

CHASING TRUTHS

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

Written by

Dennis J Manning

Copyright 2025

Dennis Manning
Dennis@danforthmusic.org

NOTE ON MUSIC

*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.*

All music references are included for artistic purposes only and are not intended as licensed content.

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.

Thank you for picking this up.

Thank you for reading.

- Dennis J. Manning

CHASING TRUTHS



Screenplay by
**DENNIS J.
MANNING**

EXT. UNKNOWN DIMENSION - NIGHT

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. But I wasn't afraid. 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

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

ON SCREEN:

OUR LADY OF LOURDES REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, 1976

Dennis (63) 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. The Kid looks like a younger Dennis.

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.

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

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

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

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

Dennis stands alone.

The hallway flickers—edges curl, like old film burning.

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
(leans in, too close)
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:

NOTHING.

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

ON SCREEN:

SUNBURY PA, 1970

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. I have 80 more house to do.

I looked down and I am on the streets of Sunbury, 1970.

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.

I looked around dazed.

DENNIS

What are we doing?

BIG DOUG

(urgent and guiding)

Den, come on we got 80 more houses to do and then swim practice at five. If we're late we gotta do laps.

DENNIS

Oh god, again, more laps?

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. White space

Yanni is playing in the background.

INT. HOME IN NEW ENGLAND 1995

ON SCREEN:

REHOBOTH, MA 1995

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 outside have all changed colors.

RON V.O.

Den, dinner is almost ready.

DENNIS

(Yelling easy)

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

He searches behind books, moves items from a shelf. He spies
his old Bible. Heavy, black cover now brushed with mildew.
He touches it and sounds rush in.

SFX. Breathing machine whirring. Heart beat is slow.

VOICES V.O.

"The lord is my Shepard"

DENNIS

(he pulls back his hand)

What the fuck?

VOICES V.O.

Language.

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*

He opens the book and a letter drops out.

DENNIS

There it is.

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

Mom - Someplace in Heaven

MOM V.O.
(tender)
You never sent this.

DENNIS
(tender)
Well how could I? (laughs) Air Mail?

MOM V.O.
No matter I got the message.

DENNIS
Well how could you? It never went, you were not here anymore.

MOM V.O.
You always spoke your heart and I always and still hear you. Open it.

DENNIS
I can't even remember what I wrote?

MOM V.O.
Well take a look.

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

DENNIS
(puzzled)
These pages, they are all blank.

He shuffles through them, looking. His face furrows.

MOM V.O.
Such beautiful words.

DENNIS
(slight panic)
But, there's nothing here. The pages are blank?

MOM V.O.
Take a breath.

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

Words write across the blank pages.

DENNIS
"I was not lonely"

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

DENNIS (CONT'D)
That's my hand writing.

The words appear.

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

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(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.

*The wind sounds like laughter as it
moves away.*

Pause. Tears are gentle tears rolling down his face.

MOM V.O. (CONT'D)
(easy and loving)
Go ahead.

DENNIS
(humble and empty)
*I'm a solitary man. Playing all
alone.*

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

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

DENNIS

Wait. Wait. Not yet. Mom? Mom?

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.

NURSE V.O.

(worried)

Doctor his pulse is weak.

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.

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

SFX: wheel, metal, footsteps. Muffled voices.

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

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! Sir calm down!

DENNIS
I just want to breathe.

The camera swirls from the POV from his eyes. He Blinks slowly. Slower. Eyes close.

DARK. Silence. (hold for 5 seconds)

VOICE V.O.
(LOUDLY)
NOW!

A thin veil of light and the camera jolts up and down.

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

The camera jolts up and down.

DENNIS

Fuck Me.

DENNIS' EYES BLINK AND THE CAMERA FOLLOWS THAT PATTERN

The sound of rain is heard faintly. Then stronger. The view runs in shades of grey and black. The rain pelts now with the fury of an August Summer Rain.

A distant sound SWISHING...SWIPING...

The POV is WIPERS from the inside of the front seat or a VALARIE Station Wagon.

SFX: SWISH...SWOOP

The camera breaks through the windshield. Glass and water fly. The camera is under water. The camera glides like a dolphin. The focus gets clearer. The water and vision become aware we are in a swimming pool at the YMCA.

SPLASH! The camera bursts out of the water.

INT. YMCA INDOOR POOL - SWIM MEAT

ON SCREEN:

SUNBURY, PA YMCA 1974

SFX: Indoor pool at the YMCA. VOICES loud. Cheering.

4 lane pool. Swim meat. Kids in swimsuits. 4 boys on the block.

DENNIS

How am I here? This day.

Big Doug talking to the kid.

BIG DOUG

Den, you ready? You got this. I think you're gonna break the record today.

Camera pans to the record board. Focus on "14 & Under"

"50 Yard Freestyle" Record holder "D. Manning"

KID

I know. I know.

Big Doug slaps the Kid on the back.

BIG DOUG
I know you do.

SFX: Way in the distance Elton John's "*Rocket Man*" is heard.
Referee holding a starting pistol.

REFEREE
(COMMANDING)
ON YOUR MARKS. SET.

BANG!

The race begins. POV of the swimmer. No breathes. Stroke.
Stroke. Kick. ONE BREATH. Stroke. Flip turn.

ELTON JOHN
(dreamlike)
I'm a rocket man.

The camera pans the pool. Back to the RECORD BOARD and holds
on the name.

DENNIS
I did win that day.

SMASH CUT:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM

POV from Dennis' eyes laying on the gurney. Oxygen mask on.
Bright lights.

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

DAWN V.O.
Uncle Dennis, come on!

The camera jolts up and down.

SILENCE.

The camera moves up and down like ragged breathing. Then
slower breathing.

SFX: He exhales. The breeze carries it forward — like a
prayer.

SFX: The waves roll in. The light is warm.

EXT. FRANCISCAN SEMINARY

ON SCREEN:

FRANCISCAN SEMINARY 1981

MOM V.O.

Just string together your memory-
moments like beads on a rosary and
see what shines.

SFX. Feet walking on gravel. The feel is gentle. Rhythmic.

Rosary beads sway of hips. The crosses dangle.

A gentle hand cradles a rosary bead. More hands do the same.

A dozen feet are walking on the gravel. POV Sandals. Men's
feet. Black flowing garments.

VOICES V.O.

(chant like)

Hail Mary, full of Grace, the lord
is with thee

MOM V.O.

Were you happy here?

DENNIS

(pause)

How are we back at the Seminary?

VOICES V.O.

Blessed art thou among women and
blessed is the fruit of they womb.

BIG DOUG

I always knew that you had a
calling. Always

VOICES V.O.

Amen.

VOICE V.O.

Friar Dennis, what is your work
duty today.

DOCTOR V.O.

Nurse I need to see here.

DENNIS

Chopping wood.

VOICE V.O.

Again? (laugh) Father Ross must
have a plan for you.

DENNIS

(laughs)

Yea. Silence. Work without
talking. Listen to the voice

ELTON JOHN

(in the far away distance)

Rocket men burning down

The camera pulls back to see 14 Franciscan Friars walking up a gravel road. Surrounded by rolling hills. All dressed in black robes with the waist cord and the three knots. Rosary beads gentle swinging. The air is crisp and the trees are full of the possibility of Spring.

One Friar stands apart. Behind the rest about 10 feet.

VOICES V.O.

(faint in the distance)

Our Father, who art in heaven

ELTON JOHN

(very faint)

*When are you gonna come down? When
are you gonna land?*

DENNIS

(softly singing along)

*I should have stayed on the farm.
I should have listened to my old*

BIG DOUG

No. You never listened. You were
never meant to. You, my brother,
had you own song inside.

DENNIS

It took so long to hear it

MOM V.O.

It took so long to listen for it.

SMASH CUT

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL.

BELL RINGS. Teenagers in school uniforms flood the hall.

He is caught in the swirl. He laughs.

VOICES V.O.

Oh God, I am not ready for the
Chemistry Test.
I hate my lunch today...

The kids all disperse magically into classrooms.

Classroom doors shut. One. Two. Three.

He is alone in the hallway. He sniffs. Smells the smoke
breath of Mr. McKay.

MR. MCKAY

Mr. Manning? I thought we had been
through this once already.

DENNIS

Yes, sir, I (pause) should get to

MR. MCKAY

(stands back and looks)
You're lost aren't you?

DENNIS

Mr. McKay, you always picked on me.
You never gave me a break.

MR. MCKAY

No. I was protecting you.

DENNIS

(puzzled)
Odd way to protect me, you saw them
beat me up.

MR. MCKAY

But did you see me beat them up?

DENNIS

What do you mean?

MR. MCKAY

Did those boys ever come after you
again after that day?

FLASHBACK

INT. HALLWAY AT LOURDES REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

ON SCREEN:

LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL 1976

3 seniors in High School slam the KID into the pale, drab olive lockers. Books fly. The kids glasses boomerang off the floor. Mr. McKay watches. Arms folded.

The seniors punch the kid in the face and stomach. The kid doesn't make a sound.

SENIOR #1
Come on cry. Yell.

No sound from the kid. Mr. McKay steps in.

MR. MCKAY
Gentlemen to my office (LOW) Now.

The three seniors scoff and look at MR. McKay.

MR. MCKAY (CONT'D)
I am not asking and not talking
twice. Go.

The three seniors walk off laughing as they do.

Mr. McKay puts his hand out to the kid to ease him up.

The camera changes to the hand of Dennis and Mr. McKay shaking hands.

DENNIS
Sir, I am ok.

MR. MCKAY
I know. I kept tabs on you over
the years. I am so

SMASH CUT:

INT> EMERGENCY ROOM

Oxygen mask on. Bright lights.

DOCTOR V.O.
(URGENT)
Come on Dennis, you got to work
with me.

The camera jolts up and down.

DENNIS V.O.
Wait finish what you said!

SILENCE.

The camera moves up and down. Then, slower breathing.

SFX: He exhales. The breeze carries it forward — like a prayer.

SFX: The waves roll in. The light is warm.

VOICE V.O.

You know where I am when you're
ready

NURSE V.O.

(URGENT)

Doctor! We are losing him.

The camera jolts up and down.

ELTON JOHN

(dark)

Cause I'm the rocket man....

INT. FAMILY HOME

Camera rushes through rooms of a house. Interrupting actions of dinner, reading, cooking, music playing, up the stairs, down the stairs, break through a wall and tumble over and over on the grass.

SFX: Laughing. Tumbling.

DENNIS

(tumbles and laughs on the
grass)

My God, I used to love to tumble

BIG DOUG

Yes till you would throw up. You
always got car sick.

MOM V.O.

You always wanted to look back and
that movement always got you sick.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM

The camera jolts up and down.

Kaleidoscope of colors swirl. The sounds of instruments being plugged in. AMPS blaring, drums practicing.

The camera out of focus. Feet and people blurry and rushing by.

POV from his eyes. Hands come over his head. Muffled sound.

A door shuts but no sound is heard. The camera pulls back and a recording microphone is in sharp view.

INT. A RECORDING STUDIO BOOTH.

ON SCREEN:

SUSQUEHANNA SOUNDS RECORDING STUDIO 1982

RECORDING TECHNICIAN V.O.
OK "Solitary Man" take one.

SFX: Silence Sounds is cupped in the headphones.

An acoustic guitar starts the song. The camera shows the POV from the eye on the microphone.

DENNIS
(easy, mellow he sings)
*Wet leaves and misty days. Make up
my longing ways.*

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

DENNIS
(singing)
*I am a Solitary Man. Playing all
alone.*

MR. MCKAY V.O.
Did they ever pick on you after
that?

BIG DOUG V.O.
Just drop the paper.

VOICES V.O.
"Hail mary full of Grace"

DENNIS
(Sings)
*I play for no one and no plays for
me.*

SMASH CUT

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM

SFX sound of low heart beat, other monitors.

The camera jolts up and down.

SILENCE. DARK. Hold 4 seconds.

SFX: waves rolling in, lapping. Repeating.

MOM V.O.

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

A gentle hand cradles a rosary bead.

SFX. A breath intake as each bead is past to go to the next.
In. Out. In. Out.

EXT. 81 ELMS STREET, WESTERLY, RI

ON SCREEN:

WESTERLY, RI, SEPTEMBER 1991

A three story duplex. Weathered and old like the Elm trees that encase it. A woman, Miss Anne, of 45, easy, confident in cropped pants and a light blouse is moving boxes in to the other side of the duplex. Her daughter of 12, lags behind noticing a ladybug on a flower. She stops to talk to it. Miss Anne looks back and smiles and then joins the daughter and they both look in on the Ladybug.

MISS ANNE

(to the ladybug)

Well, look at you bringing us luck on our first day here. This is all going to be amazing.

The feeling is easy.

Dennis has a jar of "Marge's Peaches." Home canned and delicious. He walks up to Miss Anne.

DENNIS

Welcome.

They look at each other and for the first time ever in his life he feels that he has known Miss Anne forever.

MISS ANNE
Hi (they shake hands) I'm Anne.

DENNIS
Is that with an "e"?

MISS ANNE
It is. The "e" makes it complete.

DENNIS
Well, I will call you "Miss Anne."
And here are a jar of my mother's
peaches. They are the best.

MISS ANNE
Oh, thank you (her warmth is
infectious) and what is her name?

DENNIS
Marge.

Pause. An easy silence. Miss Anne seems to look deep into his eyes.

MISS ANNE
You are an old soul. I can see
that.

DENNIS V.O.
The name, "Miss Anne" would forever
be her name by everyone from that
moment on.

INT. MAY'S DRIVE IN RESTAURANT ICE CREAM COUNTER

ON SCREEN:

MAY'S DRIVE IN RESTAURANT ICE CREAM COUNTER, 1978

The scene melts in ice cream. A hand is seen scooping
chocolate and strawberry. The arm is that of a teen boy and
smeared with dried ice cream. He wears a white apron.

CINDY THE OWNER
(woman, firm and polite)
You have the tax in your head,
right? You need to do the math by
the time you present the ice cream.
You have it.

KID
(confident)
Yes, Cindy, 6% PA tax, I got it.

He finishes scooping and hand the cone to the customer.

DENNIS
That will be \$2.12 cents.

Dennis turns and wipes the ice cream off of his arm.

BIG DOUG V.O.
You were so proud to get that job.
No one smiled more, and was so
ready to help people, than you.

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

BIG DOUG V.O.
Not yet.

SMASH CUT - Allentown, PA DISCO

ON SCREEN:

ALLENTOWN DISCO, 1990

The camera swirls in frenetic passion. Lights, closeness,
shouting.

The Madonna song "VOGUE" is playing. The camera pulls back
and it is a sea of men. Gay bar. The feel is lively. Fun.
Liberating.

MADONNA THE SINGER
(Sound of the music)
Come on Vogue (Vogue)

Dennis smiles. His feet tap. He clumsily does the VOGUE
motion.

DENNIS
I loved that song.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
Why did you stay away.

Music stops abruptly.

SMASH CUT

EMPTY HALLS OF LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL

Low lights just a hard close spotlight on Dennis.

DENNIS
I didn't stay away.

MR. MCKAY
Well you never came back.

BIG DOUG V.O.
What was there to come back to,
really? This wasn't for you.

MR. MCKAY
I would've liked to see , in-
person, the Man inside Mr. Manning.
I knew you would always be strong.

BIG DOUG
Different.

He puts his hand on Dennis' shoulder.

EXT. BEACH

Two feet walking in the sand.

DAD V.O.
(calming)
Easy does it.

DENNIS
(laughs)
Dad, you always said that.

DAD V.O.
(easy)
Keep the faith

DENNIS AND DAD V.O.
Spread it gently.

Two feet goes to just dennis walking alone. He is unaware
that Dad has left.

DENNIS
And remember when you guys came to
hear me sing back in college?

He looks around.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
(confused)
Hello? Dad?

MOM V.O.
You need to just listen to your own
beat. We hear you.

VOICE V.O.
(URGENT)
Swimmers take your marks. Set.

BANG!

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM

Dennis is on the gurney. POV from his eyes. Muted tones. Eyes
blink open and shut (the camera's POV)

Breathing slows.

In the very distant, muffled, distorted

MADONNA THE SINGER
Let your body groove to the music

DENNIS
(faintly)
I just need to wake up.

The camera sits upright and in panic looks around. People are
a blur. The emergency seems oversized.

VOICES V.O.
Hold him! Sir calm down!

DENNIS
I just want to breathe.

The camera swirls from the POV from his eyes. He Blinks
slowly. Slower. Eyes close. He ease back down.

DARK. Silence. (hold for 5 seconds)

MADONNA THE SINGER
Vogue. Vogue. Vogue.

SFX: Thunder rolls in. Rain heavy.

INT. APARTMENT, 2ND FLOOR, ALLENTOWN, PA

ON SCREEN:

ALLENTOWN, NOVEMBER 27, 1989

Dusk is falling.

Dennis (27) and Penny (32) are laughing as they bring in a fat, live Christmas Tree. Clearly too big for the room or the apartment. They hum "Deck The Halls."

Dennis stands the tree in the corner.

DENNIS
(excited)
Perfect! It's just perfect, right?

PENNY
I don't know how we got it up the stairs!

The phone rings.

DENNIS
(Light and Cheerful)
Happy Holidays! Holiday Inn!

BIG DOUG V.O.
(calm and urgent)
Den, where've you been. I've been calling all afternoon.

DENNIS (27)
Big Doug, we went to get me a Christmas tree! You should see it.

PENNY
It's the best tree!

Dennis (27) continues to talk and laugh. Penny opens up ornament boxes.

DENNIS V.O.
Fuck. He has no idea.

SFX. Heart beat rising.

NURSE V.O.
Doctor we need to calm him down.

BIG DOUG V.O.
Den, listen

DENNIS (27)
Deck the halls! Did you guys get your tree yet. I wish it would snow.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

This is gonna kill him. No one told him. They still don't tell him. Why didn't they just tell him.

MOM V.O.

We weren't sure what you would do?

DENNIS

(scoff)

What I would do? Jesus Christ. That wasn't right.

Dennis (27) is talking on the phone still light hearted. Penny opened up a bottle of wine. Dennis (27) motions "yes pour it up!"

BIG DOUG V.O.

Den You need to come home, now.

DENNIS (27)

Well I just got the tree. I was just home yesterday. I got work tomorrow. If there's stuff to take out of the attic, let mom and dad know that I can pop over Friday morning. It's a 2 hour drive but I can do that and still be back

DENNIS (CONT'D)

They're not gonna tell him

ELTON JOHN

(sounding very far away)

When are you gonna coming down

BIG DOUG V.O.

(urgent)

Would you just listen.

ELTON JOHN

When are you going to land

DENNIS (27)

Ok, Ok, I'm listening. Penny I'll take that wine!

ELTON JOHN

I should have stayed on the farm

BIG DOUG V.O.

Dad, he's in the hospital.

DENNIS

And they still didn't say it yet. Fucking Irish Catholics, never just come out and say it. They think it's protection but it's not. It's juvenile control. I wasn't gonna break, maybe just crack a little.

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)

What happened? Did he fall. What Hospital?

BIG DOUG V.O.

You should just get here.

ELTON JOHN

I should have listened to my old man.

DENNIS

Oh I hated this. Over and over again I played in my head. I know they were doing what they thought was best.

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)

What hospital?

BIG DOUG V.O.

(hesitates)

The one in town, Sunbury Community.

DENNIS

And just like that, a little lie.

Dennis (27) hangs up.

PENNY

What happened? You ok?

DENNIS (27)

Big Doug said my father is in the hospital.

PENNY

You going?

DENNIS (27)

He said come home now. I'll get some clothes and head over. Should be ok. I was at home with everyone, yesterday. He was fine.

ELTON JOHN
So goodbye yellow brick road

He picks up the phone.

DENNIS (27)
 Hello, operator can you get me the
 number for the Sunbury Community
 Hospital? (he waits) Great, can
 you connect me? I guess the
 switchboard.

He motions to Penny to pour some more wine.

ELTON JOHN
*Daniel is traveling tonight on a
 plane.*

DENNIS (27)
 Yes hello I want to check on a
 patient, brought in today, David
 Manning. Sure I'll hold.

VOICE V.O.
 Hello this is Nurse Franklin. Who
 is this?

DENNIS (27)
 (lightly)
 Oh, hi this is Dennis Manning, I am
 the youngest child and I am in
 Allentown and I heard my dad was
 brought to the hospital today. I am
 going to drive now, it takes about
 2 hours, so I should be there about
 730. Are visiting hours till, what
 time?

VOICE V.O.
 (long pause)
 Have you talked with the family?

DENNIS
 This was just the worst.

DENNIS (27) (CONT'D)
 I am the family. Can you put my
 dad on the phone?

VOICES V.O.
 (longer pause)
 Ah, Mr. Manning (voice cracks) this
 is awkward, Have you spoken with
 your mother or brothers?

DENNIS (27)
(getting irritated)
Yes! They said come home. So,
should I stop at the hospital
first.

VOICES V.O.
(calmly like death)
Sir, Mr. Manning died at 930 this
morning.

PENNY
Oh my God. Oh my God!

VOICES V.O.
Are you there? Are you ok?

DENNIS
Of course I was there. I felt
everything just slip.

VOICES V.O.
Sir?

DENNIS (27)
Yes. I am here. Thank you. I am
sorry that you had to tell me.
Thank you for doing so. That must
have been awful. I am so sorry.
Goodbye.

Dennis 27 hangs up. Vacant. No emotion. Heavy breathing.

He picks up the phone and dials.

BIG DOUG V.O.
Hello, Mannings.

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

ELTON JOHN
I can see Daniel waiving goodbye.

The camera swirls.

EXT. CEMETERY SUNBURY, PA A FEW DAYS LATER

The scene is from afar. The family gathered on a cold
December day for the funeral of their father, husband and
friend, David J. Manning, Jr.

MIKE + THE MECHANICS
Say it loud. Say it clear

DENNIS
 We all just went through the motions. Irish Catholics, We feel but we don't talk about it. God that day would never end.

BIG DOUG V.O.
 You got a speeding ticket that day coming back.

DENNIS
 Yea, I told the cop "my father just passed away, today was the funeral." He still handed me the ticket.

SMASH CUT

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

The gym is empty. Dennis is throwing basketballs at the hoop. Not one goes in. He tries again. Misses.

MR. MCKAY
 You don't feel it Mr. Manning, why did you never come out for my basketball team. You had the height, the shape. You could run circles around most guys. You had the hands for it. You had potential.

Dennis tosses another ball up to the net and it misses. They both laugh.

DENNIS
 See.

MR. MCKAY
 Yep. Stick to swimming.

BLACKNESS

VOICE V.O.
 Swimmers take your marks. Set?

BANG.

SMASH CUT.

INT. NY SUBWAY #1 TRAIN DOWNTOWN

ON SCREEN:

NYC, PRIDE DAY 1992

July day, 1992 3pm PRIDE DAY in NYC.

Miss Anne and Dennis (30) are riding on the subway downtown to Greenwich Village. The feeling is light. The subway is full. They stand holding the straps.

MISS ANNE

I've never been down to this part of town. Always an adventure with you D-Man!

DENNIS (30)

We had a great time this weekend.

MISS ANNE

Oh yes, a "weekend at Marge's" means you don't sleep and make lots of memories. The kids were great

DENNIS (30)

My niece, Dawn, is such a tomboy. I said, "Do you want kids one day? Take them roller skating like I took you?"

MISS ANNE

(Imitating a 9 year old Dawn)

No way! I am not getting married and I don't want kids!

DENNIS V.O.

She got married. Has 3 wonderful kids. Her husband, just great. She's a natural mom. Makes it look effortless. Just like her mother did.

The subway jolts. Miss Anne and Dennis (30) laugh and enjoy the ride.

The subway stops at CHRISTOPHER STREET.

MISS ANNE
This is going to be so much fun.
I've never been to a Gay Pride
Event and especially in the Big
Apple!

Dennis (30) Smiles. They get off and head into the crowd.

The camera pulls back and time lapses for a few hours
following the crowds at Gay Pride.

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

MOM V.O.
You never told her. You never told
us.

DENNIS
But you knew.

BIG DOUG V.O.
We knew.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
We always knew.

DENNIS V.O.
God she was so hurt.

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

EXT. MID TOWN NYC, ROCKEFELLER CENTER

Miss Anne and Dennis (30) are sitting by a fountain.

MISS ANNE
(voice is tight, hurt)
Well you should've told me.

DENNIS (30)
I thought you knew.

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

DENNIS V.O.
There it is. "Untruth."

Miss Anne and Dennis (30) sit in silence. 30 seconds pass.
Miss Anne reaches her hand over and holds his hand.

MISS ANNE

(Softly and tears start)
My D-Man, I am not sad you are gay.
I am not ashamed. You are my best
friend. I feel like we have known
each other for lifetimes. And You
need to know that I have your
precious, wonderful heart. Always.
You can tell me anything.

ELTON JOHN

*God I miss Daniel. Oh I miss him
so much.*

DENNIS (30)

We need a word, so when I see you
again, in some other life we can
say it and know right then that
it's us.

MISS ANNE

(she pauses, then with a
smile)
Raspberry.

SFX: The waves rolling in.

EXT. BEACH

One set of feet walking in the sand.

DENNIS

I would break her heart one more
time. I thought that the pain I was
feeling I couldn't share.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

MR. MCKAY

Mr. Manning let me show you how to
make a basket.

DENNIS

Coach McKay. I was never good at
Basketball.

MR. MCKAY
I know (he laughs). You were
awkward as hell. But I liked that
about you

VOICES V.O.
I guess it's common these days to
be hip.

They both laugh. Dennis takes the ball.

MR. MCKAY
Now see the shot. Feel it.

DENNIS
I feel it.

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

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.

SFX:

****SWOOSH.****

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...

MIKE + THE MECHANICS
You can listen as well as you hear.

EXT. THE BEACH.

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 rip off.

SPLIT SCREEN - HAND ON ROSARY BEADS / DENNIS IN THE YUKON BAR
- NIGHT

ON SCREEN:

PROVIDENCE, RI YUKON BAR 1993

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

The lighting is blues and black.

DEPECHE MODE
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.

DEPECHE MODE

*Someone to hear your prayers
someone who cares.*

VOICE V.O.

(Rosary)

And I detest all my sins because of
your just punishments.

DENNIS

Wait, no this feels wrong.
"Personal Jesus" and "The Act of
Contrition"

BIG DOUG V.O.

Den just drop the paper, we got
keep moving.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

You were always....different

VOICE V.O.

(Rosary)

Hail Mary full of grace

BAR CUSTOMER MAN

What man? You wanna dance?

DENNIS (31)

(he steps in front)

Let's do it.

They flow and disappear onto the dance floor.

Depeche Mode play on.

VOICE V.O.

(Rosary)

Holy Mary Mother of God

BAR CUSTOMER MAN

(shouting)

I like the way you move

DENNIS (31)

Sure!

BAR CUSTOMER MAN
(leaning in)
I said I like the way you move!

Dennis leans in. They kiss as the music plays.

SILENCE. FREEZE HOLD ON THE KISS.

DENNIS
That was the first time I gave into
a kiss with a stranger. It
wouldn't be the last.

VOICE V.O.
(holy and hallow)
But most of all because they offend
you.

DENNIS
I wasn't trying to be offensive
It's not wrong.

THE KISS CONTINUES.

DEPECHE MODE
(slow motion)
Your own, personal, Jesus

MR. MCKAY V.O.
When did you

SMASH CUT SPLIT SCREEN ENDS

SILENCE

INT. OFFICE OF MR. MCKAY

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.

MR. MCKAY
(firm)
When did you know?

DENNIS
Know what?

MR. MCKAY

(stern)

I won't ask a second time, Mr. Manning.

DENNIS

I never knew you looked at me or looked out for me.

MR. MCKAY

(like a wise man)

All the time. I could see you. No one else like you back then.

DENNIS

That can't be true.

MR. MCKAY

We all talked about you, the teachers. Just wanted you to break through. Let it all out.

ELTON JOHN

When are you going to land

DENNIS

I am who I always was, but that was the problem.

MR. MCKAY

How?

DENNIS

I always saw things different. Remember, Connie?

MR. MCKAY

Oh yes, you two were friends forever. (beat) You were so tight-lipped I would see how they would all tease you, taunt you. How did you just not go crazy one day? Just fight back.

DENNIS

And let them win?

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. I talked about you for
years to kids, teachers, how you
just "never let them see you
sweat." You are fine man. Look at
you. How is Connie? I am so

SMASH CUT

INT. THE YUKON GAY BAR, PROVIDENCE, RI

"Personal Jesus" plays. 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.

DEPECHE MODE
Your own, personal, Jesus

Heavy breathing. A kiss. Heavy breathing.

DENNIS
(out of breath, lust)
Then don't look away.

SILENCE.

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

MR. McKay is in RED SHORTS with Our Lady of Lourdes High
School logo. I white polo shirt, white socks and sneakers.
He shoots basketballs from the Free Throw line.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

One after another each one goes in. Effortless.

He hums, Perry Como, "*Home for the holidays*"

No one else is in the gym. The feeling is calm. It feels like a therapist session. Dennis not sure that he wants any therapy.

MR. MCKAY

(Hums)

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

(pause)

I thought you were not going to show. But you always did follow through.

DENNIS

(asking like a detective)

Why do I keep coming back to you?

MR. MCKAY

Why do I keep coming back to you?

DENNIS

You never talked to me.

MR. MCKAY

I was always here.

DENNIS

Every one else had your attention.
"Coach look here...Coach watch me throw...Coach how about that game last night.

MR. MCKAY

You wanted my attention.

DENNIS

(scoff)

Bullshit.

MR. MCKAY

(singing lightly)

"I met a man who lived in Tennessee and he was heading for Pennsylvania and some homemade pumpkin pie."

DENNIS

(singing)

"Some pumpkin pie"

They both laugh easy. Mr. McKay continues to through the basketball.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

MR. MCKAY

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

You just knew. 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

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
Ok, so I knew. Always.

I didn't know what to call it.

I knew what got my attention and what didn't.

Everyone else was in the same lane – and I just couldn't.

MR. MCKAY
Go on.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS
I never told this to anyone.

MR. MCKAY
So why tell me now?

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

MR. MCKAY
Just acting. I'm a teddy bear.

DENNIS
(laughs)
With claws.

MR. MCKAY
(chuckles)
With claws.

Dennis looks off – like a stone skipped across memory.

DENNIS
There was this guy – senior year
when 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 Facebook. 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.

MR. MCKAY
So what is this story?

CUT TO:

INT. DENNIS' HOME 1974 CHRISTMAS IN THE LIVING ROOM

ON SCREEN:

THE MANNING FAMILY CHRISTMAS, 1974

As Dennis talks these scene plays out on the screen.

Christmas morning 130 AM.

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.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
Is this a sad story?

DENNIS V.O.
Well, it is a story of love and
understanding.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
OK go on then.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS V.O.
When I was 12, I was obsessed with
the Sears Catalogue.
Every Christmas, I'd go through it
and circle everything I wanted.
And then I saw this crazy new thing
called an EZ BAKE OVEN.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
An EZ BAKE OVEN?

DENNIS V.O.
And it was pink. I was instantly
obsessed. I was possessed.

MR. MCKAY V.O.
How did they react?

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS V.O.

They all just smiled.
I had no idea about being gay or
what it meant – but in hindsight, I
was pretty much announcing my
sexuality... at 12.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

So is *that* when you knew?

DENNIS V.O.

I was the only boy I knew who
wanted one. But I didn't care.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

The heart wants what the heart
wants.

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS V.O.

Right. (BEAT)
So Christmas morning comes – and
there it is.
Not the oven exactly, but a really
big box.
Clearly it was my oven. It was the
biggest present under the tree.
My heart was racing. I think I was
shaking. I couldn't sleep the night
before...

MR. MCKAY V.O.

You really thought?

DENNIS V.O.

Yes. In my soul, I was getting the
EZ Bake Oven. So I rip off the
paper and –

(pause)

MR. MCKAY V.O.

You okay?

DENNIS V.O.

Well, it's not an EZ Bake Oven.
I wasn't sure what it was – but I
knew what it wasn't.
And it was heavy. Really heavy.
I finally get it open...

(MORE)

DENNIS V.O. (CONT'D)
And it's — are you ready for this?
(Beat)
It's weights.

SMASH CUT

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

Mr. McKay throws the basketball for a shot. BOUNCE. DROP.
The ball misses the basket.

MR. MCKAY
(like WTF)
Weights?

SMASH CUT

IN THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DENNIS V.O.
It was weights for weightlifting.
Dumbbells.
Maybe they thought I wanted to be
strong.
But I didn't.
I didn't want to lift weights.
I wanted to lift hearts.

CUT TO:

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM - CONTINUOUS

Dennis is standing. McKay still tossing the ball.

Now Dennis speaks aloud — present, grounded.

DENNIS
With cake. With cookies.
With something warm that said, "you
matter." I didn't care about
muscles. I cared about cooking.

MR. MCKAY
(stops tossing, stunned)
Weights? (beat) Oh God.

SMASH CUT

INT. DENNIS' HOME 1974 CHRISTMAS IN THE LIVING ROOM -
CONTINUOUS

DENNIS V.O.

It was weights for weightlifting.
Dumbbells. I guess they
thought...I don't know what they
thought...I guess they thought I
wanted to be Muscular...I guess
they thought I wanted to be
strong...but I didn't...I didn't
want to lift weights. I wanted to
lift hearts. With cake. With
cookies. With something warm that
said, "you matter...I didn't care
about muscles I cared about
cooking.

BIG DOUG V.O.

We didn't know what to
get you.

DAVE O.S

We did our best.

SMASH CUT

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

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

MR. MCKAY

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.

BIG DOUG V.O.

Never let them see you sweat.

ELTON JOHN

"I'm a rocket man."

DENNIS
They meant well.
And sometimes... that's all you
get.

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM - 1994 - LATE AFTERNOON

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.

Just breathes. A moment between mother and son. Too much said. Too little. It lingers.

Then—

SMASH CUT TO:

Dennis picks up the basketball. Goes to the Free Throw line. Without hesitation, he throws the ball.

SLOW MOTION

The ball leaves his hand goes to the rim. Circle around the rim. Hesitates and then falls.

BOUNCE. BOUNCE. BACK TO REAL TIME.

DENNIS
(laughs)
I guess I'll stick to swimming.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. YMCA POOL

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

ELTON JOHN
*"When are you gonna come down? When
are you going to land?"*

DENNIS (V.O.)
And maybe they gave me weights to
build the one thing I'd need most.

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

HAND ON A RADIO

Colors merge and shift.

SFX: Static sound of a radio dial turning.

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

LAURA BRANNIGAN
The iconic opening of "GLORIA"
"Gloria"

SFX dial turns. Static sound.

THE CARPENTERS
"Why do birds suddenly appear."

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

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

SFX dial turns. Static sound.

JANIS IAN
*"I learned the truth at 17, that
love was meant for beauty queens."*

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.

FLASH OF BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT.

SFX. Crashing of two cars. Tires squealing. Muffled voices
yelling.

The camera swirls like a kaleidoscope.

LAURA BRANNIGAN
(very distant and
haunting)
"Calling Gloria. Gloria....Gloria

VOICE V.O.
CLEAR!

SCREEN GOES BLACK FLATLINE SOUND

DAWN
(muffled and far away)
Do something. Uncle Dennis
(pleading) come on, come on.

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

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)

"If everybody wants you, why isn't anybody calling?"

SWOOSH. SWOOSH.

DENNIS

Why do I keep coming back to you?
We never talked.

MR. MCKAY

(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

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. DENNIS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dishes clatter. The sink runs. A sponge squeaks.

DENNIS (V.O.)

We used to beg my dad to leave out
the green things in his meatloaf.
He'd just smile and say - I'm color-
blind. I never noticed.

(beat)

He saw more than he said. And loved
louder than most who claimed to.

Dennis (60s), in sweatpants and an old "SUNY ONEONTA" T-shirt, wipes down the counters. His shoulders ache, but he keeps moving. Keeps scrubbing. Keeps breathing.

ON THE COUNTER - A half-eaten salad. An open letter. And a portable radio with a cracked speaker.

SFX: STATIC.

A song clicks in mid-note. Pam Tillis "Spilled Perfume."

PAM TILLIS (RADIO)

(faint, haunted)

*But there's no use crying over
spilled perfume*

Dennis freezes.

He grips the counter.

CLOSE ON his hands - trembling.

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

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

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

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.

He clutches his chest.

Staggered breath.

Heartbeat accelerating.

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

SFX: HEARTBEAT – now pounding.

Dennis' eyes flutter.

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

- 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.

PAM TILLIS

No use crying over, no use crying over, No use crying over, spilled perfume.

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.

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

DENNIS (V.O.)
(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..."

INT. GREY ROOM SINGLE LIGHT ON.

Dennis opens his eyes.

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

DENNIS V.O.
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
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."

VENUS
(snippy)
Not listening.

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)
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

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

- 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

- 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.

BARTENDER
 Try the #2 door...

DOOR LIGHTS UP #2. Dennis goes in.

INT. #2 DOOR ROOM

Dennis enters there is a stool. He sits down and the door closes. SILENCE. The room turns into a confessional. The panel slides open with the priest.

PRIEST
 Yes my child?

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

SARA EVANS V.O.
 (singing haunting and
 slow)
 "I always wondered what's on the
 other side of the #2 door."

Dennis gets up to re-open the door and it won't open. He panics.

SFX. Heartbeat increases. The room closes in.

PRIEST
You should confess.

DENNIS
For what?

PRIEST
Everything.

Heartbeat gets faster. The corners of the screen flash red.

DENNIS
No, I am not confessing.

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

DENNIS
I have always been hungry. Wanting
to taste everything.

PRIEST
You wanted love without
consequences. You got consequences
without love.

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

The room closes in. Voices swirl. The prayers intensify.

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

INT. CHURCH - DREAM / MEMORY - DAY

Dennis sits alone in the back pew. Stained glass bleeds
across his face. The smell of wax and dust lingers.

A kind of silence heavier than shouting.

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

Dennis kneels. Tries. Fails. He sits back. Clutches his
rosary. A long breath.

SISTER JANET MEAD (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Save us from evil and the kingdom,
 the power, and the glory,
 Forever will be yours.

IMAGES FLASH:

- A confessional with no priest inside.
- A younger Dennis in line for communion... backing away.
- Dave and Marge, standing side by side in church, looking right through him.

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

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

BACK TO:

Dennis. Breaking. Crying—not from guilt. But from the ache of
 still needing permission to be whole. The church lights
 flicker. The music fades.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK.

SFX: A single, steady heartbeat.

Not urgent. Not panicked. Just there. Still alive. Still
 Dennis.

ON SCREEN:

ZUMBA CLASS - 2020

INT. DANCE CLASS - DAY

Dennis fumbles his way through Zumba. Laughs. Breathes.
 Smiles.

A glance across the room. A wink. A maybe.

SFX: Slow inhale. Quiet exhale.

MR. MCKAY (V.O.)
 Dennis isn't healed.
 He's just back in motion.

SFX: A slow inhale. A quiet exhale.

ABBA (V.O.)
*Mamma Mia! Here I go again... My, my...
 how can I resist you?*

DOCTOR V.O.
 (firmly and with anguish)
 Dennis, come on you 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.

CUT TO:

SFX: A slow inhale. A quiet exhale. The camera moves with the
 breathing.

FADE OUT.

INT. DENNIS'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - SEPTEMBER 2018

Dim light. Familiar furniture. Rain spatters the windows.

Dennis (50s, kind, sharp, deeply tired) pours two glasses of
 wine.

CONNIE (50s, polished, restless, practiced in righteousness)
 stands at the bookshelf, looking at old photos. She holds one
 up - them at 18, grinning.

CONNIE
 You remember this? Right before you
 went into the seminary. Your dad
 and I drove you up. Franciscan,
 wasn't it?

DENNIS
 (smiles, soft)
 Yeah. You brought a rosary and a
 coffee. Said you prayed the whole
 way and kept me awake.

She sets the photo down. The mood shifts.

CONNIE
 (stiff)
 Dennis... You never got married.
 (MORE)

CONNIE (CONT'D)
You sang at my wedding, but never
tied the knot.

DENNIS
(tight)
It doesn't matter.

CONNIE
It does.
(pause)
Why not? We've known each other 50
years.

DENNIS
Do you really need to ask that?

CONNIE
(pause - voice softer)
I was scared for you. Not of you...
and I never figured out the
difference.

She flinches. Her breath catches.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
So it's true.
(beat - softer, almost
ashamed)
I never wanted to admit it.

DENNIS
Define "true."

CONNIE
Dennis, I love you. You're my best
friend, always have been. But
this... this part of you...

DENNIS
(interrupts)
This part? You don't get to dissect
me, Connie. I'm not a casserole -
you can't just leave out the
onions.

CONNIE
(struggling)
It goes against everything I
believe.

DOCTOR V.O.
Nurse what's his rate?

NURSE V.O.
59, Doctor.

DENNIS
Well maybe what you believe needs
to stretch.

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

DENNIS
(spikes)
Don't say it. Don't you dare toss
catechism at me like it's a
lifeboat. You think God's on your
side just because you stayed on the
hill and went to Mass?

CONNIE
(tears up, trying to pull
dignity from religion)
I can't love that part of you.

DENNIS
Then you never loved me.
(beat)
Because that part isn't a drawer I
open when you're not around. It's
the air in my lungs. It's the way I
see the world. It's the music in my
voice when I sing. When we sang
together.

CONNIE
(small)
But I prayed for you.

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

CONNIE
Did you parents know? My mother
certainly did.

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

CONNIE
(talking out the window)
I had promise. I had standing. And
you—

DENNIS
—I was your accessory.

She turns back to Dennis.

CONNIE
(snaps)
You were supposed to tell me.

DENNIS
I was supposed to protect myself.
Because I knew one day this moment
would come. And now here we are.

She stands.

CONNIE
I think I should go.

DENNIS
I think you left a long time ago.
(beat)

CONNIE
I'll pray for you.

DENNIS
Pray for yourself.

Connie turns to leave, then stops.

CONNIE
In high school — when you dated
that fat girl? We all laughed.
Behind your back.
(beat)
I wrote "BFF" in your yearbook
because it felt like the right
thing to do. You were always there
— happy, eager, organizing
everything. But God, you were...
suffocating.
(rising)
You were never in my league,
Dennis. Not really. I was the smart
one. I had the voice, the looks,
the future.
(sharper)
And you just... followed.
(MORE)

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 (beat — low, bitter)
 You were second class. Your house.
 Your family. You.
 (Pause — searching,
 bitter))
 I should've known.
 (mocking))
 Gay. Gay. GAY.
 (brushing herself off like
 dirt)
 Disgusting.

She spirals, quieter now — not sad, just cracked

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

SFX: Faint *flatline beep*.

The fluorescent hum of an emergency room.

FLASH IMAGE — Dennis on the ER table.

IVs. His chest rising slow. A nurse wiping his forehead.

Then—Dennis says nothing. His silence fills the room.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 (she escalates further)
 You parents must have been ashamed
 of you. I know my parents were.

DENNIS
 Perhaps you can ask my parents when
 you go to heaven.

CONNIE
 A place you'll never get to.

DENNIS
 (soft, grounded)
 I didn't know you were in charge of
 the "Guest List." But I'll still
 keep trying to live like I belong
 there. Even if the guest list
 changed.

She leaves. The door clicks shut.

SILENCE.

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

(beat)

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

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. DENNIS' CAR - DAY

Cruising. Light traffic. Sunlight flickers through the windshield.

Dennis drives. Ronnie in the passenger seat. Claudio in the 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
Please - no show tunes.

CLAUDIO
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– every thing golden
for a second.

BEAT.

SFX AND SHOT**BAM.**

A T-bone crash from the passenger side.

Metal screams. Glass explodes.

SLOW MOTION

Bodies rise up. The car flips. Objects float – loose photos,
sunglasses, a box of Tic Tacs – suspended in the crash like
memories.

TINA TURNER
(the sound is way in the
background)
*“since we’ve been together. MMMM
Loving you forever, is all i need.”*

The car rolls over two more times.

BACK TO REAL
TIME.

SFX: Screeching tires. Shattering glass. One final roll –

Silence. No one moves.

BLACK.

No music. No sound. Nothing.

DENNIS
(low, gasping for air)
Oh god...

Then, slowly...

BLACK AND WHITE - MONTAGE

ELTON JOHN (V.O.)
(singing)
"Rocket Man"

- Police arrive.
- The car that caused the accident: a Home Depot rental truck.
- Time lapse reverse: the truck runs the red at high speed, T-boning Dennis' car.
- The car rolls. The truck barely dented.
- Ambulances arrive.
- Ronnie and Claudio pulled out, lifeless.
- Sheets.
- Dennis - oxygen mask.
- Crowds gather.
- Crowds disperse.
- Tow truck.
- Nightfall.
- Street swept clean.

SFX: A single heartbeat.

Distant. Fading.

MONTAGE ENDS

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY BAY - FLICKERING BETWEEN MEMORY AND REALITY

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

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: *BZZZTTT!*

DENNIS'S BODY JUMPS.

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

DOCTOR
 CLEAR!!

SFX: *BZZZTTT!*

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.

EXT. BEACH

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 sargent)
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.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Seagulls. Laughter.

Yanni plays.

The heartbeat is shallow—but steady.

INT. KITCHEN – NIGHT

The Color is amber.

A single pink EZ BAKE OVEN hums on the counter.

The light inside glows. It's too bright. Too powerful for what's supposed to be a child's toy.

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

DENNIS
(laughs)
This is the wrong size.

He spies his mother's baking containers on the counter 4 shiny metal containers for: Flour, Sugar, Coffee and Tea.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
I am so glad I kept these all these years.

He's trying to bake something – something very specific – but the ingredients keep changing. They slip out of his hands. Labels blur. He's muttering:

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Was it one cup of Memory. Regret.
Forgiveness.

Behind him, ghosts enter – but not scary ghosts. Versions of himself.

- Young Dennis in his communion outfit.

VOICES V.O.
(sing)
"Immaculate Mary your praises we sing"

He touches the young Dennis' white communion suit and it puffs away like flour in the wind.

DENNIS
I think I need flour, right?

- High school Dennis with a guitar. He has in a HUGE pair of ELTON JOHN style glasses.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
 Oh, (sigh) those were such big
 glasses.

Dennis finds a stick of butter and as he picks it up the
 butter melts and slips through his fingers.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
 (pause) Well maybe you don't need
 butter.

- Seminary Dennis with a shaved head.

BIG DOUG V.O.
 You know when you were born the
 nuns put you on the alter in their
 chapel. Said a prayer for you and
 knew that one day you would be a
 priest.

MOM V.O.
 You were born 6-weeks early. Feet
 first. You couldn't wait to get
 out. Poor thing, all blue. So weak

Dennis is handed measuring spoons but they 100 times over-
 sized.

DENNIS
 (puzzled, quiet)
 How am I supposed to measure
 anything with these?

He holds up the measuring spoons - impossibly large.

They shimmer. Turn into fish. Slip from his hands. Swim away
 through the air.

Dennis just watches. Still holding the memory. Nothing left
 to measure.

- Drag night Dennis in lipstick.

BAR CUSTOMER MAN
 (growling, sexy)
 Hey. You got a boyfriend?

Beat. Dennis leans in and kisses him. Dennis instinctively
 wipe the lipstick after the kiss - out of old reflex

DENNIS
 Are you asking?

The man hands him an egg. Then another. A third.

Dennis laughs – starts juggling. One egg drops – it glows bright purple.

A fourth egg. Dennis tries to catch it – drops two. They shatter: one orange, one green.

Then – hands from every direction. Eggs, dozens of them. 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.

Eggs smash and run watercolors down the apron.

MR. MCKAY V.O.

I told you they wouldn't bother you
again.

One last egg hits Dennis in the chest. It cracks.

Inside: not yolk, but red. Not bright – dark. Deep. Like a bruise.

– Dennis in a hospital gown, wet with blood and rain.

They all gather around the oven like it's the altar.

Suddenly, the ding.

The cake is done. Dennis opens it – but inside?

Not a cake. A folded note. Written in a child's handwriting.

"You were always enough."

Dennis begins to cry.

A VOICE speaks from the hallway.

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

Dennis turns. The kitchen is gone.

In his hand a chocolate chip cookie.

He bites. The cookie is warm. Delicious. One of Marge's cookies.

DENNIS
Oh, my God (he savors the flavor)
Oh fresh out of the oven. The Mom's
chocolate chip cookies.

MR. McKay comes up to him.

MR. MCKAY
(questioning)
Mr. Manning?

DENNIS
Oh, Mr. McKay no, I don't have a
hall pass. But (he reaches into his
apron) but I have one of these.

He hands him a cookie.

MR. MCKAY
(Looking inquisitive,
stern)
Wait. Is this one of Marge
Manning's chocolate cookies?

DENNIS
(with a mouthful like a
happy child)
Yep. Come on sit down.

A basketball bench appears. Mr. McKay sits.

MR. MCKAY
(chewing, grinning,
genuinely impressed,
savors the flavor)
MMMMM...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)
(quiet)
You always wanted to be picked,
huh?

DENNIS
Just once.

They eat the cookies.

MR. MCKAY
You got any more?

DENNIS
(Searches, the in joy)
Wow, I got a pocketful and they are
all just out of the oven!

He hands Mr. McKay another one. They laugh.

The camera pulls back to see them on the bench sharing cookies and laughing. Mr McKay takes the coaches whistles off his neck and puts it around Dennis' neck.

Dennis looks surprised. Mr. McKay smiles (slightly). He puts out his right hand to shake.

MR. MCKAY
(Confident)
Friends.

Dennis looks and then gets a smile.

DENNIS
(warmly and shakes his
hand)
Friends.

The camera pulls back. Dennis takes the whistle and blows.

SFX WHISTLE SOUND.

The camera zooms out of the gym window.

An eagle in flight caws. Soars.

FADE TO:

INT. DENNIS' BEDROOM - 60 DAYS LATER

DENNIS lies in bed. Thinner. Paler. But awake.

Beside him: DAWN (40s), sharp, loving, his niece.

Her hand is in his.

Dennis reaches beneath his blanket. Pulls out a wrapped bundle.

A softcover book—stitched by hand.

On the front:

****CHASING TRUTH****

****by Dennis J. Manning****

He places it in her lap.

DENNIS

I wanted to write it all down and
pass it along to you.

DAWN

What is it?

DENNIS

Me. Every version.

A beat. He studies her.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Don't waste time explaining who you
are. Just be it. Loud. Beautiful.
Messy. If the world can't catch
up—leave it behind.

Dawn tries not to cry. She leans in. Kisses his hand.

DAWN

I love you, Uncle Dennis.

MISS ANNE (V.O.)

(soft, steady)

My D-Man...I am not sad you are
gay. I am not ashamed. You are my
best friend. I feel like we've
known each other for lifetimes.
And you need to know— I have your
precious, wonderful heart. Always.
You can tell me anything.

Dennis look off then turns to Dawn.

DENNIS

Dawn. Never let them see you sweat.

She laughs through her tears.

Dennis closes his eyes.

SFX: HEART MONITOR FLATLINES.

FADE TO BLACK.

MUSIC:

"SUNDAY" (Reprise)

INT. LOURDES HIGH SCHOOL GYM

The gym is empty. There is a single basketball on the floor. The sound of Dennis footsteps echo as "Sunday" plays in the background. Dennis is wearing a purple and black long sleeve tapestry-type shirt. Beautiful. Black pants and black dress shoes. His goatee is trimmed and his hair cut and looking sharp. He glows. He has a pair of black, 50-s style glasses.

Dennis eyes the ball and smiles.

DENNIS

Sure. You just won't let it go.

MR. MCKAY

Mr. Manning, I see you are back.
(he has a wry smile)

DENNIS

(sighs but upbeat)
Yes, Coach McKay I am back. (he
yells and his voice echoes) I AM
BAAAAAAAAACK.

MR. MCKAY

Good.

Mr. McKay blows his whistle and the gym is filled with people waiting for a big basketball game to start. Cheerleaders cheering. Fans yelling. Mr. McKay nods to Dennis to take a seat on the bench. There is one seat open. The bench is filled with athletes, of all shapes and sizes. Woman, men and a German shepherd.

Dennis goes over and squeezes in next to the dog on his right and a muscular, lanky athlete on his left.

Dennis looks puzzled but not fearful. The crowd cheers.

Venus De Milos slides out to the center and has a sports jersey (Tank) on. A whistle around her neck. She stands next to Mr. McKay.

Mr. McKay tosses a coin in the air.

VENUS DE MILO
(shouting)
HEADS!

Mr. McKay catches the coin. Turns it over into his other hand.

MR. MCKAY
(excited)
It's heads! You get first pick de Milo.

VENUS DE MILO
Prepare to lose!

The bench participants look excited. Dennis is not sure what to make of it all.

THE SHEPHERD
I am so excited. I LOVE to chase the ball!

MUSCULAR ATHLETE
(a little teasing but trying to help)
Doggie, you don't "chase" the ball. You pass or throw it.

Dennis looks at The Shepherd and shrugs his shoulder.

VENUS DE MILO
I pick The Shepherd.

The crowd roars. The shepherd runs to Venus and snuggle his base.

VENUS DE MILO (CONT'D)
Ok, McKay who is your first pick?

The crowd silences. A hush of great anticipation comes across the room.

A beam of sunlight pours through a window.

Mr. McKay looks up and down. The bench participants posture. Dennis is so used to this routine. He sits calm and watches with enjoyment.

MR. MCKAY
(he pauses then a nod)
Mr. Manning.

The crowd roars! The Muscular athlete jumps up and pulls Dennis into a bear hug.

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

EXT. CITY PARK - AFTERNOON

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

Dennis sits with MR. McKay.

A 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
You know what you are?

DENNIS
Tired?

MR. MCKAY
Brave.

They sit in silence.

SWOOSH.

A basketball hits a rim somewhere in the distance.

The same clean sound we heard at the beginning.

MR. MCKAY
You did good.

Dennis leans his head back. Breathes in the day.

HARD CUT.

Everything disappears. Mr. McKay and Dennis are in a blank room, softly lit.

The Chem Nun walks by as if she is floating.

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

DENNIS
Thank you, Sister.

MR. MCKAY
(firm and stern)
Mr. Manning? Where you supposed to
be right now?

Dennis looks down there is a note in his hand. He hands it to Mr. McKay. He reads it.

DENNIS
I am sorry, I seem to have
forgotten where I should be?

MR. MCKAY
It says here the class in "Chasing
Truths" but, you passed that class,
son. Move along.

Mr. McKay disappears. Dennis turns.

3 doors light up. Each door labeled with a number and with a painting on it.

-Door #1 - The girl with the Pearl Erring

-Door #2 - Mona Lisa

-Door #3 - American Gothic Couple

Dennis looks at each door. The portraits give a loving 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 takes Dennis' Right hand (it is Claudio) and a hand takes Dennis' left had (it is Ronnie). They all look at each other and smile. They glow.

"Sunday" is playing on a French accordion, Paris café-style

DENNIS

Guys, Claudio and Ronnie, I have so
missed you.

CLAUDIO

I want to do Guardians first.

DENNIS

I love that ride!

RONNIE

Space Mountain, afterwards.

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

Please - no show tunes.

CLAUDIO

If I hear *one more* Carpenter
song...

Dennis looks at the doors

DENNIS
(grinning, mock offended)
Fine. ALEXA – play “Let’s Stay Tog–

RONNIE
Pick a door, Den.

Dennis let’s go of both of their hands. He stand in front of the three doors. He selects Door #2. He breathes in. He breathes out.

DENNIS
(gently correcting)
Okay. ALEXA – play “Let’s Stay Together” by Tina Turner.

He opens the door. The music starts.

Dennis looks back one last time–grinning, already glowing.

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

They follow him through the light.

MISS ANNE (V.O.)
(in the distance)
Raspberry.

DENNIS (V.O.)
Miss Anne!

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

(MORE)

MILEY CYRUS V.O. (CONT'D)
*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.