

BE YOUR BEST

Written by
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INT. SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Old, dusty. Fluorescents hum.

BEN BEAM (18, Black) - lanky as hell - sits trapped in a chair. Leg bouncing. **Red hoodie on.**

HAM (O.S.)

Damn, man. Three days straight.
Nine this month.

Sullen. Studying his shoes. Holes in 'em.

HAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You makin' it real hard to stay in
your corner.

HAM (60s, Black) sits across. Stay tight on Ham. Neck-up.

HAM (CONT'D)

Where you been?

BEN

Been sick.

HAM

Ben's been sick... Mhm.
Boy, you stay sick.

Ben looks up.

Coughs deliberately.

HAM (CONT'D)

Ain't a nurse there for your
grandma.

BEN

Yeah.

HAM

What she say when I call her?

BEN

She say grandma ain't doin too
good.

HAM

What she say about you?

Ben rubs the back of his neck. A **small bump** there.

HAM (CONT'D)

Killin' me, man. You this. Close.
Almost out.

BEN

I ain't goin nowhere.

HAM

Brian said the same thing 'fore he
aced his shit.

BEN

Yeah Bri walkin on water too - the
fuck I here for?

HAM

Cool it.

Beat. Ham pecks at his computer.

HAM (CONT'D)

What's your exam time.

BEN

Monday. 9am.

HAM

What room.

BEN

Two-oh-six.

HAM

Test prep--

BEN

Tuesday/Thursday till then.

Ham leans back. Plops his glasses on the desk. Touché.

HAM

Man, I pray for that woman.
Dealin' wit you.

Ben eyes Ham's glasses.

BEN

Why you wear those?

HAM

They for show. Gotta look the part.

BEN

You pick the whole outfit?

HAM

Nah. The tweed is mandatory. Same
as your studyin'.

BEN

I love the look, Mr. Ham.

HAM

And I love the sound of you
steppin' out my office. Thank you,
Benjamin. That is all.

Ben snags his bag and scoots off. As he passes the doorway...

ANGLE ON: A poster hanging outside the office.

Free Intl. Space Colony

A **space** for the best and brightest

Tall trees and picturesque homes fill the background.

Ham watches Ben traverse the long hallway. Concerned.

Then...

WIDER ON HAM:

Nothing odd -- tweed jacket, corduroys.

But now he extends a curly cord from his chunky old desktop.
Lazily *snaps* the flat end to his neck.

Magnetized.

Ham's POV flickers onscreen. Video footage -- *their session* --
uploads frame by frame.

Push in.

Ham's eyes look normal. But they must be cameras...

Drifting down... landing on an old-timey PATCH **freshly sewn**
on his lapel. It reads:

H.A.M.

Human Assistance Machine
– **High School Administrator** –

Ham leans back, guzzles a tall glass of water. Exhales fondly.

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAN FRANCISCO - NEW DAY

Total logjam. Utter filth.

Ben (**different clothes**) crosses a dastardly SF street, dodging...

CARS

Gridlocked, old, dirty, honking, still running on gas. Then:

HOMELESS TENTS

dominating the walkways - spilling trash, odor, and...

SO. MANY. PEOPLE.

Sitting, laying, dying right on the sidewalk. A wave of foot commuters almost tramples Ben, hurrying towards...

EXT. TRANSPORT STATION - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Like sand through an hourglass, the hoard pours into the entrance. Ben fights his way past.

INT. TRANSPORT STATION - DAY

Just like an NYC subway.

Escalators descend into further madness. Ben navigates a busy platform. Leaps over a homeless guy.

Then he goes deeper, slipping onto another escalator marked "LONG-DISTANCE TRAVEL".

Spoiler alert --

INT. LONG-DISTANCE PLATFORM - TRANSPORT STATION - DAY

It's crowded.

A large subway platform with claustrophobic ceilings. Ticket booth to one side, turnstiles on the other.

As if there wasn't enough commotion, this level features a group of PROTESTORS **chanting away...**

RAH-RAH, no more this or that. Ben ignores them. Makes his way to the turnstiles, studying the mechanism.

A glance at his watch, then the info board:

CA --> FL | 4 stops | 3h 49m
2:14P Departure

(Across the country in 4 hours, despite the grime.)

Past the chaos, Ben spies his next hurdle:

A SECURITY GUARD
with eyes fixed on the turnstiles. HAM patch on his uniform.

[Every worker is a "HAM" with a patch unless specified.]

Ben thinks up a plan - eyes darting around. Clock. Officer.
Tunnel. Enveloped in it all.

Gears turning, until --

PROTESTOR
Hi! I'm collecting signatures! Can
I have your support?

The young female PROTESTOR **must yell** over her group. Ben
apparently has time today.

BEN
Fuck it, sure.

PROTESTOR
So- so like I'm with the Pro-Life
Association and we believe the use
of 'Be Your Best' stores is like -
okay, we think it's as addictive as
heroin.

BEN
Heroin's that shit though.

Ben's still on alert - watching as the train eases into the
station. PASSENGERS pour inside.

PROTESTOR
(still shouting)
Yeah well- so it's like people are
dying sooner for things that they
don't need, right so-

BEN
Crack is wack, dope ain't hope,
and Be Your Best-

PROTESTOR
 -makes people depressed! You've
 seen our Ads!

BEN
 Big fan of y'all. But I be
 wondering...

Ben stays dialed on the guard.

BEN (CONT'D)
 What if I just spend a *smidge* of
 time, right. 'Cause we got one
 hundred years, and folks like us...
 Gotta do what we gotta do.

PROTESTOR
 (leans close)
 To be honest... I kinda wanna try
 it when I turn 21.

BEN
 Damn it girl - you a volunteer!

Ben snatches her clipboard.

PROTESTOR
 Yeah but--

BEN
 Nah. I'ma sign this...
 But you doin' something for me.

PA ANNOUNCEMENT
*Final call Eastbound to
 Florida. All passengers
 Eastbound, final call.*

BEN (CONT'D)
 See the guard? Go for his
 signature. This fool.

Ben's already pushing her along, eyeing the transport.

PROTESTOR
 My supervisor said no Hams.

BEN
 Girl, just flash a pretty smile,
 say something's wrong.

PROTESTOR
 But--

BEN
 For a fan? Big fan?

She looks at him, rolls her eyes - but goes.

Approaches the guard all flirty, points toward the hall...

And the guard follows her. Holy shit.

Ben quickly hops a turnstile, tears through the transport doors --

INT. TRANSPORT CAR - CONTINUOUS

-- and they slide shut behind him. No biggie.

The train *lurches* forward...

And Ben tip-toes through the dim interior. Head bobbing past skinny subways ads, akin to:

Save the planet
IMPROVE YOURSELF!

100 boring years?
OR 95 GREAT ONES!

Be Your Best
IS FOR EVERYONE!

Visit your local **BYB** store
today!

Must be 21+ or 18+ in Florida and Puerto Rico.

Dark in here, like a red-eye flight.

Ben sits between fellow commuters. One spreads a **newspaper**, the other holds a **flip phone**.

Ben has nothing - nada - zilch.

No smartphone or holographic thing-a-majig one might expect. Zero entertainment.

So he glances at the neighbor's paper:

FISC CITIZENS WORKING ON EXITING NEW TECH

Gut-punched at the thought. There's that sullen look again. Staring into the void.

Pull away...

Turning longways in the transport car, camera swaying with the *super-speed acceleration*...

Until the darkness plays nicely for a TITLE CARD:

BE YOUR BEST

MERGING INTO:

A CIGARETTE BUTT
dominating frame, glowing - merging again with...

THE BRIGHT FLORIDA SUN
Heat waves blurring the foreground.

EXT. TRANSPORT STATION - FLORIDA - EVENING

Ben escapes the transport area, peers at the "DAYTONA BEACH STATION" sign.

It's much quieter here.

Ben shrugs and walks off, a mere tumbleweed in the wind.

EXT. STRIP MALL - LATER

The shopping center of a bygone era.

Crap restaurants, dry cleaners, and a post office - all boarded up with FOR LEASE signs. All of 'em, except the...

BE YOUR BEST STORE (**BYB STORE**)
It sticks out against the neglect with a LARGE GROUP gathered. Tents erected in the parking lot. Tunes cranked.

Ben stands on the outskirts and looks around. Seems legit.

He proceeds to the storefront.

INT. LOBBY - BYB STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Might as well be the DMV.

Awful beige everything, plastic chairs, numbered help windows. Nothing sexy here, except --

HOSTESS

Hello there, young man. First time
or returning?

A smiley BYB HOSTESS (20s) greets him, tits popping from her white uniform.

BEN

Returning uh, I mean--
(boobs)
First time.

HOSTESS

Great. Welcome in. You'll head this way to get checked in, okay?

She gestures to...

THE SCANNER

Like the TSA 'put-your-arms-up' thing. Its sleekness stands out against the other tech in this world.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

But first, fill out a release form for me, deary.

She holds out a thick clipboard.

LATER

Ben approaches the scanner, steps right on in. Eliciting --

RED LIGHT

Crawling up his body, detailing every inch. Then...

A SHARP NEEDLE

whirs its way over. It fires a piston:

Zip -- in and out. A quick injection.

Ben feels where he was pricked, but nothing's there.

Meanwhile, the red light summits his nose... forehead... then vanishes.

Over and done.

Ben steps out, blinking the light away. He turns to see...

A "Please Take A Number" spool. The screen at the top reads: "Next Appointment, 5d 1h".

Ben pulls a ticket and out comes a short, flexible LED SCREEN. Like a ribbon cable with an 8-bit display.

The LEDs reiterate Ben's wait time:

5d 1h

EXT. BYB STORE - SUNSET

Ben trudges through the crowd, defeated.

Junky shopping carts. Dirty tents. Trash can fires. A chronic homeless encampment.

Among the filth:

LED tickets faintly glow. Bits of light. Hope.

A dog pouts at the feet of homeless addict. Ben, watching the guy shoot up, bumps into --

MARCEL (40s, Latino) - bleached hair, ruby lips, lots of botox.

MARCEL

Oh!

BEN

(bitter)

Sorry.

And Ben's gone - angrily marching through the lot. Marcel lingers on the boy. All alone...

MARCEL

Didn't expect a 5-day line, did we?

Ben stops. Turns back.

Marcel inches forward, drink in hand.

MARCEL (CONT'D)

Cute. Don't worry, honey. It's only like that the first time.

BEN

Why's it so fucking slammed?

MARCEL

Mmmm. Welcome to Florida, tiger.

(leans in)

You're not the only 18-year-old with the same idea.

HOSTESS (O.S.)

Y'ALL!

The front door yanks their attention. The Hostess hollers at the loiterers inside.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

If your wait time is more than twelve hours, kindly Be Your Best somewhere else. I gotta make room in here!

RANDOM DICKHEAD

Only if you come tuck me in!

More heckles are tossed at the poor girl. Marcel sips his drink.

MARCEL
You out here by yourself?

BEN
Not interested, pal.

MARCEL
Oh go crank stick. You wanna place to stay or not?

Ben looks down. Nods.

MARCEL (CONT'D)
Right, well. Lucky for you...

He opens a shiny purse.

MARCEL (CONT'D)
There's a gross hostel nearby. I booked a bed all week but-
(offers keycard)
My appointment with Miss Tits is tonight. Won't be needing it.

BEN
You leavin town?

Marcel grins. Fixes a fake eyelash.

MARCEL
See kid. When you're 49 going on the big five-oh...

He raises his drink.

MARCEL (CONT'D)
...and you already spent half your life here.

Down it goes. Smooth and strong.

MARCEL (CONT'D)
Sure. Bon voyage to me.

Ben nods. Respectfully quiet.

BEN
Thanks though. For real.

MARCEL

Please. Enjoy the scratchy sheets.
Go on. Go.

Ben turns to leave.

MARCEL (CONT'D)

And by the way.

He glances back.

MARCEL (CONT'D)

Don't make it a habit...
(gestures to the crowd)
I probably said I'd do it once too.

Their eyes meet.

Ben nods, then keeps moving - into the dimming sunset.

Marcel watches him go, as Ham did.

Then he checks his LED ticket. Hmm. About that time. Marcel
tosses his empty drink.

Takes a long, deep breath...

INT. LOBBY - BYB STORE - LATER

Marcel approaches a help window, fielding hoots 'n hollers
from the lobby crowd.

Another hot BYB WORKER takes his ticket and scans it.

INT. HALLWAY - BYB STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Down a corridor Marcel goes, yet another WORKER guiding him
past door after door.

Finally they stop. A small screen reads "Returning Customer"
on the wall. Marcel scans his fingerprint, prompting a...

DOOR

Opening slowly, welcoming Marcel.

INT. DEMO ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dim. The grungy store gives way to crisp black interior.

Marcel sits on a ledge facing a mirror opposite.

Our OFF-SCREEN AI host, **ARIEL**, is female, robotic in content, but naturally soothing in delivery.

ARIEL

Welcome back, Marcel. I'm Ariel.
Thanks for choosing to Be Your Best. You have one life year remaining with 50 years of past purchases. How would you like to spend your time today?

Marcel stares at his reflection - eyes watering, botox quivering. Not sharing her enthusiasm.

MARCEL

Ariel I... I'm afraid this is our last hurrah.

ARIEL

Certainly Marcel. Look's like you've lived a long and happy life.

Marcel, fighting tears --

MARCEL

Can... can you lie Ariel? Or do you share in truth?

ARIEL

The truth, to the best of my ability.

MARCEL

Why wasn't I let off-world?

ARIEL

Looks like your exam scores were in the top 86th percentile, however, transfers to FISC are extremely selective.

Marcel grinds his jaw.

MARCEL

Then what's it like... out there.

ARIEL

The Free International Space Colony boasts longer life limits, fewer crowds, and a higher abundance of self-reported happiness.

MARCEL

Do they have stores like this
there?

ARIEL

They do not.
(hard beat)
Any more questions?

MARCEL

Should... should Marcel Withers be
proud of himself?

ARIEL

Marcel Withers should be very proud
of himself. A life well-lived.

Weeping now, doesn't buy a word.

MARCEL

...it feels good, right-- RIGHT?

ARIEL

Of course. Your essence will live
on. You'll be happy forever.

He stares at his reflection, sniveling.

MARCEL

Give it to me.

ARIEL

Prolonged dopamine comatose is an
irreversible process that provides
late-stage clients with a blissful
transfer. You must be of sound mind
and body to make this decision.
Please confirm that all your
affairs are in order and that any
and all family has been notified,
as Be Your Best is at no obligation
to do so.

MARCEL

...confirmed.

ARIEL

Thank you, Marcel. It has been my
absolute pleasure serving you.

Not a second later, a needle JUTS from the wall, pierces his
neck, and retracts (mimicking the scanner).

Marcel crumbles against the wall - **OUT**. Whatever that was just snatched his consciousness. His soul.

INT. HALLWAY - BYB STORE - LATER

Marcel lays on a stretcher.

Eyes closed, now in a plain gown. Another NURSE rips a receipt from a slot on the wall.

Slapped on his forehead, it reads "DOPA".

LATER

They reach a **security checkpoint** in the hall. A worker sits next to a walk-thru scanner.

When they pass, the light flashes green.

INT. TRANSFER ROOM - BYB STORE - LATER

BYB WORKERS mill about with chaotic precision.

Stretchers parked everywhere, going this way and that. Workers taking notes, at computers, etc.

Meanwhile, Marcel is wheeled to:

THE INCINERATOR

A scary metal door on the far wall. The Nurse brings Marcel to a spot and walks off. All business.

Two bigger workers (men) lift the body, toss him inside.

BYB WORKER #3

(call-out)

Marcel Withers!

ALL WORKERS

THANKS FOR CHOOSING TO

BE YOUR BEST.

Thumbs a button -- BLAST. The incinerator burns Marcel with ferocious power.

After a moment, the door opens with a puff of smoke. A gloved hand reaches in...

...and out comes a **metallic spinal cord**.

Or part of one anyway. Quickly - it's gone, tossed in a nearby receptacle.

Not the dopamine coma Marcel expected. Not even close.

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

Ben drops a food wrapper in the garbage. Shuffles towards the Wham-Bam Thank-You-Ma'am Hostel.

Seen brighter days - dry pool, flickering lights - but it beats the ground.

Ben pauses at the front office window, sees an OLD MAN snoozing away. High security.

Further along... into a courtyard/pool area with doors circling. Which room?

He tries one - red flash.

Red again and again, then green. Thank god.

Ben opens the door...

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

Cramped.

Four bunks and four walls. One lamp/table in the back.

Unoccupied except for **REGINALD (19)**, playing the snake game on his Nokia. Reggie's a hefty boy.

BEN
(closing door)
Yo. What's good man.

REGINALD
What up.

Ben stops in the center.

BEN
Where was the other dude sleepin.

REGINALD
Who?

BEN
Older guy. He offered up his spot.

REGINALD
Older guy, shit...

Doesn't wanna go there, but --

BEN
Bro with botox.

REGINALD
Oh shit, word. Bottom left.
(laughing)
That dude was fucked up.

Ben slides onto the bunk, then stops: Marcel left a bag.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Total drama queen, man. Swear.

Ben ignores the slander and contemplates the bag. Search it?
Sure. Ben quietly pulls the zipper...

REGINALD (CONT'D)
That's fucked up, yo.

BEN
You the one talkin mad shit, bruh.

REGINALD
He coming back for that?

BEN
Didn't seem like it.

REGINALD
Damn. Bro's dopa-dead.

Ben digs through the bag.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Any weed there?

BEN
Man, no. Shit is depressing.

ANGLE ON a few photos of Marcel's family. Parents and siblings.

BEN (CONT'D)
Guy had family.

REGINALD
Dude was what, forty?

BEN
Fifty.

REGINALD

How sad you gotta be, man. It's
lowkey suicide to be honest.

BEN

Yeah aight - look at you. Where's
your little ticket at.

That shuts him up. Reggie turns back to his phone.

And the investigation continues. Typical items, beauty
products, etc. - and finally, a KALIMBA (thumb piano).

Ben frowns at it, then...

The door JOSTLES, but doesn't open.

REGINALD

Shit - knock out the light.

BEN

You said what?

More jostling -- BANG. Someone kicked the door.

GIRL (O.S.)

(outside)

Earl you tub of SHIT!

Big grunt as she marches off.

BEN

Who the hell?

REGINALD

Turn. Off. The light.

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

The girl bangs the office window.

This is **SKYE VANDERBILT (19, Asian)** - tall, tantalizing,
rockin' the grunge look and shaved head.

SKYE

Hell-o? Earth to Earl? Wakey-wakey!

A disoriented EARL (same old guy) lifts the glass an inch.

SKYE (CONT'D)

Time for cakey. Fat fuck.

EARL
Young lady if ya gonna keep shoutin
ya ain't gettin' shit.

SKYE
(flicks key card)
Fix my fucking thing.

EARL
I'm fixin' to toss you out, crazy
bitch.

Oh here we go.

SKYE
Would it help if I drove through
the door?

EARL
Ma'am?

SKYE
I SAID.

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - SAME

SKYE (O.S.)
Would it help if I RAMMED MY CAR
through the door so I can get to my
fucking room!

BEN
(chuckling)
Who... who is that?

REGINALD
You fuckin' heard her. Crazy weirdo
man! Made botox boy cry last night.

BEN
How 'bout I just open thing--

REGINALD
No!

BEN
Yeah motherfucker, damn!

Ben does just that. Leaning the door open...

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - CONTINUOUS

SKYE
And if I--!

BEN
Hello, miss? It's all cool. I got
this thang open for ya.

Skye smiles, ready to bite.

SKYE
Oh wow. Thank you.

Skye swipes her card from Earl, marches to the room.

REGINALD (O.S.)
Dude. You fucked us.

SKYE
It's just- y'know. When I was
banging on the door earlier..?

She pauses at the entrance, clocks both boys.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Uhm, I see. Boys night. Did you cum
hard?

She slips inside. Ben laughs. Then closes himself in with the
maniac.

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - SAME

BEN
Yup. We were gayin' in here.

REGINALD
No we--

SKYE
(unplugs lamp)
Shut the fuck up. I got a headache.

Skye sprawls onto the bunk below Reggie. All is dark. Even
Reggie's damn phone is finally away.

BEN
You two make one odd couple.

REGINALD
(whisper)
Shut! Up!

Ben chuckles, assumes his bunk. Waits a beat.

BEN
Y'all know each other?

REGINALD
Dude I'm telling-- (you)

SKYE
(muffled, into mattress)
Take a fucking hint!!

Raw pain in her voice. Ben puts a lid on it.

On Skye, wrapped tight in the covers. Shivering, clenching her whole body --

INT. DINER - EARLY MORNING

Classic American, red booths.

This, like most places here, is rundown as shit. Just operated by HAM's.

Ben eats alone. Stares at his ticket: "4d 11h".

The door jingles. Skye slips her way to the counter. Buries herself in a sketchbook.

Ben's captivated - almost doesn't recognize her in a shiny purple wig.

He exhales, bored as hell. Peers at his ticket. Then gazes at the pretty maniac.

Back to the ticket. Lotta time to kill.

So he walks over and sits two stools away. Awkwardly looks at Skye.

BEN
Hello there.

SKYE
Hi.

BEN
Feelin' better?

SKYE
I was.

Ben chuckles.

BEN
 (eyeing his ticket)
 Man... these four days gon' kill
 me. How long you got?

SKYE
 I'm not here for that.

BEN
 Mmm, okay. So last night. You said
 you had a car.

Skye drops her pencil. Looks at him.

SKYE
 The other shitheads hang around the
 pier.

BEN
 And you... hate the shitheads.

SKYE
 (mad)
 Correct.

Ben hops off his stool.

BEN
 Aye, aight - say less. Thanks for
 the tip.

And he's gone.

Skye resumes her sketching. On a glimpse, she draws the
 beginnings of a deli counter. Then suddenly --

WAITRESS
 Oh my gosh, I love your hair.

SKYE
 It's a fucking wig, full-head-a-
 hair-ass bitch.

WAITRESS
 Oh, I...

The door jingles. Ben laughs on his way out (bill unpaid).

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

'Twas months before Christmas, when all through the land, not
 a creature was stirring...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

...not even a HAM.

IN A CLASSROOM

Rows of desks dusted cleanly with care, in hopes that happy students would soon be there.

TEACHER HAM

All snug in his bare PRISON CHAMBER, a sink and a toilet with not much else to remember.

ON A BED

the HAM sat just flat on his ass, in a sad little room at the back of the class.

THEN A HALLWAY

On the breast of the unused lockers.

TO A CLOSET

filled with sweepers and unfused caulkers.

There he was, JANITOR HAM and his sink/bed combo. And there we realized, these workers are just mere cargo.

More rapid and damning the SHOTS as they came, each patch sewn on to deliver a name:

High school COACHES and COOKS and more TEACHERS abound, even a GARDNER in his quarters beside the playground.

But certain the PRINCIPAL could buy a better bunk. Yet alas, she too was stuck in a trunk.

Breathing and blinking and following orders, each worker remained in their posted

H.A.M. Living Quarters

Slaves in this world, obedient and singular. Never leaving their roles, except that one from **earlier**...

INT. SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Back in the first Ham's office, now empty before the school day. Clock on the wall goes...

Tick. Tick. Tick. Until --

The school bell rings. Student chatter fills the air.

Turning... to an open door opposite the Ham's desk. A little sign denotes another "HAM Living Quarters".

--LIVING QUARTERS--

Our school counselor HAM (keep him as "Ham") sits on a tiny bed. Staring at his tweed jacket on the wall.

He breathes, ever-so-slightly, up and down.

Studying the ugly tweed, his HAM patch **old and frayed**. Knee bouncing with nervous anticipation.

In the top corner, a print-out is taped against a security camera. Blocking its view.

One final breath, then Ham stands. Grabs the tweed and exits his quarters.

--OFFICE--

On his way out, we see another blocked security camera.

INT. HALLWAY - HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Ham strides past students and stops at a doorway.

HAM

Is Ben Beam absent again?

Teacher Ham scans the classroom.

TEACHER

Afraid so.

Ham **tenses** and marches away.

EXT. BEN'S DWELLING - LATER

A door opens, revealing a HOME NURSE (20s, Black). She's curvaceous. Distractingly so.

And her eyes are wide and scared.

HOME NURSE

Can I help you?

INT. BEN'S DWELLING - LATER

Ham kneels in front of GRANDMA BEAM (super fucking old). Life-support tubing all over.

Ham tries to coax info, speaking loudly.

HAM

Mrs. Beam. You haven't seen your grandson, AT ALL?

HOME NURSE

Not since Sunday.

HAM

The boy don't come home for 2 days and you do nothin'?

HOME NURSE

(terrified)

Sir I... I can't go out lookin'.

Grandma coughs, out of it. Some support system here.

Ham marches past the Nurse, noting her figure.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Tons of electronics. Ben's hobby? His brother's?

Ham sits at a desktop computer, navigating Ben's search history.

He finally slows when he sees...

Be Your Best restrictions – search

BYB minimum age – search

Then, article links to:

18 and up brain upgrades in Florida – Orlando Post

Florida rejects new BYB bill, remains unrestricted... – Daytona Tribune

Yada yada. But one thing's important:

HAM

Florida.

HOME NURSE (O.S.)

He asked for money Sunday morning. Didn't say what for.

HAM

(studying screen)

You know if he might've--

HOME NURSE (O.S.)
Why are you looking?

Ham turns.

The Nurse stands in the doorway, gripping a kitchen knife. Shaking.

HAM
 Easy now...

HOME NURSE
 You ain't supposed to be here. You outta protocol.

HAM
 Ma'am, I'm just--

HOME NURSE
 What do you want with Ben?!

HAM
 Same as you. What Brian made sure of before he left.

The knife lowers. But her hands still tremble.

HOME NURSE
 You can't lead nobody here.

HAM
 I won't.

HOME NURSE
 Understand sir, I ain't a nurse. If they find out what I am, they-- they'll make me--

HAM
 No they won't. Promise to God I won't let 'em.

Gently, he takes the knife. She let's go like a timid child.

HAM (CONT'D)
 Let me find the boy. Get him up there with his brother.

The Nurse nods. Still rattled.

EXT. BEN'S DWELLING - MOMENTS LATER

Ham strides away, ties his jacket around his waist. A sweaty 60-year-old humanoid -- going rogue.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Covered in trash. Plastic piles like sand dunes.

A pier stretches nearby. Under it, the SHITHEADS pass time and hide from the burning sun.

Alcohol bottles strewn. BYB tickets peeking out of bags.

FANS are mounted on the pier pilings and connect to a SOLAR PANEL up above.

But the fans aren't working, and even under the pier, these youngsters are overheating. Sweaty as fuck.

--ABOVE PIER--

Ben walks with a plastic bag. Approaches the solar panel.

The always-expressive LYELL spots him from below.

LYELL

FUCK YEAH, you found it.
How much?

BEN

I stole it.

LYELL

My guy. Go nuts. Fuck - I'm dyin.

Lyell dips back to the shade. Ben never breaks stride, dumps out the bag.

Replacement parts and a few tools. He begins disassembling the panel.

CINDY (O.S.)

(from below)

I just wanna be able to sing. Like
sing-like-a-singer sing, y'know?

--BELOW PIER--

Four shitheads: Lyell joined by CARL, CINDY, and SARAH. They've been boozing HARD.

Sand and skin everywhere.

LYELL
Aww, our little karaoke merchant.

CARL
The possibilities are *ENDLESS*.

LYELL
And you wanna belt your little heart out?

CINDY
Eat my entire ass, Lyell. It's my dream.

She jabs a finger.

CINDY (CONT'D)
Tell me what you're getting so I can make *fun-of-it*.

LYELL
Mm, gladly. I'm getting back in the saddle, friend-o. Clubbin' and rubbin' after I get a memory taken out.

CINDY
Ooo, a memory...

CARL
You mean limp-dick Christmas Eve?

LYELL
How's I supposed to know I don't like boobs, Carl?

CINDY
Yeah Carl! Go! Your turn!

LYELL
Oh Carl's buyin straight brain cells, honey. IQ points for his exam.

--ABOVE PIER--

Ben hears this, working and listening.

CINDY (O.S.)
So you're cheating??

CARL (O.S.)
Nope, no! Not cheating. *Just...*
Sorta toppin off the tank, y'know?

Ben rolls his eyes.

--BELOW PIER--

LYELL

Pay-to-win, colonizer wine-sippin
ass bitch. Ya welcome.

CARL

You'd do it too if ya had any
chance. Wish me luck!

LYELL

No thanks, cheater.

CARL

WISH ME FUCKING LUCK!

SARAH

Good luck, Carl.

CARL

Marry me, Sarah.

EXT. BEACH PATH - SAME

A path runs along a short bluff over the water. Pretty if not
for the trash.

Skye (no wig) moseys along, settles down on a bench. As she
opens her notepad, she notices the pier, squints...

What do ya know? A skinny dude, laboring in the sun.

EXT. ABOVE PIER - SAME

Almost finished. Rusty parts scattered. Ben screws the cover
back in place.

BEN

Yo. RUN IT.

No response, just muffled conversation.

EXT. BEACH PATH - SAME

BEN

(far away)
Run the fans!

Skye's POV: The peanut gallery huddles under a fan, boosting one of the girl's up. Reaching, flipping the switch...

It works. Starts blasting air. They cheer!

Skye watches their hollering, rolls her eyes --

MATCH CUT TO:

ABOVE PIER: Ben makes the same expression. Two peas.

EXT. BEACH PATH - SAME

Skye watches as Ben picks up his little operation.

He hops a railing, shuffles down a sandy incline, and accepts a shower of compliments from the group.

Plus a drink, shoved in his hand.

One that he holds, looks at, as the others return to their clicks.

Ben is left to the side. An instant outcast.

He stands alone, basking in the cool air, holding the beer to his forehead. Looking... turning...

And he sees her. Smiles.

Ben offers a humble wave, then MIMES something:

He points to her, points to his eyes, points to himself, then shrugs.

"You're stalking me now."

Skye smirks, flips her own sign language (the bird), and struts away.

--BELOW PIER--

Ben watches her go, entranced.

INT. LONG-DISTANCE PLATFORM - TRANSPORT STATION - DAY

A random TICKET AGENT (60s) stares at Ham through the glass. Warily, up and down.

AGENT
(through mic)
Field trip?

HAM
Extra curricular before summer
break, yes ma'am.

Ham smiles warmly. His tweed back on.

AGENT
And the children?

HAM
Ma'am?

AGENT
Where are the children at?

HAM
Oh certainly already there. I'm one
of several chaperones.

The narrower her eyes get, the warmer Ham's smile appears.

AGENT
One second, sir.

INT. OFFICE - TRANSPORT STATION - CONTINUOUS

The Agent lifts herself from the chair, trudges through a
bureaucratic hallway. Desperately slow...

...until she peeks into an OFFICE.

AGENT
Jerry, I got a Ham comin' through
for a school trip?

Fat old JERRY, feet up on the desk.

JERRY
You got a Ham for a *what*?

AGENT
Extracurricular field trip the man
said.

JERRY
Who said?

AGENT

A school administrator who's eye
ballin' a bi-costal transport to
Orlando.

JERRY

With a bunch'a kids?

AGENT

Solo traveler.

JERRY

(standing)

Oh boy.

Now it's Jerry and the Agent, waddling on through. Slowly
reaching the ticket booth...

No Ham. Jerry looks around just as --

The transport departs from the station.

AGENT

Sir.

The Agent points to a security officer, unconscious, thrown
against a turnstile.

Travelers are in awe. One pokes the body.

JERRY

What's the first stop on that
route?

AGENT

Fort Worth.

JERRY

Then get me Fort Worth!

INT. TRANSPORT CAR - SAME

Ham sits eerily still in the darkness. Eyes open, but awfully
robotic. Scary given the recent aftermath.

Slowly...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. TRANSPORT CAR - MUCH LATER

BLINK - and the lights are on. A screen reads "DAL/FW". Ham suddenly sways one way, marking the deceleration.

He peers through a window as the station flings into view. Immediately he sees it:

Loads of SECURITY lined up for him.

Ham springs into action, eyes darting around the car. He reaches the:

--GANGWAY--

With it's big storage cabinets and blankets inside.

Ham grabs one.

--ADJOINING CAR/GANGWAY--

With the transport almost stopped, Ham books it to more storage cabinets. Probes around...

Bingo.

He finds a foldable WHEELCHAIR, akin to the hyper-compact "Revolve Air" wheelchair. Look it up.

A few yanks, and it's ready. Ham sits and covers himself with the blanket.

GUARDS enter the transport. Ham keeps his head down and they walk right past.

He waits a beat, then wheels onto...

INT. PLATFORM - TRANSPORT STATION - CONTINUOUS

Damn similar to SF, how convenient.

Ham lifts the blanket, simulates coughing noises while pushing forward. Another row of guards let him right past.

One even calls the elevator for him. Idiots.

EXT. TRANSPORT STATION - FORT WORTH - LATER

Ham reaches a safe distance on the wheelchair and ditches it. Sprints like a T-1000 through the parking lot.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Ham reaches an isolated road - dry, barren fields for miles. A brutal drought. Ham surveys the dreary landscape...

...and throws up his THUMB.

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - EVENING

The sun sets over the empty pool, casting hard shadow over the filthy bottom.

LOW on the cans, wrappers, etc. - half of them bathed in warmth, other half in cold darkness. Harshly separated.

Rising up... landing on the bathroom sign.

PRE-LAP: A vicious coughing fit. The person spits --

INT. BATHROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - EVENING

Skye takes a breath, composes herself.

Before a cracked mirror, she puts the finishing touches on her look.

Sleek, seductive make-up. Dressed for a night out.

The final touch -- a bright blue wig -- transforms her appearance. She studies herself, then downs some water.

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - SAME

Reggie lays on his bunk, immersed in his phone.

Ben's on the floor. Tired head propped by a pillow.

BEN

Say Reg.

REGINALD

Say Ben.

BEN

You take the WP exam?

REGINALD

Yeah, bruh. Last year.

We know what that means.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Fuck you, I'm smart.

BEN
I didn't say shit.

REGINALD
Let's see you pass it.

BEN
Aye, I'm set to take it soon, so.

Reggie looks up from his phone.

REGINALD
Wait a damn minute. You're here to cheat.

BEN
Funny. I heard it wasn't cheating.

REGINALD
Debatable.

BEN
How come you ain't do it?

REGINALD
I wasn't old enough!

Ben scoffs.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
If I was held back like you I wouldn't be here!

BEN
(laughing)
"If I never blew out my knee"
headass.

REGINALD
My scores were close.

BEN
Yeah, bruh.

REGINALD
89th percentile, dick!

Ben's loving it, chuckling away.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
On the record. You gonna?

BEN
Dude, on the record I'm home
studyin.

REGINALD
Dickhead. Spill it.

BEN
Yeah. Well- I want to cause, I got
a brother up there, so.

REGINALD
Fuck, really? Up there?

BEN
Yup.

REGINALD
Shit, man! What's it like?

BEN
Man, you--

Beat. No longer laughing.

BEN (CONT'D)
You know I don't know.

REGINALD
Right. My bad.

On Ben, thinking about that...

Then Skye walks in, toiletries in hand. Peering at the man-
child on the floor.

BEN
Oh hey.

SKYE
Move.

BEN
(scooting away)
Yo Reg, guess who--

SKYE
-shut up-

BEN
Guess who was stalkin' me today?

REGINALD
Who?

BEN
This one girl, shit.

Ben stands, looks at her.

BEN (CONT'D)
Dunno her name.

SKYE
Let's go.

BEN
Let's go?

SKYE
You wanted to go somewhere.

BEN
For sure but-- Earl's havin' a
movie night tonight.

REGINALD
He is?

Eye roll from Skye. She walks off.

Ben stays put.

BEN
The name. Gotta have the name.

SKYE
Skye.

BEN
..Skye..

Ben looks at Reggie, eyebrows raised, and follows her out.

THUD - door closed.

Silence.

REGGIE
Fuck me I guess. No-no I'm real
busy. Gotta prep. Big prepper.

Reggie eyes his ticket: "0d, 10h". Tomorrow.

Up-beat MUSIC surges, launching us into...

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

Ben catches up. Where'd she--?

Headlights FLASH from Skye's MUSCLE CAR. Ben's floored.
Modern to the reader, but:

I/E. MUSCLE CAR - LATER

BEN
Vintage. Hell yeah.

SKYE
Don't cum too soon.

VROOM! Burnin' rubber. Kicking up dirt. Earl ogles the scene from the office window.

EXT. DAYTONA STREETS - NIGHTS

Onward they go, tearing through the deserted beach-town streets. Passing cars with that 12-cylinder.

At a streetlight, they're side-by-side the JERK-OFF they just passed. Skye flips the dude off, revs the engine.

Ready to race.

GREEN LIGHT
and they're off. Skye had the better start, but alas, old is no match for new.

Jerk-Off silently slides up, gives Skye the V-lick gesture, and zooms past.

Fuck no he didn't. Skye stays deadpan, follows the guy on a turn. Then another. Ben looks at her, fearful.

EXT. ABANDONED PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Old neons raining down.

They've stopped in a lot - Jerk-Off getting out, yelling at her. *Fuck is up, dumb cunt? Etc.*

Skye yanks her trunk. Hoists a baseball bat (to Ben's horror and Jerk-Off's delight).

Skye returns his screaming. *This is going up your ass! Etc.*
Ben hugs her and holds her back.

Jerk-Off chuckles, licks two fingers, and makes another unsavory motion.

Skye RAGES as he hops in his car. Speeds off.

Ben lets go, panting. Spooked but exhilarated. Still digging Skye's moxie.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

Retro. Ben shrugs, points to the lanes as if to say:

BEN
Better than messin' with crack
heads?

Skye's look says "lame" but the cut says --

STRIKE

She celebrates a little - can't hide it. Gives Ben the "too small" gesture. *Oh really, okay...*

STRIKE, Ben matches.

He acts like he's been there. Skye flips the bird again, licks her middle finger, then **plunges** it into a ball.

Ben turns away, laughing.

INT. ARCADE ROOM - LATER

Skye smacks the CLAW MACHINE - livid. Ben puts up a calming hand. His turn now. He maneuvers the stick, and...

There we go. Not that hard, Skye. Not that hard. Ben hands her a stuffed lion.

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

They devour food, back where they started the day. The lion sitting, watching them.

Pull away... farther and farther, darkness to all sides. Like they're the only two beings on earth.

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

As the duo walks to the room, a flicker of LIGHT catches their eye.

EXT. BACKYARD - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

As promised, it's movie night at the Wham-Bam Thank-You-Ma'am Hostel, and Earl's hosting.

White sheet, puny projector, and a classic film on display. A cushioned pick-up bed faces the screen.

Reggie and Earl sit together - how cute.

Skye and Ben walk up together, light dancing on their faces. Reggie glances their way.

Jealous. Sullen. Left out.

SKYE (PRE-LAP)

Oh, bite my ass - don't tell me you're one of those guys.

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - LATE AS FUCK

Dark. Everyone in their bunks.

BEN

I'm afraid so.

SKYE

Simulation theory is such a man thing. In the worst way.

BEN

Aye, listen. For some dudes it's jus some shit to spew. For me, it's a whole-ass belief.

SKYE

(dry heave)
Ohh, ohhhh...

BEN

Nah nah - Skye, that's my truth right der. *My religion.*

SKYE

Benjamin...

BEN

My prayer, Skye! A man's gospel!

SKYE

And probably a theory my puny girl brain could never understand.

BEN

Fine. Know what - that's cool.
Silence my voice.

Beat. She giggles.

SKYE

Make it quick.

BEN

Quick? Look around! We're printing
out Ham's. That's some simulation
shit if you ask me.

SKYE

Okay, okay, but then if--

REGINALD

God DAMNIT, go to bed!

Oh yeah, him.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ.

SKYE

Oh piss off, Reggie.

REGINALD

Fuck you, Skye.

Oh god. Her eyes go wide.....

SKYE

I'm sorry, **what?**

Reggie reaches down, flips the lamp on.

REGINALD

You barged in here three straight
nights whining about "*ohh, my poor
headache...*" and I didn't say SHIT.
No a word, not a single solitary
fucking sound, but now it's my turn
and you two dickheads are talking
about weird cult bullshit at 3am!

Beat.

BEN

It was simulation theory, but yeah.

REGINALD

BUT YEAH.

Ben looks at Skye. Bracing for impact.

SKYE

(calm)

Fucking incel. Y'know what, Reggie?
That store is popular cause of
pieces-of-shit like you.

BEN

Skye--

SKYE

I bet-- ohhh I bet you'll spend
half your god damn life tomorrow.

REGINALD

(nah-uh)

No.

SKYE

Dude hates himself so he buys the
whole fucking menu to get laid.

REGINALD

It's not about sex.

SKYE

Die young but die happy with a
mouth around your cock and no work
in between.

Reggie pauses. Hurt.

REGINALD

Why're you such an asshole?

SKYE

It's just the way you act, Reggie.

REGINALD

I told you I'm not even thinking
about sex!

SKYE

Oh really - cause you haven't been
eye-fucking me all week.

BEN

Yo-- alright! Okay. Just... We can
settle this.

REGINALD

How??

SKYE

How??

Long beat. Ben grins at Skye.

BEN
What're you getting?

SKYE
Nothing.

REGINALD
Oh c'mon!

SKYE
I'm not getting anything.

REGINALD
Talking lots'a shit, Skye. Back it
up. Whatcha getting?

Beat. This question affects her.

SKYE
A gun. So your blood can keep me
warm all night.

REGINALD
I'm so in your head.

SKYE
Go fuck yourself.

Skye reaches out, flicks the light off.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Dicks.

Plural. Ben clocks that.

Skye turns away, curled up tight. Done talking.

BEN
(to her)
Goodnight.

Ignored. Ben lays back, kicking himself.

A long moment, then --

REGINALD
(whisper)
Can I still grab that ride
tomorrow..?

EXT. CAR (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

Motorin' down the highway. Ham drives with tired eyes.

Beside him is TED (white trash, 60s) - the vehicle's owner. He snoozes away until Ham nudges.

HAM
Hey, Ted.

The guy stirs.

TED
...what.

HAM
Car's low. I figure we charge up ahead.

TED
(yawning)
Whatever you say, Ham-I-Am. Thanks for drivin.

HAM
(stone-cold)
Of course.

Ham veers off toward a charging station up ahead. Convenience store attached.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - EARLY MORNING

Ham tears the wrapper off a **H.A.M. Bar**, bites into the jet-black mixture. *Cramming* it in.

CU on the shiny wrapper: "0% pork".

Refueled, Ham stands beside the store, surveying. Regular cars charge alongside a semi-truck.

Ham locks eyes with the TRUCK DRIVER. Sitting. Waiting. Like all the school employees.

--SEMI CARGO HOLD--

HUMAN BODIES inside, stacked nicely. There's even one we recognize:

BEN, unconscious like the rest. En route for delivery.

--back to scene--

Ham's gaze lingers toward the semi. But he walks off, ignorant to what's inside.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - LATER

Ham puts pedal to metal, impatient. Ted settles in for another nap.

TED

Shit. Wish I could afford one'a y'all. This is the life.

HAM

Absolutely.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MUSCLE CAR - BYB STORE - MORNING

Another car. Reggie in the back, also dozing through his free ride.

As they ease into the BYB parking lot, Ben's eyes narrow. Studying the grotesque customers.

Skye CRANKS the engine, startling the crowd awake. She chuckles, then swings into a space.

Reggie doesn't leave. Instead steeling himself. Nervous.

BEN

Botox guy was what now?

REGINALD

(exiting)

Bye assholes.

INT. HALLWAY - BYB STORE - LATER

Reggie waddles down the corridor - a nervous wreck.

Another Nurse gestures to his door. This time the screen reads: "First Time Upgrade".

CU - his shaky thumb hits the scanner.

INT. DEMO ROOM - LATER

ARIEL

Welcome Reginald. I'm Ariel. Thanks for choosing to Be Your Best.

Piss running down his leg...

ARIEL (CONT'D)

You have 80 life years remaining, with zero past purchases. How would you like to spend your time today?

REGINALD

Is... there a menu.

ARIEL

Actually, at Be Your Best we believe that to do so, you much engage in pure self reflection.

(rhythmic)

The mirror is there to assess, so you never ever have to guess. Let us help you on your quest, so you can Be Your Very Best.

Reggie clocks himself in the mirror. Doesn't love what he sees.

ARIEL (CONT'D)

Reggie, there's no reason to be nervous.

DING! A drawer shoots open -- with a VR HEADSET.

ARIEL (CONT'D)

To better aid your decision, please enjoy a demonstration of our wonderful upgrades. Free of charge.

Reggie takes the headset, inspects.

ARIEL (CONT'D)

But first, one question from me. Are you homosexual?

REGINALD

N-no. No.

ARIEL

Have you ever had sex with a woman?

Reggie goes quiet. Reddens.

ARIEL (CONT'D)

Okay. Please put on the device.

Reggie is bothered, but curious. On it goes...

BLINK. Light glows from the screen, and he hears the demo:

TODD (PRE-LAP)

What Italian city is known for its
medieval tower architecture?

INT. LIVING ROOM - REGGIE POV - EVENING

POV: A small get-together. Board game night with drinks.

The same BYB HOSTESS (now in a sexy cocktail dress) sits
before a board game.

She turns to us with a pleading smile.

HOSTESS

Do you know it?

RIPPED back to --

INT. DEMO ROOM - NIGHT

Reggie's eyes glued to the light...

REGINALD

Um. No I--

Returning us to:

INT. LIVING ROOM - REGGIE POV - EVENING

REGINALD (O.S.)

Oh sure. That's San Gimignano.
Delightful town.

Reggie looks at TODD (20s) - who simply can't.

REGINALD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What? It's towerful and powerful.

TODD

Literally blow yourself up. You've
been there too?

End POV.

HERE, Reggie is vibrant and all-smiles. More put-together, stylish, (skinnier..?)

REGINALD

Uh yah. I went there during study abroad. Changed my life.

Todd scoffs, grabs his wine.

TODD

Typical.

HOSTESS

Here baby. Roll for us.

Reggie rolls the dice. Hostess celebrates!

TODD

You're fucking *kidding me*. Fine, game winning question.

Todd collects a card.

TODD (CONT'D)

In what order are the strings of a damn guitar?

HOSTESS

Oh Reggie, I'm sorry-- I don't--

Reggie shushes her. She smiles.

REGINALD

Eddie Ate Dynamite, Good Bye Eddie.
(then)
E - A - D ... G - B - E.

TODD

(tosses card)
FUCK.

HOSTESS

We- you won! Reggie!

She hugs him, leans in...

--DEMO ROOM--

Reggie inhales, curls his toes.

--back to scene--

TODD

So like, do you even play?

Reggie separates from a sloppy kiss.

REGINALD

Oh I play.

TODD

Oh fuck me in half dude. Prove it.
Give us a show!

Hostess squeals. Hands him an acoustic GUITAR (from nowhere).

Reggie handles it - tunes it a bit. Hostess lusts over his every move.

REGINALD

Any requests?

She's dripping wet.

HOSTESS

Um...

REGINALD

No problem. I know a good one.

Demo Reggie plays...

INT. KIOSK - NIGHT

While Real Reggie wears a despondent expression. He removes the headset, but the guitar keeps going.

Sad, sweet - perfectly performed.

ARIEL

Reggie, you can purchase all these upgrades and more - right here, right now. Walk out of here **this morning** with the skills you've always dreamt of. Memories you wish you had. Or even fundamental human traits that make you the most charismatic man in the room.

Reggie stares ahead, face tight...

The guitar haunting him...

REGINALD

Um... Here's what I want.

Scary BASS replaces the guitar, kicking us:

--OUTSIDE--

As per usual, a nurse waits in the hallway. Deadpan.

Beside her sits an empty stretcher. And a gown.

--DEMO ROOM, LATER--

They're finishing up.

ARIEL

...must be made with sound mind and
body. All upgrades are non-
refundable and irreversible.
Reginald, do you accept these
terms?

Nothing.

ARIEL (CONT'D)

Reginald, do you accept my terms?

REGINALD

I do.

A needle **juts out**, pierces his neck, then retracts. Reggie goes LIMP, just like Marcel. His soul snatched.

The door opens ominously to the grim-faced Nurse.

She begins removing his clothes.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Down the corridor they go, Reggie in the gown. Past the security checkpoint (green flash) and into...

INT. TRANSFER ROOM - BYB STORE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie slides through the hustle and bustle, passing the entrance to a side STORAGE ROOM, just as...

Another stretcher emerges, passing right by.

Camera is curious of this newcomer. Looks sorta familiar...

But leave it for now. Catch up with the first stretcher. It's wheeled toward the back wall and left near the incinerator.

[Intercut both stretchers]

--HALLWAY--

The **new stretcher** exits the transfer room and passes through the checkpoint.

ANGLE ON the face of yet another Nurse. Couldn't give less of a fuck.

Titling down to the stretcher: It's Reggie.

Another version.

--TRANSFER ROOM--

Original Reggie is still out cold, waiting by the incinerator.

Nobody's there to burn him, well, because:

Down the hall, it's all hands on deck in the LOADING DOCK. A familiar unbranded semi-truck just backed in.

Workers are wheeling the incoming bodies inside.

--HALLWAY--

The new stretcher stops at the same demo room. The Nurse lifts the replica body inside...

...and holds his head straight.

Zip -- in and out.

The same needle insertion is repeated. Transferring one to the other.

On goes Reggie's original t-shirt, then the nurse places a curly cable on his neck.

Magnetized.

Just outside, the sign now reads:

Upgrades.....1%

And counting.

--TRANSFER ROOM--

The new arrivals roll through, past Original Reggie.

One worker stops, flings open the incinerator door, and tosses the body inside.

The worker peeks at a chart on the stretcher...

WORKER #3
Reginald Kline!

ALL WORKERS
THANKS FOR CHOOSING TO
BE YOUR BEST.

Blast off.

Original Reggie burns as other stretchers stream into the storage room.

Skye's replica is among them, rattling past.

No Ben yet.

--DEMO ROOM--

In here, this is **Replica Reggie**.

We'll still call him "Reggie" because he's the same in every discernible way.

Except for those juicy upgrades, still loading...

HALLWAY

The screen reaches 100%, then his **receipt** prints below.

It's fucking long.

DEMO ROOM

The curly cable de-magnetizes from Reggie's neck and hangs from the wall.

Reggie's eyes open slowly. Coming to...

INT. LOADING DOCK - BYB STORE - SAME

The empty semi lurches forward (silent, electric).

EXT. STRIP MALL - SAME

ARIEL VIEW: The semi drives off, departing from the opposite end of the strip mall, far away from the BYB storefront.

All those empty stores are in use after all.

EXT. BYB STORE - LATER

Replica Reggie eases outside, stuffing the receipt in his pocket.

Tired, squinty eyes - out of it.

Following closely to his neck, the boy shuffles off towards the muscle car.

(The semi drives off in the b.g.)

INT. DINER - MID-MORNING

The trio eats in silence.

Or rather, Skye and Ben eat while Reggie stares at his pie. Seemingly gutted, distraught.

BEN

...Reg?

Reggie pushes his plate away.

REGINALD

I used to love pie.

Then he looks up, smiles.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

It fuckin' worked.

INT. BUNK ROOM - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - DAY

Reggie excitedly packs, stuffing shit in a duffle.

REGINALD

And-and with that one upgrade,
y'know, I can just pick up any
instrument. Bang, I'm an expert.

BEN

Aye cool, man - shit. They show you
tits in there, too?

Skye laughs.

She and Ben sit side-by-side on his bunk. A unit.

REGINALD

No. It was very professional, I knew what I wanted. It just took a while to load I guess.

BEN

Hang on, you said any instrument..?

Ben digs around Marcel's bag.

REGINALD

Yeah. Anything.

BEN

Then shoot, man - here. Take this.

Reggie takes the KALIMBA from Ben. Quite happy with himself.

EXT. TRANSPORT STATION - FLORIDA - DAY

Skye's car idles.

Ben grabs Reggie's duffle from the trunk.

BEN

Where ya headed?

REGINALD

Minnesota.

BEN

Shit, wide open spaces.

REGINALD

Wide open.

Friends? Nah. Not quite.

BEN

Aight then, bro. Safe travels.

(fist bump)

Hope those upgrades are everything 'n more.

Parting ways --

REGINALD

Thanks. Thank you. See ya, Ben.

INT. TRANSPORT CAR (MOVING) - LATER

Reggie sits in the dark transport, bored as hell.

He leans over...

And spots a girl. Call her HALEY (20s) - sitting alone, reading. Girl next door vibe.

Reggie moves so he's two seats down from her. Doesn't yet engage. Kinda sits there. Waiting.

--TRAIN BATHROOM--

Quick FLASH of them fucking on the toilet.

--back to scene--

Men.

Reggie drums his knee, smiles, then reaches into his pack... For the kalimba.

Seriously, we doing this?

Reginald fucking Kline, vulgar little shithead with chubby fingers, begins to play.

And it's a lovely tune. The upgrades work.

Haley looks up, drawn to the sound. Lip gloss smile.

Reggie nails a charming chorus, then finishes with a delicate fade.

Soft applause from the car. Haley leans over.

HALEY

You're very good.

REGINALD

(totally heard her)

Pardon me?

HALEY

Oh I just-- that was quite lovely.

REGINALD

Thank you, yeah. What a gorgeous little instrument.

(holds it up)

I like the kalimba for these rides especially. Soothes the worry of high speed travel.

HALEY

Well. I'm very soothed.

REGINALD

And I am so glad, uh...

HALEY

-Haley.

REGINALD

Haley. I'm Reggie, at your service for this trip. How far you going, Haley?

HALEY

Portland, Oregon.

REGINALD

Well I'll be. You're stuck with me. I'm down in Bend, Oregon myself.

HALEY

Ooo, Bend's great. It's very *kalimba*, you might say.

REGINALD

Funny, um - last year we elected a *kalimba* mayor, so.

She chuckles. Eyes catch.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

But yeah. I play when I travel.

HALEY

Maybe I'll have to learn. Can't end up in *Kalimba* town without some skills.

REGINALD

I- well I could teach you, if you want. It's not too hard.

HALEY

Sure.

REGINALD

Yeah?

HALEY

Why not.

Reggie scoots closer.

REGINALD

Why not, right? So...
(hands it over)
(MORE)

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Fingers behind, and you use the thumb nail to flick these guys.

She uses her actual thumb, creating a muted sound.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Yeah. So a bit more with the nail...

He gently takes her thumb, flicks the metal.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

...to make it vibrate.

Sitting close. Hands touching.

She plays a note. Then a few more. Smiles again.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Mayor K would be proud. Keep going. You're a natural.

She flicks away, focused.

Reggie studies her face, admiring. Already in love.

--TRAIN BATHROOM--

Now receiving a blowjob.

--back to scene--

La di da... sweetly playing...

HALEY

So. What brought you east?

Reggie's mesmerized by her big brown eyes, not thinking...

REGINALD

The Be Your Best store.

HALEY

Oh.

Her thumbs go still. Disgusted.

REGINALD

But-- no. But for research. For a thesis.

HALEY

Right.

Haley hands over the kalimba -- *gross* -- and collects her bag.

REGINALD

Wait but--

HALEY

Listen man. Do your thing. Don't lie about it.

She stands...

REGINALD

What's wrong with a few upgrades?

HALEY

It's disgusting. Passing that shit off as real. Who does that?

Walking out of his life...

REGINALD

Everyone does that. Everyone gets upgrades!

HALEY

I bet you're not even from the great state of Oregon.

She stops, waits. Gets her answer.

HALEY (CONT'D)

Creep.

She leaves for the next car.

A few passengers peek from their books, newspapers...

Reggie goes red again.

Then sour. Sad.

He shoves the stupid kalimba in his bag.

INT. NEXT CAR - TRANSPORT (MOVING) - LATER

Reggie collapses in an empty dark corner. Alone. Whizzing through the earth.

He grabs the crumpled receipt from his pocket. Stares at it.

INSERT: "Deluxe Music Package" "Confidence" "Healthy Eating Habits" etc.

10+ items totaling... **32.5 YEARS.**

Dayum.

Reggie's lip quivers. Regretful. He tosses the receipt aside. Wallows in self pity.

He can't help but notice more BYB ads. Staring at him.

FIND YOUR **Eternal Bliss**

Be Your Best

Dopamine Comatose allows your soul a forever happiness that regular death just doesn't.

Pass away in style at the **BYB** store!

Must be 21+ or 18+ in Florida and Puerto Rico.

Twisting the knife. Reggie flips open his phone, considers, then dials.

MOMMY (O.S.)
(thru phone)
Thanks for calling Greenbrier Royal Estates, this is Allison.

REGINALD
...hey mom.

MOMMY (O.S.)
Oh hey honey. How's everything?
How's the trip?

REGINALD
Yeah, good.

MOMMY (O.S.)
And Jake, Dylan... how are they?

REGINALD
Fine.

MOMMY (O.S.)
And that lake house huh? Gorgeous.
Managed to keep her upright?

REGINALD
Yes, mom.

MOMMY (O.S.)
Good, good.

Beat. His eyes grow misty.

MOMMY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
So kiddo, why you calling?

REGINALD

(shaky)

I'm just um-- checkin' in.

MOMMY (O.S.)

Oh honey, what's wrong? What's going on?

Reggie leers at the receipt.

MOMMY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Reggie..? Honey?

(beat)

You still there, love bug?

Hates himself.

REGINALD

Mom I...

MOMMY

Yes? What dear?

ANGLE ON the discarded receipt.

REGINALD (O.S.)

(weeping)

I think you're gonna outlive me.

INT. MUSCLE CAR - EVENING

RIPPED from that moment.

Skye and Ben zoom along, bumpin' classics. Ignorance is bliss.

She's pushing it too. Ben holds his ceiling handle with a nervous smile.

SKYE

Cool if I try something?

Ben nods. A sudden *JOLT* --

EXT. BEACH AREA - SAME

Skye mounts an entry curb and tears down a ramp toward the sand. Once a popular activity here (driving on the beach)...

Now lost in time. Not too many folks want to.

Skye wants to.

A single chain SNAPS as the car flies through the entrance. Straight at the water she goes...

INT. MUSCLE CAR - SAME

Not stopping.

BEN

Uh yo. You gon' turn..?
Nah, you GON' TURN??

EXT. BEACH - SAME

She whips a turn and skids right through the salty foam.

Tiny sand grains sprinkle the waves as the car teeters to a stop, sloping in the water.

VROOOM! Skye shoots down the shoreline with little regard for plastic waste.

INT. MUSCLE CAR (HAULING ASS) - SAME

SKYE

Shit your pants?

BEN

'Bout to, damn.

Skye grips the steering wheel. Loving every moment.

Another *yank* and they're spinning --

EXT. BEACH - SAME

SLO-MO donuts on the deserted beach... Sand geysers into the sky... Garbage twirls... A dead fish soars...

A surreal moment of bliss. Ben and Skye at the center.

BANG. Slo-mo ends. Sand falls to the earth.

BEN

Aye, what the--

BANG. A second shot. From a crusty FLORIDA MAN near a rundown beachside bar, shotgun raised.

FLORIDA MAN
 What in the sweet holy FUCK are you
 doin?!

SKYE
 (thru window)
 EAT SHIT, ASSHOLE!

BANG. Another shell into the sky. Seagulls scatter.

FLORIDA MAN
 I ask ya again! What the hell're
 you doin' on ma goddamn property?

SKYE
 Ha! Nice shitpile, sir.

Skye gets out, marches towards him.

FLORIDA MAN
 (pointing gun)
 Young lady...

SKYE
 I'm just parking, dick!
 (arms wide)
 What're you gonna do,
STRIKE ME DOWN?

Dude lowers his gun.

FLORIDA MAN
 Ye... ye can't park there.

Skye strides past, heading to the crumbling bar.

FLORIDA MAN (CONT'D)
 You can't-- Young man, you best be
 moving that fuckin thing.

BEN
 Talk to her, bro - I'on even...

Ben shrugs on his way by, following Skye.

INT. BEACHSIDE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Both now wait at the bar. The grizzled REGULARS stare like
 they've seen a ghost.

Florida Man barrels in. Gives Skye the stink eye.

FLORIDA MAN
You even 21, miss?

SKYE
Oh please...

FLORIDA MAN
You'll produce a valid ID or you'll
fuck right outta my bar.

SKYE
(loud)
So lemme get something straight.

Now everyone's starin'.

SKYE (CONT'D)
At 18 I can go BYB-myself and walk
out speaking Chinese, but I can't
simply BRIGHTEN MY DAY-
(sweetly)
-with a tequila sunrise and one'a
those little umbrellas?

FLORIDA MAN
Get out.

SKYE
I'll tip!

KA-CHISCK. The 12 gauge eases toward her forehead.

All goes quiet.

BEN
(low)
Let's go.

SKYE
Absolutely not.
(leans in)
He'll have to blow my brains out.

Touching the barrel. Daring him to do it.

BAR REGULAR
Jesus Mother Mary, give the girl a
drink, Wayne - damn.

Skye turns to the sunburned BAR REGULAR, three stools down.

BAR REGULAR (CONT'D)
I'm buyin.

SKYE
Are you now, big fella.

Skye pivots from the gun, eyes crazy.

Then saddles up to him and **grabs the guy's crotch.**

SKYE (CONT'D)
This the deal? A drink for a feel?

The Regular begins to eye-fuck our maniac until, well, it all happens fast:

Her grin sharpens. She squeezes. HARD.

BAR REGULAR
Ah-- fuck!

He swings, CLOCKS her cheek. She crumbles.

BEN
HEY!

Ben jumps between them. Shoves the guy off his barstool. The others jump up - erupting in chaos.

Shouting. Chairs screeching.

Ben grabs Skye's arm, yelling at the men, shielding her --

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MUSCLE CAR (HAULING ASS) - BEACH - LATER

The car bounces over sand.

Skye sobs, driving, her cheek red. Shoulders trembling, the wheel wobbling in her grasp...

Larger trauma at play.

Ben watches, a bit bruised himself.

BEN
Let me drive--

SKYE
Don't tell me what to fucking do.

The engine roars louder. Ben turns away, shaken.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

The muscle car tears past frame. Far from the beach now.

INT. MUSCLE CAR (HAULING ASS) - NIGHT

Dark. Heavy silence.

The tears have dried. Skye is deadpan, a dark shiner forming. Ben glances at her. Wants to ask - doesn't.

Then her eyes flicker.

SKYE
Roads like this...

Her POV: A lone car *zips* past, mere inches away on this narrow two-lane stretch.

SKYE (CONT'D)
I could move my hand... an inch.
Less than an inch.

She does so, immediately in the other lane.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Bang... like that.

She corrects. More headlights shine in the distance.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Power. Free will.
(pained chuckle)
Sometimes we need a reminder.

The car closes in, illuminating her gutted countenance.

Lane dividers blur... yellow dashes turn solid... the engine whines... painted fingers press into the wheel...

WHOOSH. The car passes. Safe and sound. Skye turns to Ben.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Y'know.

EXT. CAR - HIGHWAY - SAME

A sedan rumbles past, again whipping us to --

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Ted's car. Ham at the wheel. Tired but alert.

HAM
(soft)
From here, man?

Ham sees the "Welcome to Florida" sign flying by.

TED
(eyes closed)
Born, bred 'n beat to shit.

HAM
Which BYB shop do the high schoolers flock to.

TED
Man. Maybe the one by the big transport line. Daytona.

HAM
Any others near a long-haul station?

Ted adjusts his sleeping position.

TED
Don't really know. As you see Mr. Ham, I drive.

A yawn...

TED (CONT'D)
Don't live near Daytona anyway. I'm way further south.

Ham shoots him a slow, glaring gaze.

HAM
Looks like you'll be doing some drivin then.

Ted opens his eyes. Absorbs Ham's menace.

EXT. RAILROAD BRIDGE - NIGHT

A rusted bridge over a swampy canal. Forest thick on both sides.

Still. Damp.



SKYE

Fuck yeah.

Skye slams her door and scampers off the roadside. Hops on one foot to remove her shoes.

BEN

Swimming somewhere?

SKYE

In that toxic shit?

Instead, she goes barefoot to help balance on the tracks. Dancing along - a kid again. Her mood swung.

She even SPINS on the thin rail and catches herself on the bridge.

Grins back at him.

SKYE (CONT'D)

Catch me if I fall.

She leaps onto the slanted beam.

BEN

You gon--? Nah nah. You ain't seein' me up there.

SKYE

Fuckin lukewarm bathwater bitch.

She scales upward. Wheezing through a grin.

BEN

Who gon' catch me?

SKYE

The bathwater!

Ben scoffs.

Skye now balance-beams toward the center. Breathing heavy. Long. Jagged.

SKYE (CONT'D)

If you don't come up here...

Okay. She drops to one knee, winded.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Then you're a bigger-- fuckin pussy
than--

She coughs. Laboring to breathe.

SKYE (CONT'D)
--than all the cowards at that
store--

The coughing worsens. Hacking now.

BEN
Skye--? Shit-- hang on.

Ben grabs the nearest support, starts climbing.

She regains control, shifts to a sitting position. Catching her breath.

BEN (CONT'D)
(halfway up)
For real. You need help down?

SKYE
Need help up? Fucker.

Ben keeps climbing while Skye spits (blood) off the edge. His skinny arms *HOIST*...

BEN
Damn. Old. Rotten. Bridge.
Gettin' the best of me.

SKYE
Almost.

BEN
(sitting down)
Almost in the death canal, shit.
And you'd drive off, wouldn't ya?

She gasps.

BEN (CONT'D)
Wouldn't ya?

SKYE
How dare you--
At least I'd film it. At least.
(small cough)
Gimme some credit.

She smacks his leg. Laughs. Flirty. Her smile pushes up the swollen cheek.

BEN
Hey, actually though...

Ben softly grazes the bruise.

BEN (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

SKYE
Shut up.
(grinning)
Don't do that.

BEN
What?

SKYE
Don't-- don't make...

She stops herself, reels in that smile. Averting her gaze.

No point.

FAR AWAY: Just the two of 'em, feet dangling. A murky river. A smoggy night sky.

And yet, still beautiful.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Don't think *for-a-second* I'll ask why you're here.

Eyebrow raise.

SKYE (CONT'D)
Cause I already know.

BEN
Really.

SKYE
You're too good for us. You wanna leave.

BEN
Mmm. You snooped me 'n Reggie.

SKYE
A little.
(smiles)
(MORE)

SKYE (CONT'D)

He must be pretty gifted.
Your brother.

BEN

He reprogrammed a sex Ham.

SKYE

Get-the-fuck-out.

BEN

I said to him - I said, *Where you
even meet one'a those?* 'n he goes
Ahh, don't even worry bout it, bro.

Avery chuckles.

BEN (CONT'D)

Stick to humans, lil man. Y'know.

SKYE

Stick to fucking humans.

(then)

And you're really gonna join him up
there.

BEN

Tryin' to.

SKYE

By cheating your dick off.

BEN

I mean...

SKYE

Spending time. Slashing your life.

BEN

Am I boutta stay down here?
Fuck no.

SKYE

Mmm. So Benjamin does what they
want him to.

(challenges him)

He falls in line.

Ben meets her eye.

SKYE (CONT'D)

Pays his toll.

BEN

Or breaks the cycle.

SKYE

How.

BEN

By getting the fuck off-world.

SKYE

Of course. And to do that..?

He shrugs.

SKYE (CONT'D)

You walk into that damn store.
Succumb to the desperation.

BEN

And that would never work on you.

SKYE

No it wouldn't.

Skye flips wig hair off her face.

SKYE (CONT'D)

I'm just here... for the scenery.

She stands and steps over Ben, tousling his hair. Her bare legs beam-walk away.

Ben's fingernail scrapes rust, watching her gracefully descend the bridge.

Considering...

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATE NIGHT

Ham struts into the 24-hour mart. Tosses Ted a nod.

HAM

Peace 'n love, man.

Ted burns rubber, annoyed.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATER

Ham exits the bathroom (needed it) and grabs a few H.A.M. bars off the shelf.

He and the CASHIER share a glance, then he leaves without paying. Hams don't use money.

EXT. STRIP MALL - LATER

Shiny wrappers plunk down on the sidewalk outside the BYB store. Ham settles in for a restless night.

Around him, others nest on the bare asphalt. Flashlights flicker in shabby tents.

The homeless tailgate continues.

Ham's gaze drifts past the crowd, toward the darker end of the strip mall. The deserted end.

Or is it?

In the far corner, vapor curls from an exhaust vent. Thick and steady.

Ham squints, then rises for a better look.

INT. HAM QUARTERS - BYB STORE - LATE NIGHT

Communal living. A sterile barracks for off-duty Hams. The Hostess gets her beauty sleep.

BATHROOM

Rows of sinks and toilets. Steam clouds the space, sucked into a steam shower at the far wall.

As a naked worker exits, squeaky clean, we RISE UP...

Following the vent's *PULL*...

EXT. ROOF - STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

...now enveloped in the exhaust Ham saw.

He peers at us from afar. Studies. Scrutinizes. Then marches forward.

EXT. STRIP MALL - LATER

Ham rounds the final storefront. Creeps to the back.

It's quiet, save for an open loading dock. A worker exits, wheeling a large white tub.

Wooosh. The contents fall into a dumpster.

Then the tub heads back inside.

Ham's off - shuffling up to the dumpster. He peeks in, reaches down...

BLACK ASH
sifts through his fingers.

Ham stares. Thinking. Then moves toward the dock.

He stretches along the way, then stands beside the opening.

One.

Two.

Three...

Wheels rumble anew. Another white tub exits...

...past Ham, unnoticed. Ham walks after the worker, **death in his eyes.**

CRASH TO:

INT. DUMPSTER - LATER

A head PLUNGES inside. Ash FLIES.

Blood trickles down the worker's naked torso. Mixing with the soot.

Finally, a tweed jacket lands over the man's lifeless eyes.

SLAM goes the lid. Pure darkness.

EXT. WHAM BAM HOSTEL - NIGHT

Skye and Ben traverse the courtyard, tired. Comfy together.

SKYE
FUCK. Right. Off.

Luggage sits by the door. Their stuff. Ben swipes his key card - red flash.

Skye is ready to fucking kill Earl.

BEN
Aye, aye. It's cool. How bout the back.

Maybe he can live another day.

EXT. BACKYARD - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - LATER

Crickets chirp.

Skye and Ben settle into the cushioned truck bed. Close, but not touching, they snuggle warm blankets.

BEN

Whole ass car 'n shit. You got money, huh.

Skye removes her wig.

SKYE

Rich asshole parents.

BEN

No shit. So you coulda had a private room.

SKYE

But I didn't. Money isn't good company.

BEN

'cept you hate everyone.

She smirks, moves closer.

SKYE

Yeah.
(lays her head on him)
Usually I do.

Beat. They peer at the sky.

BEN

(low)
You never gonna tell me why you here, huh.

She squirms.

BEN (CONT'D)

C'mon. You know why I'm--

Ben's eyes go WIDE.

She grabs his dick under the covers. Rubbing (not squeezing) to avoid the question.

SKYE

Let's just have tonight okay..?

BEN

Okay--

Right into a kiss.

Fuck it. She crawls on top. Making out. Seeking passion and ecstasy like it's her last night on earth.

And finding it.

EXT. BACKYARD - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - SUNRISE

Early.

Sun barely risen. Ben wears a goofy grin in the truck bed. Fast asleep.

Beside the fire pit, Skye writes on her sketch pad. Somber.

She tears a page and quietly assembles a fire. In it, a few clothes, drawings, and bright wigs.

She strikes a match...

And all her possessions make flame.

All except the one paper, which Skye places beside Ben. And to weigh it down...

Click. She drops the car keys on top.

Through the fire, Skye slips away, heat distorting the image.

Ben is left alone. Paper, keys, and the stuffed tiger. That made it too.

On the page, attention is drawn to a SKETCH. A retro cartoon depicts:

A deli counter with a "Take A Number" spool. Honey hams (with arms and legs) line up for humans on ice.

EXT. BYB STORE - MORNING

Skye -- no make up, wig-less, bruised -- shuffles to the entrance. Without her stylings, she looks weak. Sickly.

She turns and flips off the yammering crowd.

[Intercut Skye, Ham, and Ben]

--HAM QUARTERS--

Ham rises from his stolen bunk in stolen clothes. No one seems to notice.

He wolfs down a HAM bar. Slurps water from a fountain. A long line waits behind.

LATER: A corridor connects the HAM Quarters to the Transfer Room. In the middle is another security checkpoint.

Ham slows... waits for another worker... and crosses the detector simultaneously.

RED FLASH.

Ham continues his stride. The other Worker stops, appearing faulty.

He backs up... and goes through again.

Green flash.

--BYB STORE LOBBY--

Skye's shaky, outstretched hand offers her ticket.

HALLWAY

Skye follows a familiar Nurse, passing various doors and signs.

They reach her room. "First Time Upgrade" beside the door.

A pale thumb hits the scanner.

DEMO ROOM

Skye leans against the back wall. Tired, slack-jawed. Not anxious like the others.

ARIEL

...how would you like to spend your
time today?

All goes quiet. Momentum stops. We await Skye's answer.

She gazes at her mirrored reflection. Stays silent for an eternity, as if conflicted.

HALLWAY, LATER: A short receipt prints. "**DOPA**".

--LOADING DOCK--

Ham follows a group towards a newly-arrived semi. He stands out against the rest - much older.

Folks go about their jobs. Raising the hatch, unloading replica bodies off the truck.

Ham tempers his reaction, absorbing it all.

Workers brush past with stretchers. Ham doesn't have one, totally lost...

So he darts over and swings one inside. He lifts a young female as something slides past...

Ben's replica.

Ham loads the girl then gives chase to the boy. His target.

--HALLWAY--

More stretcher time.

Skye rides unconscious, the "DOPA" receipt slapped on her forehead.

With a green flash, she enters the always busy:

TRANSFER ROOM

Crowded again with the shipment. A train of stretchers leads new bodies to the same storage room.

Here, Real Skye and Replica Ben cross paths. Two carts later, Ham passes by, searching for Ben.

Regardless, Real Skye gets wheel toward the incinerator...

--BACKYARD--

Ben wakes up, squinting at the embers.

He yawns and moves the keys, revealing a hand-written **poem**. All goes silent, except:

SKYE (V.O.)

Do not stand by my grave and weep.
I am not there. I do not sleep.

--STORAGE ROOM--

Ham deposits his stretcher, then goes to Ben's replica.

SKYE (V.O.)
 I am a thousand winds that blow.
 I am the dust storm down below.

A different Worker arrives to retrieve a body.

Replica Skye is wheeled off, out of frame.

SKYE (V.O.)
 I am the sun on wasted grain.
 I am the pouring acid rain.

Ham lifts Ben's head, feeling his spine.

--TRANSFER ROOM--

Ham nods, making sense of it.

SKYE (V.O.)
 As you awake with morning's hush
 I am the swift, up-flinging rush...

Suddenly, Ham looks to the incinerator. Workers toss Skye's infected body inside.

SKYE (V.O.)
 Of quiet birds in circling flight.
 I am the day transcending night.

They do their typical call-outs (MOS). Then, BLAST.

--BACKYARD--

Ben reads.

SKYE (V.O.)
 Do not stand by my grave and cry.
 I am not there. I did not die.

--TRANSFER ROOM--

The Worker reaches through the smokey door...

...and finds nothing. Sticks his face in there to confirm.
 Not a thing.

Ham watches, feeling his own neck.

He wants more -- *needs to know more* -- and marches off.

INT. HALLWAY - BYB STORE - MOMENTS LATER

He passes the security checkpoint - RED FLASH.

BYB WORKER #5
Hey, dude. You gotta--

HAM
(in uniform)
Damn thing's on the fritz, man. Put
in a work order.

That doesn't quite satisfy good ol' Worker #5. He picks up a
landline. Dials.

BYB WORKER #5
Daytona Beach.

He peers at a "scan log" on his monitor.

BYB WORKER #5 (CONT'D)
HAM-ID 239572. Yes sir. No problem.

He hangs up, relaxes. Out of his hands.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

A dark sea of cubicles.

Like any drab office with the fluorescents turned off. Light
only shines from computer screens.

A shadowed WORKER hangs up the phone, typing away.

As a video loads on the monitor ("FISC" labeling), the man
lights a **cigarette**.

MONITOR: Live footage of Ham's office and quarters. One feed
is fuzzy. A printed photo is falling off the other.

More clicks yield another window labeled "Eyesight".

An **error message** dominates this feed.

The Smoker takes a long pull. Exhales...

SMOKER
Gotta be kidding me.

INT. HALLWAY - BYB STORE - SAME

Back to Ham, traversing the hall.

He side-steps an open door, then stops. Bends down to a nearby stretcher.

As Ham grabs a curly cable from a small compartment, our view is on the open DEMO ROOM.

It's **replica Skye** inside. Clothes being put on by a nurse.

But wait, wasn't she--?

Ham continues on. Doesn't know her.

INT. LOBBY - BYB STORE - LATER

Ham studies the big TSA-esq scanner.

A frazzled YOUNG LADY exits the machine and takes her ticket. She frowns and approaches our lovely Hostess.

YOUNG LADY

Hey why's my time so far away?

Ham listens.

HOSTESS

Well darling, we're proud to be the most prolific Be Your Best depot in the state. Our lines do tend to get long.

Ham sees the different ticket machines for "first-time" and "returning" customers.

YOUNG LADY

But my friends only have to wait a day.

HOSTESS

Have your friends purchased upgrades before?

YOUNG LADY

Yeah.

HOSTESS

Ah, yes. For first timers like yourself, we must take in all that new information.

(MORE)

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

Now that certainly takes time, yes
it does, so we can't offer any
upgrades until your data has
finished **processing...**

That last word echoes in Ham's mind. Serious bullshit.
He approaches the help windows.

We just saw this Worker. She scanned Skye's ticket.

HAM

Look up someone's appointment for
me. Benjamin Beam.

BYB WORKER #6

An appointment time?

HAM

Yes. Ben Beam. When's he due to
arrive.

BYB WORKER #6

Is there... a problem with this
customer?

HAM

No ma'am. Just need to...
Know when to prep his replacement.

The Worker takes a long look. Then pecks a keyboard.

BYB WORKER #6

Tomorrow. 4:30.

HAM

Good. Thank you, and--

Ham studies the "Take A Number" spool. Hazards a guess:

HAM (CONT'D)

What's his tracker location?

BYB WORKER #6

Sir?

HAM

From his ticket. The current
location.

BYB WORKER #6

(disgusted)
Um, we don't do that.

HAM

Right.

Walking off...

HAM (CONT'D)

Too intrusive.

He crosses the room, past all the willing participants.
So eager to die.

Then he spots him:

BEN, outside. Sitting in a sandy muscle car. Despondent.

Ham shoots a gaze down the hall, then back outside. Replica
there. Human here.

I/E. MUSCLE CAR - LATER

Ben stares at Skye's doodle - eyes glazed.

Tap-tap-tap. Ham's at the window. Ben rolls it down...

BEN

Listen man. Here's my fuckin
ticket, alright - I get it. I'm not
fucking sleepin--

HAM

No Ben-- Ben. It's Mr. Ham. From
school.

Beat.

HAM (CONT'D)

School counselor.

Ben only now realizes.

BEN

Yo, what the fuck--

HAM

I gotta-- hold on. I gotta show you
somethin.

BEN

Hell no. The-fuck is your--
(leans back)
Aye, yo...

Ben spots Ham's collar, pulled down. Showing some BLOOD.

HAM
Let me inside.

Ben raises the window, starts the car...

BEN
I'm good on that bro.

HAM
Ben-- fuck. The shit in there--

Ham stops short. Lowers his voice.

HAM (CONT'D)
Just- let me help you.

Ben pulls away. Fast.

HAM (CONT'D)
BEN.
(last ditch)
BRIAN SENT ME. BRIAN!

The car stops. The crowd looks over.

BEN
He ain't in any kinda position--

HAM
(marching over)
He set it up before he left.

Face to face. Glass between them.

HAM (CONT'D)
Had me watching out for your bitch
ass, ***so let me do my job.***

EXT. OFFICE - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - LATER

Through a window, Ben and Ham sit at a desk. Earl watches from behind.

--INSIDE--

Ham uses the cable (from earlier) to connect to Earl's computer. As the video loads...

Earl eyes Ham with disdain.

EARL
Machines.

Ham gives him side eye, then fast forwards the footage.

Onscreen, the semi delivery is captured through Ham's POV. Ham hits play and leans back.

Ben leans forward...

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

Smoker guy clicks through his own CCTV footage. Jumps through different locations:

Transport station -- rest stop -- convenience store -- BYB parking lot -- all with Ham on the move.

Last but not least, he watches Ham murder the poor worker then vanish inside the BYB complex.

He stubs out a cigarette, stands.

SMOKER

Bill.

Smoker traverses the dim room. Stops at another cubicle.

SMOKER (CONT'D)

Bill, I need boots on the ground for this.

INT. FRONT OFFICE - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - LATER

Ben's face says it all.

Onscreen, the shaky POV settles on the incinerator. Skye gets shoved inside --

Ben can't look away. In shock.

HAM

Nasty work.

Ben's eyes flutter...

Ham lifts the cable from his neck. Off the subtle bump.

HAM (CONT'D)

This, man. The upgrades, everything. Impossible without it.

Ben lets his head fall.

Beat.

EARL (O.S.)
And no one c'n tell the difference.

They turn to Earl, leaned against the wall.

EARL (CONT'D)
They jus use it when they needin'
to.

HAM
Anyone who's tried it even once.
They got 'em.

EARL
Do whatever they want wit 'em, heh!
This fuckin' world...
(walks out)
Take me away.

Ben eyes Earl. So funny.

Ham navigates the computer.

HAM
Gotta move, man. I bet they've seen
me.

Ben looks at the paused video. The incinerator. Scary.

BEN
I knew that girl. Spent time with
her here.

HAM
Yeah?

BEN
She was sick...
Didn't even want upgrades.

HAM
Horseshit roll. People gonna see
what they did to her though, yeah?

Ham moves the mouse with vigor.

HAM (CONT'D)
To everyone. Fucking bastards.

CUT TO:

A CIGARETTE BUTT, glowing with a long pull. A keyboard clicks
away. Growing louder. Closing in?

INT. OFFICE - FL NEWS CHANNEL 8 - EVENING

A retro landline rings.

Two HANDS set down nail polish and negotiate answering without ruining their progress.

KEELEY (O.S.)
Florida News Channel 8. This is
Keeley speaking.

Linger on the phone base. A red light blinks. Listening.

HAM (O.S.)
(lots'a southern charm)
Yes ma'am hi, this is Jonathan West
callin' and I was hoping I could
speak to a real reporter. As in, a
real-goddamn-act-of-nature like my
wife used to say.

KEELEY
Yes sir. Speaking.

HAM (O.S.)
Terrific dear. I won't keep you but
I figure y'all could always use a
good scoop.

KEELEY
Yes, Mr. West. Lay it on me.

Blink, blink goes the light. Keeley's back to painting.

HAM (O.S.)
Well darlin, there's a package on
your office doorstep. You're still
on Carlton and 6th right?

KEELEY
Yes sir but--

HAM (O.S.)
So do me a favor darlin' and take a
gander at that.
(serious voice)
*It's footage from inside the
Daytona BYB store. Do you civil
duty and spread it wide.*

KEELEY
Um- hold on, Mr. West?

The polish is put back down.

KEELEY (CONT'D)
You can't just--

Dial tone. Call over.

EXT. OFFICE - FL NEWS CHANNEL 8 - AFTERNOON

KEELEY (30s), plenty'a makeup - stoops down in her high-heels and lifts a tattered hard drive.

Ponders it, then:

--INSIDE--

She watches a computer monitor. HORRIFIED.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Smoker's monitor displays a POV at a **news station**.

RECORDED ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
(news-y music playing)
Live. Local. From QX TV, this is
Florida News Channel 8. Local
coverage you can count on.

Hand gestures are congruent with --

ANCHOR
Breaking local news. Tragedy in
Daytona County that could disrupt
one of America's largest
institutions.

A new window pops up. Security cam footage of the **BYB Store**.

INT. LOADING DOCK - BYB STORE - EVENING

CIVILIAN CONTROL OFFICERS
Or CCO's (dressed in all-black) march inside the complex.

ANCHOR (O.S.)
Good evening folks, I'm Katie
Johnson welcoming you alongside
Erik Dupree.

--TRANSFER ROOM--

The CCO's act like they own the place. Romping through.

ANCHOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 And you're hearing what's brand new
 tonight, Thursday May 7th.

--STORAGE ROOM--

The CCO's shove Ben's replica into a **bright red body bag**.

ANCHOR #2 (O.S.)
 Straight away now to our breaking
 news, we have Keeley Fulton with
 the story in studio. Keeley?

INT. MUSCLE CAR (HAULING ASS) - EVENING

Ben turns the radio dial. Ham searches the road - paranoid.

KEELEY (O.S.)
 (thru speakers)
 Well Erik, this is going to likely
 complicate the prospective
 visitation traffic in the south
 county region-

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

Smoker watches the broadcast.

KEELEY
 (devoid of emotion)
 -as police are reporting 82-year-
 old Earl Scheffler passed away
 earlier this evening due to an
 apparent heart attack.

A new window appears containing the CCTV of **Earl's office**.
 More CCO's milling about.

INT. FRONT OFFICE - WHAM BAM HOSTEL - SAME

Four to be exact. Dragging Earl's CORPSE.

KEELEY
 The body was found just outside his
 well known 'Wham-Bam Thank-You-
 Ma'am' hostel, a staple location
 for newly 18-year-olds trying to
 'Be Their Best' in the state of
 Florida.

INT. MUSCLE CAR (HAULING ASS) - SAME

Dismay.

KEELEY (O.S.)

As of now, it is unclear if his
passing will lead to the closure of
this trendy residence destination.
More on this story when we have it.
Back to you.

Ham sees something. Bangs the wheel.

HAM

No! NO!!

There's a ROADBLOCK up ahead. Imposing black vehicles parked.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

Smoker rubs his forehead after a long day. One last glorious
pull of the cigarette...

Ahh. Simple pleasures.

Smoker clicks a button on his computer. Darkness.

He trudges down a walkway, the floor outlined with tiny
guiding lights.

Other CCO's brush past (a new shift), giving way to a long...

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Equally dark. One door at the end.

Smoker continues, soon passing letters on the wall:

F_{AKE} I_{ntl.} S_{pace} C_{olony}

The "ake" is paper someone taped up.

Sweaty CCO's exit as Smoker pushes through the door. As the
entrance closes...

...the room beyond is visible through a **foggy window**.

Thousands upon thousands of CCOs are crammed into one giant HAM living quarters.

Boiling hot and steamy with so many bodies.

HAM (PRE-LAP)
*This ain't right, man! It ain't
 fucking right!*

EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - MAGIC HOUR

THROWN into the aftermath of a struggle. CCO's all over.

Ham is pinned to the asphalt. Ben is yanked from the car, a **bloody gash** on his forehead.

HAM
Let the boy be, man! LET HIM--!

TZZZZ!

Ham gets the business end of a scary-ass taser. Goes limp instantly.

The weapon's operator marches toward his next target. Ben doesn't scream or struggle. Numb to his fate.

The taser *SPARKS!*

CCO
 STOP.

The group freezes.

A random CCO puts a finger to his ear, listening. A sudden hero? Some bullshit reason for the protagonist to escape?

He walks over to Ben.

CCO (CONT'D)
 This one's human.

In one fluid motion, he fires a BULLET into Ben's face --

SMASH TO BLACK.

INT. BEN'S DWELLING - EARLY MORNING

The first wisps of dawn.

The front door hangs open, two CCO's standing sentry. Been here a bit.

Grandma lays asleep in the living room. Machines whirl.

In another Ham living quarters (coat closet):

A CCO works on the Home Nurse - out cold. Her neck is plugged into a machine. Resetting some things.

Brushing past...

More CCO's carry the same **bright red body bag** down the hall.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - LATER

Ben's replica bounces onto the bed, thrown there. CCO's toss the comforter over him. Whatever.

--LIVING AREA--

Meanwhile, the Nurse is unplugged and let be. The same, but different.

CCO's begin filing out like mice, scattering from nooks and crannies. Vacating the bedroom...

And closing the door with a soft click.

Everything the same, but different.

INT. HAM LIVING QUARTERS - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Over at the school, the day is still young.

CCOs wash Ham's naked body. His neck connects to a machine, just like the nurse.

Resetting things.

Other CCO's lay out school counselor clothes. One even sews a **new HAM patch** on a fresh tweed jacket.

Needle and thread. Like a damn seamstress.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - MORNING

Ben's eyes drift open. No bullet hole through the brain of his replica.

He stands and squints. Out of it.

LATER: He pulls on the **red sweatshirt**.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Starin' at the mirror. Lazily brushing teeth. Foggy.

Nice long look at the sweatshirt. Baggy. Seen it before.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ben trudges up the school steps.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MONTAGE - DAY

Snippets of his modest day:

- At a desk, mind elsewhere.

- Eating shit food. Doodling at lunch.

- Walking into class, a teacher slaps some worksheets into his chest.

TEACHER

Hey, there he is. Good to have you
back, Benji.

- LATER: At a desk again, papers discarded. The unfinished doodle depicts a baked honey ham with the appendages of a honey bee. Lost in an endless hive.

Just then, the same teacher walks by. Remembers --

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Oh, Ben. You missed senior test
prep so uh - probably duck out a
few minutes early. The counselor
expects you before two.

INT. HALLWAY - HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Empty corridor, others still in class. Hands on straps. Glum.

Ben wanders the hall.

INT. SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Ham sits fresh as a daisy at his desk. No injuries or grime.
New stitching on that HAM patch, just like the open.

Knock knock. He looks up from some papers.

HAM
Benjamin, hello. Take a seat, pal.

He does. Ham scoots to his computer.

HAM (CONT'D)
Long time no see, buddy. Lemme get
up to speed here.
(scrolls a list)
See if there's somethin' to review
before the big ol' test.
(then)
Hm...

Ham reads something. Makes Ben wait.

HAM (CONT'D)
Damn, man. Three days straight.
Nine this month.

Ben's sullen. Studying his shoes. Holes in 'em.

HAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You makin' it real hard to stay in
your corner.

Ham forces a grin.

HAM (CONT'D)
Where you been?

BEN
Been sick.

HAM
Ben's been sick... Mhm.
Boy, you stay sick.

Ben looks up.

Deliberately coughs.

HAM (CONT'D)
Ain't a nurse there for your
grandma.

BEN
Yeah.

HAM
What she say when I call her?

BEN
 She say grandma ain't doin too
 good.

HAM
 What she say about you?

Ben rubs the back of his neck. A **small bump** there.

Creep closer to the spot, until --

CUT TO LATER:

HAM (CONT'D)
Man, I pray for that woman.
 Dealin' wit you.

Ben eyes Ham's glasses.

BEN
 Why you wear those?

HAM
 They for show.
 Gotta **look the part...**

INT. HALLWAY - HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

"Look the part", echoing...

SLO-MO: Ben exits the office, brushing past the "FISC" poster.

We drift much closer now...

Examining that lovely nature background. Odd inconsistencies come into focus. Leaves blending into tree trunks, etc.

Clearly AI generated.

Down the hall, sunlight pierces Ben's path. He walks off, centered in the glow.

We float forward... gaining on him, drawing closer and closer to the bump on his neck.

INT. TRANSPORT STATION - DAYTONA - DAY

A stylish hand collects a ticket from the booth.

The woman meanders through the crowd. Checking signs, finding a board that says:

DAY --> SFO | 4 stops | 4h 03m
2:47p Departure

Pink hair dances over the girl's spine. She passes the turnstile and boards the train.

Skye sits down and faces camera. Takes a healthy breath.

The doors close on her satisfied smile. Ready to see that guy she met in Florida.

Will he remember her?

THE END.