

OVER BLACK;

A short strain of music comes and goes, by way of an introduction. Then we:

FADE IN:

All is a blur, but there is motion. Something is falling through frame. Slowly everything comes clear...

IN SLOW-MOTION: A shower of office supplies rains down through the frame. Glimpses of scissors, a stapler, Scotch tape, rubber bands - Beautiful.

BEN'S VOICE

(conversational)

Did you know that something like two-thousand people in this country are fired from their jobs every day? Can you imagine how awful that must be?

(beat)

I thought I could. And now that it's actually happened...Well, to be honest I don't really give a fuck.

A tiny plastic wind-up pair of breasts with feet is the last item to fall into frame, and the camera follows it down into a cardboard box full of junk.

The breast toy lands in the box with a crash, and tumbles dramatically a few times before coming to rest.

1 **INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY**

1

BEN (28) rests the now-empty desk drawer on the edge of the cardboard box. We do not see his face, only his body. Then, as we RAMP back to normal speed, Ben picks up the drawer and flings it across the cubicle into the wall.

Music kicks in.

There are several magazine clippings tacked to the wall. Ben tears them down one-by-one and tosses them into the box. On one of the clippings we can see "Written by Ben Miller" under the headline.

BEN'S VOICE

Until about five minutes ago I worked for Axiom Magazine. In my three years here I've written twenty-six feature articles for a total of 75,281 words. Judging strictly by fan mail I was the most popular writer on staff. But guess how many times I had a cover story?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

A stack of Axiom magazines sits on top of his desk. He sweeps them off the edge into the trash can. We cut in close for several shots of completely inane headlines on the cover. The camera pans around, "searching" for Ben's name. It's not there.

BEN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Yep. You got it.

(beat)

Wanna know why?

Ben slams shut the lid of his laptop, tosses it into the cardboard box, and leaves the cubicle.

2 **INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY**

2

We follow the box under Ben's arm as several employees watch him leave. "This Side Up" is stamped on the side of the box - upside down.

BEN'S VOICE

I find out today that the Managing Editor of the magazine thinks that my articles are inappropriate for the cover because of "content that is degrading to women". Content that is degrading to women? That should be the fucking slogan of our magazine.

(QUICK INSERT of magazine cover

with that very same slogan)

And why should that matter anyway when our readers are ninety-seven percent male and Axiom has more tits than a birthday party at Rosie O'Donnell's house? It's really very simple. The Managing Editor of the third-largest men's magazine in the world...is a goddamn woman.

SONJA (22), the receptionist, looks concerned as Ben walks past her and opens the door to leave.

BEN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Her name is Beth Broadstreet. But around the office we called her, "Captain Hook".

As Ben begins to walk out, BETH (36) rushes in after him. Very attractive in a dark suit and glasses, Beth is the managing editor of the magazine...and Ben's former boss.

BETH

Hey, Ben, hold up!

(CONTINUED)

Ben stops and slowly, reluctantly turns around, showing us his face for the first time. He looks like shit.

Probably once clean-cut, his almost-full beard, frazzled hair and bloodshot eyes belong to a man with issues. But he has a cocky look about him, as if he's expecting her to take him back.

BETH (CONT'D)

You still owe me one article. It's in your contract. You've got two days.

Beth turns to go, and we RAMP to SLOW-MOTION, catching a glimpse of her face in profile for the first time. She has a hideous hooked nose that instantly ruins the rest of her beauty. From directly in front she looks wonderful. But only from the front.

Ben flinches at the sight of her schnoz.

BETH (O.S.)

Oh, and Ben...

As Ben looks up we RAMP back to normal speed.

BETH (CONT'D)

Just mail it in.

Beth leaves. After a beat, Ben gives her the finger and angrily waves it around.

Sonja giggles. Ben smiles at her and pulls out the little breast toy from his box, sets it down on her desk.

BEN

Son-ja, I think you're the only one in this place who's not completely full of shit.

Sonja smiles brightly at Ben as he walks out. She picks up the little toy and inspects it. She winds it up and places it back down on the desk. It begins to move, shooting tiny sparks from the nipples.

3 **EXT. BEN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

3

Ben pulls his old, beat-up Kharmann-Ghia into the parking lot and slides into his spot. It's a tight fit, since the asshole next to him has parked on the line in between two spaces.

Ben pulls the door handle, and as he retrieves his box from the passenger seat, his door lightly taps that of the truck next to him. He cringes and looks over at it.

(CONTINUED)

His eyes narrow.

The door of the truck reads "Dent Wizard - For Custom Auto Body Work - Call the Wizard". The logo is an actual "Wizard" with a shit-eating grin on his face.

Ben casually looks around to see if anyone has noticed. Then he climbs out of the car, giving his door an extra little shove - right into the truck next to him, making a huge crease down the center of the Dent Wizard's face.

BEN
(not a care)
Whoops.

Ben comes around to the front of the building. He opens the front door, then stops. He goes over to the trash bin next to the door and throws his box away. He looks at it for a second, then reaches inside and retrieves his laptop computer. He goes into the building.

4 **INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY**

4

Ben's apartment is small and cluttered. It's basically a larger version of his cubicle. More clippings, magazines, books, etc. He walks in the door.

BEN'S VOICE
*People have been telling me my whole life
to think before I speak, or that I should
stop and consider what I'm saying...*

IN THE KITCHEN, the sink is overflowing with dirty dishes. Ben opens the cupboard and takes out the only clean cup - a plastic "big gulp" with a built-in straw.

The coffee pot is sitting on the counter next to the machine, and Ben pours the last of the cold coffee into his cup. He opens the freezer and digs inside, pulling out a carton of cigarettes from the back, covered in frost. He smacks the carton against the fridge and the last pack falls out.

BEN'S VOICE
*If they want to censor themselves, I
could give a shit. But I've always
thought it was better to speak my mind.
Even if some people don't want to hear
it.*

IN THE LIVING ROOM, Ben sets the laptop down on his desk, opening it up and turning it on. He plugs in his computer, sips his cold coffee through the straw, and pulls out a cigarette.

(CONTINUED)

Ben puts the cigarette in his mouth, and we see that he has haphazardly shaved his beard into a handlebar mustache. He digs in a drawer for a lighter. It's been awhile. He finds one and lights up, taking a long drag.

BEN'S VOICE

*Well...if Captain Hook wants her article
then she's going to have to listen.*

Ben looks at the screen and settles into his chair. He punches a key and we...

CUT TO BLACK.

The sound of Ben punching the keys as our title is typed on screen:

THE COLD HARD TRUTH

Then the "enter" button is pressed several times in succession, and the title scrolls upward and disappears.

BEN'S VOICE

*I was twelve years old when I first
learned the truth.*

Music begins as we...

FADE IN:

5 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (1986)

5

Hiding behind the upstairs banister, YOUNG BEN (11) and his best friend MOOSE (11), spy on the room below. Dressed in typical early-80s pajamas, both kids sport "rat-tail" haircuts.

The camera moves down to reveal a room full of 14-YEAR-OLD GIRLS in their pajamas; Ben's sister is having a birthday slumber party. Sleeping bags, pillows, backpacks and wrapping paper are everywhere.

The girls are crowded around a homemade plate with a spinner on it as one girl gives it a whirl. The spinner stops and the girls giggle with excitement. The SPINNER-GIRL turns red, embarrassed, and points to one of her friends. The other girls push the two together and quiet down in anticipation.

Ben and Moose exchange looks. Is this really happening? The girls lean in and kiss each other awkwardly on the mouth.

GIRLS

ONE! TWO!...

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

Ben and Moose's eyes go wide as the girls continue counting.

MOOSE

Whoa.

Suddenly towering legs appear behind the boys. A hairy arm reaches down and yanks Ben to his feet, out of frame. Moose scrambles up after him.

6 **INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT**

6

Cheers erupt from the girls downstairs.

Ben's FATHER, in his soiled undershirt and tighty-whiteys, is still half asleep. He pulls Ben inside and shuts the door behind them.

FATHER

What the shit are you doing?

BEN

Don't yell at me! Did you see what *they* were doing?!

FATHER

(uncomfortable, half-asleep)

Ben...see, there are things you gotta know about girls. They have a tendency to...

(sighs, considers)

Well, they're just messed up in the head and do stupid things. Don't waste your time trying to understand 'em, cuz it's never gonna happen. 'Kay?

Ben looks up at his dad, basking in his fatherly advice. He has no idea how much it just corrupted him. Ben's father nods, pats him on the head and walks past him, turning off the light, leaving Ben alone in the dark.

7 **INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

7

The room is dark, and Ben lays awake in his twin bed. Moose is in a sleeping bag on the floor next to him, apparently asleep.

BEN'S VOICE

I knew my dad was right. But still I couldn't help imagining what had happened after we left.

8 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - BEN'S FANTASY

8

The two girls are now kissing passionately, with the others crowded around them like at a cock fight.

GIRLS

Two hundred forty-three! Two hundred
forty-four! Two hundred forty-five!

One of the kissing girl's eyes roll back in her head and she passes out from exhaustion. The girls gasp. Silence. Then another girl quickly jumps in to take her fallen comrade's place and the kissing resumes. The girls cheer.

GIRLS (CONT'D)

Two hundred forty-six! Two hundred forty-
seven!

9 INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

9

Ben rolls over onto his side and stares out the window.

BEN'S VOICE

*Was it just my sister and her fucked-up
friends, or were all women like this?
Was there some kind of secret society
that I would never know about? More
importantly, would I ever get a chance to
see this shit again?*

Ben glances over his shoulder.

BEN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*It seemed Moose was asking the same
questions.*

Ben looks over to Moose, who lies on his side with his back to Ben. He is lying still, but the sound of thumping nylon gives him away.

Ben turns away from Moose and covers his head with a pillow, the sound of skates cutting across ice overlaid.

10 INT. ICE RINK - NIGHT (1990)

10

"Kokomo" is playing over the P.A.

A pair of hockey skates skid into frame, shooting ice past the lens. Quickly, the camera whips around the RINK GUARD (19) and up to his face. He blows his whistle and points menacingly across the rink.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

The camera whip pans over to TEEN MOOSE (15), who is skating against the flow. He's chasing after a LITTLE BASTARD (11) who is waving Moose's prize scarf in the air.

Moose loses control and plows into JESSICA (16). Moose falls on his ass. Jessica, arms out, flailing for balance, falls backward right into the arms of her friend STACEY.

TEEN BEN (15) skates up to Moose and starts to help him up. Stacey quickly catches Jessica under the arms, gripping her breasts by accident and trying to pull her up. Jessica lets out a little yelp and grabs Stacey's hands, prying them off her chest. They both fall to the ground, laughing.

Ben and Moose look at each other, awe struck.

MOOSE

Whoa.

The girls help each other up and skate off arm-in-arm, only mildly embarrassed. Seeing this, Ben cocks his head quizzically and begins to look around the rink.

All the GIRLS are skating hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm, nothing but smiles. HIGH SCHOOL BOYS in hockey skates come up to them and try to talk, but the girls only clasp each other harder and skate right by them.

Ben turns away and skates off, looking down at the ice, deep in thought.

On the other side of the rink, Moose is busy trying to skate hands first into oncoming breasts.

CUT TO:

11 **INT. JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE - TABLE - NIGHT (1993)**

11

FIVE COUPLES, including Ben, his date EMILY, Moose and MOOSE'S DATE, sit around the table in full prom attire, watching as their meal is prepared.

The JAPANESE CHEF's hands move like lightning over the grill and his eyes flicker back and forth, but his face is stone. He is a samurai warrior.

Emily rises, collects her purse, looks to the other girls.

EMILY

I'm going to powder my nose.

Without a word, the other FOUR GIRLS rise and follow her toward the bathroom. The guys are left alone at the table.

12 INT. JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT 12

The girls file into the bathroom and line up in front of the mirror, pulling out their various makeup kits.

EMILY

We all look so great tonight.

13 INT. AT THE TABLE - NIGHT 13

There's a burst of flame at the table, and the guys all recoil slightly, then laugh uneasily as the Chef continues.

MOOSE

(re: the flame)

Aw, they missed the best part!

BEN

(to Moose)

Yeah, what the fuck are they doing in there?

The Chef glances over at Ben. His hands keep moving.

CHEF

(no trace of accent)

What do you think they're doing in there?

Ben's head snaps up to look at the Chef, who is already staring back at the grill. Ben's mind races, completely caught off-guard by the Chef's comment.

We move in on Ben as his eyes narrow and he looks past the Chef toward the bathroom. The sound of the restaurant fades away and we...

CUT TO:

14 INT. BATHROOM - BEN'S FANTASY 14

It is the same bathroom as before, only lit and dressed much nicer. Three GEISHA DANCERS perform to soft Japanese music and the girls are all making out by candlelight.

Some girls are standing, two are on the newly-added couch. Emily has Moose's Date sitting up on the sink. They're all very passionate. As they kiss, Emily slowly snakes her hand up the girl's leg and under her dress.

A sizzling sound overlaps the...

CUT TO:

15 INT. AT THE TABLE - NIGHT

15

BANG! The Chef hits Ben's plate with a spatula full of grilled shrimp. Ben snaps out of his daydream and looks past the Chef to see the girls emerge giggling from the bathroom.

Music begins - "Bust a Move".

IN SLOW-MOTION: The girls walk toward the table, exchanging inside glances with one another as they look each other over. Emily licks her finger and wipes away a smudge of lipstick from the corner of one of the girl's mouth.

We PUSH IN on Ben as he sits up straight, overwhelmed by curiosity.

16 INT. FRAT HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (1995)

16

The music really kicks in now, and we are looking up from the bottom of a cooler of "jungle juice" as a PARTY ANIMAL dunks his whole head in.

When he pulls it out, everyone in the kitchen around him gets splattered with the punch. Some laugh, others have choice words for him. Ben looks down at his soiled clothes and leaves the room.

17 INT. FRAT HOUSE - HALLWAY/STUDY - NIGHT

17

Slightly aggravated, Ben heads down the hallway in search of a bathroom. The first door he passes is full of thick smoke, so much so that a group of huddled POTHEADS can barely be detected inside. The second door he passes is open as well, and Ben stops when something inside catches his eye.

IN THE STUDY, Ben can see the head and shoulders of a FRAT BOY squatting behind a desk. Curious at first, Ben is confused when the Frat Boy stands and pulls up his pants.

Then the Frat Boy bends down and picks up a huge, leather-bound book from the floor and closes it, squishing his feces in between the pages. He nods to Ben and places the book back on the shelf.

Ben's eyes go wide and he gives the Frat Boy a thumbs up. He walks on.

18 INT. FRAT HOUSE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

18

Ben has cleaned himself up a bit, and tosses a punch-stained hand towel aside. He goes over to a FRIEND of his, who is transfixed on something off-camera.

(CONTINUED)

BEN
(over the music)
I think I'm gonna take off!

His Friend continues to look off.

FRIEND
Are you kidding?!

Ben shrugs, turns to go. His friend grabs his arm.

FRIEND
No way, you can't leave, man, just check
that out!

He turns Ben around and motions into the room. Ben's whole
body straightens.

In the middle of the room, TWO HOT GIRLS are grinding on top
of the coffee table. The crowd around them begins to part,
and the light above them intensifies as if the heavens were
opening.

Ben is immediately sucked into their world. Moose, wearing a
"College" sweatshirt, comes in and stands next to him. Just
like old times.

MOOSE
(expelling smoke)
Whoa.

The girls are really getting intense now, their bodies
touching in more and more places, but their eyes have the
vacant look of the very drunk.

One of the girls, JULIE, moves up the other's body and rests
her chin on the girl's shoulder, staring up at the ceiling
and hiking up the girl's skirt to reveal her thong to the
crowd. Cheers erupt from the guys in the room, while most of
the girls shoot them dirty looks.

Then Julie looks the girl directly in the eyes. The girl
smiles and they begin to kiss.

A smile grows on Ben's face, like the Grinch discovering the
true meaning of Christmas.

BEN'S VOICE
So it was true. I finally had proof.
(long beat)
*Of course, two years later my proof
fucked me.*

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED: (2)

18

The sound of metal sliding on metal and we...

CUT TO:

19 **INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING (1997)**

19

We're in the back of the closet looking out as Ben's girlfriend GRETCHEN (22) gathers her hanging clothes and walks out of the room.

Framed in the closet doorway, a frazzled and half-asleep Ben sits up in bed. Gretchen walks in and stands at the foot of the bed. Ben has to squint to see her.

GRETCHEN

I'm borrowing your luggage.

Ben nods, then considers.

BEN

Where are you going?

GRETCHEN

I'm leaving you.

Ben cocks his head. It's too early for this shit.

BEN

You wanna talk about it?

GRETCHEN

Not really.

(shrugging it off)

I found someone I can be happy with.

Gretchen turns and walks out of the room. Ben jumps out of bed, wearing ridiculous pajamas and sporting obvious "morning wood". He follows her into...

20 **INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - MORNING**

20

Gretchen's bags are piled up next to the door and she's shoving a large hair dryer into an already full side pouch.

BEN

(looking at luggage, nodding)

This is just a little FUCKING SUDDEN!

GRETCHEN

I didn't know how to tell you.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

BEN

Tell me what? Gretchen who the shit is
this guy?

They just look at each other. There is a knock at the door.
Gretchen gestures like "that's who it is". Ben shoots her a
cold look, tucks his woody into his waistband and goes to the
door.

Ben flings open the door, revealing JULIE (22), the girl from
the party two years before. Dumbstruck, he turns slowly to
look at Gretchen.

GRETCHEN

I'll see ya.

She picks up her things, hands some of them to Julie, and
heads out.

21 INT. MAIN HALLWAY - MORNING

21

The two girls walk down the hall and get into the elevator.
Ben is blown away.

As the elevator doors begin to close, he calls from down the
hall:

BEN

What kind of fucking name is Gretchen,
anyway?!

The elevator doors close, and he goes back into his apartment
and slams the door behind him.

22 INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

22

Ben trudges into the kitchen, completely deflated. He pulls
a frosty mug out of the freezer and a beer out of the fridge.

BEN'S VOICE

*I think it's safe to say that from then
on my interest in lesbians leapt from the
"naturally curious" column into the realm
of "raging paranoia".*

(he sighs)

*But fuck me if I didn't have the right to
be paranoid.*

As he pours his beer we...

MATCH CUT TO:

23 INT. BAR - NIGHT

23

...and Ben finishes pouring. He takes a sip and resumes conversation with his date, MARY, who sits next to him.

BEN

So what do you do for fun?

MARY

Well, movies, shopping, I like to go clubbing now and then. Though it took me forever just to find a club worth going to around here.

BEN

Oh yeah? Which one is that?

Now CHERYL is next to him.

CHERYL

"Christie's" on West Ninth? It's hot.

Ben takes a sip, then looks at her quizzically.

BEN

Wait, "Christie's"? Isn't that a...
like a, you know...
(softly, makes a "so-so/gay"
hand gesture)
...gay bar?

Cheryl laughs.

CHERYL

No! Well yeah, but you don't even notice really. It's no big thing, and they play the best music for sure.

Ben doesn't get it; an alarm is going off.

BEN

But it is a gay bar? I mean, officially.

MICHELLE looks at him like "what's the big deal?"

MICHELLE

Yeah...

BEN

You have to be (hand gesture) to get in?
Or be with one?

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

No, not at all. They want anyone who
likes to party.

Ben misinterprets that. We PUSH IN on him as he opens his
mouth, about to say something.

CUT TO:

24 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

24

RACHEL

I'm having a really great time, Ben. You
know, I haven't been on a date with a guy
in like six months.

BEN

(beat)

That's a long time...without...a guy.
Must've been lonely.

RACHEL

Yeah, well, I'm alright.

BEN

Really? So you just...what?

RACHEL

It's not like I was alone, I have my
girlfriends.

Ben takes a deep breath, looks wearily at her. A cute
WAITRESS lays the bill on the table.

WAITRESS

I'll take that whenever you're ready.

She smiles and walks away. Ben watches her, then looks back
to Rachel.

BEN

She's pretty cute, don't you think?

RACHEL

Uh-huh.

We PUSH IN on Ben as he continues.

BEN

I mean she's sexy. You know. Like oh
man, you could really...

(CONTINUED)

Ben thrusts once into the table, rattling the dishes.

CUT TO:

Ben and KATIE are at the edge of the dance floor, drinks in hand. They have to yell over the music.

BEN

What?!

KATIE

How many women have you been with?
You're asking me all the questions, now
it's my turn!

BEN

That's not fair!

KATIE

Come on!

Ben is becoming desperate. He has to think of a new approach.

BEN

Well, see, I've had all kinds of
different relationships.
(he waits for a reaction -
nothing)
I like to experiment a little, you know?
(still nothing)
Get a little *taste* of everything.

MELANIE is just nodding in time to the music, looking at him and sipping her drink through a straw. Either she can't hear him or she totally smells his bullshit.

BEN (CONT'D)

But I don't have to tell you, I'm sure
you're the same way. Right?

Melanie notices Ben staring at her, waiting.

MELANIE

Ben, what the fuck are you talking about?

Frustrated she's not taking his hints, he just goes for broke. We PUSH IN on Ben, and continue the move over all the cuts where he says something he shouldn't.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 25

BEN
I'm talking about girl on girl!

26 INT. RESTAURANT - AS EARLIER 26

BEN
Carpet-munching!

27 INT. BAR - AS EARLIER 27

BEN
Muff-diving!

28 INT. ANOTHER BAR 28

BEN
Slit-licking!

29 INT. RESTAURANT - AS EARLIER 29

Ben is thrusting into the table, rattling the dishes as Rachel tries to hide her face from onlookers. The waitress turns around to look at him.

30 INT. CLUB - AS EARLIER 30

BEN
You know, the pink taco palate test!

31 EXT. ROAD - NIGHT 31

Ben's car whooshes right by us.

32 INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 32

The front door bursts open. Ben and JENNA stumble in, kissing passionately. They frantically move toward the bedroom, knocking things over, shedding clothes and tripping over furniture along the way.

33 INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 33

By the time Ben and Jenna enter, she's kicking off her pants and he's removing his shirt. Jenna hops on the bed, unhooking her bra.

Ben takes off his pants, then bends down and retrieves his wallet from the pocket. He searches for a second, then produces an old, dried, crumpled, nearly destroyed condom.

He moves toward the bed and begins to slide his boxers off.

BEN
(imitating the song)
Ya'll ready for this?

She sits up straight, hesitating.

JENNA
Wait. Could you turn off the light?

BEN
Why? You're already naked.

She doesn't know how to proceed.

JENNA
I just don't really...um...I would rather
not...see 'it'".

IN SLOW-MOTION: The condom crashes to the floor, making a shattering sound, like a car crash. Ben is pissed.

BEN
What the hell does that mean? I don't
mind looking at your tits!

Jenna immediately pulls the covers in front of her.

JENNA
Big fucking surprise! The female body is
beautiful, it's meant to be looked at!

BEN
Oh I don't believe this!!! Not you too!

JENNA
What?

BEN
(as if it was inevitable)
You like women.

JENNA
(stating the obvious)
We're just easier to look at.

Ben stands there, knowing he shouldn't say what he's thinking.

BEN
(comforting)
Alright...

He calmly walks over to the bed and sits down next to Jenna.

(CONTINUED)

BEN (CONT'D)
 I'll just go right downtown, pick up
 another chick...
 (he puts his hand on her
 shoulder)
 And watch you fuck her.

SMACK! Jenna's hand comes across Ben's face almost as soon
 as he gets it out of his mouth. She hits hard. But so do
 all the other girls, as we go in reverse through the night in
 quick succession:

34 INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT 34

Melanie smacks Ben hard. Then Katie.

35 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT 35

Rachel.

36 INT. BAR - NIGHT 36

Michelle. Cheryl. Then Mary, the first of them all, stands
 up and gives Ben a brutal uppercut. It's quite a finale.

Mary storms out, and Ben slumps back down on his stool.

BEN'S VOICE
*After about a year or so of trying to get
 back out into the dating scene, I had had
 about enough of women and all their
 fucking problems.*

He has a huge welt on the side of his face. He turns to face
 the bar and puts his head in his hands.

An electronic bleeping sound begins, and we

MATCH CUT TO:

37 INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY (PRESENT) 37

Ben, head in his hands, is startled awake by the bleeping
 sound. He lifts his head and squints his eyes at the
 fluorescent lights of the office.

BEN'S VOICE
*So I decided to go to work for a
 magazine. I wonder if that was a good
 decision....*

(CONTINUED)

As in the first scene, he has an almost-full beard, frazzled hair and bloodshot eyes. A big red "sleepy" mark is on his face where the welt used to be. He looks like shit.

Ben looks around his cubicle. It is a disaster area - worse than the worst attic you've ever seen.

Ben turns to his laptop and finds the little alert message floating around his screen. He clicks on the envelope indicating new mail, and the bleeping stops.

There is a message in Ben's E-mail box with the subject line "I've missed you!" He clicks it open and reads:

"Hi Ben! My name is Michelle and I just turned 18 last week! Would you like to see some of my birthday video?"

BEN
(to himself)
Fuckin' A.

Ben doesn't hesitate. He clicks the blue link. A web site comes up with a picture of a young, innocent-looking girl beckoning visitors to come in.

Ben clicks "enter" and a little "popup" window appears automatically. He clicks it closed and another one comes up. Ben groans.

There's a knock at the cubicle and GREG (31), another writer, sticks his head in just as Ben clicks the popup window closed.

GREG
Hey man, how goes it?

BAM!!! Ben's screen is instantly assaulted with an all-out barrage of hundreds of popup windows, one after another.

BEN
Dah!

Ben is clicking the mouse like a madman, trying to close the windows, but they regenerate too quickly for him. This sparks Greg's curiosity and he comes in.

GREG
Whatcha doing?

As Greg comes over to his desk, Ben gives up and slams the power switch, shutting the computer off all together. He quickly sits back in his chair and throws an arm over the back, feigning calmness. Greg looks at him like he's nuts.

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED: (2)

BEN

Fucker froze on me. Network's such a pile of shit.

Greg just looks at him, then catches sight of Ben's trash can. It's filled with tons of crumpled paper, 40 oz. beer bottles and an old sock or two.

GREG

Yeah...tell me about it.

BEN

So what's up?

GREG

(making a 'hook' gesture)
Captain Hook wants to see you.

Ben nods, looks around as if there was something for him to do, then gets up.

BEN

Aye, aye Mr. Smee.

38 **INT. BETH'S OFFICE - DAY**

38

The room is well-furnished, and has windows that look out into the main office. Large motivational photo prints with stupid sayings are framed on the walls, and printed on the glass door is "Managing Editor".

Ben walks in and looks around. He leafs through some of the upcoming layout ideas on the desk. He just doesn't give a shit.

Beth, who we met in the first scene, comes in through a side door. Ben tries so hard not to stare at the nose.

BETH

Hey Ben, how are ya?

BEN

Ah, alright.

BETH

(re: the layouts)
That's next month. What do you think?

BEN

I think I should have the cover.

Beth gives him a patronizing smile.

(CONTINUED)

BETH

Sit down.

Ben sits, one leg draped over the arm of the chair. He looks off as Beth makes a few notes, then takes off her glasses and looks up at him.

BETH (CONT'D)

Ben I'm worried about you.

(he shifts his glance to her)

Now I don't know if it's lack of sleep or...well I don't know what it is, but you better get it together man, you look like ass. Is there anything I can do for you that would...

As she tries to reach out to him, Ben's eyes narrow as if he's suspicious of something. We push in on Ben and begin to get a hint of what he's hearing as Beth's words begin to change and distort. He cocks his head and looks at her. Her mouth, her awful nose, her treacherous eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)

...help you get a grip on whatever is happening here. Because it's not that I don't think we could explore a purely sexual relationship under normal circumstances, it's just that I'm not really interested in you, or in any man in this office for that matter. I've always said that my job requires a *woman's touch*, and I was very serious about that...

Then we're back to reality. Beth leans forward.

BETH (CONT'D)

So, tell me what I can do to help.

After a moment, Ben wakes up and begins to stand.

BEN

Yeah, I'll get that to you tomorrow or something.

BETH

Just a second.

Ben reluctantly plops back down in the chair.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (2)

BETH (CONT'D)

One more thing. Did you know that we keep track of all employee internet usage in this office?

Ben eyes flare, and he shifts positions in his seat. He is all ears now.

BEN

No, Beth, I wasn't aware of that.

She smiles thinly.

BETH

I didn't think you were.

BEN

I've been working on a story...and...I've been doing some research. For the story.

BETH

That's good. It is. But I'd appreciate it if you could finish up your research at home. They're asking a lot of questions upstairs and I'm running out of answers.

Ben's face is bright red.

BEN

Got it.

Beth nods and Ben gets up and goes to the door.

BETH

What's the story?

Ben stops dead in his tracks. He turns around, hesitant. We PUSH IN on Ben, and know he's about to say something he shouldn't...yet again.

BEN

Did you ever have sleep-overs when you were a little girl, Beth?

39 INT. BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

39

In quick succession:

Ben dumps the contents of the desk drawer into the cardboard box at full speed.

He rips his articles off the wall.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

His face reflected in the screen, Ben slams shut the lid of his laptop.

40 **INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY** 40

The little breast toy dances around on Sonja's desk, shooting sparks.

41 **INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY** 41

IN THE KITCHEN, the cold coffee is poured into the big gulp cup.

IN THE BATHROOM, Ben quickly, carelessly shaves his beard into the handlebar mustache.

AT BEN'S DESK, the tip of the cigarette is lit, and we rack focus to his mouth as he expels the smoke, a finale of sorts for the rapid-fire cuts that proceeded.

We see the computer screen as he begins to type:

THE COLD HARD TRUTH

A Manifesto
by
Ben Miller

Ben takes a second to marshal his thoughts, then sits up straight and begins to type furiously. As he does, we slowly push in on the screen.

"I was twelve years old when I first learned the truth..."

As we see what was once Ben's voice-over spill onto the computer screen, the camera comes to rest and the sound of rapid typing fades away into complete silence.

CUT TO:

42 **INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT** 42

The apartment is dark, except for the orange glow of the streetlights outside the windows and the harsh white of the computer monitor on Ben's face.

We're looking at him from behind, all the way in the back of the room. There are the remnants of Chinese takeout on his desk, as well as six or seven empty beer bottles. Ben is on a serious buzz.

(CONTINUED)

As he types and reads out loud the conclusion of his article, we move in on him and around to his face. He reads almost faster than he can type.

BEN

(bitterly)

Have I learned anything from all of this? Hell yes. Those of you reading this article who understand what I'm talking about; you've survived - congratulations. But I'm dedicating this to those of you out there who are still wondering why your lives have deteriorated into steaming piles of horseshit. Take my advice. Don't let the bitches get you too. You still may have a chance. As for me, while I will no longer be stuck in between these pages, there are plenty of other magazines out there a lot better than this piece of shit. And as for the bitches - fuck 'em. I'm not playing their games anymore.

When he is done, he lets out a deep breath, sits up straight and cracks his back very loudly.

Then in rapid succession, with big sounds that subtly resemble those of a guillotine being prepared:

- Ben clicks "save".
- Clicks "print".
- The paper prints.
- He addresses a manila envelope to Beth.
- Rubs the paper on his balls.
- Slides the paper into the envelope.
- Licks the adhesive.

43 **INT. APARTMENT FOYER - NIGHT**

43

Ben slides the envelope into the mail slot and heads out the door feeling on top of the world.

44 **INT. NICE APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT**

44

We push in on an apartment door. Ben's hand comes in and knocks. Beat, then Moose opens the door. Dressed in a button-down dress shirt and suspenders, Moose is now the model of responsibility. He holds his BABY on his shoulder, who stares at Ben curiously.

MOOSE

(happy to see him)

Hey Benji. What's up man?

(CONTINUED)

Ben is a sight to behold. Although drunk, frazzled and sporting the handlebar mustache, he's obviously very excited. Moose casually turns the Baby around to face away from Ben.

BEN

I could be the greatest man alive.

45 INT. MOOSE'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

45

Ben sits in a chair looking off-screen.

BEN

You smell like shit, man.

Then we see that he is talking to the Baby, who sits in an automatic swing, rocking back and forth, staring at Ben in wonder.

Moose is sitting on the couch reading Ben's manifesto. KRISTEN, Moose's wife, comes over and hands Ben a beer, taking the Baby away from him.

KRISTEN

Thank God you don't have kids.

Ben pops open his beer.

BEN

Amen.

Kristen shoots Ben a look as she takes the Baby into the back. Moose finishes reading and stands up, tossing the paper to Ben as he walks past him.

BEN (CONT'D)

So? What do you think?

MOOSE

(putting on his coat)

I think you're gonna get fired.

BEN

Already did.

MOOSE

(sarcastic)

Oh. Well then you have nothing to worry about.

(off Ben's look)

Get your coat.

46 INT. POOL BAR - NIGHT

46

The spring trigger on the pinball machine is pulled back and released. The pinball shoots up and around the top of the machine and into play. It hits a few bumpers, gets bounced around a little, then gets caught in a side chute and goes dead immediately.

Ben looks down at the machine in disgust. His eyes are heavy, his buzz is beginning to wear off and he feels like shit. Sucking at pinball doesn't help him feel any better.

Moose and Ben switch places, Moose firing his pinball into play, Ben slumping down on the stool next to the machine. Moose watches the game intently, but with a kind of casualness that is only found in very good players.

MOOSE

(as he plays)

You've gotta feel like an asshole, man.

(Ben shoots him a look)

I mean, you gotta figure out your life.

Twelve years old? What the balls is wrong with you?

BEN

What's wrong with you? The one guy who should appreciate this...

MOOSE

Hey, I was there with you buddy. Yeah, it's weird, women are fucked up. But you're supposed to get over it, or at least ignore it. That's what we do.

Ben turns away from Moose and stares down at the pinball machine. The ball nearly goes in the gutter when Moose recovers and sends it flying back to the top.

The ball lands in a bonus area, causing the lights and buzzers on the machine to go crazy. A sign that says "MULTI-BALL!" lights up and two extra pinballs shoot onto the table. Moose is now playing with three balls, and Ben is even more depressed.

Moose quickly glances over at Ben as he plays.

MOOSE (CONT'D)

It's not the women doing this to you, man. It's all you. The fact is it doesn't matter what these broads have got going on in their heads.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED:

MOOSE (CONT'D)

I don't give a flying fuck who my wife thinks about, girl or guy, as long as she's still screwing me. She could be getting off to the fucking Maytag Man but she's still gonna be in my bed every night.

BEN

(dismissive)

Yeah, well you're a lucky guy.

Moose turns to Ben, letting his three pinballs crash one after another into the gutter.

MOOSE

Blow me. You work for Axiom, you get to sit around and write about sex and beer all day. *I sell insurance.*

Ben's eyes dart up at Moose. He's listening.

MOOSE (CONT'D)

You're holding a lot of cards, brother. You could have a damn good life if you wanted to.

The moment becomes awkward for Ben as he realizes that Moose is right. He glances over at their scores, displayed side-by-side. Ben got slaughtered. Then he looks back to his best friend. Beat.

BEN

You won.

47 INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

47

Sonja is working at her desk when Ben sticks his head in the door. He has cleaned himself up and is all shaved and combed. His clothes are still very writerly, but he looks good.

BEN

(whispering to Sonja)

Hey.

Sonja looks up, surprised to see him. She smiles.

SONJA

Hey Ben.

BEN

(makes the "hook" gesture)

Is she in?

(CONTINUED)

Sonja nods. Ben slips in the door and goes over to her.

BEN (CONT'D)

Miss me?

SONJA

No. And I don't think Beth has either,
so you'd better not be your usual
charming self.

BEN

We'll see what happens. Has the mail
come yet?

SONJA

(quizzically)

No.

BEN

Well listen if it does, and there's a
manila envelope for Beth addressed in red
pen, would you pull it?

(Sonja is curious)

I sent her a little thank you note.

Sonja understands.

SONJA

(nonchalant, making him sweat)

I'll see what I can do, but...

(shrugs)

Ben thinks she's joking...probably. He puts on his war face.

BEN

(deep breath)

I'm going in.

Sonja raises her eyebrows and watches as Ben goes over to
Beth's office and knocks on the door. Through the glass we
can see Beth look up, slightly surprised, and wave Ben in.

He closes the door behind him and walks over to Beth's desk
as she takes off her glasses and settles back into her chair.

In a wide shot looking over some of the cubicles we can see
into Beth's office. Ben stands in front of her desk as she
listens. Although he plays it cool, it is clear he is
apologizing.

In one of the foreground cubicles, STEVE is watching Ben and
Beth over the wall. He turns and motions to Greg, who joins
him.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED: (2)

STEVE

Never thought I'd see this.

GREG

What, Ben with his hair combed? First day he worked here, three years ago.

(takes a look, shrugs it off)

I'm gonna go take a dump.

Greg walks off. Steve calls after him.

STEVE

(wanting to fit in)

I hear that.

Steve looks back to the office.

48 INT. MAGAZINE OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY - LATER

48

Ben emerges from Beth's office and closes the door behind him. Sonja looks over at him.

SONJA

(casually)

Did you charm her?

BEN

Well I got my job back, if that's what you mean. But I won't be able to sit down for awhile.

(off her look)

You know, 'cuz I got fucked in the ass...

SONJA

Yeah I got it, thanks.

Ben smirks. Beat.

BEN

Wanna grab some lunch?

SONJA

Can't. Gotta go deliver the mail.

Sonja holds up Ben's manila envelope.

BEN

Thank Christ.

Ben takes a step forward, Sonja pulls it back.

(CONTINUED)

SONJA
(teasing)
What's it worth to you?

BEN
Name your price.

SONJA
(devilish grin)
I've got some ideas. Shouldn't you be
getting to back to work?

BEN
I'm gonna take a few days off.

SONJA
You're kidding.
(beat - he's not)
What for?

Ben steps forward and snatches the envelope from Sonja's
hand. He smiles.

BEN
Gotta make up for lost time.

Music begins, and so does our MONTAGE:

49 **EXT. ROAD - DRIVING - DAY**

49

We're moving down the road very fast when the camera picks up
Ben behind the wheel of his Kharmann-Ghia. He has his shades
on and is enjoying the wide open road. He drives into a
tunnel, and everything goes black. When he emerges on the
other side, he is driving a new BMW Z-8, the same basic color
as his old car.

The cover of the latest issue of Axiom with Ben's name on the
cover story WIPES FRAME TO:

50 **INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - DAY**

50

Mary, the girl from the date, walks over to her door and
peers through the peephole. She sighs, then opens the door
to reveal Ben out in the hall. She puts her hand on her hip
expectantly.

BEN
Look, I think we got off on the wrong
foot.

CUT TO:

51 **INT. MARY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY**

51

A shower of various fruit falls from above and scatters, bruised, across the kitchen floor.

Moving up to the table, we see Mary laid out on her back with Ben on top of her, pounding away. She is in ecstasy.

MARY
(climaxing)
I'm...so...sorry...I...punched...you...in
...the...FAAACE!!

Another issue of the magazine with Ben's name on the cover, now a little bigger, WIPES FRAME TO:

52 **INT. BETH'S OFFICE - DAY**

52

Ben and Beth are finishing up a conversation. Ben is explaining something to her and she's nodding in agreement. Ben takes his papers and walks through the connecting door into...

53 **INT. BEN'S NEW OFFICE - DAY**

53

It's just like Beth's, but furnished in a very Ben-style, much like his cubicle was. Instead of little clippings of his articles on the wall, there are framed blowups of his covers. He walks over to his desk, tosses the papers down and sits in his chair. He still has his laptop on his desk.

Another of Ben's cover stories, his name quite prominent, WIPES FRAME TO:

54 **INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY**

54

Ben holds the door open for two delivery men who are trying to fit a big screen TV box into the room. They can't quite get it through the door. Frustrated, Ben looks around, as if wondering where he would put it anyway.

55 **INTERVIEW/MORNING SHOW - ON TV**

55

The HOST addresses the camera and holds up a hardcover book.

HOST
Here it is, "The Cold Hard Truth: A
Writer's Journey Through the Minds of
Women".
(looks off at guest)
Now it's obvious that most men are going
to love the book. But what will the
women think?

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED:

55

Now we see his guest - Ben, who begins to answer, and then just chuckles.

56 INT. BEN'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY

56

The big screen TV sits against a wall set to the talk show. It clicks off. In the reverse, we see that Ben is sitting in a brand new loft apartment.

It's far too big for one person, but there he is, relaxing in a black leather message chair in the middle of an almost empty room. Surround sound speakers are set up on pillar stands directly around him.

JOSIE (26), one of Ben's new girlfriends, appears in the background wearing nothing but a T-shirt as she walks from the bedroom to the kitchen, stretching her arms and yawning.

The newest issue of the magazine, with Ben actually pictured on the cover, surrounded by women, a celebrity in his own right, WIPES FRAME TO:

57 INT. BEN'S NEW OFFICE - DAY

57

Ben is working at his desk. His phone buzzes. He picks it up, says a few words, then hangs up. He gets up and walks through the connecting door into...

58 INT. BETH'S OFFICE - DAY

58

As Ben walks in through the connecting door, Beth slowly turns her chair around to face him. She has taken her shirt off and is sitting in her bra and skirt.

Ben stands in the doorway, somewhat startled. Looking up at her face, he sees that her nose is now much smaller and nicer, though bruised and bandaged from the surgery.

She stands and begins to seductively remove her nose bandages. It looks like it hurts a bit.

BETH

You've been doing one hell of a job lately, Ben. I want to show you my appreciation.

Ben can't believe what he's seeing. He smiles politely, raises his eyebrows, then turns and walks out. As the door closes on Beth:

BETH (CONT'D)

Hey!

(CONTINUED)

BLACK. MONTAGE ENDS as we...

CUT TO:

59 INT. POOL BAR - NIGHT

59

Ben and NIKKI (25) sit at a dark booth. Nikki looks at Ben as he takes a sip of his beer.

NIKKI
(matter-of-factly)
Okay, here it is. I don't think we
should see each other any more.

Ben sets his beer down and wipes his mouth.

BEN
(as matter-of-factly)
Alright.

Nikki starts. Is that all?

NIKKI
(a little hesitant)
Okay. Then I'll...see you whenever.

Ben nods and gives a little wave. Nikki grabs her purse and slides out of the booth. Ben takes another sip of beer. Everything's cool.

After Nikki leaves, Ben finishes off his beer and goes over to the bar. LAUREN (28), the bartender, comes over to Ben and throws a coaster in front of him.

LAUREN
Another Schlitz?

BEN
(shakes his head)
Sapphire Tom Collins.

Lauren nods and goes to make the drink. As she mixes, she calls to a GIRL who's walking past Ben.

LAUREN
Hey Julie, come over and talk to this
guy, he just got stood up too.

Ben casually looks behind him, then turns his attention to his drink as Lauren sets it down.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
I think you'll like this one.

(CONTINUED)

Ben glances up at Lauren as Julie takes the stool next to him. He is polite but uninterested.

JULIE
Hey, how's it going?

BEN
(not listening)
Nothing much, what's up with you?

JULIE
(after a beat)
Nothing.
(pause)
You don't remember me.

Ben casually looks over. It's the same Julie who ran off with Gretchen, the same Julie who was the table dancer from the frat party. Ben faces forward and downs his drink in one gulp.

JULIE (CONT'D)
(flattered)
You remember.

An awkward moment passes between them. They both face forward.

BEN
Gretchen gone?

Julie nods.

BEN (CONT'D)
She still have my fucking luggage?

Julie nods again, then smiles thinly and looks over at Ben. He smiles back and they both laugh a little. Lauren comes over with two more drinks.

LAUREN
Don't tell me you two know each other.

BEN
(preparing his drink)
"Julie", is my ex-girlfriend's...uh...

JULIE
Ex-girlfriend.

Ben smiles at Julie. Lauren rolls her eyes and walks away.

59 CONTINUED: (2)

LAUREN
(trailing off)
Of all the gin joints in all the world...

60 INT. POOL BAR - NIGHT - LATER

60

We're close on Lauren at the back of the room as she flips the light switch and the bar goes dark. The bar is closed, all the chairs are up, and only Ben and Julie are left.

BEN
(looking around)
I guess it's that time.

JULIE
(shrugs)
Bar's still open at my place.

Ben nods, considering.

BEN
Sounds good.

Ben stands up, so does Julie, and they put their stools up on the bar. He turns and heads toward the door. Ben stops and turns back when Julie doesn't follow. She just stands there, hand on the stool, waiting.

BEN (CONT'D)
What's up?

Julie motions toward Lauren, who is gathering her coat and purse.

JULIE
Lauren pours the drinks at my place too.

Ben looks blankly at Julie, then over at Lauren. Julie gives him a little wink and a smile. Ben thinks for a second, shifts his weight, then looks back at Julie. He shoots her a slight smile.

BEN
Whoa.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END