

Draft 3/8/13

# **THE END OF THE TOUR**

**Screenplay by  
DONALD MARGULIES**

Based on "Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself:  
A Road Trip With David Foster Wallace" by David Lipsky

David Kanter/Matt DeRoss/James Dahl  
ANONYMOUS CONTENT

FADE IN:

EXT. / INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE. APT. (2008)

A bright, unpretentious two-bedroom in a pre-war building, cluttered with books and papers, reflecting its owner's lively mind. The decor is that of a perennial grad student's digs, the bachelor pad of a New York intellectual. An Entlebucher Mountain Dog is curled up on the sofa.

Seated at his messy desk in his office, DAVID LIPSKY, a strapping, boyishly handsome forty-three, quick-witted, tightly-wound, smokes and types speedily from scraps of handwritten notes, surrounded by books on his current journalistic subject, climate change. A stack of copies of a hardcover book - *Absolutely American* by David Lipsky - looms nearby, his recent publishing success.

SUPER TITLE: September 12, 2008

His iPhone vibrates. "Jeff/Newsweek" appears on its screen.

LIPSKY

Hey, Jeff, what's up?

JEFF'S VOICE

(over phone) Listen: According to this unconfirmed report... David Wallace is dead.

LIPSKY

(disputing) No no no no, must be one of those rumors...

While they speak, Lipsky rapidly googles "david foster wallace dead" and scans the news.

JEFF'S VOICE

I'm only telling you what we heard.

LIPSKY

I just googled it. Must be a college prank or something.

JEFF'S VOICE

I thought if anybody knew whether it was true or not...

Over, the sound of another call coming in on his cellphone.

LIPSKY

Hold on a second, I'm getting another call.

Just then, his desk phone also rings. He looks at it.

With trepidation, Lipsky refreshes his computer screen. The page now shows a flood of breaking-news items about Wallace's death at age 46. Shock registers on Lipsky's face. OVER: NPR reporter ROBERT SIEGEL.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.)  
*Now a remembrance of writer David  
 Foster Wallace...*

EXT. BARNES & NOBLE BOOKSTORE - NEW YORK - DAY

Lipsky, pensive, smoking, walks down upper Broadway on a crisp autumn day, stops at a window display honoring Wallace with his picture and copies of his books *The Broom of the System*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* and his magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*He was found dead, an apparent  
 suicide, on Friday night.*

INT. NPR OFFICE - NEW YORK

Lipsky is greeted by a college-age INTERN in the reception area and escorted to a booth.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*Wallace's novel, "Infinite Jest,"  
 brought him fame and a wide audience.*

INT. NPR STUDIO - NEW YORK

Lipsky, wearing headphones, heart pounding, nervously waits for a cue from a woman producer in the control booth.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.)  
*...Writer David Lipsky has this  
 appreciation.*

The producer signals to Lipsky, who reads his prepared remarks from his shaky hands.

LIPSKY  
 To read David Foster Wallace was to  
 feel your eyelids pulled open. Some  
 writers...

We tune down on Lipsky and hear his interior, writer's voice:

LIPSKY (V.O.)  
 Suicide is such a powerful end...

INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE. APT. - OFFICE (2008)

Lipsky at his computer composing those words.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 ...it reaches back and scrambles the  
 beginning.

As he types, we INTERCUT quick flashes:

INT. CAR / EXT. ROAD - ILLINOIS - 12 YEARS EARLIER (1996)

Blurry, indistinct POV shots of David Foster Wallace in the passenger seat of a moving car: Lipsky's memory struggling to come into focus.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Eventually, every memory and  
 impression gets tugged in its  
 direction.

INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE. APT. (2008)

Lipsky rummages through drawers and closet shelves until he locates a particular shoe box labeled "DFW." He opens the box: inside are a motley bunch of audio tapes - eight or nine of them - numbered, scrawled with dates from four days in March 1996. He lays them out in chronological order.

He digs out a quaintly clunky SONY tape recorder that was state-of-the-art back in 1996. It doesn't play. He removes its batteries and looks in drawers for new ones. No luck.

In the BATHROOM, Lipsky takes the batteries out of his electric toothbrush and puts them in the recorder.

With a mixture of excitement and trepidation, he inserts cassette #1 in the machine and presses play. The sound of David's voice mid-tape, is both comforting and moving.

DAVID'S VOICE  
 (on the recording) -- there was, if  
 anything, a conscious attempt to *not*  
 give overt direction.

FLASH TO:

INT. CAR / EXT. ROAD - ILLINOIS - 12 YEARS EARLIER - (1996)

Lipsky's SOFT-FOCUS POV: The still-elusive David FOSTER WALLACE - 34, scruffily handsome, wire-rimmed glasses, head covered in a white bandanna - in the passenger seat talking.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 Although, of course, you end up  
 becoming yourself.

With the grey, midwestern landscape passing by, David spits  
 chewing tobacco into a Savarin coffee can.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE. APT. (2008)

Lipsky presses rewind on the tape player. He ruminates as we  
 HEAR the whir of the tape rewinding.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN NEW YORK SKYLINE - NIGHT (1996)

Stock footage with the heart-stopping view of the illuminated  
 twin towers tells us we are in pre-2001 New York.

SUPER TITLE: 1996

LIPSKY (O.S.)  
 (reads) "I didn't understand SoHo..."

INT. BOOK SHOP - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Lipsky stands before a paltry turnout - consisting of old  
 people and a few loyal friends (among them his pretty  
 girlfriend, SARAH) - reading from his novel, *The Art Fair*.  
 Here, Lipsky is 30 years old but looks like a student, his  
 long, dark, Byronic hair framing his fine features.

LIPSKY (CONT'D)  
 - the warehouses, the old buildings,  
 the cobbled streets.

EXT. KGB BAR - LOWER EAST SIDE - ANOTHER NIGHT

Lipsky and Sarah walk down hip East 4th Street on a cold,  
 wintry night.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 It wasn't the Upper East Side, and it  
 was dirty.

They encounter a crowd of mostly young people in front of the  
 KGB BAR, an artsy hangout known for its literary events, and  
 a BOUNCER trying to control it. In a window, A SIGN touts a  
 book-reading by Wallace, with "Sold Out" slapped across it.

Looking above the heads of the crowd, Lipsky glimpses only the back of a man (WALLACE) wearing a bandanna being ushered into the bar like a rock star. Lipsky feels like the boy with his nose pressed up against the sweetshop glass.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I felt marooned...

INT. BOOK SHOP - NEW YORK - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

Distracted by disinterested CUSTOMERS who continue to browse, Lipsky hears a muffled giggle and sees a YOUNG COUPLE in the audience flirting and clearly not listening.

LIPSKY  
...our mother had taken us off the track of the nice life we'd been on. She'd moored us in a creepy cul-de-sac with her art-world friends."

He hears a snore and sees a homeless man in the audience stretched across three chairs, sleeping.

INT. LOFT - NEW YORK (1996)

Deafening music. A crowded, noisy gathering of mostly young, cool, black-attired New York writers and artists. Lipsky gets two glasses of wine from a bar. We FOLLOW as he makes his way through the crowd. He knows a lot of people with whom he exchanges ad-libbed greetings along the way. They have to shout to be heard above the din.

BEARDED GUY  
David, hi! How'd your reading go?

LIPSKY  
Great!

BEARDED GUY  
Sorry I missed it!

LIPSKY  
Don't worry about it!

Drinks held aloft, Lipsky continues into the crowd. A MODEL:

MODEL  
I heard you got the *Rolling Stone* job!

LIPSKY  
We'll see! I'm sort of on probation!

Lipsky delivers the drink to Sarah, who stands in a circle of acquaintances in mid-conversation.

BALD INTELLECTUAL

Every woman wants to fuck him. And every man who hates him, secretly wants to be him.

LIPSKY

Who?

SARAH

David Foster Wallace.

LIPSKY

If I hear one more thing about David Foster Wallace...

BALD INTELLECTUAL

Did you see Kirn's review in *New York*? The guy's been fucking canonized!

INT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. (1996)

Lipsky, at the bathroom door, reads aloud Walter Kirn's review in *New York* magazine (2/12/96). Sarah comes out in a towel and he follows her to the bedroom.

LIPSKY

"Next year's book awards have been decided." Can you believe this? "The plaques and citations can now be put into escrow." Unbelievable. "With *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace - a plutonium-dense, satirical whiz-kid opus that runs to almost a thousand pages (not including footnotes) - the competition has been obliterated. It's as though Paul Bunyan had joined the NFL or Wittgenstein had gone on *Jeopardy!* The novel is that colossally disruptive. And that spectacularly good." That's just the fucking opening paragraph!

SARAH

What if it actually *is* that good? You know? You may just have to read it.

She kisses him.

INT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. - ANOTHER NIGHT (1996)

We pan the apartment. If his 2008 place is grad-student-y, the 1996 Lipsky residence is smaller and explosively chaotic, like a teenager's domain: clothing, books, magazines strewn everywhere, his cluttered desk planted in the living room.

We find Sarah sitting up in their untidy bed reading the current bestseller, *Primary Colors*. We pull back and see Lipsky beside her reading *Infinite Jest*. Silence.

LIPSKY

Shit.

SARAH

What.

LIPSKY

It's good. Fuck.

Pause. She sets down *Primary Colors* and begins reading her own copy of *Infinite Jest*.

INT. OFFICES OF ROLLING STONE - DAY

Buzzing with the hip, youthful industry of people who know they're at the place to be. Lipsky drops by to see his editor, BOB LOVE, 40, greying, bearded.

LIPSKY

How many times have we interviewed a writer in the last ten years? Guess.

BOB

Um... how many?

LIPSKY

Zero. I checked.

BOB

Maybe that's because we don't interview writers.

Lipsky tosses *Newsweek*, opened to a photo of Wallace, onto Bob's messy desk.

LIPSKY

There hasn't *been* a writer like this one. Once in a generation, maybe. Hemingway, Pynchon. Let me have this story.

BOB

What story?

LIPSKY

He's finishing up his book tour and I want to go with him.

BOB

That's not a story.

LIPSKY

He teaches at some small state university, somewhere in Illinois. Send me there. Please, Bob. This is the sort of stuff I *should* be doing, not 500-words on girl bands.

(re: the photo)

Look at him: He looks like one of *us*. Talk to Jann?

BOB

He's not gonna go for it...

LATER - LIPSKY'S CUBICLE

Lipsky works at his computer. *Newsweek* with the Wallace photo lands on his desk. Bob has popped in.

BOB

I talked to Jann. You're on.

LIPSKY

Great!

BOB

But there had better be a story there...

Bob leaves. Lipsky's triumphant smile fades. He looks at the photo of Wallace. Now what?

INT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sarah, in bed, reads *Infinite Jest* as Lipsky walks back and forth across frame, gathering stuff to pack for his trip. It's irrational but he's jealous of her attention given to the novel; sensing it, she playfully removes the book jacket.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS as Lipsky packs his shoulder bag. Laptop. Notebook. Wallace's books, full of notations and post-its. Tape recorder, packs of audio cassettes. He considers then tosses in *The Art Fair* and zips up his bag.

INT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. - BEDROOM - DAWN

The diffuse, cool blue light of morning light. Fully clothed, wearing his parka, Lipsky climbs into bed beside the sleeping Sarah and kisses her goodbye.

SARAH

Mmm. Call me.

LIPSKY

I will.

SARAH  
 (teasing) Send him my love.

Lipsky playfully tosses a pillow at her.

EXT. APT. BUILDING - W. 77TH ST. - NEW YORK

A grey wintry morning. Lipsky, outside his building, hails a taxi. A cab pulls up and pops its trunk. Lipsky tosses in his valise, slams it shut, gets in.

LIPSKY  
 LaGuardia. American.

The cab drives away.

INT. CAB / EXT. FDR DRIVE - DAY

Lipsky, in the backseat, reads *Infinite Jest*; he's about three-quarters of the way through it. He makes a note in the margin, then glances out the window at the passing skyline. A road sign appears for LaGuardia.

EXT. CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT - DAY

An American Airlines plane comes in for a landing on the flat, grey, wintry landscape.

INT. CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT

Lipsky goes up at the Budget Rent-a-Car counter.

RESERVATIONIST  
 Next person in line?

LIPSKY  
 Hi, I have a reservation, the name is Lipsky? David Lipsky? L-I-P, S-K-Y. Reserved by *Rolling Stone*?

EXT. CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT - PARKING LOT

Lipsky, holding the Budget folder, locates his rental car. He finds it: a forest-green 1995 Grand Am. He clicks his key; the car blinks at him.

The Grand Am pulls out of the lot and onto the highway, past a sign for Bloomington.

INT. CAR / EXT. ROAD - BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS - DAY

Lipsky, lost, at the wheel, refers to a road map. Over we hear a telephone ringing tone.

EXT. HIGHWAY - BLOOMINGTON - DAY

An American landscape of fast-food places and chain stores. Tractor-trailer trucks thunder past, spraying slush. Lipsky's Grand Am is parked in a Mobil station. He stands at a pay phone. (We never intercut during telephone conversations.)

DAVID'S VOICE  
(over phone) Hello?

LIPSKY  
David, hi, it's David Lipsky.

DAVID'S VOICE  
Where are you?

LIPSKY  
I think I may have made a wrong turn somewhere. Let's see, I'm on County Highway 29, across from Circus Video?

DAVID'S VOICE  
How'd you get this number?

LIPSKY  
Your publicist sent it in her e-mail, just in case.

DAVID'S VOICE  
Well, lose it.

INT. CAR / EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - ENVIRONS - DAY

Stormy skies. Flat, wintry terrain. As the car pulls up, Lipsky sees, through the windshield, a modest, one-story brick house in the distance, and a man emerging from it.

From Lipsky's POV: DAVID Foster Wallace, hands shoved in his jeans pockets for warmth, comes out of his house, accompanied by his two barking, rambunctious black labs, JEEVES and DRONE. This is the first time we see David up close and in focus: stubble, long hair, blue bandanna, wire-rims, Frye boots, 6'2" and, at this time in his life, burly.

Lipsky parks. He takes a deep, bracing breath before getting out of the car to finally meet the man about whom he has complicated feelings.

DAVID  
You made it.

LIPSKY  
Yeah. Hi.

David offers his wary, tolerant hand. This being the end of his tour, his patience is frayed and he's just about talked out. But, at the same time, it's *Rolling Stone*, he wants to make a good impression.

DAVID  
Dave Wallace.

LIPSKY  
David Lipsky. Pleasure.

Lipsky is cowed but determined to hold his own. These are two really smart, competitive guys out to impress each other. Wallace wants to be favorably profiled and Lipsky wants Wallace's approval - and a good story.

DAVID  
Fucking cold, let's go inside. (to the dogs) Jeeves, Drone! Get over here!

Lipsky gets his shoulder bag out of the car and follows David and the rowdy, barking dogs into the house.

DAVID  
(to the dogs) Quiet! Our guest doesn't want you slobbering all over him.

LIPSKY  
Oh, I don't mind. I love dogs.

DAVID  
Yeah? Well, you haven't met *these* guys...

He closes the door.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Lipsky drops his bag on the messy, shit-stained shag carpet. The dogs are indeed all over him. Lipsky scratches their heads and speaks to them as a dog lover would speak to dogs.

LIPSKY  
Yes, I'm very glad to meet you, too.  
Who are you?

DAVID  
That's Jeeves. The Jeevesmeister. I got him 'cause he was so ugly. No one else wanted him. Now he's like a Cover Girl-dog. Aren't you, Jeeves? Yes, you are. And this is Drone. My provisional dog.

LIPSKY  
Why provisional?

DAVID  
Just showed up one day while Jeeves and I were out jogging and the rest is history. I feel like I should offer you tea or something.

LIPSKY  
Yeah. Thanks. That would be great.

David goes to put up water. We STAY on Lipsky, casually studying the room with the eye of a journalist, taking in the grad-student-like accoutrements: cramped cinder-block bookshelves; hodgepodge of furniture, an ALANIS MORISSETTE poster conspicuously on the wall. Lipsky peruses wildly eclectic book titles (Kant, Kael, Krazy Kat) while raising his voice to converse with David, who's in the kitchen.

LIPSKY  
Have you always been unlisted?

DAVID (O.S.)  
(from the kitchen) I had to do that recently. It was getting crazy.

LIPSKY  
Because of fans?

DAVID  
I don't know if "fan" would be the right word... but, yeah. I think what happened was, I had forgotten to tell my parents not to give my number out. So it was people who tracked my *parents* down, and um -

LIPSKY  
(knowing) Ohhh.

DAVID  
- and they were all very nice. But a lot of them were seriously troubled and upset, and wanted to talk about, in great detail, their problems. You know, like to a really good friend. Why me, I do not know. And I have this terrible problem, I just really hate to hurt people's feelings. So I did something kinda cowardly.

LIPSKY  
Unlisting your number's not cowardly.

DAVID

It kinda is. I mean, I changed my number so these folks couldn't find me anymore. There was one guy who was a computer operator in Vancouver, lived in a basement. Who I found really moving. In terrible terrible pain.

LIPSKY

What did he want from you?

DAVID

Wasn't clear, and when I would sort of ask him, he'd get angry, and that's when it got scary.

A short time later. LIPSKY'S POV: A child's drawing pinned to a shelf. He comes closer to examine the primitive scrawl: "Chickenhead Dave Wallace." David returns with mugs of tea.

LIPSKY

Thanks. (re: the drawing) Who's the artist?

DAVID

Hm? (Lipsky points.) Oh, one of my friend's daughters. Calls me Chickenhead, and I call *her* Chickenhead. Her latest salvo in the war.

Laughing, Lipsky takes out his tape recorder and starts to set it up but stops.

LIPSKY

You mind if I...?

DAVID

Hey. Do what you've got to do.

Lipsky nervously unwraps and loads a Maxell cassette in the recorder and sets it on a pile of magazines - *Cosmopolitan* on the top. David sees his reaction to the magazine.

DAVID

I subscribe.

LIPSKY

Oh. Uh huh.

DAVID

Stuff like "I've Cheated - Should I Tell?": Fundamentally soothing to the nervous system.

Lipsky laughs as he pops in the cassette. (Lipsky is a nervous laugher; he laughs a lot, not only where indicated.)

DAVID

Listen: Before we start putting stuff on tape, I gotta ask you something.

LIPSKY

Okay...

DAVID

I need to know that anything that I ask you five minutes later to not put in, you won't put in.

LIPSKY

Absolutely.

DAVID

Given my level of fatigue and fuck-up quotient lately, it's the only way I can see doin' it and not going crazy.

LIPSKY

I understand completely.

Lipsky presses play. The ever-present tape recorder becomes a third character in this conversation. David sees Lipsky make a mental note of the chess board.

DAVID

You play?

Later. They're playing. David, for all his brilliance, is a surprisingly inept - if determined - chess player. David hums a soft, indistinct tune as he assesses the board.

Jeeves puts his snout on Lipsky's knee and whines. Lipsky instinctively - perhaps inappropriately (David gives him a look) - taps the dog on his nose and immediately regrets it.

LIPSKY

Sorry.

DAVID

That's alright, he deserved it. See, Jeeves? You're pissin' even the guest off. Even the guest is swattin' ya.

David moves a chess piece.

DAVID

Well, *that* didn't do a whole heck of a lot for me, did it?

LIPSKY

I hate to do this to you...

On the contrary; he loves that he's besting David Foster Wallace at chess. Lipsky takes his rook.

DAVID

Oh fuck me! Who's idea was it to play chess, anyway?

Lipsky sees out the window: a FedEx truck pulls up outside.

LIPSKY

Looks like you've got a delivery.

DAVID

Saved by Federal Express.

Lipsky observes as David goes to the front door to deal with the FEDEX GUY, 40, who's a little star-struck.

FEDEX GUY

David Wallace?

DAVID

That's me.

FEDEX GUY

Sign here, please.

As David signs for a packet:

FEDEX GUY

So you're the writer guy, right?

DAVID

I guess.

FEDEX GUY

Saw you in *Time* - maybe it was *Newsweek*. How does it feel to be famous?

That throws David, makes him edgy.

DAVID

Well, my *dogs* don't give me any more respect, if *that's* what you mean. Look, thanks a lot.

He closes the door and refers to the chess board.

DAVID  
 Let's finish this travesty later.  
 I've got to go teach.

INT. CAR / EXT. MAIN STREET - BLOOMINGTON

KFC, Taco Bell, Wendy's, Days Inn go by in a blur of American franchises. Lipsky at the wheel. David chewing tobacco.

LIPSKY  
 You like teaching?

DAVID  
 Yeah, but these poor kids, that's what's so fucked: I haven't been around for two weeks and I'm gonna have to cut it short today.

LIPSKY  
 Why?

DAVID  
 'Cause we've gotta get up at five in the morning to leave for Minneapolis, remember?

LIPSKY  
 Oh, shit, do we really have to get up at *five*?

DAVID  
 That's what you signed on for, man.

David spits chewed tobacco into a Savarin can.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BLOOMINGTON - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The car pulls into Illinois State University parking.

INT. CLASSROOM - ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

A generic classroom: Fluorescent lighting and a big clock on the wall. Lipsky observes David, caffeinated Diet Pepsi in hand, and his arriving students; there will be 15 in all, predominantly male.

STUDENT #1  
 Ah, the Prodigal Professor!

STUDENT #2  
 I didn't realize how famous you were till my mom called, said she read about you in *Time* magazine.

DAVID  
Damn, my cover's totally blown.

They laugh in the slightly forced way of people in the presence of a celebrity. As an aside, David sees Lipsky take out his tape recorder.

DAVID  
(sotto) Could you not, uh...

LIPSKY  
Oh. Okay.

DAVID  
It's just, it gets pretty sensitive around here.

LIPSKY  
Got it.

Lipsky puts away the recorder and takes out his notebook. More students arrive, ad libbed affectionate greetings.

STUDENT #3  
Professor! Done being famous yet?

DAVID  
Two more minutes.

Students laugh. A PUNKISH wise guy from the back of the room:

WISEGUY STUDENT  
I knew him well, Horatio - a man of infinite jest...

Students laugh. David shouts to be heard:

DAVID  
OK, you're allowed one reference!

A short time later. David introduces Lipsky.

DAVID  
OK, class, listen up: The guy with the pad writin' stuff down is a writer for *Rolling Stone* - so don't embarrass me, okay?

Students, genuinely impressed, Ooo and Ahh... A pretty student seated nearby flirts with Lipsky.

PRETTY STUDENT  
Really? For *Rolling Stone*?

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

WISEGUY STUDENT

Hey, we all gonna be on the cover?

LATER. The class in-progress. Lipsky observes as David paces. He's "on" and his students are eating it up.

DAVID

A campus romance story, I gotta tell ya, to the average citizen, is not all that interesting. The great dread of creative writing professors?: "Their eyes met over the keg..."

Laughter.

EARNEST STUDENT

I just want my narrator to be funny and smart, y'know?

DAVID

Here's a tip, then: To have your narrator be funny and smart? Have him say funny, smart things. Works every time.

Laughter. Lipsky jots down a note.

EXT. ISU CAMPUS - PARKING LOT - DUSK

Lipsky and David walk back to the car.

DAVID

I'm usually a much better teacher than this. I swear to God.

LIPSKY

I thought you were great. They obviously love you.

DAVID

Yeah?

LIPSKY

Oh, come on, you know they do.

They get in the car.

DAVID

I'm hungry. You?

EXT. / INT. MONICAL'S PIZZA - BLOOMINGTON - NIGHT

The restaurant's logo - purple letters surrounding a red pizza - lit up against a cobalt sky. They park and go inside where they're greeted by a HOSTESS with big hair.

MONICAL'S HOSTESS  
Evenin', gentlemen. Two for dinner?

DAVID  
Yes, but we're not on a date.

That strikes both Lipsky and the Hostess as an odd remark.

MONICAL'S HOSTESS  
Follow me, please?

They follow her to a table. Lipsky sees DINERS smoking.

LIPSKY  
There's a smoking section?

DAVID  
Are you kidding? In some of these places in the mid-west there's a *chain-smoking* section.

LATER. They give their order to the waiter.

WAITER  
...And what can I get you to drink?  
Beer, or...

DAVID  
Uh, not for me, thanks. A large Diet Rite.

LIPSKY  
I'll have the same.

WAITER  
I'll be right back with your pop.

The waiter goes. Lipsky sets up the tape recorder.

LIPSKY  
You don't drink.

DAVID  
Is that a question?

LIPSKY  
It's an observation.

DAVID

No; I don't. You can order whatever you want, go right ahead.

LIPSKY

That's all right. My friends who have been through the program say they didn't want people to drink in front of them, so I've always...

DAVID

Well, I'm not any sort of authority on any sort of "program." But from my very limited outside understanding, people who have been in it for a while: you could snort *cocaine* off the back of your *hand* next to them and they're okay.

Lipsky is embarrassed for having been presumptuous. The waiter delivers their drinks.

A short time later. Drinking their Diet Rites and eating cheesy Chicago-Style pizza off trays.

DAVID

You know what I would love to do?

LIPSKY

What?

DAVID

A profile of one of *you* guys who's doin' a profile of *me*. Too po-mo and cute?

LIPSKY

Maybe.

DAVID

But it would be interesting. You're gonna go back to New York and sit at your desk and shape this thing however the hell you want. And that to me is extremely disturbing.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because I want to be able to try to shape and manage the impression of me that's coming across.

I can't even tell if I like you or not because I'm too worried whether you like *me*.

Before Lipsky can assure him, the waiter appears.

WAITER

Everything all right, gentlemen? Can I get you anything else?

LIPSKY

We're fine, thanks.

The waiter goes.

DAVID

So what's this piece about? What does "Jann" want?

LIPSKY

What's it like being the most-talked about writer in the country. That sort of thing.

DAVID

How do you learn to *do* this stuff?

LIPSKY

What.

DAVID

Interviewing. Did you go to interviewing school?

LIPSKY

No...

A beat. Lipsky feels a tad fraudulent to identify himself as a writer to the man whose success and talent he envies.

LIPSKY

I'm a writer.

DAVID

Oh, yeah?

LIPSKY

I mean I write fiction. Just published my first novel, as a matter of fact.

DAVID

What's it called?

LIPSKY  
*The Art Fair?*

David shrugs. He's never heard of it. Lipsky feels foolish for having brought it up.

LIPSKY  
 And I, uh, had a collection published,  
 a couple of years ago.

Lipsky's pumping leg betrays his anxiety. David notices.

DAVID  
 You're a nervous fellow, aren't you?

LIPSKY  
 Sorry.

Embarrassed, he stops.

LATER. The pizza is decimated; all that remain are charred crusts. David is loosening up.

DAVID  
 The thing about this tour is... I  
*would* like to get *laid* out of it a  
 couple of times, but... Like, people  
 come up, they kinda *slither* up during  
 readings or whatever. But it seems  
 like, what I want is not to have to  
 take any action.

LIPSKY  
 Like...?

DAVID  
 Like, I don't want to have to say,  
 "Would you like to come back to my  
 hotel?" I want *them* to say, "I am  
 coming back to the hotel. Where *is*  
 your hotel?"

Lipsky laughs.

DAVID  
 I can't stand to look like I'm  
 actively trading on this sexually.  
 Even though of course I have no  
 problem with that. In retrospect, it  
 was lucky that I didn't.

LIPSKY  
 Why?

DAVID

Basically, it just would have made me feel lonely.

LIPSKY

Why lonely?

DAVID

Because it wouldn't have had anything to do with *me*, it would have just been...

LIPSKY

Your fame.

DAVID

Yeah.

LIPSKY

Except... if they're responding to your work, and the work is so personal... then trading on it is actually another way of *meeting* you, no?

A beat. David is impressed by Lipsky's analysis.

DAVID

Huh. You know? I think this piece'll really be good if it's mostly *you*. Talk all you want, man, save me a whole lotta trouble.

Lipsky laughs, sensing his stock has risen, relaxing more into the rhythm of their conversation.

INT. CAR / EXT. STREETS - BLOOMINGTON - NIGHT

David at the wheel, driving Lipsky's rental. Tape running.

DAVID

So *this* is what a real car feels like. The one *I* have runs like a power lawn mower.

LIPSKY

You think being handsome has anything to do with your success?

DAVID

What?

LIPSKY

You are photogenic... You look good in your author's photo.

DAVID

You'd have to come put me down if I even *start* thinking that way.

LIPSKY

Thinking what way? About how books are sold?

DAVID

Like, "Do you want to do a *Rolling Stone* interview, do you want to do X, do you want to do Y" worries me that what I'm doing right now is being a whore.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

You know, cashing in somehow, or getting some little celebrity for myself that will, for some bizarre reason, sell more copies of the book.

David sees Lipsky jot that down in his pad.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Fine, you can quote that. In a context where I didn't sound like a total dweeb. By the way, are they gonna send Annie Leibovitz to take pictures?

LIPSKY

I'm not sure. Possibly.

DAVID

I know: *You're* a good-looking guy. We should have 'em photograph *you*, and say you're me. Maybe I'll finally end up getting laid.

Lipsky laughs. The car approaches a 7-Eleven lit up against the night sky and pulls into its parking lot.

INT. 7-ELEVEN - BLOOMINGTON - NIGHT

Muzak. In the blue-white fluorescent light, David stocks up on six-packs of Diet Rite, chewing tobacco, Oreos, etc.

At the cash register, Lipsky prepares to pay.

LIPSKY

Let me.

DAVID

You don't have to pay for my shit.

LIPSKY

It's not coming out of *my* pocket...  
I've got an expense account.

DAVID

All right, if you insist...

David grabs a couple more Snickers.

INT. CAR / EXT. ROAD - BLOOMINGTON - NIGHT

Riding through town, the Davids are eating candy like teenagers on a joyride.

DAVID

If you ate this stuff all the time,  
what would be wrong with that?

LIPSKY

Except for your teeth falling out and  
getting really fat?

DAVID

Yeah, it doesn't have any of the  
nourishment of real food, but it's  
real pleasurable masticating and  
swallowing this stuff.

LIPSKY

Like seductive commercial  
entertainment.

DAVID

Exactly, and what saves us is that  
most entertainment isn't very good.

LIPSKY

What about *good* seductive  
entertainment - like *Die Hard*?

DAVID

The first *Die Hard*? Great film.

LIPSKY

Brilliant, right?

DAVID

A little formulaic but, yeah. I really like Bruce Willis.

LIPSKY

I really liked him in *Pulp Fiction*.

DAVID

Yeah, but Tarantino is such a *schmuck* 90 percent of the time.

LIPSKY

I know!

DAVID

But ten percent of the time, I've seen *genius* shining off the guy.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The car pulls up, parks. They get out with the spoils from the 7-Eleven. Mid-discourse:

DAVID

So if the book's about anything, it's about the question of: Why am I watching all this shit? It's not about the shit, it's about *me*. Why am I doing it? And what's so *American* about what I'm doing? And maybe that'll hook into your gut a little bit and you feel some stuff about it. Like, "Hey, this is me."

We hear the dogs barking as David unlocks the door and they enter the house.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE (CONTINUOUS)

The dogs run out to do their thing. David puts away the soda and snacks.

DAVID

I don't know, the minute I start talking about this stuff, it sounds, number one: very vague. And, two: really reductive.

LIPSKY

I don't think you're being reductive or vague at all.

DAVID

Because it's like, I don't have a diagnosis, a system of prescriptions. You know? Like, why are we - and by "we" I mean people like you and me: mostly white, upper middle class, *obscenely* well-educated, doing really interesting jobs, sitting in really expensive chairs, watching the best, most sophisticated electronic equipment money can buy - why do we feel empty and unhappy?

LIPSKY

Kinda like Hamlet. Only without the channel-surfing.

DAVID

I'm not saying TV is bad or a waste of your time. Any more than, you know, *masturbation* is bad or a waste of your time. It's a pleasurable way to spend a few minutes. But if you're doing it twenty times a day, if your primary sexual relationship is with your own hand, then there's something wrong.

LIPSKY

At least if you wank off, *some* action has been performed, though, right?

DAVID

All right, you could make me look like a real dick if you print this: Yes, you're performing muscular movements with your hand as you're jerking off. But what you're doing is running a movie in your head, and having a fantasy relationship with somebody who isn't real, in order to stimulate a purely neurological response. Look: as the Internet grows in the next ten, fifteen years, and virtual reality pornography becomes a reality, we're gonna have to develop some machinery, inside our guts, to help us turn off pure, unalloyed pleasure. Otherwise, I don't know about you, but I'm gonna have to leave the planet.

LIPSKY

(smiles uncertainly) Why?

DAVID

Because the technology is just gonna get better and better and better. And it's gonna get easier and easier, and more and more convenient, and more and more pleasurable, to be alone with images on a screen, given to us by people who do not love us but want our money.

LIPSKY

Advertisers.

DAVID

Yes. Which is all right. In low doses, right? But if that's the basic main staple of your diet? You're gonna die. In a meaningful way, *you're going to die.*

Silence. Lipsky mulls over the gravity of what David has said. David breaks the portentous silence when he pops a wad of tobacco in his mouth.

LIPSKY

Can I try that?

DAVID

Be my guest. It takes some getting used to.

Lipsky tries it and makes a horrible face. David laughs.

LIPSKY

You mind if I use your uh...

Amused, David points the way to the bathroom.

DAVID

All yours.

Lipsky goes, leaving the tape running.

INT. DAVID'S BATHROOM

Lipsky spits the tobacco into the toilet and flushes it. He cups his hands under the running water and rinses his mouth. He looks at himself in the mirror and takes a deep, fortifying breath. He stealthily opens the medicine cabinet and finds it stocked with jars of vitamins, Stri-Dex pads and tubes of Topol, toothpaste for smokers. He jots down notes.

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM

Lipsky returns. David is playing with his dogs.

LIPSKY

Do you not have a TV?

DAVID

I do not have a TV.

LIPSKY

How come?

DAVID

'Cause if I *had* a TV, I'd watch it all the time. I don't even know if I would *watch* it; it would be *on* all the time - my version of a fireplace. A source of warmth and light in the corner that I would occasionally get sucked into.

LIPSKY

The problem with TV watching is, it's never finished. I've had to go through that my whole life.

DAVID

I sort of think, anybody our age has the same tendency, whether they recognize it or not.

LIPSKY

How much TV did you watch when you were a kid?

DAVID

A lot.

LIPSKY

Me, too. I preferred my dad's house over my mom's because there were no restrictions on TV at all.

DAVID

I had to be limited. Two hours a day on weekdays, four hours a day on weekends. And I could only watch one rough program a week.

LIPSKY

What do you mean by "rough?"

DAVID

My parents determined the definition of rough up until I was like seven or eight. They didn't count *Batman* as rough, which I remember at the time seemed like this incredible mistake on their part.

LIPSKY

Have you seen it lately?

DAVID

Unbelievably campy, right?

Later. Music on stereo. Empty soda cans. Candy wrappers. Tape running. Ruminative, growing more intimate, like friends bullshitting into the night.

DAVID

You have a girlfriend?

LIPSKY

It's complicated.

DAVID

Why?

LIPSKY

I was seeing someone, then she moved to L.A. and we theoretically broke up. And I started seeing someone else, but then I started seeing the *first* woman again - trying the bi-coastal thing - and the *second*... Well, let's just say she hasn't taken it very well.

DAVID

I don't know about you, but I seem to have this incredible knack for attracting crazy women. Say what you want about them: Psychotics tend to make the first move.

Lipsky laughs.

DAVID

It's much easier having dogs. You don't get laid; but you also don't get the feeling you're hurting their feelings all the time.

LIPSKY

You're not dating anyone?

DAVID  
*Seriously* dating? No. I'm out of practice; I wouldn't know what to say.

LIPSKY  
 You want to have kids?

DAVID  
 Yeah; do you?

LIPSKY  
 Yeah. Eventually. I think.

DAVID  
 Writing books is kinda like raising children, but you gotta be careful: you should take pride in the work but it's bad to want that glory to reflect back on you.

LIPSKY  
 You worry about having children?

David seems far away; this is difficult for him. After a beat, he speaks, sounding vulnerable, which doesn't go unnoticed by Lipsky.

DAVID  
 I don't know that I want to say anything more about it - okay?

LIPSKY  
 (prepared to back off) That's fine.

DAVID  
 I mean, we can joke about getting laid on tour and stuff, but...

LIPSKY  
 It'd be nice to have someone to be sharing this with.

DAVID  
 Yeah. I really have wished I was married, the last couple of weeks.

LIPSKY  
 You have?

DAVID

Yeah, because nobody quite *gets* it. Your friends who aren't in the writing biz are all just awed by your picture in *Time*, and your agent and editor are good people, but they also have their own agendas. You know? It's fun talking to you about it, but, hey, you've got an agenda, too. There's something nice about having somebody who kinda shared your life, and that you could allow yourself just to be happy and confused with.

LIPSKY

Nice to get back to the hotel and call someone.

DAVID

Uh huh. (A beat.) Why aren't you married at thirty?

LIPSKY

Why aren't you married at thirty-four?

DAVID

You first.

LIPSKY

Um... I think it's hard to cast that role ... to fill it when you know it's for thirty or forty years ... someone who, whatever mental landscape you're in, they're going to be in it too, you need someone who'll fit any landscape you can imagine.

DAVID

I'm not that systematic about it. I've come close a few times, and each of those times involved, you know, a three- or four-year thing. And then when it didn't work out - I think the larger thing is probably that I tend to be interested in women that I turn out not to get along very well with.

Lipsky laughs.

DAVID (CONT'D)

And the ones that I get along very well with, I'm not interested in in a kind of romantic way. So that I've got a lot of really good women friends.

But I tend to have a really hard time with girlfriends, because the ones I'm attracted to are a lot of fun in the standard ways, for like a couple of weeks. But in terms of the daily, let's-go-shopping stuff, that we tend not to get along really well.

LIPSKY

Why not?

DAVID

I don't know. I have friends who say that this is something that would be worth looking into with someone that you *pay*.

He and Lipsky laugh.

DAVID (CONT'D)

But a lot of it too is that - I can't put it as well as you did about the "mental landscapes," I just know I'm hard to be around.

David's "mental landscapes" reference: competitive, fawning, mocking? Lipsky isn't sure.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because when I want to be by myself, like to work, I *really* want to be by myself. I think if you dedicate yourself to *anything*, one facet of that is that it makes you very very self-conscious. You end up using people. Wanting them around when you *want* them around, but then sending them away.

LIPSKY

Comes with the territory, though, doesn't it? Self-consciousness?

DAVID

There's *good* self-consciousness. And then there's this toxic, paralyzing, raped-by-psychic-Bedouins self-consciousness.

Lipsky laughs. He refers to the ALANIS poster.

LIPSKY  
Tell me about that.

DAVID  
Alanis? I don't know, I guess I'm  
susceptible like everybody else.

LIPSKY  
She's pretty, alright...

DAVID  
Yeah, but in a very sloppy, very human  
way. That squeaky, orgasmic quality  
in her voice? A lot of women in  
magazines are pretty in a way that  
isn't erotic because they don't look  
like anybody you know; you can't  
imagine them putting a quarter in a  
parking meter or eating a bologna  
sandwich. But *her*, I don't know, I  
just find her absolutely riveting.

LIPSKY  
How'd you get to know her, her music,  
I mean?

DAVID  
Listening to cheesy Bloomington radio,  
and "I Want to Tell You" came on.

LIPSKY  
(correcting him) "You Oughta Know."

DAVID  
What?

LIPSKY  
"I Want to Tell You" is the book O.J.  
wrote.

DAVID  
Oh, right.

LIPSKY  
Wouldn't it be great if O.J. sang "You  
Oughta Know?"

They laugh. Lipsky is pleased to make David laugh. Pause.

DAVID  
If somehow this whole fuss could get  
me even like a five-minute cup of tea  
with her...

LIPSKY

Why don't you put out feelers, see if she'd be willing to meet you?

DAVID

You serious? I would never do that.

LIPSKY

Why not?

DAVID

I'd be too terrified. Why, you would do that?

LIPSKY

If I were you? Why not?

DAVID

Shit, a date with Alanis Morissette? What would I say to her? "So what's it like to be you?" (gruff voice) "I don't know - shut up. Keep the fuck away from me."

LIPSKY

But you'd go if *she* called? "Hey, Dave. I'm at the Drake in Chicago. Let's have that tea."

DAVID

Yeah... except this is gonna look ridiculous: like I'm using *Rolling Stone* as a vehicle to try to - but you know what? I'd go in a heartbeat.

As Lipsky cracks up, David paints the picture:

DAVID

Perspiring heavily, all the way up there, shoving Certs into my mouth. Goin' nuts. It would cost me like a week of absolute trauma, but yeah, in a *heartbeat* I would do it.

David realizes the late hour.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Look, I like talking to you but we have to get up really early.

LIPSKY

What is it, like ten o'clock?

DAVID  
It's eleven-thirty, dickbrain.

LIPSKY  
Shit...I am so sorry, I completely lost track of time. When should I pick you up in the morning?

Lipsky gets his coat.

DAVID  
Where you going?

LIPSKY  
Motel. There was like a Days Inn on the main road. I thought I'd -

DAVID  
(overlap) No no you don't want to stay there - trust me. I've got a guest-roomish place you can crash in.

LIPSKY  
You sure? I don't want to impose...

INT. DAVID'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

The room is cluttered, not unlike Lipsky's place in New York. David clears stuff off a futon that's on the floor.

DAVID  
Let me get this shit out of the way...  
Hm. (re: the rumpled sheet) Might be a good idea to change that.

JUMPCUT. Together, they put on a clean sheet.

JUMPCUT. David about to go, leaves the door ajar.

DAVID  
Uh, leave the door open for the dogs.

LIPSKY  
Oh, okay.

DAVID  
They like to wander from room to room during the night; if the door's closed, they'll eat it to get through if they have to. 'Night.

David goes. Lipsky finds himself surrounded by intimidating stacks of foreign editions of David's books. He stealthily looks around the mess of activity on the desk.

David knocks on the open door as he enters, startling Lipsky in his snooping. David's holding a blanket.

DAVID  
Gets a little frosty in here.

LIPSKY  
Oh, thanks.

DAVID  
Hey. My spare blanket is your spare blanket. 'Night.

LIPSKY  
'Night. (calls) Thanks!

LATER. Lipsky turns out the light and gets in bed. From his POV on the floor: The looming towers of *Infinite Jest* in foreign editions (German, Japanese, Italian, French). The door creaks open: Drone pays a visit.

INT. DAVID'S GUEST ROOM - DAWN

Lipsky, asleep in grey, hazy, pre-dawn light, is awakened by the sound of Jeeves HOWLING in the next room. He hears David's muffled voice through the wall.

DAVID (O.S.)  
Jeeves, *enough*. I mean it, Jeeves,  
shut the fuck up!

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DAWN

In the middle of a wintry field. The kitchen window is lit.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Lipsky, wrecked, enters and finds David drinking coffee.

DAVID  
Morning. There's coffee...

LIPSKY  
No, thanks. I don't need coffee to  
wake up. But cigarettes...?

He lights up.

DAVID  
Brothers of the lung.

A Pop-Tart pops up from the toaster.



LIPSKY

I know, Bob.

BOB'S VOICE

Get him to talk about his substance-dependency issues. There's got to be *something* to those heroin rumors.

LIPSKY

I'm working up to it; there hasn't been a good time to ask, "Is it true you were a heroin addict?" Okay?

David comes out of the shower, surprising him.

DAVID

Who're you talking to?

LIPSKY

My girlfriend.

DAVID

Say hello.

LIPSKY

(into phone) David says hello.

BOB'S VOICE

What?

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

David and Lipsky are about to leave. David writes a note and posts it on the fridge with a Chicago Cubs magnet.

LIPSKY

What's that?

DAVID

For Sally, the intrepid dog-sitter. Operating instructions.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DAY

A miserable morning. Grey, freezing rain. Lipsky scrapes ice off the windshield. The men get in the car.

INT. CAR / EXT. STREETS - BLOOMINGTON - DAY

Windshield wipers clear falling sleet. The tape recorder on the transmission between them. Radio plays softly. Riding past farmland, plants, strip malls. David, in the passenger seat, gives the lay of the land.

DAVID

...There's a Mitsubishi plant, and then there's a lot of farm-support stuff, like Ro-Tech, Anderson Seeds...

LIPSKY

What are you doing here? I mean, why aren't you in New York?

DAVID

Because every time I go to New York, I get caught up in this - there's this enormous *hiss* of egos at various stages of inflation and deflation. It's all about me-me-me.

LIPSKY

Y'know what Hemingway said: "Literary New York is like a bottle of tapeworms all trying to feed off each other."

DAVID

Yeah: Or great white sharks fighting over a *bathtub*. There's so little - the amount of celebrity and money we're talkin' about, on the scale of like true entertainment, is so small. And the formidable intellect marshaled by these egos fighting over this small section of the pie -

"Glycerine" by Bush comes on the radio. He turns it up.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Oh! Listen to this song.

LIPSKY

What is it?

DAVID

"Glycerine" by Bush. A direct steal from a song by Brian Eno. Remind me to play it for you when we get back.

They listen to the song.

EXT. BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL AIRPORT - DAY

The SONG continues over as the Grand Am approaches the airport, and pulls into a parking structure.

INT. BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL AIRPORT

David and Lipsky in a crowd of anxious travelers, awaiting word. An announcement comes over the p.a. system.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Attention passengers of American Eagle Flight 4432, service to Chicago -

LIPSKY

That's us.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sorry to inform you that at this time we still have not received promising news with regard to the runway conditions here at Bloomington.

Passengers groan.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Again, this is an indefinite delay. We have no anticipated departure for this aircraft at this time.

DAVID

(over the above) Oh, good, maybe I won't have to go.

LIPSKY

Let's get some breakfast.

INT. BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL AIRPORT COFFEE SHOP

A waitress presents Lipsky with a mountainous burger deluxe. David, appropriately having bacon and eggs, is bemused.

DAVID

I'm not even going to *start* on the idea of eating a hamburger at seven in the morning.

Later. During breakfast. The tape recorder is on the table.

LIPSKY

I gotta ask: What's with the bandanna?

DAVID

Why?

LIPSKY

People think the it's a way you're trying to connect with the younger reading audience.

DAVID

Is that what people think? I don't know very many Gen-Xers who wear 'em, do you? In the Southwest people wear 'em all the time.

LIPSKY

But people thinking it's a commercial gesture...?

DAVID

I don't know what to say. I guess in a way I don't even want you to have brought this up.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because now I'm worrying that it's going to seem intentional. Like if I *don't* wear it, then am I not wearing it because I am bowing to other people's perception that it's a commercial choice? Or do I do what I want, even though it's *perceived* as commercial - and it's just like one more crazy circle to go around.

LIPSKY

When did you start wearing them?

DAVID

In Tuscon. It was a hundred degrees *all the time*. I would perspire so much... I would drip on the page, into the electric typewriter, and worried I was gonna give myself a shock. And then I discovered that I *felt* better with them on.

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

DAVID

I *know* it's a security blanket for me - whenever I'm nervous. Or feel like I have to keep myself together. It makes me feel kinda creepy that people view it as an affectation or a trademark or something. It's more just a foible, the recognition of a weakness, which is that I'm just kinda worried my head's gonna explode.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

(over the p.a.) Attention passengers.  
We regret to inform you that American  
Eagle Flight 4432, service to Chicago,  
has been cancelled. I repeat...

DAVID

Let me call Holly, my publicist, maybe  
she'll let us bag it.

LIPSKY

Let's go. (to the waitress) Can we  
have our check, please?

Lipsky turns off the recorder and pockets it.

DAVID

Where we going?

LIPSKY

I'm driving us to O'Hare.

DAVID

You're what?

INT. CAR / EXT. INTERSTATE - DAY

The Grand Am on the road to O'Hare. Trucks race past spewing  
cascades of water. Wipers at top speed. Ambient radio.  
Tape running. Lipsky at the wheel.

LIPSKY

Your parents are both academics?

DAVID

My dad, philosophy; my mom, English.  
You?

LIPSKY

My dad's in advertising, my mom's a  
painter. They split up, I lived with  
my mother in SoHo and my brother moved  
in with my dad.

DAVID

Sounds like there's a story there.

LIPSKY

There is; I just wrote it.

DAVID

So what was that like, your family  
divided that way?

LIPSKY

Hey, who's interviewing whom? How old were you when you started writing fiction?

DAVID

Twenty-one.

LIPSKY

Never before?

DAVID

I think I started a World War Two novel when I was nine.

LIPSKY

What about?

DAVID

A bunch of people with strangely hyperdeveloped skills and powers, who are going to invade Hitler's bunker during World War Two. I remember I started it after seeing *Kelly's Heroes*.

LIPSKY

Clint Eastwood, Telly Savalas.

DAVID

Yeah, or maybe *The Dirty Dozen*. Anyway, so yeah, I really started when I was in college. I'd written a couple of papers for other people.

LIPSKY

They were paying you to write their papers?

DAVID

Well, I wouldn't put it that coarsely. But let's say there were complicated systems of reward. I'd read two or three of their papers to learn, you know, what their music sounded like. And I remember thinking, "Man, I'm really good at this. I'm a weird kind of forger. I mean, I can sound kind of like anybody."

Further down the road, on the outskirts of Chicago, bucolic mid-western landscapes have given way to massive refineries.

LIPSKY  
Odds are I'm gonna want to talk to  
your parents.

DAVID  
What for?

LIPSKY  
Biographical stuff.

DAVID  
No. Un-uh. They're real, real  
private people, and I would have a  
hard time with it.

LIPSKY  
Okay. I was just -

DAVID  
(sharply) I hereby request you don't.

Lipsky is surprised by his vehemence.

LIPSKY  
(backing off) Say no more.

They ride in silence as Signs for O'Hare terminals go by.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - PARKING LOT - DAY

Lipsky looks for a place to park the Grand Am.

INT. O'HARE AIRPORT - UNITED COUNTER - DAY

With a female ticket agent who seems to flirt with David.

UNITED TICKET AGENT  
You gentlemen traveling together?

DAVID  
Yes, but not *together*-together.

The agent is amused.

INT. O'HARE AIRPORT - TERMINAL "B"

David and Lipsky run to catch the plane.

LIPSKY  
How come you always say that?

DAVID  
Say what?

David's response is cut off by the announcement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

(over p.a.) Last call for flight #326 to Minneapolis-St. Paul. Now boarding at Gate B-16.

DAVID

Boy, are we gonna feel silly if this thing crashes.

AT THE GATE

The last stragglers are boarding. David and Lipsky breathlessly arrive. David stops.

DAVID

Wait.

LIPSKY

What's wrong?

DAVID

I'm wondering if we should get on.

LIPSKY

Are you serious?

DAVID

I always fear that when I really impose my will on something, the universe is gonna punish me.

ATTENDANT

Gentlemen?

Lipsky makes a decision. His story depends on it.

LIPSKY

Come on.

The attendant scans their boarding passes and they pass through the portal. The attendant closes the door.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Lipsky and David are seated over the wing. David lifts the window shade.

DAVID

Oh, no, there's a gremlin on the wing!

LIPSKY

Oh, man, that episode scared the shit of me.

DAVID

That was William Shatner, you know.

LIPSKY

I know. But Rod Serling didn't write that one; it was Richard Matheson.

DAVID

You know even more useless information than I do!

Even their TV trivia banter is laced with competitiveness.

LATER. David riffs off the SkyMall gift catalogue, to Lipsky's amusement. INSERT snippets from the brochure.

DAVID

The Turbo Toning Belt: Tone those abs while sitting on your fat ass... An ergonomic dog dish for food and water. Who would've thought: The posture dogs have been eating off of for fifty million years hasn't done 'em a stitch of good.

Lipsky laughs, contributes to the improvisation.

LIPSKY

The Germ-Destroying Purifier. Look at it: it looks like the Orgasmatron from *Sleeper*.

David looks at the airline Safety Guide - fluffy white clouds against a blue sky - evocative of the cover of *Infinite Jest*.

DAVID

See this? This was my major complaint about the cover of the book: it looks like a fucking airline-safety guide.

LIPSKY

What did you want?

DAVID

This great photo of Fritz Lang directing *Metropolis*. You know it? A thousand bald men and he's standing there with a megaphone?

The No Smoking sign pings on. David takes out his chewing tobacco and puts some in his mouth.

DAVID

See? Now I can enjoy full nicotine satisfaction and you cannot.

David smiles.

LATER. During the flight. Unappetizing lunches (back in the day when airplane lunches were still being served) sit on their open tray tables. Lipsky breaks a plastic knife while attempting to smear butter on a frozen roll.

DAVID

OK, crap jobs: Let's see: I was a security guard for this software company for three and a half months.

LIPSKY

Why'd you quit?

DAVID

For the incredibly brave reason that I got tired of getting up so early in the morning. I had to wear this polyester uniform, and walk under these fluorescent lights, twirlin' my baton, checking in every ten minutes: [mimes a walkie-talkie] "All clear at this cubicle!" Like, every bad '60s novel about meaningless authority.

LIPSKY

And were you thinking, "My God, I had two books come out when I was in my early twenties and here I am...?"

DAVID

No. As a matter of fact, one reason I liked that job is, I walked around *not* thinking. In a really like, "Huh: there's a ceiling tile."

LIPSKY

And after the three and a half months?

DAVID

This is the worst: I worked as a towel boy at this chichi health club.

LIPSKY

A "towel boy?"

DAVID

They called me something other than a towel boy, but I was in effect a towel boy. Who every once in a while was entrusted with the job of checking people in, having them show their card?

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

DAVID

Anyway, I'm sitting there, and who should walk in to get their towel, but this guy, this *writer* I knew. Who received a Whiting Writer's Award the same year I had, like two years earlier, in 1987.

LIPSKY

Oh, shit...

DAVID

So I see this guy that I'd been up on this fucking *rostrum* with, having *Eudora Welty* give us this prize -

LIPSKY

Oh, God!

DAVID

- And two years later, I'm like ... It's the only time I've literally *dived* under something, to have somebody avoid seeing me.

LIPSKY

Did you think you were done then?

DAVID

Yeah. I was pretty sure life was over.

LIPSKY

This is after your suicide watch?

David blinks. A beat. The STEWARDESS collects their trays.

DAVID

How'd you know about that?

LIPSKY

I read it somewhere.

DAVID

That was actually a fairly grim -

LIPSKY

McLean's, right? How long were you there?

DAVID

Eight days, I think.

LIPSKY

Why were you there?

DAVID

Mostly 'cause I was scared I would do something stupid. I'd actually had a friend from high school who tried to kill himself by sitting in a garage with the car runnin'. And what it turned out was, he didn't die, but it really fucked up his brain. And I knew, that if anybody was fated to fuck up a suicide attempt, it was me.

LIPSKY

So here you are still in your twenties...

DAVID

My late twenties.

LIPSKY

Your late twenties, somewhat in pain about your desire to become a sort of successful literary person.

DAVID

I think probably the not very sophisticated diagnosis is that I was depressed. 'Cause by this time, my ego's all invested in the writing. It's the only thing that I've gotten, you know, *food pellets* from the universe for. So I feel really trapped: Like, "Uh-oh, my five years is up. I've gotta move on, but I don't want to move on." I was really stuck. And drinking was part of that. But it wasn't that I was stuck *because* I drank. It was like, I really sort of felt like my life was over at twenty-eight. And that felt really bad, and I didn't wanna feel it.

And so I would do all kinds of things: I mean, I would drink real heavy, I would like fuck strangers... Or, then, for two weeks I wouldn't drink, and I'd run ten miles every morning. You know, that kind of desperate, like very *American*, "I will fix this somehow, by taking radical action" sort of thing.

LIPSKY

And here you are now, promoting this acclaimed book. Not bad.

DAVID

*This* [the interview] is nice, but this is not real.

They look at one another. An announcement fills the silence.

ATTENDANT

(over p.a.) Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our descent to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport...

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL AIRPORT - DAY

The plane comes in for a landing.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL AIRPORT - DAY

The guys walk from the gate and follow the arrow to baggage claim. They descend on the escalator.

DAVID

An escort's supposed to pick me up and, you know, escort me to the reading. And of course, when I hear "escort," I imagine like full geisha with hairpins who will take you to the bookstore, then back to the hotel, walk on your back and fuck your eyeballs out.

Lipsky is laughing.

DAVID

More often than not they're like burly *Irishmen*. In their forties. Who tell you their life stories. Or this lady in Boston who I sort of wanted to adopt me.

At the bottom of the moving stair stands a solidly-built, perky, forty-ish woman, PATTY, holding a sign: "MR. WALLACE."

PATTY

Mr. Wallace! I recognized you from your picture! I'm Patty Gundersson! Welcome to the Twin Cities!

LIPSKY

Hi, I'm David Lipsky.

PATTY

David and David. That's easy.

As they exit frame:

DAVID

(in explanation) We're not a couple. He's writing a piece on me.

INT. PATTY'S CAR / EXT. HIGHWAY - ST. PAUL - DAY

Driving through St. Paul toward Minneapolis, along the Mississippi. David and Lipsky share the backseat. Patty is a talker.

PATTY

You wouldn't *believe* all the famous people I've driven around! Shirley MacLaine? When she came through on a book tour? Ron Wood. You know, of the Rolling Stones?

DAVID

Uh huh.

Lipsky sees the passing, obstructed view of the Mary Tyler Moore commemorative statue.

LIPSKY

Oh, look: The Mary Tyler Moore statue.

DAVID

Oh, yeah.

PATTY

Do you want me to stop?

DAVID

No, no.

PATTY

Everybody who comes here, the first thing they want to see is where Mary Tyler Moore threw her cap in the air. One of our biggest attractions. You sure you don't want me to stop?

DAVID

I'm sure. Thanks, anyway.  
(sotto, to Lipsky)  
Trust me: This is about as sexy as the tour gets.

Lipsky laughs.

EXT. HOTEL WHITNEY - MINNEAPOLIS - DAY

Patty drops them off at the historic, one-time mill [since converted to condos]. They get their bags out of the car.

PATTY

You're at liberty. I'll be back at 5:15 to take you to the book-signing. Anything else I can do for you?

DAVID

No, thanks. We got it.

She goes. And they go inside:

INT. HOTEL WHITNEY - LOBBY - DAY

Lipsky and David check in at the front desk.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

Mr. ...

LIPSKY

Lipsky. L-I-P, S-K-Y.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

I've got you in a standard double. And Mr. Wallace? You have a room with twins.

DAVID

Ah, yes: Anita and Consuela.

Lipsky laughs. The desk clerk doesn't get the joke.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

Excuse me?

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR

The elevator arrives with a ding. They both get off; David finds his room.

DAVID

See ya later. I'm gonna get me some shut-eye.

We follow Lipsky in the opposite direction to his.

INT. LIPSKY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Lipsky plops down, fully clothed, in exhaustion, on the bed of his generic hotel room.

Later, his hair still wet from a shower, Lipsky is on the phone to Bob, his increasingly exasperated editor.

BOB'S VOICE

(over phone) Where's the beef?

LIPSKY

I'm working on it.

BOB'S VOICE

I went out on a limb for you!

LIPSKY

I know, Bob, and I appreciate it!

BOB'S VOICE

Keep at him. Be a prick if you have to.

LIPSKY

Look, tonight's his last book-signing; I'll get to see him in his element.

EXT. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE - ST. PAUL - NIGHT

Snowy. A cool, independent bookstore [now defunct]. People who have begun to show up for the event recognize David; some gawk, some smile. David's friends, two attractive women around his age, Julie (tall, blonde) and Betsy (petite, brunette), surprise him with their attendance.

DAVID

I can't believe you guys showed up!

JULIE

We wouldn't miss this, are you kidding?

DAVID

Gluttons for punishment, both of you.

They greet and hug David. Introductions, handshakes.  
Improvisational feel.

DAVID

This is David Lipsky. A reporter from  
*Rolling Stone*.

JULIE

Oh, wow, hi.

DAVID

This is Julie...

LIPSKY

Hi, Julie.

DAVID

And this is Betsy.

BETSY

Hi.

LIPSKY

Nice to meet you.

DAVID

Betsy and I went to grad school  
together, in Tucson.

LIPSKY

Nice. (to Julie) How do you know  
David?

DAVID

She wrote me a fan letter.

JULIE

I did, I was the books editor at City  
Pages and I wrote him a fan letter,  
that's right.

DAVID

Julie has worked with a whole lot of  
writers -

JULIE

So I'm discriminating.

DAVID

Exactly. And we discovered that we actually kind of like each other as people.

JULIE

Aw, thank you, Dave.

DAVID

That's how I met Jon Franzen: I wrote him a fan letter. Writers are pushovers when it comes to flattery. You should try it sometime.

David nervously smokes. Patty gives him a disapproving look. He exhales smoke.

Lipsky looks through the window at the gathering audience.

DAVID

Anybody look *dangerous*?

LIPSKY

(assessing, playing along) Mmm... No.

PATTY

(concrete as ever) Aw. Don't worry. Minnesotans are really nice and friendly.

David, irritated, says nothing, shares a look with Lipsky. The READING LADY, a robust earth-mother who loves books and loves her job, comes out to welcome David.

READING LADY

Welcome to the Hungry Mind! It's a honor to have you here.

DAVID

You haven't heard me read yet.

INT. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE

The crowd is growing, spilling into the aisles, buzzing in anticipation.

INT. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE - MANAGER'S OFFICE

The room, crammed with books and an old sofa, doubles as a kind of "green room" for visiting writers. David, Lipsky, the Reading Lady, Julie, Betsy and Patty mill about.

DAVID

Can I get something to drink?

READING LADY

Of course, what would you like?

DAVID

Do you have any artificial spit?

Everyone laughs, perhaps a little too heartily.

DAVID

No, it's an actual pharmaceutical product. Zero-Lube.

LIPSKY

Really? Artificial saliva?

DAVID

Yeah, but it's way better 'cause it *lubricates*. You don't get that *clicky* sound you do with dry mouth.

READING LADY

I'll have to remember that.

DAVID

Next tour, I bring a case.

READING LADY

In the meantime, what can I get you?

DAVID

Water? No ice?

The Reading Lady goes to fetch it.

Lipsky and Betsy.

LIPSKY

Are you a fiction writer, too?

BETSY

I'm a poet, actually.

LIPSKY

Oh, wow.

BETSY

Just got my first poem published in the *Kenyon Review*.

LIPSKY

Congratulations!

David observes Lipsky chatting animatedly with Betsy, disapproval registering on his face. The Reading Lady brings David a cup of water.

DAVID  
Oh, thanks.

He drinks it.

DAVID  
Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to do "Job One."

PATTY  
Hm?

DAVID  
I need to find the loo.

READING LADY  
Right this way...

CAMERA follows Lipsky behind David as she walks him along the perimeter of the shop, turning heads and causing a ripple of excitement. She deposits him at the rest room door.

DAVID  
I can take it from here, thanks.

He goes in. Lipsky and the Reading Lady wait. Small talk:

READING LADY  
Al Franken - who's great, by the way.  
He *killed* here last week.

Lipsky sees a woman customer pick up a copy of *The Art Fair* from a table and glance through it, raising his self-esteem. But, in a beat, she puts it back down. His heart sinks.

LATER. The Reading Lady leads them to the side of the podium. On the move:

DAVID  
I don't mean to be a prima donna or anything, but I'd really prefer it if we didn't have a Q & A.

READING LADY  
Of course. Whatever you feel most comfortable with.

DAVID

It's always stuff like "Where do you get your ideas?" (to Lipsky) From a Time-Life subscription series for \$17.95 a month.

Lipsky laughs.

A SHORT TIME Later. Off to the side of the podium. As the reading lady makes her introductory remarks off-screen, Lipsky watches David scan the faces of his young audience. He speaks mostly to himself, but for Lipsky's benefit also.

DAVID

This is it. The swan song. The finale. It's all downhill from here.

At the podium (continuous)

READING LADY

...This is the very last stop on his book tour and we're very lucky to have him! Ladies and gentlemen... Would you welcome to the Hungry Mind... David. Foster. Wallace!

The packed audience applauds enthusiastically. David checks his underarms - already soaked.

DAVID

(to Lipsky) Shit. I wish they made Depends for underarms.

Lipsky laughs as David warily makes his way to the podium. The applause subsides. Lipsky watches from the sidelines.

DAVID

Thank you. Hi. Can you hear me okay?

Members of the audience nod and assure him they can.

DAVID

Am I too close? Am I like fellating the microphone?

Laughter.

DAVID

It's kind of a hard book to read from, as you can tell by the looks of it.

More chuckles.

DAVID

But this is a section I think reads pretty well on its own.

He pauses, sips water, then starts reading from *Infinite Jest*. He wets his fingertip when turning the page. His reading voice is measured and intimate, with little inflection; he acclimates himself to performance fairly quickly and seems to relax into it.

DAVID

(reads) "Good old traditional audio-only phone conversations allowed you to presume that the person on the other end was paying complete attention to you while also permitting you not to have to pay anything even close to complete attention to her. -"

Lipsky looks around at the transfixed audience with a mix of vicarious pride and envy.

A photographer's flash goes off. David stops and addresses a WOMAN PHOTOGRAPHER.

DAVID

Could you not do that?

WOMAN PHOTOGRAPHER

(embarrassed) Oh, I'm sorry...

DAVID

It's just, I'm tryin' to read and I'm seein' like green spots. Thank you.

A smattering of applause. He resumes.

DAVID

"A traditional aural-only conversation [...] let you enter a kind of highway-hypnotic semi-attentive fugue: while conversing, you could look around the room, doodle, fine-groom, peel tiny bits of dead skin away from your cuticles, compose phone-pad haiku, stir things on the stove... "

We tune down and dissolve to the end of the reading.

DAVID

...I have no saliva left, so I'm gonna stop here. Thank you very much.

The audience applauds wildly, embarrassing David. Lipsky applauds, too, but can't help feeling a little jealous. The Reading Lady returns to the microphone at the podium.

READING LADY

Before we start the book-signing, I'm sure David wouldn't mind answering a question or two...

David shoots an incredulous look at Lipsky. The Reading Lady calls on a HIPPIE-ISH YOUNG WOMAN.

READING LADY

Yes?

The HIPPIE-ISH young woman stands.

HIPPIE-ISH YOUNG WOMAN

So, hi.

DAVID

Hi.

HIPPIE-ISH YOUNG WOMAN

Um... Like, how do you get your ideas?

David looks deadpan at Lipsky.

Later. A long line of excited book buyers wait their turn. Seated at a table, David signs his name along with his version of a smiley face and hands it to a YOUNG WOMAN.

DAVID

There you go.

The young woman looks at it with bemusement.

YOUNG WOMAN

What is that supposed to be, a computer?

DAVID

What? No. It's a smiley face. See?

YOUNG WOMAN

Ohhh...

DAVID

If you want, I could put Wite-Out over it...

YOUNG WOMAN

That's okay.

DAVID

You sure? It's *your* book...

Lipsky observes from the sidelines with Betsy and Julie.

Back to David. A NERDY GUY pulls out the Vintage paperback copy of *The Broom of the System*.

DAVID

Oh no. That old thing?

NERDY GUY

Do you mind...?

DAVID

Not as long as you buy my new one, too.

The guy plunks down a copy of *Infinite Jest*, too.

DAVID

Now we're talkin'.

David signs both books and blows over the ink to dry it.

DAVID

My publisher taught me that.

The guy laughs as David sees Lipsky laughing with Julie and Betsy and is threatened by it. Lipsky sees David looking at them and smiles; David ominously doesn't return the smile. He turns instead to the next customer.

DAVID

Who's next?

The rebuff registers with Lipsky whose smile fades.

EXT. / INT. I-HOP - ST. PAUL - NIGHT

David and Lipsky are dining out on pancakes with Julie and Betsy. Laid-back, improvisational.

DAVID

I couldn't be plain old "David Wallace" 'cause there were "David Wallaces" all over the place. And "David Raines Wallace" wrote for *The New Yorker*. That's when Fred Hill asked me what my middle name was and decided that was what my name was gonna be.

LIPSKY

(to Julie) This is like a superhero origin story.

BETSY

Dave, remember in Tucson, that professor you kind of locked horns with?

DAVID

My nemesis who shall remain nameless? I think I was kind of a prick. But so was he. I was just unteachable. I mean, I don't think I was *actively* unpleasant in class.

BETSY

You were pretty unpleasant.

Later, toward the end of the meal. The restaurant has cleared out. An employee is mopping up.

DAVID

Well, I've got to get up unconscionably early for a public radio interview.

LIPSKY

Which means that I have to get up early, too.

DAVID

You can do whatever the fuck you want. Sleep in if you want to.

David's mercurial attitude toward him unnerves Lipsky. They settle up the check.

INT. JULIE'S VW / EXT. HIGHWAY - ST. PAUL - NIGHT

Julie at the wheel; Betsy in the passenger seat. David and Lipsky are in the backseat smoking, each blowing smoke out of their respective windows. Spirits high, they sing along with the INXS SONG "Need You Tonight" on the radio.

JULIE

Can you close the fucking windows, pleaaaasssse, it's freezing!

LIPSKY

Oh but this is our hypothermia smoking tour of the Midwest.

Julie and Betsy laugh. David does not.

BETSY

"Hypothermia smoking tour." I love that! Sounds like something Dave would say.

DAVID

(to himself) Doesn't it.

David doesn't like that Lipsky amused his friends with a DFW-like joke - and Lipsky realizes it. Tremors of growing tension come to the surface.

EXT. HOTEL WHITNEY - NIGHT

Julie's VW pulls up and deposits the Davids.

JULIE

What are you doing tomorrow after your interview?

DAVID

Don't know yet.

JULIE

Give us a call, okay?

Ad-libbed "Good night"s all around. Julie and Betsy drive away and David and Lipsky enter the hotel.

INT. DAVID'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

CAMERA pans M n M wrappers, Tobelerone, mixed nuts containers strewn around the carpet: The detritus of a non-alcoholic mini-bar snack attack.

LIPSKY (O.S.)

How does that feel? People fighting to get in, big line of people who want to impress you...

We find David and Lipsky in twin beds, facing each other, talking like college roommates pulling an all-nighter.

DAVID

I'll tell you - having an audience with really really pretty girls who are paying attention to you, and like what you're sayin'? Is gratifying on a fairly I think simple *mammal* level.

LIPSKY

And why is that?

DAVID

Oh, because I think pretty girls are what you most sort of dream and despair of ever having, of ever paying attention to you. And there they are, in the front row, making eyes at you.

LIPSKY

My girlfriend loves you, by the way.

DAVID

She does?

LIPSKY

Yeah, it's actually getting to be a problem. I think she loves your writing more than she loves mine.

DAVID

Get her on the phone.

LIPSKY

What?

OVER we HEAR a ringing tone.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Lipsky holds the phone. We HEAR Sarah's voice.

SARAH'S VOICE

(over the phone) Hello?

LIPSKY

Hi.

SARAH'S VOICE

Hi! How's it going?

LIPSKY

Did I wake you?

SARAH'S VOICE

No, I'm up reading *Infinite Jest*. It's pretty fucking amazing.

LIPSKY

Listen: Somebody wants to say hello. Hold on a sec.

He hands the receiver to David.

DAVID

(whispers to Lipsky) What's her name?

LIPSKY

Sarah.

David speaks into the phone. (When David is on the phone, we - and Lipsky - hear only his side of the conversation.)

DAVID

(on the phone) Sarah? Hi. It's Dave Wallace.

Lipsky tries to reclaim the phone a couple of times during the following but David, engaged in a power play, retains control: his way of re-asserting himself after Lipsky's perceived transgressions with David's women friends.

DAVID

How are you? Nice to meet you telephonically, too. (to Lipsky) Are you behaving yourself? Yeah, I'm pretty sure he is.

Lipsky reaches for the phone but David continues talking.

DAVID

Tonight was my last reading. Okay, I guess. What's weird is there's this terrible dread beforehand, but then, like halfway through, it gets to be fun almost.

Again, Lipsky tries to reclaim the receiver.

DAVID

What're you up to tonight? No kidding! What part are you up to? Wow, you're pretty far along!...

Now that David's talking about the book, Lipsky gives up in frustration, plops into a chair, and quietly seethes as we TUNE DOWN on David's voice in the background.

INT. LIPSKY'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Lipsky, in bed, is on the phone with Sarah. He's livid.

LIPSKY

(on the phone) What the fuck was *that* about?

SARAH'S VOICE

(over phone) What.

LIPSKY

You were on the phone with him for  
like a half hour!

SARAH'S VOICE

It wasn't a half hour...

LIPSKY

It was twenty-five minutes; I timed  
it! You were only supposed to say  
hello!

EXT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - MORNING

Lipsky leaves his room and goes down the hall to collect  
David. He knocks on his door. Listens. TV sounds from  
inside. Knocks again.

LIPSKY

David? Escort's waiting. We gotta go.

David, still in boxers and Chicago Cubs t-shirt, frazzled,  
opens the door.

DAVID

Sorry, man. Got totally lost in an  
orgy of crap.

David ducks into the bathroom.

DAVID

First *Falcon Crest* was on, then *Magnum  
P.I.*, now *Charlie's Angels*. A perfect  
storm of shit. Out in a minute.

We hear the shower running. Lipsky sits on the bed watching  
Jaclyn Smith and Farrah Fawcett.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Ding. The elevator arrives. Lipsky and David emerge and we  
follow them through the lobby. David is wearing a turtleneck  
and jeans with his shower-wet hair pinned up.

They exit the hotel and find Patty waiting out front. She  
taps her watch like a schoolmarm. Her face falls when she  
sees how David is dressed: she disapproves of his attire.

PATTY

Is that what you're wearing?

DAVID

For a radio interview? Yes.

They climb into the backseat of the car.

EXT. MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO - ST. PAUL - DAY

The car pulls up to the entrance. The men get out.

PATTY  
Take your time. I'll be waiting right here.

DAVID  
Wish me luck.

PATTY  
(calls as they go) You'll be fine.  
All you need to do is loosen up!

INT. NPR STUDIO

A pretty PRODUCTION ASSISTANT greets David and Lipsky.

DAVID  
I'm Dave Wallace.

P.A.  
(blushes) I know who you are.

David introduces Lipsky.

DAVID  
My amanuensis, Mr. Boswell.

The P.A. shakes Lipsky's hand, playing along with the joke.

P.A.  
(in greeting) "Mr. Boswell." Right this way.

She leads David, followed by Lipsky, down a corridor past glass-walled studios. Lipsky sees people recognize David, whisper among themselves. Young women smile shyly, excited to be in the presence of a cool celebrity.

P.A.  
Can I get you anything?

DAVID  
Just water.

P.A.  
Glass?

DAVID  
Bottle's fine.

P.A.  
 (to Lipsky) "Mr. Boswell?"

LIPSKY  
 Same.

NPR GUY  
 We're gonna record digitally. I hope that's OK.

DAVID  
 So only yes or no answers?

Lipsky laughs, David sees him scribble in his pad.

DAVID  
 If you do a really mean job, I have twenty years to get you back. Remember that.

Later. The interview goes on the air. Lipsky observes from outside the booth. The NPR GUY has a good radio voice.

NPR GUY  
 My guest today is David Foster Wallace, who has burst on the literary scene with his 1,079-page, three-pound-three-ounce novel, *Infinite Jest*. Jay McInerney called it "something like a sleek Vonnegut chassis wrapped in layers of post-millennial Zola." David Foster Wallace, welcome to our show.

DAVID  
 Thank you, glad to be here.

He exchanges looks with Lipsky outside the booth.

NPR GUY  
 You have said that you saw yourself as - quote - "a combination of being incredibly shy, and being an egomaniac, too."

DAVID  
 I think I said "exhibitionist, also."

NPR GUY  
 Meaning?

DAVID

Well, I think being shy basically means being self-absorbed to the extent that it makes it difficult to be around other people...

INT. PATTY'S CAR / EXT. MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO - DAY

Patty waits in her car. David and Lipsky climb in.

PATTY

That was wonderful! I listened to the whole show! So interesting! I just may have to read your book!

DAVID

I'm sorry.

PATTY

You have the rest of the day off. Where would you like me to take you?

EXT. MALL OF AMERICA - DAY

Patty drops them off. David and Lipsky get out.

PATTY

I'm more than happy to stick around...

DAVID

That's okay, my friends are gonna meet us here; they have a car.

PATTY

It's my *job* to escort you around.

DAVID

You'll take us to the airport in the morning.

Patty has grown sour.

PATTY

Oh, all right. Have a nice day.

David closes the car door. She pulls away with a screech.

DAVID

See that? Another woman I disappointed.

## INT. MALL OF AMERICA - MONTAGE - DAY

A SONG accompanies David and Lipsky walking around the Mall of America, a massive monument in metal and glass to American excess. A city of the future with the ubiquitous motto, "America, You're the One!" The very thought of David Foster Wallace, the great synthesiser of popular culture, in such an environment is almost too perfect.

In a sequence that will be largely improvised, they explore shops, try stuff on, people watch. Amusement rides. Lego Store. Camp Snoopy water flume. Hulk Hogan's Pastamania!

DAVID

I don't know about you, but when I think pasta, I think Hulk Hogan.

## INT. MALL FOOD COURT - HULK HOGAN'S PASTAMANIA

Overweight, unsmiling American consumers - women, couples, teens, crying kids in strollers - haul shopping bags bursting with purchases. OVER we hear:

DAVID (O.S.)

Look at these people. Look at 'em. Are these happy campers? They're living the dream. They can't fill their maws fast enough. Processed foods, instant crap. All these received notions of happiness. If I buy *this*, if I eat *that*... Do these folks look happy to you?

David and Lipsky sit over lunch, the recorder running on the table between them.

DAVID

I wanted to write something that had kind of the texture of what mental life was like in America right now. Which meant, sort of an enormous tsunami of stuff coming at you. And also - it's not entirely reader-unfriendly. It wasn't *unfun*.

LIPSKY

Not at all. It *is* sort of heavy, though. I mean weight-wise.

DAVID

My friend said when it hit the porch, it sounded like a car bomb going off.

Lipsky laughs.

LIPSKY

Who are your readers? College kids?

DAVID

The people who seem most enthusiastic are young men. Which I guess I can understand - it's a fairly male book, a fairly *nerdy* book, about loneliness.

LIPSKY

You think it's about loneliness?

DAVID

Yeah. I think if there is sort of a sadness for people under forty-five or something, it has to do with pleasure and achievement and entertainment. And a kind of emptiness at heart of what they thought was going on, that maybe I can hope that parts of the book will speak to their nerve endings a little bit. Look at these people

He presses stop on the tape recorder, surprising Lipsky.

DAVID (CONT'D)

By the way, if you quote any of this, you'd do me a favor if you'd say that I'm talking about what I *hope* for the book, or what the book is *tryin'* to do, I don't pretend that it *has*. Okay?

LIPSKY

Got it.

Lipsky presses play.

LIPSKY

So: the Walter Kirn review, in *New York Magazine* -

DAVID

Didn't read it. I mean, I *heard*.

LIPSKY

"Next year's book awards have been decided" kind of thing. How'd it feel?

DAVID

I applauded his taste and discernment. What do you *want* me to say? How would you feel?

LIPSKY

Well, that I'd known all along it was good, and here was someone validating that.

DAVID

But there's the other part that says, "Oh no, this makes absolutely no sense to anybody else. I'm a pretentious fuckwad. People are gonna ridicule me." The *Times* dumped on it. That Japanese lady?

LIPSKY

This is one of the few cases where the *Times* didn't matter. You're already number 15 on the best-seller list...

DAVID

All I know is, this is absolutely the best I could do between like 1992 and 1995. And if everybody hated it, I wouldn't be thrilled, but I don't think I'd be devastated, either. So it's sort of like... If you're used to doing heavy-duty literary stuff that doesn't sell well? Being human animals with egos, we find a way to accommodate that fact by the following equation: If it sells really well and gets a lot of attention, it must be shit. Then, of course, the ultimate irony is: if *your* thing gets a lot of attention and sells really well, then the very mechanism you've used to shore yourself up when your stuff *didn't* sell well, is now part of the Darkness Nexus when it does, so you're screwed.

Lipsky is laughing.

INT. MULTIPLEX - MALL OF AMERICA

David and Lipsky stand outside. Julie and Betsy arrive. Ad-libbed greetings all around.

BETSY

Oh, my God, this place is insane!

JULIE

I can't believe we actually found you!

A SHORT TIME LATER. The foursome look over movie titles on the electronic board.

BETSY  
What's *The Juror*?

LIPSKY  
Demi Moore, John Grisham.

BETSY  
Oh, right. *Happy Gilmore*?

JULIE  
Adam Sandler? Forget it.

DAVID  
Ooo, *Broken Arrow*! Perfect dumb boy movie. Things that blow up!

LIPSKY  
I've already seen it, but...

DAVID  
You've already seen it? Boy, you are a man from my own heart, aren't you.

LIPSKY  
I don't mind, I'll see it again...

BETSY  
I'll see anything.

DAVID  
You sure? We can see something else.

INT. MULTIPLEX

A loud action scene - helicopters, explosions - from *Broken Arrow* with John Travolta, Christian Slater and Samantha Mathis fills the screen.

Seated up close, their heads craned looking up at the screen, Julie and Betsy sit together and Lipsky monitors David's reactions. David is an ideal spectator, totally engaged with a child-like guilelessness that Lipsky finds endearing.

DAVID  
Oh boy... oh wow, oh jeez...!

LATER THAT NIGHT

Julie, Betsy, David and Lipsky file out after the movie. Improv post-movie discussion.

DAVID  
Wasn't that cool at the end, when  
Travolta gets impaled by the thing?

JULIE  
Let's all go back to my place.

DAVID  
Can we watch TV?

INT. JULIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - ST. PAUL - NIGHT

On TV: John Michael Higgins in *The Late Show*. They sit  
around snacking on fresh popcorn and soda.

DAVID  
I know that guy.

LIPSKY  
The guy playing Leno?

DAVID  
No, the guy playing Letterman.

JULIE  
How do you know him?

DAVID  
Went to Amherst with him.

LIPSKY  
Friend of yours?

DAVID  
No. I hated his guts.

JULIE  
Why?

DAVID  
He was just very cool and popular and  
I wasn't, basically.

Laughter. The kitchen is visible from the living room.  
Lipsky gets a soda out of the fridge.

JULIE  
(calls) There's beer in there, too.

LIPSKY  
I'm okay with this, thanks.

In the living room, David looks at the TV listings.

DAVID

Ooo, you know what's on after this?  
*Sodom and Gomorrah!* You ever see  
that? Stewart Granger?

JULIE

Dave, you sure you want to do that?  
According to this it's 154 minutes.

Back to Lipsky in the kitchen. Betsy comes in.

BETSY

I brought you something.

LIPSKY

You brought *me* something?

She gives him a copy of the *Kenyon Review*.

LIPSKY

Oh, great! This has your poem in it!  
Thank you!

David sees them talking animatedly and doesn't like it.

LIPSKY

Hey, when I get back to New York, you  
mind if I e-mailed you with questions  
about what David was like in grad  
school and stuff?

BETSY

Sure, if it's okay with Dave.

LIPSKY

What's your e-mail address?

David sees Lipsky take out his pad and pen. He gives it to  
Betsy, who writes down her e-mail address.

INT. JULIE'S KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER

Lipsky, drinking from a soda can, stands watching TV. All of  
a sudden, David, flushed and angry, gets in his face, and  
pushes a startled Lipsky against the fridge.

DAVID

(whispers) What the fuck do you think  
you're doing?

Lipsky initially thinks David is joking.

LIPSKY

(smiling) What?

DAVID

I saw the way you were hitting on Betsy.

LIPSKY

*Hitting on her? I was talking to her.*

DAVID

I saw you! You got her to give you her address.

LIPSKY

Her e-mail address. In case I had questions, for the piece I'm doing.

DAVID

Well, I don't want her talking to you. She doesn't have my permission.

LIPSKY

Fine! I won't contact her.

DAVID

I *told* you she and I dated when we were in grad school... You can show me the respect of not coming on to her right in my face.

LIPSKY

David, I'm sorry it looked that way. I didn't mean to offend you. Besides, why would I want to get involved with someone who lives in St. Paul?

DAVID

You're *already* involved with someone who lives in L.A....

David is glaring at him when we hear:

JULIE (O.S.)

You guys okay in there?

DAVID

(calls) Yeah, fine. (to Lipsky)  
Stay away from her.

David goes back to the women.

DAVID (O.S.)

What'd I miss?

Once he catches his breath, Lipsky, breaking solidarity with David's abstinence, gets a beer out of the fridge and pointedly, while making eye contact with David, pops open the can and defiantly takes a slug.

INT. JULIE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

*Sodom and Gommorah* is on television. David watches; Betsy is gone; Julie has fallen asleep. Lipsky, now wary of David, sits some distance away, struggling to stay awake.

INT. TAXI / EXT. STREET - MINNEAPOLIS - NIGHT

Lipsky and David ride in the backseat in silence, avoiding each other, looking out their respective windows. The cab pulls up to their hotel. Lipsky is prepared to pay the fare.

DAVID

I got it.

LIPSKY

That's all right, my expense account'll cover it.

DAVID

So will mine. I got it, I said.

Lipsky relents.

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR

Lipsky and David ride up in silence. The elevator arrives at their floor with a ding.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR (CONTINUOUS)

Lipsky goes in one direction; David in the other.

LIPSKY

Good night.

David doesn't respond. Lipsky watches him petulantly go down the hall to his room.

INT. LIPSKY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lipsky, agitated, paces the while talking on the phone.

SARAH'S VOICE

(over phone) Were you flirting?

LIPSKY

No! Sarah, I swear to you: He just completely went bonkers on me.

SARAH'S VOICE

You do that, David, you know? You're not even aware of it.

LIPSKY

What do I do?

SARAH'S VOICE

You're compulsively flirtatious.

LIPSKY

I can't believe you're taking his side!

SARAH'S VOICE

I am not!

TIMECUT. DAWN. Lipsky, depressed after a sleepless night, is now on the phone with his editor, who we hear shouting.

BOB'S VOICE

(over the phone) What do you mean, he's not talking to you?!

LIPSKY

There's some weird, yin-yang, counter-transference, doppelganger shit going on.

BOB'S VOICE

Get over it! You've got this fucking piece to write!

EXT. HOTEL WHITNEY - MORNING

Lipsky, unshaven, and David, unsmiling, emerge from the hotel with their bags. Patty greets them with a cheery smile.

PATTY

Good morning! And how are we this morning?

David climbs into the backseat.

LIPSKY

I think I'll ride up front.

David looks a little surprised but says nothing.

PATTY

Oh. All right. Here, let me get my junk out of the way...

She makes room for Lipsky who gets into the passenger seat. Patty continues yammering but Lipsky tunes her out. The car pulls away.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Mid-flight. David, his beaten-up Robert Heinlein paperback on his lap, sleeps soundly with his lips slightly parted and his bandanna'd head leaning against the window. Lipsky studies his face with new objectivity.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - CHICAGO - DUSK

Frigid, windy, in crepuscular light. David and Lipsky emerge from baggage claim with David pulling his rolling suitcase, and look out across the wintry landscape, a fresh layer of snow covers every car in the lot, making them indistinguishable from one another.

LIPSKY

Oh, shit, where did we park?

They walk up and down the rows of snow-covered cars looking for the Grand Am. Lipsky repeatedly clicks his key hoping to have the car announce itself with blinking headlights.

DAVID

Are you fucking kidding me? You didn't write down where we were parked?

Lipsky is cold, feeling vulnerable, fighting tears.

LIPSKY

I didn't, okay? I'm sorry! I fucked up. I'm a fuck-up, what can I say? Not everyone can be as fucking brilliant as you.

DAVID

What the fuck is *with* you?

LIPSKY

What the fuck is *with* you?

Lipsky clicks the key and this time he locates the car.

They pry open the iced-over doors of the Grand Am. Lipsky finds a frozen mess of a burst bottle of Snapple looking like a chunk of amber.

INT. CAR / EXT. HIGHWAY - OUTSIDE CHICAGO - NIGHT

They ride in silence. Lipsky, at the wheel, collects his thoughts before speaking his mind. This is a more assertive Lipsky than we've seen before.

LIPSKY

I gotta say... There's something basically *false* about your approach here.

DAVID

What do you mean "false?"

LIPSKY

I think it's part of your social strategy.

DAVID

Which is...?

LIPSKY

You still feel you're *smarter* than other people.

DAVID

Oh, really?

LIPSKY

Yes. Acting like someone who's playing in the kids' softball game, trying to hold back his power-hitting, to -

DAVID

When?

LIPSKY

Here, now, for the past three days, in your social persona.

DAVID

You're a tough room, you know that?

LIPSKY

You make a point of holding back - there's something obvious about you holding back your intelligence, to be with people who are younger or maybe not as agile as you are...

DAVID

That would make me a real asshole, wouldn't it? I don't think writers are any smarter than other people.

I think they may be more compelling in their stupidity, or in their *confusion*. But I think one of the true ways that I *have* gotten smarter is, I've realized that I'm *not* much smarter than other people.

LIPSKY

Yeah, right.

DAVID

(continuous) There are ways in which other people are a lot smarter than me. Like, I don't know, it makes me feel kinda *lonely* that you think that I... Like there's been certain stuff that I've told you that's really true and, frankly, I think it's been *brave* of me.

LIPSKY

Absolutely.

DAVID

I've written enough of these "pieces" to know that you could present this in a hundred different ways. Ninety of which I'm really gonna come off as a monumental asshole. But it seems like *your* read of this is, "Huh: what an interesting *persona* Dave is adopting for the purposes of this interview."

LIPSKY

That's not what I'm saying.

DAVID

Isn't it? (A beat.) OK, this is gonna fit right into the *persona* thing: I work really really hard.

LIPSKY

David, no one is questioning how hard you work.

DAVID

(overlap) But I'm not all that fast.

LIPSKY

(incredulous) What?!

DAVID

If we'd done this interview through the mail?

And I had access to a library, and could look stuff up? You and I would be equals.

LIPSKY

Oh, come on...

DAVID

My dream would be for you to write this up, send it to me, and I get to rewrite all my quotes - which of course you'll never do. When I'm in a room by myself, alone, and have enough time, I can be really *really* smart. Don't get me wrong: I think I'm bright; I think I'm talented. I don't mean to sound disingenuous.

LIPSKY

(amused) Oh, no?!

David, angered, presses on.

DAVID

I'm not an idiot. I mean, *you* know, I can talk intelligently with you and stuff. But I can't quite keep up with you.

LIPSKY

Bullshit.

DAVID

Believe me: I'm not just "Aw-shucks, I'm just in from the country, I'm not really a writer, I'm just a regular guy." I'm not trying to lay some kind of shit. And I'm -

LIPSKY

But you just did it again! You flatter me, but are you just being patronizing because *you* know and *I* know I'm nowhere *near* your league, or because you genuinely -

DAVID

I just think to look across the room and automatically assume that somebody else is less aware than me, or that somehow their interior life is less rich, and complicated, and acutely perceived than mine, makes me not as good a writer.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because that means I'm going to be performing for a faceless audience, instead of trying to have a conversation with a person. And if you think that's *faux*, then you think what you want. But what I've got is a serious fear of being a certain way. And a set I think of like, real convictions about why I'm continuing to do this, why it's worthwhile. Why it's not just an exercise in basically getting my d\*ck sucked. And, you know what?, this is a very clever tactic of yours:

LIPSKY

What tactic?

DAVID

Get me a little pissed off, a little less guarded, I'm gonna reveal more.  
(Pause.)

It's true that I want very much - I *treasure* my regular-guy-ness; I've started to think it's my biggest asset as a writer - is that I'm pretty much just like everybody else. But I don't - you know, whatever. I'm not gonna say it again. I'm not doing a *faux* thing with you.

LIPSKY

But the *faux* thing: isn't what you just said an *example* of the *faux* thing? You don't want to take the risk of giving the full you?

DAVID

Look, I don't know if you're a very nice man or not. It's very clear that you don't believe a word I've said.

LIPSKY

All your protesting... "I'm just a regular guy." You don't crack open a thousand-page book 'cause you heard the author's a regular guy. You read it because you understand the author is brilliant.

You want him to be brilliant. So who the fuck are you kidding?

David presses stop on the tape recorder.

DAVID

I don't have the brain cells left to play any kind of *faux* games with you. I'm fried.

LIPSKY

Fine.

David turns on the radio. They ride without speaking for what seems like a very long time. An R.E.M. song comes on. Soon Lipsky starts mumble-singing along with R.E.M. In a few moments, David, barely audibly, joins him. Their voices grow stronger. Singing together, in the dark, headlights streaking by, begins to have a healing effect.

EXT. GAS STATION - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

In nasty weather, Lipsky fills the tank, leaving the cap on the roof. David runs around to the other side of the car to take over driving duty from Lipsky. They drive away, sending the cap flying.

INT. CAR / EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - BLOOMINGTON - NIGHT

Later. Closer to home. Lipsky glances over at David, at the wheel, who seems faraway and depressed.

LIPSKY

What are you thinking?

DAVID

Tour's over.

LIPSKY

Just hit you?

DAVID

Uh huh. I'm gonna have to *feel* all this, instead of just sleepwalk through it.

LIPSKY

What do you mean by "sleepwalk?"

DAVID

I've kind of *unplugged* myself for the last three weeks.

Meeting a whole lot of new people,  
 having to do things, you're in a  
 constant low-level state of anxiety.  
 And sort of deep, existential, you  
 know: *fear*, that you feel kind of all  
 the way down to your butthole.

LIPSKY

What are you afraid of? I mean,  
 what's the absolute worst thing that  
 could happen?

DAVID

The worst? That I'll really get to  
 like it.

LIPSKY

The attention?

DAVID

Uh huh.

LIPSKY

And what would be so wrong about that?

DAVID

I'll be one of these hideous: "Hey,  
 yet another publication party, and  
 here's *Dave* sticking his head into the  
 picture." I'd rather be dead.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because I don't want to be *seen* that  
 way. Would you?

LIPSKY

Well, you're deriving your  
 satisfaction from *talking* about your  
 work, as opposed to *writing*, so  
 paradoxically you'd probably get less  
 done.

DAVID

That's right. And there's nothing  
 more grotesque than somebody who's  
 going around, "I'm a writer, I'm a  
 writer."

Is that a dig at Lipsky? Lipsky thinks so.

DAVID

I don't mind appearing in *Rolling Stone*, but I don't want to appear in *Rolling Stone* as somebody who wants to be in *Rolling Stone*. You know what I mean? If you see me like, you know, a guest on a game show in a couple of years...

Lipsky laughs. Pause. David is pensive again.

DAVID

To have written a book about how seductive image is, and how many ways there are to get seduced off any kind of meaningful path, *because* of the way the culture is now...? What if I become this parody of that very thing? Hm? What then?

Lipsky looks at David, who stares straight ahead, his eyes maybe filling with tears. They drive in silence.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Grand Am pulls up, its headlights the only artificial light. The Davids get out and remove their bags. Inside, the dogs are barking in anticipation.

DAVID

I hear ya, I hear ya, boys. Hold on, I'm a comin'.

David unlocks the door and the dogs greet him and Lipsky exuberantly. David kneels so that the dogs lick his face.

DAVID

I'm never leavin' you again, baby, I swear, I swear.

David gets some mail out of the box marked "DFW."

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE (CONTINUOUS)

David tosses today's mail on top of a mound collected by the dog-walker who has left a note with a message Lipsky sees: "*LA Times* called." David looks around the carpet.

DAVID

Shit Check. (discovers) Ah! Eureka!

He goes to the kitchen to get stuff to clean with.

DAVID

God, it's good to be home. Nothing like a little excremental work... Make sure your *Rolling Stone* readers learn about *this*.

The dogs sheepishly watch David clean up their shit.

DAVID

Happens to the best of us, eh, boys?

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN

Lipsky glances at a typewritten itinerary of the past days that's held on the refrigerator by a Chicago Cubs magnet. David takes it off and crumples it.

DAVID

Don't need *that* anymore.

He tosses it into the trash.

LATER. The chilliness caused by David's irrational jealousy further abates. The mood swing is confusing.

DAVID

(remembers) Oh, there were those songs I wanted to play for you...

LIPSKY

Oh, yeah!

David goes through his CDs. He plays one.

DAVID

First, this is Eno.

LIPSKY

*What's* the name of it again?

DAVID

"The Big Ship." Off an album called *Another Green World*.

They listen. David softly sings along. He ejects the disc and puts in the second one.

DAVID

OK, now this is Bush. "Glycerine."

They listen.

DAVID

See? Pure Eno! A direct steal.

LIPSKY

Wow, you're right.

LATER. The dogs are asleep, snoring. Exhausted, the Davids lounge around the living room. Music playing. Tape running.

LIPSKY

Look, I'm leaving in the morning and I've got to ask you... this rumor...

DAVID

Oh, come on, the heroin thing again? It isn't true. Why is that so hard for you to believe?

LIPSKY

The reason that it's hard is that there's so much about drugs and addiction in the book...

DAVID

That doesn't mean it's autobiographical, the drug stuff in the book is basically a metaphor. Look at you. You don't fucking believe a word I'm saying, do you.

LIPSKY

I didn't say that.

DAVID

I was *not* and *never* was a heroin addict.

LIPSKY

The rumor I heard... in the late '80s, when you were at Harvard, you'd gotten involved with drugs and had some kind of breakdown...

DAVID

I don't know if I had a breakdown, I got really really depressed, and had to go on a suicide ward in Boston. I told you that. It had nothing to do with drugs. I mean, I'm somebody who spent most of his life in *libraries*. I never lived that kind of dangerous life. I wouldn't stick a needle in my arm.

LIPSKY

How do you think that rumor got started?

DAVID

I have no idea. To tell you truly, if you structured this as some "and then he spiraled into some terrible addiction thing," it would be inaccurate. It was more like, I got more and more unhappy. And the more unhappy I would get, the more I would notice that I would be drinking a lot more. And there wasn't any joy in the drinking. I used it for anesthesia.

LIPSKY

Were you a falling-down drinker? A waking-up-in-the-curb drinker?

DAVID

No, that's the whole thing. A lot of my reticence about this is it just won't be very good copy. Because I wasn't that way at all!

LIPSKY

I'm gonna stop pushing in a second.

DAVID

But I'm also aware that some addictions are sexier than others. I told you: my primary addiction in my entire life has been to television. Television addiction is of far less interest to readers than the idea of heroin, you know, something that confirms this mythos of the writer -

LIPSKY

You know I don't believe that myth.

DAVID

I know you don't believe that. But I also know that among the things swirling around here is you want the best fucking article you can have! You can write whatever the fuck you want, but the fact of the matter is, it was not a *Lost Weekend* sort of thing. Nor was it like some lurid, romantic writer-as-alcoholic-type-thing. What it came down to was I was a twenty-eight year-old person who really exhausted a couple other ways to live, you know? And really taken them to their conclusion.

Which for me was a pink room, with no furniture and a drain in the center of the floor. Which is where they put me for an entire day when they thought I was going to kill myself. Where you don't have anything on, and somebody's observing you through a slot in the wall. And when *that* happens to you, you get *tremendously* willing to examine other alternatives for how to live.

David stands.

DAVID

Now, if you will excuse me, I'm going to bed. Interview over.

He walks out of the room, leaving Lipsky behind, his head reeling. Lipsky presses stop on the tape recorder.

INT. DAVID'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Lipsky, still digesting the conversation, looks at himself in the mirror while brushing his teeth. He spits into the sink.

INT. DAVID'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Lipsky is in bed, still awake in the moonlight. The door ajar, David knocks and sticks his head in. He speaks softly, in shadow. He can't be seen and can't see Lipsky very well; it's sort of like confession.

DAVID

You awake?

LIPSKY

Yeah.

DAVID

I was just thinking... There's a thing in the book: when people jump out of a burning skyscraper, it's not that they're not afraid of falling anymore, it's that the alternative is so awful. And then you're invited to consider what could be so awful, that leaping to your death seems like an escape from it. I don't know if you've had any experience with this. It's worse than any kind of physical injury, it may be what in the old days was called a spiritual crisis.

Feeling as though every axiom of your life turned out to be false, and there was actually nothing, and you were nothing, and it was all a delusion. And that you were better than everyone else because you saw that it was a delusion, and yet you were worse because you couldn't function. And it was just horrible. I don't think we ever *change*. I mean, I'm sure there are still those same parts of me. I've just got to find a way not to let them *drive*. Y'know?

(Pause.)

It wasn't a chemical imbalance, and it wasn't drugs and alcohol. It was more just, I think I had lived an incredibly *American* life. That, "Boy, if I could just achieve X and Y and Z, everything would be OK." (A beat.) It's interesting to me the ways we sort of converge and differ.

LIPSKY

Yeah?

DAVID

What actors you like and don't like, what books. There's a couple writers I know really well who I've known for years. But this is weird 'cause I like only met you a couple days ago.

LIPSKY

I know; I feel the same way.

DAVID

It's kind of *intense*.

LIPSKY

Yeah, it is.

DAVID

In a couple of hours, you drive away, get on a plane, this is over. And I'm back, you know, to knowing about twenty people. Then I'm going to have to like *decompress* from getting all this attention. Because it's like getting *heroin* injected into your *cortex*. And where I'm going to need balls is to be able to sit there and go through that. And try to remind myself that, you know...

what the reality is, is bein' thirty-four, alone in a room with a piece of paper. (A beat.) Well, anyway... Good night.

LIPSKY

Good night.

David goes. Lipsky scrambles to get his pad and scribbles notes so he won't forget David at his most revealing.

INT. DAVID'S GUEST ROOM - MORNING

Morning light falls across Lipsky's face. He stirs, gets up.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE

Lipsky heads for the bathroom just as David emerges from it.

LIPSKY

Morning.

DAVID

I wouldn't go in just yet. I just wrecked some serious havoc in there.

LATER. Morning Edition is on in the background. David gathers leashes and his dogs. Lipsky, now dressed, enters the living room and puts on his shoes.

LIPSKY

Did you hear? George Burns died.

DAVID

How old was he?

LIPSKY

100.

DAVID

Wow. Maybe someone just dispatched him with a club, figuring that was the only way. (to dogs) Boys!

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - ENVIRONS - MORNING

David and Lipsky are out on a wintry field, walking the dogs. Jeeves pees in the snow; Drone sniffs.

DAVID

You get instantaneous production from the Jeevester; Drone's a much tougher nut.

LIPSKY  
Beautiful out here.

DAVID  
You should see: in the spring, when the wind blows, you can see ripples, like water. Like the ocean, except it's really green. I mean, it really is. Really calm, really pretty. (Pause.) Hungry?

LIPSKY  
You know *me*.

They turn back toward the house. David calls the dogs.

DAVID  
Jeeves, Drone, come!

LIPSKY  
Let me take you someplace nice this time. Remember, it's on Jann.

INT. MCDONALD'S - DAY

The counter girl bags an enormous amount of food.

COUNTER GIRL  
Two bacon double cheeseburgers, two large fries, two apple pies, one coffee, small; two super-large Diet Cokes... That comes to...

Lipsky pays for it.

LIPSKY  
Can I have a receipt, please?

David takes the bags.

DAVID  
(to the girl) Not all for us. We're from a bus out there.

They leave. Linger a moment as the girl cranes her head and sees them get into the Grand Am.

INT. CAR / EXT. MCDONALD'S PARKING LOT - DAY

David tucks into the takeout bag.

DAVID  
Sorry, I can't wait, I'm suddenly starving, I gotta eat something.

David picks pickles off his bacon double cheeseburger.  
Lipsky makes a mental note. David sees him.

DAVID

Great. Now the whole world will know  
what my mother's known for years: I'm  
a picky eater.

He takes a bite.

DAVID

Mmm. This shit is bad, but in a  
really good way.

He sets down the burger, starts up the car and pulls out.

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The dogs are in David and Lipsky's faces while the men eat.

DAVID

(Bible-epic voice) "They ate. And it  
was good." Jeeves, sit! You see,  
Jeeves gets very obedient when food is  
around. You sit, Drone. It should be  
clear by now that you're not getting  
any of this.

Drone sits. David feeds both dogs morsels of his food.

DAVID

Good dog! There you go, thatta boy.  
(to Lipsky) Don't leave food within  
their reach - they *will* eat it.

Lipsky takes a note.

DAVID

Oh, shit, you're not gonna make me  
look like one of those insane old  
women who talk to their dogs, are you?

LIPSKY

Don't worry.

DAVID

I *am* worried: my dogs'll be offended.

LIPSKY

Your dogs are not gonna *read* it.

Drone playfully nudges Lipsky to the floor.

DAVID

Wow - he's never taken to a male like he's taken to you. Except for me, that is.

Jeeves piles on, too, and Lipsky laughs delightedly as he rolls around with the dogs. David watches.

DAVID

You want to know what my life is like? That's what my life is like.

The phone rings. David gets it.

DAVID

(on the phone) Hello? Oh, hey.

He turns away from Lipsky and lowers his voice but Lipsky can still hear him.

DAVID

Yeah, I *would* like to. I can't right now. I've got this guy here.

Lipsky is devastated: After all the intimacy they shared, Lipsky is just "this guy."

DAVID

The *Rolling Stone* guy. Yeah. Well, he should be leaving pretty soon. Why don't I just meet you there? Okay? Great. See you there. Bye.

He hangs up. Lipsky tries not to show his hurt.

LIPSKY

I should get out of here, let you get on with your life.

DAVID

Just this friend. This dance I like to go to, with this friend.

LIPSKY

You dance?

DAVID

Uh huh. I've just discovered in the last few years that I really like it. Although I'm not very good at it.

LIPSKY

What kind of dancing?

DAVID  
The Jerk, The Swim, cheesy 70s disco.

LIPSKY  
Seriously?

DAVID  
The nice thing about Bloomington?  
You're completely hip if you do that.

LIPSKY  
Where do you go, a club?

DAVID  
A black Baptist church.

LIPSKY  
Why there?

DAVID  
Because black Baptists can *dance*.

LIPSKY  
Wow. Dancing.

DAVID  
I don't Vogue. That's the one thing I  
refuse to do:

CUT TO:

INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE. APT. (2008)

Lipsky, listening to David's voice, smiles ruefully.

DAVID'S VOICE  
(on tape) I will not Vogue. It's  
cool. All these people come, and  
they've all got their dancing shoes on  
and stuff. And it's nice. Everybody  
just, more or less, leaves each other  
alone.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM (1996)

The previous scene, continued.

DAVID  
Hey, before you leave, I would really  
like it if maybe we should exchange  
address data or something.

LIPSKY

Absolutely. (A beat.) Well, I should get my stuff together.

DAVID

And I should start carving an ice sculpture out of my car. It's like fucking Antarctica.

David grabs his coat and gloves and goes to his garage. Soon we hear the sound of David scraping ice off his car, which is heard throughout the following:

Lipsky goes from room to room, as if memorizing this time and place, softly describing what he sees into his recorder. QUICK INTERCUTS between him and the objects he rattles off.

LIPSKY

(into the device) Dog stuff. Throw toys, chew toys. Crap stains on carpet. Shark doll on bookcase.

(He bumps his head.)

Low chandelier. Um, American flag. Surrealist posters. Alanis. Coal-burning fireplace. Brick wall. Fake wood-paneling. Soda cans. Lots and lots of 'em. Diet Rite. Looks like a frat; the bookish frat. Botticelli calendar: Birth of Venus. Gold and silver chess set. Postcard of Updike! Cartoon: Comparative anatomy: Brains - Male, Female, Dog.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM

LIPSKY (CONT'D)

Barney towel used as curtain. Photo of German philosophers. Photo collage of his family, the kind kids put in their dorm rooms. His sister is pretty, looks like a female him. Clothes everywhere: sneakers, stuff on the floor, clothes draped over stuff.

INT. DAVID'S BATHROOM

LIPSKY (CONT'D)

Padded toilet seat. Postcards: Baboons. Clintons. St. Ignatius: "Lord teach me to be generous. / ...to give and not count the cost, / to toil and not seek for rest / to labor and not ask for reward..."

## INT. DAVID'S GUEST ROOM

The scraping is still heard. Lipsky packs tapes, the recorder and his belongings. We see a loafer on the floor he overlooks. About to zip up his bag, he looks inside and sees his book, *The Art Fair*.

## INT. DAVID'S GARAGE

Lipsky finds David systematically scraping away at his car.

DAVID

Driving that rental of yours? The feeling of *gliding*? This shit heap didn't even have shock absorbers.

LIPSKY

What *is* it?

DAVID

'85 Nissan Sentra. I know it didn't look like much, but, man, this thing *starts*. It's actually a terrible problem.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

'Cause I gotta get a new one but I *can't* junk this.

LIPSKY

Why not?

DAVID

It's my *friend*.

Pause.

LIPSKY

David, I, uh...

Lipsky shyly presents David with a copy of his book.

DAVID

Oh, hey. Just happened to have it on you?

LIPSKY

I debated with myself whether or not I should I do this.

DAVID

Why not?

LIPSKY

I don't know, you don't think this is like some pathetic, kid-brother sort of thing for me to be doing?

DAVID

No. Thanks, man, I look forward to reading it.

LIPSKY

You're welcome. I wrote my address and e-mail on the flyleaf.

DAVID

Excellent. I'll read it soon as I'm done with the Heinlein and I'll send you a note.

LIPSKY

Great.

David flips through the book.

DAVID

I'll be curious to see what it's like being inside *your* head for a change. I like your cover.

LIPSKY

Yeah, me, too. I had them use the cover art for the British edition.

DAVID

You got approval but I - ?(stops himself) Really nice.

LIPSKY

Thanks.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DAY

Lipsky puts his bag in the Grand Am and slams the trunk. David and the dogs have followed him out to his car.

LIPSKY

So, all in all, isn't it reassuring that a lot of people are reading you and saying you're a really strong writer?

DAVID

It'd be very interesting to talk to you in a few years.

LIPSKY

Why do you say that?

DAVID

'Cause my own experience is that that's not so. That the more people think that you're really good, actually the bigger the fear of being the fraud is. And that the worst thing about having a lot of attention paid to you, is that you're afraid of *bad* attention. If bad attention hurts you, then the calibre of the weapon that's pointed at you has gone way up. Like from a .22 to a .45. But yeah, there's a part of me that *wants* a lot of attention. And that thinks I'm really good, and wants other people to see it. It's one of the ways I think we're sort of alike, you know?

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

DAVID

Let's face it, specimens like us, we could've gone *pre-med*, or Wall Street or something. And that would have been a much more... *American* way to go. You know?

Lipsky smiles and nods. Pause.

LIPSKY

(in farewell) Well...

Lipsky's awkward attempt at a hug - unreciprocated by David - turns into a clumsy handshake. Lipsky gets into the car. David stands at his window.

DAVID

Trust me: You don't want to be me.

LIPSKY

I don't?

David shakes his head.

DAVID

I'm not sure *I* want to be me.  
(A beat. He smiles.)  
Hey, send my best to "Jann."

LIPSKY

Will do.

Lipsky shuts his door, starts the car and pulls away while David calls to his dogs and wrangles them toward the house.

INT. CAR / EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - BLOOMINGTON

Lipsky watches David in the rearview mirror get smaller and smaller until he disappears from view without ever having looked back at his visitor. From the barren, grey, midwestern landscape we hear traffic sounds and

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. BUILDING - DAY (1996)

The urban landscape of Central Park West, near the Museum of Natural History.

INT. LIPSKY'S W. 77TH ST. APT. - DAY (1996)

Lipsky is typing at his keyboard. The doorbell buzzes.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Lipsky beholds a parcel. The return address is "David Wallace." What could it be? He excitedly slices open the box and peels away newspaper to reveal: A single loafer. And a message written on a Chicago Bears note pad: "Yours, I presume?" Accompanied by a smiley face. Nothing on the reverse. That's all. Huh. Lipsky smiles in bemusement.

LIPSKY (V.O.)

When I think of this trip...

CUT TO:

INT. BARNES & NOBLE BOOKSTORE (2010)

Lipsky reads from his published book, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, to a nice-sized crowd (including Sarah and Bob, his editor).

LIPSKY

(reads) ...I see David and me in the front seat of the car.

Intercut - flashES back to the car ride, as described. We see them talking animatedly but cannot hear them; all we hear is R.E.M. on the radio and the sound of tires on the road.

LIPSKY (V.O.)

We are both so young. He wants something better than he has; I want precisely what he has already. Neither of us knows where our lives are going to go. It's nighttime. It smells like chewing tobacco, soda, and smoke. R.E.M. is playing. And the conversation is the best one I ever had.

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH DANCE HALL - BLOOMINGTON (1996)

Lipsky imagines, in slow-motion, David dancing the Jerk, joyously, sweating like crazy, with members of the Baptist church the night Lipsky left, the night that began the rest of his life.

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

David thought books existed to stop you from feeling lonely. If I could, I'd say to David that living those days with him reminded me of what life is like, instead of being a relief from it, and I'd say it made me feel much less lonely to read.

The screen suddenly goes black.

**THE END**

*David Lipsky's interview with David Foster Wallace was never written. Rolling Stone decided not to publish it after all.*

FAUX "OUTTAKES" are intercut during the closing crawl:

I. INT. CAR / EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

LIPSKY

So tell me more about your Alanis Morissette obsession.

DAVID

Ah, my Alanis Morissette obsession... followed my Melanie Griffith obsession.

LIPSKY  
A Melanie Griffith obsession?

DAVID  
For six years. Preceded by something I will tell you that I got teased a lot for - you gotta promise you won't laugh -

LIPSKY  
Promise.

DAVID  
- which was a terrible *Margaret Thatcher* obsession.

LIPSKY  
You fucking kidding me?

DAVID  
Hey. I'm opening up to you, man.

LIPSKY  
I'm sorry, I'm sorry. When was this Maggie Thatcher obsession?

DAVID  
All through college.

LIPSKY  
And how did it manifest itself?

DAVID  
*Posters* of Margaret Thatcher, *ruminations* on Margaret Thatcher...

LIPSKY  
Sexual?

DAVID  
*Unspecifically* sexual. *Sensuous* perhaps.

LIPSKY  
You're gonna have to be more specific.

DAVID  
It involved - like having *tea* with Margaret Thatcher? Having her really enjoy something I said, *lean forward* and cover my hand with hers? "Oh, David, how marvelous!"

Lipsky is cracking up.

## II. INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DAVID

I mean, I didn't really go through puberty till I was like nineteen.

LIPSKY

By puberty, you mean, your body getting bigger, 'cause you obviously developed gonads and crap like that, right?

DAVID

My voice didn't change till I was nineteen. Had my first wet dream when I was like seventeen. I told everybody about it.

LIPSKY

I didn't have a wet dream until I was twenty-two.

DAVID

Pretty late.

LIPSKY

I tried to swear off masturbating once for about three months. Or I wasn't going to have one.

DAVID

People have wet dreams, even if they're masturbating. Otherwise no one would ever have one.

LIPSKY

Well - I thought if I preserved my natural bodily fluids...

DAVID

Mr. Lipsky has said, he finally stopped masturbating *in order to have a wet dream!*

Lipsky is laughing.

## III. INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Replay a scene we saw earlier (when Lipsky excused himself to spit out the chewing tobacco).

LIPSKY

You mind if I use your uh...

David points the way to the bathroom.

DAVID

All yours.

Lipsky goes, leaving David with the tape running. But this time, instead of following Lipsky, we break form and stay on David:

DAVID

(into the recorder) Now it's just me and the tape recorder sittin' here. Drone's lookin' at the floor, I'm smokin', having said I wasn't going to smoke, I'm smokin'. Just talkin' to your tape recorder.

**The SCREEN GOES BLACK for the very last time.**