

PART II: MORNING

FIRST VOICE

Now this.

Stand on this hill. This is Verizon Hill. And from this stump-stump-stumpified Slip 'n' Slide slope of slash and scree, you can see the entire Lite-Brite valley below you.

Now, just a few digits before dawn, you can see the street lights shimmering on the Su-Doku'd, Spirographic, Subaru'd streets, like serpentine strands of genuine Tanzanite against a Black Velvet background.

You can see the circuit-board Scrabble-board checker-board dart-board dash-board Ouija-board subdivisions, sparkling like necklaces of 10-carat Cubic Zirconia, twinkling like bracelets of Blue Topaz, glimmering like Diamonique earrings, each set off by liver-and-kidney-flavored swimming pools casting a translucent sheen, like rings of beryllium aquamarine.

Look! You can see the Sunkist slopes of Purple Mountain blush Maybelline red as the sun begins to rise on the Cool-whipped hills, slowly revealing distinctive features well known to locals. There's the snow-coned Purple Peak, the highest point on the mountain. Just below, there's Monica's Gap; protruding to the left, Spock's Ear; rising to the right, the Twin Towers. Sitting just above the tree line, you can see Hawking's Wheelchair. And further down the slope lies OJ's Glove.

To the west, you can see the sun caress the concrete bodice of Dasani Dam, built in the forties to corset Dasani Creek, which created the town's water supply by flooding Dasani Canyon, submerging sacred native acreage, and drowning, under a reservoir of snow melt, petroglyphs of hands, eagles, horses, snakes, owls, deer, reverently etched into the ancient stone by Dasani tribesmen.

From here, on Verizon Hill, as the earth spins ever-eastward, you can see the sun rise over the entire town.

(As they are mentioned, each of the CITIZENS appear.)

You can see it rise on the Broad Stripes Golf Course, where Lunesta Richman, as is his custom and his privilege, is the first to tee off from the first hole at first light.

You can see it rise on the Home of the Brave Trailer Park, where Lilly Eli arrives home to her double-wide after her double-shift at the Twilight's Last Gleaming Retirement Home.

You can see it rise on Big-box Boulevard, at the east entrance of the Clear Cut Mall, where Randy Lenscrafter pulls into the parking lot for his shift in the control room of the security operations center.

You can see it rise on the Purple Mountain Animal Shelter, where Sergeant Hartz prepares to patrol the city, seeking out animals abandoned, abused, unwanted, and unloved.

You can see it rise on Encroachment Road, where Activia Green, breaking her fast with organic eggs, local strawberries, and Fair Trade tea, reviews her lesson plans for another day of passing on the past.

You can see it rise on Sprawl Street, where Amy Clearblue, waiting for the bus in a blousy outfit unfit for school, checks her silhouette in the side-view things-are-closer-than-they-appear mirror of a slightly-used cherry-red Volvo.

You can see it rise on Makita Street, where Mr. Hyper-Griper, in his restored Victorian, still asleep in his Sleep Number bed, wakes to a groundskeeper's chorus of gasoline engines—

(The cast becomes a chorus of lawn machines.)

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Loud enough to rouse the dead!

FIRST VOICE

The basses, the low-riding fume-puking lawn-mowers—

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Do you have any idea how much exhaust those damn things spew?

FIRST VOICE

The baritones, the lazy long-necked leaf-blowers—

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Worst-Damn-Invention-of-the-Twentieth-Century! Just blowing those leaves into the street!

FIRST VOICE

The tenors, the whirring, whistling weed-wackers—

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Get some goats! Get some llamas! Get a damn clue!

FIRST VOICE

All singing, in the minor key of green, a full-throttled, d-day-decibeled Lida Rose to lawn, hedge, bush, and tree.

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Lazy-ass landscapers! Massacre the planet somewhere else!

FIRST VOICE

Amana McNugget, emerging from the Jacuzzi tub, thinks about her e-date for that night, set up online through her e-Yente membership, and hums happily to herself, as she stands on the cranky Weight Watcher's scale, who, resenting the daily burden of the ritual, grumbles—

SCALE

Huh, wuh juh think? That you'd be lighter this morning? After all the crap you ate yesterday? Bacon and cheesecake and chips? Oh, my! Give me a break!

AMANA MCNUGGET

You can't bother me this morning. I have a date tonight. An actual date.

FIRST VOICE

Moisturized, conditioned, pumiced, shaved, plucked, brushed, combed, Amana dons a robe and hums her way down to the well-equipped kitchen, where her warm and dependable friend, Mr. Haff-Caff, brews up a cheerful morning greeting.

MR HAFF-CAFF

Good morning, Amama! How did you sleep? Well, I hope.

AMANA MCNUGGET

Very well, thanks. I'm so excited about my date! I hope you're stronger than I am this morning.

FIRST VOICE

She opens the sub-zero fridge, where the bacon is chilling out on the middle shelf.

BACON

Amana! Hey, I've been waiting for you, babe! Eat me! I'm what's for breakfast!

AMANA MCNUGGET

Oh, I'd love to, but—no, no, I shouldn't! Not today.

BACON

Come on, Amana, you know you want me. I'm lean and I'm delicious. Strip off a few slices, lay me down on the griddle, and let's get sizzlin'!

AMANA McNUGGET

Mmm. You're so tempting. But, no—I should grind you up in the disposal instead! Oprah says that if I have bacon in the fridge that I'm in denial!

BACON

That's ridiculous—Oprah loves me. Oprah can't get enough of me. Oprah and I go way back!

AMANA McNUGGET

I'm sure that's true, but, still—

BACON

You know you can't resist me, Amana, so let's binge, baby. Besides, you know you can always purge me later if you have regrets.

AMANA McNUGGET

Ugh! Please! I don't do that!

FIRST VOICE

On the top shelf, buried behind the Diet Snapple, the yogurt pleads—

YOGURT

Amana, don't listen to that disgusting pig! Eat me! I'm creamy and sweet, and so good for you.

BACON

So tasteless and so unsatisfying, you mean.

YOGURT

Shut up, you filthy swine!

BACON

This woman needs a piece of meat in her belly, not your bacterial nastiness.

AMANA McNUGGET

Stop it now, stop it, both of you! I have a date tonight, and you're not going to spoil my day!

FIRST VOICE

Mort Soloflex, in his hospital bed in the ICU at Unilever Hospital, is shaken awake by a vaguely familiar figure surrounded by bright white light—

TRAUMA

Wake up, Morty.

Where am I?
MORT SOLOFLEX

You're in the hospital.
TRAUMA

What? Why?
MORT SOLOFLEX

You were DWI again last night. You lost control of the car.
TRAUMA

Who are you?
MORT SOLOFLEX

You don't remember me?
TRAUMA

Joey?
MORT SOLOFLEX

No, certainly not. We had drinks last night.
TRAUMA

We did?
MORT SOLOFLEX

Several rounds.
TRAUMA

So—who are you?
MORT SOLOFLEX

I'm Trauma.
TRAUMA

Trauma?
MORT SOLOFLEX

Don't worry. I'm a fully licensed subcontractor. Cases like yours don't really interest
Death.
TRAUMA

Ah.
MORT SOLOFLEX

TRAUMA

No offense, I hope.

MORT SOLOFLEX

None taken. Besides, you're just the morphine talking, right?

TRAUMA

Let's not pretend now, Morty. I know you've seen my shadow. I've been walking behind you for a long time now. Are you prepared?

MORT SOLOFLEX

Wait a minute.

TRAUMA

That's what they all say. Look, I'm not authorized to grant reprieves.

MORT SOLOFLEX

But there are loopholes, right?

TRAUMA

Not in your case.

MORT SOLOFLEX

No, no, wait, I—

TRAUMA

It's too late now, Morty.

MORT SOLOFLEX

But, I...I need to talk to my son. I never—

TRAUMA

You should have thought of that before.

MORT SOLOFLEX

Maybe you'll...take a bribe?

TRAUMA

Out of the question.

MORT SOLOFLEX

Wait! I've heard that you play Monopoly. Is that true?

TRAUMA

Yes, that's true. I'm an excellent Monopoly player.

MORT SOLOFLEX

But you can't be better than me.

(Pause.)

TRAUMA

Good thing I brought my board.

(The entire stage becomes a Monopoly board.)

MORT SOLOFLEX

As long as I hold out against you, I live. If I win, you release me. Do we have a deal?

TRAUMA

Deal. I'll be the banker.

MORT SOLOFLEX

Excellent.

TRAUMA

Choose a piece.

MORT SOLOFLEX

I'll take the little shot glass.

TRAUMA

That's a thimble.

MORT SOLOFLEX

Is it? Oh. Then I'll take the race car.

TRAUMA

But of course. And I'll take the casket.

MORT SOLOFLEX

There's no casket in—

TRAUMA

Special Edition. Apropos, don't you think?

(JOEY enters, and crosses the stage.)

FIRST VOICE

After a late breakfast, Joey Adderall takes Lotto Jones' beloved pit bull for a morning strut down the Sunny-D side of Makita Street.

JOEY ADDERALL

(From offstage) Come on, Oswald, do your damned business.

FIRST VOICE

The business done, Joey slips a hand into the plastic Purple Mountain Herald bag, stoops, scoops up the pit-bull-poop, turns the bag inside out, ties a knot in the top, looks both ways, and drops it back onto the manicured grass—*(a knotted plastic bag is lobbed onto the stage)*—where someone else, some dog-hating hyper-griper with a December-disposition and a February-face, will pick it up later in the day.

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

Damn it! What in Lucifer's eternal inferno is wrong with these nano-wit dog owners?

FIRST VOICE

—sputters Mr. Hyper-Griper, descending his pedigreed stairs—

MR. HYPER-GRIPER

They go to the trouble of picking up their dog's poop, and then leave the non-biodegradable bag behind on the ground? Who do they think is going to pick up after them? The butler? Here's a tip for you, you feces-pieces-dropping-sphincter-heads: take the doggie-bag home with you!

FIRST VOICE

Emerging naked from a tepid shower—eyes, muscles, head, stomach, blurring, throbbing, pounding, flummoxed—staring at her southbound jowls breasts tummy thighs in the vapor-draped mirror, Lilly Eli stands shivering at the sink, water dripping from her leathery epidermis, and imagines—

LILLY ELI

—standing at the North Pole, in the middle of the frozen Arctic Ocean—

FIRST VOICE

—a way to escape the indefatigable gravity of her life.

LILLY ELI

—standing exactly on the spot, on the icy skull of the earth—where there's no time, and no direction: no time, because this is the vanishing point where all the time zones merge, where all the threads of longitude suture together, so that a small step in any direction hobbles the clock; and no direction, because any way you look, any way you step, is South, South, South, South. Here, the sun rises only once a year, and sets just once a year; so a single "day" takes a year to pass, and a "year" becomes a single day. Here, precisely here—freed from the tyranny of time and the dictatorship of space—standing on the axis of our planet as it hurtles through eternity, I'll take off all my clothes, and—

PHARMA-GODMOTHER

Oh, you poor thing! Here, take these, Lily—

FIRST VOICE

Says her Pharma-Godmother, emerging from the medicine cabinet behind the mirror.

LILLY ELI

What are they?—

FIRST VOICE

Asks Lilly, as she opens the bottle, and swallows down several pills.

PHARMA-GODMOTHER

An invitation to the royal ball!

FIRST VOICE

Shad Rogaine, on the way to his job managing the Sushi Shack at the mall—

SHAD ROGAINE

(To the traffic) What the fuck?

FIRST VOICE

—blatantly late and headed nowhere haste-post-haste—

SHAD ROGAINE

(To the traffic) Stupid sons-o'-bitches.

FIRST VOICE

—sitting in a long line of idle and exhausted commuters by the sharp left turn on Ginsu Drive, where a mutilated Buick is being tugged out of a ravine by a tow truck—

SHAD ROGAINE

(To the traffic) You dumb fuck-wads couldn't wait 'til after rush hour for this bullshit?

FIRST VOICE

—feeling his temper rising, switches on the anger management CD permanently parked in his car stereo.

DR LOVEBALM

Now, imagine a favorite place from your childhood, a place where you felt joy and contentment.

SHAD ROGAINE

Uh...Lake Superior—"the largest fresh water lake in the world."

DR LOVEBALM

Imagine yourself now in that place. Go there. Be there right now. Where are you? Where is this special place?

SHAD ROGAINE

Isle Royale. In the middle of Lake Superior, there's an island called Isle Royale, which is the largest island in the largest fresh water lake in the world.

DR LOVEBALM

Now, ask yourself: what makes this place unlike any other? Why is it special to you?

SHAD ROGAINE

On Isle Royale there's another lake, called Siskiwit Lake, which is the largest fresh water lake on the largest island in the largest fresh water lake in the world.

DR LOVEBALM

Good. Now observe your surroundings. What is it that you see?

SHAD ROGAINE

I see some fat motherfucker trying to cut in. *(To the traffic)* No way, pal! Get your fat-ass Cadillac the fuck back in line!

DR LOVEBALM

That's right. Allow the memory of this place to fill you up with a sense of serenity and peace. What else do you see?

SHAD ROGAINE

Um...another tiny island. In the middle of Siskiwit Lake, there's an island so small and trivial that it doesn't even have a name.

DR LOVEBALM

Very good. Now, recall a moment, in this special place, when you felt tranquility in your life, a balance between your mind and spirit, a one-ness with your existence.

SHAD ROGAINE

One summer, my dad and I took a skiff out to that nameless island, drifted silently, and cast our lines for fish. Never caught a thing. Didn't matter.

DR LOVEBALM

Wonderful. Get in touch now with all of your senses: what do you see hear taste touch smell in this transcendent moment? Etch all of these details into your mind and spirit.

SHAD ROGAINE

That island isn't even on the map. Doesn't even have a name. But it should be famous, you know? It should damn well be—

(To the traffic) What the fuck, old man? Don't get out of your fucking car! O, you stupid fucking anus, get back in your goddamn car before you have a coronary! Nobody needs your fucking help, grandpa! Get back in your FUCKING CAR!

FIRST VOICE

In his study, diverting himself in a quiet moment, Pastor Poligrip is putting the final touches on the Italian sonnet to his beloved Joey Adderall.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

“Flesh”?

DONNE

No, “heart” is better.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Okay. Does “image” work here?

DONNE

No, try “likeness” there.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Yes, “likeness” is good. And what about “mortal” here?

DONNE

No, no, try “earthly.”

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Uh-huh. Is “wrong” okay here?

DONNE

Oh no, go with “sin” instead.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

“Sin.” Yes. Much better. So—what do you think? Finished?

DONNE

Yes. Definitely. Time to stop. Remember: A poem is never finished—

PASTOR POLIGRIP

—only abandoned.

DONNE

Exactly. Read it aloud for me.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Why dost thou make me love, O gracious Lord,
Where I can never love but in disgrace?
Dost Thou my heart tempt with an angel's face
To bar my soul from heavenly reward?
And how can it be sin, O loving Lord,
Whom love for all men bids all men embrace,
To love an earthly creature Thou didst grace
With Thine own likeness from Thine own mold poured?
But who am I to question Thy dear love,
Who gave us for our sins His only son?
O pardon me my questions, God above!
I hereby vow, with questions, I am done.
And yet I only question Thee to learn
A way to love that Thy love I may earn.

FIRST VOICE

In study hall at Advil High, during third period, scrunched over his pulsating laptop,
Bobby Starkist works on his application to MIT—

M.I.T. ADMISSIONS OFFICER

In order for the admissions staff of MIT to get to know you, the applicant, better, we ask
that you answer the following questions:

AMY CLEARBLUE

Question one:

FIRST VOICE

—Asks Amy Clearblue, a Fig Newton of Bobby's love-addled imagination—

AMY CLEARBLUE

What do you hope to accomplish in the years following your graduation from MIT?

BOBBY STARKIST

It is my aspiration to solve the greatest scientific mysteries of our time, hidden from the
mind of man by the chastity of Space:

AMY CLEARBLUE

Yes, Bobby, pluck out the heart of my mystery...

BOBBY STARKIST

To solve the puzzle of Higgs Boson, the elusive lattice-work that gives matter mass—

AMY CLEARBLUE

Uncover my naked truths...

BOBBY STARKIST

To find the missing 96 percent of matter and energy that make up the rest of the universe—

AMY CLEARBLUE

Sound the depth of my unknowns...

BOBBY STARKIST

To control nuclear fusion...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Explore my undiscovered countries...

BOBBY STARKIST

To determine how life arose on earth...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Surmount my invisible forces...

BOBBY STARKIST

To cure cancer...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Untie the knot of my enigma...

BOBBY STARKIST

To discover what drives evolution...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Unfold my folded paradox

BOBBY STARKIST

To ascertain whether alien life exists...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Unpuzzle my puzzlements...

BOBBY STARKIST

To uncover how the universe began...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Fathom my unfathomables...

BOBBY STARKIST

To understand what causes gravity...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Conceive my inconceivables...

BOBBY STARKIST

To know how human culture evolved...

AMY CLEARBLUE

Penetrate my quandaries.

BOBBY STARKIST

So that Amy Clearblue will love me.

FIRST VOICE

Purelle Swiffer, on hand and knee, scrubbing at the floor with an Oral-B, recalls the day her teenage son packed a small duffel and left the house.

JOEY ADDERALL

Fuck this! I am so out of here, anyway! It's like living in a fucking funeral parlor!

PURELLE SWIFFER

You were so right, Joey—it's true. This house is a morgue. Except, there's no casket, 'cause I'm the one who's dying.

(To herself) All the dust in this house—this dust is *you*, Purelle, returning to the earth, one cell at a time. My desiccated corpse is everywhere—cowering under the couch, hiding in the blinds, gathering on the mantel, festering under the fridge, caught in the lint trap, rotting beneath the bed. I'm my own pall-bearer, carrying my body out of the house, a little bit everyday, on wipes and sponges, in towels and tissues, tumbled from undies, spun out of skirts, squeezed out of mops, poured out of buckets, sucked out of rugs, flushed down the sewer.

So, you were right to leave here, Joey. I see that now. It was for the best.

FIRST VOICE

Meantime, in the back seat of his black chauffeured sedan, on the way to his private jet, Lunesta Richman calls his assistant—

LUNESTA RICHMAN

That's right—I want you to start buying up—very discreetly—parcels on Mars...No, not the candy company, the planet!..That's right, the fourth planet from the sun. Purchase every piece of Martian real estate you can get your hands on. Concentrate especially on the polar ice cap. We're gonna need that water. And find out what's available on the slopes of the Olympus Mons, and on Tharsis, along the edge of the Valles Marineris, and also the Hellas Planitia. I want to own the lion's share of that property before the week is up!

FIRST VOICE

Stocking merchandise from the loading dock at the back of the Good Sport Sporting Goods store in the lower level of the Clear Cut Mall, Dash Goodyear listens to yesterday's scores on the radio—

(DASH appears, putting on his back brace and knee brace.)

SPORTS / KPUR RADIO

In football yesterday, the Denver Coors squeezed the Tampa Tropicanas, 21 to 7; the New York Trumps sucked down the Seattle Starbucks 15 to 3; the Orlando Disneys boiled the San Francisco Rice-a-Ronis, 24-12, and the Philadelphia Cream-Cheesers smothered the Houston Halliburtons, 17-10. Now this.

DASH GOODYEAR

Yeah! Go Cheesers! Great damn team. Almost got to play for them. Scout was there for the regional finals against Old Navy, my senior year. To see me, everyone said. Sacked the Q.B. three times in the first quarter. Made two picks in the second. I was in half-time heaven. But I blew out my knee in the third. Tore up the ligaments like toilet paper. We fell behind in the fourth and lost the game. And that was that. No pro contract. I was damaged goods. *(A slight pause.)* Still am, I guess.

FIRST VOICE

Fifteen minutes into fifth period, Activia Green is teaching her American History class in room 222 at Advil High—

ACTIVIA GREEN

That's a great question, Triscuit. If Columbus discovered America in 1492, why don't we live in the United States of Columbus? Anybody know the answer? Anybody?

(Silence.)

Well, the reason is, that when the first map of this continent was drawn up in 1507 by a German mapmaker named Martin Waldseemüller, he named the continent after an explorer who came here just after Columbus, in 1499, and again in 1502—

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

That fool Columbus! Ha! He got it all wrong! He actually thought he had landed in India—that he'd sailed all the way around the world to the west side of India! Ha! Well, I, Amerigo Vespucci, have been there, too, have seen it with my own eyes, and I can tell you that it's not the west coast of India—it's a whole new continent! A new world! And it's ours for the taking!

ACTIVIA GREEN

That's right—Amerigo Vespucci. So how did Amerigo Vespucci's name end up on the map of the new world, rather than Columbus? How did Amerigo Vespucci earn the naming rights to an entire continent, just for correcting the record? Anybody know?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Ha! That's easy! Better connections! Better marketing! Better Public Relations!

ACTIVIA GREEN

That's right—Amerigo Vespucci made sure that everyone in Europe knew about his discoveries. Columbus didn't. And that's why we live in America, Triscuit, not Columbus. We should all just be glad that we don't live in the United States of Vespucci!

FIRST VOICE

At the Land of the Free Gun Shop & Range, down a self-loading, ear-muffled gallery, Joey Adderall, standing erect in a shooting stall, cups the heel of his Costner pistol in his palm, squints down the barrel, and empties a clip into a witless silhouette—

(Before each gunshot, a product icon appears, giving JOEY a target.)

JOEY ADDERALL

Just Do It.

(Shot.)

I'm Lovin' It.

(Shot.)

Think Different.

(Shot.)

Got Milk?

(Shot.)

Be All That You Can Be.

(Shot.)

When it Rains, it Pours.

(Shot.)

Snap Crackle Pop!

(Shot.)

Betcha Can't Eat Just One.

(Shot.)

Because You're Worth it.

(Shot.)

We Answer To a Higher Authority.

(Shot.)

Please Don't Squeeze the Charmin.

(Shot.)

Have It Your Way.

(Shot.)

Don't Leave Home Without It.

(Shot.)

We Try Harder.

(Shot.)

How Do You Spell Relief?

(Shot.)

FIRST VOICE

—while down the corridor, Johnny Viagra, stationed at his Ikea desk, a stack of neglected background checks oozing from the swollen in-box, leans back in his high-caliber chair, his prosthetic legs standing guard by the dead-bolted green door, and spends a few unbillable minutes single-handedly sowing his Quaker Oats while watching StrawberryJam@poptart.com spread her delicious goodness over the web.

(JOEY continues to shoot his pistol during JOHNNY's exchange with STRAWBERRY—all of which overlaps loosely and rises to a climax.)

JOHNNY VIAGRA
O Strawberry! You're the one.

STRAWBERRY JAM
O yes, Johnny! Don't quit.

JOHNNY VIAGRA
There's no one else but you—

STRAWBERRY JAM
We're inter-connected...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
you, my poppin'-fresh,

STRAWBERRY JAM
forever linked...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
seven-figured,

STRAWBERRY JAM
by your extended membership...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
thermo-fashionable,

STRAWBERRY JAM
with unlimited access...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
Uma-tall,

STRAWBERRY JAM
to enhanced services...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
Halle-berried,

STRAWBERRY JAM
through increased bandwidth...

JOHNNY VIAGRA
Scarlett-lipped,

via high-speed cable... STRAWBERRY JAM

J-Lo-ded, JOHNNY VIAGRA

to digitally mastered... STRAWBERRY JAM

Heigl-icious, JOHNNY VIAGRA

high-definition... STRAWBERRY JAM

Strawberry! JOHNNY VIAGRA

full-length features! STRAWBERRY JAM

O! Strawberry! JOHNNY VIAGRA

Yes, Johnny! STRAWBERRY JAM

O! JOHNNY VIAGRA

RANDY LENS CRAFTER
A Day in the Life of the Mall: A film by Randy Lenscrafter.

(The CITIZENS enter, as shoppers at the mall.)

FIRST VOICE
In the central control room of the Mall, security specialist Randy Lenscrafter leans forward in his Tarantino chair, scanning the monitors fed by the 37 cameras of the Clear Cut CCTV network.

RANDY LENS CRAFTER
Camera 31, in front of Claire's—*(snap)*—zoom in on a pack of pre-teens wearing too much make-up, but trawling just offshore for more;

Camera 29, in front of Baby Gap—(*snap*)—tracking shot of a twentyish mother, pushing twins in a carriage, searching for a shop that carries a suitable replacement for the youthful days she far too readily traded away;

Camera 23, in front of Borders—(*snap*)—wide shot of a gargantu-woman skimming the latest diet-book while she sucks up, through a pachydermal straw, the cool contents of a 600-calorie Grande-Mocha-Lappa-Frappa;

Camera 19, in front of Godiva—(*snap*)—close up on the wealthy matron at the candy counter sneaking her fourth free truffle from the “try-one!” dish;

Camera 17, in front of Fossil—(*snap*)—pan left to an old man seated on a bench, waiting for his wife of forty years, while he tracks the orbiting bodies of passing lassies, each one evoking a heavy sigh for a lost lifetime of self-inflicted fidelity.

FIRST VOICE

Sergeant Hartz of Purple Mountain Animal Control heads back to the shelter after picking up an unrepentant pit bull running amok on Have-not street.

SERGEANT HARTZ

It's all right, boy, it's all right. You don't have to explain it to me. I know why you bit that kid. Chained to that post day after day; running in circles till you've dug a trench in the dust; eating, sleeping, and shitting in the same spot month after month, starved for love and affection and companionship year after year, until nothing is left of your life but the sound of your own barking. You needed a taste of blood, didn't you? To know you were alive. I understand that. Don't worry. When we get you back to the shelter, I'm gonna take good care of you. Gonna take all that pain away. And your long winter of neglect will finally be over.

FIRST VOICE

Back at Advil High, the incessant bells insisting on sixth period, Amy Clearblue, knees to the grout in porcelain-prayer, hears fillies neighing in the neighboring stalls.

GOSSIP GIRL 1

I heard it was Oliver Oreck, with his arms like an Octopus—

GOSSIP GIRL 2

I heard it was Honey-nut Thomas, with his sugar-frosted tongue—

GOSSIP GIRL 1

I heard it was Jeffrey Butterfinger, with his Almond Joy eyes—

GOSSIP GIRL 2

I heard it was Joey Adderall, with his two-handed joystick—

GOSSIP GIRL 1
Yes, *I* heard that, too!

GOSSIP GIRL 2
In the back seat of his Ford Sinestra?

GOSSIP GIRL 1
In a dressing room at the Gap?

GOSSIP GIRL 2
Behind the boathouse at Purple Lake?

GOSSIP GIRL 1
In the graveyard behind the church?

GOSSIP GIRL 2
That's what *I* heard, too!

GOSSIP GIRL 1
Does Joey even *know*?

GOSSIP GIRL 2
How could he *not*?

GOSSIP GIRL 1
But does *Bobby* know?

GOSSIP GIRL 2
Not a chance!

GOSSIP GIRL 1
Bobby adores her!

GOSSIP GIRL 2
Bobby worships her!

GOSSIP GIRL 1
She won't tell him!

GOSSIP GIRL 2
Maybe *we* should tell him?

FIRST VOICE

And they Twitter off though the yammering door and down the crowded hall.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Thou shalt not...thou shalt not...thou shalt not...

FIRST VOICE

In the cramped water-closet of his study, Pastor Poligrip reads his sonnet silently to himself one last time, coming to the same inevitable conclusion with an epiphanous sigh.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Amen.

FIRST VOICE

His business done, he uses the poem to clean himself—

PASTOR POLIGRIP

A poem is never finished, only abandoned.

FIRST VOICE

—and flushes it down into the Stygian underworld of the sewer system.

Meanwhile, on Have-not Street, Joey Adderall, using the back of his last pathetic pay-stub from the Sushi Shack, scribbles out a note of contrition to his absent amigo, which, when finished, he will tuck in an envelope, along with a personal check, and place under the joystick of his gaming console on the Goodwill coffee table.

JOEY ADDERALL

Yo, Lotto:

I'm really sorry that Oswald got out this morning. He bit the kid down the street and they took him away. The guy said they'd have to put him down. Just add it to long list of things I fucked up for everybody.

I know it's not much consolation, but as my only friend you're entitled to everything I own. The check I wrote you should be most of the money in my bank account. Maybe my things can bring in a few bucks, too.

My car is up to date with its maintenance. It just leaks a little oil. You can probably get a grand for it. It'll be parked somewhere at the mall, but I'm not sure where. I'm sure you'll get a call about it soon.

I'm sorry to put all this on you, buddy.

Good luck in this shitty world.

(JOEY turns his back to exit, revealing a gun tucked into his pants.)

FIRST VOICE

Now this.

INTERMISSION