

JOKER
an origin

written by
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FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT

This story takes place in its own universe. It has no connection to any of the DC films that have come before it.

We see it as a classic Warner Bros. movie. Gritty, intimate and oddly funny, the characters live in the real world and the stakes are personal.

Although it is never mentioned in the film, this story takes place in the past.

Let's call it 1981.

It's a troubled time. The crime rate in Gotham is at record highs. A garbage strike has crippled the city for the past six weeks. And the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is palpable. Dreams are beyond reach, slipping into delusions.

TP/SS

OVER BLACK:

HEAR LAUGHTER.

The sound of a man totally cracking up.

FADE IN:

INT. DEPT. OF HEALTH, OFFICE - MORNING

CLOSE ON ARTHUR (30's), tears in his eyes from laughing so hard. He's trying to get it under control. His greasy, black hair hanging down over his forehead. He's wearing an old, faded green cardigan sweater, a threadbare gray scarf, thin from years of use, hangs loosely around his neck.

He's sitting across from an overworked SOCIAL WORKER (50's), African American. Her office is cramped and run-down in a cramped and run-down building. Stacks of folders piled high in front of her.

She just sits behind her desk, waiting for his laughing fit to end, she's been through this before. Finally it subsides.

Arthur takes a deep breath, pauses to see if it's over.

Beat.

ARTHUR

--is it just me, or is it getting
crazier out there?

Despite the laughter, there's real pain in his eyes. Something broken in him. Looks like he hasn't slept in days.

SOCIAL WORKER

It's certainly tense. People are upset, they're struggling. Looking for work. The garbage strike seems like it's been going on forever. These are tough times.

(then)

How 'bout you. Have you been keeping up with your journal?

ARTHUR

Everyday.

SOCIAL WORKER

Great. Did you bring it with you?

Beat.

ARTHUR
 (dodging the subject)
 I'm sorry. Did I bring what?

SOCIAL WORKER
 (impatient; she doesn't
 have time for this)
 Arthur, last time I asked you to
 bring your journal with you. For
 these appointments. Do you have it?

ARTHUR
 Yes ma'am.

Beat.

SOCIAL WORKER
 Can I see it?

He reluctantly reaches into the pocket of his jacket hanging
 on the chair behind him. Pulls out a weathered notebook.
 Slides it across to her--

ARTHUR
 I've been using it as a journal,
 but also a joke diary. Funny
 thoughts or, or observations-- Did
 I tell you I'm pursuing a career in
 stand-up comedy?

She's half-listening as she flips through his journal.

SOCIAL WORKER
 No. You didn't.

ARTHUR
 I think I did.

She doesn't respond, keeps flipping through his journal--

PAGES AND PAGES OF NOTES, neat, angry-looking handwriting.
 Also, cut out photos from hardcore pornographic magazines and
 some crude handmade drawings.

A flash of anger crosses Arthur's face--

ARTHUR
 I didn't realize you wanted to read
 it.

The social worker gives him a look, then reads something in
 the pages that gives her pause--

SOCIAL WORKER
(reading out loud)
"I just hope my death makes more
cents than my life."

She looks up at Arthur. He just stares back. Lets it hang out there for a beat.

Then he laughs a little, even though he doesn't think it's funny--

ARTHUR
Yeah. I mean, that's just--

SOCIAL WORKER
Does my reading it upset you?

He leans in.

ARTHUR
No. I just,-- some of it's
personal. You know?

SOCIAL WORKER
I understand. I just want to make
sure you're keeping up with it.

She slides his journal back to him. He holds it in his lap.

SOCIAL WORKER
How does it feel to have to come
here? Does it help having someone
to talk to?

ARTHUR
I think I felt better when I was
locked up, in the hospital.

SOCIAL WORKER
And have you thought more about why
you were "locked up?"

ARTHUR
Well I suppose I was mentally ill.

SOCIAL WORKER
How's that?

ARTHUR
Well my mother thought I was
mentally ill, so she had me
committed.

SOCIAL WORKER
Did you *feel* mentally ill?

ARTHUR
They've been saying that since I was little. So who knows.

Long pause.

ARTHUR
I was wondering if you could ask the doctor to increase my medication.

The social worker ruffles through some papers--

SOCIAL WORKER
Arthur, you're on seven different medications. Surely they must be doing something.

Beat.

ARTHUR
I just don't want to feel so bad anymore.

And we HEAR "TEMPTATION RAG" playing on a broken down piano--

EXT. GOTHAM SQUARE, MIDTOWN - AFTERNOON - DAYS LATER

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, NOW DRESSED UP AS A CLOWN, painted white face... Wide red smile outlined in black around his mouth... Bulbous red nose... Bald cap with two patches of frizzy green hair sticking out over the ears, little bowler hat... Too-tight buttoned jacket... Baggy pants and oversized colored shoes. This is his job.

PULLING OUT, we see he's holding a sign in front of Kenny's Music Shop that reads, "EVERYTHING MUST GO!" A banner above the store reads, "GOING OUT OF BUSINESS!" Behind him, an OLD MAN plays an old piano on the busy street, garbage bags piled everywhere.

Arthur's doing a little Charlie Chaplin like performance to the music, twirling the sign, bringing attention to the sale. He's pretty good, feeling the music in his bones, light on his feet. Still most people walk right past, ignoring him.

ARTHUR SEES A GROUP OF BOYS pointing at him from down the street, laughing at him... One of the boys throws an empty Coke can at Arthur as they get close... Arthur holds up the sign like a shield, Coke can bouncing off it--

The boys walk up on Arthur... He tries ignoring them, keeps dancing to the old ragtime, holding up the sign as they surround him... One of the kids knocks the sign out of Arthur's hands--

The other kids crack up. Arthur bends over to pick up his sign and... Kicks it... Attempts to pick it up again and... Kicks it again... It's a bit.

Arthur bends over a third time to pick up the sign and...

One of the boys kicks him right in the ass--

Arthur falls face first onto the sidewalk. Oddly, the old man playing the piano picks up the pace of the music--

The kids crack up. One of the boys grabs Arthur's sign and takes off running across the street--

The other kids follow, weaving through traffic--

Arthur gets up and gives chase. He needs his sign back.

He almost gets hit by a taxi, spinning out of the way just in time-- Spinning right into another taxi that stops just short of hitting him.

Arthur keeps running through traffic. People stare. A clown barreling down the street has got to be a joke--

EXT. CORNER, ALLEY - GOTHAM SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The five boys are booking it down the busy street laughing and whooping it up. At the last second they take a sharp right turn down an alley--

Arthur almost overshoots the corner, slip-sliding in his oversized shoes--

He rights himself and heads down after them--

Sees them running up ahead--

WHAP! Out of nowhere Arthur gets hit in the face!

He falls to the ground.

One of the kids was hiding behind a dumpster and hit Arthur with the "EVERYTHING MUST GO!" sign, splintering it in two--

The other kids turn back and walk up to Arthur down on the ground.

Arthur reaches out, still trying to save the sign--

THE KIDS START KICKING AND BEATING THE SHIT out of Arthur. It's brutal and vicious. Nobody on the street stops to help.

CLOSE ON ARTHUR'S CLOWN FACE, down on the ground. Sweat running down his face, smearing his make-up. Doesn't even look like he's in pain. He just takes the beating. Arthur's good at taking a beating.

That stupid smile painted on his face.

TITLE:

JOKER

INT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - HEADING UPTOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

Arthur sitting in the back of a crowded bus, looking out the window at the city passing him by... his make-up's washed off, still see some white grease-paint smudged on the sides of his face.

He feels somebody staring, turns to see a sad-eyed THREE-YEAR-OLD BOY, face puffy from crying, sitting on his knees looking back at him. His mother's facing forward, but even from behind you can tell she's angry.

Arthur doesn't know where to look, feeling self-conscious and small. He gets back into "character" smiling like a clown and covers his face with his hands-- Starts playing the peek-a-boo game with him.

The boy stares back at him for a moment then giggles--

WOMAN ON BUS
(turns back to Arthur;
already annoyed)
Can you please stop bothering my
kid?

ARTHUR
I wasn't bothering him, I was--

WOMAN ON BUS
(interrupts)
Just stop.

AND SUDDENLY ARTHUR STARTS TO LAUGH. LOUD. He covers his mouth trying to hide it-- Shakes his head, laughter pausing for a moment, but then it comes on stronger. His eyes are sad. It actually looks like the laughter causes him pain.

People on the bus are staring. The little boy looks like he's going to cry again.

WOMAN ON BUS

You think that's funny?

Arthur shakes his head no, but he can't stop laughing. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a small card. Hands it to the woman.

CLOSE ON THE CARD, it reads: "Forgive my laughter. I have a condition (more on back)"

She turns the card over and there is a bunch of information in small writing--

"It's a medical condition causing sudden, frequent, uncontrollable laughter that doesn't match how you feel. It can happen in people with a brain injury or certain neurological conditions."

She doesn't read it (but if you freeze frame the movie you could). She just shakes her head annoyed and throws the card on the ground.

Arthur laughs harder. Tears running down his face.

Not wanting to attract any more attention to himself, he covers his mouth with his threadbare scarf, trying to muffle the laughter--

EXT. THE BRONX, STREET - SUNSET

The bus pulls away, sun almost gone.

Arthur heads slowly limping down the litter-covered streets. Garbage is piled along the sidewalks, the air thick with smog creates a haze over everything.

The streets are crowded with the poor, the elderly and disenfranchised. Women with children in busted strollers. Homeless people sleeping on subway grates. Stray dogs. His is one of the few white faces.

Arthur makes his way into a run-down drug store, behind him two drunks fight on the corner, beating the shit out of each other. Arthur, and nobody else for that matter, pays them any attention.

No one here gives a shit.

EXT. SIDE ALLEY, TENEMENTS - EARLY DUSK

Arthur cuts through a garbage filled alley behind decaying apartment buildings. Holding a small white (prescription) bag in his hand. Tenants overhead leaning out their windows, smoking out their windows, laughing, arguing over loud music.

A BUNCH OF YOUNG KIDS HANGING OUT ON A FIRE-ESCAPE, yell down at Arthur giving him shit in Spanish.

EXT. STEEP STAIRWAY, TENEMENTS - DUSK

Arthur turns from the street, looking up at a long, steep concrete stairway that seems to go up forever, cutting between two tenement buildings, graffiti tags sprayed all over the brick walls. He starts the long climb up, step-after-step-after-step-after-step...

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, LOBBY - DUSK

A shabby lobby in a building that was once probably pretty nice, but now it's a dump.

Arthur checks his mailbox. He's still holding the small white bag in his hand.

The mailbox is empty.

INT. ELEVATOR, APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Arthur steps onto the small, graffiti covered elevator, flickering fluorescent lights.

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, FRONT DOOR - EVENING

Old apartment, worn carpet. Nothing's new inside but it's fairly neat and well-kept.

PENNY (OS)
 (shattering the moment)
 Happy?! Did you check the mail
 before you came up?

ARTHUR
 Yes, Ma. Nothing. No letter.

His mother, PENNY FLECK (60's), comes in all made up. She walks over and gives him a kiss on the cheek. He covers the pain from his beating the best he can-- His mother doesn't seem to notice anyway.

PENNY

You sure you looked? Sometimes I don't know where your head is.

ARTHUR

Yes I'm sure. And my head's right here. Go lie down, I'm gonna make you some dinner, okay?

QUICK CUTS:

ARTHUR TEARS OPEN THE PRESCRIPTION BAG... A FLURRY OF PILL BOTTLES TUMBLE OUT ONTO THE COUNTER.

SEE HIS NAME, "ARTHUR FLECK" ON THE ORANGE PILL BOTTLES, TEMAZEPAM... PERPHENAZINE... AHENELZINE... AMITRIPTYLINE... BENZEDRINE... DIAZEPAM... MEPROBAMATE...

TAKES OUT ONE PILL FROM EACH THE TEMAZEPAM AND MEPROBAMATE BOTTLES.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arthur sets the food down in front of his mother lying in bed. The TV's on, playing the local news.

PENNY

He must not be getting my letters.

Arthur sits down on a small chair in front of an old vanity, table covered with his mother's make-up.

ARTHUR

It's Thomas Wayne, Mom. He's a busy man.

PENNY

Please. I worked for that family for years. He always had a smile for me. Least he could do is write back.

ARTHUR

Ma, eat. You need to eat.

PENNY

You need to eat. Look how skinny you are.

Before Arthur can say anything, his mother points to the news on the TV--

PENNY

All day long it's more bad news.
That's all there is.

ARTHUR

Maybe you shouldn't watch so much
television.

PENNY

Thomas Wayne is our only hope.
He'll make a great mayor. Everybody
says so.

ARTHUR

(playful)

Everybody who? Who do you talk to?

PENNY

Well everybody on the news.
(beat)
He's the only one who can save this
city. He owes it to us.

Arthur smiles for his mother as he cuts up some more of her
food.

PENNY

(she pats the bed)

Come sit. It's starting.

Arthur gets into bed with her, their nightly ritual. Stay on
his face as he watches the opening to their favorite show--

BARRY O'DONNELL (OS ON TV)

*From NCB Studios in Gotham City,
it's "Live with Murray Franklin!"
Tonight, Murray welcomes, Sandra
Winger, comedian Skip Byron and the
piano stylings of Yeldon & Chantel!*

ANGLE ON TELEVISION, intro to "LIVE WITH MURRAY FRANKLIN!"
playing--

BARRY O'DONNELL (ON TV)

*Joining Murray as always, Ellis
Drane and his Jazz Orchestra. And
me, I'm "that guy" Barry O'Donnell.
And now, without further ado--
Murraaaaay Franklin!*

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

SPOTLIGHT ON SHIMMERING MULTICOLORED CURTAINS PARTING, AND OUT DANCES MURRAY FRANKLIN (late 60's) doing an old soft shoe to the jazzy tune Ellis Drane is playing him out to. Audience cheering and applauding loudly for him. Murray takes a little bow, and does one or two more steps to the music...

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, clapping in the middle of the crowd. He's dressed "richer" (it's Arthur's fantasy version of himself). Everybody around him is enthusiastically applauding Murray.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (looking into the crowd)
 Thank you. Glad you're here. We've
 got a great looking audience
 tonight.

Murray motions for everybody to quiet down, nodding his head in appreciation of their applause--

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 Wow. Thank you.

He glances up at Arthur, who is clapping wildly, squints his eyes a bit to make him out---

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 Thank you.
 (beat; smiling)
 Who's that there? Hey Bobby, can
 you raise the lights for me?

The house lights come up. Murray takes a few steps downstage and points straight up at Arthur--

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 You there, will you stand up?
 What's your name?

Arthur looks around at the people around him, and realizes Murray's talking to him. Murray picked him out of the crowd--

Arthur gets up to his feet. He talks more here, and with more confidence, looks more at ease than we've seen him.

ARTHUR
 Hi Murray. Arthur. My name is
 Arthur.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 There's something special about you
 Arthur, I can tell. Where you from?

ARTHUR

I live right here in the city. With my mother.

The audience starts to giggle and laugh at him.

Murray holds up his hand, stopping them from laughing, coming to Arthur's defense--

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Hold on. There's nothing funny about that. I lived with my mother before I made it. It was just me and her. I'm that kid whose father went out for a pack of cigarettes and never came back.

Audience "awwwws" for Murray, we can hear how much empathy they have for him.

Arthur looks around at the crowd surrounding him.

ARTHUR

I know what that's like, Murray. I've been the man of the house for as long as I can remember. I take good care of my mother.

The audience starts to applaud Arthur.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

All that sacrifice. She must love you very much.

ARTHUR

She does. She always tells me to smile and put on a happy face. She says that I was put here to spread joy and laughter.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

What? Hold on. Can you say that again?

ARTHUR

(beaming with pride)
My mother told me I had a purpose, to bring laughter and joy to the world.

Murray Franklin nods in approval, and claps his hands loudly along with the rest of his audience, cheering for Arthur--

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Wow. I like that. I like that a lot.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arthur looks over at his mother lying next to him, her eyes glued to the TV, hears the studio audience applauding, blue light flickering over her face--

CUT TO:

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, listening to the audience applauding him, their applause getting louder and louder. He makes himself smile as wide as he can to show them he's happy.

Sees Murray Franklin waving for him to come down out of the crowd... First Arthur shakes his head no thanks... Sees BARRY O'DONNELL (60's), Murray's announcer, also waving him down... And Arthur finally relents and makes his way to the stage... joining Murray under the lights.

MURRAY TAKES ARTHUR'S HAND, RAISES IT ABOVE THEIR HEADS AND LEADS HIM IN TAKING A DEEP BOW... The audience goes crazy. Murray leans in and whispers something to Arthur, who laughs.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(turns, looks into TV camera)

Okay, we got a big show tonight, stay tuned. We'll be right back.

Ellis Drane and his Jazz Orchestra plays them to the commercial break... house lights go back down... cameras start moving to their next position... Murray puts an arm around Arthur, a private moment between them.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

That was great, Arthur, thanks. I loved hearing what you had to say. Made my day.

ARTHUR

Thanks, Murray. You know I grew up without a dad too. He left right after I was born. I don't know what I ever did to him,--

Murray pulls Arthur in closer, lowers his voice--

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Fuck him. Guy like that doesn't deserve you, Arthur. You see all this, the lights, the show, the, the love of the audience, I'd give it all up in a heartbeat to have a son like you.

Arthur looks at Murray Franklin, tears in his eyes and Murray looks back at him and gives him a hug.

CUT TO:

INT. HA-HA'S TALENT BOOKING, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The cramped locker room of a small talent booking agency. This is where Arthur works. They "rent out" talent for parties and events. Clowns, magicians, male strippers.

Arthur takes off his shirt in front of his open locker, grimacing in pain as he moves. His body's bruised from the beating he took chasing after his sign.

RANDALL (OS)

You okay?

He turns. A fellow party clown, RANDALL (mid 50's), big bear of a know-it-all, is opening his own locker putting his dry-cleaned clown suit inside.

RANDALL

I heard about the beat down you took. Fucking savages.

ARTHUR

It was just a bunch of kids. I should have left it alone.

Randall searches through his messy locker, going through all the bags inside--

RANDALL

No, they'll take everything from you if you do that, all the crazy shit out there, they're animals,--

ARTHUR

(nods)

My mother says that people nowadays lack empathy.

RANDALL
What's empathy?

ARTHUR
It means like "feeling for other people."

RANDALL
Like sympathy?

ARTHUR
Kind of. But different.

Randall comes over, hands Arthur a brown paper bag-- Arthur looks inside, sees a GUN, a .38 SNUB-NOSED REVOLVER.

Arthur looks back up at Randall, confused--

RANDALL
Take it. You gotta protect yourself out there. Or you're gonna get fucked.

As Arthur stares at the gun--

ARTHUR
(whispering)
Randall, I'm not supposed to have a gun.

RANDALL
Don't sweat it, Art. No one has to know. And you can pay me back some other time. You know you're my boy.

That lands with Arthur, he smiles to himself. Stuffs the brown paper bag into his locker and continues getting dressed.

Randall leans over and nudges Arthur, motioning to another clown, GARY (30's), a dwarf, coming into the locker room from their boss's office--

GARY
Arthur,-- Hoyt wants to see you in his office.

Before Arthur can ask why, Randall interrupts him--

RANDALL
Hey Gary, you know what I've always wondered?

GARY
 (he knows what's coming)
 What?

RANDALL
 Do you people call it miniature
 golf or is it just golf to you?

Randall cracks up at his own dumb joke-- Gary just stares at him, this is apparently their thing. Arthur's not sure if he should laugh or not--

INT. FRONT OFFICE, HA-HA'S TALENT BOOKING - DAY

Arthur still half-dressed, walks into the cramped office.

His boss, HOYT VAUGHN (60's) sits behind a metal desk. The office is a complete mess, newspapers and files litter the desk. A giant ashtray filled with cigarette butts. A calendar of booking hangs on the wall. A scribbled, jumbled mess.

ARTHUR
 Hey Hoyt. Gary said you wanted to
 see me?

HOYT
 (without even looking up)
 How's the comedy career? Are you a
 famous stand-up yet?

ARTHUR
 Not quite. Haven't even performed
 yet. Just been working my material.
 This business is all about fine-
 tuning.

Now Hoyt looks up. Takes a drag from his cigarette.

HOYT
 Right.

Arthur goes to sit down--

HOYT
 Don't sit. This will be quick.

Arthur stops in his tracks.

HOYT
 Look, I like you, Arthur. A lot of
 the guys here, they think you're a
 freak. But I like you. I don't even
 know why I like you.
 (MORE)

HOYT (CONT'D)

I mean, you don't say much.

(beat)

It's probably that stupid laugh. It gets me every time. Kills me.

Unsure how to respond, Arthur just nods.

HOYT

But I got another complaint. And it's starting to piss me off.

Arthur takes a deep breath, and just smiles.

HOYT

Kenny's Music. The guy said you disappeared. Never even returned his sign.

ARTHUR

No. I got jumped. Didn't you hear?

HOYT

For a sign? Bullshit. It makes no sense, just give him his sign back. He's going out of business for god's--

ARTHUR

(interrupting)

Why would I keep his sign?

HOYT

(snaps)

How the fuck do I know, why does anybody do anything? Listen, if you don't return the sign I gotta take it outta your paycheck, you clear?

ARTHUR JUST LOOKS BACK AT HOYT AND KEEPS SMILING, like it hurts his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ALLEY, OUTSIDE HA-HA'S - DAY

WE'RE AT THE FAR END OF AN ALLEY, about halfway down, catch a glimpse of Arthur still half-dressed on the other side of a dumpster. From this vantage, all we can see is him furiously KICKING and STOMPING on something... or somebody.

We don't hear anything. And we can't make out what it is that he's so violently beating down.

It could be a cat... a cardboard box... a homeless person...
We don't know.

Arthur just continues unleashing his rage--

INT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - HEADING UPTOWN - LATE DAY

Arthur at the end of his work day, sitting in his spot toward the back of the bus.

Across the aisle from him, he's innocently watching a young couple, playfully teasing each other.

EXT. STREETS, THE BRONX - SUNSET

Arthur heading back home down the litter-covered streets like he does every night. Garbage still piled along the sidewalks, some burning in trash cans, air still thick with smog.

He's carrying the paper bag that Randall gave him.

EXT. SIDE ALLEY, TENEMENTS - EARLY DUSK

Arthur cuts through the alley, a couple of the young kids are smoking on the fire-escape.

EXT. STEEP STAIRWAY, TENEMENTS - DUSK

Arthur trudging up the endless staircase, step-after-step-after-step-after--

INT. LOBBY, APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK

Arthur checks his mailbox. Empty.

INT. ELEVATOR, APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK

Arthur is on the elevator, as the door closes, he hears--

SOPHIE (OS)

Wait!!

He puts his foot out with some panache to stop the closing door-- He's a romantic at heart. *Ding.*

And SOPHIE (late 20's), African-American, looking harried, tired eyes, steps onto the elevator with her 5-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER who's holding onto a doll, talking to her mother about what she wants for her birthday.

Arthur moves to the back of the elevator--

Sophie nods thanks. The doors wheeze shut, pausing for a moment before they close--

Arthur holds his breath, hoping he doesn't start to laugh. Elevator rises, halting at first. Floors dinging.

Suddenly the elevator shudders hard, making a loud groaning sound. Flickering lights cut off, then come back on.

SOPHIE
(shaking her head; to
Arthur)
This building is just so awful,
isn't it?

Arthur nods yes... he doesn't know what to say. The little girl just keeps babbling about what she wants for her birthday.

Sophie can't take it any more, looks over at Arthur and mimes blowing her head off with her finger--

Arthur's eyes go wide.

The doors open. They all step off.

Sophie grabs her daughter's hand and walks down the hall in the opposite direction of Arthur.

He just stands there for a beat. Heart beating fast.

ARTHUR
(calls out after her)
Hey--

She turns around.

And Arthur mimes blowing his head off with *his* finger--

Sophie doesn't know what to say, just forces a strained smile back at him.

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - NIGHT

ARTHUR'S GIVING HIS MOM A BATH, being careful with her as he shampoos her hair.

He fills an empty plastic container with some bath water.

ARTHUR

Look up.

PENNY

Maybe the mailman's throwing them
away.

She tilts her head back and he rinses her hair with the water
from the container...

ARTHUR

Mom, why are these letters so
important to you? What do you think
he's gonna do?

PENNY

He's gonna help us.

ARTHUR

Help us how?

PENNY

Get us out of here, take me away
from this place and these-- these
people.

ARTHUR

You worked for him over 30 years
ago. What makes you think he would
help us?

Penny looks at him with conviction, water dripping down her
face, into her eyes. She wipes it away with her hands--

PENNY

Because Thomas Wayne is a good man.
If he knew how I was living, if he
saw this place, it would make him
sick. I can't explain it to you any
better than that.

Arthur nods. Annoyed, but not worth the argument.

ARTHUR

I don't want you worrying about
money. Everyone's been telling me
they think my stand-up is ready for
the big clubs. It's just a matter
of time before I get a break.

PENNY

Happy, what makes you think you could do that?

ARTHUR

What do you mean?

PENNY

I mean, don't you have to be funny to be a comedian?

Beat.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Penny is out cold in her bedroom, a half-eaten plate of food is next to her on the bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM, MOM'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arthur sits on the couch. The 1937 version of "Shall We Dance" is playing on the TV. He holds the .38 SNUB-NOSED REVOLVER Randall gave him in his hand. He's never held a gun before, looks uncomfortable with it, the weight of it in his hand...

He stares at it for a moment, then points it at the black & white movie playing on TV, hand trembling a bit... Points it at the chair his mother sits on... Points it at his head.

BLAMMMMMMM!

He jumps up off the couch. What the fuck!? He looks around in a panic. His hands shaking.

He shot a hole in the wall.

PENNY (OS)

(awoken by the shot)

HAPPY!? What was that? Are you okay?

ARTHUR

What?!

He quickly turns up the TV volume, A GROUP OF MEN WORKING ON A SHIP SINGING "SLAP THAT BASS" TO FRED ASTAIRE--

PENNY (OS)

THAT NOISE! DID YOU HEAR THAT NOISE?

ASTAIRE NOW SINGING AND DANCING FOR THE OTHER MEN, Arthur shouts back to his mother as he shoves the gun under the couch cushions--

ARTHUR
I'M WATCHING AN OLD WAR MOVIE.

PENNY (OS)
TURN IT DOWN!

He heads for his mother's bedroom.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

Arthur looks in on his mom in her dark bedroom, can make out the outline of her body sitting up.

PENNY
It's so loud.

ARTHUR
I know. The Americans are really giving it to the Japs.

He walks over to Penny in the darkness. Kisses her on the forehead.

ARTHUR
(softly)
I'm sorry. I'll turn it down.

INT. KITCHEN, MOM'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Arthur is writing in his journal. He speaks softly to himself as he writes...

ARTHUR
Why didn't Randall tell me the gun was loaded? I could have killed someone.
(beat)
I could have killed myself.

CLOSE ON THE LAST LINE, he crosses out "could"...

Writes... "should"

ARTHUR
(still to himself)
I should have killed myself.

CLOSE ON ARTHUR as he crosses out something again...

ARTHUR
(louder to himself)
I should kill myself.

Beat.

EXT. STEEP STAIRWAY, TENEMENTS - MORNING

SOPHIE AND GIGI MAKING THEIR WAY down the steep stairs, on their way to school. Sophie is dressed more conservatively than when we've previously seen her.

REVEAL, Arthur watching them from the top of the stairway, keeping his distance. He starts after them--

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - MORNING

Sophie drops GiGi off at school. Arthur's watching them from a distance.

EXT. ELEVATED SUBWAY PLATFORM - MORNING

Sophie waits on the platform. Lights a cigarette.

We see Arthur, hidden behind a steel support beam-- watching her from a distance.

EXT. STREET, FINANCIAL DISTRICT - MORNING

Towering buildings crowd the sky. White collar, white businessmen in suits. Still lots of trash, but it's piled high, neatly in black bags along the sidewalk.

Arthur's hanging across the street from Gotham First National Bank as Sophie enters the building. He's just standing there watching, trying to get the nerve to go inside.

Beat.

INT. GOTHAM COMEDY CLUB, CHINATOWN - NIGHT

Arthur sitting in the middle of a dark, crowded comedy club. People on dates. Groups of friends. All here to watch the stand-up. He sits at a small table by himself, watching the act on stage.

The comic on stage is killing it. The whole room is laughing and applauding. Everyone except Arthur. He's watching. Studying. Diligently jotting down notes in his notebook.

EXT. GOTHAM COMEDY CLUB, STREET - CHINATOWN - NIGHT

People are piling out of the club, onto the narrow street, jumble of lit-up signs, most glowing yellow or red. Arthur walks out alone, carrying his notebook. He sees a FLYER taped to the entrance of the club.

CLOSE ON THE FLYER, "Open mic night. Thursdays. 7pm."

He rips the flyer off the wall.

INT. KITCHEN, MOM'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Arthur is writing in his journal. His mom is dead asleep. He opens his worn notebook. Flips to a page titled "Jokes" and starts writing--

CLOSE ON WORDS, as he slowly writes: "The worst part about having a mental illness is..."

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, pausing, thinking it over for a moment. Then he laughs to himself when he comes up with something.

CLOSE ON WORDS, coming faster now, "...that people expect you to behave as if you don't."

He hears knocking on the front door--

INT. FRONT DOOR, MOM'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arthur opening the door--

Sees Sophie standing there with attitude, leaning up against the door frame.

SOPHIE

Were you following me today?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

SOPHIE

I thought that was you. I was hoping you'd come in and rob the place.

Beat.

ARTHUR

(leans in, quietly)
I have a gun. I could come by tomorrow.

SOPHIE
 (laughing)
 You're so funny, Arthur.

ARTHUR
 You know, I do stand-up comedy. You
 should maybe come see a show
 sometime.

SOPHIE
 I could do that.

ARTHUR
 Yeah?

SOPHIE
 You'll let me know when?

ARTHUR
 Yeah.

And she just turns and walks away toward her apartment--

INT. HA-HA'S TALENT BOOKING, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Arthur is putting on his make-up, using the small mirror in his locker. Behind him a couple other clowns are eating their lunch at a small table, not paying Arthur any attention.

Arthur pauses half-finished, and stares at himself for a beat. Hooks the corners of his mouth down with his index fingers, turning his mouth into the "tragedy mask" frown--

And then he pulls his fingers up, pulling them up wider and wider, stretching his smile into a grotesque parody of the "comedy mask," trying to make himself look happy, pulling his mouth so wide tears come to his eyes--

PRE-LAP SCRATCHY OLD-TIME FOLK RECORDING OF "If You're Happy and You Know It"--

"OLD TIME" VOICE (RECORD)
 (singing, strumming
 guitar)
*--if you're happy and you know it
 and you really want to show it, if
 you're happy and you know it clap
 your hands.*

INT. GOTHAM GENERAL HOSPITAL - CHILDREN'S WARD - LATE DAY

Arthur lip-syncing and strumming an air guitar along to the song (like a Dennis Potter musical), for a ward full of sick children. He's wearing an oversized white lab coat over his clown costume. A few nurses and doctors watch as well, song blaring from a small record player--

ARTHUR
 (lip-syncing)
*If you're happy and you know it,
 stomp your feet.*

Arthur stomps his feet to the song... All the kids stomping along with the recording...

ARTHUR
 (lip-syncing)
*If you're happy and you know it,
 stomp your feet.*
 (stomp, stomp)
*If you're happy and you know it and
 you really want to show it, if
 you're happy and you know it stomp
 your feet.*

And Arthur stomps harder, trying to make the kids laugh and--

HIS .38 SNUB-NOSED REVOLVER slips out from the bottom of his pants, sliding across the floor--

ARTHUR STOPS SINGING, EVERYBODY LOOKS AT THE GUN as it clatters to a stop on the floor. "If You're Happy and You Know It" still playing on the record player...

EXT. PHONE BOOTH, GOTHAM GENERAL HOSPITAL - DUSK

Arthur's in a cramped graffiti-covered phone booth on a busy street corner outside Gotham General, trash piled high. He's in his street clothes, clown-face still painted on, green wig still on his head.

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Hoyt, let me explain.

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 Oh, this'll be good. Please tell me why you brought a gun into a kid's hospital?

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 It was, it was a prop gun. It's
 part of my act now.

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 Bullshit. What kinda clown carries
 a fucking gun? Besides, Randall
 told me you tried to buy a .38 off
 him last week.

Arthur's taken aback that Randall would do that to him.

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Randall told you that?

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 He was with me when the call came
 in. You're a fuck up, Arthur. And a
 liar. You're fired.

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Hoyt, please I love this job--

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 Say it, Arthur.
 (beat)
 Let me hear you say it.

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Say what?

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 I'm a fuck up and I'm fired.

ARTHUR
 (into phone; low)
 --I'm a fuck up and I'm fired.

HOYT (OVER PHONE)
 Louder.

ARTHUR
 (into phone; louder)
 I'm a fuck up and I'm fired.

The line goes dead.

INT. SUBWAY (MOVING) - NIGHT

ARTHUR SITTING ON THE SUBWAY CONTEMPLATING WHAT JUST WENT DOWN, face still painted, his clown gear in a shopping bag on the seat next to him, green wig on his lap.

Subway car near empty. Arthur's sitting across from a lonely-looking MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, there's also a YOUNG WOMAN (late 20's) reading a book at the far end.

Arthur glances at the Middle-Aged Woman, maybe trying to make a connection, but the woman doesn't even notice him as the train comes to a stop, her head's somewhere else--

The woman gets off the train, and THREE WALL STREET GUYS get on. They're loud and obnoxious, clearly drunk. One of them is eating some french fries out of a greasy McDonald's bag. He flops down on the bench across from the young woman, and checks her out. The other two guys start getting into it with each other--

WALL STREET #1

--I'm telling you, she wanted my number. We should have just stayed.

The train starts moving again...

WALL STREET #2

You're dreaming, man. She wasn't interested-- at all.

WALL STREET #1

Are you nuts? Did you see how close we were dancing!? She was in love, bro.

He starts dancing a bit with himself, mimicking what he remembers. Wall Street #2 takes a swig from the brown bag he is carrying.

WALL STREET #2

She couldn't wait to get away from you.

Arthur's watching them closely, impressed by their confidence and easy-going camaraderie.

WALL STREET #1

(to the third guy)

Ryan, am I crazy? Tell him what you saw.

But the third Wall Street guy isn't paying his friends any attention. He has his eyes set on the young woman sitting across from him, reading her book.

WALL STREET #3
(to the girl)
Hey. You want some french fries?

He holds out his McDonald's bag and shakes it to get her attention. The other two share a look. Arthur watches from his seat.

WALL STREET #3
Hello? I'm talking to you. You want some fries?

She looks up and shakes her head, polite smile.

YOUNG WOMAN
No thank you.

The other two guys crack up at this apparent blow-off. The third Wall Street guy shakes his head, embarrassed, and starts softly flinging fries at the young woman.

WALL STREET #3
You sure? They're really good.

She just buries her face deeper in her book--

WALL STREET #2
Don't ignore him. He's being nice to you.

One of the french fries lands in her hair. She looks down toward Arthur, looking to see if he's going to do something or say something--

Arthur just sits there nervous. Not sure what to do, or even if he wants to do anything at all.

AND HE JUST BURSTS OUT LAUGHING. He covers his mouth with his wig as they continue to harass the woman.

They all look over-- What the fuck is this clown laughing at?

WALL STREET #1
Something funny, asshole?

With their attention diverted, the young woman rushes out through the door between subway cars, glancing back at Arthur before she goes--

WALL STREET #3
 (shouts after her)
 BITCH!

He laughs even harder through his green wig. The Wall Street guys turn to him sitting by himself at the end of the car--

Arthur sees them staring. Looks down at the ground, hand still covering his mouth, face turning red. Subway swaying, lights flickering on and off.

Beat.

One of the guys heads down the car toward Arthur, starts singing "Send in the Clowns" as he approaches--

WALL STREET #1
 (singing)
Isn't it rich?
Are we a pair?
Me here, at last on the ground
You in mid-air
Send in the clowns.

The others crack up and follow after him. The guy plops down next to Arthur, puts his arm around his shoulder as he sings--

ARTHUR
 (shakes his head, stifling
 the laughter)
 Please. Don't.

WALL STREET #1
 (continues singing to him)
Isn't it bliss?
Don't you approve?
One who keeps tearing around,
One who can't move.

Arthur starts to get up-- The lead guy pulls him back down.

WALL STREET #1
Where are the clowns?
There ought to be clowns.

As he finishes the song, Arthur's laughing fit is coming to an end. One of the other guys sits down on the other side of him. He's now sandwiched in between them--

WALL STREET #2
 So tell us, buddy. What's so
 fucking funny?

ARTHUR

Nothing. I have a condition--

Arthur reaches into his shopping bag to get one of his "Forgive my laughter" cards, the third guy sees him reaching and tries to grab the bag from him--

Arthur pulls on it--

ARTHUR

No. It's just my stuff. I don't have anything.

The guy rips the bag from his hand--

WALL STREET #3

I'll tell you what you have, asshole.

Arthur gets up from between them to go grab his bag back. The two guys are cracking up.

WALL STREET #3

You want it back? Here--

Arthur reaches out to grab the bag--

And the guy tosses it over his head to one of his friends. Keeping it away from Arthur.

Three guys in suits tossing a shopping bag around, playing 'monkey in the middle' with a clown AND WE HEAR the drum roll opening to BOBBY SHORT singing "Send in the Clowns" Live at the Café Carlyle.

Arthur keeps trying to catch his bag until suddenly--

WHAP! Out of nowhere one of the guys punches him hard in the face.

Arthur goes down as if in slow motion. Blood coming from his nose. He tries to get up, but his feet slip from under him and he falls back down--

WALL STREET #1

Stay down you freak.

And the third Wall Street guy starts kicking him--

The others join in. Surrounding Arthur on the ground, kicking him deliberately, sadistically, and the music swells--

BLAM!

Wall Street #1 falls back dead. Blood splattering on the subway wall behind him--

And we HEAR Bobby Short sing out, picking up from where the Wall Street Guy left off--

BOBBY SHORT (SINGING)
*Just when I'd stopped opening doors
 Finally knowin' the one that I
 wanted was yours*

BLAM! BLAM! Wall Street #2 goes down--

Revealing Arthur on the ground, opening his eyes to see what he did, blood dripping from his nose, smoking gun in hand--

BOBBY SHORT (SINGING)
*Making my entrance again with my
 usual flair
 Sure of my lines
 No one is there*

The third guy takes off running for the doors that separate the cars.

Arthur starts after him, but then stops... turns back to grab his bag and his wig, his hands shaking from the adrenaline.

The train is coming to a stop.

BOBBY SHORT (SINGING)
*Don't you love farce?
 My fault I fear...*

Arthur grabs the green wig from between the two dead bodies, blood everywhere, and stuffs it into his shopping bag--

The subway doors wheeze open and Arthur steps halfway off the train, waiting to see if the third Wall Street guy gets off in the car ahead of him. Arthur sees him run off--

EXT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

The platform is empty, the Wall Street guy is running toward the stairs--

Arthur follows, blood still dripping from his nose--

Behind them, the train pulls away--

BOBBY SHORT (SINGING)
*I thought that you'd want what I
 want.
 Sorry, my dear.*

The guy makes his way to the stairs, unaware that Arthur is behind him--

BLAM!

The third guy falls, tumbling down the stairs. Arthur walks over to the body and empties the chamber-- BLAM! BLAM!

BOBBY SHORT (SINGING)
*But where are the clowns?
 Quick, send in the clowns
 Don't bother they're here.*

BLAM! He's got nothing left.

EXT. ROBINSON PARK SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Arthur hauls ass up the stairs, rushing out of the station, the song still playing--

EXT. STREET, ROBINSON PARK - NIGHT

Bounding past bags of garbage, he leaps over a pile, taking a turn into a run-down needle park, the lights of garbage fires flickering in the darkness.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM, ROBINSON PARK - NIGHT

Arthur bursts into the small bathroom, out of breath. Overwhelmed, vibrating with emotions. He leans his forehead against the door, sweat dripping down his face, and catches his breath.

Arthur feels all those emotions running through his body, can feel them all. He sticks his right foot out and starts to slowly turn, his right arm rising slowly above his head as his right foot leads, turning like something is awakening inside of him--

Sweat dripping down his face, "Send in the Clowns" finally comes to an end. He starts washing the blood and clown make-up off his sweaty face.

Looks up at his smudged reflection in the dirty mirror, water dripping, white grease paint running off his face--

Beat.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - NIGHT

ARTHUR FLOATING OUT OF THE ELEVATOR AND DOWN THE HALLWAY AS IF IN A DREAM, coming up on Sophie's door and knocking--

She opens the door and sees Arthur standing there--

And before Sophie can say anything Arthur leans and kisses her and--

Sophie kisses him back and pulls him inside her apartment, closing the door behind them--

CUT TO:

INT. HA-HA'S TALENT BOOKING, LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

Arthur walks into the locker room, sees Randall half-dressed for work, sitting with Gary, TWO OTHER CLOWNS AND A HANDSOME "CHIPPENDALES" DANCER around the small table, shooting the shit, drinking coffee.

They nod hello at Arthur or give him a perfunctory wave, most of his co-workers think he's a freak.

GARY

Hey Art, I heard what happened--
I'm sorry man.

RANDALL

Yeah, Hoyt did you wrong, buddy.
Doesn't seem fair.

Arthur looks hard at Randall for a moment, just slowly nods, and continues on to his locker.

He starts to clean it out, stuffing all of his clown gear into an old brown paper shopping bag. Hears them talking about him behind his back, about why he got fired, laughing at him--

HA-HA CLOWN #1 (OS)

Did you really bring a gun to the
kid's hospital, Artie? What the
fuck would you do that for?

Arthur doesn't answer them, just continues emptying his locker, a bag of balloons, a magic wand, some trick flowers--

CHIPPENDALES

No, I heard he pulled it out and waved it around like a cowboy.

His co-workers crack up. Arthur answers the guy without looking back--

ARTHUR

It was a prop gun. And I didn't pull it out, it fell out.

CHIPPENDALES

So is that part of your new act? If your dancing doesn't do the trick, you just gonna shoot yourself?

More laughter.

HA-HA CLOWN #2

I thought your clown was a lover, Artie, not a fighter,--

Arthur turns and looks at all of them, nods at Randall--

ARTHUR

Why don't you ask Randall about it? It was his gun.

RANDALL

What? Stop talking outta your ass, Art!

(to the guys)

I think all his stupid laughing musta scrambled his brain or something.

The guys laugh and keep jawing. Arthur doesn't say anything. Just finishes packing up his bag and closes his locker door--

INT. STAIRWAY, HA-HA'S TALENT BOOKING - MORNING

Arthur walks down the stairs, brown shopping bag under his arm.

Behind him, Randall follows him into the stairway--

RANDALL

Hey, Art, hold up,--

Arthur stops, turns around.

RANDALL
What the hell was that about? Why
would you say that?

ARTHUR
What?

RANDALL
(lowers his voice)
That it was *my idea* about the gun.
That subway shit's no joke, you
know, they got sketches of clowns
on the front of every newspaper,--

ARTHUR
I don't know what you're talking
about, Randall.

RANDALL
(looks at him)
Right. Okay. I just want to make
sure you got your head on straight.

Arthur just looks back at him and smiles.

ARTHUR
My heads right here.

Randall nods, maybe it's sinking in with Arthur.

RANDALL
Good. I don't even know if you did
it but there's no need to draw any
attention to yourself, y'know? Or
we're both fucked.

ARTHUR
What are you worried about,
Randall? You didn't kill three
assholes on the subway, did you?

RANDALL
Of course I didn't.

ARTHUR
(continuing)
You didn't shoot one point blank in
the head. The other one twice in
the chest, before chasing the third
one down and shooting him three
times in the back, right?

Arthur puts his fingers forming a gun to Randall's head,
stares straight at him--

ARTHUR
 (singing)
*Isn't it rich?
 Are we a pair?*

Then turns and heads down the stairs, keeps singing "Send in the Clowns"--

ARTHUR
*Me here at last on the ground,
 You in mid-air.
 Send in the clowns.
 Where are the clowns?
 Don't bother, they're here.*

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - MORNING

CLOSE ON A COUPLE OF PILLS BOTTLES, THEY'RE NEARLY EMPTY NOW.

PENNY (OS)
 Happy, look Thomas Wayne is on TV.

ARTHUR
 Yes, mother.

Arthur swallows a few of the pills...

PENNY (OS)
 They're interviewing him about
 those horrible murders on the
 subway.

He glances at the TV playing in the living room through the open wall--

ARTHUR
 Why are they talking to him?

INT. MOM'S LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Penny shushes him, she's sitting in her chair, watching one of those "Good Morning, Gotham" shows.

PENNY
 He looks like he gained weight.

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)
 All three of them worked at Wayne
 Investments. They were good,
 decent, educated.

A small smirk registers on Arthur's face when photos of the THREE WALL STREET GUYS come up on the screen.

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)
And while I didn't know them personally, like all Wayne employees, they were family.

Arthur's mom sits up in her chair--

PENNY
You hear that! I told you. We're family.

ANGLE ON TELEVISION, footage of GRAFFITI around the city. "KILL THE RICH" spray painted on a storefront. "F*CK WALL STREET" written on a subway wall. "RESIST" scrawled across a billboard.

"GOOD MORNING" HOST (ON TV)
There now seems to be a groundswell of anti-rich sentiment in the city. It's almost as if our less fortunate residents have taken the side of the killer.

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)
Yes and it's a shame. It's one of the reasons I'm considering a run for mayor. Gotham has lost its way.

"GOOD MORNING" HOST (ON TV)
Are you announcing your candidacy?

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)
(smiles)
No comment.

We hear Penny gasp, excited.

"GOOD MORNING" HOST (ON TV)
What about the eyewitness report of the suspect being a man in clown make-up or a clown mask?

A smile starts to creep across Arthur's face--

The camera zooms in closer to Thomas Wayne on the screen--

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)
It makes total sense to me. What kind of coward would do something that cold-blooded? Someone who hides behind a mask.

(MORE)

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV) (CONT'D)

Someone who's envious of those more fortunate than themselves, yet too scared to show their own face.

(to camera)

And until those kind of people change for the better, those of us who've made a good life for ourselves will always look at those who haven't as nothing but clowns.

INT. DEPT. OF HEALTH, OFFICE - DAY

Arthur sits across from the same Social Worker from the opening scene. Same depressing office. He takes a drag from his cigarette--

ARTHUR

--I heard this song on the radio the other day. This guy was singing that his name was Carnival.

(sings)

"Rise and fall, spin and call, and my name is Carnival."

SOCIAL WORKER

Arthur--

ARTHUR

Which is crazy because that's my clown name at work. And until a little while ago it was like nobody ever saw me. Even I didn't know if I really existed.

SOCIAL WORKER

Arthur, I have some bad news for you.

ARTHUR

You don't listen, do you? I don't think you ever really hear me. You just ask the same questions every week. *"How's your job?" "Are you having any negative thoughts?"*

(beat)

All I have are negative thoughts. But you don't listen anyway. I said, "for my whole life I didn't know if I even really existed." But I do. And people are starting to notice--

SOCIAL WORKER

They've cut our funding. We're closing down our offices next week.

He looks around, just noticing some MOVING BOXES stacked against the wall.

SOCIAL WORKER

The city's cut funding across the board. Social services is part of that. This is the last time we'll be meeting.

Arthur nods, not hating the idea.

ARTHUR

Okay.

SOCIAL WORKER

They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And, they really don't really give a shit about people like me either.

Arthur sits there for a moment. And then it dawns on him--

ARTHUR

How am I supposed to get my medication now? Who do I talk to?

SOCIAL WORKER

I'm sorry, Arthur.

He just stares at her, taking it all in.

INT. COMEDY CLUB, BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - NIGHT

ARTHUR'S POV, slowly walking down the hall-- as if in slow motion-- toward a set of stairs leading up to the back of the stage, spotlight bleeding through the curtain, other wannabe comics looking at him as he passes--

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, he's changed his hair, it's slicked back some, not quite as smooth as the Wall Street Guys, sweat beading on his forehead--

He climbs up the stairs-- always climbing uphill-- and waits at the edge of the curtain, pulls his worn joke-notebook out of his back pocket. Glancing into the room he sees it's a pretty good crowd. Sees Sophie taking a seat in the back.

Wheeling back into the stairway, he catches his breath in the shadows--

He hears the EMCEE from the stage.

EMCEE (OS)

This next comic describes himself as a lifelong Gotham resident who from a young age was always told that "his purpose in life was to bring laughter and joy into this cold, dark world." Ummm. Okay.

He hears the crowd laugh.

EMCEE (OS)

Please help me welcome Arthur Fleck!

There is a smattering of applause.

INT. STAGE, COMEDY CLUB - CONTINUOUS

ARTHUR STEPPING ON STAGE, out under the spotlight, lifts the microphone in front of his mouth, the light so bright he can't see faces in the dark audience, his hand trembling holding onto his worn notebook--

He takes a deep breath, looks out at the dark crowd, and opens his mouth.

AND STARTS TO LAUGH. His eyes go wide. God no, not now. A terrified look comes to his face under the laughter. He just keeps laughing. The crowd is just staring back at him.

Finally he composes himself--

ARTHUR

(trying to stop himself from laughing)

-- good evening, hello.

(deep breath; trying to stop laughing)

Good to be here.

(keeps cracking up)

I, I hated school as a kid. But my mother would always say,--

(bad imitation of his mom, still laughing)

"You should enjoy it. One day you'll have to work for a living."

(laughs)

"No I won't, Ma. I'm gonna be a comedian!"

Arthur keeps cracking up. Hard to hear anything or anybody else. He goes through his notebook trying to find another joke--

ARTHUR

(reading verbatim)

It's funny, I was thinking the other day,-- Why are rich people so confused by the poor people?

(silently counting to three)

Because they don't make any sense!

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, looking out into the audience, sees Sophie sitting in the back laughing--

The MUSIC SWELLS...

CUT TO:

EXT. COMEDY CLUB, CHINATOWN STREET - NIGHT

Arthur and Sophie walking out of the club after the show.

They walk past a newsstand-- a wall of Chinese language newspapers mixed with local papers and tabloids, screaming headlines about the three Wall Street Guys gunned down on the train.

Arthur stops and stares at the headlines--

CLOSE ON HEADLINES, "Subway Vigilante"... "Yuppie Slaughter" "Killer Clown On The Loose?"...

SOPHIE (OS)

(re: the headlines)

You believe that shit?

(beat)

I'll bet you five bucks those rich assholes deserved it.

He turns to her.

ARTHUR

You think?

SOPHIE

Look at their faces. Those smug smiles. I've seen that look. Fuck them.

Sophie flicks her cigarette away and starts walking.

SOPHIE

The guy who did it is a hero. Three
less pricks in Gotham City. Woo-
hoo! Only a million more to go.

Arthur watches her walk for a beat. She looks great, even in front of the mounds of garbage bags that line the sidewalk.

A CAB rolls past. In the backseat, someone wearing a CLOWN MASK stares back at Arthur. Holding his look for a moment.

INT. DONUT SHOP, BOOTH - NIGHT

A run-down donut shop.

Through the window we see Arthur and Sophie sitting across from each other in a molded plastic booth. Bathed in ugly fluorescent light, a few other patrons scattered about.

We don't hear what they're saying, but they look happy-- and Sophie is laughing. Hard.

Arthur stares at her, this may be the best night of his entire life.

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur opening the door to his mother's apartment, holding a box of donuts in his hand, sees the flickering blue light of the TV on in the living room, hears the end of "LIVE WITH MURRAY FRANKLIN!" He locks the locks, drawing the security chain high on the door.

URNS TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF HIS MOTHER PASSED OUT in the living room.

Arthur sets the box of donuts down and puts his face up against his mom's nose, to see if she's breathing or if she's dead--

ON THE TELEVISION Murray does his signature sign off, the one he's been doing for years--

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
(looking into camera)
Good night! And always remember,--
That's life.

He gently shakes her awake. Sweeping her up out of the chair as he hears Ellis Drane and his Jazz Orchestra close the show with an upbeat instrumental version of Frank Sinatra's "That's Life"...

MOM
 (half-asleep)
 Happy, I wrote a new letter.

ARTHUR
 (grabs her hand)
 C'mon, Ma, dance with me a little.

Arthur pulls his mother in close and starts dancing with her to the music, the only light coming from the television...

MOM
 For Thomas Wayne. It's important.

She looks at him and smiles, dances with him a little...
 "That's Life" still playing from TV...

MOM
 You smell like cologne.

ARTHUR
 Cause I just had a big date.

MOM
 (laughing)
 I'm going to bed. Just don't forget
 to mail it.

She breaks away and walks toward her bedroom.

Arthur can't help but smile to himself as he takes off his jacket and throws it on the chair. He continues to slow dance with himself for a moment-- He notices the envelope on the table, addressed to Thomas Wayne.

He stares at it for a beat. Cranes his neck toward his mother's bedroom, listening if she's still awake. And then--

Quietly rips it open, starts to read the letter:

CLOSE ON WORDS, "Dearest Thomas, I don't know where else to turn..."

"We need your help..."

"Your son and I need help"

Stops reading, stays on--

"Your son"

He glances up at his mother's room, then back down at the words, "Your son"

ARTHUR STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LIVING ROOM staring at those two words like he's too afraid to move, lit up by the flickering blue light--

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

ARTHUR'S SITTING IN A CHAIR in his mother's room watching her sleep. He has clearly been up all night. Still wearing the same clothes.

He's holding her letter in his hand as the sun is just starting to rise outside the windows, light just beginning to crack the gloom.

Arthur impatiently sits there for another moment waiting for his mother to wake up, then suddenly--

SHRIEKS OUT AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS like a teapot, kicking his back on the chair like an excited toddler--

Penny wakes with a start, looking around half asleep and confused--

PENNY

--what, what time is it?

He doesn't answer.

PENNY

What happened? Did you hurt yourself again?

Arthur holds her letter up in his hand.

ARTHUR

What is this? How come you never told me?

PENNY

Is, is that my letter? Is that my personal letter, Happy?

(angry)

You have no right opening my mail. Who do you think you are?!

ARTHUR

(raising his voice;
excited)

Apparently I'm Thomas Wayne's son!
How could you keep that from me?

Penny slowly getting up out of bed.

PENNY

Stop yelling at me, you're gonna
kill me, give me a heart attack!

She goes into the bathroom.

ARTHUR

(shouts after her)

I'm not yelling! I'm just, excited.
How can any of this be real!?

PENNY (OS)

(shouts back from behind
the door)

I'm not talking to you until you
calm down.

Arthur paces for a minute, now goes to the bathroom door.
Talks to his mother from the behind the closed door.

ARTHUR

(lowers his voice; trying
to sound calm)

Okay. How's this, Mom? Better? Will
you please talk to me?

Arthur leans in closer to the door. Leaning against it with
just his head--

ARTHUR

Please.

PENNY (OS)

He's an extraordinary man, Arthur.
A powerful man. We had a
connection. I was so beautiful
then. We were in love.

Arthur just leans there, listening. He closes his eyes, it's
all too much.

PENNY (OS)

He said it was best that we not be
together, because of appearances.
You know, not all love stories have
happy endings.

(hear her crying now)

(MORE)

PENNY (OS) (CONT'D)
 And, I could never tell anyone
 because, well, I signed some
 papers, and besides you can imagine
 what people would say about Thomas
 and me, and, and what they would
 say about you.

ARTHUR
 (eyes still closed, head
 leaning against the door)
 What? What would they say, Ma?

PENNY (OS)
 That I was a whore, and Thomas
 Wayne was a fornicator, and that
 you're a little, unwanted bastard.

AND THE BATHROOM DOOR SUDDENLY SWINGS OPEN, and Arthur falls
 face first into the bathroom--

Just missing his mother, crashing down onto the floor--

CUT TO:

**INT. METRO TRAIN (MOVING) - COUNTRYSIDE, OUTSIDE GOTHAM -
 AFTERNOON**

PUSHING PAST ROWS AND ROWS OF WHITE BUSINESSMEN, many of them
 reading one of Gotham's two tabloids. On the cover of one, a
 detailed sketch of Arthur's clown face, headlined, "KILLER
 CLOWN STILL ON THE LOOSE!"... The other cover screams, "KILL
 THE RICH -- A NEW MOVEMENT?"...

WE PUSH PAST A "KILLER CLOWN" SKETCH, settle in on Arthur
 reading the tabloid.

REVERSE ANGLE BEHIND ARTHUR, see the headline "Thomas Wayne
 Announces Run -- Response to Troubled Times", over campaign-
 style photograph of Thomas Wayne waving to a crowd standing
 next to his wife, MARTHA (50's), a well-preserved former
 model, and a glimpse of their son, BRUCE WAYNE (10), hiding
 behind his father. Only catch half of his face looking
 straight into camera, eyes wide, scared by the crowd.

SUB-HEADLINE READS, "Protest Planned at Wayne Hall Gala."

Arthur stares at the family photo.

CLOSE ON WAYNE FAMILY PHOTO, Arthur's fingers ripping it out
 of the paper--

EXT. WAYNE MANOR, FRONT LAWN - SUNSET

Arthur walks down a small hill alongside an intimidating brick wall, surrounding the estate like a prison. From this angle he's able to peer over the wall, catching a glimpse of an innocent looking TEN-YEAR-OLD BOY tracking him from behind the trees, hiding as he follows.

Arthur comes to the front. A giant, wrought iron gate. We see a long driveway that leads to the big house, surrounded by beautiful trees and plush, green grounds.

Arthur stops.

He sees the boy approach, but not get too close.

Arthur reaches into his pocket and pulls out a magic wand--

He holds it up for the boy to see.

The boy steps up to get a closer look.

Arthur looks over the wand, pretending like he's trying to figure out what it does. He waves the wand over the front gate lock to "try and see" if it will open-- It doesn't.

The little boy tentatively walks toward the fence, face like an angel.

Arthur waits until he gets closer and then reaches his hand through the fence and hands the kid his magic wand so he can try and figure out what it does--

The boy takes the wand and it goes limp in his hand before he can wave it-- He looks at it, confused. He hands it back to Arthur.

Arthur straightens the wand back out, and reaches in through the fence again so the kid can give it another try.

And again the wand droops in the boy's hand. Disappointed, he gives it back to Arthur--

Arthur examines the wand as if its "broken", stiffens it one last time, crouches down lower, and...

Ta-da! A bouquet of flowers bursts out the end of the wand--

Arthur hands the boy the wand bouquet of flowers--

The little boy takes the flowers. Keeps staring at Arthur, not sure what to do or say. Not smiling.

Arthur looks back at him for a moment.

THEN REACHES BOTH HANDS THROUGH THE GATE and firmly takes the little boy's face in his hands--

Uses his thumbs to hook the corners of the boy's mouth and pulls them up into a smile, into a "comedy mask"--

The boy is okay with it, puts his hands on top of Arthur's hands. They look at each other for a beat.

ALFRED (OS)
(shouting)
Bruce!

Arthur lets go. The boy is now smiling on his own--

ALFRED (OS)
Bruce! What are you doing? Get away
from that man.

Little Bruce stops smiling, steps back from the gate.

Arthur looks up and sees a tired-looking, ALFRED PENNYWORTH (50's) bounding toward them.

Arthur stands back up.

ALFRED
(still shouting)
What are you doing? Who are you?

Bruce runs behind Alfred, hiding behind his legs.

ARTHUR
I'm here to see Mr. Wayne--

ALFRED
(interrupting)
You shouldn't be talking to his son. Why did you give him those flowers?

Alfred takes the flower-wand away from the kid--

ARTHUR
I, I was just trying to make him smile.

He hands it back to Arthur.

ALFRED
Well it's not funny. Do I need to call the police?

ARTHUR

No, please. My mother's name is Penny Fleck. She used to work here, years ago. Can you tell Mr. Wayne that I need to see him?

ALFRED

(color drains from his face; beat)
You're her son?

ARTHUR

Did you know her?

Alfred doesn't say anything.

Arthur puts his face right up against the bars, whispers so the boy can't hear him--

ARTHUR

I know about the two of them. My mother told me everything.

ALFRED

There's nothing to know. There is no "them". Your mother was, was delusional. She was a sick woman.

ARTHUR

No. No, just let me speak to Mr. Wayne.

Now Alfred leans in closer to Arthur, almost looks like he feels some pity for him--

ALFRED

Please just go, before you make a fool of yourself.

Beat.

ARTHUR

(blurts out)
Thomas Wayne is my father--

Alfred looks at Arthur, and can't help but crack up laughing at him.

AND ARTHUR REACHES HIS HANDS THROUGH THE BARS AGAIN AND GRABS HIM. Pulls Alfred in close, trying to choke him, still holding the wand of flowers in one hand--

AS HE CHOKES ALFRED, Arthur sees little Bruce, wide-eyed in the shadows, looking out at him in horror.

Arthur stops.

Lets go of Alfred... Takes off running back down the street away from Wayne Manor, magic wand in hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BRONX, STREETS - NIGHT

ARTHUR'S BACK IN HIS PART OF TOWN, garbage everywhere here. The neighborhood at night is alive. Loud kids on the street corners... A drunk seemingly fights no one... Sirens wailing...

As Arthur approaches his building, he sees AN AMBULANCE PARKED in front. Lights flashing. Hit with a sense of dread, he runs toward the building--

EXT. STREET, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A SMALL CROWD OF GAWKERS have gathered around watching the drama unfold. Shouting and laughing, loud dance music blaring out an open window, feels like an impromptu block party.

ARTHUR RUNS UP, SEES TWO PARAMEDICS wheeling his unconscious mother down the front steps on a stretcher.

FROM ABOVE, Arthur pushing through the crowd, rushes to his mother's side--

ARTHUR
 (following as they wheel
 her, leaning over
 stretcher)
 Mom? Mom, what happened?

PARAMEDIC #1
 Sir. Please step back.

ARTHUR
 What happened to her?

PARAMEDIC #1
 Who are you?

ARTHUR
 I'm her son.

PARAMEDIC #1
 Oh, great. You can probably help us
 out inside. We don't know what
 happened yet.

Arthur follows them as they load Penny into the ambulance.

INT. CITY AMBULANCE, BACK (PARKED) - MINUTES LATER

Arthur watches as the two paramedics work on his mother, descending on her like vampires, shouting instructions to each other while checking her vitals (pulse, pupils), shouting questions at him as they begin to intubate her--

PARAMEDIC #1
Does your mother take any
medications?

Arthur doesn't answer, just watches in horror.

PARAMEDIC #1
Sir. Is your mother on any
medications?!

ARTHUR
No.

PARAMEDIC #2
When was the last time you spoke to
her?

ARTHUR
I don't know.

The ambulance starts to pull away.

PARAMEDIC #2
Does she have any medical history?

Arthur doesn't answer.

EXT. CITY HOSPITAL, EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur sitting on a bench waiting outside the bustling emergency room of a massive city hospital. He watches the sick and dying being rushed through the glass doors. Opening and closing. This happens in the background throughout the scene.

The two detectives walk up to Arthur, interrupting him watching the doors. Gotham police detectives, GARRITY (50's), grey hair, and BURKE (30's), his partner.

DET. GARRITY
Mr. Fleck, sorry to bother you, I'm
Detective Garrity, this is my
partner Detective Burke.

Arthur looks up at them. Doesn't say anything.

DET. GARRITY

We had a few questions for you, but you weren't home. So we spoke to your mother.

ARTHUR

What did you say to her? Did you do this?

DET. GARRITY

What? No. We just asked her some questions and she started getting hysterical-- hyperventilating, trouble speaking-- then she collapsed. Hit her head pretty hard.

ARTHUR

Yeah, the doctor said she had a stroke.

Beat.

DET. GARRITY

Sorry to hear about that. But like I said, we still have some questions for you. They're about the subway killings that happened last week. You've heard about them, right?

ARTHUR

Yeah. It's horrible.

DET. GARRITY

(reading over his notes)

Right. So we spoke to your boss at, uhh, Ha-Ha's. He said you were fired that day-- fired for bringing a gun into the children's hospital.

ARTHUR

It was a prop. It's part of my act. I'm a party clown.

DET. BURKE

All right. So why were you fired?

ARTHUR

They said I wasn't funny enough. Can you imagine that?

(he stands)

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Now, if you don't mind, I need to go take care of my mother.

The detectives share another look.

Detective Burke steps close to him, holds up the card that Arthur handed him--

DET. BURKE

Your boss also gave us one of your cards. This condition of yours, the laughing, is it real or some sort of a clown thing?

ARTHUR

A clown thing?

DET. BURKE

Yeah, I mean-- is it part of your act?

ARTHUR

What do you think?

And Arthur walks away-- heads for the sliding glass doors. Only the motion detector doesn't engage--

AND HE SLAMS RIGHT INTO THE GLASS DOOR.

HARD.

He bounces back.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (SHARED), CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

PENNY LIES IN BED UNCONSCIOUS, HOOKED UP TO MACHINES.

Arthur sits bedside, distraught. Sophie is next to him... rubbing his back.

SOPHIE

She's gonna be okay.

He just nods. Lost in thought. After a beat...

SOPHIE

I'm going to get some coffee? You want one?

He nods again. As Sophie walks out, we HEAR MURRAY FRANKLIN from the TV set bolted high up on the wall.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 So I told my youngest son, Billy,
 you know, the new one, the 'not so
 bright' one,--

CLOSE ON TV, Murray is in the middle of doing his monologue.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 (laughter)
 I told him that the garbage strike
 is still going on. And he says, and
 I'm not kidding, Billy says, "So
 where are we gonna get all our
 garbage from?"

Murray Franklin cracks up at his own joke. Studio audience
 laughs.

Arthur glances over at his mother, laughing over the sounds
 of her labored breath.

He looks back up at the television.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 And finally, in a world where
 everyone thinks they could do my
 job, we got this videotape from the
 Gotham Comedy Club. Here's a guy
 who thinks if you just keep
 laughing, it'll somehow make you
 funny. Check out this joker.

EXTREME CLOSE ON TV, GRAINY VIDEO OF ARTHUR'S STAND-UP
 PERFORMANCE. Arthur on stage smiling behind the microphone,
 under the harsh spotlight.

Arthur watching himself on TV, his jaw drops--

ARTHUR (ON TV)
 (trying to stop himself
 from laughing)
 -- good evening, hello.
 (deep breath; trying to
 stop laughing)
 Good to be here.
 (keeps cracking up)
 I, I hated school as a kid. But my
 mother would always say,--
 (bad imitation of his mom,
 still laughing)
 "You should enjoy it. One day
 you'll have to work for a living."
 (laughs)
 (MORE)

ARTHUR (ON TV) (CONT'D)
 "No I won't, Ma. I'm gonna be a
 comedian!"

Back to Murray Franklin shaking his head, trying not to
 laugh.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 You should have listened to your
 mother.

The studio audience erupts into laughter.

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, watching Murray Franklin make fun of him on
 TV. He gets up and starts walking toward the TV set as if in
 a trance. Unsure if this is really happening.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 One more, Bobby. Let's see one
 more. I love this guy.

Another moment of Arthur at the comedy club plays--

ARTHUR (ON TV)
 It's funny, when I was a little boy
 and told people I wanted to be a
 comedian, everyone laughed at me.
 (opens his arms like a big
 shot)
 Well no one is laughing now.

Dead silence. Nobody is laughing. Not even him.

CUT BACK CLOSE ON MURRAY FRANKLIN, just shaking his head.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)
 You can say that again, pal!

Murray cracks up and the studio audience laughs along with
 him. Shot of Barry O'Donnell laughing too.

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, looking up at the television, hearing them
 all laughing at him.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

FROM ABOVE, looking down on Arthur hunched over, lying on his
 side in his mother's bed, his left arm below frame-- hard to
 tell if he's in pain or beating off.

He reaches out his right arm to where his mother slept, the
 TV's blue light flickering, 11:00 News turned up--

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

The anger and resentment that's been building in the city for weeks seems close to exploding. Protesters, many dressed as clowns, took to the streets today in one of several planned demonstrations taking on the city's elite. Including a massive rally outside tomorrow night's benefit at Wayne Hall.

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, quickly turning and sitting up in bed when he hears what's on the television--

ANGLE ON TELEVISION, a crowd of protesters, a few wearing Arthur's clown mask are being interviewed.

"CLOWN" PROTESTER #1 (ON TV)

It's gonna show 'em that they can't ignore us. Our voices need to be heard. We're not--

"CLOWN" PROTESTER #2 (ON TV)

(interrupts; screaming into camera)

[Beep] the rich, [beep] the politicians, [beep] the whites, [beep] the blacks, [beep] Thomas Wayne, [beep] the whole system. That's what this is [beeping] about!

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, moving down to the edge of the bed, gun on the nightstand behind him, leaning forward closer toward the flickering screen to make sure he's seeing what he's seeing-- Thomas Wayne now being interviewed on the plaza in front of Wayne Tower-- "...had no comment on the upcoming rally."

THOMAS WAYNE (ON TV)

Well what I will say is, there's something wrong with those people. I'm here to help them. I want to lift them out of poverty, help make their lives better. *That's* why I'm running. They may not realize it, but I'm their only hope.

CUT TO:

INT. WAYNE HALL, THEATER - CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS - DUSK

ANGLE ON MOVIE SCREEN PLAYING "MODERN TIMES", FACE OF A ROMAN NUMERAL CLOCK FILLS THE FRAME, and up fades the forward...

"Modern Times". A story
of industry, of individual
enterprise -- humanity
crusading in the pursuit
of happiness.

And as the screen fades to black, we pull out to reveal the Gotham Philharmonic playing Chaplin's silent movie score in front of a black-tie high society crowd... Behind them, on screen, glimpse the opening shot of a crowded herd of sheep, a lone black sheep caught in the middle, dissolving into a mass of crowded workers rushing out of a subway station.

EXT. CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS, WAYNE HALL - DUSK

ARTHUR ALL ALONE HEADING TOWARD AN ANGRY MOB in front of the Center for Performing Arts. Night falling. Storm clouds gathering.

ANGLE ON THE CROWD OF PROTESTERS SCREAMING AND SHOUTING IN FRONT OF WAYNE HALL, behind steel barricades. Many wearing Arthur's "clown face" mask... A few wave homemade signs, "CLOWN FOR MAYOR"... "KILL THE RICH"... "MR. WAYNE, AM I A CLOWN?"

A LINE OF POLICEMEN AND SECURITY GUARDS stand between the crowd and the lit-up white marble building.

Arthur pauses and watches the crowd for a moment.

EXT. WAYNE HALL, FRONT ENTRANCE - DUSK

A FIGHT BREAKS OUT between a "clown" masked protester and two cops. The crowd goes crazy, pushing through the barricades toward the building. Distant thunder rumbling. The police and Wayne Hall Security fight to keep them out--

Amidst all the chaos, we glimpse Arthur slipping into the building unnoticed--

INT. LOBBY, WAYNE HALL - NIGHT

Arthur walks through the massive multi-level lobby. It's completely empty since the performance has already begun and whatever security was available is outside helping the police deal with the protesters.

He looks up in awe at the crystal chandeliers... He's never seen anything this opulent in his entire life.

He starts up the grand staircase to the second floor--

INT. SECOND LEVEL, BALCONY - WAYNE HALL - NIGHT

ARTHUR MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE SHADOWS ALONG THE BACK WALL OF THE BALCONY, a birds-eye-view, looking around for Thomas Wayne in the sold-out black-tie audience--

He catches bits of the silent movie projected down on stage behind the orchestra, the Tramp working in a factory.

He continues moving along the back wall looking for Thomas Wayne, sees him sitting in a box seat on the side of the theater with his wife.

Arthur watches him in the darkness, waiting--

JUMP CUT:

INT. BALCONY, SECOND LEVEL - LATER

PROJECTED ON SCREEN, the Tramp roller skating blindfolded on a date with the Gamin (Paulette Goddard) in a department store. Arthur's still standing against the back wall in the shadows, laughing along with the rest of the audience watching the Tramp skates blindfolded, skirting along the edge of a balcony with no rail, orchestra playing the bouncy score.

Arthur's really enjoying the movie, almost forgetting for a moment why he's there, when he glances over to Thomas Wayne's box and sees him leaving, being led by his BODYGUARD--

Arthur's eyes go wide and he quickly turns to go, behind him on screen, the Tramp is rescued by the girl before he falls off the edge, orchestra swelling--

INT. SECOND LEVEL - WAYNE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Arthur catches a glimpse of Thomas Wayne heading into the men's room, his bodyguard waiting by the door, still hear the orchestra playing the score---

Arthur glances around the lobby, sees a lobby broom and upright dustpan tucked in the corner--

INT. HALLWAY, MEN'S ROOM - WAYNE HALL - SECONDS LATER

Arthur's sweeping up the hallway with his head down, hear the orchestra playing the melancholy "Smile" from the film's score. He sweeps along to the music like Emmett Kelly's famous act... Sweeping around the bodyguard's feet... Annoyed, he moves a bit away from the bathroom door... And doesn't give Arthur a second look as he heads inside...

INT. MEN'S ROOM, WAYNE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Arthur sweeps his way into the cavernous, black & white tiled bathroom, ornate gold fixtures. It's empty save for Thomas Wayne peeing at the far end of a long line of urinals.

Arthur takes a deep breath, and walks down the line of urinals right up next to Thomas Wayne--

He stands there for a beat while Thomas urinates, lobby broom and upright dustpan in hand--

THOMAS WAYNE
(glances over; annoyed)
Can I help you, pal?

ARTHUR
What? Yeah. No I, I--

THOMAS WAYNE
(interrupting)
You need to get in here or something?

Thomas Wayne finishes and zips his fly back up. Arthur is not sure what to say to him, just says--

ARTHUR
Dad. It's me.

Beat.

But Thomas Wayne doesn't hear him, he was flushing the urinal. He walks toward the sink.

THOMAS WAYNE
Excuse me?

Arthur follows after him.

ARTHUR
My name is Arthur. I'm Penny's son.
(beat)
I, I know everything.
(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

And I don't want anything from you.
Well... maybe a hug.

And Arthur smiles, it's all very emotional for him. Thomas looks over at him like he's fucking crazy.

THOMAS WAYNE

Jesus. You're the guy who came by
my house yesterday.

Arthur nods, relieved he finally broke through.

ARTHUR

Yes. But they wouldn't let me in,
wouldn't let me see you. So I came
here. I have so many questions.

Thomas Wayne just laughs to himself and turns on the gold faucets at one of the sinks.

THOMAS WAYNE

Look pal, I'm not your father.
What's wrong with you?

ARTHUR

How do you know?

Thomas Wayne just keeps washing his hands, doesn't even look over at Arthur.

THOMAS WAYNE

Cause you were adopted. And I never
slept with your mother. What do you
want from me, money?

ARTHUR

No. What? I wasn't adopted.

Thomas starts drying his hands.

THOMAS WAYNE

She never told you? Your mother
adopted you *after* she worked for
us. She was arrested when you were
four years old and committed to
Arkham State Hospital. She's
batshit crazy.

Arthur starts to smile, feels a laugh coming on.

ARTHUR

No. No, I don't believe that.

Thomas finishes drying his hands. Turns to Arthur, his tone way more serious now.

THOMAS WAYNE

I don't really give a shit what you believe.

(steps in closer)

But if you ever come to my house again, if you ever talk to my son again, if I ever even hear about you again, I'll--

AND ARTHUR CRACKS UP LAUGHING, interrupting his threat. Laughing right in his face--

THOMAS WAYNE

Are you laughing at me?

Arthur's laughing so hard he can't answer.

THOMAS SHOVES ARTHUR HARD UP AGAINST THE TILED WALL, gripping his neck with one hand. Arthur just cracks up louder, he drops the dustpan and broom--

THOMAS WAYNE

(shouting)

You think this is funny?

Thomas Wayne's bodyguards bang open the door, rushing into the bathroom when they hear the shouting--

They stop when they see Thomas has Arthur jacked up against the wall.

ARTHUR

(tries shaking his head
no; still laughing and
choking)

No, no I have a con--

THOMAS WAYNE

(interrupting; raising his
voice)

Is this a fucking joke to you?

AND THOMAS WAYNE PUNCHES ARTHUR STRAIGHT IN THE FACE with his free hand, blood spraying from his nose--

INT. BEDROOM, MOM'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunshine peeking through bedroom windows. Arthur's eyes are open, he's been awake all night, he still hasn't slept.

Phone starts ringing in the kitchen, he lets the machine pick it up--

SHOW BOOKER (ON MACHINE)
 This message is for Arthur Fleck.
 My name is Shirley Woods, I work on
 the Murray Franklin show.

Arthur gets up quickly and heads for the kitchen as the woman continues to leave a message--

INT. KITCHEN, MOM'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arthur walks in, listening to the woman on the machine--

SHOW BOOKER (ON MACHINE)
 I don't know if you're aware, but
 Murray played a clip of your stand-
 up on the show recently and we've
 gotten an *amazing*--

Arthur picks up the phone--

ARTHUR
 (into phone; skeptical)
 Who is this?

SHOW BOOKER (OVER PHONE)
 Hi, this is Shirley Woods from
 Murray Franklin Live. Is this
 Arthur?

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Yes.

SHOW BOOKER (OVER PHONE)
 Hi Arthur. Well, as I was saying--
 we've gotten a lot of calls about
 your clip, amazing responses. And,
 Murray asked if I would reach out
 to see if you would come on as his
 guest. Can we set up a day?

PUSH IN ON ARTHUR'S FACE, as it sinks in.

ARTHUR
 (into phone)
 Murray wants me to come on the
 show?

SHOW BOOKER (OVER PHONE)
 Yes. Isn't that great? He'd love to
 talk to you, maybe do some of your
 act. Does that sound good to you?

As the PUSH IN ON ARTHUR finishes.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - MORNING

A GRAY, BEHEMOTH STATE HOSPITAL looming over the city block. Metal screens cover steel-framed windows. Arthur crosses the street toward the building, eyes weary, he hasn't slept in days.

INT. ARKHAM STATE, HALLWAY - MORNING

ARTHUR WALKS DOWN A LONG HALLWAY, PASSING TWO GOTHAM CITY COPS AND A PARAMEDIC rolling a naked sunburned man screaming his head off, handcuffed to a stretcher underneath a white sheet. Sounds bouncing off the walls, up and down the halls, working other patients into fits, screaming back.

INT. DOCUMENTS & RECORDS OFFICE - BASEMENT HALLWAY, ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - MORNING

Arthur stands at a service window that looks into the cramped records office, a metal grate covers most of the window. Harsh fluorescent lights flicker above. He glances at the hallway behind him, sees two orderlies walking a dead-eyed patient back to his ward, hears distant echoing screams.

He's interrupted by a CLERK (40's), ID clipped to his shirt, who's lugging an old heavy file storage box. He drops the box down on a counter beneath the window.

CLERK

Sorry for the wait. All our records
 that are 10 years or older are
 stored in the basement. You're
 talking over 30 years ago,-- I had
 to do some serious digging.

Arthur nods thanks. The clerk looks at Arthur for a moment, like he's trying to place him--

CLERK

And, like I said, if it's in here,
 I'm still gonna need a release from
 her. Have we met before?

Arthur shakes his head no.

The clerk opens the file box. Starts digging through it. Arthur watches the orderlies locking the doors behind them, still hears the screams.

ARTHUR

Can I ask you a question? How does someone wind up in here? Have all the people committed crimes?

CLERK

(going through the files)
Some have. Some are just crazy and pose a danger to themselves or others. Some just got nowhere else to go.

Beat.

ARTHUR

(nods; looks down)
Yeah, I know how that is. Sometimes I don't know what to do, y'know, I don't think I can take any more of this.

The clerk is half listening as he scans the paper work.

CLERK

Yeah, I can't take much more of this shit either. Now they talking about more layoffs, man, we're understaffed as it is. I don't know what I'm gonna do.

Arthur looks up at the guy, thinking he's made a connection.

ARTHUR

Last time I ended up taking it out on some,-- people. Bad shit. I thought it would bother me but, it really hasn't.

The clerk finally looks back at him--

CLERK

What's that?

ARTHUR

It's just so hard to try and be happy all the time, y'know, when everything's going to shit all around you.

CLERK

(taken aback; beat)

Listen, I'm just an administrative assistant, like a clerk. I file paperwork. I don't really know what to tell you, but maybe you should see someone-- they have programs, like city services.

ARTHUR

(backtracking)

Yeah. They cut those. Anyway, I was just talking to talk.

The clerk just stares at Arthur--

CLERK

(realizing)

Wait, I know where I've seen you,-- You were on Murray Franklin the other night, weren't you?

ARTHUR

(beat)

No. I don't know what you're talking about.

CLERK

(shrugs, goes back to looking through the files)

Sorry, Murray just killed some poor guy on TV,--

The clerk shakes his head to himself, finally finds what he was looking for.

CLERK

(surprised)

Here it is,-- Fleck. Penny Fleck.

He pulls out an old file, bulging with yellowing records. Moves the box to the floor and sits down on his stool behind the window.

ARTHUR

(saying it out loud for himself to hear)

So she was a patient here.

The guy opens the file. Yellowing pages of her records--

CLERK

(nods, skim-reading)

Uh-huh. Diagnosed by Dr. Benjamin Stoner... The patient suffers from delusional psychosis and narcissistic personality disorder... Found guilty of endangering the welfare of a child--

The clerk stops reading out loud, eyes going wide as he skims further ahead. Arthur just looks at the guy, waiting to see what he's gonna say.

ARTHUR

What?

CLERK

You said she's your mother?

Arthur just nods.

CLERK

(closes the file)

I'm sorry, I can't. Like I said, I can't release this without the proper forms. I could get in trouble.

(closes the file; beat)

Besides, it's pretty bad.

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, he shakes his head and smiles to himself.

ARTHUR

I can handle bad.

The clerk puts the file down on the counter--

CLERK

Yeah, sorry. If you want these records you have to get your mom to sign a patient disclosure form. I can have someone mail you one.

Arthur just stands there, thinking it all over for a moment.

Then reaches in under the metal cage and snatches the file--

The clerk grabs it as well.

They play tug-of-war with the file, it's awkward and goes on way too long. Out-of-nowhere Arthur slams his own head violently against the metal grate, surprising the guy, allowing him to pull the file away--

Arthur takes off running down the hall with it. The clerk watches for a beat, but does nothing.

INT. HALLWAY, ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - MORNING

Arthur running down the hallway, files in his hands. Frantic. Unaware he is not being chased. Turns a corner and runs down another long hallway--

Gets to a stairwell door and runs in.

INT. STAIRWELL, ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Bounding up the steps. He stops at a landing above. Looks down, sees no one is chasing after him, just hears the echoing screams and shouts of other patients--

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, catching his breath. He opens the file, flipping through the records, finds the page the clerk was reading. As he reads it over for himself, he HEARS his mother being interviewed for her psychiatric assessment, over 30 years ago.

YOUNG PENNY (VO)

He's not adopted-- he's Thomas Wayne's son. I worked for him, I told you, I cleaned his house.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY INTERVIEW ROOM, ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - DAY

A younger PENNY FLECK (mid 20's) is sitting across the table from DR. BENJAMIN STONER (50's), in a dreary small interview room, windows covered with security screens. Penny takes a drag off a cigarette, her face is beaten to shit, nose battered, lip busted up.

Dr. Stoner is going over Penny's thick file, the same file Arthur's holding in his hands.

DR. STONER

We went over this, Penny. You adopted him. We have all the paperwork right here.

YOUNG PENNY

He had that all made up, so it stayed our secret.

Dr. Stoner doesn't believe her, keeps going through the file, pulls out black & white forensic photographs of three-year-old Arthur's body--

DR. STONER

You also stood by as one of your boyfriends repeatedly abused your adopted son. And battered you.

Penny exhales smoke.

YOUNG PENNY

He didn't do anything to me. Or to my boy. Can I go now, I don't trust hospitals.

Dr. Stoner lays out the photographs in front of Penny--

Penny keeps smoking her cigarette, glances down at the photos, we catch glimpses of various bruises on parts of Arthur's body... A filthy crib... A rope tied to the radiator...

CUT BACK TO:

Arthur looking over the same black & white photographs, still HEARS his mother--

YOUNG PENNY (VO)

I never heard him crying. Not once. He's always been such a happy little boy.

DR. STONER (VO)

Penny, your son was found tied to a radiator in your filthy apartment, malnourished, with multiple bruises across his body and severe trauma to his head.

Arthur looks up from the file when he hears/reads this, turns and looks at Penny's reaction-- HE'S NOW IN THE INTERVIEW ROOM WITH THEM, living what he's reading on the page.

He sees his mother lean forward in her chair, glaring at Dr. Stoner--

YOUNG PENNY

That's not true. My apartment wasn't filthy. I keep a clean house.

Arthur just stares at his mother.

Dr. Stoner looks at Penny, not sure how to respond to that.

DR. STONER

(beat)

And what do you have to say about
your son?

ANGLE ON PENNY, thinking it over, taking a drag off her
cigarette.

YOUNG PENNY

I'm just glad I got to know him.

Arthur just keeps staring at her as she exhales--

ARTHUR BACK IN THE STAIRWELL LOOKS UP FROM THE FILE, looks
like maybe there's cigarette smoke drifting in front of his
face--

EXT. THE BRONX, STEEP STAIRWAY - NIGHT

IT'S POURING RAIN.

Arthur walks up the long, steep concrete stairway up toward
his building--

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Soaking wet he enters the elevator and hits the button for
his floor. Sensing something, he turns around and "sees"
Sophie.

She mimes blowing her head off with her finger--

INT. HALLWAY, APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Soaking wet, clothes clinging to his body, Arthur exits the
elevator and walks toward Sophie's door. He turns the
doorknob. It's unlocked.

He pushes open the door and heads inside--

INT. SOPHIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Arthur walks into Sophie's apartment, looking around.

He sits down on the couch--

Sophie comes out of her daughter's bedroom, jumps a little on
spotting Arthur--

SOPHIE

Oh my god! What are you doing in here?

Arthur just keeps staring straight ahead.

SOPHIE

(beat)

You're in the wrong apartment.

He turns around finally--

SOPHIE

Your name's Arthur, right? You live down the hall.

He nods.

SOPHIE

I really need you to leave. My little girl's sleeping in the other room. Please.

Arthur just stares at her--

ARTHUR

I had a bad day.

Beat.

SOPHIE

Can I call someone. Is your mother at home?

PUSH IN ON ARTHUR, looking at her-- he raises his fingers to his head, mimicking a gun.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Arthur walking down the hallway toward his mother's apartment.

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur sits alone on the couch, laughing. The TV is on but he's not watching it.

He just continues to laugh, rolling onto his side from the joke that his life seems to be.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL, HOSPITAL ROOM (SHARED) - MORNING

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, leaning forward in a chair, sitting close to his mother in her hospital bed, hear the hum of the machines, the wheezing of the other patient in the room. He's holding onto her hand-- Blue curtain pulled around them.

ANGLE ON PENNY, looking back at him holding her hand, still somewhat out of it.

After a moment, Arthur smiles to himself--

ARTHUR

Hey Ma, what's my real name? Where did I come from?

Penny looks at him confused. Arthur keeps holding her hand in his--

ARTHUR

You remember how you used to tell me that God gave me this laugh for a reason? That, that I had a purpose. Laughter and joy, that whole thing,--

She looks away, she knows what he's talking about.

ARTHUR

HA! It wasn't God, it was you. Or, or one of your boyfriends,-- Do you even know what my real name is? Do you know who I really am?

She looks away. Her whole body is shaking, overwhelmed with emotion.

ARTHUR

C'mon, Ma, who am I?

She looks back him, struggles to speak--

PENNY

H-h-happ--

ARTHUR

(interrupting; snaps)
Happy?! I'm not happy. I haven't been happy for one minute of my entire fucking life.

He lets go of her hand, getting up fast from the chair like a vampire--

ARTHUR

But you know what's funny? You know what *really* makes me laugh?

He reaches behind her, grabs one of her pillows as he leans down closer, face-to-face with her, smiling wide--

ARTHUR

I used to think my life was nothing but a tragedy, but now, now I realize it's all just a fucking comedy.

INT. BLUE CURTAIN, HOSPITAL ROOM (SHARED) - CONTINUOUS

Other side of the blue divider curtain. We see Arthur's feet shifting a little.

SLOWLY WE PULL OUT, backing out of the room. Leaving behind whatever Arthur's doing to his mother on the other side of the curtain.

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ARTHUR'S STUDYING A VHS TAPE OF "MURRAY FRANKLIN LIVE!", he jots down notes in his worn notebook... Watches as A MOVIE STAR GUEST come out... how he crosses the stage... how he greets Murray... how he waves to the audience... how he sits down... if he cross his legs or not... studying how to be at ease, how to be a person like other people.

Arthur gets up, adjusting the waist of his pants... Walks across the living room like he's on the show, smiling, waving to the "audience"... He mimes shaking Murray's hand... Mimes unbuttoning his jacket and sits down, legs uncrossed. He smiles and pulls out his worn notebook from his pocket--

ARTHUR

You wanna hear a joke, Murray?

He "waits" for Murray to answer. Then Arthur nods okay and opens his notebook--

ARTHUR

(reading)

Okay. Knock-knock.

He "waits" for Murray to answer. Arthur nods okay and crosses his legs--

ARTHUR
 (re-reading)
 Okay. Knock-knock.

Arthur awkwardly pulls the .38 snub-nosed revolver from the waist of his pants and puts it to his head and pulls the trigger--

Click.

ARTHUR
 (too himself)
 Should I cross or uncross 'em...
Both feel completely unnatural.

Arthur gets up off the couch, shoving the gun back in his pants and walks back across the living room. Does it again... Waves to the "audience"... Mimes shaking Murray's hand... Mimes unbuttoning his coat and sits down... Legs uncrossed.

ARTHUR
 Thanks for having me on, Murray. I can't tell you how much this means to me, it's been a life long dream. Okay I have a joke for you,-- Knock-knock.

Arthur pulls the gun less awkwardly from his pants now, and points it at his head-- CLICK.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - NEXT AFTERNOON

ARTHUR'S LEANING OVER THE BATHROOM SINK, water running. He's wearing rust colored pants and a white "beater" T-shirt. "Rock n' Roll (Part 1)" blaring from a transistor radio.

Arthur lifts his head. He's dyed his hair green like his old clown wig-- but he's missed spots. Some of his hair is still its original color, sticking out all helter-skelter.

He does a quick spin to the music, gyrating his hips to the thumping beat--

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Arthur applying his mom's lipstick, outlining his large clown smile, sitting at her vanity in front of the three-way mirror. White grease-paint covering his face.

He glances at a mask hanging off the corner of the mirror. He's trying to copy how it looks. A copy of a copy of himself.

He hears someone knocking on the front door--

Arthur opens a small drawer, rummaging around looking for something. Finds some old rusty scissors and pockets them. Before he closes the drawer, he notices some old photographs of his mother. Sees one that makes him stop. He pulls it out--

ANGLE ON BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF A YOUNG PENNY, laughing at something or someone out of frame. She looks so young and beautiful and happy. Flipping over the photo, sees a handwritten note on the back, "Love your smile-- TW"

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, staring at the note on the back as he hears LOUDER BANGING on the door. He glances up at his three reflections in the mirrors--

INT. FRONT DOOR, MOM'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Arthur unlocks the locks, keeping the security chain latched, and cracks open the door,-- Sees Randall. Looks down, and sees Gary next to him. Undoes the chain and opens the door for them--

Randall and Gary get a look at Arthur's face, his dyed green hair still wet, streaking white grease-paint smeared over his face, red lips half done--

GARY
(re: his look)
Hey Arthur, how's it going?

ARTHUR
Oh hey guys. Come on in.

GARY
You get a new gig?

ARTHUR
No.

Arthur shakes his head no, steps aside so they can come in, palming the scissors in his hand--

RANDALL
You must be goin' down to that rally at City Hall, right? I hear it's gonna be nuts.

ARTHUR
Is that today?

Randall looks at him and laughs--

RANDALL
Yeah. What's with the make-up then?

Arthur shuts the door behind them. Locks the chain-lock.

ARTHUR
My mom died. I'm celebrating.

Randall and Gary share a look... that's weird.

RANDALL
(nodding)
Right, we heard. That's why we came
by, figured you could use some
cheering up.

Arthur stares at Randall.

ARTHUR
(beat)
That's sweet. But no, I feel good.
I stopped taking my medication. I
feel a lot better now.

RANDALL
Oh, okay. Well, good for you.
(beat)
Listen, I don't know if you heard,
but the cops have been coming
around the shop-- talking to all
the guys about those subway
murders. And um--

GARY
(interrupting)
They didn't talk to me.

RANDALL
(annoyed)
That's because the suspect was a
regular-sized person. If it was a
fucking midget you'd be in jail
right now.
(back to Arthur, sincere)
Anyway, Hoyt said they talked to
you and now they're looking for me,
and, and I just wanna know what you
said.

(MORE)

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Make sure our stories line up,
bein' that you're my boy and all.

ARTHUR

Yeah, that's important. Yeah, that
makes a lot of sense. Thank you,
Randall. Thank you so much--

AND ARTHUR STABS THE SCISSORS AS DEEP AS HE CAN into
Randall's neck. Blood spurts. Randall screams. Gary stumbles
back in shock--

GARY

(screaming)

What the fuck what the fuck WHAT
THE FUCK--

Arthur pulls them out and jams them into Randall's eye before
he can react. The sound is sickening. Gary's screaming in the
background--

Randall blindly fights back, screaming in pain, flailing his
arms, his own blood blinding him--

Arthur grabs Randall by the head -- all of his pent up rage
and frustration pouring out of him -- AND SLAMS HIS HEAD
AGAINST THE WALL.

AGAIN. And AGAIN. And AGAIN.

Arthur lets go of Randall's head and Randall drops to the
ground. Arthur leans back against the wall, out of breath,
kind of slides down the wall to the floor--

Sees Gary huddled in the corner, trembling with fear--

ARTHUR

(catching his breath)

Do you watch the Murray Franklin
show? I'm gonna be on tonight.

Gary doesn't answer. Doesn't move--

ARTHUR

It's okay, Gary. You can go.

Gary backs away toward the door. Arthur sits there for a
moment, breathing heavy, wipes Randall's blood off his face--

GARY (OS)

Hey, Art?

Arthur turns, sees Gary at the front door. He points up high
to the chain-lock. He can't reach it.

Arthur just shakes his head to himself and gets up to unlock the door.

He walks past Gary who's still trembling almost too afraid to look up at him. Arthur leans over him and undoes the chain, opens the door. Gary takes off, Arthur closing the door behind him--

ANGLE ON ARTHUR, leaning his back against the wall. Takes out a cigarette, lights it with his left hand and smokes.

Exhales deeply.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

(Over the following, we don't see Arthur's face. We don't reveal his finished "look" just yet.)

CLOSE PICKING UP HIS NOTEBOOK, fanning through the pages--

INT. LIVING ROOM, MOM'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON TAKING RANDALL'S WALLET OUT OF HIS BLOOD SOAKED PANTS, pulling out all the cash.

INT. KITCHEN, MOM'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

ARTHUR'S POV FINISHING WRITING A NOTE, "...on Murray Franklin Tonight -- Please Watch!"

CLOSE ON STUFFING THE NOTE AND ALL OF RANDALL'S MONEY into an envelope--

TURNING ENVELOPE OVER, WRITING "SOFI" on the front.

INT. HALLWAY, APARTMENT BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

FOLLOWING BEHIND ARTHUR, walking down the hallway as if in slow motion, heading for Sophie's apartment. His dyed green hair now slicked back.

He's wearing an ill-fitting rust colored suit.

STILL FROM BEHIND, he lays the envelope in front of Sophie's door, then pulls something else out of his pocket -- his body obscuring what it is -- puts it down by her door and leaves.

As he walks away down the hallway, we see what else Arthur left behind--

HIS MAGIC WAND OF FLOWERS, at Sophie's door.

Hold.

INT. ELEVATOR, HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

FROM BEHIND ARTHUR STEPPING ONTO THE ELEVATOR, TURNING TO FACE US AS THE DOOR STARTS TO CLOSE, FINALLY REVEALING HIS LOOK--

Green hair slicked back like one of the Wall Street assholes he killed... White grease paint smeared over his face... red nose painted on... blue peaks over and under his eyes... his mother's red lipstick crudely outlining his smiling mouth... Under the harsh flickering fluorescent lights, he looks like an insane version of his mask.

Ding. And as the door closes on his new face, again we HEAR the banging opening of Gary Glitter's "Rock n' Roll" but this time it's "Part 2", the instrumental version--

EXT. STEEP STAIRWAY, TENEMENTS - LATE AFTERNOON

ARTHUR, NOW "JOKER" DANCING HIS WAY DOWN THE LONG STAIRCASE, doing his own Bill "Bojangles" Robinson stair dance... Skipping and twirling down fours steps, dancing and singing along to the music in his head (and on the soundtrack)...

...Hopping back three...

...Shuffling on a step for a beat or two or three...

Sun setting in the sky.

DET. BURKE (OS)
(shouting)
Hey Arthur, we need to talk!

Joker looks back up the staircase rising above him and sees Garrity and Burke all the way up at the top of the steps.

He dances up a few steps toward the cops..

...Pauses on the edge of a step...

...Teetering on the edge...

Then turns and dances as fast as he can back down the steps and takes off running down the street--

Way up behind him, Burke and Garrity start down the steep staircase after him--

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET, THE BRONX - CONTINUOUS

Joker running like his hair is on fire past guys hanging out on the sidewalk, glances behind to see if the two cops are chasing after him--

Doesn't see them yet, looks back forward and--

RUNS RIGHT INTO THE BACK of a black guy walking down the street, almost running him over--

THE BLACK GUY TURNS AROUND, HE'S WEARING WHITE FACE "JOKER" MAKE-UP.

JOKER TURNS SLOWING DOWN WALKING BACKWARD, staring at the black guy's clown face, but before he can say or do anything, sees Burke and Garrity turning onto the sidewalk from the stairs--

Joker takes off across the street, Burke and Garrity chase after him, "Rock 'n' Roll (Part 2)" still playing--

EXT. SIDE ALLEY, TENEMENTS - CONTINUOUS

Joker cuts through the garbage filled alley, the usual gang of kids hanging out on their fire-escape--

Garrity and Burke run into the alley, the kids on the fire escape start throwing whatever shit they can find at them, hurling insults in Spanish at the cops--

EXT. SIDE ALLEY, JEROME AVE - CONTINUOUS

Joker darts out from the alley onto the busy avenue, the elevated train entrance down across the way on the next corners. Joker runs across the street without looking--

RUNNING RIGHT IN FRONT OF AN ONCOMING YELLOW CAB--

BAM!

The cab hits him and Joker goes crashing into the windshield. Bounces up and over the car. Landing hard on the pavement--

Joker pops back up from getting hit. He's in pain. But not dead.

Burke has drawn his service revolver as he runs out of the alley with Garrity--

Joker takes off running, limping down the street toward the entrance for the elevated train, passing a few other people dressed as clowns, some in "Joker" masks, others painted up to look like the "Joker" mask...

EXT. ELEVATED TRAIN STATION, STEPS - CONTINUOUS

Joker hustling up the stairs, dripping sweat, his white grease-paint running down his face, starts to slow down as he mixes in with the crowd of clowns. He gets to the top of the stairs, sees the waiting Jerome Ave/Downtown Express Train, looks back and catches a glimpse of Garrity and Burke at the bottom--

EXT. PLATFORM, ELEVATED TRAIN STATION - CONTINUOUS

Joker makes his way down the crowded platform, passengers starting to file on the train. It's packed with protesters heading to the rally at City Hall. Many carrying signs, most of them look like Joker, or are dressed as clowns. Joker fits in with all of them. "Rock 'n' Roll (Part 2)" ends.

Joker looks through the crowd of clowns and sees the two cops getting to the top of the stairs, looking up and down the platform for him. Pulling out their badges on chains from around their necks. Identifying themselves as cops.

Joker's willing the doors to close. But they don't.

The two detectives run onto the train just as the doors are finally closing--

INT. JEROME AVE/DOWNTOWN EXPRESS (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Joker moves through the loud train pushing through the rowdy protesters-- Into the next car, all of them packed.

AS THE TRAIN GOES UNDERGROUND, the lights flicker on and off-- car GOING BLACK FOR A FEW SECONDS as the train turns and dips and speeds down the tracks.

Joker glances back at Burke and Garrity pulling out their badges on chains around their necks. Smith & Wesson service revolvers by their sides. Shouting at the crowd, identifying themselves as cops.

Joker hears some on the train shouting back in anger at the police, keeps moving...

past clown-faced protesters carrying signs, "RESIST"... "AM I A CLOWN?"... "SAVE A CITY, KILL A YUPPIE"...

The two cops push through the car, scanning all the "clown" faces... So many look like Joker. They just shove protesters out of the way, shouting at them all the while. A few more voices rising up in protest--

Joker feels Burke and Garrity behind him getting closer. In the flickering light sees a DRUNK GUY (20's) wearing a 'Joker' mask and pulls it right off his face--

The drunk guy turns ready to fight.

He throws a punch at Joker, and Joker steps out of the way--

The guy pummels someone else--

A FIGHT BREAKS OUT, spilling down the car.

Joker slips the clown mask over his clown face--

AND JUST STANDS THERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CHAOS, at home with the mayhem all around him--

Garrity and Burke spot Joker's rust colored suit in the middle of the unruly mob--

Burke pulls his gun--

DET. BURKE
(shouting)
EVERYBODY DOWN, GOTHAM PD!

The crowd doesn't drop to the ground. They just keep fighting with each other--

Burke sees Joker just standing there. Keeps yelling for the crowd to get down, get down, but they don't listen to him--

He starts shoving protesters down, out of the way-- and

AND THEN THE MOB TURNS ON HIM AND GARRITY, starts closing in around them--

Garrity and Burke are pointing their guns at the crowd, yelling panicked for them to back off, back off, and one idiot reaches for Garrity's gun--

Bang.

Burke fires into the crowd, as the train pulls into the station--

A protester falls dead. The other clowns on the train go crazy, turning on the cops.

As the subway doors open, the violence spills out onto the platform, catch a glimpse of Joker walking away from the chaos. Taking off the mask and dropping it at his side as he heads up the stairs, disappearing into the crowd.

EXT. NCB STUDIOS, FRANKLIN THEATER - MIDTOWN - DUSK

WIDE SHOT, excited line of ticket holders waiting to get into "Live with Murray Franklin!" The poster marquee box near the door reads: "TONIGHT'S GUESTS. Lance Reynolds. Dr. Sally Friedman. And Special Guest."

INT. STUDIO 4B, STAGE - FRANKLIN THEATER - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT, set for "LIVE WITH MURRAY FRANKLIN!" is dark... but we can still make out his desk... the guest couch... Ellis Drane's band stand... huge multicolored curtain. Three TV monitors hang from the ceiling, facing the audience seats. Three studio cameras on the floor, black cables strewn everywhere.

INT. HALLWAY, FRANKLIN THEATER - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT, empty hallway.

Then Murray Franklin turns the corner, walking fast toward the drab dressing rooms with his producer, GENE UFLAND (50's), who's holding the show's rundown rolled up in his hand. Murray looks a little more frayed around the edges than he did in Arthur's fantasy.

GENE UFLAND

--You gotta see this nut for yourself, Murray. I don't think we can put him on. With all the shit that's going on out there.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(in a sour mood; annoyed)
Jesus, Gene, I don't have time for this. Cindy's been breaking my balls all day.

GENE UFLAND

She's still mad at you about that thing?

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Four marriages, you'd think I'da fuckin' learned *something*.

(then)

What do I gotta see? I already know he's a nut. That's *why* we're putting him on, it's a goof.

A young BLONDE INTERN walks by in the opposite direction. She nervously smiles to them and keeps walking. Both men turn and check out her ass. Murray winks at Gene.

GENE UFLAND

(just shakes his head, and smiles)

I'm telling you, you gotta see him, Murray. I think it's too risky, the show's too big. It's worth too much to blow it on this,-- this freak.

INT. DRESSING ROOM, FRANKLIN THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Joker's sitting on a small couch in the cramped dressing room, watching the local news on a TV that's mounted up on the wall, live shots from the subway station where Burke shot the protestor, footage of the City Hall rally, clashes with police.

He's cleaned himself up as best he could... white grease-paint smeared more evenly over his face, green dyed hair slicked back in place. Red lips redone.

Murray and his producer Gene open the dressing room door without knocking--

Joker gets up off the couch and goes to shake Murray's hand. Murray pauses when he sees Joker's face.

JOKER

(shakes Murray's hand; effusive)

Murray,--

GENE UFLAND

It's Mr. Franklin, buddy.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Oh shut up, Gene. Who gives a shit.

JOKER

Thanks, Murray. I feel like I know you,-- I've been watching you forever. My mother never missed a show.

Murray nods not listening, he's heard this before.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

So what's with the face? Are you part of the protests?

JOKER

No, I don't believe in any of that. I don't believe in anything. I just thought it would be good for my act.

GENE UFLAND

(upset)

Your act? Did you hear what happened on the subway? Some clown got killed.

Joker looks like he's about to bust out laughing. All of that news is playing out on the TV behind him. He takes a deep breath. Swallows the laugh.

Beat.

JOKER

No. I hadn't heard.

GENE UFLAND

(turns to Murray)

-- the audience is gonna go crazy if you put him on. It was okay maybe for a bit, but not a whole segment.

Murray thinks about it for a beat.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

No. I think it works. We're gonna go with it.

Gene rubs his temples, he doesn't like this, but Murray is the boss.

JOKER

Thank you, Murray.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(flashes his bemused
smile; condescending)

Couple rules though,-- No cursing,
no off-color material, we do a
clean show, okay? You'll be on
after Dr. Sally. Someone will come
and get you. Good?

Joker nods good. Smiles back at Murray.

Murray and Gene turn to go, exchanging smirks with each other
as they walk out, making light of Joker who we see behind
them still standing there.

JOKER

Hey Murray,-- one small thing? When
you bring me out, can you introduce
me as "Joker"?

Murray and Gene look back at him

GENE UFLAND

What? You don't want to use your
real name?

JOKER

Honestly, I don't even know what my
real name is.

Joker smiles, the guys can't tell if he's kidding or not.

JOKER

Besides, that's what you called me
on the show, Murray. A joker.
Remember?

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(to Gene; trying not to
crack up)

Did I?

GENE UFLAND

I have no idea.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(turns back to Joker)

Well, if you say so, kid. Joker it
is.

Murray starts to laugh at Joker as he closes the dressing
room door, shutting it right in his face.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE, BEHIND CURTAIN - STUDIO 4B - NIGHT

JOKER'S BACKSTAGE AT THE EDGE OF THE CURTAIN, trying to watch the show through a slim gap. Behind him there's a monitor on a cart playing the live feed.

He moves the curtain aside to get a better look-- Glimpses Murray laughing, finishing up talking to noted sex therapist DR. SALLY FRIEDMAN (60's), sitting next to Barry O'Donnell.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

-- I'll try it, but I'm not sure my wife will let me do it. Maybe my next wife.

The audience laughs.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(laughs; to Dr. Sally)
Will you stick around? You gotta see our next guest for yourself. I'm pretty sure he could use a doctor.

DR. SALLY FRIEDMAN

Oh. Does he have sexual problems?

MURRAY FRANKLIN

He looks like he's got a lot of problems.

Another big laugh.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(turns, looks into camera)
Alright folks, don't go anywhere. We'll be right back.

APPLAUSE SIGN LIGHTS UP. Everyone claps. Joker keeps watching Murray through the slim gap at the end of the curtain. Hears the FLOOR MANAGER shout, "And we're out. Back in three."

Joker adjusts the gun in the waist of his pants. Takes a deep breath.

INT. DIRECTOR'S BOOTH, STUDIO 4B - NIGHT

Perched one story above the studio. There's a long console where the DIRECTOR sits in front of a gooseneck microphone, looking over a double-bank of monitors.

Sitting next to him are the ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR who times the show, and the TECHNICAL DIRECTOR who operates the board. The monitor showing the live feed is playing a commercial.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Back in 30 seconds.

DIRECTOR
Okay, cue the clip. We'll come to it straight out of break.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Five... Four... Three...

DIRECTOR
Roll clip. Put up the show graphic.

ON THE SHOW MONITOR, video of Joker's original stand-up performance comes up with the show's graphic in the lower right of the screen.

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

ON THE SET, Murray watches the clip on the monitor above his desk, can't help but laugh. Sees the FLOOR MANAGER counting him down silently with her fingers... Three... Two... points to Camera One.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
(looking into camera)
O-kay, you may have seen that clip of our next guest when we first played it a couple weeks ago. Now before he comes out, I just want to say that we're all heartbroken at what's going on in the city tonight. But, this is how he wanted to come out, and honestly I think we could all use a good laugh. So, please welcome-- Joker.

BEHIND THE SHIMMERING MULTICOLORED CURTAIN, Joker gathers himself, ready for his moment. Doesn't hear his introduction or see a STAGEHAND pull open the curtain for him to go out--

ON SET, THE CURTAIN'S OPEN, Ellis Drane and his Jazz Orchestra are playing Joker on. He doesn't come out. Murray looks over to the empty space in the curtain.

The audience laughs.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN, Joker sees the stagehand motioning for him to go out on stage.

Joker starts out, pausing when he takes a step into the bright lights. The stagehand doesn't see him stop, and drops the curtain back on Joker before the audience can really see his face--

Tangling Joker up in the curtain.

The audience keeps laughing thinking it's part of his act. The band keeps playing him on. Joker untangles himself from the curtain and the audience gets a good look at him.

Some continue laughing. A few boo. Most don't know what to make of him.

Joker walks across the stage, forgetting to wave like he practiced. He trips over the riser surrounding the set when he goes to shake Murray's hand. Almost falls on him.

Murray tries not to crack up. The audience laughs. Thinks it's part of Joker's act.

Joker reaches out to hug Dr. Sally as she goes in for a handshake. Another awkward moment. More laughs.

Barry O'Donnell stands there with his hands up, as if to say "what about me?"

Joker ignores him and just sits down next to Murray. Crosses and uncrosses his legs. Can't get comfortable. Murray shakes his head.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

So, ahhh, thanks for coming on the show. But I gotta tell ya, with what happened at City Hall today, I'm sure many of our viewers here, and at home, might find this look of yours in poor taste.

Joker's not listening to Murray. He's mesmerized by all the lights shining on him... all the eyes on him... he doesn't answer Murray.

Nervous laughter from the audience.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(tries again)

So... can you tell us why you're dressed like this? A lot of protesters are going with this look, right? City seems to be full of clowns these days.

A long uncomfortable beat.

JOKER
 (glances at the studio
 audience; awkward)
 Yeah. Isn't it great?

INT. DIRECTOR'S BOOTH, STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

Dead silence in the booth, everybody's just staring at the monitors.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
 (looks to the director)
 This guy's got nothing.

DIRECTOR
 (hits the producer's talk
 button; into the mic)
 Gene, what the hell? You wanna kill
 this?

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Murray glances over at his producer Gene Ufland, who's sitting off-camera on a director's chair by a monitor. Gene shrugs at him.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (smiles; trying to save
 the interview)
 So when we talked earlier, you
 mentioned that you aren't
 political. That this look isn't a
 political statement.

JOKER
 That's right. I'm not political,
 Murray. I'm just trying to make
 people laugh.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (beat; smiles)
 How's that goin' for ya?

The studio audience laughs at Joker. Joker doesn't answer Murray, just smiles to himself.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (trying not to laugh)
 Have you been working on any new
 material? Do you want to tell us a
 joke now?

The audience claps, egging Joker on to tell a joke.

Joker reaches into his jacket pocket and--

Pulls out his worn notebook. Looks through it, sees Bruce Wayne's photo, pauses for a moment then turns the page. Finds the joke--

JOKER

(reading)

Okay. Here's one. Knock-knock.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

And you had to look that up?

Studio audience laughs.

JOKER

(nods; reads it again)

I want to get it right. Knock knock.

Murray makes a face like, "Okay, I'll go along with this."

MURRAY FRANKLIN

Who's there?

Joker looks up from his notebook-- Sees the audience looking back at him, waiting for the punchline.

Decides to finish the joke--

JOKER

It's the police, ma'am. Your son has been hit by a drunk driver. He's dead.

A few in the audience groan. A couple even laugh.

Ellis Drane plays "wha-wha-wha-whuuuh" on his trumpet from the band stand. Barry O'Donnell clears his throat.

DR. SALLY FRIEDMAN

Ahhhh! No, no,-- You can not joke about that.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(shakes his head;
irritated)

Yeah, that's not funny, that's not the kind of humor we do on this show.

Murray glances over at Gene in the wings. He gives him the "wrap it up" sign.

JOKER
 (just keeps going, on a
 roll)
 Sorry. It's been a rough few weeks,
 Murray. Ever since I killed those
 three Wall Street guys.

Beat.

Studio audience can't tell if he's joking or not. Murray can't either.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (looks at him confused)
 Okay. I'm waiting for the
 punchline.

JOKER
 There is no punchline. It's not a
 joke.

INT. DIRECTOR'S BOOTH, STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

The director stares at the monitor.

DIRECTOR
 Did he just confess to killing the
 Wall Street Three?

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
 (horrified)
 Yeah. I think he did.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
 (turns to the director,
 nods)
 He definitely did.

DIRECTOR
 Jesus Christ.
 (hits the camera talk
 button, into mic)
 Camera Three, get in close.

ANGLE ON MONITOR, Camera Three slowly zooming in close on Joker's face.

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Gene Ufland motions for Murray to kill the interview. Murray shakes his head to himself. This is a big "get," it could be great television.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(turns back to Joker; with gravitas)

You're serious, aren't you? You're telling us you killed those three young men on the subway. Why should we believe you?

JOKER

(shrugs)

I got nothing left to lose, Murray. Nothing can hurt me anymore. This is my fate, my life is nothing but a comedy.

INT. SOPHIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sophie's sitting on her couch watching this interview play out on TV. GiGi's asleep next to her. The open envelope and the money are lying on the coffee table. No sign of the flowers anywhere.

MURRAY FRANKLIN (ON TV)

Let me get this straight, you think killing those guys is funny?

JOKER (ON TV)

Comedy is sub, subjective, isn't that what they say? All of you, *the system that knows so much, you* decide what's right or wrong. What's real or what's made up. The same way you decide what's funny or not.

Sophie edges forward on the couch, can almost see a hint of agreement on her face.

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - STUDIO 4B - CONTINUOUS

Back on set, we can tell by the way Murray's now interviewing Joker, talking to him slower, more thoughtfully, that he thinks this is gonna get him an Emmy... Maybe even a Peabody.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

(beat)

Okay, I think I understand. You did it to start a movement, to become a symbol.

JOKER

C'mon, Murray, do I look like the kind of clown who could start a movement? I killed those guys because they were awful. *Everybody's* awful these days. It's enough to make anyone crazy.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

So that's it, huh, you're crazy. That's your defense for killing three young men? Because they were mean to you?

JOKER

No. They couldn't carry a tune to save their lives.

Some audible groans from the audience.

JOKER

Why is everyone so upset about these guys? Because Thomas Wayne went and cried about them on TV?

MURRAY FRANKLIN

You have a problem with Thomas Wayne, too?

JOKER

Yeah. I do. Everything comes so easy for him.

MURRAY FRANKLIN

And what's wrong with that?

JOKER

Have you seen what it's like out there, Murray? Do you ever actually leave this studio? Everybody just yells and screams at each other. Nobody's civil anymore. Nobody thinks what it's like to be the *other* guy. You think men like Thomas Wayne ever think what it's like to be a guy like me? To be anybody but themselves.

(MORE)

JOKER (CONT'D)
 (shaking his head, voice
 rising)
 They don't. They think we'll all
 just sit there and take it like
 good little boys. That we won't go
 wild. Well, this is for all of you
 out there.

Joker "howls at the moon." It's fucking weird.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 So much self-pity, Arthur. You
 sound like you're making excuses
 for killing three young men. Not
everybody's awful.

JOKER
 You're awful, Murray.

There is no more laughter. The audience is watching this
 exchange with full attention.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 Me? *How am I awful?*

JOKER
 Playing my video, inviting me on
 the show,-- You just wanted to make
 fun of me. You're just like the
 rest of them, Murray. Everything
 comes too easy for you.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 (on the spot; defensive)
 You don't know the first thing
 about me, pal. Look what happened
 because of what you did, what it
 led to. There are riots out there.
 Two policemen are in critical
 condition, someone was killed
 today.

JOKER
 How about another joke, Murray?

MURRAY FRANKLIN
 No, I think we've had enough
 of your jokes--

JOKER
 What do you get when you
 cross a mentally-ill loner
 with a system that abandons
 him and treats him like
 trash?

JOKER
 (pulling the gun)
 I'll tell you what you get. You get
 what you fucking deserve,--

And as Murray Franklin turns, JOKER SHOOTS THE SIDE OF
 MURRAY'S HEAD OFF--

Blood splatters all over the back of the set. Some spraying
 in Joker's face. AUDIENCE SCREAMS! Dr. Sally dives for the
 floor. Barry O'Donnell reaches over her to try and save
 Murray--

INT. SOPHIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sophie screams and jumps to her feet horrified! Waking up
 GiGi who starts to cry when she sees what's on television--

ANGLE ON TELEVISION, Joker gets up and walks right up to the
 camera. Blood sprayed over his white painted face. Hear the
 studio audience still screaming, bedlam all around him.

JOKER (ON TV)
 (looks straight into
 camera; screams Murray's
 signature sign off)
 GOOD NIGHT AND ALWAYS REMEMBER,--
THAT'S LIFE!

And as Joker waves goodbye to the home audience, a black &
 white "INDIAN-HEAD TEST PATTERN" playing HERB ALPERT's
 "Spanish Flea" cuts off the show--

"PLEASE STAND BY"

CUT TO:

**INDIAN-HEAD TEST PATTERN IN THE MIDDLE/BOTTOM HALF OF THE
 SCREEN... A NEWS BULLETIN SPLIT INTO THE RIGHT/BOTTOM HALF...
 REST OF THE FRAME BLACK...**

A solemn WGC ANCHORMAN (50's) sits behind the news desk. We
 still hear "Spanish Flea" playing...

WGC ANCHORMAN
 Good evening. Breaking news,--
 Popular TV talk show host, Murray
 Franklin, was shot dead tonight on
 the live telecast of his program by
 one of his guests.

THE SCREEN SPLITS AGAIN, MIDDLE OF ANOTHER NEWS BROADCAST LEFT/BOTTOM HALF...

Middle of a clip of Joker shooting Murray Franklin on the show, screaming into the camera, then getting tackled down to the ground, hear an IBN ANCHORWOMAN (40's) talking over the video.

IBN ANCHORWOMAN (VO)
-- the man, who was introduced by Franklin as "Joker", is currently under arrest.

WGC ANCHORMAN
(continuing)
Warning, the following video is graphic and may be disturbing to some of you.

THREE MORE SPLIT SCREENS APPEAR ACROSS THE TOP OF THE BLACK FRAME ONE RIGHT AFTER ANOTHER, LEFT/TOP A REPORTER IN FRONT OF A CROWD AT THE NCB STUDIOS... MIDDLE/TOP RAW FOOTAGE OF THE RIOTING AND LOOTING... AND RIGHT/TOP AN ANC NEWS REPORTER ON THE STREET...

NCB NEWS REPORTER
Just minutes ago, police led the suspect handcuffed out of the studio. When asked why he did it, he just laughed and said he didn't understand the question.

ANC NEWS REPORTER
(shouting; breathless)
Looting and rioting have intensified here after the Franklin shooting. More people pouring into the streets, many wearing clown masks. And as you see, Gotham is burning.

Right/bottom split screen they show the shooting from multiple angles, slowed-down... Left/bottom they cut to the IBN Anchorwoman sitting behind the desk... In the middle, the "Indian-Head Test Pattern" keeps playing...

IBN ANCHORWOMAN
(continuing)
The man said he meant no harm. Again, Murray Franklin dead tonight, killed live on the set of his own show.

WGC ANCHORMAN (VO)
(continuing)
After he was arrested, he told police officials, that he meant nothing by it, that it was merely just a punchline to a joke.

ALL SIX SPLIT-SCREENS PLAYING AT ONCE, "Spanish Flea" on a loop, a cacophony of noise, competing video of Joker shooting Murray interspersed with footage of rioting and fires, "Indian-Head Test Pattern" the only constant. It's enough to drive anybody crazy--

CUT TO:

INT. GOTHAM SQUAD CAR (MOVING), GOTHAM STREETS - NIGHT

DEAD SILENCE. JOKER GAZING OUT THE WINDOW, at all the violence and madness in the city. We only see it in the reflection of the glass... the fires burning... the mob crowding the streets. Joker's handcuffed in the back of the squad car moving slowly through the rioting, sirens wailing, red lights flashing, blood still splattered on his face.

AND HE STARTS TO LAUGH. It's not his affliction, he just finds it all so hilarious.

POLICE OFFICER #1 (OS)
Stop laughing, you freak. This isn't funny.

AND JOKER JUST LAUGHS HARDER--

POLICE OFFICER #2
(glancing at Joker in the back seat)
Yeah, the whole fucking city's on fire cause of what you did.

JOKER STOPS LAUGHING AND LEANS FORWARD, FACE PRESSED AGAINST THE GRATE--

JOKER
I know. Isn't it beautiful.

AND BEFORE THE OFFICERS CAN ANSWER THE SQUAD CAR GETS HIT BY A SCREAMING AMBULANCE SPEEDING LIGHTS FLASHING DOWN A CROSS STREET--

VIOLENTLY CRASHING INTO JOKER'S SIDE, Joker flying like a rag doll crashing against the opposite door, glass spraying--

BOTH COPS BANGING AGAINST THE DASHBOARD AND DOORS, bones breaking, screaming in pain and terror--

THE SQUAD CAR GETS PUSHED INTO ONCOMING TRAFFIC, A yellow cab headed straight for it, swerves right to avoid, clipping the front end of the squad car and flipping onto its side.

THE SQUAD CAR COMES TO A STOP in the middle of all the chaos, ambulance lights still flashing, fires burning--

Nobody inside the wreckage moves. Glass and twisted metal everywhere. Through the broken window looks like TWO MEN IN CLOWN MASKS getting out of the ambulance--

ANGLE ON JOKER, head slumped to the side, face and mouth cut up and bleeding, blood smearing his dyed green hair.

He looks dead. And we HEAR the soft and familiar opening to FERRANTE & TEICHER's piano version of "Send in the Clowns"...

SUDDENLY HANDS REACH INTO THE BACK OF THE SQUAD CAR, hands grabbing Joker's body, pulling him out--

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER, STREET - UPTOWN - NIGHT

A LIMOUSINE ON FIRE SLOWLY ROLLS THROUGH FRAME as if in slow-motion, we pan with it to--

A WELL-HEELED CROWD LETTING OUT OF A MOVIE THEATER, coming upon the car on fire, realizing the violence has reached here, the nice part of town... Gangs of punks wearing clown masks running past, breaking car windows, sirens wailing... Catch a glimpse of the lit up marquee listing the films playing, "Blow Out" and "Zorro the Gay Blade". Hear "Send in the Clowns" still playing...

FROM BEHIND SEE A SILHOUETTED COUPLE AND THEIR KID hurry down the dark side of the street, ducking into an alley to avoid the chaos--

Catch a glimpse of a punk in a "Joker" mask following after them pulling a gun--

EXT. ALLEY, MOVIE THEATER - CONTINUOUS

FROM BEHIND, FAMILY IN THE SHADOWS see the guy's eyes go wide behind the mask, pointing his gun, music swelling--

PUNK
(shouting)
Hey Wayne! You get what you fucking
deserve.

And the punk shoots the man. Reaches out and grabs something off the woman's neck before he shoots her as well. Both fall to the ground dead. Revealing their young son standing behind them--

CLOSE ON EIGHT-YEAR-OLD BRUCE WAYNE, closing his eyes as blood sprays across his face. He opens his eyes and looks up scared at the man in the "Joker" mask who killed his parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. SQUAD CAR (CRASHED), STREET - NIGHT

FROM ABOVE, JOKER LAID OUT ON THE HOOD, arms spread, his hands uncuffed, a crowd has started to form around the wreckage, checking out his broken body--

ANGLE ON JOKER, A CROOKED SMILE PLASTERED ON HIS FACE, laughing, coughing up blood. The crowd steps back in surprise. Joker stumbles to his feet, standing up on the hood of the car--

Looks out at the city burning all around him... the crowd at his feet stunned that's he's alive... And over it all, Joker HEARS A STUDIO AUDIENCE APPLAUDING...

He raises a hands above his head, does a little dance move and the CROWD GOES CRAZY--

CLOSE ON JOKER, tears in his eyes from all the pain and suffering, still he keeps smiling as he wipes his bloody hand from one cheek across his mouth to his other cheek, smearing a wide blood-soaked smile across his face so they can all see how fucking happy he is--

He is the Joker.

CUT TO BLACK.

A long beat.

HEAR LAUGHTER.

The sound of a man totally cracking up.

FADE IN:

INT. ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL, INTERVIEW ROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON JOKER, tears in his eyes from laughing so hard. Still smiling. His head's been shaved, he's wearing white institutional clothes. He looks medicated or maybe even lobotomized.

He's sitting across from an overworked HOSPITAL DOCTOR (50's), African American woman. Somehow it's the exact same room Joker imagined his mother was in some 30 years ago. The room and the doctor also look vaguely similar to the social worker and her office in the opening scene.

The doctor just sits there, waiting for him to stop laughing. A weathered notebook is on the table in front of him. Finally, Joker stops himself.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
What's so funny?

He takes a deep breath, his eyes are glazed over. His voice is scratchy, like he doesn't use it much. But the smile never leaves his crooked lips.

JOKER
--just thinking of this joke.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
Do you want to tell it to me?

Beat.

JOKER
You wouldn't get it.

The doctor writes something down in her notes.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
How are you feeling?

JOKER
Good. Everything's good now.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
Have you been keeping up with your journal?

Joker slowly nods.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
Great. Have you been writing about what happened? About your episode?

JOKER
How I remember it.

HOSPITAL DOCTOR
(re: the journal)
May I see?

Joker slides his journal across to her. She picks it up and flips through the pages--

ANGLE ON JOURNAL, blank page after blank page, there's nothing inside of it.

The doctor looks up at him confused.

Beat.

ANGLE ON JOKER, his smile creeping wider across his face. And we HEAR the groovy organ opening to FRANK SINATRA's anthem "That's Life"...

Beat.

INT. HALLWAY, ARKHAM STATE HOSPITAL - MORNING

From behind, see Joker shuffling down the long hallway past all the other mental patients. Sinatra starts singing...

And Joker does a slide step to the music like he can hear it too... into a skip... and another slide step into a spin... Dancing down the hallway into the sunset...

IRIS OUT:

"That's Life" keeps playing over credits.