

FADE IN:

TEXT ON BLACK BACKGROUND

The sound of an acoustic guitar being tuned slowly builds in the background.

*SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW WHERE  
THIS DIRTY ROAD IS TAKING ME  
SOMETIMES I CAN'T EVEN SEE THE  
REASON WHY*

*I GUESS I KEEP ON GAMBLIN',  
LOTS OF BOOZE AND LOTS OF  
RAMBLIN'*

*IT'S EASIER THAN JUST A-  
WAITIN' 'ROUND TO DIE*

-TOWNES VAN ZANDT

MORE TEXT FADES IN

*... YOU MAY WANT TO SKIP MUCH  
OF THE MIDDLE... WHICH  
CONCERN(S) THE LIVES OF PEOPLE  
IN THEIR EARLY TWENTIES, AND  
THOSE LIVES ARE VERY DIFFICULT  
TO MAKE INTERESTING, EVEN WHEN  
THEY SEEMED INTERESTING TO  
THOSE LIVING AT THE TIME*

-DAVE EGGERS

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

A young man in his early-twenties sits on a chair. His face partially off-screen, he peers into the camera. This is JAKE. He holds a guitar in his hands (only seen as the neck)

JAKE  
(Looking at camera)  
Oh hello. I'm glad you came to visit.  
Would you like to hear a new song?

Jake reaches behind the camera and shakes it up and down a couple of times.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You would? Oh, well, are you interested  
in settling back with a can of fine  
domestic lager?

The camera indicates that it is not interested.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Oh that's too bad. I guess it's just the song then...wait, what's that? A title? Looks like you're a someone who knows that great songs have great titles. I'll let you know when I've played it for you. I don't want the title to give a false set of expectations.

Jake looks at the camera and breaths in.

JAKE (CONT'D)

1, 2, 3...

Jake proceeds to play an uptempo folk song a third of the way through until one of his strings breaks.

The opening credits roll.

Jake screws it up a couple of times, laughs to himself and plays the song through, even singing the female backup vocals as well.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Oh, are you interested in the title now? It's called Ha..

A cellphone rings.

Jake holds up his finger to the camera and answers.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Talk to me Pete...yeah...yeah...sure dude, lets grab something.

EXT. SIDEWALK

Jake and PETE, a stocky man in a CORDUROY JACKET and THICK GLASSES, stand on a corner.

PETE

You ready.

He pulls a pill out of his pocket and hands it to Jake.

Jake pops it in his mouth.

Jake and Pete walk briskly down the city sidewalk.

PETE (CONT'D)

It's a fucking crime is what it is Jake. You're not going to find a chick in this whole city who is not going to leave you for another chick. It's just the odds, they are all bisexual, all of them goddammit. And it never works in my favor because I'm no going to call up two bisexual chicks and try and get them together with me. It's like two, you know, angry insects fighting and I'm like the other third insect that is not getting a blowjob.

JAKE

You'd make an excellent potato bug I'd think.

They continue to walk.

INT. CURLY SUE'S BAR - AFTERNOON

They stop and drink a couple of shots of whiskey.

JAKE

I can't get a break in this town, I just want to play for people and everyone only wants bands that use homemade instruments and wear funny hats, but dudes like me, guys who just want to play can only hang out in coffee shops or play in the back of bars where people ignore us. I say, we should start our own place. I'd call it "The Hardware Store".

PETE

You should play here sometime, this place is cool.

JAKE

Here? At Curly Sues? I'm not sure my music...

PETE

Come on Jake, you gotta play somewhere and why not at *the* Curly Sues.

Pete and Jake meet a group of friends at a bar and drink IRISH CAR BOMBS.

They stand outside for a smoke.

JAKE  
What are we doing Pete?

PETE  
What?

JAKE  
Did you hear me or do you not understand?

WOMAN  
Hey, do you guys have a light?

Pete pulls out a novelty lighter and lights her cigarette.

PETE  
Hey, are you bisexual?

WOMAN  
Excuse me?

JAKE  
Pete, you fucker.

Jake sucker punches Pete in the kidney.

Pete moans and falls to the ground.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry for this guy, was he bothering you? He's just had a bad run of luck with his dream of two chicks at once.

The woman puffs her cigarette and nods.

WOMAN  
Serves him right.

Pete struggles to his feet.

PETE  
Oh come on now, what's your name, sweetheart?

WOMAN  
It's Alice, and I have no idea why I'm still talking to you assholes.

Alice throws her still lit cigarette at Jake's chest and walks back into the bar. Jake quickly picks it up and takes a drag. He coughs.

JAKE  
Menthol? I love her.

PETE

You love her? She threw a lit cigarette at you and you love her? You are so weird man.

JAKE

I need to talk to her.

Jake takes out a small single size bottle of alcohol and downs it.

INT. BAR

Jake looks around the bar and finds Alice leaning heavily against the wall and walk slowly forward.

JAKE

Hey, Alice, right, you threw the lit cigarette at me earlier.

ALICE

Yeah, I remember you. Hey, do you still have that? That was my last one...

JAKE

So, uh, what are you doing, I thought you might want to grab a drink.

Alice sizes him up.

ALICE

Dude, seriously, I am completely wasted, I am still not going to sleep with you and your friend. Do I look like a chick that sleeps with two dorks at once, why does everyone keep asking me?

JAKE

No, you've got it all wrong, that guy only sleeps with lesbians, he said it himself.

ALICE

One point for you ace. So...what do you do?

JAKE

I'm a singer, well, a singer-songwriter really.

ALICE

Well, tickle my ass, write me a song.

JAKE  
Wait, what?

ALICE  
Nevermind, okay, here's one... If I told you I ate a sandwich out of the garbage earlier, would you still be talking to me?

JAKE  
Well, what kind of sandwich was it?

Alice pauses for a moment, and then throws up on Jake's shoes.

JAKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
She handed me a hand made business card with her vomitty hand. I think there are other people in the world who fall in love like this, but I wouldn't want to know them.

INT. TABLE

A stack of polaroid pictures. A female hand flips through them.

A picture of Alice and Jake held at arms length.

About 60 pictures are flipped through depicting Jake and Alice's relationship, every 5 or so, they stop and a sound of pencil scratching can be heard in the background.

The camera tilts up to Alice's face.

ALICE  
Jesus christ Jake, we've shot like eighty bucks in polaroids

JAKE  
I wouldn't have had to hoc my boots.

ALICE (QUIETLY)  
Wouldn't have had to use the hanger for that abortion...

Jake makes a weird face at her.

JAKE  
You're sick Alice, let me be, I gotta get this opening song right for tonight.

Alice makes an obscene gesture.

Jake plays the opening notes of his song and begins to sing. He makes a mistake, stops and starts to tune.

Alice crawls onto the bed behind him and flips open a magazine.

ALICE  
We never fuck like we used to.

JAKE (NOT LOOKING UP\_)  
Yup.

ALICE  
I am drawing a picture of us fucking and it's not how we just fucked, but like maybe the 5th time we fucked, and that fuck was a lot better fucked than the fuck we just fucked.

JAKE  
How do you remember the 5th time we slept together?

ALICE  
You should say fucked, because that's what we were doing at the time, the 5th time, we were fucking at that point. Before that, we had sex, and then maybe the 3rd time we made love, and sometimes we just have sex, but mostly we fuck now, and I mean, that time was fucking too, but it was a different fuck we fucked is what I'm saying to you.

Jake gives himself a confused look in the mirror next to him.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
You don't have any idea do you?

JAKE  
You just said fuck more than I can count, that was a lot of fucks and talk about fucking that seems like you're probably just fucking with you me. Do you follow?

ALICE  
Yeah, I'm not an asshole like you.

Jake plucks a few more strings.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
So what's going to happen after tonight?

JAKE

I dunno, I'll probably just sleep, I've got to work in the morning.

ALICE

No, I mean, with the music, I mean, where are you gonna play? You worked hard to play at Sue's so where are you going to play next? We could record something, I've got a tape player, we could record your stuff all lo-fi and creepy and send it out to record companies and tell them you're dead.

Jake sighs and puts his guitar in his case. He picks it up, kisses Alice on the cheek and walks out the door.

EXT. ALLEY

Jake walks down a desolate alley, only accompanied by his guitar case.

ALICE (V.O.)

Sometimes I'm cold, I know it. I was leaving him on the night he cared about most, and I wasn't even going to tell him. I've always been this way, break off things clean and move away. I'm taking the pictures this time, so maybe I'm sentimental after all. I mean, they did cost me, well, honestly I stole them from my last boyfriend. It just seemed like the thing to do at the time.

INT. CURLY SUE'S - NIGHT

Curly Sue's is a small, raggedy looking bar, a large sign in the back proclaims "Live Music Most Nights".

Jake fiddles with the placement of a single kick drum placed next to a microphone.

A CRUSTY LOOKING BAR WORKER walks up next to Jake.

CRUSTY BARK WORKER

Listen kid, you better not screw up, I gotta serve all this shitty beer to these kids and I don't want you drivin' them away.

JAKE

(meekly)

Sure man, I got some good songs.

CRUSTY BARK WORKER

Then fucki n' start playi ng them then.

Jake sits down behind the drum and grabs puts his guitar strap over his shoulder.

JAKE

He..hey, I'm the Kitchen Knives, thanks for listening.

Jake's pupil dilates.

Jake is sitting on a much larger stage bathed in red light.

He plays an intense dirge with the kick drum all the way through.

Jake's pupils constrict and he snaps back to reality with the crusty bar worker in front of him.

CRUSTY BARK WORKER

Jesus christ kid, on one hand, you scared away the assholes who here earlier, but on the other, you fucking sucked, either way, you're buying yourself a drink.

The bar guy moves away, revealing Pete sitting alone at a table facing the stage. He stars clapping slowly.

Jake sets his guitar against his chair, stands up and walks to Walter.

PETE

That was amazing man, fucking amazing!

JAKE

Was anyone even here?

Walter shakes his head no.

PETE

You were on last man, everyone was pretty much gone after that disco Skynyrd cover band incident. Christ, you didn't even open your eyes the entire time.

JAKE

I just couldn't look at them, ya know?

Yeah, you were good, but your shit is too depressing. All that country stuff.

(MORE)

(CONT' D)

You might as well be burying your dog at the same time. It's pathetic.

JAKE

It's just sums up the last three years of my life. You get to a certain place, you get over the hump, you play a gig where the songs are yours and everyone is here to see, something showy.

PETE

Dinner theater?

JAKE

Yeah, fucking dinner theater is what they want to see. Dramatics, stage presence, I'm here to play music, but if I played what those assholes wanted, all I'd have to do is put on a clever t-shirt and play a sparkly keyboard.

PETE

You're selling yourself short, I think that'd be a great idea.

JAKE

Shut the fuck up Pete.

PETE

Hey, sorry, so Alice dropped by and said to give you a note.

He hands it over to Jake.

Jake opens the note.

EXT. ALLEY

Pete is pushed out the alley door with great force.

PETE

Jesus Christ, I'm sorry I said anything.

JAKE

Were you fucking her?

PETE

Jake, you're crazy, I wouldn't fuck her, she's gross.

Jake punches Pete in the face, and puts him in a headlock.

JAKE

Just tell me you fucked her.

Pete elbows Jake in the ribs, pushes him into some garbage bags and kicks him in the ribs.

PETE

Listen, I did not sleep with Alice. She gave me the stupid note, I don't know if it said that I slept with her, but I didn't. I wouldn't. But don't try and kick my ass again.

He punches Jake in the face once more for good measure, and then offers a hand. Jake slaps it away.

Pete rights his glasses and walks down the alley.

PETE (CONT'D)

Give me a call next time you want your ass kicked

Jake lays on the piles of garbage staring into the street light.

JAKE (V.O.)

Sometimes people say "It's kill or be killed". I think of sharks and stock-traders whenever it floats across my brain. Usually when I'm playing pinball or masturbating. The idiocy of it usually takes the fun out of the whole thing. It's not like there is some incoming tide of raiders with swords clenched between her teeth. It's hard enough trying to communicate to people without swords. It's harder still, just trying to exist in a world that can, if you want, offer very little in the way of actual barriers, so much so that people create them artificially, and by artificially, it means you get drunk, act like a maniac and your friend kicks you in the face.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I am a weak person and I need a drink.

Jake struggles to his feet and brushes garbage and debris off of himself and walks slowly down the alley.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Jake walks into a dark bar and takes a seat at the end. He stares at the knick-knacks stacked behind the bar and shoved in corners. It looks like the vomit of a thousand estate sales.

Jake notices a glass sitting next to him at the bar.

An older man sits down next to him. He is wearing a BLUE HEADBAND and has a PIPE stuck between his teeth. The pipe is not lit. This is JACK.

JACK  
You look fucked up, kid.

Jake looks at him and stays silent.

Jack motions to the bartender.

JACK (CONT'D (CONT'D)  
Two whiskeys.

Jack sizes Jake up.

JAKE  
Listen brother, I know you probably ain't interested in an ugly old bastard like me and what he's gotta say, but I been kicked to shit a time or two and the only thing I found to cure it out of me is to sit in a bar and drink some fucking whiskey and get meaner than before. There ain't nothing better than drinking the cheapest, stiffest shot in the bar and then drinking another.

The waitress returns with the two shots.

Jack slides on of the shots in front of Jake.

JACK  
Sally, you mind if I light this thing up now?

Sally waves at him from down the bar.

Jack pulls out a box of matches from his coat and lights his pipe slowly.

JACK (CONT'D)  
So I notice that you're carrying a guitar, as beat up as it is, you play at all?

JAKE  
Yeah, just had my last gig, I think.

JACK

Last gig, eh? You movin' on to something bigger, or giving up your place for a better man?

JAKE

I guess I'm giving up on this whole fucking thing. It's not that I suck, I mean, lots of people who make money as musicians are terrible, and I'm no better or worse than any hack that ends up on MTV, but I just can't play the game, and maybe this is as far as I go. Maybe it's time to take the most traveled path, the one that everyone back home takes.

JACK

I know what you're saying friend. I been married a time or two, I got a couple of families out there, I found out a couple of times that it's hard enough way settling down as it is to kick the shit out of things and carry on in shitkicker bars like this one.

JAKE

Lets have another drink.

The camera pulls back from the pair

V. O.

As Jake and the stranger poured back shots of the worst whisky in the worst bar in the northwest, Jake began to slowly play a chord in his head, a verse started to form, and then a second. He listened to the old man's stories of woe and death and realized some things that only an omnipotent narrator can discern.

JACK

Well son, you got to light 'em up and shoot it down, if you know what I mean.

JAKE

Thanks Jack.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jake walks down the street with a guitar slung over his shoulder. In the background a guitar is being plucked, and Jake sings. His voice is hollow and muted.

## ELSEWHERE

Alice sits in a car at a crossing crossing, the sign has JAKE pointing one way, and ELSEWHERE pointing. She takes a swig from a bottle.

PETE walks unlocks his front door to find his GIRLFRIEND and another woman making out. He looks sad. One of them motions for him to join. He flips them off and walks out the door.

Jake opens his front door and throws his guitar case into his bathroom. He slumps to the floor near the toilet and looks at the case, now broken up against the shower.

Alice takes another swig of whiskey and turns on the car.

Jack puffs on his pipe in the bar, the cherry glowing red.

Pete walks to the end of the hallway, stops, and turn runs back towards his door.

Alice stairs at the sign in front of her, and revs the engine.

Jake sits on the edge of his tub singing the song that we heard in the background.

As the song ends, we cut to a tape from the beginning of the film.

JAKE

Sorr about that interuption, but thanks  
for listening to The Ki tchen Knives and  
my song Handmade and Skin Ti ght.

Jake leaves his guitar on the bed.

CREDITS ROLL OVER TAPE

FADE OUT: