNIS
And nothing. I let it go. Didn't
block him. Didn't write back.

MR. MCKAY
(pause, then quiet)
We all wrestle with the past.

Dennis exhales.

SWOOSH.

A basketball lands cleanly in the net.

BIG DOUG V.O.

I mean everyone gets gifts that they don't want. Why did you not ask for it the following year? Or your birthday.

DENNIS

There was no point in the that. I figured it out.

MOM V.O.

We had all figured it out and we're so worried for you.

DENNIS

I was fine. I am fine.

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM - 1994 - LATE AFTERNOON [M]

The room is still. Faint light through the blinds. A dresser cluttered with old cologne bottles, coins, a cracked frame.

Dennis (24) enters, sets down his bag from work. Notices something.

A letter. It's his. Folded, careful, heavy.

He freezes.

MOM (O.S.)

I read the letter.

Dennis turns. His mother stands at the doorway. She's been crying.

DENNIS

I'm... I'm sorry. Maybe you shouldn't have read it.

SILENCE.

She doesn't move. Neither does he.

MOM

He made Baked Alaska. For my birthday.

DENNIS
(soft, stunned)
Yeah. He did.

She walks away.

Dennis sits on the bed. Holds the letter. Doesn't open it.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
What was the letter?

DENNIS
From a man that said he loved me
and thanked me for saving his life.
(beat) So the truth was not out,
but I never said it.

Just breathes.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. YMCA POOL [S]

The gym shifts – melting into a pool. Dennis swims. Stroke, stroke, Breath. Flip turn. Blow out air. Stroke. Stroke.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(singing under water)
*"When are you gonna come down? When
are you going to land?"*

Stroke, Stroke. Breath. Flip turn. Blow out air. Stroke. Stroke.

HAND ON A RADIO [S]

Colors merge and shift.

SFX: Static sound of a radio dial turning.

MUSIC MONTAGE:

- Laura Brannigan's *GLORIA* – joy, heat.
- The Carpenters – soft ache.
- Janis Ian – truth cutting through.

DENNIS (V.O.)
Funny, you carry something long
enough, it finds another way to get
out.

SFX Heart beating faster, red flashes in the corner of the screen.

VOICE V.O.
Mr. Manning. Mr. Manning?

SFX dial turns. Static sound.

CRASH! Tires squeal. Metal screams.

SFX: "CLEAR!"

SCREEN - BLACK. FLATLINE.

INT. HOSPITAL [H]

DAWN (O.S.)
Uncle Dennis, come on!

SFX: SHARP INHALE. Heartbeat returns.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
MR. MANNING!

SFX. SHARP INTAKE OF BREATH

BLACK AND WHITE CAMERA SHOT

ANGLE on Dennis' eyes he wakes up. Blinks

BIG DOUG V.O.
Den, just drop the paper, we gotta go.

RON V.O.
Den, dinner is ready, come on.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM [S]

BACK TO COLOR

Mr. McKay is throwing basketballs again.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH

The gym is empty. Dennis is in a hospital bed

MR. MCKAY
(singing like Laura
Brannigan)
(MORE)

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
*"If everybody wants you, why isn't
 anybody calling?"*

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
 (singing like Laura
 Brannigan)
*"You don't have to answer. Leave
 them hanging on the line, oh oh"*

Dennis gets up from the bed. He walks to Mr. McKay.

DENNIS
 Stop. (beat) I didn't shout.
 But I didn't lie.
 I just... lived louder.

MR. MCKAY
 (sly)
 Mr. Manning, let's not fool
 ourselves.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

Dennis takes the basketball.

DENNIS
 (serious)
 I don't know what you are getting
 at.

SLOW MOTION.

Dennis throws the ball. It heads to the basket.

MR. MCKAY
 Chasing Truths.

The basketball bounces off the rim and falls.

BOUNCE BOUNCE.

DENNIS
 (stunned)
 What?

JANIS IAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
*"We all play the game and when we
 dare. We cheat ourselves at
 Solitaire. Inventing lovers on the
 phone..."*

SCREEN GOES BLACK AND WHITE

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

SFX DEEP SIGH. Regular heart beat. Camera moves up and down.
POV from Dennis' eyes on the ER Table.

NURSE
(sigh and resolve)
He's back.

HOLD ON BLACK.

SFX: Seagulls.

The faint lapping of waves.

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT [M]

Dennis (60s), worn but steady, cleans the counter.

A radio hums - *Pam Tillis, "Spilled Perfume."*

He freezes. The scent of something floral lingers.

Memory flares - flash of a man's chest, a belt, breath.

He collapses.

Lights strobe.

IN A FLASH:

QUICK IMAGE - A man's chest. A belt unbuckled. A look in the mirror.

Gone.

Dennis takes a slow breath. His eyes glaze.

A faint SCENT wafts up. Something floral. Something from a long, long time ago.

DENNIS
(softly)
That scent.

His hand slips from the counter. His knees buckle. He falls into a dark hole.

SFX: WHOOSH—

The kitchen light strobes—ON, OFF, ON, OFF—

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM [H]

POV - From above dennis on the operating table. Blood soaked. Oxygen on. Machines whirring. IV tubes 2 doctors, 4 nurses. Dennis lifeless. Low hear beat.

DOCTOR
Come on you, Bastard, stay with me.

The camera swirls up to the ceiling lights and the out into the clouds.

Quick travel, like going through a time tunnel, into a museum.

INT. GRAND MUSEUM - SILENCE [S]

Dennis stands barefoot in the middle of an impossible museum — endless corridors of art, shadow, and echo. It's both modern and classical, pristine and cracked.

He's no longer in sweats — he's wearing a tailored suit. A deep burgundy tie. He looks incredible. He looks scared.

WHISPERS around him.

He walks forward.

INT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS [S]

The MONA LISA is lit alone on a wall. She blinks. She SMIRKS.

MONA LISA
He's not going to get it, is he?

Dennis steps back. Blinks.

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING
(from another frame)
I don't think he's ready.

VENUS DE MILO
(standing in the middle)
I'm so tired of "poor me, nobody
understands me.

AMERICAN GOTHIC WOMAN
(another frame)
What I wouldn't give to have his
life.

The portraits begin talking over each other, rising tension.

MONA LISA
Look at him. Still aching for some
man who doesn't even remember his
name.

PAM TILLIS V.O.
(singing)
Dry your morning-after tears
'Cause what's done is done.

VENUS
He just wants applause for
surviving.

PEARL EARRING
Who doesn't?

DENNIS
Okay, okay—I get it. Jesus.
Even my trauma's got critics now.

They suddenly turn on each other.

(beat)

Stillness.

Then—

AMERICAN GOTHIC MAN
(to Mona)
You're one brushstroke away from
irrelevance, Lisa.

VENUS
(to Mona, ganging up)
At least I have texture.

MONA LISA
(To Venus)
At least I have arms.

VENUS
(To Mona)
No you don't. Bitch

PEARL EARRING
(To Venus)
You were never even finished.

Their insults morph into Dennis' voice – distorted, echoing:

VOICES (V.O.)
You're too much.
You're too soft.
You're just a phase.
You'll never matter.

The insults spiral. Paintings yelling. The noise surges.

DENNIS
(muttering, half-laughing)
Okay... this is officially too gay
to process.

INT. HOSPITAL [H]

He clutches his chest.

Staggered breath.

Heartbeat accelerating.

NURSE (V.O.)
Mr Manning? Can you hear me? Do you
know what day it is?

SFX: HEARTBEAT – now pounding.

Dennis' eyes flutter.

INT. GALLERY – NIGHT [S]

The lights in the gallery flicker–then blur, smear, melt.

The paintings collapse into color. Time bends.

A single rosary bead rolls across the gallery floor.

A basketball bounces once, then disappears.

His knees give out.

He falls—into another room.

INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

Silence.

Dennis steadies himself.

He looks around, dazed.

DENNIS
(softly, realizing)
It's Sunday.

Before him, in impossible clarity:

****"A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte."****

Everything else falls away.

From the PAINTING — a voice emerges:

MANDY PATINKIN (V.O.)
Order.
Balance.
Design.
Harmony.

The opening chords of "Sunday" begin — soft, sacred.

MANDY (V.O.)
*Sunday,
By the cool,
Purple, yellow, red water...*

The music floats. The world holds its breath. Dennis stands still.

Tears fall. No shame. Just release. For a moment— Everything is still. And beautiful.

DENNIS
This painting. This musical.
Changed my life. I was so lost.

MOM (V.O.)
Dennis...

He turns.

INT. MONTAGE - FAMILY MEMORIES SPIRALING THROUGH DENNIS'S MIND [M]

- A roast chicken hits the floor. SLAP.
- Dead silence at the table. Madonna's boyfriend stiffens.
- MARGE, calm as a saint, says:

MARGE V.O.

Don't worry. I have another one in the oven.

- She exits.

SFX: Sink running. Oven door WHOMP.

- 2 minutes later, same carved chicken, same gash.
- She returns. Places it on the table like nothing happened.
- The boyfriend stares.

BOYFRIEND

So good you had a backup chicken, Mrs. Manning.

- MARGE just smiles. No comment.

DENNIS (V.O.)

Marge never let you see her sweat. Neither did Dave. That was the first time I saw someone *rewrite reality* - without lying.

(beat)

We laughed about that chicken for years. But I think something *true* landed with it.

Sometimes grace is just knowing when to say,
"I've got another one in the oven."

MOM (V.O.)

You are never stuck.
You can always come home.

SFX: SMASH. SUNDAY IN THE PARK FRAME BREAKS.

A close-up of the shattered frame on the museum floor. A single drop of red paint rolls down the glass.

THEN—FADE TO
BLACK.

INT. HALLWAY OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL

MR. MCKAY
Mr. Manning. Hall pass?
(beat)
You're wandering again.

DENNIS
(sigh)
I thought you and I were friends...

SISTER JANET MEAD (V.O.)
(singing, distant,
echoing)
"Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name..."

A door lights up and opens. Mr. McKay nods to him to proceed.

INT. GREY ROOM SINGLE LIGHT ON. [S]

Dennis looks down.

A folded piece of paper appears in his hand.

It reads: ***"HALL PASS - DENNIS J. MANNING"***

He looks up—The floor beneath him glows like polished glass.
A tiger walks by.

SFX: Distant wind in the trees. A low rustle. Jungle-like.

DENNIS (V.O.)
I always hoped the tiger would turn
back. Just once. Just to say
goodbye.
(beat)
But it didn't. And I told myself I
didn't care.
(sniff of a laugh)
Because who cries over something
that was never really there?
(beat)
Me. I do.

A TIGER WALKS BY. SLOW. SILENT. NEVER LOOKS BACK.

A distant door creaks open. He steps through.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT GRAND HALL OF THE MUSEUM [S]

DENNIS

God, I, I just want to wake up.

MONA LISA

He's still not getting it.

(sigh)

Art is wasted on the emotional.

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

(from another frame)

I don't think he's ready.

VENUS DE MILO

Can someone give me a hand?

ALL the paintings clap.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)

(scoff)

And you'll are just two dimensions.

Try living like this - in pieces.

DENNIS V.O.

Oh my God...

VENUS DE MILO

(to Dennis)

Oh, now you have an opinion?

(turns to Pearl Earring)

And you - that pearl is fake.

I can see it from here.

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

(quietly, wounded)

It was a gift...

She starts to cry. Dennis gently offers a handkerchief. She takes it. A real moment - in a room full of performance.

MONA LISA

(sly, in French,
subtitled)

Il ne va jamais comprendre.

AMERICAN GOTHIC WOMAN
 (stamping her pitchfork)
 English, please!
 (to Dennis)
 We're in your head. We know that
 you don't know French.

MONA LISA
 (tsk, tsk)
 Je ne comprends pas.

DENNIS
 I took two years in high school.
 And the language app.

VENUS DE MILO
 (scoffs)
 How'd that work out for you, boy?

DENNIS
 (to Venus)
 Can't say it often enough: change
 your hair, change your life.

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING
 (softly)
 Shade.

AMERICAN GOTHIC MAN
 (Nods)
 Most certainly shade. (beat) Plus
 one for DJ.

All heads turn. MONA LISA looks smug as hell. PEARL EARRING
 pretends she didn't mean to cause a stir.

VENUS DE MILO –
 (Venus mouths like an 8-
 year-old brat)
"Plus one for DJ."

Dennis tries not to react. Fails. A flicker of a smile – not
 smug, not gloating – just a quiet moment of recognition.

AMERICAN GOTHIC MAN
 Well then—what does Mona's line
 mean?

VENUS
 (flips her head toward
 them)
 Oh now you want my help?
 (sassy)
 (MORE)

VENUS (CONT'D)
Fine. It means, "About damn time
someone did something real."

Dennis pulls a roll of duct tape from nowhere. He tears a strip and sticks it firmly over Venus's mouth. She stares, muffles a scoff, and slowly turns her back to all of them.

DENNIS
(quietly)
Finally.

A long beat. They stop judging. For once... they just look at him. He looks back.

And for the first time, he doesn't flinch.

SISTER JANET MEAD
(singing, ethereal)
"Thy kingdom come, thy will be
done..."

SFX: A single heartbeat. Then—Silence.

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT [M]

Clothes on the floor. Laptop open. Chat apps glowing. Dennis scrolls. Stares. Closes it. Opens it again.

SFX: STATIC—

The song clicks in: SARA EVANS "I Keep Looking"

SARA EVANS (RADIO)
*When my low self esteem
Needs a man loving me
And I find me a perfect catch*

MONTAGE -THE SONG CONTINUES [M]

- A bar hookup that ends with silence.
- Waking up next to a stranger, not remembering the name.
- A mirror. Shirtless. Aging. A sigh.
- Scrolling photos of "the one that got away."
- Voice messages never sent.

DENNIS (V.O.)
*I always wonder what's on the other
 side Of the number two door
 I keep looking. Looking for
 something more*

He dials.

MISS ANNE (V.O.)
 Hi, this is Miss Anne. Sorry I
 missed your call. Make it a great
 day.

Dennis stares at the phone. Silent. He hangs up. Sighs.

SARA EVANS (RADIO)
*It's your typical thing
 You got ying you want yang*

MONTAGE - THE SONG CONTINUES [S]

- County line dancing to the song, Dennis goes from Man to man to man. All different. Sexy, average, Drop-dead
- He goes to the bar for a beer. The bartender ignores him.

DENNIS
 (shouting)
 Hey can I get a beer!

MUSIC STOPS.

INT. YUKON BAR - NIGHT [M]

BARTENDER
 Try the #2 door...

Music cuts. The bar dissolves into silence.

Only the neon sign remains - "#2" glowing faintly.

Dennis steps toward it.

The door opens - white light pours through.

He enters.

INT. #2 DOOR ROOM [S]

A small stool. Nothing else.

He sits. The door shuts itself.

Blackness.

A sliding panel opens – lattice and shadow.

PRIEST (O.S.)
Yes, my child?

DENNIS
(confused)
What? I thought this was the #2
Door.

SARA EVANS (V.O.)
(slow, haunting)
“I always wondered what’s on the
other side of the #2 door...”

Dennis stands – grabs for the handle.

It won’t budge.

SFX: HEARTBEAT begins – slow, steady.

PRIEST
You should confess.

DENNIS
For what?

PRIEST
Everything.

The room tightens – walls pulse like a heartbeat.

Light flashes red at the edges.

DENNIS
No. I’m not confessing.

MOM (V.O.)
Never shop when you’re hungry.

DENNIS
I’ve always been hungry.
Wanting to taste everything.

PRIEST
You wanted love without
consequence.
You got consequence without love.

Whispers fill the dark – prayers overlapping.

VOICES (V.O.)
 "Hail Mary... Our Father... Amen..."

The words circle him like water in a drain.

DAWN (V.O.)
 Uncle Dennis... can you hear me?

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DREAM / MEMORY - DAY [S]

Dennis sits alone in the last pew.

Stained glass bleeds across his face.

Wax. Dust. Silence.

SISTER JANET MEAD (V.O.)
 (singing)
 And lead us not into temptation...

He kneels. Tries. Fails.

Sits back. Clutches the rosary. Breathes.

FLASHES:

- Empty confessional.
- Young Dennis stepping out of a communion line.
- Dave and Marge, side by side, looking through him.

DAVE (V.O.)
 Never let them see you sweat. Just
 walk away.

MARGE (V.O.)
 You can always come home.

Dennis breaks. Not from guilt - from *the ache of still
 needing permission to exist.*

The church flickers - wax light trembling.

Music fades.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK.

SFX: A single, steady heartbeat.

Not urgent. Not panicked. Just there.

Still alive. Still Dennis.

ON SCREEN:

INT. HOSPITAL [H]

SFX: Slow inhale. Quiet exhale.

Dennis lies unconscious – face bruised, bandaged.

Heart monitor steady. Breathing low, ragged.

DOCTOR (V.O.)
He's not healed. He's just... back
in motion.

A single *pulse* of light rolls across his face.

Above him – a disco ball turning in silence.

ABBA (V.O.)
(dreamlike)
"Mamma Mia, here I go again–

My, my... how can I resist you?"

The DOCTOR'S voice overlaps – firm, aching.

DOCTOR (V.O.)
Dennis. You've got to keep
fighting.

DENNIS (V.O.)
I'm still looking. But I stopped
expecting answers. Now I just hope–
the questions keep me curious.

The disco ball slows.

Each flicker dims... until it stops.

Darkness.

A soft *inhale*.

FADE TO COLOR:

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM [S]

A gentle blue light. Empty bleachers.

Mr. McKay sits, waiting.

Dennis joins him.

MR. MCKAY
Can I ask you something?

DENNIS
(weary, curious)
Sure.

MR. MCKAY
Where's Connie in all this?
You two were always together.
I'm surprised she's not here.

CUT TO:

INT. DENNIS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - SEPTEMBER 2018 [M]

Dim light. Rain taps the windows.

Photographs from their past slide from an album—falling like wet leaves.

Connie's bright red hair stands out in every frame.

Dennis always wears glasses.

- First grade, Catholic school uniforms.
- Fifth-grade cookout.
- Ninth-grade talent show, both on guitars.
- Senior year yearbook: her scrawl - *BFF. Forever means it.*
- Dennis singing at her wedding.
- Connie singing at Marge's funeral.
- Connie, Ronnie, Dennis - coffee and laughter.

Dennis (50s) pours two glasses of wine.

Connie (50s), polished but restless, studies a photo of them at 18 - smiling like they owned the world.

CONNIE
You remember this? Right before you went into the seminary.

DENNIS

(soft)

Yeah. You brought a rosary.

She sets the photo down. The air thickens.

CONNIE

You never got married. You sang at my wedding... but never had your own.

DENNIS

(tight)

Doesn't matter.

CONNIE

It does.

(beat)

Why not? We've known each other fifty years.

DENNIS

Do you really need to ask?

CONNIE

(smaller)

I was scared for you. Not of you... and I never knew the difference.

A long silence. Rain fills it.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

So it's true.

DENNIS

Define "true."

CONNIE

I love you. You're my best friend. Always have been. But this--this part of you--

DENNIS

(cuts in)

This part? I'm not a casserole, Connie. You don't get to leave out the onions.

CONNIE

It goes against everything I believe.

SMASH CUT TO [H]

DOCTOR (V.O.)
Nurse, what's his rate?

NURSE (V.O.)
Fifty-nine.

BACK TO [M]

DENNIS
Maybe what you believe needs to stretch.

CONNIE
Marriage is sacred. Between a man and a woman.

DENNIS
Don't— Don't throw catechism at me like it's a life raft. You think God's on your side because you stayed on the hill and went to Mass?

CONNIE
(tears, trembling dignity)
I can't love that part of you.

DENNIS
Then you never loved me. That "part" isn't a drawer I open when you're gone— it's the air I breathe. The way I see the world. The music in my voice when we sang.

CONNIE
(small)
But I prayed for you.

DENNIS
I learned guitar because of you. And then everything blossomed.

CONNIE
Did your parents know? My mother certainly did.

DENNIS
Don't. Don't waste holy water on something you never tried to understand.

CONNIE
(looking out the window)
I had promise. Standing. And you—

DENNIS
—I was your accessory.

She turns, defensive.

CONNIE
You were supposed to tell me.

DENNIS
I was supposed to survive you.
Because I knew this day would come.

She rises.

CONNIE
I think I should go.

DENNIS
You left a long time ago.

CONNIE
I'll pray for you.

DENNIS
Pray for yourself.

She pauses in the doorway—turns, venom curdling to confession.

CONNIE
In high school—when you dated that fat girl? We all laughed. Behind your back. I wrote “BFF” because it looked kind. You were always eager, organizing everything. But God, you were suffocating.

(beat)
You were never in my league, Dennis. I was the smart one, the voice, the looks, the future. And you just... followed.

(lower)
Second class. Your house. Your family. You.

A pause—then the poison slips.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 I should've known.
 (mocking, almost
 childlike)
 Gay. Gay. GAY.

She wipes her hands like dust.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 Disgusting.

Her energy drains—cracked, hollow.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 I had promise. I married right. I
 homeschooled four exceptional
 children. My God is not your God.

SFX: *FAINT FLATLINE BEEP* [H]

FLASH IMAGE — Dennis on the ER table. A nurse wipes his
 forehead.

BACK TO [M]

CONNIE
 (final thrust)
 Your parents must've been ashamed.
 I know mine were.

DENNIS
 Then ask mine—when you get to
 heaven.

CONNIE
 A place you'll never reach.

DENNIS
 (quiet, unshaken)
 I didn't know you managed the guest
 list. But I'll still try to live
 like I belong there. Even if the
 guest list changed.

She exits.

The door clicks.

Silence.

Just the rain.

Dennis turns his back to the camera. The camera pans slowly to reveal his face. Gentle tears streaming.

(beat)

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(soft, to no one)
I didn't want to be understood.
I just wanted to be released.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT [S]

Empty bleachers. Only the sound of a basketball rolling... thud-thud-thud ...then still.

Dennis sits at center court, facing away. Shoulders slack. Mr. McKay stands by the rack, watching him for a long beat. No words. Just the hum of lights and the faint squeak of shoes on varnish.

McKay crosses the floor. Slow. He places a hand on Dennis's shoulder - a coach's touch that becomes a friend's. Dennis doesn't turn. His chest trembles once, then stills.

McKay kneels beside him.

He wraps one arm around Dennis - not tight, just enough to anchor him.

Dennis's eyes stay forward, lost in the rafters.

MR. MCKAY
(whispers)
You did fine, son.
You did fine.

He stands, wipes at his face. Tears he won't let Dennis see. Walks off, the echo of his steps fading into the gym's hollow air.

Dennis finally turns his back to the camera.

The camera pans slowly around until his face fills the frame—gentle tears sliding down, almost a smile breaking through.

DENNIS
(soft, to no one)
I didn't want to be understood. I
just wanted to be released.

He exhales. The sound of that breath lingers – merges with the sound of wind.

FADE TO WHITE.

The wind grows louder.

A distant radio tune hums through static.

RADIO (V.O.)
...and that's traffic on I-95
northbound..

In the distance, the swoosh swoosh of a basketball.

Mr. McKay's hum of "Home for the Holidays.

The white begins to color – sunlight flickers, shaping into movement.

INT. DENNIS' CAR - DAY [S]

Cruising. Light traffic. Sunlight flickers through the windshield.

Dennis (63) wears a Mickey Mouse T-shirt and shorts.

Claudio (65) a Mouse-Ears hat, sunglasses.

Ronnie (79) in a short-sleeve shirt and jeans, tinted blue glasses.

Dennis drives. Ronnie rides shotgun. Claudio's in back.

The mood is easy, like they've done this drive a hundred times.

Elvis's "Kentucky Rain" fades out.

CLAUDIO
I want to do Guardians first.

DENNIS
That ride always gets me sick.

RONNIE
Space Mountain, then.

CLAUDIO
(laughs)
Oh, he turned green for an hour.

DENNIS
 (teasing)
 Fuuuck you.

Laughter. Comfortable. Familiar.

RONNIE
 Your turn, Den. Pick a song.

DENNIS
 Okay, okay... let's see...

RONNIE
 (stern)
 Please - no show tunes.

CLAUDIO
 (more stern)
 If I hear *one more* Carpenter
 song...

They stop at a red light.

DENNIS
 (grinning, mock offended)
 Fine. ALEXA - play "Let's Stay Tog-

RONNIE
 It's green, Den.

DENNIS
 (gently correcting)
 Okay. ALEXA - play "Let's Stay
 Together" by Tina Turner.

Dennis pulls forward.

TINA TURNER (V.O.)
 ♪ Let me say that since... ♪

A glint of sunlight hits the windshield-everything golden for
 a second.

BEAT.

SFX: A HEARTBEAT - steady, human.

BAM.
 A T-bone crash from the passenger
 side.

Metal screams. Glass explodes.

The HEARTBEAT accelerates.

SLOW MOTION.

Bodies lift. Gravity forgets them.

Loose photos, sunglasses, a box of Tic Tacs—
all suspended like memories refusing to fall.

 HEARTBEAT THUNDERS.
Claudio's Mouse-Ears spin
weightless.

Ronnie's blue-tinted glasses flash Dennis's face—frozen in
horror.

HEARTBEAT — doubled, distorted — inside his ears.

 TINA TURNER (FAINT)
♪ "Since we've been together... Mmm,
loving you forever..." ♪

The car rolls. Once. Twice. Third.

HEARTBEAT — skipping, uneven.

BACK TO REAL
TIME.

SFX: Screech. Shatter.

One last roll—then *impact silence.*

HEARTBEAT — a faint echo now.

BLACK.

No music. No sound. Nothing.

 DENNIS
 (low, gasping)
Oh God...

HEARTBEAT — barely there.

BLACK AND WHITE - MONTAGE.

ELTON JOHN (V.O.)
(singing, far away)
"Rocket Man..."

- Police lights pulse in rhythm with his fading pulse.
- The truck idles.
- Reverse-time blur.
- Bodies pulled.
- Ambulances.
- Sheets.
- Nightfall.

HEARTBEAT SLOWS.

SFX: One final beat.

CUT TO BLACK.

MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY BAY - FLICKERING BETWEEN MEMORY AND
REALITY [H] [S] [M]

SFX: GURNEY WHEELS SLAM. LIGHTS WHIP OVERHEAD. BREATH
CATCHING.

The world fractures. Time bleeds. We're everywhere and
nowhere at once.

POV - FROM DENNIS'S EYES

Blur. Blinks. Fluorescents smear.

People move - then freeze - then glitch.

JANIS IAN (V.O.)
(fragile, echoing)
"I learned the truth at seventeen..."

NURSE
(overlapping)
Sir - do you know your name? Sir?

SISTER JANET MEAD (V.O.)
 (singing, warping)
 "Our Father who art in heaven—"

FLATLINE.

SARA EVANS (V.O.)
 (ghostly)
 "I've been looking, looking for
 something—"

NURSE
 (into chaos)
 We're losing him!

CRASH CART. PADDLES. METAL ON SKIN.

DOCTOR
 (grunting)
 Dennis! Come on! Stay with me!
 Fight!

VOICES STACK — LAYERED, INESCAPABLE

DAVE (V.O.)
 Never let them see you sweat.

DOCTOR
 NOT ON MY WATCH.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
 Mr. Manning — you're late again.

MADONNA (V.O.)
 "Come on VOGUE. Let your body..."

DOCTOR
 CLEAR!

SFX: *BZZZZTTT!*

DENNIS'S BODY JUMPS.

ABBA (SLOWED, WARPED, UNDERWATER)
 "You can dance... you can jive..."

DOCTOR
 CLEAR!!

SFX: *BZZZZTTT!*

HEARTBEAT: ONE. TWO. THREE.

POV — EYES SNAP OPEN.

Everything is ***too bright. Too loud. Too alive.***

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
(tapping Dennis's face,
urgent)
Stay with me, Dennis. I got you.
You had a big day.

DENNIS
(smiling, barely)
Cool.

Dennis' eyes shut. The screen is back.

NURSE
What do you think?

DOCTOR
He's lucky to be alive.
(straightening)
Whether he stays that way... well,
that's on all of us.

NURSE
Does he understand what happened?

Dennis's eyes flutter open.

He sees her. She sees him.

DOCTOR
(gently)
Dennis, you just rest.

Dennis nods, the camera nods slightly as in agreement.

BIG DOUG V.O.
Den, just leave the paper, come on
we got to go.

Light gets bright like a sunrise.

SFX. In the distance a basketball bounces. SWOOSH.

MR. MCKAY
(standing over him)
Mr. Manning.

Dennis's eyes open. They look at each other.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
(gentle)
Come on buddy, (his voice breaks)
let's get you to class.

Dennis' eye close. Heartbeat very shallow.

EXT. BEACH [S] [H]

The sun is warm. The air is light. Seagulls, dogs barks kids play.

DOCTOR (V.O.)
(commanding distant)
Dennis. Stay with me now.
Don't go anywhere. I got you.

MOM V.O.
(softly)
You can always come home.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
(commanding)
Mr. Manning your hall pass?

DENNIS
(weak)
I don't have one.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
(drill sergeant)
Then off you get, get back to your
homeroom. I'll see you later.

BUZZER sounds.

FADE TO WHITE.

A heartbeat.

A breeze.

The world exhales.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT [S]

The color is amber, like syrup and firelight. A single pink
EZ BAKE OVEN hums on the counter. The glow inside - too
bright for a toy. It's a sun pretending to be safe.

Dennis - same age as the crash - stands in a child-sized
apron. Not camp. Not cute. Haunted.

DENNIS
(laughs softly)
This is the wrong size.

He notices four old tin canisters on the counter:

FLOUR. SUGAR. COFFEE. TEA.

Their lids gleam under the amber light.

DENNIS

I'm so glad I kept these all these
years.

He tries to bake something – something exact – but the ingredients keep changing. Labels blur. Containers slip from his hands.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Was it one cup of memory?
A pinch of forgiveness? Half a
pound of regret?

Behind him, ghosts enter – not terrifying, just echoes.
Versions of himself.

- Young Dennis in his white communion outfit. Voices begin to sing, far away:

VOICES (V.O.)

(singing softly)

"Immaculate Mary, your praises we
sing..."

Dennis touches the child's sleeve – it bursts into flour,
drifting away like breath.

DENNIS

I think I need flour, right?

- High school Dennis with a guitar and enormous Elton John glasses.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Oh, those were such big glasses.

He finds a stick of butter. It melts instantly, dripping
between his fingers.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Maybe you don't need butter.

- Seminary Dennis appears, head shaved, calm.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)

The nuns put you on the altar the
day you were born.

(MORE)

BIG DOUG (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Said a prayer. Said you'd be a
priest.

MOM (V.O.)
Six weeks early. Feet first.
You couldn't wait to get out.

Dennis is handed measuring spoons — enormous, impossible. He holds one up.

DENNIS
How am I supposed to measure
anything with these?

The spoons shimmer — turn into silver fish — slip from his hands and swim through the air. He watches them go. Still holding nothing. Still trying to measure the unmeasurable.

A BAR CUSTOMER steps out of the shadows — a man's shape, voice low and warm.

BAR CUSTOMER
You got a boyfriend?

Dennis leans in. A half-smile.

DENNIS
Are you asking?

The man hands him an egg. Then another. Then another. Dennis laughs, juggling. One drops — it glows violet.

A fourth. He fumbles — two fall, orange and green. They splatter. Smoke rises.

Then — hands from everywhere. Dozens of eggs. Cracking. Breaking. Running.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(panicked)
No — stop — I can't take that many—
Please—too many—

The crowd turns. Eggs fly. SPLAT. SPLAT. SPLAT.

VOICES (V.O.)
(overlapping, taunting)
Queer.
Freak.
Pansy.
Homo.
Last to be picked for basketball.
Loser.
Loner.

From the light – CONNIE. Her hair haloed. Her smile wrong.

CONNIE
Forget something?

She cracks an egg – thick watercolor yolk runs down his apron. A rainbow turned sour.

INT. KITCHEN – NIGHT [S] (CONTINUED)

CONNIE (V.O.)
(laughing)
You're my BFF!

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
I told you they wouldn't bother you again.

One last egg hits Dennis in the chest. It cracks – not yolk, but red. Not bright – deep, like a bruise.

SFX: HEARTBEAT – slow, present.

Dennis looks down – he's suddenly in a hospital gown, soaked with blood and rain.

Around the glowing EZ BAKE OVEN, they gather: Mr. McKay, Venus, Mona Lisa – all of them framed like saints around an altar. Connie lingers behind them, trying to see.

The oven hums, louder, holy.

Mona Lisa watches. Venus slides in beside Mr. McKay. The light inside the oven shifts from pink to white.

They all look to Dennis. He smiles. They smile.

Then – ding.

Silence.

Dennis opens the tiny oven door.

Inside – no cake. Just a folded note, written in a child's hand:

You were always enough.

MR. MCKAY
(tender)
You were always enough.

Venus begins to cry. Mona Lisa reaches out, gently dabbing her tears.

Mr. McKay looks to Connie. Her eyes shimmer. She blinks hard. He nods to Mona, who offers her a tissue.

Connie hesitates. Refuses. She turns. Walks away. Each heel strike grows louder – until it becomes the only sound.

From the hallway – a voice.

INT. LIMINAL SPACE - NIGHT [S]

MOM (V.O.)
Never shop when you're hungry.

Beat.

Dennis turns.

The kitchen is gone.

In his hand – a chocolate chip cookie.

He takes a bite. Warm. Buttery.

Steam curls into the air like prayer smoke.

DENNIS
(soft, half-laughing)
Oh my God...
(faint moan of delight)
Fresh out of the oven. Mom's
chocolate chip cookies.

From the glow, Mr. McKay steps forward – clipboard gone, eyes gentle.

MR. MCKAY
(questioning)
Mr. Manning?

DENNIS
(grinning, child-like)
Oh, Mr. McKay – no, I don't have a
hall pass.
But... (reaches into apron)
...I've got one of these.

He offers a cookie.

MR. MCKAY
(takes it, curious)
Wait — is this one of Marge
Manning's chocolate-chip cookies?

DENNIS
(with a full mouth,
joyfully)
Yep. Come on, sit down.

A basketball bench materializes behind them — gym lights
shimmering in amber.

Mr. McKay sits, bites.

A moment. Then a slow smile.

MR. MCKAY
(chewing, savoring)
Mmm... that's grace you can taste.
Thank you, Marge.

He doesn't announce it — he discovers it, right there on his
tongue.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
(quietly)
You always wanted to be picked,
huh?

DENNIS
(soft)
Just once.

They share another cookie.

Laughter — small, real, healing.

MR. MCKAY
You got any more?

DENNIS
(searches pockets,
delighted)
Wow... a whole pocketful — still
warm!

He hands one over. They eat.

The laughter echoes, gentle and endless.

The camera drifts back — the bench floating in soft light, as
Mr. McKay removes his coach's whistle and slips it around
Dennis's neck.

Dennis blinks – surprised.

Mr. McKay smiles. Offers his hand.

MR. MCKAY
(confident)
Friends.

Dennis takes his hand.

DENNIS
(warmly)
Friends.

They shake.

Dennis lifts the whistle to his lips – a single soft blow.

SFX: the whistle tone bends, elongates – morphing into the faint, steady tone of a heart monitor.

MATCH CUT TO:

SFX WHISTLE SOUND.

The camera zooms out of the gym window.

An eagle in flight caws. Soars.

NT. HOSPITAL – DAWN [H]

The E-flat hum of a ventilator replaces the wind. Dennis lies motionless under sterile light. Monitors pulse: steady, fragile. A nurse checks vitals, adjusts tubes. She leans close, whispering – something we can't hear.

The heartbeat steadies.

The room glows faintly amber, like the oven light.

FADE TO WHITE.

SUPER: "Sixty Days Later"

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM – MORNING [M]

The white fades into sunlight filtering through curtains.

Dennis, thinner but awake, lies in bed. A gentle rhythm – not the beeping monitor now, but the soft ticking of a wall clock.

Beside him, DAWN (40s) – sharp, loving, his niece. Her hand rests in his.

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM – MORNING [M]

Soft light filters through thin curtains. Dennis – thinner, paler, but alive – lies in bed. Dawn sits beside him, her hand resting on his.

A long silence. Just breath. The steady tick of a wall clock.

Dennis reaches beneath the blanket. He brings up a small, hand-stitched softcover book.

ON THE COVER:

CHASING TRUTHS
By Dennis J. Manning

He places it in her lap. Dawn traces the stitching. No words yet.

Dennis meets her eyes. A faint, knowing smile. He mouths–It's all there.

She nods. Tears rise. She leans forward, kisses his cheek.

SFX: The clock tick fades, replaced by the faint beep of a monitor.

Dennis turns his gaze toward the window– morning light, leaves shifting, life still moving.

A photograph catches his eye: he and Miss Anne, laughing.

MISS ANNE (V.O.)
(soft, steady)
My D-Man... I feel like we've known
each other for lifetimes.
And you need to know– I have your
precious, wonderful heart. Always.

Dennis breathes in, turns back to Dawn. The monitor hums once... holds... then flattens into a single, unwavering tone.

Dennis closes his eyes.

SFX: Heart monitor flatlines.

FADE TO BLACK.

MUSIC CUE: "SUNDAY (Reprise)"

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM - TIMELESS SPACE [S][M]

The gym is empty. A single basketball rests mid-court.

Footsteps echo - Dennis's.

He appears from the shadows, moving easily, freely. Wearing a purple-and-black tapestry shirt, tailored black pants, polished dress shoes. Goatee trimmed, hair neat, black 1950s-style glasses.

He glows.

As the chords of "Sunday" fill the air, Dennis walks across the polished floor.

Each step leaves a faint shimmer of reflected light - the gym alive again with memory, music, and grace.

Dennis eyes the ball and smiles.

DENNIS

(to the basketball)

Sure. You just won't let it go.

MR. MCKAY

(he has a wry smile)

Mr. Manning, I see you are back.

DENNIS

(sighs but upbeat)

Yes, Coach McKay I am back. (he yells and his voice echoes) I AM BAAAAAAAACK.

MR. MCKAY

Good.

He blows the whistle - and suddenly the bleachers explode with life: Fans cheering, drums pounding, cheerleaders flipping in slow motion. Confetti falls like snow.

McKay points to the bench. Dennis looks - one open seat amid a row of athletes of every shape and age: A ballerina in sequins, a boxer, a nun, a drag queen, a farm boy, a German shepherd wagging its tail.

Dennis hesitates - then grins. He slides in between the shepherd and a muscular, lanky athlete.

DENNIS

(to himself, amused)

Okay, sure... why not?

THE SHEPHERD
(excited, pure joy)
I love to chase the ball!

MUSCULAR ATHLETE
(teasing)
Doggie, you don't chase the ball.
You pass it.

Dennis shrugs, laughing.

From center court, VENUS DE MILO struts out – jersey, whistle, high ponytail. The crowd goes wild.

VENUS DE MILO
(shouting)
Alright, Coach– flip the coin!

McKay tosses it skyward. It spins in a shaft of golden light.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)
HEADS!

McKay catches it, turns it over into his palm.

MR. MCKAY
(excited))
Heads it is! You get first pick, De Milo.

The Crowd roars. A school band plays.

Cheerleaders com out and start a cheer no one hears.

VENUS DE MILO
Prepare to lose.

The players straighten, ready.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)
I pick... the Shepherd!

The crowd erupts. The Shepherd bolts forward, tail wagging, tongue out, as Venus kneels and hugs him.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)
You're on my team, Champ.

She looks to McKay.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)
Your turn, Coach.

A hush. Anticipation ripples through the gym. Sunlight streams across the bench, catching the particles of confetti midair.

McKay scans the players. Faces beam. Dennis just sits there – calm, amused, whole.

McKay's gaze stops. He smiles, small but proud.

MR. MCKAY
Mr. Manning.

The crowd erupts. The Shepherd barks. Venus laughs.

The muscular athlete jumps up, sweeps Dennis into a bear hug.

Dennis laughs – hard, full, free.

MUSCULAR ATHLETE
Oh I hope I am on your team!

Dennis gets up and goes to the center. The Shepherd is wagging his tail.

Mr. McKay shakes Dennis' hand.

MR. MCKAY
I want you on my team.

SMASH CUT

DENNIS V.O.
Dedicated for anyone who ever
wanted to be picked.

Silence.

Faintly sounds of a park.

EXT. CITY PARK – AFTERNOON [S][M]

Silence, then faint sounds of life – children laughing, wind, ducks, the far-off thump of a basketball.

A quiet bench near a duck pond. Sunlight filters through trees like stained glass.

Dennis and Mr. McKay sit side by side. A brown paper bag rests between them.

MR. MCKAY
(gentle)
You were always chasing something,
Mr. Manning.

Dennis smiles, pulls out a cookie.

DENNIS Not something. Just... permission.

He takes a bite. Chews. Closes his eyes.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
You know what you are?

DENNIS
(he breathes out)
Tired.

MR. MCKAY
Brave.

They sit in silence. A faint SWOOSH. Somewhere, a basketball hits a rim. The same clean sound we heard at the beginning.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
You did good.

Dennis leans back, lets the sun hit his face.

He exhales – peace, not pain.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. BLANK ROOM – TIMELESS [S]

Softly lit. Everything gone except Dennis and Mr. McKay.

A light mist floats at their feet.

The Chem Nun glides past – serene.

CHEM NUN
Mr. Manning, wonderful job with
your exam yesterday.

DENNIS
Thank you, Sister.

She nods, disappears into the mist.

MR. MCKAY
 (firm but kind)
 Mr. Manning? Where are you supposed
 to be right now?

Dennis looks down – a folded note in his hand. He offers it.
 McKay reads.

DENNIS
 I'm sorry... I seem to have forgotten
 where I should be.

MR. MCKAY
 It says here – "Class: Chasing
 Truths."
 But you passed that class, son.
 Move along.

McKay smiles, proud. Then fades away.

Dennis turns.

Three doors glow before him. Each with a number – and a
 painting:

#1 – The Girl with the Pearl Earring

#2 – Mona Lisa

#3 – American Gothic Couple

The portraits come alive, giving him a warm, knowing smile.

MOM (V.O.)
 You are never stuck. You can always
 come home.

BIG DOUG (V.O.)
 Den, drop the paper. Let's go.

A hand slips into Dennis's right – Claudio, wearing his Mouse
 Ears. Another slips into his left – Ronnie, in his blue-
 tinted glasses.

They smile. They glow.

A French accordion begins: "Sunday" – Paris café-style.

DENNIS
 Guys... Claudio, Ronnie – I've missed
 you.

CLAUDIO
 I want to do Guardians first.

DENNIS
(laughs)
I love that ride.

RONNIE
Space Mountain afterwards.

CLAUDIO
(laughs)
Oh, he turned green for an hour.

DENNIS
(teasing)
Fuuuck you.

They all laugh – real, familiar laughter.

RONNIE
Your turn, Den. Pick a song.

Dennis looks at the three glowing doors. They hum faintly, waiting.

DENNIS
(grinning, mock-offended)
Fine. ALEXA – play “Let’s Stay Together” by Tina Turner.

RONNIE
Pick a door, Den.

Dennis lets go of their hands. He steps toward the doors. He breathes in. He breathes out.

DENNIS
(quiet, sure)
Okay. Let’s go.

He chooses Door #2 – Mona Lisa. As it opens, golden light floods in. The song plays big and bold.

He turns back, grinning. Dennis already beginning to glow.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Come on, guys. Let’s go.

They follow him through the light.

From the distance – a single word, bright, teasing, eternal:

MISS ANNE (V.O.)
Raspberry.

DENNIS (V.O.)
Miss Anne!

The door closes in a wash of light.

FADE TO BLACK.

POV - THE CAMERA IS LOCKED IN ON ALL WHITE THEN AS THE SHOT
PULLS BACK IT IS A SEA OF FEATHERS.

Birds fly across the morning sunrise

Miley Cyrus song "USED TO BE YOUNG" starts.

Credits roll. Photographs will slide as ripples in water. All
photos are joyous or peaceful.

MILEY CYRUS V.O.
(sings)
*The truth is bulletproof, there's
no foolin' you
I don't dress the same*

-Photo of Dennis in the Seminary - 1981

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Me and who you say I was yesterday
Have gone our separate ways*

-Photo Dennis at a gay bar, everyone doing "VOGUE" - 1989

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Left my livin' fast somewhere in
the past
'Cause that's for chasin' cars*

-Photo - Dennis in San Francisco - CASTRO sign - 1985

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Turns out open bars lead to broken
hearts
And goin' way too far*

-Photo - Dennis at night, alone with his guitar, pad and pen -
1994

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*I know I used to be crazy
I know I used to be fun*

-Photo- Dennis and Miss Anne - Pride NYC, Miss Anne has on
"Statue of Liberty Glasses." Big Smiles - 1990

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*You say I used to be wild
I say I used to be young*

-Photo - Dennis at swim meet ready to dive off the blocks.

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*You tell me time has done changed
me
That's fine, I've had a good run*

-Photo - Dennis, Ronnie and Claudio - In Paris Eiffel Tower -
2014

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*I know I used to be crazy
That's 'cause I used to be young*

-BLACK & WHITE Photo - Bog Doug and Dennis delivering papers -
1970

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Take one, pour it out, it's not
worth cryin' 'bout
The things you can't erase*

-Photo - Dad's Funeral all around the grave - 1989

-Photo - Mom's Funeral, all remaining around the grave - 1994

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Like tattoos and regrets, words I
never meant
And ones that got away*

-Photo - Dennis sitting at a bar alone

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
(sings)
*Left my livin' fast somewhere in
the past
And took another road*

-Photo - Ronnie and Dennis quiet dinner

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*Turns out crowded rooms empty out
as soon
There's somewhere else to go, oh-eh*

-Photo - Dennis alone with a Birthday Cake "24" Birthday hat on.

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*I know I used to be crazy
I know I used to be fun
You say I used to be wild
I say I used to be young*

-Photo - Dennis and Connie with acoustic guitars, singing - 1978

-Photo - Dennis and crowd roller skating - 1980

-Photo - NYC Broadway - 2022

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*Oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh
Oh-whoa, oh-whoa, oh-whoa
Oh, yeah
Whoa-oh-oh
Whoa-oh-oh
Oh-whoa, oh-whoa, oh-whoa
Oh*

-Photos move rapidly like flash cards:

-Birth

-Dennis fishing with Dad

-Dennis and Sister driving

-Birthday 16

-Birthday 28

-Birthday 39

-New Orleans and Dennis, Ronnie and Claudio

-Dennis in high school, books on the floor, Mr. McKay watching

-The car crash, mangled car, ambulance, stretchers with two bodies

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*I know I used to be crazy
Messed up, but God, was it fun*

-Photo - Dennis and Miss Anne, Dying his hair it turned
ORANGE - 1992 - Laughter

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*I know I used to be wild
That's 'cause I used to be young*

-Photo Dennis on stage

-Photo Dennis playing Guitar in a nightclub

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*Those wasted nights are not wasted
I remember every one
I know I used to be crazy
That's 'cause I used to be young*

-Photo - Dennis in the music studio, headphones on.

-Photo - Dennis and Ronnie in Vegas

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

*You tell me time has done changed
me
That's fine, I've had a good run*

-Photo - Dennis in hospital post accident, monitors
everywhere, Dawn by the bedside.

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)

(sings)

I know I used to be crazy

-Photo Dennis eyes morph from Birth, to 16, to 47, to now

COLD STOP. SILENCE

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

Mr. McKay (40) is tossing the basketballs in the net.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

He turns his head to Dennis.

MR. MCKAY
(easy questioning)
Mr. Manning, what brings you here?
You graduated.

DENNIS
I want to say, "Thanks"

They hold eyes.

BEAT.

Mr. McKay gives a knowing wink and nods.

A mist comes over the screen. Final BLACK & WHITE photo floats in.

CHRISTMAS 1974.

Dennis (12) in the photo sitting by the tree with the set of weights. Dennis tries to smile.

MILEY CYRUS V.O.
(sings)

That's 'cause I used to be young

EXT. BEACH

Waves lapping. Sunset.

ON SCREEN:

ON SCREEN
For every 12-year-old who ever
wanted an EZ BAKE OVEN and got
something heavy instead.

FADE TO BLACK.

ON SCREEN —
FINAL CARD:

IMAGES FOLLOW AND COORDINATE WITH THE SCRIPTING

That dog on the bench — tail wagging, eager to play, totally unaware he doesn't belong there — is the point.

He shouldn't make sense.

Just like the EZ Bake oven. Just like Venus mouthing "Plus one for DJ." Just like a hall pass in purgatory. Just like art talking back. Just like being gay in a family that wanted a priest. Just like wanting to be picked when no one's calling your name.

The dog is joy. He's hope. He's grace with fur.

He is unapologetic belonging.

And that's why he made the team.

THE END.