

SOUND OF METAL

written by

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HE HEARS HEAVY FEEDBACK, BUILDING AND SQUEALING...

INT. CLUB STAGE - NIGHT

Harsh white lights illuminate RUBEN (40), beady eyes, punk-like, weathered boyish face and tattoos everywhere. He's waiting, intensely, for the beginning, for it all to start. He looks up and his focus locks in tight on Lou (30) an assured, freak, creature dressed in black, with an air of royalty about her. The loop of her sound grows. Guitar pedals and synthesizers lay on the stage floor as she looks to Ruben with a suddenly manic intensity. She picks up her beat up Telecaster and strikes a chord with surprising menace. She stomps on her looping pedal. The sound hisses low, wild and bracing. Ruben stares and waits, poised... he can almost taste her sweat. She flashes a quick glance toward him and Ruben unleashes, bringing the sticks down upon his drums with pure demonic ecstasy. Lou leans in towards the microphone, relishing the moment. Her desperate and distorted scream fills the hall. The whites of Ruben's eyes flash as if igniting an erotic charge, this glorious being, merging with him. Sweat drips from Ruben's hair and his eyes burn in an endless climax... or pain.

SOUND OF METAL

INT. AIRSTREAM - MORNING

We hear the slightest whistle of a breeze... a squeak... subtle noises from the outside world as...

Ruben sits up suddenly and looks around a small, oddly shaped room at the back end of an old Airstream trailer. He looks down at Lou as if expecting her to be gone. She's asleep and immediately unrecognizable from her severe on-stage persona. He stares at her pale, unmade face, eyes closed... he imagines her dreams, complex, dark and rich with meaning. Ruben listens...A leaf blower outside in the distance. he gets up.

He pulls open the window curtain over a tiny dining table. The morning light blinds his eyes and illuminates the interior of the AIRSTREAM. This is the living, kitchen, dining and war room of an obsessed audiophile. Instruments, cords, mixing boards, reel-to-reel tape recorders, mics, all tightly hung and fit into the tiny space. Sound equipment coexists with other items of kitsch collected over years of nomadic living.

Ruben peers out the window. He looks for signs of danger, anything...

INT. AIRSTREAM - MORNING

The SOUND OF COFFEE DRIPPING AND GURGLING into a coffee pot.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben packs green vegetables and spices into a blender. He presses his hand down and the blender THRASHES LOUDLY.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben performs his daily stretches and pushups.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben, with laser focus, cleans out some electrical equipment with compressed air... fastidious... borderline OCD...

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben places a record on a turntable and a surprisingly tender, blues song from the 1920's plays. Ruben slowly turns up the volume.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben makes breakfast, sets food and smoothies on the small dining table.

RUBEN

Lou!

INT. AIRSTREAM - MORNING

Ruben walks from the living room to the back of the airstream. He looks at Lou sleeping...

RUBEN

Hey Lulu.

No response. Ruben stares. He grabs a pair of drum sticks and sits on the bed next to her. With great focus, he begins to slowly drum a beat on the backs of covered thighs... this goes on for a minute before Lou groans sleepily... the rhythm picks up steam. Ruben's drumming and sound effects grow louder and faster... He's in full drum solo now...

LOU

Stop...

INT. AIRSTREAM - LATER

Close intimate shot of Ruben and Lou dancing together to a 1960's soul song. Ruben is silly enough that Lou finally laughs. This is their routine.

EXT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

The airstream flies by into the endless, rolling, American landscape.

INT. AIRSTREAM - LATER

Ruben drives and Lou sits in the passenger seat.

LOU AND RUBEN

(Singing in deep voices)

And I would do anything FOR LOVE!
But I won't do that.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

What's left for him to not do?

LOU

Anal.

(Singing again)

No no- but I won't do that.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben and Lou still talking and driving as overpasses fly by on the highway.

RUBEN

I use to imagine Jeff Goldbloom was my Dad. I saw him in The fucking Fly- I was like that must be what my Dad looks like. Also explains a lot because the dudes fucking weird. But he looks like me man.

LOU

It's true. Yeah.

RUBEN

YEAH!

LOU

You kind of look like Jeff Goldbloom.

INT. AIRSTREAM - LATER

Ruben and Lou still driving.

RUBEN

Why is it okay to use a toothpick
in public but not floss? Have you
ever tried that?

LOU

To floss my teeth in public?

RUBEN

To floss- you're just at the dinner
table and-

LOU

No-

RUBEN

-you pull out some floss and shit?

INT. AIRSTREAM - LATER

Ruben and Lou drive through a inner city.

LOU

I used to imagine my funeral a lot
when I was a kid. At school, in
math.

RUBEN

FUN.

LOU

I used to day dream about my
funeral then I'd make myself cry.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Still driving.

LOU

Uh yeah- I think I'd get cremated
what about you?

RUBEN

Cremated or like just fed to the
birds, you know?

LOU

Well you know now you can get ashes
put into tattoo ink. My face on
your back where the clown is.

RUBEN

What?!

LOU

Yeah.

RUBEN

(Singing)

Scary clown face. Scary clown face.

INT. SILO CLUB - DAY

Ruben and Lou set up their funky version of a MERCH TABLE. Lou talks with ANOTHER MEMBER OF A BAND while Ruben sets out various spray painted pieces of original art and a stack of vinyl to sell. Suddenly, out of nowhere, A RINGING SOUND enters Ruben's ears... he tilts his head as if trying to dislodge it... Ruben stands frozen, waiting for the sound to abate. It doesn't. He looks at Lou. She looks up at him and smiles. He looks away.

INT. SILO CLUB - STAGE - NIGHT

On stage, Ruben slams away at his drums in deep concentration as Lou screams torturously in the background. We push toward him as the RINGING SOUND again takes over and then gives way to a LOW VIBRATIONAL, THUMPING OF HIS DRUMS.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MORNING

MUFFLED QUIETNESS. Ruben's eyes open painfully... The trace of daylight coming through the closed curtain... He turns anxiously glancing at Lou's peaceful face, asleep on the pillow... He pulls himself out of bed, very carefully so as not to wake Lou and enters the bathroom... he studies his ears in the mirror, almost expecting to find a bug or creature hiding inside.

He makes A NOISE IN HIS THROAT. It registers in his ears as DAMP AND MUFFLED.

He COUGHS. MUFFLED.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben takes a quick shower... lost in worry... The SOUND OF THE WATER is just barely audible.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MORNING

The MUFFLED SOUND OF COFFEE DRIPPING into a coffee pot.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

The MUFFLED SOUND OF A BLENDER.

INT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Lou watches the hood shut from the passenger seat. She studies Ruben, wearing headphones, as he makes his way to the door and into the Airstream. She notes his odd, vacant state... he glances at her nervously as he starts the engine.

LOU

You okay?

Ruben can't hear, doesn't respond as he pulls forward, looks at her and musters an incongruous smile.

INT. CELLAR ROOM CLUB - AFTERNOON

Ruben sweats profusely as he finishes loading in the last of Lou's 3 giant amplifiers... he glances at Lou as she begins sound check... increased panic... he starts walking off stage... turns back to Lou...

RUBEN

Lulu... gotta run around the corner
and grab something.

Lou says something back to him but he can't hear.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

I'll just be sec ok?

He turns awkwardly and exits...

INT. PHARMACY - AFTERNOON

Ruben frantically walks toward a pharmacy counter and waits for the PHARMACIST to finish talking to someone.

PHARMACIST
Can I help you find something?

RUBEN
What?

PHARMACIST
Can I help you?

Ruben moves toward him. He doesn't want to talk for fear he's talking too loud. He overcompensates by talking too softly.

RUBEN
Um. I'm having a funny thing with my ears today.

PHARMACIST
Pardon me?

RUBEN
I'm having a problem with my ears.

The pharmacist nods.

PHARMACIST
And what's going on?

RUBEN
What was that?

PHARMACIST
(loudly)
What's going on with your ears?

RUBEN
Oh uh... It's a ringing and-

PHARMACIST
Uh huh. In both ears?

The pharmacist speaks up and gestures to both ears.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)
BOTH EARS?

INT. PHARMACY - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben watches the pharmacist making a phone call. He looks at his phone, sees that texts have come in from Lou. He switches his phone to vibrate then looks up to see the pharmacist motioning and giving him a thumbs up.

PHARMACIST

Can you go now? He can see you
right now.

Ruben stares.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)

NOW.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruben sits and waits, texts that he's dealing with some shit
but not to worry. A NURSE CALLS HIS NAME. He doesn't hear.
She taps him on the shoulder, startling him.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SOUND BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben sits in a sound booth. He is terribly nervous and
totally claustrophobic... He drums his fingers on his pants.
A DOCTOR enters the booth and helps him put headphones on. He
leaves and shuts the door behind him. Ruben's breathing
increases. Then he hears A LOUD, VOICE.

DOCTOR

You hear me in both ears?

RUBEN

What?...

Ruben now has headphones on. The doctor sits in the
foreground.

DOCTOR

Okay we're just going to get
started in your right ear okay?

Ruben looks confused.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

What I want is for you to repeat
the words back to me. They're going
to stay at this level I just want
the last word back okay?

RUBEN

Sorry?

DOCTOR

REPEAT THEM... THE WORDS, OKAY?
JUST REPEAT THEM.

Ruben nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Say the word base.

RUBEN
Mm....

The doctor moves on quickly. Ruben get's increasingly more nervous.

DOCTOR
Say the word mess.

RUBEN
Uh... Bent?

DOCTOR
Say the word cause.

RUBEN
...Cars?

DOCTOR
Say the word mop.

RUBEN
... Not sure.

DOCTOR
Mop.

Ruben can't speak. He laughs nervously.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Say the word youth.

Ruben scratches his head...

INT. AUDIOLOGIST OFFICE - DAY

The doctor goes over to a shelf and takes out some headphones and hands them to Ruben. He gestures for Ruben to put them on. He does...

DOCTOR
Can you hear me?

The doctors voice is small, tinny and distant as he speaks into the microphone.

RUBEN
Hear you?... Yeah, kind of.

Ruben presses his hands against the headphones to hear.

DOCTOR
 (loud and clear)
 This music you play; this is how
 you make your living?

RUBEN
 Yes sir.

DOCTOR
 Okay that's ah... that's an issue.

Ruben stares... shocked.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 Is this particularly loud music
 you're playing?

RUBEN
 Loud?...

The doctor gets Ruben's chart. Looks it over and then holds
 it up for Ruben.

DOCTOR
 These are your charts Ruben.
 Normal speech discrimination is 100
 percent. You were under 30 percent
 in the right and 25 in the left.
 That meant that no matter how high
 she turned up the volume, you still
 missed 70 to 80 percent of the
 words. That's really ominous.

RUBEN
 What was that?

DOCTOR
 OMINOUS, not good.

RUBEN
 Ah... Okay? So... What's the deal?
 How do I get it back?

The doctor nods slowly.

DOCTOR
 Well-

RUBEN
 I mean, its normal or what?

DOCTOR

No not at all normal. Sudden hearing loss is common enough by itself, and certainly with the sort of noise you've exposed yourself to it needs to be considered but in your case with both ears and this level of severity we need to look to a number of other possible causes as well - can I ask, do you have any hereditary auto immune issues in your family that you're aware of?

Ruben's confused...

RUBEN

What? I don't know-

DOCTOR

How's your parents health... or grandparents?

Ruben stares intensely.

RUBEN

I'm sorry?

DOCTOR

The reason I ask Ruben is that it could help us determine whether this might be a disease or not-

RUBEN

Huh?

DOCTOR

Are you having any joint pain lately?

RUBEN

What? In my ears?

DOCTOR

Mr. Davis I'm trying to help you get to the bottom of this-

RUBEN

IT'S NOT A DISEASE. I just need to figure out something uh- What can you give me to help clear this out a little?

DOCTOR
I don't follow.

RUBEN
I mean is there a medication kind
of thing to put in my ear and clear
this out or what?

DOCTOR
Right... Ruben...
(sighs)
I understand this is all quite
shocking for you but I need you to
understand something. Whether this
is somehow a result of over
exposure to noise or it's an
autoimmune issue, your hearing is
deteriorating very rapidly. Right?

RUBEN
Well-

DOCTOR
And over the next days or even
hours it will likely get worse-

RUBEN
Dude, I'm asking you what can I do?

DOCTOR
First thing, as a precaution is I
would absolutely eliminate exposure
to loud noises. Then once we have
run some tests and identified
exactly what is going on with your
ears we can have some other
conversations-

RUBEN
What other conversations? About
what?

DOCTOR
Well in the event of permanent loss
there are procedures we can
discuss-

RUBEN
Like what? What procedures?

DOCTOR
Like for instance. Cochlear
Implants-

RUBEN
What are those?

DOCTOR
Cochlear implants?

RUBEN
Yeah what are they? They work?

DOCTOR
They can be very effective for people with severe hearing loss or complete deafness yes-

RUBEN
Uh huh. So let's do that then.

The doctor chuckles.

DOCTOR
Well not so simple. There are many details and it's quite costly.

RUBEN
What?

DOCTOR
(loudly)
EXPENSIVE.

RUBEN
How much? Like what general kind of price?

DOCTOR
Well they range between 40 and 80 thousand depending... and unfortunately they're not covered by insurance.

Ruben nods slowly.

RUBEN
Okay... and when could this happen? Do you have them... in stock?

Ruben stares at the doctor...

DOCTOR
Cochlear implants? No Ruben that's a very involved process as well as an invasive surgery. But once we've identified the issues we can have that conversation. Okay?

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

As I said before; the one thing you should be focused on right now is protecting what hearing you have left...

Rubens stares lifelessly.

HARD CUT:

INT. THE CELLAR ROOM, STAGE - LATER

Red lights strobe on Ruben's sweat ridden face as he crushes his sticks against the drums. He tries to hold on to an impossibly thin thread of sound. As we move closer into Ruben's eyes we see a deep well of hurt... The strobing lights continue, illuminating flashes of Ruben's face in various poses of demonic ecstasy and pain... The song builds as Ruben hits harder and harder... Suddenly, the crackle of sound breaks up... Ruben's no longer hearing Lou or his own drums. His drumming and Lou's playing is suddenly out of sync. She looks back at him, abruptly broken out of her spell, her eyes full of confusion. Ruben panics. He continues to play in shock - staring hard at Lou, trying desperately to hold on to her rhythm and his place in the song, his place in the world. She looks at him closely as she plays the final chord. Ruben glances at the crowd, paranoid, devastated in his horrible, emerging silence. He stops playing, puts down his sticks. Lou is shocked. Ruben gets up and pushes his way through the crowd, down a hall, up stairs and bursts out into an ally... no sound... the world has gone silent. He stares, terrified and alone... his hands shake.... He whips around feeling a hand on his shoulder. Lou is standing there. She reacts immediately to his demeanor. She speaks but Ruben doesn't hear...

LOU (SILENT)

What the fuck? What happened?

Ruben stares at her voiceless screams... unresponsive... Lou can see Ruben's pain. She is crying now...

LOU (CONT'D)

Rubi, what's happening? What's wrong?

Ruben looks at her, total terror in his eyes... he speaks but can't hear his own voice...

RUBEN

I can't hear anything.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Close up of coffee spinning in a mug. Lou, still in her concert outfit, looks at Ruben as he twirls his glass. She writes on a piece of paper with a shaky hand: WILL IT COME BACK?... And slides it to Ruben... Ruben reads, trying to act calm...

RUBEN

It will when I get surgery...
There's an implant thing. The put
it in your shit. It's fine. It's
easy. Forty grand or Eighty or
something... so, but... yeah-

Ruben glances up to catch Lou's freshly heartbroken face... tears running down her cheeks... she tries to pull herself together. She stares at Ruben's hand tapping nervously...

RUBEN (CONT'D)

We just gotta figure it out. We'll
play tomorrow night and see how it
goes. I'll just be like a click
track, you can play to me-

Lou tries to speak-

RUBEN (CONT'D)

It'll be different but it is what
it is.

Lou stares at Ruben like he's an alien.

LOU

Um-No.

She writes on a scrap of paper: WE'RE NOT PLAYING ANYTHING RUBEN. Slides it to Ruben... he reads.

RUBEN

Yes we are playing. We are.

Lou puts up her hands as if to say "What are you talking about?"

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Lou. We have a fucking tour booked.

LOU

No.

RUBEN

YES. ACTUALLY YES WE DO. WE HAVE A
TOUR BOOKED.

Lou looks anxiously at Ruben while at the same time massaging a quickly building pain in her stomach. Ruben pulls at his hair, unable to be in his skin. He SEES A GUY outside smoking a cigarette and he abruptly stands up from the table trying to break himself out of his daze.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Be back.

Lou watches Ruben walk away with deep concern in her eyes. She picks at her food alone, suppressing tears as she HEARS RUBEN outside ASKING SOMEONE FOR A SMOKE.

EXT. DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben takes the last sucks of a cigarette. His hands shake and his eyes dart around. He flicks the cigarette before heading back toward the diner.

INT. DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben picks at his food... Lou stares at him.

LOU

Were you?
(gesturing)
Smoking?

Ruben shrugs. Lou writes.

LOU (CONT'D)

What the fuck!

Lou seems surprisingly alarmed.

LOU (CONT'D)

We need to call Hector.

RUBEN

What?

Lou pantomimes calling and mouths the words HECTOR.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Why would I call Hector?

Lou stares.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Just cause I had a fucking
cigarette?
(Scratching head
furiously)
(MORE)

RUBEN (CONT'D)

I think even you'd probably have a cigarette too, don't you think?

Lou looks around... Ruben's being really loud.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

What?

LOU

I don't know.

RUBEN

What?!

LOU

Stop!! Relax...

RUBEN

COME AGAIN?

Lou looks at Ruben with frightened eyes ... Clearly scared... she gets up and goes around to his side of the booth and sits right next to him. She turns to him and takes his face and kisses his cheek and then she crosses her arm through his and she writes as Ruben watches in real time: ANSWER TRUTHFULLY. ARE YOU IN DANGER RIGHT NOW? Lou looks at Ruben... He looks ahead stiffly shaking his head slightly, but doesn't say no... She writes: LET'S CALL HECTOR. Ruben shakes his head. Lou writes PLEASE? - she underlines it and nods her head. She writes GO.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Now?

Lou nods her head.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

How am I gonna call Hector?

Lou motions to get on with it. Ruben takes out his phone and dials and passes it to Lou. Lou listens.

LOU

Hi Hector, sorry to wake you. It's Lou. Ruben's in some trouble. He has some hearing problems and...

Beat.

LOU (CONT'D)

Well I can put him on but he won't be able to hear you.... okay.

Lou passes phone to Ruben. Ruben makes a face-

RUBEN

S'up Hector. I can't hear anything in my ears so this is dumb but I know you'd be asking if I'm-
 (mocking his voice)
 -feeling unsteady? To which I'd say mm, yeah I don't but then you'd say "Ah Ruben did you know that serenity is what we get when we quit hoping for a better past?" And I'd say "Ah thanks Hector, that's helpful."

Lou shakes her head at Ruben.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Lou thinks I'm being rude or somethin but I'm totally fine I just had a fucking cigarette to calm my nerves-

Lou motions for the phone.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

My manager wants you back. Dude I'm all good. Thanks for chatting-

Ruben hands the phone back to Lou.

LOU

Hey... Yeah he's not hearing anything right now... I don't know how but-

She listens for a beat.

LOU (CONT'D)

Okay... I will. Okay thanks Hector.

Lou hangs up. Passes phone back.

RUBEN

What's the deal? That's it?

LOU

He's going to look into it and call back.

RUBEN

He has nothing to say?

LOU
 No he's going to call back...
 (Reuben still doesn't get
 it)
 He'll CALL BACK! CALLLLL BACKKK.

RUBEN
 What are you saying? Write it down.

Lou writes.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 He's gonna call back? That's it?
 Fucking Hector. So what the fuck do
 we do now? Let's just go Lulu-

LOU
 (overwhelmed)
 Go where?

But Ruben doesn't hear.

I/E. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Lou enters the airstream. Sees Ruben in the drivers seat, in
 a war with his seat belt. She watches him, scared, doesn't
 want him to drive. Her phone rings. She answers quickly.

LOU
 Hi.

She listens.

LOU (CONT'D)
 He's right here...

Beat.

LOU (CONT'D)
 Here. In the RV.

Beat.

LOU (CONT'D)
 Not so good...
 (listens, nods)
 Oh really?... Okay... where is it?

Lou sits in her seat across from Ruben.

LOU (CONT'D)
 Okay wow. Um... that's not close.
 It'll take us some time cuz
 we're... not close.

Ruben is watching her.

RUBEN
 That Hector?

Lou is frazzled, motions for him to shush.

LOU
 Nothing... Yeah okay...
 (beat)
 I don't know. Probably a couple
 days or something?
 (Beat)
 Yeah we'll leave right now.
 (Beat)
 No he'll drive-
 (she looks at Ruben)
 Cuz that's what's happening and he
 always drives-

RUBEN
 What?

LOU
 Okay thanks Hector. I really
 appreciate it... yeah I'll tell
 him. Thanks. Bye.

RUBEN
 What?

Lou pantomimes that Hector wants her to drive.

I/E. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Ruben drives on a northbound highway...

WE HEAR from his deaf POV, LOW VIBRATIONAL SOUNDS OF THE ROAD
 intermixed with SOUNDS OF NATURE and the hearing world.

INT. AIRSTREAM - NIGHT

Ruben and Lou sleep in the airstream.

I/E. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Ruben drives silently north on a cold, desolate highway...

INT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Further into the wilderness...

EXT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

The airstream flies by into the endless, rolling, American landscape...

I/E. JOE'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Ruben turns up a dirt road, surrounded by forest - consumed in anguish. He notices a sign, DEAF CHILD AREA.

RUBEN

You have service?

Lou shakes her head and peers forward, perhaps just as apprehensive as Ruben.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Shit.

They continue down a long dirt dead end road ending in a large, funky, rambling house. Ruben brings the Airstream to a stop in front of the house. He and Lou see A MAN, JOE, 70, walking out of the house, holding his DOG.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

That him? Must be...

Lou keeps looking at him. Ruben kills the engine. Joe sets his dog down.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben and Lou exit the trailer and walk toward Joe. He waives to say hi.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)

You must be Ruben?

RUBEN

Hey I'm Ruben. I don't do that but...

Joe smiles faintly, nods, points to the Airstream.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
That's quite a rig.

Joe motions "big".

RUBEN
Oh yeah. Right.

Joe turns to Lou and speaks normally.

JOE
Hello I'm Joe.

LOU
Hi. I'm Lou.

JOE
What was that? I read lips.

LOU
Oh. Um... My name's Lou.

JOE
Lou. Hi.

LOU
Hi.

Joe turns back to Ruben.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Shall we chat?

He makes the motion for talking to each other. Ruben stares at him blankly.

JOE (CONT'D)
Lou could I ask you to look after my beast for a bit while I borrow Ruben?

LOU
(looking at dog)
Oh yeah. Sure.

Joe gives Lou a couple treats.

JOE
Give him a couple of these and he'll love you forever. His names Louie after the shortstop Luis Aparicio. Pennant of '59.

LOU
Oh right-

Joe raises his eyebrows.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Anyhow. Okay Ruben-
(nodding his head to come)
Follow me.

RUBEN
What about Lou?
(turning to Lou)
Lou you coming?

LOU
It's okay. Go. Really.

RUBEN
You sure?

LOU
Yeah. I'm good.

Joe sticks his thumbs up.

JOE
You stay here Louie. Stay.

Lou motions for Louie, holding out a treat. Joe begins walking around the back of the house.

RUBEN
Okay. I'll be right back.

Lou nods. Watches Ruben walk away. Suddenly she's alone.

LOU
Louie. Come here.

EXT. BACK OF JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe walks in front of Ruben. JEREMY exits the back door of the house. Joe signs to him.

JOE (ASL)
(to Jeremy)
Can you help me with that program
thing Jeremy?

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruben sits in a small, shed like room while Joe watches JEREMY fiddle with a computer. Jeremy turns to Joe and signs to him.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
You just have to open YOU CAPTION
and then specify one headset or two
in the preferences...

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Just do it please Jeremy.

Jeremy shakes his head.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
What?

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Come on it's simple.

Joe looks up skeptically. Jeremy shrugs.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
Put on the headset.

Joe puts it on over his hat. Jeremy rolls his eyes.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
Say something.

Joe speaks in a gravelly voice without much accent.

JOE
Okay, uh. Test.

The words pop up on a screen. Joe looks at the screen and sees it's working.

JOE (CONT'D)
Oh good.

Chris signs to him.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Just press quit when you're done.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Where do I do that?

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
You have to learn this stuff Joe.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Can you run a chain saw Jeremy?

Jeremy stares at him and shakes his head.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Whatever. Just leave it. I'll come back.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Thank you, shut the door please.

Jeremy shuts the door and leaves.

JOE (CONT'D)
(Looking at Ruben)
Okay. So... It works. Is this okay?

Ruben reads the screen.

RUBEN
Yes.

JOE
How are you?

RUBEN
Um. Can you hear me?

JOE
No but I'm going to read your lips.
I might miss some things but I'll
try, okay? Try to speak clearly-

RUBEN
Okay...

JOE
How are you Ruben?

RUBEN
Um... Okay.

Ruben exhales... Joe nods.

JOE
Are you hearing anything now?

Ruben shakes his head.

RUBEN
No, Nothing.

Joe nods.

JOE
When did you lose your hearing?

RUBEN
Uh, a few days ago.

JOE
Oh. Really?

Joe glances at Ruben's leg shaking incessantly as if playing an invisible kick drum.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Lou sits on the step of the Airstream, petting Louie.

JOE (V.O.)
What sort of drugs?

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruben takes a deep, shaky breath.

RUBEN (V.O.)
What'd I take? Um, lots of things.
Heroin mainly.

JOE
Have you thought about using since
you lost your hearing?

RUBEN
... Uh... I mean, I don't know. But
I mean, I'm fine. I haven't taken
anything it's just kind of fucked
up, sorry, uh, you know it's messed
up right now with this-

Ruben gestures to his ears.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
So. I don't know.

JOE
What don't you know?

RUBEN
Uh- I just don't know. Today's not
a good day. I'm not feeling steady
today. But I'm mainly here because
of my girlfriend you know?

(MORE)

RUBEN (CONT'D)
I just don't want to mess
everything up for her.

JOE
How would you do that?

Ruben shrugs...

RUBEN
I don't know, I just don't want to.

JOE
And you think you might?

RUBEN
I don't know. Probably not.

JOE
Okay... let's talk about me.
(Pointing at himself)
I'm an alcoholic. Beer, you know?

RUBEN
(Dazed)
Good.

JOE
Good? No, not good Ruben.

RUBEN
No, I didn't mean that. I'm sorry.
Sorry. Not good-

JOE
I lost my hearing in the Vietnam
war when a bomb exploded near me.
Then I lost everything else, my
wife, my kid. Not because of being
deaf mind you. It was the beer
Ruben.

RUBEN
Okay. Sorry.

JOE
(stares at Ruben)
How long have you been clean?

RUBEN
Five years.

JOE
Five?

RUBEN

Yes sir.

JOE

And you want some help right now?

RUBEN

(Fidgeting)

Uh... No. I just need to get uh...
I need to figure out this hearing
stuff and yeah. But-I don't know.
This is a bad day. I'm not very
clear.

Ruben points to his head making an "I'm crazy gesture"

JOE

Okay. What about the addiction?

RUBEN

Um. I'm okay in that department.

Ruben puts his hands up as if to say "I don't know" Joe
stares blankly.

JOE

You're okay?

RUBEN

Yep.

JOE

So why are you here then Ruben?

Ruben stares for a beat, fishes for his phone, sees there's
no signal.

RUBEN

I should see if Lou is okay.

JOE

You worried about Lou?

RUBEN

I just don't know what she's doing.

JOE

How long have you two been
together?

RUBEN

Four years.

Joe nods, thinks.

JOE
You play music right?

Joe mimics someone playing guitar. Ruben makes a face.

RUBEN
No.

JOE
No?

RUBEN
Not any more - until I get the-
(Pointing to ear)
... implant.

JOE
Implant?

Ruben looks at the screen... nods. Joe looks unimpressed.

RUBEN
Oh, sorry. Do you know much about
these implants you can get?
Implant?

JOE
I know, yes.
(IN SIGN)
Expensive.
(Rubbing two fingers
together)

RUBEN
Oh right. Yeah well.

Silence for a beat. Ruben is getting increasingly antsy.

JOE
So you should understand Ruben that
this is a Deaf community. Not just
my program but we're part of a
larger deaf community of working
Deaf adults and Deaf children from
all over. And my program and those
in it, benefit tremendously from
that Deaf community. We work with
them and they work with us. But
it's very important if you want to
be here you understand that we're
looking for a solution to this...
(pointing at his
forehead.)
Not this...
(pointing to his ears)
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

In this community being Deaf is not thought of as a problem that needs to be fixed. You understand?

RUBEN

Okay. Yeah okay cool.

Ruben checks his phone again. Joe thinks.

JOE

Why don't you invite Lou to come in here?

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Lou stands in the front of the house. She stares at the nothingness, feeling very alone and terrified. her moment is interrupted by the sound of Ruben's voice.

RUBEN (O.C.)

Lou!

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Lou walks toward the wooden stairs leading up to Joe's office. Ruben is at the top of the stairs, holding the door open.

RUBEN

This guy wants to talk to you.

LOU

Okay.

I/E JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Lou and Ruben sit awkwardly.

JOE

I think it's important that you stay here with us right now Ruben. Learn some sign language? Find some solid ground. What do you think?

RUBEN

Sounds great but we got no money and-

JOE

Well sometimes our church sponsors deaf people in need of help. And right now you fit the bill Ruben.

Ruben rubs his face.

RUBEN

Well honestly we're not church people so-

JOE

Ruben can you please...?

Joe gestures for Ruben to not cover his face.

JOE (CONT'D)

I read lips, what did you say?

RUBEN

We're not religious. Either of us. Very much not into religion no offense.

JOE

Religion plays no part of this Ruben. The church helps PEOPLE in need, not just religious people. The most important thing is that you want to be here. If that's in place then I think we can find a way.

JOE (CONT'D)

(turning to Lou)

Do you think Ruben needs help right now Lou?

Lou stares, nods subtly.

JOE (CONT'D)

You understand that if Ruben was to come here, he'd have to do it on his own? Members live in one house together with no contact to the outside world - no phones. I've found that in all cases that's the way it works best. Can you help Ruben Commit to that Lou?

Lou is shocked. Ruben reads the screen, agitated.

RUBEN

We can just live in the RV. We have a house.

JOE

I'm sorry to say that's not the way this works Ruben.

RUBEN

Well that's a problem then.

Joe nods.

JOE

Is there anywhere you could be during this time Lou?

Lou is like a deer in the headlights. Ruben stands.

RUBEN

That's that man.

Ruben sticks his hand out and shakes Joe's hand.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Cheers dude. Thanks for your time.

Joe stands.

JOE

It's nice to meet you Ruben.

Ruben nods and exits. Joe opens the door for Lou and follows her down the stairs. She and Joe get to the bottom of the stairs as Ruben is already around the corner. Lou turns to Joe

LOU

So thanks. But can you tell us anything about the surgery thing? I think that's our main concern right now.

JOE

Cochlear implant surgery?

LOU

I know it's expensive but I thought maybe you could point us in the right direction so we can get everything going as fast as possible.

JOE

The surgery is not a fast process Lou. It's brain surgery. It takes months. So either way, Ruben will not be hearing for some time. It's important you understand this. He needs real support now and focusing on the surgery is actually not going to help him. In fact it could be very destructive.

LOU

Oh really?

Joe nods with certainty.

LOU (CONT'D)

Ok well-

JOE

This must not be so easy for you either. It seems like maybe you could use some support too.

Lou nods.

JOE (CONT'D)

Do you have anywhere you could go find some help if Ruben came here?

Lou takes her hand off her stomach, trying to stay strong.

LOU

Well I'm fine but it's just, I don't know-

JOE

Sometimes people won't get help for themselves until they know people they love are going to be okay.

LOU

Okay. Yeah. Thanks-

JOE

So if you have anywhere at all to land, consider doing that for Ruben's sake.

Lou nods.

LOU

Okay.

JOE

And Lou, don't hesitate on this.
Pull the bandaid off quick. It'll
hurt a lot less than the
alternative.

EXT. TOPS FIELD FAIR GROUNDS - NIGHT

The airstream is parked in a deserted fair grounds.

INT. AIRSTREAM - NIGHT

Lou scribbles in a journal in bed while Ruben sits at his
bedside workshop, fiddling loudly.

RUBEN

(a little too loud)

I think we should still go hit our
gig in Dayton Lulu. Seriously. I
can fucking watch you for cues. I
mean, it's not like we don't know
our shit. I can fucking make it
work until we have enough for the
surgery. We'll get there.

Ruben looks at Lou.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Really we're good to go.

He shuts the light off and gets in bed, puts his hand on
Lou's arm.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Come're little warthog.

LOU

Don't call me a warthog.

RUBEN

How's your tummy?

Lou puts her journal down and curls up in a ball next to
Ruben. He strokes her head.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Can I get you something? Tea?

Lou shakes her head no. She's on verge of tears.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 Man just need to deal with this
 shit... I'll deal with it. It's
 just fucking money. That's it.

As Ruben strokes Lou's head, the spark leaves his eyes and he is overcome with an intense darkness.

INT. AIRSTREAM - EARLY MORNING

Lou wakes up, HEARS, a distant thumping sound. Ruben is not in bed. Lou gets up and walks out of the bedroom into the living room. She sees Ruben in the front of the airstream obliterating a piece of equipment with his foot. Ruben looks possessed. Lou walks toward him, sees him sweating all over.

LOU
 Ruben!

Ruben doesn't hear, doesn't turn.

LOU (CONT'D)
 RUUBEN! STOP IT!

Lou sees Ruben has emptied a cabinet. Stuff is strewn on the table and bench. Lou clutches her head in a state of paralyzed anxiety as Ruben demolishes some equipment on the floor.

EXT. AIRSTREAM - CONTINUOUS

She walks outside, paces outside of the airstream in a state of deep thought and anxiety. She remembers Joe's words. She takes out her cell phone and scrolls through her contacts. She shivers in the cool of the morning. Her hands shake. She can't bear to make this call... she can't... but she finally presses a number and holds the phone up to her ear, her face a contorted mass of anticipation. She talks to herself as it rings. She shakes her head and is about to hang up, when a SCRUFFY VOICE picks up. Lou's face goes white at the sound of the voice.

LOU
 Oh... ah... hello. Bonjour... is
 this Richard?

Beat...

LOU (CONT'D)
 Ah this is... Louise.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben is apoplectic.

RUBEN

Why would you do that? Why would you call him? How's that helping us?

Lou writes furiously on a scrap of paper and slides it to Ruben. He reads: IT'S THE ONLY PLACE FOR ME TO GO. AND YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO THAT PLACE.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

I'm not going back there. Why do you need somewhere to go?

Lou writes. YOU NEED SUPPORT.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

This is support? You fucking leave? You don't want to be here?

LOU

OF COURSE I DO!

RUBEN

I knew this was coming. Knew it. This about the album or what? Something your not telling me? You get an offer?

Lou is perplexed. Mouths WHAT?"

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Fuck it.

LOU

Ruben-

RUBEN

I'm not a complete fucking moron Lou ok?... please give me a little credit-

LOU

What are you saying?! What's wrong with you!!!

RUBEN

What?!... I can't hear you!!! DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT I AM DEAF!???? NO FUCKING HEARING!!

Lou is teary eyed. Rubbing her sore stomach. At a loss... Looking down at the table while Ruben rants... Lou writes on a piece of paper, passes it to him. He reads. YOU NEED SUPPORT RIGHT NOW RUBEN.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
I need a fucking gun in my mouth is what I need. I NEED A FUCKING GUN IN MY FUCKING MOUTH!

Lou can't take those words. Ruben looks around, lost and angry. He looks back at Lou, sees her pain.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
Look... I'm sorry Lulu I'm really fucked up right now let me just think for a second... I should just come with you. I can figure shit out there-

Lou stares at Ruben, crushed. Her phone rings. She answers, while Ruben watches.

LOU
Hello... oh really? Okay.

RUBEN
Who's that?

Lou covers the phone while she listens.

LOU
Okay... okay I have to get ready... no I'll call a cab. Yeah its fine. okay. Thanks. Yeah thanks.

Lou pockets her phone.

RUBEN
What's going on?

LOU
I'm going to catch a plane and you're going back to that place.

RUBEN
What?

Lou can't bear to repeat it.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Ruben and Lou stand outside the airstream next to her guitar and a big duffle bag etc. Ruben is crawling out of his skin.

RUBEN

Lou please don't do this. No way.

Lou tries to stay focused, clutching her stomach still in heavy discomfort.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

How did this happen. Why are you being cold like this?

This breaks Lou's heart. She shakes her head.

LOU

I'm not being cold.

Ruben stares at her as she sways in discomfort.

RUBEN

Just don't leave. I can figure this out.

Ruben sees a taxi pulling up.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Oh mother fucker. This is fucked up Lou. This is so fucked up.

The cab pulls up. Lou grabs her bag.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Hey. Slow down. Here.

He takes the bag.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Just slow down.

The cab driver gets out.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

(to the cab driver)

Just chill. We'll be a minute dude.

LOU

It's okay. Thank you.

The cab driver gets back in. Lou brings her guitar and other stuff to the trunk. Ruben follows with her bag. Lou shuts the trunk.

Ruben looks at Lou, white as a ghost, trying to be brave.

RUBEN
This is so fucking wrong.

LOU
It's okay.

Lou holds up a finger, takes out a pad and scribbles: PROMISE ME YOU ARE GOING BACK TO THAT PLACE FOR HELP. She flips the pad over for Ruben to see... He reads and she takes it back, writing again and pointing to the word for emphasis: PROMISE!!

RUBEN
(Struggling with the
thought)
I promise if-

Lou cuts him off. She is in tears and rage. She slaps his chest.

LOU
No. Promise Rubi!!
(Pointing at the page)
Promise!

Ruben nods... like a child suddenly.

LOU (CONT'D)
Or all of this is for shit Rubi.

RUBEN
I need more of a plan than this. I
need more, Lou... You gonna wait
for me?

From Ruben's POV now as Lou nods her head, tears streaming...

LOU (SILENT)
What do you mean wait? Of course
I'm waiting.

Lou writes. YOU GOTTA GO BACK TO THAT PLACE. She stares at him, takes Ruben's arm and turns it over and points to his LULU tattoo.

LOU (CONT'D)
You hurt yourself and you hurt me.
I'll hurt myself too Rubi. I'll
hurt myself too! Go right back
there. Right now. Promise. Say it.

Lou mouths "promise".

RUBEN
Jesus.

LOU
Say it.

RUBEN
Promise.

LOU
Good.

RUBEN
I'll figure out all this shit Lou-
(pointing to ears)
I'll figure it out okay? You know I
will. It's not that bad.

The pain and sadness is breaking Ruben. Lou takes his face and kisses it.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
When you get there I want you to
write me and tell me you're safe?
You're my fucking heart Lou. You're
it for me. Okay?... Okay? I'm gonna
fix this. If it's shitty there,
just get your ass back here and
we'll figure it out. It's not that
hard.

LOU
I love you.

But Ruben doesn't hear.

LOU (CONT'D)
(unable to bare it)
Bye.

Lou turns and gets in the cab. Ruben shuts the door for her. She looks forward and doesn't turn back. Ruben watches her drive away. He stands alone in the parking lot. quietness. He turns back and looks at the airstream, walks over, the terror and loneliness of selfhood descending upon him as the emotional muscle memory of loss takes over his gut. He sits on the step of the airstream, broken and alone.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Joe SEES RUBEN, sitting on the porch stairs, looking a mess, smoking.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - LATER

Joe takes his boots off and sets them next to a bunch of other boots and sneakers. He gestures for Ruben to do the same. He motions for Ruben to follow him up the stairs. They walk up to the third floor.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE, RUBEN'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Joe reaches in and flicks the lights. Then he enters into a room with two beds. He gestures toward the bed without sheets and blankets on it. He puts his thumb up.

RUBEN

Is someone else in here?

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)

Yes.

Joe stretches out his hand. Ruben is confused. Joe mimics "someone starting a car". Ruben gets it.

RUBEN

(holding up keys)

You want them?

Joe shrugs while nodding as if to say "I might as well." Ruben hands the keys to Joe, stiffly. Then Joe signals for Ruben's phone by putting his hand up to his face and talking into his fingers.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

No, we're not doing that.

Joe is steadfast. Ruben looks at his phone. Hands it over.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - LATER

All of the adults in the house sit together in a circle... Ruben fidgets...

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)

Everyone please say hello to Ruben.

Everyone simultaneously signs hello. Ruben nods back to the rest of the room.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)

Ruben has recently gone deaf, he does not know ASL. He's an addict and he will need support from everyone.

Joe looks around the room to make sure everyone gets it.

JOE (CONT'D)
He will also need a name.

Joe proceeds to write on a white board, "I JUST TOLD EVERYONE THAT YOU'RE A DEAF ADDICT WHO DOES NOT KNOW SIGN LANGUAGE"... Joe looks at Ruben then writes "YET". Ruben's face is pale and expressionless. We can see he hasn't slept in days. Joe writes. YOU WILL ALSO BE GIVEN A DEAF NAME ONCE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE. AND A JOB. Joe directs Ruben's gaze to another white board with a graph and everyone's name on it. He points to a name and then the corresponding job title. Some of the titles are "kitchen crew" or things like maintenance. He then writes Ruben's name on the board and writes: LEARN HOW TO BE DEAF... LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE? Joe looks at Ruben and raises his eyebrows. Joe looks at a large, butch woman, JENN, 30's tough, baggy jeans, hoodie. He signs something to her. Jenn looks at Ruben and back at Joe... shrugs- nods. Joe writes: EVERYONE HERE HAS A BUDDY. JENN WILL BE WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES UNTIL YOU ARE STABLE AND COMFORTABLE. Ruben glances at Jenn who nods back to him.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
(to Jenn)
Take the tablet for the first week
while Ruben gets his sea legs.

Spontaneously ONE WOMAN has an idea about a name for Ruben. She holds her hand up to her face to indicate the largeness of Ruben's eyes. The other members of the group agree, this is a good name for Ruben. Joe agrees too. Ruben has been named and he's the only one who doesn't know it.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - DAY

From Ruben's POV the meal is muffled, save for the low frequency slamming of the table as raucous conversation ensues around him.

We break out of his perspective into a surprisingly loud dinner as an animated conversation progresses to a fever pitch between DAN and a red faced Jenn. She signs lightning fast... her signing becomes more and more crude as the moment progresses. Joe slams the table adding something to the conversation. Jenn shrugs as if to say "What's the problem?" Jenn looks at Ruben, knowing he's catching none of the conversation. She types something into her tablet and big bold words scroll across the screen: "DAN'S A PUSSY". We stay on Ruben's face for a beat. He stares down at his food. He looks around, bleary eyed at his alien, new home.

INT. RUBEN'S ROOM - DAWN

Peter's snoring. Ruben's staring at him in the low morning light but he hears nothing.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pee silently hits the water in the toilet.

Ruben stares at his face in the mirror as he brushes his teeth, silently.

EXT. JOE'S BARN - MORNING

Ruben light up a cigarette on the back porch. He looks up at a broken eave on the low roof. Joe comes out and signals for Ruben to come.

EXT. BACK OF JOE'S PICKUP - DAY

Ruben is packed in the back of a pickup, next to Jenn and a handful of house-mates, signing to each other. Joe gets in the driver seat and they drive down the driveway. Jenn types in the tablet and it scrolls -FEEL BETTER? Ruben looks and half nods. He motions for the tablet. He types IS THERE WIFI ANYWHERE? Hands it back. She shakes her head, types - ONLY IN JOE'S OFFICE. WHY? Ruben shakes his head, peers around as the truck bumps along the dirt road.

EXT. FARM - DAY

The truck climbs a truck road up to the farm.

EXT. FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone disembarks at a large garden. Joe shows them what to do.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Ruben follows Joe through the school. They pass a group of HIGH SCHOOL KIDS, signing to each other.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF/CLASSROOM - DAY

They approach a classroom. Joe sticks his hand in and flicks the light switch.

Ruben stands behind Joe as DIANE, AN ATTRACTIVE, KIND LOOKING WOMAN opens the door opens to a classroom filled with very rowdy, Deaf second graders. She signs hello to Ruben, who does his best to sign back. Joe SPEAKS TO DIANE, GESTURES SOMETHING ABOUT DRUMMING TO HER. She nods, Joe turns back to Ruben.

RUBEN

What's up?

Joe pats Ruben hard on the back with a smirk, ushers him in the classroom, then as Ruben looks at him, Joe shuts the door between him and Ruben leaving him to fend for himself. Diane beckons him in. The children gape at Ruben's appearance as he stands with Diane at the front of the room. Diane signs to them. The only noise in the room is breathing and the shuffling of hands.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)

Settle down.

(One boy, MICHAEL is
standing on his chair)

Michael sit in your chair.

Diane waits until everyone is settled...

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)

This is Ruben. Everyone say hello.

The class does a simultaneous, signed hello.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Ruben is just learning ASL so he
will need your help and your
patience. Okay?

The kids sign "Okay"...

DIANE (CONT'D)

Okay.

Ruben looks at the kids.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)

Hi.

The kids giggle. Ruben wonders if he messed up. He looks at Diane who smiles in encouragement. Ruben looks at Diane.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Ah...

He's at a loss... doesn't know what he's doing... the kids are laughing at his confusion.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
My name is Diane, what's your name?

Ruben suddenly cannot remember anything from the ASL class. The kids giggle and sign to one another... Diane spells her name in sign for Ruben and then writes it on the board. She points to Ruben... Diane hands him the chalk and gestures for him to write his name... Ruben writes his name wildly - graffiti style. His inspiration surprises Diane and the kids go crazy for it.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
(To kids)
Relax please everyone.

Diane models an "R" in ASL to Ruben. Ruben tries to mimic and Diane adjusts his hand. Ruben looks at the classroom of kids raising their "R's" in the air.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben stands in the corner of the class now, watching Diane walk a shy girl thru a spelling lesson.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
(handing her chalk)
Just your name Susanna.

The girl is too shy. Diane has to hold her hand while tracing out the letters on the board.

LATER -Michael's sleeve is dark with saliva where he's been chewing it. He watches Ruben, wide eyed as he draws. The chalk board is now covered with names written graffiti style like Ruben's. Michael stands up and puts his hands in the air. He's the last one. Diane nods for him to come up. Michael cannot contain his ADHD craziness. This may be the most magical thing he has ever seen and Ruben, the most magical person. He signs to Diane - a torrent of ideas. Points to Ruben.

MICHAEL (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Can he make mine? I want the
letters dripping in blood and
poison!!!

Ruben looks at Diane.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Take a breath Michael.

MICHAEL (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Poison blood!!!!!!

Michael laughs devilishly and looks at Ruben.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Last chance Michael!

EXT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Ruben sits next to Jen and smokes. She taps her watch.

RUBEN
What?

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Jenn and Ruben stand at a classroom door. She motions that she'll meet him in an hour.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Normal chit-chat is replaced by the sound of rustling clothing and the noise fingers/mouths make when they move. Ruben sits amongst a small group of people. An ASL teacher teaches an ASL class. Ruben feels claustrophobic, trapped in a muffled hell.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Jenn and Ruben walk together back to Joe's.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EVENING

They approach an outdoor meal. Ruben taps Jen.

RUBEN
I'll be there in a minute.

Jenn seems unsure.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
I'll be back.

Ruben turns and walks toward the back door, looks back to Jen to see she's turned the corner, then he heads up the stairs to Joe's office.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ruben, on Joe's computer, scrolls through his emails quickly and panicked. He sees a message from Lou. He clicks on the e-mail, heart pounding... scans quickly, stares at a selfie of Lou huddled on a Parisian balcony... reads, HI RUBI, I AM HERE. SO STRANGE - PLEASE LET ME KNOW THAT YOU'RE SAFE... KNOWING THAT YOU'RE BEING SO BRAVE RIGHT NOW IS KEEPING ME ALIVE. I MEAN IT! YOU MUST KEEP BEING BRAVE FOR ME WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO FOR YOURSELF. DON'T FORGET THIS PLEASE. I ADORE U RUBI.

Ruben fights back emotion as he looks at the picture of LOU...

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DUSK

Ruben smokes in the fading light.

RUBEN

Fuck.

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - NIGHT

We continue to hear THE WHISPER OF HANDS signing in unison as we see solo shots of deaf addicts signing the lords prayer...

DEAF GROUP (ASL-SUBTITLED)

God grant me the serenity to Accept
the things I cannot change; Courage
to change the things I can-

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - NIGHT

Ruben, sitting next to Jenn, stands up awkwardly.

RUBEN

(Looking around room)

So yeah, I'm Ruben and I'm an
addict. I've been sober for about
six years. I'm sorry I don't know
any-

(Mimics sign language)

Ruben looks at Joe as Joe translates to the room. The room nods warmly at Ruben as they sign -

DEAF GROUP (ASL-SUBTITLED)

Hi Ruben...

Ruben waves a quick "hi" back to the group, then glances uneasily to Joe. Joe nods as Ruben shrugs, deflated.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Ruben tries to get a screw into the broken shutter on Joe's house. He focuses on his task. He looks up and sees Joe looking at him. Joe shrugs as if to say "what are you doing?"

RUBEN
(Half salute)
Hey Joe.

Joe gestures again, "what are you doing?" Ruben points to the obviously broken shutter. Joe stares at Ruben. He signals without any room for translation that Ruben should follow him. Ruben's a bit confused by Joe's demeanor.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe sits across from Ruben.

JOE
What's that all about Ruben?

Ruben reads the words on the screen.

RUBEN
What? The shutter?

Joe nods.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
(Smiling)
I was trying to fix your shutter.

JOE
Did I ask you to do that?

Ruben reads... suddenly worried that Joe might be crazy.

RUBEN
Ah... no but-

JOE
Maybe I like it that way.

RUBEN
(Laughing nervously)
Okay... Uh.

Ruben shakes his head, confused.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I tried to fix your
broken shutter. That was bad.

Joe nods...

JOE
You don't need to fix anything
here.

Ruben is confused.

RUBEN
(Losing it a little)
You understand I was just trying to
help YOU OUT a little and be
useful. That's it.

JOE
Useful?

Ruben nods, exasperated, raises his eyebrows at Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)
(Animated)
Useful to who? Useful to me? Cause
I don't need that Ruben. If I do,
I'll ask you okay?

Ruben stays frozen. Shakes his head.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'll be frank with you Ruben. You
are in a hard spot right now.
You're in the middle of multiple
crises-
(Long look)
Sudden deafness, addiction, the
loss of your profession... And your
girlfriend too right?

Ruben tenses, shrugs.

JOE (CONT'D)
Ms. Barnett told me you were
wonderful with her kids yesterday.
She'll be starting a summer program
with some students next week and
she'd like you to help her. I think
that's a good idea. Does that
interest you?

Ruben shrugs in frustration...

RUBEN

I don't know. I'm not fucking
drumming man. So-

JOE

I can't see you, can you not cover
your face Ruben?

RUBEN

(scratching)

Sorry. I don't know if this will
work for me. Here.

JOE

... Well we'll find out Ruben.
You're here aren't you? You're here
of your own volition and you're
being fully supported.

Ruben looks away.

JOE (CONT'D)

How old when you started to support
yourself Ruben?

Ruben shrugs.

JOE (CONT'D)

(Nodding)

Young? Teenage?

Ruben stares... a "yes" by default.

JOE (CONT'D)

Do you think you know the
difference between working and
surviving, or living and surviving
Ruben?

Ruben looks mortified. He chews his lip as he reads the
words.

JOE (CONT'D)

I have an assignment for you okay?
Ready?

Ruben stares at the screen.

JOE (CONT'D)

You probably won't like this at
first but from this point forward I
would like you to devote the first
part of the day to yourself
Ruben... Okay?

RUBEN
 (Very skeptical)
 Uh huh.

JOE
 I want you to take some time before
 breakfast. You wake up early right?

RUBEN
 (Nodding)
 Pretty early.

JOE
 I will have hot coffee waiting for
 you by 5:30. Is that early enough?

RUBEN
 I guess, I don't know.

JOE
 Okay five... And I will provide a
 room for you.

RUBEN
 A room?

JOE
 And there is nothing that needs to
 be accomplished in this room Ruben.
 All I want you to do is sit.

Ruben stares at Joe, biting his lip.

JOE (CONT'D)
 The only thing I ask is when, and
 if you cannot just sit, you turn
 yourself to the pen and paper, that
 I will supply for you... And you-
 (Pantomimes writing)
 Write?

Ruben squints... very uncomfortable with the thought.

RUBEN
 Uh.

JOE
 It doesn't matter what you write,
 how you write, whether it's spelled
 correctly or if it's a-
 (pantomimes a big mess)
 Mess... I don't care. No one will
 read it ok?

Ruben stares at the screen.

JOE (CONT'D)
 But I want you to keep writing
 continuously, without stopping
 until you feel like you can sit
 again.

Joe stares at Ruben.

RUBEN
 (Stressed)
 Right... So, does it have to be
 writing or?

JOE
 Writing. Yes. Not drawing. Writing.

Ruben chuckles quietly, rubbing his closed eyes in disbelief.

JOE (CONT'D)
 It wont be easy at first. And if at
 any point it becomes too difficult
 you should come find me. I will be
 in my apartment doing the same
 thing as you. Okay? I'll be Writing
 too...

RUBEN
 (Under breath)
 Fuck... Okay I guess.

Ruben stands.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 By the way she's still my
 girlfriend.

Joe raises his eyebrows.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 You said I lost my girlfriend.
 She's still my girlfriend.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ruben smokes by himself. Jenn and Jeremy walk over. Jeremy signs something to Ruben. Jenn types in the tablet: JOE WANTS HIM TO DANCE FOR THE KIDS END OF SCHOOL THING. HE WANTS TO KNOW YOU IF YOU'LL PLAY DRUMS WITH HIM. Ruben looks at Jeremy. Jenn types. HE'S A DANCER. Ruben motions for the tablet, types. DID JOE ASK YOU TO ASK ME? Jeremy reads and looks at Ruben.

RUBEN
Thought so.

He stares at Jeremy somewhat intensely.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
Sorry bro. Not for me.

Jeremy is surprised at the rejection and the sudden mood flair. He looks at Jenn, she's also surprised.

JEREMY (ASL - SUBTITLED)
(To Jenn)
Cool. Okay.

RUBEN
Cool.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ruben walks into the kitchen and finds a donut sitting on a plate and hot pot of coffee ready in the coffee maker.

INT. JOE'S STUDY - LATER

Carrying his coffee, his donut in his mouth, Ruben peers thru an open door into a very empty room with a desk, a chair and a couple nice, large windows... He looks at the room suspiciously. He enters and closes the door. He sees a pen and a notebook waiting for him. He puts his coffee down, sits. He takes a sip as he looks out the window... He scratches at his jeans... his hand and body restless... Now he hits the pen against the desk over and over again... he gets up, feeling like a true moron for being there at all...

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - GYM - DAY

Parents and students are seated. Ruben sits next to Jenn and looks on as Jeremy turns a song on full volume, holds the stereo to feel the rhythm and then dances. Ruben is impressed by Jeremy's dance, feels ashamed for not drumming with him. He looks over and sees Michael flopping around while Diane tries to get him settled. Ruben signals to Diane that he can take him outside. Diane gets Michael's attention and points to Ruben. Ruben signals for him to follow him.

EXT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, PLAYGROUND - DAY

Ruben and Michael exit the school. Michael runs ahead to the slide. Ruben walks up to him at the top of the slide, signals to Michael the symbol for "phone".

RUBEN

You have a phone dude?

Michael nods, surprised to be useful. He takes out his phone.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Is it locked?

Michael doesn't understand. Ruben gestures for the phone. It's locked. He shows it Michael. Michael unlocks it. Ruben sits on the bottom of the slide and quickly opens up a web page, loads his e-mail, nothing from Lou. He erases the web page, lowers the phone. He turns around to see Michael's face looking down at him from the top. Ruben turns around, sits on the ground and begins tapping on the metal... We HEAR from his POV... Michael smiles up at him feeling the vibrations... Ruben takes out his other hand and starts tapping a simple beat. Michael's eyes go way wide and he laughs... Ruben keeps the beat up but begins to increase the speed and complexity of it... Michael is in heaven as he feels the beat vibrating inside of his head. Ruben watches him as he drums on the slide... Michael closes his eyes in a rare moment of calm... The metallic beat continues, echoing out over the school campus... as...

BEGIN MONTAGE:

EXT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Ruben, Diane and the children walk through the fields around the school. We see Ruben is signing now with the Deaf children. The children chase Ruben joyfully until he lets himself be tackled and wrestled to the ground.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE, STUDY - MORNING

Vibrations in the coffee as Ruben writes feverishly...

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Ruben plays an ASL game with a kid in the class. He's learning.

EXT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - DAY

Ruben and Diane take the children hiking.

I/E TRUCK, JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ruben sits in the back of the truck with other addict adults from the community... Ruben looks out at forest passing him by... his eyes have calmed somehow and the silence is no longer oppressive to him...

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Ruben sits around the dinner table, now comfortable in ASL. He laughs and signs and eats.

EXT. PORCH - LATER

At the table, Ruben draws a picture of a sexy, nude, woman... Jenn is watching... he gets to the crotch area and looks at Jenn.

JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
What? She's hot.

Ruben mimics like he's drawing on the crotch.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
What are we talking?

|JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
(Nodding)
Bush? Yeah bush, definitely.

Ruben nods in an inspired "Oh, okay" manner. Jenn nods. Ruben goes back to the drawing and starts in on the bush. Jenn taps his shoulder.

JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Little bit. Not crazy.

Ruben grins, nodding in approval.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Name?

Jenn suddenly gets very serious... Thinks... Ruben looks at her... "No", she shakes her head rigidly. Ruben looks for a beat more at Jenn's face... some untold story... untold love.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
Where do you want it?

Jenn points to the back of her shoulder.

INT. JOE'S STUDY - MORNING

Ruben closes the door of the writing room, sets his coffee down on the table... sits in the chair. He looks at his notebook but he doesn't open it. He picks up his coffee and takes a sip. He looks out of the window... and he sits... Ruben just sits...

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, GYM - DAY

In the middle of the wooden floor of the gym, Ruben finishes assembling his drum kit. He walks to the stool, sits, picks up his sticks. He hits the bass drum once. It's an odd feeling to be behind the kit again. He can only feel the vibration of the sound. Then he launches into a funk beat that he doesn't hear.

Portraits of children, feeling the sounds through colored balloons. Diane too.

Now from behind Ruben we see all the kids holding their balloons. And we hear the full sound of Ruben's drums.

Afterwards he shows Michael the kit.

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - NIGHT

Close up on Jenn's face. A moment of rawness.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Everyone should congratulate Jenn on reaching the end of her stay at the house. Is it frightening to think of leaving?

Jenn shrugs, trying to maintain her tough composure.

JOE (CONT'D)
Where will you stay?

Jenn gulps...

JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Probably land with my parents I guess...

Jenn's face is blotchy with fear... she speaks to try to get out of the emotion.

JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
A middle aged deaf, dyke, addict,
living with her parents. That's
pretty hot.

Ruben can't follow what's being said but he sees Jenn's face and he gets it.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Do you think that environment at
your parents is going to be
conducive to your stability and
happiness Jenn?

Jenn shrugs... she is overwhelmed with fear... she tries to hold it together...

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Ruben reads on the porch. Joe approaches.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
How are you doing Ruben?

Ruben nods...

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Okay.

Joe sits.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
I know you and Jenn are close. Can
be tough when it's time for folks
to move on.

Joe looks at Ruben. Ruben scratches his head anxiously.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
You have become important to many
people around here Ruben.

Ruben shrugs.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
How are you feeling?

RUBEN
(Fidgeting)
Um... Okay.

Joe studies him...

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
So Ruben. I'd like to offer you a
way to continue on here with us...

Joe nods at Ruben trying to gauge Ruben's feeling... Ruben
nods conservatively.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
I imagine that you're probably
beginning to think about the future
a little. Right?

Ruben repeats the sign for future.

RUBEN
Future?

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
Yes future.

Ruben shrugs, looking increasingly uncomfortable... He
continues to read from the computer screen.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
I do think there's a way that you
could stay and work here if you'd
like to. Maybe helping me
with my program, maybe working at
the school with the kids... Maybe
both.

Ruben nods and Joe nods back with a confident smile.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
Anyway, you think about it okay?

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Okay thank you...

Joe gives him a slap on the knee before walking away. Ruben
lights a cigarette and as he sits, his anxiety builds... an
old familiar rumbling.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben jogs up the stairs of to Joe's office.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruben clicks on a video link someone shared on their bands website... written comments in French. Suddenly he's watching Lou with her gear, performing wildly on a French stage, alone... we watch Ruben's face as he watches Lou's face, without him... his eyes locked in torment...

INT. AIRSTREAM - DUSK

Ruben rounds a group of trees to where he parked his airstream. He makes sure no one is looking, opens a side compartment, finds a hidden key and enters the Airstream. He looks around at his old life. The posters of their band. Sees the mess he made before saying goodbye to Lou. Ruben scours thru drawers of Lou's clothes... He finds a piece of Lou's clothing and holds it to his face, breathing her in. He sits in Lou's seat and holds her sweater.

INT. AIRSTREAM - LATER

With intensity Ruben begins to rip the cords out of the back of the racks full of equipment.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben sets up his drum kit. He sits behind it, hits it a couple times before launching into a furious blast beat. The sounds echo through the woods around him.

INT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Ruben grabs a box from the back of the Airstream as Jenn gazes at the wall of pictures. She sees a very dated picture of a woman(20's), warm and strong and a boy (Ruben at 10) standing outside the same airstream. The woman stands behind the boy with her hands on the boys shoulders, wearing a proud smile. Jenn points at the woman in the picture.

JENN (ASL - SUBTITLED)

Mom?

RUBEN

Mom?

Jenn nods.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah. Mom.

Jenn moves her focus down the wall of pictures. Her eyes get wide as she stares at a picture of Lou. She flashes Ruben, who's busy working, a look of "Holy shit, is she yours?". Ruben's mind is elsewhere but he manages a half hearted nod and a shrug. Ruben points to a pile of packed boxes and looks at Jenn for her reaction. Jenn looks overwhelmed. She gestures animatedly, with horror, as if to say "What, all of them?". Ruben nods confidently and Jenn shakes her head with displeasure. We hear her heavy deaf accent.

JENN

Fuck that.

Jenn finishes punching a last few letters into the tablet before holding it out, aggressively, for Ruben to see. I NEED TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'S IN THE PACKAGES AND WHY YOU ARE SENDING THEM? NO BULL-SHIT. Ruben doesn't hesitate. He points at the picture of Lou... He looks back at Jenn signaling "money" with his fingers. He points back to Lou's picture - meaning, "For her". Jenn nods slowly, not convinced. Ruben signals again "Money" and points to himself and then to Jenn. Jenn waves off Ruben's offer of money.

EXT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben and Jenn load the large mixer into the van. He turns to Jenn, looks at the tattoo on her shoulder of the picture he drew for her. He taps the tattoo to get Jenn's attention... he gestures...

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)

I should go with you Jenn and help with this beast.

Jenn shakes her head...

JENN

Don't sweat it. I got this.

Ruben sees Jenn is hurting.

RUBEN

You okay?

JENN

Yeah I'm fine.

RUBEN (ASL - SIGNED)

(Nodding adamantly)

Seriously I should go with you.

Jenn makes a gesture "suck my dick".

RUBEN (CONT'D)

You sure?

Jenn gets in the van and starts it up. Ruben holds his hand up to her. She rolls down the window.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)

Remember just cash no checks.

Jenn makes a face and pulls forward.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

You cool?

Jenn nods in annoyance.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - CLASSROOM - DAY

End of summer performance. Diane and Ruben and the children sit in a circle with white plastic buckets in front of them. Ruben takes a bag of sticks...

The bag is passed around and the children hold their sticks in their hands. Even Michael manages to be patient. When everyone has the sticks, Ruben signals to Michael to lead the rhythm. Michael begins to hit his bucket using a simple rhythm. The other kids join in unison. The beat progresses. Diane watches Ruben's focus with the kids. The simple beat echoes loudly from all of the buckets... Ruben looks at Michael who is eyeing him intently. He nods to him and Michael speeds up, double timing the beat, too focused to smile. Ruben looks on proudly. At the end the parents clap.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - GYM/THEATER - DAY

Everyone's gone except for Michael, who plays a video game while Ruben and Diane clean up... Diane touches Ruben's shoulder as he stacks chairs...

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)

You can go. It's okay. Michael's father is always late.

RUBEN

It's okay. I'll stay.

EXT. DEAF COMMUNITY - DUSK

Ruben and Diane exit the school and walk down a campus road toward the parking area. Diane glances at Ruben as they walk.

There is an implied intimacy to being outside together without the children. They come to Diane's car. Diane stops. Ruben stops too. Diane looks at him perhaps a bit more intently than before. Ruben, caught for a moment in her eyes, does not allow room for the moment to extend. He salutes her.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Okay good night.

Diane is taken off guard.

DIANE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Would you like a ride?

Ruben shakes his head.

RUBEN
No. I'll walk. Goodnight.

Ruben turns unceremoniously and walks away. Diane grins slightly, absorbing Ruben's departure. She watches him walk away for a moment, then turns the other direction.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruben flicks the light switch on Jenn's door... finally he opens the door but the room is empty.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruben sets the table. Jeremy walks by.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Have you seen Jenn?

JEREMY
Not since breakfast.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - LATER

Joe is pulling out as Ruben runs toward the truck. He rolls down the window.

RUBEN (ASL - SUBTITLED)
She mentioned something about going into town... I should come with you Joe.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Did she say anything else?

Ruben shakes his head.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
I'll see you later.

Joe pulls away.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruben smokes on the porch.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Early morning...

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ruben walks down the hall toward Jenn's room. He opens the door. The room is still empty.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben sees no donut or coffee waiting. Louie the dog perks up at the sound of Joe's truck. Ruben sees him pulling up in front of the house.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

The group sits in a circle. Joe looks at everyone... exhausted.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
Jenn did overdosed last night.
Luckily the police found her in
time. She is in stable condition at
the hospital now and will go from
there to rehab again I think...

Joe rubs his face... he's clearly very upset.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
I must say I didn't see this
coming. She apparently had a large
sum of cash on her. I am baffled as
to how she had access to cash
but...

Ruben looks down. Joe notices.

EXT. FARM - DAY

Ruben works extra hard in the farm.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben tries Joe's office door. It's locked.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ruben enters Joe's apartment door and enters his section of the house. He quietly closes the door behind him, goes up the stairs - looks around at Joe's very neat and orderly room. His eyes are caught by a picture on Joe's refrigerator of Joe as a young man with his wife and child, now long gone...

Ruben rifles through drawers, finds a small inner drawer with keys... he rustles through the keys until he comes to his Airstream keys.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben sits at the computer. He feverishly pulls up Prince Audiology, looks around nervously then dials the number on the captioned telephone. He waits until he sees words pop up on the screen.

RUBEN

Hello, can you hear me?

The words, YES I CAN HEAR YOU. CAN YOU PLEASE TELL ME YOUR NAME?

RUBEN (CONT'D)

It's Stone. Ruben Stone. R-U-B-E-N Stone, S-T-O-N-E. I'm confirming an appointment.

Ruben waits.

RUBEN (CONT'D)

Yes I can hold.

INT. SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, GYM - DAY

Ruben and Diane and all the children gather around a grand piano in the gym and put their hands on it. A PIANIST begins playing a piece of music and the children listen to the music through their hands.

Ruben looks at the children but his mind is elsewhere. The sweet sounds of the piano merge with dark vibrations of his unrest.

INT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Ruben sits in Lou's seat. For a moment he appears to be alone until he looks over at a MAN AND HIS GROWN SON, as they inspect the Airstream.

INT. AIRSTREAM - MOMENTS LATER

The man writes a number down and slides it to Ruben. Ruben looks at the paper and grins...

RUBEN

(Waving hand all around)

Man, you know exactly what I have here right? I mean really. I don't need to sell this. I REALLY don't. I'd be happy to keep it dude.

Ruben looks dead into the mans eyes. The man shrugs stiffly.

MAN

I understand. So Listen-

The man writes a number and slides a piece of paper across the table to Ruben.

MAN (CONT'D)

This is it. That's all I'm doing so-

Ruben gazes at the piece of paper. Looks up at the guy.

RUBEN

... So I have a proposition for you. Honestly it's the only way I'd even consider-

(Gesturing to the paper)

This. But here's the deal though...

RUBEN (CONT'D)

You and I both know that this is worth a hell of a lot more than what you're offering... it's fully wired as a recording studio. You know how much, just that is worth?

The man begins to protest-

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 Hey, Common. Just don't. I know the
 fair price for this and I know you
 do too and this,
 (Pointing to his number)
 -is a fucking joke.

The man shrugs coldly.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 But I have an idea. What if I were
 to give it to you at this price?

The man looks up...

RUBEN (CONT'D)
 With the condition that I have the
 option to buy it back from you for
 ten percent more than you're paying
 me within like... a couple months
 from now.

The man looks at Ruben like he's nuts. From Ruben's POV...

MAN (SILENCE W/T SUBTITLES)
 Why?

RUBEN
 But it's got to remain in it's
 current condition, everything in
 place
 (gesturing)

The man considers as Ruben waits. The son gives a thumbs up.
 Ruben wants to rip his throat out.

MAN
 I can give you a month-

Ruben signals to the guy to write it down. He does. Ruben
 looks at it.

RUBEN
 Five weeks. Pay pal's ideal.

EXT. AIRSTREAM - DAY

Ruben watches as the man drives away with his Airstream
 followed by the son in his SUV.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Close up on Ruben writing a note. JOE, EVERYTHING IS OKAY.
I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW. -R

Ruben leaves the note next to the donut that's waiting for him... the pot of coffee... but instead of eating it he turns and exits the house leaving the donut and coffee behind.

INT. OPERATION ROOM, HOSPITAL - DAY

Sound of A BUZZING NOISE... as the monitor in the operating room shows a drill working it's way through the hardest bone in Ruben's skull toward his ear canal. A wide shot reveals a SURGEON and a nurse, leaning over Ruben, only recognizable by his exposed, tattooed hand.

INT. RECOVERY ROOM, HOSPITAL - LATER

Ruben lies in a bed. There are bandages over two shaved spots on his head where he had the surgery. A doctor writes on a white board: EVERYTHING WENT WELL RUBEN. YOUR EAR CANAL HAS BEEN BYPASSED SO YOU WILL EXPERIENCE ABSOLUTE SILENCE DURING THIS TIME. YOU WILL NEED TO COME BACK HERE IN FOUR WEEKS FOR ACTIVATION.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Ruben, wearing a beanie, walks toward Joe's.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruben, wearing the hat, sticks his hand inside Joe's study and flicks the light switch. Joe opens the door.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED)
You're back.

Ruben shrugs. Joe stares at him.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come on in.

Ruben enters, sits. Joe sits.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
(motioning at computer)
You want this on?

Ruben shrugs.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'll turn it on but you don't
really need it anymore do you?

Joe turns on computer. Then turns to Ruben.

JOE (ASL - SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)
What's on your mind?

Ruben is squirmy.

RUBEN
That's a good choice of words.

JOE
Why's that.

RUBEN
I did the deed.

JOE
The deed?

Ruben lifts his hat a little.

RUBEN
Surgery.

Joe disguises shock, raises his eyebrows, taking it in.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
Ok... Does it hurt?

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
Not too bad.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
Hmm. And when do they get
activated?

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
3 or 4 weeks.

Joe looks stiffly at Ruben for a long beat... Ruben smiles
uncomfortable... He looks around the room.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
(Rubbing hands together)
So yeah...

Ruben looks back at Joe who's face is unchanged.

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
 (Shrugging)
 What's up?

JOE
 (ASL - SPOKEN)
 How'd you find the money?

RUBEN
 Sold my RV. And my shit.

Joe nods.

JOE
 Okay-

Ruben looks suddenly shaky, out of sorts.

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
 Look, I really don't wanna explain myself right now Joe? I'm sorry but no... now's the time for fucking action and saving my fucking life so that's what I'm doing. Okay? It's time... Nobody else is saving my life right?

(Pointing to ears)
 I mean this isn't a joke. I know you think this is just another fix and now I'm fucked, blah, blah... and I really appreciate everything you've done for me man but... I had a fucking life before I got here Joe and I'm losing it...

Joe looks on at Ruben stoically...

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
 I mean if I just sit here and diddle around, what will I have? Nothing.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
 You know Ruben, I understand how you feel. I do-

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
 What does it matter? All this shit, it just passes. Nobody cares if I vanish man. Seriously. Who cares? It's all gonna just keep moving... and...

(Tearing up)
 That's what life does.

(MORE)

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
It fucking passes. It doesn't
fucking wait... So-

|JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
When you say passes do you mean
your girlfriend? What?

|RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
Yes my fucking girlfriend. All of
it... everything! I can't just sit
here and waste away. So...

Ruben fidgets. Joe watches calmly.

JOE ((ASL - SPOKEN)
I wonder Ruben, during these
mornings when you have been sitting
in my study-
(signs sitting)
Sitting. I wonder if you've had any
moments of stillness?

Ruben stares at the words on the screen.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
Because you're right Ruben the
world does keep moving and it can
be a damn cruel place... But for
me, that place of stillness that
comes when I'm not clamoring, or
running or desperately clutching...
the moments where this crappy
mundane world suddenly becomes
radiant and magnificent, and all
fear is gone... for me, THAT PLACE
is the kingdom of God... not a
church or heaven or any particular
religion... THAT PLACE, inside
you... that is where god lives
Ruben...

Ruben looks away from the screen to Joe who is staring deep
in his eyes.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
And that place will never abandon
you, never pass you by. When all is
lost, it'll still be there for you
I assure you.

Ruben nods as his foot shakes up and down.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
 But I see you have made your
 choice, right?

Ruben stares at the words on the screen. He nods, not able to
 look at Joe.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
 And I sincerely hope it brings you
 happiness-

Ruben nods... Beat...

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
 Look, ah... I was wondering Joe...
 I mean I don't know if it's
 possible but I need to come up with
 some money to buy back my RV and
 um, I can totally pay it back I
 just have a bit of a time issue
 right now-

Joe stares at Ruben.

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN) (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry to ask but...

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
 Ruben? I don't understand the
 situation you've put yourself in
 but from my seat you look and sound
 like an addict-

Ruben laughs and shakes his head.

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)
 That's fine Joe. My situations
 fine. My girlfriends got a rich
 daddy who can totally front me so
 I'll just go ask him. Thought I
 might skip that humiliating fucking
 road, but hey at this point, the
 hell with pride right? No, fuck it.
 Sorry to ask but. Seriously. This
 is nothing. You can't imagine how
 fucking nothing this is. I'm good
 man.

Joe stares.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)
 Okay.

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)

Okay.

Joe nods as Ruben.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)

Ruben, as you know everyone here shares in the belief that being deaf is not a handicap. Not something to fix. That's pretty important around here. All of these kids, all of us need to be reminded of it every day.

Ruben shifts in agitation...

RUBEN (ASL - SPOKEN)

I understand-

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)

And my house is a house built on that belief and built on trust. And when that trust is violated, things happen like what happened to Jenn. Right?

Ruben stares at Joe. Knows he knows.

JOE (CONT'D)

And I can't have that. There are too many others to consider...

Ruben feels a pit in his stomach. He looks at Joe with feigned resilience.

RUBEN

Okay.

JOE (ASL - SPOKEN)

So, in your current state, at this time, I don't see a person who can be here.

Beat.

JOE (CONT'D)

And for my part I will not support the choices you're making financially or otherwise. So I'm going to have to ask you to pack your stuff today and find another place to be Ruben.

Ruben stares at Joe...

Joe stares back...

RUBEN

Cool.

Ruben gets up and leaves. Joe sits and reaches for his mug. His hands shake and for one small moment we see the depth of his burden and his pain at having lost one of his own.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Ruben sits with his bag at a bus/train stop.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Ruben watches closed captioned TV in a dark motel room eating Chinese food out of a container.

INT. MOTEL, BATHROOM - DAY

Ruben unwraps his bandages, looks at his stitched scars.

He takes out electric clippers and shaves his head.

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

Ruben walks across the parking lot with groceries. He watches people talking to each other and laughing.

EXT. MOTEL - DUSK

Ruben does laundry.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Ruben fights to make it through the loneliness and the gnawing desire to get high. He thinks of Lou.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

An Audiologist bends over Ruben and affixes a contraption to his ear with a module that connects magnetically to something now embedded underneath his skin. Ruben watches her lips move noiselessly.

AUDIOLOGIST

Are you ready?

Ruben nods... despite not hearing her.

AUDIOLOGIST (CONT'D)

Okay.

We HEAR ABSOLUTE SILENCE until...

The doctor flips a switch and suddenly sound enters Ruben's head... WE HEAR THE NOISE AS RUBEN DOES...

AUDIOLOGIST (CONT'D)

Can you hear me?

Ruben hears sound for the first time in months. But the sound is strange. Not at all like natural sound. This is digital and harsh sound. Ruben nods... trying to keep from crying. He touches the device around his ear as if maybe the sound will suddenly clear and turn into what he remembers...

AUDIOLOGIST (CONT'D)

How does it sound?

RUBEN

Um... it's weird.

Ruben does not like the sound of his own voice. It is loud and tinny... he tries to suppress his panic... the doctor adjust the frequency. The sound changes but it's still oppressive.

AUDIOLOGIST

How's that?

Ruben is shell shocked.

RUBEN

Ah... sounds bad.

AUDIOLOGIST

As I'm sure you know Ruben, this is not sound like you remember. What you're hearing is actually a digital signal being received by a metal device in your head and it's sort of tricking your brain into thinking that you are actually hearing. But in reality your ears aren't working still. It's the implant inside your head that is creating the sensation of sound. That's the sound you're hearing...

RUBEN

Okay.

AUDIOLOGIST

You gotta give it some time okay? I would suggest you take it easy in these next weeks...

Ruben stares into the void as the metallic sounds fill his head.

EXT. SKY - EARLY MORNING

A jet plane enters the frame. The sound builds to a deafening roar.

EXT. PARIS STREET - DAY

The early morning traffic of Paris like a rocket in Ruben's ears... as he pulls his bag through the city... a scooter goes by, a siren... French school children yapping like geese...

EXT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ruben approaches an ornate Parisian apartment building. He rings a buzzer and waits. An old voice comes through a speaker like a chain saw.

RICHARD (O.C.)

Bonjour?

RUBEN

Ah hello. Is ah... is Lou here?

RICHARD (O.C.)

(heavy accent)

Who is this?

Ruben hesitates.

RUBEN

Ruben. It's Ruben.

A moment - then the door buzzes. Ruben enters -looks around at the sophisticated opulence. He opens the door of an antique elevator, wincing at the metallic clatter. He rises.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

RICHARD (60, French, handsome) opens the door of a sprawling, magnificent Parisian apartment. He looks Ruben over...

RUBEN
Hey. I'm Ruben.

RICHARD
Yes hello. Come in.

Richard turns and walks into the apartment leaving Ruben with no choice but to follow, past a vast array of eclectic and sophisticated stuff. Much of the items relate to Richard as a young singer and his legendary career in music. Richard speaks in French to a couple of WORKERS preparing for a party. Richard disappears into the kitchen.

RICHARD (O.S) (CONT'D)
You are hungry Ruben?

Ruben follows behind unsure if Richard said anything. Richard is making food when Ruben enters the kitchen.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You are hearing now?

Richard gestures to Ruben.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You are hearing?

RUBEN
Um... yeah, I got an operation.

Ruben removes his hat and reveals the hearing devices above his ears. He looks sheepish with his short hair and awkward ear fixtures.

RICHARD
Ah wow. This is very good no?
Louise told me your wish for this.
(Beat)
And so now you will go back to your drums?

RUBEN
I need to get some things settled first but yeah.

RICHARD
Settled like what?

RUBEN
Oh just back into it and you know, financial stuff, just have to figure it all out-

Richard gives Ruben a look-

RICHARD

Is see. Louise is not here. Does she know you are coming? She didn't mention.

RUBEN

No-

RICHARD

Well this will be a big surprise. She has been very busy lately as I'm sure you have heard. We are preparing a party as you see. So she will most certainly be home for this. They think I am to die so we have a birthday party but really it is, as I call it a death party.

RUBEN

Wow. Okay. Then happy birthday or whatever-

RICHARD

It was two months past. As I say not about birth.

Ruben stares.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

But let me tell you it is wonderful to see Louise playing music again.

Richard stares at Ruben.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

It is of her blood as you say.

RUBEN

Right. Yeah.

Ruben fidgets uncomfortably.

RICHARD

I will make you some eggs.

RUBEN

No it's okay.

RICHARD

Yes, you need some eggs.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ruben and Richard sit at the table, the bells of Paris in the background.

RICHARD
Where did you grow up Ruben?

RUBEN
Just uh, kind of everywhere...
Virginia, Georgia, Houston,
Arizona-

RICHARD
Why so many places?

RUBEN
My mother was a nurse in the
military so just had to move a lot-

RICHARD
And your father too?

RUBEN
No. I mean, I don't know.

RICHARD
I see. But this is of your blood
then isn't it, this traveling?

RUBEN
I guess.

Ruben looks away and jerks his knee up and down. Richard observes him...

RICHARD
And now is it back on the road for
you?

RUBEN
Um... yeah, sure.

Ruben looks away - shifts uneasily. Richard tears off a piece of bread and uses it to eat his egg.

RICHARD
I must be honest, I have not always
had such good feeling for you these
years Ruben.

Richard chews...

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I confide it is as one has stolen
something precious. You understand?

RUBEN
Um-

RICHARD
And I admit I am not understanding
this music of yours... so all the
time I am thinking what is this?

RUBEN
Okay.

RICHARD
But Ruben I know that it was not
you who took Louise from me.

Richard chews with ferocity.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Her mother did this... You
understand?

Ruben nods. Richard's hand trembles as he holds the bread...
Ruben watches it.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Yes?

RUBEN
Yes. I know about that.

RICHARD
She took Louise when she left me
and she took her again when she
killed herself.

Richard stares at Ruben.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Louise should have come back here
then but she was hating me so what
could I do?
(long sigh)
But you... you gave her a place to
go at this time.

Richard is suddenly, surprisingly emotional-

RICHARD (CONT'D)

This is very good. I did not like you so much then but now I thank you. I want to say you this okay?

Ruben stares.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

But anyhow, I think you will be happy to see her doing so well. That is what is important right?

Richard chews on another piece of bread.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

No?

RUBEN

Of course.

RICHARD

Ok good.

INT. LOU'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ruben closes the door of a large bedroom. This is Lou's room. Stuff is piled everywhere in typical Lou fashion. Some musical equipment. Books. Next to Lou's bed is a photo of Ruben in front of the Airstream. Ruben picks up a pile of photos from a stack of stuff in the corner of the room. He looks through a series of shots of Lou as a young girl with her very beautiful, once was actress, mother - presumably taken by Richard... on a beach... her mother, topless, flirting with the camera. Lou, withdrawn, even then. Underneath these photos is a stack of magazines highlighting Lou's mother at the height of her stardom in various, highly sexual poses - some with a much younger, cooler Richard. Ruben closes the shutters over Lou's bed muffling the sound of the street below. He climbs into bed.

INT. LOU'S BEDROOM - EVENING

From Ruben's POV, he wakes in a daze to the SOUND of shutters opening, letting the last blue light of the day into the room. Ruben turns over... sees Lou. Ruben can barely recognize her. She looks vibrant and strong.

RUBEN

Whoa.

Lou turns toward him, grins warmly; but uncomfortably; taking in all of her lost friend.

LOU
Hi. Can you hear me?

Ruben sits up, feedback slamming his ears as she latches the shudders.

RUBEN
Yeah. Loud and clear...
Look at you Lulu.

She turns toward him.

LOU
What?

RUBEN
You look different.

Ruben looks at her arm.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
No scratching.

LOU
Oh yeah-

RUBEN
That's good...

Ruben gets up and give Lou a hug, his ears buzzing with the noise.

INT. LOU'S BEDROOM - LATER

Lou sits next to Ruben on the bed, rubs her finger over the bump on Ruben's head and then puts his implant on, feeling the magnet engage with his skin.

LOU
Does it feel weird?

RUBEN
Not really.

LOU
So crazy. How'd you do it Rubi?

RUBEN
Oh I just... I worked some magic...
I have to talk to you about it
actually. I had to-

RICHARD'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD CALLING FOR LOU FROM DOWNSTAIRS.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Lou, tu descend?

Lou pulls herself up suddenly - little manic...

LOU
I'm sorry... I have to go set up
for this... party thing for
Richard. Did he mention?

RUBEN
Yeah.

LOU
It's shitty timing-

RUBEN
No no no it's great it's cool.

LOU
I wish you told me you were coming
Rubi. I would have arranged
something for us.

RUBEN
It's cool. Sorry I just-

LOU
No I'm glad you're here I just feel
bad- actually we could go somewhere
tomorrow if you want? I just have
to do this thing tonight-

RUBEN
Yeah cool-

LOU
You sure it's okay?

RUBEN
Yeah totally-

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ruben walks through the apartment toward the sounds of a stereo blasting frenetic 60's jazz... sees/hears people preparing food, clattering in the kitchen, loudly in French... he peeks around the corner to the front door... Lou is laughing with some guests arriving. She sees Ruben and smiles at him, holding up a "gimme a sec" finger.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - LATER

More guests... the stereo continues playing but now three times louder than before... this is a very entrenched scene, filled with musicians and artists. Ruben might as well be deaf, even as his head is PUMMELED WITH SOUND. He SEES Lou out in the yard AMONGST A GOOD LOOKING GROUP OF PEOPLE. She is genuinely happy to see him coming over. She says something to the others but for Ruben it's just a digital and confusing mess of sounds. Someone says something to him but he can't understand.

LOU

Did you get something to eat?

RUBEN

What?

Lou leans toward him.

LOU

Did you get something to eat?

Ruben nods unsure of what she said.

EXT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Ruben stands by himself, just trying to get through it. Lou steals a glance at him from afar.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The sounds are more intense now as people continue to drink. The harsh sound of a fork hitting a glass-

Now we break out of Ruben's perspective and Richard finishes hitting his glass. The room quiets.

RICHARD (FRENCH SUBTITLED)

I would like to ask my daughter to join me for a song.

LOU

Papa no-

RICHARD (FRENCH SUBTITLED)

Come Louise. It is my birthday. Is that fair?

The crowd likes the idea. Lou does not. Ruben watches her, unsure what is happening. Lou concedes, walks up to her father to much applause.

Ruben watches her but she doesn't look at him. She stands next to her father. Richard whispers something in Lou's ear. Lou flushes, nods - sits at the piano.

RICHARD (FRENCH SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)

Some of you here knew Louise's mother. And you know I wrote many songs for her. This one was Louise's favorite.

(looks at Louise)

You remember?

Lou nods. Richard sits at the piano. Ruben stares at Lou, standing awkwardly behind him. Richard begins to play the piano and smiles warmly at Lou and nods. Lou sings in French, her voice pure and simple. Richard joins her, his once smooth crooning voice is now a scratchy grumble but it mixes with Lou's voice surprisingly well. The words they're singing together clearly have great meaning to both of them. Lou doesn't look at Ruben as she sings but Ruben stares deep into her eyes. There is no mistaking her connection to the experience and her father's world around her. Through Ruben's digital ears, Lou and Richard are a beautiful, fractured tragedy of sound. The song ends and there is a beat of silence before the applause, the sound shattering Ruben's ears. Lou looks away...

INT. LOU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ruben sits on the bed and glances at Lou as she gets ready to join him. Her movements are awkward. She comes to the bed and sits. She turns to Ruben, maybe for the first time since she sang. She reaches out and sweetly rubs his ear - Ruben ignores the loud scratchy sound. He pulls her toward him and kisses her. The kissing intensifies between them and then Lou pulls back and reaches for her glass.

LOU

Sorry I need water.

RUBEN

You okay?

LOU

Yeah. It's just really dry in here.

Lou drinks... puts the glass down and slips back into place next to Ruben... she fondles his ear gently.

LOU (CONT'D)

You're good?

RUBEN
Yeah. Fine.

Beat.

LOU
So tell me how you did this.

RUBEN
The
(pointing at his ears)
This?

LOU
Yeah. That.

Lou stares at Ruben.

LOU (CONT'D)
Where'd the money come from?

RUBEN
It ah... I have to talk to you
about that. It's complicated-

LOU
What did you do-

RUBEN
I just borrowed... I mean I have to
talk to you about it but... it's
cool... we'll talk tomorrow. I'm so
fucking exhausted.

Lou can see she's not getting the truth.

LOU
Okay.

Beat. Ruben taps his leg. Awkward silence...

RUBEN
That was cool tonight. You sounded
really good.

LOU
Haha right.

RUBEN
No really. Straight up. You sounded
amazing singing like that.

LOU
Anyways. Thank you.

RUBEN

Yeah I'm just saying - you were in it.

LOU

Well. I don't know. It's my dad's stuff.

Lou fidgets awkwardly. Ruben sighs.

RUBEN

This is a pretty amazing place.

LOU

Yeah well... it doesn't have wheels.

RUBEN

That's true. But it's cool here. All these fancy French people and shit... has it been weird here... must be weird-

Ruben looks at Lou. She looks radiant. She looks away.

LOU

It's been crazy... lots of really crazy stuff has happened-

RUBEN

Wow I bet. You're speaking French now. I didn't even know you could do that-

LOU

Barely. I had mostly forgotten. But it's coming back a little.

Beat. Ruben looks around at the room.

RUBEN

You remember this place at all?

LOU

Now I do. Yeah- It's disconcerting some of the things we hold onto in our memory without knowing we're holding onto it...

Lou looks off with a very sad look in her eye.

LOU (CONT'D)

Just, I don't know. We never talked about it... ever.

(MORE)

LOU (CONT'D)
So this place was just a weird
dreamy idea. But some things have
come back now...

Lou looks at Ruben.

LOU (CONT'D)
I told everyone about our little
gypsy life...

Ruben keeps looking away.

LOU (CONT'D)
I miss it.

RUBEN
Who's everyone?

LOU
Just people I've met-

RUBEN
Uh huh... yeah we gotta get back in
it Lulu. Back in the fucking
groove. I have to get back and get
the airstream sorted and stuff.

LOU
What do you mean sorted?

RUBEN
Well... just...

Ruben gulps, can't get him self to bring up the money.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
Just... I don't know. Got a lot to
do.

LOU
You mean with the tour?

RUBEN
The tour... everything. We gotta
get on it!

Ruben looks down. When he looks up, Lou is looking away. He notices her scratching her arm in the spot she used to scratch. He stares at her fingernail grinding into her skin. He looks at her face and at the picture of them together in front of the airstream, Lou like a different person then. Ruben's eyes take in the truth of Lou now. She can't go back with him. And he can't stay. The revelation is devastating.

He sits with it, then reaches out and stops her hand from scratching. Lou doesn't look up for a moment. Then she does.

RUBEN (CONT'D)
It's okay Lulu.

Lou stares at Ruben, a crushing sadness coming over her.

LOU
What?

RUBEN
It's okay.

LOU
What's okay?

Ruben stares at her and nods, hardly believing the truth he suddenly knows. He stares.

LOU (CONT'D)
What?

RUBEN
You saved my life and you made it beautiful.

Lou hears this like a gunshot.

LOU
What are you saying?

She looks at Ruben, sees an emotion in him she's never seen. He covers his face, shaking.

LOU (CONT'D)
You saved my life too Rubi.

She puts a hand on him and they wrap themselves around each other, holding tight.

INT. LOU'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Ruben glances down at Lou asleep in bed in the blue light of early morning Paris. He quietly pulls a shirt on. He looks at Lou again for one last moment.

EXT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Ruben opens the door to the street and steps out with his bag. Even the early morning street noise hits his brain hard.

EXT. PARIS - MOMENTS LATER

Now Paris is awake and loud as Ruben walks through it. The sound kills his head...

EXT. PARIS STREET - LATER

Ruben sits on a bench in front of a cathedral square as the sounds of tourists, flocking pigeons, children, coalesce in a crazy horrible cacophony. Then, to add to the chorus the church bells start ringing. Their clanging slams at Ruben's brain. The world around him is a crazy chaotic mess. His first impulse is rage. He reaches up and removes the devices from his ears. Everything goes instantly silent. He breathes. The morning sun breaks over the slate on the steeple. He breathes again, something shifts, his eyes fall over the many moments around him, no longer abrasive, they each have a singular, silent beauty. He looks up at the church bells as they swing silently back and forth...