

SMALL TOWN GOSSIP

OVER BLACK:

The sound of many large and small dogs BARKING, some hound dogs HOWLING. A strange tiny YAP, YAP, YAP.

FADE IN:

INT. DOG SHOW - GROOMING AREA - DAY

PAUL HARTLEY (early 30's, professional, speaks with a calm, mature voice, usually wears a vee-neck cashmere sweater over a collared shirt), walks around, observes show dogs being groomed on their tables.

There is a Shih Tzu with curlers, a Bichon being blown dry and puffed up, a Cocker Spaniel being brushed, an Afghan's long ears braided with ribbons, and a Poodle's fur being clipped.

Other barking dogs wait in crates.

Paul casually walks down a wide corridor past a SIGN shaped like an arrow, "1975 MONTGOMERY DOG SHOW", headed for the arena.

INT. DOG SHOW - ARENA - DAY

Paul takes a seat as a MALE ANNOUNCER speaks on the LOUD SPEAKER.

MALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Next up is the Terrier group.

Trainers walk out in single file with their dogs: an Airedale, American Staffordshire, Bedlington Terrier, Border Terrier, Cairn, Schnauzer, Wire Fox Terrier, and Yorkshire Terrier.

Paul takes particular note of the beautiful Airedale.

The male trainer, DYLAN MACKENZIE (20's, exuberant, sweats charm, usually wears jeans and T-shirt), poses the Airedale for the female Judge.

The Judge walks over, checks the dog's teeth, eyes, ears, shape. She gestures to Dylan to walk the dog.

The Judge watches the dog's gait as Dylan runs with the dog around the ring, then goes to the end of the line.

As the Judge repeats the procedure with the other dogs, Paul looks around the arena, notes the gallery is full, a large TV monitor overhead shows close ups, TV cameras move along on wires overhead, TV commentators, and crew.

The female Judge takes a last look at all the dogs standing in line while she makes her decision. She points to the Airedale.

MALE ANNOUNCER (V.O) (CONT'D)
Snickers, the Airedale, wins
the Terrier group.

Large smile on Dylan as he shakes the Judge's hand. Dylan bends down, hugs the Airedale.

INT. DOG SHOW - GROOMING AREA - DAY

Paul approaches Dylan walking Snickers back to the grooming table.

PAUL
Congratulations.

DYLAN
Thanks.

Paul extends his hand as they walk.

PAUL
My name's Paul.

Dylan stops. He eyes the handsome man up and down, likes what he sees.

DYLAN
(shaking hands)
Dylan. Dylan MacKenzie

PAUL
Beautiful dog. Is she yours?

Paul notices Dylan's gold pinky ring sparkle in the light as he effeminately waves his hand when he speaks.

DYLAN

No, Honey. Dr. Soshi Yakamura owns her. I'm just the handler and groomer.

DR. YAKAMURA rushes over smiling, bows to Dylan, then to Paul.

DR. YAKAMURA

Good job, Dylan.

DYLAN

She's got some tough competition today, Dr. Yakamura.

DR. YAKAMURA

Yes, the Standard Poodle I hear has won three championships.

Dr. Yakamura pats her Airedale on the back.

DR. YAKAMURA (CONT'D)

(to dog)

Anata wa champion desu.

(Subtitle: You are a champion)

She bows to the dog, Dylan, Paul, walks back to the arena.

Dylan brushes Snickers.

PAUL

I was wondering if you are available to show my Airedale. He comes from championship stock. His mother won Best in Show, and his father was a Grand Champion.

DYLAN

I'd have to take a look at him, but I will only train him if I feel he could win.

PAUL

I don't think you'll be disappointed.

(takes out card)

Here's my card. Please call at your convenience.

DYLAN

Sure,

(reads card)

Hm, a doctor. Dr. Paul Hartley.

He strokes the card on his cheek toward his chin in a sexually flirtatious way.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul opens the front door with his Airedale, BARON by his side.

PAUL

Come on in. Glad you could make it. This is Baron.

Dylan looks at Baron from all sides, checks teeth, hips.

DYLAN

You were right. He's a beaut.

Baron BARKS.

PAUL

Let's go into the kitchen. I'm making some lasagna. Come join me.

As they walk towards the kitchen, Dylan notices photos of Paul and Baron, no wife or children.

DYLAN

If I do handle him, I'd be working with him about three hours a day which includes walking and grooming. How would your wife and kids feel about that?

They enter the kitchen. Paul opens the oven door.

PAUL

I'm only married to my job, and
there are no kids, only Baron.

DYLAN

Yes, your card said you're a
veterinarian.

PAUL

The card told you that?

Dylan laughs, sits at the table as Paul puts the steaming lasagna on the table next to a large bowl of salad.

DYLAN

You know what I mean.

Paul gets two plates and silverware, brings them to the table.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

So, what's with the interest
in showing Baron?

PAUL

I've always wanted my own pet
clinic. The \$50,000 prize
money would help with expenses,
but more importantly, I like
the excitement and thrill when
he wins.

DYLAN

I agree. It's a great high you
can't get doing drugs or
drinking booze, right?

PAUL

Exactly. It's pride and passion
rolled into one.

DYLAN

Nicely put. Pride and passion.

Paul opens a bottle of wine, pours two glasses.

Dylan looks out through the sliding glass door.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Nice yard. Good space to work
with Baron.

PAUL
Good. I'll give you a key for
the side gate.

Paul hands him one of the glasses.

PAUL (CONT'D)
To Baron's success.

DYLAN
And hopefully a new pet clinic.

They clink glasses, stare into each other's eyes a long time. Sparks seem to fly. They smile at each other.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul enters through the front door, walks over to the sliding glass door. Watches Dylan train Baron in the backyard.

He slides the door open, goes outside.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Dylan teaches Baron to pose stretching his back legs way out.

PAUL
How's he doing?

DYLAN
He's doing really well. He's
quick to learn and eager to
please. Watch this.

Dylan runs with Baron, stops, uses a hand motion. Baron poses himself.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
(giving treat)
That a boy, Baron.

PAUL
Can you teach me the hand
motion?

Dylan walks up to Paul.

DYLAN
Sure, give me your hand.

Dylan moves Paul's hand as Paul looks into his eyes. There is sexual tension. Paul quickly diverts his eyes in embarrassment.

Dylan takes note, but doesn't release his hand. He strokes his thumb on Paul's hand. They smile.

PAUL
Tomorrow's my day off. Why
don't we take him to the park?

DYLAN
I think we'd both love it.

Dylan picks a piece of lint off Paul's sweater, stares into Paul's eyes. Paul likes that, smiles.

EXT. PARK - DAY

As Paul and Dylan walk, Paul throws a toy. Baron chases it, brings it back. Paul throws it again.

Dylan takes pictures with his 35 mm camera.

DYLAN
He shows great attitude in his
gait.

They walk to a tree, sit with their backs against it. Baron lies down next to them.

There is a moment of silence as they both watch shirtless men playing football.

PAUL

When did you know you were gay?

Dylan frowns.

DYLAN

I'm gay?

Paul is surprised.

Dylan smiles as he lightly fist-bumps Paul on his arm.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I'm yanking your chain.

PAUL

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry.

DYLAN

That's okay, Honey. I don't mind.
How else are we going to get to
know each other?

Paul's relieved.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I was in the sixth grade and
had a huge crush on this cute
guy in the seventh grade.

PAUL

Do you like being gay?

This time Dylan looks surprised.

DYLAN

Uh... I guess. Why, you don't?

PAUL

Is it obvious that I'm gay?

DYLAN

Not so much. I can tell you
don't like coming out of the
closet.

Paul crosses his arms over his chest.

PAUL

I'm not that confident. Actually, I'm scared. I wish we weren't considered abnormal, you know?

DYLAN

Yeah. I was in the closet a long time afraid anyone would find out. I think my mama always knew, but I didn't tell my parents until I was eighteen. And you?

Paul looks down at the grass dejectedly. Dylan notices.

FLASHBACK

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - DAY

A naked teenaged Paul lies on the floor as his father, THOMAS HARTLEY (looks like Colonel Sanders) beats him with his belt over and over.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Paul looks at Dylan.

PAUL

My parents didn't approve.

DYLAN

It shouldn't matter to you. Do what makes you happy. To hell with them!

Paul looks at Dylan, nods.

PAUL

You're right. To hell with them. So, besides showing and grooming dogs, and photography, what's your passion?

DYLAN

My passion? I'm an advocate for gay rights like getting married and adopting children. There's no reason why we shouldn't be allowed to live like everyone else.

PAUL

I agree. Good for you.

DYLAN

A group of us are going to protest in front of City Hall tomorrow. Why don't you join us?

PAUL

While I commend you for what you are doing, that's not my thing.

DYLAN

Why not? Is it because you think, if you hang around with other gays, people will know you're gay?

Paul nods.

Dylan SIGHS DEEPLY.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I'm not going to pressure you, Honey. I know you'll out when the time's right.

Dylan rests his head on Paul's shoulder, holds Paul's hand.

Paul's posture stiffens, looks around to see if anyone saw that.

PAUL

Not here. Let's go back.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul and Dylan walk out of the bedroom, both shirtless and wearing underwear.

Paul goes to the kitchen.

Dylan lies back on the couch, puts his bare feet on the coffee table.

Paul brings their coffee, sits on the couch. He lies back, puts his feet on the coffee table next to Dylan's. They sip their coffee.

Dylan moves his foot over, strokes Paul's leg with it. Paul smiles, puts his cup on the side table, turns sideways facing him.

PAUL

Do you like to go to the movies?

DYLAN

I do. I like thrillers and quirky comedies, like The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

PAUL

That was the best, wasn't it? Jaws is playing tomorrow. Do you want to see it?

Dylan excitedly grabs Paul's arm.

DYLAN

Oh, we've got to see it! I heard it's great.

Dylan smiles.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

So, we're dating now?

PAUL

Took you long enough to figure that out, Sherlock Holmes.

Paul strokes his index finger on Dylan's cheek.

DYLAN

Who?

PAUL
Sherlock Holmes.

12.

Dylan has a confused look.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Seriously, you don't know about
Sherlock Holmes?

Dylan shakes his head.

PAUL (CONT'D)
How old are you?

DYLAN
Twenty-five.

Paul SCOFFS.

PAUL
You're just an adorable baby.

Dylan strokes Paul's thigh. They smile at each other, kiss.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

While watching JAWS, Paul puts an arm around Dylan.

Dylan is about to lean his head on Paul's shoulder, when the shark suddenly lunges onto the boat, shocking everyone in the audience. Paul and Dylan SCREAM.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Three TEENAGERS wearing hoodies rob the store. One of them points a gun at the clerk, whose hands are up.

One grabs the cash from the register.

The other grabs beer.

They run out the door laughing.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Paul and Dylan walk on the sidewalk with one hand inside each other's back pant pocket.

DYLAN

Ever since I saw Hitchcock's
'Psycho', I've been afraid to
take a shower alone. Now, I
don't think I'll ever go into
the ocean again!

PAUL

You're so cute.

Paul stops, looks around, sees no one. They kiss a long
time.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Teenagers drive by drinking the beer, see Paul and
Dylan kissing.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The car suddenly SCREECHES to a stop.

The Teenagers run over to Paul and Dylan.

A very muscular football player-type, TEENAGER #1, grabs
Paul by his sweater, pulls him away from Dylan.

TEENAGER #1

Look what we've got here. Two
faggots.

DYLAN

So, what if we are? What's it
to you?

TEENAGER #2 gets in Dylan's face.

TEENAGER #2

(to Dylan)

You don't belong here, fairy.

DYLAN

We belong here just as much as
you do. We're not hurting anyone.

PAUL

Dylan, don't provoke them.

TEENAGER #1

Yeah, Dylan, don't... don't
whatever he said.

Dylan takes an aggressive step towards him.

DYLAN

Why don't you just leave us
alone?

TEENAGER #2

Maybe we don't want to.

Teenager #1 shoves Paul to the ground, kicks him.

Teenager #2 punches Dylan in the stomach. As Dylan hunches
over, Teenager #3 holds Dylan's hands behind him.

Teenager #2 punches Dylan in the face, over and over.

A SIREN wails in the distance.

TEENAGER #3

Cops are comin'. Let's go!

The Teenagers grab Dylan and Paul's watches off their
wrists, take their wallets, and Paul's keys.

They rush back inside the car, speed off.

Paul and Dylan get up slowly, hold onto each other as an
ambulance whizzes by.

PAUL

You don't look so good. We need
to get you to the ER.

DYLAN

No, I'm alright. It's just, they
took my father's watch. God, I
loved that watch. It was the
only thing I inherited from him.

PAUL

I'm sorry.

DYLAN

15.

How are you?

PAUL

My sides hurt, but I don't think
anything's broken.

Dylan uses his sleeve to wipe the blood pouring down his
face.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Let's get you home.

Paul searches his pockets as he looks at his parked car.

PAUL (CONT'D)

They took my keys. Do you know
how to hotwire a car?

DYLAN

Not a clue.

PAUL

Well, it's too far to walk home,
and we don't have any money to
call for tow service.

Paul sees a taxi approaching, holds his abdomen as he hails
it.

Paul taps on the passenger window. The window rolls down.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Excuse me, sir. We were just
robbed. They took our wallets.
I have some money at home if you
could just trust me to pay you
when you take us home.

The CAB DRIVER looks over at Dylan. Dylan spits blood into
the street.

CAB DRIVER

Okay, get in, but don't get any
blood in the car.

Dylan nods, puts his hand over his mouth.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

As the Cab drives, he looks back and forth into his rearview mirror having a cross dangling on a beaded chain. He listens in on the conversation.

PAUL

We need to report this to the police.

DYLAN

It would just be a waste of time. When they see we're gay, all the cops do is file a report. I know that for a fact. I was in love with a wonderful guy named Jack Turlington.

Dylan has a far-away look.

FLASHBACK**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

Dylan and Jack Turlington sit inside a parked car.

DYLAN (V.O.)

We were sitting in his car talking about hiring a surrogate for a child.

Two men approach the car.

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

Suddenly two men opened the doors pointing their guns at us.

Jack tries to grab the gun, a fight ensues. The GUN GOES OFF.

END FLASHBACK.**INT. TAXI - NIGHT**

Dylan's eyes well as he looks down.

DYLAN

17.

Jack died on the way to the hospital.

Paul puts his arm around Dylan.

PAUL

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

DYLAN

The cops didn't even investigate.

He leans his head on Paul's shoulder, tears flowing heavily

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Jack was the love of my life.

Paul kisses his forehead.

The Cab Driver's face shows compassion.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The taxi pulls in to Paul's driveway. Paul is worried, looks at his front door.

PAUL

I hope they haven't broken into the house.

Paul and Dylan gingerly get out.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(to Cab Driver)

I'll be right back with your money.

CAB DRIVER

That's okay.

He drives off.

PAUL

(yelling)

Thank you!

The Cab Driver waves from his window.

Paul walks slowly toward the front door, checks it, is relieved.

PAUL (CONT'D)
It's still locked. No sign of
the teenagers.

He walks over to the window, looks inside.

Baron is asleep on the couch.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Baron! Baron!

Baron lifts his head.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Baron, come!

Baron sees Paul in the window, rushes over.

Paul motions with his hand for Baron to push the window lever to open the window outward.

Baron just looks at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
We'll have to break the window.

DYLAN
Let me try first.

Dylan motions for Baron to jump up onto the window ledge. Baron does.

Dylan motions Baron to push the lever. Baron tries a couple times, then succeeds.

The window opens just enough for Paul to grab it and pull it open.

PAUL
You are definitely a great
trainer!

Dylan offers his hands to boost him up. Paul steps on

Dylan's hands, GROANS, climbs through the window head first.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul grimaces as he painfully lands on the floor, holds onto his rib cage.

PAUL
(patting Baron)
Good boy, Baron. Good job!

Paul gets up gingerly, opens the front door.

DYLAN
You might want to get the locks
changed tonight before the teens
get here.

Paul nods.

Dylan grabs a bottle of liqueur from Paul's home bar, looks at Paul, raises the bottle.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Let's get drunk.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Dylan and Paul sit across each other in a booth. Glasses of water on the table.

Paul looks at Dylan trying to read his menu with one red, swollen eye with purplish skin all around it.

Paul empathically extends a hand.

Dylan reaches over, holds it.

An imposing man, the OWNER, comes over.

OWNER
You two girls hafta leave.

Paul doesn't believe what he just heard, looks at Dylan, then back at the man.

PAUL

What?

OWNER

You heard me.

The Owner angrily looks at Dylan.

OWNER (CONT'D)

We don't serve queers...

He looks at Paul.

OWNER (CONT'D)

...or Jews.

PAUL

I'm not Jewish.

OWNER

You look like a Jew. And if you
look like a Jew, you're a Jew.

Dylan looks at him.

DYLAN

You hafta serve us. It's the
law.

OWNER

I'm the law in here. This is
my restaurant, and I have the
right to refuse service to
anyone. Now, I said git out.

Paul motions with his chin at Dylan to go. Dylan shakes his head. They don't move. It's a stand-off.

The Owner picks up Dylan and Paul's glasses of water, spits a loogie in each one, sets the glasses back down.

Paul is fed up, stands slowly grimacing in pain.

Dylan rises, walks in front of the Owner towards the door.

The Owner roughly bump's Dylan with his body.

Dylan stops, turns around, steps toward the Owner ready to fight, but Paul grabs his arm, pulls him towards the door.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Paul and Dylan walk down the sidewalk away from the cafe.

PAUL

Look at us, Dylan, I hate
being a punching bag. Do you?

DYLAN

I don't like it either.

PAUL

And, I'm tired of being treated
like I'm doing something wrong.
Why is being gay such an evil
thing?

DYLAN

We can't just be passive and be
a victim. The time has come
for us to speak up and demand
equality.

PAUL

You're right. We should be
treated equally because we're
just like everyone else.

Dylan stops, puts both hands on Paul's shoulders, looks him
in the eyes.

DYLAN

No, we're not, Honey.

Paul's brows rise in surprise.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

We're better. We're more
polite, tolerant of people's
differences, and...

Dylan straightens Paul's collar.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

...we have a better sense of style.

Paul's eyebrow goes back down. They laugh, continue walking

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Paul and Dylan hand their menus to the Waiter. The Waiter leaves to get their food.

PAUL

I want to get away from these
city thugs and live a quiet,
peaceful life with the man I
love.

He puts his hand on Dylan's.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about moving.

DYLAN

Moving? See, that's the
difference between us, Paul.
You want to just escape. I
want to stay and fight for
our rights.

The waiter arrives with Paul and Dylan's order.

They take spoonfuls of each item, add it to their dish.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

So, where would you go?

PAUL

There's a small town west of
here in the mountains called
West Moreland.

They start eating.

PAUL (CONT'D)

They posted an ad in the
newspapers for a vet to open
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

a Pet Clinic. I wouldn't earn as much money, but then costs would be cheaper. And small-town life is less stressful. I've heard nothing but good things about it.

DYLAN

You sound like you've made up your mind.

PAUL

I guess I have. I was hoping Baron would win prize money to help expenses, but I can take out a loan.

Dylan stops eating. Looks depressed.

DYLAN

Seems silly to start a relationship when you're leaving.

PAUL

I know it's presumptuous of me to ask, but would you be willing to come with me?

Dylan SIGHS heavily.

DYLAN

I don't know, Paul. Gay rights are important to me, and the best place to fight for them is here.

PAUL

I understand.

DYLAN

And what about my job? I've got established clients.

PAUL

You could be the receptionist
in my clinic. You could still
groom.

Dylan thinks as he eats.

DYLAN

Are you sure small-town people
will accept us? Usually, people
in small towns get to know each
other, and they're more
close-minded.

PAUL

Not if we're like... discreet.

DYLAN

Who's that?

PAUL

Silly goose. That means we
can't hold hands or kiss, and
you can't call me 'honey' in
public.

Dylan stops eating, looks at Paul in disbelief.

DYLAN

So, you want me to go back
in the closet?

Paul looks at him, shrugs.

Dylan tosses his fork on the table in anger.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Why do I have to hide who I am?
You realize you're asking me to
act straight because you're
afraid to come out.

Paul looks down, keeps eating.

Dylan watches him eat.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You're asking me to sacrifice a lot for you. What are you sacrificing?

PAUL

People are just not open to gays. And, I can't have it ruin my business.

Dylan looks down, shakes his head.

DYLAN

I don't know, Paul. Honestly, I'm not happy about this. I love you very much, but I don't know if I want to be in a relationship with you right now.

He stands, slowly tosses his napkin on the table.

PAUL

Wait. What?

Dylan leaves.

INT. GAY BAR - NIGHT

Paul walks through the crowded room with many people dancing, on his way to the bar looking for Dylan.

He sees Dylan at a booth having drinks with another GUY. Their table has several empty glasses.

Paul orders a drink.

Dylan spies Paul at the bar, watches him.

Paul finishes his drink. He raises his glass, gestures for more rounds.

The bartender fills his glass.

The Guy leans over, speaks into Dylan's ear.

GUY
(to Dylan)
You wanna dance?

DYLAN
Uh...

He looks at Paul.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Sure, Honey.

Paul turns, watches Dylan and the Guy get up. They walk to the center of the room, dance apart.

The Guy moves closer, hugs Dylan as they dance. He rubs his hands over Dylan's butt.

He turns Dylan around, hugs him from the rear with the front of his body grinding Dylan's back provocatively.

As Dylan dances, he keeps looking over at Paul.

Paul watches as he holds his drink.

Dylan pretends he's having a good time.

The music changes to a fast dance. The Guy yells above the loud music.

GUY
Let's get outta here.

DYLAN
Uh, I think I'll stay for a while.

Dylan starts to walk away.

The Guy grabs his arm.

The music stops.

GUY
(yelling)
I paid for all our drinks. You owe me, bitch.

Everyone hears this, stops, looks at them, including Paul.

DYLAN

All I owe you is a "thank you".

GUY

Not good enough. Let's go!

He shoves Dylan toward the door.

Dylan turns around, shoves him back.

GUY (CONT'D)

You fuckin' tease.

The Guy raises his fist to punch Dylan.

Paul rushes over, tackles the Guy.

The Guy looks up at Paul from the floor.

Paul throws a couple of twenties at him.

PAUL

This'll pay for your drinks.
Now, get the fuck out of here.

The Guy grabs the money, leaves.

A slow song is played. Dylan and Paul stare into each other's eyes as others dance around them.

DYLAN

I hate men like that, so
possessive. They think they
own you.

Paul nods.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I'm surprised to see you here.

PAUL

I was hoping to find you.

Dylan smiles, walks closer to Paul.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
I'm glad you did. You were my
knight in shining armor.

PAUL
It was my pleasure to rescue you.

Paul speaks into Dylan's ear.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I was feeling jealous.

DYLAN
Good.

Dylan reaches over, plays with Paul's hair.

PAUL
I missed you, Dylan. I'm sorry.
I want us to be together again.

Dylan smiles widely, swishes his shoulders as he speaks.

DYLAN
Feeling's mutual, Honey.

Dylan grabs Paul's hand, kisses it.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
I love you, Paul Hartley. And
when I love someone, I'm loyal
to a fault.

PAUL
Good to know.

DYLAN
Just so you know, I don't like
having meaningless sex because
I hate taking advantage of
someone just for my own sexual
satisfaction.

PAUL

I thought I was the only one
who felt that way.

Paul leans his forehead on Dylan's.

DYLAN

I think I'll go with you to
that small town. I love you
so much.

Paul grabs the back of Dylan's neck, pulls him in for a
kiss which leads to tonguing.

PAUL

Come home with me.

EXT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

Paul and Dylan do a kind of dance from the waist up as Paul
drives his SUV on a curved road through a forest lined with
birch trees and conifers. Baron is inside a crate in the
back.

They pass a metal sign: "YOU ARE LEAVING MONTGOMERY,
ALABAMA". Someone added "AND DON'T COME BACK" with spray
paint.

They drive past a sign, "WELCOME TO WEST MORELAND, POP
1,673".

DYLAN

They'll have to change that to
1,675.

Paul LAUGHS.

They drive towards a picturesque, little town nestled among
lush green hills with a pristine emerald green lake.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Oh, my God, Paul. Look at that
lake!

They drive through the center of town with Fourth of July
flags everywhere. Not many people walk around, few cars.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You were right about it being
a small town.

They drive under a banner, "FIREWORKS AT DELILA'S FARM, 9
PM" with many crows sitting across the top. They SQUAWK as
a sudden gust of wind sends them flying.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

Paul and Dylan park in front of a vacant store. There is a
sign, "PET CLINIC OPENING SOON" in the window.

DYLAN

It's in a good location.

They get out of the car, look in the window.

PAUL

I was thinking a little paint,
maybe white with yellow and
blue here and there.

DYLAN

And some orchids and animal
prints on the walls.

PAUL

Yeah. Great idea.

They get back into the car, drive on.

EXT. PAUL'S NEW HOUSE - DAY

Paul and Dylan exit the car, stand in front of a nice
little house near the end of town.

DYLAN

I like it.

A moving van approaches.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dylan organizes papers as he sits behind a counter in the
empty room. Baron lies in a crate next to him.

An assertive woman in her fifties (looks like Betty White),
DELORES ADA-RAE MADISON walks in with her Rat Terrier.

Dylan looks up.

DYLAN

Well, congratulations.

DELORES

What for?

DYLAN

You're our first customer.

He looks at her little dog wearing a jacket and booties.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

And who is this little
fashionista?

DELORES

This is Penny. She has a little
cold and has been sneezin' a lot.
I'm Delores. Delores Ada-Rae
Madison, relative of James
Madison, who signed the
Constitution.

DYLAN

No kidding? James Madison?

Delores nods.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Well, I'm Dylan MacKenzie,
relative of Jason and Pearl
MacKenzie.

DELORES

Never heard of 'em.

Dylan smiles.

DELORES (CONT'D)

Well, welcome to our town, Dylan.
Where you from?

DYLAN

Originally, Louisville.

DELORES

You'll find life here more
laid back. People help their
neighbors, but keep to
themselves. No crime like in
them there big cities.

DYLAN

That's what Dr. Hartley and I
were hoping.

DELORES

It's tradition in West Moreland
to have a welcome barbeque.
That way you get acquainted
with everyone in town. Are the
two of you free on Sunday? You
and Dr. Hartley will be our
featured guests.

He rests his chin in his hand.

DYLAN

Yes, I think we are.

DELORES

Great. It'll be at the Rusty
Barn around the corner. Starts
at twelve.

DYLAN

That's really cordial of you.

As he speaks, he swishes his hand like he's showing her his
fingernails. Delores looks at them.

He notices her look, hides his hand below the counter.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I, for one, am looking forward
to it. I love barbeques.

Penny sneezes.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Well, bless you, sweetheart.

Dylan hands Delores her a form to fill out.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Just fill this out, Delores.
Dr. Hartley will see you shortly.

Delores sits down, fills in the form.

A middle-aged grossly overweight lady, WILLA MAE ROSS,
waddles in with her cat in a carrier.

DELORES
Willa Mae.

Willa Mae never smiles and never says much.

WILLA MAE
Delores.

Willa Mae approaches Dylan, puts the carrier on the
counter.

WILLA MAE (CONT'D)
Cat's sick.

Dylan tries to see the cat inside the carrier.

Willa Mae puts the carrier on the floor.

Dylan hands her a form.

DYLAN
Fill this out. You'll be after
Ms. Madison.

WILLA MAE
(to Delores)
You gonna be long?

DELORES
That's okay. You can go first.

Paul comes out, smiles at the women.

PAUL

Good morning, ladies. Who's first, Dylan?

Willa Mae doesn't wait for Dylan to answer. She rushes past Paul to the back room.

DYLAN

That would be Willa Mae Ross.

Paul smiles at Dylan, walks to the back room, closes the door behind him.

DELORES

You have to excuse Willa Mae. You see, Willa Mae, bless her poor soul, lost her husband of twelve years, and her sweet, child, Chloe in a car accident two years ago. She's kind'uv lost her way. Always wears the same housedress and those ugly slip-on shoes.

She pauses to catch her breath.

DELORES (CONT'D)

And, apparently can't stop eatin', though who can blame her for findin' a little happiness with food.

ROY GILBERT (60's, mountain-man type, long beard, angry face with furrowed eyebrows) rushes in carrying his coon dog with an obvious broken leg. He shoves the backdoor open with his shoulder.

Dylan quickly follows.

INT. PET CLINIC - BACK ROOM - DAY

Paul, holding Willa Mae's large Bengal cat, is startled by the intrusion. The man plops his dog down on the metal table.

ROY

Well, just don't stand there,
fix her!

PAUL

Sir, I will when I finish with
this young lady.

ROY

Young lady, my ass. This here
dog's more important than that
ol' cat.

PAUL

Sir.

ROY

I said fix her, now!

PAUL

Will you excuse us, Willa Mae?

Willa Mae takes her cat from Paul, puts it inside her carrier, leaves the door open as she exits the clinic clearly agitated.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Dylan closes the door.

DELORES

That'd be Roy, Roy Gilbert.
Meanest, ornery man you'll ever
see. Been that way since his
wife left him and took all five
kids. His cows supply our markets
with milk. Sweetest milk you'll
ever taste. Dog's name's Biscuit.

Roy storms out without Biscuit.

Paul walks out to the waiting room, smiles at Delores.

Dylan hands him Delores' paperwork.

DYLAN
Delores Ada-Rae Madison and
Penny.

PAUL
Sorry to keep you waiting, Ms.
Madison. Come on in.

INT. PET CLINIC - BACK ROOM - DAY

Delores walks in with Penny, sees the Coon dog falling asleep on the table, an x-ray on the wall.

PAUL
I have a few minutes until the
sedative kicks in. What seems
to be the problem?

INT. PAUL'S NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul and Dylan eat dinner with Baron sitting on the floor next to Dylan.

DYLAN
That guy Roy sure scared the
bejesus out of me.

PAUL
Yah, what an attitude, right?

DYLAN
Delores is sure a gossip lady.
You don't need to read the
papers to find out what's going
on in this town. Just ask Delores.

Dylan feeds Baron a piece of chicken.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
It's like listening to a soap
opera. There's no such thing as
privacy with Delores around.
(to Baron)
Right, Baron?

Baron BARKS.

EXT. RUSTY BARN - DAY

Almost EVERYONE in town is at the barbeque. Paul and Dylan are greeted by Delores.

Delores blows an AIR HORN, speaks into a BULLHORN.

DELORES

Folks, this here's Dylan MacKenzie and our new vet, Dr. Paul Hartley. Let's give 'em a West Moreland welcome.

EVERYONE

(in unison)

Yee, haw!!

Delores waves to some men to come over, addresses Dylan and Paul.

DELORES

Go mingle and have some food.

Delores walks away.

A very old man, SAWYER BIGGS, along with several hillbilly-type men, surround Paul and Dylan.

SAWYER

Where you fellas from?

PAUL

We're from Montgomery.

Sawyer Biggs starts walking towards the picnic table loaded with food. They all follow, including Dylan and Paul.

SAWYER

I came here from Montgomery, too, thirty-two years ago. I'm Sawyer Biggs. I own the barber shop.

PAUL

Nice to meet you.

As Paul and Dylan get plates, five women dressed

provocatively walk up to them. Among them is a young large breasted woman, JASMINE DELACROIX, with hair tips dyed purple.

JASMINE
(to Paul)
Give me your hand.

PAUL
My hand?

Paul extends his hand as he looks at Dylan with a smirk.

Dylan squeezes mustard on his hot dog. Another woman in Jasmine's group, ABILENE stands very close to Dylan. She licks her lips, smiles at him as she opens a blouse button around her cleavage.

Dylan squeezes too much mustard, squirts his shirt.

ABILENE
(getting napkin)
Here, let me get that for you.

As she wipes his shirt, Dylan smiles strangely at Paul.

Jasmine writes her number on Paul's arm.

JASMINE
I'm Jasmine Delacroix. Any time
y'all want a drinkin' buddy,
give me a call.

SAWYER
You sure do work fast, Jasmine.

JASMINE
A girl's gotta do what she's
gotta do, Sawyer. I've got
bills to pay same as y'all.

She turns to the women.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
Come on, girls.

The women walk away as Sawyer Biggs turns to Dylan.

SAWYER

Never mind 'em. Say, you two fellas look like you could use a haircut. Come by my barber shop sometime. Your first haircut's on me.

Dylan nods, smiles at Sawyer, then trashes his hot dog.

DYLAN

Thanks. That's very nice of you.

He looks at Paul.

Paul dips a napkin in the ice bucket and wipes off Jasmine's number.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I like this town.

Paul looks back at Jasmine.

PAUL

I can see why.

INT. BARBERSHOP - DAY

Paul and Dylan sit in barber chairs as a room full of men and boys wait. Sawyer Biggs snips Paul's hair.

He stops, looks over at his younger barber, BURT CALLAWAY (looks like Elvis with long side burns) combing Dylan's hair. Sawyer looks at everyone through the mirror.

SAWYER

Well, fellas. Tomorrow's my last day.

MUMURING from everyone.

Burt stops, looks at him.

BURT

You finally got a new owner?

SAWYER

That's right, Burt. Can't wait to do some travelin', a little fly fishin', and visitin' my granbabies in Utah.

PAUL

Have you had this place very long?

BURT

Sawyer's had this place before I was even born.

Other men waiting all nod, LAUGH.

Burt finishes Dylan's hair first. Dylan gets out of the chair, takes out his wallet.

SAWYER

Put your money away. I meant what I said. No charge.

DYLAN

Thanks. Thanks a lot.

Paul gets out of the chair, looks at everyone in the room.

PAUL

Well, it's been a pleasure meeting all of you.

(to Sawyer)

Good luck on your retirement.

Sawyer waves.

Dylan holds the door open for Paul as they leave.

The two barbers walk over to the window, everyone follows, stands behind them.

They watch Paul and Dylan cross the road towards the clinic

BURT

Whatta ya think, Sawyer? That Dylan fella sure is a little girly.

SAWYER

41.

Jury's out on that one. Could be just good friends since they work together.

Tall, awkward-looking OTIS PERKINS, with long arms and legs, speaks up.

OTIS

I think it's more than that, Sawyer. I saw them at the market buyin' goods together.

SAWYER

They could be roommates sharing the costs. Nothin' wrong with that.

They watch Paul and Dylan go inside the Clinic.

OTIS

Don't you think it strange they don't live with women folk?

SAWYER

Could be relatives, Otis.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Delores enters with Penny, approaches Dylan at the counter.

DELORES

With all the commotion the other day, I plum forgot to get a flea collar.

DYLAN

No problem. I'll get that for you right now.

An eight-year-old girl, WILLOW GUTHRIE (disheveled hair covering her face, dirty, no shoes or socks), walks in clutching her white floppy eared rabbit. She sits down without saying anything.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Is your baby sick?

She nods. Dylan looks at Delores.

DELORES

This is Willow. Willow Guthrie.

Dylan knocks lightly on the backroom door. Paul opens it.

DYLAN

Ms. Willow Guthrie is here to
see you about her sick bunny.

Paul walks out. His smile dissipates when he sees how she
looks. He walks over, sits in the chair next to her.

PAUL

What's your rabbit's name,
sweetheart?

WILLOW

(sotto voce)
Snowflake.

PAUL

(pointing)
Let's go back there and see if
we can make Snowflake feel
better.

She follows Paul to the back room.

Dylan looks at Delores, rests his elbow on the counter,
his chin in his hand, waits for the gossip.

DELORES

The Guthries live clear down
the end of the road, then to
the right up a long road into
the hills. The father drinks.
Worthless good-for-nothin'.

She pauses to catch her breath.

DELORES (CONT'D)

Mother has two jobs. The oldest
daughter is more of a mother to
(MORE)

DELORES (CONT'D)

all of 'em. Willow's the middle child of nine kids. As the middle child, she doesn't get much attention judgin' by her unkempt appearance.

Dylan nods in understanding.

DYLAN

I'm a middle child. I know how she must feel.

Willow walks out to the waiting room with her rabbit. Paul follows closely behind. They all watch her leave.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Bye, Sweetie.

Willow stops at the door, looks back, smiles at Dylan.

PAUL

Willow's going to have plenty of friends. Snowflakes' pregnant.

BRAD TURLINGTON (20's, husky, football player-type) rushes in out of breath.

BRAD

Our mare's having a breech. We need the vet!

PAUL

I'll get my bag.

He grabs a medical bag, rushes out following Brad.

Dylan looks at Delores.

DELORES

That's Brad Turlington. He has a twin brother named Tad. They work at the hardware store liftin' heavy equipment all day. Strong as an ox, them two. They play pool down at the bar every night. Well, Penny and I best be goin'.

Delores pays Dylan, leaves.

Dylan looks at Baron.

DYLAN

She sure knows everybody's
business, doesn't she Baron?

Baron covers his nose with this paw.

EXT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

Light MUSIC plays as Paul and Dylan drive with Baron in the backseat. Orange, yellow, and brown leaves on the trees herald the arrival of fall. Dylan takes photos as they drive.

PAUL

It feels good to have a day off.

DYLAN

What am I going to do without
Delores' daily news?

They laugh.

They drive past a metal sign, "MONTGOMERY - POP 151,243."

DYLAN (CONT'D)

I wonder how old that sign is.
I mean, with babies being born
every minute, and people dying,
how often do they update the
number?

PAUL

You know, I never thought of
that. That's a good question.

EXT. MONTGOMERY SIDE STREET - DAY

Paul parks the car in front of a house that needs repair.
Dylan and Paul exit. Paul takes Baron out of his crate.

They walk down the sidewalk, then around the corner.

They enter a building with a sign, "Montgomery Town Hall".

INT. MONTGOMERY TOWN HALL - DAY

Dylan and Paul, holding Baron by his leash, approach two women and a man sitting at a reception table.

PAUL
Good afternoon. Can we get
some information about your
dog show on December 15th?

EXT. MONTGOMERY SIDE STREET - DAY

Paul and Dylan walk back to their car, see an adorable African-American boy, LEROY (8) hide in the bushes in front of his house.

The child's MOTHER (hair in curlers, glasses, chubby face, extra-large muumuu) and FATHER (looks like an older MICHAEL JACKSON with large afro, open collared button-down shirt, bell bottoms) yell at each other on the porch.

Leroy covers his ears, shakes his head.

Paul and Dylan get inside their car, watch the boy.

DYLAN
That poor kid.

PAUL
Some people don't deserve
children.

They drive further into the city.

INT. CAR - DAY

Paul parks in front of the SAHARA RESTAURANT.

DYLAN
I was thinking.

PAUL
Well, that's good.

DYLAN

What if we have a Halloween costume contest where everyone dresses up their pets?

PAUL

That's a great idea. I love it. We can give out candy to everyone who enters.

DYLAN

Yeah. And maybe award a free vet visit to the winner. And a case of dog food for second place, and maybe a leash and harness for third place.

Paul smiles.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

What?

PAUL

That's what I love about you. You're so thoughtful and compassionate. We'll get the prizes after lunch.

Dylan grabs Paul's hand, thumb-strokes it. Paul looks around, pulls his hand away.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Remember, we're back in Montgomery.

DYLAN

Have you noticed we're the only gays in West Moreland?

PAUL

I really haven't noticed. Why? Are you tired of me already?

DYLAN

Very funny.

EXT. MONTGOMERY STORE - DAY

47.

Paul and Dylan enter a pet supply store with Paul holding Baron by his leash.

They return with a basket full of supplies, load the car.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

As Dylan unloads the supplies for the clinic, Delores walks by without Penny, sees Dylan with an armful of bags struggling to open the door.

DELORES

Let me give you a hand, Dylan.

DYLAN

Thanks, De...

Dylan stops in mid-word as a man wearing a Davy Crockett-type hat with beard, approaches with an alligator on a leash.

Delores leans closer to Dylan, speaks softly so the man won't hear.

DELORES

That'd be Birdie Taylor. He don't like the name Birdie. Says he'd rather be called a squirrel. He lives by the swamp at the edge of town. Likes to hunt. Keeps mostly to his self. Only see him when he needs supplies and when we have our town celebrations. Comes in for the free food. His gator is like one of those emotional support dogs. Takes it everywhere.

SQUIRREL stops near them. Dylan puts the bags down.

DELORES (CONT'D)

Afternoon, Squirrel. How's Jasper?

SQUIRREL

Got a little tummy ache, Delores.

(MORE)

SQUIRREL (CONT'D)
Found himself three ducks and a
water snake yesterday.

DELORES
That so.

Dylan looks down at Jasper's bulging belly.

Squirrel looks at Dylan.

SQUIRREL (CONT'D)
Wonder if he can have Pepto Bismol.

DYLAN
Don't know. You can ask Dr.
Hartley when he comes out.

Paul walks out.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Here he is now.

Paul is surprised to see the gator.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Squirrel here wants to know
what to give Jasper for his
stomach ache.

Paul looks down at the alligator, then gives Dylan a
"you're kidding me" look.

Dylan tries to keep from laughing.

Paul looks at Squirrel.

PAUL
Well, Squirrel. Squirrel, right?

DYLAN
Yep.

PAUL
Well, Squirrel. Did he eat too
much recently?

DYLAN/DELORES
Three ducks and a water snake.

SQUIRREL
He keeps makin' these burpin'
sounds.

PAUL
Sounds like he's got gas. I
think it'll just pass.

Squirrel touches his hat, nods.

SQUIRREL
Thank you, kindly, sir. Best
be on our way.
(looks down)
Let's go, Jasper.

They watch Squirrel and Jasper walk down the sidewalk.

PAUL
I think I've seen everything now.

DYLAN
(to Paul)
How'd you know it was gas?

PAUL
I didn't. I've never studied
alligators. Never knew they got
indigestion. But burping usually
means gas.

Dylan picks up the bags of supplies, looks at Delores.

DYLAN
I'm glad you came by, Delores.

They hear a loud FART, turn to look at Squirrel and Jasper.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
You think that was Jasper?

Everyone laughs. Dylan has a hard time speaking as he
continues to laugh.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

50.

Anyway, Delores, Dr. Hartley
and I decided to sponsor a
costume parade for Halloween.
Do you think you can tell
everybody?

DELORES

Does a hen lay eggs?

EXT. TOWN MAIN STREET - HALLOWEEN PARADE - DAY

The street is lined with many people watching the parade as
pets wearing costumes are escorted by their young owners in
a single file past the Pet Clinic.

Paul wears a Popeye costume as he sits behind an outdoor
table next to Dylan who is Charlie Chaplin. Baron wears a
sheet with eyeholes like a ghost.

As each pet and owner passes, Paul and Dylan wave.

PAUL

What a great idea, Dylan. This
is fun.

DYLAN

It's going to be hard to choose
a winner.

A little girl dressed as Red Riding Hood pushes a baby
stroller full of baby chicks who keep jumping out and
escaping.

The girl's older sisters, dressed as the three pigs, chase
after them, bring them back.

A donkey wears a referee shirt and a lanyard with a whistle
dangling from its neck. It is escorted by a boy wearing a
basketball uniform.

A dachshund dressed as a spider is escorted by a teenager
covered in webs.

A little girl walks her chihuahua wearing a large lion
head. The girl's father wears a cardboard box designed as
dog treats, while the mother wears a large bag of dog food.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

The waiting room is packed. Delores sits next to a friend, AUGUSTA ADAMS (50's, red hair worn like Lucille Ball, wears glasses with pointed ends), with her white miniature poodle.

The poodle's fur on her head and tail is dyed pink. She has pink polish on her nails to match. MUFFLED sounds as Delores and Augusta talk.

A thin, tall, African-American woman, FRANCIS WILLIAMS, with 3 children, and their German Shepherd in a harness, walks in.

Everyone stops talking. They stare at the family.

Augusta leans toward Delores.

AUGUSTA
(whispers)
Who's that?

DELORES
Don't rightly know, Augusta.
Hopefully, just passing through.

FRANCIS
(to everyone)
Hello. My name's Francis Williams.

Everyone stares at her.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
This is Kat, Tyrone, and Willy.
We just moved in. My husband
is the new owner of the barber
shop.

Everyone looks at Delores, who shakes her head.

They talk to each other ignoring Francis.

Dylan takes note of their behavior.

They watch Francis and her children approach Dylan.

DYLAN

52.

I apologize for everyone's
disrespect, Ms. Williams.

He looks at everyone.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Everyone deserves to be treated
equally with the upmost courtesy.

(to Ms. Williams)

Now, how may I help you?

Francis smiles at Dylan's respectful treatment.

FRANCIS

Our Shepherd, Jayden, needs grooming.

DYLAN

Well, you've come to the right
place. I specialize in grooming,
and I'd be happy to take care
of him.

Delores shakes her head in disgust of him being so polite
to her.

Francis turns around to sit down. No one offers her their
seat. She lifts her chin. She and her children stand
against the wall.

Roy Gilbert storms in carrying Biscuit. Her mouth is
bleeding, teeth missing, swollen battered eye.

He shoves the closed backroom door, barges in.

INT. PET CLINIC - BACK ROOM - DAY

Paul examines teen JASON'S iguana. Paul looks up at Roy.

PAUL

Roy, you can't just barge
in here every...

ROY

Fix her!

He reaches Biscuit out to put her on the table. Jason

quickly grabs his iguana so it doesn't get squashed, steps back.

Paul shakes his head at the teen, mouths, "sorry".

Jason shrugs.

Paul examines Biscuit's mouth and eye as the teen watches.

PAUL

What happened to her?

ROY

Don't rightly know.

PAUL

She's in a lot of pain. She could have a broken jaw and might even lose the eye. I'll need to take x-rays.

ROY

You do that!

PAUL

I'll need to keep her under observation for the night. You'll have to come back for her tomorrow.

ROY

Don't be ringing up no big bills.

He storms out.

Dylan walks in, sees Paul taking x-rays.

DYLAN

Everything okay?

PAUL

This is going to take a while.

DYLAN

The waiting room's full. Should I tell them to come back?

Paul nods as Dylan leaves.

Paul shakes his head as he examines the x-rays.

He walks over to Biscuit lying almost motionless on the table. He cups her face with both hands as he looks at her.

She looks away very depressed and lethargic.

PAUL

You poor girl. What has he done
to you this time?

She looks into his eyes, then slowly licks his face. He strokes her head slowly, over and over, then releases his hands. She lays her head back down, SIGHS deeply.

He gets a syringe, injects the area near her eye and mouth.

Dylan walks in.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I think Roy's abusing her. Her
eye will heal, but she has a
broken jaw. He must have kicked
her in the face. But the damage
is more psychological. It's like
she's given up and doesn't want
to live any more.

DYLAN

Oh, Paul. He doesn't deserve her.

Paul stitches near Biscuit's eye.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Are you going to give her back
to him? Because he's just going
to abuse her again. You know he
will.

Paul wires her mouth.

PAUL

Legally, I have to give her to
him.

Paul stops, has a far-way look.

DYLAN

I know that look. What are you thinking?

PAUL

What if I tell him she was in too much pain and didn't survive? He'd believe me.

DYLAN

But then, what are you going to do, Honey? You can't keep her. Delores will find out, then he'll find out.

Paul paces as he thinks.

PAUL

We have to get her out of this town and find her a good home to someone in the city, because if anyone finds out, I could lose my license.

Dylan puts his hand on Paul's shoulder.

DYLAN

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

PAUL

That little boy?

Dylan nods.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Biscuit would be perfect for him. Coon dogs are good with children. But, I don't know if the parents will take her.

DYLAN

Worth a try.

Paul and Dylan, holding Biscuit on a leash, approach Leroy as he plays jacks by himself on the porch.

The boy's eyes widen in excitement at seeing Biscuit.

PAUL

Hi, my name's Paul. Is your
mama home?

Leroy nods, can't take his eyes off Biscuit.

Paul knocks on the screen door.

Leroy stands up, pets Biscuit.

LEROY

What's his name?

DYLAN

This is Biscuit. She's a coon
dog.

LEROY

What's a coon dog?

The boy's middle-aged Mother (missing front tooth, hair again in curlers, same muumuu under long pocketed apron) comes to the screen door, and listens.

Paul smiles at her, about to speak.

She puts an index finger to her lips, for him not to say anything.

DYLAN

Well, she's a hunting dog.
Chases raccoons, cougars, and
bears.

LEROY

What happened to her face?

PAUL

She's been through some tough
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

things and will take some time to heal, but she'll be as good as new soon. She's looking for a new home.

MOTHER

We'll take her.

The Mother comes out onto the porch, smiling.

PAUL

What about your husband?

MOTHER

He left. Don't 'spect to see him no mo'.

Paul smiles.

Leroy looks up at his mother.

LEROY

We gonna keep her?

She nods.

Biscuit looks at Paul.

PAUL

It's okay, girl. No one will hurt you anymore.

Leroy smiles at her, hugs her tightly.

LEROY

I love you Biscuit.

Biscuit's tail wags. She licks the Boy's face over and over. Leroy GIGGLES.

Paul and Dylan smile at each other.

MOTHER

Leroy hasn't spoken a word in almost two years since the accident.

The Mother has a far-away look as her memory flashes back.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

My husband Jackson was takin'
Leroy and his brother Rashawn
to git a haircut. I had to
stay home to tend my ninety-
three-year-old mama.

FLASHBACK

EXT. CAR - DAY

Jackson (long sleeved shirt under vest, short scarf around neck, striped bell bottoms) straps six-year-old Leroy and his four-year-old brother, Rashawn in the backseat of his car.

INT. CAR DRIVING - DAY

Jackson drives down a busy street, looks in the rear-view mirror at Leroy.

JACKSON

I gotta take a dump.

He pulls into a gas station, looks back at Leroy.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

You stay in the car. You hear
me, boy?

Leroy nods.

INT. CAR - DAY

After a while, the car gets hot. Leroy opens a window, sees...

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

... a shiny yoyo in the gas station window.

Jackson walks out of the bathroom, sees a small group of people standing around something in the street.

He looks at his car, sees the back door wide open.

He looks at the crowd again, sees Leroy crying, then looks down at everyone's feet, sees Rashawn's little foot.

Jackson runs over.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Jackson shoves people out of the way. He looks down, stares in disbelief at Rashawn's mangled body.

He turns around. With his face full of tears, he punches Leroy so hard across his face, it makes Leroy fly backwards.

Leroy's head hits a car. He lands on the ground.

JACKSON

I told you not to git outta the
damn car. Now your brother's
dead 'cause you didn't obey me.
This is your fault. You hear?
Your fault!

Leroy holds his sore face. He looks at his father wide-eyed in shock. Tears pour down his cheeks, but doesn't cry aloud

An ambulance SIREN gets louder as it approaches.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MONTGOMERY HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

The Mother wipes tears from her eyes with one hand. She rubs the back of Leroy's head with the other.

MOTHER

Still has a bump on his head.

She gets down on her knees, pets the dog with one hand, rubs Leroy's back with the other.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

So, yes, we'll gladly take her.

EXT. TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

Augusta walks past the now vacant Barber shop with a sign across its window, "FOR SALE".

She enters the Pet Clinic.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Augusta sits in the last open seat next to Delores.

A six and a half foot tall, blonde Russian woman, MARINA PARUSKY, walks out from the back room with her Husky.

DELORES

Marina. How's Spirit doin'?

MARINA

Ve fine, Delores. Just got shots is all.

Marina pays Dylan, leaves.

Delores addresses Dylan in front of everyone.

DELORES

That there is Marina Parusky.
One of those immigrants who come over lookin' to marry an American.
Looks like a model, but tough as nails. She don't take guff from no one.

Everyone nods in agreement.

DELORES (CONT'D)

Does she, Augusta?

AUGUSTA

No, she don't, that's for sure.

DELORES

Them two brothers, Brad and Tad, both fell in love with her. She beat both of 'em in last year's arm wrestlin' competition.

Paul comes out from the backroom.

PAUL
Who's next, Dylan?

DYLAN
Delores, you're next.

Delores carries Penny to the back.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
(to Augusta)
She sure knows about everybody.

AUGUSTA
Well, she should. She's the mayor.
Been re-elected three times.

People run by screaming outside the windows.

Everyone gets up, looks out the windows.

Delores comes out from the back.

DELORES
What's all the fuss?

AUGUSTA
Somethin's goin' on outside.

Delores leads everyone outside.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

People scatter frantically.

A frantic MAN runs past the clinic.

DELORES
What's goin' on?

MAN
Best git inside.

Delores looks to her left, sees a tribe of monkeys running towards the clinic. They fill the street.

Some climb on top of parked cars, others chase people.

Everyone rushes back inside.

SIRENS are heard.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Everyone watches out the windows again as monkeys run past.

One climbs a lamppost just before firetrucks arrive.

DYLAN

What's going on, Delores?

DELORES

Damned if I know.

Dylan looks at Baron.

DYLAN

(sotto voce)

Well, that's a first.

Baron nods.

Dylan increases the volume on the waiting room tv to hear the NARRATOR.

NARRATOR (ON TV)

Monkeys have escaped from the city zoo. Animal Control and the Fire Department are on their way to capture them. Residents of West Moreland are asked to stay indoors.

Everyone watches through the windows as some monkeys are caught in nets. The rest are herded by firemen towards the end of town.

Dylan grabs his camera, snaps photos through the window.

DELORES

Come on, everybody. Let's go
(MORE)

DELORES (CONT'D)

watch the show!

(to Dylan)

We ain't had this much
excitement since you fellas
moved in.

Everyone leaves the clinic.

Paul comes out from the back room, sees the empty waiting
room, looks at Dylan.

DYLAN

We got ourselves a circus.

EXT. TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

Dylan and Paul follow everyone down the street.

All the monkeys are caught except one SCREECHING atop a
telephone pole.

Dylan takes photographs as a fireman climbs a ladder
leaning against the pole.

The monkey walks along the wire to another pole. The
fireman climbs down, leans the ladder on the other pole.
He climbs again.

The monkey walks back to the other pole.

Dylan LAUGHS.

DYLAN

I think that monkey's smarter
than he is!

As the fireman extends a long pole with a noose toward the
monkey, the monkey hangs from the wire. He swings, lands
in a nearby tree.

Paul shakes his head.

PAUL

That isn't going to work.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
(yelling to firemen)
Hang on, guys. I have an idea.
(to Dylan)
Dylan, go back and get Baron's
crate.

Dylan runs back to the clinic.

Paul rushes down the street, goes inside a nearby market.

He comes out of the store with a bunch of bananas.

He tosses a banana at the base of the tree near the monkey.

The monkey looks down, SCREECHES. He looks around,
cautiously climbs down, grabs the banana, eats it.

Dylan returns with the crate.

Paul addresses the crowd who are cowering behind cars and
walls.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Okay, everyone. Listen to me.
Don't move and don't say a
word. Got it?

Everyone nods.

Paul sets the crate in front of a trash bin. He opens the
crate door, tosses two bananas in it. He leaves the door
open, motions to Dylan to join him behind the trash bin.

Paul tosses half a banana between the tree and the trash
bin.

The monkey sees it, but doesn't go for it. He looks around
at everyone quietly watching.

He slowly approaches the banana. He sees the other bananas
inside the crate.

He carries the half banana in his mouth as he approaches
the crate. He stops, sits, looks around, enters the crate.

Paul rushes out from behind the bin, closes the crate door.

Everyone CHEERS. People come closer, pat him on his back, marvel at the monkey in the crate happily eating the bananas.

Dylan takes lots of photos.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Many people on shore and in the water enjoy themselves.

Dylan and Paul stand at the end of a dock, undress to their swim trunks. They leave their clothes and towels on the dock, jump into the lake together.

Paul splashes Dylan.

Dylan goes underwater. Paul swims down after him.

They hug underwater, come up for air, smile at each other. They swim toward the dock.

They lie on their towels basking in the sun.

DYLAN

Those monkeys sure sparked up
the town. You're a hero now,
Paul. I think everyone would
accept it if we came out of the
closet now.

Paul's phone rings.

PAUL (INTO PHONE)

Mom?

He listens.

Paul stands, walks away from Dylan. Paces as he listens.

PAUL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Why should I be there?

He listens.

PAUL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

But tomorrow's Labor Day.

He listens.

PAUL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
I'm not interested in what he
has to say. He can rot in hell,
for all I care.

He hangs up, walks back to Dylan.

DYLAN
Everything okay?

PAUL
My dad's dying. My mother wants
me to see him before he passes.

DYLAN
And you're against that because...?

Paul sits down next to him.

PAUL
I hated the son-of-a-bitch.
(beat)
I've felt guilty about being gay
my whole life because of him.
I tried to go straight. I went
to college and became a vet to
make him proud. But I was never
good enough for him.

DYLAN
This would be a good time to
mend fences.

PAUL
He destroyed that fence. There's
no way to mend it.

DYLAN
What happened between the two
of you?

PAUL
I don't want to talk about it.

DYLAN

Paul, Honey. Whatever upsets you, upsets me too. The two of us will get through this.

PAUL

There is no 'us'.

DYLAN

What?

(pause)

You don't mean that. I'm gonna let that pass because I think you're just upset about your dad.

Paul doesn't reply.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Whatever happened between the two of you can still be forgiven. I'm sure he just didn't understand.

PAUL

Oh, he understood all right.

Paul starts dressing, grabs his things, walks away.

Dylan dons his shirt, grabs his things, follows.

DYLAN

That's right, walk away, Paul. That's what you do. When are you gonna stop being the victim? Come out of the closet and be proud of who you are.

PAUL

You need to stay out of this, Dylan.

DYLAN

You're right. It's none of my business. We're not married. You don't need my permission to do anything. But I love you,
(MORE)

DYLAN (CONT'D)

68.

and I'm concerned about what
upsets you.

PAUL

Well, don't be.

Dylan tries to keep up with the fast-walking Paul.

DYLAN

I don't think I like this side
of you. You have unresolved
issues with your father, and
you're taking your anger out
on me. I've done nothing wrong.

Paul stops, turns to Dylan, walks angrily up to him.

PAUL

You can always leave.

Paul gets into his car, drives away leaving Dylan stranded.

EXT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

Paul drives up to the front of his parents' two-story white
Southern mansion.

EXT. HARTLEY MANSION - DAY

He gets out of the car, looks over at the nearby woods.

FLASHBACK

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Teenaged Paul's face is marked with acne as he laughs and
runs around trees. He is being chased by another teenager,
JIMMY with big ears and freckles.

Jimmy pins Paul to a tree. They stare at each other, kiss
passionately.

Paul runs toward the house.

PAUL

Come on.

Jimmy smiles, follows.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. HARTLEY MANSION - DAY

Paul sees several parked cars. He looks up at his bedroom window.

He walks up the front stairs, opens the door.

INT. HARTLEY MANSION - HALLWAY - DAY

Paul enters, sees a small group of people consoling his mother, CAMILLE, (wearing black with a large cross around her neck, the same cross she always wears).

Everyone stops talking.

Camille looks at Paul without smiling, doesn't walk over to Him.

CAMILLE

You're too late.

Paul notices a Priest among the crowd.

CAMILLE (CONT'D)

We're just about to bury him.

The Priest helps guide Camille outside. The crowd follows.

Paul looks at the dining room table, then at the stairs.

FLASHBACK

INT. HARTLEY MANSION - DAY

IN THE DINING ROOM

Paul and Jimmy excitedly run past Paul's parents who calmly eat at the dining table.

The boys quickly run up the stairs to -

PAUL'S BEDROOM

Paul closes the door.

The boys smile at each other as they quickly undress.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Paul's parents watch the chandelier sway.

His father, THOMAS, gets up, storms upstairs to --

PAUL'S BEDROOM

Thomas opens the door, stands in shock.

The two boys are in bed.

THOMAS

You perverted freaks!

Thomas rushes over, grabs Paul.

Jimmy fearfully grabs his clothes, flees naked.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Camille watches in shock at Jimmy running down the stairs and out the door.

She gets up, quickly walks to the hallway.

IN PAUL'S BEDROOM

Thomas beats Paul with his belt over and over.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I'm gonna beat that gayness out
of you, you piece of shit.

Paul grimaces in pain on the floor with each whipping.

Camille rushes over, tries to get Thomas to stop.

CAMILLE

Thomas, stop. You're gonna kill
him!

THOMAS

I hope I do.

(to Paul)

You're no son of mine. You
worthless fruitcake.

He kicks Paul. Paul cowers into a fetal position.

Camille gets between Paul and Thomas. She prevents Thomas
from attacking with both of her hands on Thomas' chest.

Paul looks at his father. If looks could kill, Thomas would
be dead

CAMILLE

No more, Thomas. That's enough!

THOMAS

(to Paul)

Get out of my house. I never
wanna see you again!

Thomas looks at Camille.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

It's your fault.

CAMILLE

My fault?

THOMAS

Always pandering to his every
whim, treating him like the
daughter you always wanted.
Are you happy now?

Thomas storms out of the room.

Camille looks down at Paul, then at his bed.

CAMILLE

You've committed a very big sin,
Paul. I don't condone what your
father has done, but I agree
with him. I don't think I can
forgive you.

She walks out of his bedroom.

Paul sits up. He pulls the blanket down from the bed, wraps it around him. He wipes the blood coming out of his mouth with the edge of the blanket.

INT. HARTLEY MANSION HALLWAY - NIGHT

Paul slowly sneaks down the stairs carrying a suitcase. He stops in front of the dining room, sees his mother and father drinking tea.

Camille sees his suitcase. She stands, wants to walk toward him, but Thomas grabs her arm.

THOMAS

Don't you dare. Let him go,
Camille.

CAMILLE

But he's just a child. Where's
he gonna go? Who's gonna take
care of him?

THOMAS

That's not our concern now.

She sits, looks at Paul, shakes her head.

Paul looks dejected, walks out.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. HARTLEY MANSION - HALLWAY - DAY

Paul shakes his head, leaves.

EXT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

Paul drives the opposite direction of the funeral procession. Tears flow heavily down his face. He wipes them with his sleeve as he drives.

EXT. PAUL'S NEW HOUSE - DAY

Paul drives up to the front of his house, exits the car.

Dylan walks out of the house wearing leather boxing gloves, holds another pair of gloves.

DYLAN

You've got a lot of anger.
Never thought you had it in you.

PAUL

Well, now you know. Don't ever
mention my parents, or you'll
see it again.

DYLAN

Agreed.

He holds out the gloves.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's fight. Fight
for the right to be gay.

Paul looks down sadly, then at Dylan.

PAUL

(sotto voce)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry to
take it out on you.

DYLAN

I forgive you, Honey.

Paul breaks down, cries.

Dylan drops the gloves, hugs him.

EXT. WEST MORELAND TOWN HALL - NIGHT

The town celebrates Thanksgiving in a very large room adorned with paper decorations everywhere. Several tables are pushed together full of food. Long wooden tables are near the walls. The center of the room is for dancing.

Everyone TALKS, eats, listens to MUSIC, dances.

Delores sits next to Augusta.

Willa Mae, wearing the same dress, sits across from them. She doesn't say a word, wolfs her food.

AUGUSTA

You know it's all you can eat buffet, Willa Mae. You can go back and get more if you want.

Willa Mae nods.

Paul and Dylan eat at another table talking with Brad and Tad.

Willow and her whole family dance up a storm. Their father stops now and then to drink, then re-joins the dancing.

Francis, with her husband and children, walk in. The Musicians stop playing.

Paul and Dylan stop talking to each other, notice everyone quietly staring at the Williams family.

Everyone looks at Delores.

She nods.

The Musicians play again. People continue with what they were doing.

PAUL

Unbelievable how much power she has. It's like everyone looking at a Roman emperor for a thumbs up or thumbs down.

The Williams family gets in line for food. People in line keep their distance from them.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(sotto voce)

You see, Dylan. This is how they treat others who are different. You think they're going to accept a couple of gay men?

The Williams family walks over to join others at a picnic table.

Those sitting look at Delores.

She lifts her chin.

They pick up their plates, move to another table.

Four other people with their plates full of food, can't find an empty table. They walk over, stand hovering over the Williams family who have not finished eating.

FRANCIS

Let's get up and let these fine
folk of West Moreland enjoy
their meal.

They rise, carry their food, sit near a wall to finish eating. No one talks to them.

As Delores walks over to them, everyone stares. The musicians stop playing.

DELORES

Too bad about the barbershop
closin' down. Thought you was
movin', Francis.

FRANCIS

Can't 'til we sell our house,
and don't look like that's
happenin' any time soon. No one
wants to buy a home from black
folk.

As Delores walks away, a very thin CALLER yells out.

CALLER

Anyone wishin' to partake in
square dancin', grab a partner
and form your squares.

When the MUSIC starts, those dancing grab hands, start circling, YELP a WHAHOO.

EXT. PAUL'S NEW HOUSE - DAY

76.

Dylan works with Baron in the backyard as Paul watches.

PAUL
Do you think he's ready?

DYLAN
Oh, yeah. Looks like a champ
to me.

EXT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

Paul and Dylan drive toward the city. Dylan snaps photos of the barren birch trees and conifers full of snow. Augusta and Delores sit in the backseat. Baron is in the back hatch inside his crate.

INT. MONTGOMERY TOWN HALL - GROOMING AREA - DAY

As Dylan grooms Baron for show, Paul eyes his competition.

Paul leans over, kisses Dylan on the cheek.

PAUL
Break a leg.

DYLAN
Hope so.

Paul leaves, enters the Arena.

INT. MONTGOMERY TOWN HALL - ARENA - DAY

Paul sits next to Augusta and Delores already seated.

Everyone's attention is on the arena. It is eerily quiet as they wait for the Judge's decision.

The middle-aged male Judge points to a Spaniel.

A FEMALE ANNOUNCER announces the winner over the LOUD SPEAKER.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Mocha, the English Springer
(MORE)

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D) 77.
Spaniel, owned by Jerry Webster,
wins the Sporting Group.

The Trainer is excited, jumps up and down with his dog.

AUGUSTA
She deserved it. So beautiful!

PAUL
We're up next.

Delores smiles, holds up both hands with fingers crossed.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And now for the Terrier Group.

Twelve trainers walk out with their dogs. Dylan and Baron
are fifth in line.

AUGUSTA
Baron sure looks good.

PAUL
Yes, he does. Dylan did a
great job.

After examining each one, the middle-aged female Judge (in
long skirt to ankles) pulls out five dogs from line. Baron
is one of them.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Yes!

The Judge has the trainers take a walk around with their
dogs.

Back in line, the Judge observes them again. Everyone is
silent. Tension is high. Someone COUGHS, startles Augusta.

Paul bites his fingernail.

The Judge points to Baron.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Baron, the Airedale, wins the
Terrier Group.

PAUL

Yay! He won!

DELORES

Congratulations!

AUGUSTA

Yes, congratulations, Paul.

PAUL

Thanks. Let's go congratulate
Dylan.

Delores and Augusta follow Paul to the grooming area.

INT. MONTGOMERY TOWN HALL - GROOMING AREA - DAY

Paul hugs Baron, then grabs Dylan's face with two hands,
kisses him on the lips.

Delores is shocked, looks at Augusta. She grabs Augusta's
arm, pulls her to the side.

DELORES

Did you see that, Augusta?

AUGUSTA

Yes, my eyes are very good.
Take no mind to it. They're
just happy.

DELORES

Let's go home.

AUGUSTA

But, it's not over.

DELORES

Whadda ya mean? Baron won,
didn't he?

AUGUSTA

Only for this group. Now, he has
to compete with the other group
winners.

Augusta walks back to the men. Delores reluctantly

follows.

Paul hugs Baron, looks him in the eyes

PAUL
You can do this, Baron.

He hugs Dylan.

Delores shrugs at Augusta. Augusta pats Delores' hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Come on, ladies. Let's get to
our seats.

INT. MONTGOMERY TOWN HALL - ARENA - DAY

Paul, Delores, and Augusta have good seats.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And now, for the Best in Show.

Seven trainers walk out proudly with their winning dogs.
Dylan and Baron are last.

After examining Mocha, Dylan parades Baron towards the
ELDERLY MALE JUDGE.

The Judge examines Baron's teeth, feels his body.

Dylan runs with Baron as the Judge watches. Dylan and Baron
turn around, run back towards the Judge.

Baron poses in front of the Judge as the Judge takes one
last look.

Dylan runs Baron around the arena back to line with the
other six winners.

The Judge studies each dog waiting in line.

He walks over to a table having three people guarding the
awards. The Judge records his results in a ledger.

A woman and man follow him to the center of the room. The
man carries a large trophy, the woman, a large blue ribbon.

ELDERLY MALE JUDGE
(pointing)
The Airedale.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Baron, the Airedale, owned by
Dr. Paul Hartley, wins Best in
Show.

CHEERS from everyone as Paul runs out to Dylan and Baron in the arena. He grabs Dylan by the waist, lifts him up, puts him down, kisses him on the lips, over and over.

Delores is aghast with gaping mouth.

The Elderly Judge hands Paul a check. Paul happily shows it to Dylan, kisses him on the mouth again.

Delores shakes her head over and over in disgust.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

The room is empty. Paul places Baron's trophy on the counter.

PAUL
Where is everyone? It's been a week.

Dylan decorates a Christmas tree.

DYLAN
Not a clue. Delores hasn't
come in since the show.

PAUL
Well, something's going on. We
better get some customers soon.

Paul goes into the back room as Dylan goes outside.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

Christmas decorations adorn the street. People walk by.

DYLAN
Merry Christmas.

No one answers.

Dylan looks across the street. People stop, look at him.

Delores comes out of a gift shop with Christmas presents, sees Dylan.

A man walks near Delores. Delores stops him, nods toward Dylan, tells the man something (inaudible). The man scowls, shakes his head as he stares at Dylan.

Dylan goes inside the Pet Clinic.

INT. PET CLINIC - DAY

Dylan sits behind the counter, looks at Baron, opens the crate to let Baron out.

DYLAN

Well, I don't know why, Baron,
but I think we're Delores'
headline news.

Baron puts his head on Dylan's thigh, looks up with sorrowful eyes. He goes to his crate, brings out a toy. Drops it next to Dylan.

Dylan picks it up, plays tug-o-war with him.

INT. PAUL'S NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

Paul and Dylan eat dinner as usual. This time no one says anything for a long time. Then Dylan breaks the silence.

DYLAN

I've been trying to figure out
why no one is coming to the
clinic.

Paul stops eating, looks at him.

PAUL

I don't get it. I was a hero
when I caught the monkey. What's
changed. Why are we ostracized?

DYLAN

82.

I think gossip lady saw us
kissing. You know how bigoted
she is.

PAUL

Yeah. I think you're right. That's
got to be it.

DYLAN

The town Christmas party is next
week. We'll know then if we're
being shunned like Francis and
her family.

Paul takes his half-empty plate to the sink.

INT. WEST MORELAND TOWN HALL - DAY

The town celebrates with a Christmas party. The layout is
the same as the Thanksgiving party. This time there is a
large Christmas tree with presents under it for the
children.

A Santa sits next to the tree, has a small child on his
lap.

Everyone eats as the musicians play.

Paul and Dylan walk in. The music stops. Everyone stares.

PAUL

Yep, this confirms it. We're the
talk of the town. Unbelievable!

Paul turns around, walks towards the door.

DYLAN

If you walk out that door, I'm
leaving you!

Paul stops, turns around.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

It's now or never, Paul.

Paul looks at everyone. He's nervous. His whole body
trembles.

PAUL

83.

I can't do this.

DYLAN

Why not? Your father's not going to punish you.

(beat)

Trust me. I understand how you feel.

Paul sweats profusely. His forehead beads. He fidgets with his shirt collar, pulls the sweater collar out to cool him.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You'll be okay. I'm living proof that you'll survive. In fact, you'll feel so much better. Just be the sweet, wonderful person you are.

Paul nods, nervously walks up closer to Dylan.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

The only thing keeping you from being happy, is you.

PAUL

You don't think I know that?

DYLAN

You can do this, Paul. Stop fighting with yourself. You've gotta be tired of it.

Paul looks at Dylan. His posture relaxes. EXHALES DEEPLY.

PAUL

You're right, Dylan. I am tired of fighting with myself.

He swiftly kisses Dylan.

Look of shock on everyone. Some with gaping mouths.

Dylan hugs Paul, pats him on the back.

Paul puts his hand around Dylan's waist, looks at everyone.

PAUL (CONT'D)

84.

(to everyone)

Merry Christmas!

It is eerily quiet. Everyone looks at Delores. She looks down at the floor. No one says Merry Christmas back.

Paul and Dylan walk to the buffet.

Delores looks at Augusta, then watches Paul and Dylan fill their plates.

She thinks, then looks at the musicians.

DELORES

Well, go on and play.

The music starts. People go back to talking, eating, and dancing as if nothing happened. But no one talks to Paul or Dylan.

Paul and Dylan sit at a table, eat by themselves.

EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY

A bundled-up Delores walks on the sidewalk with Penny wearing a furry coat. It snows lightly.

INT. SUV DRIVING - DAY

The sun's about to set as Paul and Dylan drive home in the snow.

PAUL

We're going to have to close the clinic and move. There are just as many bigots here as in the city. Might as well make more money in the city.

Dylan spies Delores.

DYLAN

There's gossip lady.

They watch Delores walk her dog. Suddenly Penny spies a raccoon, pulls her leash out of Delores' hand, chases the

raccoon toward the frozen lake around the corner.

Paul hits the brakes.

EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY

Paul and Dylan chase after Penny in the snow.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Penny runs down the dock, onto the lake. The ice cracks.

Paul and Dylan run to the end of the dock.

PAUL

Dylan, go get Baron.

Dylan runs past Delores toward the car.

Delores is beside herself. She paces frantically as she watches, shakes her head in disbelief.

Dylan returns with Baron.

Paul addresses Baron, points to Penny.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Go get her, boy.

Baron runs onto the lake, slides, grabs Penny's leash with his teeth, pulls her closer to Paul.

The ice cracks even more.

DYLAN

No, Baron, stay!

(to Paul)

If he moves, he's going under.

Paul looks back at the edge of the lake for a long branch, doesn't see anything.

PAUL

I'm going to lie down. Hold onto my feet. I'll try and reach them.

DYLAN

86.

Paul don't.

PAUL

If I don't do something, I'd
never forgive myself for not
trying.

Dylan frantically pulls his hair with both hands.

Paul lies flat.

Dylan gets down, holds Paul's feet.

Paul slithers toward the dogs. He reaches, grabs the leash,
pulls Penny to Dylan.

Dylan runs to Delores, practically throws Penny into her
arms, then rushes back.

He sees Baron and Paul fall into the icy water. He watches
as Paul, clutching Baron, floats under the ice toward
shore. Paul's eyes are wide open in panic.

DYLAN

No, no, no, no, no!

Dylan looks around for something to break the ice, finds a
medium-sized rock, hits the ice over and over,
relentlessly.

Roy Gilbert stops his pickup truck, rushes over.

He punches the ice with his gloved fist, over and over.

Brad and TAD stop their truck, run over.

The ice cracks open. Dylan and Roy snatch Baron from Paul's
hands.

Brad and Tad pull Paul out of the water. Both Baron and
Paul are lifeless.

Delores watches anxiously as Dylan performs CPR on Paul.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Come on, Paul. Stay with me.

After a few minutes, water gurgles out of Paul's mouth.

BRAD

(to Tad)

I'm gonna hoist him up on your
shoulders. You ready?

TAD

Go for it.

Brad lifts Paul onto Tad's shoulder as night falls.

ROY

Put him in my truck.

Tad rushes Paul to Roy's truck with Dylan running right
behind him.

At the truck, Dylan looks worriedly back at Baron still
lying motionless with the ice glistening in the moonlight.

He grabs Baron's blanket out of Paul's car.

Tad lays Paul down in the back of Roy's pickup truck.

Dylan gets in.

Delores watches hugging Penny as they drive away.

EXT. TRUCK DRIVING - NIGHT

As Roy races his truck, Dylan takes Paul's cold, wet shirt
off, wraps him in Baron's blanket. He lies down next to him
to keep him warm.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Paul lies in bed, unconscious. Dylan is asleep in a nearby
chair.

Paul wakes up, looks around the room, sees Dylan.

PAUL

Dylan?

Dylan rushes over, sits on the bed's edge, holds Paul's hand.

DYLAN

Man, I thought I'd never talk to you again.

PAUL

What happened?

DYLAN

You went under the ice. Roy, Brad, and Tad helped me get you out.

PAUL

Roy?

DYLAN

Yea. You should've seen it. He got to vent all that anger.

PAUL

How long have I been here?

DYLAN

You were in ICU for a week, and three days in here. You had hypothermia and then pneumonia. Your heart stopped twice. And you missed New Year's.

PAUL

How's Baron?

Dylan bites his lip as he thinks how to answer.

DYLAN

I don't know. I've been here the whole time watching you breathe on that machine and watching your numbers go up and down.

PAUL

You've been here for ten days?

Dylan nods.

DYLAN

They wouldn't let me stay in
here with you overnight, so,
I slept in the cafeteria.

PAUL

That's why you look like shit.

DYLAN

I've been using your shower,
and the cafeteria food's pretty
good.

Dylan scoots closer, has a serious look. There is a silent
moment as his lips quiver, his eyes well up. He SIGHS
DEEPLY.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Paul, when I thought you were
dead, a piece of me died. I
don't ever want to live without
you.

PAUL

Me, too. I love you so much.

Dylan leans over, kisses him.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

A nurse pushes Paul in a wheelchair out the front door as
Dylan walks alongside.

Brad and TAD greet them.

BRAD

Welcome, back, bro.

Tad steps aside.

Paul sees Baron.

Baron sees Paul, wags his tail, BARKS.

PAUL

90.

There you are.

DYLAN

No way!

Baron rushes over, puts his head on Paul's lap, looks up.

Paul hugs him tightly as Baron licks him over and over.

PAUL

I love you, too, buddy.

Dylan looks at Tad.

DYLAN

But he wasn't breathing. He was
dead. Very dead.

PAUL

What?

Baron's ears perk up at the sound of Dylan's voice, rushes
to Dylan.

Baron jumps on Dylan, causes him to fall onto his rear. He
straddles Dylan, licks him over and over.

Dylan grabs Baron's face, kisses him on his mouth. Rubs his
head.

DYLAN

He seems fine.

(to Baron)

I missed you, too, Baron. Oh my
God. I thought you were dead.

He looks up at Paul.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, Paul. I didn't have the
heart to tell you.

TAD

While you were leaving for the
hospital, Brad kept breathing
into his mouth.

BRAD

First and last time I'll ever
put my lips on a dog's mouth.

(looks at Baron)

No offense, Baron, but you're not
my type.

Baron BARKS twice.

Paul extends his hand to Tad and Brad. They shake hands.

PAUL

Thank you for saving my life,
and Baron's.

TAD

Bring it in bro.

Tad bends down, hugs him.

BRAD

Just so you know, not everyone
agrees with Delores. It's just
she, well, she can make life
difficult, you know?

Paul nods in agreement.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

Delores walks Penny on the sidewalk alongside Augusta and
her poodle.

Dylan carries empty moving boxes toward the Clinic, sees
them across the street. He stops before entering the
Clinic, decides to confront Delores.

DYLAN

You all liked us before. So,
what's changed, Delores? Paul
and I haven't changed. Don't
you see, it's just your opinion
of us that's changed.

She lifts her chin up, looks away.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You hate gays, I get it. I
frankly don't care if I disgust
you, but Paul doesn't deserve
it. He risked his life for
Penny. He didn't have to do it.

Delores looks at him.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

The word is tolerance, Delores.
Accepting people just the way
they are. We shouldn't have to
prove ourselves to you or anyone
for acceptance.

She is stoic, doesn't respond.

He shakes his head, gives up, walks away.

Augusta turns to Delores.

AUGUSTA

For Christ's sake, Delores. How
can you be so mean to 'em?
Everyone in town likes 'em.
Always did since they arrived.
But because of you, everyone's
afraid to speak up. It's time
you let 'em be.

Delores looks down, shakes her head, looks at Augusta.

DELORES

But a man lovin' another man
ain't right. It's a sin.

AUGUSTA

They're a better example of a
kind, compassionate, carin'
human than you, or me, and
everyone else in this town!

Delores starts to walk on with Penny. Augusta grabs her arm.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

I'm not askin' you to approve
of what they do, just accept
this is the way they are.
Willa Mae is a Presbyterian.
Roy is Lutheran. The Williams'
are black.

She pauses to catch her breath.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Everyone's got a right to be
happy. You can't hate 'em
'cause they're different than
you.

Delores yanks free of Augusta's grip. She's furious.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

You're a bigot and a racist,
Delores Ada-Rae Madison, and I'm
ashamed to call you my friend!

DELORES

I'm not a racist, or a bigot.

She stares at Augusta.

DELORES (CONT'D)

Am I?

AUGUSTA

I call it as I see it. You need
to wake up, Delores.

Augusta pauses, sees no reaction. She gets into Delores'
face.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

And by the way, my daughter's
a lesbian. There, I said it,
and I'm glad it's out. I didn't
want to tell anyone because of
narrow-minded people like you.
Everyone's got a secret, Delores.

(MORE)

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Everyone's got baggage. These two fellas are in love. They're happy. And bein' happy and in love are important things in life. Nothin' else really matters. Not even your opinion.

Delores watches Augusta storm away. She looks down at Penny.

Penny WHINES with soulful eyes.

Delores looks inside the clinic through the window. She walks to the door, hesitates to turn the doorknob, then goes inside.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Paul and Dylan stop packing as Delores approaches. The room is tense.

DELORES

I owe you two gentlemen an apology and my gratitude for savin' Penny. It's just hard for me to accept, you know? But, I'll try.

Paul hugs her. She's taken aback, doesn't hug back.

DELORES (CONT'D)

We'll just take it slow and easy, okay?

Dylan and Paul smile at each other.

INT. WEST MORELAND TOWN HALL - DAY

Everyone celebrates Valentine's Day. Paper hearts hang everywhere. The buffet table is filled with all kinds of desserts, mostly red, white, and pink in color.

The musicians play, "LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART".

Paul and Dylan walk in holding hands.

Delores raises her hand. The music stops. Everyone stares. The room is eerily quiet.

Dylan puts his hands on his hip, taps one foot on the floor. He's clearly annoyed.

DYLAN

Seriously? This is the way you
all want to treat us after all
Dr. Hartley's done for you?

Dylan points his finger, moves it to select people as he reprimands them.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You. He's helped your iguana.
And you. He saved your cat.
He saved your mare, Brad. He
even cured Squirrel's gator.
I know 'cause I heard him fart.
And, who saved the town from
all those monkeys while you all
were cowering like scared
children? Yes, that's right,
Dr. Hartley.

Delores walks up Dylan.

DELORES

I was about to welcome you.
Come on in, fellas.

Everyone erupts in CHEERS. They rush over to shake Paul and Dylan's hands. The Musicians continue playing.

A pretty LADY (30's, dressed exquisitely) walks up to Paul.

LADY

That was brave of you to risk your
life for a dog.

PAUL

Thank you.

Dylan looks at Delores.

DELORES

(sotto voce)

Mary Beth Mc Knight. Millionaire
divorcee. Just moved in.

DYLAN

I never thought I'd say this,
Delores, but God, I missed
your gossip.

They smile at each other.

The CALLER yells.

CALLER

Everyone pick a spot for some
line dancin'.

Paul and Dylan pick a spot among everyone. They all dance.

INT. PET CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

The waiting room is empty again. Dylan, wears a carrot
costume. He drapes a flower basket costume on Baron.

He walks Baron to the front door, yells back inside.

DYLAN

Hurry up, Paul. They're ready
to start.

EXT. PET CLINIC - DAY

Paul rushes outside wearing an Easter bunny costume with
vest and bow tie.

Dylan stands next to a table full of Easter baskets with
candy. Paul takes one, holds it.

EXT. TOWN MAIN STREET - EASTER PARADE - DAY

The street is decorated with "Happy Easter" signs, pastel-
colored ribbons everywhere, paper cut outs of the Easter
Bunny and little chicks on storefront windows.

Many spectators without pets, including Jasmine Delacroix

and her group of women, stand or sit along the main street.

PAUL

Happy Easter everyone!

The parade starts. Five men play instruments as they walk in front of the parade. They play, "IN YOUR EASTER BONNET".

They are followed by a single file of people with their pets all wearing Easter bonnets.

Delores and Penny wear a large flower around their heads with their face the center of the flower. Delores nods to Paul and Dylan as she walks by.

DELORES

Happy Easter to you, too.

Dylan nods back as Paul waves.

Augusta follows next with her poodle. Both wear bridal veils with a crown of flowers. Augusta waves to Paul and Dylan, then to the spectators on both sides of the street as she walks on.

Burt uses a cane to guide a goose with a tiny straw hat riding atop a pig with an enormous flowered hat. Otis walks alongside with his goat wearing a silly hat. The goat tries to eat the flowers off the pig's hat.

OTIS

(to goat)

Stop that, Belle.

Marina Parusky, wears a very large 1890's hat with feathers. She towers over Brad and Tad Turlington as she walks between them holding onto their elbows. Both men strut with pride.

The brothers' mare and six-month-old colt each wear long rabbit ears, and a necklace of carrots. Their manes are braided with flowers. Tad holds the reins of the mare with his free hand. Brad holds the reins of the colt. They stop, bow in unison to Dylan and Paul as Marina yells to them.

MARINA
Schastlivoy paschi
(subtitle: Happy Easter)

Paul and Dylan bow back.

Following them is Francis Williams and her family all dressed as different rabbits. Their shepherd wears bunny ears and a rabbit face mask. His tail is wrapped into a bun to look like a rabbit's tail.

They walk past the barbershop having a large paper sign plastered on the window, "GRAND RE-OPENING".

Paul waves to them. Francis' children run over to Paul. He lets them take candy from his basket.

FRANCIS
(to children)
What do you say?

CHILDREN
(in unison)
Thank you.

They run back.

Jimmy walks proudly with his iguana on his shoulder. His pet has a tiny grass hat with one flower.

Paul waves to him.

PAUL
Happy Easter.

Willow Guthrie pushes a baby stroller with Snowflake inside. Her sisters walk alongside pushing matching strollers with Snowflake's bunnies. All wear small flowered strapped hats.

Squirrel wears a large yellow chicken costume as he walks Jasper. The gator wears a small cage on top of his head with a live chick inside. It is securely strapped around Jasper's neck.

Paul and Dylan look at each other, LAUGH.

Next is Roy Gilbert with his hair slicked back, proudly holding Willa Mae Ross' elbow. She wears a new dress and shoes. They wear a matching Mad Hatter's hat with ears.

Roy's cows follow him with the lead cow wearing a huge BELL around her neck. Four other cows walk two by two. Each cow wears a different colored cowboy hat with flowers, vegetables, or colored Easter eggs attached.

The Caller and other town residents follow, all nodding to Dylan, Paul, and Baron as they pass.

With the parade over, some people get candy from Paul and Dylan. MUFFLED SOUNDS as everyone mills around, talks among each other with their animals.

A large van drives up, parks near them.

Everyone turns, looks at it.

A Jewish family of father, mother, and four children exit the van. The males wear yarmulkes. They stand next to the van, stare at everyone.

Delores walks over, stares at them. She looks at Augusta, then back at them.

Everyone stops talking. There is an eerie moment of silence.

DELORES

Welcome to West Moreland.

EVERYONE

Yee, haw.

FADE OUT.