HOW AND WHY

by

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Montage of a father, mother, and 8 year old Bobby enjoying life together to the following sluggish and slightly off-key song:

SONG
We’ve had bad times and we’ve had good/But our family sticks together just like a family should/We’ll always take a frown and turn it to a smile/So welcome to our humble home/Come laugh with us a while.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The room is cheerful in salmon and sky blue. Bobby, 10, sits on the couch watching TV. On the television is Goodman, a 50 year old lab-coated man, on a homey living room set with plaid wallpaper, addressing the camera. He seems bored.

GOODMAN
Welcome back to “How and Why.” This week has been all about human sexuality. Before the break we learned the How and Why of fallopian tubes and their homologous structure in males, the appendix of testis. Now we’re going to switch gears a little and discuss the act of sexual intercourse. Typically, before penetration, there is something called foreplay. David, can you tell me what foreplay is?

DAVID
It’s when two people, either a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman interact, with the intent of encouraging sexual readiness.

GOODMAN
Good. Diane, can you think of an example of foreplay?

DIANE
Kissing?

GOODMAN
Sure. Kissing can be part of foreplay. David, what is kissing?

DAVID
It's when two people, either a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman touch lips.

GOODMAN
Yes. Lips on lips, as well as lips on other parts of the body. But let's start with lips to lips. How is kissing done? Here's a wonderful, award-winning animated short feature which illustrates various kissing techniques.

ANIMATION

Cell animation of man and woman kissing. It is very technical: different parts of the faces and mouths are lettered and numbered, and there are lots of animated arrows and scrolling scientific text.

PULL BACK TO SEE:

Bobby, one eye on the TV, practising kissing a throw pillow. An unseen audience laughs. Dave, his dad, enters with a briefcase. Bobby immediately throws the pillow to the floor and switches off the show. The audience laughs again. Dave stops and looks at him.

BOBBY
What??

DAVE
What *what*?

BOBBY
Nothing! I wasn't doing anything!

Dave nods and smiles, satisfied.

DAVE
Cool.

Dave continues walking through the room. Audience titter.

BOBBY
Wait. Dad?

DAVE
(turning)
Yup?

BOBBY
(long pause)
Have you ever kissed a girl?

Audience laugh.

DAVE
Well, sure. I've kissed your mom.

BOBBY
No. I don't mean that. *I've* kissed Mom. I mean a *girl*.

Laugh.

DAVE
(joining Bobby on couch)
Your mom's a girl -- Well, a woman. They prefer to be called women now. Woman-American, I think. By the way, she's not *my* mom, y'know. So, yeah, I've kissed her -- and I've kissed her the way someone might kiss a girl.

BOBBY
Ew.

Laugh. The mom walks by with a laundry basket.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
No, offense, Mom.

Laugh.

MOM
None taken.
(to Dave)
What'd he say about me?

DAVE
He said me kissing you is gross.

MOM
(considering, then to Bobby)
Gross because of the *your-dad* part or gross because of the *me* part?

Laugh.

BOBBY
I don't know! Do you really want to pursue this line of questioning?

The parents look at each other for a moment, then both look back at Bobby.

MOM AND DAD
Yes.

Laugh.

BOBBY
I gotta go!

Bobby runs off. The mom and dad look at each other, shrug, and kiss.

MOM
Kids.

Laugh.

MOM (CONT'D)
Well. Laundry waits for no Woman-American.

Laugh. She exits. Dave sighs a terrible, broken sigh. He sits quite still, staring at the floor for a long while. The audience titters nervously.

DAVE
(muttering)
None of this is funny. Nor is it interesting. Or real in any way. I've traveled the fucking world to get away from you. I lived in a cave with a swami outside of Bombay, for Christ's sake. And, guess what? He had an over-the-top Indian accent. And you laughed. So --
(beat)
-- I don't want to play anymore.

He pulls a gun from his jacket pocket and quickly shoots himself in the head, as if before he can change his mind. Laughter. Blood has splattered the wall behind him. Dave falls to the ground in a heap. Applause.

FADE OUT AND IN.

The living room is filled with police taking measurements and photographs, interviewing Bobby and the mom, who are wrapped in blankets and red-eyed from weeping. Titters.

Later: Moving men carry boxes and furniture from the living room. A sympathetic "awwwww" from the audience.

Later: the room is empty of all furnishings. The splattered blood still stains the wall. We stay on the empty, silent room for a long while. Applause.

INT. HOW AND WHY LIVING ROOM SET - DAY

Goodman looks bored and talks to David and Diane, who look bored. The set now feature a blown up shot of a Buddhist monk meditating and a shot of space from the Hubble telescope.

GOODMAN
What is emptiness? A fascinating question in both the world of philosophy and in the world of science. Did you know that “vacuum” derives from the Latin word for empty? We’ll talk about scientific vacuums later, but first let’s look at emptiness as understood in both Eastern and Western cultures.

INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - DAY

Day to night to day in a time lapse cycle, faster and faster until the room is viewed in a blur of flickering daylight, like an old-time movie.

INT. HOW AND WHY LIVING ROOM SET - DAY

Goodman addresses two new children. There’s a grandfather clock behind him.

GOODMAN
What is time? We say it “passes”, but what exactly is passing? Is time simply a construct of the human brain designed to measure relentless and terrifying change?

The children looks confused.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

In time lapse, vines grow untended outside the living room window, until they completely obscure the outside world and the room has been thrust into green twilight.

INT. HOW AND WHY LIVING ROOM SET - DAY

The room is very dimly lit. Goodman, distracted and picking at his fingernails, talks to two new children.

GOODMAN
What is darkness? It's the absence of visible light, which is electromagnetic radiation with a wavelength of about 380 to 740 nanometres. But, of course, darkness can also be metaphorical, as in a dark night of the soul. And we will peer into this darkness. As Lovecraft says, "We shall see that at which dogs howl in the dark, and that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight.

The children look terrified.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's dark for a long moment. The front door opens and glaring sunlight pours in. House painters enter. They lay tarps on the floor. Outside, gardeners cut away at the overgrown vines.

INT. HOW AND WHY LIVING ROOM SET - DAY

The show is not on. The set is lit with glaring work lights. Technicians putter. Goodman ponders a script. Mellencamp, a middle-aged executive, enters. Goodman looks up.

GOODMAN
You got some new kids for me?

MELLENCAMP
(beat)
So, there's a bit of a sea change going on around here, Goodman.

GOODMAN
What exactly does that mean, Mr. Mellencamp?

MELLENCAMP
Your ratings have been slipping precipitously for three years now.

GOODMAN
It's the kids. We need better kids. How often must we have this conversation? Did you get the new ones?

MELLENCAMP
We keep changing them out. It's not the kids. The kids all test through the roof. It's you. Your heart is not in this anymore.

GOODMAN
Yes, my heart is.

MELLENCAMP
We want to support you in finding your passion, Goodman. You're such a smart, talented man.

GOODMAN
Then keep me. I've got three children to take care of. My heart is in this.

MELLENCAMP
We have to go fresher, Goodman. Younger. We know you'll land on your feet and we're all so excited to see what you do next.

Mellencamp pats him on the shoulder and leaves. Goodman sits there for a bit, then yells after him:

GOODMAN
I want to keep doing <u>this</u> next!

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The room is now empty, white, and pristine. After a pause, the front door opens and a real estate agent enters, followed by Goodman, his wife Yvonne, and their identical triplet sons Acton, Ellis, and Currer. Yvonne looks around.

YVONNE
Oh, yeah! This one! I love this one!

The triplet ad-lib excitement.

ACTON
This is home! I recognize it!

GOODMAN
It's very nice.

YVONNE
Enough acreage for the horses. And maybe goats?! And the price is crazy good for this area, Goodman.

AGENT
It really is. It's a little insane, actually, the price.

GOODMAN
Right.
(beat)
Is there a reason? For the price... *insanity*?

AGENT
(shrugging)
Motivated seller?

ACTON
Can we go look upstairs? At our rooms?

YVONNE
Of course.

The boys say "yay" and run upstairs.

YVONNE (CONT'D)
(to Goodman)
They feel safe here, Goodman. New town. New job for you. New school for them. You see their hopefulness, right? They haven't felt safe in so long.

GOODMAN
I just don't want to jump into anything.

YVONNE
Can't you feel it? This house has our name on it. It's calling to us.
(through non-moving lips)
Die nee. Die nee, Goodnan. Die Nee.

GOODMAN
That's just you. I can see your lips moving.

YVONNE
Yes. I wasn't actually trying to trick you into thinking there was a disembodied voice in the house. I assumed you knew I was joking.

GOODMAN
I was joking, too.

YVONNE
Okay.

GOODMAN
Okay.

INT. HOW AND WHY LIVING ROOM SET - DAY

It's been revamped. Bright colors and cartoony furniture. An energetic young man in a brightly colored sweater talks to David and Diane, the two kids from the earlier version of the show.

YOUNG HOST
So, guys, what can you tell me about water?

David throws a bucket of water into the host's face, drenching him.

DAVID
(to camera)
It's wet!

A sad trombone plays "wah-wah-wah-wahhhh as the host looks with mock sadness into the camera. An off screen audience of kids laughs and cheers wildly.

PULL BACK TO SEE:

INT. LIVING ROOM MORNING

The living room is piled with boxes and wrapped furniture and paintings. Goodman, in a suit, is watching *How and Why*. Yvonne enters in her robe, with a cup of coffee.

YVONNE
You can see the horses from the kitchen window. It's so wonderful.

Goodman clicks off the TV.

GOODMAN
(measured)
Ah. That's great.

YVONNE
Coffee's made.

GOODMAN
I'll grab some on the way to work.

YVONNE
Could you take the boys? I really want to get going on this mess.

She indicates the packed boxes.

GOODMAN
Are they ready? I've got to leave right now.

YVONNE
They do take forever, don't they?
(calling)
Boys?! Are you ready? Daddy's leaving!

ELLIS (O.S.)
Soonish!

GOODMAN
I have to go, guys!

ACTON (O.S.)
We're not completely ready! Mom, can you take us?

YVONNE
Daddy's going right past the school, hon! I need to start unpacking!

ACTON (O.S.)
Ok, ok, ok! We're coming!

The boys hurry downstairs. They are dressed in identical school uniforms: blazers, ties, dress pants. Perfectly tailored. They present themselves as models would.

ELLIS
So? Be brutal.

YVONNE
Oh, my goodness! You all look wonderful. So smart! Like wonderful, smart young students!

They smile and bow.

ACTON
Daddy?

GOODMAN
The blazers fit well. Very good.

ACTON
Ellis took them in last night. They were not -- They just did not fall at all well. I don't know what torso they were cut for, but it certainly wasn't human.

ELLIS
Shall we? It won't do to be late on our first day. We're terribly nervous.

YVONNE
You'll be fine. Bathus Academy is the best kind of progressive. I know you're all going to thrive there.

ACTON
(big gulp of air)
From your mouth to God's ear. Bye, Mother.

Acton gives Yvonne a peck.

ELLIS
Bye, Mother. Fingers crossed.

Ellis give Yvonne a peck.

CURRER
Bye, Mom.

Currer gives Yvonne a peck.

YVONNE
Have a wonderful day, my wonderful boys! You deserve only wonderful things!

The boys smile with anticipation and head out the door.

GOODMAN
(to Yvonne)
Well, see ya.

YVONNE
(blandly)
Yeah. Have a good one.

Goodman exits. Yvonne sits on a box and starts to weep.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY - MORNING

Goodman waits stiffly at the security desk. Mendelson. 30's, approaches, hand extended.

He wears a photo ID in which his face seems almost smashed against the camera lens.

MENDELSON
Goodman!

They shake.

GOODMAN
Mr. Mendelson. Hi.

MENDELSON
Shane, please.

GOODMAN
Shane.

MENDELSON
Listen, let's get you your photo ID right away, so you won't have to stand here with Billy again tomorrow. Kidding, Billy.

Billy the security guard stares straight ahead.

INT. HALLWAY - A BIT LATER

Mendelson leads Goodman down the hall. It looks like an apartment building hallway. They turn a corner and the hall suddenly looks like an office building hall.

MENDELSON
Almost there.

GOODMAN
So many halls.

MENDELSON
Used to be the National Hallway building.

GOODMAN
The what?

MENDELSON
National Hallway? Just the most prestigious hallway design firm in the United States. "We do hallways -- all ways"?

GOODMAN
That's a ludicrous idea for a business.

MENDELSON
Ludicrous all the way to the bank. “Every building needs a hallway.” That was their motto.

GOODMAN
I thought their motto was Hallways -- all ways.

MENDELSON
They had two mottoes.

They turn a corner and it looks like a hospital hallway.

MENDELSON (CONT’D)
This building was primarily their showroom. We got it for a song when the CEO and CFO killed themselves. It’s not without its challenges though. The offices are tiny. Mostly dummy rooms behind door samples.

Mendelson opens a door marked Photo ID’s.

GOODMAN
Why’d they kill themselves?

GOODMAN (CONT’D)
The Great Murfreesboro Hallway Collapse of ‘03. They went belly-up after that.

INT. PHOTO ID OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Goodman enters followed by Mendelson. The office is tiny. Barely room for a camera on a tripod. Cynthia, the photographer, is behind the tripod, smashed against a wall. Her ID badge also features an incredibly close photo

MENDELSON
Cynthia, this is Goodman Hesselman. He needs an ID. New Talent.

CYNTHIA
Hello. Such a big fan since I was a kid. My sister and I watched you all the time.

GOODMAN
Oh, thank you.

CYNTHIA
Please, have a seat.

Goodman sits on the stool, which is about five inches from the camera lens.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Smile. Or you don't have to. Some people do. Others don't. It's really a matter of personal taste.

Goodman attempts a smile. Cynthia looks through the camera.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
This doesn't get any easier, Shane.

MENDELSON
I know, sweetie.

CYNTHIA
I've been doing some research? There's something called a "macro lens"? For shooting insects and dew drops? Maybe I can put in for one of those?

MENDELSON
Let's try to make this work for a while, Cynthia. Our friend Goodman here doesn't come cheap.

Cynthia sighs and takes Goodman's photo.

INT. HALLWAYS - A BIT LATER

Goodman, now wearing his smush-faced ID, walks with Mendelson down a hospital corridor. They arrive at a door marked Shane Mendelson/VP Programming. They enter.

INT. MENDELSON'S OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It's a cramped, tiny room, a desk taking up most of it. Mendelson's secretary Magda sits at the desk.

MENDELSON
Magda, this is Goodman.

MAGDA
Hi! I'm such a fan. My sister and I watched you growing up.

GOODMAN
Oh! Thank you. Hi.

MENDELSON
Magda and Cynthia are sisters.
(to Magda)
Any calls?

MAGDA
Rick needs to talk to you soonest, re:
(reading off paper)
papier-mâché Alice in Wonderland heads, specifically the pigeon. Specifically, it fell and the beak broke off and can it be made into a martian? Which it looks like now, which would be an easier fix.

MENDELSON
Ok, ok.
(to Goodman)
Never a dull moment. Shall we?

There's a door behind Magda's desk. They squeeze past her to get through the door.

INT. MENDELSON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Tiny here as well. There are tiny windows on two walls.

MENDELSON
Corner office, eh? Not bad, eh?
(gesturing to chair)
Sit, sit! Be comfortable!

Goodman sits across from Mendelson. Their knees touch.

MENDELSON (CONT'D)
So, brass tacks time. I'm sorry about how things went down at "How and Why", but their loss is our gain, right? Have you seen any of their new episodes?

GOODMAN
No. I've intentionally avoided it.

MENDELSON
Well, let's just say it's very good. Peppy and fun. That's why they're the big boys. We have our work cut out for us.
(off Goodman's reaction)
But we're not doing that type of show, I realize.

GOODMAN
That's not my show.

MENDELSON
Exactly, which brings me to -- Legal says we can't use any title with the words "how" or "why" in it.

GOODMAN
What?

MENDELSON
(shrugging)
Crazy, right? Fortunately, they've come up with some great alternatives. Let's see...
(off paper on desk)
Where and when?

GOODMAN
No.

MENDELSON
Which and what?
(looking up)
That's not bad.

GOODMAN
No.

MENDELSON
Up and Down?

GOODMAN
No.

MENDELSON
You and me?

Mendelson looks up at the now silent Goodman

MENDELSON (CONT'D)
(back down at paper)
High and low. Through and through. Hither and thither. Um...
(looking up)
Tic Tac Dough is apparently available.

GOODMAN
My show tries to make rational sense of the world around us. "How and Why" is the only title that works.

MENDELSON
Legal says no, Goodman.

GOODMAN
Fine. Then give me another word for 'why.'

Mendelson ponders.

MENDELSON
Well... Why is like... *why*. *Why* something happens... is what why is, for instance. Like... *why*. Like... what reason did that thing happen? That's what why is. What reason did it happen. Right? ... That's what why is.

GOODMAN
'Wherefore' works.

MENDELSON
Well, not exactly, because wherefore means where. "Wherefore art thou, Romeo." So I don't think --

GOODMAN
Wherefore means why, not where.

MENDELSON
Why would wherefore mean why?

GOODMAN
Why would wherefore mean where, when *where* means where? Why would you add a suffix to where to mean where?

MENDELSON
Because it's *old*-t*imey*, Goodman! Jesus. Just... c'mon! Don't fight me on every little thing.

GOODMAN
The show is now called "Wherefore and...
(thinking)
... By What Means."

MENDELSON
Ok.
(beat)
See, that's kind of longish to me. To *me*.

GOODMAN
We'll let *How and Why* be for the simpletons who crave slapstick.
(MORE)

GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Wherefore and By What Means will be for the genuinely intelligent person, the one who can confidently co-exist with a “kind of longish” title.

Long pause.

MENDELSON
Ok. Sure. Moving on.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Mendelson and Goodman enter the studio. It’s tiny. The living room set that’s squeezed into it has just enough room for Goodman and the kids to stand almost touching.

MENDELSON
I know it’s a little tight, but check out the craftsmanship. You won’t find that in New York or L.A.

Kip and Kitty, around 10, enter with their mothers.

MENDELOSN
Ah. Here they are! The kids of the hour! Kip and Kitty, meet the great former celebrity science host of nationally syndicated *How and Why*, Goodman Hesselman, who needs no introduction.

They all ad lib greetings.

MENDELSON
Kip and Kitty are *the* star child actors of our local community theater scene. Kitty recently played Annie in *Annie* and Kip recently played Oliver in *Oliver!*

KIP
Plus Peter Pan in *Peter Pan*.

KITTY
Plus The Bad Seed in *The Bad Seed*.

GOODMAN
So are you kids interested in how the world works, that sort of thing?

KIP
I am. I often think, how do things work, Mr. Hesselman.

KITTY
I do, too. Mostly as it pertains to playing a scientist, so I can look convincing while playing her.
(to Kip)
And don't say there are no female scientists, because... Madame Curious.

GOODMAN
Curie.

KITTY
What?

GOODMAN
In any event. My goal is to foster a sense of wonder in young people.

KITTY
I can do wonder.

She looks up, crazy-eyed, at an imaginary cosmos.

KITTY (CONT'D)
(to Goodman)
That look got me "Maria" in the Fleischmann Planetarium commercial.

MENDELSON
That's our state-of-the-art Planetarium.

GOODMAN
Ah.

Pause. Mendelson claps his hands together.

MENDELSON
Exciting! What a great first meeting! Really good acting, Kitty! So first taping tomorrow at three. Be there or be square!

GOODMAN
I think a little more --

MENDELSON
And what fantastic topic will we be exploring, Goodman?

GOODMAN
Gravity.

MENDELSON
Oh.
(beat)
Great.
(beat)
It's just that, didn't you do gravity on *How and Why*.

GOODMAN
So? It's a big subject.

MENDELSON
Unfortunately, legal says --

GOODMAN
Are you fucking kidding me?

MENDELSON
It's legal, Goodman, not me. Personally, I love gravity. It's interesting.

GOODMAN
I did twenty-five years of *How and Whys*! There's no subject I didn't already talk about!

MENDELSON
I understand, but if you just dig a little deeper --

GOODMAN

They don't own gravity!

MENDELSON
In a real sense, they do. We can't take on the network. They're Goliath and we're like some kind of -- very small boy, in comparison. Not that there aren't benefits to be being a small boy. We have a lot more freedom here.

INT. CAR - DAY

Goodman pulls up to the school. The triplets are waiting sadly on the front steps. They stand and make their way dejectedly to the car and get in the back seat.

GOODMAN
Hey. Sorry I'm late.

ELLIS
Late. Early. Never. It doesn't matter.

He pulls away from the curb and drives off. Silence. He studies them in the rearview mirror.

GOODMAN
So... how was the first day?

ACTON
They eye us with disdain.

GOODMAN
Who does?

ACTON
Everyone.

GOODMAN
Everyone? Every single person eyes you with disdain?

ACTON
Yes.

CURRER
Except the janitor Bill Senior. He eyes us with gentle, sad eyes.

ACTON
True. He does do that.

GOODMAN
(concerned)
The janitor, you say?

CURRER
He looks at us like he wants to protect us.

ELLIS
Like he loves us, really.

GOODMAN
What do you mean by “loves”, exactly?

ELLIS
Don’t be provincial, Daddy. Like he knows we need his compassion and protection. A sort of guardian angel.

GOODMAN
Huh.
(uncertain)
Well, that’s good, right?

ELLIS
It really is. His supply closet was the one place we felt safe today.

GOODMAN
You were in his supply closet? With Bill Senior the janitor?

ELLIS
He was showing us various industrial cleaning supplies. He was very patient with our questions. It was nice.

GOODMAN
(beat)
Good, then.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Yvonne, red-eyed from crying, is finishing unpacking living room items. Goodman enters, followed by the boys.

YVONNE
Perfect timing. Just through getting everything ready for finishing touches from the interior design team of Acton, Ellis, and Currer.

ELLIS
(dejectedly)
You can finish, Mom. We're going to go to our room to watch TV.

The triplets head upstairs.

YVONNE
Bad first day?

GOODMAN
Me or them?

YVONNE
Them.

GOODMAN
Yeah. And me, too.

YVONNE
Me too. But I put on a good face.

GOODMAN
You do?

YVONNE
(defensive)
I think so, yes.

GOODMAN
Ok.
(beat)
Do you want to know about my day?

YVONNE
(sighs)
Not at the moment, okay? I've got to finish the room now. Later, okay?
(beat)
No, I mean, yeah, of course, tell me now. I'll -- Is it okay if I straighten while you talk, because -- or no, I'll just -- we'll just sit and you can tell me.

Yvonne sits on the couch and looks expectantly at Goodman.

GOODMAN
No, that's ok. I'll --

YVONNE
Oh, don't be like that! I said I want to know, for Christ's sake.

GOODMAN
No. You didn't, actually. You didn't say you wanted to know. You --

YVONNE
Okay, Now you're being -- What? I have to say those exact words?? Look, obviously I'm not a properly interested wife. Pardon me! So, tell me how to speak. I have say I'm interested in the exact way you want?

GOODMAN
You sighed. It doesn't make me feel like ... you're interested.

YVONNE
(yelling)
Really?? That's what you come away with? I didn't exhale in a properly interested way? Of course I'm interested! Why wouldn't I be interested??

GOODMAN
It doesn't matter, Yvonne. Nothing really happened. I just have a headache.

YVONNE
Don't turn this around, Goodman!

GOODMAN
Don't turn what around? I mean... fuck you, Yvonne.

YVONNE
Wow. Where'd that come from?

GOODMAN
(screaming)
Yeah, Wow! Yeah, Jesus! Whoa! Holy moly! Holy --

YVONNE
Look at you! You're, like, bright red!

Goodman emits a frustrated stifled scream and exits.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Goodman walks. The sky above is swirly with black clouds.

SONG
Where am I going?/Why am I here?/What am I doing?/What do I hold dear?/One second forward equals three steps ahead/How many footsteps before I am dead/Young man walked somewhere else, somewhere free/Old man walks here/Young man felt summer rain, summer breeze/ Old man feels fear.

A man in an ill-fitting black jacket turns the corner and heads toward Goodman. There is something off about him. The man is close now. Goodman nods at him. The man stops.

MAN IN BLACK PARKA
Excuse me, what is the way out?

GOODMAN
The what?

MAN IN BLACK PARKA
The exit.

GOODMAN
From where?

MAN IN BLACK PARKA
From here.

Goodman looks perplexed and after a moment says:

GOODMAN
I'm sorry. I don't understand what you're asking me.

MAN IN BLACK PARKA
I'm a Crazy Man, right? I wear a heavy black jacket even when it's warm. My eyes are glazed. Sometimes I smile for no reason. You've seen me before. You saw me where you used to live. And where you lived before that. I'm interchangeable. I'm a Crazy Man. That's all anyone has to know. I'm just an idea. And when I'm not in front of you, I no longer exist. Except I do. I exist for every single moment of my life, from my infancy to my death. And I'm looking for the exit.

GOODMAN
(beat)
Um, I don't know. I guess --
(pointing off)
Like, maybe that way?

The man ignores Goodman's directions and continues the way he'd been walking. Goodman watches after him, then sits on the curb and stares at his feet.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Yvonne is putting finishing touches on the room. It's looking neat and stylish. Goodman enters.

YVONNE
Hey, I was beginning to worry. Where'd you go.

GOODMAN
Just for a walk. Stopped and thought.

YVONNE
Are you ok now? I'm sorry
If I wasn't present before. I think I'm just tired. I'm sorry.

GOODMAN
It's ok.

YVONNE
Good. So do you like the room?

GOODMAN
Yeah. It looks great. Good job.

YVONNE
Thanks. You hungry?

GOODMAN
Not really. Have the boys been down?

YVONNE
They ate. But they went back up and closed their door.

GOODMAN
I'll check. I'm worried about them

INT. BOY'S ROOM - NIGHT

The boys are flopped on the bed, watching a sitcom on TV. In it, a dreamy teen bad boy is talking to his mother.

DREAMY BOY
I'm 16 years old, Mom. And my dad killed himself. And now we're poor and struggling to keep one step ahead of the bill collectors. That's who I am. That's all I am.

The audience "ohhhhhs" sadly.

MOTHER
No, Bobby. You're so much more than that. You're a good friend. A great son. A guitar wiz. A boy who loves nature and sports cars and football and a million other things that make you unique. And I'm proud to be your mom.

The audience "awwwwws" and applauds as Bobby and his mother hug. There's a knock on the triplets' door.

ELLIS
Yes?

GOODMAN (O.C.)
It's Dad.

ELLIS
Enter, Pater!

The door opens and Goodman enters.

GOODMAN
Just wanted to say hi.
What you watching?

ACTON
“On Our Own.”

GOODMAN
Ah. You’ve grown up with that kid.
Bobby, is it?

ACTON
Yeah. Bobby. Although he’s going by Bob now, mostly. Except to his mom.

GOODMAN
We parents just refuse to let you kids grow up, right?

CURRER
Oh, Daddy.

GOODMAN
Listen, I just wanted to tell you guys that I love you and that I know things haven’t been easy for you lately. But you need to know, you’re special, creative, smart, loving boys. Anyone who can’t see that is a fool. And I’m so proud to be your dad.

The boys are tearing up. They hug Goodman.

GOODMAN (CONT’D)
You want me to talk to someone at school tomorrow? The principal?

ELLIS
No. You can’t help us anymore, Daddy. We’re too old. Parents intervening at our age only makes things worse.

GOODMAN
I don’t really think --

CURRER
It’s true. We’re on our own now. But it’s okay, Daddy. We’ll be okay.

GOODMAN
If you change your mind --

ACTON
We have a plan to fit in by being invisible for several years, until everyone's hormones settle down.

INT. GOODMAN AND YVONNE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Goodman and Yvonne lie in bed, eyes open and on their backs. There is a silence.

YVONNE
I'd like to hear your day. If you want to tell me.

GOODMAN
I'm just too old to be starting again, this far down the toilet.

YVONNE
It's going to work out.

GOODMAN
I should've done something else with my life. I should've done *something*.

YVONNE
You did great. You are a national celebrity. How many people could say that?

GOODMAN
That's not anything. Now even that's gone.

YVONNE
This is a nice town, nicer than New York or L.A. could ever hope to be. The boys are going to blossom here.

GOODMAN
Yeah. I hope so. I *think* I hope they blossom. I'm a little worried about that, too.

YVONNE
Everybody worries about everything.

GOODMAN
That's a lot of worry in the world. What does it look like? What does that massive trash heap of worry look like?

YVONNE
(thinks, then dreamily:)
It's green, like an electric green -- too bright to look at directly. And windy, a swirling dustdevil of electric green. It worries, too. The worry worries about worrying And we're its children. Each of us born of it, getting held upside down and smacked in the butt by it to make us cry. And it permeates us, this genetic inheritance, attaches itself to our faces like old-man stage make up,, writes expiration dates on our foreheads, coats our eyes with anxiety.

GOODMAN
(beat)
Yeah.
(beat)
Night.

YVONNE
Night.

Goodman stares up at the ceiling. A time lapse begins of the two tossing and turning, Yvonne throwing off her sheets, both of them lifting their heads and checking the digital clock periodically. Finally, it's early morning and they've been quiet for a long while. Yvonne gets out of bed. She walks drowsily to the bedroom door and exits. We stay on the still sleeping Goodman. After a few moments:

YVONNE (CONT'D)
(screaming)
Goodman! Goodman!

Goodman jerks awake.

GOODMAN
(sleepy panic)
What?! Huh?!

He lumbers out of bed and exits.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Goodman descends the stairs to find Yvonne standing there. Hands over her mouth, staring at the room, all the elements of which have been repacked in taped-together, greasy-looking boxes. It's a messy job, but complete. Yvonne turns and looks at Goodman, terrified. The boys appear behind Goodman on the stairs.

GOODMAN
Did you guys do this?

ELLIS
No!

YVONNE
Goodman? What happened here?

GOODMAN
Are you guys telling the truth??

All three ad-lib "Yes!" There's a long silence. Then:

YVONNE
(tentatively)
It's a message, I think. Someone doesn't want us here. That's what I think.

GOODMAN
That's absurd. Who?

YVONNE
Or maybe some*thing*?

GOODMAN
What does that even mean, Yvonne?

YVONNE
I don't know! I don't know!
(beat)
I think we have to bring someone in. A ghost expert.

GOODMAN
Someone did this, Yvonne. Not some*thing*.

YVONNE
Okay, who then??

GOODMAN
I don't know. But I *know*.

There's a silence. Finally:

ELLIS
We think it's ghosts. Poltergeists can be brought on by pubescence, which we are on the cusp of, in case anyone cares.

YVONNE
(nodding head)
The boys are right. I've read that, too. Although I think it's pubescent girls that bring it on. I'm going to call someone. I am freaked out. This has freaked me out.

She exits. Goodman looks at the boys.

GOODMAN
Well, I guess we'd better all start our days.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

There are large photos of apparitions hung on the set. Goodman addresses Kip and Kitty.

GOODMAN
So what exactly is a ghost? Kip?

KIP
A ghost is a spook.

GOODMAN
Okay. Kitty, can you elaborate?

KITTY
A ghost is a dead person which is stuck between our world and the next.

GOODMAN
The next world?

KITTY
Yes. Like heaven, for our example of the next world. Or in different religions, other places. Like Buddha.

INT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Yvonne watches Dagmar, a frail, shaky, hollow-eyed ethereal woman, as she glides around the room.

DAGMAR
(definitively)
Yes. Yes.

YVONNE
Yes?

DAGMAR
Yes. There is something.

YVONNE
What, exactly?

DAGMAR
It's hard.
(ponders)
Imagine an echo with a will, a wound with desires.

YVONNE
I don't know how to imagine those.

DAGMAR
If you insist on remaining a foot soldier for the rational, Yvonne, you will never become porous enough to experience the true world behind the veil.

YVONNE
Is it beautiful? behind the veil?

DAGMAR
Not all of it. Some of it's a disgusting, vermin infested mess. But it is true.

YVONNE
I'll try.

DAGMAR
Then sit.

Yvonne does.

DAGMAR (CONT'D)
Allow your heart to beat to the vibrations of this house which vibrates to the earth which vibrates to the air which vibrates to the universe.

Yvonne, slack-jawed, eyes closed, begins to sway.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A green breeze creeps into town, wraps itself around buildings, people, cars, around the high school, where it finds Acton, Ellis, and Currer in the schoolyard being savagely beaten by a group of boys in identical blazers.

DAGMAR (O.S.)
A ghost is what's left after a traumatic incident, eternally, futilely trying to heal.

YVONNE (O.S.)
So ghosts aren't dead people?

DAGMAR (O.S.)
Not only. Living people create ghosts, as well, with their mindless violence and deceit.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Goodman chats with Kip and Kitty.

GOODMAN
Are there really such things as ghosts?

KIP
Half the people say yes and half the people say no. That means that there are fifty percent of ghosts. According to math.

GOODMAN
Is it possible that the people who say there are ghosts might be mistaken or confused or even lying?

KIP
Why would they lie?

INT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Yvonne and Dagmar, eyes closed, feel the spirit of the room, sway and moan to it.

GOODMAN (O.S.)
For attention? For monetary gain? It's possible some people believe in ghosts because it alleviates their crushing fear of death. Of the nothingness that follows.

Green seeps in through the studio walls.

INT. SUPPLY CLOSET - DAY

Ellis, Acton, and Currer sit on drums in the crowded closet, their clothes ripped and dirty, their faces swollen and bloody. Bill Senior, a kind-looking bear of a man, gently dabs at the boy's faces with a wet cloth.

BILL SENIOR
I'm sorry there's such meanness out there.

CURRER
It follows us, Bill Senior. Wherever we go.

BILL SENIOR
I know it does.

CURRER
We thought it might be different here. Different school. Different state. But it's the same. It's like the same boys in masks or like the new boys got a phone call from the old boys call telling them we were coming.

BILL SENIOR
(thought)
I ought to teach you three to box. I'm not allowed to go out there and beat those assholes to death, but with the proper instruction, you could.

ELLIS
I don't think we could study boxing. We're not comfortable with the hitting part or the part of getting hit.

ACTON
We could study boxercise. I've had my eye on boxercise.

ELLIS
Yes. Or even kick-boxercise.

ACTON
I hear they both get you into fantastic shape.

BILL SENIOR
Well, y'know, I do teach boxercising class at the Y on Tuesday nights. It's a ladies class, but I could borrow some equipment and teach you boxercise right here in this closet -- our closet.

ELLIS AND ACTON
Oh, Bill Senior.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Green seeps along the floor of the studio.

KIP
You make like people are crazy. Like they just make up stories and believe them. Well, that's what crazy people do, not actual people.

GOODMAN
Maybe people need to tell themselves stories. Maybe people are a little more vulnerable to fear and sadness than you would allow for.

KIP
I allow for *ghosts*! That's what I allow for! Why not, right? It's a free country! And ghosts are only logical. I mean, people have to go somewhere when they die.

GOODMAN
No. No, it's not logical, Kip. When people die, they decay and go back to the earth. There's no substantiated evidence of ghosts.

KIP
Next you're going to tell me there's no Draculas!

An unseen, far away audience erupts in laughter. Goodman looks off. The studio audience consists of about twenty seats, only one of them occupied -- by a bored-looking sailor, smoking a cigarette.

GOODMAN
(to the kids)
Did you hear that?

KITTY
Hear what?

GOODMAN
Sort of like lots of people far away... laughing.

KIP
(sly smile)
Could it be... *Ghosts*, Mr. H.?

Goodman gives him a sideways glance. The distant audience laughs again. Goodman looks off for the source.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dagmar and Yvonne sit silently for a long moment, Then, conclusively:

DAGMAR
But this one is dead.

YVONNE
Why did it pack our stuff?

DAGMAR
I believe it retains only a vague understanding of the material world. It remembers that packing is what you do before you leave. It's looking for the way out.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Goodman, Kip, and Kitty hold hands around a small table with three candles on it. The lights are low.

GOODMAN
Departed spirit of Kip's Grandmother -- What is her name?

KIP
Grandma. Betty, I think. Or Beppy.

GOODMAN
Ok, close your eyes and concentrate.

The kids close their eyes.

GOODMAN (CONT'D)
(closes eyes)
Departed spirit of Kip's grandmother, we beseech you to join us here today on our Earthly plane.

Nothing happens.

GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Betty. Or Beppy. Please join us here today.

Nothing. Goodman opens his eyes.

GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Nothing.

The kids open their eyes.

GOODMAN (CONT'D)
(to camera)
Well, it's not possible to prove a negative, but this is --

KITTY
Hello.

GOODMAN
Kitty, let me finish this --

KITTY
I'm not Kitty. I'm Beppy.

GOODMAN
Oh, for God's sake, Kitty --

KIP
(competing)
No, It is Beppy. I can tell.
(weeping)
Grandma! I love you!

KITTY
Kip, my little corn cob!

GOODMAN
(calling off)
Shane! Stop tape!

Shane runs on to set.

SHANE
I think it's going amazingly!

Kip and Kitty are both writhing on the floor now, seemingly in trances.

GOODMAN
I'm trying to talk about real things here. I'm too old. I'll be back tomorrow. I want them replaced.

MENDELSON
Goodman, be reasonable --

Goodman exits.

INT. HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Goodman stomps down a high school hall. At the end, he looks uncertain and turns left onto an apartment building hallway. He turns right onto a hospital hall. A middle aged woman dressed as Alice in Wonderland walks with a man in a bird suit and a *papier-mâché* martian head.

GOODMAN
Excuse me, I'm looking for the exit.

ALICE
Sure. Take a left at Haunted House, right at Capitol Building, then left at Upper Westside Apartment Book-lined Hall.

GOODMAN
Thanks.

Alice smiles and nods and Goodman continues on. He's soon lost. The halls have become very narrow. He panics and walks faster. Far away titters turn to far away laughter. He's running now, crazy-eyed. Up ahead he sees a green glow. He arrives at the intersection. The glow is coming from an exit sign down the hall.

EXT. BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Goodman leans against the building, heaving. He cocks his head as he hears far away applause.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Yvonne and Dagmar sit and chant with eyes closed. Suddenly a jolt throws Yvonne hard against the couch. A spray of blood flies from the back of her head and onto the wall behind her. She opens her eyes with a start and looks back, but the wall is clean.

DAGMAR
What happened?

YVONNE
Something exploded through my head.
Words. Fast. Painful.

DAGMAR
Can you remember them?

YVONNE
(as if recalling a dream)
“Bobby wants to learn how to kiss.
Sarah’s fed up with the guys’ messiness.
Dave shoots himself in the head.”

Yvonne looks anxiously at Dagmar.

DAGMAR
Something else?

YVONNE
(beat)
“Rerun.”

END