

The Achievers

FADE IN:

TELEVISION STATIC AND NOISE. Eventually, the static fades in and out to reveal A MAN IN SILHOUETTE Walking towards us, his long leather coat flaps in the wind, A LEATHER-BOUND POLICE BADGE SWINGS FROM HIS NECK - he stops and reaches into his jacket pocket

JUMP CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE OF MATCH IGNITING. HE LIGHTS A CIGARETTE.

JUMP CUT TO:

A CIGARETTE HANGING FROM THE MAN'S LIPS; HE CRUSHES THE CHERRY BETWEEN HIS FINGERS -

MURPHY (V.O.)
I can see your future.

He flicks the cigarette into the air

SLO.MO EXTREME CLOSE ON CIGARETTE FLIPPING THROUGH THE AIR

CUT TO:

AN EVICTION NOTICE SLAPPED ON A FRONT DOOR. SOUND OVER SWISH-THUNK!

MURPHY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And this is your fortune:

CUT TO:

A LARGE MECHANICAL STAMPING DEVICE POUNDING ONTO A ROLL OF PAPER. SOUND OVER MECHANICAL SWOOP-THUNK! THE STAMPER PULLS BACK TO REVEAL PRINTED ON THE PAPER:

"YOU WILL FIND A NEW HOME"

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - DAY

We push forward through a hallway as office workers shove past us like trout swimming upstream; there's a growing CACOPHONY of keyboards CLICKING, phones RINGING, VOICES, as the hallway opens up into -

A VAST ROOM containing a SEA OF CUBICLES. Workers crisscross past them at breakneck speeds.

We push into one of these cubicles to see ELLEN, 24, Chinese American, working at her desk. She's pretty behind a pair of glasses, smartly dressed. She's typing, reading a report, and talking to a client on the phone -- all at the same time.

There are two framed PHOTOGRAPHS on her desk: A picture of Ellen as a child embraced by her MOTHER, and a recent picture of Ellen and her boyfriend BRAD: White, Ivy League, piercingly handsome.

Ellen sees that the picture of her mother is blocking Brad's -- so she places his picture in front of hers.

INT. DEVIATE - DAY

A trendy women's clothing store bumping with CLUB MUSIC. Giant photographic murals of beautiful women, racks of red and black club wear.

AKIRA, 24, Japanese American, works the counter. She's sharply beautiful, with intense eyes that can see through bullshit with x-ray vision.

She's doodling on a shopping bag: A cute cartoon of herself behind the counter, bored out of her mind.

CUT TO:

LARGE MECHANICAL STAMPING DEVICE POUNDING ONTO A ROLL OF PAPER. SOUND OVER MECHANICAL SWOOP-THUNK! THE STAMPER PULLS BACK TO REVEAL PRINTED ON THE PAPER:

"YOU WILL FIND SOMEONE TO LOVE"

BACK TO:

AN ASIAN COUPLE BROWSING THE STORE. WHILE HIS GIRLFRIEND SHOPS, THE MAN (JAKE) BREAKS AWAY TO APPROACH AKIRA -

JAKE

Hi. I'm Jake.

AKIRA

My name's Akira. It's a boy's name.

His eyes run up and down her body -

JAKE

Well. You are definitely not a boy.

She smiles at him, already knowing what he wants.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - DAY

WE FOLLOW AKIRA THROUGH A DOORWAY AS SHE LEADS JAKE INTO HER BEDROOM; SHE SLIPS A KNOTTED RED HANDKERCHIEF ONTO THE DOORKNOB AS SHE CLOSES THE DOOR -

She SHOVES him up against a wall, kissing him furiously -- and they move to the bed.

After the act, Akira looks at herself in the bathroom mirror, fixes her makeup, and lights a cigarette.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

We push towards a doorway through which we see TRENT, 24, Chinese American, sitting at his computer. He's achingly shy, but he just might be handsome once he finally blooms.

And just as we're about to push into his room, Trent SHUTS the door on us.

CUT TO:

LARGE MECHANICAL STAMPING DEVICE POUNDING ONTO A ROLL OF PAPER. SOUND OVER MECHANICAL SWOOP-THUNK! THE STAMPER PULLS BACK TO REVEAL PRINTED ON THE PAPER:

"YOU WILL FIND WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR"

BACK TO:

TRENT'S COMPUTER SCREEN: AN INTERNET SEARCH WEB SITE. TRENT ENTERS THE NAME "LAUREN HAYES", AND AN ADULT WEB SITE POPS UP FEATURING A GORGEOUS BLONDE MODEL. TRENT CLICKS ON HER IMAGES AND HIS COMPUTER SAVES THEM ONTO A CD.

We float across shelves of Trent's CDs, all marked by models' names and dates: An enormous collection of digital porn.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

WE FLY THROUGH A LARGE CHINESE RESTAURANT -- WAITERS ARE SERVING CUSTOMERS AND CHANGING TEA-STAINED TABLE CLOTHS -

WE CONTINUE ON THROUGH THE KITCHEN WHERE COOKS ARE FRYING, STIRRING, CHOPPING -

We push through a metal doorway and into an enormous CHINESE BAKERY connected to the restaurant. Machines HUM as workers harvest moon cakes and almond cookies from ovens. The heat in this room is unbearable.

And on a balcony overlooking the bakery floor, MURPHY, 24, Korean American, types at a battered old computer.

CUT TO:

LARGE MECHANICAL STAMPING DEVICE POUNDING ONTO A ROLL OF PAPER. SOUND OVER MECHANICAL SWOOP-THUNK! THE STAMPER PULLS BACK TO REVEAL PRINTED ON THE PAPER:

"I'M TYPING THIS WITH MY DICK"

BACK TO:

MURPHY'S COMPUTER SCREEN, WHERE HE TYPES: "I'M TYPING THIS WITH MY DICK".

Murphy laughs to himself. He sighs and looks at the clock.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE ON BACKSPACE KEY. MURPHY PRESSES AND HOLDS THE KEY DOWN.

He goes back to typing from the fortune list.

CAMERA CRANES DOWN TO FOLLOW A CABLE RUNNING FROM HIS COMPUTER TO MACHINES DOWN BELOW; THEY FOLD PRINTED FORTUNES INTO THOUSANDS OF FORTUNE COOKIES WITH MECHANICAL PRECISION.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE OVER MONTAGE OF FORTUNE COOKIE ASSEMBLY LINE.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

We hear a TV LAUGH TRACK as we push through a doorway and into the living room of a once-modern apartment: Hand-me-down furniture, conflicting posters (Bruce Lee and Claude Monet), piles of shoes by the front door.

Shingo, 24, Asian American, sits on the couch, hypnotized by the TV. Smoke drifts from a bong in his hand.

He absentmindedly pulls a STRING on the wall, activating a RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINE constructed from Legos and toy robots. It unleashes a PLASTIC TOY PELICAN that flies in on a wire and drops a bag of DORITOS in his lap. A LAUGH TRACK erupts from the TV, and he explodes in LAUGHTER along with it.

EXT. SANTA MONICA STREET - DUSK

Murphy walks home through a dying part of Los Angeles: Pink and blue strip malls, 7-11s, Oriental Massage parlors and frozen yogurt joints.

He arrives at an APARTMENT BUILDING, once modern in the Eighties and now as outdated as The Love Boat.

INT. THE APARTMENT - OUTSIDE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elevator doors open to REVEAL Murphy, whistling as he heads down the hall. There's an ARGUMENT going on far away, barely audible. Must be the neighbors.

Murphy pulls a set of keys out of his pocket, but FREEZES in his tracks -- his front door is wide open.

He leans back up against the wall, sliding towards his doorway.

The argument is coming from inside his apartment -- and there's an eviction notice taped to his door -

Murphy cranes his neck, looking through the doorway -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shingo is immobilized on the couch, staring at the TV. Behind him, Ellen desperately follows a middle-aged LANDLORD around as he YELLS at her -

LANDLORD

Noise violations, damage to the unit,
rent check failed to clear -

ELLEN

That's not me! My roommate -

Murphy winces from his hiding place -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Is in charge of the rent. And he's
not the most responsible person in
the world, but when I see him I'm
gonna -

LANDLORD

AND IT SMELLS LIKE MARIJUANA IN HERE.

Shingo snaps to attention on the couch -

SHINGO

Oh, my. My bad --

He confusedly offers the bong to the Landlord -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

Blaze away.

Ellen SHOVES him back onto the couch -- the Landlord aims an accusing finger at her -

LANDLORD

You should be glad I don't call the
cops!

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

While the argument rages outside, Akira sits on her bed, wrapped in a sheet and drawing in a SKETCHBOOK: A cute cartoon of Ellen getting yelled at by the Landlord.

There's a KNOCK at the bedroom door -

ELLEN (O.S.)

AKIRA!

Jake lolls under the covers, annoyed at the noise -

JAKE

Tell that bitch to shut up -

Akira PUNCHES him in the shoulder, HARD. He yelps -

AKIRA

Call my friend a bitch one more time
and the next one's headed for your
crotch.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Exasperated, Ellen presses her forehead against the door,
feebly knocking. The door opens a crack and Akira peeks her
head out -- their faces are inches apart -

ELLEN

The Landlord's here to evict us -

AKIRA

What do you want me to do? Punch
him or blow him?

ELLEN

I want you to help me talk to him.

AKIRA

(Points at the doorknob)
The red handkerchief's on the door,
Elle. You know what that means:
Don't knock.

Ellen thumps her head against the doorjamb, fed up -

AKIRA (CONT'D)

(Winks)

Don't worry -- I'll blow him later.

AND Akira disappears behind the door. Ellen turns back to
the landlord.

ELLEN

See, Mr. Johnstone, this is not me.
I just sleep here. And half the
time I have to sleep somewhere else
because of THAT red handkerchief -

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trent nervously listens to the argument from his bedroom;
he hears Ellen's voice approaching, panics, and punches a
key on his computer -- the porn on his screen disappears for
a moment, but then with a female moan from his computer
speakers, a pop up of more porn appears.

He closes that one and more appear, he desperately tries to close them all.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Landlord shoves a notice into Ellen's hands -

LANDLORD

You have three weeks to get out.

ELLEN

I don't have anywhere to go -

LANDLORD

Do what my son does: Move back in with your parents. Eat their food, crash their Lexus -

ELLEN

But -

LANDLORD

BUT I don't care!

INT. THE APARTMENT - OUTSIDE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Landlord storms out of the apartment and spots Murphy -- out comes the accusing finger -

LANDLORD

You are not a model minority!

MURPHY

Thanks.

And the Landlord walks off grumbling.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy peeks into the living room -- Ellen's gone. Shingo's still watching TV. The coast is clear. Murphy tiptoes in towards the boys' bedroom -

ELLEN (O.S.)

Freeze.

We swing away to see Ellen rapping her fingernails against the kitchen counter. She moves in for the kill -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Murphy, your rent check wouldn't have bounced if Shingo would pay us for his part of the rent, which he has agreed to do even though he doesn't really live here and is totally screwing us up!

SHINGO
 (Sincerely)
 I'm sorry.

MURPHY
 Well, he just needs a place to crash
 for a while -

ELLEN
 That's what you said when he first
 got here -- over a year ago!

Ellen dials a number into a CORDLESS PHONE -

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 He did graduate from college, didn't
 he?
 (To Shingo)
 What degree did you get?

Shingo thinks hard, then finally remembers -

SHINGO
 Molecular Biology.

ELLEN
 Molecular Biology?

SHINGO
 Yeah, and I'm supposed to be in Med
 School right now, but, well...
 (Grins)
 You know.

Ellen rolls her eyes and puts the phone to her ear -

CUT TO:

BRAD'S PHONE RINGING ON A DESK SURROUNDED BY FRAMED
 PHOTOGRAPHS OF HIMSELF -- THE ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP -

BRAD'S ANSWERING MACHINE
 This is Brad, leave a message! [Beep]

BACK TO:

ELLEN, WHO DISAPPOINTEDLY HANGS UP. SHE CLOSES IN ON MURPHY -

ELLEN
 Murphy, remember that time you, me,
 and Akira went to that bar, and Akira
 got sick, and the two of you took
 off and left me by myself...

MURPHY
 No, I don't think..

ELLEN
In Tijuana?

MURPHY
(Trying not to smile)
Yes.

ELLEN
(Seething)
That is now the second worst thing
you've ever done to me.

lightbulb goes off in Shingo's head -- he bolts up from the
couch -

SHINGO
Don't blame Murph, man. Look --
this is all my fault. But I'm gonna
handle this -

MURPHY
Shingo, you don't have to -

SHINGO
No, Murph -- Shingo's gotta grow up
and be a man. You guys won't have
to move anywhere. I'll take care of
this.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trent stares at a dark screen. Suddenly the door BURSTS
open -

SHINGO
Trent! Can I use your computer?

Trent turns on the computer screen again and gives his seat
up to Shingo. He cracks his knuckles, punches a couple of
keys. Suddenly we hear beat-thumping MUSIC. Shingo bobs
his head to it as he types.

TRENT
How did you...

On the computer screen: A search web site. Then a web page
pops up displaying a DIAGRAM of a RED MOLECULE spinning in
three dimensions.

Shingo smiles at the screen -- to him, this molecule is the
solution to all of their problems.

Ellen and Murphy watch him from the doorway -

ELLEN
How did he ever graduate from college?

MURPHY
He used to be more focused.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

Murphy types on his computer as he thinks aloud -

MURPHY
Your direction... Your path...

On his computer screen as he types: "YOUR PATH WILL BE
DIFFICULT BUT WILL BE REWARDING".

And the machines on the bakery floor churn out hundreds of
cookies containing this fortune.

Murphy looks around to make sure no one's watching. Then he
quickly begins to type -

ON SCREEN: "YOU WILL DIE A HORRIBLE DEATH"

ON SCREEN: "I'M TRAPPED IN HELL! LOVE, GRANDMA"

BACK TO:

Murphy laughing diabolically.

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
HEY!

Murphy is startled by the voice, -- he turns to see his Mad
Dog-faced SUPERVISOR -

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)
They need you up front!

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

Murphy emerges from the swinging kitchen doors carrying a
large tray of food.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ellen types rapid-fire on her computer, totally focused on
her work.

CUT TO:

ELLEN FILING REPORTS IN A ROOM FULL OF CABINETS; SHE DOES A
LITTLE DANCE, SHUTTING THE DRAWERS WITH HER ELBOWS AND KNEES,
KICKING THE LAST ONE IN WITH HER HEEL -

Ellen is stamping and signing a stack of reports when her
phone RINGS -- she picks it up -

ELLEN
 (Professionally chipper)
 Jackson and Brown, this is Ellen...
 Hello, Mr. Bale!

She waves at a business-suited man (MR. BALE) behind a GLASS WALL on the far side of the office. He waves back at her as he talks to her on the phone.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 Yes, I'm just finishing the
 Worthington account now...the
 Fullerton account? But I...no,
 it's no problem. Yes...yes, well,
 it's all about the bottom line.

She peeks out over a monolithic STACK of work on her desk -

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

Murphy struggles to keep an enormous tray of food balanced on his shoulder while his BOSS keeps PILING even more food on.

DREW, a 24 year-old white waiter, watches with concern as the tray precariously sways back and forth.

Knees quivering, Murphy's finally ready to go. His boss gives him a SLAP on his shoulder -- and the tray slips a millimeter before it CRASHES to the ground. A hundred bucks worth of Chinese food is now road kill.

Murphy looks down at the mess as his boss YELLS BLOODY MURDER AT HIM -

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Murphy and Drew stand next to a Dumpster behind the restaurant as they sip boba through straws. Shingo sits nearby, carefully writing in a notebook.

MURPHY
 God, I hate this job.

DREW
 I hear you. I'm outta here, man.
 Just as soon as I get accepted into
 Med School.

MURPHY
 How's that going?

DREW
 Not so good. Though I did get on
 the wait list for one in Honduras.
 (MORE)

DREW (CONT'D)
 (Then, re: Shingo)
 Meanwhile, this fool can get into
 any school he wants, yet he chooses
 to kick it on your couch -

Shingo SPITS a boba ball through his straw, knocking a can
 off a wall. He scribbles something into his notebook -

INSERT A PAGE FROM SHINGO'S NOTEBOOK: COMPLEX CHEMICAL
 FORMULAS SURROUNDED BY DOODLES OF ELEPHANTS AND TURTLES.

DREW (CONT'D)
 (Back to Murphy)
 And you wanna be a writer, don't
 you? At least this job keeps you
 writing.

MURPHY
 They've got me writing fortune
 cookies, Drew. These are things
 that people add the words "in bed"
 to. I gotta write something good.

DREW
 Well, maybe you should get a real
 job.

MURPHY
 Maybe.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Reporters sit at rows of desks hammering out articles. A
 MURAL on the back wall reads: "THE LOS ANGELES TIMES"

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

HONG PARK, a formidable Korean American man, sits behind a
 desk backed by awards from a lifetime of achievement. He
 flips through a WRITING SAMPLE while Murphy nervously watches
 his reaction -

HONG PARK
 (Shakes his head)
 These are all short stories. This
 is fiction.

MURPHY
 I know.

Hong gives him a hard look -

HONG PARK
 If you want to write for a newspaper,
 you can't write fiction.

MURPHY

I don't want to write for a newspaper,
Dad.

This isn't a job interview -- it's a son showing his father
what he's doing with his life. And Dad isn't pleased -

HONG PARK

Your mother and I paid good money
for you to study journalism with the
expectation that you would,
eventually, become a journalist!

Hong sighs and chucks the pages onto his desk -

HONG PARK (CONT'D)

Tell me -- what do you expect to
accomplish by writing this stuff?

MURPHY

I don't know. Make people laugh?
Make them question stereotypes?

HONG PARK

When I was your age, you know where
I was?.. Covering race riots.
Getting bricks thrown at my car by
striking auto workers -

MURPHY

I know, Dad -

HONG PARK

You fight stereotypes with the truth.
You want to be a writer? Write
something real. I told you before,
we can start you off as a clerk, and
in a year you'll be writing real
articles -

MURPHY

Dad, can you please just let me go
my own way for once? I mean,
technically I'm following in your
footsteps -- maybe I'm just taking a
different path.

HONG PARK

I thought you might have changed
your mind. What the hell are you
doing here then?

Murphy gives his father an embarrassed smile that he instantly
recognizes; Hong sighs, pulls out his wallet, and hands a
few twenty dollar bills to his son. As they're walking out
of his office, Murphy turns back to his father -

MURPHY

Thanks, Dad. Someday, you'll be proud of something I write.

HONG PARK

I'll be proud of you the day you pay me back.

INT. DEVIATE - DAY

Akira folds clothes at the counter as a DANCE BEAT blasts around her. She glances up momentarily, looking out at the street through the store's glass facade -

HER POV: ACROSS THE STREET, A FATHER AND HIS 6 YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER. THE LITTLE GIRL WHISPERS SOMETHING TO HER FATHER, AND HE PICKS HER UP AND HOLDS HER IN HIS ARMS. CARS ZOOM PAST IN FRONT OF THEM, TURNING AKIRA'S VIEW INTO A BLUR.

And Akira returns to her work, mechanically folding and sorting with deliberate, increased speed.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

We drift across beautiful houses with white picket fences -- cut-out MAGAZINE PHOTOS pinned to the wall of Ellen's cubicle. And we end up on -

The picture of Ellen and Brad. Ellen wipes a smudge off it as she holds the phone to her ear, hoping he'll pick up... But instead she gets -

BRAD'S ANSWERING MACHINE

This is Brad, leave a message. [BEEP]

ELLEN

Hi sweetheart, I miss you. I know you're busy, but I want to see you. So call me when you can.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Ellen sits with Akira at a table by the window. Ellen is scanning the CLASSIFIED ADS looking for a new apartment -- she meticulously sorts each listing on a note pad based on size, rent, commute time -

AKIRA

Why are you still with him?

ELLEN

Who?

AKIRA

You-know-who. The American Dream. Bradley "Harvard Law School" Jones.

ELLEN

(Smiles)

Because he's perfect.

AKIRA

I know. I've seen him from behind.

(Then)

But I've heard that a relationship is where you call the guy and he calls you back. It's been, what, a week since he's called you back?

Ellen idly twists a small gold RING on her finger -

AKIRA (CONT'D)

I think you can do better than that, Elle.

ELLEN

This isn't college anymore, Akira. I can't spend my time chasing after men -

AKIRA

Who said that you have to chase them? All I'm saying is that you're in a long-distance relationship with a boy who LIVES HERE.

Ellen looks back down at the classified ads -

ELLEN

I don't need to see a guy every day.

(pause)

Or in your case, every night.

Akira is slightly irked by this, but moves on. She taps a glass with her chopsticks -- ding-ding-ding -- and Murphy arrives at their table with his pen and pad.

He sits down next to Akira and smiles -

MURPHY

What will you fine ladies be having for lunch today?

AKIRA

Murphy, I'll have the number twenty-three and Ellen here will have a new boyfriend.

MURPHY

(As he writes)

One spicy pepper chicken and one heterosexual male.

Murphy spots Ellen with the classifieds -

MURPHY (CONT'D)
Found a new place yet?

ELLEN
Just started looking.

MURPHY
Well, I think all of us should live together again.

ELLEN
(Dry)
Does "all of us" include Shingo?

AKIRA
Ellen thinks that having a stoner in the living room is bad Feng Shui.

Suddenly, Akira SQUEALS and WAVES wildly at someone outside the restaurant; Ellen and Murphy turn to see a tall, hunky man (DEKE) pressed up against the window making faces at her.

Deke runs into the restaurant and into Akira's arms. And Murphy shrinks in his seat as she KISSES him.

Ellen notices Murphy's reaction and shows him a corner of the newspaper where she's written the words "YET ANOTHER ONE".

AKIRA (CONT'D)
Guys, this is Deke! Deke's in a band!

Murphy slaps the table, wishing he could jettison himself into space. He stands -

MURPHY
I gotta get back to work.

And he hurries off. Deke takes Murphy's seat, grinning at Akira -- and she watches Murphy as he disappears into the kitchen.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - DAY

ANGLE ON TRENT'S FLUORESCENTLY LIT FACE AS HE STARES INTO A CAROUSEL-STYLE VENDING MACHINE. FOOD SLOWLY ROTATES INSIDE.

Trent paces down a crowded hallway, anonymous as a shadow.

CUT TO:

TRENT WORKING IN HIS TINY OFFICE: FOUR BARE WALLS AND A COMPUTER. PEOPLE BRISKLY WALK PAST HIS OPEN DOOR AS HIS EYES STARE STRAIGHT AHEAD AT THE SCREEN.

CUT TO:

TRENT'S COMPUTER AT HOME, ITS SCREEN PULSATING WITH PICTURES OF LAUREN HAYES -- IT'S AUTOMATICALLY COLLECTING THEM OFF THE INTERNET WHILE HE'S AWAY.

EXT. SANTA MONICA STREET - DAY

Trent walks alone as crowds of people go past; he stares at the ground, never making eye contact with anyone. Couples walk by as he quickly steps out of their way. And in the distance we can just barely hear children's mocking laughter.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Trent sits down at his computer and clicks a key. It faithfully displays all the IMAGES that it collected in his absence.

He clicks on one of them and it EXPANDS to fill the screen: Lauren Hayes' smiling face. He smiles back at it, reflected in the screen. She's the only beautiful thing in his life, and he looks at her like he's dreaming.

Just then, Murphy, sneezing, walks into the room -

MURPHY

Hey.

TRENT

(With a Mandarin accent)

Hey.

Murphy's used to seeing his roommate staring at porn; he walks right past and riffles through the clutter on his own desk. He grabs an allergy prescription bottle hidden underneath some papers. He opens it and takes out the last tiny red pill.

MURPHY

Oh, great.

He puts the bottle down on the edge of the desk. As he walks away it rolls off the desk and down to the ground.

WE PAN ACROSS A SHELF OF MURPHY'S FRAMED PHOTOS: HIM, ELLEN, AND AKIRA IN GRADUATION GOWNS... MURPHY AND AKIRA, HER ARMS AROUND HIM... AND FINALLY, PICTURES ONLY OF AKIRA: SMOOCHING THE CAMERA, PRETENDING TO EAT A SQUID, AND A FINAL CANDID SHOT OF HER, LONELY-EYED, STARING INTO THE DISTANCE.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Akira and Murphy are playing Horse. Akira takes a shot that SWOOSHES into the basket. Murphy sneezes, dribbles the ball to the free throw line -

MURPHY
So how's Deke?

AKIRA
Why, you like him?

MURPHY
Psssh. YES.

AKIRA
Murphy... I just wanna have some fun, y'know? These boys don't mean anything to me. I don't need them.

MURPHY
Then why are you with them?

AKIRA
What does it matter? In the end they all get fucked.

This causes Murphy to slip as he shoots; the ball sails awkwardly off course -

MURPHY
What?

Akira grins as she snags the ball -

AKIRA
The word "fuck" has two definitions. Definition Number One: To make love to someone. And Definition Number Two: To destroy someone -- to fuck them up. Never get 'em mixed up -

MURPHY
I'll try not to.

AKIRA
Deke and the boys are headed for Definition Number Two.

She takes a long shot and nails it -

MURPHY

Well in that case, can I take a Number One?

AKIRA

(Laughs, then)

I don't fuck friends, Murphy. You know that. And you are just too nice of a guy to fuck with.

MURPHY

(Coy)

No I'm not.

Akira smiles as she grabs the ball and dribbles it to the free throw line. Murphy puts his hand out -

MURPHY (CONT'D)

It's my ball. Gimme the ball.

Akira holds the ball over her head with a playful smile, challenging him. Murphy tries to steal it out of her hands but she YANKS it away.

EXT. SANTA MONICA STREET - DAY

A MAN wearing a GAS MASK pedals an old SCHWINN BICYCLE, zigzagging through traffic.

We're right in front of him as he huffs and pedals harder; he pushes the gas mask onto his forehead to reveal that it's Shingo. He balances a heavy CARDBOARD BOX on the handlebars -- he pops a wheelie, and something made of glass CLINKS inside.

INT. LAW FIRM RECEPTION AREA - DAY

RECEPTIONIST sits at the front desk of an ultra-modern law firm, talking on the phone -

RECEPTIONIST

He's not here -

ELLEN (V.O.)

Well, he's not at home, and... This is his girlfriend -

RECEPTIONIST

Honey, I get 'em all calling in here. Wives, husbands, kids, and girlfriends.

WE PULL BACKWARDS THROUGH GLASS DOORS TO REVEAL ELLEN STANDING OUTSIDE, TALKING TO THE RECEPTIONIST ON HER CELL PHONE -

ELLEN

I was thinking about coming by to surprise him...

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

I can book one for next Wednesday.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the door to the girls' bedroom: A TACK BOARD divided into an Akira half and an Ellen half. Akira's half is covered with POST-IT NOTES -- messages from her men -- and Ellen's half is depressingly empty.

Akira runs down her notes with her finger -- Dave called, Randy, Steve, Jake...

But she freezes on a final note: "YOUR DAD CALLED"

Akira rips the note off the door and stares at it, unnerved.

Just then, Shingo comes in through the front door burdened by the CARDBOARD BOX -- she shows him the note -

AKIRA

Did you write this?

Shingo squints at it -

SHINGO

I think so.

Akira TEARS the note in two and goes into her room.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shingo hauls the cardboard box over to the CLOSET and turns on the light inside:

We see that this walk-in closet is really a makeshift bedroom complete with a COT and hundreds of BOOKS on shelves: Chemistry and Physics textbooks, novels, dozens of CDs.

Shingo unpacks the contents of the box: Beakers, glassware, a burner -- all kinds of CHEMISTRY EQUIPMENT. As he walks back out of the closet his foot kicks something on the ground. It is Murphy's prescription bottle.

SHINGO

Cool, camouflauge.

He picks the bottle up.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A TYPEWRITER AS IT TYPES THE WORDS "HE HAS A PLAN".

REVEAL Murphy writing on the typewriter, pausing to think between spurts of typing. As he clicks the keys we see GLIMPSES of a scene that he's writing:

He types the words: "HIS BADGE SWINGS FROM A CHAIN" -

JUMP CUT TO:

A MAN IN SILHOUETTE WALKS DOWN A SIDEWALK, A LEATHER-BOUND POLICE BADGE SWINGING FROM HIS NECK -

Murphy types: "A CIGARETTE BURNS FROM HIS LIPS" -

JUMP CUT TO:

A CIGARETTE HANGING FROM THE MAN'S LIPS; HE CRUSHES THE CHERRY BETWEEN HIS FINGERS -

And Murphy continues writing, lost in thought.

We PULL AWAY to see Akira sitting in a doorway with her SKETCHBOOK in her lap; she's secretly drawing a sketch of Murphy as he writes.

She flips through her sketchbook looking for a blank page to draw on. We see that it's one of a SERIES of sketches of Murphy: Pensively typing, looking up into the air for inspiration, laughing at what he's written, all of these sketches drawn with care.

INT. VIDEO STORE - NIGHT

Ellen browses a shelf of cheesy ROMANCES; behind her, a CUTE COUPLE playfully argue about what to rent, underlining the fact that Ellen's here to get a movie to watch by herself.

She looks up and frowns when she sees that she's browsing a section titled "MOVIES FOR LONELY WOMEN".

Suddenly, her cell phone RINGS -- she fumbles to pick it up -

ELLEN

Hello?

BRAD (V.O.)

I got your message.

Ellen smiles at his voice; her whole body lifts with delight.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The girls' walk-in closet is divided into two halves: The half belonging to Akira is all red and black club wear, and the half belonging to Ellen is all dark blue business attire.

Akira sits with her back pressed into Ellen's clothes; she's impatiently giddy -

AKIRA

Let me see!

Ellen emerges from behind Akira's hanging clothes -- she's dressed in one of Akira's outfits: Something tight, red, scandalous.

Akira joins her as Ellen looks at herself in a mirror, embarrassed -

AKIRA (CONT'D)

Wow -- who's the hot one now?

Ellen looks down at her chest -

ELLEN

I don't fill out the front enough.

AKIRA

You want to get his attention, don't you? You've gotta grab him by the nuts and take control -

Ellen takes a black dress from her side of the closet and shows it to Akira -

ELLEN

This is what I'm wearing.

And she walks out with it.

AKIRA

(Calls out)

Fine. After dinner you can join a convent!

INT. BISTRO ORANGE - NIGHT

A glitteringly expensive Beverly Hills restaurant gilded in glass and gold. Ellen looks around smiling, tasting the good life. She's elegantly dressed -- an unexpected beauty.

Seated in front of her is BRAD, a sharp-suited Greek statue of a man. He devours a steak as he lectures -

BRAD

(chewing)

But you shouldn't let other people interfere with your success. I know they're your friends, but you've got to stop feeling sorry for them. You should never feel sorry for anyone.

ELLEN

It's hard leaving people behind.

BRAD

I understand. And I know it sounds harsh, but... You know me -- I can't stand weakness.

ELLEN

(Smiles)

I'm glad you called me tonight. I'm glad that you remembered.

Brad is puzzled, but he knows that the best thing to say when you're caught off guard is:

BRAD

(still chewing)

Yes.

She rubs the ring on her finger -

ELLEN

It's been one whole year.

He smiles, puts his hand on hers, and touches the ring.

INT. BRAD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Everything in this dark room is coldly impressive: Floor to ceiling windows, a huge glowing fish tank, a big screen TV.

Brad takes Ellen into the shadows and kisses her there; she's intimidated by his speed, but she gives in, happy to finally be with him.

INT. BRAD'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Brad stands over Ellen as she sits on his bed. She looks up at him, eyes seeking acceptance, then slowly begins to unbutton his pants.

MOVE IN TO CLOCK ON BEDSTAND READING 10:30.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME SHOT CLOCK READING 10:45

INT. BRAD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ANGLE ON PHOTO BEAUTIFUL TUDOR HOUSE WITH RICH GREEN LAWN

PULL BACK to reveal that the house is only a picture in a MAGAZINE that Ellen is holding in her lap. Ellen looks at it longingly as she sits dressed in a RED BATHROBE; Brad's big screen TV blares in front of her.

In the kitchen, Brad is mixing a juice drink in a blender; he rocks and thumps it -

ELLEN
(Loudly, over the
noise)
I have to find a new place to live.

Brad crinkles his brow and turns the blender on to end the conversation- Ellen waits a moment.

Afraid of looking weak, she back-pedals -

ELLEN (loudly) (CONT'D)
I'm not saying that I need a place
to stay -

He turns the blender on high -

ELLEN (CONT'D)
(To herself)
I'm just saying that I need to start
looking.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy writes on his typewriter as the TV blazes. Just then, there's a KNOCK at the front door. Murphy answers it: It's Jake -- he shoves past Murphy without a word.

Jake strolls over to the girls' bedroom door and WHIPS it open; We see Akira inside, startled at his crass -- she shoots Murphy a look through the doorway.

Jake tosses the RED HANDKERCHIEF to Murphy as he swaggers into the girls' bedroom and shuts the door behind him; and Murphy clenches the handkerchief in his hand, angry at what he can't have.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lauren Hayes on the computer screen illuminates Trent's face, asleep in his chair.

Behind him in the dark is the door to Shingo's closet, outlined by light coming from within -

INT. THE APARTMENT - SHINGO'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Shingo crafts a stapler-like device (the PILL STAMPER) with a pair of pliers. He's now completely surrounded by chemistry equipment, and drawn on his wall are chemical diagrams -- including the RED MOLECULE from before.

Shingo squeezes goo from a cake icer into the pill stamper, then presses it shut. He opens it and holds the result up to the light:

A tiny RED PILL engraved with a lower-case "S". Shingo rolls it between his fingers, examining his handiwork.

SHINGO
Prototype number 10.

He carefully puts the pill into Murphy's prescription bottle. There are now ten pills in the bottle. He puts the safety cap on it and leaves it on the table.

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - MORNING

Ellen is driving through rush-hour traffic; she BANGS on the dashboard until the static noise silences and the RADIO comes to life.

The classified ads sit next to her on the passenger's seat, neatly circled in red pen.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF ELLEN'S SEARCH FOR A NEW APARTMENT

Ellen strolls through a living room guided by an APARTMENT MANAGER. She likes what she sees, mouths the words "how much" -- and the manager tells her a number that makes her briefcase fall out of her hand.

Ellen inspects a kitchen in a second apartment. She opens the dishwasher and its door CLUNKS against the oven.

She looks out from the window of a third apartment as police cars race past, sirens WAILING. And she opens a curtain to reveal a half-dozen BULLET HOLES in the glass.

BACK TO:

ELLEN DRIVING AGAIN, FRUSTRATED.

The light turns red and she stops. She sees in the car next to her a mother and daughter. A miniature WIND CHIME hangs from their rear view mirror.

CHILD'S HAND REACHES UP TO TOUCH IT -- IT JINGLES AGAINST HER FINGERS. CAMERA MOVES TO REVEAL ELLEN AS 8 YEAR OLD GIRL

FLASHBACK ELLEN AND MOTHER IN CAR - DAY

Young Ellen turns to the driver of the car: ELLEN'S MOTHER, 32, smiling warmly.

YOUNG ELLEN
How big is our new house?

ELLEN'S MOTHER
(With a Cantonese
accent)
Just the right size for the two of
us.

Young Ellen knows that this is her mother's polite way of saying that it's tiny.

YOUNG ELLEN
Why do we have to move?

ELLEN'S MOTHER
Your Daddy isn't here anymore. We
have nowhere else to stay.

Young Ellen watches passing strangers -

YOUNG ELLEN
What if he comes back and we're not
there?

This question breaks her mothers' heart, but she hides it well -

ELLEN'S MOTHER
We have our own place now. You and
me.

FLASHBACK MONTHS LATER ELLEN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Ellen is walking home from school. She turns the corner and walks toward her building. She looks up.

Ellen's Mother smiles hopefully from the UPSTAIRS WINDOW of an APARTMENT BUILDING, its baby blue paint cracked and chipped. She's waiting for her daughter to come home. Ellen looks away and keeps on walking.

BACK TO THE PRESENT:

Where Ellen is standing in front of the same building. She looks to the upstairs window -- its drapes flutter out in the breeze, and inside it's dark, silent.

Ellen looks at the front door, wanting to go in.

But instead she gets into her car and drives away.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Akira runs down a new set of POST-IT NOTES on her door -- Deke called, Jake, Randy... And she GROANS when she sees three more NOTES that read: "YOUR DAD CALLED".

She RIPS the notes away -

AKIRA
Dammit, Shingo...

EXT. THE APARTMENT - ROOFTOP - DUSK

The roof of the building -- a tar surface bordered by a low wall, and surrounded by L.A. in all directions.

Shingo pours a bubbling LIQUID out of a chili pot and into a METAL BARREL; he shoves the gas mask onto his face and stirs with a wooden pole.

Suddenly, he hears MUSIC -- a rhythmic BEAT. He looks around but can't tell where it's coming from; his head bobs uncontrollably to its sound.

The sun is setting now, and we see it through Shingo's POV: Orange and purple hues mixing in the shadows of buildings, green and red spikes of palm trees cutting into the sky, yellow and blue light shining off of cars. Impossible colors colliding in his mind.

And the BEAT continues as -

EXT. BAD NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK

JOHNNY WANG, 29, menacingly struts past a chain-link fence, its shadow crisscrossing his face.

He is the man that we caught glimpses of earlier in Murphy's writing -- a cop's BADGE swings from a chain around his neck, and a CIGARETTE burns from his lips.

He arrives at a crumbling old TENEMENT BUILDING and runs up to the front door -

INT. TENEMENT - NIGHT

The Wang climbs a dark staircase, arriving at the front door of his apartment. Suddenly, he FREEZES in his tracks -

There's an EVICTION NOTICE taped to his door. He tears it off, reads -

JOHNNY WANG
What the fuck?

INT. LANDLORD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The LANDLORD, a balding tater tot of a man, counts money at his desk. Someone BANGS on the door -

LANDLORD
I'm busy!

The door gets KICKED off its hinges; The Wang slowly steps into the room, burning with anger -

JOHNNY WANG
So you're gonna lock me out of my
crib, huh?

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy writes on his typewriter, absorbed by the scene that he's creating (and that we are witnessing) -

MURPHY
Write what you know.

INT. LANDLORD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The Wang HAULS the terrified Landlord to his feet -

JUMP CUT TO:

MURPHY'S TYPEWRITER AS HE TYPES: I'M HERE TO REDEEM YOUR
COUPON -

JOHNNY WANG
I'm here to redeem your coupon...for
a can of whoop-ass!!

The Wang PUNCHES the Landlord -- he falls backward and stacks of money SPRAY into the air, floating down in a storm. A hundred dollar bill drifts down, and The Wang SNATCHES it -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)
And I'll be taking back my security
deposit now, you cack!

INSERT A TITLE PAGE:

JOHNNY WANG: KILL UNTIL DEAD

SCREENPLAY BY MURPHY PARK

EXT. BAD NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A FIERY EXPLOSION. The Wang walks out of the flames in SLOW MOTION like a man emerging victorious from hell.

MURPHY (V.O.)

Johnny Wang: The exact opposite of
the stereotypes of Asian men -

THE TYPEWRITER AS MURPHY TYPES: MASCULINE

BACK TO:

THE WANG AS HE FIGHTS A MACHETE-ARMED VILLAIN WHO SLICES, TWIRLS, AND KEEPS ON MISSING HIM; THE WANG THUDS HIM WITH HIS FISTS, THEN SPINS AND KICKS THE DUDE IN THE FACE; HE COLLAPSES IN A TRASH HEAP -

JOHNNY WANG

Damn, you left a tooth on my fist!

THE TYPEWRITER: SPEAKS PERFECT ENGLISH

BACK TO:

THE WANG AS EVIL GOONS SURROUND HIM WITH CROWBARS, KNIVES, AND CHAINS. THE WANG CROSSES HIS ARMS, UNIMPRESSED -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Boys, the verisimilitude of this
altercation is that you're all going
to get thrashed, trodden, and
otherwise batteued -

GOON TRIES TO SNEAK UP BEHIND HIM BUT GETS BACKHANDED -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

BITCH!

A one-sided FIGHT erupts -- Johnny Wang effortlessly punches, kicks, and tosses goons left and right -- he's fluid like water, striking like a tidal wave.

THE TYPEWRITER: AND HE'S SMOOTH LIKE BUTTER

INT. JOHNNY WANG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

GORGEOUS WOMAN reclines on The Wang's bed. Her POV: The Wang standing in the doorway, shirt off, muscles rippled like carved wood. He looks back at her with a hungry smile -

JOHNNY WANG

Hey baby. I'm here to deliver some
Wang.

THE TYPEWRITER: HE TAKES HER INTO HIS ARMS

The Wang takes her into his arms -

THE TYPEWRITER: LEANS IN FOR THE KISS

And The Wang's lips are about to touch hers -

Just then, we hear a telephone RING -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy pauses over the keys, derailed, as the phone RINGS.
He picks it up -

MURPHY

(Annoyed)

Yeah?..

(Calls out)

Akira! It's Steve!

Akira saunters by and grabs the phone, chatting it up -- and
Murphy returns to his writing, trying to ignore her.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ellen types on her computer, satisfied with her high level
of productivity -- she's a machine today.

She hits a key to SAVE, but her computer rejects her with a
BEEP. She squints at the screen and hits another key -- it
BEEPS again. She GROANS, clicks a few more keys, and BEEP-
BEEP-BEEP -- the machine's dead.

Ellen opens her desk drawer and comes up with a list of phone
numbers. She dials a number and someone picks up -

TRENT (V.O.)

I.T. Support.

ELLEN

Yeah -- I can't connect to the
network.

TRENT (V.O.)

Is your Ethernet cable plugged in?

She looks at the back of her computer -

ELLEN

Yes.

TRENT (V.O.)

Do you know your user name and
password?

ELLEN

Look, I don't mean to be rude, but
could you please just come up here?
Twelfth Floor, Block B.

There's a CLICK on the other end -

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - LATER

Ellen presses keys on her computer, continuing to make it
BEEP; she senses someone behind her and turns to see -

ELLEN

Trent! Hey! I didn't know you work
here -

TRENT

(Uncomfortable)
Yes, ever since I move into the
apartment.

ELLEN

Well, I guess that shows how much we
talk.

TRENT WORKING ON HER COMPUTER WHILE ELLEN WATCHES

ELLEN

I'm sorry that you had to get into
this situation with us. When you
first moved in I should've told you
that we're not very responsible.

(Then)

So have you found a new place yet?

TRENT

I sign a lease yesterday.

ELLEN

That was quick... Hey, you and I
should -

He hits a key and Ellen's work successfully saves -

TRENT

It's fixed. Is everything else okay?

ELLEN

The machine's fine, but -

TRENT

Okay.

As he leaves -

ELLEN

Trent! I wanted to say that you and I should go for lunch sometime, since...we're roommates and everything.

TRENT

Yes.

We follow him as he walks away. But after a moment, he looks back at her over his shoulder -- and she catches him and smiles.

Embarrassed, he quickly scampers away.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Trent balances on a chair, straining to retrieve a METAL BOX from its hiding place on top of a shelf; he opens it, revealing a STACK OF CDs, each marked with an "L" and a date.

He takes one of the CDs and carefully places it in his computer; its screen jumps to life:

A PHOTO OF HIMSELF, THROUGH A DOORWAY, WORKING ON A COMPUTER.

FLASH BULB goes off -

INT. TRENT'S DORM ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

MATCH CUT TO:

TRENT THROUGH THE DOORWAY OF HIS OLD COLLEGE DORM ROOM. FOUR BARE WALLS AND A COMPUTER, MUCH LIKE HIS CURRENT OFFICE.

Trent looks up to see an 18 year-old girl (LAUREN) standing there holding a CAMERA -- she's fresh, beautiful with a crooked smile -

LAUREN

What are you doing?

TRENT

Homework.

Lauren sits cross-legged on the bed behind him -

LAUREN

You know what everybody calls you? The Thinker. 'Cause you always look like you're thinking. So tell me what you're thinking about.

TRENT

I'm not thinking anything. I'm just -

LAUREN
 Doing homework. Right. Well,
 everybody wants to know something
 else: Why don't you talk to anybody?

TRENT
 I don't know anybody.

As she leaves -

LAUREN
 I'm Lauren Hayes. And now you know
 me.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF LAUREN'S MANY APPEARANCES OVER THE COURSE OF A
 YEAR:

Trent works on his computer as Lauren walks past his doorway;
 she has a TOOTHBRUSH in her mouth. She waves -

LAUREN (CONT'D)
 Hey!

And Trent waves back without looking up from his machine.

Trent works on his computer as Lauren walks past his doorway
 dressed as the TOOTH FAIRY. College kids run past in various
 HALLOWEEN COSTUMES. Lauren waves -

LAUREN (CONT'D)
 Hey!

Trent looks up and waves back -

TRENT
 Hey.

She motions for him to join them, but he declines; she
 extends a WAND WITH A GIANT TOOTH on it, holding it fixed on
 him as she walks by.

Trent works on his computer as Lauren walks past his doorway
 wearing a SANTA HAT. She waves -

LAUREN
 Hey!

He's happy to see her as he waves back -

TRENT
 Hey!

She hurls a CHRISTMAS PRESENT into his room. He unwraps it:
 A small reproduction of the sculpture "The Thinker".

Trent turns it around in his hands.

CUT TO:

TRENT'S ROOM, ILLUMINATED BY CHRISTMAS LIGHTS HANGING ACROSS THE WALLS; LAUREN IS DANCING TO MUSIC IN CIRCLES AROUND HIM AS SHE WAVES A SPARKLER.

Trent stands sheepishly as she twirls around him -- she grabs his hands -

LAUREN
Dance! C'mon -- dance!

She PULLS him forward, forcing him to move. Trent begins to bob at the knees, finally feeling the music. His self-consciousness fades -- he's free.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
He's alive, ladies and gentlemen!

REVERSE ANGLE THROUGH THE DOORWAY AND INTO TRENT'S ROOM:
THE TWO OF THEM ARE DANCING AND LAUGHING INSIDE, HAPPY TO BE TOGETHER.

BACK TO THE PRESENT:

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

On Trent's computer screen: Pictures of himself and Lauren. Trent presses a key on his computer and the image changes -- It's Lauren studying, her hair tied up with a pen.

With each keystroke, Trent flips through a SLIDE SHOW of her pictures -- a steady transformation from college girl to a collection of her images as a porn star.

Suddenly, Trent whirls around to see Akira watching him from the doorway as she nonchalantly munches on a bagel -

TRENT
(Embarrassed)
It's not what you think.

She smirks - yeah, right. She tosses something into his lap: A BOX OF KLEENEX.

And she impishly waves (Have Fun!) and walks away.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shingo mixes CHEMICALS in a jar as he watches TV; he has a huge grin on his face -- his favorite sitcom is on, his snack food is easily accessible, and all is right with the world.

The TV blasts out a LAUGH TRACK which suddenly wavers, pops, and CRASHES as the TV show DISAPPEARS in a snowstorm of STATIC.

Confused, Shingo clicks the remote control -- every channel's gone, replaced by static. He PANICS, checks the connections on the back of the TV -- this can't be happening -

He looks out a window and sees a CABLE VAN parked down on the street -

EXT. THE APARTMENT - DAY

A burly CABLE GUY walks out of the building holding a single length of COAXIAL CABLE in his hand -- the former connection to Shingo's television viewing pleasure.

Shingo leans out the window -

SHINGO
Hey -- I need that!

The Cable Guy is chewing a wad of gum and couldn't care less -

CABLE GUY
You apartment 604? You're three months past due.

SHINGO
Well, um... Do you take bribes?

CABLE GUY
Why? You got money?

SHINGO
(Thinks)
No?

CUT TO:

THE CABLE VAN SCREECHING AWAY

SHINGO (CONT'D)
Dang.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

STEVE, yet another one of Akira's guys, shoves chopsticks up his nose to do his walrus impression -- and Akira is not impressed. A WAITER drops a check off at their table along with two FORTUNE COOKIES -

Akira cracks open a cookie that reads: "WHERE DO YOU FIND THESE GUYS?"

She looks up to see Murphy leaning against a wall, smiling at her -- and she CRUSHES his cookie.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - DAY

Akira ties rollerblades onto her feet -- Murphy watches her extend a leg as she pulls them on tight -

CUT TO:

MURPHY AS HE WALKS DOWN A CONCRETE PATH WHILE AKIRA SKATES IN CIRCLES AROUND HIM -

AKIRA
What would you and I do in a
relationship that we don't do now?
Have sex? Is that what you want?

Murphy smiles at her candidness -

MURPHY
I'd still want the friendship.

AKIRA
(Shakes her head)
You can't have both friendship and
sex.

MURPHY
(Assertively)
Yes you can -

Akira BRAKES right in front of him -

AKIRA
(Smirks)
NO. YOU CAN'T HAVE BOTH FRIENDSHIP
AND SEX.

And she skates ahead, skillfully spins and dips, then takes a deep bow in mock circumstance.

INT. MURPHY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Murphy is just getting out of the shower. He is sneezing repeatedly. As he walks by Shingo's closet he sees his allergy prescription bottle. He shakes it and hears the pills rattling inside.

MURPHY
Shingo, man, leave my stuff alone or
get off the pipe.

He opens the bottle and swallows one of the pills.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Murphy stands alone at the free-throw line, casting a long shadow on the empty court; he takes a shot that BRICKS off the rim. It makes a stange echoing warbled sound.

He lines up for another shot, pausing to get it right. As he does the goal starts to undulate, reflecting green and purple light. Murphy tries to shake it off -

JOHNNY WANG (O.S.)

You think too much.

Murphy looks up to see THE WANG standing on the court, staring back at him in disdain. He puts his hands out -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Gimme the rock.

Murphy dribbles, trying to ignore this hallucination -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like I'm crazy.

Now gimme the rock!

Murphy gives in and passes the ball to The Wang; he dribbles with expertise, then effortlessly SINKS a shot -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

I like your style, Writer. The world needs an Asian American like myself. Daddy's gonna be real proud of you.

(Then)

But here's a tip: If you wanna get Akira, you've gotta give her something to look at.

MURPHY

How do you know Akira? Anyway, she and I are just friends.

JOHNNY WANG

Whatever. Like it matters anyway. When she looks at you she sees nothin' but a goofy little oriental. You might as well be pullin' a rickshaw around the living room.

The Wang's got the ball again, and dribbles to the far end of the court -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

You've gotta make yourself into something that she can't ignore.

And he hooks an impossible shot that somehow goes in -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)
 'Cause if you haven't noticed, my
 Brotha, we're invisible.

Murphy stares at the bouncing ball, trying to figure out how he cleared that shot. The ball rolls to his feet as he looks up to see that The Wang has vanished.

EXT. THE APARTMENT - BALCONY - DAY

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS: AN APARTMENT WINDOW ACROSS THE WAY. THE BINOCULARS FOCUS ON A PAIR OF LEGS BELONGING TO A WOMAN SITTING ON A COUCH WATCHING TV. HER LEGS CROSS AND UNCROSS.

REVEAL that Shingo is leaning over the balcony railing staring through the binoculars with a smile.

POV THROUGH HIS BINOCULARS: THE VIEW SWINGS AWAY TO SETTLE ON THE WOMAN'S TV SCREEN -- SHINGO IS GIDDY NOW, FINALLY ABLE TO WATCH SOME TV.

Suddenly, his view through the window is BLOCKED by the woman, staring back at him angrily; she SHUTS her blinds -

SHINGO
 Nuts!

Just then, the cordless phone RINGS; he pauses over a note taped to it that reads: "DO NOT ANSWER IF IT'S AKIRA'S DAD". He thinks about this for a moment, then answers it -

SHINGO (CONT'D)
 Hello?

JAKE (V.O.)
 Hey Spicoli, put Akira on the phone.

Shingo pauses, trying to identify the voice -

SHINGO
 I'm Shingo, man...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

STEREO SPEAKER BLASTS BEHIND JAKE -

JAKE
 (Into the phone)
 I don't have time for your stoner
 shit. Just put her on the phone -

EXT. THE APARTMENT - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Shingo complies -

SHINGO
(Calls out)
Akira! It's Jake!

And we see Akira pick up the phone in the girls' bedroom.

INT. THE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ellen dejectedly watches a TV DINNER rotate in the microwave.

ELLEN
(Calls out)
I'm sleeping here tonight!

In the living room, Shingo fiddles with home-made RABBIT EARS, trying to get the TV to come back to life -- with zero success.

SHINGO
Can't -- Jake's sleeping over.

Ellen sticks her head out from the kitchen -

ELLEN
Doesn't Jake have his own apartment?

SHINGO
Jake lives in Burbank, and Akira doesn't want to drive out there.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Akira puts makeup on in the bathroom mirror; Ellen crosses past the doorway as she dials a number on the cordless phone -

ELLEN
(To Akira)
We're getting evicted and you're still taking booty calls. That's just great.

Ellen puts the phone to her ear and hears -

BRAD'S ANSWERING MACHINE
This is Brad, leave a -

She hangs up, frustrated.

AKIRA
Is it okay if you sleep over at Brad's?

Ellen is in the closet now, packing an OVERNIGHT BAG.

ELLEN

(Cold)

Sure.

Akira senses Ellen's mood and tries to recover the situation -

AKIRA

Hey -- Deke scored two tickets to see the Lakers this weekend. So whaddaya say I ditch him so you and I can go?

ELLEN

I can't. I've got to look at more apartments, I've got a ton of work left, and I haven't gone to see my Mom in -

AKIRA

How long has it been?

ELLEN

Ages.

Ellen picks up her overnight bag and walks out of the room in a huff -

AKIRA

(Calls out)

Well, maybe I could go with you -

The front door SLAMS; Akira turns towards it, uneasy.

INT. COMIC BOOK STORE - NIGHT

Akira flips through a COMIC BOOK, tracing the lines of ink with her finger, trying to figure out how to duplicate the effect. Jake stands by, dying of boredom -

JAKE

What the hell are we doing here?

AKIRA

I just need to pick up a few things and then we'll go.

AKIRA DROPPING A SMALL STACK OF COMIC BOOKS AT THE CHECKOUT COUNTER;

The COMIC BOOK CLERK smiles awkwardly at her -- he has a crush on her too -

COMIC BOOK CLERK

Greetings, Akira.

AKIRA
(Warmly)
Hi Frank.

He rings up her purchases as Jake picks through them -

JAKE
Are these for that dickless roommate
of yours?

AKIRA
(Annoyed)
I thought I told you not to mess
with my friends.

JAKE
You mean the dork with the typewriter?

And that's the last straw:

AKIRA
There's been a change in plans, Jake:
Why don't you go get something to
eat by yourself, go have a drink by
yourself, and then go home and fuck
yourself?

Akira takes her things and storms out of the store; Jake
stands there, blinking in disbelief -- getting dumped is a
first for him.

INT. SEYMOUR'S PAD - NIGHT

A thumping BEAT shakes the walls of this cluttered apartment.
Records spin on TURNTABLES as a wanna-be DJ (THUY) practices
his beat matching.

There's a loud KNOCK at the front door; SEYMOUR, 25, Chinese
American and in excessively baggy jeans, answers the door:
It's Ellen with her overnight bag.

ELLEN
Thanks for letting me stay here again.

He smiles as a toothpick gyrates in his mouth -

SEYMOUR
No problem.

His eyes follow her as she carries her things into the other
room; Thuy stares after her too -

THUY
Dang, C -- your cousin's fiiiine!

SEYMOUR

(Grins)

I know.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Akira lies on her bed, carefully reading through a comic book as she sketches a perfect copy of it.

Just then, the phone RINGS -

AKIRA

(Calls out)

SHINGO! Pick up the phone!

But it RINGS again. She sighs as she rolls off the bed -

It keeps on RINGING as she looks into the boys' bedroom -- no one's home to answer it. Each RING shakes her nerves.

She walks over to it, slowly picks it up -

AKIRA (CONT'D)

Hello?

There's a stifled breath on the other end -

INT. AKIRA'S FATHER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

An old man, turned away sits at the edge of his bed; He coughs, breathes in pained and strains into the phone -

AKIRA'S FATHER

Akira?

BACK TO:

AKIRA, WHO INSTANTLY RECOGNIZES THE VOICE -- A LOOK OF FEAR CUTS ACROSS HER FACE. SHE SLAMS THE PHONE DOWN, SHAKEN TO THE CORE.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Akira pulls a SHOEBOX out from under her bed; she opens it to find hundreds of PHOTOGRAPHS inside.

She takes TORN PIECES of a photograph out of the box and arranges them on her bed like a jigsaw puzzle.

As she assembles the photograph, INTERCUT -

FINALLY BACK TO:

AN EXTREME CLOSE UP OF THE JIGSAW PICTURE: A MAN'S EYES,
ANGRY AND INTENSE.

EXTREME CLOSE ON AKIRA'S EYES

They are inherited from her father in appearance and intensity. SOUND OVER Yelling, SCREAMING in the distance as we PULL BACK to reveal the entire picture: There are pieces missing, but are enough there to see a dark, brooding MAN. This is Akira's father.

The caption reads: "SGT. AKIRA NAKAMA, U.S.M.C."

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Murphy writes on his typewriter.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL ALLERGY PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE OPEN

We see FLASHES of The Wang in a dark alleyway. The Wang slowly turns a PAPER CRANE around in his hands as we -

INTERCUT WITH: A MONTAGE OF MURPHY AS HE WRITES:

Murphy writing in a note pad at the Happy Family Restaurant as The Wang watches, simultaneously eating and smoking -

Murphy and The Wang sitting back-to-back on a washing machine in a LAUNDROMAT. Murphy scribbles away while The Wang smokes under a large NO SMOKING sign -

Murphy sitting on the toilet, still writing, while The Wang relaxes in the bathtub, still smoking -

BACK TO: The Wang, who unfolds the paper crane to reveal that it is a PICTURE OF AKIRA.

Just then, The Wang SNIFFS at the air -

MURPHY, PAUSED OVER HIS TYPEWRITER, ALSO SNIFFING AT THE AIR.

Murphy follows the scent to Shingo's closet. As he's about to knock on the door, it BURSTS open -- Shingo comes out holding a frying pan containing a steaming, CRUSTY GOO.

MURPHY
(Suspiciously)
What's that?

SHINGO
(Thinks)
Toast?

MURPHY
Toast, eh?

Murphy extracts some of the goo with his finger, sniffs it, and is about to taste it when Shingo GRABS his wrist -

SHINGO

Don't.

MURPHY

What is this stuff?

SHINGO

Methylenedioxymethamphetamine.

Murphy gives him a crazy look -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

Eeeeeeee -

MURPHY

Eeee?

(A lightbulb goes on)

Ecstasy? You're making Ecstasy in my bedroom?

SHINGO

Eeeeeee-yeah!

Murphy is floored -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

I got the recipe off the internet!

Shingo opens the door to give us a full view into his CLOSET: It's filled with CHEMISTRY EQUIPMENT and VATS that go from ceiling to floor -- TUBES run everywhere. All of his belongings are shoved into a cramp corner.

Murphy grabs Shingo and THROWS him up against the wall -

MURPHY

This is a felony, Shingo!

SHINGO

It's all I could think of to raise some money real quick so I can pay you guys back -- 'cause I feel real bad -

MURPHY

You don't pay people back by making drugs in their bedroom!

Murphy seizes a PLASTIC BUCKET full of RED PILLS -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy locks himself in the bathroom; Shingo RAPS at the door -

SHINGO
Hey, Murph, you're not doing anything
to my pills, are you?

THE PILLS BEING POURED INTO THE TOILET -

SHINGO (CONT'D)
'Cause that sure sounds like pills
being poured into the toilet -

We hear the toilet FLUSH.

SHINGO (CONT'D)
Okay, now that sounds like a toilet
flushing. And these two sounds
together are very distressing -

Shingo desperately BANGS on the door -

SHINGO (CONT'D)
MURPHY! Oh, man... Dang...

The door opens and Murphy hands Shingo an empty bucket.

MURPHY
You don't have to pay us back. We'll
be out of here soon and it's cool.

SHINGO
But friends pay each other back.

MURPHY
I know. And you've caught my ass
plenty of times in the past -- we're
even. So from now on, don't EVER
make anything again!

INT. THE APARTMENT - SHINGO'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Shingo sits on his cot, defeated. He's still feeling defeated as he pulls a SECOND BUCKET full of red pills out from its hiding place. And then a THIRD, and a FOURTH...

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ellen is writing an E-MAIL on her computer when her cell phone RINGS -- she picks it up -

ELLEN
Hello?

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Brad lazily reclines behind his ultra-modern desk -

BRAD
I want to see you tonight.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

ELLEN
(Annoyed)
Wow, twice in one week. You sure
know how to make a girl feel special.

BRAD (V.O.)
(Stern)
Don't be like that.

Ellen sighs, knowing that she's giving in too easily. She
clicks SEND on her computer; the e-mail window disappears.

BRAD CROSSING OUT AN APPOINTMENT AND WRITING ELLEN'S NAME
INTO THE SLOT

BRAD (CONT'D)
Ten o'clock?

ELLEN (V.O.)
Ten o'clock.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - TRENT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Trent clicks on a NEW MESSAGE ICON on his computer screen -

INSERT THE E-MAIL FROM ELLEN:

Hi Trent. I usually have lunch by myself, but if you're
free, I'll be at the Thai place down the street. Hope to
see you there. -- L

EXT. THAI RESTAURANT - DAY

Ellen sits at an outdoor table by herself, thumbing through
a report. We PULL BACK to see Trent watching her from an
ivy-covered archway.

He gathers his courage, and starts toward the table. He's
jolted by MEN'S LAUGHTER -

He turns to see Brad and a few MALE COLLEAGUES laughing as
they emerge from the indoor seating area of the restaurant:

MALE COLLEAGUE
So -- are you having Italian or
Mexican tonight?

Brad looks back with a smirk -

BRAD
Chinese.

ELLEN (O.S.)
Hi.

Brad looks up, surprised to see Ellen approaching him -- but her smile shows that she heard none of it.

He puts his arm around her waist and grins at his colleagues. They grin back -- nice.

And Trent sees this, then turns and walks away.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shingo sits aimlessly on the couch as the TELEVISION stares back at him, lifeless. He sighs as he checks his watch -- it seems to be ticking backwards.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF TV SUBSTITUTES:

SHINGO SOLVES A RUBIK'S CUBE, SIGHS, QUICKLY RANDOMIZES IT, THEN INSTANTLY SOLVES IT AGAIN -

HE CREATES MINIATURE PORTRAITS USING EZ-CHEEZE AND RITZ CRACKERS. HE EATS ONE -

HE SWINGS NUNCHAKUS AROUND, SMACKING HIMSELF IN THE FACE -

AND FINALLY, TOTALLY DEFEATED BY BOREDOM, SHINGO IS BACK ON THE COUCH. HE PICKS UP THE REMOTE CONTROL, CLICKS -

On the television screen: STATIC.

The light from the static fills the room; Shingo looks away, but the static catches his attention, draws him closer -

We hear a rhythmic BEAT fade in as he stares at the screen -- but it is drowned out by the HISS.

He moves closer to watch, his face reflected in the screen. It is hypnotizing. It is interesting to him.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - TRENT'S OFFICE - DAY

On Trent's computer screen: A NEW MESSAGE ICON. Trent clicks on it and an email pops up:

MODEL CON L.A. - The HOTTEST Adult Models in America All In One Hot Location: Pasadena City College Trent's eyes run

down a list of models' names, focusing intensely on one:
LAUREN HAYES.

He stands up and sits back down again; he wrings his hands, looks at her name, then smiles like Christmas came early.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - HALLWAY - DAY

Trent pushes a CART loaded with computer monitors and CPUs down a hallway as he whistles, feeling invincible.

He passes Ellen in the hall and she walks after him -

ELLEN
Hey, missed you at lunch -

TRENT
I'm sorry, Ellen. I was busy.

ELLEN
It's okay. But I was wondering if
we could get together sometime.
There's something I want to ask you.

TRENT
Yes, soon. I promise.

And he leaves her behind as he continues on, an unbreakable smile still etched on his face.

INT. THE APARTMENT - SHINGO'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Shingo stamps out pills as quickly as he can, trying to make up for his losses. A PLASTIC BOTTLE in the corner catches his eye -

He picks it up, shakes a RED PILL out of it. He hesitates, wondering if now's a good time. But without another thought, he SWALLOWS it.

A HAND PUSHING THE BOYS' BEDROOM DOOR OPEN; SOMEONE IS ENTERING THE BEDROOM. SOUND OVER BLARING RAVE MUSIC

Shingo's too busy dancing wildly and laughing to notice -- he tries to do a handstand and flops onto his back.

THE HAND AS IT PUSHES OPEN THE DOOR TO SHINGO'S CLOSET, REVEALING RED PILLS SPILLED OUT OF THE PLASTIC BOTTLE.

Shingo BOUNCES off the couch and lands on his feet. He looks up and sees Akira mouthing words to him, but he keeps on dancing; then her voice CHIMES IN -

AKIRA
Shingo. Shingo! SHINGO!

The music abruptly SILENCES -- Shingo looks at her, sweating -

AKIRA (CONT'D)
What are these?

She holds out a PAIR OF RED PILLS. Shingo blinks at them.

AKIRA (CONT'D)
They look like ecst -

SHINGO
(Stammers)
They're, uh, my vitamins. For when
I get... I'm sick -

He lets out a tiny little COUGH; Akira skeptically squints the pills -

AKIRA
Vitamin "S"?

Shingo SNATCHES the pills away from her -

SHINGO
Yeah. The "S" stands for...
(Thinks)
Stop... Being... Sick. Shingo.
(Then)
Goodbye.

And he escapes into the boys' bedroom.

Akira smiles to herself, then holds out her other hand: In her palm are TWO MORE RED PILLS.

INT. BRAD'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

We're looking down at Ellen lying next to Brad as he sleeps. She stares up at the ceiling, feeling empty and a little used. She holds her hand up in the light, looks at the RING on her finger - she gets up and grabs her clothes.

EXT. THE APARTMENT - ROOFTOP - MORNING

Ellen looks out over the haze of the city while Murphy takes a sip from a bottle of beer -

MURPHY
Maybe you should find someone with a
little more time on his hands.

ELLEN
That would be Shingo. And as
attractive as he is, I can't stand
the smell of weed.

MURPHY

Yeah, but at least he's always there.

MURPHY sneezes twice.

ELLEN

Allergies?

MURPHY

Yeah, I'm taking my Rynatan, but it just seems to make me sweaty. Weird.

ELLEN

Well, soon I'm gonna make full consultant and Brad'll move up in his firm. And then we can spend more time together.

She leans back against a wall; she grows quiet now as she tells him her dream:

ELLEN (CONT'D)

We have a plan. We're going to buy a house together.

MURPHY

Yeah.

ELLEN

And when I come home from work, he'll ask me how my day went. And I'll say that it was good. And I'll be able to say that for the rest of my life.

Ellen waits for his approval. Murphy says nothing and takes a sip of his beer.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

So what's wrong with that, Murphy? Nothing. And nothing's wrong with him.

MURPHY

(abruptly)

Which is exactly what's wrong with him. Me, I'd want to be with someone that isn't so...perfect. That way you know that you matter to them.

ELLEN

(offended)

Well in that case, you found the perfect person to be attracted to.

He nods slightly, not surprised by the truth. He takes a swig from his bottle -

MURPHY

Well, tomorrow I'm going to help you find a new apartment. It's not fair for you to be looking for all of us.

Ellen looks away, ashamed -

ELLEN

Murphy, I should've told you this sooner, but... I'm looking for a place for myself.

He's stunned -- she's never left him out of anything.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I've got to keep my life on track. I can't deal with any more distractions.

MURPHY

What about Akira?

She pauses, conflicted, but sticks to her plan:

ELLEN

I can't spend my life worrying about her or any of you. I'm sorry, Murphy. You have to find a place for yourself. I can't do it.

EXT. CHOCO CHICKEN - DAY

An outdoor fast food joint by the beach. Akira eats french fries while Murphy puts a CIGARETTE in his mouth, agitated; he lights it, carefully inhales -

And GAGS and COUGHS the cigarette onto the ground. He picks it up again and sticks it back in his mouth -

AKIRA

When did you start smoking?

MURPHY

(Coughs)
Yesterday.

Akira steals the cigarette out of his mouth and takes a drag -

AKIRA

You shouldn't smoke. It's really bad for you.

MURPHY

(Hacking)

I can see why that would be -

Akira looks out over the water, burdened by thoughts of her father. She needs to blow off some steam -

AKIRA

Hey, I need to have some fun tonight.
And you're coming with me.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Akira emerges from the girls' bedroom dressed to the nines -- long coat, short skirt, ready for trouble.

She sees Murphy emerge from the boys' bedroom -- he's sharply dressed in all-black, reminiscent of Johnny Wang. She smiles back, impressed.

EXT. CLUB DARSHAN - NIGHT

Akira and Murphy are waiting in a line that stretches down the street outside a industrial-style CLUB; a muffled BEAT sounds from within.

Akira looks troubled; she can't keep this to herself any longer -

AKIRA

My dad's been calling.

MURPHY

(Astonished)

What? How'd he get our number?

AKIRA

I don't know... Has Ellen found us
a new place yet?

MURPHY

Actually, she said that she wants to
live by herself.

Something inside Akira snaps, but she hides it -

AKIRA

Fine. Good for her. She can do
whatever she wants.

MURPHY AND AKIRA HEADING DOWN A DARK HALLWAY AND EMERGING ONTO THE DANCE FLOOR. THEY SNAKE THROUGH A YOUNG, RAVENOUS CROWD AS LIGHTS FLASH ACROSS THEIR FACES AND A POWERFUL BEAT THUMPS AROUND THEM -

INT. CLUB DARSHAN - LADIES' ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Akira is reflected in the mirrors as she paces around with her CELL PHONE to her ear; she's agonized, needing to find out what the hell's going on with Ellen.

She hears a beep-beep-beep -- her phone can't get any reception in here -- and she clenches it in her hands, wanting to smash it in frustration -

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - NIGHT

Ellen walks past dark cubicles with a stack of reports in her arms. It's late, and she's alone in the silence.

As she drops the stack on her desk, her phone RINGS; she picks it up -

ELLEN

Jackson and Brown, this is Ellen...
Hi, Mr. Bale!

She turns to see Mr. Bale on the phone behind his GLASS WALL -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Yes, I've got a moment. Uh-huh...

Suddenly, her smile fades. Her heart stops.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

She looks up at Mr. Bale -- his back is turned. And what he's saying to her on the phone is tearing her apart -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Is it something that I did, or
something that I didn't do, because...
Ok...sure.

Ellen gets a grip on herself, becomes professional -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Yes. I will complete them by
Thursday. I understand. It's all
about the bottom line.

She's slowly puts the phone down. And behind the glass wall, Mr. Bale walks away.

There is a moment of ticking silence as Ellen looks around her cubicle trying to find something to hold on to. The pictures of the houses. The picture of her mother.

The picture of Brad.

She dials a number and holds the phone to her ear -- each RING sounds forever. Then she hears -

BRAD'S ANSWERING MACHINE
This is Brad, leave a message. [Beep]

Ellen sits silently holding the phone.

INT. CLUB DARSHAN - LADIES' ROOM - NIGHT

Akira stands in a bathroom stall staring at a single RED PILL in her hand. She hesitates, wondering if it's safe. But she SWALLOWS it anyway.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Likewise, Shingo shakes a RED PILL out of the plastic bottle and SWALLOWS it too.

He looks at the TV -- STATIC burns across its screen.

And MUSIC fades in, explosively loud -

INT. CLUB DARSHAN - NIGHT

Akira dances with Murphy, energized by the drug; she giggles with a warmth that's glowing inside her.

They dance as friends would, copying each others' moves, laughing out loud. She's happy to be alive, for the first time in a long time.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

TV STATIC AND NOISE pours into the living room; Shingo watches the static waver and crackle. He's shivering now, rolling with the Ecstasy, an enormous grin on his face -

Just then, the phone RINGS. He picks it up -

SHINGO
Hello?
(Looks around)

No, she's not here. Yeah, I'll be sure to -

Suddenly, he's shocked by what he hears -- he grows quiet -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

What?... Is this... Yeah, I'll tell her, I promise. I'm sorry... I'm so sorry.

He hangs up, shaken. But the STATIC calls out to him, and he answers, staring straight ahead at the TV -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

No bad vibes... No bad vibes...

The chaos of the static melts with the MUSIC, pulsating with its beat; Shingo begins to move to the music, letting it overcome him as he tries to escape from this moment in time.

We CUT away, looking at Shingo from a distance as he bobs his head to the music -

We CUT further away: He's trying to hold on, growing more and more desperate -

We CUT even further away to: SILENCE. We see Shingo through a doorway -- he continues to rock even though the music is gone. It doesn't come from anywhere -- it's only inside his own head.

INT. CLUB DARSHAN - NIGHT

But the MUSIC here is now lucid and trance-like, engulfing Akira. Her vision is swimming with Ecstasy -- she feels overwhelmingly loved, and so incredibly lucky to be with someone that she loves back.

She holds Murphy tightly in her arms, her head pressed against his shoulder. It's not a sexual embrace -- it's the way a daughter would wrap her arms around her father.

Murphy senses something strange about her behavior, but he completes her embrace, happy to be close to her. He looks into her eyes, sees such overwhelming vulnerability, and so much pain underneath.

In a flash he sees The Wang amidst the crowd -- he smiles back as he lights a cigarette -

JOHNNY WANG

Do it.

Murphy ignores him as Akira's cheek brushes against his face; she feels so cold. She places his arms over her bare shoulders, melting in the warmth of his body.

The Wang's voice sounds out again, cutting through the music -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for? Do it!

And there's a change in Murphy's expression -- he looks into Akira's eyes, sees something that he's wanted for so long.

And he kisses her.

Akira pulls away, startled; but if this is the only way she can have love right now, she'll take it.

And she kisses him back with her whole body.

The Wang smiles as smoke curls from his lips -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)
That's my boy.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The RED HANDKERCHIEF is tied to the girls' bedroom door.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

And inside, Akira is wide awake, lying next to Murphy in her bed. Both of them are naked under the covers.

She wraps a sheet around her body and goes to look at herself in the bathroom mirror -- she's coming down from the high, and is sickened by what she sees. Every ounce of love that she felt has melted away, and she's left with a freezing, crippling emptiness.

She looks down into the sink.

And Murphy watches her from the bed, realizing that he's made a terrible mistake.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - NIGHT

Ellen walks down a hallway, fighting back tears; she puts her back up against the wall, crying -

And in the distance, behind a GLASS WALL, a tiny FIGURE watches her cry.

It's Trent. He looks at her with concern, wanting to comfort her -- he understands what he's seeing.

She doesn't see him as she stifles her tears; she composes herself, straightens her clothes, and looks down the hall with uncertainty.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We drift across Shingo in the darkness, sleeping on the couch. Akira sits waiting at the kitchen table, and finally looks up to see Ellen come in through the front door -

AKIRA

Murphy said that you want to live by yourself.

(Ellen ignores her -)

You should've told me. Because I thought that -

ELLEN

Well, we're not, okay? I can't do this anymore.

CUT TO:

MURPHY SITTING ON AKIRA'S BED IN THE GIRLS' BEDROOM, ASHAMED OF WHAT'S GOING ON.

BACK TO:

AKIRA AS SHE STANDS AND FACES ELLEN -

AKIRA

So you're gonna walk out on me?

ELLEN

Every night when I want to come home and sleep, I can't because of Jake, Steve, Randy, Deke or Butkus -- you should rope off the living room so they can form a fucking line!

AKIRA

Oh, fucking deal with it. Yeah, I get all the guys, I get laid and all you get is a great successful perfect life. And every time I screw up it makes you feel even better about yourself -

ELLEN

Akira, you don't know what you're talking about...

AKIRA

Oh, I know exactly. Because in your eyes, I'm a fucking slut...

ELLEN

I never said that...

AKIRA

Like hell you didn't. Yeah I may sleep around but at least I'm in control. I say when and how, not them. And I never wait by the phone for a guy that never calls.

ELLEN

(Hurt)

What did you say?

AKIRA

I don't give my love to a guy that only wants me when he has no one else to fuck.

(Beat)

And I have never left you out, Ellen. But if you're gonna leave me out now, fine. Fuck you.

Akira heads toward the girls' bedroom -

ELLEN

For a change of pace, why don't you fuck yourself?

Akira stops in her tracks. Murphy emerges from the girls' bedroom -- Ellen shoots him a look, then picks up her things -

MURPHY

Where are you going?

ELLEN

I'm moving out. NOW. I'll be at my cousins' place. If anyone calls, take a message.

Shingo suddenly surfaces -

SHINGO (to AKIRA)

There's a message for you.

Everyone turns to him -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

Your mom called.

AKIRA

I don't care.

SHINGO

Hum, I'm sorry but..she said they've been trying to get a hold of you because your Dad's really sick -

AKIRA

So, great...I'm glad -

SHINGO

He's gonna die.

Silence. Akira's heart clenches; her blood runs cold - Akira turns toward the front door, not knowing whether to stay or leave; Ellen looks at her, but says nothing.

MURPHY

Akira, are you -

AKIRA

(Numb)

I'm fine. Fine. I've been waiting
for this for a long time.

And she walks out the front door as Murphy and Ellen watch her go.

EXT. THE APARTMENT - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Akira stands by the edge of the roof smoking a cigarette. She stretches upwards, and the sunlight casts her in silhouette. She looks down over the edge -- the distance to the ground is wrenching -- but she moves closer.

She's now at the very edge, looking down with no fear, no emotion left. And she moves even closer, as if to jump -

And we see her cigarette slowly fall down to the ground.

REPRISE OPEN SLO.MO EXTREME CLOSE ON CIGARETTE FLIPPING
THROUGH THE AIR

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Ellen trembles as she drives, wiping tears from her eyes.

INT. MURPHY'S CAR - NIGHT

Murphy drives as Akira sits in the passengers' seat, staring out into the night. Passing STREETLIGHTS illuminate her face like a strobe light, her expression crumbling with each flash of light.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Akira slowly walks towards us while Murphy stands at the end of the hallway, growing distant.

She arrives at a DOORWAY, and looks into a room -

AKIRA'S FATHER lies in a bed, perfectly still. His face in the shadows. Akira stands frozen at the doorway. She tries to get herself to enter the room, but is paralyzed by fear and anger.

She feels a HAND on her shoulder -- she looks up to see Murphy... And she walks away without a word.

EXT. BABY BLUE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ellen stares longingly at the UPSTAIRS WINDOW, wanting to see her mother waiting for her, wanting to tell her what's happened.

And there's a LIGHT in the window -- but after a moment, it goes out.

FADE TO BLACK, THEN FADE IN:

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Lauren's smiling face on Trent's computer screen. Trent's desk is now scattered with PRINTED PHOTOS of Lauren. He sifts through them, then turns to the screen -

TRENT

There's something I want to tell you.

INT. UCLA DINING HALL - FLASHBACK

And Lauren is sitting in front of him turning pasta around on a fork -

LAUREN

There's something I want to tell you. You know how we're supposed to sign up for classes tomorrow?

TRENT

Yes.

Her crooked smile comes out of hiding -

LAUREN

I'm not signing up for classes tomorrow. I'm moving to New York.

The fork becomes heavy in Trent's hand -

TRENT

Why?

LAUREN

Everyone there knows what they want. They're all going somewhere important. And I want to be like that. I want to be able to look out and see people all around me. Because I'm not like you -

EXT. UCLA CAMPUS - FLASHBACK

Trent carries Lauren's bags out of the dorms as she follows him; he has a lost expression on his face -

LAUREN (V.O.)
I'm not happy being alone.

Trent puts her bags into the trunk of her CAR. She hugs him -

LAUREN (CONT'D)
You know how they say that people change? I want you to change too.
Don't hide so much.

TRENT
When am I going to see you again?

She gets into her car and smiles back at him -

LAUREN
I guess you'll just have to come and find me.

Her POV as she drives away: Trent in the REAR VIEW MIRROR, becoming miniscule with distance, and eventually disappearing.

BACK TO THE PRESENT:

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - DAY

Akira lies on her bed holding a small MIRROR in her hand. She tilts it back and forth between the darkened doorway and her own reflection. Her eyes are cold, distant.

She tilts the mirror -- in its reflection is Murphy, standing in the doorway. He enters the room, sits down next to her.

MURPHY
Just wanted to see if you're ok,...if you need anything.

AKIRA
(Cold)
I'm fine. Super. I don't need anything...anyone.

Murphy puts his hand on her shoulder - Akira's mood seems to shift.

AKIRA (CONT'D)
Don't. Murphy...I don't know why but I needed someone that night. I did. I needed a friend.

MURPHY
(Ashamed)
I'm sorry.

She touches his hand to brush it off, and he pulls it away.

AKIRA
(Quietly)
I don't want to see you anymore,
Murphy.

He looks at her, then stands and walks away.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - TRENT'S OFFICE - DAY

TRENT'S COMPUTER SCREEN: THE E-MAIL INVITATION TO MODELCON
LA.

He quickly copies the directions onto a piece of paper. We
PULL BACK to reveal Ellen standing in his doorway, watching
him -

ELLEN
What are you doing?

He SCRAMBLES to hit a key and the email window closes -

TRENT
Uh... Database things.

ELLEN
Trent, I wanted to ask you something.
Do you mind?

TRENT
No.

She thinks for a moment -

ELLEN
You and me. We're successful, right?

Trent turns away from his computer and looks up at her.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
We went to college, we got these
jobs, we've done all the right things.
We're successful, right?

TRENT
I don't know.

ELLEN
I'm asking you because you seem to
get by without anyone else's help.
(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I admire that. You don't need anyone.
You're okay being alone.

Trent looks away, wishing that she knew the truth.

TRENT

Well, we're on a track whether we
want it or not. All of us. We just
keep on going. Except Shingo maybe.

ELLEN

Sometimes...sometimes I feel like
I'm just surviving. Just going to
keep on going. But where? When I
was a kid it was easy, do what you're
told.

(laughing)

And I was always trying to get
peoples' attention, impress somebody.

TRENT

Your parents?

ELLEN

Of course. Actually, just my mom.

TRENT

Did you know what you wanted when
you were little? I mean, did you
want to be an Associate Consultant?

ELLEN

(Smiles)

No... Did you want to be a Network
Engineer when you were a kid?

TRENT

No.

(pause)

I wanted to be invisible.

ELLEN

(Laughs)

Really?

TRENT

(Seriously)

Yes.

ELLEN

(Stops laughing)

Oh.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT BATHROOM - NIGHT

Murphy blows his nose and throws away the Kleenex. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out an allergy pill. He puts it in his mouth and turns on the faucet.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Murphy smokes a CIGARETTE behind the restaurant. He's more successful at it now, but the smoke catches in his throat and he begins HACKING; He flicks the cigarette away -

And The Wang CATCHES it and takes a drag. He tosses an incomplete SCREENPLAY at Murphy's feet -

JOHNNY WANG

Finish it.

MURPHY

Fuck you.

The Wang APPLAUDS as the cigarette twists between his teeth -

JOHNNY WANG

You know, Writer, I love your work.
Especially your recent stuff.

Murphy turns his back to him -- The Wang is annoyed that his creator isn't seeing him eye-to-eye -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Tell me if I'm wrong, but isn't that
what you always wanted? To have
Akira moaning underneath you?

MURPHY

I'm ignoring you.

JOHNNY WANG

Man, I gotta hand it to you. Always
the gentleman. But now that you've
fucked her I suggest that you forget
her.

MURPHY

What is this? Where did you come
from? You think that life is an
action movie? You think that I'm
gonna operate like you?

JOHNNY WANG

Hey -- you made me. And then you
made me a part of yourself. So finish
the job.

He kicks the script towards Murphy.

MURPHY

You can take that script and shove
it up your fictional ass.

JOHNNY WANG

(Laughs)

Well. All the world's a stage, but
clearly, not all of us can be players.

He grins as he draws his GUN, CHARGES it -

MURPHY

What are you gonna do? Shoot me?

The Wang SMASHES Murphy across the face with his gun -- he
crumples to the ground. The Wang KICKS him a few times for
good measure, then leans over him -

JOHNNY WANG

Do I have your attention? Can you
hear me?

Murphy COUGHS, clutching his gut -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

You're Fu Manchu without a beard,
you're Charlie Chan without a clue,
your Kung Fu SUCKS -- and you're
trapped in a fucking fortune cookie
factory!

Murphy painfully picks himself up as he reaches for the script -

MURPHY

I didn't know I was so insecure.

JOHNNY WANG

You should get over it.

MURPHY

I will.

REVEAL that Murphy is using his LIGHTER to set the script on
FIRE -- The Wang lunges for them -

JOHNNY WANG

NO!

But Murphy throws the flaming pieces into the air; the wind
picks them up in a vortex, like fireflies in the darkness.

And they blow past where The Wang once stood.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Akira smokes a cigarette in the shadows. She has a lost look on her face -- there's no one left for her to turn to.

AKIRA AT THE BAR --

She hammers down a shot of vodka as a MAN behind her puts his arm around her; She drunkenly falls against him, looking up at him with dead eyes. He kisses her with no resistance.

AKIRA DANCING IN A TIGHTLY-PACKED GROUP OF MEN; SHE KISSES TOTAL STRANGERS AS MUSIC BLASTS. THEIR FACES WHIRL AROUND HER

INTERCUT with Shingo as he STAMPS out more pills, trembling in the light of the television static -

BACK TO:

AKIRA STARING AT HER REFLECTION IN A FILTHY RESTROOM MIRROR

She's green with sickness, close to throwing up. A STRANGER approaches her from behind -- he turns her around, running his hands over her body. As he kisses her neck she looks back at her reflection and closes her eyes.

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Ellen looks into her reflection in the rear view mirror, staring at her own eyes -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ellen approaches the girls' bedroom door wanting to talk to Akira, but she STOPS when she sees the red handkerchief on the door. She sighs, then walks away -

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy sits on Akira's bed. He notices something on the ground, and picks it up -

It's Akira's SKETCHBOOK. He flips through it, faintly smiling when he sees the sketches of himself. There are sketches of Ellen, Shingo, even of Trent. Sketches of the little girl and her father. And Murphy turns the page to find -

The TORN-UP PHOTOGRAPH of Akira's father, pasted onto a page. She's drawn in the missing pieces, and the overall picture is demonic, terrifying.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

ANGLE ON PHOTO OF BRAD

Ellen touches the photograph, wondering where he is. She sees her mother's photograph behind his -- she takes it out, looks at it sadly. Then she puts it down and walks away.

Just then, Ellen's phone RINGS on her desk -- but she's long gone.

INT. FILTHY BATHROOM STALL - CONTINUOUS

Akira sits in the stall, dead-eyed listening to the dial tone on her cell.

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Ellen is driving now, clenching the steering wheel -- she needs to see someone too.

EXT. BRAD'S LOBBY - NIGHT

Ellen walks alongside a GLASS WALL -- behind it is the grand lobby of Brad's high-rent apartment building, finished in gold and sterile in its magnificence.

She runs her fingers along the glass -- her ring shines in its reflection. She stares through the glass like a child, admiring the elegance inside -- an outsider looking in.

Suddenly she sees Brad emerge from an elevator inside -- she presses her hands against the glass, a smile growing on her face -- she frames him like a portrait with her hands.

Just then, a WOMAN walks in from behind him, puts her arms around him, kisses the back of his neck. Ellen's fingers drift down against the glass, her smile melting away as her heart breaks.

REVERSE ANGLE to see Ellen, tiny, forlorn, watching from behind the glass as Brad and his woman walk away.

EXT. PASADENA CITY COLLEGE - DAY

Trent briskly walks across a sunlit campus carrying a small bouquet of flowers. He arrives at the front steps of the MAIN AUDITORIUM -- across it is a banner that reads:
"MODELCON LOS ANGELES - THE IMAGE OF BEAUTY"

He hurries up the steps, TRIPPING and FALLING in the excitement; but he picks himself up and continues inside -

INT. PASADENA CITY COLLEGE - MAIN AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Where it's a ZOO. Hundreds of MEN are wandering between booths with plastic bags full of schwag. VENDORS hawk videotapes and odd collectibles, and there are LINES OF MEN, each ending at a MODEL signing autographs at a booth.

Trent meanders through the crowd, eventually discovering a STAND-UP SIGN that reads "LAUREN HAYES". It makes the beginning of a line whose end is out of sight.

He takes a deep breath and gets in line.

INT. HOSPITAL BATHROOM - DAY

Akira stands in front of a MIRROR. She's coming down from last night, and hurts both physically and emotionally.

She looks up, finding the strength to speak to her reflection.

AKIRA

I want to ask you something. I want
to know why.

She pauses, wipes tears from her eyes -- she needs to get it right:

AKIRA (CONT'D)

So -- I want to ask you something.
I want to know...
(With strength)
I forgive you. I forgive you.

INT. PASADENA CITY COLLEGE - MAIN AUDITORIUM - DAY

Trent stands in line, one tall man away from getting to the front of the line -- his eyes are closed as he waits, whispering to himself -- a memorized speech to Lauren.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Akira marches down the hall, tightly wound, preparing to deliver her message to her father.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Akira stands silent in her father's hospital room -

The bed is empty. He's gone.

We hear someone weeping. Akira turns to see her MOTHER standing by the door. She's been crying for a long time. She reaches out to her daughter -

But Akira silently walks past her and into the hall.

INT. PASADENA CITY COLLEGE - MAIN AUDITORIUM - DAY

Sitting before Trent is LAUREN. She's heavily made-up -- there's something artificial about her beauty now. She's surrounded by FLOWERS, like the center of a halo.

Trent looks at the bouquet in his hand -- it seems too small.

There's a brief moment of recognition in her eyes -- Trent tries to remember what he was supposed to say...

And Lauren takes a PHOTOGRAPH off a stack, signs it, and passes it to him. He silently takes it, begins to walk away, but STOPS -

TRENT

Do you remember me?

Trent awkwardly returns to the booth -- she glances up at him, then turns to the next man in line -

TRENT (CONT'D)

I want to know. Because I remember you.

The others in line are getting impatient; she turns to him now, blank-faced -

TRENT (CONT'D)

You were the only person that ever wanted to know me. And I was alone. And I didn't know that I was alone until I met you. And you said... To come find you. So tell me that you remember me.

She looks up at him emotionless, removing all signs of pity, machinelike -

LAUREN

Trent -- people change.

EXT. PASADENA CITY COLLEGE - MAIN AUDITORIUM - DAY

Trent sits on the front steps of the auditorium as people stream past. He's a million miles away from all of them now, holding the small bouquet of flowers in his lap.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy sneezes. He grabs a tissue and blows his nose. Then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out his allergy prescription bottle and shakes it. It rattles with the sound of one pill. He opens it and as he does the one pill falls to the floor. He reaches down and picks it up. He wipes it off on his shirt and inspects it.

ANGLE ON PILL EXTREME CLOSE

There is a big "S" on it. Suddenly it all clicks.

MURPHY

Oh, my God.

Just then Shingo walks in. Murphy bolts up and slams Shingo against the wall.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

You idiot! What were you trying to do, kill me?

SHINGO

Easy, man easy!

MURPHY

What was I a guinea pig?

SHINGO

I don't know...

MURPHY

I've been taking these for my allergies, and looks like I've got a new prescription.

Murphy holds up the one pill left and shows the "S" to Shingo. He gets it now.

SHINGO

Oh, man there they are. I knew I had made an extra 10. Murph I was just using the bottle to keep them in...

MURPHY

So I've been on eeeeeee for this whole time. No wonder I've been seeing things...you idiot! I should kick your ass...

SHINGO

(interrupting)

Hey Murphy -- before you do could you give me a ride out to Burbank?

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Murphy opens the door to Shingo's CLOSET -- inside, we see Shingo holding up TWO HUGE BAGS OF RED PILLS. Murphy goes berserk -

MURPHY

We've gotta get rid of this stuff!

He lunges for the bags, but Shingo YANKS them away -

SHINGO

That's why we've got to go to Burbank.

MURPHY

What's in Burbank?

SHINGO

F-Dogg.

MURPHY

What's an F-Dogg?

SHINGO

He's the guy that's going to buy all this E off of me.

MURPHY

No way -- you're calling the deal off.

SHINGO

No, can't call the deal off. I promised to deliver three thousand hits of E for twenty-five thousand dollars -

This amount makes Murphy pause.

MURPHY

Twenty-five thousand dollars?

SHINGO

Yeah. And you do not break your promises to these people. And I want to pay you guys back. All we have to do is go to Burbank, meet F-Dogg, and that's it.

Murphy crosses his arms -

MURPHY

After this, you're out of the drug-making business for good?

Shingo makes the sign of a Scout's Honor.

SHINGO

I just laid myself off.

EXT. THE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shingo, happy as a puppy, carries a box with the two bags of pills out the front door. Murphy GRABS him by the collar -

MURPHY

Can we put the huge bags of drugs in the trunk, please?

SHINGO

No can do, they might spill all over.

They get in the car and take off.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - LATER

Akira opens the door. Akira frantically rummages through Shingo's closet and finally comes up with a PLASTIC BOTTLE. She opens it and shakes a DOZEN RED PILLS into her hand.

CUT TO: Akira laying the red pills in a row on her bathroom counter. She looks into the mirror one last time and SWALLOWS TWO of the pills.

INT. MURPHY'S CAR - NIGHT

Murphy nervously drives while Shingo sits in the passengers' seat, humming. He has a BOX full of drugs in his lap.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Ecstasy is already beginning to affect Akira -- she quickly paces as she chats up the phone -

AKIRA

(Into the phone)

Hello, Eddie? Guess what? I'm getting evicted -

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF AKIRA CALLING UP EVERY MAN SHE KNOWS -- ACE, DAN, RANDY, STEVE, DAVE, DEKE, MANY OTHERS -- LEAVING MESSAGES AND INVITATIONS

AKIRA (CONT'D)

Yeah, I'm having a get-together tonight at my place. It's a going away thing.

EXT. BURBANK - NIGHT

Cars ZOOM past on a barren street lit by sparse streetlights. Murphy stands with the cardboard BOX OF DRUGS at his feet while Shingo sighs with relief as he pees against a wall -

MURPHY

I'm standing on a corner next to twenty-five thousand dollars worth of Ecstasy.

(MORE)

MURPHY (CONT'D)

I'm getting evicted, I haven't found a place to live, and I can't come up with anything good to write.

Shingo shakes and zips up -

SHINGO

Well, what you just said sounds pretty darn entertaining.

Murphy shakes his head with a tiny smile -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

Write what you know man.

MURPHY

I don't know much.

SHINGO

Me either...nothing.

Murphy looks at Shingo like he's crazy -

SHINGO (CONT'D)

Nothing. Just static. Like the TV now. It's neat. It teaches you how to...become nothing.

MURPHY

You're trying to become nothing...

(Sighs)

What happened to you, Shingo? Back in school you used to study! You used to lecture me about being lazy -

SHINGO

Never belonged in college, Murphy. You know that. And Med School... That stuff's for people who know what they want. Me, I just want to start from scratch.

MURPHY

Why?

SHINGO

'Cause everybody's been trying to get me to become something for years. So I figure that if I start over from nothing, I can be whatever I want.

(Then)

Parents, school, work, TV, they all make you. But how much of yourself do you get to make?

Murphy pauses.

MURPHY

I don't know.

Just then, a BLACK CAR pulls up down the street. Four DARK FIGURES emerge from it and stare them down -

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Is that F-Dogg?

SHINGO

Yup. Okay, I'll see you later.

Shingo picks up the box of drugs and heads toward the car -

MURPHY

Where are you going?

SHINGO

I gotta give F-Dogg a sample of the product.

Murphy walks after him -

MURPHY

Then I'm coming with you -

SHINGO

This isn't going to be safe, Murphy.
You know what the "F" in F-Dogg stands
for? It stands for "I'm Gonna Fuckin'
Kill You". Go home -

MURPHY

No -

Shingo can't shake Murphy off his tail, and he's getting anxious -- F-Dogg's gonna spot him -- Shingo turns around and SCREAMS -

SHINGO

GO THE FUCK HOME!

Murphy is startled by Shingo's sudden change; he gives in, hands Shingo his CELL PHONE -

MURPHY

Call me when you're done, and I'll
come get you.

Shingo returns to his normal state -

SHINGO

Don't worry, Murph. I'll be back.

And he waves as he walks toward the black car, slowly disappearing in the darkness.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC blasts; Akira's "going away party" has the room CROWDED with MEN, all drinking, smoking, and demolishing the place. A TRIO of them (RAY, ACE, and NICK) are talking loudly in a huddle -

RAY

This is the worst sausage fest I've ever seen.

ACE

Seriously. Where's Akira?

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alone in her room, Akira has her back to the bedroom door -- the Ecstasy is driving her hard, and she slips to the ground, sweating and clenching her teeth; she hears their VOICES outside -

ACE (O.S.)

What's the deal? Is everybody here gonna fuck her?

NICK (O.S.)

I think everybody here already has.

Akira gropes along the wall, stumbling into her bathroom -

There are the RED PILLS, neat in a row.

She tries to focus on them; she needs to feel good again, to return to baseline. She picks up another RED PILL, SWALLOWS it, then looks in the mirror to see her reflection.

It wavers as she touches it, impenetrable behind the glass. Her mind is tearing apart at the sight of herself, at what she's become. She grinds her teeth as she presses her hands, her face, against the glass.

She begins to SWALLOWS the red pills, one by one.

INT. F-DOGG'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A small PLASTIC BAG is turned on its side -- spilled out of it onto a kitchen table are a bunch of RED PILLS.

There sits F-DOGG, a gaunt Asian gangster, impatiently sorting a hand of cards. His CREW sits around him, restless. One of the them (40 OUNCE -- who, at 5 feet tall, is about as tall as a 40 Ounce) speaks up -

40 OUNCE

Hey, Dogg -- you feel anything?

F-DOGG

Nope.

F-Dogg looks at his watch, then out into his LIVING ROOM:
Shingo's sitting on the couch watching static on his TV.

F-Dogg puts his cards down, and the crew rise to their feet.

INT. F-DOGG'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shingo is lost in the static; he doesn't notice F-Dogg and the crew come up behind him -- F-Dogg GRABS him -

F-DOGG

You tryin' to sell us some shit!!

And they HAUL Shingo backwards off the couch - F-Dogg rears back and punches Shingo in the face.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The drug has Akira sprawled out on her bed, BREATHING incredibly fast, her heart beating itself to death. She is mumbling something. A few men are on the bed with her grabbing her and removing her clothes. The door opens and Jake walks in holding a beer. He laughs to himself then starts to roughly grab the other men on the bed.

JAKE

C'mon, out of here, one at a time
and I'm getting her first.

Two of the men sit on the bed uncertain.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I said get the fuck out!!!

He throws the bottle at the wall. The two remaining men bolt out the door. Akira lays there in front of him half undressed and out of it. He smiles.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM DOOR- NIGHT

He puts the RED HANDKERCHIEF on the doorknob and shuts the door -

INT. F-DOGG'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

F-Dogg PUNCHES Shingo in the face -- he collapses on the ground, sputtering blood. F-Dogg's crew grab Shingo and hold him up so F-Dogg can get in another HIT -

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Akira's half-open eyes are fixed on the ceiling -- she's on the edge of consciousness, breathing out incoherent words. Jake climbs on top of her -

JAKE
What did you say?

AKIRA
Why did you...make me this way? Why
did you...hurt me...why...fuck...me

He puts his ear to her mouth, listens -

JAKE
You want to be fucked? I'll fuck
you.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The front door opens and Murphy comes in, shocked by all the men in the room; he winds his way through the crowd towards the girls' bedroom, BANGS on the door -

MURPHY
AKIRA!

Inside, Jake turns Akira onto her stomach and pulls her panties off -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy HAMMERS at the door, calling out Akira's name -- he puts his hand on the doorknob, pausing at the red handkerchief -- but FUCK THE HANDKERCHIEF -

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy BURSTS through the door. Light from the bathroom illuminates red pills spilled on the ground; he sees Jake on top of Akira pumping away and rushes over, trying to pull him off of her -

JAKE
Wait your fucking turn!

Jake throws Murphy aside -- he comes CRASHING to the floor. Murphy shakes it off and gets up -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy pushes through the crowd; he gets to the coffee table and grabs his TYPEWRITER -

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake is turning Akira over to get a new position going -

Just then, Murphy runs in with his typewriter and SMASHES Jake over the head with it; he falls off the bed, GROANING as he clutches his skull.

Murphy turns Akira over -- she's opens her eyes and looks at Murphy.

AKIRA

I forgive you..I forgive you..

Akira passes out. Murphy wraps her body in a sheet -

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy carries Akira's limp body out of the girls' bedroom -- a path clears for him as everyone around them stops to watch. Murphy heads for the front door.

MURPHY

All of you get the fuck out of here,
now.

And everything SLOWS DOWN as Murphy struggles to carry Akira. The MUSIC becomes an echo, and the door seems so far away...

CLOSE on Akira's face: Cold, pale, lifeless.

And lights flash across the crowd's faces as Murphy's screams fade to silence.

F-DOGG'S TELEVISION, FILLED WITH SILENT STATIC

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lit by stark, fluorescent lights, Murphy briskly walks toward us, concerned at what he's about to find -

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Murphy stands in the doorway looking in. He enters, slowly approaches the bed -

Lying there, perfectly still, is Akira. Her face is as pale as death, but her eyes slowly open -

AKIRA

(surprised)
I'm still here.

MURPHY
You're still here.

AKIRA
(A very faint smile)
And so are you.

He sits down beside her, gently strokes her hair. He's serious now, having seen how much she's suffered.

MURPHY
I didn't want to be another guy to
walk out on you.

She smiles slightly then begins to cry -

AKIRA
My dad's gone.

MURPHY
I know.

AKIRA
All I ever wanted was to love him.
I wanted to love him the most. I
wanted to hate him the most. And
now I can't go back and hurt him, I
can't go back and ask him why... he
fucked me. Because of all the men
that have ever fucked me, my dad...
Fucked me first.

MURPHY
(lightheartedly)
He really "number 2'd" you I guess.

AKIRA
(pause)
Number one.

Murphy finally understands, and holds Akira's hand tightly.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Murphy stands by an outdoor PAY PHONE lit by the emergency lights of an ambulance. He has the receiver to his ear -

INT. F-DOGG'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy's cell phone lies on the ground RINGING. There's no one around to answer it, and the voice mail picks up -

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

We're looking down on Trent as he lies in bed, motionless.

His computer screen is blank, and in the TRASH CAN is a mishmash of photos of Lauren Hayes.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BABY BLUE APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ellen stands in front of her mother's building, staring at the front door. She looks to the UPSTAIRS WINDOW -- it's empty.

She walks to the front door, reluctant to enter, but forces herself to go in.

INT. BABY BLUE APARTMENT BUILDING - BEDROOM - DAY

We follow her through the doorway. Her mother's bedroom is furnished like the living room, quaint and cheerful.

Ellen sees her MOTHER sleeping in her bed; she kneels alongside, sadly whispers -

ELLEN

Mom, I'm home.

Her mother doesn't stir -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I just want to tell you how I've been doing. I lost my job, I lost my home, and Brad... Everything's falling apart. And it's been happening for a long time now. I just never knew it. And I was working so hard to be an American that I forgot -

She pauses, ashamed -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

forgot that it was you that made me one in the first place.

She rests her head on the bed, touches her mother's hair -

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(Slowly, in tears)

So I want to know if you think that I'm successful. I want to know if I'm worth all the sacrifices that you made. And I want to know if I've lived up to you.

Ellen shuts her eyes and listens, hoping for a response.

And when she opens her eyes, we see that she's kneeling in an EMPTY ROOM, alone. We CUT AWAY through the apartment, to see that every room is EMPTY.

And we push forward through the window in the living room to see the LIGHT outside, filling our vision.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

BASKETBALL hits the rim, teeters for a moment, then goes in. Murphy grabs it and passes it to Drew -

DREW

So you haven't heard from Shingo?

Murphy shakes his head.

DREW (CONT'D)

I've got one more shot at the MCATs,
and he offered to help me study -

Drew takes a shot -- the ball goes in -

MURPHY

So you're going to give Med School
another chance?

DREW

(Smiles)

I can't be a waiter forever. And
neither can you.

MURPHY

I'm trying my best, man.

DREW

(Smiles)

Just write something good, Murph.
And make sure it doesn't come out of
a goddamned cookie.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - ELLEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

The walls of Ellen's cubicle are empty -- the pictures of the houses are gone, but the framed photograph of Brad remains. Ellen sadly gathers her things and puts them into a CARDBOARD BOX. She picks up the picture of Brad -- it feels heavy in her hands, and she places it face down on her desk.

Trent watches her from far away -- he hesitates, but approaches her -

TRENT

Hey.

She turns to him, gives him a weak smile.

ELLEN

Hi.

He notices her packed boxes -

TRENT

They moving you to another office?

ELLEN

No.

Ellen pauses, then finally lets it out:

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I haven't even been able to say it
to myself, but... I got laid off.

Trent is shocked -

TRENT

Why?

ELLEN

They hired too many Associate
Consultants. They've got to drop
the dead weight.

(Half-hearted smile)

It's like you said - we're on a track
whether we want it or not. But
sometimes the track doesn't want
you.

TRENT

I'm sorry, Ellen -- you'll be okay.
I know it.

(Then)

After the next few days, we aren't
going to see each other anymore.

ELLEN

No. I'm sure we'll run into each
other again sometime.

She's slipping away from him; He tries to think of something
to say.

TRENT

Where can I get a hold of you?

ELLEN

I don't know yet. But I'm sure you
be able to find me. Bye.

TRENT

Bye.

CUT TO:

ELLEN CARRIES A POTTED PLANT WALKING TOWARD US DOWN A LONG HALLWAY;

She arrives at a set of ELEVATOR DOORS, then turns to see Trent, tiny in the distance, watching her go. Trent, realizes that this has happened before, and it may be his last chance

He bolts down the long hallway, TRIPPING and TUMBLING to the ground -- but picks himself up and keeps on going. The elevator doors are opening and Ellen is getting in.

He jumps toward the elevator and sticks his arm in between the closing doors. Ellen is a little shocked by this as he now calmly walks into the elevator.

ELLEN

(Surprised)

Hey!

TRENT

I just wanted to...get your email address. Do you have a computer?

ELLEN

Yeah, sure.

TRENT

Oh, so. Good.

(Takes a deep breath)

Ellen...there is something I want to tell you.

Ellen gives him her full attention -

TRENT (CONT'D)

You're wrong.

ELLEN

I'm wrong?

TRENT

(With a sad smile)

I'm not okay being alone.

(Then)

I am invisible. And I don't want to be anymore.

ELLEN

Then you have to let people in. You have to let us know that you're there.

(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(Smiles)

I want to know.

He looks away from her, hesitates -

TRENT

I don't want to disappoint you.

ELLEN

Why would you disappoint me?

TRENT

Because I'm not that successful.

ELLEN

Neither am I.

INT. CONSULTING FIRM - HALLWAY - DAY

The elevator doors open and Ellen and Trent walk out together he grabs the potted plant and carries it for her. She takes his arm -- it's stiff at first, but it loosens.

INT. THE APARTMENT - GIRLS' BEDROOM - DAY

Akira sits in the closet with her back to her own clothes. She looks up at Ellen's side -- all of Ellen's things are gone.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Murphy sits alone on the couch. He notices a STRING hanging from the wall -- curious, he yanks it -

To his surprise, Shingos' RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINE begins cranking away in the kitchen. And the plastic pelican faithfully files in and drops a bag of DORITOS on Murphy's head -- it bounces into his lap.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Murphy is on the phone, waiting through the rings -

CUT TO: Murphy's cell phone RINGING as it sits in a PILE OF CELL PHONES on a table.

BACK TO: Murphy as he hangs up, worried. He reaches in his pocket and finds the last "S" pill. He shrugs his shoulders and swallows it.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

Single FORTUNE COOKIE sits on Murphy's desk. Murphy sits down in front of it -- he cracks it open -

The fortune reads: "I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU."

He turns around -- there's The Wang, seething -

JOHNNY WANG
You haven't been writing.

The Wang PUNCHES Murphy out of his chair -- he hits the ground so hard his SHOE falls off. The Wang picks Murphy up again and THROWS him against a desk -- he gasps, clutching his back -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)
You're gonna finish my script -

MURPHY
Or else what?

The Wang SEIZES Murphy, pulling him to his feet -

JOHNNY WANG
Don't think. Feel!

The Wang KICKS Murphy across the room -- he CRASHES against the wall. Murphy sits up with a FOOTPRINT on his chest -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)
I made you what you are today, my Brotha. You wanted Akira and you got her. And you were THIS close to being The Man -

MURPHY
I wanted to be like you. But not anymore. I'm gonna be real.

JOHNNY WANG
Back to the way the world sees you?
As a videogame-playing, mathematics-
aceing, buck-toothed, slanty-eyed,
oriental?

MURPHY
No. I'm gonna be me.

Murphy rises to his feet and puts up his dukes -

MURPHY (CONT'D)
Bring it on, you two-dimensional
bastard!

FIGHT SCENE -- Murphy comes out swinging -- The Wang BLOCKS, KICKS, Murphy dodges, PUNCHES back -- The Wang gets hit, stands surprised... Then comes back like a hurricane. He PUNCHES Murphy, who SLAMS against the railing of the balcony, almost falling onto the floor below -Murphy touches his lip.

He tastes his own BLOOD, then throws himself back into the fight with a vengeance; he manages to PUNCH The Wang twice, which astonishes him.

But The Wang returns with a precise roundhouse KICK -- Murphy SMASHES against a stack of crates.

The Wang picks Murphy up by the THROAT -- he struggles, grasping at The Wang's jacket. The Wang SLAMS Murphy's head against the railing, and he falls to the ground, limp -

JOHNNY WANG

You gotta fight stereotypes with action -- you've gotta be something they can't ignore. Now -- are you gonna WRITE, or do I have to get unpleasant?

Murphy groans, struggles onto his back -

MURPHY

Why don't you just shoot me?

JOHNNY WANG

just might -

The Wang reaches for his GUN but finds that it's not there -- he looks up to see that Murphy has his own gun AIMED at him -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Smooth move, Writer -- you stole my gun.

The gun trembles in Murphy's hand as The Wang slowly approaches, hands up -

JOHNNY WANG (CONT'D)

Don't forget -- you made me -

MURPHY

And I can unmake you too, you plastic sucka!

The Wang ROARS and CHARGES -- but Murphy FIRES -- one, two, three times. The Wang looks down at the holes in his body.

JOHNNY WANG

I just... Wanted to be a real boy.

And he COLLAPSES against a STACK OF CARDBOARD BOXES -- they BURST open, sending fortunes fluttering down like rain.

Murphy picks one out of the air, reads it to The Wang's body:

MURPHY

"Life is short -- so eat out more often" -- you cack!

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - DAY

Ellen drives down a tree-lined street -- she looks up through the car window to see blinding SUNLIGHT pushing through the branches above.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Ellen kneels before a HEADSTONE, upon which is engraved her mother's name in Chinese and in English.

AKIRA (O.S.)

She'd be proud of you.

Ellen turns to see Akira leaning against a tree nearby.

AKIRA (CONT'D)

Trent said you were gonna be here.

ELLEN

I'm not so proud of myself.

short pause -

AKIRA

Did you know that I was always jealous of you? The only thing you and I had in common was that we were friends.

ELLEN

We have more in common than that.

AKIRA

No. My father made me. And your mother made you. And look at how different we are.

ELLEN

Well, they're gone. And now it's just you and me. Let's see what we can do.

Akira smiles and looks out across the grass -- the world is silent now, peaceful. She feels Ellen's hand on her shoulder, and puts her arm around her.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's MOVING DAY. We drift through the apartment to see that everything has been packed into stacks of CARDBOARD BOXES; all that's left is the TV and the couch.

INT. THE APARTMENT - BOYS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Murphy packs his typewriter into a box; he looks up to see SHINGO'S CLOSET -- all of his things are still there, and Murphy wonders where he could possibly be.

Moments later, Murphy's on the phone, waiting through the rings -- just as his voice mail is about to pick up, someone answers -

SHINGO (V.O.)
Hello?

MURPHY
Shingo! Where the hell are you?

SHINGO (V.O.)
Behind you.

Murphy whips around to see Shingo standing there with the cell phone to his ear and a BAND-AID on his nose -

SHINGO (CONT'D)
(Into the phone)
What's up?

Murphy SLAMS the phone down, thankful to see him -

MURPHY
Where the hell have you been?

INT. F-DOGG'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

F-Dogg and his crew are KICKING THE CRAP out of Shingo at the end of the hallway -

SHINGO (V.O.)
The negotiations with F-Dogg took a little longer than expected.

Suddenly, F-Dogg starts LAUGHING -

F-DOGG
You know what, fellas? I really enjoy our choice of lifestyle!

40 OUNCE
Yeah! Kicking the shit out of this guy really makes me happy!

The drug is beginning to affect them; their kicks get softer until they're just barely tapping Shingo -- he looks up with a bloody nose -

F-DOGG

(Empathetic)

Dang, man -- I think we hurt him.

They pick Shingo up and brush him off... And then start to MASSAGE him.

SHINGO (V.O.)

They liked the pills so much, they took me to Vegas.

EXT. VEGAS - FLASHBACK

Shingo, F-Dogg, and the crew are driving down The Strip, hooting and hollering.

SHINGO (V.O.)

Too bad they didn't know they were caffeine pills.

MURPHY (V.O.)

Caffeine pills?

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Shingo sorts pills into two PLASTIC BOTTLES -

SHINGO (V.O.)

Yeah. Making E is, like, hard. I could only make enough to give F-Dogg and his friends a taste test. Meanwhile, I cooked up a few thousand caffeine pills and sold 'em to them.

Shingo turns the bottles around and we see that they're labeled "REAL" and "NOT REAL".

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shingo grins -

SHINGO

I didn't think they'd buy them, but then again, they weren't Molecular Biology majors.

MURPHY

Um, isn't F-Dogg going to find you and Fuckin' kill you?

SHINGO

No, because he thinks that I live in Burbank and that my name's...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

40 OUNCE

...JAKE!!!

Someone's BANGING on the front door. Jake opens it to find 40 Ounce standing there with a baseball bat. He HITS Jake in the shin -

JAKE

Ow! You little shit!

Jake CHASES 40 Ounce into the hallway, then senses someone behind him; he turns to see F-Dogg and his crew, all holding baseball hats and wearing big shit eatin' grins -

JAKE (CONT'D)

Aw, fuck.

And F-Dogg smiles even wider at the sound of his name.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shingo hands a few STAPLED PAGES to Murphy -

SHINGO

Our new lease. I gave the Landlord our rent for the year, in cash. SO, if you guys need a place to crash, I got a nice little apartment here.

MURPHY

Oh. Well, I'd love to hang out with you some more, but I've gotta move on. I'm sorry, Shingo.

Shingo flops onto the couch, disappointed.

SHINGO

Oh. Wow.

MURPHY

Hey -- I'm gonna go have a drink with a friend. Why don't you come with us?

Shingo picks up the REMOTE, turns on the TV -- STATIC flashes on its screen.

SHINGO

Naw. I'm gonna relax a bit, watch some TV.

As he leaves, Murphy looks back at Shingo -

MURPHY

Then I hope that you make something
of yourself.

Shingo absentmindedly stares at the TV -

SHINGO

Me too.

ANGLE ON STATIC TV. MOVE IN AS IT STARTS TO FADE AND FLICKER

MURPHY (V.O.)

I can see your future. And this is
your fortune:

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

COFFIN LOWERS INTO THE GROUND. AKIRA, MURPHY, AND ELLEN
WATCH IT DESCEND. WE PULL AWAY TO SEE A SMALL FUNERAL
GATHERED IN THE STARK DAYLIGHT -

Akira whispers words to the coffin as it disappears into the
ground; she throws the TORN PIECES of her father's photograph
onto it, and they come to rest upon flowers laid across its
shell.

And the pieces bearing his EYES disappear in the darkness.

MURPHY (V.O.)

You will find someone to love.

INT. THE NAKAMA HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

We see Akira's reflection in a mirror. She has her sketchbook
in her lap. Her mother comes in and sits next to her. Akira
hugs her deeply. She looks at the mirror as she draws what
she sees. And in their reflection is a growing seed of hope.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE on an ENVELOPE on Brad's desk. Brad enters gabbing
business on the cell phone. He sits behind his desk and
sees the envelope. He slices it open, shakes its contents
into his hand: Ellen's gold RING.

He holds it up to the light.

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - DAY

Ellen sits in the passenger's seat, watching the world drift
by like she did as a child. She turns to look at the DRIVER --
it's Akira.

MURPHY (V.O.)

You will find a new home.

EXT. NEW APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ellen takes a BOX out of the trunk of her car and passes it to Akira -- they're laughing about old times as they move into a new apartment building.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Ellen reads to children clustered on the floor around her. She has given up consulting for teaching. The recess bell rings and all the kids rush toward the door. Trent stands at the doorway with a small picnic basket as the kids work their way around him. Ellen smiles.

ANGLE ON ELLEN WALKING TO TRENT AND KISSING HIM. MOVE TO REVEAL MOTHER'S PHOTOGRAPH ON HER DESK.

MURPHY (V.O.)

You will find what you are looking
for.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

Murphy is typing away on the battered old fortune cookie computer -

MURPHY (V.O.)

And I'm still trapped in a Chinese
fortune cookie factory. But before
I go, I'm gonna take the opportunity
to publish myself.

INT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

On the bakery floor below, machines are printing and stuffing thousands of fortune cookies.

Murphy's Boss wipes his mouth after just finishing his meal. On the table sits a small dish with one fortune cookie neatly placed on it. He picks up the fortune cookie and cracks it open. It reads: "I QUIT." He looks at it with dismay as a WAITER behind him slips, and a tray of food comes CRASHING to the ground.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Hong Park walks in, hangs up his coat, and approaches a single FORTUNE COOKIE waiting for him on his desk. He picks it up with a puzzled look. Underneath it is a bound stack of pages. The top page reads: "FORTUNATE, A SHORT STORY BY MURPHY PARK."

EXT. HAPPY FAMILY CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Murphy shoves open a door and emerges into daylight. He chucks his apron aside as he walks away a free man -- the

sun lights his face as he looks out across the street to see Akira waiting for him. Cars ZOOM past between them.

She begins walking, and Murphy follows her on his side of the street.

Suddenly, she smiles at him and takes off RUNNING. He runs after her with a grin on his face -- the crosswalk is just up ahead, and he's closing the gap.

And we're flying down the street as Murphy runs towards us.

DISSOLVE TO:

STATIC ON TV FULL SCREEN

MURPHY (V.O.)
I can see your future.

INT. THE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shingo sits alone in the darkness hypnotized by TELEVISION STATIC. He digs in his pocket -

There's one last RED PILL in Shingo's hand. He puts it in his mouth.

But a second later, he SPITS it out.

He looks ahead at the TV, and his expression begins to change. The blankness that was there fades away, and it's as if he's suddenly awakened from deep sleep.

He turns and looks at the front door, then turns back to the TV.

MURPHY (V.O.)
And you will find a way to escape.

MURPHY points the remote at the TV and clicks it .

FULL SCREEN STATIC FLASH FRAMES TO JOHNNY WANG WINKING AND THEN -

CUTS TO BLACK: