

Welcome To My World of Compromise

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. STUTTS' BACKYARD - DUSK

STUTTS (42) stands at the bottom of his empty kidney-shaped pool. Raking leaves into a neat pile.

STUTTS (V.O.)

For the record, I'm not hiding. I'm valiantly staving off the inevitable.

(beat)

My wife's making me take a breathing class, tonight. I didn't even know there was a wrong way.

Stutts SIGHS deeply and mournfully.

STUTTS (V.O.)

Thank God, my kids are afraid of hard work. Or they'd be down here begging for money and the transportation to spend it.

(beat)

I'm not a father. I'm a carbon-based cash machine.

Stutts likes raking leaves. It makes him feel useful.

STUTTS (V.O.)

Being a father was so much easier for my dad. The ability to pee while standing up was the only qualification to establish dominance.

(beat)

But nowadays, guys hafta start wars and scale mountains that have already been climbed a zillion times. Just to prove we still matter.

Stutts squeezes lighter fluid onto the pile with a mischievous grin.

STUTTS (V.O.)

That's why I like it down here. Everything's on the surface. There's no mystery. No ambiguity. No compromise.

(beat)

Not even the wind can interfere, as I bend nature to my will.

Stutts lights a match. Sets the leaves ablaze. Dark smokes climbs towards the sky. A beatific smile grows on his face.

STUTTS (V.O.)
But don't get me wrong. I love my family. I just don't always like 'em.

A DISTANT SIREN GROWS LOUDER. Stutts frowns as his wife, Marcy, screams from inside the house.

MARCY (O.S.)
Fire! Fire!

STUTTS
(to camera)
Welcome to my world.

FADE TO BLACK.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE UP:

EXT. STUTTS' HOME - NEXT MORNING

The morning sun glistens on a large, turn-of-the-last-century home in Crocus Hill. The mansion district in St Paul, MN.

Home to F Scott Fitzgerald, the minor league darling St Paul Saints, Winter Carnival and the largest indoor curling rink in North America (can you say bonspiel?).

INT. STUTTS' HOME - MORNING

Not quite awake, Stutts puts whole beans in his food processor (without a cap). Sending them flying onto the white tile floor.

STUTTS
Good one, Stutts.

Stepping on the loose beans, Stutts loses his footing. Catching himself on the counter. Forced to crawl to the broom closet.

On all fours, he bumps into his wife's legs, MARCY (38). An all-business, alpha female without an ounce of fat. Bound and determined to rule her domain (defined by all she sees).

MARCY
I'm sorry I called 911, last night.
But if this is your way of getting even.

STUTTS
Don't worry. I can handle this.

As Stutts gets the broom, OSSIE (10) enters in a business suit. He wears heavy glasses and carries a briefcase. HAVING JUST GIVEN HIMSELF THE WORST HAIRCUT IN HISTORY.

OSSIE
Good morning, earth parents.

STUTTS
Morning, Ossie.

OSSIE
I'd prefer that you use my proper name from now on.

Ossie hands his father a business card that reads: *Clark Kent, Reporter, The Daily Planet.*

STUTTS
Umm, sorry Mr. Kent.

MARCY
Watch your step. There are beans...
(looking at his hair)
Oh my God! What did you just do?

OSSIE
Nothing.

Stutts looks at his son's haircut which borders on self-mutilation. Marcy HYPERVENTILATES. Trying to center herself.

STUTTS
Am I missing something?

MARCY
His hair. You can't see that?

STUTTS
Yeah, I see it. So what?

Marcy holds Ossie protectively. Looking at Stutts like he's some kind of monster.

MARCY
Your son just took a hacksaw to his head. And that doesn't set off any alarms?

STUTTS
Not when it's him.

MARCY
You sweep. I parent.

Marcy leads Ossie to the kitchen table. Pours him a big bowl of cereal. Fusses over the signature curl grafted onto his forehead.

MARCY
I swear your father suffers from male-pattern blindness. I just hope he hasn't passed it along to you.

Stutts looks up from his sweeping.

STUTTS
I heard that.

MARCY
I didn't say you were deaf.

MARCY

(to Ossie)

You have such beautiful hair. Why did you do this to yourself?

Ossie pushes away his bowl of sugar-fortified cereal.

OSSIE

Can I have eggs?

Marcy pushes back the bowl.

MARCY

This cereal pays for half our mortgage. You'll eat it all and like it.

Enter STELLA (13). Dressing a little too sexy for her chaste age. Carrying their NEW BABY.

STELLA

Am I the only person in this house who can hear a baby crying?

Marcy takes the infant from her.

MARCY

Thanks, Stella.

(to the baby)

Is momma's little man hungry?

OSSIE

He can have the rest of my cereal.

STELLA

Ya know, it'd help me develop an emotional bond with my new brother, if he had a name.

Stutts and Marcy share a guarded look.

STUTTS

We're getting closer. We've just agreed to enter into binding arbitration.

Stutts' electronic leash goes off. He checks the text.

STUTTS

I gotta get to the hospital. Honey, can I borrow some cash for parking?

Without waiting for a reply, Stutts ruts through her purse and PRODUCES A PACK OF CIGARETTES.

STUTTS

Marcy, did you start smoking again?

Marcy nurses the baby.

MARCY

No. And that's not my purse.

STUTTS

So whose purse is it?

All eyes, eventually, land on Stella. DUM-DUM-DUM! Busted!

INT. STELLA'S ROOM - DAY

Stella sits on the edge of her bed. Looking at her feet. Stutts tries to look stern, while Marcy paces angrily.

MARCY

I'd like to know how you'd punish your daughter, if you caught her doing something stupid like this?

Stella looks at them, defiantly, in the eye.

STELLA

That's easy. I'd let her get an apartment and buy her a Vespa.

Marcy GROANS. Stutts restrains his loving wife.

STUTTS

Calm down, Marcy. Remember our breathing lessons.

MARCY

(accusingly)
And what exactly are you doing to help?

STUTTS

What? This isn't my fault.

MARCY

And it's not some hockey game you get to watch from the luxury box. She's your daughter too.

For Stella, watching her parents fight is the worst torture in the world -- especially when she's the subject.

STELLA

Can we get this over with? I'm gonna be late for school.

MARCY

Don't get lippy, young lady. You're in more trouble than you know.

STELLA

(mumbling)

Well, yeah. Cause you won't tell me what it is.

Marcy turns back to Stutts.

MARCY

And I'm getting sick and tired of doing everything around here.

STUTTS

So what should I do? She's too old to spank. We can't tie her up in the yard. And you've taken rendition right off the table.

MARCY

If you think you can do better, Stutts, be my guest. Just make sure you don't backslide later.

Stella, vainly, attempts to hurry things along.

STELLA

You could always ground me in my room for a week.

STUTTS

Well...

MARCY

No way. That'd be like locking you up in a wifi playpen.

STELLA

What about taking away my cellphone?

STUTTS

Maybe we...

MARCY

(sarcastically)

And what if I need to get a hold of you?

STUTTS

You're completely incapable of delegating, aren't you?

MARCY

What? No, go ahead. Punish on.

STELLA

Maybe I should wait outside, while you two get your act together?

MARCY

Can you believe her nerve? I'm tempted to...

STELLA

I thought Dad was handling this?

STUTTS

He is! I mean I am. Ignore the woman behind the curtain! I'm in charge, now.

(beat)

And plan to come down on you so hard, it'll make Abu Ghraib look like a cheerleading camp.

Stella folds her arms defiantly. Ready to butt heads.

STELLA

Do your worst. But I won't be treated like a baby anymore. The second you turn your back, I'm getting a tattoo.

Her parents share a look of shock and awe.

MARCY

I better deal with this. If you screw up, she'll be disfigured for the rest of her life.

STUTTS

What's the big deal? You got a tattoo, when you were sixteen.

Marcy scowls at Stutts. Stella's eyes widen with possibilities. If only Stutts could take back his words.

STELLA

Really? Where?

(beat)

What else did you do back then? Sex? Drugs? Drive-by shootings?

MARCY

Thank you for shattering any credibility I had in this matter.

STUTTS

It just sorta slipped. But don't worry. I can straighten out Stella without needing any back-up. Easy, peasy, Japanesy.

MARCY

If you wanna tackle a situation with life-long repercussions, I'll give you enough rope to hang yourself.

(beat)

But if you screw up and she does get a tattoo, I'm naming our baby.

INT. HOSPITAL SURGERY ROOM - DAY

Stutts monitors his anesthesiology ventilator, while his best friend, DICK LEMPKE (40's), performs open-heart surgery. The kind of guy who smokes, while he works.

DICK

So Marcy offered up the bait and you took it. Hook, line and sinker.

STUTTS

It's a slam dunk, Dick. I can handle my own kids.

DICK

But didn't Marcy already say you could name the next baby, if she picked the last one?

INT. STUTTS' NURSERY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Stutts and Marty look over the crib.

STUTTS

Whatta ya think about namin' him after me?

MARCY

Chester? Over my dead body. I wanna call him, Osceola.

STUTTS

Osceola? Can't we, at least, pick an American name?

MARCY

It is an American name. An ancient American name. Held by the greatest chief of the Seminole tribe.

MARCY (cont'd)

(beat)

I want our son to have a name that puts him head and shoulders above his class. Makes him completely unique and thrusts him into a position of leadership.

STUTTS

With a name like that, they'll thrust his head in a urinal, the second he starts middle school.

DICK (V.O.)

And right after that, Marcy played her vasectomy card. Am I right?

END FLASHBACK.

INT. HOSPITAL SURGERY ROOM - DAY

Stutts grimaces. Stupid-stupid-stupid. A NURSE peels back Dick's mask so he can take another drag.

DICK

If your urologist hadn't botched that job, you wouldn't even be having this problem, right now.

Stutts feels duped. Dick pulls off his gloves triumphantly. Raising his arms like he just tied a rodeo steer.

DICK

(to the ceiling)

Time! Sorry God, not in my house!

(to Stutts)

Let's get some lunch. We'll take my new Bentley.

STUTTS

Sure. Soon as I find my glasses.

DICK

They're on your forehead.

Stutts looks up. Oh, right.

STUTTS

Tell me, Dick. Have you ever heard of a condition called male-pattern blindness?

DICK

You kidding? I just finished a 20K walk-a-thon to raise awareness for that disease.

STUTTS

Really? How'd I miss that?

Dick politely shrugs. Not wanting to hurt his feelings.

STUTTS

D'ya think I got it?

DICK

It's hard to say, Stutts. We've known each other for so long, I'm too close to make an accurate diagnosis.

(beat)

It's not like you get a throbbing chancre, every month, as a friendly reminder.

STUTTS

Guess I'm part of the problem and not the solution.

DICK

Don't worry, buddy. Lemme be your eyes. You just keep doin' what you do best -- passin' gas.

Dick CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF as he walks off. Stutts looks at his ventilator like it's his worst enemy. Pumping up and down.

STUTTS

That one just keeps gettin' funnier.

EXT. STUTTS' HOME - DAY

Stutts gets out of his pristine 1960 Buick Invicta (the plates read: DAD-CAR). He grabs the baby's car seat (with hang tag: *Baby Doe*) and heads to the front door.

STUTTS (V.O.)

If anyone should take the blame for this problem, it's me. I've been way too soft on these kids. So it's time to step up and take back the night. Let 'em know what having a real dad is like.

MUSICAL CRESCENDO. But the door's locked. Stutts can't find his keys anywhere. Losing his momentum.

STUTTS (V.O.)

I wish my dad was still around. I could use a good role model, right about now. Even a negative one.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG STUTTS (10) caddies for his dad, BOB STUTTLEMEIER (40's). One of those little wrestler guys. Built like a fireplug with a raging Napoleon complex.

Young Stutts (almost his dad's height) drags his heavy clubs across a decorative bridge that spans a large water hazard. The sun glaring down.

BOB

Careful with those clubs, Stutts.
They're worth more than you are.

Young Stutts stops dead in his tracks. Mad as hell. Throwing the clubs off the bridge and into the water. Bob's astonished by this open act of defiance.

BOB

I didn't even want kids.

Bob jumps over the rail to rescue his clubs. Disappearing below the surface.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STUTTS' HOME - DAY

Stutts rings the doorbell but no one answers.

STUTTS (V.O.)

That was the last time I saw my father alive. How was I to know the little bastard couldn't swim?

Stutts puts the baby down and takes everything out of his pockets. Looking for his keys.

STUTTS (V.O.)

But I'm gonna find a punishment that turns Stella around. Bring back the daughter I once knew and liked. I've been training for this moment, ever since I started changing diapers.

(beat)

STUTTS (V.O.) (cont'd)
 It's my big chance to prove to my
 wife, she can't go it alone. And
 show my kids that I can fix
 problems without my wallet.

ANOTHER MUSICAL CRESCENDO. Stutts pounds on the front door.

STUTTS (V.O.)
 This is my destiny. My chance to
 seize the day. If only I could get
 inside my house.

Exhausted, Stutts spies the keys sitting on top of his car.

STUTTS
 (to himself)
 You're an idiot, Stutts.

INT. STUTTS' HOME - DAY

Stutts enters with the baby.

STUTTS
 Ossie? Stella?

No response. Then Stutts finds a note on the closet door.
Please Meet Me In My Office ASAP. Clark.

STUTTS
 Office? What office?

That's when Stutts looks at the closet door again.

INT. STUTTS' CLOSET - DAY

Holding a flashlight, Stutts crawls into the closet. Ossie
 crouches behind a TV tray he's fashioned into a working desk.
 His close-cropped hair makes him look quite professional.

STUTTS
 (holding up the note)
 You wanted to see me, Mr. Kent.

OSSIE
 Yes, Mr...
 (off his paperwork)
 Stuttlemajor? Stuttleminor?

STUTTS
 Stuttlemeier.

OSSIE

That's right, Stuttlemeier. I heard about your little pact for the baby's naming rights. And want to offer my services.

STUTTS

Don't worry. I got it all handled.

OSSIE

Do you? The choosing of a child's name should never be taken lightly.

Ossie hands Stutts some paperwork.

OSSIE

So I've taken the liberty of downloading some punishments forbidden by the Geneva Convention.

(beat)

I suspect they'd be quite persuasive on my big sister, if applied with the proper...zeal.

Stutts looks at the diagrams and grimaces. Ouch! THEN NOTICES SOME SCUFFS ON OSSIE'S FACE.

STUTTS

Hey, are you okay? What happened?

OSSIE

It's nothing. What can you expect when you put too many hamsters in one cage?

Stutts licks his tie and tries to clean Ossie's abrasions.

STUTTS

This happened at school? It looks pretty bad. Lemme get some Bactine.

Ossie brushes him off.

OSSIE

Cut it out. You're acting just like mom.

STUTTS

And the minute she sees this, she's gonna freak.

OSSIE

We gotta leave her outta this. As far as mom's concerned, I fell off the slide at recess.

STUTTS

But you gotta lemme do something.
Why are they picking on you?

OSSIE

I can take care of myself. It's my
little brother I'm worried about. I
don't want history to repeat
itself.

STUTTS

(defensively)

For the record, I wanted to name
you after me. And held out as long
as I could. But your mother ground
me down like a ton of raw suet.

OSSIE

I'm not here to point fingers, Mr.
Stuttlemeier. I just wanna make
sure we have an...understanding.

STUTTS

(nervously)

I'm not sure that we do.

OSSIE

I want my sister's punishment to
stick so you can name the baby.
(threateningly)
And I wanna like that name. I
really wanna like it.

Ossie pops open the snaps on his shirt. Revealing a big red
"S" on his chest.

OSSIE

And you won't like it, when I'm
angry.

STUTTS

Isn't that Hulk's catchphrase?

OSSIE

Trust me. You don't wanna piss off
Superman either.

INT. STUTTS' UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Stutts practices his proper breathing, as he stands outside
Stella's door. It's much harder than it looks.

STUTTS

(to himself)

No pressure. No pressure.

He KNOCKS on the closed door.

STUTTS

Stella? You ready to be
effortlessly snapped outta your
tweener ennui?

No response. Stutts KNOCKS again.

STUTTS

Why are you acting like this? We
used to have so much fun together.

(beat)

Stel? You in there?

Stutts cautiously opens the door. The room is empty. Stella never came home from school today.

STUTTS

Marcy's gonna kill me.

Stutts rushes off. Then comes back to check again. Just in case MPB impaired his vision. He seems almost relieved, when she's not in the closet or under the bed.

STUTTS

Nope. Still not here.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. INTERSTATE EXCHANGE CLOVERLEAF - DAY

Stutts free falls from the bridge. Plunging towards the speeding traffic below.

STUTTS (V.O.)

During times of stress, stop and take a deep breath. Inhale, hold, release. Sure, sounds simple enough.

(beat)

My yogi, Sri Sri Sandeep Chakribarti claims better breathing can bring greater awareness, less stress and a happier life.

Stutts crashes into a moving car. A collision of broken bones, shattered glass and twisted metal.

STUTTS (V.O.)

And if that fails, you can always cheat.

INT/EXT. STUTTS' CAR - DAY

Stutts takes a hit from an asthma inhaler. Smiling like a junkie who just got his fix.

STUTTS

Okay boys, daddy's got his mojo back.

Ossie and the baby sit in the backseat.

OSSIE

Can I have my inhaler back? I need it to live.

Stutts takes a wide turn. Losing a hubcap in the process. Desperately hitting the redial on his cellphone.

STUTTS

Your sister won't take my calls. And we can't let your mother find out she never came home, today. Because somehow, it'll be all my fault.

OSSIE

Ya know, Stella might be at the bus station. Chasing the adolescent myth of freedom.

(beat)

And, as she searches in vain for a substitute father-figure, she'll find herself mired in a vicious cycle of pimps, hustlers and dealers.

STUTTS

Don't bait me, Osceola.

Marcy calls his cellphone. Stutts puts on a brave face.

STUTTS

Yallo.

INT. MARCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Marcy talks to Stutts from her plush corner office at General Mills headquarters. The sign on her door reads: *Brand Manager. Boxed Cereals Division.*

MARCY

So have you dropped the hammer yet?

INTERCUT:

INT/EXT. STUTTS' CAR - DAY

Stutts narrowly averts an accident, as he juggles the phone.

STUTTS

No, I've decided to let her sweat it out a little. If ya know what I mean.

MARCY

A tough guy, huh? I like that.

STUTTS

Yeah? Maybe she's not the only one who could use a little discipline.

MARCY

Do me a favor. Don't shave, tonight. Or...I could close my door and tell you what I'm not wearing.

Stutts looks visibly torn. The boys smile at him innocently.

STUTTS

Now's not a good time.

MARCY

It's your loss. But thanks for taking this on. It's nice having a real man around the house.

Marcy hangs up. Stutts HEAVES A LOADED SIGH.

INT. MARCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Marcy's assistant, PHILLIP (30's), hands her some proof sheets to approve.

PHILLIP

So how's the family?

MARCY

Stutts thinks he's got the stones to discipline the kids. And I've found myself in a win/win situation.

(beat)

If he pulls it off, I don't have to play the bitch anymore. And if he chokes, it proves he's completely incompetent.

PHILLIP

Gee. Almost makes me wish I was a breeder.

INT. MALL OF AMERICA - DAY

With the baby strapped to his chest and Ossie in tow, Stutts wades through the crowded mall. Constantly referencing the screen on his cellphone.

INT. INK - DAY

This is not your father's tattoo parlor. Ultra-spare and ultra-chic. Franchising and marketing the concept of tribal decoration until it's completely meaningless.

Stutts finds Stella and her GAGGLE OF GIRLFRIENDS looking at the flash on the wall.

STUTTS

Thank God, I caught you before you did anything stupid.

STELLA

Dad? How did you find me?

Stutts holds up his cellphone authoritatively.

STUTTS

Besides causing massive brain tumors, this also serves as an effective tracking device.

(sternly)

Why aren't you home watching your little brother? That is your job.

OSSIE

Yeah. Who knows what I might have done to myself?

STELLA

Well, I was already in trouble. So if I got my tattoo, right away, I could spin a two-for-one deal out of my punishment.

STUTTS

But you gotta be eighteen to get a tattoo.

Stutts fishes out the fake ID from her purse.

STUTTS

And you can't prove that anymore.

(reading the ID)

Latoya Brown.

(sternly)

Come on, we're going home.

STELLA

Isn't it a little late to try this "father" routine? And I won't go home with you losers. I'll have Jesse drive me.

STUTTS

Jesse? Who's Jesse?

The GAGGLE OF GIRLS separates to reveal a cute boy with long hair, JESSE (16). He smiles uncomfortably.

STUTTS

You're old enough to drive?

JESSE

Umm, yeah.

Stutts approaches Jesse threateningly.

STUTTS

And you hang out with 13-year-olds?
What's wrong with you? And why d'ya
look so damn unthreatening?

Stella steps in her father's path.

STELLA

Leave Jesse outta this. This was my
idea.

STUTTS

(to Jesse)

So that's how you keep that pretty
face. Lettin' little girls fight
your battles.

STELLA

Get a grip, Dad. Jesse could kick
yer ass!

Jesse shakes his head emphatically. No, I couldn't.

STELLA

And he hasn't done anything to you.

STUTTS

Oh yeah? And what exactly has he
done to you?

Stella's completely embarrassed.

STELLA

I can't believe you just said that.

Stutts grabs Jessie's shirt.

STUTTS

If this baby wasn't strapped to my
chest, I'd kick your ass up and
down all 2.5 miles of this mall.

Stutts backs Jesse into a tattoo chair. Grabbing an ink
injector from a frightened TATTOO ARTIST.

STUTTS

Maybe I'll put a warning label on
your forehead. As a public service
announcement for all parents with
impressionable daughters!

Adding insult to injury, the GIGGLING baby throws up on Jesse
(who then squirms away and runs out the door).

Stutts holds up the ink injector like a raving lunatic
raising a bloody butcher knife.

STUTTS
Okay, who's next?!

STELLA
Why am I not dead?

Stella's friends look even more afraid than she is.

INT/EXT. STUTTS' CAR - DAY

Stutts drives his brood home. Regretting his behavior, as Stella pouts beside him.

STUTTS
If your mother finds out what happened today, she'll make our lives quite uncomfortable.
(beat)
So if we can agree to keep this a closely-guarded secret, I won't take the coward's way out and drive us all into Lake Harriet.

STELLA
Go ahead. I'll roll down a window.

OSSIE
Why can't you wait for Dad to name the baby, before you get a tattoo?

STUTTS
Yeah. With names like Stella Stuttlemeier and Osceola still smoking in the chamber -- who knows what your mother's got left in her clip.

STELLA
That's not my problem. Ten years from now, I'll be married to Jessie with a new last name and my own family I can torture at will.

STUTTS
(exasperated)
Okay, I'm sorry I over-reacted. Is there anything I can do to make up for it?

STELLA
Sure. Lemme get my tattoo.

STUTTS

You may not believe me but I know about all the changes you're going through.

(beat)

When I was your age, I wanted my own breasts. And thirty years later that wish has come true.

Stella's visibly disgusted by this personal revelation.

OSSIE

Eeesh!

STELLA

That's how you reach out?

STUTTS

But it's true.

Stella turns her back to her father.

STELLA

I don't want you to even look at me anymore.

STUTTS

I'm sorry, Stella. I...I...

(defeatedly)

I have no idea why my male-pattern blindness has forsaken me.

INT. STUTTS' HOME - NIGHT

The Stuttlemeier family sit down to a typical dinner. Eating anything that can be microwaved in under three minutes. Marcy fawns over Ossie's bruises.

MARCY

You fell off the slide?

Ossie silently pleads for Stutts' corroboration.

STUTTS

Backassward down the steps. His teacher saw the whole thing.

MARCY

How could she let something like that happen? I'm calling the school board and demand they hire catching guards before I sue their fat asses.

Ossie silently pleads for more help, as Marcy cradles his head in her arms.

STUTTS

Honey, honey, honey. It was an honest mistake. And hasn't frivolous litigation done enough damage to this country?

Marcy consents to this line of reason.

MARCY

My poor, clumsy baby. From now on, you'll have to wear a helmet on the playground.

Ossie pleads for another rescue. But Stutts' electronic leash goes off.

STUTTS

They need me at the hospital. Who wants to kiss daddy goodbye?

Ossie scowls -- yuk. Marcy dotes on her eldest son. Stella, unsuccessfully, wishes herself invisible.

STUTTS

Gee, kinda makes leaving home feel worthwhile.

Stutts exits. The baby starts CRYING. Marcy hands Stella the baby food.

MARCY

Can you feed the baby, while we finish cleaning up?

STELLA

Why? He's not mine.

MARCY

Keep this up and you will in no time.

STELLA

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

MARCY

What I'd like is a daughter who's as grown up as she thinks she is?

STELLA

And I'd like a mother who remembers what it's like to be my age.

MARCY

Oh, I could remember. I just choose not to.

(sternly)

Now, feed the baby.

They stare each other down. First one to look away loses. Stella blinks. Picking up the strained squash.

STELLA

How come Ossie never has to take care of Li'l No Name?

MARCY

Because I don't want my youngest child to have the life-span of one of Ossie's turtles.

Marcy bussess the dishes with Gestapo precision.

OSSIE

And why do I always hafta clean up?

MARCY

Just be grateful I don't make you wear a helmet, while you're doing it.

INT. HOSPITAL SURGERY ROOM - NIGHT

They're work done, Stuttts and Dick sit on the surgery table in sweaty scrubs. With a *NO SMOKING* sign nearby, Dick exhales smoke into an aspirator.

DICK

I remember when things like smoking or being a man could be taken completely for granted.

(beat)

But the paradox we're trapped in makes us capable of ripping open a man's chest to save his life but unable to change an air filter or hang a towel bar.

Stuttts fusses with an oxygen tank.

STUTTS

Ossie's got his superheroes all backasswards. Guys are more like Batman. We're unable to accomplish anything without the aid of technology.

DICK

Take away those ladders that reach
our gutters and we become nothing
more than walking semen banks.

This hits home with Stutts. Taking him down a peg.

STUTTS

Maybe I should just cut my losses
and let Marcy name the baby.

DICK

Quitting won't get you off the
hook, Stutts. That'll just leave
the battle for ultimate control
between Marcy and Stella.

(beat)

And you'll become as useless as
your own nipples.

STUTTS

But my old tricks don't work on
Stella anymore. She's growing up at
hyper speed and I dunno how to slow
her down.

Dick, sagely, exhales smoke into the aspirator like the
caterpillar from *Alice In Wonderland*.

DICK

Have you tried binding her feet?

STUTTS

It's too late for that.

DICK

Well, you better do something. It
sure won't get easier. Even
breathing's not as simple as it
used to be.

Stutts breathes through his clear oxygen mask to clear his
head.

STUTTS

You got that right, brutha.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Stutts walks down the frozen food aisle. Carrying a box of
tampons. His shoulders slumped in defeat.

STUTTS (V.O.)

It's no wonder my kids think I'm a tool. I hardly portray the ideal of masculinity. Thank God, my dad's not around to judge me.

Stutts opens the freezer door and sticks his head inside. Smiling as he breathes in deeply through his nose.

STUTTS (V.O.)

I loved this smell, when I was a kid. This, the faint smell of Old Spice and nicotine in my dad's Buick and the musty scent of aging porno mags. The smells of my youthfulinnocence.

The ASST NIGHT MANAGER CLEARS HIS THROAT. Making it clear Stutts is not welcome to sniff freon in this safe haven anymore.

INT. OSSIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Stutts finds Ossie dressed as Superman. Staring unblinkingly at the wall.

STUTTS

Clark, we need to talk about what happened at school, today.

OSSIE

Can't. I'm working on my x-ray vision.

Stutts sits beside him, while Ossie stares at the wall.

STUTTS

Maybe you can just listen then. Because I know what it's like to be bullied. Every waking hour, your mother and sister toss me around like a worn rag doll.

(beat)

And it's my fault you've turned out...the way you are. I can't say I've been much of a role model.

Ossie stares unblinkingly at the wall.

OSSIE

I'm listening.

STUTTS

But if your mother finds out what happened today, you'll end up going to school in a plastic bubble. And nobody wants that.

(beat)

So can you tell me what happened?
It's the only way I can help.

Ossie relents. Looking his father in the eye.

OSSIE

Every day, the same guys make fun of my name. It's endless. If I walk away, they follow me. When I try to stand up to 'em.

(off his facial scuffs)

I end up looking like this.

Stutts winces sympathetically.

OSSIE

I hate being a pussy. Why couldn't I have a tough name like The Rock or Sly or Clark? Everything would be different.

STUTTS

So there's more than one bully, right?

Ossie nods.

STUTTS

And they're not girls or in wheelchairs or anything like that?

Ossie nods again.

STUTTS

Good. That's a good start.

Stutts squeezes the bulging foam bicep on Ossie's costume.

STUTTS

Lemme tell ya 'bout the superhero I discovered, while I was growing up. Let's call him, Goofman.

OSSIE

Goofman?

STUTTS

Ya see, every kid in school's deathly afraid of being unique. It leaves 'em wide open to ridicule.

STUTTS (cont'd)

(beat)

That's why they all obey an
unwritten code of conformity like
so many suicidal lemmings.

Stutts has Ossie's undivided attention.

STUTTS

But you can harness that fear for
your own evil purposes. Because if
you're not afraid look foolish. And
do it on purpose. You negate all
their snide remarks.

(beat)

And prove you've got guts they'll
never have. A power they'll all
fear and respect.

Ossie smiles. Giving his father a big hug.

OSSIE

Thanks, Dad.

STUTTS

Stick with me and you'll be eating
over the sink in no time.

OSSIE

But you couldn't have told me this,
in kindergarten.

INT. STELLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Fully-clothed, Stella stands before her mirror. Holding up a
pair of butt-floss panties. Working up the courage to put it
on. Stutts KNOCKS and opens the door.

STUTTS

Ready for your punishment?

Stella quickly hides the panties behind her back.

STUTTS

What are you hiding?

STELLA

Nuthin.

STUTTS

What kinda nuthin?

Stutts snatches the underwear. Completely shocked.

STUTTS
That kinda nuthin.
(off the price tag)
Thirty dollars worth of nuthin!

Stutts grabs Stella's arm and pulls her out of the room.

STELLA
What are you doing?

STUTTS
If you're determined to grow up too
fast, I'm gonna give you one big
shove!

INT. RUSTY'S TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

This is your stereotypical tattoo parlor. Catering to bikers, sailors and hookers. The owner, RUSTY (40's), looks like a roadie for ZZ Top. Showing Stutts and Stella the work on his body. Beginning with the eyeball on the palm of his hand.

RUSTY
And that one only took three weeks
to heal.

STUTTS
(wincing)
Ouch. I bet that hurt.

RUSTY
It wasn't so bad.

Rusty closes his eyes. Open eyeballs are tattooed to his eyelids.

RUSTY
Now, these hurt like a sumbitch.

STELLA
Hold on a sec. Tattoos hurt?

STUTTS
Not as much as growing up.

STELLA
I dunno if this is such a good idea
anymore.

STUTTS
You make it sound like you have a
choice.

RUSTY

Yeah, Sweetheart. If yer boyfriend's willin' to front the dough, why not get one?

STELLA

Boyfriend? Ewww!

STELLA

You can't force me to get a tattoo. That's...that's branding.

STUTTS

I prefer to call it pro-active parenting. But I'm open to negotiating some sorta compromise.

STELLA

Like what?

STUTTS

You used to tell me everything, Stella. You were like the son I never had. Especially, after Ossie was born. So why are you shutting me out, now?

Stella looks at Rusty. Looks at Stutts. Looking like a cornered animal.

STELLA

It's just not fair. That's all.

STUTTS

What's not fair?

STELLA

You guys think I'm old enough to take care of your baby. But still treat me like one.

(beat)

Why do I get stuck with all the drudgery of being an adult without any of the benefits?

Stutts mulls this over. Accepting partial blame.

STUTTS

Okay, you got a point. I'll talk to your mother. But if she finds out about Jesse, she'll make my life a living hell. Any boy stuff stays strictly between you and me, okay?

STELLA

Got it.

STUTTS

Good. So how do we get our old magic back?

INT. STUTTS' HOME - NIGHT

To Marcy's dismay, when they press their arms together their matching tattoos complete a broken heart. Stutts' says *Sugar Daddy* while Stella's says *Daddy's Girl*.

STUTTS

Whatta ya think? Makes me look kinda tough, huh?

STELLA

My friends will be so jealous.

OSSIE

But what about the baby's name? We had an understanding!

STUTTS

Sorry, Os. But when your male-pattern blindness kicks in, it'll be like none of this ever happened.

Ossie slumps off in defeat. The baby starts CRYING in the other room.

STELLA

Don't worry, guys. I got it.

Stella kisses Stutts on the cheek and runs off. Leaving him alone with Marcy.

MARCY

Only you could turn Stella around and lose our bet -- all at the same time.

Stutts gingerly prods his tattoo. It still hurts.

STUTTS

I bet my dad would have handled things differently.

MARCY

But not nearly as well. So I've decided to name the baby after you.

STUTTS

Chester? Really?

MARCY

Sure, it's not like we'll ever call him that. You don't even use your name. And since he'll be the third Chester Allen Stuttlemeier, we can call him Trey.

Marcy wraps her arms around Stutts and kisses him.

MARCY

Ooh, rough like sandpaper.

Stutts locks her in a vise-like embrace. Refusing to let go.

STUTTS

I think you like it, when I take charge. It makes you feel safe and protected. Like a little girl.

Unable to free herself, Marcy playfully bites his ear. Ouch!

MARCY

Oh yeah? We'll see how tough you talk, after I make you my bitch.

Stutts looks a little nervous, as they lock lips again. It's not *Postman Rings Twice* but this isn't cable either.

INT. STUTTS' POOL - NIGHT

Pool lights illuminate the crystal-clear water. Below the surface, a buck-naked Stutts achieves momentary stasis.

STUTTS (V.O.)

What I'd give to breathe through my belly button again.

Stutts experiences a momentary underwater euphoria.

STUTTS

It could be my depleted oxygen supply talking but it's so damn peaceful down here.

(beat)

But nothing lasts forever, right? Soon my head will throb. My lungs will burn. And my instinct to survive will drive me away from this serene oasis.

(beat)

Back to a world where I gotta scratch and scrabble just to justify my everyday existence.

(beat)

STUTTS (cont'd)

But I'm getting ahead of myself
again. I've gotta learn to enjoy
the moment. And sort the rest out
later.

FADE UP a happy, hopeful song. Something like *What A
Beautiful World* or *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* or that sweet
medley of both by the late, great Issie Kamakawiwo.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO