

# VERVE

a talent and literary agency



A screenplay by  
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Based on events real and imagined.

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BLACK. SILENCE.

Pinpoints of light appear, growing first into bright stars, then slowly into various nebulous creatures: curious, eccentric, whimsical... *hairy*.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

This is the story of a young boy named Ted,  
and the wonderful things that filled up his  
head.

We move closer to one figure in particular. It is furry, black with white features... closer still we see it is an animal, smiling, *feline*.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Zonks and grommets and tin-armored doves,  
things that could only exist but for  
love.

Closer and closer until the figure is obscured - shades of charcoal fill the screen until finally we see...

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

A PENCIL TIP, coloring a piece of paper.

The pencil drops as a young boy - TED, 8, dark-haired and wearing a neatly tied bow tie - is handed a shoulder bag by his adoring mother - HENRIETTA "NETTIE" GEISEL, 30s, strong yet tender. He bounds out the front door.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Love was the thing that was key to his spring,  
and the people who said *you can do anything*

Seconds later, he runs back in and kisses her cheek, then dashes back out without a word.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

Pushed him and nudged him and gave him the guts  
to be who he was, though some might say nuts.

Nettie picks up Ted's sketch and smiles a mile wide.

EXT. CITY STREETS, SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, 1912 -- DAY

Ted marvels at the scene, his imagination running wild: a baker tossing a loaf of bread to a man with a wide handlebar moustache, a dog catcher with an oversized net, a butcher curiously juggling fish, a MAN IN A TALL TOP HAT bending low as a lady passes.

A signpost marks the thoroughfare: this is MULBERRY STREET.

OLD MAN (V.O.)  
 You have to believe in this magic you see,  
 defy those who say it can't possibly be.

Suddenly a rock whizzes by Ted's head, then another, nearly missing him. A group of BULLIES appear from around a corner. Ted takes off as amidst another volley of rocks.

A WILD CHASE ENSUES as Ted runs through the city. Only steps ahead of his attackers, he scrambles past dumpsters and trucks.

OLD MAN (V.O.)  
 Through bad times and good, believe yes you should,  
 For it's magic so strong, it turns terrible good.

Rocks continue to sail, but as they hit building facades in his wake, they mysteriously burst into splashes of brilliant color, like splatters of paint.

Ted finally emerges in front of a school building and sprints up the steps through the front door, safe for the day.

OLD MAN (V.O.)  
 I tell you the truth, I promise, you'll see,  
 I know this because it all happened...  
*to me.*

SMASH TO BLACK:

A single title card fades in: **SEUSS.**

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE -- DAY

A stern-looking PRINCIPAL - 50s, proper - shuffles a stack of loose-leaf paper. Ted sits quietly across from him.

The Principal holds up a page, presenting an ambiguous-looking design to the boy.

TED  
 Bird.

He shuffles again, presenting another drawing.

TED (CONT'D)  
 Lion.

And another.

TED (CONT'D)  
 Duck-dog.

Frowning now, the Principal shifts in his seat. Then one more:

TED (CONT'D)  
Zizzer-zazzer-zuzz.

PRINCIPAL  
Son, there is no such thing as a--

The office door CREAKS opens as a grim-faced man enters, eyes locked on the boy, who lowers his head. This is T.R. GEISEL - 30s, burly, cold, and most importantly, Ted's father.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)  
Mr. Geisel, thank you for coming. We were just reviewing your son's... *arithmetic assignments.*

T.R. approaches the desk and flips through the pages, not an ounce of arithmetic to be found amongst the odd drawings.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)  
You see our concern.

T.R., barely masking a fuming rage, returns the pages to the corner of the Principal's desk. In his heavy German accent:

T.R.  
Indeed. Thank you.

T.R. storms out. Ted musters a brave smile at the Principal, then takes his drawings and stuffs them into his pockets as he hurries out the door.

INT. MOTORCAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Father and son ride in total silence, neither one breaking it. Ted stares out the window.

T.R.  
You are wasting your education. Making a mockery of this family.

The lack of reaction from the boy suggests this isn't a new criticism. After a beat, he turns pointedly to T.R.:

TED  
Once six is six, two sixes are twelve, three sixes are eighteen, four sixes are twenty-four, five sixes are--

T.R.  
Enough.

Ted looks back out the window, vindicated.

INT. GEISEL HOME -- DUSK

An anxious-looking Nettie puts the finishing touches on the family meal, doffing her apron as the front door SLAMS.

NETTIE  
What happened?

T.R. drags Ted into his bedroom by the scruff of his coat, then swiftly collects the BRIGHTLY-STRIPED SKETCHBOOK and pencils on his desk. He shuts the door and locks it behind him.

T.R.  
You coddle him too much.

INT. BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Ted finds a nub of a pencil under his bed and draws on the floorboards. A HEATED ARGUMENT echoes through the walls:

NETTIE (O.S.)  
He's eight years old... He's just a boy!

T.R. (O.S.)  
Then he's ten, then fourteen, then twenty-four, then fifty! When does it end?

Ted pulls the school drawings from his pockets, which bear a resemblance to the odd-looking stuffed animals around his room.

NETTIE (O.S.)  
Never. If that's who he is.

T.R. (O.S.)  
He will amount to *nothing* if you continue to indulge these... doodles.

With a sudden burst, Ted rips the drawings apart, one after the next. Slumped on the floor, he screws his eyes shut amidst the shreds as the argument in the next room continues.

INT. BEDROOM -- LATER

Nighttime. Silence. Ted stares up at the ceiling when the lock to his door turns with a CLINK. Nettie peeks in.

NETTIE  
Thought you might be hungry.

She offers him a plate of food, which he tears into.

TED  
Why does he hate me so much?

NETTIE

(heart breaking)

Come here. Your father doesn't hate you. Not one bit. He just has no imagination. You want to know a little secret? I think it's maybe because he feels... left out.

TED

Left out of what?

NETTIE

The wonderful world of things that live up here.

(she taps his head, then his chest)

And in here.

Young Ted struggles to absorb this.

NETTIE (CONT'D)

Do you want to tell me what happened today? Did you see anything you liked?

(then, with a twinkle in her eye)

Anything wild and amazing and extraordinary?

Ted brightens - this is a game that's been played many times.

TED

I walked down Mulberry Street to school.

NETTIE

Well, there's not much to see on Mulberry Street...

TED

There is!

NETTIE

Tell me.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. MULBERRY STREET -- DAY

Ted, back on the city streets. Only this time the roadway is plain, sepia, devoid of color. *A blank canvas.*

*A nondescript horse and buggy appear.*

TED (O.S.)

A horse! And a wagon.

NETTIE (O.S.)  
A plain old horse and wagon?

*The horse and buggy transform before our eyes into...*

TED (O.S.)  
I mean a zebra. And a charioteer!

NETTIE (O.S.)  
And maybe... an elephant?

*Ted and Nettie stand by the side of the road now, watching the parade materialize in front of them.*

TED  
Yes! A zebra, a charioteer, an elephant,  
and a brass band, and... a raja--

NETTIE  
Ooh, a real live raja?

*Ted is now by himself in the middle of the menagerie, the ringleader of the show that continues to unfold around him.*

TED  
Yes. And jugglers and policemen and,  
and... the mayor!

BACK TO SCENE:

INT. BEDROOM -- SAME

Ted breaks into giggles as Nettie hugs him tightly.

NETTIE  
Quiet now, you'll wake your father.

Nettie hums quietly as the boy closes his eyes.

TED  
Stay a while?

NETTIE  
Always.

After a moment, she looks up to see T.R. in the open crack of the doorway. His face remains stoic, then vanishes.

Nettie turns back to Ted and gently touches his head.

NETTIE (CONT'D)  
*You're off to great places.*

CUT TO:

INT. GEISEL HOME -- LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA -- 1955

A cocktail party in full swing: guests mingle and imbibe, appetizers are passed. TED GEISEL, now mid-50s, stands awkwardly at the center of attention with his wife, HELEN GEISEL, 50s.

AUDREY DIAMOND, late 30s, stands next to husband GREY and raises a flute of champagne. TING! TING! TING!

AUDREY

It's an honor to see so many friendly faces tonight. Thank you all for coming--

TED

To my house!

AUDREY

We couldn't very well get you to celebrate anywhere else, now, could we?

A few CHUCKLES around the room.

TED

I know you're only here for the canapes... Especially you boys from Random House!

Two JUNIOR EXECUTIVES in the back of the room raise a glass.

AUDREY

To your latest book, Ted - may it charm and delight the rest of the world as much as it has all of us.

A few HEAR-HEARS round up the toast. Helen wraps a protective arm around Ted as the congratulatory crowd descends.

JUNIOR EXEC #1

(aside)

How's it tracking?

JUNIOR EXEC #2 just shakes his head.

JUNIOR EXEC #1 (CONT'D)

Are the rumors true?

A portly, gruff BENNETT CERF, 50s, approaches Ted and Helen across the room. Ted embraces him warmly.

JUNIOR EXEC #2

Poor son-of-a-bitch doesn't even see it coming.

Cerf breaks the embrace.

CERF  
 (to Ted)  
 Have a moment?

TED  
 Of course.

INT. GEISEL HOME -- STUDY -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted takes a seat at a large desk, gestures for Cerf to sit.  
 Helen stands to the side.

CERF  
 (indicating Helen)  
 I'd rather imagined we'd be alone--

HELEN  
 We are.

CERF  
 (miffed)  
 Of course. Ted, you know I'm not much  
 for small talk, so let's cut to it.  
 We're not picking up your contract.

Ted's face drops. The LAUGHTER of the crowd in the next room  
 fills the silence.

TED  
 Impeccable timing, Bennett--

HELEN  
 This is ludicrous. Everyone loves Ted's  
 books. Walter at the Times--

CERF  
 Ted's books don't sell, Helen. And I  
 can't publish books that no one buys no  
 matter who likes them. This little  
 experiment is over.

HELEN  
 Thidwick, McElligot's Pool... the  
 Bartholomew Books-- you call these an  
 experiment?

CERF  
 A failed one.

HELEN  
 Fine. We'll go to Scheuster, or Houghton  
 Mifflin, or--

CERF  
 They won't bite.

Helen scoffs.

HELEN

Old boys' network alive and well, is it, Bennett?

CERF

Everyone's pushing for primers, Helen.

TED

Early readers are hot now, Bennet?

HELEN

So Ted will write you a primer.

CERF

All due respect, Ted's books are filled with nonsense. The "Jungle of Nool"? "Horton"? And "Whos"? And--

TED

You'd prefer Dick and Jane? See Dick Run? See Dick get stabbed in the back by his publisher?

CERF

Ted.

HELEN

Dropping Ted cold, sales or no sales is going to raise some eyebrows.

CERF

Raised eyebrows I can handle. Red ink, I can't.

TED

You're making a mistake, Bennett.

Cerf studies Ted, measuring his response. Sighs.

CERF

Tell you what. I've got a list of words - 300 of them.

He pulls a piece of paper from his lapel pocket.

CERF (CONT'D)

Unrelated, beginner words-- some sort of... bureaucratic educational decree. I need to turn them into a book.

Ted takes the list, reads.

TED  
 (sarcastic)  
 Rain, house, bump, fish... cat? This one  
 should write itself.

CERF  
 I can't make heads or tails of it and  
 neither can any editor in town. You do  
 this, we'll talk.

HELEN  
 Done.

They both turn to Ted, who shrugs.

TED  
 Okay.

CERF  
 I need it fast.

Cerf stands and turns back at the study door.

CERF (CONT'D)  
 "Oobleck" is not on the list.

HELEN  
 We understand.

As Cerf exits, sounds of the party bleed into the room. Ted  
 wipes a crease in his forehead, defeated.

TED  
 So I'll go back to writing ads.

Helen goes to him.

HELEN  
 You can do this, Ted.

TED  
 A primer? I don't even know where I'd  
 start... how I can--

HELEN  
 Hey.

She places a hand on his chest.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 It's all right here. Just be you.

Ted melts, dismissing his troubles with a wave of his hand.

TED  
 So are we celebrating? Or what?

INT. GEISEL HOME -- LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Ted, Helen, Audrey and a small group of friends stand around a baby grand singing as Grey plays, "As Time Goes By." Everyone is tipsy and enjoying themselves to the fullest.

As the final chorus winds up, Ted's eyes meet Helen's across the piano. They smile - this is a couple for the ages.

Suddenly, Helen stiffens, then stumbles as her knees buckle. She claws at the piano as she falls, landing in a heap on the floor amidst a flurry of GASPS. Ted rushes over.

INT. HOSPITAL -- EARLY MORNING

Ted sits with head in hands in a waiting room chair - he's clearly been here all night. He is disheveled, eyes bloodshot.

DR. ADAM DAVIS, 40s, approaches. Ted jumps to his feet.

DR. DAVIS

Sit, Mr. Geisel. Girls taking okay care of you? Show you the way to the cafeteria, some coffee?

TED

Doc, please... spill it.

DR. DAVIS

Pathology indicates that your wife's body's immune system is attacking her nerves -- it's called Guillain-Barre syndrome. Usually starts with weakness and tingling in the extremities - sometimes, rarely - symptoms progress very rapidly, with complete paralysis of legs, arms and breathing muscles over the course of a few hours. That's where we are with Helen, Mr. Geisel.

Ted face registers shock, horror.

DR. DAVIS (CONT'D)

It is treatable with plasmapheresis - blood cleansing - which we do through a series of transfusions. The first is underway.

TED

She's paralyzed?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

The room is filled with archaic, beeping machines, glass bottles and tubes. We forget what medicine looked like 60 years ago.

Helen is encased in a cold, airtight, metal cylinder that looks like a medieval torture device. Only her head is visible. This is an IRON LUNG.

DR. DAVIS (O.S.)  
 Thing's keeping her alive. Doing the  
 breathing for her. Best we can do right  
 now.

IN THE HALLWAY, Ted looks in through the window, face ashen. Helen, alone, stares at the ceiling, blinking back tears.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- SAME

Ted wanders down the hallway, shell-shocked, and finds himself standing before the nurse station.

NURSE  
 Can I help you sir?

TED  
 I need a phone.

The nurse gently guides Ted over to a pay phone. Ted dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. T.R.'S HOUSE -- SAME

T.R., now late-70s, answers.

T.R.  
 Yes? Hello?

TED  
 Dad, it's Helen.

T.R.  
 Where are you, son?

TED  
 The hospital. It's serious.

T.R. sighs. After a beat:

T.R.  
 Serious was never your strong suit.

A TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS! WOOO WOOO...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPRINGFIELD TRAIN STATION PLATFORM, 1921 -- DAY

TED, now 18, tall and lean, hurries to catch his train.

CONDUCTOR

All aboard!

Impeding his way is his ENTIRE EXTENDED GERMAN-AMERICAN FAMILY, waving goodbye. He endures hugs around his legs, old-lady lipstick kisses, and taunts from teenage cousins.

TEENAGE COUSIN #1

Don't fall in love Teddy-boy!

TEENAGE COUSIN #2

Wouldn't know what to do if he did...

Ted shrugs them off and stiffens as he approaches T.R.

T.R.

In spite of our differences, you've earned this, Theodor, on your own accord.

Ted beams under his father's tacit approval.

T.R. (CONT'D)

This is a first for the Geisels. I expect great things.

TED

I know.

T.R.

Good.

T.R. squeezes Ted's shoulder.

T.R. (CONT'D)

These are the progeny of great men, son - bring back something we can use. Make a name for us.

TED

I will.

Finally, Ted hugs Nettie. She whispers in his ear.

NETTIE

Have fun.

Ted kisses her on the cheek, then jumps onto the train car just as it glides away from the platform and disappears inside.

EXT. NEW ENGLAND COUNTRYSIDE -- AERIAL OVER

The steam train cutting through hills blanketed in trees as far as the eye can see. A small town sits on the horizon.

EXT. TRAIN -- DAY

As the train crosses the Connecticut River into New Hampshire, we pull back to see Dartmouth College campus: crew shells gliding on the river, copper-roofed buildings covered in ivy.

Ted looks out the window, eyes wide.

DEAN LAYCOCK (V.O.)

There is a long history of greatness that precedes you, a line of men who have created a niche for themselves in this world and gone on to inspire countless others.

INT. GRAND LIBRARY HALL -- LATER

Ted sits among a few hundred freshmen, awash in pride and awe. DEAN CRAVEN LAYCOCK - late 50s, stuffy with a permanent scowl - finishes his matriculation address.

DEAN LAYCOCK

(indicating portraits on wall)

Daniel Webster. Salmon P. Chase. Charles Pilsbury. Senators, Justices. Captains of industry. Great men. Dartmouth Men. Over the next four years of hard work, dedication, and a commitment to excellence both in and out of the classroom, I ask that you focus on a single question: *what kind of man will you be?*

A look of determination spreads across Ted's face.

EXT. THE GREEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted walks with a fellow doe-eyed FRESHMAN.

FRESHMAN

Bottled *soda?*

TED

How else do you revive a family business that bottles beer when you're not allowed to bottle beer? Prohibition's killed the industry.

FRESHMAN

Why not just go to a soda fountain?

TED

I'm telling you, *bottled soda*. Wave of the future.

FRESHMAN

Next you'll be trying to sell me bottled *water*.

MAC

Look out!

A scruffy, bearded upperclassman sprints up to them hoisting a SUITCASE above his head and barrels into Ted - the two go crashing to the ground.

This is NORMAN "MAC" MACLEAN, 21.

MAC (CONT'D)

Sorry, chap.

Mac springs to his feet and launches the suitcase shot-put style towards the balcony of the beat-up building in front of them.

MAC (CONT'D)

Grab it!

Another upperclassman on the balcony scrambles for the bag, then places it gingerly on top of a towering pile of luggage that looks ready to topple at any second. Mac turns to Ted.

MAC (CONT'D)

Tower of Baggage. Trying to reach heaven. Annual tradition.

(then, to the balcony)

Jackos! We need more bags!

Mac runs off.

TED

Jackos?

FRESHMAN

Jack-O'-Lantern. Campus humor rag.

Mac heaves another bag that CRASHES through a window. The guys inside CRACK UP as Ted and the Freshman head off.

TED  
Jack-asses, more like.

INT. TED'S DORM ROOM -- LATER

Ted opens a textbook and tries to concentrate amidst the muffled sounds of a budding RAGER upstairs.

TED  
Doesn't anybody here study?

A piece of plaster from the ceiling falls on his forehead.

INT. TED'S DORM, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted storms up to find the hallway packed with young revelers, all wearing *oversized party hats*.

As he enters the hallway, he's stopped by HELEN PALMER, 21, girl-next-door beautiful. She offers Ted a white top hat - Ted still clutches the piece of plaster ceiling in his hand.

HELEN  
Party favor!

TED  
(waving the plaster)  
Who's responsible for this?

HELEN  
Sorry! I can't hear you! Not without your hat.

TED  
What?!

HELEN  
I said I can't hear you if you're not wearing your hat!

Ted takes in Helen for the first time and is stunned by her beauty, her coy playfulness. He relents and puts on the hat.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
(re: hat)  
Adorable.  
(then)  
Him!

Helen points to a figure across the hall.

TED  
Him, what?

HELEN

Guy in charge of the party. I think.  
Let's go find out! Come on.

Helen takes Ted's hand and pulls him through the crowd over to Mac, of the crew from the Jack-o'Lantern.

TED

This guy?

HELEN

Hey - is this your party?

MAC

Hell, yes! Second-best party of the year! Gotta go all out to reel in the sister schools - rest of the year's a... little lonely around here.

TED

(indicating the plaster)  
Right. Well, this landed on my head!

MAC

Good thing you've got your hat on!

TED

(getting flustered)  
I didn't, I mean, I just put this on... Listen, if you don't keep it down, I'll have to report you to the R.A. - I can't believe he hasn't broken this up already!

MAC

(extending a hand)  
Norman Maclean, Resident Assistant  
extraordinaire.

TED

You're the R.A.?

MAC

Call me Mac.

TED

Well... what about the cops? I'm sure they'll be here any minute - you can hear this a mile away!

Mac indicates a string of bulbs lining the hall.

MAC

You see these lights?

HELEN

Like Christmas!

MAC

They wind around the hall, out the window down to the stoop, where we've posted a watch. Police show, the watchman flips a switch, halls light up and everyone slips quietly into the rooms. Cops are none the wiser.

Mac leans in, whispers in Ted's ear, re: Helen.

MAC (CONT'D)

Maybe you'll be lucky enough to slip into a room with her.

TED

No. Look, I'm trying to study--

MAC

Yeah, yeah, yeah... live a little!

Mac passes Ted and Helen a beer and disappears into the crowd. Helen raises her glass to Ted and shrugs.

HELEN

Well, cheers!

Left alone with Helen, Ted implodes under a wave of frustration.

TED

I... uh, I'll be back! Cheers...!

INT. TED'S DORM, BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Ted tears off the hat and slams the beer down on the sink top.

TED

This is NOT part of the plan.  
(then, debating himself)  
Live a little... Bah.

He studies himself in the mirror, sees how worked up he's gotten, and exhales. After a beat, he puts the hat back on.

TED (CONT'D)

Come on, you drum-tummied snum.

He grabs the beer and takes a swig of liquid courage.

TED (CONT'D)

One beer.

EXT. TED'S DORM, FRONT STOOP -- SAME

Outside, a GEEKY STUDENT looks up to see a squad of policemen striding towards the door. Panicked, he flips the switch.

INT. TED'S DORM, HALLWAY -- SAME

Upstairs, the lights flicker accordingly, and the amused students pile into the nearest rooms, enjoying the game. Helen glances towards the bathroom with concern.

In moments, the halls are deserted. The policemen arrive on the scene, just as Ted emerges from the bathroom, still wearing the hat, beer in hand. Busted.

POLICEMAN

Let's go, son.

INT. POLICE STATION -- NIGHT

A deflated Ted sits in an empty cell. A sympathetic JAILER approaches, tosses him a newspaper.

JAILER

Help pass the time.

TED

Thanks.

Ted opens the paper to the comics, pulls a pencil from his pocket, then begins aimlessly doodling in the margins.

CUT TO:

EXT. LA JOLLA STREETS -- 1955 -- DAWN

A convertible speeds through town as the sun rises over the pacific. 50-year-old Ted is behind the wheel, bleary eyed and distraught. He careens around a corner and barely avoids hitting a PAPERBOY on his bike.

EXT. GEISEL HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted screeches up the drive, jumps out of the car and hurries into the house, leaving it idling.

INT. GEISEL HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Ted stands in the doorway staring at the remnants of the previous night's dinner party, the signs of its abrupt and calamitous end. Suddenly he's off:

-- IN THE GARAGE rifling through a closet, tossing everything aside as he finally finds a suitcase

-- IN THE BEDROOM indiscriminately tearing clothes from dresser drawers into the suitcase

-- IN THE KITCHEN opening the fridge, grabbing fruit and a bottle of juice, then heading back out, leaving the fridge door wide open.

INT. CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted slams the door, REVS the engine, and looks back over his shoulder as he throws the car in gear.

As he hits the gas and pops the clutch, the car jolts forward and CRASHES into the garage door.

TED  
Gabernacky!!

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPUS POLICE STATION -- 1921 -- MORNING

JAILER  
You can go, kid.

Young Ted twitches awake from a sitting-up half-sleep and zombie-like, makes his way out the door.

JAILER (CONT'D)  
(calling after)  
Hey! You forgot your stuff!

TED (O.S.)  
It's garbage.

As the Jailer stoops to grab the white hat, the newspaper catches his eye: every inch is covered with drawings of *odd characters and creatures*.

EXT. CAMPUS -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted drags himself across campus towards his dorm.

MAC  
Hey - wait up!

Mac, out of breath, catches up to him.

TED  
Thank God. My R.A.

MAC

Aren't you gonna thank the guy who just bailed you out of jail?

TED

(without breaking stride)  
Haven't had a chance to thank the guy who put me there.

MAC

It wasn't so bad, now, was it? Okay, okay, okay. Stop. Listen, I'm sorry about last night. That wasn't supposed to happen... My system was flawless!

Mac jumps in front of Ted.

MAC (CONT'D)

Seriously, wait. Come write for me at Jacko.

TED

Do what?

MAC

I need new artists. And you've got talent, Ted.

TED

How would you even know--

Mac holds up the newspaper sketches from jail.

TED (CONT'D)

How'd you get that?

MAC

Hey man, local fuzz are the easiest bribe around. Couple bucks and I get your stuff back, keep you outta hock with the Dean, no record... you should thank *me*.

Ted grabs his sketches.

TED

Those are mine.

MAC

I especially like the one with the scrumptiously bulbous lady-leg? I was thinking we'd call it, "The Fatted Calf."

TED

We? Look, Norman. Mac. I'm not interested. I'm not wasting my life on stupid drawings.

MAC  
That didn't sound rehearsed or anything.  
Who taught you that little ditty?

TED  
You guys are a joke.

MAC  
Maybe. But we're a joke on every major  
newsstand from Chicago to Manhattan.

Ted storms off.

MAC (CONT'D)  
Just think about it, eh? What have you  
got to lose?!

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA -- 1955 -- DAY

Ted drags a blunt pencil back and forth over the edges of a  
newspaper. A tray of untouched food is cast aside.

AUDREY (O.S.)  
She's awake. And asking for you.

Audrey approaches and sits down next to Ted, tries to playfully  
lift his spirits.

AUDREY (CONT'D)  
She said, and I quote, "there's room for  
two in this sardine can."  
(then)  
By the looks of your skin and bones, I  
don't doubt she's right. Have you eaten  
anything--?

TED  
She can't speak, Audrey. She's paralyzed.

AUDREY  
Fair enough.

Audrey takes the pencil from Ted, looks him square in the eye.

AUDREY (CONT'D)  
She needs you. And not this sullen,  
heavy-hearted bore that sits next to me.  
She needs *Ted*.

TED  
(weakly)  
That guy's a yutz.

AUDREY  
Like that's news to anyone.

Audrey rises and extends a hand to Ted.

AUDREY (CONT'D)  
C'mon. One foot at a time.

Ted takes her hand, stands up, takes a deep breath, and...

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE -- 1921 -- DAY

...exhales. Young Ted stands before the dilapidated building we saw earlier. He debates before ringing the bell, which produces a comically loud GONG! Mac appears on the balcony above.

MAC  
(from the balcony above)  
Ted! What are you doing here?

TED  
I don't know... Guess I thought I'd take a look around.

MAC  
Members only, chap. You in or out?

TED  
I'm not-- I don't even-- I don't know.

MAC  
No trouble. Meet me around back. I need an assist.

TED  
Okay...

EXT. JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE, REAR -- MOMENTS LATER

MAC  
Here. You may need this.

Mac hands Ted a moldy, green hock of ham.

TED  
(wtf)  
Glad I skipped breakfast.

MAC  
Take the ham. You'll thank me later.

A LOUD GROWL brings Ted's attention to a makeshift pen in the parking lot, which contains TWO FROLICKING BROWN BEAR CUBS.

TED

Mac. Those... are bears.

Mac jumps into a truck and is backs it up to the pen.

MAC

Ah, they're babies.

TED

*Why* are there baby bears in there?

MAC

Couple of the guys went hunting, shot the mom. Total accident. Come on - we're helping the little fellas out. All we have to do is load them on the truck and get down to the train station and we're golden.

Ted looks at the rotting ham hock in his hand.

TED

*Mac, I do not like ham, I do not like bears, I do not like them--*

One of the bears edges close to Ted and the ham hock, spurring him into terrified action.

TED (CONT'D)

Okay, here you go, fella. That's right, follow the ham.

The second cub wanders over, sniffs the air, then lunges for the ham hock, gauging a huge bite inches from Ted's fingers.

TED (CONT'D)

He almost ate my hand!

MAC

(gesturing wildly)  
Fling it! Fling it!

As the bears zero back in on the ham hock, Ted hurls it into the cage on the back of the truck. The bears jump in and battle over the remains as Mac slams the cage door.

MAC (CONT'D)

Brilliant!

Mac jumps into the driver's seat and fires up the engine.

MAC (CONT'D)

You keep an eye on the cubs!

TED  
What?! Why me?

MAC  
You're great with animals!

Ted jumps on the back as Mac pulls the truck onto the road, Ted clinging on for dear life. It starts to rain.

MAC (CONT'D)  
Admit it! This is fun!

TED  
*Not in the rain!*

EXT. WHITE RIVER TRAIN STATION -- LATER

As the truck pulls into the loading dock of the station, the boys greet a burly ZOOKEEPER SAM in the steady downpour.

ZOOKEEPER SAM  
Howdy! Name's Sam! Just open your pen and let the little fellas wander into my wagon.

Ted cautiously opens the cage and the first cub walks straight onto Sam's car. The second cub starts out, then pivots on Ted and rears on its hind legs, dangerously close.

TED  
Um, Sam-- I am...

ZOOKEEPER SAM  
You're fine kid, just be calm!

The cub slams its paws against the cage, pinning Ted above the shoulders. The bear sniffs his face, then suddenly licks him with a sloppy, wet bear tongue, and turns to join the other.

MAC  
Amazing!

Ted bends over laughing with relief, then straightens, the smile draining from his face.

TED  
I could have been killed.

MAC  
Bah. Everyone almost gets killed a few times in college.

TED  
No, Mac. They don't.  
(then)  
(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)  
Although if my father catches wind of  
this he may just prove you right.

He gets in the truck and slams the passenger door.

MAC  
Ah. Him again.

Mac jumps in the cab.

MAC (CONT'D)  
This whole thing has you a little  
rattled, huh?

TED  
Not rattled. Well, okay, a little  
rattled, but more just--

MAC  
Grumpy?

TED  
I'm not grumpy.

Mac reaches through the cab window and grabs the remains of the  
*green ham hock*.

MAC  
Hungry? Lunch?

TED  
What?! Ugh, no! That's disgusting!

MAC  
Try it.

TED  
No.

MAC  
Eat it.

TED  
No.

MAC  
You want some green eggs to go with that  
green ham, don't you?

TED  
No.

MAC  
C'mon. Would you like it with a beer?

TED  
I would not.

MAC  
Try it! Eat it!

TED  
NO!

MAC  
Okay fine.

Mac tosses the hock out the window.

INT. TRUCK -- MOMENTS LATER

MAC  
You know what you've got...

Ted ignores him as they drive back to campus.

MAC (CONT'D)  
Old man problem.

TED  
Old man problem - you mean my father.

MAC  
No, I mean you're 18-years-old and you're acting like you're an old man.

Ted doesn't bite.

MAC (CONT'D)  
You know, my father always expected I would go off to school and come back a 'man of the cloth,' like him. True story. And I started out intending to stick to the plan - religion, philosophy, Greek, Hebrew... Problem was, one day I woke up and discovered that I hated myself. Day after day, week after week. And all the sudden I was miserable. Wouldn't have known fun if it bit me on the ass.

Ted absorbs this.

TED  
And now you run Jacko.

Mac shrugs.

TED (CONT'D)  
What did you say to your dad?

MAC

I told him life's too short to walk in  
someone else's shoes.

Ted stares out at the horizon, the rolling hills, the autumn  
colors creating a vibrant patchwork vision.

MAC (CONT'D)

Gotta have something to live for.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- 1955 -- NIGHT

Ted walks into Helen's room, leaving Audrey at the door. As he  
approaches the iron lung, the rhythmic pump, beep and hiss of  
the machinery temporarily overwhelm him. He finds Helen's eyes.

At the sight of him, silent tears stream down Helen's face. Ted  
kneels down and places his head next to hers, struggling to hold  
it together.

TED

You know you can't get rid of me that  
easy.

Helen sobs, laughing and crying simultaneously. Ted produces a  
tattered, old card from his pocket. It's a faded sketch of a  
young woman.

TED (CONT'D)

Remember this old gal?

Helen takes a deep breath, a twinkle in her eye. Ted smiles and  
stays with her.

A LOUD KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S DORM ROOM -- 1922 -- DAY

The knocking persists as young Ted dabs at a giant mural on his  
wall with a paintbrush - it's a scene of two playful bear cubs.

TED

One second!

Brush still in hand, Ted swings open his door to find his  
father, T.R., staring coldly, Nettie standing behind him.

T.R.

Theodor.

TED  
Father. Mother. What are you--

T.R.  
You haven't written or called since you arrived.

TED  
I've been busy.  
(then)  
Studying.

T.R.  
Indeed.

T.R. frowns at the mural as Ted drops the brush.

TED  
This... this is nothing.

T.R.  
Fine. Get dressed. I've arranged an adventure for us.

T.R. turns as Nettie lingers to admire the mural.

TED  
(impressed)  
An adventure?

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

A bulletin board reads, "WELCOME BOSTON AREA ROTARY BUSINESSMEN." Dozens of stuffy, humorless late-50s men in coats and ties mingle about, making idle conversation.

Ted stares blankly at a BUSINESSMAN chewing an hors d'oeuvres, talking out the side of his mouth.

BUSINESSMAN  
That's the advantage of the I.S. In the case of multiple gobs, the shears cut the gobs simultaneously, and they fall into the blank moulds in parallel--

A waiter walks by with a tray of appetizers.

BUSINESSMAN (CONT'D)  
Do excuse me.

As he and T.R. trail off after the grub, Nettie leans in.

NETTIE  
Some adventure, isn't it?

OFF Ted, his mother's humor the only saving grace.

INT. RESTAURANT, BOSTON -- LATER

T.R. talks enthusiastically, drawing a diagram on a scrap of paper as Ted mindlessly spoons soup.

T.R.

If we can recalibrate the furnaces to accommodate the new process, then we just might make it. We can cut corners by eliminating the dealkalinization, which...

As T.R. trails on, Ted's gaze lands on Helen, the girl from Mac's party. Her smile lights up the restaurant as she laughs aloud, enjoying a joke from her friends. Ted involuntarily chuckles as well, swept up in her vibe.

T.R. (CONT'D)

Theodor, this is important.

TED

Yes, sir.

But Ted remains distracted as he sees Helen rise from her table.

TED (CONT'D)

Excuse me... Sorry, dad.

T.R. sighs in frustration - Nettie smiles knowingly.

Ted heads off but lingers at the register. He grabs a blank order card from the counter and a pencil and begins sketching.

As Helen arrives, she stands behind Ted, waiting patiently.

HELEN

Excuse me, are you in line?

TED

Me? No...

HELEN

Hey - Dartmouth guy, right? At the party, with the hat?

T.R. glares from across the room.

TED

No... I mean, yes.

HELEN

I'm sorry?

Ted turns and hands Helen the order form.

TED  
For you.

The sketch bears a striking resemblance to Helen, complete with a towering hairdo. She smiles.

HELEN  
I hadn't realized quite how bad a hair day it was until just now.

TED  
It's beautiful. Your hair.

Ted turns to leave but Helen grabs his wrist, puts the drawing in his hand.

HELEN  
You keep it.

TED  
But it's for you--

HELEN  
This way you'll never forget me.

Her eyes twinkle as she turns away. Ted beams.

EXT. TED'S DORM -- DAY

Nettie walks Ted to his dorm as T.R. idles in the car.

NETTIE  
It's a lot to take in all at once, being here. Everything so new, so much happening... go easy on yourself.

TED  
It just feels like a lot of pressure. To do the right thing, be the right--

NETTIE  
Just don't get hung up - keep going right along. *Being you.* Maybe think about drawing again. Or maybe you already have...

They stop at the entrance to his dorm. Ted kisses her cheek.

NETTIE (CONT'D)  
Girl at the diner was a cutie...

She winks at Ted - their secret.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- 1955 -- DAY

Ted stands at the window, gazing out at the view, adjusting a and tilting a small handheld mirror on the sill.

Dr. Davis enters and stumbles over a standing mirror, barely catching it before it smashes to the ground.

TED

Careful, Doc. That's seven years I don't have.

DR. DAVIS

What are you doing?

The room is filled with a series of mirrors in a a visual relay. Inside the iron lung, Helen barely manages a smile, but her eyes glisten with joy.

TED

Changing the scenery.

DR. DAVIS

Where did you get all these mirrors?

TED

Around. Here and there. Everywhere.

Ted slaps a final piece of duct tape on an accordion-arm mirror, connecting it to a rolling IV stand.

TED (CONT'D)

Give me a hand here, Doc. Or rather a foot. Stand here - needs a counter-weight.

With the Doctor's foot securing the IV stand, Ted extends the mirror over the iron lung, directly above Helen's eyes.

TED (CONT'D)

(to Helen)

Don't move. Just kidding.

Ted runs out of the room, then pops back in.

TED (CONT'D)

You either, Doc.

And he's gone. The Doctor stands impatiently. Finally, a distant BARKING echoes through the room.

From Helen's POV: in the mirror, we see an upside down image of Ted leading a DOG down the path running outside Helen's window.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS -- OUTSIDE HELEN'S WINDOW -- SAME

As Ted reaches the mirror, the pup BARKS into it.

TED  
See someone you know there don't ya?

BARK! BARK! The dog licks the mirror.

TED (CONT'D)  
Atta boy. He really misses you Helen!  
(then)  
Doc, how's she doing?

DR. DAVIS  
She's smiling.

Helen suddenly breaks into a weak laughter, which builds.

TED  
(alarmed)  
Is she okay??

Doctor Davis checks a gauge on the iron lung, adjusts it.

DR. DAVIS  
Take a deep breath, Helen, can you?

Helen's laughter calms, she inhales carefully, then nods. As the muscle control returns to her mouth, her speech is garbled.

HELEN  
Uh huh. Yes, yes I can...

As Ted climbs through the window--

DR. DAVIS  
She's breathing on her own, Mr. Geisel.

TED  
Well, get her out of that thing already!

Helen sees Ted and bursts into a SOB of happiness. Dr. Davis unclasps a few latches and with a dramatic HISS, the iron lung is open. With Ted's help they slide Helen out.

DR. DAVIS  
Your fingers, your toes, try wiggling them.

Ted grabs Helen's hand. With considerable effort and concentration, Helens limp fingers slowly contract, and squeeze Ted's hand back. Off TED's ecstatic face we...

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWY WOODS -- 1922 -- DAY

TIGHT ON TED'S FACE. He's shitting his pants, but doing a reasonable job hiding it.

MAC (O.S.)

TRUST. It's the glue that cements together this brotherhood. It's the net that allows for true, honest creative expression. It's the... uh--

CHARLIE KING, 19, sharp-witted, chimes in.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Clay.

MAC (O.S.)

(clearly making this up as he goes)

Clay that lays the foundation for every brick which... shall... then be built upon.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

It.

ANGLE ON CHARLIE, WILDER DOUGLASS - 19, one of the campus' only black students - and Mac.

MAC (O.S.)

It. Built upon it. Whatever. Let's do this.

And we pull back to see Ted and another new recruit, ERNEST SMITH, sitting in makeshift half-beer barrel sleds at the top of a 300-FOOT SKI JUMP. Ernest literally shivers with fear.

WILDER

Most unworthy neophytes of the Dartmouth Jack-o'-Lantern, prepare yourselves!

Charlie places a boot on Ernest's sled, Wilder on Ted's.

MAC

Ready? Set--

ERNEST

NO! Please, no. Don't. Please!

The Jacko boys break into silent hysterics behind them - this is clearly all a practical joke to scare the new guys.

CHARLIE  
You don't *trust* us?

ERNEST  
Yes! I do! I just... please.

As Ernest's pleading sends the guys into another round of subdued laughter, a resolve spreads across Ted's face.

TED  
I do.

And with that he pushes off! As his terrified BELLOWS echo down the mountain, the Jacko Staffers' faces drop.

CHARLIE  
HO. LY. CRAP. Holy crap!

MAC  
(panicked)  
He actually did it. Did somebody push him?!

WILDER  
I didn't do it!

They watch as Ted launches off the jump, clinging to the keg for dear life as he sails through the air. Finally landing in a giant drift, Ted's muffled laughter breaks the tension.

TED (O.S.)  
I'm okay!

WILDER  
That is some balls right there.

INT. JACK-O-LANTERN OFFICES -- DAY

Ted and Ernest sit at the front of the room, each wearing a bright green beanie. The new guys.

JACKO STAFFERS  
(singing)  
Here's to Chick Maynard, Chick Maynard,  
Chick Maynard... Here's to Chick Maynard,  
we love you, we do. We love you, you  
asshole, we love you, you asshole!  
Here's to Chick Maynard, we love you, we  
do. So drink up up! Up up! Up up!

Mac, presiding, ceremoniously chugs a whole beer, then BELCHES. The staff snaps their fingers.

TED  
Who's Chick Maynard?

CHARLIE  
Worst pro athlete ever to come out of  
Dartmouth.

TED  
So why do we love him?

Charlie smirks at Ted - *you'll find out soon enough.*

MAC  
Gentlemen, it's been three years since a  
member of this staff won the Winter  
Carnival poster contest. This year, I want  
the trophy back. Let's see what you got.

TED  
What happens during Carnival?

MAC  
(with a wink)  
*First-best party of the year.*

Ted mulls it over, then sketches away furiously. We see a  
montage of his attempts, each of which he tears off his sketch  
pad and crinkles into a ball:

*A fish jumping out of a beer stein, a fox in snow-shoes, a bear  
with a plate of green ham.*

Mac paces behind the staff, peering over shoulders.

MAC (CONT'D)  
Nope. Wrong direction. No. No...

As he reaches Ted, he watches with amazement. Even Ted's  
misfires are unique.

Looking up, Ted finally smiles. He's drawn a lanky bird on  
skis, floating gracefully through the air, complete with a stein  
of beer balancing on one wing.

Mac taps the desk pointedly, nodding.

MAC (CONT'D)  
Now we're getting somewhere.

CUT TO:

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY -- 1955 -- AERIAL OVER

Adult Ted clutching Helen's hand as they drive the coastal road, top down. Helen, weak and frail, closes her eyes, feeling the fresh air on her face. Ted looks on at her adoringly.

## INT. GEISEL HOME -- LIVING ROOM -- LATER

With the assistance of a walker, Helen slowly makes her way through the house.

TED  
Almost there!

HELEN  
I know I'm almost there, it's not like I haven't lived here, you dolt.

TED  
Love you, too.

Helen stops at the sight of the living room: railings, a wheelchair, various exercise equipment is spread about. Her face drops.

TED (CONT'D)  
Ugly as hell, I know. But we'll make the most of it!

Ted jumps on one of a pair of stationary bikes facing a bay window overlooking the ocean.

TED (CONT'D)  
We can ride together over the waves of foona-lagoona as we hunt for elusive baboona!  
(then)  
Come on!

Helen forces a smile as she sets aside the walker, balancing on the handle bars. It gets clunky quickly.

TED (CONT'D)  
(helping her out)  
Just hold on up here, and put your left foot here. It's like riding a--

HELEN  
I got it--

TED  
And with a good heave swing your leg over the seat.

HELEN  
Swing it.

TED  
Yeah, swing it.  
(off her look)  
Okay can you lift here... in my hand...  
and just... keep holding the handlebars.

Helen's legs begin to shake.

HELEN  
No Ted, stop. I can't. Help me down.

Ted eases her off the bike and onto a sofa nearby. He is unable to mask his disappointment.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Tomorrow. We'll try again tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDENT COMMONS -- 1922 -- NIGHT

Ted's winning poster hangs over the festive Winter Carnival Ball, proudly displayed for all to see. Ted and Wilder stand off to the side of a crowd of dancing and canoodling coeds.

TED  
"Have no thought for to-morrow: love is enough."

WILDER  
If I can get one of these girls to *love on me*, that might be enough.

Ted's gaze lands on HELEN, with a group of girlfriends.

TED  
I'll be damned.

WILDER  
You know her?

TED  
Sort of.

As Helen looks up and sees him, she smiles. Ted doesn't budge.

WILDER  
You know, *talking* to a girl is always a good step in the getting-to-know-you phase of things.

Ted heads over towards Helen just as Charlie intercepts him.

CHARLIE  
 Ted! Thank god I found you. Prank or  
 booze run?

Ted looks sadly over at Helen.

TED  
 Is the prank on me?

CHARLIE  
 Quite possibly.

TED  
 Okay, booze run.

CHARLIE  
 Excellent! Prank *then* booze run.

TED  
 You can't win these things, can you?

CHARLIE  
 No, you can't.

EXT. STUDENT COMMONS -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted crouches on the roof next to a heavy snow drift teetering on the edge, shovel in hand. Charlie signals from a distance. Ted looks down and sees Mac exiting.

TED  
 This one's for you, Mac.

Ted leans into the drift, but struggles to push it off the eaves. With a final shove, he succeeds, but misses Mac entirely, covering the next soul through the doorway. WHOOMP!

TED (CONT'D)  
 Oh... that's not good.

Panicked, he jumps down.

TED (CONT'D)  
 Oh my god, are you alright?

HELEN  
 Oh, goodness! Seriously?!

And Ted's hapless victim is revealed. Wet and shaken, Helen stares daggers at Ted.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 What kind of person dumps snow off the  
 roof onto someone?

TED  
I am so, so sorry--

HELEN  
I could have been killed!

TED  
Well, it was just snow, really. And besides, everyone almost gets killed in college a few--

HELEN  
Who do you think you are?!

Ted gives this a split-second of genuine thought. Then:

TED  
I'm just... Ted.

Ted and Helen finally make eye contact. That spark again.

HELEN  
Ted, huh? I just can't seem to shake you, can I?

Charlie WHISTLES from across the green at Ted - hurry up!

TED  
Um, yeah. No. I gotta go.

HELEN  
What?

TED  
Pledge thing, sorta. Listen, I'm sorry--

HELEN  
It's okay.

TED  
Okay.

Ted turns and heads towards Charlie. After a moment, he runs back to Helen, who watches him with amusement.

TED (CONT'D)  
Wanna come?

HELEN  
Where are you going?

TED  
Just a stupid run to pick up a couple kegs of illegal beer from this crazy old bootlegger North of town. You game?

HELEN  
Let's see - stupid, illegal and crazy.  
All in one breath...

TED  
Well, when you put it that way--

Helen studies Ted for a beat.

HELEN  
Okay. I'm in.

TED  
Really?

HELEN  
C'mon. Let's go before I change my mind.

TED  
Here.

Ted puts his coat around her shoulders.

HELEN  
Such a gentleman.

TED  
What's your name?

HELEN  
Helen Palmer.

TED  
Palmer... Palmer? I think Helen Geisel  
has a much better ring to it.

Helen laughs at Ted's quirky, charming forwardness.

TED (CONT'D)  
Let's go, Helen soon-to-be-Geisel Palmer!

INT. TRUCK -- NIGHT

Ted struggles to see in the darkness as he approaches a crossroads illuminated by the truck's single headlight.

TED  
*Damn streets aren't marked.*  
Go left, maybe?

Suddenly, a GIANT MOOSE comes into view. Ted slams on the breaks, sending the car into a full skid. Helen and Ted SCREAM, stopping just short, face to face with the moose.

HELEN  
 (enjoying herself)  
 How about... *back, maybe?*

EXT. TRUCK -- CONTINUOUS

The truck edges back, then weaves up and along the windy mountain path into the dark night.

EXT. BARN -- NIGHT

Ted kills the engine. They stare a little nervously at a ramshackle barn in front of them.

HELEN  
 He's expecting you, right?

TED  
 Oh, definitely... not.

HELEN  
 But you've met him before.

TED  
 Mmmm, no.

HELEN  
 Grand.  
 (then)  
 You want some company?

TED  
 No, no. Yes, but no. I've got this.

Ted steps out of his truck to discover a dozen beer barrels loaded on the back of pick up next to the barn. Only one window is lit.

Peeking in, he sees the OLD BOOTLEGGER- 60s, bent over - *wrapped in a lime green quilt next to the fire, bushy brow and spindly beard poking out from under his cap.*

Suddenly, a WILDLY BARKING DOG jumps up on the window, scaring Ted half to death.

BOOTLEGGER  
 Max! Dammit! Who's out there?

INT. BARN -- CONTINUOUS

Ted enters cautiously. Stepping into the light, he is greeted with the barrel of a shotgun.

BOOTLEGGER

You're on private property! I don't tolerate trespassers. Especially ugly, long-nosed, fuzzy-haired, pasty bohunks like you!

TED

I'm not-- I'm just here to see about procuring a few barrels of beer for the Jack-o'-lantern magazine? Down on campus-

Ted holds out a wad of cash.

BOOTLEGGER

Procuring a few barrels... ha! For you brats? Oh, with your parties, and your singing, and *all the NOISE NOISE NOISE NOISE NOISE!* Well not this time!

Helen jumps in the driver's seat and lets off the parking brake - as the truck begins to roll, Ted's eyes go wide. What is she doing?

BOOTLEGGER (CONT'D)

Beat it!

Helen eases the pick-up bed to bed with the Bootlegger's truck, then hops down and tugs on the keg-truck gate.

TED

(stalling)

Right, well, it's Winter Carnival, you know, and we've got this great big party, and... you see...

BOOTLEGGER

*Cry, cry, cry, boo, hoo...* NO! You see how great your big party is without my liquor, huh?

A loud BANG echoes out as Helen finally frees the gate and a pair of kegs roll into Ted's truck, finally getting the Bootlegger's attention. She jumps back in and fires up the truck's engine.

HELEN

Let's go, Ted!

Without thinking, Ted grabs the shotgun, drops the wad of cash, and beelines for the truck. No sooner does he hit the yard when the little yapping Max bites onto his heel.

BOOTLEGGER

Get 'im, Max. Attaboy!

Dog dangling from his ankle, Ted hops on one leg, mostly trying not to hurt the harmless pup.

TED  
Off. Get off. Go. Heel. No, opposite  
of heel.

As Ted finally reaches the truck, Max relents and YIPS his way back to the Bootlegger. Ted throws the shotgun down on the ground, which FIRES upon impact, taking out a tree right beside them.

TED (CONT'D)  
He's shooting at us!

Ted dives in the open passenger side door Helen peels out. Leaving the Bootlegger in the dust, they burst out laughing.

HELEN  
Never a dull moment with you, it is?

TED  
Not when you're around.  
(beat)  
Wow. *He's a mean one, that guy.*

HELEN  
*Cuddlier than a cactus.*

TED  
Bet that grinch even hates Christmas.

INT. THE JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Helen follows as Ted and Charlie carry the beer barrel through the largely empty main office room, only a couple staffers drinking beer and chatting.

HELEN  
(not impressed)  
All that for this? Some party.

Ted smiles as they hit the back door and walk out into...

EXT. THE JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

The back parking lot has transformed into a WINTER WONDERLAND: a man-made ice rink / dance floor is surrounded by twinkling lights, a 10-PIECE JAZZ BAND, and a massive crowd of partiers.

Helen takes it all in as Ted unloads the keg and joins her.

TED  
Not too shabby, huh?

HELEN

You know, you aren't like all these boys up here.

TED

Is that a plus, or a minus?

HELEN

Yet to be seen...

TED

I'm sorry about that snow drift. And the moose, and the shooting, and--

HELEN

Shush. Ask me to dance.

TED

Would you like to dance?

HELEN

I thought you'd never ask.

Out on the icy dance floor, Ted is stiff as Helen studies his face. But then he loosens up, adding silly flourishes to his moves that make Helen laugh as they slip and slide away.

INT. THE JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE -- LATER

Alone now, Ted walks Helen past his work station as the party carries on outside. She lifts a pile of his sketches.

HELEN

May I?

After a flicker of hesitation, Ted nods.

HELEN (CONT'D)

What are these?

TED

Animals, mostly.

(opening up slowly)

I'm trying to come up with one for every letter of the alphabet. See, *alligator*, *bumblebee*, *camel*...

HELEN

Why is this one upside down?

TED

*Camel on the ceiling*. Sort of a nice ring to it, don't you think?

HELEN

You know my father used to always say that a smart man hits whatever it is he shoots for in life.

Helen looks up to Ted.

HELEN (CONT'D)

But I always thought a man who shoots for something *no one else can see*, and hits that... now that man is a *genius*.

EXT. THE JACK-O'-LANTERN OFFICE -- LATER STILL

As the party winds down, Ted and Helen are the last to clear the dance floor. They glide together to the edge.

HELEN

That was nice.

TED

So, what's... next?

HELEN

Hmmm.

TED

That doesn't sound good.

HELEN

Ted, I'm an old lady next to you. My friends already think I'm robbing the cradle.

TED

The older the fiddler, the sweeter the tune--

HELEN

Let's just remember this for what it was.

TED

I refuse to accept that on the grounds that it's utter gabbernacky.

(then)

It's crap.

HELEN

You are adorable.

(then)

You know, I'm spending this summer on Nantucket with some friends. You should visit.

She softly kisses him on the lips and turns to join her friends.

TED  
Nantucket? That's all you're giving me?  
It's a whole island!

Her friends pull her arm-in-arm out into the night.

HELEN  
Cliffside Beach Club. We're there every  
year. And it's a *plus*, by the way.  
Definite plus.

TED  
One day we'll meet again, Helen Palmer!  
*98 3/4 per cent guaranteed!*

Ted sighs as he watches Helen leave.

INT. JACK-O-LANTERN OFFICES -- EARLY MORNING

Still in clothes from the party, Ted draws with a fury we have not yet seen. Sketch after sketch after sketch, it's clear that Ted is inspired: he's in the zone...

FADE TO:

INT. GEISEL HOME -- LA JOLLA -- 1955 -- EVENING

Old Ted hurries in from the driveway with an arm-load of bags.

TED  
Helen?

Ted drops the bags off in the kitchen - no answer. He panics.

TED (CONT'D)  
Helen? HELEN?!!

Helen hobbles in from the patio.

HELEN  
I'm here... I'm here. Take it easy.

TED  
I thought you might have--

HELEN  
I was just outside enjoying the sunset.

He rushes to her side.

TED  
Let me help you--

HELEN

Ted, I'm fine. Let's not have any more of this.

She pecks him on the lips.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Did you pick up the prescriptions?

TED

(definitive, a little proud)

Yes.

Helen looks through the pharmacist's bag.

HELEN

Any special instructions?

TED

Yes. And he said this was important: you are supposed to... *not* supposed to take them on an... *empty* stomach?

Helen waits for the clarification.

TED (CONT'D)

I'm not sure which, but it was definitely one. Or the other. I'm sure of that.

HELEN

Oh, Ted.

TED

I'll call him right back and square it all away.

Ted jumps up to grab the phone, then is struck with a thought.

TED (CONT'D)

Except... I saw him leave.

HELEN

The pharmacist is gone for the day.

TED

We had a nice chat in the parking lot. Asked if we had children and I told him, "you have 'em, I'll entertain 'em"--

HELEN

We'll get it straightened out in the morning.

(she shivers)

How about throwing on some tea?

TED  
Of course, anything.

Ted moves the kettle to the stove and strikes a match, attempting to light it. Nothing.

TED (CONT'D)  
That's funny...

Ted sticks his head into oven, sniffing for fumes.

TED (CONT'D)  
(from inside the oven)  
There's no gas!

HELEN  
The gas is off?

TED  
(genuinely befuddled)  
It's the oddest thing.

Helen slumps, then wraps herself in a blanket.

HELEN  
Remember our conversation about the household necessities? You said you'd take care of paying things on time?

TED  
That's impossible. They don't just up and turn off your gas if you're a wee bit behind schedule... do they?

Off Helen's look:

TED (CONT'D)  
I'll take care of it. Right away.

INT. GEISEL HOME -- LA JOLLA -- STUDIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted hurries into his office and finds a pile of unopened mail on the desk.

He rifles through it, and discovers four envelopes from Southern California Gas stamped "DELINQUENT." The final envelope reads, "DISCONNECTION NOTICE."

TED  
(who'd-uh-thunk-it)  
I'll be damned.

Ted finds another envelope from Random House. He opens it trepidatiously. A few words stand out: LATE. NEED TO SEE SOMETHING IMMEDIATELY. FINISHED...

He takes a look around his studio: a blank canvas on an easel, a blank sheet of paper on his desk.

Ted sits still, overwhelmed, immobilized.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK-O-LANTERN OFFICES -- 1922 -- DAY

Young Ted draws feverishly as Charlie and Wilder look on. Ernest eavesdrops.

CHARLIE  
Been at it 48 hours straight.

WILDER  
How is he even awake?

ERNEST  
Enjoy it while it lasts. Some of us actually make it to class and contribute to the magazine.

CHARLIE  
Yeah, but your drawings suck, Ernest.

ERNEST  
Ha, ha. Anyone got a word that rhymes with 'pantry'?

CHARLIE  
Nothing rhymes with pantry.

Ted chimes in, without lifting his head from his work.

TED  
'Fantry.'

ERNEST  
(scoffing)  
That's not a word.

TED  
Sure it is. It's a young woman who plays cello in the bathtub.

A chuckle from the Charlie and Wilder.

ERNEST  
Right.

TED  
Seriously. There are too many good words we run screaming from because they have no apparent rhymes.

ERNEST  
So you just make them up.

TED  
Why not?

ERNEST  
Because there are rules, Ted--

TED  
Ernest, rules are for, um...  
(feigning a struggle)  
Anyone got a word that rhymes with  
'rules'?

WILDER  
(a little too quick)  
Fools!

Charlie shakes his head as Ernest storms off.

CHARLIE  
Nothing gets past this guy. Ted, mind if  
we take a look?

TED  
Have at it.

Ted hands Charlie and Wilder a stack of drawings then dives back  
in without missing a beat.

Charlie and Mac flip through, aside.

WILDER  
(impressed)  
Damn.

CHARLIE  
Yeah.

WILDER  
I like the turtle.

CHARLIE  
Yertle.

WILDER  
*Yertle the turtle?*

Charlie nods.

WILDER (CONT'D)  
Funny stuff.

CHARLIE  
 (flipping through them)  
*Thidwick the Moose*, this little old guy  
 he calls, "*Lorax*"--

WILDER  
 Lorax?

CHARLIE  
 Little guy's apparently got a thing for  
 trees, go figure. Check this out: it's a  
 boy with a speech impediment. He can  
 only say "boing."

WILDER  
*Gerald McBoing Boing*.

CHARLIE  
 He's already got a dozen more with Mac  
 for review. Just as good.

WILDER  
 Where does he come up with all this  
 stuff?

CHARLIE  
 Something's got into him.

We move in on Ted, a picture of concentration. Pinned  
 inconspicuously next to Ted's desk is the sketch he made for  
 Helen in the diner.

CUT TO:

EXT. YACHT -- LA JOLLA -- 1956 -- DAY

On a picture-perfect day, a modest boat motors off the coast.

INT. YACHT -- SAME

Adult Helen, looking green, sits by a window as Grey approaches.

GREY  
 It's great to see you out, Helen, though  
 I'm sorry you're not feeling better.

HELEN  
 Goodness, I can't remember the last time  
 I felt nauseous on the water.  
 (then)  
 Look! Two spotted off the starboard.  
 Gorgeous flukes. Oh, let's see.

Helen grabs a pair of binoculars, points them toward the whales.

GREY

Have you been to see any of the doctors at the Scripps?

HELEN

Not yet.

GREY

You should consider going, they're doing tremendous work in immunology and microbial science, both of which have potential implications for your condition. Their infectology department has made significant strides...

As Grey drones on, Helen ignores him, swinging her view over to the bow, where Ted and Audrey are chatting animatedly.

GREY (CONT'D)

...and while it remains largely academic for the time being, the research coming out of molecular therapeutics is nothing short of promising in terms of--

HELEN

Grey, be a dear, I'd like some air.

GREY

Certainly.

As Grey helps Helen to her feet--

EXT. YACHT -- CONTINUOUS

Ted and Audrey have a good laugh.

TED

There I am, skis strapped to my feet tethered to a model T - water slash snow skiing at 30 miles an hour as I'm hauled across campus... Many a close call on many an adventure!

AUDREY

And you'll have many more, I'm sure of it.

A swell laps into the boat, knocking Audrey off balance, and into Ted's arms. They stare into each other's eyes for an awkward moment.

TED

We'll see.

Helen and Grey emerge, just as Ted and Audrey untangle themselves.

HELEN

You see, Grey - I knew we were missing all the fun inside.

AUDREY

Helen! Feeling better?

HELEN

Don't quite have my sea-legs yet.

(then)

But I can walk.

TED

Audrey, Grey, thank you so much for the outing.

GREY

Our pleasure. We'll do it again. What are you two up to for the weekend?

HELEN

Working. Ted's creating a new reading primer for Random.

AUDREY

Lovely! How's it coming?

HELEN

Yes, Ted, how's it coming?

TED

(sheepish)

Haven't started.

AUDREY

Oh.

HELEN

(eyes on Audrey)

Yes, if we don't get you back at your desk, lord knows what kind of trouble you'll get yourself into.

A labored silence hangs as the boat approaches the harbor.

EXT. HARBOR PARKING LOT -- LATER

Helen and Ted walk towards their car in silence, Helen a step ahead. Ted stops abruptly.

TED

I'm going to catch a taxi down to the gas lamp for a nightcap, if you don't mind.

HELEN

(suddenly in a rage)

Of course I mind! And the hell you are. You're going to drive your wife home.

TED

Of course I am.

Helen stops abruptly.

HELEN

You know what? Go. Do whatever it is you need to do. See if *Mrs. Diamond* might like to meet for a drink.

TED

Audrey? Helen, come on, you're being ridiculous--

HELEN

Give me the keys. I don't need your condescension.

TED

Helen, please, you're tired--

HELEN

And I certainly don't need your pity.

She grabs the keys and storms towards their car - Ted follows at a distance.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Stop following me like some sad puppy! Here, around the house, into the kitchen, into the bathroom... I am not an invalid!

Helen gets in the car and screeches out of the lot - several BYSTANDERS look on.

TED

(shouting after)

And I'm not a puppy!

(then, to bystanders)

Woman's got *fire*.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- THE NEXT MORNING

Helen stirs awake and finds Ted's side of the bed empty.

HELEN  
Bastard.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Helen enters the kitchen to find a plate of fruit and toast, a pot of coffee freshly brewed. She furls her brow.

HELEN  
Ted?

TED (O.S.)  
Up here!

Helen heads up the winding stairs towards Ted's studio.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME - STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

Ted wields a large brush, painting broad blue strokes across a sprawling canvas. He keeps at it as Helen enters.

TED  
Hi.

HELEN  
Hi.  
(a beat, then)  
What are you doing?

Ted looks over his canvas at Helen, mischief in his eye.

TED  
Staying out of trouble.

HELEN  
I mean, what are you painting?

TED  
Oh, that.

Ted turns his easel around so Helen can see - it's a tiny patch of land in the middle of a wide ocean.

TED (CONT'D)  
It's our island. Just big enough for two. I can't help but follow you around, see? It's too small. No matter where we go, the other of us is right there. Like always. Remember?

This catches Helen off guard - she is visibly moved.

CUT TO:

EXT. FERRY -- 1923 -- AERIAL OVER

Young Ted, bursting with excitement, standing at the boat's bow as it motors across the wide blue sound, a beautiful sight.

## EXT. NANTUCKET FERRY DOCKS -- LATER

The landing is a tableau of wealth - fancy cars, men and women dressed in their summer best, parasols and chauffeurs.

Ted, wearing his trademark bow-tie, stands out like a sore thumb as he searches the crowd.

TED

Now. Where are you, Helen Palmer...

## EXT. CLIFFSIDE BEACH CLUB -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted has made his way down to the shore and soaks it all in: the ocean, cabanas, sailboats... A large sign reads "CLIFFSIDE BEACH CLUB: NO TRESPASSING," which Ted wanders right by.

TED

Amazing.

There, a group of PREPSTERS toss around a football, a few girls watching on the sidelines. Ted smiles - one girl giggles and elbows a friend as a MAN IN A SUIT approaches.

MAN IN SUIT

Excuse me, sir. Members only.

TED

Pardon? It's the beach--

MAN IN SUIT

Members. Only.

Suit Man escorts Ted past the Prepsters and girls, who look at him disparagingly. Ted is shades of red.

TED

Bully.

## EXT. PUBLIC BEACH -- LATER

Ted looks out over the vast expanse of water, the cliffs by the shoreline, and the hotel beach he's just been booted from. With a heavy sigh, he closes his eyes and soaks up the warm sun.

Suddenly: SPLASH! A bucket of ice-cold Atlantic water is dumped on Ted's head, jolting him from his slumber. He looks up to find: *Helen*, proudly standing above him.

HELEN

Oh, I'm sorry, did I just dump a bucket of icy water on your head on purpose?

Helen plunks down next to him in the sand.

TED

You know that snow drift was meant to be for someone else.

HELEN

Oh, I think it was definitely *meant to be...*

(then)

Hi. See, island's not so big.

TED

Big enough for two.

HELEN

Glad I wandered off the reservation.

TED

I believe this is where I'm supposed to ask you for a dance?

HELEN

Or a stroll along the water.

Ted stands and reaches out his hand.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I thought you'd never ask.

Helen sneaks a quick kiss to Ted's lips, then playfully sprints ahead. Ted is smitten.

EXT. BEACH CLUB CAFE -- LATER

American flags and red-white-and-blue streamers decorate the cafe - a July 4th theme in progress.

Helen indicates a group of girls on the beach.

HELEN

They've been here every year since they were little girls. We were all close back at school, so, they dragged me along. Prolonging our good-byes till the end of summer.

TED

Avoid growing up at all costs.

HELEN  
Something like that.

TED  
So you're not one of *them*?

HELEN  
No, just visiting. Like you.

TED  
Lucky us.

A WAITER delivers two lemonades.

WAITER  
Account name?

TED  
Oh. Umm...

Ted and Helen share a look. The waiter raises an eyebrow.

TED (CONT'D)  
I'll be paying cash.

Ted hands the Waiter a soggy bill. He snorts and heads off.

TED (CONT'D)  
(calling after)  
Thank you!

HELEN  
Well la-di-da...

Ted gestures over to two stuffy OLDER MEN in animated conversation at a table nearby. Ted mocks from a distance.

TED  
"Good one, Sylvester McMoney! Have I shown you my Duesenberg? Fastest, reddest car on the island!" Damn sneetches.

HELEN  
Sneetches?

TED  
(matter of fact)  
Snooty beaches.  
(then, yelling over)  
Sneetches!

HELEN  
(laughing)  
Shhhh! Aren't you embarrassed?

TED

Oh, I embarrass myself all the time.

HELEN

I find that hard to believe.

TED

Honest. As long as I can remember. Actually, here's a story. So when I was a kid I was in the Boy Scouts--

HELEN

I bet you were adorable.

TED

Of course, but listen. One summer, we all sold these war bonds. And the five of us that sold the most war bonds won a medal.

HELEN

Oooh, a medal.

TED

But these were no ordinary medals - they were to be presented by the then former President Theodore Roosevelt himself.

HELEN

(serious now)

That's a big deal, Ted. You won one?

TED

So, there I am, on the stage, watching as he places the medals on the first four boys, one by one, until he finally gets to me. Thing is, at this point, he's run out of medals. They miscounted, or misplaced one, who knows. But instead of owning up to it, the former President, in front of the entire town of Springfield, my parents, every kid in school, bellows: "What's this little boy doing here?"

(then, sobering)

Then he turns and bears down on me, squinting his eyes, and he says, "Who are you?" And then storms off, leaving me center stage, out to dry.

Ted suddenly laughs like he's delivered a punch line.

TED (CONT'D)

Like I was invisible.

A beat.

HELEN

That's the saddest thing I've ever heard.

Ted shrugs. Helen slips her hand into Ted's.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Sneetches. I like it. They have their club, we'll have ours.

CUT TO:

POP! POP! POW!

EXT. NANTUCKET HOUSE -- 1923 -- NIGHT

Fireworks light up the sky as the party gathers outside. Ted takes Helen by the hand, and together they slip away.

He grabs a bicycle and rolls it over to Helen. She jumps on, holding tight as Ted zig-zags out onto the coastal road.

HELEN

(laughing)

Where are we going?!

TED

On a hunt for the elusive baboona!

HELEN

Baboona? On Nantucket?

TED

Nantucket? No! We're off to foona-lagoona! Hold on tight!

EXT. NANTUCKET -- NIGHT

Together they explore the island in the dark, climbing over sand dunes, chasing each other through the soft tide, their mutual affection growing with each passing moment.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER -- DAWN

As the sun rises over the water, Helen returns from freshening up at a roadside diner to find Ted sketching the stunning horizon on a napkin.

EXT. NANTUCKET ROAD -- DAWN

Back on the bicycle, Ted swerves to avoid colliding with a stubborn seagull and lands the bike in a ditch with a CRASH.

Helen lies limp, her legs tangled with Ted's. He panics.

TED

Helen. Oh my god. Helen, are you okay?!

Ted puts his face down by her mouth to check for breathing, wild-eyed. After a beat, she BITES his ear, giggling.

TED (CONT'D)

Oh my god! I thought you were dead!

HELEN

No, just... compromised.

Her skirt rides dangerously high up her leg.

TED

I think this is what they call a 'happy accident.'

She giggles harder, pulls Ted in for a long kiss.

HELEN

You are one-of-a-kind, Ted Geisel.

TED

Marry me.

HELEN

(laughing hard now)  
What?

TED

Marry me!

HELEN

I can't marry you, Ted.

TED

Well, not in this ditch. How about in a church?

HELEN

Not in a church--

TED

Town hall! *Would you at town hall?*

HELEN

(still giddy)  
*I wouldn't! I couldn't!*

TED

Come on! Just give it a try... *Try and you may, I say!*

Unable to resist any longer she pulls him down on top of her.

HELEN  
Okay... maybe.

Their laughter fades as their passion builds.

CUT TO:

EXT. LA JOLLA BEACH -- DAY -- 1956

Adult Helen and Ted stroll on the beach, hand in hand. Though her strength has returned, Ted walks slowly to support her.

TED  
So the star-free Sneetches get a visit from a fix-it-up chap who offers to put stars on their bellies for a price. He creates an all out star war...

HELEN  
Okay, but no fad lasts forever. How about having stars be in fashion, then they're out, in then out--

TED  
And it goes on and on until the chap has bled the entire Sneetch beach dry, taken all their last pennies!

HELEN  
(with a smirk)  
No resentment there, Ted.

TED  
None at all.

HELEN  
And so the Sneetches finally get their due. I love it.

TED  
I've also got this idea about a guy named Sam-- his name is Sam-I-Am, actually-- isn't that great? Who loves green ham and he tries to convince some poor schlub to taste it--

Helen stops.

HELEN  
What about the primer?

TED  
It's coming.

HELEN

Really.

TED

(he taps his head)

It's all up in here. Somewhere. I just have to figure out how to get it out!

HELEN

You still haven't started.

Ted is silent.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Ted! All of these ideas-- the Sneetches, Sam-I-Am, everything! They won't amount to a thing if no one is publishing you.

TED

Do we really need a publisher, Hel? I mean, these new stories are fantastic! And fantastical! Everyone's going to love--

HELEN

Who, Ted? Who's going to love them? Critics... *friends*, Ted. Not the public. That's all that matters. Cerf's right: if you don't deliver this primer, none of these-- none - will ever get printed.

TED

The primer, the primer, the primer... that's all I hear anymore from you!

HELEN

So get it done! It's the same as anything you've ever written, start simple. Let it find you.

(then)

We can do this together, Ted.

Helen holds out her hand, which Ted takes. She rests her head on his shoulder as they continue walking down the beach.

INT. GEISEL HOME, KITCHEN -- 1956 -- DAY

Adult Helen looks over some of Ted's sketches, early versions of Sam-I-Am, the Grinch, the Sneetches. She is quietly impressed.

TED

Gabberynacky!

Ted balls up the primer word-list and tosses it.

TED (CONT'D)  
This is stupid.

Helen retrieves the list, un-balls it and places it back in front of Ted.

HELEN  
Try again. Start with the fun words.

TED  
There aren't any.

HELEN  
Sure there are. You're just not having any fun.

TED  
Okay, HAT. There once was a fun, fun hat, and it was so fun that people called it the Fun Hat-- this is ridiculous.

HELEN  
Better than half the primers I've read.

TED  
I can't even use the word "people."

HELEN  
Don't think about the words you can't use.

TED  
The ones I can use don't fit. None of this makes any sense!

HELEN  
Since when did that concern you? Use your imagination! You picked "hat," start with "hat." Go draw a hat.

TED  
I've drawn hats before. 500 of them.

HELEN  
Ted, go do something. You just sitting there is not any fun, and it's not going to get this thing written.

TED  
Fine, I'll go draw another hat.

He stands and shuffles over to the stairs up to his tower office.

HELEN

Don't forget your list. Oh look, "fish" is on here, too.

TED

Fish is definitely not fun. Oh, but "cat" is! Now there's a fun one. That fun, fun cat. Let's go play upstairs with the Fun Cat...

Ted takes the list and drags himself upstairs. Helen smiles with self-satisfaction.

INT. STUDIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted stares at a sheet of paper where he's assembled all the words that could potentially rhyme. He puts pencil to paper. Stops. Nothing. He sighs big.

TED

Hat, cat, gown, down, net, bet, tricks, kicks, play, say...

In a burst of exasperation, he throws his entire sketch pad out the window with a frustrated SHOUT. Outside, the papers shuffle in the breeze above the garden.

Ted looks around his studio, notices that a picture frame was knocked askew in the ruckus. He moves to right it and we focus on the frame's subject: a young Helen beneath the brim of an oversized sun hat.

He turns back to his desk, grabs another sketch pad.

TED (CONT'D)

Now there's a hat...

He sketches the outline of a familiar face of a grinning feline in a floppy top hat. He sits back, then--

TED (CONT'D)

Hello, Hat Cat.

INT. KITCHEN -- SAME

Helen sees the papers floating outside, shoots an inquisitive looks upstairs.

TED (O.S.)

Helen! I think I've got it! Come see!

All smiles, she heads for the stairs, but on the second one, her knee buckles and she catches herself just before falling. She winces, her face registering pain and fear.

HELEN  
 (calling up)  
 Just in the middle of something. I'll  
 come see in a bit, okay?

TED (O.S.)  
 Okay, but you're missing out on all the  
 fun! Lots of funny and good fun!

Fighting back tears, she turns around and quietly, cautiously  
 hobbles back to the kitchen. She retrieves a pill bottle, and  
 POPS off the cap.

CUT TO:

A champagne cork POP!

INT. SCOTTIE'S TAVERN -- 1924 -- NIGHT

In a rustic campus diner, prettied up for the occasion, an  
 emotional MRS. PALMER, late-50s, simple, makes a toast.

MRS. PALMER  
 I want to thank you all for making it up  
 to this beautiful New England campus to  
 celebrate this wonderful engagement.

T.R. and Nettie flank the young couple as Mac and a few of  
 Helen's friends look on. CAT-CALLS from the back of the room  
 reveal the Jacko Staffers also in attendance.

MRS. PALMER (CONT'D)  
 I must admit, although the news certainly  
 comes as shock--

WILDER  
 (to Charlie)  
 She marries *me*, that'd be a shock...

MRS. PALMER  
 I'm relieved to know that Theodor is a  
 bright young man, from a good family with  
 a promising future. If you'd all be so  
 kind as to raise a glass...

As Mrs. Palmer's emotions overcome her, T.R. takes over.

T.R.  
 To their bright futures.  
 (to Helen)  
 In the classroom--  
 (to Ted)  
 And in business.

HERE-HEREs abound as the crowd mingles. Ted wipes his brow.

MAC  
Still thinks you're coming home to run  
the family store, huh?

TED  
Hasn't exactly come up lately.

MAC  
You might want to get on that.

Nettie approaches Ted and Helen.

NETTIE  
I think it's time to let the boys be  
boys. I'm so happy for you both.

HELEN  
I'll walk with you, Mrs. Geisel.

NETTIE  
Lovely. Shall we?

Glowing with pride, she kisses Ted on the cheek and exits.

EXT. CAMPUS STREETS -- MOMENTS LATER

HELEN  
It was a lovely reception. My sincerest  
gratitude for the manner in which you've  
accepted me into your family.

NETTIE  
Of course.

HELEN  
Mr. Geisel seemed in good spirits.

They walk in silence.

NETTIE  
I worry for him.

Helen is taken aback by Nettie's candor.

HELEN  
Oh?

NETTIE  
My dear, of course you've noticed. He's  
so concerned with... duty. I fear it  
will be his undoing.

Unsure how to respond, Helen does her best.

HELEN

Perhaps he's not cut of the same cloth as most men--

NETTIE

He mustn't be bogged down and consumed by the mundane - real life, if you will. He must be kept on course - his course. Which to many may seem adrift, but as we know, is far from it.

Helen, now thoroughly at a loss, can fake it no longer.

HELEN

Mr. Geisel adrift? Mrs. Geisel, I--

NETTIE

*Theodor*, my dear. Ted.  
(then, pointedly)  
He's no ordinary young man. See to it he stays that way.

INT. SCOTTIE'S TAVERN, BACK ROOM -- LATER

The mood has changed as the Jacko crew holds court in the bar. Mac TINGS the side of a beer stein with a fork.

MAC

I have an announcement folks: believe it or not, the college finally got sick of me hanging around campus still pretending to be a student after graduation.

WILDER

Aren't we all!

The crowd of staffers laugh. T.R., off to the side, frowns.

MAC

So they hired me to teach--

CHARLIE

*Professor Maclean* - to the demise of higher education!

MAC

...and made me the inaugural faculty advisor to the Jack-o'-lantern, so you just can't get rid of me that easy.

This sends the staff into an uproar.

CHARLIE

You're like the clap!

They sing a round of "Here's to Chick Maynard," which ends ceremoniously as always with Mac chugging a beer.

TED

When did all this go down?

MAC

While you were off falling in love, some of us were planning our futures. Now, after careful consideration--

CHARLIE

Careful my ass!

MAC

And with nearly unanimous consent--

WILDER

More like lack of alternatives!

MAC

The staff of the Jacko have elected... Ted Geisel as our next editor in chief!

STAFFERS

Hear-Hear!/ Congrats Ted!/ Cheers!

The crew breaks into another round of Chick Maynard.

TED

I still don't even know who Chick Maynard is!

MAC

Worst pro athlete--

CHARLIE

Drink, Ted!

Ted chugs the song-ending beer, and Mac throws an arm over his shoulder.

MAC

This is going to open a lot of doors, Ted. Just you wait and see.

At the other end of the bar, T.R. fumes.

INT. SCOTTIE'S TAVERN -- EVEN LATER

T.R. and Ted sit in a back booth, mid-argument.

T.R.

So what do you plan to do? Deposit pictures you've drawn at the bank? Write a limerick at the grocery?

TED

(incensed)

Of course not--

T.R.

And what about the business? The fact that you're choosing to just give that up--

TED

I never had a choice!

T.R.

Never had a choice... we talked for years about this--

TED

Geisel and Geisel is the *only* thing you'd ever talk to me about.

T.R.

(sarcastic)

Oh, you had it so hard, Theodor.

(then)

I started working at my father's brewery when I was barely old enough to count, and I never took a single day for granted. I worked hard, and stuck to the plan. And I made a life for myself and my family!

TED

You sure that's how it went? All those years after the brewery shut down, you did *nothing*. Never a word to us, except when you felt the need to criticize the whole world - criticize *us* - for *your* troubles.

(then, pointed)

I'm not going down that path.

T.R.'s eyes grow cold.

T.R.

You're making a mistake, Theodor. And I will not stand by idly and watch you throw away your life.

Ted leans in.

TED

Like you did?

In a flash, T.R. reaches out and SMACKS Ted in the face, hard.

T.R.

The only way your frivolous writings and childish drawings will provide for you is with the heat they'll emit when you burn them for fuel.

T.R. storms out. Mac joins Ted, who slumps in the booth.

MAC

That didn't look like it went so well.

TED

My whole life. I've done this and I've done that... my entire life! The only time he encouraged me or supported me was when I was doing what *he* wanted me to do. German classes, riflery, gymnastics... like my life is an extension of his own, you know?

MAC

You're not him, Ted.

TED

Maybe he's right. Maybe I *should* just go into the bottling business. Maybe Geisel and Geisel is exactly what I should be doing...

MAC

Or maybe this: an old friend of mine is coming up for homecoming. When he's not lolly-gagging around campus still pretending to be a student--

TED

Sounds familiar.

MAC

...He's a book publisher in New York. And he's always mentioning that he wants to meet my star staffers - why don't I drop him a line and tell him even though I don't have one, maybe he should have breakfast with you?

TED

Now that's funny.

CUT TO:

Old Ted laughing hysterically...

INT. LA JOLLA RESTAURANT -- 1956 -- NIGHT

As he contains himself, he grabs a pair of breadsticks off the table, and tucks them under his upper lip, like tusks.

AUDREY  
An elephant.

Reveal Audrey, across from him at the table.

TED  
Give me some credit, I would have  
fashioned a trunk.  
(off Audrey's amusement)  
Hang on, I'll help you out.

Ted grabs a handful of shredded cabbage from his plate and holds it up to his cheeks. He looks ridiculous.

TED (CONT'D)  
How 'bout now?

AUDREY  
(laughing)  
I... oh my... a big toothed rabbit?

TED  
Come on!!

AUDREY  
The cabbage!

TED  
Fine, I'll spoon feed you.

Ted BARKS like a seal as Helen approaches from the ladies room.

HELEN  
Doing the walrus again, are we? Haven't  
seen him in awhile.

TED  
Exactly! Thank you, Helen.

Ted goes to kiss Helen, bread tusks and cabbage whiskers and all - she dodges him. Ted BARKS in playful protest.

HELEN  
Please. Ted.

AUDREY  
We were just having some fun.

Ted removes the culinary attire.

TED  
Hopeless, Audrey, simply hopeless.

AUDREY  
(still giggling)  
Stop it.

TED  
Waiter! Dessert! Drinks!

HELEN  
Ted, it's nearly ten o'clock. I'm sure  
Grey will be missing Audrey soon.

AUDREY  
Oh, no - please don't call it a night on  
my account. Grey won't likely be home  
until well after midnight - he's covering  
for another doctor.

HELEN  
I see.

TED  
Excellent! One more, like old times,  
Hel!

Ted grabs two empty martini glasses from in front of him and places them over his ears, then stares intently at Audrey and Helen. He begins HUMMING.

TED (CONT'D)  
(a little too loud)  
NOW WHAT?

Ted's humming continues. In spite of herself, Audrey breaks back into giggles.

AUDREY  
I have no idea!

TED  
I'm a *humming-fish*!

Audrey laughs, but takes note of Helen's demeanor. Although she's smiling, she looks as sad and tired as we've seen her.

AUDREY  
Oh... great fun. You know, Helen's right  
- it is getting late. I should be going.

Ted removes the glasses from his ears.

TED  
Really? Okay then. Another time.

They all stand. Helen leans in for a polite embrace.

HELEN  
Lovely seeing you, Audrey.

TED  
Indeed.

Ted goes to kiss her cheek, but trips on a shoe lace and plants one on her mouth. They both laugh awkwardly.

TED (CONT'D)  
Yes. Well. Thank you for a delightful evening.

AUDREY  
Always.

Helen and Ted head for the door, Ted's shoe laces flying around behind him.

FADE TO:

EXT. HANOVER INN -- 1925 -- DAY

Young Ted stands outside as Helen adjusts his bow-tie.

TED  
I can't feel my feet.

Helen kisses him, then looks down and smiles sweetly.

TED (CONT'D)  
What? What??

HELEN  
*Sweetheart, I think you mixed up your left and your right.*

Ted looks down to see his shoes on the wrong feet. Helen bends down to help him adjust. Then, tying the last bow:

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Go get 'em.

TED  
I don't even know what I've got to show this guy. All I have is this mish-mosh of, of... blibber-blubber.

She pulls his face close.

HELEN  
You've got you.

INT. HANOVER INN -- DINING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Well-to-do hotel guests litter the Inn dining room. Forks CLINK against elegant China.

Ted sits nervously across from MIKE MARSHALL, 30s, as he silently flips through Ted's portfolio.

MARSHALL

Hm.

TED

There are some writing samples, some jokes, cartoons, a one-act I wrote awhile ago... The most recent articles are toward the front--

MARSHALL

I see.

Ted chews on a thumbnail - this is torture. Finally, Marshall slowly closes the folder and looks up.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

(flatly)

I don't get it.

TED

Well... you see--

MARSHALL

If I'm being honest, this is all over the place.

TED

I realize that and I've been thinking of leveraging my Jacko experience into a satirical novel, maybe. Perhaps a coming of age tale or a--

MARSHALL

Ted, you're a Dartmouth man. Have you considered Wall Street?

A beat while Ted stares ahead blankly.

TED

Not remotely.

MARSHALL

Publishing, writing... it's a brutal business.

TED

It's all I want to do...

Marshall considers Ted's sincerity, his desperate tone.

MARSHALL

Tell you what. I'll pass some of your cartoons to our juvenile division, see what they can make of it.

TED

Children's books?

MARSHALL

Dick and Jane, that sort of thing.

TED

(getting pissed now)  
That's absurd.

MARSHALL

(regarding the portfolio)  
Kind of thought absurd might be right up your alley.

TED

Due respect, Mr. Marshall, but there's not a bat's chance in hell you'll ever find me writing *kid's books*.

Marshall closes the portfolio and slides it back to Ted.

MARSHALL

Suit yourself.

EXT. HANOVER INN -- MOMENTS LATER

Helen spots Ted exiting. His face says it all.

HELEN

It couldn't have been that bad.

Ted tosses his portfolio into a trash can - Helen grabs it.

HELEN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

TED

To hell with it! They're right! I'm not a writer. I'm not an artist. I'm a cheap-shot joker with questionable drawing skills. That's not a job--

Helen collars Ted and plants his face in the selection of magazines on a nearby stand. Among them is the Jacko.

HELEN

Look at these.

(rifling through)

Magazine after magazine, sold everywhere, filled with satirical cartoons, editorials, articles, all full of razor-sharp wit, even the ads. Where do you think all these come from?

(then)

This is who you are, this is what you do.

She lines up one of Ted's drawings with an ad for emphasis.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You do this in your sleep.

Ted softens. OFF the side-by-side drawings:

HELEN (CONT'D)

Jacko's your ticket into this world. And I'll be here to see you through it, every step of the way.

TED

You'll be in New York, teaching.

HELEN

I'll train up every weekend.

TED

Helen, come on--

HELEN

I'd rather freeze to death in New Hampshire, suffering the drunken advances of horny college boys--

TED

You forgot to say unwanted. Drunken *unwanted* advances--

HELEN

--than let you work a single day at anything other than what you love. It should be like that.

Ted lets this soak in, his funk lifting with every step.

TED

You know girls aren't supposed to live with boys on campus.

HELEN

Well, I'm a *woman* and you live *off-*  
campus. And since when are you afraid of  
getting into a little trouble?

CUT TO:

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- 1956 -- DAY

Old Helen sits quietly looking out the back window at the ocean. She looks up as the doorbell rings, then hobbles to the front door, noticeably weaker than we've seen her.

Helen opens it to find Audrey with a sack of groceries.

AUDREY

I was in the neighborhood.

HELEN

Audrey. This isn't necessary. Really.

AUDREY

Ted mentioned you've been prescribed an  
extra measure of rest... of course it is.  
It's the least I can do.

HELEN

Ted mentioned.

AUDREY

The other evening. I was asking after  
you - I'm sorry if--

HELEN

It's fine.

Helen labors over to the kitchen, produces a prescription bottle and rattles out a giant pill, gulping it down with difficulty.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'm fine.

Helen returns to her seat by the window. Audrey notes the subdued atmosphere, breaks the silence.

AUDREY

I'll just let myself out. Please don't  
hesitate to call if you need anything.

Audrey turns for the front door--

TED (O.S.)

Helen! Is that Audrey? Bring her up for  
a peek!

Helen just stares out the window, doesn't respond, leaving Audrey unsure how to proceed.

TED (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Audrey! I need a parent's opinion!

HELEN  
Seem's he needs you.

With a head nod from Helen, Audrey heads up the stairs.

INT. STUDIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted sketches on a pad, his pencil worn down to the nub.

AUDREY (O.S.)  
Ted, may I?

TED  
Yes, yes please. Welcome to the lair.  
Just finishing up a whisker.

Audrey emerges from the spiral staircase, wonders at the sight of his studio for the first time.

TED (CONT'D)  
Don't get too many visitors.

Audrey moves into the room, wide-eyed.

Pictures of Helen and Ted's world travels adorn the window sills: the Egyptian Pyramids, Machu-Picchu, Paris, Rome, Tokyo.

On the walls hang mounted heads of his papier-mache invented wild game: a toucan colored gazelle with a horn, an oversized smiling bird with a curled feather atop his head.

AUDREY  
You made these?

TED  
Caught them with my bare hands!

Audrey laughs, delighted. Ted beckons her over.

TED (CONT'D)  
Here, take a look. Tell me what your children might make of this.

He lays out a handful of sketches. After a moment of hesitation, Audrey heads over to inspect.

TED (CONT'D)  
So these two kids are stuck at home on a rainy day, their mother heads out.  
(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

And they've got this... imperious goldfish insisting they behave.

AUDREY

Oh, he's cute! My kids have a goldfish, or rather, had. They don't last long, you know.

TED

Then, a surprise visitor arrives - a free-spirited cat... in a hat.

Ted lays out a sketch of the Cat in the Hat: it's very close to resembling the final version, but the hat is nondescript and the Cat has no bow tie. Audrey's eyes light up.

AUDREY

Oh, they'll love this, Ted.

TED

Hang on, don't move.

AUDREY

What is it?

TED

Need to capture a little more mischief in this cat. Kind of like what's happening in your eyes right now.

AUDREY

(blushing)

Ted--

TED

You've got cat eyes.

Ted sketches with a pad and pencil.

TED (CONT'D)

It's no big deal, women usually resemble one of four animals. A bird, a cat, a horse or a pig.

(then)

Lucky for you, you're a cat.

AUDREY

I think you're forgetting about all those mousey women.

TED

Well sure, there are giraffe women, too. In fact, I've got a sketch of one here.

(then)

You know Judith Morgan, right?

As Ted and Audrey burst out laughing...

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- LIVING ROOM -- SAME

Helen, hearing the laughter from the studio, pulls herself off the sofa and over to the stairs.

She looks up the menacing tower of stairs as the mumble of conversation and Audrey's laughter from above continues. She braces, steps, winces... then makes it up the first step.

A little more confident, she struggles up the next, her body shaking as she grips the railing and sets her weight down slowly. Sweat beads on her forehead. More laughter.

As she goes for the third step, her legs buckle and she falls to the floor in a crumpled heap with a THUMP. Ted runs out.

TED

Helen!

CUT TO:

INT. OFF-CAMPUS APARTMENT -- 1923 -- NIGHT

Young Ted sketches with a heavy piece of black charcoal, fully engaged. Helen pokes her head in, buttoning her nightgown, with a post-coital glow.

HELEN

Seems that did the trick. You're off and running.

Ted meets her eye with a mischievous grin as he sketches.

HELEN (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Good. My work is done here.

The phone RINGS. Helen goes to get it.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Animals! You told those boys no calls past 10 on school nights, didn't you?

Ted shakes his head, "no."

TED

Of course.

HELEN

(giggling as she answers)

I told Ted to tell you animals no calls after 10! What gives?

A beat, as Helen's face drops.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
 Yes... I understand. Don't you...?  
 Yes, I'll tell him.

She hangs up.

TED  
 (not looking up)  
 Tell me what? Mac's got me on *another*  
 cover this month?

He looks up to see Helen's face, white, terrified. Ted instantly senses there is something terribly wrong. The charcoal drops to the floor.

HELEN  
 Ted, it's your--

TED  
 No.

HELEN  
 She just--

TED  
 No, Helen. Don't say it.

Helen bursts into tears.

TED (CONT'D)  
 No no no no no no NO!

INT. TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, SPRINGFIELD -- DAY

PASTOR  
 Henreitta Seuss Geisel, wife, mother,  
 friend, and congregant...

Ted, Helen and T.R. sit at the front of the crowded chapel, somber.

PASTOR (CONT'D)  
 She will be remembered for her enduring  
 kindness, her generosity of spirit, and  
 her bravery in facing her own mortality  
 for the final months of her life.

Ted looks up, shocked, then over at T.R. as the Pastor continues. OFF Ted, horrified, guilt sinking in:

INT. TED'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM -- DAY

Ted listlessly enters his room as his eyes fall upon a KNITTED RED AND WHITE STRIPED HAT resting among his things.

T.R. appears in the doorway.

T.R.  
She just finished that. For the harsh winters.

TED  
She should've told me. You should've.

T.R. says nothing.

TED (CONT'D)  
Why didn't you tell me?

T.R.  
How could I, Theodor--?

TED  
How about, "Son, your mother is sick and probably going to die you might want to make the most of her time left" maybe?

T.R.  
She was protecting you.

TED  
From what?!

T.R.  
From yourself, son. *You're just a child.*

TED  
Unbelievable.

Helen appears behind T.R. as Ted stuffs down every last emotion and places Nettie's hat into his overnight bag. He storms out.

T.R.  
(angry now)  
Everything has always been about you, Theodor! Perhaps if you'd spent one spare moment thinking of your mother--

TED  
Don't.

T.R.  
You'd have noticed she wasn't well--

Ted face flushes red, ready to burst. Helen steps in, calm.

HELEN  
 (to T.R.)  
 Stop. Okay?  
 (then, to Ted)  
 Let's go.

Ted follows her lead and exit without a word. OFF T.R.....:

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL -- 1956 -- NIGHT

Dr. Davis closes the door to Helen's room as he approaches Ted and Audrey. Audrey looks worried. Ted is wild-eyed.

AUDREY  
 Doctor. What happened? Is she--

DR. DAVIS  
 She's comfortable now. No fractures.

AUDREY  
 But... what--?

DR. DAVIS  
 We need to run a series of studies in the morning before we know anything we can take to the bank. I gave her something to help her sleep - she'll be out the rest of the night.

Ted abruptly turns and heads for the door.

AUDREY  
 Ted...?

INT. DOCK BAR -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Glassy eyed, Ted sits alone at the long bar, nursing a healthy scotch. The BARMAN sidles up, delivers the tab.

BARMAN  
 Gotta close up here soon.

TED  
 I know.

Ted pulls out his wallet and pays the bill.

BARMAN  
 Thank you, sir.

As Ted stuffs the change back into his wallet, a faded scrap catches his eye. He pulls it out, studies it.

INSERT: Handwritten script that reads, HENRIETTA SEUSS GEISEL.

He turns it over to reveal an old photograph of Nettie from Ted's childhood, worn from the years.

The Barman flips through the day's sports section.

BARMAN (CONT'D)  
Yankees and Dodgers in the series. And  
history repeats itself, once again.

Ted breaks his reveries and looks up.

TED  
What's that?

BARMAN  
History. Repeats itself. Same damn  
thing over and over again.

Ted looks back at his picture of Nettie, puts it away sadly.

TED  
Yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. SCOTTIE'S TAVERN BACK ROOM -- 1923 -- NIGHT

Young Ted sits at the bar, drunk as drunk can be. He waves at SCOTTIE for another drink. Mac intercedes.

TED  
One more!

MAC  
I think we're good here. Thanks,  
Scottie.

SCOTTIE  
You got it, Mac. Hey, great issue.

Scottie waves a copy of the Jacko.

MAC  
It's all this guy.

Ernest enters the bar, looking for trouble.

ERNEST  
Jacko staff hard at work again, I see.

MAC  
Leave it alone, Ernest.

ERNEST

Sorry, just finishing up the layout so we can actually, you know, go to press. Guess I'll be up all night by myself finishing up, then?

TED

You do that, Ernest.

ERNEST

I will. Who needs an editor, really? Right, Ted?

TED

Editor, schmeditor. That's what I say.

MAC

Come on. Let's get you home before Scottie starts charging rent.

He goes to help Ted off his stool. Ted pushes him away.

TED

I got it. I got it.

But Ted stumbles and knocks the stool over as he falls. Charlie and Wilder look over from the dartboard. Mac offers a hand.

TED (CONT'D)

I got it. I'm going.

CHARLIE

Me, too. I'll walk you home, Ted.

TED

Stop. All of you. I'm fine. Leave me alone.

And with that, Ted's stumbles out.

EXT. CAMPUS -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted weaves down the sidewalk, barely keeping his balance, eventually colliding with a bench and careening to the ground.

Staring up at the sky, he LAUGHS, tears coming to his eyes. He pulls himself to his feet, stumbles to the curb, opens his fly and urinates into the street.

He closes his eyes and emits a sigh of relief, just as a police car glides past him slowly and stops. Ted opens his eyes and they meet with the POLICE OFFICER's. Ted's face is blank.

INT. POLICE STATION -- MORNING

Ted sleeps in a heap on the bench. He jolts awake.

JAILER

Let's go, kid. You're out.

Ted, bleary eyed, looks up to find Helen standing beside the Jailer. He gets up and walks out of the cell, averting his eyes. Helen looks at him sadly.

INT. LAYCOCK'S OFFICE -- DAY

A sullen Ted sits just outside the Dean's office. There is a quiet MURMURING from within. After a beat, Laycock appears.

LAYCOCK

Mr. Geisel, come in.

Ted takes a seat next to T.R. as his arraignment begins.

LAYCOCK (CONT'D)

Public drunkenness, disturbing the peace, public indecency. My inclination, Mr. Geisel, is to expel you for this and wash my hands of the whole ordeal.

(then)

But your father has made a compelling argument on your behalf.

Ted stares ahead blankly.

LAYCOCK (CONT'D)

I have decided to allow you to stay on campus long enough to graduate. But you will remain on probation in the interim and any hint of an infraction of this school's rules or policies, academically or otherwise, will result in your immediate and final dismissal.

No reaction from Ted.

LAYCOCK (CONT'D)

Your father has also suggested, and I agree completely, that your days at the Jack-o'-lantern magazine are finished. I'll inform Professor Maclean of your removal from the mast, and any contribution bearing your name in this or any other campus publication will likewise result in expulsion. Are we clear?

T.R.  
 (shaking the Dean's hand)  
 Yes we are, sir. Many thanks.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted strides past T.R. as they approach his car.

T.R.  
 Not even a thank you, then.

Ted stops, turns on T.R.

TED  
 Why would you *suggest* that I be fired  
 from Jacko?! It's the only damn thing  
 I've done up here that I'm proud of!

T.R.  
 I am helping you to clear this blot from  
 the family name--

TED  
 The family name, *the family name!*  
 That's all you care about, isn't it?  
 God-forbid you actually stand up for your  
 son. No, the "Geisel family name" is far  
 more important. What a load of crap!

T.R.  
 I'm trying to help you, son.

TED  
 I don't need your help!

T.R. pulls an envelope from his pocket, hands it to Ted.

TED (CONT'D)  
 What's this?

T.R.  
 I've arranged a job for you in New York  
 after graduation. Our old neighbor, Mr.  
 Thompson, has agreed to take you on and  
 teach you the actuarial business from the  
 ground up.

Ted stares at the envelope in his hands.

T.R. (CONT'D)  
 It's a chance to straighten out your  
 life, son.  
 (then)  
 Your mother would be proud.

T.R. gets in his car and pulls away.

TED  
No she wouldn't.

CUT TO:

INT. LA JOLLA HOSPITAL -- 1956 -- DAY

Helen rests in a hospital bed with Ted by her side, holding her hand. Dr. Davis stands with an oncologist, DR. WALSH, mid 40s.

DR. DAVIS  
The good news is that Helen's blood work shows no trace of Guillain Barre.

HELEN  
Thank God--

DR. DAVIS  
However, the panels we ran do show an elevated white blood cell count, which is why I brought in Dr. Walsh. He's from oncology.

DR. WALSH  
Mrs. Geisel, based on your admitting pathology, we dug a little deeper, ran some precautionary tests, and this is the bad news. We found more than one indication that there is a likely malignancy in at least one lymph node. Cancer.

Close on TED. The Doctor's voice fade outs, drowned out by the sounds of his beating heart, his breath, white noise...

DR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
I'm sure you both have questions - Dr. Walsh will talk through the next steps...

Helen looks up to Ted, desperate for his strength, but he's checked out. Ted releases his grip on her hand, and moves to the window, staring out.

As Dr. Walsh continues, only a few words break through the noise in Ted's head.

ONCOLOGIST  
...early stages... radiation...  
chemotherapy... surgery... treatable...

With an exhale, Ted checks turns around, checks back in.

## ONCOLOGIST (CONT'D)

The only certainty is that this will be a long, ongoing fight, requiring all your will and determination. But with the right attitude, miracles can happen.

Ted's transformation is not lost on Helen. He forces a smile for her, takes her hand in his once again.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME, LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Ted helps Helen get comfortable then moves to the kitchen. Ted finds and flips through Helen's calendar.

TED

I'll clear the schedule, cancel appointments... they're all listed in here somewhere, right?

HELEN

Ted.

TED

Oh, and I'll call the airline -- they'll refund the New Zealand trip, right? Who do I ask for there?

HELEN

Ted, please.

TED

I can't quite make this one out but whatever it is I'm sure it can wait-- what's more important than--

HELEN

Ted, STOP.

Ted finally looks up.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Come here. Sit with me.

Ted obliges, scolded like a school boy. He sits with Helen, she reaches out, touches his face, their entire life in a gentle caress. Ted melts under her gaze, back at ease.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Look at me. *Look at me, now.*

(then)

I will not let this disease ruin us. I will figure this out. Okay?

Ted offers a half smile, cautiously optimistic.

CUT TO:

INT. OFF-CAMPUS APARTMENT -- 1925 -- DAY

Daylight seeps through the window shade onto young Ted's pasty, stubbled face.

HELEN  
Smells great in here.

She throws open the curtains, drenching the room, and Ted, in blinding light, then cracks a window.

TED  
(squinting)  
What the hell??

Ted buries his head under the pillow.

HELEN  
I wish we had something to do.

TED  
You could leave me alone.

Helen sees Ted's red bow tie sitting on his dresser. She wraps it around her neck.

HELEN  
*Well look at me, look at me now!*

TED  
Knock it off.

Helen looks around the room and zeroes in on Ted's trunk.

HELEN  
I've got it - how about a game of *fun in a box?*

Ted sits up in the bed, thoroughly annoyed.

TED  
C'mon, Hel.

HELEN  
Sit, sit, sit, sit! Let's see--some books, a toy ship, a kite? When do you plan on flying this?

TED  
Helen... Stop. I mean it.

HELEN  
And what's *this*?

She pulls out the *KNITTED HAT FROM NETTIE*.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
This from your mother?

*As Helen dons the hat, she takes on a new aura, playful, mischievous...*

TED  
TAKE THAT OFF.

HELEN  
Well at least I've got your attention!

Helen springs up, holding the toy ship, the kite, and wearing the hat... She bolts out of the room, bumping a small table and sending a lamp CRASHING to the floor.

TED  
Helen! Dammit! Look at this mess!

The front door SLAMS, Helen's footfalls pounding down the steps. Ted, in a mild state of shock, ponders a moment.

TED (CONT'D)  
Oh hell.

EXT. THE GREEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Helen jogs through the rain with Ted's menagerie of things under an umbrella. Ted trails not far behind.

TED  
Helen! This is ridiculous!

Helen leads them up the steps to the campus cafeteria.

HELEN  
UP! UP! UP!

INT. CAFETERIA -- CONTINUOUS

Ted scrambles after Helen and smashes into a STUDENT carrying a stack of books.

STUDENT  
Watch it!

Helen jumps over a table and taunts Ted from the other side. She grabs a handful of mashed potatoes from a passerby's tray and volleys it at Ted, who ducks just in time.

TED  
Helen, what the hell...?

The potatoes land square in the chest of a SQUAT LOOKING REDHEAD. Next to him, his IDENTICAL TWIN tosses his own tray of food back at Ted.

As a cafeteria-wide food fight ensues, Helen sprints for the door. Ted, in hot pursuit, gets pelted with a drumstick.

EXT. THE GREEN -- CONTINUOUS

Helen and Ted burst through the doors, barely avoiding a collision with a student carrying a large fishbowl.

Racing across the green, Helen stumbles over a GROUNDSKEEPER's rake, bending it beyond repair.

GROUNDSKEEPER  
My new rake!

Ted finally catches Helen and they both double over, out of breath.

TED  
Why are you doing this??

HELEN  
Because you're in serious need of an un-slumping.

TED  
It's my slump! Let me have it to myself!

Helen pounces on Ted - exhausted, they fall to the ground. Helen removes the hat, serious now.

HELEN  
Hey. I can't even begin to pretend to understand what you're going through. But, you gotta stop playing this game with yourself - you can't win.

TED  
What game?

HELEN  
The lonely guy game.  
(then)  
You're not alone, Ted. Not for one second - don't ever forget it. There are a few of us who are still here who'd do anything for you. So stop pushing us away. Stop pushing *me* away.

After a beat, Ted gets up and storms off.

TED  
She's gone, Helen. *Everybody leaves.*  
(almost to himself)  
So should you.

HELEN  
So should I what?

TED  
Go.

Helen absorbs this, hurt.

HELEN  
Just like that.

TED  
This was all a joke anyway, you know. A  
big cosmic joke.

HELEN  
Ted...

TED  
Go, Helen. Go back to New York. Go.

Helen turns, concealing her face as she bursts into tears. Ted stuffs down every last emotion as he watches her go.

TED (CONT'D)  
*That is that.*

INT. JACK-O-LANTERN OFFICES -- DAY

Ted clears out his desk as Wilder, Skip and Charlie look on.

CHARLIE  
So that's it?

TED  
That's it.

WILDER  
What about the summer issue--

TED  
(pointedly)  
Guys, it's over.

ERNEST (O.S.)  
That's right, gentlemen.

Ernest strides in, commanding everyone's attention.

ERNEST (CONT'D)

Was it worth it, Ted? I warned you, all of you, *there are rules*. You can't just go around making things up to your liking. I don't drink, I work hard at school, I take life seriously. And now I've been appointed interim editor-in-chief of Jacko.

CHARLIE

By what imbecile?

ERNEST

Dean Laycock, and I'd watch your tone.

The peanut gallery is silent. A long, sad beat, then--

CHARLIE

Well... Ted's the Shmeditor. He said it himself.

ERNEST

There's no such thing as a--

CHARLIE

Yes, there is.

Charlie grabs a dictionary, flips it open.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And... Shmeditor, here it is-- "A big-nosed giant who controls everything, forever."

ERNEST

(not funny)

That's funny.

CHARLIE

I move that Shmeditor be made the official leader of the Jack-o'-lantern forever. All in favor?

The entire staff raises their hands - a round of "ayes."

ERNEST

You're all very loyal, I see that--

WILDER

I further move that title of Interim Editor be moved to the bottom of the pecking order and be renamed "jackass two-faced rat crap no class talentless slime traitor."

CHARLIE

Damn. I second *that*. All in favor?

Another round of ayes as Ernest leaves in a flurry.

ERNEST

To hell with you people.

Ted grabs his box of things and heads for the door.

TED

(flatly)

Thanks guys.

CHARLIE

What about Mac? Aren't you going to say  
goodbye?

Ted reluctantly turns back.

EXT. THE CONNECTICUT RIVER -- DAY

Mac casts his fly rod, deep in the meditation of the rhythmic motion. Ted sits on the riverbank.

TED

You're one of them now, you know.

MAC

Who?

TED

An adult.

MAC

Maybe. I'm not getting any younger,  
anyway. So who does that make you?

TED

An actuary.

MAC

An actuary?

TED

Time to get serious.

MAC

Huh.

Ted rises to his feet and turns up the riverbank.

TED

Guess I'll see ya.

Mac snaps his fly back, holding his cast.

MAC

Hey, Ted - remember *Chick Maynard*?

TED

"The worst pro athlete to come out of Dartmouth?"

MAC

Chick Maynard was brilliant, top of his class, could have had any job he wanted. And he also played baseball. By some people's standards, not very well. But he loved it. So after graduation, he turned down offers from all the Wall Street shops and tried out for the majors. Long story short - he was signed by the Boston Red Sox.

TED

But then he got cut, right? If he was so awful--

MAC

Yeah, it was a pretty short career - twelve games, in fact.

TED

What's the point? Of any of this--

MAC

Chick Maynard *played*. For those twelve nights of his life, he stood under the lights and he swung for the fences. He lived his dream. And that's why we love him.

(then)

You'll never know if you don't try. Not everyone has to be *great*, Ted, but you gotta do what's in here.

He taps his heart. Ted is silent. This hits a chord.

TED

(false bravado)

You sound like a preacher. It's not too late, you know--

MAC

I'm doing what *I* love, Ted.

Mac casts the fly once more.

MAC (CONT'D)

What about you?

OFF Ted, conflicted:

EXT. GRADUATION CEREMONY -- THE GREEN

Amidst a sea of caps and gowns, Ted sits listlessly. As his name is called, he approaches Laycock, receives his diploma, and forces a smile as he shakes hands with the Dean.

INT. OFF-CAMPUS APARTMENT, BEDROOM -- DAY

Packing his trunk for the last time, Ted finds the red and white hat from Nettie. He places it on his head and studies himself in the mirror, then pulls it off.

Seeing his portfolio, he picks it up and opens it. He flips through the drawings and writings with increasing angst, then throws them into his trunk and slams it shut.

CUT TO:

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- 1956 -- LIVING ROOM

As a winter rain pours down from the sky, Ted slumps on the couch, staring aimlessly out the window. Helen joins him.

HELEN

So what should we do on this dreary, wet day.

TED

Nothing comes to mind.

HELEN

Good a time as any to lock yourself in the studio.

TED

Helen...

Helen looks him in the eyes.

HELEN

Play with me Ted. Please.

Ted softens, slumps down, and rests his head on Helen's lap.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So... the Hat Cat. What's it like?

TED

Black fur with a white belly and face.

HELEN  
That's not very interesting. There's got  
to be more to it than that.

TED  
There is.

HELEN  
Tell me.

Ted closes his eyes as Helen strokes his hair.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. IMAGINARY HOUSE -- DAY

Ted and Helen sit in two simple chairs as rain pelts the window beside them.

A LOUD BUMP draws their attention to the door as the nondescript Black and White Cat in a plain old Hat bursts through the door.

TED (V.O.)  
His hat, it's tall and it flops.

HELEN (V.O.)  
A plain old floppy hat?

*The Hat transforms before our eyes into...*

TED (V.O.)  
With red and white stripes.

HELEN (V.O.)  
And maybe... a bow tie to boot?

TED (V.O.)  
Yes! And he's making a dreadful mess.

HELEN (V.O.)  
What kind of mess?

TED (V.O.)  
Toys everywhere, clothes strewn about.

HELEN (V.O.)  
That doesn't sound too bad...

*Ted and Helen follow the bow tied Cat through the house now, watching as he tears through cabinets and cupboards.*

TED (V.O.)  
And garden tools and food. And he's  
flying a kite in the house.

HELEN (V.O.)  
Ooh, mother won't be happy about that.

*Ted is now by himself in the house, chasing the cat with a butterfly net.*

TED (V.O.)  
Exactly. So we've got to stop him!

BACK TO SCENE:

TED  
But the mess it's almost too much to bear.

HELEN  
What on earth will they do?

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- STUDIO -- NIGHT

Ted draws in a fury late into the night.

TED (V.O.)  
Make the cat clean it up.

HELEN (V.O.)  
But how? With a mop and a broom?

TED (V.O.)  
With a street sweeper of sorts!

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- LIVING ROOM

Ted, his eyes closed, revels in his vision as Helen leans down, and kisses him on the head.

HELEN  
That's some cat.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CAR -- 1925 -- DAY

Young Ted, slumped in his seat, leans his head against the window as the trees outside whip by in a blur.

CLOSE ON Ted's hand, we see him holding the picture of Nettie tightly, the same one he carries around the rest of his life. He flips it over, runs his finger back and forth across Nettie's name: Henrietta Seuss Geisel, Henrietta Seuss, Seuss, Seuss...

Ted sits up straight and pulls out his portfolio, flipping through it. *We see glimpses of Yertle the Turtle, Gerald McBoing Boing, Sam-I-Am, the Grinch.* Then a blank page.

Eyes welling up, he puts pencil to paper.

As the picture takes shape, we recognize it as the parade from Mulberry Street Ted envisioned with Nettie as a child.

As he puts the final touches on the sketch, he sighs deeply, and puts it back into his folder, slumping back down in his seat.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER -- LATER

Ted stares up at an intimidating Midtown skyscraper, being jostled by the throng of BUSINESSMEN as they hustle to and fro.

INT. ELEVATOR BANKS -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted stands shoulder to shoulder with men in suits, his face a mixture of apprehension and determination.

INT. OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted sits in a waiting area, stoic, wheels turning. A buzzer on the SECRETARY'S desk squawks.

VOICE

Send him in.

SECRETARY

Go ahead, Mr. Geisel. He's expecting you.

Ted somberly nods a thanks, steels himself, and heads in.

INT. OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Mike Marshall, the publisher friend of Mac's, looks up.

MARSHALL

Make it quick. My girl out front tells me you're not leaving without a meeting.

TED

Yes, sir.

Ted pulls out the sketch from the train.

TED (CONT'D)

Last time you said my stuff made no sense.

MARSHALL  
Listen, kid, I was just trying to--

TED  
You were right. It's absurd.

He hands over the sketch.

TED (CONT'D)  
But I think maybe when you mentioned  
children's books...

Marshall flips it around to reveal *MULBERRY STREET*, the parade  
of animals and rajahs, all full of artistic wonder.

TED (CONT'D)  
I think maybe you were on to something.

Marshall looks at the byline below the sketch.

MARSHALL  
Doctor... Seuss? Who's that?

Ted beams with pride.

TED  
That's me.

MARSHALL  
(then, nodding, impressed)  
You got a story to go with this?

TED  
Do I ever.

CUT TO:

INT. LA JOLLA HOME STUDIO -- 1956 -- NIGHT

Close on old Ted as he stares at a piece of paper. With a final  
slug of wine, he paints a final stroke, then places the page on  
top of an adjacent stack.

REVEAL The Cat in the Hat manuscript, in full, finished glory.

With joy in his eyes, he takes the stack, and heads downstairs.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Ted finds Helen asleep on a couch. He places the pages by her  
side, pulls the blanket up around her shoulders, tucking her in.

He regards the medicine on the table, the omens of her deteriorating health, and any semblance of joy or euphoria vanishes in an instant. Helen's eyes open.

HELEN  
You finished.

Ted nods solemnly.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Are you happy?

Ted shrugs. Staring at his wife, there's so much he wants to say, but he chokes back his tears, and silently heads off. Helen's eyes fill with sadness.

FADE TO:

EXT. STREETS OF MANHATTAN -- 1925 -- DAY

Ted hurries along the exterior of an old school building, shouting up to the classrooms.

TED  
Helen! Helen Palmer!

Kids faces press against the windows, marvelling at the sight.

TED (CONT'D)  
HELEN!! I LOVE YOU!

Finally a window pops open and a TEACHER looks out.

TEACHER  
Please! Stop shouting.

TED  
I need to see Helen Palmer!

TEACHER  
She's not here anymore--

This stops Ted in his tracks.

TED  
She's gone? She's really gone?

TEACHER  
(taking pity on Ted)  
No... she's just moved to the other side  
of the building. Room 226.

Ted regains his composure.

TED  
Thank you.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, CLASSROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Helen passes out worksheets starting at the back of the room with an adorable YOUNG GIRL, then working her way forward.

HELEN  
William, please read the first paragraph on the top of page four, then Cindy continue after William.

The YOUNG GIRL's eyes suddenly go wide at the sight of Ted sneaking into the class, unbeknownst to Helen.

CINDY LOU  
(whispering)  
Mister, what are you doing?

TED  
I'm here to learn, Miss...

CINDY LOU  
*Cindy Lou.*

The CHILDREN next to Cindy begin buzzing:

CHILDREN  
*Who? Who's that?*

TED  
(sotto, to Cindy)  
I'm here to learn my ABCs.

Hearing the commotion, Helen turns back to the class to see: Ted, quite a sight, crammed into a small desk and chair.

HELEN  
Ted.

A dozen curious faces crane towards Ted...

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Are you *mad*?

Ted stands up, his legs temporarily getting stuck in the desk. The kids laugh as he struggles.

TED  
Helen-- Miss Palmer... Please just hear me out--

HELEN  
Ted, I can't.

CINDY

Why don't you hear him out, Miss Palmer?

Ted seizes the window.

TED

I never meant to treat you like I did.  
You are my love, and I apologize from the  
bottom of my heart.

HELEN

That's it? You're sorry?

He drops to a knee.

TED

Marry me, Helen! Today! City Hall.

Helen turns beet-red then drags Ted into--

THE HALLWAY. She shuts the door, and spins him to face her.

TED (CONT'D)

Hi. You look amazing--

HELEN

No, Ted... No. You are brilliant,  
passionate, and you're going to be as  
famous as famous can be...

Ted begins to protest.

HELEN (CONT'D)

...but you're a child. You need someone  
to keep you in line, steer you away from  
trouble, *help you put on your shoes*, Ted.  
That's not what I signed up for.

TED

Wait. I've been an ass. A giant,  
elephant sized, fire breathing, dragon  
haired, walnut crushing, salamander  
eating--

HELEN

Stop.

TED

And I may be... a child. But I will be a  
better man to you than any man out there  
could ever possibly be. Just, stay with  
me, Helen. We'll laugh and explore and  
see the world and be off to great places.  
Together.

Helen weighs this all carefully.

TED (CONT'D)  
I mean it. *One hundred per cent.*

A tension-filled beat, then:

HELEN  
I've got to get back to class.

TED  
Helen? Please.

...then back to Helen, who softens entirely.

HELEN  
Okay. Yes.

Ted, overjoyed, grabs Helen and kisses her passionately. Breaking the kiss, Ted spies a STACK OF KIDS FACES, piled one atop another, peaking through doorway.

TED  
She said yes!

The kids CHEER, breaking into a frenzy. As she heads into her classroom, he pulls her into one last embrace.

HELEN  
Ted!

TED  
I'll never let you go, again, you know.  
Never, never, never.

Ted shoots one last mischievous look at a flummoxed Helen, then picks her up and carries her into her classroom.

CUT TO:

INT. LA JOLLA HOME, LIVING ROOM -- 1956 -- MORNING

Audrey enters.

AUDREY  
Helen? I let myself in, no one answered  
and I got worried.

She finds Helen alone, exhausted, subdued.

HELEN  
Oh. Thank you for coming, Audrey. Sorry  
to call so early.

AUDREY  
It's no problem. Can I get you anything,  
is everything alright?

HELEN  
Ted's finished another book. The primer.

AUDREY  
Helen, that's wonderful! Where is he?

Helen points Audrey to the patio where Ted lies asleep on a chaise his robe and pajamas.

HELEN  
I think he was up most of the night.  
You'll find him out there some mornings.

AUDREY  
Oh, poor Ted.

HELEN  
Would you mind? Taking care of him?

AUDREY  
Of course, anything. Why don't I head to town, fetch some fresh bread and cheese. Coffee?

HELEN  
That would be perfect.

AUDREY  
Alright, I'll be right back.

Audrey heads to the door.

HELEN  
Audrey? You'll need to tie his shoes.

AUDREY  
His shoes?

HELEN  
He's helpless without us, you know.

AUDREY  
Of course.

Off Audrey, befuddled, confused...

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- BEDROOM -- NIGHT

In bed, Helen lies awake, regarding Ted for a long moment. She kisses him on the forehead slowly, then enters the bathroom and closes the door.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Retrieving her prescription bottle, Helen watches in the mirror as she takes a pill. Then another, then another, then another... finishing the bottle off.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- STUDIO -- NIGHT

Helen climbs the stairs, weak, growing more groggy by the moment. She slumps onto the couch, hazily grabs a pencil and paper, and begins writing.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- BEDROOM -- MORNING

Ted wakes up, alone. He wipes the sleep from his eyes and looks around.

TED

Helen?

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- VARIOUS -- CONTINUOUS

Ted stumbles through the house calling out, his anxiety building.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

Ted climbs the stairs and finds Helen prone on the couch. He rushes over to her.

TED

Helen? Helen!

He runs his hands over her face, her body - it is cold and stiff, dead. He screams and shakes, knocking over easels as he paces back and forth in front of her body, finally falling to his knees, sobbing.

Hands trembling, he finds a note clutched by her heart. He opens it, and begins reading.

HELEN (V.O.)

*Dearest Ted, I am too old and enmeshed in everything you do and are, that I cannot conceive of life without you ... but I consider with equal gravity the thought of my condition destroying your gift, the joy and love and spirit you have which is unmatched by any the world's ever known.*

BEGIN MONTAGE:

EXT. LA JOLLA HOME -- DAY

A funeral home's van carefully wheels a gurney across the drive, loading it into the empty cargo hold.

HELEN (V.O.)

*It's up to you to decide what to do with your life, you're the only one who can possibly know what's right for you.*

Ted's eyes well up.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- STUDIO

Ted re-assembles the shambles of his studio, rights the easel, collects the paint brushes and pencil scattered on the floor.

HELEN (V.O.)

*Remember the games we used to play? Inventing worlds and stories that would make us laugh and laugh and laugh? Know that even when I'm gone, these places continue to exist. They will always be right there inside you.*

Ted finally slumps on the couch, surrounded by his art and photos of his adventures with Helen.

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- DAY

Ted stares into a closet, his fingers running through Helen's clothes.

HELEN (V.O.)

*Things may seem jumbled and confused sometimes, and you may find yourself stuck.*

He pulls out a suit of his own, followed by a bow-tie, staring at it, unsure how to tie it.

HELEN (V.O.)

*Unsure how to go on, waiting for something to happen, or...*

INT. FUNERAL HOME -- LATER

Ted greets MOURNERS as they pay their respects.

HELEN(V.O.)

*...waiting for people to be a certain thing or act a certain way.*

EXT. LA JOLLA BEACH -- DAY

Ted, in his funeral clothes, strolls down the beach alone.

HELEN (V.O.)  
*But sometimes just biding your time,  
 being alone with yourself, is all you  
 need.*

INT. LA JOLLA HOME -- AFTERNOON

Post funeral, mourners and friends have gathered at the Geisel home. Next to Ted is older MAC. Ted does his best to be human.

HELEN (V.O.)  
*Take every measure to know who matters  
 least, who matters most --*

As Audrey enters the house, Ted's gaze lands on her.

HELEN (V.O.)  
*--and who will be there for you 'til the  
 end.*

EXT. LA JOLLA HOME -- ANOTHER DAY

Ted watches as the last of the rehab equipment is loaded onto a van, the bicycles, the railings, the medical equipment.

HELEN(V.O.)  
*And above all, be yourself, Ted, and say  
 exactly what's inside of you.*

Ted signs a final form, sending the van down the drive, and past another car pulling up.

HELEN (V.O.)  
*Because those who mind don't matter and  
 those who matter don't mind.*

Audrey emerges from the car, approaches Ted, full of empathy.

AUDREY  
 Hi.

TED  
 Hi.

AUDREY  
 Just came by to see if you'd like to take  
 a walk. I'm no botanist, but I overheard  
 someone say that the truffala trees are  
 in bloom. Truffula - that's not right.

Ted looks her in the eyes, and they meet, perhaps for the first time.

TED  
No, that's perfect.

Audrey reaches out for Ted's hand.

AUDREY  
One foot at a time.

As Ted and Audrey head down the road-- the Torrey Pines transform to Truffala trees, the sun glows a vibrant pastel color, the sea foams green and white, the houses clinging to the cliffs - it all morphs into the wonderful world of DR. SEUSS.

HELEN (V.O.)  
*So be sure where you step...*

HELEN's voice is replaced by the OLD MAN's from the opening, the voice of the real DR. SEUSS.

DR. SEUSS (V.O.)  
*...Step with care and great tact  
And remember that Life's  
A Great Balancing Act.*

*Just never forget  
To be dexterous and deft.  
And never mix up your  
right foot with your left.*

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS -- VARIOUS

A series of overlapping images of diverse set of MOTHERS and FATHERS reading "The Cat in the Hat" to their children.

DR. SEUSS (V.O.)  
*And will you succeed?  
Yes! You will, indeed!  
(98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)*

On the final image, a mother who reminds us of Nettie, finishes the book, and kisses her young black-haired son, on the head, tucking him in. The boy's eyes are alight with wonder.

DR. SEUSS (V.O.)  
*KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!*

Smiling to herself, the Mother reaches up and clicks off the lamp.

SMASH TO BLACK.

End titles over BLACK:

*The Cat In the Hat* was published in 1957 and is arguably the most recognized children's book of all time.

*Dr. Seuss* remains the best-selling children's author in the world, outselling *J.K. Rowling*, *Walt Disney*, *Beatrix Potter*, and *E.B. White*. He won the Pulitzer in 1984 for his life's work.

*Ted* and *Audrey* married in 1968 and were together until the day *Ted* died at the age of 87 in 1991.

Long after his death, *Dr. Seuss* continues to inspire us all... generation after generation.