



"Shaming of the True" is a wild, genre-blending musical odyssey that follows Johnny Virgil and his band chasing fame in the dazzling yet ruthless *City of the Sun*. The relentless pressure to conform and commercialize their art pushes Johnny to his breaking point, fracturing the band and leading to the tragic downfall of his songwriting partner, Michael. Fueled by Kevin Gilbert's eccentric and visionary music, the play weaves a surreal, thought-provoking tale of ambition, sacrifice, and the cost of chasing the dream.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHNNY VIRGIL ----- Male, 30s, creative soul, committed to win
DIANE ----- Female, 30s, smart, supportive, Johnny's partner
MICHAEL ----- Male, late 30s, songwriter/piano, wears black
DANNY ----- Male, 30s, bass player, really hates his day job
BOB ----- Male, 30s, drummer, go with the flow guy
DANNY VESTRI ----- Male, 40s, A&R for Megalaphone Records
ARTIE SHTIPP ----- Male, 50s, record producer, savvy, old school
RECORD PRESIDENT ---- Male, 50s, successful, distant, good heart
ACCOUNTANT ----- Male, 40s, accountant for Megalaphone, meek
SPIDERS ----- Female & Male, 30s, angry, spiteful musicians
SECRETARY ----- Female, 40s, admin at Megalaphone, entitled
A&R CHOIR ----- Female & Male, 40s, voices of reason for the biz
D.J. ----- Male, 50s, stereotype D.J., at KSUN radio
CHIP ----- Male, works at CND Records, too happy, unaware
ALEXA ----- Female, 20s, secretary at CND
FANS OF JOHNNY ----- Female, late 30s, fanatics living in the past

"The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side."

- Hunter S. Thompson

ACT I

CURTAIN OPENS TO SHOW A GRID BUILT HOUSING SIX AREAS, THREE ACROSS THE TOP AND THREE ALONG THE BOTTOM. THE BACKDROP BEHIND THE GRID IS BLACK. THE LIGHTS COME UP ON THE TOP RIGHT SECTION WHERE JOHNNY VIRGIL STANDS HOLDING AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR. HE IS TALL AND THIN WITH DIRTY BLONDE HAIR TO HIS SHOULDERS. THE AUDIENCE HEARS LOW SYMPHONIC STRINGS. HE BEGINS TO PLAY.

Parade

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Virgil,
I play this here guitar,
I play it for myself.
Got a heart that's full of
music,
A head that's full of songs
Got a love for nothing else.

Gonna take a look around me,
parades are marching by
of the people who have made it,
who are never gonna die.

My name is Johnny Virgil,
and I'm gonna be a star,
gonna get my share of fame.
Everybody's gonna love me,
everybody's gonna care,
everyone will know my name.

I've been listening to Dylan,
I've been listening to The Dead;
I've been listening to the music
that plays inside my head.
I've been listening to The
Beatles, I've been listening to
The Who, and they don't know it
yet,
but they're gonna listen to me too.

My name is Johnny Virgil.
Everybody, did you hear?
My name is Johnny Virgil.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

LIGHT FADES AS THE SONG FINISHES. LIGHTS COME UP ON THE LOWER LEFT SECTION WHERE A SMALL COFFEE HOUSE IS HALF FILLED WITH PATRONS. BEHIND THE BAR IS DIANE. WITH A HALF APRON AROUND HER WAIST, SHE IS MAKING COFFEE DRINKS. HER HAIR IS JET BLACK AND FALLS BELOW HER SHOULDERS. LIGHT COMES UP ON A SMALL RISER ON THE LEFT WHERE JOHNNY SITS ON A STOOL WITH HIS ACOUSTIC GUITAR.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

I appreciate you coming in tonight. I have one last
song before my official non-union break. Be sure to tip
your barmaid, I get half of the haul.

JOHNNY BEGINS TO PLAY.

Goodness Gracious

JOHNNY

Goodness gracious,
is there nothing left to say?
When the ones that get to keep looking
are the ones that look away.
It's pabulum for the sleepers
in the cult of brighter days.

Goodness gracious, at the mercy of the crooks,
we're broke and stroking vegetables
and there's way too many cooks.
In every pot a pink slip,
in every mouth a hook.

Goodness gracious,
I'm not listening anymore
cause the spooks are in the White House
and they've justified a war.
So wake me when they notify,
we're gonna fight some more.

Goodness Gracious,
not many people care.
Concern is getting scarcer,
true compassion really rare.

I can see it on our faces,
I can feel it in the air,
goodness gracious me.

Goodness Gracious
my generation's lost.
They've burned down all our bridges
before we had a chance to cross.
Is it the winter of our discontent
or just an early frost?

Goodness Gracious
of apathy I sing.
The baby boomers had it all and wasted everything.
Now recess is almost over
and they won't get off the swing.

Goodness Gracious
we came in at the end.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY (cont'd)

No sex that isn't dangerous, no money left to spend.
We're the cleanup crew for parties
we were too young to attend.
Goodness Gracious me.

Goodness gracious,
my grandma used to say;
The world's a scary place now,
things were different in her day.
What horrors will be commonplace
when my hair starts to gray?

AUDIENCE CLAPPING

JOHNNY

Thanks, I'll be back in 20 minutes, and of course, the
entire band, collectively known as Thud, plays here
every Friday night.

JOHNNY LEAVES THE SAGE AND WALKS TO THE BAR WHERE
DIANE IS CLEANING GLASSES.

DIANE

Half of the haul, huh?

JOHNNY

These are my people. I'm just trying to throw you a
little love.

DIANE

I see, it's nice to have that support.

JOHNNY

You got it. Have you seen Michael? He's supposed to
come by.

DIANE

No, haven't seen him. You two are inseparable, almost
tied at the hip.

JOHNNY

Hmm, didn't know it was that obvious.

DIANE

Did you know that when we first met, I thought you two
were gay? A lot of people did.

JOHNNY

Should that concern me?

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

No, it's just that you are always together, it leads one to wonder...

JOHNNY

And now you're in love with me, funny how that whole metro-sexual thing works out.

DIANE

Funny isn't the word.

JOHNNY

Was I the cute one?

DIANE LOOKS CONFUSED.

JOHNNY

You know, almost every gay couple has a cute one and a... not so cute one. Was I the cute one?

DIANE

I don't believe you... Why's Michael coming by?

JOHNNY

We haven't heard back from the record label that has had our demo for 10 days. He was going to call them. I just wanted to see how creative our 'turn down' was.

DIANE

Mr. Positivity, maybe more record companies would want your music if it weren't so...dark.

JOHNNY

I sing the truth.

DIANE

You know I like it, but not everyone is looking for the truth.

JOHNNY

You think? I don't agree.

DIANE

The mind needs to escape from time to time. I understand you have a purpose, I get that, and your songs are real...just maybe too real. Everyone is searching for something, some for the truth. Some are just looking for the latest excuse for why things aren't what they should be.

JOHNNY

Excuses...or answers.

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

To most of us, they're the same, only excuses feel better because they are in the past...reasons stick around to haunt you.

JOHNNY

The world has an Air Supply, they don't need another one.

DIANE

I don't know...Air Supply sold a shitload of records. I'm not saying all of your music should be liquid sunshine, but occasionally you two could come up with something that doesn't make you want to run screaming into the night.

MICHAEL ENTERS THE BAR WITH A LARGE ENVELOPE TUCKED UNDER HIS ARM. HE HAS A MUCH BIGGER BUILD THAN JOHNNY AND HIS DARK HAIR IS SHORT AND CROPPED TO HIS ROUND FACE. HE IS WEARING BLACK JEANS AND A BLACK SHIRT.

MICHAEL

Yo.

JOHNNY

Did you know that Diane used to think we were a couple?

MICHAEL

Was I the cute one?

DIANE WALKS AWAY WITH HER HEAD HANGING DOWN.

JOHNNY

Did we hear anything?

MICHAEL

Ya, they like the stuff and want to hear more. I spoke with Danny Vestri, one of their A&R guys. He's going to be out here in New York in two weeks and is willing to come and see us. He said he could be our 'savior' ...imagine that, Jesus is coming to hear us play!

JOHNNY

Willing to come and see us? That doesn't sound like he's that big of a fan.

MICHAEL

You know what I mean; I thought we would try to make it happen at the rehearsal studio. That way, we wouldn't have any interruptions or distractions. We could make sure that the sound was right before he got there... give us a bit of an advantage.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Makes sense, what did they say about the songs?

MICHAEL

Nothing really, they wanted me to send them a photo of the band. We can use the shot from that indie release.

JOHNNY

But nothing about the songs themselves?

MICHAEL

He said they were ominous (pause) ominous. We've been called a lot of things over the years...but ominous is a new one.

JOHNNY

That's cool. I guess it's a compliment, in some way. What do we know about this label?

MICHAEL

Meglaphone Records. Lots of indie artists, but has major distribution. If someone on their roster starts to sell, they can have their stuff in every Walmart on the planet in three days. A lot of acoustic bands, some coffee house, and some born-again stuff. I think they sign loads of bands and hope that some of them take off. They do a lot of social media around their roster.

JOHNNY

Good, and I think the rehearsal hall idea is the way to go.

MICHAEL

There's nothing like a controlled environment to allow someone to really listen. Are we still on for a short practice tonight?

JOHNNY

Yes, 9ish.

MICHAEL

Cool, see ya then.

MICHAEL LEAVES THE COFFEE HOUSE. DIANE WALKS FROM BEHIND THE BAR AND BEGINS WIPING DOWN TABLES. JOHNNY FOLLOWS AND SITS AT ONE OF THE SMALLER TABLES.

JOHNNY

Why is this scaring me?

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

I think that's normal; you aren't used to trying to sell yourself.

JOHNNY

I don't see it as that; maybe it's just not my comfort zone.

DIANE

I don't think I've ever seen your comfort zone. If this works out, it will take you away from everything you know, home, friends, but isn't that part of the gig?

JOHNNY

Ya, I'm not doubting the decision, it's just I thought I would be more excited when this happened.

DIANE

Well, it hasn't happened yet, so you probably need to concern yourself with making this guy think you're the band that's going to make him famous.

JOHNNY

Like the guy who signed Air Supply?

DIANE

Now you're talking. You guys need to just do what you do best; your songs will serve you well. I know I tease you a lot, but...Johnny Virgil, you have something very original and very real; there are people out there waiting for it.

JOHNNY

Kind words, I just hope we get a chance for them to hear us...I would do anything for that to happen.

JOHNNY REACHES OVER THE TABLE AND HUGS DIANE.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM

LIGHTS COME UP ON A REHEARSAL ROOM. THE WALLS ARE IN SOME NEED OF REPAIR AND HAVE ACOUSTIC TILES SPORADICALLY PLACED ON THEM. THE BAND'S EQUIPMENT IS STREWN THROUGHOUT THE ROOM, WITH MOST OF IT FACING THE CENTER. BOB, THE DRUMMER, IS SITTING AT HIS KIT WORKING ON THE KICK PEDAL. HE IS IN HIS LATE TWENTIES AND HAS A THREE-DAY GROWTH OF BEARD. DANNY, THE BASS GUITAR PLAYER, IS STANDING PLAYING HIS GUITAR WITH HEADPHONES ON. HE IS TALL AND LANKY, AND IS WEARING A RED FLANNEL SHIRT. JOHNNY AND DIANE ENTER THE ROOM THROUGH THE THICK PADDED DOOR. JOHNNY IS CARRYING HIS GUITAR AND HOLDING DIANE'S HAND.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Greetings.

DANNY LOOKS AT JOHNNY AND NODS HIS HEAD TO THE BEAT OF THE MUSIC IN HIS HEADPHONES. BOB DOESN'T LOOK UP, HE RESPONDS AS HE CONTINUES TO BE BENT OVER WORKING ON HIS DRUM KIT.

BOB

You don't have an extra kick pedal on you, do ya?

JOHNNY

(SARCASTICALLY)

I don't think so.

DIANE

Hi Bob.

BOB

I'm not going to bother asking you, Diane.

JOHNNY

Good call.

JOHNNY

Where's Michael?

BOB

He ran to the store, said he needed Scotch and Roloids.

DANNY

TO JOHNNY

So, are we set with this A&R guy?

JOHNNY

Seems so, next week he is supposed to come by and meet us, listen to some music...so far that's about it.

DANNY

What do we know about this label?

JOHNNY

Michael knows more than I do, but it sounds like they promote their stuff well, but it's kind of a shotgun theory...sign a bunch of bands and see which one hits.

BOB

So we just have to be the best one on the roster.

JOHNNY SMILES

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL WALKS IN HOLDING A BROWN SACK. HE IS ANIMATED AND MOVES QUICKLY TO HIS KEYBOARD.

MICHAEL

Who wants a scotch?

BOB

In a bit.

JOHNNY

When you die, are you going to donate your liver to science? I think you owe it to humanity.

MICHAEL

You might be on to something.

MICHAEL OPENS THE SCOTCH AND POURS SOME INTO A PAPER CUP SITTING ON HIS KEYBOARD. HE PUTS THE CAP BACK ON THE BOTTLE AND PUTS IT DOWN ON THE GROUND BY HIS FEET. HE RUBS HIS HANDS TOGETHER AND STARTS TO FIDGET WITH THE SETTINGS ON HIS INSTRUMENT.

MICHAEL

Johnny, check this out.

MICHAEL HITS A CHORD, AND A VERY BRASH HORN BLAST IS PLAYED. IT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING JAMES BROWN WOULD USE IN HIS DAY.

MICHAEL

Feeling a bit Motown tonight.

JOHNNY

That's good, are you thinking of that for "Rain"?

MICHAEL

You are psychic; once again, the man can read my mind. Want to give it a shot?

JOHNNY

Nice.

HE LOOKS AT DANNY AND BOB.

Guys ready?

BOTH NOD

Waiting for the Rain

*After the horn blasts play during the intro,
Johnny smiles and nods to Michael in approval.*

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Remember when we used to talk the hours away,
remember when we laughed together?
Lately I'm noticing a change of heart,
and noticing the change in weather.

I've been in love before and it always ends the same,
I've heard the thunder now I am waiting for the rain
waiting for the rain, waiting for the rain.

THE BAND IS ENJOYING PLAYING.

Am I the fool who stands at the edge of his life
and burns his bridge before he crosses?
Why do I believe that I can make it work?
When any fool would count his losses.

I've been in love before and it always ends the same
I've heard the thunder now I am waiting for the rain
Waiting for the rain, yeah, waiting, waiting.

Painted smile on an empty face
Protocol maintained
Missing piece of a broken heart,
waiting for the rain.

I've been in love before and it always ends the same.
I've heard the thunder now I am waiting for the rain.
I've been in love before and it always ends the same

Whoa, yeah, oh yeah, I'm waiting for the rain
Waiting for the rain, waiting, waiting
Waiting for the rain.

JOHNNY

That's a keeper.

BOB REACHES DOWN TO HIS KICK DRUM.

BOB

Broke it, give me a few guys.

DANNY PUTS HIS HEADPHONES BACK ON AND STARTS TO PLAY
SILENTLY. JOHNNY WALKS OVER TO MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

Thought that would add a little soul to the mix.

JOHNNY

It was cool; we might want to use that in "Last Plane

(CONTINUED)

Out".

MICHAEL PICKS UP HIS GLASS OF SCOTCH AND FINISHES IT.

JOHNNY

What do you think we should play for this A&R guy?

MICHAEL

Why don't we do one or two of the songs he heard on the CD, and I was thinking "Best Laid Plans" might be cool.

JOHNNY

"Best Laid Plans"? Why did you pull that one out, we haven't played that in forever.

MICHAEL

First, it's a great song. Second, the label is somewhat known for acoustic bands, and that song would be very strong with an unplugged arrangement.

JOHNNY

Are you concerned that we will be too loud for this guy?

MICHAEL

No, I just think if we gave him something that fit into their norm, it would be a good idea.

JOHNNY

I think the song is a good choice, but I'm not sure about changing it around for him. What happens if he likes it that way and we are stuck playing a bunch of acoustic songs on the record?

BOB

Sounds like a nice problem to have.

JOHNNY

I get the idea that we really want to get our music out there guys, but changing it radically for some A&R guy? That's not us; well, at least that's not me.

MICHAEL

I don't think doing an acoustic version of a song qualifies as "changing our music."

JOHNNY

It just surprises me; we have always let our music speak for itself...and it has.

MICHAEL

Yes it has, to hundreds of people; wouldn't it be nice to have it speak to a bigger audience?

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

I guess it's just what price you are willing to pay.

MICHAEL

I think you're making too big of a deal about this, forget it we won't play the song.

JOHNNY

It's not about the song; it's about your willingness to treat this like a competition. And changing what we do to win over the judges.

MICHAEL

You don't see this as a competition? An audition? What the hell do you think it is?

JOHNNY

I don't see it as some fuckin' talent show, do you?

MICHAEL

Unfortunately, ya. It's our job to show this Vestri guy that people will want to hear our music. There is no prize for being the best unheard band on the fuckin' planet. I think we are all a bit tired of putting everything into this band, and not getting any further away from our day jobs.

JOHNNY

I don't see it that way.

MICHAEL

How do you see it? We don't make enough to live on, with an album out there and the ability to tour, we have a fighting chance. Johnny, people aren't beating down our door to give us a record deal.

JOHNNY

If that's the band's vote, then I suggest we put on the best 'dog and pony' show we can for this guy. But I have to tell you that's pretty fucked up. We will host the circus.

BOB

I see what you're saying, Johnny, but don't think what Michael is suggesting compromises anything...especially if it makes our stuff more appealing to this label.

JOHNNY

(TO DANNY)

Danny?

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

I hate my day job; I truly hate my sorry ass day job.

JOHNNY

(SARCASTICALLY)

Then it is decided, we will play the song with an ' acoustic flare' and blow enough liquid sunshine up this guy's ass he will think we are the new Glen Campbell.

BOB

Who the hell is Glen Campbell?

JOHNNY

Read a book.

BOB

Was he an author?

BOB STARTS TO SING THE CHORUS TO "RHINESTONE COWBOY"

FADE TO BLACK

INT. COFFEE HOUSE IT IS CLOSED AND ONLY A FEW LIGHTS ARE ON.

LIGHTS COME UP TO SEE MICHAEL AND JOHNNY SITTING AT A SMALL TABLE IN THE CLOSED COFFEE HOUSE. DIANE IS BEHIND THE BAR, MAKING THREE CUPS OF COFFEE. SHE COMES AROUND THE CORNER WITH THE COFFEE AND JOINS THEM AT THE TABLE. THE LIGHTS ARE LOW AND THEY ARE THE ONLY ONES IN THE PLACE. MICHAEL GETS UP AND WALKS OVER AND REACHES BEHIND THE BAR, RUMMAGING AROUND IN THE DARK. HE RETURNS TO THE TABLE WITH A BOWL OF NUTS AND SETS THEM DOWN AS HE SITS. BOTH JOHNNY AND DIANE GIVE HIM A CONFUSED STARE.

JOHNNY

(TO MICHAEL)

Hungry?

MICHAEL

They go great with scotch.

MICHAEL REACHES INTO HIS JACKET POCKET AND BRINGS OUT A PINT BOTTLE OF SCOTCH. HE OPENS IT AND POURS SOME INTO HIS COFFEE CUP. HE LOOKS AT JOHNNY TO OFFER HIM SOME.

JOHNNY

(AFTER A MOMENT)

Well, if we are going to have nuts.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY MOVES HIS CUP OVER FOR MICHAEL TO POUR SOME
IN HIS COFFEE. MICHAEL THEN LOOKS AT DIANE.

DIANE
Scotch and coffee? I'll pass.

MICHAEL
Don't knock it; think of the guy who invented the
Harvey Wallbanger...pure genius.

DIANE
I think we have different visions of genius.

JOHNNY
(LOOKING AT MICHAEL)
Are we ready for this?

MICHAEL
If we aren't ready by now, something's wrong. We have
been working towards this for a long time, partner.

DIANE
Did you say the label is based in Los Angeles?

MICHAEL
Sunset Blvd, you don't get more L.A. than that.

JOHNNY
(TO DIANE)
How does L.A. sound to you?

DIANE
I think you boys have some work to do before you ask me
what I think of L.A.

JOHNNY
(PAUSE, THEN TO MICHAEL)
Well?

MICHAEL
It's going to be the biggest move we've ever made. And
I think we are ready for it, I know I am.

JOHNNY
Living in L.A. is one thing, but from the moment the
album is done, we will be living on the road.

MICHAEL
That's the normal part for me. I moved 11 times before
I graduated from high school. Moving is easy.

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

Where was home?

MICHAEL

There wasn't, it made it easier. My Dad was never happy with what he was given, so we always moved to where he thought it would be better for him, but it never was. So we just kept on packing our stuff up and moving on. Some would look at my father and think he was driven, but it was more of an obsession. At first, I wanted to believe that everyone moved as much as we did...but they didn't. I used to tell people that my dad had these really cool jobs: astronaut, scientist, or even a brain surgeon. They never found out because by the time anyone got to know the family...we moved. My favorite was when he looked for undercover spies,

(SMILING)

he did that one a lot.

DIANE

What did your mom think of this?

MICHAEL

It didn't matter what my mom thought, or what I thought, or what anyone thought. My dad didn't leave a whole lot to discuss; it was just following the leader.

JOHNNY

Even if the leader didn't know where he was going?

MICHAEL

(IN A ROBUST VOICE)

Oh, he knew where he was going, the next town, the next state...it didn't matter. I just don't think he knew what he wanted, so he kept searching. My poor Mom just followed him with little to say. I think she just wanted his attention as much as I did, and her only way to get that was to not ask questions and follow him aimlessly. (pause) Maybe that explains why I paint, and maybe even why I chose the piano, two things that I can do by myself, and not depend on anyone else.

JOHNNY

But now you depend on the band.

MICHAEL

(DEFINITIVE)

I depend on you. The band is just a fringe benefit.

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

I have to lock this place up, and you two are discussing the problems of being successful...maybe a bit premature, you think?

JOHNNY

I guess so, but this could mean so much to all of us. Our only responsibility would be to write and play music. Just think of it, waking up and realizing that today you were going to create something that was going to be heard around the world by millions of people.

DIANE

Maybe, but this could be just the next step to getting out of New York, to something new and different.

MICHAEL

I like New York, it just seems to me that if you don't look like Bowie, you don't get taken seriously.

DIANE GETS UP AND COLLECTS THE COFFEE CUPS. AS SHE REACHES FOR MICHAEL'S, HE PICKS IT UP AND DOWNS THE LAST SWALLOW. SHE PUTS THEM BEHIND THE BAR AND BEGINS TURNING THE LIGHTS OUT.

DIANE

Gentlemen, we are wrapping up this evening.

JOHNNY AND MICHAEL GET UP AND START FOR THE DOOR.

MICHAEL

(EXCITED AND COMICAL VOICE)

A new adventure for the crime-avenging twins!

JOHNNY

We will not only rid Los Angeles of all crime, but ridiculously bad music will be vanquished to the desert!
(JOHNNY STARTS MAKING SWORD FIGHTING GESTURES)

Ah Ha!

AS DIANE WALKS OUT BEHIND THEM, CLICKING OFF THE LIGHTS SHE MUMBLES.

DIANE

Great, at least we don't have to worry about maturity.

FADE TO BLACK

(CONTINUED)

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM

LIGHTS COME UP INSIDE THE BAND'S REHEARSAL HALL. BOB IS HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH DANNY. JOHNNY IS PLAYING HIS ACOUSTIC GUITAR, WORKING OUT SOME SONG PARTS. HE TRIES A COUPLE OF DIFFERENT TAKES ON THE SONG'S INTRO, AND SEEMS TO BE GETTING FRUSTRATED.

JOHNNY

This ain't happening! it's not an acoustic song; it needs power. It's about the battle of good vs. evil.

BOB AND DANNY STOP TALKING AND LOOK OVER. WHEN JOHNNY STOPS TALKING AND GOES BACK TO PLAYING, THEY RETURN TO THEIR CONVERSATION. AFTER A FEW MORE ATTEMPTS, JOHNNY STOPS AGAIN.

JOHNNY

I don't feel it. Maybe it's the wrong song to play?

BOB AND DANNY LOOK OVER AGAIN, AND WHEN JOHNNY STOPS TALKING AND GOES BACK TO PLAYING, THEY AGAIN RETURN TO THEIR CONVERSATION. JOHNNY TRIES A COUPLE OF DIFFERENT WAYS TO PLAY THE INTRO, STOPS, THEN STARES AT THE GROUND.

JOHNNY

I hope you both know you are absolutely no help at all.

BOB

Just doing our job.

JOHNNY

How's that

BOB

That's what we do when you are working on a guitar part. We listen, pay attention, and stay quiet; that's always been our job.

DANNY

(SMILING)

We're actually pretty good at it.

JOHNNY

You're shitting me, right?

(LONG PAUSE)

Are you saying that I don't value your opinion? Is that how I make you feel?

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

No, not at all. It's just that when it comes to songwriting, your and Michael's ideas are genuinely better than ours.

BOB

So far, it's worked quite well. Besides, we have played this song the new way 50 times over the past week, and the A&R guy is going to be here in 15 minutes. why are you trying to make it more difficult than it is?

JOHNNY

I don't know, maybe I'm just overthinking this whole thing. So, am I compromising myself and my song if someone is not even going to know it? I mean, artists are always changing their stuff to fit an audience, aren't artists, right? Isn't that what we are doing, changing our stuff for this guy? Am I out of my mind?

BOB

Yes.

JOHNNY

Yes?

BOB

Yes, you are out of your mind. Relax, or you are going to jack this up, and that's the last thing you want to do.

DANNY

His label likes acoustic bands. He will listen to it and be enthralled. How is he getting here?

JOHNNY

Diane is picking him up at his hotel and bringing him over.

THE DOOR OPENS AND MICHAEL WALKS IN.

MICHAEL

Evening boys.

MICHAEL DROPS HIS PACK DOWN AND SITS BEHIND THE KEYBOARDS. AFTER SWITCHING ON THE EQUIPMENT, HE LOOKS UP AT THE GUYS AND GIVES A HUGE, OVERSTATED SMILE

JOHNNY

Do you all want to run through the set one more time?

MICHAEL

First off, it's not a set, it's three songs. (CONTINUED)

Secondly, we have done these songs over and over so many times that I'm beginning to dislike them.

JOHNNY

You have a better idea?

MICHAEL

(PAUSING TO THINK)

Yes, yes, I do. I have a grand idea; let's play something new. Something we've never played; it will loosen us up.

MICHAEL PUT HIS HANDS IN THE AIR.

MICHAEL

(EXCITED)

Alright, here we go...hang on, this one's gonna hurt a bit.

MICHAEL STARTS PLAYING BARRY MANILOW'S "COPACABANA". THE BAND JOINS IN SHOWING A LIGHTHEARTED APPROACH. ALL OF THEM ARE SMILING AND JOHNNY IS LAUGHING. THEY HAM IT UP AS THEY BANG THROUGH THE SONG. THE DOOR TO THE REHEARSAL ROOM OPENS, DIANE AND DANNY VESTRI WALK IN WHILE THE BAND IS CLOWNING AROUND. THE BAND CONTINUES FOR A MOMENT, THEN NOTICES THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE, AND THEY ABRUPTLY STOP. LOOKING A LITTLE EMBARRASSED, THEY GREET VESTRI.

VESTRI

(SMILING)

Catchy.

MICHAEL

Ya, you can't beat the classics.

DIANE

Mr. VESTRI, let me introduce you to Thud.

MICHAEL WALKS FORWARD AND REACHES OUT TO SHAKE VESTRI'S HAND. SLOWLY VESTRI REACHES OUT AND WELCOMES THE GREETING.

MICHAEL

Welcome to New York, and more importantly, to our little hideaway.

VESTRI

Right, thank you. I'm guessing I caught you working on something new?

JOHNNY

Just fooling around.
(INTRODUCING THE BAND)

(CONTINUED)

This is Bob on drums, Danny on Bass, and of course, you have spoken to Michael on the phone. I'm Johnny.

VESTRI

Nice to meet you all. My meetings for this evening have been moved up, so I can only stay for a short while.

VESTRI LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM

Nice place you have here.

JOHNNY

It's home.

VESTRI

Thud?

(DRAMATIC PAUSE)

I have been trying to figure that one out.

MICHAEL

It's kind of an inside joke.

VESTRI

Right, how inside?

JOHNNY

Most people don't care about the name, just the music.

VESTRI

I guess you're right, I really don't care. It was just more out of curiosity, I imagine.

JOHNNY

(INTERUPTING WITH A STOIC TONE)

'Thud' - the sound of a man's head hitting the table when he realizes that no one understands.

VESTRI

(UNCOMFORTABLE PAUSE)

What do you have for me to hear?

MICHAEL

We had planned three songs, if you have the time. You've heard two of them already; they were on the tape we sent you.

VESTRI

I heard the first one; it sounded interesting.

JOHNNY

You flew out here after hearing one song?

(SARCASTIC)

I guess that's quite a compliment.

(CONTINUED)

VESTRI

Right, let's hear what you guys can do.

THE BAND STARTS TO GET THEIR INSTRUMENTS ON AND READY. VESTRI'S CELL PHONE RINGS, AND HE LOOKS AT THE INCOMING CALL NUMBER, THEN MOTIONS TO THE BAND THAT HE HAS TO GET IT. MICHAEL NODS AS VESTRI TURNS AWAY AND SLOWLY WALKS AGAINST THE SIDE WALL AND TALKS.

MICHAEL

(TO JOHNNY)

"That's quite a compliment?" Pretty subtle.

JOHNNY SHRUGS AND CONTINUES TO PUT ON HIS ACOUSTIC GUITAR. THE REST OF THE BAND IS READY TO PLAY, WAITING FOR VESTRI TO GET OFF THE PHONE. VESTRI LOOKS OVER AND SMILES, ENDS THE CALL.

JOHNNY

This one is called Best Laid Plans.

VESTRI

Best Plans, let's hear it.

JOHNNY

(SHORT PAUSE)

Best Laid Plans.

JOHNNY LOOKS BACK AT BOB AND COUNTS OFF THE BAND. JOHNNY STARTS WITH THE ACOUSTIC INTRO.

The Best Laid Plans

A FEW SECONDS INTO THE SONG, VESTRI'S PHONE RINGS AGAIN. HE MOTIONS TO THE BAND TO CONTINUE TO PLAY. AS HE ANSWERS THE CALL, HE PRETENDS TO BE LISTENING, BUT IS ACTUALLY PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO THE CONVERSATION. JOHNNY LOOKS AT MICHAEL AND ROLLS HIS EYES. VESTRI MOTIONS TO THE BAND TO KEEP PLAYING EVEN THOUGH HE STILL HAS THE PHONE TO HIS EAR. AFTER A FEW BARS, JOHNNY PUTS DOWN THE ACOUSTIC IN DISGUST. HE PICKS UP THE ELECTRIC AND TURNS THE AMP ON. HE AGGRESSIVELY CONTINUES THE SONG WITH THE ELECTRIC GUITAR, SMILING TO THE BAND IN A MANNER OF ACCOMPLISHMENT. SOON VESTRI ENDS THE CALL AND LEANS AGAINST THE WALL AS HE LISTENS. JOHNNY IS PLAYING IN A VERY ANIMATED MANNER, ALMOST AS THOUGH THERE WAS NO AUDIENCE.

JOHNNY

(SINGING)

(CONTINUED)

The Shepherd raises up his staff
and hurls it at the crowd
to the sound of a maniacal calliope.
And Leo the Lion reclines on the throne
he had built by the boys in the band,
and the crown upon his head reads
'By the Queen's decree'.
Do we all agree,
luck knows no justice at all.

Everyone's a self-made man,
there before the thing began,
making such a circus of the best-laid plans.
Everyone's responsible, empty words and purses full,
making such a circus of the best-laid plans.

The clowns arrive in a pirate ship
and pose before the crowd,
hilarious remarks and inactivity.
They throw the dog-faced boy a bone
command him to play dead,
for the Hollywood and Hollywood infirmary,
for the standard fee. (repeat after me)
Luck knows no justice at all.

Everyone was paid their fee; I made you and you made me
and we made such a circus of the best laid plans.
Everyone's responsible, empty words and purses full,
making such a circus of the best-laid plans.

You can tell a big man by the company he fleeces.
Step right on up here, son, see how your wealth increases
Get your Cross of Iron, get your thirty silver pieces.

Here's Dr. Dogma's smug prescriptions,
placebo cures of all descriptions,
shucking and jiving for the circus
of the best-laid plans.
I wish I might, I wish I may.
You've ruined my August, and it's only
May. I'm off to join the circus, Dad.
Of the best laid plans.

Everyone's responsible, empty words and purses full,
making such a circus of the best-laid plans.

DURING THE FINAL CHORUS, VESTRI'S PHONE RINGS AGAIN AND
HE TAKES THE CALL. JOHNNY WALKS TOWARDS HIM AS HE'S
PLAYING, MAKING IT VERY HARD FOR VESTRI TO HEAR THE
CALL. VESTRI PLUGS ONE EAR, AND TRIES TO HEAR THE CALL,
BUT JOHNNY FOLLOWS HIM AROUND THE ROOM PLAYING LOUDLY.
FINALLY, VESTRI CRINGES AGAINST THE WALL, TRYING TO HEAR

(CONTINUED)

THE PHONE BUT WITH NO SUCCESS. HE OPENS THE DOOR TO THE HALL AND EXITS THE ROOM, CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

Everyone was paid their fee; I made you and you made me
and we made such a circus of the best laid plans.

Everyone can fill their nose.
Everyone can strike their pose.
Welcome to the circus.
The Circus of the Best Laid Plans.

THE BAND FINISHES THE LAST FOUR CHORDS OF THE SONG AND STOPS. THERE IS A MOMENT OF SILENCE. DIANE OPENS THE DOOR AND LOOKS OUTSIDE FOR VESTRI. SHE BRINGS HER HEAD BACK IN AND CLOSES THE DOOR, SHAKES HER HEAD AS TO LET THEM KNOW THAT HE WASN'T OUTSIDE. JOHNNY TURNS AROUND AND LOOKS AT THE BAND WITH A BIG SMILE.

JOHNNY
Well, that went nicely.

MICHAEL
Right.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT IN QUEENS, N.Y.

MICHAEL IS SEATED IN A RECLINER STARING AT A PAINTING THAT SITS ON AN EASEL ACROSS THE ROOM. HE HAS A PAINT BRUSH IN ONE HAND, AND A BEER IN THE OTHER. HE IS SLUMPED IN THE CHAIR AS HE BRINGS THE BEER TO HIS MOUTH, DRINKS THE ENTIRE CAN, AND CASUALLY DROPS THE CAN BY THE RECLINER'S SIDE.

THE PAINTING IS A PORTRAIT OF A MAN. HIS FACE SEEMS TO BE SMERED WITH PAINT ALMOST AS IF HE IS MELTING. MICHAEL GETS OUT OF THE CHAIR AND WALKS OVER TO THE PAINTING, AND STANDS DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF IT. HE CONTINUES TO STARE AT IT, AS HE PUTS HIS HANDS ON HIS HIPS. HE TURNS AWAY FROM IT, AND THEN SPINS AROUND AS IF TO CATCH IT OFF GUARD. THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR, BUT MICHAEL CONTINUES TO BE COMPLETELY FOCUSED ON THE WORK OF ART.

JOHNNY
It's me.

THE DOOR OPENS AND JOHNNY WALKS IN SLOWLY. HE NOTICES THAT MICHAEL IS ALMOST IN A TRANCE, STARING AT THE PAINTING. JOHNNY IS CARRYING A SIX PACK OF BEER AS HE WALKS PAST MICHAEL TO THE KITCHEN. MICHAEL REACHES OVER AND SWIPES A
(CONTINUED)

BEER FROM THE PACK WITHOUT TAKING HIS EYES OFF THE PORTRAIT. JOHNNY PUTS THE BEER IN THE REFRIGERATOR AND RETURNS TO THE FRONT ROOM. HE STOPS FOR A MOMENT AND WATCHES MICHAEL AS HE CONTINUES TO BE CAPTIVATED BY THE PAINTING. JOHNNY LOOKS AT THE PAINTING FOR A MOMENT, THEN LOOKS BACK AT MICHAEL, THEN BACK AT THE PAINTING.

MICHAEL

I can't get him to blink his eyes.

JOHNNY LOOKS AT MICHAEL WITH A BIT OF CONCERN, THEN CONTINUES HIS WAY TO A CHAIR AND SITS.

JOHNNY

Let me know how that works out for you.

MICHAEL

(OPENING HIS BEER)

It's so lifelike, it's almost as if he is here in the room with us.

JOHNNY TAKES A LONG LOOK AT THE PORTRAIT, TURNING HIS HEAD FROM SIDE TO SIDE.

JOHNNY

With all that paint smeared on his face, how would you even know if he blinked his eyes?

MICHAEL

That's not smeared paint, that's what he looks like.

MICHAEL CHUGS HIS BEER ALL AT ONCE.

JOHNNY

Who is that?

MICHAEL

(PAUSING)

My Father.

JOHNNY

I don't think your father had a smeared face.

MICHAEL

You've never met him.

(BURPS)

He had a very unrecognizable appearance; it was kind of his Trademark.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL SITS ON THE COUCH.

JOHNNY

We should use that as our first album cover.

MICHAEL CONTINUES TO STARE.

JOHNNY

Is he still alive, your father?

MICHAEL

I think so. I'm sure someone would have called me and let me know if he wasn't.

MICHAEL GETS UP AND PUTS THE PAINTBRUSH ON THE EASEL. HE MOVES THE EASEL BACK AND TURNS IT SO THE PAINTING FACES THE WALL.

MICHAEL

He was the kind of guy who was in the room, but wasn't truly there. It was almost as if the family was a waiting room for him, until it was time to go somewhere else.

JOHNNY

Did you guys get along?

MICHAEL

I think so. We didn't fight a lot, we didn't talk a lot, and we didn't do much together. The complicated issues were easy for him; the simple things were difficult. Just sitting and talking, watching a parade, playing catch; he wasn't comfortable with that kind of stuff.

LONG PAUSE

I never felt important. Maybe I just wasn't that important to him, but I was in good company. I don't think he ever let anyone get close enough to him.

JOHNNY FOCUSES INTENTLY ON MICHAEL

MICHAEL

(SOFTER VOICE)

When you find yourself talking to someone, wondering if you stopped...would they notice? That was my childhood. He never hit me, never screamed...never really seemed to care. He looked just like that. I waited for years for the other shoe to drop, and it never did. It's hard to imagine lying in bed wishing that he would lose it, scream, and tear the place apart. One smashed bottle against the wall would have made me feel a part of something, something real.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

You should have been in my house; you would have fucking loved it.

MICHAEL

Maybe, but I wasn't. I was in my world.

MICHAEL LOOKS AT HIS BEER.

MICHAEL

These used to be larger.

LONG PAUSE

JOHNNY

So, when are we supposed to hear back from the label?

MICHAEL

(BECOMING MUCH MORE ENGAGED)

Soon I guess, or never...I'm not sure.

JOHNNY

I don't think I pissed him off too much.

MICHAEL

I don't think so either. I would have done the same thing, but it's hard to pin a guy against a wall with a piano. At least he knows that we are serious about what we are doing. If it doesn't go, then we continue to swim upstream until something happens.

JOHNNY

Ya, I just had a good feeling about this one.

MICHAEL

If it's meant to be...

MICHAEL'S PHONE RINGS. HE GETS UP TO ANSWER IT AS JOHNNY HEADS INTO THE KITCHEN FOR MORE BEERS.

MICHAEL

(ANSWERING THE PHONE)

Yello.

JOHNNY COMES BACK INTO THE ROOM.

MICHAEL

(ON THE PHONE)

Really, and you're sure of that? I see. *(pause)* I appreciate the call. Email me this information in case I wake up in the morning and remember it all as a dream. Cool, thanks.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL PUTS THE PHONE DOWN SLOWLY. HE TURNS TO JOHNNY.

MICHAEL

We got it, we fucking got it! We are moving to the City of the Sun!

JOHNNY

No shit?

MICHAEL

Two record deal, and an advance for us to live on in L.A.

JOHNNY LUNDGES FORWARDS AND HUGS MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

We leave in the morning.

JOHNNY

Tomorrow?

FADE TO BLACK

INT. DIANE'S APARTMENT. IT IS NICELY DECORATED, WITH FLOWERS ON THE FRONT TABLE. LIGHTS COME UP ON DIANE AND JOHNNY; SHE IS SITTING ON THE BED FACING HIM, HE IS SITTING ON A CHAIR. THEY ARE BOTH SILENT AND LOOKING AT THE FLOOR.

DIANE

(SOFTLY)

Tomorrow?

JOHNNY

We need to be out there by Friday. Michael and I are going first, and Danny and Bob will follow next week.

DIANE

I should be excited for you, I think I am... but I'm sad. I knew it would happen for you; you deserve it. I just didn't realize it would be so soon. This is what you've been working for all your life. It's time for the world to hear your stories; you and Michael have a lot to say.

JOHNNY

And you?

DIANE

Unless you have a better plan, I imagine I will be hitting L.A. when the time is right.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY SMILES AND NODS IN AGREEMENT.

DIANE

Get your album done. Don't let anything or anyone get in your way of making the music you were born to create. You and Michael are a brilliant team, count on each other...he may be the only one you can trust, don't forget that.

DIANE STANDS UP SLOWLY AND SMILES

So, is your first single going to be about me? I think it should be, I think I have that coming.

JOHNNY

All my songs are about you, in some way. You're my home.

DIANE

You've written some pretty dark shit Johnny Virgil, I'm not sure if that's a compliment.

JOHNNY SMILES

JOHNNY

It wasn't meant as a compliment, just the truth.

DIANE

I imagine the rest of the band is on top of the world right now.

JOHNNY

Danny reminded me that he "really hates his sorry ass day job" and he was headed down there to quit in person. When I called Bob, I couldn't hear a thing with his girlfriend screaming in the background. I guess that's a good sign. Yes, everyone is excited and ready for this.

DIANE

Are you ready for this?

JOHNNY

(QUIETLY)

I think so, I hope so. When it's someone else's music, it's easy to see what is good and what isn't. When I hear a song, I know what I would have done differently with a chorus or a lyric...but that doesn't necessarily mean that it would make it better...just different. When it's my music, it comes from a place that has no ability to reason. I can tell if an idea is headed down

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

the wrong road, but when it's finished and I play it for you, or Michael, you are hearing it differently because you know me. You are hearing me within the song; the rest of the world doesn't know me.

DIANE

I love you, Johnny, I'm proud of you. Let the world see you...let them hear you. Don't question what you are doing, no caution, no filter, just you. I will be a part of that world soon enough...when the time is right.

JOHNNY LOWERS HIS HEAD AND COMES TO REST ON DIANE'S FOREHEAD.

DIANE

Take care of yourself, and take care of Michael.

FADE TO BLACK.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EXT. OUTSIDE JOHNNY'S FLAT IN N.Y., IT IS EARLY MORNING;
THE SUN IS SHINING.

CITY OF THE SUN

THERE IS A LARGE CARDBOARD BOX SITTING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS FROM JOHNNY'S FLAT. THE BOX HAS FLOWERS AND PEACE SIGNS PAINTED ON IT WITH FLUORESCENT COLORS. IT HAS WHEELS PAINTED ON IT AS IF IT IS A 'HIPPIE BUS' FROM THE 60'S. JOHNNY COMES RUNNING DOWN THE STEPS WITH A SMALL SUITCASE AND A GUITAR CASE OVER HIS SHOULDER. MICHAEL COMES UP FROM STAGE RIGHT WITH A SUITCASE AND THROWS IT IN THE BACK OF THE CARDBOARD BOX. JOHNNY TOSSES HIS STUFF IN THE BACK ALSO AND STOPS TO LOOK AT MICHAEL. THEY BOTH START TO DO A LITTLE DANCE OF EXCITEMENT AND CLIMB INTO THE 'BUS'. THEY LIFT UP THE BOX AND HEAD OFF AS IF THEY WERE DRIVING AWAY. THEY STOP INTO A MAKESHIFT GAS STATION, ALSO PAINTED IN PSYCHEDELIC COLORS. THERE IS AN ATTENDANT AT THE PUMPS.

JOHNNY

(NICELY AVOIDING THE ATTENDANT, SINGING TO THE AUDIENCE)

The attendant at the Texaco saw the guitar case in my back seat and decided to impart his tragic tale. He said: "I used to play in a band like you, we even made a record too." and he sang a bar that hardly rang a bell. Now I'm not one to make a lot of omens and premonitions and fleeting thoughts but I must admit that I tried to avoid his stare. 'Cause I didn't want to see him see himself in me with the look of an extinguished flame that might be lurking there.

MICHAEL

Waxing sad with drip and dreg,
c'mon now Toto get off my leg,
you gotta remember we're not in Kansas anymore
and remember always to look both ways,
say 'please' and 'thank you' and curtsy twice,
before you gore their sacred dinosaurs...

VESTRI AND THE A&R CHOIR APPEAR IN THE TOP
RIGHT CUBICLE. THE CHOIR IS DRESSED IN BLACK.

VESTRI AND THE A&R CHOIR

Welcome to the City of the Sun.

VESTRI

Johnny on the sidewalk,
Johnny on the street,
Johnny in the places where the outlaws meet.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VESTRI (cont'd)

Johnny on the sofa,
Johnny shaking hands,
Johnny with the spinning head in Wonderland.

DIANE WALKS INTO THE TOP LEFT CUBICLE.

VESTRI AND THE A&R CHOIR

Welcome to the City of the Sun.
Welcome to the City of the Sun.

DIANE

Oh, Johnny, you've got a song in your
heart, you've got important things to say.

A MEMBER OF THE A&R CHOIR

We're here to help you make a new start,
we're not gonna take your heart away.
You stand before us like a veiled figure at the end of
a long gallery,
distant and forever mysterious.

VESTRI

Advice from the tasteless to the bland,
wash all the magic from your hands.
Make it so we might understand.

FOUR PEOPLE ARE LOWERED DOWN TO THE STAGE ON WIRES. THEY
ARE WEARING BLACK LEATHER PANTS AND HAVE ELECTRIC GUITARS
STRAPPED TO THEIR BACKS. THE GUITARS RESEMBLE INSECT
LEGS.

SPIDERS

Good morning, precious.
Good morning, special.
I've got news for you,
there's millions like you...

THE LIGHTS COME UP ON A DJ BOOTH AT THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE
STAGE. THE DJ HAS HEADPHONES ON AND IS BROADCASTING OVER
THE RADIO.

DJ

Every one of you that are listening to this broadcast,
I want you to pack your bags. You are not going on a
vacation, we are moving. Can you shout Amen somebody!
Because we are moving into the City of the Sun where we
can enjoy all of its blessings!

JOHNNY

I was there to get no rest
It's the shaming of the True, I guess...

(CONTINUED)

VESTRI

But Johnny, I can see you're qualified.
Johnny on the sidewalk,
Johnny on the street,
Johnny in the places where the bigwigs meet.

THE A&R CHOIR

Welcome to the City of the Sun.

DIANE

Oh, Johnny, you got a seed in your
head, it is the seed of your demise.
Ambition's going to lure you away
into the land of compromise.

MEMBER OF THE A&R CHOIR

You stand before us like a brash over-ripened nectarine;
someone better pick you soon.
Advice to the dying from the dead:
silence the voices in your head.
Wouldn't you rather eat instead?

INT. RECORDING STUDIO. AUDIO EQUIPMENT IS POSITIONED
AROUND THE ROOM.

MICHAEL IS ALONE IN THE ROOM, SITTING WITH HIS ELBOWS ON
THE CONSOLE. JOHNNY ENTERS THE ROOM CARRYING HIS GUITAR
CASE. MICHAEL TURNS AROUND AND STARTS TO APPLAUD.

JOHNNY

Thank you.

MICHAEL

I have always been a fan.

JOHNNY

How does the room look?

MICHAEL

Looks good, I think. I don't know what a lot of this
gear does, but it looks like it works.

JOHNNY

I would say that is key. Are we the first ones here?

MICHAEL

Ya, Bob and Danny are a few minutes away. I haven't
heard anything from Vestri or his 'guy'.

JOHNNY

Vestri is sure big on this producer.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

I did some background on the guy and he was the shit years ago. Made a lot of records, sold a lot of records, and worked with new bands mostly.

JOHNNY

Well, we will see. At least we are in the studio, anything can happen.

JOHNNY WALKS AROUND THE CONTROL ROOM AND OUT INTO THE STUDIO TO LOOK AROUND. HE RETURNS TO WHERE MICHAEL IS SITTING AT THE RECORDING CONSOLE.

JOHNNY

I worked on that lyric for the new song last night; I think I might have something.

MICHAEL

Cool.

JOHNNY OPENS UP HIS BACKPACK AND PULLS OUT A SPIRAL NOTEBOOK. HE TAKES A SEAT NEXT TO MICHAEL AT THE CONSOLE AND OPENS THE NOTEBOOK. MICHAEL READS THROUGH THE PAGES.

JOHNNY LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM AS MICHAEL READS.

JOHNNY

So, this is where dreams are made? Seems a bit cold, but when we start making noise, that should change.

MICHAEL FINISHES READING

MICHAEL

It's good, but it's a little big.

JOHNNY

Big?

MICHAEL

I love the idea, but it takes a while to get to it.
(PAUSE)

Did I ever tell you about Miss Parish, my 7th-grade English teacher? 70 years old, single, and drove a Jaguar XKE. You wouldn't have believed this woman. She was about 5 feet, and nothing but piss and vinegar. Her entire life was about the classics, but she always had a Rolling Stone rolled up in her bag. Anyway, she used to preach to us that we should always think of words as if they were in short supply. Almost as if there was a pool to choose from, and when they were gone...they were gone. The simplest way to explain something while still painting that picture was the true test of an

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

writer. It was all about those few brushstrokes that make the difference between a painting...and a work of art. So, we had an assignment to write a short story that was to be a large part of our grade for the semester. The only rule she gave us was that it had to include the following topics: religion, royalty, sex, and mystery. In keeping with my usual adolescent attitude, my entire paper read like this:
Oh my god...religion, the Queen...royalty, is pregnant...sex, who did it?...mystery.

JOHNNY

What grade did she give you?

MICHAEL

(QUICKLY)

An F, but that's not the point. She was right, our words have to be chosen to carry more than their weight. Less is more. Check this out; it's something I've been working on...

MICHAEL GETS UP AND GOES INTO THE STUDIO. HE SITS AT THE PIANO. JOHNNY FOLLOWS HIM INTO THE ROOM.

MICHAEL

Take love, for instance. It always seems to work better if both people think they have a slight upper hand. In a way, it's like a good poker game; you don't want to seem vulnerable to anyone, so you put up a front in ways that make you feel you're protected. It's no different when you are in love. Each person wants the other to believe they are willing to walk away if it comes to that, even though the absolute opposite is the truth.

Neither of them believes it, but they spend years establishing those electric fences. Don't get me wrong, they will fight to the death defending the fact that their relationship is built on 'honesty,' and in some ways it is...but neither is willing to be seen as helpless or weak.

Now, when it all starts crashing down, they have spent so much time building up those protective walls...it's almost impossible to figure out why it went wrong. The rules they have silently approved are now killing them. So, rather than preaching all that...

MICHAEL PLAYS AND SINGS THE FIRST VERSE OF "HOLDING ON WITH BOTH HANDS."

Holding on With Both Hands

How did we ever come to this?
A careless word or an empty kiss.
And I'm so brave to say I'm ready for the end,
until you say you are too.

THE LOAD IN DOOR AT THE SIDE OF THE STUDIO SWINGS OPEN
WITH A CRASH. BOB AND DANNY PILE IN CARRYING THEIR
EQUIPMENT.

MICHAEL

(TO JOHNNY)

Let's kick some ideas around tonight.

JOHNNY AND MICHAEL GET UP AND HELP WITH LOADING IN
THE GEAR.

DANNY VESTRI ENTERS THE CONTROL ROOM WITH ARTIE
SCHTIPP. ARTIE IS A LARGE MAN WITH A PATCHY,
INEFFECTIVE BEARD. HIS CLOTHES ARE DISHEVELED AS IS
HIS OVERALL APPEARANCE.

VESTRI

(LOOKING INTO THE STUDIO)

Looks like they are on time.

ARTIE

Half the battle.

(ARTIE LOOKS AROUND THE CONTROL ROOM)

I've done a lot of great things in this room. So,
which one is Johnny?

VESTRI

The tall blonde.

ARTIE

He looks like a star, and if we do our job right...he
will be.

VESTRI

We've done it before, just like old times. My man, this
could put you back on the map, being quite honest.

ARTIE

(LAUGHING)

There is no room in music for honesty, don't ever
forget that.

THEY NOTICE VESTRI AND ARTIE ARE STANDING IN THE CONTROL
ROOM. THEY PUT DOWN THEIR EQUIPMENT AND ENTER THE ROOM.

(CONTINUED)

VESTRI

Boys, may I present to you the infamous Artie Schtipp.

ARTIE IMMEDIATELY STEPS FORWARD AND SHAKES JOHNNY'S HAND.

JOHNNY

Thanks...this is our drummer Bob, Danny on bass, and Michael on songwriting and keyboards.

THERE IS A PAUSE WHILE ARTIE JUST FOCUSES ON JOHNNY.

VESTRI

Well, you are booked in this studio for the next two weeks, so the place is yours. I have to get back to the office, can't wait to hear what comes out of here.

VESTRI SHAKES ARTIE'S HAND, NODS TO THE BAND, AND EXITS THE CONTROL ROOM. THE BAND AND ARTIE STAND LOOKING AT EACH OTHER IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

JOHNNY

So, Artie...what's the plan? How do you see this thing playing out?

ARTIE

Let's sit down and figure that out.

THE BAND SETTLES INTO CHAIRS AROUND THE ROOM. MICHAEL AND JOHNNY SIT AT THE CONSOLE IN THE ONLY TWO CHAIRS THERE. ARTIE SEARCHES FOR A SEAT AND THEN LOOKS AT MICHAEL. MICHAEL LOOKS AROUND FOR AN ADDITIONAL CHAIR AND, AFTER A MOMENT, OFFERS HIS CHAIR TO ARTIE, WHO TAKES IT. MICHAEL SITS DOWN NEXT TO BOB.

ARTIE (CONT.)

This space needs to be a true creative environment. If I'm going to do my magic, then we have to have completely open minds as to what we are creating. You have to keep in mind that the way your songs sound now is not necessarily what they will sound like on the album.

JOHNNY

I'm all about the creative vibe, but I'm not quite sure I catch you on the 'your songs will sound different' part.

(CONTINUED)

ARTIE

I didn't say they would sound different. What you have heard in your heads in the past is not what I will necessarily hear in my head. A studio is a place for change, not a place for replication. You do that on tour, every night in every city. Here in the studio, we create and the way you are used to playing your songs is going to change; that's why I'm here.

MICHAEL

Are you going in with the mind that every song needs to change, or is it just keeping an open mind as to what possibilities we have?

ARTIE SILENTLY SMILES AND RAISES HIS ARMS IN THE AIR IN UNCERTAINTY.

DANNY

We just want this album to represent who we are; our songs aren't the average pop crap out there.

ARTIE

If it was the average crap, we wouldn't all be here. Finish loading your gear in, and let's get started getting some sounds. It will be good, trust me.

THE BAND GETS UP AND STARTS TO MOVE INTO THE STUDIO. JOHNNY STAYS SEATED LOOKING AT ARTIE. ARTIE RETURNS THE STARE. MICHAEL TAPS JOHNNY ON THE SHOULDER AS HE HEADS TO THE GEAR.

MICHAEL

Let's go big, fella.

AFTER A SHORT PAUSE, JOHNNY GETS UP AND HEADS IN TO FINISH LOADING THE GEAR. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, YOU HEAR AN EXCITED YELL FROM IN THE STUDIO.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

THE GEAR IS SET UP AND AN ASSISTANT ENGINEER IS FINISHING LAYING DOWN THE MICROPHONE CABLES. HE IS A SMALL-FRAMED 18-YEAR-OLD NAMED LOPES. JOHNNY POINTS TO THE FLOOR IN FRONT OF WHERE HE IS STANDING.

JOHNNY

Anywhere around here is fine.

LOPES

(POINTING TO THE ISOLATION ROOM)
I think you'll be in there.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Out here will be fine.

LOPES SETS UP A MICROPHONE STAND AND A MICROPHONE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM. IT IS FAIRLY CLOSE TO MICHAEL'S MICROPHONE AND KEYBOARD RACK. LOPES CONTINUES TO LAY DOWN CABLES AS JOHNNY AND MICHAEL DISCUSS THE SONG. ARTIE NOTICES FROM INSIDE THE CONTROL ROOM AND ENTERS THE STUDIO.

ARTIE

Lopes, put Johnny's mic in the iso room

JOHNNY

What's the theory behind that?

ARTIE

Leakage, sound leakage. I don't want his drum on your vocal track, and I don't want your vocals on his drum track.

JOHNNY

I think we would do better if we played as a band, in one room. It's worked so far.

ARTIE

That's not the way it's done. Lopes, put the gear in there.

(TO JOHNNY)

You will be able to hear everyone in your headphones. It will be as if you are all back in NY playing at that rat's nest you called home.

JOHNNY

This doesn't feel like home.

ARTIE

It's your new home, Johnny; now let's start getting some sounds. Bob, are you ready to make some noise?

BOB STARTS TWIRLING HIS DRUM STICKS IN THE AIR.

BOB

Making noise is my specialty.

BOB STARTS TO PLAY HIS ENTIRE DRUM KIT LOUDLY, WITH MASSIVE CYMBAL HITS. WHEN HE NOTICES THAT ARTIE AND EVERYONE ELSE ARE JUST STARING AT HIM, HE STOPS WITH A LOOK OF CONFUSION.

ARTIE

(SARCASTICALLY)

That was beautiful, now let's do it one drum at a time.

(CONTINUED)

ARTIE SPEAKS TO THE BAND THROUGH THEIR HEADPHONES

ARTIE

Alright, Bob, quarters on the kick.

BOB STARTS TO DO SINGLE HITS ON THE KICK DRUM. ARTIE AND LOPES ARE SEEN WORKING IN THE CONTROL ROOM. AFTER A MINUTE OF SINGLE KICK HITS, BOB LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM AND GIVES HIS BEST ROCK STAR GRIMACE AND STARTS TO TWIRL HIS DRUM STICKS OVER HIS HEAD.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

THE BAND IS IN THE STUDIO WITH THEIR INSTRUMENTS. JOHNNY IS STANDING IN THE ISOLATION ROOM WITH HIS GUITAR AND HEADPHONES ON. DANNY IS PLAYING SINGLE NOTES ON HIS BASS GUITAR AS ARTIE AND LOPESS ARE DIALING IN THE SOUND. ARTIE SPEAKS TO THE BAND.

ARTIE

Alright, let's get the mix in your cans.

JOHNNY LOOKS CONFUSED AND GLANCES OVER TO MICHAEL THROUGH THE GLASS IN THE ISO ROOM DOOR. MICHAEL TAPS ON THE SIDE OF HIS HEADPHONES AND SMILES. JOHNNY UNDERSTANDS WHAT "CANS" ARE AND SMILES BACK.

ARTIE

Let's start with Danny, quarter notes.

DANNY BEGINS TO PLAY.

ARTIE

Everyone hear Danny?

BOB

Yup.

DANNY

Yup

MICHAEL

Yup.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

NOPE

ARTIE LOOKS OVER AT JOHNNY AND CONTINUES TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS
ON THE CONSOLE.

ARTIE
HOW ABOUT NOW?

JOHNNY
A BIT.

ARTIE
Michael, hit some keys.

MICHAEL BEGINS TO PLAY HIS KEYBOARDS

ARTIE
Boys?

DANNY
Yup.

JOHNNY
Yup.

MICHAEL
Yup.

BOB
Nope.

ARTIE LOOKS UP AND THEN BACK DOWN AT THE CONSOLE.

ARTIE
Johnny, guitar.

JOHNNY STARTS PLAYING HIS ELECTRIC GUITAR IN THE ISO
ROOM.

MICHAEL
Nope.

DANNY
Nope.

BOB
Yup.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

A bit.

ARTIE AGAIN LOOKS UP IN FRUSTRATION.

ARTIE

Let's take one, and I'll dial it in as we go.

JOHNNY

What?

DANNY

(LOUDLY TO JOHNNY)

Let's play something, and the mix will happen.

BOB

What?

ARTIE MAKES THE MOTION WITH HIS HAND TO START.
JOHNNY SEES ARTIE'S SIGNAL AND SPEAKS INTO HIS
MICROPHONE.

JOHNNY

For those who can hear me...let's do 'Remember my Name'
from the top.

THE BAND NODS TO JOHNNY, BOB GIVES A COUNT OFF WITH HIS
STICKS.

Remember My Name

MICHAEL STARTS THE INTRO PIECE, AND JOHNNY MOTIONS HE
CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING IN HIS HEADPHONES. ARTIE ISN'T WATCHING AND
OVERLOOKS JOHNNY'S CONCERN. JOHNNY SHARES GLANCES WITH THE REST OF
THE BAND AS THEY ARE FIDDLING WITH THEIR HEADPHONES. WHEN THE
DRUMS START, JOHNNY PULLS OFF HIS HEADPHONES IN FRUSTRATION AND
KICKS OPEN THE ISO ROOM DOOR. HE ENTERS THE STUDIO WITH THE REST
OF THE BAND PLAYING HIS GUITAR. ARTIE RAISES HIS ARMS IN CONFUSION
AND FRUSTRATION. THE BAND MEMBERS SMILE AND EACH OF THEM, IN TURN,
SHAKE OFF THEIR HEADPHONES AND PLAY WITH RENEWED ENERGY, HAVING
FUN BEING A BAND. JOHNNY MOVES OVER AND STARTS SINGING IN
MICHAEL'S MICROPHONE. THE PLAYERS ARE HAVING THE TIME OF THEIR
LIVES.

JOHNNY

Living by the printed page.
The landmarks of the age I find...
a coat that's poorly lined,
handed down from time to time.
Waiting for the sun to shine

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY (cont'd)
standing here amidst this crowd.
And wondering aloud, I find...
a joke that's poorly timed.
Thinking back to simpler days
of waiting for a light to change.

JOHNNY & MICHAEL
No one can take this away from me.
The martyrs and madmen
I learned of in school
will remember my name.
Some things are never the way they seem,
bury our centuries' wasted regrets
and remember this reign.

JOHNNY
Waking from the weary gloom,
the din of empty rooms I find...
a poem that's poorly rhymed.
And waiting for the walls to fall,
I'm stunned by the failure of it all.

JOHNNY & MICHAEL
No one can take this away from me.
Spellbound in anger my heroes have failed
to remember my name.
Some things are never the way they seem.
Buy up our centuries' bleeding remains
and remember this reign.

JOHNNY
It's only water falling down,
it's only water in my tears,
it's only water drowning me.
It's only water for all these years,
and waiting for the walls to fall.

CHORUS (X2)

THE SONG FINISHES WITH A BIG CRESCENDO AND THE BAND IS
OVER THE TOP WITH EXCITEMENT.

JOHNNY
(TO THE BAND)
God damn that was good!

BOTH BOB AND DANNY GIVE OUT A YELL OF EXCITEMENT. MICHAEL
REACHES OVER AND GIVES JOHNNY A HIGH FIVE. JOHNNY TURNS AROUND
TO SEE ARTIE THROUGH THE GLASS IN THE CONTROL ROOM. HE IS JUST
SILENTLY STARING AT THE BAND. THE BAND GETS QUIET AND STARES
BACK. AFTER A SHORT PAUSE, JOHNNY NODS HIS HEAD AS IF HE'S
LOOKING FOR APPROVAL. ARTIE CONTINUES TO STARE AND THEN USES THE
TALKBACK MIC.

(CONTINUED)

ARTIE

NICE.

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP.

ARTIE

Danny, give it more pop...more snap. With the low register of the keys, you need to make yourself known. One more time from the top.

THE TAPE MACHINE REWINDS AS ARTIE LOOKS TO JOHNNY

ARTIE

It's getting there.

JOHNNY

Ya, it's not bad. on the bridge, I think he could be more legato and carry the notes over the sharp horn hits.

ARTIE

Maybe, let's try it.

(TO DANNY)

In front of the bridge, hold your notes full, and sustain over the horn hits. We'll start 8 before the chorus.

DANNY

Ok.

THE TAPE MACHINE STARTS AND DANNY BEGINS PLAYING. WHEN THE CHORUS BEGINS, DANNY HOLDS THE NOTE FOR A FULL MEASURE. ARTIE NO

ARTIE

(TO JOHNNY)

Good call, it fills in the space.

JOHNNY

Sounds nice, keep him going, he's locked in now.

JOHNNY ROLLS HIS CHAIR AWAY FROM THE BOARD AND MOTIONS TO MICHAEL, WHO IS SITTING AT THE BACK OF THE ROOM. THEY BOTH GET UP AND STEP OUT OF THE CONTROL ROOM INTO THE HALL.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

What do you think?

MICHAEL

It's sounding good, everyone is doing their part. I am a bit confused that we have sent rough mixes to Vestri every day, and we haven't heard anything back...good or bad?

JOHNNY

He's probably not even listening to them, lots of phone calls to make, you know.

MICHAEL

I don't know, he and Artie have to be talking, and I don't know if it's a good thing that we haven't been involved with those conversations.

JOHNNY

Well, Vestri is supposed to come by later today with our per diem cash, let's ask him.

MICHAEL

It might be waking the sleeping giant, maybe no news is good news.

JOHNNY

The tracks sound good, we like them, and Artie seems somewhat pleased. I think you're making too much out of this.

JOHNNY AND MICHAEL WALK BACK INTO THE CONTROL ROOM AND SIT DOWN AT THE BACK OF THE ROOM TOGETHER. AFTER A MINUTE, ARTIE FINISHES THE TAKE AND REWINDS THE TAPE.

ARTIE

(OVER THE TALKBACK MIC)

Alright, Danny, nice take. Let's take 15 minutes.

DANNY TAKES OFF HIS HEADPHONES AND PUTS HIS GUITAR DOWN. AS HE WALKS INTO THE CONTROL ROOM ARTIE IS STILL TWEAKING THE KNOBS ON THE BOARD.

Good stuff, I'll have Lopes put on the other tape. We will attack 'Jenny Ledge' after the break.

DANNY

Cool, anyone for a beer?

(SILENCE)

I'm buying.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Sure, a beer sounds good.

JOHNNY

Grab me one and I'll have it in a bit, thanks.

DANNY LEAVES THE CONTROL ROOM. ARTIE SITS FOR A MOMENT, STARING AT THE CONSOLE. HE TURNS HIS CHAIR AND FACES JOHNNY AND MICHAEL.

ARTIE

It's coming together.

JOHNNY

Does Vestri have all of the rough mixes we've done?

ARTIE

I send them over at the end of every day.

JOHNNY

I find it funny that he hasn't said anything.

ARTIE

He has, just not to you. He and I have spoken every day, about every song, every lyric, and every mix.

MICHAEL

Wow, and you don't feel we should be in that conversation?

ARTIE

Why? We're not done yet. To tell you the truth you two haven't exactly been begging for input so far, so why would I share someone else's opinion with you? I could be wrong, but I would assume it would not be taken in stride.

MICHAEL

What has he said?

ARTIE

LONG PAUSE

They don't hear hits. The label feels the songs are good, but no hits.

JOHNNY

What do you think?

ARTIE

As I told you, we're not done yet. I think the songs are strong.

(TO JOHNNY)

I think you're a great frontman. Let's keep moving

(CONTINUED)

ARTIE (CONT)

FORWARD AND SEE WHERE THE NEXT WEEK TAKES US.

JOHNNY

Hard to get inspired by that plan.

ARTIE

Listen, as much as you two don't like the concept of having to make hits, you have to remember it's called the 'music business' for a reason. If you don't sell, no one gets paid. To a lot of people, that's pretty important. I think the songs are good, and I think they still have a way to go...but I'm not your audience, the label is. I've kept the mixes pretty rough for a reason. The better the daily mixes become, the closer they will think we are to finishing. If you think they are being negative now, just wait until they don't hear hits on the final record.

JOHNNY

You can't sit down with the plan just to write hit songs.

ARTIE

Some can, some can't, others don't need to. Your songs might click right out of the box. They are different than what is out there; in a good way, but different.

MICHAEL

I have faith we are headed in the right direction.

ARTIE

Of course you do, it's your fucking record! If you didn't, you should be waiting tables. The people you have to convince are the Vestris of this world. Once they believe that they have something special, they will leave you alone. Just because they have all the power in the world over your career doesn't mean they have any ability whatsoever to pick out a great song. They're businessmen, not musicians. Sell them on the songs, make a great record, go on the road and kick the almighty God ass...it's that simple boys.

DANNY WALKS IN WITH A BAG AND PULLS OUT A SIX PACK OF BEER.

DANNY

First call.

JOHNNY

All of a sudden, I'm thirsty.

JOHNNY TAKES A BEER.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

I'm always thirsty.

MICHAEL TAKES A BEER

ARTIE

I never drink during a session.

(PAUSE)

Are they cold?

DANNY ANSWERS YES BY SHAKING HIS HEAD. ARTIE REACHES OVER AND TAKES A BEER. DANNY WALKS BACK INTO THE STUDIO AND PUTS HIS BASS GUITAR AND HEADPHONES ON WHILE ARTIE IS WORKING ON THE BOARD. JOHNNY STANDS UP, LOOKS AT MICHAEL, AND THEN AT ARTIE.

JOHNNY

(TO ARTIE)

We need to talk to Vestri and the other suits. can you set up a meeting for us?

ARTIE

Are you sure you want that?

JOHNNY

(LOOKING AT MICHAEL)

Yes, as soon as possible.

ARTIE

You got it.

(TO DANNY)

Let's return to the top and see what we must fix.

DANNY

Cool.

ARTIE ROLLS THE TAPE BACK AND STARTS THE PLAYBACK.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

JOHNNY IS DIALING THE PHONE IN THE STUDIO HALLWAY. IT'S A PAY PHONE SO HE IS PUTTING IN COINS. THE PHONE BEGINS TO RING IN THE UPPER-LEFT CUBICLE, WHICH IS DIANE'S APARTMENT. THE ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MACHINE

Hi, you've reached 212-728-1772...leave a message and I'll get back with you. *Beep.*

JOHNNY

Hi babe, just calling to check in and see how you're doing. You must be out enjoying all that is N.Y. Things are going great here. They are probably not great, but they are headed in the right direction. The music is coming out great, and the producer is getting some nice things on tape. As much as I doubted him in the beginning, he does know what he's doing, and I think he is on our side. That may sound a bit weird.

DIANE WALKS INTO THE ROOM AND REACHES FOR THE PHONE, THEN STOPS.

So, how are your plans going for the trip out here? Let me know so I can clean up the place, it's pretty trashed, as I'm sure you know. *(long pause)* It would be great to see you, really great. I would love you to hear what we are doing, and be a part of it...because you are a part of it. I love you...call me.

DIANE STANDS MOTIONLESS, STARING AT THE PHONE.

DIANE

I love you, Johnny, I do.

FADE TO BLACK

Johnny's Apartment

THE ROOM IS EMPTY; JOHNNY WALKS IN AND DROPS THE GUITAR CASE ON THE BED. WALKS OUT OF THE SCENE AND COMES BACK WITH A BEER. HE WALKS OVER TO THE ANSWERING MACHINE AND PUSHES THE BUTTON. THE A&R TEAM APPEARS IN BLACK SUITS ON EITHER SIDE OF JOHNNY'S CUBICLE. THEY ARE LIT FROM BEHIND; THE MESSAGE PLAYS AS HE IS SIFTING THROUGH THE MAIL. AS THE MESSAGE BEGINS, HE STOPS LOOKING AT THE MAIL AND SITS ON THE BED.

Suit Fugue

(Dance of the A&R Men)

A&R GUY #1

Hi, John, it's Mel from Meglaphone
I've been listening to your tape for the 19th time,
oh that's another call - can I call you?
Back when I was in a band, we used to sound like this,
and I loved your songs; they reminded me of myself.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

A&R GUY #1 (CONT)

You sound like Air Supply meets GWAR, in a good way;
here's my other number. Can you wait for just a sec?
That's another call coming in, I'll get back to you,
have my girl take your information.

A&R GUY #2

Hi, John, it's Guy from Groan-o-phone.
Heard some talk about the band and the way you sing,
I really think it's great - can we make a
deal with me, call me a friend, we'll be a family.
You're a talented individual if you sign here on the
dotted line...that's good.
And my nephew will be your producer.

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Virgil
(hammer hammer hammer hammer)
I play this here guitar
(schmooze schmooze schmooze schmooze)
I play it for myself.
(patronize, patronize, pass the buck, pass the buck)
(weadle weadle weadle weadle, sell sell sell sell)

A&R CHOIR

CAN WE SPEAK CANDIDLY?!

JOHNNY

Got hands that move like clockwork
(hammer hammer hammer hammer)
A voice that carries far,
(schmooze schmooze schmooze schmooze)
Got a love for nothing else.
(patronize, patronize, pass the buck, pass the buck)
(weadle weadle weadle weadle, sell sell sell sell)

A&R CHOIR

LET'S BE SPONTANEOUS!

A&R GUY #5

Hi Jack, it's Al from A&R,
you don't really need the band they are in the way
we only wanted you anyway so
dump the band, you are the face
you better wise up fast.
This is not a game - we're professionals.
Did I mention that you won't be out this year?
Cannot be helped - go take a vacation.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

A&R GUY #5 (cont'd)

One more thing that you should know,
we're all counting on you to be
our new golden boy.
Lots of lives and jobs in the balance.
.

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Virgil,
(weasel weasel weasel weasel, lie lie lie lie)
I play this here guitar...
(pacify, pacify, jack you off, jack you off)
Ah, fuck it.
(shuffle shuffle shuffle shuffle, yawn yawn yawn yawn)

A&R CHOIR

ARE YOU A PRIORITY!?

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Virgil,
(weasel weasel weasel weasel, lie lie lie lie)
I'm gonna be a star,
(pacify, pacify, jack you off, jack you off)
and this is how it's done.
(shuffle shuffle shuffle shuffle, yawn yawn yawn yawn).

A&R CHOIR

Do you want a hit of this?

JOHNNY SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS. HE QUICKLY GRABS
THE PHONE AND DIALS VESTRI. VESTRI ANSWERS THE PHONE.

VESTRI

Vestri here.

JOHNNY

What the fuck do you mean, dump the band! Are you out
of your fucking skull?!

VESTRI

Ya, right...I was waiting for your call, but so far it
sounds like more of a yell fest than a phone
conversation.

JOHNNY

And to top it off, you don't even call me, you have
some idiot in your office do the dirty work.

VESTRI

Come on, Johnny, are you telling me you haven't thought
of it?

JOHNNY

(MORE)
People are not disposable; we have been a band for a

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY (CONT)

long time, we still are a band, you idiot.

VESTRI

Tell me if I'm hearing you right, what has been will always be? It's time to get out of the dark, my friend. What has been is past, what is now is different than what will be tomorrow. You have to see that? Are the songs you're writing now the same as a year ago? I sure hope not, things change; people change, and now is a time for you to change.

JOHNNY

Michael writes half of the material, and if you ever really paid attention, you would know that.

VESTRI

So, you keep Michael on as a songwriting partner, but that doesn't change the fact that you should be a solo artist, not a band.

JOHNNY

Why? Why is it now all about me and not about the band you signed?

VESTRI

We signed you. The band was on your coat tails for support, and to get the album done. They will get their performance royalties from the album; I'm not trying to screw anyone out of any money. Honestly, I'm just trying to make it easier for you.

JOHNNY

You are so full of shit; the fucking album isn't even finished!

VESTRI

Maybe if you made all of the musical decisions, and not four people, it would be done. You know what you want, and now it's time you go out and get it. Your songs are a part of you; the simpler you make this process, the better. When's the last time that your drummer or bass player came up with an incredible musical idea?

JOHNNY

That would be Danny and Bob.

VESTRI

You see, that's what I mean. To you, they're Danny and Bob; to me, they are two people who are standing in the way of you being as successful as you can be. So, I don't give a shit what their names are, because if it was up to me, they would be just a part of your past.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

(LONG PAUSE)

Johnny, nothing has been decided; we won't do anything without your approval. Maybe the message wasn't delivered correctly. Let's get through tomorrow's meeting, if we don't convince the head of the label that we know what the hell we are doing, it may not matter if you have a band or not. We will discuss this down the road, but honestly, it's the best thing for your career, and you have to own up to it...this whole project is about you, not a band.

(LONG SILENCE)

You still there?

(SILENCE)

JOHNNY

Ya, I'm here for now.

VESTRI

You're not going anywhere; you're going to be a star. 10 A.M. at the label tomorrow, be on time and be on your game. We might need a little of that 'Johnny Magic'.

JOHNNY HANGS UP, SITS ON THE BED, AND STARES AT THE FLOOR. HE FALLS BACK ON THE BED AND PUTS HIS HANDS OVER HIS FACE. AFTER A LONG PAUSE, THE PHONE RINGS. JOHNNY ALLOWS IT TO RING SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE SITTING UP QUICKLY AND GRABBING THE RECEIVER.

JOHNNY

What!?

LIGHTS COME UP ON STAGE LEFT TO SHOW DIANE ON THE PHONE.

DIANE

(SHE'S STARTLED BY JOHNNY'S VOLUME)

Hey, easy there.

JOHNNY

Sorry, Diane, I wasn't expecting it to be you.

DIANE

I think I'm glad I'm not the person you were expecting. Why are you so angry?

JOHNNY

I just got off the phone with Vestri. He says the label is pushing him to have me as a solo act and not a band.

DIANE

And the guys? (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

We would finish the album, and then we would still tour as a group but not be billed as Thud.

DIANE

Hmmm. What do you think brought this on?

JOHNNY

To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. Vestri says it's because it's easier to market a solo artist than a band, but that doesn't make sense. Shouldn't the music get people's attention, not whether it's a band or not?

DIANE

I don't know, maybe it's both.

JOHNNY

I think it's bullshit, and we have always been a band. I don't see that changing anytime soon.

DIANE

Sounds like you have made your decision, and Michael? What's his take on the idea?

JOHNNY

(SARCASTICALLY)

"Michael, what do you think about being a paid player and not really a member of the band...in fact, there is no band; just me. The Johnny Virgil show is what we are now, how does that sound, big guy?" I'm sure it would be fine with all of them, why not? Why the fuck wouldn't they want to give up everything to make me famous...I think it's a no-brainer!

DIANE

I'm not the bad guy here, Johnny. Your sarcasm is not needed. I was simply asking if you had mentioned it to anyone else. If you're so sure that you aren't going with this, why are you so wound up about it?

JOHNNY

Because it's pure insanity, they don't get what we are trying to do...as a band.

DIANE

Alright, so if they said you should give up being a musician...would you react the same way?

JOHNNY

Continue.

DIANE

I think you would blow them off because you knew in your heart it had no merit. You would be over it by the time you hung up the phone. But this seems to be different... (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

So, you're saying in some way, I agree with this?

DIANE

I'm not saying anything, I just think you should look inside and see why Vestri has been able to get under your skin. I think Michael could be a great partner in this, he may say screw it...let's do all we can to get to where we need to be.

(PAUSE)

Johnny, maybe it's your conscience that's bothering you and not Vestri.

JOHNNY

You don't get it; it's more involved than that.

DIANE

Ok, I just called to see how you are doing, but that seems to be the question of the day. Call me if you want to talk, but I think you have some soul searching to do first. I love you Johnny, be good.

DIANE HANGS UP THE PHONE SLOWLY. JOHNNY PUTS THE PHONE DOWN AND FALLS BACK ON THE BED. HIS HANDS ARE OUTSTRETCHED ABOVE HIS HEAD, HE BRINGS THEM TO HIS FACE.

JOHNNY

Fuuuuuuuuuck me!

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MEGLAPHONE RECORDS OFFICE

A SECRETARY IS SITTING AT A LARGE DESK IN A VERY WELL-APPOINTED OFFICE. SHE IS ON THE PHONE WHEN JOHNNY AND MICHAEL WALK IN TOGETHER. THEY STAND IN FRONT OF THE DESK, WAITING FOR HER TO HANG UP THE PHONE. SHE SMILES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEM AND CONTINUES TO TALK ON THE PHONE.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

(TO MICHAEL)

You cool?

MICHAEL

Yes, this is not going to be a big deal.

JOHNNY

Right, I just wonder why we are here.

MICHAEL

Well, it's a little late for that now.

THE SECRETARY HANGS UP THE PHONE AND LOOKS UP AT JOHNNY AND MICHAEL WITH A SMILE. SHE SAYS NOTHING, JUST STARES INQUISITIVELY.

JOHNNY

We have an appointment; Danny Vestri is meeting us here.

SECRETARY

Have a seat over there.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

THE TWO WALK OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE OVERSIZED OFFICE AND SIT. THE DOORS LEADING INTO THE NEXT ROOM ARE ENORMOUS AND MADE OF OAK.

JOHNNY

What the hell are we going to say, "I heard you don't like our songs.", "So you wish you hadn't signed a contract with us?" or how about "We don't suck as much as you think we do?"

MICHAEL

(NODDING HIS HEAD IN APPROVAL, THEN STOPPING)
No, not the best approach.

JOHNNY

Well Jesus Christ, Michael, they heard our music, they wanted us on the label, we moved to freaking L.A. and now they decide we're not the band they want?

MICHAEL

They haven't said that, in fact, they haven't said anything at all to us, right? We heard through Schtipp that they "didn't hear hits", that's all.

(MORE) JOHNNY

(CONTINUED)

That's all?! I just want to walk in there and tell them to shove the contract up their asses and go to another label.

MICHAEL
(NODDING IN APPROVAL, PAUSES)

No, not the best approach.

BOTH OF THEM SIT QUIETLY, STARING AT THE GROUND.

JOHNNY
I believe we are making a great record. People are going to go crazy over the stuff we are doing.

MICHAEL
Hits come from great records, they need to believe that and have some faith. If they are looking for the standard hit song, it has no substance, no reason for being written other than making money. How can we make them understand that, and let us do what we need to do?

JOHNNY
There's always Copacabana.

MICHAEL
I'm tempted; at least they'd get the point.

JOHNNY
I don't see why we have to defend what we do, who the fuck are they to say we aren't going to be successful?

MICHAEL
Time is money, and the money is theirs. Vestri has to back us up. After all he's the one that signed us, but we also have to take them by storm...leave no room for debate. Make our point, and get the hell out.

THEY BOTH SIT QUIETLY, STARING AT THE GROUND

JOHNNY
Any ideas?

MICHAEL
Not yet, but I'll come up with something.

THEY BOTH SIT QUIETLY AS VESTRI WALKS INTO THE WAITING ROOM. HE BRIEFLY FLIRTS WITH THE SECRETARY, THEN WALKS OVER TO JOHNNY AND MICHAEL.

VESTRI
Well, boys, are we doing well?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THEY BOTH JUST STARE UP AT HIM, THEN MICHAEL SPEAKS.

MICHAEL

Ya, we're cool, and we are so ready and excited to let these guys know that we are on the same page as they are. Hits aren't born, they're crafted, they are pieces of our society that all of us know and love and want to hear about in songs. They are...hits.

VESTRI SMILES.

VESTRI

Great! Let's go share the news with the big boys.

Johnny and Michael stand up and look at each other as Vestri heads for the large oak doors.

JOHNNY

(TO MICHAEL)

I hope you have a plan.

MICHAEL

Follow my lead; this is going to be epic...hang on.

THEY BOTH START TO WALK TOWARD VESTRI, WHO IS SLOWLY OPENING THE GIGANTIC DOORS TO THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. THE PRESIDENT IS SEATED BEHIND A HUGE DESK, AND HIS SECOND IN COMMAND IS PERCHED IN AN OVERSTUFFED CHAIR ACROSS THE ROOM.

THE SONG BEGINS AS THE THREE OF THEM ENTER THE OFFICE. JOHNNY AND MICHAEL STRUT INTO THE OFFICE DISPLAYING A HUGE SWAGGER. AS THE PRESIDENT STANDS AND OFFERS A HANDSHAKE, MICHAEL SLAPS HIM A HIGH FIVE AND THEN DANCES OVER TO THE VICE PRESIDENT, GIVING HIM A LOW FIVE. THE ENERGY IN THE ROOM IS ELEVATED AS EVERYONE STANDS UP AND BEGINS TO DANCE.

Certifiable Number One Smash

MICHAEL

(TO THE PRESIDENT)

I gotta tell you about this, because I'm very excited about it.

It's got tattoos, it's got a pierced hood,
it's got Generation X.

It's got lesbians, and vitriol,
and sadomasochistic latex sex.

It's got Mighty Morphin' Power Brokers,
and Tanya Harding nude.

Macrobiotic lacto-vegan

non-confrontational, (MORE) free-range food.

(CONTINUED)

It's got the handshake, peace talk, non-aggression pact
A multicultural interracial
non-segregated historical fact.

JOHNNY RUNS TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE, HANGING ABOVE
HIS HEAD ARE TWO NEON SIGNS; ONE SAYS "AMEN", THE
OTHER "HALLELUJAH". JOHNNY IS VERY EXCITED AND MOTIONS
FOR THE AUDIENCE TO STAND UP, AND POINTS TO THE AMEN
SIGN WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THEM TO SING IT, THEN THE
HALLELUJAH WHEN IT'S TIME. THE AUDIENCE FEELS LIKE IT
HAS BECOME PART OF THE PLAY.

AUDIENCE

Say Amen. Hallelujah! Say Amen.

MICHAEL

It's a certifiable number one smash.
Hallelujah. Amen.
Certifiable, undeniable, solid platinum
number one smash.

It's got more hooks than a tackle box,
it's got really loud guitars.
It's got a blasting cap in the fertilizer,
got the secret anguish of the network stars.
It's anti-fur, it's unplugged,
it's got an OK from the Pope.
Got art nails and a Wonder Bra,
and Dreadlock blunt rolled Buddha dope.
Got the head nod, the finger pistol,
the nose up in your crack.
Montel, and Geraldo,
and the women who hate the men that hate them back.

JOHNNY ONCE AGAIN RUNS OUT TO THE FRONT AND SHOUTS AMEN
AND HALLELUJAH WITH THE AUDIENCE, DANCING THE ENTIRE WAY.

AUDIENCE

Say Amen! Hallelujah! Say Amen!

MICHAEL

It's a certifiable number one smash.
Hallelujah! Amen!
Certifiable, undeniable, solid platinum
number one smash.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL RUNS OVER AND JUMPS UP ON THE PRESIDENT'S DESK. HE ADDRESSES THE PEOPLE IN THE ROOM WITH EXCITEMENT AND ENERGY. THEY WATCH AND HANG ON EVERY WORD.

Now I gotta tell ya about the video idea... you're really gonna love this. We start out in one of these rural churches in the middle of Alabama somewhere, and they're having this gigantic rave-up gospel church festival with fat women with their hands in the air yelling Amen and Hallelujah. And our boy, our hero, he's right in the middle of it, and religious fervor is just exploding off of his body. Behind the altar of this church, there's this gigantic icon of a black Jesus Christ...who our boy later licks. Smash cut to him on a hillside dancing wildly, half naked, with his undulating midriff sweating profusely in front of hundreds and hundreds of burning crosses. Smash cut back to the church only now it's not a church, right, it's a courtroom and the priest has become a judge, and the choir's become the jury, and black Jesus is on trial for raping our boy. So, this really angry contingent of fat trucker lookin' guys sweeps up black Jesus, beats him senseless and throws him in prison, where our boy takes pity on him, goes to him, weeps in front of the bars, and then gives him a hand job through them. But it's all shot by Herb Ritz, so it's really beautiful, and you feel sorry for both of them.

All right, all right...so that we don't offend everybody in the whole fucking world at this point, these two gigantic beautiful red velvet curtains close from either side of the screen and then reopen and the whole cast of the video takes a bow like it was a play or somethin' right! Get it? All right well, if you don't get that, you'll get this...when those receipts start tearin' in from all over the world, you're gonna kick the almighty god ass my friends because sixty billion flag waving fans in every stadium in the fucking planet are gonna be yelling'!...

JOHNNY IS AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE WORKING THE AUDIENCE INTO A SCREAMING FRENZY.

Sequins, bell-bottoms, peace and hope, and love.
OJ and VR, and Elvis Jackson with a blue suede glove

AUDIENCE

Say Amen! Hallelujah! Amen!

MICHAEL

Certifiable number one smash.
Hallelujah! Amen! Certifiable,
undeniable, solid platinum number one

(CONTINUED)

smash!

THE SONG ENDS, THE OFFICE IS IN SHAMBLES. THE
PRESIDENT STARES IN AWE OF THE PERFORMANCE, THEN JUMPS
UP AND YELLS.

PRESIDENT

I love it!

JOHNNY AND MICHAEL QUICKLY LOOK AT EACH OTHER, THEN AT
THE PRESIDENT, THEN AT THE AUDIENCE IN BEWILDERMENT.

FADE TO BLACK

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

INT.

MICHAEL'S FLAT

AS LIGHTS COME UP, MICHAEL'S FLAT IS DECORATED FOR CHRISTMAS, WITH A CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM. IS DECORATED. HE IS WEARING A SANTA CLAUS HAT, A BATHROBE, AND HOLDING A MARTINI IN HIS HAND. THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

MICHAEL

(LOUDLY, AND A BIT DRUNK)

Welcome to the North Pole!

THE DOOR OPENS AND JOHNNY WALKS IN HOLDING A BROWN PAPER BAG. MICHAEL IS DECORATING THE TREE.

MICHAEL

It's all about the festive spirit.

JOHNNY

(SMILING)

The hat is a nice touch.

MICHAEL

You think? This was a family tradition growing up. My Dad would always wear the Santa hat while decorating the tree.

(WITH A SARCASTIC LOOKING SMILE)

Oh yes, this brings back the old days.

JOHNNY

Dad was a martini fan, I see.

MICHAEL

No, I added that new tradition. Dad wasn't much of a drinker, although if he were, he probably would have been more fun. That's what life is all about, making changes that need to be made. I think that "martini tree decorating" is going to be big, and I mean

(LOUDLY)

BIG!

JOHNNY

(INTENTLY STARING AT MICHAEL)

I see, it looks like you have put a lot of thought into this.

MICHAEL

Yup, no shooting from the hip for me. You want one of these? I have the recipe perfected.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

No thanks. I'm going with the traditional festive beer.

JOHNNY TAKES A CAN OF BEER OUT OF THE BAG AND PUTS THE BAG ON THE COFFEE TABLE.

MICHAEL

Your loss, my friend.

(FINISHING HIS DRINK IN ONE GULP)

You don't know what you're missing.

MICHAEL WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN SINGING 'DECK THE HALLS' WHILE MAKING A DRINK. HE RETURNS TO THE ROOM AND SITS DOWN IN HIS RECLINER FACING THE TREE.

MICHAEL

You know, this whole 'killing a tree' for our celebration is rather strange. I'm fairly sure that it is sending the wrong message to kids all over the world.

(TURNING TO JOHNNY, WITH AN EXCITING SMILE)

Maybe, instead we could have a Santa Claus piñata stuffed with Christmas candy, tie a rope around his neck and hoist him up into a living tree...hand all the little kiddies a stick and beat the shit out of him until he gives up the goods.

JOHNNY LEANS FORWARD IN HIS CHAIR.

JOHNNY

Nah, it would never catch on. Parents don't want their kids eating all that sugar.

MICHAEL TAKES A SIP ON HIS MARTINI, PROUDLY SMILES, AND ASKS JOHNNY

MICHAEL

What do you think of this magnificent tree, my friend?

JOHNNY

It's very nice, quite festive. I think there are too many ornaments on this side of the tree, it's uneven.

MICHAEL

Where?

JOHNNY

(pointing at the tree)

Right there, look...you have a bunch on the far side

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY (CONT)

and not that many over here.

MICHAEL

Hmmm?

MICHAEL REACHES INTO HIS BATHROBE POCKET AND PULLS OUT A PISTOL AND SHOOTS AN ORNAMENT OFF THE FAR SIDE OF THE TREE. JOHNNY LUNGES BACK OUT OF SURPRISE. MICHAEL RETURNS THE PISOL TO HIS POCKET AND CALMLY TAKES A SIP OF HIS MARTINI.

MICHAEL

That should even it up.

JOHNNY

(YELLING)

What the fuck are you doing?

MICHAEL

(CALMLY)

It's easier than getting up; besides, the decorations are from Walmart, very cheap. One day only sale.

JOHNNY

Where the hell did you get a gun?

MICHAEL

Hey, I'm from the Bronx, we all have a piece.

(RAISING HIS MARTINI GLASS)

Are you sure you don't want one of these?

JOHNNY

I may be heading down the wrong path, but I personally don't think getting smashed on gin and using a gun to decorate the Christmas tree falls under 'now that's a good plan'.

MICHAEL

Too lazy to get up. If it makes you nervous, I'll put it away. Calm down, relax, man...it's the holiday season.

MICHAEL GETS UP AND HEADS DOWN THE HALL TO HIS BEDROOM AND REAPPEARS IN A MOMENT.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

Sometimes you are just too fucking weird.

MICHAEL

Creative, not weird...there's a difference.

JOHNNY

I don't consider a .45 creative.

MICHAEL SITS IN HIS RECLINER.

MICHAEL

Is Diane still planning on being here by Christmas?

JOHNNY

(SITTING DOWN)

Yes, she gets in the day after tomorrow.

MICHAEL

How's she feeling about the album?

JOHNNY

She's only heard the rough mixes, but she says she likes them. There are only two songs on it that she hadn't heard, so maybe she likes it because she knows them.

MICHAEL

Probably a bit of that, the hard part is going to be the next album. We had 7 years to write this one, the next one we are going to have to spit out while living on a tour bus. I guess that's a nice problem to have.

JOHNNY

I'm not worried about that, we will always be able to write songs. It's the label's attitude that's keeping me up at night. Everyone has an opinion...everyone. I don't think it helps that it's 82 degrees at Christmas time. It's no wonder why everyone out here is a little screwed up.

MICHAEL

Having Diane here will be good; she's the rock. I think she's the only one who can put up with both of us, and that can't be easy.

JOHNNY

She's going to tell you to back off on the hard stuff.

MICHAEL

What are you saying? Do you think I drink too much?

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

(QUICKLY)
Yes.

MICHAEL

Wow, that was a quick answer.

JOHNNY

I'm not one to lie, you've been hitting pretty hard lately.

MICHAEL

(SMILING)
It's Christmas, just enjoy the spirit of the season.

JOHNNY

I gotta go.

MICHAEL

So soon? We haven't sung any Christmas carols yet...how disappointing is that?

JOHNNY

I'm going by the studio. I wanted to throw down a couple of song ideas while they're still fresh, just some rough tracks.

MICHAEL

I see. New stuff I haven't heard?

JOHNNY

Just ideas, a few hooks. Besides, I left my acoustic there and don't really want it disappearing.

(JOHNNY GETS UP, GRABS HIS COAT, AND HEADS TO THE DOOR.)

MICHAEL

See ya tomorrow.

JOHNNY

Let's make it a later start; no need to get in early.

MICHAEL

(CURIOUSLY)
Ok, sure. You cool?

JOHNNY

Yup, just not feeling too Christmassy. I guess I just need it to be cold, like Christmas has always been.

MICHAEL

The times they are a-changin, my friend.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

I know.

JOHNNY HEADS OUT THE DOOR. MICHAEL TAKES THE LAST SIP OF HIS MARTINI, STARES AT THE CHRISTMAS TREE. HE GETS UP AND MOVES AN ORNAMENT FROM THE NEAR SIDE TO THE SIDE WHERE HE SHOT ONE. HE STANDS AND PONDERES THE TREE.

MICHAEL

Much better.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. STUDIO CONTROL ROOM.

ARTIE AND JOHNNY ARE SITTING AT THE CONSOLE. AS THEY LISTEN, THEY DISCUSS THE FINAL MIX AHEAD OF THEM.

JOHNNY

I think that works, but I'm not sure if the guitar is still too loud.

ARTIE

Come on, is this going to be a rock and roll album? Well then...when in doubt, turn it up.

JOHNNY

(SMILING)

Right.

ARTIE

So, do you miss the keyboards in this one?

JOHNNY

It actually opens it up for the vocals a lot. It's not like they battled each other...

ARTIE

(INTERUPTING JOHNNY)

But you don't miss them now that they're gone, right?

JOHNNY

It definitely opens it up.

ARTIE

Cool. We have the rest of this week to knock out the vocal overdubs you wanted, there are the two guitar solos that need some love, then...I'd say it's time to

(CONTINUED)

mix.

JOHNNY

Man, that sounds really good.

THE DOOR TO THE CONTROL ROOMS OPENS AND MICHAEL WALKS IN LOOKING SOMEWHAT SCRUFFY AND DISHEVELED. BOTH ARTIE AND JOHNNY SEEM TO BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD. JOHNNY TURNS AROUND TO MICHAEL AND ARTIE REVIEWS SOME MIXING NOTES.

MICHAEL

Hey, what's up?

JOHNNY

Nothing, I didn't know you were coming in today.

MICHAEL

I wasn't going to, but I didn't make it in yesterday to redo those keyboard parts...so I thought I would do them today.

ARTIE

(STILL LOOKING AT HIS NOTES, HE ADDRESSES MICHAEL IN A STERN VOICE)

It wasn't yesterday, it was two days ago that you were supposed to come in and fix them.

MICHAEL

I got busy, couldn't make it in.

JOHNNY

I don't think we need to worry about getting those parts fixed. Listen to this.

MOTIONS TO ARTIE TO PLAY BACK THE SONG. AS THE SONG PLAYS, MICHAEL REALIZES THERE ARE NO KEYBOARDS IN THE MIX. AFTER A MINUTE OF LISTENING, ARTIE STOPS THE TAPE.

JOHNNY

(TO MICHAEL)

How's it sound?

MICHAEL

Other than the fact that you took out all my piano, pretty good.

JOHNNY

That's the point, when we took out the piano, it opened it up for the vocals and melody.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

(CURIOUSLY UPSET)

That's it; you just take it out...gone, adios...never to be heard again?

JOHNNY

No. Knowing that the original part was wrong, we took it out and realized that the song didn't need it.

MICHAEL

Hmmm.

(TO ARTIE, SARCASTICALLY)

How many more of our songs have you found that don't need keyboards? Well, Artie...how many?

ARTIE

(ARTIE QUICKLY SPINS AROUND IN HIS CHAIR TO FACE MICHAEL. HE REPLIES WITH STERN CONVICTION)

If it were up to me, a lot.

MICHAEL

Well, it's not up to you. Johnny?

JOHNNY

Along with this song, I think 'Last Plane Out' is tighter with just drums, guitar, and bass.

MICHAEL

And vocal.

JOHNNY

(GETTING FRUSTRATED)

Yes, and vocal being as we aren't an instrumental band, I think people would miss not hearing words.

ARTIE

Honestly Michael, if it's not important enough for you to get your hung-over ass down here to record new tracks to fix the old ones that you were too drunk to play last week...why would you expect it to be important enough for me to keep them?

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

(ANGRY AND BITTER)

Well, we wouldn't want anything to step on the vocal now, would we? I am just confused as to how you can have the power to erase tracks without letting anyone know.

ARTIE

Do you want me to go to the next song and show you that it's really easy to erase shitty tracks to improve a song. It's on my list of things to do today, but I can put it up as a priority so you can witness it if you want. I don't think you'd like it, to be quite honest.

MICHAEL

Fuck you.

ARTIE

No, fuck you. You have no vested interest in this project. you prefer to spend your days seeing how drunk you can get to feel better about something, God knows what that is. I don't have time for that crap. Thousands of players would kill for this chance, and you really couldn't give a shit.

MICHAEL

I see. Johnny, is this the direction of the band, or just Mr. Mixmaster over there taking control of our future?

(LONG PAUSE)

ARTIE

(TO JOHNNY)

You tell him.

JOHNNY

I was going to discuss this with you tonight, and now may not be the best time. The label is going to promote the album as a solo artist.

MICHAEL

Are you serious?

JOHNNY

Yes, it doesn't change the lineup of the tour band; we are all going on the road. You and I will still be the songwriters, that will never change. They just feel that in the current market, we will have a better chance of getting played if it's not a band.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Did you hear what you said? Not a band.

JOHNNY

That's not what I meant. The only thing that is changing is that we won't be known as Thud.

MICHAEL

That's fucked up; we have never been 'The Johnny Virgil Band.'

JOHNNY

It's just going to be Johnny Virgil. The label says it's going to make us more approachable. It's not going to change our music, Michael.

MICHAEL

I'm gone; this is way too scary in here.

(TO ARTIE)

You told us at the beginning that the studio is a place where we create, it's not a place where we destroy. Johnny, I don't even know what to say.

JOHNNY

You're making too big a deal about this.

MICHAEL

Not even you believe that! How am I supposed to believe it?

MICHAEL WALKS OUT. AFTER A MINUTE, JOHNNY WALKS OUT AFTER HIM. MICHAEL IS STANDING IN THE HALLWAY.

JOHNNY

Michael. It's not the way you think.

MICHAEL

Ok, explain how we are now a solo artist, my tracks are disappearing by the minute, and I should be excited about it. Go ahead, Johnny, make me feel good about this.

JOHNNY

So, you think I felt good about this when the label told me?

MICHAEL

They told you? How about saying no? How about saying that the reason this shit sounds better than anything out there is because we all live this music...as a band.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

They made it very clear that this was the way it was going to go, or there was no record release. They don't get the music, so they think they are reducing their risk by marketing it differently.

MICHAEL

Wow. You have to feel pretty good about your songs right now. Marketing is now in charge of our careers. I'm fucking out of here.

MICHAEL HEADS DOWN THE HALL AND KICKS OPEN THE DOOR AND LEAVES.

MICHAEL WALKS AT A FAST PACE DOWN THE ALLEY.

From Here To There

MICHAEL

And I'll build me a robot,
and we'll look just the same.
And I'll teach him the handshake,
and I'll teach him the game.
And he won't feel empty,
and I won't feel ashamed.
And I'll find a way back home.

And it's one for the money,
and it's two for the show,
and it's three to get ready,
but there's no place to go.
Cause I'm on the move now
but this world moves too
slow.
I need a way back home,
I need a way back home.

(CONTINUED)

INT.

MICHAEL'S FLAT, HE IS ALONE.

MICHAEL IS STANDING IN FRONT OF THE PAINTING OF HIS FATHER, A SMEARED FACE WITH VERY LITTLE RECOGNITION. HE HAS A DRINK IN ONE HAND AND A PAINT BRUSH IN THE OTHER. HE IS ANGRY. AS HE SPEAKS LOUDLY TO THE PAINTING, HIS WORDS ARE SLURRED, AS HE HAS BEEN DRINKING FOR HOURS. ADDITIONAL PAINTINGS LINE THE WALLS OF THE ROOM ON EASELS. ONE OF THE PAINTINGS IS OF SANTA CLAUS WITH A LARGE BROWN STAIN WHERE THE NOSE WOULD NORMALLY BE. HIS TELEVISION IS PLAYING MTV, THE SOUND IS TURNED DOWN.

MICHAEL

So, this is what it's all about, eh Dad? Nice place to live. New record coming out which may or may not have my name on it, and I spend my day painting this kind of shit!

MICHAEL WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN. HE COMES BACK WITH A BOTTLE OF VODKA, WHICH HE USES TO FILL HIS GLASS AND HAS A GULP

MICHAEL

This is lovely, isn't it, Dad? Dad? Why aren't you listening? Is this not very interesting, hmmm? Maybe I just wasn't clear! Everything I was has just flittered away, somehow. You know what, maybe it was never really there to begin with, maybe life is just one big fucking clearance sale! Can you imagine that?! One big colossal never-ending piece of shit flea market, everything is for sale...at the right price Dad! It's ok it's ok, and look at all I have. I have been told I should be happy, so I guess I'm happy. But one would probably not see the happiness at first, you have to dig in deep to see just how fucking satisfied I am... fucking deep Dad!

The Ghetto of Beautiful Things

AS THE DRUMS BEGIN, MICHAEL SLASHES THE PAINT BRUSH ACROSS THE PAINTING OF HIS FATHER. IT MAKES A HUGE X ACROSS THE SMEARED FACE. IN A CALMING MANNER, HE SLOWLY TURNS TOWARD THE AUDIENCE AND WALKS TOWARD THEM.

MICHAEL

Sometimes you have to climb up real high, and it's scary
just to paint the big letters that say 'One Day Only'.
Exhaust so bad, headache won't quit,
I painted Santa with a brown nose
just for the fun of it.
Windows full of sleazy androgynous guys
in tight leather vests,

(CONTINUED)

and girls in fishnet pantyhose that never smile at me.
Everything must go - Everything must go
America's having a blowout sale.
I'm cultivating the stroke garden
and I'm run down by the drunken taxi cab
of absolute reality.

I just wanted to work with my hands,
see something go from A to B.
And somehow, I ended up
in the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.
In the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.

Kick away the pigeons
dripping day glow sidewalks.
They stole my bag of horse-hairs
while I was painting a toothy woodchuck.
Change my sex, burn my cash,
stick my tongue up the client's ass.
And I vanish into Nowhere's End, New Jersey.

Uniforms, formulas, Formica, office forms,
conformism, formalism, formalities.
Anima's the thing I never had.
Anima's the thing I never had.
I just want to play catch with my Dad.

I just wanted to work with my hands,
see something go from A to B.
And somehow, I ended up
in the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.
In the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.

MICHAEL TAKES THE BOTTLE OF VODKA
AND BEGINS TO SMASH ALL OF THE
PAINTINGS, DESTROYING EVERYTHING
IN HIS PATH

Fuck 'em all this is art.
Fuck 'em all this is art.
Fuck 'em all this is art.
Fuck 'em all this is art.

High noon at the oasis.
Put your content to bed.
Exclamatory penance served.
I've slid to hell on Satan's sled.

JOHNNY'S FACE APPEARS ON THE TELEVISION, IN AN MTV
INTERVIEW. MICHAEL REACHES INTO THE SIDE POCKET OF THE
RECLINER AND RETRIEVES HIS PISTOL. HE USES THE BUTT OF
THE GUN TO SMASH THE TELEVISION SCREEN AND THEN KICKS THE
TV OVER WITH HIS FOOT.

I just wanted to work with my hands,

(CONTINUED)

see something go from A to B.
And somehow, I ended up
in the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.
In the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.
In the Ghetto of Beautiful Things.
It's too late to be a slacker; doesn't matter.

THE LIGHTS GO OUT, A SLASH OF LIGHT APPEARS AS THE
AUDIENCE HEARS THE PISTON FIRING ONE SHOT, FOLLOWED BY
THE SOUND OF A HEAVY BODY HITTING THE FLOOR.

A SINGLE SPOTLIGHT COMES UP AS THE AUDIENCE SEES JOHNNY
SITTING AT A PIANO. HE IS LEANING OVER, RESTING HIS HEAD
ON THE INSTRUMENT. AFTER A MOMENT, HE SLOWLY LIFTS HIS
HEAD AND PUTS HIS HANDS ON THE KEYS OF THE PIANO.

Song for a Dead Friend

JOHNNY

Michael my friend,
I think you knew me better than I ever knew you.
Cause you read every chapter,
and I just glossed right over them
and pretended I knew.
But I believed in you,
I loved you for your brilliance
and your way of making everything absurd.
And I relied on you
to make me see the foolishness
of paragraphs that were better as one word.

What could I have told you to make you think again?
We draw the same conclusions
but we choose a different end.
When you tear it down, it only looks more ragged,
and when you build it up, it only looks more fake.
So why not let it be at least until tomorrow?
And then you just might see your sad mistake.
'Cause life has more to give than what you take.

Michael, my friend,
forgive me if I break our rule,
but I think it's overdue.
I really cared about you,
I didn't think that I could love a friend
as much as I loved you.
And we were always friends,
we were Captain Jim and Billy
the Super-human Crime-avenging Twins.
I'm gonna miss you, Mike.
I truly am alone now

(CONTINUED)

because there's no one to congratulate my sins.

I wish I could have been for you
a more consistent friend.
The chapters that I skipped
I'm going to have to read again.
But when I tear it down, it only looks more ragged,
and when I build it up, it only looks more fake.
So why not let it be at least until tomorrow,
and then you just might see your sad mistake.
'Cause life has more to give than what you take.

But when I tear it down, it only looks more ragged,
and when I build it up, it only looks more fake.
But I can't let it be because part of me died with you,
and there's lots of pages missing from my book.
You had more to give than what I took.

JOHNNY'S HANDS DROP TO HIS SIDE, AND HE LOOKS UP TO THE
CEILING FOR ANSWERS. THE CURTAIN CLOSES FROM EACH SIDE.

FADE TO BLACK

INTERMISSION

ACT II

INT. CONCERT HALL/ LOBBY

DURING THE LAST 10 MINUTES OF INTERMISSION, NUMEROUS ACTORS (DRESSED AS FANS) MIX INTO THE CROWD (BOTH IN THE LOBBY AND THE THEATRE) WEARING JOHNNY VIRGIL T-SHIRTS FROM PAST TOURS. THEY APPROACH AUDIENCE MEMBERS AND START TALKING ABOUT HOW EXCITED THEY ARE TO SEE HIM AGAIN IN CONCERT. THEY ASK PEOPLE IF THEY'VE SEEN HIM ON PREVIOUS TOURS. EACH FAN BEGINS TALKING ABOUT ALL OF THE TIMES THEY HAVE SEEN HIM, HOW HE HAS CHANGED THEIR LIVES, AND HOW AMAZING IT IS FOR HIM TO COME OUT OF RETIREMENT. THE HOUSE LIGHTS FLICKER, THE FANS IMMEDIATELY SCREAM AND RUN DOWN TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE.

SPOTLIGHTS START TO SWIRL ON STAGE AS AN ANNOUNCER IS HEARD OVER THE SOUND SYSTEM.

(CONTINUED)

ANNOUNCER

Los Angeles, are you ready?! Ten number one hits, 8

ANNOUNCER (CONT)

platinum albums and 7 sold-out world tours. The hottest comeback tour on the planet!! Ladies and gentlemen...Johnny Virgil!

HUGE AUDIENCE APPLAUSE IS GREETED BY JOHNNY WALKING OUT WITH AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR. HIS HAIR IS SHORTER AND SHE SHOWS WEAR AND TEAR OF THE MANY YEARS ON THE ROAD. HIS BAND IS MADE UP OF SESSION PLAYERS, NEITHER BOB NOR DANNY IS PRESENT.

JOHNNY

Thank you, L.A.!

THE FANS AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE ARE GOING WILD, AND AS THE SONG BEGINS, THEY SLOWLY FILTER TO THE SIDES AND DISAPPEAR.

Last Plane Out

JOHNNY

Greetings from Sodom
how we wish you were here.
The weather's getting warmer
now that the trees are all cleared.
There's no time for a conscience
and we recognize no crime.
Yeah, we got dogs and Valvoline
it's a pretty damn good time.

Men of reason, not of rhyme
keep the spoils and share the crime.
Goodman, Badman, lost without.
A hope for passage on the last plane out.
There was one repressed do-gooder
and a few who still believed.

JOHNNY LOOKS AT THE BAND.

Yes, I think there were five good men here yesterday
but they were asked to leave.
So, we've kept the good old
vices and labored to invent a
few.
With cake in vulgar surplus,
we can have it and eat it, too.

Men of reason, not of rhyme
keep the spoils and share the crime.
Goodman, Badman, lost without.
A hope for passage on the last plane out.

Men of reason, hide your face.

(CONTINUED)

Walking backwards, plays his ace.
 Goodman, Badman, lost without.
 A hope for passage on the last plane out.

Here's a concept: you can't dance
 to an idea you cannot hum.
 There may not be an empty seat
 when all is said and done.

I'm not the guy who sings the hymns,
 no bleeding heart to mend,
 but I like the part where Icarus
 hijacks the little red hen.

Someone said the Big Man
 may be joining us soon.
 But I never was the type to hang
 with the harbingers of doom.
 And this party is addictive,
 self-destructive, no doubt.
 So I hope that someone saves a seat for me
 on the last plane out.

Men of reason, not of rhyme
 keep the spoils and share the crime.
 Goodman, Badman, lost without.
 A hope for passage on the last plane out.

Men of reason, hide your face.
 Walking backwards, losing the race.
 Goodman, Badman, lost without.
 A hope for passage on the last plane out.
 Men of reason, not of rhyme
 keep the spoils and share the crime.
 Goodman, Badman, lost without.
 A hope for passage on the last plane out.

AS THE SONG FADES OUT, THE BAND SLOWLY SLIDES BACKWARDS
 AND DISAPPEARS INTO DARKNESS. JOHNNY IS LEFT STANDING BY
 HIMSELF. HE SHAKES HIS HEAD AND LOOKS AT THE GROUND. HE
 APPEARS TO BE CONFUSED AND SLOWLY REMOVES HIS GUITAR AND
 LAYS IT DOWN ON THE STAGE. ON THE UPPER LEVEL, DIANE WALKS
 OUT FROM THE RIGHT AND STANDS NEXT TO THE DIVIDER. MICHAEL
 (DRESSED ALL IN WHITE) WALKS SLOWLY OUT FROM THE LEFT SIDE
 AND SITS DOWN WITH HIS LEGS HANGING OVER THE EDGE.

Staring Into Nothing

JOHNNY

Here I am again with the bright lights on my face,
 and I am lonely.
 A thousand screaming voices, screaming out my
 name, and I am lonely.
 Someone said;

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

Hey Johnny, do you still love me?

JOHNNY

I said, "Baby, don't you ever use that word around me 'cause I don't want to hear it anymore."

Take a look in my eyes,
go on, take a look in my eyes.
You're staring into nothing at all.
Nothing at all.
You're staring into nothing at all.
Nothing at all.

A&R CHOIR

oh, oh... oh, oh oh...

JOHNNY

I'm not what I seem 'cause I am not real.
Pretending to care, pretending to feel.

Here I am again with everything that I could want,
and I am empty.
With the blanket of approval and the slaps upon my back
and I am empty.
Someone said;

MICHAEL

Hey Johnny, do you feel happy?

JOHNNY

And I said, "I don't need anybody's ten-cent therapy.
Can't you see I'm on top of the world?"

Take a look in my eyes,
go on, take a look in my eyes.
You're staring into nothing at all.
Nothing at all.
You're staring into nothing at all.
Nothing at all.

A&R CHOIR

oh, oh... oh, oh oh... (ohhh...)

I'm not what I seem 'cause I am not real.

A&R CHOIR

oh, oh... oh, oh oh... (ohhh...)

JOHNNY

Pretending to care, pretending to feel.

A&R CHOIR

(CONTINUED)

oh, oh... oh, oh oh... (*ohhh...*)

JOHNNY

I'm not what I seem 'cause I cannot feel.

A&R CHOIR

oh, oh... oh, oh oh... (*ohhh...*)

JOHNNY

I can't go on pretending I'm real.

The curtain parts again
revealing politicians and thieves,

JOHNNY & A&R CHOIR

the champions of nothing.

JOHNNY

We perform in a silhouette
lit from behind by blinding sheets of light.

JOHNNY & A&R CHOIR

In the halo of nothing.

JOHNNY

The show was second-hand
derived from what we thought you'd need to see.

JOHNNY & A&R CHOIR

The story of nothing.

JOHNNY

But everyone was entertained
and no one could remember how it was

JOHNNY & A&R CHOIR

before there was nothing.

THE LIGHTS COME UP ON STAGE RIGHT WHERE THE DJ IS IN HIS
BOOTH WITH HEADPHONES ON. THE SCREEN BEHIND THE STAGE
STARTS SHOWING RANDOM VIDEOS OS JOHNNY PERFORMING IN PAST
YEARS, HUGE CROWDS, JOHNNY BEER ADVERTISEMENT...ETC.

DJ

In a related story, Johnny Virgil, the popular singer,
whose concert dates were breaking attendance records
this summer, says he's quitting the business. At a
press conference held this morning at the Hyatt
Regency, Virgil's manager stated that the singer was
suffering from exhaustion and would be unable to
complete the rest of his scheduled appearances on his
tour. Fans were said to be disappointed but
enthusiastic about a refund being offered by Stanley
Beer Company, the tour sponsors. Stanley Beer offers a

(CONTINUED)

free twelve-pack of their special Johnny Beer in exchange for un-torn Johnny Virgil concert ticket stubs.

JOHNNY IS LYING ON HIS BACK WITH HIS HANDS OVER HIS FACE. SLOWLY HE SLIDES ACROSS THE STAGE IN AGONY. AS THE SONG ENDS HE RAISES HIS ARMS AND DROPS THEM BY HIS SIDE.

Home

AS THE LIGHTS COME UP, JOHNNY IS SITTING IN THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE HIS FLAT, LEANING AGAINST THE DOOR. DIANE IS SITTING CROSS-LEGGED INSIDE THE FLAT WITH HER BACK AGAINST THE DOOR.

A Long Day's Life

JOHNNY

(A CAPELLA)

When I was a boy, I would sit by the sea and ambitious Sirens would sing to me songs of a future both noble and grand. Now here I stand with my back to the wall, errant in some ways and tired in all. Life is what happens while you're making plans. At the end of a long day's life.

DIANE

That was then, Johnny.

JOHNNY

I know that, but it's hard to see where now.

DIANE

You don't have to discover everything; sometimes what happens next is just that.

JOHNNY

That's too simple, there has to be some sort of plan.

DIANE

There is, you live, you love, you die...I don't see it as any more complicated than that.

JOHNNY IS STILL LEANING ON THE DOOR. HE GENTLY KNOCKS ON IT.

DIANE

Come in.

DIANE GETS UP AND OPENS THE DOOR; JOHNNY WALKS IN AND HUGS DIANE. HE THEN WALKS INSIDE AND DIANE CLOSSES THE DOOR.

DIANE (CONT)

(CONTINUED)

Johnny don't make it tougher than it has to be; not everything
, needs to be arranged.

JOHNNY

It all just seems so different.

DIANE

It is,
(PAUSING)

different. But inside you are still the same, and I'm
still the same...it's just the world out there has
changed. That's the way it's always going to be.

JOHNNY WALKS IN AND SITS ON THE BED. DIANE GOES INTO THE
KITCHEN AND STARTS MAKING COFFEE. THE PHONE RINGS, AND
AFTER A FEW RINGS DIANE WALKS IN TO ANSWER IT. SHE LOOKS
AT JOHNNY, HE MOTIONS WITH HIS HEAD NOT TO ANSWER IT, AS
IF IT WASN'T IMPORTANT. THE ANSWERING MACHINE TAKES THE
CALL. THEY BOTH LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE BEING LEFT.

ANSWERING MACHINE

(VERY BUBBLY AND EXCITED)

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip, and I work for CND Records.
We are now representing your catalog, and I have to tell
you I'm really excited about finding new ways to get people
to listen to your music. I recently did some awesome work
for another classic artist, Rockin' Robbie, by getting his
hit song from the 80s as the new theme music for Kellogg's
Choco Mocha Bits cereal.

(EVEN MORE EXCITED)

Can you imagine 25,000 little kids humming that song every
morning while eating their Choco Mocha Bits...I know, it
was great. Anyway, please give me a call so we can throw
ideas against the wall to see what sticks, you know...put
our creative juices to work finding ways of tagging your
songs to products that best represent them. My number is
213-509-4567. Cheers.

JOHNNY STARES AT THE ANSWERING MACHINE, HE PUSHES THE
PLAYBACK BUTTON.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip and I work for CND Records...

JOHNNY HITS THE STOP BUTTON.

JOHNNY

(CONTINUED)

Who are you...

JOHNNY HITS THE PLAY BUTTON.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip and I work for CND
Records...

JOHNNY STOPS IT AGAIN.

JOHNNY

I'm sorry, I didn't get that. Who are you?

JOHNNY PUSHES PLAY.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip and I work for CND
Records...

JOHNNY PUSHES STOP.

JOHNNY

Who the fuck are you?

DIANE

(CONCERNED)

Johnny?

JOHNNY PUSHES THE BUTTON AGAIN.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip and I work for CND
Records...

JOHNNY HITS STOP, STARES AT THE MACHINE FOR A MOMENT.
THEN HE REPEATEDLY HITS THE BUTTON.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip
Hi Mr. Virgil, my name is Chip
Hi Mr. Virgil,
Hi Mr. Virgil,

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY PICKS UP THE PHONE AND DIALS A NUMBER. THE CUBICLE DIRECTLY ABOVE HIM LIGHTS UP. A WOMAN IS SITTING AT A DESK AS HE PHONE BEGINS TO RING. SHE ANSWERS THE CALL.

ALEXA

CND Records, this is Alexa. How can I direct your call?

JOHNNY

Chip.

ALEXA

We have several Chips; do you have a last name?

JOHNNY

(ANGERED)

You know CHIP ...the king of the Choco Mocha Bits campaign!

ALEXA

May I ask who is calling?

JOHNNY

Johnny Virgil.

ALEXA

One moment, sir.

THE TOP RIGHT CUBICLE LIGHTS UP. CHIP IS SITTING AT HIS DESK AS HIS PHONE RINGS. HE LISTENS AND THEN HITS A BUTTON ON THE PHONE TO SWITCH LINES.

CHIP

Mr. Virgil, thank you for returning my call.

JOHNNY

First, it's not Mr. Virgil. I'm not your fucking gym coach. What the hell is CND Records, and why in God's name did you call me?

CHIP

Umm, CND Records is the largest distributor of hits from the past. I am now the agent assigned to your music. I didn't mean to upset you Mr....Johnny. I think we can do some great things together.

JOHNNY

How did my songs get to you, without anyone asking me?

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Catalogs of music content are bought and sold every day. Yours just showed up on my desk last week. Again, I think this can be a really good thing...there are tons of markets out there wanting songs that parents might know and younger people don't.

(JOHNNY PAUSES)

JOHNNY

What is CND?

CHIP PAUSES FOR A SECOND.

CHIP

Classic Never Die.

JOHNNY

That's not true, Chip.

JOHNNY HANGS UP THE PHONE SLOWLY. HE THEN GETS UP AND RUSHES OUT THE DOOR AND DOWN THE STAIRS. THE STAGE DARKENS AS THE AUDIENCE HEARS STREET AND TRAFFIC NOISES. THE BOTTOM LEFT CUBICLE LIGHTS UP. IT IS THE WAITING ROOM AT MEGALAPHONE RECORDS. JOHNNY COMES INTO THE ROOM QUICKLY. HE LOOKS AT THE SECRETARY, AS HE TURNS TO HEAD INTO THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE.

SECRETARY

(TO JOHNNY)

You can't go in there!

JOHNNY

(TO THE SECRETARY)

Wrong again.

JOHNNY PULLS HARD TO OPEN THE LARGE OAK DOORS. THE LIGHTS IN THE CENTER CUBICLE COME UP, AND THE PRESIDENT IS SITTING AT HIS DESK. HIS ACCOUNTANT IS SITTING ACROSS THE ROOM, TAKING NOTES. WHEN JOHNNY BURSTS IN, THEY BOTH STOP TALKING AND LOOK AT HIM.

JOHNNY

Gentlemen, I have come here today to save my soul.

THE ACCOUNTANT STARTS TO GET UP, BUT THE PRESIDENT MOTIONS FOR HIM TO SIT DOWN.

PRESIDENT

Well, Mr. Virgil.

JOHNNY

(TO THE PRESIDENT)

JOHNNY (CONT)

You know...I really hate that name. Do you know why?

(JOHNNY LOOKS OVER AT THE ACCOUNTANT, WHO LOOKS VERY NERVOUS)

Do you know why, Scooter? The reason I hate when someone calls me Mr. Virgil is because just after they say that name, they always start fucking me up the ass. It's almost a strange method of foreplay. Maybe, just maybe, they could finish the sentence with, Mr. Virgil, this is going to hurt, so brace yourself,

(LOOKING AT THE ACCOUNTANT)

What do you think Scooter? Is that how the sentence should end?

(THE ACCOUNTANT SLOWLY GETS UP AND SLIDES OUT OF THE ROOM. JOHNNY TURNS TO THE PRESIDENT, STILL SITTING DOWN. HE HAS A SMIRK ON HIS FACE AS HE WATCHES JOHNNY WORK THE ROOM.)

PRESIDENT

That was impressive, you haven't had a captive audience like that in a while. Now, being as I have no idea why you are here, why don't you let me in on this soul-saving mission?

JOHNNY SITS DOWN IN FRONT OF THE DESK, LEANS BACK IN THE CHAIR, AND RESTS HIS FEET UP ON THE DESK.

JOHNNY

You see boss, oh sorry, you're not my boss anymore. I now have my career in the hands of the makers of Choco Mocha Bits. Feeling quite positive about that move.

PRESIDENT

I see, that's what this is about.

JOHNNY

Did you know that,
(LEANING IN)

Classics Never Die? Classics...Never...Die... Did you know that? (pause) I don't think that's true, do you? I think the phrase should go something like... "Classics Never Die, they just wish they had when they hear their music being used to sell tampons!"

PRESIDENT

I never thought you would be worked up over making some
PRESIDENT (CONT)

money. That's all this is: someone trying to make you some money.

JOHNNY

That's how you see it? Some guy calls me and lets me know that he is now my agent, and he's pretty excited about putting my music to a Buick commercial...and you just see that as money?

PRESIDENT

I think you've forgotten the full name of this industry, Johnny; it's called the Music Business. Each word carries the same importance. Without the music, you have nothing to sell. Without the business, you have nothing to eat. You've always known that, you just don't like to admit it.

JOHNNY

Is that what allows you to sleep at night?

PRESIDENT

I have no trouble looking in the mirror, I know where I stand, I know where I'm at, and I know what I've done...do you?

JOHNNY

You don't think I do?

PRESIDENT

Doesn't matter what I think. That might sound a bit foreign to you...not caring what someone thinks of you. You've spent the last 15 years writing amazing songs and swimming upstream trying to prove to everyone you're different. You are different, but differences have a shelf life...and now you bust into my office pissed off that I handed your future over to someone that will be able to ensure you don't have to work a day job. I'm not sure you understand where you are.

JOHNNY

I'm right here in front of you, wondering how I can just be handed off. It just doesn't make sense. It just doesn't make sense to me.

PRESIDENT

Johnny, it's not whether it makes sense or not; it's the way it is. Things have moved on. Give that guy a call and see what he has to offer. Right now, he's the only guy in your corner. Don't repeat the past and burn bridges. There aren't that many left for you to cross.

JOHNNY

Why does one have to give so much just to play music? Shouldn't it be simpler?

PRESIDENT

Maybe that's what comes next.

JOHNNY

I've lost 15 years of my life.

PRESIDENT

If you had the chance to do it again, you wouldn't even think twice.

JOHNNY

I almost lost Diane.
(LONG PAUSE)

Michael.

PRESIDENT

You didn't lose Michael, Michael lost Michael.

JOHNNY

So, this is it, no more tours, no more press releases, no more creating.

PRESIDENT

I wouldn't say that. You tried the comeback tour, and right now it didn't work for you. You weren't ready to come back. Johnny, you need to go home. Raise a family, Diane is the best thing that ever happened to you, and you know that. If you want to change the world, raise good human beings, they will make the difference. It's not that everything is over; it's just different now.

JOHNNY GETS UP SLOWLY AND BEGINS TO WALK TO THE DOOR. HE STOPS BEFORE LEAVING, AND TURNS AROUND, PAUSES, AND THEN TURNS BACK TO THE DOOR AND LEAVES.

FADES TO BLACK

LIGHTS COME UP AS JOHNNY IS OUTSIDE HIS APARTMENT. JOHNNY IS PACING BACK AND FORTH. YOU CAN SEE DIANE THROUGH THE UPSTAIRS WINDOW. THE WINDOW IS OPEN AS JOHNNY SHOUTS TO HER.

JOHNNY

Diane! Diane!

DIANE WALKS TO THE OPEN WINDOW AND LOOKS DOWN TO THE STREET.

DIANE

What are you doing?

JOHNNY

Not sure. That's not true, I think I know.

DIANE

Johnny, I have no idea what you're talking about.

JOHNNY LOOKS AT THE GROUND, AND THEN BACK TO DIANE.

JOHNNY

I want to go home. I need to go home.

DIANE LOOKS CONCERNED.

JOHNNY (CONT)

What about you?

DIANE

What?

JOHNNY

Do you want to go home?

DIANE

I thought we were home, Johnny.

JOHNNY

I don't know if I am.

DIANE COMES DOWN STAIRS.

DIANE

Are you alright?

JOHNNY

Ya, I'm alright.

JOHNNY REACHES OVER AND TAKES DIANE'S HAND. THE CUBICLES ARE DARK. AS THE SONG BEGINS, THE LIGHTS COME UP IN THE TOP MIDDLE CUBICLE. MICHAEL (WEARING ALL WHITE) IS SITTING ON THE FLOOR WITH HIS FEET DANGLING OVER THE EDGE. MICHAEL REACHES OVER AND PICKS UP AN ELECTRIC KEYBOARD AND PUTS IT ACROSS HIS LAP. LIGHTS COME UP IN THE TOP RIGHT CUBICLE WHERE DANNY VESTRI IS LEANING AGAINST THE POST, WEARING A VERY STYLISH SUIT. MICHAEL HITS THE KEYS WHEN THE PIANO IS HEARD. THE A&R CHOIR APPEARS IN THE FAR-RIGHT CUBICLE.

The Way Back Home

JOHNNY

I was lost in the city when I chanced on a man who said he was Jesus as he held out his hand.
I tossed him a quarter and said, "I'm your biggest fan. Do you know the way back home?"

LIGHTS COME UP IN THE BOTTOM CENTER CUBICLE WHERE JOHNNY'S ORIGINAL BAND MEMBERS, DANNY AND BOB, COME OUT WITH THEIR INSTRUMENTS. THEY BOTH LOOK UP TO MICHAEL AS HE SMILES AND NODS. BOB IS TWIRLING HIS DRUM STICKS IN TRUE ROCK STAR FASHION.

JOHNNY (CONT)

And the planet sits waiting for this man to appear, who will solve all our problems
and make everything clear.
'Cause we are all prisoners of apathy and fear, and we lost the way back home.

DANNY AND BOB START PLAYING AS THE DRUMS BEGIN.

JOHNNY (CONT)

We lost the way back home.

A&R CHOIR

THE CHOIR IS USING HAND MOTIONS IN OLD MOTOWN STYLE.

Find the way back home.
Find the way back home.
Find the way back home.

JOHNNY

But there is no one coming with great things to say. There's
no simple solutions,
there's no last judgment day.
There's only the trying to find a better way to
look for the way back home.
To look for the way back home.

JOHNNY AND DIANE WALK TO BOB AND DANNY. THERE IS AN ELECTRIC
GUITAR ON A STAND IN FRONT OF THE DRUMS. JOHNNY ACKNOWLEDGES
THEM WITH AN ENTHUSIASTIC SMILE. THEY SMILE BACK, AND DANNY
NODS TO THE GUITAR. JOHNNY LOOKS BACK AT DIANE. SHE STEPS
BACK AND ALSO NODS TO THE GUITAR. JOHNNY SLOWLY WALKS OVER
AND PUTS THE GUITAR ON. DANNY STARTS TO BOUNCE AS THE BAND IS
EXCITED ABOUT PLAYING TOGETHER.

A&R CHOIR

Find the way back home. Find
a way back home.
Find the way back home. Find
a way back home.
Find the way back home.

MICHAEL

Walking on pavement where old illusions fall
I'm struck by a sadness, lonely here inside these walls...

JOHNNY PLAYS THE GUITAR SOLO. WITH THE ORIGINAL BAND BACK
TOGETHER, THEY ARE OVER THE TOP WITH EXCITEMENT.

A&R CHOIR

Find a way back home.
Find a way back home.

VESTRI WALKS OVER TO MICHAEL AND LEANS OVER TO
SPEAK TO HIM. HE THEN WALKS BACK TO HIS CUBICLE AND
LIGHTS A CIGARETTE.

Find a way back home.
Find a way back home.
Find a way back home.
Find a way back home.

MICHAEL

And the man who was Jesus lit his last cigarette.
And he spoke in a whisper with a voice of regret.

"You've all heard the answer,
but you're not listening yet.
Love is the way back home..."

FADE TO BLACK

THE SOUND OF RAIN IS HEARD. A SINGLE SPOTLIGHT COMES UP ON
JOHNNY, WHO IS SITTING AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE WITH HIS FEET
DANGLING OVER. HE HAS AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR.

Johnny's Last Song

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Virgil,
I used to be a star,
it was a long, long time ago.
Sometimes I hear my records
in the wee hours of the night,
on the oldies radio.
People sometimes ask me
for the secret to success,
I tell them what I know.
Believe in what you're doing,
remember who you are,
and who knows where you'll go.

DIANE APPEARS FROM BEHIND JOHNNY AND PUTS HER HAND ON HIS
SHOULDER AND SMILES. JOHNNY LOOKS UP AND SMILES BACK.

FADE TO BLACK