

From Buddy Movie to Bromance

A study of masculinity and homosocial behaviour between male protagonists within mainstream, male-centric American buddy movies from the 1950s to present day.

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

by

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Abstract

As well as critiquing my own abilities throughout the writing process, the essay aims to explore and examine the various models of friendship between central male protagonists and the evolution of masculinity and homosociality within the buddy movie/bromance genre which has been a staple of the American film industry since the before the 1950s. In addition, I will note if these on-screen relationships have been the product of social change and wide spread acceptance of an evolving idea of what constitutes ‘masculinity’ and if, in turn, these new boundaries of homosociality have been, in any way genre changing.

Alongside this essay I intend to create a piece of creative writing within the bromance comedy genre set against the backdrop of Montclair New Jersey in present day which explores the difficulties and solidarities of friendship between five old college friends. This film intends to fit in with contemporary bromance and appeal to the market demographic of 18 – 35 males by conforming to accepted and expected aspects of the genre such as, friendship, exploration, crisis, discovery and, most importantly, comedy.

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Preface

In the following essay and creative writing piece I am going to be examining the ideas of masculinity and male homosocial interaction within the American mainstream bromance/buddy comedy movie genre; examining films starting at the 1950s and leading up to the present day. My aim is to study, through the exploration and the examination of genre and movie chronology, the various patterns of homosocial relationships between central male protagonists. In addition I will note if these on-screen relationships have been the product of social change and wide spread acceptance of an evolving idea of what constitutes ‘masculinity’ and if, in turn, these new boundaries of homosociality have been, in any way genre changing. That is to say, I will explore if the gaining social acceptance of public displays of male affection have altered the way in which a genre has developed. For example, later in this essay I will be looking at the changes within the gangster heist genre from a Noir construction of males betraying or even shooting their co-conspirators once a crime has been committed (Miner, 2009, p.55) to the modern day bromance friendly heist which places the crime in the background as a “backdrop for semi intimate relations among male professionals” (Station, 2001). This change is most noticeable, I will demonstrate, when a comparison is made between the original Lewis Milestone movie *Ocean’s Eleven* (1960) and the remake of the same film in 2001 by Steven Soderbergh. I will also explore how the 1980s cop genre took the idea of homosociality from male bonding to a socio-political statement changing the focus from good cop/bad cop to a complex biracial narrative containing, “axes of racial, generational, political and ethnic difference under a collective performance of extraordinary virility” (Fuchs, 1993, p.194–195).

I will examine the almost ethnographic documenting of evolving intimacies between male protagonists in films, looking at early ‘buddy’ movies such as *The Road to Bali* (1952) and *The Odd Couple* (1968) and the development of the contemporary bromance movie, *I love you Man* (2009), *Stepbrothers* (2008) and *Hangover* (2009) where male bonding and friendship are central to the plot. I will also consider the ‘Apatow effect’ namely the effect which producer, writer and director Judd Apatow has had on the modern day comedy/buddy movie. Focusing on films from the 1950s to present day, I aim to analyse the situations, performances and developing character relationships throughout a variety of genres such as heist movies, cop movies, road movies, contemporary bromance as well as the up and coming female “bromance” movies, noting how these relationships, the open displays of emotional and the affectionate nature of male homosocial friendships have changed. I will also be

noting the possible reasons for the resurgence of the buddy movie, remarketed as the 'bromance' and why the genre garnered such a wave of popularity from the start of the millennium onwards.

Rather than being two separate but relevant pieces of work, my aim is for my research essay and screenplay to create a symbiotic relationship. Using the knowledge gained through research I hope that my piece of creative writing will incorporate the iconography, homosociality and varied masculine roles commonly found in the contemporary bromance genre. In turn, it is my aim that the creative writing script will contextualise my research, enabling me to explore my research more effectively. For example, when researching the genre and the idea of modern masculinity I made a conscious effort to incorporate different, yet recognisable, characterisations of men, the adolescent, the family man, the achiever and the misogynist. My piece of creative writing is a challenge to establish whether a woman can effectively write a commercially viable American script for a male-centric audience. Being a woman, there may be a possibility that my writing might become too 'feminine' as most cultural hegemony is male centric, however, by researching thoroughly I do not envision this as being problematic.

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

By

NICOLA VAUGHAN

MONTAGE - SONG "HOLD ON" BY SAM AND DAVE"

TITLES PLAY OUT OVER MONTAGE

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

JON a bleary faced 40 year old man with slightly curly, tousled salt and pepper hair is still asleep.

His face peeks out through a disheveled pile of bedding in an unkempt bedroom with mismatched, functional furniture. He moves only to wrap himself tighter inside the grey comforter.

INT. ED'S KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

ED, a slightly pudgy 40 year old man dressed like a middle manager scrabbles through papers, dishes and baby toys trying to find his keys.

BETH, a homely looking younger woman of 36, cocooned in a faded old dressing gown, sleepily stands up with their eight month old baby, Sarah, in her arms and walks to the fridge. Confused, she reaches in and pulls out a bunch of keys.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Jon squints as sunlight bounces onto his face from a crack in the curtain. He screws his face up and pulls the covers up over his head.

The comforter rides up exposing his white sport socks wearing legs and threadbare underwear with the words 'perfection' written in faded letters.

The underwear is so old that most of it has come away from the waistband exposing half of his naked ass.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

STEPHEN, a 41 year old tall, dark haired man with the conventionally handsome look of a local television Anchorman, stands at his wardrobe wearing pressed blue striped pyjamas and an impossibly neat side parting.

He stretches before retrieving a suit from his perfectly organised wardrobe and carefully takes out his trousers, shirt and jacket and lays them out neatly on the bed.

His eyes focus in on a small imperfection on the bottom of the trousers leg. His face crumpled in annoyance, he goes back to the wardrobe and lays out another suit.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Jon makes a snorting noise and lays in a deep sleep drooling onto the pillow which now has a wet patch by his mouth.

INT. JASON'S SHOWER - EARLY MORNING

Jason, a olive skinned and craggy looking 42 year old man who, even though showering, still manages to look dirty, is singing to himself in the shower.

The door of the shower cubicle opens and a beautiful young Latino woman steps in to join him.

The woman jumps up onto Jason and closes the glass cubical door behind her which then instantly steams up.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - DAY

A hand reaches out from under the duvet, picks up a mobile phone and drags it inside.

Jon jumps quickly out of bed in a panic. He grabs some clothes from the chair and floor, sprays deodorant all over himself and throws items around the room as he hunts for his clothes.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - DAY

He rushes to the front door, grabs his jacket from a hook next to it and stumbles out. A few seconds as he rushes in hopping in the middle of taking off one of his shoes. He shakes it violently and out plops a flattened half eaten burger. He hops back out the door putting the shoe back on.

INT. INSURANCE BUILDING - DAY

A vast and open plan ground floor of a large and imposing insurance building. A white and clinical looking lobby leads to an old fashioned looking floor with a glass fronted meeting room at one end and art deco looking elevators at the other.

Jon, looking slightly disheveled in his ill fitting suit ambles past a glass fronted meeting room, the clean lines of the dark woods and glass fronts somehow make Jon look even more out of place.

He stops to look in at the rows of old and balding men sat around a large desk in the meeting room and sees Ed giving a presentation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As he pulls uncomfortably at his collar and, feeling something strange, pulls out a piece of lettuce and hurriedly throws it not noticing it has landed on the leg of a man walking past.

As he catches Ed's eye, Jon positions himself behind one of the very serious looking business men and starts simulating having sex with the man in front of the glass.

Ed bursts out laughing causing that the entire room to see what is going on. As they all turn to face him, Jon freezes for a moment before quickly pretending to clean a spot on the glass with his sleeve. He then looks over and waves to nobody as if he is being called and walks quickly away to the reception area.

Jon quickly sits down and picks up a magazine and pretends to read it. He looks over at the desk where a Young Receptionist is watching him then looks at the cover of his magazine to find he is reading Brides magazine.

JON

It makes me a more sensitive lover.

The receptionist quickly goes back to looking at her computer as Jon continues to read his magazine. He doesn't notice Ed approaching until the magazine is snatched from his grasp.

JON

HEY! I was about to work out my 'am I still sexy over 40' score.

ED

If it helps, you scored 100% in the 'man fucks his friend over in front of his boss' quiz.

JON

It wasn't that bad.

ED

Those were shareholders. Shareholders who could have me fired in a heartbeat.

Exasperated, Ed starts to walk away and Jon quickly gets up to follow him. As he leaves he waves at the receptionist who quickly averts her eyes.

ED

Do you come down here just to torture me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

No. I also come down to use the visitors bathrooms, which they actually bother to clean, and to steal fruit from reception.

Jon reaches into his pocket, pulls out an apple and starts chomping into it.

ED

What do you want, Jon?

JON

(munching on his apple)
We're all going to Larry's tomorrow night and you promised you'd come this time. Remember?

Ed appears to be hesitant.

JON

You haven't been out with us in eight months.

ED

Yes. The eight months it has taken me to help nurture and care of my baby daughter.

JON

Come on, it's time you came back to the fold.

ED

I'm not making any promises, but I'll talk to Beth tonight.

JON

Don't let me down. We've been friends too long. You'll break my heart, you don't want to break my heart do you?

A look of dread comes over Ed's face.

ED

Don't.

Jon starts to sing the song 'Don't go breaking my heart' as Ed looks around embarrassed. The people milling around the office floor stop and turn to watch him. Ed starts to get more embarrassed as Jon sings.

JON

Don't go breaking my heart. You couldn't if you tried. Honey if I get restless.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

Okay, point made. Now, shut up,
everybody is staring at us.

Jon smiles to himself and stops singing.

JON

Tomorrow night, Larry's bar, 8pm.

Jon makes his way towards the elevators as Ed makes his way back to the glass meeting room. Jon walks backwards toward the elevators so he can keep Ed in his eye line and continues to sing.

JON

When I was down, you were my
clown.

Ed shakes his head and watches as Jon turns to go into the elevator and bumps into a bunch of people coming out. He turns back to see Jon, his face still grinning, pull himself in just in time as the doors to the elevator close

INT. JON'S CUBICAL/STEPHEN'S OFFICE & RECEPTION - INTERCUT

A dull, strip lit, grey and beige coloured office floor split into segments. Jon walks his office cubical and sits down. His padded dividers are grubby and his desk is cluttered with papers, empty cans of Dr.Pepper and various office based detritus.

He brushes some loose papers off his phone and starts to dial.

At the high school, in a large old fashioned wood panelled office lined with bookshelves full of books and files. Stephen sits, imposingly, behind a large desk made of intricately crafted dark wood.

As he browses through a manila file STACY, a bored looking student, is slumped on a small plastic chair in front of him. Her blue jeans are ripped and her figure hugging, top which is inappropriate for school.

As Stephen reads his file she sits playing with her hair and not really paying attention. His cell phone vibrates in his pocket. He tries to ignore it but it is clearly distracting him. Patiently he waits for the phone to go to voice mail and continues reading the file.

Jon patiently stays on the phone and hears Stephen's voice mail.

STEPHEN

I am unable to take your call at
this moment in time. Please leave

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN (cont'd)

a message after the tone and I will contact you as soon as possible. Alternatively you can contact the Sherpoint School reception in case of an emergency.

Stephen closes the file and looks over at the boneless heap of teenager in front of him.

STEPHEN

Stacy. We have a clothing policy for a reason. You simply can't come to school wearing jeans that say...

Stephen looks through his notes again.

STEPHEN

Open for business? Really? Open for business? Do you even understand what that means?

The phone vibrates in Stephen's pocket again. Instead of waiting, this time he swipes it to voice mail, leans over and puts it in a drawer and slams the door shut. As he goes to sit up he is pulled down by his tie which he has slammed in the drawer.

Stephen releases his tie, closes the door and becomes annoyed that his tie now has a crease in it.

STACY

I don't know what the big deal is. You can't see what it says when I'm sitting down.

Stephen starts to undo his tie and walks towards a small cabinet next to his desk where six ties hang. He picks out a tie and starts to knot it.

STEPHEN

We've already had this conversation last month when you wore a t-shirt saying 'Twin airbags' to the driver safety talk.

STACY

It's just fashion.

Stephen smooths his newly knotted tie and sits back down behind his desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

I'm not in the business of fashion, Stacy, I'm in the business of education and within this educational building we have rules that must be fol...

Stephen's flow is interrupted by a loud vibrating rattle coming from his desk drawer which makes both him and Stacy jump.

Visibly annoyed he opens the drawer, picks up the phone and spins his chair so his back is to his student.

Jon notices a mayo stain on his outgoing mail and uses his sleeve to wipe it away.

JON

What up?

Stephen starts talking in a loud and angry whisper.

STEPHEN

what do you want? I'm in the middle of a student disciplinary.

JON (V.O)

What for? Are you handing out A grades for blow jobs?

STEPHEN

You're disgusting and I'm hanging up now.

JON

Wait, wait. You're still on for tomorrow night, right?

STEPHEN

I'm not sure, I've got a lot of -

JON

If you say paperwork I'm going to call school and inform them about that hole you made that looks into the girl's changing rooms.

STEPHEN

There isn't a hole that looks into the girl's changing rooms.

JON

Not yet there isn't.

STEPHEN

What the hell is wrong with you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Jon is talking on the phone a stern and humourless looking man walks over to his cubical and stands behind him. As soon as Jon realises he is there he starts pretending he is on the tail end of a business call.

JON

Do you think you can have the figures for the William's case sent to me by tomorrow afternoon?

Stephen is confused by Jon's sudden change in topic.

STEPHEN

What?

JON

So that's all settled for tomorrow, you'll send me the file and we won't have to take any further action.

STEPHEN

Jon? Jon?

Stephen looks at his phone in bewilderment before putting it back in his pocket and turning to talk to Stacy who is now watching a music video on her phone. Stephen takes off his glasses and starts to rub his temples.

Jon quickly puts the phone down and starts to shuffle some papers on his desk. He turns to face the man standing behind him and pretends to be startled.

JON

Mr Olivia, you startled me.

MR OLIVIA

Have you finished inputting the numbers on the Polidoro account?

JON

Of course. They're here, somewhere.

Jon scrabbles around the papers on his unkempt desk until he pulls out a crumpled pile causing another pile to fall over. He hands it to a less than impressed looking Mr. OLIVIA who takes the files and walks away with a look of despair.

Rolling his eyes Jon takes out his cell phone and writes the text message "Drinks tmrw?" We can see at the top of the phone that this is being sent to Jason.

Jon sends the text and puts the phone on his desk but before he can move his hand, the phone vibrates. He takes the phone and opens the text message from Jason that reads "Yank your fucking doodle I am".

Jon chuckles to himself, puts the phone in his pocket and then, reluctantly, grabs a piece of paper and starts typing into his computer.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Ed makes his way through the crowds of rowdy drinkers in Larry's darkly lit sports bar. A long bar covering one side of the room is thick with customers who are lit with a myriad of flashing neon bar signs and are trying to get served.

At a table near the bar he sees Jon, Stephen and Jason laughing and chatting to each other. Their table is covered in snack crumbs and empty glasses apart from three glasses of beer which sit on one part of the table front of an empty chair.

As the group chatter and clatter their glasses together Jon spots him and waves him over. As he approaches the table the group cheer and Ed sits down in the empty chair with the three full beer glasses in front of it, immediately picks up a beer and takes a sip.

JASON

You're going to need to drink a lot faster than that, you're playing catch up.

Ed takes another sip but Jon starts to tip the bottom of his glass forcing Ed to drink the beer in one go as the rest of the table changes and cheers. When the beer is drunk Ed slams the glass down, gasps for air and burps loudly.

JON

Better?

ED

Better.

JON

Where have you been?

Ed picks up his next beer and takes a small sip.

ED

We were giving Sarah a bath and then did a she shit in the bath so we had to drain and clean the bath so she could have another one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jon isn't paying attention to what Ed is saying, instead he seems to be focused on Ed's jacket. Leaning forward slightly he reaches out his arm and pulls a tiny sock from the lapel. Ed looks a little startled and then embarrassed.

JASON

And for his next trick the
Amazing Jonathan will pull the
flags of the world from out of
his ass.

The group of men laugh and continue to drink.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - LATER THAT SAME NIGHT

The table now has a few more empty glasses and snack crumbs over it and the group is visibly drunker. Stephen has taken off his jacket and tie, Jon has rolled up the sleeves on his sweater, Ed is looking crumpled and has a beer stain down his shirt but Jason looks the same.

The group is engaged in a drunken conversation when they are interrupted by a very loud bang at the bar. They look over to where the noise is coming from and see a waitress on top of the bar banging an empty ice bucket. After a short moment of chatter the bar falls silent and all attention is on the WAITRESS.

WAITRESS

Listen up everybody. Larry here
has an important announcement.

LARRY, a small, craggy looking oldish man wearing a stained white apron stands behind the bar on top of a crate to make him taller and clears his throat. His voice is that of a heavy smoker and he has a thick New Jersey accent.

LARRY

Thank you. As many of you know
I've been running this bar since
1963. A lot of my time and love
has gone into this bar over the
years and to me she'll always be
my baby. But, fuck it, I ain't
getting any younger and you lot
ain't tipping any better. So,
this morning I signed a contract
with a development company who
have made me a rather generous
offer so I can do what people my
age are supposed to do. Retire to
Florida. I hope you'll all join
me here in nine weeks time for
our closing night party. Until

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LARRY (cont'd)
then, please continue to top up
my retirement fund.

Everybody in the bar lets out a cheer, the music starts up again and customers slowly go back to their conversations and their drinks. Jon, however, is not taking the news well.

JASON
Fuck me. He's closing the fucking
bar.

JON
This is our bar. He can't close
our bar.

ED
That's terrible news. It's going
to be so sad to see this place
close.

STEPHEN
I guess we'll have to find
another bar.

JON
I don't want to find another
fucking bar. We've been coming
here since college. This is our
bar. He can't just sell our
bar. We are this bar. This is
where we celebrated when we
graduated, that stain on the pool
table is where Stephen threw up
after we made him eat that pickle
we found in the men's room. It's
where Jason slapped that really
angry lesbian and where we all
calmed Ed down after he found out
he was going to be a father. I
mean, fuck, this is where Thunder
Roads got our first paid gig.

The table suddenly goes quiet as each member seems to suddenly have the Same memory. They say together looking off into the distance and all repeat the name.

ALL
Thunder Roads.

JASON
We were such a kick ass band.

STEPHEN
Well, we were a band.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jon isn't listening anymore, he has a faraway look in his eye as he sits and fondly remembers his college band.

ED

I loved being in that band. It was the only time in my life when I actually did something interesting.

STEPHEN

Even I have to admit that we had a good time.

Jon suddenly becomes very excited.

JON

We could do it again?

ED

Do what again?

JON

Put the band back together.

STEPHEN

You're drunk.

JON

So are you. We all are. That doesn't mean it isn't a great idea. Come on! It would be amazing. We get to hang out, play music.

JASON

I'd totally be up for it.

ED

Hello? New born baby. Big, responsible job. I can't be in a band.

JASON

Get your balls out of your wife's vagina, Ed. We could work around it.

ED

What does that even mean?

JASON

I don't know. I'm just so excited.

STEPHEN

Calm down, Ed is right. We're all different people now, most of us

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN (cont'd)
are real grown ups. Where would
we find the time? It's just
impossible.

Jon slumps in his chair, dejected and deflated. Jason
picks up his drink and holds it aloft in a toast.

JASON
A toast. To Larry's bar which has
served us well and to the
mightiest denim clad, Bruce
Springsteen influenced band of
bad ass mother fuckers who ever
rocked out in a variety of
regional bars across the South
East. To Thunder Roads!

The group of men stand and hold up their beers. As Jon
drinks, however, he looks distracted as he drinks down his
beer to the fading sound of cheers.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ed and Jon stumble up the dimly lit street to the front
door of Ed's house. Jon has Ed's arm held tightly around
his shoulders to keep him up right as Ed's head and body
slackly bounce about along the tarmac driveway. Jon tries
to prop Ed against the front door but Ed refuses to let go
of Jon. Ed lifts his head to speak, his speech is slurred
and garbled from the drink.

ED
Did I ever tell you how much I
love you?

JON
Did I ever tell you that I can't
believe you're my boss?

ED
I'm not your boss when we're
outside of work hours, Jon. I'm
your friend. And as your friend I
want you to know how much you
mean to me and how much I love
you.

Ed manages to swing around Jon's neck and envelops him in
a tight bear hug.

JON
Any more of that and the
neighbours will talk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ed slides down Jon's body and lands on the middle step on his front porch. He puts his head in his hands and lets out a big sigh. Jon sits down next to him on the step.

ED

Do you think I'm going to be a good dad?

JON

I hate to break this to you, but you're already a dad.

Ed ignores Jon's sarcastic comment.

ED

She's so small and perfect, Jon. She's got these tiny little hands and they look all small and harmless but they really hurt when they poke you in the eye. But I still love her.

Jon puts his arm around Ed to comfort him.

JON

And she loves you too.

ED

(drunkenly upset)

And I love her. I love her so much that I don't want to let her down. What if I screw her up? What if she starts dating a guy with tattoos on his face? What would I do? How would I cope with that? Why would she date a guy with tattoos on his face?

JON

Nobody is dating anybody with tattoos on their face.

Ed playfully nudges Jon.

ED

You really think I'll be okay?

JON

You'll be more than okay.

ED

Listen. If you want to put this band back together, buddy, then I am 100% behind you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

I appreciate the sentiment, but I think that may be the eight beers and three whiskeys talking.

ED

Probably. Definitely. But if you want to be in a band, Jon, then you go be in a band. Follow your dream. Just don't put a tattoo on your face. I don't want you to have a tattoo on your face.

Ed's voice starts to trail off into a drunken whisper. Jon turns to reassure Ed but sees that he's passed out on his shoulder.

Jon tries to wake him but Ed remains unconscious. With great difficulty Jon picks him up and drags him to the front door. Jon rummages around in Ed's pockets for his door keys, all the while struggling to keep him upright. After some fumbling Jon manages to find the keys and opens the front door.

Ed, who was propped up against the door, falls backwards into the floor of the hallway as soon as the door opens. Jon grabs Ed's feet and tries to push him further into the hallway.

Eventually he folds Ed's legs so they fit past the door, closes it and then realises he still has Ed's door keys.

After looking around the porch for a secure place to leave them he unlocks the door, throws the keys inside and closes the door.

ED

(muffled through the door)

Ouch.

Jon turns up the collar of his jacket against the night and continues to walk home.

INT. JON'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THE SAME NIGHT

Jon opens the door to his untidy apartment, he stumbles over some jeans left on the floor and throws his keys into a bowl by the front door.

He staggers around to the kitchen where he grabs a beer from the fridge and makes his way into the living room. He flops himself on the sofa and reaches over to his phone, pressing the button for the answer machine, a female computerised voice speaks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANSWER MACHINE (V.O.)
You have no new messages and no
saved messages.

JON
Well fuck you.

He takes a few swallows of beer, awkwardly kicks off his shoes and goes into the bedroom.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jon grabs his laptop from the side of the bed and fires it up. He taps at a few keys as he sips his beer.

JON
No emails. No Facebook messages
either. Typical.

The laptop beeps a warning and Jon reaches down the side of the bed for the laptop power cable. After fumbling under the bed for a moment or two he pulls out a dusty cardboard box.

Sitting cross legged he rummages through the contents of the box until he finds pictures of himself with Ed, Stephen and Jason graduating college, he smiles as he looks at the picture.

He continues to rifle through to the bottom of the box and pulls out an old T-shirt with Thunder Roads emblazoned on the front followed by a cassette tape with the words "live demo" written on it.

JON
Oh my God.

Jon plugs in his lap top and goes back to the box where he finds a picture of a young Stephen with dyed jet black hair and a faded blue denim jacket along with a picture of him and Ed in matching denim jackets outside Larry's bar.

JON
How on earth did any of us ever
get laid?

He takes another swig of beer and sorts through more pictures when a pinging noise on his computer alerts him to a Facebook message. A text box opens with the words "Did you hear about Larry's bar?" Jon types the reply "Yes, we were there when he made the announcement".

After a brief moment of looking back at the photograph when the computer pings again with the reply "Any chance you guys are going to play there again?"

Jon sips his beer and stares at the screen.

INT. GARAGE - DAY, FLASHBACK

Younger versions of Jon, Ed, Stephen and Jason sit amongst various instruments in a cluttered, stone white washed walled garage. All four are dressed in jeans and denim jackets and Jon smokes a cigarette whilst clutching a battered electric guitar.

JON

There's no way we're not going to make it big, we are shit hot at the moment.

STEPHEN

Let's not get carried away.

JASON

There's a reason why Stephen goes out of his way to burst our bubble. It's because he's a giant prick.

STEPHEN

Fuck you, Jason.

JASON

In your dreams, lover boy.

ED

Maybe we could have a tour bus with our name on it.

JASON

We can fill it with all the beer and girls it can handle.

JON

Don't you mean we can handle?

Jason leans over and gives Jon a high five.

STEPHEN

We still need to graduate.

JASON

There goes another one, Prick.

The boys laugh at Jason but Stephen, clearly, is becoming annoyed.

ED

Why are you two friends again?

JASON

His mom offered me cash in return for being his friend when he started college. I didn't need

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON (cont'd)
 the money so she paid me in kind.
 And she's been paying me ever
 since.

Jason goes over to a broom which is resting on the garage wall and starts simulating having sex with it.

JASON
 OH yes, oh yes, of course I'll go
 to the opera with your son Mrs
 Stewart, it would be my pleasure.
 What's that? Do it harder? You
 are filthy Mrs Stewart, so very
 filthy.

As the boys laugh Stephen picks up a dirty rag and throws it at Jason's head. As it hits his head it makes a strange pinging noise.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY

Jon hears the pinging sound again as another message beeps up on his Facebook from Wyatt who types "Are you still there?"

INT. ED'S HOUSE - SAME MORNING

We see a close up of Ed's face as he stirs from his sleep. He feels something dripping on his face and slowly moves his arm to wipe his cheek. Gradually he opens his eyes, the light clearly causing him a lot of pain.

His vision is blurry but he starts to make out the shape of Beth standing over him. As the figure comes into focus we can see Beth holding baby Sarah who is dripping drool onto Ed's face.

Ed looks around and realises that he's lying on the floor in his hallway and clumsily scrambles up on his feet and holds his head which is throbbing with a hangover.

BETH
 Good night was it?

ED
 What?

BETH
 It looks as though you were
 posted home after your drunken
 night of idiocy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

Hey?

Ed sits up, obviously badly hung over and blinks up at Beth.

BETH

Here you go, one baby. I want you two to have fun today whilst mummy goes out to get have coffee with auntie Jessica so she can feel like a normal human being again.

Ed can't seem to gather his thoughts together quickly enough to speak. He steadies himself on the hallway wall, holds as Beth hands him his daughter.

Beth chuckles to herself before kissing Sarah on the top of her head and ruffling Ed's hair.

BETH

Try not to break daddy, he's very fragile at the moment. I'll see you later tonight. I love you. Bye.

Beth breezily walks past Ed and the baby and is out of the house before Ed manages to clear his throat and find his voice. Still a bit stunned starts to carry the baby upstairs.

He starts sniffing the air, then he lifts his arm up and sniffs himself before turning Sarah upside down and sniffing her ass.

ED

I think we could both use a wash and a change of clothes because one of us has more than ass in their pants. And I am really hoping it's only you.

Ed carries Sarah upstairs towards her bedroom when his cell phone lets out a text message tone. He stops, clumsily reaches into his pocket for the phone and sees a text from Jon which reads "Morning my sweet prince".

Ed shakes his head and we see Ed types "YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE" on the screen before putting the phone back in his pocket and carrying on up the stairs.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - SAME DAY

Ed places Sarah onto a changing mat and tries to take off her shoe as she wriggles around on her back. She squirms and kicks her leg sending the loosened shoe flying off the end of her her foot.

Ed catches the shoe and congratulates himself on his lightening fast reactions. He then peels back Sarah's diaper as she farts, sending a small chunk of poop into the air and landing on Ed's cheek.

Sarah then starts to laugh and Ed lets out a large sigh.

ED

I probably deserved that.

INT. MOONSTRUCK DINER - DAY

Stephen, Ed and Jason sit at a table by a large window in a traditional American diner. The pastel walls are covered with pictures of American landscapes and the bright cherry red booth tables are peppered with customers.

The table is strewn with various breakfast items and cups of half drunk coffee. There is an empty seat at the table, for Jon, that has a cup of coffee and a plate of scrambled eggs which have not been touched.

STEPHEN

Have you got any idea why he wanted us all to meet him here?

ED

Not a clue, he just said to be here Saturday morning at eleven.

Jason reaches over pours an entire jug of syrup over a stack of waffles.

STEPHEN

Want some waffles with that syrup?

JASON

You're funny. Maybe you should go on that TV show, America's got assholes.

Stephen rolls his eyes and Jason goes back to eating his pancakes.

STEPHEN

(looking at his watch)
It's twelve minutes past eleven.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON

And I didn't get to sleep until five this morning.

STEPHEN

What were you doing until that time?

Jason pauses for a second and then waves his breakfast spiked fork at Stephen.

JASON

Before I answer that, you should know that last night I left the bar with a fat chick and three tubs of chocolate ice-cream. Now, ask yourself this question. Do you really want to know?

Stephen thinks for a moment, pulls a face of disgust and carries on eating his breakfast. Jon casually joins the table and sits down.

ED

Where have you been?

Jon doesn't say a word and starts eating his eggs.

ED

Well?

Jon remains silent and continues eating his breakfast.

STEPHEN

If you're not going to say anything after having kept us waiting then I'm going to go.

Jon reaches into his pocket and slams a bunch of photographs down on the table. The group lean forward they see an old group picture of their younger selves posing after a gig.

Jason picks up the photograph and laughs as he passes it to Ed who then shows it to Stephen.

ED

Jesus Christ, look at the state of Jason's...
(pause)
...everything.

JASON

I look good. I still look good.

Jon picks up the picture and holds it up for the men to see and points to a young looking teenager wearing a denim outfit matching theirs, standing next to them and smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Do you remember this kid?

The men lean forward and study the scrawny looking teenager in the photograph.

ED

No.

JON

That is Wyatt Martin. He was that scrawny kid who used to come to all of our gigs. Kept asking us questions about speakers and shit like that.

ED

Our only fan.

JON

When I got home from the bar the other night I pulled out this box of old band shit and started sifting through it. This kid was in nearly all of our pictures.

Jon reaches behind him and pulls out a bunch of pictures and puts them, one by one, on the table for the guys to see.

JON

Here he is in the front row, here he is helping Ed load a speaker, here he is in the background and there he is helping set up the drums. He is everywhere.

STEPHEN

Where are you going with this?

JON

The other night he sent me a message on Facebook about how bad he felt about Larry's bar closing. We started chatting and he's got all these recordings of us that he still listens to. And the good news is that his kid has a life threatening heart condition.

STEPHEN

You need to redefine your definition of good news.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Shut up. So, we start throwing around the idea of us getting the band back together.

STEPHEN

We've been through this, we're not getting the band back together.

Jon gets visibly annoyed.

JON

I swear, the next person who butts in is going have to have a waffle surgically removed from them.

The table sits silently and waits for Jon to continue.

JON

I know you all think I'm crazy for wanting to get the band back together and I know you're all busy with your real jobs and your family lives. But. What if us getting back together was for something bigger than just shits and giggles?

ED

What do you mean?

JON

I was thinking that we could put the band back together, just for the one gig, and play Larry's closing night to raise money to help Wyatt with some of his medical bills.

The men at the table start to digest the information.

STEPHEN

I'm still not doing it.

JON

Why not?

STEPHEN

I'm happy to help, but not if it involves making a fool of myself. Besides, how much money do you think we could possibly raise? We'd be playing Larry's not Shea stadium. A hundred people, a twenty dollar cover charge? I'll

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN (cont'd)
write you a cheque right now for
two thousand dollars and nobody
needs to look like an idiot in
public.

Jon takes his frustration at Stephen's attitude out on his
eggs as his fork mashes and stabs at them.

JON
Larry's can hold way more people
than a hundred, more like two
hundred. And we can raise more
money on the night with
collections and shit like that.

STEPHEN
Shit like that? Sounds like
you've really got this figured
out.

JON
I didn't say that I had it all
figured out, I'm just trying to
figure out ways to help an old
friend.

JASON
Maybe we can take that solid gold
stick out of Stephen's ass and
auction it off, we'd make a
fortune.

Jason dives his hand under the table and starts pulling at
Stephen's trousers. Stephen yelps and slaps his hand
away.

STEPHEN
You are such a child.

JASON
I'm in Jonny boy. You know me,
I'll bang the shit out of
anything. Sick kid or no sick
kid.

JON
Epic, as always Jason. What do
you say, Ed? Will you help this
little girl? If Sarah were in
trouble wouldn't you be happy
knowing there were people out
there ready to help?

ED
Are you trying to use my child
against me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Not against you, no. All I'm asking for is for you to put yourself in his shoes. He works in a Walmart, Ed, not a fancy big office. And he's drowning. What do you say?

Jon and Jason wait expectantly for Ed's reply. Jason has some waffle on a fork by his mouth, frozen in expectation, refusing to eat it until Ed gives his answer.

A short moment of contemplation later, Ed lets out a sigh of exasperation and this is all Jon needs to hear.

JON

Stephen?

STEPHEN

Still no.

JON

Come on, Stephen. Everybody else is in.

ED

Theoretically in.

Jon nods his head and flaps his hand to get Ed to be quiet.

JON

What do you say?

STEPHEN

I don't want to.

Stephen looks at his watch, grabs his jacket, wipes his face with a napkin and gets up out of his chair.

STEPHEN

And on that note, I have to go.

JASON

You can give me a ride.

STEPHEN

How accommodating of me.

JASON

Yes, yes it is.

All four men stand up and pile money onto the table to cover the bill. Jason pats Stephen on the back just as he is getting up and enthusiastically motions for Stephen to follow him out of the dinner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Reluctantly Stephen does up his jacket and meticulously picks off tiny pieces of dirt. He straightens his tie, smooths down his hair and heads to the door.

As Stephen turns his back to Ed and Jon they see a syrup covered waffle stuck to the back of his jacket where Jason slapped him.

Ed goes to warn Stephen but Jon stops him and holds his arm to keep him from leaving.

JON

Can you talk to him?

ED

About the waffle?

JON

No, genius, about the charity gig. You're more on his grown up wavelength. I'm sure you can think of a way to tap into that stubborn head of his.

ED

I'll try, but I don't even know if I can do it yet. It's a big ask, Jon. A really big ask.

JON

I know but it's the band and it's for a great cause. And you're always telling me to think of others. Just try and talk to Stephen.

Jon places a hand on his shoulder in appreciation.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

In a small, dank and dark cluttered room we see a young Jon, Jason and Stephen sitting together nervously and in complete silence.

Suddenly there is a loud bang and Ed bursts through the door. Dressed in far too much denim and clearly sweating and out of breath it takes him a few moments to compose himself enough to talk but he is still breathless.

ED

The last band have dropped out.

JON

What do you mean the last band has dropped out?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

They've gone home. There was shouting and screaming and the long and the short of it is, they're out and we're in.

JON

So we're now the headline act?

The door opens and a young, limp haired young man with bad skin and a leather jacket stands in the doorway.

CALL BOY

Thunder Roads?

JON

That's us.

CALL BOY

The headline band have left so I guess you're up.

ED

We're going on now? The Fright Owls only just went up on stage.

CALL BOY

The bass player just got hit in the face with a taco. So, you're up.

The CALL BOY turns to leave and the rest of the boys follow him down a paint crumbling, echo filled corridor.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Through the wings at the side of the stage the band can see the LEAD SINGER play the final chords on his guitar. He jumps in the air, ignoring the jeers from the crowd, retaining his rock and roll demeanour until an ashtray hits him in the groin.

As the lead singer doubles over, the BASS PLAYER takes the mic.

BASS PLAYER

Thank you Hakensack, you've been amazing.

The crowd react violently to this and boo as the band take their instruments and walk off stage.

Just before the lead singer gets to where Jon is standing in the wings a shoe hits him on the side of his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SINGER

What the fuck, man?

As the singer holds his head and turns to see who threw the shoe he gets hit on the front of the face with another taco. With salsa dripping down his face he silently walks away.

JON

Let's just play the fuck out of this place.

Jon places his hand out in front of him and encourages the others to follow. As each member of the band puts his hand in the circle Jon starts to speak getting louder as he talks.

JON

We are the brave warriors of rock
and we will take no prisoners. We
are Thunder roads.

ALL

Thunder Roads

INT. SHERPOINT HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR - PRESENT DAY

Stephen walks down a long school corridor. His shoes squeak quietly on the polished floor and the bare brick walls are covered in student made posters as well as large motivational banners such as, "Do the best for yourself AND your school".

He passes by a room and stops to look through the window. The room he is looking into is an empty music room strewn with various music stands and instruments.

He tries the door handle and is surprised to find that it is unlocked. Looking up and down the corridor he hesitantly goes inside.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Stephen looks around the yellow and mustard coloured music room and idly runs his fingers over various instruments before moving towards the baby grand piano which sits in the corner.

Slowly he lets his fingers dabble on the keys before taking a seat behind the piano and playing a soft melody. The longer he plays the more frantic and passionate the music becomes and starts to sway his head as if lost in his own world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Just as he is reaching the crescendo of his musical maelstrom a loud cough startles him and he smashes his hands down on the keyboard making a terrible sound.

LAUREN the music teacher, a strawberry blond dressed in a long and homely looking knitted jumper, stands in front of him. In one hand she is holding a cup of coffee with a muffin balanced on top and in the other a binder of papers.

Stephen stands up quickly and moves towards her looking slightly embarrassed.

LAUREN

I didn't mean to interrupt you,
please, keep playing.

STEPHEN

No, that's alright. I should get
back to my office.

Lauren smiles a broad smile at Stephen blushes deepen.

LAUREN

I didn't know you played.

STEPHEN

I don't. I mean I did. I mean I
haven't in a while. In fact it's
been years.

Lauren sits down, places the binder on the desk and then unwraps her muffin and takes a big bite of it. With a mouth still full of muffin she starts talking, spitting bits of muffin over the desk.

LAUREN

If you ever get the urge to play
again then you are welcome to
come in here anytime you like.
You know my timetable so you know
when it's empty.

STEPHEN

Thank you. Actually I may be
playing a charity gig with my old
college band to help raise money
for a little girl with a heart
condition.

LAUREN

That's a really lovely gesture.
You'll have to tell me when and
where you're playing so I can
join the moshpit in the front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lauren smiles again as Stephen stands up from the piano stool and walks over to the desk. He stands for a moment visibly trying to think of something to say.

STEPHEN

I really should leave you to get on with your marking. Thank you for letting tinkle on your ovaries, I mean ivories.

Lauren giggles at the mistake and Stephen goes bright red with embarrassment.

LAUREN

You can play with my instruments any time you like.

Stephen gets up to leave and knocks the corner of Lauren's desk causing her desk calendar to fall over. Hastily he stands it back up, looks at it for a moment, moves it, looks at it again before positioning it so that the calendar is parallel to the edge of the desk.

STEPHEN

Now it's straight.

Lauren nods and Stephen rushes out of the room.

INT. SHERPOINT HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Smiling to himself Stephen walks once more along the corridor, only this time with a spring in his step. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone. Stephen opens up a new message to Jon and types "Okay, you win. I'm in".

He hits the send button and smiles as he puts his phone back into his pocket and springs back down the corridor.

INT. ED'S KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Beth and Ed sit at their large kitchen table eating dinner surrounded by mess. Beth is dressed in a large, baggy shirt with her hair tied back. She is visibly tired as she holds Sarah against her shoulder.

Beth pats and soothes the baby, rocking it slightly and patting her back. Ed has finished his dinner but Beth's plate is still full of food as she hasn't had the time or the inclination to eat it.

ED

How about I wrap that up and put it in the fridge for you to eat it later?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH

Sure.

ED

I'll even wrap it up in a foil swan like they do in the fancy restaurants.

Beth offers Ed up a weak smile and goes back to fussing over the baby. Ed clears the plates and gets some foil from a drawer to wrap Beth's leftover dinner.

ED

I was talking to Jon today.

BETH

Did he apologise for dumping your drunk ass in the hallway?

ED

Not really.

BETH

Yup, that sounds like Jon.

Beth isn't really listening as Ed sheepishly starts to fold the tin foil around the food, more as a distraction than anything else. She stands up and pats and gently bounces the baby.

ED

You know if Sarah ever got really sick you'd be glad if people rallied around to help us, right?

BETH

What are you talking about?

ED

People taking time out to help people.

BETH

What people?

ED

Jon was talking to...

BETH

You're not lending Jon any more money.

ED

No, it's nothing like that. Jon is trying to organise a fund raiser to help out this sick kid's family with their medical bills.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH

Jon?

ED

Yes.

BETH

No, that doesn't sound right.

ED

It's true and he's asked us all if we'd help him.

BETH

Ed, I'm glad that Jon is finding his inner Oprah but we can't afford to be giving away a lot of money right now.

ED

That's great because he doesn't want money.

Ed finishes wrapping up his tin foil swan, he holds it up but it just looks like a big ball of tin foil with a hook on the side.

ED

He just wants us to put the band back together.

Ed winces slightly as Beth shoots him a startled look.

ED

But just for one night and it's a good cause and you're always telling me I should get more involved with the community.

Beth rolls her eyes, gets up from the table and gets a bottle of juice from the fridge.

BETH

I meant shovel snow off old people's driveways not prance about on stage in tight jeans. You have a baby now, remember?

ED

I know, but it won't take up much of my time, I won't let it. And as a thank you for being such an amazing and understanding wife, how about I take you away for the weekend?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH

Where?

Beth stares at Ed as he tries to think of something Beth would like. Suddenly he is struck by an idea.

ED

Vermont.

BETH

Vermont?

ED

I can book us into that bed and breakfast in Vermont where we spent our first weekend together. What's more, I will look after Sarah while you get pampered to within an inch of your life?

BETH

Would we get the room with the whirlpool bath?

ED

For my amazingly understanding and patient wife, anything.

BETH

This doesn't mean I'm overjoyed at the thought of you getting involved in another one of Jon's schemes.

ED

I know.

BETH

But a four hour soak in a whirlpool bubble bath may give me more time to think it over.

Ed holds out his hand and Beth shakes it only to discover that it's sticky with gravy. Ed walks over the counter and brings back a tea towel. Beth wipes her hand and, as she does so, Ed wipes his hand on the back of the baby.

BETH

You're so lucky to have me.

ED

I know.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

Jon and Stephen are just finishing putting up the sound proofing all around Stephen's basement. The room is small and dark with a drum set, electric piano, bass and guitar squeezed into it.

The guitar and bass rest on a medium speaker and in the corner of the room is a table filled with boxes containing soda. Jon goes up to get a soda and looks at it disparagingly.

JON

Why can't we have beer?

STEPHEN

Because last time my neighbour woke up to find Jason on his lawn with the rake from his Japanese zen garden wedged in his ass. That's why.

Jon rolls his eyes as he sticks the last piece of soundproofing up on the wall. Ed and Jason arrive together and walk down into the dimly lit room via a set of steep concrete stairs.

ED

You've actually done a really good job.

JON

Don't sound so surprised. Here, have a diet soda to celebrate.

Jon throws a can of soda at Ed. He fumbles but manages not to drop it. He then throws one to Jason.

JASON

Soda?

JON

His majesty doesn't want your ass offending the neighbourhood.

JASON

My ass does nothing but improve this neighbourhood.

Ed walks around the small space and presses his face up against the foam soundproofing and takes a deep breath.

ED

The smell of this stuff really takes me back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Me too, so how about we play some mother fucking rock and roll?

Jon picks up his guitar and plugs it in, the rest follow his lead.

JON

I'm thinking we start off with a real crowd pleaser?

ED

Our closer?

JON

Exactly. You heard it boys, Take Me Home in four.

Jason holds his drumsticks aloft to count them. They men start to play but the sound coming from the band is chaotic, as though they are all playing different songs.

Jon signals for them to keep going but as they play the sound is not improving. When Jon can't take it any longer he signals everybody to stop playing and the noise comes to a clattering halt.

JON

So we're going to need a little practice.

JASON

A little practice? We sound like somebody set fire to a Mariachi band.

ED

It wasn't that bad.

JASON

A Mariachi band in a cat shelter which was also used to store fireworks in metal garbage cans.

JON

We're going to have to start from the beginning.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - LATER

The men are paused, looking at Jason, with an intense look of concentration on their faces. All four men have the same bright yellow book in front of them.

Jason counts them in and they begin to play the song Three Blind Mice together, incredibly slowly. When they all stop Ed is the only one who is looking pleased with himself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON

We've been doing this for five hours. Unless this is going to be our opening number we need to move on.

STEPHEN

What we need is Rob.

The band seem to freeze and Jon becomes visibly annoyed.

JON

We do not need Rob.

STEPHEN

I think we do.

JON

And why do you think that?

STEPHEN

We're not a full band without him. If this is going to be a proper reunion then we need Rob.

Jon rushes over and stands, aggressively, close to Stephen's face.

JON

You need to get this through your oddly perfect side parting head. Rob has nothing to do with this band, nothing. He doesn't get to hear about it, he doesn't get to talk about it, he doesn't even get to think about it. I started this band, I get to say who does and doesn't play. And I say Rob doesn't play.

Jon suddenly becomes aware of the band staring at him and he goes back to his guitar.

ED

It's our band. And Stephen is right, we're not a real reunion without Rob.

JASON

We will definitely sound better with Rob, and surely the better we sound the more money we'll make for Wyatt.

JON

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON

For the fundraiser.

JON

I think what would help Wyatt is having a group who can get past grade one nursery rhymes. So let's get back to it. Page six, Mary had a little lamb.

The men pick up their instruments and wait for Jason to count them in.

INT. ED'S OFFICE - DAY

Ed sits behind a large desk in a modest wood and glass walled office. His desk is covered with trays of paper and files as well as various pictures of his wife and his daughter.

He is busily tapping information into his computer when the phone intercom buzzes, startling him.

ED

(into the intercom)

Is there no way we can change that screaming buzzer into something a little gentler? Like a shotgun or a child being run over by a pickup truck?

MARY (V.O.)

I'm sorry, Mr Harris, but I don't know how to change the settings on the intercom. Do you want me to give the engineer a call?

ED

No, no. It's fine. What do you want, Mary?

MARY (V.O.)

You have a man here to see you, he says he is your proctologist.

ED

Proctologist?

JON (V.O.)

We know the source of your constant anal bleeding. It's down to your addiction to shoving massive co...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Before he has a chance to finish his sentence, Ed rushes out of his chair and opens his office door where he sees Jon bent over the desk with Mary, a sweet looking sixty year old woman, looking shocked.

ED

Get in.

Ed makes an apologetic look towards Mary.

ED

If you can hold my calls for the next few minutes, Mary, that would be great.

As Ed closes the door we can see Mary, still frozen in shock at her desk.

Jon strolls confidently over to the sofa opposite Ed's desk and unceremoniously plants himself down.

ED

Please, sit down, make yourself comfortable. What do you want, other than to send my secretary hurtling into an early grave?

JON

Can't a friend come and visit a friend at work just because?

ED

You yelled anal bleeding at my secretary. What do you want?

JON

Come to see Larry and book the bar with me.

ED

When?

JON

Now.

ED

We can't go now, we're in work. But we can talk about you and the whole Rob thing.

JON

We can't, we're in work.

ED

Then I have things to do. Why don't you just call him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

That's too impersonal. Come on, you look more professional than I do.

ED

That's because my flies are done up and I don't have ketchup on my shirt.

Jon quickly does up his flies and sucks his shirt to try and get the ketchup out of it.

ED

Whether you like it or not, Jon, you're a grown up and grown ups have to do grown up things. You are more than capable of doing this on your own. I'm not going to let you talk me into something I don't want to do.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - DAY

Larry's bar is quiet with only a few customers drinking at the tables, most are sat at the counter watching a baseball game on the television.

Jon walks confidently with smug smile on his face as Ed looks visibly annoyed.

ED

I can't believe you talked me into doing something I didn't want to do, again.

JON

I can't help if if you're easily led, now keep an eye out for Larry.

After looking around the bar for a short while, eventually Jon spots him going into the back room with a box full of glasses and motions Ed to follow him.

JON

There he is, come on.

Jon pulls Ed over to the bar and, quickly, they duck under the hatch, through the bar and into the back of the bar.

ED

I don't think we're supposed to be back there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON
We'll be fine.

Ed follows Jon through the bar to the door which opens into a room at the back.

INT. BACKROOM OF LARRY'S BAR - DAY

A run down and dark space filled with various sized boxes which clutter the already small space.

They find Larry muttering to himself whilst stacking boxes of glasses on top of other boxes.

JON
Hey, Larry. You need a hand?

LARRY
Jesus Christ you frightened the life out me.

JON
Sorry.

LARRY
What do you want? You're not supposed to be back here.

ED
I told you.

JON
We're after a tiny favour.

LARRY
what kind of a favour?

JON
Our old college band Thunder Roads played your bar a long time ago. In fact, you were the first person to give us a paid gig. Something which we've always been grateful for and the reasons we've been such loyal and generous customers for nearly twenty years.

LARRY
Spit it out, kid, I've got work to do.

JON
A good friend of ours is going through a rough patch at the moment and he needs a helping

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON (cont'd)
hand. His kid has a heart condition and he's kind of drowning in medical bills so we were hoping you could see it in your heart to let us hijack your closing night?

LARRY
What's your band got to do with this sick kid?

ED
What Jon has left out is that we're planning on having a fund raiser.

JON
We were thinking we could put on a concert to raise some money, sell tickets, have a collection, do an auction.

ED
We've got all of our own equipment, you won't have to do a thing.

Larry hesitates, unsure if he likes the idea.

LARRY
I suppose it's a good idea and a good cause but...

JON
We'll pay you a non refundable deposit of two hundred dollars to cover any inconvenience or damage the equipment might make. Call it a retirement gift.

LARRY smiles a broad smile.

ED
We're supposed to be raising money, not spending it.

LARRY
Deal.

Jon holds his hand out enthusiastically and Larry turns to shake it as Jon pulls him in for a hug which Larry is not enthused by. Jon then turns to Ed.

ED
Ed, pay this fine gentleman two hundred dollars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ed looks, understandably, shocked at this and quietly leans in to Jon.

ED

What do you mean, pay him two hundred dollars?

JON

I don't have two hundred dollars in the bank let alone in my wallet.

ED

How am I going to explain to Beth the sudden hole in our expenditure?

JON

Tell her it was an emergency or, better still, don't tell her at all. I'll pay you back.

ED

How are you going to do that? In increments of one dollar a week?

Exasperated, once more, at being railroaded by Jon, Ed takes out his wallet.

ED

Will you take a cheque?

LARRY

Sure. Leave it with Liz behind the bar. Now make yourselves useful and take these out with you.

Larry hands Ed a large pile of trays and throws a hefty bag of ice at Jon. Both men grunt under the weight of their items and then slowly make their way back through to the bar.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - DAY

Ed puts the pile of trays onto the bar and Jon hands the large bag of ice to the bartender. Both men puff their way to the other side of the bar and sit down. Ed writes a cheque.

JON

We should have a drink to celebrate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

I can't afford to, some con
artist just fleeced me out of two
hundred dollars. You want a ride?

Ed rips the cheque from his chequebook and places it on
the bar.

JON

I think I may stay for a small
celebratory drink.

Ed straitens his jacket and turns to leave the bar.

JON

Ed.

ED

What?

JON

Thanks, man. I appreciate it.

ED

I'll add it to the growing list
of things you owe me. Make sure
that cheque gets to the right
person.

As Ed leaves Jon turns and waves to the bartender for a
drink.

A woman with bright pink lipstick and big hair wearing a
tight black top with Larry's Bar emblazoned on it comes to
take his order.

JON

Can I get a Jack Daniels, no ice
please? Oh, and this is a cheque
for Larry, can you make sure he
gets it?

BARTENDER

Sure thing, what's it for?

JON

It's for our band.

BARTENDER

You're in a band?

The bartender hands Jon his drink and he takes a
triumphant sip.

JON

I am now.

EXT. LARRY'S BAR - DAY

Jon steps outside the bar and starts his walk to find a cab. He stops for a moment to do up his coat and turns to look back at the building.

He seems frozen in a memory, barely registering a group of young, exuberant people sitting outside at a table, chatting.

EXT. TABLE OUTSIDE LARRY'S BAR - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

A younger Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason are sat at a table outside Larry's bar. With them are four girls.

Jason has two women fighting for his attention and Ed and Stephen are talking to the Same girl. Jon is in deep conversation with a girl named SAM, a grungy looking twenty something with jet black hair and very little make up. She is wearing a Led Zeppelin t-shirt and black jeans.

Their table is surrounded by instrument cases and various musical equipment and they all seem to be dressed in various shades of the same kind of faded denim.

SAM

When is your next gig?

JON

We're playing a few local warm up gigs next month.

STEPHEN

We're playing a prom party in Clifton next week as well.

Jon looks horrified at Stephen and kicks him sharply under the table. Stephen stares, confused, at Jon before dismissing his actions and resuming his conversation with Ed and the girls.

JON

We're just trying to get our sound right before we start our tour of the East Coast

SAM

Touring the East Coast, huh?

Sam smiles reassuringly at Jon as if to say that she understands.

JON

Touring may be an exaggeration but we're getting as many gigs in as we can. It's all stage time. I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON (cont'd)
think it's important to get our
sound right. Especially if you
want the right people to notice
you.

SAM
The right people?

JON
Record producers, label scouts,
radio DJs.

SAM
So you want be a musician full
time?

JON
That's the dream. A town in each
state, a girl in each town.

JASON
A finger in each girl.

Jon pretends to be shocked at what Jason has said in an
attempt to separate himself from his friends.

JON
Ignore him, he's an animal.
Making music for a living is a
great dream but it seems to get
further away every time we have
to play a free prom or a friend's
birthday party.

SAM
Have you ever played this bar?

JON
Larry's?

SAM
Yeah. They have live bands, I've
seen them. You play just as good
as they do. Why not just for a
paid gig here?

JON
I'm not sure how well our kind of
music would go down with this
crowd.

SAM
Does your music go down better
with clumsily teenagers fucking
against cafeteria bins?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jon chokes a bit on his beer and spills some on his jacket. Shocked and amused he dabs at the beer on his denim.

JON

You've got a point. I'll give him a call in a couple of days.

SAM

We're here now.

JON

I can't go barging up to Larry at one in the morning covered in stage sweat and ask for a paid gig.

SAM

Why not?

Out of the corner of her eye, Sam spots LARRY coming out of the bar wheeling a few large green containers in front of him.

He stops by a bulky industrial looking bin and starts to empty the contents of the container into it.

Sam suddenly gets up from the table and runs over to where Larry is standing. Jon can only look over in shock as he sees Sam talk to Larry and point to their table.

Larry seems confused but as Jon watches them talk, he sees Larry start to nod just as Sam sticks out her hand and he shakes it.

Jon sees Sam write on a small piece of paper before shaking Larry's hand and bounding back to the table.

SAM

You're playing a gig here in three weeks time.

JON

We're what?

SAM

You're playing a gig here in three weeks time. Here's the details, you need to call Larry to finalise everything in the next couple of days.

Sam hands Jon the piece of paper which he looks at, stunned.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

How did you do that? What did you say to him?

SAM

All I said was that you're a great local band and that I you'd bring a lot of beer drinking fans into his bar.

Jon looks amazed.

JON

How was that so easy for you to do? It's mind boggling.

SAM

I can be very persuasive when I want to me.

Sam winks and takes a sip of her drink causing Jon to let out a small chuckle.

JON

The very least I can do is buy you another drink.

Jon turns to the rest of the group at the table.

JON

Gentlemen, we have our first paid gig.

The table erupts into enthusiastic cheers.

EXT. LARRY'S BAR - DAY

Jon is shaken from his daydream by the group of excited friends cheering as they all drink a shot of tequila. Smiling to himself he does up his coat even tighter and starts walking.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A smartly dressed Stephen walks in to a modern, hipster looking artisan coffee shop. Its red brick walls are covered in modern art paintings and none of the tables and chairs match.

Happy in his thoughts he looks up at the chalk board menu behind the counter as he joins the queue of people waiting to be served. The phone in his pocket vibrates and as he unlocks it we see his wallpaper is a picture of a blue sky with an eagle in flight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He presses on the text message icon and it opens a message from Jon that reads "Time to get your rock on".

Stephen shakes his head, locks his phone, puts it back in his pocket and continues reading the coffee menu.

Deep in thought he is startled when he feels a tap on his shoulder causing him to jump. He turns to see Lauren standing behind him smiling.

LAUREN

Sorry.

STEPHEN

That's okay, I was just lost in my own little coffee world, pondering the merits of a latte over a cappuccino.

LAUREN

Those sorts of decisions should never be made lightly.

STEPHEN

Indeed.

An awkward silence falls making both Stephen and Lauren a little uncomfortable. Thankfully the lady in front of them takes her coffee and Stephen steps up to the counter.

STEPHEN

Can I get a tall Hazelnut latte and, Lauren, what can I get you?

LAUREN

I'll just have a large black coffee please.

Stephen smiles and turns to the guy behind the counter.

STEPHEN

And can I get a large blueberry muffin with that as well, please?

COFFEE SERVER

Is that to sit in or to go?

Stephen turns to ask Lauren but she isn't there, panicked that she has left he quickly looks around the coffee shop and sees her taking her coat off and sitting at a table by the window. She sees him and waves.

STEPHEN

It looks like we're sitting in.

(CONTINUED)

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COFFEE SERVER

OK that will be fifteen dollars
and eighteen cents and if you go
and sit at your table we'll bring
your order over to you in a
moment.

Stephen makes his way, happily, through the busy coffee shop to where Lauren is sitting. She is sifting through her bag looking for her purse.

LAUREN

How much do I owe you?

STEPHEN

Oh no, it's my treat.

LAUREN

That's very kind of you.

STEPHEN

My pleasure.

Another awkward silence falls as Stephen plays with a piece of cotton on his shirt and Lauren looks out of the window.

The waiter comes over with their coffee order and places them down on the table along with a giant blueberry muffin.

Lauren and Stephen pick up their coffees and take a sip. Stephen is about to start speaking when his phone rings. Reaching into his pocket he sees that Jon is calling him. Stephen makes an apologetic face to Lauren and answers the call.

STEPHEN

what do you want, Jon?

INT. JON'S APARTMENT/COFFEE SHOP - INTERCUT

Jon stands in front of a small hallway mirror preening his hair as he talks to Stephen

JON

I'm heading off to pick up Ed.
You got everything set up?

STEPHEN

Can you guys hold off for about
an hour? I'm not at home yet.

JON

Where are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

I'm at Gad's coffee house.

JON

That's fine, I can swing by and get you after I've picked up Ed.

STEPHEN

No. Just meet me there in about an hour.

JON

What's going on?

STEPHEN

Nothing.

Lauren waves to get Stephen's attention and points to his muffin.

LAUREN

Can I try a bit of your muffin?

Stephen nods in agreement.

JON

Who was that?

STEPHEN

That was the waitress.

JON

The waitress if she could taste a bit of your muffin?

STEPHEN

Yes, they're doing some kind of survey.

JON

They are doing a survey of customer's muffins?

STEPHEN

Yes.

JON

Is it code? Are you in trouble? Say honeydew if you're locked in a sex dungeon.

STEPHEN

I will see you in an hour.

Stephen doesn't wait for Jon to reply and quickly ends the call.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAUREN

Sorry, I hope you didn't cut that short on my account?

STEPHEN

No, no. It was just Jon calling about our band practice today.

LAUREN

How's it going?

STEPHEN

It's going.

They both smile as Stephen nervously picks at his muffin.

STEPHEN

I hear there's a new Mexican restaurant opened up in town. Do you like Mexican food?

LAUREN

Not really, no.

Flustered and a little dejected, Stephen goes back to awkwardly eating his muffin.

LAUREN

I'm more of a home cooked meal kind of woman, anyway. Hypothetically, if a guy were to invite me over to his house for dinner, I'd prefer that over a meal in a restaurant where you can't hear each other talk.

Lauren waits patiently for Stephen to try and pick up on the hints she has been dropping.

STEPHEN

Oh, I see. Well I've been told my chicken in Italian sauce is nice if you'd like to come over one night and try it?

LAUREN

I'd love to.

Stephen smiles triumphantly and takes another sip of his coffee as the pair fall silent.

LAUREN

Is it a kind of competition?

STEPHEN

Huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAUREN

If I can guess the date and time you're thinking of, I get to eat the chicken?

Stephen flusters, embarrassed.

STEPHEN

Sorry, sorry. How about I next week some time? I will call you later with a proper date and time. I promise.

LAUREN

I shall look forward to it.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

The band is coming to the end of a song. Jon tries to get them to end together by jumping up with his guitar.

To his annoyance, once he lands the rest of the band is still playing. Jon tries to catch their attention again, especially Jason, by jumping up and giving them a wave. However, they still continue to play oblivious to what Jon is doing.

In the end he just stops playing and stands with the guitar around his neck until, gradually, everybody else notices and stops playing.

JASON

Is that how the song is supposed to end?

JON

No it isn't. Didn't any of you see me do the classic end of song jump?

JASON

To be fair, you've got your back to me.

JON

What did you think I was doing?

JASON

Dancing?

JON

Come on guys, we need to get it together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

We sound a lot better than we did.

JASON

That's not really saying much.

STEPHEN

At the risk of being yelled at again, we need Rob.

The band, apart from Jon, nod in agreement.

STEPHEN

The simple fact is that we're just not a band without him.

JON

No, Stephen. The simple fact is that he bailed on us and so he's not welcome back in my band.

STEPHEN

It's not your band and it's not your call. This isn't about what you want, it's about what's best. How about you stop being so childish and selfish and think about other people for a change.

JON

How am I being selfish? I'm the one organising this gig, I'm the one who had to persuade all of you to help somebody out. So, tell me, how is that being selfish?

STEPHEN

You're being selfish by not allowing the band to be the best it can be all because of some stupid grudge that's nearly twenty years old.

JON

If Rob hadn't been such a colossal dick then we wouldn't have to play a charity gig, we'd just be able to pay off Wyatts bills with our royalty cheques.

ED

Stephen's right. He is our best hope of sounding half decent. And it is for a bigger cause. Maybe we should call him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

You know what, fuck you guys.

Jon throws off his guitar and storms up the basement stairs and Ed follows him.

INT. STEPHEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jon is bent over looking angrily around in Stephen's refrigerator as Ed comes around the corner. Ed stops for a moment to take in the immaculate kitchen before banging on the door of the fridge.

ED

If you're looking for a beer then you're probably out of luck.

Jon is startled, he didn't hear Ed follow him up the stairs. He grabs a can of ginger beer out of the fridge, closes the door and leans on it.

JON

How can a grown man have a fridge with no beer?

ED

The same reason why a grown man can have a freakishly clean basement and condiments which are alphabetised.

JON

He alphabetises his condiments?

ED

Take a look.

Jon opens the door to the refrigerator and looks inside to find all of his condiments and sauces placed neatly in door shelf in alphabetical order.

JON

That guy needs to get laid.

ED

You know Rob's going to end up playing with us eventually, don't you?

JON

I don't see why we need him.

ED

You know why we need him and you also know that, at some point, you're going to have to move past this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Maybe I don't want to move past it. Music was and still is a big part of my life and it just seems like everybody is trying to take it away from me. Again.

ED

Nobody is trying to take anything away from you. You know Stephen, he's pragmatic, he's just doing what he thinks is right. You're going to do the right thing eventually, so how about saving us a few more weeks of yelling and let Stephen call Rob.

Ed puts his arm around Jon and ushers him towards the basement. Jon stops for a moment and goes back to the fridge. He opens it and starts to re-arrange the condiments in the door.

ED

You know he's going to totally freak out when he sees that?

JON

Good.

INT. STEPHEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen is leaning over his kitchen counter with his laptop open, talking on Skype.

STEPHEN

Rehearsals are going well, we're all playing the same song at the same time now.

A chuckle comes from the computer as we see ROB'S face staring back through the screen.

His long hair is flowing, scruffily, down his face to a white linen shirt, open at the neck to reveal a shell necklace.

ROB

I've got to tell you, I'm surprised that Jon has even entertained the idea of me playing with you guys again.

STEPHEN

Truthfully, he isn't. He's not that happy about the idea of me even talking to you. But I think

(MORE)

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CONTINUED:

STEPHEN (cont'd)
we've got to think of what's best
of the band first and face his
little tantrums later.

ROB
I don't know why he can't just
get over it.

STEPHEN
Me neither.

The doorbell rings, startling Stephen, who quickly removes
removes his apron.

STEPHEN
I've got to go, Rob. But we'll
see you soon.

ROB
I'm looking forward to it.

Stephen closes the lid of his laptop, checks his hair in
the side of a chrome toaster and answers the door.

Opening the door he sees Lauren standing there wearing a
floaty summer dress and holding a bottle of wine.

STEPHEN
(nervously)
Hello. How are you? You look
lovely. Is that wine? I like
wine.

LAUREN
Thanks. Can I come in?

STEPHEN
Sorry. Yes, please, come on in.

Stephen takes Lauren's light cardigan and places it on a
hook by the door before guiding her to the kitchen
counter. She looks around his house as they walk.

LAUREN
Wow. Your home is amazing.

STEPHEN
Thank you. Shall I take the wine?

LAUREN
Something smells nice.

STEPHEN
That'll be my penne arrabiata.

Lauren looks impressed as Stephen guides her towards the
breakfast counter and signals for her to sit down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAUREN

Sounds fancy. If I had known you were going to be going to so much trouble I'd have worn my fancy underwear.

STEPHEN

Don't be silly. I'm sure your underwear is just fine.

Stephen immediately regrets what he just said and starts to get flustered.

STEPHEN

Not that I have an opinion on your underwear. I don't care about your underwear, you could be wearing no underwear as far as I'm concerned. I mean. I don't mean.

Lauren giggles and lays a hand on Stephen's shoulder to calm him down a little.

LAUREN

I think your sauce is in danger of bubbling over.

Lauren looks over into the kitchen and points to a pot on the stove filled with thick, lava like sauce bubbling and popping on the stove.

Stephen quickly rushes around the breakfast counter and turns the heat down on his sauce. Lauren swivels around on her breakfast bar stool and looks around at the open plan living/dining room.

LAUREN

Look at this kitchen, you wouldn't think anybody has been cooking in here. It's immaculate.

STEPHEN

I find cleaning therapeutic. I can't concentrate in a clutter or mess

Stephen pauses for a moment before blurting out.

STEPHEN

I'm not gay. If that's what you're thinking.

LAUREN

I wasn't thinking that. I am now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

Well I'm not. There's nothing wrong with it, obviously. It's just that I'm not, just in case you thought I was, some people are quick to judge. Me, not gay people, although a lot of gay people are judged.

Stephen stops abruptly and takes in a long, deep a breath.

LAUREN

That sauce smells amazing.

STEPHEN

Would you like a sneaky taste?

Lauren nods and Stephen turns, stirs his sauce and then reaches across the counter for a tea spoon. He puts a little sauce on the spoon and holds it out.

STEPHEN

Here. Tell me if it needs anything.

Instead of accepting the spoon from her position at the counter, Lauren slides off her stool and walks to the other side of the counter where Stephen is standing with the spoon outstretched.

She holds on to Stephen's hand and starts to blow lightly on the spoon looking at Stephen as she does so.

Lauren takes a sip of the sauce on the spoon and starts moaning with pleasure.

LAUREN

Oh my God, Stephen. That sauce is amazing.

Stephen looks embarrassed.

STEPHEN

It's okay? It doesn't need more salt?

LAUREN

That's more than okay, that's incredible.

Lauren grabs the spoon and goes to dunk it into the sauce pan but Stephen stops her, grabs the spoon and gives her a clean one.

She takes some sauce, blows on the spoon and steps uncomfortably close to Stephen.

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CONTINUED:

Lauren places the spoon into her mouth and turns it so the spoon slides slowly out of her mouth with the back of it towards Stephen.

LAUREN

Know what I'm thinking now?

Stephen is still paralysed with fear and awkwardness.

LAUREN

I'm thinking if you can kiss as good as you can cook I'm in for an even bigger treat.

Stephen becomes more flustered. He tries to speak but the words won't seem to come out. Lauren steps a little closer to him and Stephen leans into her.

Slowly Lauren puts her lips on his and Stephen instinctively puts his arm around her waist. Lauren drops the spoon to the floor and places her hand in Stephen's hair.

After a short and passionate kiss, Stephen and Lauren step back, both a little shocked. Lauren puts a finger to her mouth and wipes away some of the stray lipstick before looking unimpressed.

LAUREN

Oh well. One out of two isn't bad.

Stephen looks devastated and is about to apologise when he notices the smile creeping across Lauren's face.

STEPHEN

Why do you keep doing that?

LAUREN

Because I can.

Stephen grabs Lauren, picks her up and sits her on the kitchen counter. He stops for a second, picks her up and puts her down as he grabs a small tea towel which he places on the counter.

Stephen then picks up Lauren again and places her on the tea towel upon the counter and kisses her.

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jon is asleep, fully clothed, on his sofa. His shirt has ridden up his torso and a slice of pizza rests on his naked stomach.

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CONTINUED:

The sound of a car horn beeps outside which startles him awake, he notices the pizza on his stomach and peels it off, wipes the sauce away with a cushion and puts the pizza on the arm of the sofa.

He quickly gets up, runs his hands through his hair, grabs his keys from the table and his bag from the side of the sofa.

Before he leaves, he grabs the slice of pizza from the side of the sofa, takes a large bite and leaves the house.

INT. INSIDE STEPHEN'S SUV - DAY

Stephen beeps the car horn and gives Jon an exasperated look as he eventually leaves his apartment and jumps into the passenger seat of Stephen's car.

STEPHEN

You look like shit. And you smell even worse.

JON

Considering I don't even want to be on this happy-fun-time-fuck-Jon-over roadtrip to Rob's, you should be happy I turned up at all.

STEPHEN

Maybe you should have stayed at home.

JON

And have your little coven cackling about me and how unreasonable and childish I am? No way.

STEPHEN

So you thought you'd come along and be unreasonable and childish in person?

JON

Damn straight.

Just as Stephen pulls out onto the road to start their journey, Jason pops his head between the two front seats frightening Stephen.

He holds out his iPod and makes his way towards the jack lead to plug it into the car stereo system.

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CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

What do you think you're doing?

JASON

Getting this road trip off to a great start with some mother fucking tunes.

Before either Stephen or Jon can say anything Ed forces his head between the two front seats as well. He too is holding out his iPod.

ED

I've put together a great mix of driving music for us to listen to. We should play mine.

Ed goes to snatch the jack lead but both hands are batted away by Stephen.

STEPHEN

Sit back down the two of you or I will turn this car around, I swear to God. I'm the driver, I get to choose the music.

The whole car groans in objection

JON

That's what this trip needs, sing-a-long-a-Driving Miss Daisy. It just so happens that I have the very thing that will make this sham of a road trip a tad more bearable.

Jon leans forward and pulls an old cassette walkman from a small bag. The Walkman was once bright yellow but is now scuffed and held together in places with black electrical tape.

He reaches over to the jack lead, plugs it into the earphone socket of the walkman and hits play. Suddenly the opening bars of Bruce Springsteen's Born to Run play out of the car and the boys start smiling as Stephen pulls back out onto the road.

INT. INSIDE STEPHEN'S CAR - LATER IN THE DAY

The car is quiet as the men drive on an open highway. Ed has fallen asleep in the back of the car using his coat as a pillow against the tinted window.

Jason is wearing headphones and is watching SpongeBob SquarePants videos on his phone whilst eating a carton of candy.

Jon looks over at Stephen who is humming along to the quietly playing radio and leans his head on the window to watch the landscape flying past him.

INT. MOBILE HOT DOG CART - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

The young guys plus Sam sit around two tables outside a mobile hot dog van shaped like a silver hot dog. They chomp enthusiastically on various combination of hot dogs, burgers and fries.

As Jon takes a bit of his grilled cheese sandwich he stares over at the other table where Sam is talking to Rob.

The two laugh as Rob tries his best to throw French fries into Sam's open mouth. This irritates Jon enough for Jason and to Ed notice.

JASON
Do you like Sam?

JON
Of course I like Sam, we all like Sam.

JASON
Yeah, but do you like her in a way that makes you want to put more than fries in her mouth.

JON
You're disgusting.

Jason shrugs off the comment and goes back to eating his sandwich.

JON
I don't know what she sees in him, he's into KISS for Christ's sake.

ED
You should ask her out.

JON
Eat your hot dog.

ED
Fine. Sit and stare at her in silence all evening. That's not creepy at all.

Ed shakes his head and starts to shove his hot dog into his mouth. Jon goes back to eating his sandwich.

INT.EXT STEPHEN'S CAR - PRESENT DAY

A bump in the road shakes Jon from his thoughts as the car drives down a sunny, pastel coloured suburban street.

They pull up outside a modest wooden structured house painted lemon and white which has a cherry blossom tree in the front garden.

EXT. ROB'S HOUSE - SAME DAY

The men get out of the car and shuffle up the gravel path to ROB'S front porch with Jason and Jon hiding behind Stephen who gives a look of despair and rings the doorbell.

After a moment of trying making themselves look presentable by smoothing the crumbs off their clothes and patting down their hair, Sam, now an older but still fresh faced natural looking woman in white trousers and a yellow t-shirt opens the door.

When she sees the men in front of her she beams a massive smile and lunges towards Stephen giving him a big hug.

SAM

Oh my God. it's you, and you, and it's all of you. It's so good to see you. I can't believe you're all here, it's been so long, too long.

Sam focuses her affection on Ed whom she kisses on the cheek, doing the same to Stephen and then dives at Jason swaying him back and forth in an enthusiastic hug.

Once she has finished hugging Jason she stands for a moment in front of Jon.

SAM

Jon, let me look at you. You haven't changed a bit.

Sam then squeezes him tightly and kisses him on the cheek which makes Jon blush slightly.

SAM

We can't stay out here all day, come on, come in, come in.

Sam then ushers the boys into the house.

INT. ROB'S HOUSE - SAME DAY

Rob's house is a large, light filled, home. The open plan living room is filled with knick knacks and tribal looking artifacts from various countries.

In the corner is a white baby grand piano and the wooden floors are adorned with ethnic looking colourful rugs.

Rob is sat on the sofa wearing white linen trousers, a loose fitting white tunic, a beaded necklace and no shoes. When he notices the men he quickly puts down his book and gets up to greet them.

ROB

Amazing. You all look exactly how I remember you.

JON

Do we still have the knives sticking out of our backs?

STEPHEN

Don't start.

JON

What? I'm just making conversation.

ROB

It's alright, Stephen, let Jon get it all out of his system. Regardless of what you think, it's good to see you. ALL of you.

Rob heads towards Stephen and envelops him in hug, before hugging each of the boys all of whom more reluctant to accept his overly tactile affections.

SAM

Sit down everyone, sit down, make yourself at home. Tea? Coffee?

JASON

You got anything a bit stronger back there?

SAM

We've got beer. I'll get some glasses.

Sam goes off towards the kitchen and Rob shouts after her.

ROB

Just a green tea for me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rob takes Jon's hand in his and holds it in silence for a while. Jon looks over to the others who shrug back in response.

ROB

I know you're still angry at me, and I understand. But from what Stephen tells me we have been given the opportunity to make a difference to a child's life and her family. And if that's not worth building bridges for, I don't know what is.

Jon shuffles awkwardly on the spot as Rob smiles and hugs him before leading everybody to the lounge area to sit down.

Sam appears immediately after them with bottles of beer and some glasses on a tray.

ROB

I still can't believe that Larry is selling up. I thought that old duffer would be there till the day he died.

ED

So did we.

SAM

I used to love going there. And, of course, if it wasn't for Larry's I would never have met you guys and me and Rob would never have ended up together.

Sam reaches over to ruffle Rob's hair and then leans in for a kiss on the cheek that turns into a quick and passionate kiss on the lips.

The boys sit in silence as Sam and Rob continue to kiss. Jason stares at them, Ed starts looking around the living room and Jon drinks his beer.

Eventually Stephen coughs and they stop.

SAM

And now you're all getting back together for a big reunion. I think that's amazing.

JON

We will do what we can.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

By the way. What exactly is wrong with the little girl?

JON

She has a heart condition.

SAM

What sort of hard condition.

Jon falters for a moment.

JON

I'm not sure. To be honest I didn't like to ask. If you've got a sick daughter I'd imagine somebody asking a lot of questions about the ins and outs of it may be a bit upsetting.

SAM

Still as considerate as ever. Bless your heart.

STEPHEN

Yes, yes, Jon is a modern day Mother Teresa. If I can talk logistics for a moment, Rob. Do you think you'll be able to learn our old songs in time for the gig?

ROB

All of our old songs are still locked up here in my memory vault. With just a little mind lubricant they will all slide right out.

The men are not quite sure what to do with that analogy and Jason sits with a look of disgust on his face.

ED

You still play then?

ROB

Very much so, got the old SG upstairs oiled and ready go to.

ED

Are you playing just for fun?

ROB

Most of the time, but I've been noodling along with a tribute band every now and then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON
Is it a KISS tribute band?

ROB
How did you know?

JON
Educated guess.

ROB
I want to get this out of the way now. It would bring me nothing but happiness to play with Thunder Roads again, but I'm only going to do it, Jon, if you are 100% happy to have me.

Jon feels the stares of the rest of the group and slumps slightly.

JON
(through gritted teeth)
It wouldn't be the same without you.

ROB
Good to know.

JON
To celebrate how about we all start drinking, now, immediately?

The group pick up their drinks and start to sip. Jon, however, enthusiastically gulps his beer down.

INT. ROB'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Much later in the evening the guys are sitting around talking. Sam rocks back and forth in a small wooden rocking chair by the fireplace, happily listening to the guys talking.

Ed is putting his phone back into his pocket after having shown it to Rob.

ED
She's coming up to nine months now and it's been the most amazing nine months of my life.

ROB
You're a lucky man.

The conversation dies down to a natural lull and Jon casually looks at his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

We're going to have to get going
if we're going to find a motel
near by.

SAM

Motel? What are you talking
about? You guys are going to stay
here tonight.

Jon's eye's widen as he tries to send a mental message to
Ed to tell him to refuse.

JON

There's four of us, we don't want
to put you out. We planned on
finding a motel somewhere local
anyway. It's really no trouble,
we shouldn't impose.

SAM

Don't be stupid, friends don't
impose and you're more than
friends, you're family. You'll
stay here. You don't mind sharing
two to a room, do you?

STEPHEN

Not at all, and it does sound a
lot easier than us driving around
looking for a motel room at this
time of night.

Jon looks at Stephen like he wants to push his head into
the sofa cushion.

ED

As long as you really don't mind.

Jon looks physically hurt and betrayed.

ROB

Of course we don't mind. Mi casa
es su casa.

JASON

Mi burro tiene buenos dientes

Rob looks at Jason quite puzzled as he translates what he
has just said.

ROB

Your donkey has nice teeth?

JASON

He does indeed. It's one of the
only phrases I learned in

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON (cont'd)
Spanish. That and Quisiera tocar
los pechos de su hija.

ROB
I'm not sure I know what that
means.

JASON
Can I touch your daughter's
breasts.

ROB
Jason, you haven't changed a bit.

JASON
Thanks.

STEPHEN
I wouldn't take that as a
compliment.

Sam springs up from her chair enthusiastically and heads
upstairs.

SAM
I'll go and get some fresh bed
clothes and put the cots up in
the utility room.

STEPHEN
I'll come and give you a hand.

ED
Me too.

As Jon realises he is going to be left with Rob he starts
making panicked throat cutting gestures towards Ed and
Stephen.

Sam leads a confused looking Ed and Stephen upstairs and
Jason moves up to the sofa but Jon, adamantly, stays sat
on the floor.

Already feeling awkward and uncomfortable, Jon quickly
drinks what is left of his beer.

JON
I don't suppose you have anything
stronger than beer in the house?

ROB
Like what? Whiskey?

JON
Anything will do. I don't sleep
very well on strange beds. A shot

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON (cont'd)
or two of something strong
usually knocks me out for a few
hours.

JASON
I've been using that dating
technique for years.

Rob ignores Jason's bad joke and walks towards a cabinet in the corner of the room. He gets down on his knees and starts to rummage around inside it.

ROB
I think I've got some Bourbon
here somewhere.

Rob pulls out a quarter full bottle of Bourbon followed by a tumbler glass. Jason excitedly waves his arms.

JASON
Dude. You can hit me up for a
share of the nightcap if there's
any going spare.

Rob retrieves another glass from the cabinet, walks back to the living room area and sets them and the bottle down on the coffee table.

Jon reaches for the bottle, quickly unscrews it and pours two very large measures for himself and Jason before taking a big gulp.

He splutters and shakes his head for a moment before relaxing again.

ROB
Careful, Jon, you'll choke.

Jon quickly finishes the rest of the bourbon in his glass and fills it up again.

JON
(under his breath)
Here's hoping.

INT. ROB'S SPARE BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

Jason and Stephen are sharing a double bed under the double bed in Rob's guest room. It is decorated in pastel pink colours and the bed itself has an old fashioned, ornate brass frame.

Stephen is asleep rigidly on his back with his arms folded on one side of the bed. Jason is asleep on his stomach with his arm draped over Stephen and one of his legs dangling over the bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The covers are bunched up around him revealing that he is naked apart from one white sock. Suddenly Jason farts astonishingly loudly and wakes Stephen but not himself.

Stephen is horrified at the sight next to him but is unable to roll over due to Jason's tight grip. As the smell hits him he starts to gag and flails his free hand around the bedside table.

He picks up an object which turns out to be a plug in air freshener block which he places on his face and breaths deeply.

INT. UTILITY ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Jon and Ed lay on two cot beds placed side by side in a basement utility room. There is little space around the beds as the room is cluttered with white good appliances, cleaning products and various tools and mess.

ED
Are you awake?

JON
Of course I'm awake.

ED
Can't sleep?

JON
No.

ED
Anything I can do?

JON
Yes. You can stop talking to me.

There is a short pause.

ED
Jon?

JON
What?

ED
Do you hate me?

JON
For talking?

ED
No, for wanting Rob to join the band again?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

I hate you a little bit, but I'll get over it.

ED

I hope so. I do think it was the right thing to do.

JON

Be careful your halo doesn't strangle you in your sleep. Or I do.

ED

Night

JON

Night.

Just as Jon turns to try and go to sleep they both hear the strained noises of Sam and Rob in the bedroom above them starting to have sex.

Jon lets out a frustrated and exasperated moan as he tries to block out the noises by shoving a pillow over his head.

JON

Ed?

ED

Yes?

JON

Can you do me a favour?

ED

What?

JON

Hand me that nail gun so I can shoot myself in the face.

As the sounds of Sam and Rob having sex above them gets louder Jon presses the pillow harder over his face and starts punching it.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT A MUSIC VENUE - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

A young Jon and Ed, red and full of sweat, are standing in the corridor, backstage at a music venue.

ED

It's not just me, is it? That was an amazing gig?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

That was the best we've ever played, I feel like I'm floating.

ED

I feel invincible.

JON

That's the word, invincible. In fact, where's Sam?

ED

I think she's in the dressing room. Why?

JON

I'm going to ask her out, I'm going to actually tell her how I feel and I'm going to whisk her away somewhere fancy.

ED

It's about time.

JON

After that performance how could she say no?

Jon bounds down the corridor towards their dressing room. He knocks on the door, after no reply he knocks again.

JON

Sam? Are you in there?

Jon flings open the door to find Sam and Rob having sex on top of an old speaker. Both are shocked to see him.

JON

I'm sorry. I didn't. I mean I wouldn't have. I'm sorry.

SAM

Jon, wait.

Jon quickly closes the door and staggers back up the corridor towards where Ed is still standing.

ED

You alright? What's up?

Rob, wearing only a small scarf, comes jogging up towards where Ed and Jon are standing.

ROB

Sorry about that, man, I should have put a sign up or something.

Jon and Ed aren't quite sure where to look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

It's fine, honestly, I just didn't expect to see...that.

ROB

Sorry dude, it's just she's so hot and I just couldn't wait any longer to, you know, get in there.

ED

Uh huh.

Rob pats Jon on the side of the shoulder and jogs back towards the dressing room. He enters the room and then opens the door again, placing the scarf which was hiding his modesty on the door handle. Looking to Jon, he gives him a wink.

ED

Well that was unpleasant. Never mind buddy, there's plenty more fish in the sea.

JON

Shut up now or I am going to gnaw this plectrum down to a tiny shiv and stab you in the eye.

Dejected and angry, Jon walks off, punching the wall as he goes.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - PRESENT DAY

Stephen and Rob are practising together in the basement when the door opens and Jon, Jason and Ed walk down the stairs into the basement.

Jason is eating a large, messy sandwich.

JON

Hey, Simon and Garfunkel, you two finally decided to become a duo?

STEPHEN

If you lot are late for a rehearsal again I might consider it. Jason, what have I told you about bringing food down here?

JASON

To stop doing it because I keep getting mayonnaise on the carpet?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

Exactly, so why do you keep doing it?

ED

Because I don't care.

STEPHEN

Eat it in the kitchen, it's a pain having to carry the vacuum cleaner down here.

JASON

I don't like your kitchen, it smells like lavender disinfectant. It's like eating in my grandmothers underwear drawer.

Jason makes his way to the drums as Jon kneels down to take his guitar out of its case and plug in his lead.

JASON

Can I just say something? When I said it's like eating in my grandmothers underwear drawer I didn't mean it was like me going down on my grandmother. I wouldn't want you to think that's what I meant.

STEPHEN

Nobody thought that is what you meant. You know why? Because we are all fully functioning adults.

JASON

I'm a fully functioning adult.

STEPHEN

You've got egg on your neck.

Jason wipes his neck with his hand then rubs it on his t-shirt.

JON

Less chat, people, more play.

ED

Before we start, Jon. What's the name of the kid?

JON

What kid?

ED

Wyatt's kid, the one we're doing all this for.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Oh, that kid. His kid's name is Whitney. Why?

ED

Because it dawned on me earlier that we've been slogging away for weeks to help this kid and we never stopped to ask her name.

JON

For Whitney!

ALL

For Whitney!

The band plug in and stand behind their instruments. Jon moves towards the front and stands in front of the microphone.

He then turns and shouts to Jason and the others off the mic.

JON

Jefferson Down Town.

Jason uses his drumsticks to count them and they start to play the heavy rock chords of the introduction. Jon stares at Rob who has his eyes closed as if lost in the music.

Jon rolls his eyes and mutters to himself.

JON

This is going to be a long ass day.

INT. ED'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ed quietly enters his house and gently closes the door behind him before slowly taking his shoes off in the hallway.

He opens the door to the living room where he finds Beth cradling Sarah, who is crying. Beth's face and hair is a mess and she looks exhausted.

BETH

I don't know what's wrong with her. She just won't settle down.

Ed places his hand on Sarah's head.

ED

She doesn't seem to have a temperature.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beth rocks the baby back and forth making soothing noises but to no avail. The baby's crying gets louder.

BETH

Nothing seems to be working. I'm calling Doctor Williams.

Ed takes Sarah off Beth and starts walking around the living room with her in his arms.

ED

I honestly don't think there's any need to call Dr. Williams. He'll think we're a couple of paranoid fruit loop first time parents.

BETH

We are first time parents. Although at the moment it feels more like I'm a single parent.

Ed looks hurt and angry. He wants to shout but he doesn't want to upset the baby so he shouts in a loud whisper.

ED

That is totally unfair.

BETH

You know what's unfair? Me spending all my time with OUR baby while you hang out with your buddies all of the time.

ED

A couple of evenings a week is not all of the time and It's not as though we're just messing about. There is a point to it.

BETH

I don't care about some stranger's kid right now, I care about ours. Or isn't that as important as being Jon's little lap dog.

ED

I am NOT Jon's little lap dog.

BETH

Please! All he has to do is flash you those puppy dog eyes and you come running.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

That's not true.

Ed pats Sarah on the back as he bounces her up and down to try and get her to stop crying.

BETH

Don't bounce her about so much.

ED

Why? Because I'm such a dead beat dad that I can't look after my own daughter?

Sarah gives a loud hiccup and then throws up all over Ed. Beth gives him an 'I told you so' look.

BETH

No, because she's just been fed and she might throw up all over you.

Beth walks over to Ed and takes Sarah off him. His shoulder and front of his shirt is now covered in baby sick.

ED

At least she's stopped crying.

BETH

I'm going to put her to bed. I'll see you later, unless you're going to sleep over at Jon's house tonight seeing as you two make such a lovely couple.

Beth takes Sarah out of the room and Ed goes into the fridge and grabs a beer. He leans on the kitchen counter and stares at a picture of him, Beth and Sarah.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

Breathless and sweaty, we see the band enthusiastically playing the final chords of a song. As the chord ends they all let out a yell of excitement.

With an atmosphere of self congratulations hanging in the air a disheveled Jon walks to the mini fridge in the corner and pulls out a can of Dr. Pepper and holds it to his head for a second.

He looks for a moment at the rest of the band happily chatting about how good they are now sounding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

That's a million percent improvement. We're actually starting to sound like a real band.

JASON

That sounded so good that my balls have swollen to the size of cantaloupes. You think I'm lying? Here, look at my balls. Look at them!

Jason stands up from behind the drums, sweating profusely he starts to unzip his jeans. The group quickly make noises of protest.

STEPHEN

Nobody is getting their balls out in my basement.

JASON

Weird, that's the opposite of what your mom said to me last night.

STEPHEN

Shut up.

JASON

At least I think that's what she said, her mouth was full.

STEPHEN

I am warning you.

JASON

Full of my balls.

Stephen attempts to rush at Jason but is stopped by Jon.

JON

Stephen, pay no attention to him. Jason, stop talking about tea bagging Stephen's mother.

Rob puts his guitar down, stands in the middle of the basement and takes a deep breath.

ROB

I would say we're almost there.

Jon rolls his eyes.

JON

Thank you for your valuable input.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROB

I was paying us all a compliment.

JON

And we're all very grateful for daddy's approval.

ED

Jon, cut it out.

JON

What? I said we were all very grateful.

STEPHEN

When you think of how bad we sounded just a few weeks ago, it almost seems like we're a different band now.

Jason comes out from behind the drums and walks over to where Jon is standing and places a sweaty arm around him.

JASON

Dude, we are gonna fuck this gig in the ass until it bleeds awesome.

JON

You're a disturbing little man. And I love you.

JASON

I love you too.

The band prepares for another round of rehearsals when Ed stops them.

ED

I've got us something. I was waiting until I was absolutely sure that we could pull this gig off without completely embarrassing ourselves.

Ed goes to the corner of the basement, lifts a cloth and reveals two large cardboard boxes. He opens a box and pulls out a t-shirt that says, "Thunder Roads Rocks out for Whitney".

JON

What is that?

ED

I got some t-shirts printed. I thought we could sell them on the night to make a few more bucks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

That's a great idea.

JASON

I'll buy one.

ED

See, it's raising money already.

JON

Did you buy them yourself? How much did they cost?

ED

Not much, plus I used a printing company which gives us a discount at work. When I told them what it was for, they knocked 50% off the price.

ROB

Good Job, Ed.

JON

(putting on childish voice)
Good Job, Ed.

ROB

What's got your pants in a twist all of a sudden?

JON

Nothing, look, let's just get back to practising.

Ed, happily, goes back to pick up his bass guitar.

JON

We're sounding good at the moment but we could sound even better. Until our gig I suggest that we all practice during any spare moment we have.

MONTAGE - SONG "NOTHING'S GONNA STOP US NOW"

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

All five men are playing in Stephen's basement, nodding as they play. Each man is covered in sweat and looks exhausted.

INT. STEPHEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rob sits on Stephen's sofa and plays his guitar riffs to Sam on Skype as she nods her head in time with them.

INT. ED'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ed in his kitchen with baby Sarah in his arms, he plays her like he's gently slap playing the bass as he's burping her.

INT. JASON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jason plays the electric drums as a naked woman lays in bed smiling and watching him. He throws a drumstick into the air, fails to catch it and it lands on his crotch causing him to fall off his stool.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

The boys have stopped playing and Stephen emerges with a tray full of soda and sandwiches. Jon smiles at the offering but reaches into his bag and pulls out a small plastic bottle of booze which he pours into his own soda and Jason's soda can. Rob looks on disapprovingly.

INT. THE MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Stephen spends his lunch hour in the music room playing the piano and talking to Lauren. Occasionally he breaks to give her a kiss but she quickly slaps him and tells him to keep playing.

INT. JON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jon sits and plays his guitar as he watches Letterman on late night television. He laughs at something on the show, reaches for a beer and goes back to his chords.

INT. STEPHEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

Jon is nodding happily to Stephen and Ed as the band is showing some improvement in their playing. Rob gets down on his knees to play a guitar riff and looks to the others for approval, but they unanimously shake their head no.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ed stands next to Sarah's crib playing his bass guitar as he sings his daughter to sleep.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

As Jon stands in line with a carton of milk we see him strum it like a guitar. The woman behind him gives him a strange look.

End of montage.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - NIGHT

The bar is full and noisy and the boys are crowded around their usual table which is cluttered with half eaten chicken wings and stacked up bottles of beer.

Rob is drinking an orange juice and Ed has fallen asleep on the table.

Jason finishes his drink and stares at Rob who takes a small sip of orange juice.

JASON

you're about four beers behind us.

STEPHEN

I'm pacing myself.

JASON

I want you to let your hair down.

STEPHEN

And I want you to stop breathing nacho cheese in my face.

ROB

If I'm going to be playing my best tomorrow night, I'm going to need a clear head.

JON

If you're in a band and you're not playing with a hangover, then you're doing it wrong.

Jon nudges Ed who lifts his head off the table to reveal a beer mat stuck to his head. He snorts, rubs his eyes and looks around the table confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON
You alright there, Ed?

ED
What?

Jon pats Ed on the back and reaches for his beer.

JON
Here. Drink this, it will make
you feel better.

Ed takes the bottle and drinks the contents in one go.

JASON
And that, my friends, is how you
do that.

Ed suddenly stands up and kicks his chair away. His stance is that of a confident man but his speech is slurred and sloppy. He starts to shout.

ED
I have something to say.

The entire bar quietens down and turns towards Ed.

ED
No, sorry, not all of you, just
this table. Sorry.

The bar slowly goes back to its ambient noise of chattering drinkers and Ed's demeanor changes to a quieter, less confident man. He clears his throat and takes a sip of beer slurring as he talks.

ED
I just want to say that the time
I've spent hanging out with you
guys has been fucking great. Even
though my wife has spent a lot of
time yelling at me, which is a
new thing. But she will forgive
me eventually and I am here now
and I am drunk.

JASON
You clearly are.

ED
Yes, I clearly are. I want you
all to know how much I'm looking
forward to staging my music
comeback.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

You tell it like it is, Liza.

ED

We've come so far and I'm so proud of all of us. Especially Jon, who has been selfless, thoughtful and kept his opinions about Rob to himself. He didn't tell him, for example, that sometimes he imagines kicking him off a mountain and does a shot every time he bounces off a rock.

ROB

What?

Jon raises his glass to Rob.

ED

So can I just say. Although the odds were stacked against us, we fucking did it!

Ed raises his beer in the air a little higher than he should and some of it spills over him.

ED

We fucking did it!

Jon stands up to steady Ed.

JON

Gentlemen. Please be upstanding.

Everybody at the table stands.

JON

Our drunk and exhausted friend is right. We have indeed fucking done it. A toast, to mother fucking rock and roll.

Everybody raises their drinks once more and shout in unison.

ALL

MOTHER FUCKING ROCK AND ROLL

They clink their glasses and Ed, Jason and Jon down what is left of their beers. Stephen and Rob, however, take a small sip of theirs.

EXT. ED'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ed and Jon stagger the familiar drunken path up to Ed's house, both men lolloping their drunken heads and bump into each other as they amble up the driveway towards the steps of the front porch.

Ed sits on the step, as they were both walking with their arms around each other, Jon is pulled down to sit on the step as well. Their voices are slurred and drunken.

ED

We're actually going to do this,
we're going to play a real gig.
It's so cool.

JON

It really is. Rob being there
takes the shine off it a bit, but
still, we're actually going to do
it.

Ed smiles a large drunken smile and puts his arm around Jon but his expression then turns sad.

ED

Rob is my friend.

JON

That's cool. He can be your
friend.

Ed starts to smile a beery smile again.

ED

But you're my bestest bud. I tell
you everything. There aren't any
secrets between me and you Jonny
boy. We're like blood. BLOOD!

Jon seems deep in thought which makes Ed push his face right up to Jon's face. He swings his head back violently before studying his face again.

ED

What's up?

Jon's shoulders slump forward, his head heavy on his shoulders he doesn't attempt to look at Ed, instead he starts to fiddle with some imaginary thread on his trousers.

JON

You're right, Ed, we don't have
any secrets. Between you and me,
I've done something stupid and
it's been killing me not being
able to talk to you about it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

What did you do? Is it a woman?
Did you catch something, you
know, down there?

Ed drunkenly points towards Jon's crotch.

JON

I wish it were something that
simple. But I've really fucked up
this time.

Jon thinks for a moment as Ed drunkenly sways next to him.
Eventually takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

ED

This is me you're talking to.
You're wing man, your bro, your
second in command. You can tell
me anything. What's the matter?

JON

There's no Wyatt.

ED

There's no wires?

JON

No. There's no Wyatt, no sick
kid, no medical bills, no
Whitney, no nothing. I made it
all up.

Ed tries to process the information but is having
difficulty.

ED

What?

Ed drunkenly blinks as he realises what Jon is saying.

ED

So there's no Wyatt? At all?

JON

Nope.

Ed contemplates this turn of events in a calm and drunken
manner.

ED

So you just flat out lied to us?

JON

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

Why would you do that?

JON

Because I'm stupid and selfish and wanted to play with the band again and nobody wanted to and I just panicked.

ED

Then who was the guy in all the pictures?

JON

Just some fan kid who used to follow us around, I don't even remember his name.

ED

I can't believe you made it all up. That is a super shitty thing to do.

Ed starts to sober up slightly.

JON

I know.

ED

Super fucking shitty.

JON

I know, I know and I feel terrible.

ED

So you should. Fuck. I printed five hundred t-shirts. What am I going to do with five hundred fucking t-shirts?

JON

I'll pay you back.

Ed becomes more angry and agitated.

ED

Oh you'll pay me back? And will you pay me back the two hundred dollars I gave you for the venue? Will you pay me back the hours of missed time with my family? Will you pay me back the years I've spent bailing your sorry ass out of everything?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

I'm sorry.

ED

No. That's not good enough. I've been sleeping in the spare room for the last week because I was stupidly sticking up for you. Oh he's changed, I said, he's doing something good, I said. What a fucking idiot.

JON

You're not an idiot. I am.

ED

Oh I know you're an idiot. A big, selfish fucking prick idiot. You have to tell the others.

JON

I'm not going to tell them.

ED

Well if you're not going to them, I am. You can't fuck your friends over, Jon, it's not cool.

JON

I was going to tell you near the start but then you had to go and get Rob involved and then I couldn't tell anybody. I didn't want that douche bag laughing at me again.

ED

You and fucking Rob. He fucked a girl you hardly knew and left the band, big deal. We could have gone on without him but nobody wanted to. We'd had enough. So stop blaming Rob for something we were all responsible for. Rob didn't destroy the band, we just all grew up. Well, most of us did.

Ed gets up and walks to the front door.

ED

You need to start thinking about how you're going to worm your way out of this one. But you can do it without my help. You've crossed a line this time, Jon, a big fucking, fuck off line.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ed heads into the house and Jon watches from the step to make sure he, at least, gets inside the house this time.

He hears a thump as the door closes and then goes back to contemplating on the porch step. He holds his head in his hands.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY, FLASHBACK

A young Jon, Ed, Jason and Rob are backstage at a gig. Rob and Sam are all over each other which is making Jon uncomfortable.

Stephen suddenly runs in.

STEPHEN
He's out there.

JON
Who is out there?

STEPHEN
Roger Klepper.

The group suddenly perk up.

ED
Misfit Records' Roger Klepper?.

STEPHEN
Yes

JASON
Is outside?

STEPHEN
Yes.

JON
That is so awesome!

JASON
A break, we're actually going to catch a break.

The guys start cheering and jumping up and down. Jon notices that Rob and Sam are acting more subdued.

JON
What's the matter?

SAM
Nothing, it's great news, really great.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON
What's going on.

ROB
Nothing.

JON
No, something's going on, spill
it.

Sam stares at Rob and Rob stares back at Sam, both trying
to persuade the other to talk.

JON
Somebody say something.

Sam pushes Rob who reluctantly speaks.

ROB
I've loved being in this band, I
really have. But I just got
offered a job teaching music in
Michigan and I think I'm going to
take it.

Everybody is shocked at the news.

JASON
You're going to live in Michigan?
Nobody lives in Michigan.

ROB
We will. It's a good job with
good pay and I get to use my
degree for something other than
tips and bar snacks.

JON
You were more than happy with
that a few months ago.

ROB
Well things have changed. I'll
still play tonight and as long as
I can until you find a
replacement.

STEPHEN
It won't be the same without you.

JON
This is bullshit.

ROB
Can't you just be happy for me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON

Happy? You've landed your dream job, but you've gone and shit all over mine. So what the fuck have I got to be happy about?

Jon storms out of the dressing room.

INT. BACK ROOM AT LARRY'S BAR - PRESENT DAY

In the dark and unwelcoming backroom of Larry's Bar, Stephen is sitting on pile of crates, Ed is looking at his phone and Rob is sat on the floor reading a magazine.

Stephen idly swings his legs and taps the keyboard stand whilst looking at his watch.

The door creaks open as Jon and Jason shuffle over, apologetically, to where Stephen is sitting.

STEPHEN

Where the hell have you guys been? You're over an hour late.

Ed looks up from his phone and glares at Jon. Jon sheepishly looks at the floor.

JON

We got stuck in traffic.

Rob stares at Jason's face for a while before walking right up to him. He notices something on his cheek.

ROB

You've got syrup on your face.

STEPHEN

You haven't been stuck in traffic, you've been out for breakfast.

JASON

Alright, keep your wig on Scooby Douche bag. We stopped for a bit of breakfast. We were hungry.

STEPHEN

Maybe if you hadn't drunk so much last night you wouldn't have needed to stuff your faces and make your friends wait.

Stephen stops to look at his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN

Seventy two minutes for you to show up.

JON

Can we not do this now?

ROB

I think Stephen is right. It's disrespectful.

JON

And it wouldn't be right to be disrespectful, would it?

ROB

What is your problem?

JON

My problem is you waltzing in here trying to take over a band which you walked out on in the first place.

ROB

I'm not trying to take over anything

Suddenly Ed's phone rings. He fumbles in his pocket and answers the call.

ED

(into the phone)

Hey baby. What time do you think you're going to arrive later? What? You'll have to speak up a bit.

Ed pushes himself further into the corner and covers his exposed ear with his hand as Rob and Jon continue to argue.

JON

You think you can just walk back in as if everything is fine, like you didn't turn your back on us.

ROB

I can't keep saying sorry forever, Jon.

JON

Once would be enough.

ED

(into the phone)

What was that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Ed listens to Beth on the telephone his face suddenly drops and he starts to panic. He waves to the rest of the men to get them to stop talking.

ED

Be quiet.

Ed is getting more and more flustered and annoyed as the noise level increases.

ED

Shut the fuck up, all of you.

Ed goes back to talking on the phone.

ED

Hospital? What hospital?

The men hear the word hospital and suddenly fall silent, focusing their concern and attention on Ed.

Ed is visibly shaken and is trying to process the information he's being given as he continues to listen to Beth on the telephone.

ED

It's fine baby, everything is going to be just fine. Tell me which hospital you're going to and I'll meet you there. I love you.

Ed pushes the call end button and collapses against the wall. He goes to fall further but Jon rushes over and holds him up.

JON

What is it? What's happened?

Ed sits for a moment in a daze, his words slur as if he is drunk.

ED

Sarah's been taken to the hospital. I need to go.

ROB

Which hospital?

ED

St James. They're going to St James hospital. I need to go to St James hospital. Where are my keys? Have you seen my keys? I need my keys.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASON

You're in no fit state to drive anywhere. I'll drive you.

STEPHEN

How long do you think you'll be? What about the fund raiser?

JASON

The kid is being rushed to hospital, Stephen, I know you're dead inside but show a little compassion.

JON

I'm sure Larry can shuffle an iPod and sell the shirts at the door.

Ed is staring off into space, distracted and confused. His speech trails off as if his brain isn't engaging with his mouth.

ED

That was good timing when you think about it, Jon. Now you don't have to lie about the fund raiser thing anymore.

STEPHEN

What does he mean lie about the fund raiser?

ED

He made it all up, there isn't any sick kid, well apart from mine. Where are my keys?

Ed starts to pace around the room again becoming more and more agitated unaware that he has just told the group Jon's secret.

The men look angrily and accusingly at Jon.

JON

I'll explain later, I promise. Right now we need to get Ed to the hospital.

STEPHEN

I'll drive you in my car, it's more reliable than Jason's truck.

JASON

Then I'm coming too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROB

Me too.

JON

We'll all go, I'll call Larry
from the car.

The guys bundle Ed out the door with Jon physically pushing them out from the back. He stops for a second and looks back into the room filled with instruments and looks deflated.

EXT. THE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Stephen's SUV stops abruptly outside the hospital with a squeal of breaks at the main entrance. Ed and Jon get out of the car and Stephen opens the window to talk to them.

STEPHEN

You guys go on, we'll find a
place to park and meet you in the
waiting room.

Jon and Ed get out of the car and Stephen drives off leaving Jon and Ed on the sidewalk outside.

Jon starts walking towards the hospital but Ed doesn't move. Jon grabs Ed's arm but he remains standing stubbornly on the sidewalk. Jon, worriedly, makes another grab for his arm but Ed pulls away.

JON

What the fuck Ed? We haven't got
time for this. Come on.

ED

I'm not going in. I can't go in.

JON

Stop being a prick and get
inside.

ED

I can't do this. You go in.

JON

Beth definitely doesn't want to
see me. Now move your ass.

Jon makes another grab for Ed's arm but he, once more, pulls away.

JON

I shit you not, Ed, I will punch
you into that hospital if I have
to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

She hates me, and it's all your fault.

JON

She doesn't hate you, she hates me and nobody can blame her, but right now she needs you more than she hates me. If that doesn't explain how much she needs you, then I don't know what else will.

Ed starts to cry and laugh at the same time as Jon pulls Ed by the arm, into the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen, Jason and Rob are sitting quietly in the waiting room when Jon walks in. The group stare at him, judgmentally, and Jon shifts uncomfortably from foot to foot.

JON

I know, I'm total dick.

JASON

True story, bro.

STEPHEN

I can't believe you lied right to our faces.

JON

I know I fucked up and I'm sorry.

STEPHEN

And you used a sick child to get your way.

ROB

Why would you make up something so outlandish?

JON

First of all, I didn't use a sick kid, there was no kid. And secondly, nobody was interested in playing, I had to do something.

STEPHEN

You didn't have to do anything. You could have accepted that nobody wanted to be in the band and let us get on with our lives.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEPHEN (cont'd)
You certainly didn't have to make
up a charity and guilt us into
playing.

ROB
What were you going to do with
the money?

JON
I wasn't going to keep it.

JASON
Dude.

JON
I'm not that much of a scumbag. I
was going to use some of it to
pay Ed back the money I owed him
and the rest was going to a
children's hospital.

ROB
How do we know that's true.

JON
My real friends will know that's
true. You all know I'd never have
kept the money, right?

STEPHEN
I am so close to punching you
right now.

JON
And nobody would blame you if you
did. In fact, go on, punch me,
punch me right in the face.

Jon sticks his face out for Stephen to punch it but he
doesn't.

JASON
I would have taken that punch.

JON
Get to the back of the line. I
know I fucked up, I know I'm a
selfish fuck. I was just so
focused on the band that I didn't
even stop to think about anybody
else. And where has it gotten me?
Nowhere. No show, no band, my
best friend's wife on the verge
of leaving him and his kid is in
the hospital. If I hadn't talked
him into joining the band he

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JON (cont'd)
would have been at home, he would
have been able to help Beth from
the start. If it wasn't for me,
maybe Sarah wouldn't be sick at
all.

ROB
Sarah being sick isn't your
fault, Jon.

JON
What would you know? There's no
need for you to be here now,
there is no gig. So just fuck off
back to your perfect house and
perfect wife and leave me to
wallow in my own crappy life.

The mood in the room softens as Jon breaks down and cries. Stephen catches Jason's attention and motions to Jon and Rob with his head and then motions to the door. Jason has no idea what he is doing,

Stephen then motions again before opting for something less subtle.

STEPHEN
I don't know about anybody else,
but I need a coffee. Jason, come
and help me get some coffee.

JASON
Get it yourself.

STEPHEN
I really could use your help.

JASON
With four cups of coffee?

STEPHEN
Yes. Now.

Jason reluctantly gets up out of his chair and Stephen grabs his arm and marches him out of the door.

Rob sits in silence for a while longer as Jon moves to look out of the window.

Eventually Rob walks over to where Jon is standing and spins him gently to face him.

JON
Okay, you win. I'm still a total
loser, take your shot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROB

Tell me what you want me to say, Jon. Because I sure as hell can't work it out for myself. All I've done on this trip is try to build bridges and all you've done is try to burn them down. Would it help if I said I'm sorry? Not just for the past few weeks, but for everything.

JON

Everything?

ROB

For quitting, for leaving you in the lurch, for moving away, for not staying in touch, for letting things fester. I'm sorry.

JON

I fuck up and you say sorry. Don't you get dizzy being so far above the rest of us?

ROB

I don't care about being higher or bigger or any of that. If it helps us get past whatever we need to then I'll say it again, I'm sorry.

JON

I guess I'm sorry too.

ROB

You need to know something, it wasn't easy for me to leave. I thought about it for a long time and in the end I had to make a choice. Not just for me, but for Sam too.

JON

Trust me, if there were ever a lesson to be learned about priorities, the universe is yelling it to me right now.

There is another small and awkward pause.

ROB

I'm sure it will be fine. Your friends are very forgiving. And if we can sit in a room together without killing each other, then anything is possible.

Jon gives out a small chuckle and Rob pats him, gently, on the back.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Ed rushes into a small, white private hospital room where Beth is sitting alone on a bed. When she sees Ed she gets up, rushes over to hug him and starts to cry.

Ed soothes and comforts her before gesturing for her to sit back down on the bed. He takes a blanket from the bottom of the bed and drapes it over her before sitting down next to her.

ED

Where's Sarah?

BETH

They took her away. They shoved me in here and then they took her away. Nobody will tell me what's going on.

ED

It's going to be fine. I promise you, everything is going to be fine.

Ed puts his arm around Beth and kisses her softly on the top of her head. Beth wipes her snotty face with the sleeve of her jumper.

The door suddenly opens and a tall, middle aged doctor enters the room looking at a clip board. Ed and Beth immediately stand up and rush towards him expectantly.

ED

What's wrong with her, doctor, and don't pull any punches, I can take it.

DOCTOR

You will be pleased to know that we have identified your child's mystery rash.

BETH

What is it? Is it serious? Can we see her?

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

ED
Grape juice.

JON
Grape juice?

ED
The rash, it was grape juice.
Luckily the crack team of
doctors managed to treat and
cure the problem almost
immediately.

Ed pulls out a purple stained square of material and shows everybody. Jon lunges for Ed and grabs wraps him in a massive bear hug before punching him on the shoulder.

ED
What was that for?

JON
That was for making me the most
scared I've ever been in my life.

ED
(quietly to Jon)
I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't
mean to blab, my head was just so
noisy.

JON
Don't worry about it. It'll be
fine, we've all been through far
worse.

As Jon and Ed are speaking Beth walks in carrying a sleeping Sarah. The group greets her with whispered enthusiasm.

BETH
You all look so tired. I'm so
sorry I put you through this and
I can't believe I ruined your big
night. I feel like such an
idiot.

Beth walks closer to Jon and kisses him on the cheek and then slaps him in the face.

BETH
The kiss is for getting Ed into
the hosiptal. I don't have to
tell you what the slap is for.

Beth looks up at the clock on the wall that says 12.30.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH

Everybody, I appreciate you all being here but I'm fine and the baby is fine so why don't you get down to Larry's and celebrate his retirement while there's still a bit of time left?

JON

If we hurry, we could even play a few songs.

STEPHEN

By the time we get the rest of our stuff set up it will be way too late.

BETH

Shouldn't you at least try? You've all worked so hard, it would be a shame for all of that to go to waste.

ED

You guys can go, I'm going to go home with Beth.

BETH

Oh no you're not. If they are going then so are you. I'm not having all of those hours away from us counting for nothing.

The men look at each other not sure how to react. Various uncertain faces are pulled and they mumble to each other.

ROB

If we hurry we may be able to play a couple of songs.

JON

You really think we could make it?

JASON

What are we? A Judy Garland musical? Everybody get in the car.

The men go to yell excitedly but, seeing the sleeping baby, whisper their jubilation once more and run out of the waiting room to the car followed by Ed and Beth walking slowly with baby Sarah.

ED

You're amazing.

EXT. OUTSIDE LARRY'S BAR - NIGHT

The men run inside Larry's bar only to find all the lights on, an empty bar and Larry cashing up behind the bar.

LARRY

Hey, what happened to you guys?
You missed one hell of a party.

STEPHEN

Things took a little longer than
we expected.

LARRY

That's a shame. Still, it's nice
of you guys to come back and say
goodbye.

JON

You're closing now?

LARRY

I got no choice, they drank the
bar dry. Only a half bottle of
hazelnut liquor and few bottles
of coke left. Oh and here.

Larry reaches under the bar and pulls out a jar full of notes and coins. You managed to raise \$1,825, not bad. I hope the kid's dad appreciates it.

JON

Actually Larry

ED

That's great, he'll be over the
moon.

Jon looks at Ed with confusion but Ed makes a gesture to drop it.

JASON

Larry, can I have the fat lady
neon lamp?

LARRY

Of course, take what you want,
this place isn't my
responsibility any more.

Jon is suddenly struck with an idea.

JON

Larry. How about you start your
retirement a bit early?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LARRY

What do you mean?

JON

Let us lock up for you tonight,
give us a chance to say goodbye
to the place.

LARRY

Fine by me, just try not to burn
the place to the ground until
after 6.am, that's when the new
owners officially take over.

Larry reaches over the bar and ruffles Jon's hair before
throwing a large bunch of keys at Stephen.

LARRY

Leave them in the register.

The boys gather around Larry to shake his hand as he
leaves. When he comes to Jon he is pulled in for a hug.
Larry turns and waves and takes one more look at the bar
before leaving and closing the door behind him.

INT. LARRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Larry's bar is eerily quiet, the lighting is sparse and
cold and the place is mostly empty apart from a few
friends, bar staff and partners who have come back to the
bar. Everybody is wearing a Thunder Roads for Whitney
t-shirt.

Lauren and Beth sit together with baby Sarah who is
wrapped up in a t-shirt in a Moses basket and wearing
large pair of ear protectors.

The table they are sat at has a laptop open and pointed
towards the stage. We see that the laptop has Skype open
with Sam's face beaming on it which they have set up so
she can watch the show.

Over a needlessly loud PA system we hear Jon's voice.

JON (O.S)

Tonight playing their comeback
show here at the prestigious
venue of Larry's bar the
beautiful location of downtown
Montclair New Jersey, for one
night only, Thunder Roads

The small crowd make as much noise as possible as the guys
bound onto the stage dressed in various shades of Denim.
Beth and Lauren wolf whistle and laugh at the jean clad
images in front of them and then start to cheer wildly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Stephen winks at Lauren as Jason counts them in. After four beats on the drum sticks Jon plays the introduction.

At the end of the bar, alone, is "Wyatt" wearing a faded 'Thunder Roads' T-shirt. He takes a swig of his beer and beams a huge smile as he watches the band.

The End.

Titles.

From Buddy Movie to Bromance

A critical self-reflection of the script writing process

Critical Self-Reflection

The Idea

Why write a bromance movie? Bromance comedies (or bromantic comedies) are often dismissed as immaterial popcorn flicks, disparaged at times for their unsophisticated plot lines and crass humour. CNN's critic Tom Charity wrote of David Wain's *Role Models* (2008): "This unremittingly juvenile comedy routine may be getting a little old." (Charity, 2008). Xan Brooks' one-star review of the Adam Sandler film *Grown Ups* (2010) advises: "If root canal surgery feels too childish a torment, may we direct your attention to this ghastly celebrity roast in the guise of a boisterous family comedy." (Brooks, 2010). And lastly, Philip French laments in *The Guardian* that Will Ferrell's *Talladega Nights* (2006) is: "An inane parody of a triumphalist celebration of all-American sporting heroism." (French, 2006). As a film genre, it hangs around with the same crowd as the chick flick, the rom-com and the bigger than life action movie. To those who may reside on the loftier side of the cinematic fence these movies could seem inconsequential, however, I believe that the bromance/buddy movie genre can provide an interesting celluloid ethnographic record of changing social attitudes towards the evolving relationships between men and their ability to emote. As Goldstein writes in his *LA Times* article, "In many ways, the buddy film serves as a necessary escapist fantasy; it's one of the few arenas where men can openly express their feelings for each other." (Goldstein, 2001).

In the same *LA Times* article, Goldstein writes that the development of male-bonding relationships is not only confined to modern day films but can be found in early literature, some of which pre-dates the invention of motion pictures. One of the most recognisable books containing examples of this male-centric, homosocial narrative can be seen in the works of Mark Twain between the characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, "(...) the original good boy-bad boy combo" (Goldstein, 2001).

With a large back catalogue of male/male character driven films under its belt, this genre is familiar to most western cinema-going audiences. With this in mind, my screenplay would need to follow some traditional genre conventions and plot lines or at least make references to them. My screenplay centres around the story of five friends, their evolving and, at times, fractious relationships and their quest to reignite their friendship and garner a deeper emotional connection. In a nutshell, I am aiming for a 40-something version of Rob Reiner's

Stand by Me (1986), an adventure which will cement an existing bond of friendship and which will sit comfortably within the conventions of the bromance comedy genre.

The challenges facing me at the start of my screenplay were twofold; the first being, as a comedy writer, my contributions for radio shows or television screening pilots vary from the short (2-minute sketches) to the uncreative (concepts that are to be formatted for an already planned out television pilot). This would be my first attempt at a feature length movie screenplay. The second challenge was my ability to write a consistent piece of professional work whilst suffering from a bi-polar disorder. Writing solid and snappy dialogue when, for 50 per cent of the time, getting out of bed is an effort would be challenging. Still, I had my idea and as stated by Robert Edgar-Hunt and others that the idea is the most freeing part of writing:

This is the stage where you can let rip – unfettered by practical considerations. (...)Coming up with the right story line – the right atmosphere, the right degree of complexity – is difficult, but almost infinite resources surround you. And once you have that core idea or concept – the rest is only bloody hard graft (Edgar-Hunt et al, 2009, p.34).

My starting point was to ask myself what I wanted from this screenplay, what was going to be its driving force? “Is it a premise? An interesting situation? A character? Some action? A dilemma? A social issue? An artistic expression? A postmodern interpretation of angst or a large pay cheque?” (Parker,1998, p.57). On reflection, the driving force of my screenplay is the character of Jon. His need to recapture his youth and his desperation to rekindle his college ‘salad days’ friendship with Ed, Jason and Stephen are the things which push the narrative along. I also believe that the premise of a central character and his group of peers, all in their 40s going on a quest to relive a youthful experience fits comfortably within the parameters of the Bromance/Buddy Movie genre. The narrative arc is clear and also makes room for dialogue within heavy intergroup relationship scenes, funny dialogue and a chance for the male characters to engage in acts of homosocial bonding without the audience ever questioning sexuality.

For One Night Only tells the story of a group of college friends now in their early 40s who want to get their band back together to play their regular bar which is soon to close down. However, reforming the band proves challenging as the rest of the members now have stable jobs and family responsibilities and their lead guitarist, Rob, is no longer living in the same state as them. The boys travel to find Rob and manage to persuade him to come back

and play but the animosity between Jon and Rob threatens to disrupt their progress. Having finally reached the day of the show, Ed gets a worrying phone call from his wife saying that his daughter is in hospital; the gig has to be cancelled. The film culminates in the band playing in an empty bar to a few friends and family members.

When I started the idea of the screenplay back in 2011 the chronology of the characters and their band was more apparent. If the characters were born in the very late 1960s, 1967 for example, it would have made them approximately 44 years old in my “present day” of 2011. This would mean their college years would have been 1985 – 1988 which would fit in with the Bruce Springsteen look and sound. However, as time moves on and the characters stay in their early/mid 40s the ‘present day’ time period would have to shift for re-writes. For example, the mixed tape and Walkman would become a CD and CD Walkman. I would still be keen to keep them as a Springsteen inspired band but I would have to make a comment in the script that this had been uncool. I could achieve this with a line of dialogue along the lines of, “we’ve never been a cool band, we were knocking out rock ballads when the rest of the kids were mainlining Nirvana and Rage Against the Machine”.

Questions of formatting had to be addressed and the concern over which way to layout certain aspects of action such as telephone conversations, flashbacks and montages had to be decided. During this maelstrom of typography befuddlement, I was spurred on, however, by writer Robert McKee who wrote that: “Anxious, inexperienced writers obey rules. Rebellious, unschooled writers break rules. Artists master the form” (McKee. 1997, p.3). And although I am in no way an artist, I was comforted by the idea that, although rules existed, it might not be the end of the world (or my PhD) if a few were bent or broken.

Enjoying the camaraderie of American male-centric comedy movies such as *I Love You, Man* (2009), *The Hangover* (2009) and *Anchorman – The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004) as a member of the cinema-going audience is one thing, but knowing a genre and writing a genre are two different animals. The process would also pose an interesting challenge to find out how well a British female writer could write an American- based male-centric movie which could sit comfortably with other movies in the same genre. My main worry about writing within a male dominated genre was the possibility that a female perspective may infiltrate the writing. When writing the character Jason, as an example, who is a womaniser, I had to address the question ‘would my ‘female wiring’ take over my objective genre writing and make the other characters judgmental of his behaviour’?

Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on how you look at it) having worked as a comedian and comedy writer within a male dominated industry for twenty years my thinking, within a comedy writing context, tends to be more masculine. Also, knowing that the male protagonists were based on real people also helped me create characters that were believably masculine in their traits and thinking.

Having consumed a large amount of American bromance comedies going back as far as the 1930s both for academic and recreational reasons, I felt as though I, at least, had a solid grounding in the genre and that my story idea was a strong one: “(...) in essence, the start of the screenplay’s development is an idea which the writer believes in” (Parker, 1998, p.57). However, writing within an existing and popular genre can be both reassuring and discouraging as popular genres can impose their own narrative conventions and story designs. Audiences, familiar with the genre, expect certain preconceptions to be fulfilled. “Consequently, the choice of genre sharply determines and limits what is possible within a story” (Campbell, 2008, p.86). Just as the romantic comedy audience expects a happy ending and the action audience expects a high body count; the bromance audience expects to see close friendship bonds and physical and emotional exchanges between male characters to be expressed openly without the questioning of sexuality.

Being a lecturer in film and media, I was already familiar with the four giants of narrative theory such as the structure of Tzvetan Todorov’s equilibrium – disequilibrium – new equilibrium; Roland Barthes’ five codes of Action, Enigma, Symbolic, Semic and Cultural; Vladimir Propp’s character roles; and Claude Lévi-Strauss’ binary oppositions. This meant I was starting with some idea of classical narrative structures but I was also aware that there existed many examples of films which did not cohere to any of these narrative structural rules and so afforded me the opportunity, if needed, of some artistic wiggle room should my story structure ‘go rogue’. “When we survey the totality of Hollywood film, we find an astonishing variety of story designs, but no prototype” (McKee, 1997, p.3). But, after some consideration, and with this being my first feature length screenplay, a good, solid structure was going to be the key to help me build my story. First, I was drawn to a *Seinfeld* approach to narrative. When Jerry Seinfeld and co-writer and producer Larry David made *Seinfeld*, their unofficial motto was always: “no hugging, no learning” (Smith, c. 1992, p.37). But although this structure suits a 30-minute television show, an hour and a half film about nothing (something that *Seinfeld* itself referenced in an episode where Jerry Seinfeld pitches a

television idea to a network by calling it a show about nothing) or a plot driven just by comedy and no narrative would have been unfeasible.

As well as adhering to structures of narrative and genre, my screenplay also had to be funny. Comedy writing has different priorities to that of dramatic film; some writers in the comedy profession, traditionally, are of the opinion that comedy is more difficult to write than drama. “Most people can’t write good jokes” (Bent, 2009, p.224). The foremost intention of a comedy film is to make an audience laugh but it also has to include the elements of dramatic storytelling. A successful comedy film, for example, needs more than just jokes. As well as witty dialogue, comedy films, traditionally, integrate physical comedy and performance skills into the narrative. “In these films, aspects of the classical representational paradigm coexist with a presentational mode of attraction that has its roots in such variety forms such as vaudeville and burlesque” (Karnick & Jenkins, 1995, p.17). The character of Chow leaping naked from a car attacking all three main protagonists in *The Hangover* (2009) for example, or the comical fight scenes in McKay’s *Anchorman – The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004) and *Step Brothers* (2008) highlight this. Dramatic film rarely includes additions and there is seldom a break for comedic misunderstanding or slapstick. The film *Schindler’s List*, for example, would not have been enhanced with the inclusion of a scene where Liam Neeson accidentally gets hit in the testicles with a golf club. But that is not to say that the comedy films are devoid of drama, conflict, love, friendship or emotional growth. When William M. Akers talks about the film *Wedding Crashers* (2005), for example, he defends it against those who may equate its mass appeal with a form of juvenile storytelling: “(...) at its core, *Wedding Crashers* is real and touching. It’s not a stupid comedy. It’s a lovely heart-warming story” (Akers, 2008, p.5). What I had to keep in the forefront of my mind when writing my screenplay was that there needed to be more to my film than just funny one-liners or characters falling over: “Whether it’s a comedy or a drama, wringing out the emotions of the audience is the name of the game. Making it an emotional experience, using *all* the emotions, is what it’s about” (Snyder, 2005, p.152).

First draft

Using Sally J. Walker’s first chapter as a stepping stone, I studied her six basic identifiable elements for fiction to check if my screenplay contained the points she puts forward as being essential for a strong/engaging narrative (Walker, 2012, p.4&5). The first was to have a ‘*Main Character/Protagonist to Care About*’. I have attempted to

sympathetically write my main protagonist, Jon. Even though his motivations may be construed as selfish at the start of the screenplay, I have tried to write in both humour and empathy. Challenging Jon with a journey of self-realisation and enabling the audience to see both his childish/humorous side as well as his nurturing side through his relationships with other characters, especially Ed, has hopefully created a character that is compassionate and one which an audience roots for.

The second concerns itself with the '*Environment and Physical Setting*' of a film. I have set my film in the present day and, although my location is Montclair in New Jersey, I have made a conscious effort to make the setting and tone one that is relatable to audiences from any location. The geographical setting may be alien but the themes and relationships are universal. I have used New Jersey rather than New York as I wanted a grittier feel and New York is affiliated to many iconic movies. New Jersey is also the home to legendary musician Bruce Springsteen, a person from whom Jon draws much inspiration and is referenced throughout the screenplay. There are also cultural differences between the two states which create different types of people. I have heard it said on many occasions whilst staying in New York that New Jersey is to New York what Essex is to London. The poorer 'working' parts of New Jersey are less ghettoized and occupied by workers of traditional industry like plant workers and steel workers; the wealthiest parts of New Jersey are also more suburban family homes with much less of the hedonistic night life culture found in the Upper West Side of New York.

Although I have always had New Jersey as a location set firmly in my head, it is not impossible to change the location to suit any part of America, or indeed the world. The location could be adapted to fit into any working class area of the UK just as easily as the US, for example, changing the state from New Jersey to West Yorkshire or Detroit wouldn't change the dynamic of the screenplay to a great degree. As a writer I am always mindful of the commercial aspect of writing; being too precious about aspects which can be changed causing minimal impact on the story can be the difference between a script being rejected or optioned by a production company or studio.

Thirdly, Walker talks about having an '*Objective/Goal*'. The objective or goal becomes immediately apparent to the audience very early on in the movie. The driving force of the movie is Jon's quest to reunite the band, find the missing member and to work together to reach the common objective of playing a gig. The emotional goal of the film's lead

character is, however, to address his selfishness and make decisions which put others' needs before his own. Each of the central characters are chasing something, Jon is chasing the band, Stephen wants a wife, Ed wants security, Rob wants peace and Jason wants to play the drums.

The next criteria are '*Obstacles/Opposition to Goal THUS conflict*'. The obstacles and oppositions placed in front of the characters have a powerful effect on their psyche as well as their relationships with other characters. Here the opposition, or the antagonist, strays from the traditional idea of the bad guy. The obstacle preventing Jon from achieving his goal is Jon himself. By re-contextualising the motives and actions of the character of Rob due to past conflict and blame, he constantly perceives them to be negative and thus almost jeopardising his goal of reforming the band. The conflict here does not arise from a 'bad guy' but a personal vendetta complex. There are also obstacles which create conflict and opposition to the main protagonist's goal from various secondary characters and their hesitance to comply with Jon's plans due to career and family reasons. But Jon's two main obstacles come from the emotional obstacle of letting go of the past and the obstacle of his best friend's daughter being taken to hospital and his decision to cancel the gig.

All obstacles and low points are an opportunity for the lead character to reflect on his behaviour and grow. For example, the scene where Jon chastises himself in the car before going on a soul-searching drive of his old neighbourhood. His realisation about his selfish attitude and his need to change reinforces the fact that he is growing emotionally. In addition, his joyful emotional response to witnessing the young buskers, which represent his past and immediate future, enforces the notion that he could be as happy as they are if he swallows his pride.

The fifth identifiable element Walker goes on to describe is the '*Chain of Events*'. Flashbacks are used alongside the present day narrative to help the audience unravel the questions posed by the film as the two work together almost in a state of symbiosis. At key stages of the narrative, the flashback interject to reveal pertinent plot points which allow the audience to understand the emotional reticence of the main character to be drawn in to trusting Rob and then, later, his friends. The story and the characters evolve and learn through each conflict and plot twist.

Lastly is '*Unity*'. This is the point where every element and word contributes to the whole. Unity is ultimately reached when the band members resolve their conflicts with each other.

Jon has made his peace with Rob, Ed's child is no longer in danger, Stephen has the girl and Jason gets to play his drums. Each member now works towards fulfilling the ultimate goal of the film which is to play a gig in the bar. Jon also comprehends the sacrifices his friends have made to help him fulfil his dream, the importance of real friendship and the resolution of his long standing conflict with Rob. The scene outside the hospital where Jon is trying to persuade Ed to be reasonable and go inside also shows that Jon is capable of unselfish acts and that despite his childish tantrums and sardonic remarks, he cares deeply for his friends. "The bottom line in most stories is to leave the audience knowing that the protagonist at least realises he or she is better off (or worse off) for the experiences of the story and is on the road to changing and becoming a better (or worse) person as a result" (Duncan, 2006, p.20).

From the film's conception, I wanted to reveal the character's back story, and that of the band's original demise, using flashbacks as a framing device. The switching back and forth between past and present day until the past fully reveals itself nearer the climax of the film creates a kind of whodunit or, in this case, whydunit. Here the audience finally understands the reasons for Jon's reluctance to reconcile his anger towards Rob. I used flashbacks not only to tell a back story but also to create some dramatic tension. As it is revealed to the audience the reasons for the original breakup of the band, it becomes uncertain if these reasons will become impassable objects for Jon to clear in order to achieve his ultimate goal. "(...) audience attention is achieved by creating in them hope and fear about the outcome of a question: will a character get his or her objective?" (Gulino, 2006, p.64). In terms of character development, the flashback also grant me the opportunity to show the main characters as young men and create a shortcut for the audience to see how much, some of them, have grown and changed.

Also, from the beginning of the writing process, I wasn't sure if I wanted a happy ending. "The happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation" (Campbell, 2008, p.19). My original idea saw the crisis with Ed's family occurring much earlier in the film and the film ending with the band about to walk out onto the stage before the credits rolled. After several meetings about various endings with my tutor (including such things as fake death for tax reasons, a character in a wheelchair and a surprise sex change) I settled on moving Ed's crisis nearer the end of the film and creating a false unhappy ending with the band arriving back at the closed bar. Thus creating a moment where the audience assume the objective of the main character has not been achieved; "There's got to be, the Low Point, where we think

the hero has lost it all. Everything he's wanted the entire movie is destroyed" (Akers, 2008, p.55).

In many bromance movies (or most movies in general), the lead often becomes involved in some romantic liaison with 'the girl'; however, I didn't want there to be any amorous plot lines involving Jon and a female character. In this instance, I consider the band to be Jon's romantic lead. Throughout the film he treats the band much like one might treat the memory of an ex-girlfriend with whom one is still in love and peruses long after a break up. "In a romance, this is where the couple will fall in love, fall out of love, fall in love again and so on" (Edgar-Hunt et al, 2009, p.34). This is the same relationship Jon has with the idea of his band; he wants it, he jeopardises it, he wants it, he jeopardises it again and so on. He fantasises and romanticises about, what I've termed, the 'bandfriend', and daydreams about their time together and regrets their ended relationship. Like a drunken man, Jon is metaphorically calling his bandfriend at midnight to tell it that he still loves it and to see if there is a chance he can sleep with it one more time. Consequently, when Jon is forced to face Rob, the manifestation of their break up, it's not surprising that he finds it hard to deal with.

When it came to writing about the band, I didn't want to allow the audience to see or hear the band perform an actual song. My rationale for this came from not wanting the audience to categorise or make assumptions about the protagonists based on the kind of music they played. Although there are clues throughout the film, allusions to denim and heavy Bruce Springsteen references to name a couple. I was attempting to highlight that and although the band is a pivotal part of the film, it wasn't about the music but the journey to the music.

When writing, I didn't want Jon's motivation for the band reuniting to stem from some deep seated hatred of his life or a sense of being a failure or an underachiever. Although there are times during the film where Jon is seen to lament his present day life, he is still enjoying not having responsibilities or ties. In the end, his motives for the reunion are purely selfish, he wants the buzz of playing in the band again and he wants to spend more time hanging out with his friends. Ultimately, Jon is a teenage boy stuck in the body of a 40-year-old man who doesn't wholly comprehend why his friends complicate their lives with careers and families. In this respect, Jon's character is similar to the character Sydney Fife played by Jason Segel in John Hamberg's 2009 film, *I Love You, Man*. With his man cave and his guitar

and drum stage set up and his jerk off station; Sydney is unencumbered by adulthood and perplexed by the idea of commitment or appropriate adult behaviour.

This does not mean that the character of Jon is one dimensional or devoid of complexity. An audience wants to see more than a joke machine: “Your characters’ internal world needs to have desires, regrets, hopes, dreams, fears, failures, love, resentment and many other emotions which reveal who they are” (Ballon, 2005, p.57). The audiences do see his character growing up, facing his mistakes and becoming accountable for past decisions, but not every facet of his personality is explained to the audience but, as the writer, it is important for ‘me’ to know how and why he behaves the way he does in certain situations.

I toyed with the idea of Jon deviously trying to coerce the band members into reuniting permanently by him casually mentioning before their reunion gig that a record producer will be attending their show. The reasoning for this was to create more conflict between the band members throwing into doubt whether the band would play. On discussion with my tutor and other writer friends, I concluded that this would add both a sinister and desperate edge to Jon’s character which would make it hard for the audience to sympathise or empathise with him.

The character of Rob, in Jon’s eyes the antagonist of the film, is almost a diametric opposition to Jon’s character. Jon is a drinker but Rob rarely touches alcohol. Jon is selfish whereas Rob works with his community. Jon is sardonic where Rob is genuine and when Jon becomes hot tempered and irrational, Rob remains even toned. When I started to write the character of Rob, I made him a lot more hostile towards Jon. His character would make a point of rubbing in Jon’s face the fact that he got the girl, the house and the career. However, during the time I spent writing the first draft and getting to know my characters more, it became apparent that this kind of relationship didn’t suit the narrative or the other characters within the film. Why would any of them want Rob in the band if he was so spiteful? I started to change Rob’s character but kept in mind the idea of him as the antagonist. Although the antagonist traditionally has a specific role which is to be a counterpoint: “(...) in opposition to the protagonist in terms of how they are to reach his goal” (Duncan, 2006, p.15). I thought it would be interesting to develop Rob into a character which only Jon sees as the antagonist. To the rest of the characters in the film, Rob is seen to be going out of his way to help Jon achieve his goal. To Jon, however, his mere presence is perceived as a hindrance to it. The majority of the conflict between Jon and Rob comes from Jon’s skewed perception of Rob’s

actions. He re-contextualises almost everything Rob says and translates it into a personal attack. Rob is his past, his failures and his shortcomings and he needs to face his daemons before he can put them to rest. The past is responsible then for Jon not being able to see a future where Rob is a part of it. It is only when Jon has his epiphany in the hospital does he remove his blinkers and understand how unreasonable his behaviour has been.

When writing the other members of the band I strived to make each of the characters as individual as possible whilst, at the same time, remembering that there needs to be a commonality to them which has kept them friends for so long: “Each character’s voice – the way in which they speak, the words and expressions they use, the tone and the style of their language – should be distinctive and unique” (Kopperman, 2009, p.67). I have tried to make each character as distinctive as possible but, at the same time, being aware that the appeal of my genre is broad: “Characters must be defined within broad categories of consistency, change, being true to type and life, and force of characterization” (Lee, 2001, p.92).

One of my main concerns, when writing, was that the characters of Stephen and Ed might be too similar as they both have responsible careers and they are both traditionalists. The distinction I have made (other than Ed has the family that Stephen desperately wants) is in their reactions to social situations and their closeness to Jon. Jon and Ed have the archetypal homosocial ‘bromance’ relationship: “The idea of the bromance, defined primarily as a ‘man-crush’ or close, non-sexual relationship between two men” (Ryle, 2013, p.423). Throughout the film, the relationship between Ed and Jon fluctuates between that of husband and wife to father and son. Ed is capable of showing affection and reassurance when Jon needs it but, at the same time, can assume the paternal role and chastise or discipline him when his behaviour becomes unreasonable. Much like a wife or girlfriend, Ed is often dispatched to talk to Jon and Jon calls on him when he needs a sounding board. They support each other emotionally and there are a couple of instances during the film where they express their love for each other. The scene where Ed is drunk at the start, for example, sees Ed telling Jon that he loves him is mirrored at the end of the film at the hospital where Jon shouts his affections back to Ed as he runs through a busy hospital corridor.

Stephen’s character is, for the most part, straight-laced but this is more to do with his concern with how others perceive him. He is confident in the things he can control such as his career and his home life but can become flustered and insecure in social situations and does not handle conflict well. Jason, the only real ‘manly man’ of the group, is a man who still

enjoys hard work, cold beer and a string of one-night stands; he is Stephen's antitheses and when these two characters are together they morph into a comedic couple, bickering like they have been married for twenty years.

Second draft

It can be disheartening when the first draft of a script comes through with more notes than dialogue but that is the purpose of the first draft, to get your ideas on paper and then chip away to create something out of those ideas. As John Morely puts it: "Nobody gets it right first time, so don't waste your time trying. Apply your seat to your chair and get your ideas sketched out as quickly as possible" (Morely, 2008, p.233) or as Ernest Hemingway famously said: "The first draft of anything is shit."

The first problem that needed to be addressed from the first draft was the colossal length of it. In trying to incorporate every intrinsic relationship, situation and nuance of the story culminated in a screenplay which was well over three hours long. Knowing that the script needs to be culled, the act of culling can be difficult to manage. After all, these are characters and situations I have created and now would have to take a metaphorical blow torch and burn them to the ground. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch notably coined the phrase 'killing your darlings' which describes perfectly the ruthlessness a writer needs to exhibit when editing down the first draft, even if that means cutting out a line or scene which the writer feels is unusually good (Edgar-Hunt et al, 2009, p.100) But practicalities, common sense and my PhD supervisor all concluded that it needed to be shorter.

Rewrites are daunting - that's all there is to it. You have to be critical, you have to be cruel, and you have to memorize phrases like "It's for the good of the script" because the first thing you have to do is cut. If you have more than 120 pages of script, cut one-fourth of it. (Schellhardt, 2008, p.247)

Reading through my first draft again could be, at times, embarrassingly painful as so much of the dialogue was needless exposition. As Xander Bennett states: "Just as you cut a sentence down to its leanest, strongest form, so should you cut a scene down to its leanest, strongest emotion" (Bennett, 2012, p.158). Learning the importance of understanding that a film is a visual medium helps and means that a five-minute conversation about going to a bar is more effective if you simply show them going to the bar. "In contemporary film dramaturgy, exposition is not your friend. Film is an insistently present-tense medium" (Gallo, 2012, p.95).

One of the scenes that I was sorry to lose was between Stephen and Lauren. The scene involved them sitting on a bench in a park with Stephen opening up about his relationship with the other band members. Here was a flashback of his own as he told the story of “the night of fifteen beers”. The flashback was to his time at university when Jon had snuck in a slab of beers which he and Ed were drinking. After mocking Stephen for being dull, Jon bet Stephen that he couldn’t drink fifteen beers in a row; but if he could, Jon would pay for all of his books that semester. Stephen, unbelievably, took up the challenge but on the last swallow of the fifteenth beer he began to feel unwell and projectile vomited over most of the history section. Although they passed it off as food poisoning to the librarians, Stephen could never go into the library again.

I enjoyed that scene because it showed Stephen as something other than a fusty, straight-laced conservative. However, the scene didn’t move the narrative forward so it had to be cut, something described by Kate Wright as: “Superfluous action.” A scene has overall actions which oppose and reinforce the main character and so that which doesn’t advance the narrative will, eventually, be deleted. (Wright, 2004, p.214).

When re-reading my first draft with my red pen in hand, it seemed as though my original script was struggling with its identity. It had the buddy relationships and drunken escapades of a Hollywood bromance but also moments of dialogue heavy introspection more usually found in more independent, low budget movies. Somewhere along the way, I had lost the identity of my movie. Writing a recognised genre means that there is an established pattern that audiences recognise and this enables them to make sense of, and feel comfortable in, the confines of the story. In these conventions lay the key to stories reflecting the way people behave meaning a narrative can cross cultures and languages. Audiences expect a specific pattern of development within each genre construct and if that construct is not followed an audience will become bewildered:

[The audience] will stop taking in all other information, which the screenwriter wishes it to engage with, as it struggles to understand what is motivating the characters to carry on. In essence, the audience will try to work out what the story really is and what it is therefore about. (Parker, 1998, p.18)

Getting bogged down in the psychology of my characters, although understanding their motives is essential, meant that a lot of the light-hearted comedy was gone. I had to take a step back and look again at the conventions of my chosen genre and use that as a marker for the tone of my script. The confines of writing for a specific genre, as Ric Beairsto states, can

be helpful as: "...the narrow confines, can, in theory, force the screenwriter to work better than ever" (Beairisto, 2008, p.66). As a genre already contains preconceived ideas about narrative, character and tone (the girl getting the boy at the end of a Rom Com, the impossible hero destroying the aliens after a brief crisis of confidence in a Sci Fi etc.) it means that the writer is able to work within a familiar and solid environment. Genre, it could be said, becomes a scaffold which holds the walls (or conventions) steadfastly whilst the writer creates freely within them. As Robert McKee states, "Genre convention is a *Creative Limitation* that forces the writer's imagination to rise to the occasion" (McKee, 1994, p.91).

I went back and watched a selection of my favourite bromance movies and noted the tone and the focus shifts between narrative and character interplay. The gaping plot holes take a back seat to comedy in *The Hangover Part II* (2011), the simplistic narrative and obvious homosocial love story in *I Love You, Man* (2009) and the comedy slapstick in the relationship between Emmett and Austin in *Spies Like Us* (1985).

Taking out the needless dialogue and scenes which didn't move the story helped to trim my script by almost sixty pages and it was then I realised that I could have written a second screen play with the scenes that I had cut.

It was when reading the second draft I noticed that, for some reason, the character of Beth (Ed's wife) had become rather limp and lifeless. She was coming across as a put-upon, nagging wife whose only purpose seemed to be to enable Ed to get to a future plot point; this was far removed from the character I wanted her to be. Although not as quick witted and bolshie as Lauren (Stephen's girlfriend), I still wanted Beth to be more than just a struggling housewife to Ed and an exposition tool for the audience and in this incarnation I couldn't see why Ed would have married her. "I contend that if ever there is a choice to be made between character authenticity and information, authenticity should win" (Gallo, 2012, p.96).

Even though the film is a male-centric bromance genre, I wanted to include some female characters who were not there simply to look good or support the leading male characters which is something found in abundance within the buddy movie/bromance genre. In one of her articles, a blogger who goes by the name of NSB states that the inherent under use of female characters in the films of Judd Apatow are not strictly speaking misogynistic, "It's more like fairytale sexism. By that I mean an extremely crude simplification of women characters for the sake of the male protagonist and his ego" (NSB, 2007). The upbeat notion of unintentional sexism triumphing over overt sexism, however, still results in sexism

permeating the bromance genre, especially in Apatow's films. The nagging girlfriend and the prostitute in *The Hangover*, the girlfriend who wants to change her man in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* and the money grabbing trophy wife in *Talladega Nights*, are just a few examples. However, Apatow did address the imbalance when he extended the 'bromance' gross-out style genre to an all-female cast with *Bridesmaids*. The idea I struggled with was, as a female writer, should I go against what could be perceived as an aspect of genre (dominate male characters with token female characters) or should I create more rounded female characters and risk changing the tone of my screenplay? A bromance, by definition, is male-centric and I feared that, ultimately, the female characters would inevitably become watered down to make way for male character/narrative screen time.

After looking at her character biography I employed a character bio exercise from Susan Kouguell's book:

Your characters can confide in you. They can tell you their secret thoughts about the other characters, their hopes and dreams, their likes and dislikes, what angers and pleases them, their first loves, their favourite books, their favourite songs and food, and so on. (Kouguell, 2006, p.89).

I began asking myself questions about her personality: What was her favourite childhood toy? What would be the first object she would rescue from a burning building? What is her ideal night out? By asking these questions of my character, I began to get a deeper understanding of who she was and was able to translate that into dialogue which suggested a strong and reasonable woman dealing with the challenges of raising her first child rather than being just a nagging housewife.

Although I had cut my screenplay down, it was still too long; approximately 2 hours. At that point, I was too close to my script to see what else could be trimmed so I sent this draft to Max Kinnings, my PhD supervisor, who would be able to offer more objective criticism to my work.

Third Draft

The meeting with my supervisor raised more questions about dialogue and length. Cutting scenes and long conversations from what they were was an improvement but more still had to be culled and the aim was to get the screenplay down to 95-105 pages long. Conversations which I thought were reinforcing the relationship between Ed and Jon, on closer inspection, were simply covering the same ground as previous conversations.

One sticking point between us was the character of Larry, the bar owner. In my head, although Larry was the catalyst for the group getting back together (after he announces his retirement from the bar), I never envisioned him as a main character.

My supervisor proposed I turn the character of Larry into more of a father figure, a person whom the main characters wanted to please and felt some emotional attachment to. After some deliberation, I decided not to explore this character path simply because I didn't want Jon's motive to be anything other than selfish. If I had made Larry a father figure, I believe it would have opened up another unnecessary plot line between him and Jon and I would have had to have written more scenes with him as he nurtured the boys.

After spending so much time alone with a piece of work, hearing somebody else talk about it, give criticism to it and put forward changes can be challenging. The majority of writers work alone but the process of getting a script to screen has to be collaborative and I am not alone in my reticence in allowing third parties to view my work in progress. Many writers, much like only children, find it hard to adjust to working with others but it is necessary in order to create a piece of work suitable for a network or a specific audience. "To survive, screenwriters have to learn how to use the collaborative process to their best advantage. They have to learn how to hustle". (Stempel, 1991, p.228).

I decided to keep Larry in as a grumpy but affable character who just wants to retire and reluctantly accepts the idea of the boys playing his bar sits comfortably with the character interplay more effectively; keeping him more as an the Odd Couple's (1968) grouchy Oscar Madison rather than a polite, try hard Felix Ungar. That is not to say that there was a refusal to evolve the character a little more, or that I had not compromised elsewhere, it was just that I felt confident in my decision to keep Larry as a significant but background character. Rachel Ballon states: "...use your intuition, your good judgement and your faith in yourself and let common sense tell you what to do when the situation presents itself. And above all, don't lose confidence or belief in yourself or your writing. (Ballon, 2005, p.154).

What was interesting and helpful was the discussion my supervisor and I had about the character of Stephen. Already written as a fusty, conservative, straight-laced character, he picked up on a few idiosyncrasies which could be explored further. In the opening montage, Stephen is seen in his pressed pyjamas laying out a suit on the bed for work before going into the shower. It was suggested that we take his neatness to an almost OCD level and have him unable to leave things until they were perfect.

With this in mind, I started tweaking his scenes; the scene where Stephen and Lauren speak in the music room, for example. Here, Stephen becomes flustered and bumps into Lauren's desk causing him to disturb the items on it. Instead of leaving, Stephen stops to put things right, then alters them so they are all straight, then makes sure all the items are parallel to each other and in neat clean lines. It is here that I want the audience to see, above all else, that Stephen needs order and control even if that makes him look even more self-conscious and awkward than usual.

The character that needed to be more prominent was Jason. It was pointed out that Jason, although not the focus of the story, would be the character the majority of the male audience would warm to the most. A character with little or no filter between his brain and his mouth, who is unattached and sexually active with multiple partners, enjoys winding up Stephen and epitomises the rock and roll do-what-you-want-when-you-want attitude to life.

I had to make more of Jason, ramp up his outlandish statements and actions and include him in more scenes. For this I drew inspiration from John Belushi in both *Animal House* (1978) and *The Blues Brothers* (1980). I was trying to create a character which an audience would warm to and who would act as the balance for Stephen's straight-laced character. This opposition of character is showcased best in the scene where Jason and Stephen have to share a bed together at Rob and Sam's house. Stephen with his neatly ironed pyjamas was forced to share a bed with Jason, wearing nothing apart from some nasty looking underwear. The idea that the level of uncomfortable-ness that Stephen is feeling becomes heightened by Jason's teasing and willingness to go the extra mile to make Stephen feel ill at ease reinforces the characters and creates a kind of comedy double act. As Lesley Brown states:

Opposites provide instant incongruity: big and small, happy and sad, funerals and weddings. This is why double acts often exaggerate the physical differences between them: for instance, Laurel was thin and Hardy was fat. Casting of Only Fools and Horses must have been helped by the eight inch height difference between David Jason and Nicholas Lyndhurst. (Brown, 2011, p.3).

One problem I had encountered was how to format phone conversations as various books and screenwriting websites seemed to have their own ideas on formatting. It can be frustrating to read a large amount of texts on the same subject and to find that there seems to be a majority agreement but no hard and fast rules for some aspects of script writing. Some encourage a detailed scene description: "The lazy writer will describe a location as if

punching in the numbers” (Golding, 2012, p.295); some don’t, “So how do you create a sense of space? I can tell you how *not* to do it: by globbing down enormous chunks of descriptive text all over your lovely screenplay” (Bennett, 2012, p.38). Some tell you to include transitions: “To go from Point A to Point B in a screenplay requires making transitions that connect the two” (Field, 2003, p.337); some say to avoid them: “A popular misconception shared by novice screenwriters is that every scene must end with a transition” (Kukoff, 2005, p.12). For my phone conversation, some favoured putting the phone conversation in the slugline, others favoured a new scene heading for each time a character spoke. My supervisor and I agreed to put an INTERCUT into the heading followed by a V.O or (into phone) for the reader to make sense of the location of each of the characters during the conversation.

Fourth draft

The aim of the fourth draft was to make some structural changes, move some scenes around and keep my script down to approximately 100 pages. To achieve this with the previous draft a lot of unnecessary scenes had been cut as well as some which I loved but knew had to be cut for time.

The character of Jason was coming more to the forefront but there were still issues with the character of Larry. My supervisor now wanted to make him more of a wise-cracking character rather than the reluctant old bar owner I had created. A compromise was reached in that I would flesh out Larry’s character but still leave him as the catalyst to Jon’s decision to get the band reunited rather than the linchpin. I found that writing for a secondary character was, at times, harder than writing for the main character. Philip Parker compartmentalises the secondary elements/characters into four types of situation comedy: the romantic, the family, the institution and the loner. In the 'romantic', the secondary characters take sides in main character disputes which are something Larry never gets involved with; in the 'family' context, the secondary character takes sides to solve disputes which, again, are not Larry’s purpose within this movie. As Larry is certainly not the 'loner', for a loner is a secondary character who blocks the main character from achieving his or her goal; the 'institution' is where Larry happily resides. Here the secondary character acts as the source of reason in the face of the main characters plans (Parker, 1998, p.31). Larry is the source of Jon’s inspiration, the kick in the allegorical backside he needs to fulfil his dream. I believe that, eventually, the character of Larry was fleshed out as much as needed. He became more than just an

exposition for the plot or a catalyst for action; he stood as a rounded character in his own right with his own personality. Even though his part in the movie is small, it is still significant to the narrative.

Structurally there were still some issues. As mentioned earlier, coming from a background of sketch writing and writing pilots, my job as a writer was, metaphorically, more construction than design. “If you write for the studios, you are basically a contractor and they have asked you to build them a house and they will want certain things to go certain places” (Lennon, 2014). With a history of being told not to be too descriptive as the director will be handling the visuals, learning to write the action was the trickiest part. For my fourth draft I would need to use more visual language as well as giving the reader of the script ‘white space’. Having only heard that expression when I was a web designer, it was explained to me that script readers like white space and that no paragraph during the description or action should be more than a few lines. “In screenwriting, there should be a lot of white space.” Melissa Samaroo goes on to say: “A good screenwriter must strike the right balance between the amount of dialogue on the page and the description” (Samaroo, 2013, p.39-41).

The opening montage was constructed poorly and so my supervisor could not visualise it. Having neglected to indicate that the opening montage would be silent with a song playing over the titles, the script came back with an instruction to add drama and dialogue. What I wanted from the opening montage was a snapshot of each character’s lives played over the opening titles to give the audience a short cut to understanding their backgrounds and some of their personalities.

Stephen with his pressed pyjamas and neatly laid out suits, driving a new SUV with a sensible haircut tells the audience that he is meticulous and organised. Jason’s shower scene with a beautiful woman alongside his ramshackle house and scruffy appearance tells the audience that he is a womaniser with a laissez-faire attitude towards appearance. Ed’s montage scenes focus around his family and his child. His forgetfulness and appearance tells the audience that he is a new father and a hard-working family man. The fact that Jon spends most of the montage in bed followed by a mad dash to get to work on time lets the audience know that Jon is a bit of a waster who will do what is required of him, but with minimal effort

The relationship between Rob and Jon needed some work. I was finding it hard to strike a balance between resentment and spite, meaning that some of the conversations

between the two seemed bitter and out of character for Jon. Ultimately, I wanted to bring across to the audience that Jon was angry about having his dream crushed by Rob but that anger was almost childlike, like a teenager being grounded and unable to see their favourite band. The problem I was having was some of the dialogue and action between them made Jon look vindictive and petty.

There were scenes in a montage where Jon would play tricks on Rob such as putting pepper in his sandwich or making him trip over his guitar cable. In an earlier scene, Jon and Rob are playing guitar during the rehearsal and Jon aggressively pushes his guitar neck against Rob's until Rob falls over. I wanted to communicate the anger felt by Jon towards Rob but, with these scenes, Jon had become mean spirited. This character development wasn't adding to the narrative and would prevent the audience from identifying with him or rooting for him to succeed. Taking Kate Wright's 'deeds and behaviour' as a template, the deeds each character performs aims to advance the plot and story: "Deeds are related to outer story goals." As my outer story goals were not to have the group disband because of his behaviour, this had to change. "Behaviour, in contrast, reveals the inner nature and inner conflict of the characters" (Wright, 2004, p.176). I also didn't believe that the inner nature of Jon was to be that vindictive so an alternative scene had to be written.

The introduction of Rob also needed to happen earlier in the script as the first conversation the band has about him doesn't occur until an hour or so into the movie. The character of Rob, the idea of him rather than his physical presence, needed to be established much earlier in the script. This is one of the main sources of conflict within the screenplay and waiting an hour for any sort of conflict makes for a flat movie.

Conflict is what heightens interest from an audience and charges the air with tension by transforming boring events into compelling moments. It's what audiences want in a story, even though in real life, we try to avoid conflict and live as peaceful and conflict free as possible. (Iglesias, 2011, p.137).

The audience needs to understand why Jon isn't happy about Rob's name being mentioned or thrilled at the thought of having him rejoin the band; they need to understand that, not only is there a conflict between these two characters, but why that conflict is there and how it advances the narrative. It is important for the audience to appreciate Jon's point of view and that his anger comes from a place of disappointment and disenchantment rather than from a place of malicious pettiness.

Final Draft

There were tweaks and minor re-writes between the last draught and this one and so, ultimately, the draft feels leaner and quicker with only a few small structural and grammatical changes needed. The rest of the notes for this draft were to add some more jokes, have a look at the ending and to rethink the band practice conflict scene between Rob and Jon.

The scene between Jon and Rob which had changed from the previous draft from a malicious and, at times, physical conflict during a scene of duelling guitars, to a scene where Jon asks Rob to take a few steps to the side until, eventually, he ‘accidentally’ falls over. I thought the scene was a bit more playful than its predecessor but, even though it was less vitriolic, it still showed Jon to be too mean spirited. Rather than think of another way for them to engage in a physical bout of one-upmanship, I decided to cut the entire scene as it still wasn’t adding to or advancing the story of the movie. Reading the script from a few scenes ahead to a few scenes after proved that the flow of the script worked just as well without it.

If in doubt, cut it out. Learn to trust your intuition; if you get a feeling that something isn’t working for some reason, you don’t have to fret endlessly over it – get rid of it and see whether what you’ve written plays better with the cut. (Dimaggio, 2007, p.43)

The addition of a few more jokes was a difficult note to note to work to. Writing a comedy can be difficult because once you’ve read the same joke over and over again you forget why something was funny in the first place. Add to this the idea that comedy is subjective and the phrase ‘make this funnier’ becomes a creative Everest. “...the individual appreciation of comedy is more specialized than writing it. What makes one man laugh may elicit a groan from another” (Yoakem, 1958, p.47). The humour had to come from the character’s interaction and the best two characters for comedy, as mentioned earlier, are Stephen and Jason.

After re-reading the script I decided to make a fundamental change. As I was still uncomfortable with the premise that the band members would unite for money I changed it to a fund raiser to help Wyatt with his medical bills. The reasoning behind this change was that the idea of the men purely doing a gig for the money didn’t fit in with their characters. None of them, with the possible exception of Jason, seemed the type to waver their oppositions for cash. However, as Ed is a family man and Stephen also works with children, the idea of a

charity fund raiser to help a sick child would be more likely to sway them. Ed because he has a small child and Stephen can be seen to improve his standing within the community and, in some small way, use it to impress Lauren further.

The charity also gives Jon the opportunity to use guilt to get what he wants. A sick child is an excellent cover to emotionally blackmail his friends. The sticking point was that friends may forgive being conned out of money but using a fake child to get what you want may be more difficult. I changed the conversation on the steps between Ed and Jon, where Ed instantly forgives Jon for the made up cash, to Ed becoming angry at him. Jon, here, can defend his actions to Ed (and the audience) so it is made clear that he did not have malicious in his intent. Later in the film where it is revealed there is no child, the urgency and gravitas of the situation and environment of that revelation (Ed's daughter being rushed to the hospital) offers a perspective to Jon, and the rest of the friends, in which they can express their anger but also allow some for some compassion. I would also hope that I have written the relationships between the friends as strong enough to overcome this hurdle as well as highlighting that Jon being charismatic enough to talk his way out of most sticky situations.

I also changed Rob's character to be less of a hippy and more of a family man. By giving Jon less ammunition (that is, to make Rob just an ordinary man who enjoys music and not a new age target of obvious ridicule) his annoyance at Rob in the present day can be seen as unfounded. I have also included a scene of Jon walking in on Rob having sex with Sam just as he was going to ask her out. This underscoring of Jon's bad timing and losing something he wanted will also be the event that leads Jon to act on his impulses for the rest of his life. Although having Rob end up with Sam is hurtful, Rob leaving the band just as they were getting successful is what Jon is angry about the most. For this reason, I have played down the Sam and Jon narrative. It is also referenced in Ed's angry speech to Jon on the steps that he's been acting like a child over a woman he barely knew and a band which was coming to an end anyway. This makes Jon realise that the memories of his band were distorted and that there was never a guarantee that they would ever have continued or would have been successful.

One of the downsides to editing and cutting from the first to the final draft was the loss of some scenes and interactions between Jason and Stephen. These scenes highlighted the wild and comically destructive character of Jason and so it was frustrating having to sacrifice and marginalise him. It was difficult because with his free speaking unpredictable

nature, he was my favourite character to write, however, no matter how painful it was to cut his antics they only reinforced the character of Jason and did not move the narrative forward. The story had to come first.

One other small addition, thanks to the input of my supervisor, was at the scene in the diner where Jon tries to persuade them to reform the band. As everybody gets up to leave, I originally had Jason patting Stephen on the back in an overtly friendly way just to annoy him. However, to highlight how little regard Jason has for Stephen's OCD-like standard of neatness, an extra joke was added; now as Jason pats Stephen on the back, Stephen spends a good few moments making sure his tie is straight, his buttons align and there are no crumbs on his shirt. As Stephen turns to leave, we see that Jason has, in fact, slapped a syrup covered waffle onto the back of Stephen's jacket. The comedy here comes from the character opposites as well as the fact that the audience knows we are building up to something with the double pay of the punch line and having been let in on a joke of which the character is unaware. As Andrew Horton puts it: "Comedy involves a playful and imaginative tension between the constructed and the discovered, between the 'made' and the 'found'" (Horton, 2000, p.11).

I'd always had very specific ideas in mind for the ending of the movie and apart from one short discussion at the very start of the writing process, my supervisor agreed with what I had visualised. The men were to step out on stage, play one bar or an introduction to a song and then the film would end. As I mentioned earlier, I didn't want the audience to actually hear any of their songs. During our discussion about the fourth draft an idea was put forward that, as Wyatt was the mystery figure in most of the band's pictures (meaning Jon could put him forward as a believable character for his fake story), maybe we could end the film on a shot of him standing at the bar during the final show.

At first, I thought this idea was corny but, looking at the constructs of my genre, a little corniness now and then seemed acceptable. I think the addition of the Wyatt character, sat at the back of the bar, sipping and wearing a faded Thunder Roads T-shirt wraps the film up nicely. After, unwittingly, being the subject of Jon's lies and deceit, it turns out that he really DID want to hear the band one more time.

One of the biggest challenges of writing the screenplay was the struggle between my academic research on representation within the genre and writing a 'sellable' screenplay for that audience and market. For example, the imbalance of bi-racial homosocial bromance

movies in the contemporary genre field is noticeable, however, I didn't feel this issue would be something that could be overtly addressed in my writing. A decision to conspicuously create a character from another race/culture and to address that directly within my script may have resulted in further stereotypes or non-believable characterisation. It is one thing to be a woman and to write from a male perspective (especially having submerged myself within that culture from an early age), it is another to be a white woman and to write from an African-American or Asian-America view point. That being said, there is no mention of race in my screenplay which means that if a casting director or production company wanted to cast a diverse range of ethnicities they would be free to do so. As a writer, it is not my place to make those decisions. So whilst the screenplay isn't blatantly ethnically diverse there is no restriction on which actors from which backgrounds could play the roles.

Similarly, the conflict between writing a male-centric screenplay and understanding the poor representation of women in the genre was also, at times, a struggle. Whilst empathetic to the male audience and genre expectations in terms of the female characters (that is to say, the women adding very little other than proof of heterosexuality, an object for sexualisation or an object of derision) I was hoping to utilise them more in the narrative and not leave them on the side-lines. The original draft had more scenes with Beth and with Lauren where their personality was more explicit and they brought their own back stories to the narrative. Similarly with Sam, even though she is the object of Jon's desire, I wanted to make her more than just a link or a catalyst. As my script was condensed down to a more realistic and commercially viable one hour forty minutes I found that a significant amount of backstory and dialogue from the female characters was being cut due to time and movement of the story. This is something I feel a little disappointed with. Coming to terms with the idea that whilst writing for the genre I had fallen into the same trap as other male writers – writing the female protagonists as conduits for the male protagonist's story – I felt, commercially speaking and genre speaking, it was the right decision. I still maintain, however, that the character of Lauren, although making herself sexually available to Stephen, retains much of her humour, independence and individuality.

Conclusion

Not to sound too much like a Doogie Howser MD closing credit sequence, the journey over the past three years from initial idea to final draft has been a steep learning curve. The variety of books, talks, videos and journal material available for new screenwriters is encouraging and I've learned to shake off all of the bad habits I'd accrued over the past fifteen years as a contribution/comedy writer. I tried to read a wide variety of books, not just books about feature film writing (although these were the majority), I read books on digital writing, comedy writing, writing for television, theatre, poetry, gender, genre and history. Each author gave me an insight into different perspectives on presenting creative writing.

Learning the structure and formatting techniques has been invaluable. These have given me a foundation on which to properly build my creative writing upon and, hopefully, start writing more feature length scripts.

I think the evolution of my screenplay shows this learning curve and I am happy with the story, characterisation and tone of my script. Now is a battle between the good of the screenplay and a perfectionist's need to constantly tinker with a product that, for all intents and purposes, is finished. "Sheer perfection will always seem just out of reach. The best that can be achieved is a close approximation." (Shirley, n.d)

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From Buddy Movie to Bromance

**An essay studying masculinity and homosocial behaviour
between male protagonists within mainstream, male-centric
American buddy movies**

Introduction: Homosociality and the Bonds of Male Friendship

Before studying the homosocial nature of the bromance, there must be a clear definition of the term 'homosocial'. Although the term is thought to have been popularised by author Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), it is widely acknowledged that the term was first coined and discussed in Jean Lipman-Blumen's debate of the social institutions of occupational segregation in the 1976 journal *Towards a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles*. In this journal, Lipman-Blumen defines homosociality as the enjoyment and/or preference for same sex companionship, distinguishing itself from the term homosexual and predominantly used in non-sexual interactive relationships between members of the same sex. "The basic premise of this homosocial view of sex roles suggests that men are attracted to, stimulated by and interested in other men" (Lipman-Blumen, 1976, p.15). Robert Kolker (2011) discussed the idea that the 'buddy' is, in truth, just an expansion of the age old cultural cliché of male bonding, "a situation in which men can fantasize about being released from the repressions imposed by the company of women." Men even enjoyed close friendships in previous centuries such as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where they could be openly affectionate, speak with sentimentality and even hold hands in public and many friendships shared "a similar intensity as romantic relationships between men and women" (McKay and McKay, 2008). For example, President Abraham Lincoln of the United States of America (USA) shared a bed with his close friend Joshua Speed when they lived together in Illinois (Greif, 2009, p.24). The nineteenth century was the last point in history where male/male friendships proffered little reaction or scandal as up to this point in time the concept of homosexuality, as we know it, wasn't prevalent. Even the term 'homosexual' did not exist before the nineteenth century. "Sex between men did occur, but it was not always labelled deviant, and it was not an issue on many people's radar" (Greif, 2009, p.24). This meant that men were free to have affectionate relationships without fear of being labelled until the turn of the nineteenth century when psychologists started analysing homosexuality. "When that happened, men in America started to become much more self-conscious about their relationships with their buds and traded the close embraces for a stiff pat on the back" (McKay and McKay, 2008). The twentieth century's Industrial Revolution and the increased competition for jobs meant that male friendship also suffered as potential friends were now competition, this prevented the development of close homosocial bonds as the cutthroat nature of business becomes complicated when the competitor is a close friend. "The world was an urban jungle and the

man who looked out for himself was the man who was going to eat” (McKay and McKay, 2008). But as families became settled and suburban hamlets were established, this created an environment where men could establish male-bonding activities, “the golf course, the front yard, and work. Instead of basing friendships on an emotional bond, men in the twentieth century based their friendship around activities” (McKay and McKay, 2008).

Filmic representations of the male ‘buddy’ fantasy allows the male viewer to indulge in adventure, frat house style joking around and the marginalisation of women with the absence of anyone questioning their sexuality. “The ‘buddy’ complex views sexuality as an obstacle to manly acts. But this denial of sexuality carries a covert admission of the possibilities of homosexuality, which, of course, is inadmissible (Kolker, 2011, p.280). Michael Messner, a sociologist who has studied many aspects of gendered friendship within the sporting arena, writes about the construction of friendship and masculinity within our culture. He states that there is a general consensus amongst those who have studied gender within the USA that friendships between women are perceived to be more meaningful, with the suggestion that female friendships are intimate and long-lasting garnering a high consensus of opinion. The same study also found that, in contrast, male friendships were perceived to be superficial, unsatisfying and more likely to resemble acquaintances than full friend status. Some commentators have stated that the reasoning behind the apparent shallow nature of male friendships may stem from childhood where males are, at times, prevented from developing the requisite emotional skills needed to forge strong friendship bonds and instead are encouraged to focus on competition and success, “men have been taught to be highly homophobic, emotionally inexpressive and competitive ‘success objects’” (Messner, 2001, p.253). Don Kulick and Deborah Cameron wrote that a society which is immersed in a strong heteronormative, male-dominated, ideology potentially creates a problem and although male bonds are highly valued they can also be problematic. Male bonding within fraternities, male only clubs, within the sports arena and at work play a crucial role in the maintenance of power hierarchies but these are also highly problematic because “male homosociality tends to raise the spectre of homosexuality (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p.69). As Cynthia Fuchs notes, this conspicuous expectation society associates with masculinity situates the male/male friendships between the poles of homoeroticism and homophobia with males enjoying the company and emotional bond but wary of the inference. “Caught inside conventions of ‘male bonding’ and outside racist, heterosexist norms, the buddy polemic can only implode” (Fuchs, 1993, p.195).

There has, however, been a steady increase in men's ability and confidence in engaging affectionately with other men, unimpeded by the fear of being labelled a homosexual and this 'coming out of the platonic cupboard' could be, in some way, due to the rise in homosexual representations within the mass media leading to their normalisation and the crossing over of this attitude into heterosexual culture. According to Dainty Smith, this could also be responsible for more open friendships between homosexual and heterosexual men in what has been coined a 'hobromance' (Smith, 2012, p.17). The bromance or buddy film accomplishes and dissolves any anxiety within a 'homosocialised and homosocialising society' and by presenting relationships between both heterosexual and homosexual or heterosexual and heterosexual men "rigorously polices against any erotic dimension to those bonds" (Greven, 2009, p.137). When the mass media is seen to be normalising and desexualising these bromance and hobromances, audiences, too, contextualise and normalise their own friendships without fear of misinterpreted sexual orientation. There are many examples of close-knit homosocial male relationships in the American cinema. Pre-1950s, Laurel and Hardy, for example, shared a bed with no hint of sexual orientation being questioned (something Morecombe and Wise would later emulate on their popular, eponymous British television programme). The Marx Brothers, Abbott and Costello, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope all participated in the expression of close and open friendships. Each decade appears to develop its own take on the buddy/bromance movie as well as adapting the model to become more relevant to its contemporary audience, each one inching closer to bringing men into an arena where they are not only indulging their emotional side with other men but comfortably displaying heteronormative traits and qualities to balance their relationships with their male counterparts.

If homosocial behaviour in bromance movies is viewed from a functionalist perspective, a macro-level idea of society shaping social structures, it could be argued that the modern day bromance is a device used to quell anxiety through normalising mutual male affection within a society which is becoming more and more accepting of open homosexuality in its culture. Modern bromance, then, can be seen as a construction created to redefine the nature of male heterosexual friendships rather than representing a new form of male relationship creating a distinction between homosocial (non-sexual intent) and homosexual (sexual intent). By reinforcing the loving, caring and camaraderie aspects of classic friendship as staunchly heterosexual it is "quelling any social anxiety regarding

heterosexual friendship in the light of heightened social sensitivity to homosexuality” (Cameron, 2010).

However, male studies has a tendency to concentrate on the localised experiences of homosocial enclaves which underscore how men’s relational experiences are affected by the social organisations between men (Flood, 2008, p.339). There has certainly been a shift in the cultural landscape away from the competitive nature of heterosexual male relationships of the past which have been reflected in language and within the media. The alpha-male has journeyed past the metrosexual and can now be both masculine and emotionally open to other men without fear of reprisals or questions about his sexuality. The idea of the traditional ‘male’ is now being replaced with a new man ‘construction’ which is imbued with basic ideas of feminism and who strives to structure relationships with women and children on an equal, non-aggressive, footing (MacKinnon, 2003, p.13). It is almost a ‘psychological truism’ that people will identify with others who are perceived to hold high status and possess the resources and power in any given situation and this is true when adapted to the real relationships experienced between two men. Men can, and commonly do, seek satisfaction for most of their needs from other men. “They can derive satisfaction for their intellectual, physical, political, economic, occupational, social, power, and status needs - and in some circumstances their sexual needs - from other men” (Lipman-Blumen, 1976, p.16).

This recognised normalisation of male homosocial intimacy with its monogamous parallels to marriage is seen as problematic to some who take issue with the mimicking of traditional, opposite gendered relationship forms as a negative aspect of the platonic male/male relationship. This disapproval stems from the idea that the intimacy within the male/male relationship can be viewed as an alternative to traditional marriage which may lead to more availability and acceptance of these kinds of relationships. The possibility exists that men may be avoiding sharing their intimate feelings with their female partners by choosing instead to share those feelings within the context of a mutual homosocial environment and thus shun marriage altogether. Encouraging heteronormativity disguised as masculinity, they are encouraging “exclusivity and dyadic pairings” as well as mimicking “marriage and its concomitant burdens” (Chen, 2012, p.241). As more movies are made where male protagonists delay the ideas of marriage indefinitely and escape commitment in order to ‘hang out’ with friends they create, Adam Kotsko calls them “overgrown adolescents”. Instead of committing to women, they are committing to other males, propping

up a system which allows “reluctant men to indulge in habits associated with the awkward status of overgrown adolescence.” He goes on to identify that these habits which form the basis of male bonding are not traditionally accepted forms of male activities such as sports and drinking beer but instead the habits normally associated with teenagers thus creating a culture of grown men indulging in “all the marijuana, video games and incompetent pick-up lines that status implies” (Kotsko, 2010, p.47-49).

In the more recent past men were forced, economically and through conflict, to spend a large proportion of their time away from women, they went to war or worked long hours whilst their wives were at home tending to the family. Wives were looked upon as a family obligation rather than a partner for social interaction and so spheres of male bonding were created. The act of male bonding, according to the 2007 online article *The Importance of Male Bonding in Society* written by Murad Abel, has important implications for family and is a key component in society, the profundity of which could affect future generations of children. These spheres of male bonding are being family, fraternity and friendship.

To protect and provide for the family being the most important obligations for the majority of men, this unravelling of the traditional nuclear family could also mean the shifting of social norms in the family structure, particularly in the raising of children, with the male status becoming lowered within the hierarchy of the family. The shifting of the focus concerning rigid heteronormative parental roles, as a percentage of women now work and provide for the family, is, perhaps, allowing men more time and freedom to socialise with other men thus sanctioning strong homosocial friendship bonds to be formed. The importance placed on the role of family can be found in Richard Donner’s film *Lethal Weapon* (1987) where Police Sergeant Murtaugh (Danny Glover) exemplifies the ideological father role at the head of a secure family unit whereas Police Sergeant Riggs (Mel Gibson) is alone with no family due to the death of his wife. Murtaugh embodies the traditional perception of the stereotyped husband. He jokes about his wife’s bad cooking, he is fiercely protective of his daughters and he strives to be an excellent role model for his son. Riggs, conversely, is so distraught about the loss of his family (wife) that he becomes lost, depressed and, at one point, teeters on the edge of suicide. This hopelessness is replicated by the character Felix Ungar (Jack Lemmon) in Gene Sak’s *The Odd Couple* (1968) who, wounded by the breakup of his marriage, also attempts suicide.

The idea of a male fraternity is far from being a recent invention with the Halliwell

Manuscript or Regius Poem making reference to Freemasonry as early as 1390. Secret orders, university fraternities, hobby groups as well as social sporting and drinking activities are common place and, can be said, to give men an outlet and a purpose. As Lillian Rubin states: “Men tend to distance themselves from each other by organizing their time together around an activity that is ‘external’ to themselves” (Rubin, 1983, p.135). These social activities may provide men with an opportunity to form bonds which would have been formed by previous generations during military service. Although set in an army hospital, Robert Altman’s *M*A*S*H* (1970) demonstrates how most problems are worked out by the main protagonists Trapper (Elliott Gould) and Hawkeye (Donald Sutherland) over games of golf or whilst drinking home-brewed liquor. The entire premise of Todd Phillips’ *Old School* (2003) revolves around close friends trying to recapture the glory days of their college fraternity, staying up late, drinking copious amounts of alcohol and performing idiotic dares and initiations. Ernesto Vasquez del Aguila writes that alcohol, most definitely, is seen as the glue that holds most male bonding sessions together. There are, as he states, questions raised as to the masculinity of those who do not ‘keep up’ with the rest of the drinking pack. “Alcohol constitutes the space for negotiations between dominant and subordinate masculinities, between the ones able to ‘hold their liquor’ and those who are ‘cabeza de pollo’ (chicken head)” (Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, p.128).

Finally, in his article, Abel goes on to state that men still need a place where they can talk to other men in order to gain a better perspective on their issues, and to listen to friends and associates in a number of spheres such as sporting events and gambling establishments. Importantly, this form of male bonding makes males feel appreciated by their counterparts (Abel, 2007). The themes of drinking, gambling alongside acts of male friendship and appreciation are peppered throughout the Todd Phillips’ film, *The Hangover* (2009), where the ‘wolf pack’ head to Vegas to celebrate the impending marriage of their friend Doug (Justin Bartha). Not only do they wake up with the mother of all hangovers, they need to work together to find their friend, culminating in the men gambling and winning the money needed at the blackjack table. These themes are also the mainstay of Lewis Milestone’s *Rat Pack* movie *Ocean’s 11* (1960) which, along with its 2001 remake, were set in the same city, consisting of the same themes of hard-drinking, hard-gambling and criminal activity.

Increasing academic study into the inexpressive nature of men may have contributed to a widespread expansion of the idea that femininity associates itself with intimacy. The

consequences of this feminism/intimacy results in males refraining from labelling their own friendships as intimate in an attempt to retain a more populist image of traditional dominant masculinity regardless of the realities of their intimate pattern of everyday homosocial relationships (Kaplan and Rosenmann, 2013, p.3). The shift in how comfortable open gestures and adoptions of ‘female’ traits by men are treated within films can be demonstrated by taking, as an example, the characters of Felix Ungar and Oscar Madison (Walter Matthau) from movie *The Odd Couple* (1968) and the characters of Phil Wenneck (Bradley Cooper), Stu Price (Ed Helms) and Alan Garner (Zach Galifianakis) from *The Hangover* (2009). In *The Odd Couple* (1968), Felix is the butt of many jokes by Oscar about his adoption of the widely accepted traditional female traits of cleaning and cooking. In one particular scene when asked by a friend what happened to his usually messy apartment, Oscar replies, “It’s been given the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.” Earlier in the film, we also see Oscar threaten to call his poker buddy’s wife to inform her that her husband is in Central Park wearing a dress. The movie is peppered with digs and insults stemming from the reinforcement of the negative connotations consequential to characters when adopting feminine behavioural qualities. In *The Hangover* (2009), however, after an exhausting caper involving some traditional movie ‘masculine’ action comprising of fighting, car chases and alcohol consumption, Stu vents his frustration towards Phil about being unfairly treated by the police. As he walks off to get a soda, his friend Phil casually says to Alan, “My man doesn’t shut up”. What is interesting about this scene is how Phil makes no attempt to deride his friend for choosing a soda instead of a more masculine cold beer and also Alan who makes no attempt to ridicule Phil for referring to Stu as ‘my man’. In fact, Alan uses this moment to open up about his own feelings of fear and distress as well as bringing up the death of his grandfather. The casual nature by which Phil refers to his friend Stu as ‘my man’ without fear of reprisals coupled by various hugs, kind words and supportive actions exchanged between the men throughout the movie without accusations of homosexuality reflects the modern male attitude to allowing oneself to openly show one’s emotions and adopt female speech patterns or behaviours with no fear of retaliation from male counterparts.

Returning to Murad Abel’s spheres of male bonding and the importance of fraternity, it could be stated that there is a feminising influence taking effect within the sphere of male friendships. In the online article entitled, *Male homosociality and the buddy movie*, the author notes that “collectivity always tends towards feminisation precisely because it signifies invasion of individual boundaries, cancels differences between men, and effects a

transgression of boundaries” (Bastubis, 2007). An effect of this ‘hangover’ of traditional masculinity within the buddy movie genre may be the result of the absence and marginalisation of female characters within it. This results in a situation where males are permitted to indulge in intimate friendships by the simple inclusion of women as objects of desire and sexual availability. This could be seen as the ‘having your cake and eating it’ paradigm of the bromance narrative. For example, in *I Love You Man* (2009), Peter Klaven (Paul Rudd) is able to kiss another man, talk openly about masturbation with Sydney (Jason Segel) and take a variety of men out on “dates” because the reason and focus for his behaviour is to find a best man. His heterosexuality is reinforced by the presence of his fiancé along with the reassurance that his intimate friendships with men are contextualised within the construct of a heterosexual wedding.

Defining the Bromance

There are many who may dismiss the Hollywood bromance movie genre as juvenile, overly commercial and without value, judging their content and character to be unworthy of being categorised as art. Some may make the concession that Hollywood movies could become ‘artlike’ or could be forced into a shape resembling art by various film theorists. Since the Hollywood blockbuster or mainstream comedy is usually a collaborative piece of work which is prone to compromise, there are people who doubt, for example, that an Adam Sandler comedy could mean anything, except in the haphazard, semiconscious way that calls for ideological decoding (Klawans, 2003). CNN’s critic Tom Charity wrote of David Wain’s *Role Models* (2008), “This unremittingly juvenile comedy routine may be getting a little old” (Charity, 2008). Xan Brooks’ one star review in *The Guardian* of the Adam Sandler film *Grown Ups* (2010) advises, “If root canal surgery feels too childish a torment, may we direct your attention to this ghastly celebrity roast in the guise of a boisterous family comedy” (Brooks, 2010), and, lastly, Philip French lamented in *The Guardian* that Will Ferrell’s *Talladega Nights* (2006) was, “An inane parody of a triumphalist celebration of all-American sporting heroism” (French, 2006).

However, there is some merit to the idea that these Hollywood mainstream buddy movies could also be viewed as an insightful tool in studying the changing or evolving nature of public displays of male emotion towards other men. Examples of intimate male greetings and expressive bonds of friendship can be found within some American movies, but these

tend to feature male characters from cultural backgrounds which are more accepting of male/male affection. European male friends, for example, greet each other with an embrace as well as kisses on each cheek. This level of male intimacy tends to feature within films containing Italian-American characters such as *The Godfather* (1972) and *Goodfellas* (1990). "...all-male groups exemplify that southern Italian homophilism whose visible tokens consist of hugging, kissing, and other gestures of physical affection" (Renga, 2011, p.168). The majority of these movies, however, are mafia or gangster films where the intimacy of male friendship is set against a backdrop of hyper-violence. This reinforces the idea of masculinity and so the heterosexuality of these characters is never called into question.

If we look at the bromance movies of the 1980s as an example, there is a scene in *Lethal Weapon* (1987) where Riggs calls Murtaugh a 'Fag' when faced with unexpected bodily contact and reacts repugnantly. In the contemporary movie *I Love you, Man* (2009), however, there is a scene where Pete, actively seeing a male best friend, is French kissed by a homosexual who mistakes their dinner for an actual date. Pete not only remains calm and understanding about the incident but goes on to share the experience with his wife and his new friend Sydney.

Tim Walker welcomes the popularity of the bromance calling it a "cause for celebration" (Walker, 2008), going on to embrace the now accepted norm for male friends to engage in open displays of affection from Kirk Douglas being kissed by John Travolta at the Santa Barbara Film Festival to Ben Affleck being hugged on stage by President Obama. "Awards shows evidently bring out a man's bromantic side: Forest Whitaker and Jeremy Irons got cosy at the SAG awards, and Sam Rockwell 'threw' a face at George Clooney during the Berlin Film Festival in 2003" (Walker, 2008).

Although the term bromance is still relatively new, the etymology has been traced back to an American skateboarding magazine *Big Brother* where the phrase was coined by its editor Dave Carnie but the concept of the bromance is far from new. In the 1990s, he wrote that bromance "specifically described the relationship between skate-buddies who spent lots of time together and/or shared hotel rooms on road trips" (Elliott, 2007). The development of non-sexual, intimate male friendships is not only confined to modern day, or modern day film and television, but can be found in early literature, some of which predates the invention of motion pictures. One of the most familiar of these books containing examples of male-

centric, homosocial friendship can be found in the works of Mark Twain between the characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer - ‘the original good boy-bad boy combo’ (Goldstein, 2001). It is even possible to go further back all the way to 300 BC when Aristotle wrote:

“For all friendship is for the sake of good or of pleasure -- good or pleasure either in the abstract or such as will be enjoyed by him who has the friendly feeling -- and is based on a certain resemblance; and to a friendship of good men all the qualities we have named belong in virtue of the nature of the friends themselves; for in the case of this kind of friendship the other qualities also are alike in both friends, and that which is good without qualification is also without qualification pleasant, and these are the most lovable qualities. Love and friendship therefore are found most and in their best form between such men.”

(Aristotle, 350 BC/2007, p.198)

The term bromance can be understood and defined in a number of different ways within a variety of schools of cultural anthropology. In an article entitled *Should 'bromance' really be in the dictionary?*, Daniel B. Wood explores the notion that although a word may be new it doesn't necessarily follow that it describes new concepts but, rather, new ways of defining something that already exists, in this case an aspect of human relationships. In his article, Professor Bryan Crable asserts, "We need words to show how we interact. Bromance is a convenient shortcut to identifying a situation between two men in a way that 'friend' or 'lover' don't" (Wood, 2011). Linguistically, the term bromance is derived from a portmanteau of the words *brother* and *romance* to form the moniker used, though not exclusively in film genre terms, as a shortcut to convey the combination of traditional homosocial male bonding with a non-sexual romance, a loving and lasting relationship traditionally expressed between a man and a woman.

From a demographic standpoint, bromance movies are traditionally made for the male audience due to the obvious core narrative centring on the relationship between two or more male protagonists. As the audience started to grow up through the decades (from battle-scarred war heroes with conservative values and stay at home wives to men with white collar jobs working alongside women) so, it could be said, did the emotional maturity of the men in the movies. The beginnings of a changing society and its perception of ‘men’ giving a gentle but persuasive nudge to the American film industry into a less aggressive arena of male

bonding can be seen, somewhat, in the films spanning a short timeline from the 1960s to the 1990s. Susan Hayward notes that the buddy genre was very much in vogue in the 1960s and 70s with films such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), and *The Sting* (1973) all of which exalted the virtues of hard-drinking, action-packed adventure with men shooting their way out of trouble. Cynthia Fuchs writes about this early decade of the genre as a rebellion, “the buddy film responded to the political advent of sex, gender and race issues and the Civil Rights movement” all during the height of Women's Lib (Fuchs, 1993, p.196). However, in the late 80s to early 90s, the genre started to develop and embrace some semblance of a more nurturing and less destructive ‘proto-father-son’ take on homosocial behaviour, “signifying a restoration of family values or at least the value of the father ('every boy needs a man to show him how to be a man')” (Hayward, 2013, p.68).

The bromance is often seen as providing an avenue for males to explore a level of intimacy which, depending on social circles and family upbringing, contrasts with the idea of friendships that society permits men to have. “Mates meet up for a quick beer at the pub; bromance happens when two guys make a dinner date weeks ahead. Mates get pissed at Cold Chisel tribute bands; bromantics make compilation tapes for one another” (Elliott, 2007). As Goldstein, also, writes in his *LA Times* article, “In many ways, the buddy film serves as a necessary escapist fantasy; it's one of the few arenas where men can openly express their feelings for each other” (Goldstein, 2001).

A change of course in the reception of romantic comedies by producers, audiences and critics alike who defined the genre as principally made for female cinemagoers dragging their reluctant husbands or boyfriends along with them may explain, in some small way, the emergence and popularity of the bromance (Alberti, 2013, p.28). If men were being taken to films projecting unrealistic and conflicting ideals of masculinity from glistening six-pack sporting Lotharios to female-focused, attentive, romantic boyfriends then, perhaps, the breakout of a male sub-genre would be inevitable. Claire Mortimer writes in her book *Romantic Comedy* that these films work to reclaim a lost masculinity for a generation which understands the history of the feminist movement and is familiar with differing popular culture representations of men, “ranging from the metrosexual icon of David Beckham to the macho posturing of many hip hop stars” (Mortimer, 2010, pp.135-136).

Whilst the romantic comedy has been a staple of American cinema since the 1920s (the 1924 Fred C. Newmeyer and Taylor directed *Girl Shy* starring silent screen favourite Harold Lloyd being amongst the first), the turn of the new millennium has seen a growth amongst cinema going audiences in popularity for this new kind of on screen ‘bromance’ relationship. Bromance comedies (or bromantic comedies or in some darker corners of cinema texts, dick flicks) tend to focus on the homosocial relationships of men in various narrative escapades culminating in emotional outpourings and the cementing of long-lasting friendships. This can be seen in the questing nature of *The Hangover* (2009) as the protagonists go in search for their best friend Doug, concluding with the cementing of the infamous ‘wolf pack’. There is also the news anchors of *Anchorman* (2004) who rally around their lead anchor in his time of need and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) which follows the narrative of the outsider Andy (Steve Carell) being brought into the enclave of workplace male bonding (starting with an evening of clandestine drinking and gambling at work after hours) as his colleagues-turned-friends attempt to help him lose his virginity. The genre and location may change, from road trips to Indonesia, war zones in Korea or running around Las Vegas but the central premise stays roughly the same with their relationships, “tested by events until they discover an unlikely affinity, forging a bond of friendship that replaces the customary guy-gal sexual union at picture's end” (Goldstein, 2001).

If the buddy movie genre was nudging gently away from the ideals of the stereotypical ‘real man’ in cinema then the modern day Apatow-led directed/produced bromance movies pushed it off a very tall cliff as the traditional Alpha male character representation seems to be slowly being expunged. It is possible that this is in recognition of how dominant, attractive, physically fit, high status male characters have themselves become a radically changing force (Alberti, 2013, p.28), as masculinity is now viewed as a changeable and fluid social construct, depending on what shifting definition of ‘masculine’ the current era purports, “rather than a biological determinism of a ‘manly gene’. Masculinities are as much about men’s relationship to other men as they are about men’s relationship to women” (Chen, 2012, p.241). The homosocial socialisation became a place where men could create a ‘safe’ space for men to share in exclusive intimacy in a free and non-judgemental environment, as Molly Haskell puts it, a time when “men, released from their social pose of laconic self-possession by the ‘confessional’ impulse and style of the times, discovered each other” (Haskell, 1974, p.362).

The popularity of contemporary bromance movies coupled with the critical ambivalence towards them means they are stuck at a crossroads as they attempt to “explore other types of relationships” between people within a “new climate of social and sexual equality” (Alberti, 2013, p.43). Even though the genre is able to connect with large cinema audiences as well as gaining a popular cachet amongst them, Maria San Filippo notes that the genre remains “virtually unaddressed by media scholars despite its visibility and clear investment in mediating among contemporary masculinities and males same-sex relationships” (San Filippo, 2013, p.194). Interestingly, the rise in popularity of this genre has been linked to the rise in popularity in the idea of marriage equality for both heterosexual and homosexual couples, “equality advocacy and the reactionary responses it has provoked, and the shared preoccupations of both suggested mutually informing discourses (Shary, 2013, p.182).

The Judd Apatow Effect

The popularity and continued success of these bromance movies is, largely, attributed to one man who utilises themes and motifs of the platonic male/male relationship at an almost ‘auteurist’ level. A student of screenwriting, Judd Apatow tried his hand at stand-up comedy after university before going on to produce the sketch/variety series *The Ben Stiller Show* (1990-91) which, although only running for one season, earned Apatow an Emmy for his writing. After many years and Emmy nominations producing Garry Shandling's *The Larry Sanders Show* (1992-98), Apatow created the critically acclaimed series *Freaks and Geeks*, which debuted in 1999, and although the television show only ran for one season it would cement the themes which modern day cinema audiences would associate with this producer/writer/director, as well as providing a catalogue of actors who would work with him in future projects including Seth Rogan, Jason Segel and James Franco. Apatow's themes and social mores continue to exhibit themselves in his movies, the bonds of friendship, the awkwardness of life and the reluctance to grow up, however, it is the “abundance he has undertaken as his role as the producer ‘ringleader’ that has increased his reputation and standing within the Hollywood movie making industry (Sickels, 2013, p.21). The homosocial themes and narrative within his films are so strong that it led Chris Lee to proclaim in his *LA Times* column that Apatow was the “the Moses of bromance” (Lee, 2008) and Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times* to crown him “the king of such sublimated man-on-man affairs” (Dargis, 2009). Later, in his *LA Times* article, Lee also wrote about how Apatow

“split a new comedy atom” by being able to find the real comedy within the idea of single men forming strong relationships irrespective of how they are viewed by those outside of them, without playing for cheap laughs by questioning their sexuality. M. K. Franklin wrote that the idea that anybody would perceive these narrative’s strong male/male relationships as evidence of latent or unconscious homosexuality would be “reductionist to the point of missing most of the significance of these texts” (Franklin, 1990, p.4).

Apatow’s ‘breakthrough’ moment came after his directorial début *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), which Apatow also wrote and produced, was an unexpected smash, earning almost \$110 million at the box office, making it apparent that Apatow was already, “cementing a reputation for creating popular work around men coming to terms with growing up” (Apatow, 2014). In addition to his directing, Apatow has produced and/or written for a number of successful comedies including *Anchorman* (2004), *Talladega Nights* (2006), *Superbad* (2007), *Step Brothers* (2008), *Pineapple Express* (2008), *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008), *Get Him to the Greek* (2010) and *Bridesmaids* (2011) and at the centre of all of these movies lies a form of intimate male friendships with which he has perfected a “comedy style that solidified him as the face of the ‘bromance’ (Sickels, 2013, p.19). Apatow creates a bonding far removed from ‘traditional’ male pastimes such as beer drinking and sport. His characters, instead, reiterate the point made by Kotsko, they join in solidarity with other men in acts of not growing up by becoming the “overgrown adolescence” (Kotsko, 2010, p.49). By creating a cast of ‘manchildren’, Apatow also removes the need to adhere to the long-standing societal stereotype of what is traditionally thought of as manly. “This apparent collapse of unself-conscious machismo even deflates ordinarily confident models of classic masculinity” (Shary, 2013, p.33), placing them in contrast with the “lone wolf/macho hero movies that are always part of the entertainment scene” (Franklin, 1990).

This hefty label as the granddaddy of bromance has wide reaching effects on other movies fighting for space within Apatow’s genre with reviewers and journalists all scrambling to associate other films with his trademark themes. As Peter Travers writes, “His influence is so pervasive that he’s credited or blamed for every bromance on the market” (Travers, 2009) and in his review of *Neighbors* (2014), Jason Grober writes how remarkable it is that so many films have “traces of Apatow’s DNA” going on to write that although the film under review had nothing to do with the director, the stars and writers all got their starts “under the tutelage of the funny man director, it’s not surprising to see Apatow’s fingerprints

all over this work” (Grober, 2014). It is not only bromance that suffers from the Apatow effect, in a review of the film *The Other Woman* (2014), starring his wife Leslie Mann, one of the opening lines states, “this isn't an Apatow vehicle, but many of his favorite themes are present” (Rankin, 2014). Even the most quintessential of bromance movies, *I Love you, Man* (2009) which was directed by John Hamburg doesn't escape the Apatow comparison, “Though Mr Apatow isn't officially credited, his DNA is all over this bromance” (Dargis, 2009).

His influence on the film industry is so far reaching that a parody film, *The 41-Year-Old Virgin Who Knocked Up Sarah Marshall and Felt Superbad About It* (2010) was made to mock the conventions found in most Apatow movies. Predictably, the film was a flop with critics deeming it a “waste of time” and full of flat jokes that were “scatological, sexual or about vomit” (Woliver, 2010). The reason for the failure of the film could be found in the fact that it is parodying movies of the past which are more forward thinking than the more current parody. That is to say, in one scene in the film, for example, there is a kinky threesome which goes wrong when the two male characters end up rolling around on the floor together. By presenting male/male intimacy (intended or accidental) as being ‘gross out’ comedy, it is appealing to a minority audience which would find the act obscene, “ostensibly straight men kissing one another fully on the lips is a phenomenon viewable on American screens almost weekly courtesy of *Saturday Night Live*” (Shary, 2013, p.183). Judd Apatow has not only changed what modern cinema audiences expect from comedies, “infusing bawdy blockbuster comedy with heartfelt homosocial (initially male, and now increasingly female) sentiment” but, more significantly, he may possibly have changed the way audiences “conceive of contemporary auteurism” to include comedy film-making (Sickels, 2013, p.17).

Road Movies: Planes, Trains, Automobiles, Bikes and Buses

Throughout cinema history, filmmakers covering all genres and directorial styles have been drawn towards the road movie, these including low-budget independent movies such as *Badlands* (1973), mainstream Hollywood movies such as *Due Date* (2010), documentary movies such as *Citizen USA: A 50 State Road Trip* (2011) as well as road movies with a feminist bent like *Thelma and Louise* (1991). From the early days of popular American cinema which brought audiences Bob Hope and Bing Crosby travelling their way out of trouble in the *Road to Singapore* (1940) to modern day, high octane shock-slapstick comedy

The Hangover (2009), American cinema has forged a long-lasting relationship with the open road, and remains a “Hollywood genre that catches peculiarly American dreams, tensions and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of other nations” (Cohen and Hark, 1997, p.2).

Although a popular film genre, the documenting of men’s adventures in bonding, friendship-fuelled travel is evident between the pages of many early works of literature. The most insightful and applicable being Jack Kerouac’s 1957 watershed novel *On the Road*. The book encompasses various recurrent themes and stylistic overtones which can be found in many past and contemporary road movies providing a valuable formative source for describing road movie iconography as well as “outlining its ideological contours and contradictions” (Laderman, 1996, p.42). This iconography, as read by audiences to identify the road movie genre, echoes the adventuring freedom which is reflected, usually, in their visual motifs of vast deserts, highways and various open landscapes and coupled with expansive, aesthetically pleasing horizon lines, the never ending roads of *Easy Rider* (1969) and the long, empty night-time highways driven by John Candy as he passes the time with a radio sing-a-long which almost kills him in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987). An example of these recurring cinematography motifs used in road movies is the dynamic montage sequences designed to convey the thrill of driving as found in the open-topped, freewheeling, beer drinking, Vegas-bound scenes in *The Hangover* which combine the thrill of the drive with the splendour and overwhelming skyline of Las Vegas.

Laderman goes on to articulate that Kerouac’s book highlights the ideological incongruity between rebellion and tradition which is found both within the narrative of the book and within the narrative of the road movie. That is to say, on the one hand the road serves as the perfunctory requirement of a point-to-point conduit, a traditional route from A to B but, on the other hand, the characters sharing intimate space allows for a narrative which analyses the complex minutiae of human relationships which either rejects the normative ideology of the ‘no feelings, just sport’ remit of stereotypical male companionship or serve to facilitate protagonists seeking to eschew a society in which they feel has failed them, “the journey functions ambivalently, as a mode of critical observation” (Laderman, 1996, p.42). The buddy road movie combines the ideas of hopeless mobility and rebellion, seemingly, as a fundamental basis of its narrative to highlight how “boys and men of all ages can use various kinds, and attitudes towards, mobility to affirm themselves, their partners,

fathers, and places in the broader American culture” (Slethaug, 2012, p.168). The idea of travelling the open road coupled with the dissection of personal interactions can also help examine the ideas of masculinity and enforced male bonding. As narratives progress, the relationship between protagonists mutates from ‘brothers in arms’ to each member adopting traits found more in a family than a fraternity, the road is no longer a conduit but a measure of masculinity and self-sustainability. "Reassigning disempowering elements of patriarchy to female keeping, they attempt to substitute male brotherhood for the nuclear family” (Carden, 2009, p.79). In *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), for example, heteronormative roles are quickly adopted with Ratso (Dustin Hoffman) becoming the homemaker, clearing his house to make Joe (Jon Voight) comfortable. This relationship is characterised beautifully in the scene where Ratso cooks dinner and lays the table as Joe, reading a comic book as an archetypal head of the household may come to the table reading a newspaper, sits down to eat, upsetting Ratso with his ungrateful and unappreciative attitude towards his cooking skills.

The pervasive themes of many popular road movies such as Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), or Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991) reflect on characters, living trapped lives which are seen as ‘intellectually stifling’. As Sam North goes on to say in his article *The Road Movie*, “The road seems to offer an easy escape, set within a western landscape that is at once beautiful” (North, n.d). With key themes of freedom, flight, danger and jeopardy, these films depict the humdrum nature of a life riddled with a negative mundanity and pitches it against the adventure and freedom of responsibilities the road, seemingly, can offer. “Road movies draw on the fantasy of the road as liberation from responsibilities and restrictions of relationships repeating themes of escaping the meaningless existence” (Redshaw, 2008, p.60). In *Sideways* (2004) Miles (Paul Giamatti) is seeking to escape his depressed and near alcoholic stupor, whilst Jack (Thomas Haden Church) is seeking an escape from the commitment of marriage by having a fling with a waitress. Although the total escapism is rarely ever achieved, Sam North writes later in his article that it is in the nature of the road movie to remind the protagonists that, on the road, “all manner of dangers may lurk” (North, 2013). For *Thelma and Louise*, the danger which lurked was in the form of their relationships with men, from controlling partners to a fatal altercation with a drunk who attempts to rape Thelma (Geena Davies) in a parking lot and ultimately the law, from whom they must constantly try to escape. For the protagonists in *Easy Rider*, it was rednecks with a blood lust, relentlessly attacking and eventually killing Wyatt (Peter Fonda)

and Billy (Dennis Hopper) and in the case of *Midnight Cowboy*, the danger was lurking in almost every crevice of New York City.

Chuck Klosterman in his article *On the Road* also comments on the recurring themes and structures of the road movie's narrative trajectory which, he states have remained intact since the days before *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). He writes that the road movie's narrative journey, typically, starts down the well-trodden path following a central protagonist who 'experiences a loss and attempts an exodus from normal life.' If we take *Due Date* (2010) as an example and hold its plot up to Klosterman's 'narrative trajectory' we find Ethan (Zach Galifianakis) running away to Hollywood to pursue his dream of being an actor after experiencing the loss of his father whereas Peter (Robert Downey Jr) is running towards a normal life as he attempts to get home in time to see the birth of his first child. Klosterman goes on to explain that, next, the character, "reinvents his or her self-identity while travelling." Ethan continually inflates his personality to grandiose egotism mixed with an oblivious self-entitlement as a way to deal with the loss of his father and to help deal with Peter who, clearly, does not like him. "Along the way, the character encounters iconic individuals who (usually) illustrate authenticity and desolation" (Klosterman, 2008). A relationship is forged with Peter who forces him to talk about the loss of his father in a touching 'acting' masterclass in the bathroom of a public restroom when Ethan lets down his actor guard and delivers an emotional speech about how he is really coping with his father's death. "Upon the recognition of seemingly self-evident realizations, the character desires to return to the point of origin." Lastly, Ethan, now a more genuine character (but still with some significant character flaws) fulfils his original goal of becoming an actor and stars on his favourite television show *Two and a Half Men* (Klosterman, 2008). Todd Phillips substantiates this idea in an interview promoting *Due Date* (2010):

"While it is a road movie and a comedy at its core, it's a movie about Zach's character, Ethan, who's going through a trauma, having just lost his father, and Robert's character, Peter, who's about to become the father for a first time. And about why Robert needed to travel with this kind of man-child who was going through traumatic experience but is a purely loving creature, much like a child who just needs some adjustments."

(Phillips, 2012)

Historically speaking, men are the controllers of lorries, cars, motorcycles and this goes some way to explaining the high incidence of male-centric narratives and plots centring

around male pairings within the road movie genre. Although the genre would seem to have more of a preference for cars or motorcycles as their chosen vehicles, road trip films involving other modes of transport have been made: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) traversed the wild west on horseback, in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), Ratso and Joe Buck travelled by bus and the characters of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) spend most of their journey on foot. Mostly, however, the majority of films chose to place the male protagonists behind the wheel of a car which could be interpreted as an assertion of their masculinity and need for control, as Iain Borden states, “The connection between car ownership, driving and masculinity is one of the central themes of urban cinema” (Borden, 2012, p.24). With a lack of work structure, material possessions, family or buddy network, the measure of masculinity is now shifted as tarmac and metal replace the ladder of success with “the freedom of the road as primary measures of male identity” (Carden, 2009, p.79). In addition to the heightened sense of masculinity, the road movie traditionally calls for the hero to be at the helm of a form of transportation that they can control. As Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark state in their book *The Road Movie* (1997), it is imperative that the protagonist controls their vehicle as the ability to control their own providence lies at the very heart of the road movie. “Americans’ love affair with the car is fuelled by ideology that upholds our individualism, and the car has a symbol for our rights to freedom, and our belief in technological progress” (Cohen and Hark, 1997, p.60). This masculinity projected by the controlling of the car allows the protagonists to enter into the mythology which surrounds what Mary Paniccia Carden described as the ‘male-identified dynamics of travel’. The ideas of exploration, independence and conquest are observed by the ‘imperial eye’ of the self-contained adventurer, the bracing challenge of the unknown, the empowering erotics of discovery and conquest (Carden, 2009, p.77).

The combination of the hyper masculinity of car ownership and the freedom of the road are juxtaposed with the inevitably strong homosocial bonds formed by road movie pairings. The idea of two men on the run, fleeing matriarchal clutches, sharing long car journeys, hotel rooms and, at times, a bed could provide movie going audiences ground for projecting a homosexual subtext onto the narrative. As a result of this sexual ambiguity, many early road movies included scenes which confirmed for the audience that the protagonists are very much heterosexual, “normative masculinity has never been the genre’s untroubled premise but rather a persistent problem the genre labors to address” (Kaplan, 2010, p.92). An example of this heterosexual reinforcement can be found in *Planes, Trains*

and Automobiles (1987) when characters Neal (Steve Martin) and Del (John Candy), after a long and eventful journey, finally arrive at their motel room, the last one available in the building, only to discover that instead of a twin there is only one double bed. Awkward and uncomfortable looks are exchanged as neither is willing to voice their trepidation about the implications of sharing a bed with another man resulting in meaningless chatter about the cab ride and the investigation of random surfaces around the room. This uncomfortable affront to their masculinity is further reinforced when Del asks if Neal wants to take a shower, Neal's knee jerk reaction of "No" and Del's needed clarification of "No, I mean, do you want to go first" is met with relieved and nervous laughter followed by fervent denials by both that they are not interested in each other romantically, aggressively reinforcing their heterosexuality. This reinforcing of masculinity is further explored the next morning when, cuddled up together, spooning and holding hands, Del wakes Neal by kissing his ear and holding his hand. As the realisation of their situation dawns on them, Neal asks the question, "Where is your other hand?" to which Del replies, "Between two pillows". When the, now famous line, "those aren't pillows" is uttered the instant repulsion, shaking, retching and wiping of hands (as if one can wipe the gay away), again, reinforces to audiences that, whatever this relationship/friendship may become, it most certainly will not manifest itself sexually.

Interestingly, if we flash forward twenty three years to *Due Date* (2010) (a film many critics labelled a needless updating of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*), the need to reinforce heterosexuality has dampened. The two male protagonists, Ethan and Peter, are comfortable in each other's company without the need of male posturing, a scene involving the two men sleeping in the front seat of a car early on in the film demonstrates this when Peter is woken by the sound of Ethan masturbating in the seat next to him. Unlike *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987) there is no exaggerated show of masculine disgust as an affront to his heterosexuality. Even though Ethan has his legs on the dashboard Peter complains only about the noise, throws his coat over his head and continues to try and sleep. The instant acceptance of Ethan's excuse that he is only doing it because otherwise he can't sleep is processed, accepted as just something that men do, no action is taken and there is no apprehension that this is a sexual advance. This difference in reaction may, possibly, be the result of modern cinema going audiences increasingly relaxed and accepting attitude towards viewing intimate male friendships in film and media coupled with the addition of society's increasing destigmatisation of homosexuality and the emergence of non-sexual heterosexual/homosexual friendships known as hobromances.

As a further reinforcement of masculinities, Mark Williams states that the relationship between men and the roads they travel on is not dissimilar to the relationships they have with women, or rather, their desire to escape from relationships or unwanted commitments to women, “Confronted with challenges by the fact of their own neglect or misjudgement, these heroes’ last (and often only) resort is to drive out of trouble” (Williams, 1982, p.9). A point which Borden supports, citing the car as a medium for “opportunist male lotharios frequently use cars to meet or escape female lovers” (Borden, 2012, p.24). In *The Hangover* (2009), for example, the character Phil uses the stag party road trip to Vegas as an escape from his nagging wife and the shackles of parenthood, to freely drink and gamble with his buddies. Crosby and Hope spent a large percentage of their movies singing, dancing and escaping the clutches of wedding fevered women in their *Road to* movies and in *Sideways* (2004), Jack also uses the road to escape the reality of his imminent marriage and then again, later, to escape his mistress.

That is not to say that female-centric road movies (although a scarcely populated genre) do not use the road in a similar way. *Thelma and Louise* (1991) also used the road as a means of escapism, as mentioned earlier, escaping their controlling husbands and monotonous boyfriends, escaping their humdrum lives and, later, running from the consequences of their murdering actions by fleeing the police. It may also be pertinent to mention that, in a large proportion of road movie, plot lines don’t end that well for their freedom-seeking protagonists. In *Easy Rider* (1969), both Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper come to a nasty end at the hands of murderous rednecks, *Thelma and Louise* (1991) solidify their friendship and find the ultimate form of escapism by driving off a cliff, Ratso dies on the bus journey to a better life in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) are ambushed and shot to death and in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) Mike (River Phoenix) has his possessions stolen and is bundled into a mystery truck. Audiences will also be familiar with the nightmarish turn a male bonding canoe trip takes in the film *Deliverance* (1972).

It would seem that the driving force, if you excuse the pun, which propels the road movie, is the idea of the journey presenting itself as a means of a cultural critique. “Road movies generally aim beyond the borders of cultural familiarity, seeking the unfamiliar for revelation, or at least the thrill of the unknown. Such travelling, coded as defamiliarization, likewise suggests a mobile refuge from social circumstances felt to be lacking or oppressive

in some way” (Laderman, 2002, p.2). Archetypal road movies revolve around the idea of escaping ‘normal’ life and its problems which are either too large or too numerous to deal with. Protagonists can revel in the exploration of the endless possibilities the open road represents, a road which, symbolically, has been a persistent and recurring theme of American culture. In their introduction to *The Road Movie* book, Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark discuss this continuing theme, linking the road movies to a harking back to wild west frontiers America and the liberation from the shackles of societal pressures, they contrast “the liberation of the road against the oppression of hegemonic norms, road movies project American Western mythology onto the landscape traversed and bounded by the nation’s highway” (Cohen and Hark, 1997, p.1). This comparison is also noted by Sam North who writes that many of the necessary constituents of the road movie are compatible with those genre constructs found within the cowboy or ‘Western’ genre, “From John Ford’s ‘Stagecoach’, to ‘Butch and Sundance’ and Eastwood’s ‘Outlaw Josey Wales’, men, on horses, on the trail, encounter always more than they bargained for” (North, 2013). An early shot from *Easy Rider* (1969) highlights this suggestion as Billy and Wyatt are seen working on a flat tyre whilst, in the foreground, a blacksmith shoes a horse, capturing the themes of the old west as well as the evolution of transport bringing together the “modernity of transportation on the twentieth-century road and the traditions still historically present in the settings that the road crosses” (Cohen and Hark, 1997, p.1).

When analysing the road movie in terms of narrative structure, the traditional three-act configuration need not vehemently apply to these movies in the same way they do with many in the mainstream. Structurally, Walter Salles writes that the road movie is one of the few mainstream genres which can eschew the conformity of this narrative structure especially in terms of disequilibrium of external conflicts. “Road movies, for instance, are rarely guided by external conflicts; the conflicts that consume their characters are basically internal ones” (Salles, 2007). In *Sideways* (2004), for example, the actions of the protagonists stem from internal conflicts of commitment, estrangement and a crisis of confidence which, in turn, create conflict. Jack has an affair, not due to outside forces of enticement or revenge, but because of his internal conflict over his upcoming marriage which, in turn, leads to conflict with best friend Miles. The focus is rarely on external conflicts which exist outside, on the road, but rather on each character inside the vehicle. Walter Salles goes on to say that the road movie is about challenging the culture of conformity, it’s about the journey rather than the destination. The road movie genre draws from what characters can learn from each other,

and sometimes what the audience can learn from the characters, and from those who are different, “In a world that increasingly challenges these ideals, the importance of road movies as a form of resistance can’t be dismissed” (Salles, 2007). Katie Mills describes the genre as a way to present a narrative which demonstrates how experiences and perspectives gained on the road can transform a character identity. “The road presents a way to experience life, affect others, and change ourselves – and the road story dares us to dream a better life” (Mills, 2006, p.22). It is rare that the genre expresses specific political points or external rationale as the pivotal motive for the journey. Michael Atkinson writes that they are simply “too cool to address seriously socio-political issues”, so it is the internal conflicts of a protagonist’s personal crisis that offers the road as an escape and solution. However, it is the same road which delivers them “false hope of a one way ticket to nowhere” (Atkinson, 1994, p.14).

If the conventional road movie strives to include specific themes of escapism and adventure on the open road in its genre, it could be argued that the comedy road movie not only aims to include these constructs but also, as comedy, sets to subvert convention, create its own sub-genre themes and motifs. “...whenever comedy borrows another genre’s icons, it subverts that genre in the process” (Sipos, 2010, p.24). Antithetical to the ideas of liberty and escapism found in traditional male-centric road movies are the themes of conformity, stability and a return to ‘normality’ found within the comedy bromance road movie. Rather than the road symbolising a getaway from life, family or conformity, it symbolises a way back to these things. Here the road isn’t a conduit to connect the protagonists to a world of possibility and unknown, it is a pathway back to the known, it is the measure of distance back to their routine and the allegorical chasm that exists between, traditionally, two diametrically opposed characters forced together to achieve a selfish goal.

Another of the main differences between comedy road movies and their more ‘serious’ counterparts stems from the characters and the relationships they form with their travel companions. The male pairing is a dominant configuration in the road movie, both comic and straight, just as it is in Hollywood movies in general. Aside from the practicalities of narrative and filming, two men sat in the front of a car makes for simple shooting, also the “confined space of the car, the shared lodgings, booths in diners and often hardship and desperation build intimacy and plot conflict quickly” (Cohan and Hark, 1997, p.8). In the classic road movie narrative, the two central protagonists create and cement their homosocial

bonds over a mutual desire to break away from their monotonous existence and pervading sense of ennui. In *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), Joe Buck wants to escape small town living and start a new adventure in the big city as a male escort. In *Easy Rider* (1969), Wyatt and Billy embark on a personal odyssey to find an America where they can be free to live their own lives. Both sets of friends metaphorically flee their oppressive shackles and challenge the status quo. Both pairs of friends are working towards the same goals and driving in the same direction both metaphorically and literally. Conversely, comedy road movies, most certainly during the first act of the plot, tend to focus on the central protagonists oppositional views, conflicting character traits and differing societal outlook. Instead of being in tune with each other, they quarrel like a married couple or argue over trivialities like bickering brothers. This clash between characters may stem from the fact that both are longing to return back to the familiar. They do not wish to rebel against conformity, they want to embrace it. The rebellion within these movies is the reluctance to accept the personal ideologies of their travelling partner rather than a specific societal ideology. In *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), this clash of personalities helps create an almost symbiotic relationship between Neal and Del. Neal represents what Del has lost which is love, intimacy and family but he finds Neal's passive aggressive, unwavering and finicky personality jarring which prevents them from bonding. In addition to this, Del is a constant reminder of what Neal finds irritating and is trying to escape chaos, crassness and incompetency. However, they are forced to work together to achieve their goal of getting home for Thanksgiving, meaning the pair is seemingly locked in a mutual Stockholm syndrome, both repelled yet reliant on the other.

By pairing protagonists with oppositional views, backgrounds and social etiquettes both heading back to what each consider to be their comforting equilibrium, the film creates conflict which, in turn, leads to comedy. In conventional road movies, the pairings are complementary opposites working together rather than conflicting characters working against each other. Opposites attract but they do not necessarily bind. Therefore, two characters who are opposites provide fertile premise for either comedy or tragedy (Suber, 2006, p.280). As David Laderman notes (1996, p.168), the genre pairings tend to be 'active/passive' such as the extroverted Del who can slick talk himself out of any situation paired with the passive aggressively quiet Neal or the 'intellectual/sensual' combination which is effectively personified with the pairing of autistic savant Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) playing opposite charismatic Hollywood royalty Tom Cruise's slick hustler Charlie in *Rain Man* (1988). In *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), Steve Martin's character, Neal Page, is not interested in the rebellion of becoming a non-conformist like his travel companion Del Griffith. Del,

however, also refuses to stop being himself regardless of the situation or the company he keeps, "I like me. My wife likes me. My customers like me. 'Cause I'm the real article. What you see is what you get". These character's differences are also laid out visually in the opening scenes, Neal dressed in a suit having a meeting in an opulent office alongside other people wearing equally nice suits leaves to rush for a cab to the airport only to have it stolen from him by an anorak wearing fat man in a flat cap (Del). Later, at the airport, when Neal and Del officially meet their visible differences are easily identified. Neal in his suit, Del in his sleeveless cardigan and scruffy, unbuttoned shirt with a loosened tie, Neal sitting upright in his chair, Del slouched in his. Neal is seen reading a copy of GQ magazine resting on his briefcase, Del engrossed in a well-thumbed paperback entitled "*The Canadian Mounted*" which sports a red cover with a picture of a woman splayed on all fours wearing lingerie. Similarly, in the opening scenes of *Due Date* (2010), Robert Downey Jr's character Peter Highman is seen waking up in a room with a striking city view, his home - seen whilst he is having a phone conversation with his wife - is beautifully decorated. He is clean shaven, wearing a sharp suit and is being chauffeur driven to the airport. The door of his chauffeur-driven car is knocked off by an oncoming beaten up old station wagon in which Zach Galifianakis' character emerges wearing casual clothes, a large beard and carrying a small dog in a bag. The happy shambles and striving perfectionist collide and are forced to work together.

Obvious differences in character and ideology may well be highlighted effectively within the road movie genre, however, if there was a bromance/buddy movie genre which went to further extremes to emphasise differences of personality, ethnicity and economic background, it was the cop movie.

The Biracial, Masculinity of the 1980s' Cop Movie and Beyond

From Norman Jewison's small town investigations in *In The Heat of Night* (1967) to the quick talking charm offensive undercover cop action of Baltasar Kormákur's *2 Guns* (2013) to the heyday of popular stalwarts such as *48 Hours* (1982), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987). The buddy-cop movie has remained a popular cinematic genre especially since its resurgence in the 1980s. Not always played for laughs with high instances of cartoon, high octane, action movie style violence, some buddy-cops were still rooted in gritty crime drama. The Dennis Hopper film *Colors* (1988), for example, paired up Robert

Duvall as the veteran cop and Sean Penn as the rookie fighting against the rise of gang violence in LA which was big on male companionship but short on laughs. The beach side movie which grew friendships in the ocean was Kathryn Bigelow's *Point Break* (1991) which "threw Buddhism, beaches and, um, Patrick Swayze into the mix" (Clark, n.d) was also laden with personal issues and criminal surfers.

The 1980s were the heyday of the action cop movie with crime fighting duos combining a narrative of action, violence and witty one-liners co-existing alongside on screen relationships "a contemplation of male bonding in the face of danger" (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004, p.185). This 'forced' companionship may go some way to explaining why cop/action movies frequently crossed over from crime drama to buddy movie. Pairing up mismatched cops with other races, other classes and even other species has also been a popular narrative tradition in both the buddy-crime genre, with the 'dogs and cops' model being particularly fashionable. Man's best friend alongside Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks in the pooch turned detective movie *Turner and Hooch* (1989) was a big box office success, as was James Belushi and his four-legged helper in Rod Daniel's *K-9* (1989). In *48 Hours*, the hard-hearted cop, Jack Cates (Nick Nolte), is reluctantly paired with the wise-cracking criminal, Reggie Hammond (Eddie Murphy) in order to catch a killer. In *Lethal Weapon* (1987), the soon to retire cop who plays by the rules, Murtaugh, is forced to partner with maverick cop Riggs. Jimmy and Paul have to find a rare stolen baseball card in *Cop Out* (2010) and let us not forget how Agent Kay (Tommy Lee Jones) and Agent Jay (Will Smith) set aside their differences to save the world from an invading alien threat in *Men in Black* (1997). The pairings end the movie having forged strong bonds of friendship from working together towards a common goal. Protagonists with oppositional personalities and ethics, forced to work together, is a common trait within the buddy movie oeuvre, matching up good cop/bad cop, straight cop/crazy cop dynamic of the partnership lends itself to natural homosocial bonding and developing trusting relationships through the element of transference "whereby ideas and values are exchanged through shared experiences" (O'Brien, 2012). O'Brien then goes on to reiterate that these relationships stem from both men, regardless of background, being united in battle, working to defeating a specific danger and, during this process, their relationship becomes closer and more expressive. In one of the final scenes of *Lethal Weapon* (1987), after Riggs has defeated the main antagonist Joshua (Gary Busey) in a mud-covered brawl, the bad guy's attempt to kill Riggs results in Riggs and Murtaugh, in an act of almost symbiotic synchronisation, simultaneously shooting him dead. "Any threat to that

relationship becomes, in effect, a threat of schism: an attack on one is an attack on both” (O’Brien, 2012).

The Reagan-Bush decade, summed up by its “laissez-fair economy and meritocratic ideas” which stirred an atmosphere of almost ‘constant paranoia’ (Lee 2010 p.31), saw the rise in popularity of the muscle-bound masculine leading men of films such as *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Rambo* (1982) storm the big screen. These testosterone-filled displays of masculinity emphatically underscored the heterosexuality of characters who allowed themselves to become involved in emotionally charged relationships with their partners against crime. This need to assert masculinity even presents itself, in some cases, during the opening credits, before audiences have even had a chance to witness any brutal killings or hand to hand combat. The title text for *Lethal Weapon* (1987), for example, strikes at the screen with its large, heavy and metallic text, grey and gleaming like welded steel. Similarly, *Stakeout* (1987) stamps its masculinity onto the opening credits by presenting words that appear to have been chiselled out of stone. These titles scream out their masculinity, just in case the audience were in any doubt. The heavy, power-laden lettering reassures them that they are about to watch a man's film, a man's film made of manly materials and there is simply no room for comic sans here.

This reinforcement of heterosexuality and masculinity, once established, needs to be carried by the narrative, a popular short cut used in many cop movies is using the *suggestion* of a heterosexual relationship by means of an off screen girlfriend or wife who is either conspicuously absent during the film or has, conveniently, died. Riggs’s wife in *Lethal Weapon* (1987) is only seen in picture form having died in a car accident. In *Stakeout* (1987), Lecce comes home to find his life in boxes and his girlfriend gone and in the British film with American sensibilities, *Hot Fuzz* (2007), Nicholas Angel’s (Simon Pegg) girlfriend dumps him at a crime scene but does so whilst dressed in an all-in-one hazmat suit so the audience never actually get to *see* her. This booster of heterosexual confirmation may have been due to the genre convention similarities between the buddy-cop movie and the romantic comedy. In the typical Hollywood rom-com movie, or mainstream movies in general, the onus is placed on a relationship between the hero (usually the male) and the love interest (usually the woman), the buddy-cop movie (as in other films featuring male/male relationships at its focus) replaces the woman with another man. The lack of a female focus, again, brings into question the sexuality of the protagonists, even though this time the protagonists are gun-

fighting, bloody-shedding, unwavering embodiments of machismo. Cynthia Fuchs writes that these action/cop genres are “conceived in paradox” and that the buddy-cop relationship must both “deny and fulfil” the idea of male desire, that is to say, in order to satisfy the audience’s need for both male bonding and masculinity, the characters must illustrate character traits from homosexuality to homophobia and back again. In *Rush Hour* (1998), for example, Carter (Chris Tucker) saves Lee (Jackie Chan) from falling to his death and as the two fall to the ground, Lee (who has landed on top of Carter) kisses him in gratitude. In a reaction similar to that previously written regarding *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), Carter immediately wipes his face in disgust and pushes him away. Similarly, in *Lethal Weapon* (1987) when Riggs and Murtaugh find themselves standing outside a house which unexpectedly explodes, Murtaugh uses himself, bravely, as a human shield and attempts to put out any burning embers which have landed on Riggs. In the ensuing confusion, a defensive Riggs pushes Murtaugh away, calling into question his sexuality, “Even such an ‘explicable’ moment of physical contact is framed by Riggs’s protests about ‘fags’” (Tasker, 1993, p.46). Later in the film, however, Murtaugh cradles Riggs and strokes his face after he is shot in the chest, a more open gesture of emotion which is accepted, unquestioningly, by Riggs. As Fuchs goes on to say, this paradox is ingrained in the buddy-cop genre’s movement from conflict to resolution within “a narrative continuum which contains initial axes of racial, generational, political and ethnic differences under a collective performance of extraordinary virility” (Fuchs, 1993, pp.194-195). The *Lethal Weapon* series of films, in particular, embrace the need to verbally reassure the audience that the male protagonists are *definitely* not gay.

In the first *Lethal Weapon* (1987) movie, there are countless references to having fought in the Vietnam War. The duo even helped a fellow veteran who saved Murtaugh’s life by finding and bringing to justice his daughter’s killer. Military service and brothers in arms is another convenient short cut for allowing male bonding without the threat of questioning sexuality which I will explore later in relation to the original and remake of heist movie *Ocean’s 11* (1960). Even the conversation between Riggs and Murtaugh where Riggs confesses how every night he has to find a reason not to kill himself, a sensitive and personal subject matter, is tackled by the two men angrily shouting in an empty store as Murtaugh goads Riggs into blowing his brains out. In the second film, *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989), a scene plays in which Riggs pretends to be dying whilst Murtaugh, again, cradles him in his arms using a cinematic convention normally found within the war movie genre. Yvone Tasker notes that these parodic enactments of the wartime death scene, along with its recognisable conventions, mark the scene as justifiable and explicitly comical but in no way sexual. Going

on to write that this cinematic convention “only allows men to embrace if one of them is dying, the film both plays with and averts the possibility of desire between the two men” (Tasker, 1993, p.46). In *Stakeout* (1987), the rivalry played out between two cop partnerships manifests itself in constant ribbing and practical jokes, an indication to the audience that these relationships are fraternal and not sexual.

Typically, the action-cop genre, along with the conventions of the buddy/bromance movie, pair seemingly drastically opposing personalities, often contrasting differing styles of masculinity, creating both drama and comedy where “the animosity serves largely to heighten the excitement of the detection. Despite some acknowledgement of each other’s qualities” (Franklin, 1990, p.2). The nerd and the high school jock in *21 Jump Street* (2012), the more feminised and sensitive young cop and the grisly pessimistic veteran cop in *Stakeout* (1987), the smart cop and the dishevelled slob in *Tango and Cash* (1989) all explore the issues of conflicting background and class. It was during the 1980s, a decade fuelled with conservative masculine posturing, that audiences were “witness, in apparent counterpoint, to the arrival of the ‘racially sensitive’ buddy-cop film” (Chan, 2009, p.110). As the 1980s progressed and as America transitioned from Ronald Reagan to George Bush, Hollywood continued to make, “ever more formulaic buddy films, featuring higher body counts, larger numbers interracial and cross-class buddy teams” (Fuchs, 1993, p.196). Films like *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987) explored the juxtapositioning of different races (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004, p.185). Although the biracial ‘black and white’ buddy pairing proved a successful box office hit, the placing of biracial pairings within storylines has a long literary history within American fiction, one which stretches back at least as far as Huckleberry Finn and his friend the fugitive slave Jim. Movie and television audiences were wanting more minority representation although there had been a smattering of biracial buddy-cop movies in the 1970s with the trend gaining popular momentum after the well-received early combination of Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder in *Silver Streak* (1976). These interracial pairings seemed to make “political and financial sense to Hollywood Studios” (Chan, 2009, p.110) and after the big box office success of films like *48 Hours* (1982) and especially the *Lethal Weapon* (1987) franchise, the flood gates opened for a slew of movies of another sub-genre (a sub-genre of a sub-genre if you like) the biracial buddy-cop movie. The inclusion of differing races also changed the dynamic of the on screen friendships, adding another dimension to them, “the formation of a bond or affiliation between the men and the individual overcoming prejudice that involves reclaiming parts of the self” (Franklin, 1990, p.4).

Hollywood started to change its political and economic structure alongside its mode of production and exhibition, as Chris Jordan states, “The relocation of the white middle class to the suburbs left urban black audiences as the primary patrons of older downtown movie theatres” (Jordan, 2003, p.77). These interracial buddy-cop films also allowed American audiences to live out a celluloid fantasy of a “racially harmonious America” in which they would become immersed once inside the movie theatre (Chan, 2009, p.111). Male homosocial behaviour was now more than a projection on the growing popularity of platonic friendships which became the embodiment of a gradually changing America. The race relations subtext extracted from the bonds of biracial friendships as they engaged in bloody shoot outs, violent spectacles and car chase adventures made the biracial buddy movie create “an effective vehicle for Hollywood’s agenda of marketing movies to crossover audiences at home and abroad (Jordan, 2003, p.79). The repetitive narrative of this marketing tool can be excruciatingly formulaic as Steven Zeitchik, writing in the *LA Times*, sums up:

Two men of different background/race are thrown together by circumstance (and quadrant-minded Hollywood marketing executives). They chafe at and resist each other; in fact, they rub each other so wrong that comedy (and, later, a little bit of drama) ensues. But thanks to a common threat, they finally come to appreciate and help each other. We all feel a little lighter for laughing, and maybe a little elevated to boot, because, hey, if a white cop and a black cop can get along, can't all of us? - (Zeitchik, 2010).

Presenting audiences with harmonious biracial cop partnerships was also a common strategy for encouraging white American audiences to view films which cast black men in leading roles. As Jeanette Covington explains, black cinema audiences were able to enjoy films where the central black character was not a criminal and “the presence of the white buddy assured white audiences that nothing substantial would be said about white racism and its role in perpetuating racial inequalities” (Covington, 2010, p.49). However, not all cinema going audience members saw the rise in popularity of the biracial buddy-cop duo as a positive move. Philippa Gates posits that these movies offered an impotent representation of African Americans, placing them in roles which removed any threat of civil right empowerment and often placing them in a subordinate role to the white hero. “The biracial buddy film performed two functions: first, to place black masculinity in a subservient role to white masculinity, and second, to exclude women from the centre of the narrative” (Gates,

2006, p.136). The relationship between the two main protagonists in *Lethal Weapon* (1987) adheres to this idea with Murtaugh continuously being placed in a less masculine light than Riggs as well as becoming increasingly more subservient even though the idea of stereotypes seem to appear to be subverted.

Given the moniker of the “ultimate eighties action crime movie” by writer Howard Hughes, *Lethal Weapon* (1987) mixes hard-hitting topics of suicide, mental illness, loss, humour, violence and car chases with values of love, family and friendship. Hughes goes on to write that *Lethal Weapon* (1987) is much more than just your average buddy movie it's a “million-dollar firework display” (Hughes, 2006, p.166). Much like the pattern of many other buddy-cop movies, the relationship between Martin Riggs and Roger Murtaugh is built on their differences of class, age, race and general outlook on life. Murtaugh is a family-loving, reliable, suburban dwelling cop who is just turning 50 and Riggs is a hard-drinking, hard-smoking, unpredictable and unstable wild card. Predictably, whilst battling their personal demons and oppositional personality, they find common ground for bonding. As Kenneth Chan writes, “Thus in the context of black-white race relations, the Riggs-Murtaugh partnership seems to demonstrate a state of progress in racial politics that appeals to mainstream white American audiences” (Chan, 2009, p.111). However, some were mindful of the class dynamics within *Lethal Weapon* (1987) which, at first reading, appears to invert the stereotypes of white and black aspirations but, on further investigation, reinforces them. Brenton Malin states that the “common narratives of the poor black man and the malevolent white male who helps him” are subverted in the film, Murtaugh, the African American, is the successful established family man and Riggs, the Caucasian American, is the emotional mess in need of support (Malin, 2005, p.133). However, Robyn Wiegman notes that, whilst on the surface, the shift of power has changed there are clues within the film which highlight the opposite. When Murtaugh's daughter, Rianne (Traci Wolfe), is abducted it is Riggs who is first to take control of the situation telling Murtaugh that “We do this my way” and giving orders, “You shoot, you shoot to kill. You get as many as you can,” “In the process, the white male body becomes the privileged emblem of masculinity in the film” (Wiegman, 1995, p.141).

In terms of the ‘traditional’ conventions of masculinity, Murtaugh may be the successful family man, but he is, by no means, the Alpha male within the relationship. The effects of this kind of heteronormative biracial homosocial relationship could possibly see the

(re)virilising of white masculinity and, in turn, power by coding the black character as “like a woman” (Reeser, 2010, p.206). For example, in the opening scenes of *Lethal Weapon* (1987), Murtaugh is seen enjoying a bubble bath, a leisurely treat most would associate with women, as he relishes his bubbles the audience, conversely, follows Riggs from his unkempt bed as he smokes a cigarette and walks, naked, to the refrigerator to grab a beer for breakfast. The hard-drinking, hard-smoking, hard-bodied Riggs is presented as being entirely opposite to soft-bellied, bubble bath-taking, sensible jumper-wearing Murtaugh. Of course, it is not only the male biracial homosocial on screen relationships which heteronormalises their relationships, in *Stakeout* (1987) Reimers (Emilio Estevez), adopting a feminised role, chastises Lecce (Richard Dreyfuss) for making a mess whilst eating a sloppy egg sandwich, “that is disgusting, my God do you eat that way in front of your mother?” Also, in the buddy-cop parody movie *The Other Guys* (2010), Hoitz (Mark Wahlberg), although seemingly the epitome of masculinity with his aggressive eagerness to get out there and shoot down the bad guys, is constantly telling Gamble (Will Ferrell) how he wants to be a peacock, “I’m like a peacock, you gotta let me fly” and later in the film he also shows his skills as a ballet dancer. These homosocial relationships - both biracial and non - once again are not that far removed from the interpersonal relationships of a married couple. Within the freedom which is symbolically accorded to the intense friendship of male bonding is the possibility that heterosexuality or heteronormativity is not dissolved but reformulated into another pretext. Todd Reeser posits that the cinema-watching audience understands that a nation needs heterosexuality to advance the chance of reproduction and the new racial guise and masculinity of the context (gun-shooting, beer-drinking, hard-nosed cops) symbolically evokes the idea of heterosexuality to allay any anxiety of its absence. At the same time, however, as this is not a biracial heterosexual marriage or couple, it removes the ‘threat’ of racial intermingling and of ‘racially impure’ children. “The utopian idea of America is evoked as neither entirely masculine, nor entirely heterosexual, creating a new racial-gendered coding all its own” (Reeser, 2010, p.206).

The African American/Caucasian American buddy-cop movie was given a twist in Brett Ratner's film *Rush Hour* (1998) which nonchalantly does away with the traditional white protagonist and replaces him with an Asian protagonist. The film gained publicity and notoriety for expanding the buddy-cop movie genre and was the first movie of its kind to feature an Asian and African-American pairing in the lead roles and no white protagonist. Although, Klaus Rieser states that the issue of race and interracial contact within this biracial

pairing remains highly visible. The race pairing may be different but the narrative expectation, heteronormative characteristics and masculine heterosexual assurance are still present. “The film progresses from dichotomizing - Lee (Jackie Chan) as controlled, Carter (Chris Tucker) as hysterical - to an acceptance of difference *within* masculinity” (Rieser, 2004, p.369). Here, the macho and frenzied characteristics are projected onto black masculinity to be counterpoised by the feminisation of Asian masculinity. Rieser goes on to state that although a prolific martial arts super cop, Jackie Chan's character, Lee, promotes a sensitive masculinity, or a feminine manhood. This sensitive masculinity is “racialized in the stereotype of the feminine Asian man...at the same time de-racialized and thus integrated into a state-of-the-art global model of masculinity” (Rieser, 2001, p.369). Although the film was economically successful it only served to reinforce the stereotypical notion of Asian and African-American manhood. “The representations of Asian men in *Rush Hour* are part of a cultural production formula based in part in consumers’ familiarity with stereotypes of Asian masculinity” (Balaji, 2011 p.197).

As the machismo flaunting 80s came to an end, the 1990s saw the number of cop movies gradually reduce as society, once again, changed its attitudes towards the ideas of what did and didn’t constitute ‘traditional’ masculinity. “Ideals of masculinity shifted from ones embodying brawn and violence to ones embracing intelligence and vulnerability” (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004, p.185). Whereas the contemporary buddy movie has blossomed into the bromance, there have been few box office success stories in the buddy-cop genre in the last few years. Critic and blogger Matt Singer laments the loss of this once proud genre, “Clearly this generation is suffering from a distinct shortage of tough, sarcastic guys who drive around in '70s muscle cars making wisecracks” but also posits a possible reason for their slow demise that laying in the centre of the buddy-cop movie is what lays in the centre of any big blockbuster action movie, “big, dumb action featuring big, dumb guys saying big, dumb things while shooting big, dumb guns” (Singer, 2012). It could be that the modern, gender fluid, digital age film watcher no longer needs to mask homosocial friendship with violent masculine heterosexual male posturing, that the ‘modern man’ is secure enough within himself to accept a close relationship between two men within a purely working/social situation. “The worn conceit of this post-Apatow buddy movie is that the characters make no pretence about hiding how much they prefer each other’s company to anyone else’s” (A Little Bromance, 2012).

Of the most recent buddy-cop movies, *21 Jump Street* (2012), *The Other Guys* (2010) and *2 Guns* (2013), none was a standout hit. Each modern day manifestation of the buddy-cop genre has tried in some way to subvert or update the idea to make it relevant to audiences. The juxtaposition of characters in *21 Jump Street* sees Jenko (Channing Tatum) and Schmidt (Jonah Hill) starting out as high school rivals but developing into best buddies through their police training as they discover each of them have skills which would be beneficial to the other. A friendship which is strengthened when, working undercover at a high school, they discover that their personal experiences of high school have been subverted. The nerds are now the cool kids and the jocks are ridiculed. Jenko, once the epitome of high school masculinity, now turns to Schmidt for support and guidance as he now has no clue how to navigate through a teenage world “in which a gay black guy is one of the cool kids” (*A Little Bromance*, 2012). In *2 Guns* (2013), a film that passed relatively unnoticed in the UK, Mark Wahlberg and Denzel Washington play two undercover cops from different agencies posing as drug traffickers in order to catch a drug baron. There is little between the two characters, both confident, fast talking and both exuding an almost predatory masculinity. The schism of character comes down to Wahlberg being the cheeky, winking, almost childlike character and Washington the more swaggering confident poser. The relationship, such as it is, is not heteronormative but fraternal and perhaps is the reason for the film's flaccid response. John Patterson wrote of the film in *The Guardian* that the problem with the movie was the formula and not the duo stating that as sharp as the camaraderie is, “there's no dodging the fact that Walter Hill's *48 Hours* has officially now been remade for the bazillionth time in 31 years,” Maybe audiences have now evolved to not see race as an issue which comes with issues which need to be resolved and are comfortable in allowing males to express their love of friends openly without fear of reprisals. Patterson goes on to state, “maybe the cop buddy movie has flatlined” (Patterson, 2013). The sequel to *21 Jump Street* was *22 Jump Street* (2014) and encompassed a great deal of the traditional buddy-cop movie iconography. Narratively speaking it also touched on the bromance breakup between Jenko and Schmidt and proved to be a popular hit at the box office. This may be due to the comic self-reflexive ‘meta’ nature of the movie which constantly references genre conventions and the bigger, louder nature of sequels than the relationship between the characters or the action genre.

If the buddy-cops seemed to dwindle at the box office, the start of the millennium proved that where the good guys failed the crooks could, albeit briefly, succeed with a re-

imagining of a popular film, *Ocean's 11* causing a resurgence in the 'heist' or 'gangster movie' popular in the 1950s and 1960s.

From Ocean to Ocean: How Friendship Changed the Crime Genre

The heist or caper movie was a sub-genre spawned from the popular gangster/noir films of American cinema and this evolution from gritty crime drama to a lighter narrative came from the filmmakers desire to capitalise on the sympathy which audience members felt for the criminal protagonists and owes much to the concept of the "gentleman thief" (Hardy, 1997, p.71). This transformation was a metaphor for the beginnings of social change where production was giving way to a new era of consumption. The familiar pre-war noir movies focused on a gangster or gang rising to power through the lawless production and supply of sordid commodities such as drugs, prostitution, gambling and alcohol. As Jules Dassin asserts, "the heist changes the emphasis, as from an economy of production we move to consumption and consumerism" (Dassin, 2006, p.78). This new sub-genre established a litany of themes and images including the idea of the reluctant criminal committing one more crime before retirement, groups of criminals gathered around a plan rolled out on a kitchen table and the getaway cars careening through city streets making their getaway (Hunter, 2010, p.109). Madonne M. Miner adds that, especially in a modern age, audiences like to see the mechanism at work, "Heist movies are about a mechanism. They're about forming a mechanism and foiling machinery" (Miner, 2009, p.45). Within the 'heist' movie conventions, the mechanism involves getting the team, working on the plan which sees the usually poor and powerless criminals going up against the machine of big business, banks and insurance corporations, a theme which is still prevalent in many contemporary movies. "The heist film is the embodiment of countercultural trends and possibly contains the utopian gesture that positively reconstitutes postmodern male utility" (Tait, 2011, p.237).

The personality of the criminal characters has also changed, whereas a typical noir gangster may be portrayed as tough, aggressive and violently imposing, the lighter 'heist' criminal would be "a well-dressed, impeccably cool character" (Hardy, 1997, p.71). Whereas the traditional gangster movie follows a trail of violence and disorder through various illicit activities as protagonists fend off competition to climb the criminal ladder, *Little Caesar* (1931) is a prime example of this, the heist film engages the audience's sympathy by presenting them with one crime, its plan, set-up, execution and, in the majority of cases, the

aftermath. As Matthew Sorrento puts it, “the plot style works as a variant of one of the simplest, the goal-orientated narrative in which a protagonist plans and achieves a goal, against the antagonist’s power or lack thereof” (Sorrento, 2012, p.15). By shifting the audience’s attention from the violence and giving the character substance and motive, they form a bond with the character. Nichole Hahn Rafter notes that the global and generational want for an audience to favour with the criminal comes easy when presented with the narrative from the criminal’s perspective. “Regardless of whether heist movies end tragically or happily, audiences are always positioned to favour the criminals.” She goes on to explain that the idea of stealing from those who have too much creates a “populist appeal of Robin Hood underdogs” (Rafter, 2006, p.41). This Robin Hood comparison was literally played out in the new heist ‘diet crime’ genre when notorious singers, actors and drinking buddies - ‘The Rat Pack’ - made the movie *Robin and the 7 Hoods* (1964).

This was the third big Hollywood movie made by this “small group that epitomized male ‘coolness’ with drinks and cigarettes in hand, and surrounded by women” (Ashby, 2006, p.393). It told the tale of gangster loyalty and retribution under the strain of the American Prohibition era. A detachment from the 1950s’ Rat Pack focused its attention on Hollywood actors, headed by Humphrey Bogart, this group of well-loved rogues was led by the Chairman of the Board, Frank Sinatra. His band of swinging and singing performers, comedians and actors Dean Martin, Sammy Davies Jr, Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford were the go to guys of cool. “The Pack epitomized male bonding and, according to one reporter, its members “were men behaving badly and being loved for it” (Ashby, 2006, p.393). These men embodied the principles of on screen homosociality, displaying their affection for one another both in the grainy, hard liquor, easy women of the movies and off screen during their shows, appearances or ‘down time’ in their stomping ground, Las Vegas. Earning immense pay cheques whilst appearing to work for fun, the Rat Pack were described as “like the PTA – Perfect Togetherness Association” by member Dean Martin. They rooted themselves on a conspicuous path to hedonistic consumption, limitless sexual license and unapologetic hedonism. “They ridiculed pomposity and formality. Yet there was a code of honor behind Rat Pack repartee” (Rojek, 2004, p.119).

Arguably, their most famous film, as a pack, is the heist movie *Ocean’s 11* (1960), the tale of a Danny Ocean (Frank Sinatra) and his recruitment of war veterans from the 82nd Airborne Division to pull off the robbery of five different casinos in the same night. The film

takes the conventions of the crime genre and mixes it together with comedic and some tragic elements creating a “playful, reflexive romp for actors to play themselves within a formal structure and to sing songs in the middle of what was once presumably a venue for serious social reflection” (DeWaard and Tait, 2013, p.137). But even without the singing and dancing, heist movies of the 1960s tended to be more “glitzy, glamorous, and (for crime films) relatively cheery” (Rafter, 2006, p.41) but the added dimension of The Rat Pack’s pre-established camaraderie made these films look, almost, like a musical documentary of a group of friends messing about in Vegas with a little plot thrown in for good measure. This audience friendly, character relationship approach neatly fits the aims of the ‘heist’ or ‘caper’ movie which usually features a spectacular or impossible theft, “Villaneros in caper films have to pull off the impossible and have to break the law to do it” (Beker, 2004, p.189) of which attempting to rob highly guarded and almost impossibly secure casinos on New Year’s Eve is one. The members of the group are already famed for their late night cabaret antics, “Male bonding and camaraderie are really the secret to the Rat Pack’s values and also their appeal to audiences” (Bondanella, 2004, p.156), they were almost inseparable, where one was performing then others would appear and engage in a seemingly impromptu comedy performance, heckling songs and changing song lyrics. “They were not just celebrities, but gods of the pop culture scene. Their chemistry made *Ocean’s 11* an instant classic” (Oubre, 2013). From their many television appearances, live shows and interviews, almost exclusively featuring Sinatra, Martin and Davies Jr., audiences would have been expecting nothing less than the close knit, fast talking friendship they had come to associate with The Rat Pack, projected onto the silver screen.

The homosocial interaction between the cohorts seemed to be embedded in genuine affection and trust between The Rat Pack, formed during their long-shared history. “Whether swapping old war stories, standing lookout while electrical boxes are being rewired, or making sure locked doors are marked for later intrusion, this Eleven works well as a team” (Station, 2001). By using military service as a short cut, once more, for heteromascularity and presenting each of the heist conspirators as members of the 82nd Airborne Division who all served under Sgt. Danny Ocean during World War II, coupled with the externally accepted homosocial bonds each of them displayed towards each other, the language and physicality of the male relationships could continue unimpeded by that all too popular questioning of sexual orientation. B. H. Liddell Hart wrote that the war was “waged by Battalions, not by individuals, by bands of men who, if the spirit was right, lived such intimacy that they

became part of one another” elaborating on the widely held view that friendship provided a constant anchor during crisis (Cole, 2003, p.140). It also allowed touching lines such as Danny Ocean who turns to Sam Harmon (Dean Martin), his seemingly best friend on and off the screen saying, “I think the only reason I got into this caper is to see you again.” “The men complement one another through their previously formed alliance during the war, and their heist rekindles the flames of friendship that lay dormant for years” (Donaldson, 2005, p.43).

As in the earlier chapter on cop movies where the opening titles reinforced heterosexuality and hegemonic ideas of masculinity by, seemingly, forging the titles from steel and concrete so the opening scenes of the original *Ocean’s 11* (1960) reinforces the masculine playboy lifestyles of the protagonists. After the drinking and gambling Vegas animations of Saul Bass, the audience is shown lines of men in the barbers shop getting shaved with cutthroat razors, half-naked massages from scantily clad girls and men drinking hard liquor in the afternoon, all of which exude the ideas of ‘playboy’ masculinity of the time. Each of the characters in *Ocean’s 11* (1960) also seem to represent a different aspect of masculinity and, in particular, the central protagonists. Danny Ocean is the leader, the take charge man in control, and when he is told that a member of his division may not participate in their plan, Danny plans to use his status to *make* him join, boasting that he “took him by the years and dragged him from Salerno to the Siegfried line.” Sam Harmon is the joker, the bloke in the bar with the funny one liners. In one scene, Danny asks him how he is and Sam replies with a bastardisation of a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem *The Building of the Ship*. When he is called a ‘ferry’ he retorts, “I’m not a ferry boat, I’m a very manly schloop, where I go people stare at me in dumb admiration.” Dean Martin cleverly uses comedy as a deflection to a slight on his heterosexuality. Josh Howard (Sammy Davies Jr.) demonstrates the sensitive side of masculinity, an ex-ball player forced to retire because of his one eye he responds to Buddy’s trepidation about the scheme, not with ridicule but with supportive words, “The brave ones don’t come back, you stay scared.” When Tony Bergdorf (Richard Conte) is at the doctor’s office he epitomises the archetypal, straight talking, fearless side of masculinity, after a less than positive medical exam instead of breaking down he squares up to the doctor saying, “Give it to me straight, doc. Is it the big casino?” Even the possibility of death can’t rattle away the gambling metaphors. Lastly, there is Jimmy Foster (Peter Lawford) who plays the eternal child or ‘overgrown adolescent’ still relying on his mother for his money. When talking to Sam about his relationship with his mother, “I had so much

mother love you would have thought I was quintuplets”, he wonders why he couldn’t just get a job to which he replies, “Money is a hard habit to kick.”

Returning to the idea of the reluctant criminal and garnering audience sympathy by showing the criminal’s point of view, the original *Ocean’s 11* epitomises the bromance/crime movie ‘heist’ genre. As is customary in many of these ‘heist’ movies, the assembling of the participating criminals from each of their backgrounds became part of the plot. Each of the ‘criminals’ has their personal reasons for wanting to pull off the heist, “One wants to get his wife out of stripping, one is dying of cancer and needs to pay his kid’s way through college, another wants to play baseball but is forced to drive a garbage truck because he’s black - he wants to buy his way out of his life” (Croft, 2001). Importantly, The Rat Pack were not only seen as masculine, they were seen as cool, a more ritualised form of masculinity, they wore sharp suits and posed with beautiful women, “their physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength and control” (Billson and Majors, 1992, p.4). After a bar fight, they emerge almost unscathed, suits still impeccably pressed, hair still Brylcreemed within an inch of its life and at the end of the movie when each of the men realise their ill-gotten gains have just literally gone up in smoke, they remain calm, contemplatively walking down the Las Vegas strip, still looking sharp in their suits to the sounds of Sammy Davies Jr. singing the song *EO-11*. The fact that they remain together signifies that, as with their military service, they can combat whatever life throws at them, as long as they still have those bonds of friendship. Marilyn Beker asks the question, “Are caper films unethical?” Addressing the concern that the antics of these ‘cool’ characters charming their way through a life of crime may have an adverse effect on an audience’s attitude towards crime by making grand theft and larceny a, possibly, attractive career choice. But, ethically speaking, these movies (*Ocean’s 11* in particular) have criminal activities as the centre point of the narrative, they are not about glorifying crime, they are really about the bonds of friendship, “They’re really about the characters and personal relationships of the thieves. In fact, character and relationships are the things that make caper movies interesting” (Beker, 2004, p.189).

The great American heist movie petered out slowly after the last Rat Pack movie which was the genre’s last attempt at popularity but even though the films starred some of Hollywood’s most popular hitters, it was still perceived as a “baroque incarnation of the form, and its repatriation by the silly antics of the Rat Pack looting Vegas sent the heist genre

into limbo for a long stretch” (Tait, 2011, p.237). As a genre, it was no longer connecting with a smaller contemporary consisting of smarter people who were not satisfied with the cartoon, tongue in cheek heist genre and were looking for more gritty realism. *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), for example showed the true horror of violent crime, horrible realistic bloodshed in graphic detail, “Body parts split apart. Skin flies away in pieces. Blood spurts. Victims do not perform quick falls, as in many previous Hollywood movies” (Toplin, 1996, p.129). Heist films just couldn't compete with the new wave of filmmakers who were reworking genres for a more current audience. “Independent filmmakers were grabbing audiences with movies that delivered what Hollywood wouldn't - sex, violence and sensationalism” (McDonagh, 2004, p.110). It was granted a brief revival in 1975 with Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) (an original take on the heist movie where a bank robbery turns into a media circus) and then all but disappeared.

In the early 2000s, the heist movie sparked into a brief revival as Steven Soderbergh remade and updated *Ocean's 11* - now *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) - which located the style and context of the film, as Mark Gallagher writes, to a specific ‘neo-retro’ pop culture formation which is a recurring theme running through Soderbergh’s film-making sensibilities. This, at the time, contemporary heist film placed the ‘neo-retro’ configuration of masculinity in the foreground and contorted it to fit within the modern audience’s attitude towards homosocial male/male relationships. “The neo-retro combination updates past sensibilities for contemporary tastes” either to form barriers against a response to patriarchal audience and filmmakers perceived crisis of masculinity or as an “accoutrement to refined social roles (a rival of old masculinities for a postfeminist age, for example)” (Gallagher, 2013, p.160).

The remake also has a very different ‘tone’ even though the narrative of the remake and original are almost identical, the original was more about toe-tapping tunes and friends having fun than the spurned lover revenge plot from Soderbergh. Gallagher goes on to write that the film attempts, somewhat successfully, to update the iconography of The Rat Pack but, again, updating it for a modern audience by toning down the misogyny and doing away with the tokenism. The remake, then, attempts to integrate the “model of on screen playfulness that extra-textual discourse link to stars’ off screen behaviour” (Gallagher, 2013, p.160). Although the attempt at a remake starring actors who already shared some history of ‘bromance’, Soderbergh's movie didn't quite ignite the same relationship spark, especially between Danny Ocean and Rusty Ryan (Brad Pitt) - an update of Dean Martin's character

Sam - who never managed to capture the sociability and close friendship bond between characters/actors as the original. The cast of the new movie, Karen Croft writes, seemed to have been “thrown together by the marketing department” which meant the film lost that feeling that the cast were making a film because they wanted to work and play together. “They shot for short periods during the day before going onstage in Vegas together at night to perform for the likes of JFK and others who wanted to bask in their aura” (Croft, 2001). Although the remake managed to capture some aspects of the glamour, and glitz of the original Rat Pack, the film’s biggest criticism seemed to stem from the lack of chemistry between the actors and the lack of cool cache the new cast held. “The real Rat Packers possess more ‘cool’ credibility (as they are essentially playing themselves), and more class than the likes of George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, and Julia Roberts” (Bondanella, 2004, p.156). Although George Clooney and Brad Pitt had received, and still do receive, press coverage about their close friendship, during the filming of *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), the press covered many stories of intense male bonding between the pair amid poker games and pranks which “ran rampant, and at the centre were the dreamy film stars: Clooney and Pitt” (Hallenbeck-Huber, 2010, p.13). Even now, the press continue to write about their close friendship with *The Huffington Post* writing the feature, “George Clooney Just Can't Stop Talking about Brad Pitt” which is peppered with quotes from George Clooney and his openly heartfelt relationship with the actor. “Not only do I enjoy him as a person and respect his talent, but I also love what he does in the world. I can't speak highly enough about how hard he works at making the world better. I'm very proud to call him my friend” (Clooney, 2012). Marjorie Hallenbeck-Huber continues, “They appear to have bonded beyond work, hosting dinners together, supporting each other's film projects and charitable works” (Hallenbeck-Huber, 2010, p.14).

Mark Moss writes that the “unequivocal poster boy for the hyper-masculine” is George Clooney, a man who ‘transcends gender’ being attractive to both men and women and being the proud owner of the title, ‘World's Sexiest Man’ as bestowed upon him by *People Magazine*. Sophisticated, athletic and pretty he is often called a ‘man's man’ but remains “not over blown or super-muscular, yet still exudes a total masculine package” (Moss, 2011, p.25). Clooney's Danny Ocean is far removed from Sinatra's, and the relationship between him and his cohorts, as a result, is also different. There are no short cuts to justify their close relationships, no military battalions served, these are criminal recruits and no opening sequences reinforcing masculinity. Clooney's Danny Ocean is no longer a

war hero but a “con fresh out of prison that brings together a group of fellow conmen and grifters to plan their casino heist” (Freeman, 2013). The opening scene of Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) sees George Clooney, sat in front of a parole board, looking like a lost little boy (despite the beard) pleading his case for release. There is no misogynistic bent to Clooney's *Ocean*, he is not a serial cheater like Sinatra, he is confident with his masculine identity, enough to openly talk about his reasons for committing the crime that put him away. “My wife left me. I was upset. I got myself into a self-destructive pattern.” When he is released from jail, he removes his facial hair (another defrocking of masculinity) and instead of seeking what many who have served a long jail sentence may seek home comforts, open roads, the touch of a woman, he instantly seeks out his male friends. The dissimilarity in back story makes a distinction within the bones of the film, a buddy caper vs. an act of revenge, a reuniting of friends continuing lifelong bonds of friendship vs. a gang setting out to combat one enemy, seemingly out of spite. The focus of the heist is also different, whereas the original was a mixture of excitement and daring alongside an attempt by all involved to improve their lives, the remake focuses on Danny's need for revenge and one-upmanship. Greed is the motivation not the adventure. Where in the original the money was destroyed but the friendship stayed intact, the remake changes it to a ‘happy’ ending with the eleven robbers getting away with the \$150 million. The catalyst for the crime foregrounds the justification of the heist at the need to vilify the casino's owner, Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia), because of his ruthlessness and greed and the taking of *Ocean's* ex-wife, “his *Ocean's Eleven* becomes an allegory of the growing gulf of class difference in supply-side America and the role of the movies in affirming or critiquing it” (Barker, 2011, p.21).

Both movies do not rely, largely, on guns or weapons to commit their crime, instead they use planning and intelligence as they mostly “eschew the use of violence in favour of ingenuity and skill, redeeming themselves through their loyalty to the group and the utility of the job itself” (DeWaard and Tait, 2013, p.136). The lack of aggression in both movies lets the audience focus on the close homosocial relationships formed by the characters rather than being distracted by explosions and gunfire. Nobody really gets hurt (unless it's a sting from a well-timed barb fired from a quick thinking buddy). The heyday of the heist movie has come and gone with audiences choosing violent and realistic action crime movies over knockabout crime capers. The genre which infused the buddy movie and noir crime genre has now split and reverted back to their original homes. The violence that shocked audiences in 1967 when *Bonnie and Clyde* took to the screen is back in urban crime dramas such as *Getaway* (2013)

and *The Town* (2010) and the buddy movie has turned into the bromance, a genre which is still proving as popular as ever with cinema audiences.

Role of Women in Bromance and the New 'Homance' Genre

As the buddy/bromance movie slowly evolves, it would appear that one of the traditions of the archetypal buddy movie is still alive and kicking within the modern day genre and that is the role attributed to female characters and roles for women. From capers, road movies and masculine shoot-em-up cop movies to bungled heists and the gestation of the 'new man', this genre has remained a bastion of male exclusivity regardless of the evolving, so called, on screen feminisation of men. As Richard Corliss notes, "In this all-guy world, girls are the mysterious Other... But they are only the goal: get the girl because of the challenge. They are not only unknowable, they're hardly worth knowing" (Corliss, 2007). It should be mentioned that the male-centric buddy movie/bromance is, by no means, the only genre which marginalises its female characters. Most of Hollywood seems to adhere to some secretly endorsed vagina embargo when it comes to acting roles for women. Even female audiences can have a hard time getting recognition as consumers until recently, and Hollywood has been notorious for not creating vehicles that are directed towards a modern female audience (Tally, 2014, p.153). In an article on the role of women in the movies, blogger Catherine Balavage comments that based on information from castings she and her friends attend, the scripts which she reads put most women into the following categories, "girlfriend (always hot and between 18-30), stripper (who usually has a heart of gold), older women who are always perceived as past it and never with a storyline of their own, and the nagging wife" (Balavage, 2013). The controversial 'Bechdel test' has also highlighted the lack of prominent roles for women in Hollywood movies. For a film to pass this test popularised by Alison Bechdel's comic strip '*Dykes to Watch Out For*' (1987 to 2008), a film must contain at least two named women who talk to each other about something besides men or a specific male character. At the time of writing, the test has shown out of 5,096 movies tested so far, 56.7% pass all three components of the test. Looking specifically at the roles women play in the buddy movies, many of them do adhere to the populist roles quoted by Catherine Balavage and fail the test parameters laid out by Alison Bechdel.

This certainly is the case in the *Road to* movies which seemed to work on the ‘same plot, new location’ style of screenwriting and centre around two specific plot points - the escape from the nagging wife or the threat of marriage and the testosterone-induced competition for the affection of a beautiful woman. Buddy movies have a propensity to use narratives where the emphasis is “usually how a single female gets to be passed between the hands of two men within the terms of an erotic triangle” (Stringer, 1997, p.172). In *The Road to Singapore* (1940), Crosby and Hope, after vowing never to become tied down, are both harangued by their partners and family to get married and so flee to a mysterious island where they fight for the affections of Mima, an exotic island girl. In *The Road to Rio* (1947), the duo travel the country, successfully escaping the clutches of commitment, until they find themselves ship bound for Rio where they both fall in love with a poor but exotic woman Lucia (Dorothy Lamour) who has been hypnotised. Lastly, in *The Road to Bali* (1952), the pair hurriedly left Australia to avoid the mounting pressure of marriage proposals, ending up in Bali where they vie for the affections of a beautiful and exotic Princess Lala (Dorothy Lamour). These movies can be seen as a backlash against rising female empowerment as they offer plot lines that offer male movie audiences “escapist fantasies of men rejecting women, marriage and domesticity for the independence, adventure, and rewards of male bonding” (Aronson and Kimmel, 2004, p.114). The narrative of these *Road to* movies, as well as countless others, are filled with references to living the bachelor dream, or as Robert Ebert wrote when reviewing the bromance *Hall Pass* (2011):

“There’s a common fantasy where the guys get away from their wives and girlfriends and escape to where they’re free to guzzle beer, eat sloppy, belch, fart, leave pizza boxes on the floor, scratch their butts, watch sports on TV, and in many other ways become irresistible to hot chicks.”

(Ebert, 2013, p.223)

The nagging wife, girlfriend, ex-wife is a staple of the buddy movie. During a ‘boys night in’ card game in the film *The Odd Couple* (1968), for example, Oscar Madison’s wife calls to complain that he is late with his support cheques. As Oscar complains that he is only three weeks behind and not four, he loudly relays the message for the audience her threat to send him to jail. To this threat he retorts, “With my expenses and my alimony, a prisoner takes home more pay than I do.” After slamming the phone down, he announces to the table that he is \$800 behind on his alimony so the stakes need to be raised. The men then go back to bemoaning the plight of the harangued and henpecked husbands. As a side note, shortly

after this, we learnt that Madison's soon-to-be housemate Felix's attempted suicide in the opening scenes of the film was as a result of his marriage ending, and was due to his eagerness to embody an archetypal female role of the housewife. This same 'feminisation' is also cited as the cause of the breakdown in friendship between himself and Oscar. In order to chastise women in their fight for equality, "buddy films excluded them from the narrative by replacing the traditional romantic couple with a male buddy relationship and a narrative focus on male crisis" (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004, p.114). Here the film goes one step further and not only replaces the woman with a close male friendship bond, it almost transitions one of the men into a woman.

The Catherine Balavage model of Hollywood's portrayal of women also fits modern day bromance movies. Using *The Hangover* (2009) as an example, the catalyst for the group adventure is 'husband-to-be' Doug arranging a bachelor party in Las Vegas so he can enjoy one last night of freedom with his friends. Bradley Cooper's character Phil, the only one of the group who is married with a family, constantly berates Doug about how terrible married, family life is, using his own life as an example, "I fucking hate my life, I may never go back...you should enjoy yourself because come Sunday you're going to start dying, just a little bit, every day." Next, mild-mannered dentist Stu's girlfriend, Melissa (Rachael Harris), is portrayed as a bossy, vile, cheating nag. Although we see her, physically, at the start of the film, as she reels, disapprovingly, away from her boyfriend's affection, barking orders at him, her true character develops verbally from other characters throughout the film. Paranoid that she will make his life hell, Stu is forced to lie about the location of their trip, telling her they are at a wine-tasting break in Napa Valley, the rest of the men relay stories of what a horrific woman she is, "So, you can't go to Vegas, but she can fuck a bellhop on a Carnival Cruise line?" When Stu reveals that he is going to ask her to marry him, Phil (still the most vocally anti-commitment member of the group) reacts by saying, "If it's what I think it is, I think it's a big fucking mistake...she is a complete bitch." Lastly, the most prominent female character in *The Hangover* (2009) is Jade (Heather Graham), a stripper and an escort, who is introduced to the audience after carelessly leaving her only child in a hotel wardrobe. All three female characters neatly embody Balavage's stereotypical female roles: the ball and chain, the constant nag and the whore.

The objectification of women, especially within the buddy movie/bromance genre, could, again, be a product of a movie audience's need for a heterosexual anchor. A society

questioning why groups of men would be spending exorbitant amounts of time together, in the case of road movies or plots involving men moving in together like *The Odd Couple* (1965), may raise that familiar question regarding the characters' heterosexual orientation. To further reinforce the heterosexual identity, a female to fight over is introduced, once again, reinforcing masculinity by a show of red-blooded sexual attraction and competitive male posturing, reassuring any doubters in the audience that, although these men are close, they are still men who like women. This would be especially significant in films post-World War II particularly when paranoia about sexuality was rife as gay and lesbians led lives with their sexuality hidden thanks to "the homosexual paranoia fostered by the Red scare, the fear of communist infiltration of the U.S. government following World War II" (Merriman, 2007, p.251). If the women are mostly presented as sexual objects they, therefore, underscore the men's heterosexuality and so it is often the case that the treatment of female characters can habitually waver into the murky waters of misogyny, especially given that "women are imagined as threatening and disruptive to the male bond...women are treated as dispensable characters whose roles are marginal to the male-male relationship" (De la Mora, 2006, p.88). A slow-burning reaction to this shortage of oestrogen within buddy movies has been the recent emergence of a smattering of female-centric buddy movies, or 'homances' as some are naming them, which have been sluggish to emerge in the past. As columnist Kyle Buchanan notes, "It's more than a little disheartening that, since the eighties, fewer than ten buddy comedies starring two women have been released" (Buchanan, 2013). The 1980s saw two Bette Midler buddy movies, *Outrageous Fortune* (1987) in which she was paired with Shelley Long, and *Big Business* (1988) where Lily Tomlin and her played the dual role of twins. A cult hit *Romy & Michelle's High School Reunion* (1997) reared its head in the 1990s alongside *B.A.P.S* (1997) but both focused on the well-trodden path of women wanting to dress pretty, be popular and attract the attention of men.

A differentiation should be made that female buddy movies should not to be confused with the 'chick flick' where the narrative focus is on the death of a friend, the death of a partner, the death of a family member or the death of a sex life. "Look at what happens in each of these movies. They die, get raped, die from cancer" and as writer Tara Parker-Pope also states in the opening of her article about female targeted movies, "One of the great divides in male-female relationships is the 'chick flick' movies like *Terms of Endearment* (1983) and *The Notebook* (2004) that often leave women in tears and men bored" (Parker-Pope, 2014). Although these movies may be catering for a female-focused demographic, in

2012 it was found that only 28% of these ‘Lifetime Movies’ (so named after the television channel that carries so many of these mascara-thinning tragedies) were actually directed by a woman (Zeilinger, 2008). It should also be noted, that many of the big hitters in the female buddy movie were also written and directed by men. Michael McCullers wrote and directed *Baby Mama* (2008) and even though *The Heat* (2013) and *Bridesmaids* (2011) were both written by women - Katie Dippold and Kristen Wiig with Annie Mumolo respectively - both were directed by Paul Feig. One of the few female-led movies of recent times, both written and directed by a woman, was Lesley Headland’s *Bachelorette* (2012). It has also been noted that having a woman involved, in a large role, with a Hollywood project doesn’t categorically assure a progressive text. Karen Hollinger states that the effect of female professional influence can be “severely limited by the heavy hand of a dominating male director, the strong force of Hollywood filmmaking conventions and even the expression by female writers and directors of internalized patriarchal ideas” (Hollinger, 1998, p.71). The lament of a new generation of women tired of the female-marketed chick flick and romantic comedy was the subject of a *Screen Robot* article deriding the genre whose representations of women were often ‘borderline offensive’. Writer of the article, Emily Sutherland, makes the point that not only are the narratives of these movies repetitive but that going to the cinema is expensive enough thanks to concession store markups so why would a woman bother spending money to go to the cinema to see a film they have already seen many, many times before, “Romantic chick flicks are increasingly mundane, inane and boring. They’re formulaic and they’re overdone. Hollywood kept churning out the same tired clichés and lazy stereotypes until audiences just couldn’t be bothered anymore” (Sutherland, 2014).

Examining the state of female-led buddy movies in the 1990s, Yvonne Tasker took issue with the oblique engagement popular cinema, at the time, had with contemporary political discourse. Working friendships and relationships between women within popular cinema’s generic sphere touted female-led films such as *Beaches* (1988), *Waiting to Exhale* (1995) or *Thelma and Louise* (1991) under the guise of portraying women as a source of strength. The discourses of these movies, with an added dollop of easily identifiable film iconographies from movie genre such as the buddy movie and road movie, purported to, “articulate an emotive response to women’s desires and differences to other women.” However, on closer inspection, Tasker notes that what they were actually doing was simply, “reformulating the process” (Tasker, 1991, p.144). The gaining in strength of feminist equality (both politically and socially) meant female audiences were keen to watch more

female-led movies, but that, ultimately, their portrayal was merely a perpetuated cycle of female representation wearing a different hat. In the movie *Outrageous Fortune* (1987), for example, Bette Midler and Shelly Long play two women who managed to outsmart killers, cops and criminals, however, when they stop to use a phone at a rundown convenience store they are immediately distracted by a clothing rack and start enthusing about how pretty the outfits are, giving each other compliments and ideas for accessories, “Get a little snake skin belt, get a little texture.” At this time, as Karen Hollinger also notes, a study of mainstream Hollywood’s portrayal of female friendships illustrates that political intervention or discourse was not high on the agenda. Instead of using female characters and their relationships as a way to intervene in the struggle against patriarchy, they work to subtly influence a woman’s “psychological and social development”. Instead of offering the female buddy concept to its audience as a basis for the formation of “feminist collectivity”, it could instigate a discourse to action against a patriarchal social structure. “Female friendship films serve instead as explorations of female relationships and their impacts on women’s personal lives” (Hollinger, 1998, p.242). It is something which is prevalent within the majority of popular American genre cinema that these representations of female friendship have been marginalised often favouring the attractive stars existing in ‘spectacular isolation’, supporting characters that exclusively exist in relation to the hero or women competing against each other (Tasker, 1991, p.139). In an interview with writer and producer Todd Philips, he comments on the lack of female comedy movies explaining that, in his mind, comedy comes from the awkwardness which occurs where men are placed into a situation, an awkwardness that women don’t seem to have explored, “I notice that the women have such an elegant way of interacting with each other. And guys just don’t have that elegance. So it’s just funnier to me to explore that ‘unelegance’ (Phillips, 2010). It seems as though Philips is proposing that the perceived elegance of women, as opposed to the ‘unelegance’ of men, is a valid reason for the movie industry to omit women from comedic film roles. Not only does this attitude reinforce the idea that women should be graceful and ‘lady-like’ on screen, it also dismisses the contribution made to the film industry by women such as Lucille Ball, Goldie Hawn, Whoopi Goldberg, Lily Tomlin, Bette Midler and Audrey Hepburn, to name just a few.

The traditional romantic comedy, movie studios are slowly discovering, bares little than a flickering resemblance to the lives of women today. Sutherland states, “many don’t want their lives to reflect this narrow representation of success, romantic or otherwise.” This slow but momentum-gaining rise of the female comedy, as Sutherland goes on to say, could be put

down to a number of factors but mostly it may be that audiences and Hollywood have, “simply grown out of the overly saccharine, boy-meets-girl-then-there’s-some-kind-of-drama-oh-it’s-all-fine stage... In 2014, we’ve all stopped believing in the fairy tale ending most of these films rigidly stick to” (Sutherland, 2014).

Not until recently has the genre of female-led buddy movie comedies begun to shy away from the chick-flick-sorority-girls-forever model and started to ground themselves firmly within grass roots comedy. Lamenting the lack of female buddy movies, Kyle Buchanan notes that the first signs of an encouraging revival of women-led buddy comedy was *Baby Mama* (2008), which paired Tina Fey, a successful business woman desperate for a child and Amy Poehler, an obnoxious and immature woman chosen to be her surrogate. These signs of life for the genre were threatened, however, by a studio system stuck in the era of the traditional male-centric buddy movie so despite *Baby Mama* making \$60.4 million and outgrossing the stoner antics of the second Harold and Kumar film *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008) which made only \$38.1 million, three *Harold and Kumar* movies were made but only the one *Baby Mama* (Buchanan, 2013).

The reluctance for studios and audience alike to attach support to female-led buddy comedy films could lie somewhere within the widely accepted idea that women just aren’t funny. During a press conference at the Cannes Film Festival for the film *Max Rose* (2013), comedian and actor Jerry Lewis was asked who his favourite female comics were. After firstly answering “I don’t have any”, he went on to say:

“People doing comedy that are females is one thing, but when the female takes that ability and puts it in a single context on a stage doing this and that and trying to capture the basis of what broad comedy is, I can’t see women doing that ... I cannot sit and watch a lady diminish her qualities to the lowest common denominator. I just cannot do that.”

(Lewis, 2013)

Jerry Lewis is not the only person to wade in on this most contentious declaration that women are just not funny. In an article for *Vanity Fair* entitled, “Why Women Aren't Funny”, Christopher Hitchens continues the diatribe against funny women. “Why are women, who have the whole male world at their mercy, not funny?” He goes on to lament that idea that a woman might feel the need to use humour over their sexuality to attract a man stating that, “Women have no corresponding need to appeal to men in this way.” Later in the article,

however, Hitchens does concede, in some small way, that there may be a modicum of humour to be found in those who are vaginally impaired “but there are some impressive ladies out there. Most of them though, when you come to review the situation, are hefty or dykey or Jewish or some combo of the three” (Hitchens, 2007).

One of the cultural and sociological reasons why women may be perceived as less funny than their male counterparts, especially in mainstream movies, could be the constraints placed on how a woman can express herself. Many cultures, as Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner state, have included taboos woven into their societal ideology which are in opposition to a woman’s use of bad language, sexualised content or un-ladylike behaviour. “...women’s humor has been described as more gentle and genteel than men’s, more concerned with wit than derision...more focused on private than on public issues.” Women, it seems, have lacked the attributes of aggression needed to be funny with a greater reliance, instead, on “verbal devices of understatement, irony and self-deprecation” (Dresner and Walker, 1998, p.173). There is still some bias in favour of the idea that the more raunchy humour is the domain of the male rather than the female and that “young men should be the coveted group for whom humorous television programmes and movies are created” (Tally, 2014, p.148). This lack of the ‘funny gene’ would certainly go some way to explaining the shortage of female buddy comedies and why the female Hollywood comedian is on the ‘endangered species list’. As Melissa Silverstein goes on to assert, “My god, we have three female Supreme Court justices, we’ve had three female Secretaries of State ... YET for some reason funny women in Hollywood films are on a missing poster” (Silverstein, 2011).

But there does seem to be, at this moment, a slight beacon of hope shining from Hollywood as a change in attitude towards female buddy comedies seems to be shifting. The current batch of buddy comedy movies with strong female leads such as *Pitch Perfect* (2012), *The Heat* (2013) and *Bridesmaids* (2011) along with standout performances from Tina Fey, Melissa McCarthy, Rebel Wilson and Kristen Wiig who are growing in popularity might suggest that women’s humour may now have a place in our cultural line-up, even though, at this time, strong female comedy roles remain limited. As Margaret Tally notes, “Some young women have been able to get through the glass ceiling by offering up humour that is both self-referential and which acknowledges their own foibles while at the same time offering a sense of being ‘in’ on the joke (Tally, 2014, p.153). Emily Sutherland also welcomes this changing face of female-led buddy comedies exalting that films such as *Bridesmaids* (2011)

and *The Heat* (2013) are “fresh, funny and don’t patronise their audiences. They don’t rely on lazy stereotypes and offer genuine wit alongside developed characters, rather than caricatures obsessed with shoes and shopping” (Sutherland, 2014). The casting process within mainstream cinema’s female buddy genre is also a little lacklustre when it comes to these break-out female buddy movies. For films centred around the antics of male characters, Hollywood brings out its A-list stars like Robert DeNiro in *Showtime* (2002), Bradley Cooper in *The Hangover* (2009) or Vince Vaughn in *Wedding Crashers* (2005). Female-led movies, on the other hand, tend to feature newcomers to the silver screen who wield little box office power. “While we do not fault these young actresses for having short résumés, it makes it difficult to market the films they star in when they’re up against the likes of Vaughn and Tatum” (Schnurr, 2014).

Bridesmaids (2011) remains an important watershed moment in twenty-first century cinema for female buddy movies with writer Jamie Denbo differentiating that “*Bridesmaids* is not a ‘chick flick’. It’s a ‘flick’ that happens to have chicks in it” (Denbo, 2011). This was a film in which female characters are crass, bawdy, comically over sexualised (in the case of Melissa McCarthy) and, most importantly, funny. Robert Ebert summed up the breakthrough movie’s appeal and smashing of the female ‘demure’ demeanour by writing, “It definitively proves that women are the equal of men in vulgarity, sexual frankness, lust, vulnerability, over-drinking and insecurity” (Ebert, 2011). On the flip side, vulgarity and comedy equality although almost groundbreaking on one hand also put pressure on those women who were also keen to have their new projects green lit as the phrase “Let’s see how *Bridesmaids* does first” was uttered by studio execs all over Hollywood meaning “no studio is likely to take any sort of chance on any new projects perceived to be ‘female-driven comedy’ unless they have proof that it can perform. And perform *well*” (Denbo, 2011). As Lynda Obst observed the morning after the first weekend of *Bridesmaids*, “everybody was knocked on their collective asses” and with this paradigm shift some interesting things happened. Kristen Wiig became a huge star, Melissa McCarthy, who also gave a breakout performance, was catapulted into one of the top female comedy actresses in Hollywood, old-fashioned ideas about ‘chick flicks’ were being scrutinised and lastly, “50,000 R-rated female buddy comedies showed up on manager’s desks” (Obst, 2013, p.17).

The success of *Bridesmaids* (2011) opened the door for, if not a tidal wave then a small, steady trickle, of female-led comedy buddy movies. The most recent and most ‘bromantic’ of

them being *The Heat* (2013), a cop movie starring Melissa McCarthy as an unpredictable maverick cop who is teamed up with Sandra Bullock, a straight-laced, hard-working cop with a premise that it is extremely close to that of *Lethal Weapon*. The movie incorporates humour and action and a female relationship that doesn't reinforce or conflict with ideas of what is and isn't 'female'. But does the film's status as a Hollywood blockbuster mean an increase in even more female-driven buddy comedies? Kyle Buchanan is sceptical, "Don't be surprised if Hollywood's response to a successful Bullock-McCarthy team-up is blustery immediate talk of doing a sequel, followed by years of further hot air about doing a sequel, followed by absolutely nothing" (Buchanan, 2013). Even so, the idea that female buddy movies are catching up to their male counterparts is an ever encouraging thought.

Conclusion

If we take the segment of American films studied in this essay from 1950 to the present day as an ethnographic documentation of masculinity and male friendship, the change in masculine behaviours and homosociality are clear. There was a move away from the traditionalists of the 1950s where rigid gender roles and stereotypes of 'manly' husbands and masculine bachelors sought out wives to provide for them or aggressively perused women. Society's (and cinema's) definition of masculinity started a fundamental change in the 60s with a rising interest in 'men's liberation', masculinity and men's social position. This "eventually resulted in revolutionary ways of thinking and real change in the cultural fabric of American life" (Bradley and Goodwin, 1999). The 1970s also saw disillusionment with government and the advance of civil rights as well as the increasing influence of the women's movement with many 'radical' ideas of the 60's gaining wider acceptance in mainstream American life and culture. America was also being challenged by "the student revolt; the Counter Culture; the rise of the feminist and anti-war movements; the Civil Rights Movement; and black militant and gay and lesbian movements; together with a steady decline in the income of white working - and lower middle class men" (Morag, 2003, p.20). This, in turn, gave way to new codes of conduct for women to become more proactive in the workplace and within sexual politics and men to try building new relationships, opting to stay at home and care for children as well as opening up emotionally to other men. "Among those men who have become conscious of the politics of masculinity, the main reaction has been to try to remake themselves in a new image, moving as far away as possible from mainstream 'macho' images" (Connell et al., 1987). Although, Eleonora Odes wrote that there were still

barriers to emotional intimacy in male friendships with young men still not being comfortable in “self-disclosing personally sensitive information to their close same-sex friends because they were concerned with showing weakness” (Odes, 2011, p.47). With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981, this new ‘feminised’ man hit a stumbling block. “Ronald Reagan became the premiere masculine archetype for the 1980s embodying both national and individual images of manliness that came to underlie the nation’s identity during his eight years in office” (Jeffords, 1994, p.11). As the hegemonic potential of cinema also serves “the interest of governing classes in promoting an ideology of consensus” (Chapman, 2003, p.32), this decade saw the rise in popularity of the muscle-bound masculine leading men of films emphatically underscoring the heterosexuality of characters in hard core action movies and cop films. By the time the 90s were in full swing, the taste for testosterone was waning and the ‘new man’ was taking shape who could “transform himself from the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the eighties into the considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man of the nineties” (Jeffords, 1994, p.153). As Herbert Sussman states, “Consider the celebrated rise of the sensitive man, the man who is empathetic, who listens, who even cries” (Sussman, 2012, p.155).

As the most basic assumptions underlining masculinity was being challenged, so were the traditional cultural ideologies of manliness, “primarily because of changing economic conditions and the increasing equality of women” (Sussman, 2012, p.155). As men increasingly adopted these ‘female’ roles with the equal division of parental duties, women entering the workforce and men no longer being the only enforcers of discipline in the home, the boundaries between heterosexuality/homosexuality, gay/straight were eroding. This, in turn, saw the beginnings of the destigmatisation of male/male relationships as men were unafraid to show their emotional sides. “Straight metrosexual men perform in the mode conventionally associated with gay men, so men can increasingly, without shame or danger, feel and perform same-sex affection without sex” (Sussman, 2012, p.156). A society with an increasingly relaxed and accepting attitude towards viewing intimate male friendships depicted in the media coupled with the addition of society’s increasing destigmatisation of homosexuality resulted in males allowing themselves to become more open to non-sexual male affection without fear of being labelled ‘gay’. The reciprocal nature of cinema to make incremental changes to content and characters which both reflect and influence a society cannot be disregarded as a persuasive tool for social and attitudinal changes towards masculinity and, in turn, open affection and homosociality.

As American society's attitudes towards masculinity were changing so then were the film industry and its representation of male/male relationships and the changing ideas of male roles. These representations were not simply mirroring the real but producing meaning. "In producing meanings, representations may in effect shape our understanding of the world we live in" (Kuhn, 1990, p.53).

Susanne Kord and Elizabeth Krimmer wrote that cinema provides models of leadership in which they show audiences a variety of situations, with each and every film establishing divergent links to our contemporary world from how to respond to danger and how to think about violence to how to negotiate the demands of friends and family. "...they define masculinity as a composite of varying parts of professionalism, intellectual superiority, learning, brute power, looks and language" (Kord and Krimmer, 2013, p.8). And by representing, and sometimes misrepresenting reality, films can inform and even "create the standards by which we judge our current and future actions" (Kord and Krimmer, 2013, p.8). Molly Haskell reiterates this point by asserting that "Movies are one of the clearest and most accessible of looking glasses into the past, being both cultural artefacts and mirrors" (Haskell, 1974, p.xiv)

Clearly, American cinema pays attention to the values introduced by mass culture by, not only reflecting these values but orienting it, such as "Conflictual optimism, personal engagement, and affective positivity" (Galli and Rositi, 1967, cited in Casetti, 1999, p.259). Therefore, it is possible to conceive that these societal changes in the perception of masculinity and male bonding have been absorbed into the narratives of popular American cinema. This absorbing of narrative as then, in turn, influenced mainstream audiences into accepting different lifestyle choices and variant forms of masculinity within society. James Chapman asserts that films, although not reflective of society directly, can respond to the culture and society in which they are made and, as such, are informed by and respond to the societies and circumstances in which they are produced, "films cannot be detached from the contexts in which they were produced and consumed" (Chapman, 2003, p.32).

The nature of male/male friendship is cyclical, the contemporary homosocial relationships of shared emotion and openly tactile friendships are not dissimilar to those enjoyed by men of the nineteenth century. The morphing of the new man into the 'bro' (or

dude), a “socioeconomic products of progressivism” took the ideas of sensitivity and added the element of intense friendship bonds, adolescent in its nature and “free from the responsibilities of self-conscious adulthood. In this sense, the haphazard hero is anti-intellectual, apolitical, and ahistorical” (Chani and Troyer, 2005, pp,265-267). This new “new man” is neither an active womaniser nor outright misogynist but, rather, a prepubescent adult regressed back to a time of boys’ only games in the playground and the distancing from women with their “girl germs”. As film continues to cater and adapt to the changing societal attitudes towards masculinity and homosociality, the representation of the male/male relationship may continue to evolve into a more emotional or more feminised and tactile one. However, presently, the bromance genre continues to serve as a “broadly accessible popular cultural means of interrogating both the discomforts of compulsory heteronormativity and the pleasures of boundary crossings” (DeAngelis, 2014, p.24).

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APPENDIX

From Buddy Movie to Bromance

Presenting the rough draft step outline, character biographies and synopsis to demonstrate a progression of work.

Short synopsis

For One Night Only tells the story of a group of college friends now in their early 40s getting their band back together to play the closing night of their regular bar. After hearing that Larry's bar is being sold to developers; singer and guitarist Jon begins reminiscing about their first paid gig there as classic rock band Thunder Roads. He enthusiastically announces to his friends that he wants to get the band back together. However reforming the band proves challenging as the rest of the members now have stable jobs and family responsibilities. When Jon eventually persuades them to reform and start rehearsing they all agree that something is missing. That something is lead guitarist Rob who joined the band late and left early with object of Jon's affection, Sam, just as the band was taking off. The boys travel to find Rob and manage to persuade him to come back with them but the animosity between Jon and Rob threatens to disrupt their progress. Their rehearsals continue through heated animosity but they finally seem to be getting better and enjoying being part of a band again. Having finally reached the day of the show bass player Ed gets a worrying phone call from his wife saying that his daughter is in hospital. The group rally together and during their time waiting for news at the hospital Jon and Rob decide to put their differences behind them. Luckily Ed's daughter is given the all clear and the band rush back to Larry's bar to play their gig. Unfortunately they arrive to see the bar empty and Larry locking the doors. Jon insists that the gig is not important to him now and that the journey to get there has had more of an effect on him. A few words from keyboard player Stephen, however, sees Larry handing over the keys to the group in order for them to play as the bar is now no longer his responsibility. A few friends gather in the empty bar to watch Thunder Roads fully reunited and finally able to play their comeback gig at Larry's, for one night only.

Principle characters

Jon – dreamer, fighter and lead singer

An easy going character who has never been fearful of authority or keen to obey rules he doesn't agree with. Brought up in a rough area of Passaic New Jersey by his mother Laura. He is a staunch libertarian believing that decisions about an individual's life should be made by the individual and not a government or authority.

He believes in the pursuit of happiness and works a lot of his frustrations out by getting in his car and driving to no particular destination with the music of Bruce Springsteen playing loudly in the car.

Guitarist and singer with his band Thunder Roads, Jon can also change a bed in under 2 minutes and eat three large sausage pizzas from Essman's on Fortune street in one sitting. He is, so far, the only customer to be able to do this.

"I have a mind to call the school board and tell them that you were the one who drilled a hole in the gym wall because you like to watch Cheerleaders and touch yourself"

Stephen – Straight laced, responsible and piano player

A straight laced conservative character with slight liberal leanings he was brought up by his traditional/Catholic parents in an affluent neighbourhood. Having gone against his family's wishes regarding his university option and career choice he is seen to have a small rebellious streak.

He believes in traditional values of the family but is also a big believer in accepting the lifestyle choices of those around him without judgment.

Stephen is the head of faculty at Sherpoint High School, West Orange, New Jersey and has been the head of department for five years. He enjoys teaching; however he sometimes laments how little spare time he allocates himself.

"I'm not in the business of fashion, Stacy, I'm in the business of education"

Ed – Family man, high level manager and bass player

A laid back character who likes to occupy the middle of the road whilst sitting on the fence. His outward appearance may be that of a 50 year old man but he is willing to get involved in any schemes, plans or madness usually thought up by his best friend Jon. He holds no particular religious beliefs and was raised by liberal parents who also had no religious leanings. Jon often teases Ed that when most teenagers rebelled against their parents by drinking and partying he rebelled by getting a sensible weekend job and applying his own curfews.

Manager of small claims at the Careway insurance building he is in charge of an office of 25 people and a department of 500. His management skills can be unpredictable and he is often

made fun of by the other managers for his lack of slick talking business buzz words. He enjoys his job because it gives his life structure, however, he also likes his best friend working in the same building, giving him somebody 'normal' to have lunch with instead of the brokers and other managers.

A competent bass player with Thunder Roads and surprisingly good at sewing.

"We were a great band, 15 years ago, but most of us have grown up since then, some of us even have responsible jobs they have to get back to"

Rob – New aged but competitive and lead guitarist

Rob believes in music and distrusts those who don't appreciate music in all its forms. His ambition used to be to live in a wooden cabin on a hillside teaching music to local children. However he now wants to save enough money so he and his wife Sam can settle down and have a family.

His rock and roll rebellious side gave way to fighting the 'man' in big business, in environmental issues and corruption in government. But then he took a job teaching music at a private school to earn money for a family.

Currently works as a music teacher at St Stewarts private school and has happily been doing the same job for over 5 years.

"I feel like we're lost brothers reuniting after hearing the call of that mistress music"

Jason – Drummer

Jason believes in the beauty of a good looking woman, the coldness of a glass of beer and the camaraderie of being with close friends. He has no political beliefs and most of the time has difficulty in differentiating between the two main political parties.

Left High School after graduation to work at his father's garage because it was agreed sending him to university would have been a waste of money. Although he started there as a general dogsbody Jason is now a full time mechanic.

Currently works as a mechanic at his father's garage Schall's auto shop. He has aspirations of becoming the manager but first he has to learn to not set fire to the workshop, not to spill

acetone on BMWs and that filling up the work pit with water for an improvised pool party has consciences.

“Dude, we sound like somebody set fire to a Mariachi band in a cat shelter”

Beth – Traditionalist, housewife and married to Ed

A small town girl from Burwell, Nebraska who moved to Montclair when she was in her mid 20s to be with her then boyfriend. A smart and family orientated woman she has three older brothers and so has always been treated as the child of the family. She always wanted a child and her and husband Ed suffered three miscarriages before they finally gave birth to their daughter Sarah.

Beth worked as an admin assistant at the Sherpoint High School and is currently on maternity leave. A level headed woman but with a sharp sense of humour her and Ed met at a fund raiser at Sherpoint high where Stephen introduced them.

“We’re both responsible for this child’s well being, she’s more important than some stupid show in front of a handful of drunk college students”

Laruen – Music teacher, female nerd and eventual girlfriend of Stephen

Born and raised in Montclair New Jersey, Laruen is currently the music teacher at Sherpoint High School. She has been working at this school for a year after transferring from her old school due to an incident with a student that was never made public. She is a shy and sweet woman with a wicked sense of humour.

She enjoys teaching music and as so far led the school to victory in two local and one national band competition. She developed a crush on Stephen after hearing him play the piano in her music room and loves the way his hair gets tousled when he really gets into playing

“Wow, if you can kiss as good as you can cook and play the piano I’ve found my perfect guy. (They kiss) Oh well, two out of three ain’t bad”

Sam – Opened minded, strong willed and wife of Rob

Born and raised in Montclair New Jersey she now lives in with husband Rob. A teenage

rebel she left home at the age of 16 to live with her boyfriend Rob who was a bass player and 4 years older than her.

She is the epitome of a free spirit believing that you should always follow your heart and spent her late teens on the road touring with her boyfriend and his band *Salt Rock* until she found out he was cheating on her. Despite her love for rock music and her rebellious youth she is kind hearted and regards her friends as her most precious possessions.

“When he plays the guitar it makes me feel like I’m a teenager again and I just can’t stop myself from moving”

Storyline

Act I

The film opens with a montage of all four main characters going through their usual morning routine. This will also set up the characters personality traits. We see Ed already awake trying to get ready for work whilst taking care of his six month old baby. Stephen neatly puts out his work suit, turns on the shower and folds his pyjamas before placing them on his pillow, Jon lays in bed sleeping. Jason is in the shower when the door opens and a woman joins him, Ed tries to brush his teeth at the same time as feeding his daughter when his wife (Beth) appears in a dishevelled dressing gown and puts on the coffee.

Jon squints his eyes in the sunlight, rolls over and pulls the covers over his head. We then see Stephen sitting at the table reading a newspaper, drinking coffee and eating breakfast whilst, contrastingly, Jason is sat at a kitchen table being fed toast by a half naked woman then reaches over and kisses him passionately.

Lastly we see them all leaving for work. Ed rushes out of the front door, furiously wiping something from the front of his jacket, Stephen gets into his SUV, puts on some classical music and calmly drives away, Jason tears himself from the grip of the woman, gets in his beat up old car shaking his head and drives away. Then we see Jon who pokes his head out from under the duvet, looks at his phone and hastily dresses, spraying deodorant all over himself as he stumbles out of the front door.

Next we are in a very large and corporate looking building. A board meeting is being held in a glass fronted office and Ed is giving a presentation to some important looking men and women in suits. Jon walks past, stops and then seeing it is Ed who is giving the presentation he positions himself against the glass so that only Ed can see. Jon then proceeds to try his best to distract Ed from his presentation, at one point he positions himself behind one of the board members and licks the glass where his head rests.

After the meeting Ed comes to find Jon who talking to the receptionist and tells him that his childish behaviour is what keeps him out of an air conditioned office and down in his little sweat box. Although Ed and Jon don't see eye to eye on everything, it is clear from their warm exchanges that they are very close friends. And Jon insists that he is very happy in his little sweat box away from the suits.

Jon checks with Ed that they are still on for drinks tomorrow night and when Ed is hesitant Jon reminds him that they used to go out weekly, then monthly and now it's a big drama to get together once every three months, reminding them that they made a pact in college that they would always make time for fun. Ed tries to argue that things are different now but Jon is insistent about them not losing their friendship. Ed doesn't know why he is putting up a fight as Jon always manages to persuade him into doing what he wants and so Ed reluctantly agrees and leaves for another meeting.

Jon sits at his cluttered desk in his cubical and picks up the phone to call Stephen. When his receptionist explains that he is busy he tells her that he is Stephen's lawyer with a very important news about his custody battle which simply cannot wait. When the receptionist questions whether Stephen has any children Jon pretends to get angry and the receptionist puts his call through to Stephen's office. Stephen is actually in the middle of talking to a 16 year old female student about a clothing violation. Stephen picks up the phone and Jon greets him with a string of obscenities. When Stephen calmly informs him that he is currently with a student Jon launches into a slew of inappropriate comments about the sexual legality of the situation which makes Stephen shift uncomfortably in his chair.

After the teasing ends Jon reminds Stephen that tomorrow night they are all going to Larry's bar and that if he complains he's going to write a formal letter of complaint to the school board informing them that Stephen was the one who drilled a hole in the gym wall because he likes to watch Cheerleaders and touch yourself in a way that makes Jesus sad. As he talks an older man walks by Jon's cubical and hovers behind him. Jon pretends he's on a business call and swiftly hangs up. The manager asks Jon if he's finished his data entry task to which Jon assures him that he is almost done. The manager gives him a look of despair and walks off. Jon gets out his mobile phone and texts Jason to make sure he is coming for drinks, he gets a text back almost instantly saying that he is looking forward to it. Jon puts his phone in his pocket and gets back to work, grumbling as he does so.

Next we go to Ed's house where he and Beth are having a conversation she tries to calm down their baby. Their kitchen looks like a bomb site with food and baby clothes everywhere. Ed clears away some of the mess in the kitchen and tentatively brings up the subject of him going out with Jon and the rest of the boys tomorrow night. Beth seems to annoyed but then calmly asks where they are going. Ed explains, almost apologetically, that he's just going out for the traditional monthly drink with Jon, Jason and Stephen. Ed explains

how important this is to Jon and that he doesn't have much else in his life...offering to take her away for a romantic weekend with his mother babysitting in exchange for her approval. Beth isn't keen on that idea stating that she last time his mother babysat she came home to find she's re-organised the kitchen. Beth agrees to him going out with his friends if, the next day, he has the baby all day while she goes out shopping with her sister. Ed holds out a hand all sticky with baby food and says she has a deal.

Larry's bar is a dark, rough around the edges typical downtown New Jersey bar. Jon, Stephen and Jason sit around a table and give the waitress their drinks order. Stephen attempts to order a white wine spritzer but Jon immediately changes it to a beer stating that on a man's night out you should drink anything that could be found in an episode of Sex and the City. When Ed finally arrives and Jon hands him a beer from the table. Ed explained that his daughter wouldn't go to sleep and it took longer than expected to get out of the house because they couldn't find his daughters toy Mr Jarvis. Jason then continues to tell Jon and Stephen about a girl he's been seeing how she tires him out in bed. He shows them his cell phone which has various pictures she has sent him and then tells them the pictures are just from that day. As Jon asks how old she is Stephen reluctantly looks at the pictures and says he is sure that he used to teach her. When Jason replies that she is either 18 or 19, he forgets, Stephen asks if he thinks that is an appropriate age for him to be fooling around with. Jason replies that she's been all kinds of inappropriate around his house and once in a bathroom stall at a gas station before thrusting the proof in front of Stephen's face. Stephen reminds them that he is an assistant principal and if somebody sees him looking at nude pictures of ex students while drinking in a public bar he could get fired.

Jason asks him if it's just the public bar that is stopping him and the boys suggest to Stephen places where it WOULD be alright for him to look at naked pictures of students. Jon stops for a second to Ed to lean forward, as he does so Jon pulls a tiny sock out of Ed's collar.

The group happily toast to their friendship and drink, the shot cross fades to later on in the evening, and the group are still at the same table but they are now a little more drunk. Jon is asking Stephen why he is still single and questions his sexuality.

In the middle of a conversation they all become distracted by a loud banging, they look over towards the bar where one of the waitresses is standing and banging a metal ice bucket with a dust pan brush. When she has everybody's attention she informs them that Larry, the owner, has something to say.

After a loud cheer the bar returns to normal but we see that Jon is devastated. He starts drunkenly arguing about how closing the bar is bad but selling it so some suits can build some soulless entertainment complex is unfair. He reminds everybody that they have been coming to the same bar for years. When Ed tries to calm him down by insisting they will find another bar Jon becomes more belligerent. Jason sympathises with Jon stating that he met his first real girlfriend in this bar and how he once saw a kid lose his virginity in the parking lot. Jon reminds Stephen that the corner of the bar is where he threw up, slipped and knocked himself out and that where they are sitting is exact the table where Ed announced he was going to ask Beth to marry him. Jon goes on to say that it is also the table where they calmed and reassured Ed when he found out he was going to be a father.

The guys start reminiscing about various memories they have of the bar when Stephen, very quietly, says the words “Thunder Roads”. The table hushes as each of them repeats the phrase Thunder Roads. Ed suddenly remembers that Larry’s bar was the very first venue that their rock band Thunder Roads got paid to play, Jason remembers how ridiculous their dreams of being a major rock band were but Jon corrects him saying that they had real talent, that everybody said so. Stephen enquires as to whom these people are but Jon isn’t listening. Jason stands and holds his beer in the air proposing a toast to Larry’s bar and to Thunder Roads and to the sad end of an era.

We see Jon and Ed drunkenly stumble up the street towards Ed’s front door. Ed is leaning heavily on Jon telling him what a great friend he is and that he loves him. Jon laughs at his drunken friend and says he can’t believe that Ed is his boss. He also jokes that if he keeps flirting with him and grabbing him he’s going to have to buy him dinner.

Ed suddenly stops dead on the driveway and sits down on the door step. When Jon asks him what’s wrong Ed reveals how hard he is finding fatherhood and that he isn’t sure he’s doing the best job. Jon sits down next to him and reassures him that he’s going to be an amazing father. He also reminds Ed of all the scrapes he has gotten him out of over the last fifteen years. As Jon he turns to offer more support he sees Ed has passed out with his arm around his shoulders and his head on his neck. Jon does his best to drag Ed into his house but only manages to get the key in the front door and tip Ed forward through the door landing him on his face with his feet sticking out the front door and his body in the hallway. Jon mutters that is close enough and continues his long walk home.

Jon gets to his apartment and swaggers around the kitchen grabbing a beer from the fridge. After taking a few swallows of beer a thought occurs to him and he goes into the bedroom. After fumbling under the bed for a moment or two he pulls out a dusty cardboard box. Getting up on the bed and sitting cross legged he rummages through its contents until he finds pictures of himself with Ed, Stephen and Jason graduating college. He takes another swig of beer before riffling through to the bottom and pulling out an old t-shirt with Thunder Roads emblazoned on it followed by a cassette tape with the words “live demo” written on it.

Jon laughs to himself as he finds a picture of a young Stephen with dyed black hair and a blue jean jacket and a picture of him and Ed in matching denim jackets outside Larry’s bar. Jon sighs and puts the items back in the box, as he lays on top of the bed he falls fast asleep, letting the beer bottle drop from his hands.

We then have our first flashback of the movie. Ed, Jason, Stephen and Jon are in a garage surrounded by instruments. A young Jon enthuses that one day they’re all going to be huge rock stars and they all excitedly talk about groupies and how big their tour bus is going to be. Stephen, ever the sensible one, interjects to remind them that a dream is all well and good but they still need their degrees and that maybe they should hold off doing too much practice until they have graduated. Jason derides Stephen explaining that when they are rich and famous the only diploma he’s going to need is one that certifies his penis as a holy monument. Stephen wonders why he is even friends with Jason and Jason reminds him that his mother bribed him to be his friend and she’s been handing out sexual favours to him ever since. Jason simulates sex with a broom so Stephen throws a dirty rag at his head. Jon interjects saying that the band isn’t even fully formed yet so they’ll have to save the in fighting for when they’re on their world tour. Jon goes over to pick up his guitar, Jason follows by getting behind drums, Ed straps on his bass and Stephen turns on his keyboard. As they start to play what is obviously rock music Jon is confused when the Carpenters song “*We’ve only just begun*” is all he hears. He looks over at Jason thrashing out the drums and Stephen hitting the keys hard but he can’t hear any of the instruments. Jon then wakes up suddenly; he looks over to find that it’s his clock radio which is playing The Carpenters song. He groans and stiffly reaches over, picking up the alarm clock and throwing it at the wall opposite his bed. The clock radio smashes and the pieces fall to the ground landing on various other pieces of broken alarm clock. He opens a drawer filled with clock radios and places a new one on the night stand before reaching for his phone and dialling a number.

Ed stirs from his sleep, he hears and feels a dripping on his face and wipes his cheek while slowly opening his eyes. In his blurry vision he sees Beth standing over him with the baby who has been dripping drool on his face. Ed realises that he's lying on the floor in his hallway but before he has time to explain Beth informs him that she is going to see her sister to shop like they agreed. She pats him on the head and breezily walks past him and out the door. Slowly Ed gets up with the baby and carries her upstairs telling her that they both smell a little ripe and need a change of clothes and a shower. He is halfway through putting a dress on his daughter when the phone rings. On the other end of the phone is Jon telling him that they are all meeting at the Moonstruck diner in an hour and he has to be there. Ed explains he has his daughter; Jon tells him to bring her explaining that they are going for coffee and pancakes not Jack Daniels and hookers. Ed is reluctant but, once more, Jon is insistent explaining that everybody is going to be there. Reluctantly Ed agrees. As he struggles to put a shoe on Sarah as he puts the phone down she kicks her shoe and it hits him in the face. Ed mumbles to himself that today isn't going to be a great day.

The table at the diner is covered with various breakfast items and coffee. Jason groans and pours an entire container of syrup over his waffles, when Stephen enquires if he'd like some waffle with his syrup Jason gives him the finger and shoves a forkful of pancake into his mouth. Ed chastises him for doing that in front of his daughter but Jason argues that the kid is too young to even know what he's saying before leaning into her and saying in a soft, cooing voice, "who's got a pimp and a two grand a day habit? Is it you? Peek-a-boo, I see your bruises". Ed slaps the glasses off his head and Jason tells him that's not cool but Jason laughs and goes back to eating his waffles. Jon takes a sip of coffee and gets to the crux of the meeting; he tells his friends how important Larry's bar was to all of them and that its closing will signal the end of an era and an event like that needs something special to commemorate it. Jon then tells the group that he wants to put the band back together again and play Larry's bar just for one night. The table is silent., Jason says he hasn't played the drums in years, Ed replies that he can't be a rock god with a six month old daughter and Stephen reminds everybody that he is now an assistant principle and assistant principles do not play in rock bands. Jon is disappointed in his friend's reaction; he repeats that it's only for one night and that surely each of them can spare that. Ed reminds him that it's not just stage time but also a month of rehearsal that they need to think about Stephen asks where Jon thinks they would rehearse as Jon's parents now live in Florida. Jon gives Stephen a knowing look and Stephen starts protesting telling Jon there is no way. Ed and Jason look confused

and Stephen says that Jon is after using his basement, just like the time he wanted to turn it into a bar, an arcade and a hot tub room. Jon says that all those ideas were great and it's a shame to see such a good space being used to store books and old blankets. Stephen reassures Jon that one day he'll do something with it but for the moment he has neighbours to consider even when Jon insists that he will sound proof the room. Jason eats another mouthful of pancake and says that he'll do it seeing as he doesn't get up till noon, has a dead end job, a string of meaningless girlfriends and a borderline drinking problem that he may as well justify it by being in a band. With Jason on board he tries to persuade Ed and Stephen but Ed says that with a new baby it would be impossible. Jon implores them to at least think about it, a one off gig, a fond farewell and one last blow out for the boys. Ed caves in first and says that he'll think it over they all go back to their breakfast. Stephen asks Jason just how many women are in a string, to which he replies, "More than a handful".

Back at home Jon opens his wallet and takes out one of the old pictures of him, Stephen, Ed and Jason together at college that he took from his box at home. He looks around the apartment for somewhere to put it; he takes the picture of what seem to be his parents and sticks it over that. He looks at it longingly before picking up the phone and dialling Ed. When Ed answers Jon introduces himself as private investigator calling with information about his wife's infidelity problem. Ed reminds him that his number shows every time he calls. Jon doesn't even register that Ed is talking and tells him that he's looking at the picture of them all and they were a great band. Ed doesn't disagree but says a lot of time has passed and most of them have grown up, maybe he should try it. Jon ignores the comment and persuades Ed to come over to his apartment that evening for a quick beer. Ed says he is looking after his daughter and Jon tells him to bring her over to. Ed is hesitant but Jon assures him that it's only one drink and eventually Ed agrees.

Later that night we see Jon struggling to open the front door as he is laden down with beer and snacks. He puts the bag on the counter in the kitchen, looks at the clock on the wall and realises that Ed will be arriving soon. Swearing under his breath he hurriedly fills the sink with ice and throws in a few bottles of beer. He takes a few big bags of potato chips and throws them on the table as he sits down with a bottle of beer. As he calms himself on the sofa he slowly swallows his beer and drifts off into a daydream.

Once more in flashback we see a young Jon, Jason and Stephen sitting nervously in a dank small room, Jon is drinking beer and pacing, and Jason is tapping a drumstick onto his

thigh. Stephen tells them both to cut it out because they are making him nervous. Ed comes rushing in to explain that the last band has dropped out, something about a dead grandfather, so that means they're are going on last. Jon excitedly states that this means they are the headline act. He explains that they should all remember this moment because this is the beginning of fame and fortune for Thunder Roads. Ed asks jon if, maybe, he's taking the hakensack battle of the bands too seriously. Jon disagrees saying everybody has to start somewhere. The door opens again and a young man informs them that they have been moved to the last act and that they will be on in five minutes because the crown is turning ugly on the band playing now. as they walk towards the stage they hear the closing chords of the band on stage and the booing of the crowd. Jon gathers them all into a huddle and explains that to some this might just be a battle of the bands in some small town shithole but for them it's the start to their journey. The young man holds the curtain back as the four of them walk out towards the stage.

Jon is woken from his daydream by a loud knocking, realising where he is shuffles to the door to let Ed in. He gives Ed have a beer and flops down, unceremoniously, on the sofa. Exasperated, Ed sits and takes a sip of beer before asking Jon why he's so upset. Jon explains that when he heard Larry's was going to close he realised how much of his life was tied up in that place and that soon it's going to be gone. That the closing of the bar and the rekindling his passion for the band is really getting to him Ed asks why playing in the band is so important to him now as he's never shown an interest in getting them back together before. He reveals that he really thought the band and music was going to be his life, that music was going to be his ticket out of the drudgery of day to day living and into something better. He goes on to explain that it wasn't just the women and the drugs, although that was a part of it, but it was being able to be somebody else, to be free to experiment and do something different. He explains that Ed has his family and Stephen has his job and that Jason can't see beyond his penis. But that he doesn't have a 'thing'. He also explains that he misses hanging out with everybody and just playing without there having to be a weeklong planning meeting. This was supposed to be a job to tide him over until he figured out what he wanted, but now it's twelve years later and it could just be that this was all he was destined to be. Just for one night he'd like to forget that and just get some fire in his belly again. Ed teases Jon that such an emotional speech would be perfect for a TV movie but reassures him that he knows what he means and that, sometimes, he feels it too. Ed says he never realised how much getting back together meant to Jon and would try his best to get on board. Jon then asks if he thinks

Stephen will ever agree. Ed thinks that if they all get together to pull the giant stick out of his ass then they might have a deal.

The next day we see Stephen walking down the hall of the High School chastising a child for looking scruffy and another for running. As he passes the music room he stops and looks inside, trying the handle and finding that the room is unlocked he goes inside. Running his fingers over a few of the instruments Stephen then sits down at the piano and begins to play. At first he plays soft classical music but becomes more frantic. He is in full rock mode when a quiet cough startles him back to reality. Lauren the music teacher is standing in front of him and Stephen starts blushing with embarrassment. Lauren asks him how long he has been playing and he explains his parents made him take piano lessons from the age of five. She clarifies that she meant how long has he been playing in her room, she only went downstairs for a coffee and a muffin. Sheepishly he says that he's only been there for a few minutes. When she asks him if he plays professionally he tells her how he used to be in a band and that his friends are trying to persuade him to play one last reunion show. Lauren says how wonderful it would be to hear him play live and that if he wanted to practice he could use her room whenever he wanted to. Stephen thanks her for the kind offer and gets up to leave, Lauren tells him to stay and practice, saying she'd loan him some earphones so he could play in private on the electric piano while she marks some papers. When Stephen enquires if Lauren plays any instruments she tells him that she plays the trumpet. She admits that it's not the sexiest of instruments but the breathing and mouth muscle exercises have come in useful over the years. She reaches into her desk drawer to get a red pen and says if he ever feels like jamming with her, he knows where she is. As she closes the door behind her Stephen peers in at her through the window as she peels the wrapper off her muffin. Smiling to himself Stephen walks once more along the corridor, only this time he has a spring in his step. We hear his mobile phone ringing and as he picks it up we see a picture of Ed with his name underneath. Ed calls to try to persuade Stephen to join the group Stephen doesn't give him a chance to finish his sentence, he almost doesn't hear what he is saying anyway, he's too happy from his encounter with Lauren. All he says to Ed is, "I'm in" Stephen then ends the call and puts the phone back in his pocket before continuing his journey whistling to himself.

A couple of days later we see Jon and Stephen are putting up the last bit of sound proofing on the wall when Ed and Jason walk in. Ed explains that he has made a deal with his wife that for every hour he spends with the band that is an hour she gets to spend on herself

as he takes care of the baby which seems like a good and fair trade off. Jon asks Jason if anybody had a problem with him coming to rehearsal. In a daydream we see Jason making out with a beautiful woman on her bed when Jason stops and announces that he is going to have to leave soon for a band rehearsal as he's drummer. The woman stops and reiterates that she is in bed with a drummer, she gets up and walks to her bag and spins around holding and we see she is holding a collar and a large chain. She walks slowly towards him saying that she always had a thing for Animal out of the Muppets. She opens up the collar and straddles his lap. Back in Stephen's basement Jason rubs his neck and says that no, he had no problems with at all. All four men get behind their instruments and Jon says they should just jam for a bit to blow the cobwebs off. As Jason counts them in they start to make a terrible noise but Jon signals for them to keep going under the impression that if they just keep going they'll get in sync. After a short while it is clear that jamming isn't improving their playing and Jon asks them all when the last time they played was. They all confess to not having played in a long time so Jon says that they will have to start from the beginning. We then cut to them all concentrating very intently on the yellow children's music books in front of them as they play 'Three Blind Mice'. Stephen says there is no way they will be ready in time but Jon is insistent they keep trying anyway, knowing how much this means to him Ed backs him up. They arrange to meet after work on Friday and Jon suggests that, in the meantime they should all practice whenever and wherever they can.

Next we see Ed sitting behind his desk in his office working at his computer when his intercom buzzes. His secretary informs him that his proctologist is here to see him urgently and when Ed says that he has no such appointment he can hear somebody goading his secretary into saying he is here concerning the excessive bleeding from his anus. When Ed hears giggling through the intercom he tells her to let Jon in, she apologises and tells him that he made her say it, he even wrote it down for her. Jon enters Ed's office and plants himself firmly on the couch and Ed asks him why he feels the need to continually pretend to be other people when he calls or drops and Jon's only explanation is that it breaks up his day. They talk about the band and Ed voices concern that they sound terrible and wonders if there was ever a time when they actually sounded good. Jon assures them that they were amazing and could have set America on fire with their music, maybe even opened for Springsteen. Ed changes the subject by subtly informing Jon that there is going to be an opening for the position of office manager on his floor, he explains that it's not a great position but that it's better than being stuck in a cubical down near the basement. Jon thanks him but explains

that, although he might find it hard to understand, he is doing fine down there. He has no real responsibilities, enough money to live on and no stress and he is concentrating on their gig so he can't possibly risk going for an interview at this point. He asks how Beth and his daughter are and says he still can't believe that Ed is a dad, he asks if he sometimes wishes his wife and kids would just vanish, just for a little while, so he could remember what it was like to have no real responsibilities. After thinking about it for a second Ed shakes his head and tells Jon that although his life is stressful, he wouldn't change it for the world. Jon gets up and reminds him that they are going to see Larry at the bar later on to secure their gig. Ed groans but Jon reminds him that he promised and Ed agrees. Ed asks why Jon came up to see him, Jon says it was to remind him about the gig and also because they were doing some dull equality in the work place talk that he didn't want to sit through. Ed says that those meetings are important and he could get into trouble for not attending but Jon says that's why being friends with the big boss has its perks and informs him he's going to flirt with the receptionist on floor twelve for a while.

That night Ed and Jon enter the bar and look for Larry who is out the back carrying a tray of glasses. They ask how he feels about the bar closing and Larry starts to explain that he won't miss any of it and is looking forward to retiring. Jon interrupts the small talk to explain that they have come to talk to him about putting on a farewell gig on closing night. Jon explains to Larry about their band and Larry says that he vaguely remembers them saying they played very loud music and one of them wore very tight denim trousers. Ed and Jon look at each other and simultaneously say 'Jason'. Larry explains that he didn't care much for the music but that the audience bought a lot of beer that night, maybe because the bar was so far away from the stage that it got them away from the noise of their music. Jon explains about their plans to play the bar one more time, Ed chips in saying how much the bar and Larry mean to them and it would be an addition to the evening. A hesitant Larry finally agrees to let them pay saying if they play on the very last night it won't matter if the crowd turns nasty and destroys the place because it won't be his problem. He makes it clear that he's not going to pay them and Jon and Ed agree before Larry gives them the tray of glasses and tells them to take it to the bar for him as he's going upstairs to watch TV. They take the tray to the bar and Jon offers Ed a drink but he refuses explaining that he has to get back to his kid, Jon decides to have one drink and they say their goodbyes. Whilst sitting at the bar one of the barmaids starts up a conversation and Jon tells her about the band and their upcoming gig, the barmaid is interested in how they got started and why they want to play at Larry's, Jon explains and

she seems impressed, she picks up the drinks and leaves saying she'll bring her friends to the show. With a smile on his face he finishes his drink and leaves.

Jon does his coat up and stands outside looking at the bar and as he does so his mind starts to wander. In another flashback we now see the four of hanging out at a big table outside Larry's bar relaxing after a gig. Jason has two girls with him, Ed and Stephen are talking to the same woman and Jon is in deep conversation with a girl called Sam. Sam asks Jon when their next gig is and Stephen says they are playing a school dance later in the week. Jon kicks him under the table and explains to Sam that they are just doing a few warm up gigs before they launch themselves onto the paying public. The woman Stephen and Ed are talking to seems unimpressed that they have yet to play a professional gig but Jon assures them that sooner rather than later they'll be touring the east coast of America. Sam thinks Jon's ambition is cute and asks him where he hopes to be playing; Jon explains to Sam his dream of being a touring band but then confides in her his frustration that he has to get a paid gig in his own town. Sam asks Jon if he's ever thought of playing Larry's bar as she knows they have live music now and again. Jon shrugs and says he's not really thought about it and that maybe Larry's bar is more of a sports bar than a music venue so wouldn't suit them. Sam reminds him that all gigs are experience and if they get paid for it then they are one step closer to being a professional band. Stephen points out that gas money would be a good idea and Ed suddenly suggests they could some kind of stage uniform, maybe matching t-shirts. Jason, however, is too busy with his two girls to pay much attention to what is going on. Jon tells Sam that it's a great idea and that he'll call Larry in a few days to talk it out. Sam looks confused and tells him why wait, he is in the bar now and there is no time like the present.

Out of the corner of her eye Sam spots Larry taking something out to the trash bin outside. She grabs hold of Jon's hand and pulls him, reluctantly, to where Larry is pouring glass bottles into a large container. Sam introduces herself and explains that Jon is the lead singer of Thunder Roads an up and coming new rock band who is currently taking the college circuit by storm. Jon tries to interrupt but Sam keeps talking. She tells him that they are looking for a warm up venue before their big east coast tour and would he consider putting them on at his venue. He looks at Jon and asks him what kind of music he plays; Sam describes the music as classic rock with a contemporary twist, kind of like early Springsteen meets contemporary Springsteen but with more of a melodic undertone. Larry looks at him for a moment and asks if they are a Springsteen tribute band. Jon laughs and says that no, that they play a few covers but mostly their own stuff. Sam interjects with the fact that they

are very popular with a young audience who are the kind to spend a lot of money on beer. Larry is about to go back inside when we stops and offers them \$80 for an hour at the end of next month Sam holds out her hand and tells him he's got a deal. Larry is less than enthusiastic and adds if it gets rowdy they have to pay for any damage.. The two of them become extremely excited and start shouting and bouncing around. Jon is woken from his daydream by a group of drunken guys hollering at a table outside. He does his coat up even tighter and starts to walk home.

It's the following day and we see Stephen walking into a coffee shop, as he opens the door his cell phone beeps with a message from Jon that says, "we got the gig, so get your rock on" he shakes his huffs out a small laugh and joins the end of the line. As he is waiting he feels a tap on his shoulder and when he spins around he sees Laruen standing behind him. She asks how the band practice is going and they chat for a while as they wait to be served. The barista asks Stephen if he wants the coffee to go so he turns and asks Lauren if she would like to join him, she agrees, so he orders the coffees and finds them a table. They sit making small talk for a while. Stephen explains that he likes this coffee shop because they use filtered water and you can really taste the difference, he then apologises saying that was probably one of the lamest things every spoken. Luckily Stephen's conversational diarrheah is interrupted by a phone call from Jon informing him he is on his way to pick up Ed. When Stephen explains that he is a bit busy at the moment Jon becomes curious and after badgering Stephen he eventually explains that he is having a coffee with Lauren. Jon takes this opportunity to tease Stephen, pretending to be his mother he tells him to be respectful and careful because he's too young to be a grandmother. Stephen says he'll see him later and hangs up the phone continuing his conversation. Stephen asks if Lauren would like to go out for dinner sometime and Lauren says she would love to. They finish their coffee and Stephen gives himself a self congratulatory fist pump in celebration.

Meanwhile Ed and Beth are having breakfast in the kitchen surrounded once more by baby tops and mess, as baby Sarah is sitting up in her playpen. Beth asks Ed how his band practice is going and Ed says things are shaping up nicely. They sit quietly eating breakfast for a few moments before, out of the blue, Beth asks if Ed thinks their lives will change too drastically now they have the baby. Ed doesn't think so, but Beth mentions that she is scared that he already sees her more as a mother than a wife. Ed is confused but Beth explains that she worries about him not finding her attractive any more, that being at the birth might have put him off being with her. He reassures her that being at the birth was humbling not

disgusting and that he loves her very much. She asks if the band is a distraction, an excuse to get out of the house or a way to recapture his youth when he had no ties. He laughs at that idea saying it's for Jon mostly, but he's enjoying being one of the boys again. But it's temporary, that what they have is real and forever. A car horn beeps outside and Jon sits in his car waving at them through the window. Ed says he has to go reiterating that he loves her and their baby very much. He kisses them both on the head and leaves the house. Beth turns to baby Sarah and says, "When you grow up you're going to have nothing to do with men in bands, you're going to be a scientist or better yet, a nun".

Ed and Jon arrive at Stephen's house for their rehearsal, Jon asks how his date went and Ed is surprised that Stephen hadn't mentioned a girlfriend. Stephen explains about Lauren and Jon continues to tease him. The teasing is interrupted by the arrival of Jason and they start their band practice. After a short time playing they agree that they sound better but that they still don't sound great. Jason says they sound empty and that it feels like there is something missing, Ed says he knows why it feels like something is missing but Jon refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem. The rest of the group, however, agree that to sound as good as they used to they need something extra and that Jon knows what that something extra is. Jon refuses to be drawn in to the discussion saying that they just need more practice but Stephen says he is deluded and that they need to get Rob. Jon says there is no way he is going to play if any of them contact Rob. He then gets angry and threatens to quit if they bring him in. He asks if any of them remember what he did and had they forgotten that he was the reason the band split up and caused them to miss out on a golden opportunity. Stephen tells Jon that they need Rob, with him they don't sound as good and if Jon it would be selfish. He goes on to explain that he won't have a chance with Lauren if they stink or if they don't go through with the gig. He passionately explains that the band is the only interesting thing about him and asks why Jon would want to take that away from him. Jon says that Stephen is the one being selfish and caring more about getting laid than the music. Jason interrupts saying that was the only reason why he joined the band in the first place. The group then descends into an argument and Jon storms off to get a beer.

Ed looks for Jon and finds him in the kitchen looking in Stephen's refrigerator. He joins Jon and reminds him that he's driving him home so he better not be scouting for beer. Jon says he's already ahead of him and pulls out a bottle of apple juice. They talk for a while about why Jon is so upset and Ed reassures him that the guys aren't being ungrateful and that if he wants a full reunion then it's only fair to contact Rob because he was part of their

success. Ed explains that he is one of his best and oldest friends and that yes, he understands that Jon is still hurt, but it was a long time ago and he should have moved on by now. Ed explains that they have come too far now to just give up and how exciting it is to be doing something fun again. He says that Rob has probably changed, that they've all grown up and that if Jon is doing this for the music and his dream of playing again then they really do need Rob. Jon sighs and agrees to Stephen calling Rob but he refuses to speak to him. Ed pats him on the back and tells him to come downstairs because they can't afford to waste practice time chit chatting over fruit juice.

Act II

Jon is slumped at his desk half heartedly writing on a piece of paper when Ed comes to see him. Ed asks what he is doing and he shows him a piece of paper with an intricate drawing, he explains that it's a drawing of a snake being impaled on a spiked guitar neck which is also on fire. Ed asks why there is an arrow next to the snake with the word Rob next to it; Jon shrugs and replies that he thought it was appropriate. Ed tells Jon that Stephen called Rob last night and that they're going to drive up to see him on Saturday. Ed says he understands if Jon doesn't want to go but he thinks it would be a good idea if he did. Jon is also less than thrilled to hear that Stephen will be driving but Ed explains that Stephen has the big SUV and the ability to spread out is more important than the fact that he drives like an old woman, "even miss daisy flips him off on the Freeway". Jon reluctantly agrees to coming with them to see Rob and then uses it as leverage to guilt Ed into taking him out to an expensive restaurant for lunch. Jon says he wants to go somewhere expensive and when Ed protests he argues that he's the one with an expense account he just has to pretend that he's his accountant or better still, his mistress.

We see Ed and Jon enjoying their lunch in an obviously expensive Italian restaurant. Ed tells Jon how his daughter is doing and asks when Jon is going to think about settling down. Jon almost spits out his wine and says that he's a long way off where Ed is at the moment and that being brought up in a family with a dead beat dad and an over worked mother has put him off marriage for life. In the middle of the conversation Ed's phone rings and he is greeted by a very panicked Stephen. All Jon can hear is Ed telling the person on the other end to just calm down, Jon looks confused and Ed mouths that it's Stephen on the phone. Stephen is having a crises of confidence out about his dinner tonight with Lauren, it's been a long time since he dated he doesn't want to mess it up. Ed relays the info the Jon who

finds it funny but Stephen is annoyed that Jon is there, he didn't want him finding out which is why he called Ed. Ed calms Stephen with some encouraging words and Jon adds his own unhelpful advice to the mix. Eventually they calm Stephen down and once he hangs up Jon and Ed stop and gives a toast to Stephen's hopefully working penis.

The next evening Stephen is futzing about in the kitchen when the doorbell rings, he opens it to find Lauren waving a bottle of red wine and mineral water in her hand. She tells him that she's brought the mineral water because of what he said in the coffee shop and then says that they are now probably even on the saying lame things scale. Stephen laughs, takes her coat and she sits at the counter and opens the wine while he finishes the pasta sauce he's been cooking. He tells her about the developments with the band and that he is going to be spending his weekend driving for 6 hours in a car full of barely toilet trained band members. Lauren is sympathetic but says it must still be exciting on some level to be back in a band. He agrees that he didn't think he would enjoy it as much as he has been but for her not to tell Jon that he said that as he is insufferable enough as it is. As he continues to stir his sauce Lauren comments that if Stephen's cooking is as good as his keyboard playing she is going to be in for a real treat tonight. He grabs a spoon, takes some sauce offers her to come over for a taste. As she walks to the other side of the counter Stephen offers her the spoon. Instead of taking it she blows on the spoon which Stephen is holding and then takes a sip. After confirming that he can cook she says if Stephen kisses as well as plays and cooks she's found her ideal man. Tentatively Stephen steps forward and Lauren leans in and kisses him. Lauren steps back and slowly opens her eyes. Looking up at Stephen she shrugs and says that two out of three isn't bad. Stephen looks panicked but is then relieved when Lauren starts to laugh before going in for another kiss. The phone starts to ring and Stephen looks over to see Jon's name on the caller ID, Stephen reaches over for the phone and switches it off and gives Lauren another kiss.

We cut to Jon who is sitting in his apartment on the phone, he realises that Stephen has just put the phone down on him and chuckles to himself saying to himself that Stephen's getting lucky. He settles back down in front of the television with some chips and a beer and continues to watch a film until he slowly falls asleep.

Stephen brings Rob into the garage explaining that he just heard this guy play and he would be a great addition to the band. Jon is hesitant saying that they already have a guitarist but Stephen insists that they need a lead guitarist and while Jon can play and sing the band

would benefit from a few rock licks. Jon says that rock licks isn't what the band is about. Jason and Ed think he should be given a chance because he can only add to the band and it might get them more work. He asks Rob who his musical influences are and he says his favourite band is Kiss. Jon raises an eyebrow but Stephen quickly asks Rob to play them a few tunes. Rob plugs in his guitar and starts to play, the rest join in and after they finish are all enthused by the sound they just made. Jon goes over to shake Rob's hand, as he does so a horn sounds and Jon wakes up. He is still in his recliner and covered in potato chips; he jumps when he hears Jason banging on his door. Quickly he gets up, splashes his face with water that's in the sink, combs his hands through his hair and grabs his keys and bag.

When he gets outside he sees everybody sat in Stephen's car and ready to go. Jason starts to get back into the front seat but Jon stops him and informs him that he placed an eternal shotgun when Stephen first bought the car; Jason complains that there is no such thing but Stephen backs up this Jon's story and Jason gets into the back with Ed.

Once in the car Jon thanks Stephen for backing him up but Stephen whispers that he couldn't drive for six hours next to a man who smells like junk food and bad life choices. Jason reaches over the seats and goes to plug in his iPod before Ed snatches the cable insisting that he had to do a lot to get here and so they should play his music. Just as the music starts Stephen grabs the wire and attempts to plug it into his iPod saying they should have something more subdued. Jason asks why they all just don't listen to their own music and Stephen says if he is going to drive all day he's not going to do it with everybody plugged into their iPods while he drives in silence. Jon then takes the wire and states that there is only one way to play tunes during a nostalgic 6 hour road trip. He reaches into his bag and pulls out an old walkman and a battered cassette, he plugs the wire in and Bruce Springsteen 'born to run' starts to play. The boys start smiling and singing a long as the car drives into the distance.

Sometime later in the car Ed and Jason have started to watch cartoons on the DVD head rests and Jon and Stephen are driving in silence. Stephen then asks Jon if he resents him for getting in touch with Rob, Jon shakes his head and says that Ed was right, if the band is getting back together then it really should be the whole band. Jason starts laughing and Jon makes a comment about feeling like a parent taking his kids on a day out. He then asks why Stephen has an SUV with all the kid friendly gadgets when he is earning enough to afford a pretty nifty sports car. Stephen says he's not really the sports car type and that he bought the

SUV because wanted people to think he has a family. He goes on to say that people might think that there is something suspicious about somebody in his position being a bachelor. People question his sexuality, a lot. He knows it's silly as everybody at work already knows he's not married with kids but he explains that a real family is something that he's always wanted a family. In some strange way having a big family friendly car makes him feel closer to that goal. Jon asks how is date with Lauren went and then says that maybe in the not too distant future the two of them will need an SUV. Stephen smiles and says that underneath it all Jon is actually an alright guy. Jon agrees and says it makes up for all the other stuff he says and does. Stephen then suggests stopping for gas and something to eat.

Stephen pulls into the diner attached to the gas station and they go inside for food. As they eat they start to reminisce about the things they have done since college and the kind of people they have become. Ed recalls the time Stephen got locked in a motel room with an angry prostitute. Everybody laughs as they remember but Stephen is less than happy and says none of them has ever owned up to who locked him there and they all look away innocently. He reveals that he had to pay her \$200 when she got freaked out and pulled a knife. He says he wouldn't have minded if he'd actually gotten something out of the deal. Jon fakes shock and asks Stephen if he just admitted to regretting not getting a blow job from a prostitute. Stephen tells Jon to just eat his burger. Jason remembers the time they stole and drank a bottle of weird nut liquor they found in Jon's parents liquor cabinet. Ed remembers that it tasted terrible and Jason reminds him that he threw his up in Jon's guitar case. Jon then says that the case smelled like pukey snickers bar for weeks. They all agree that they had some of their best times in the band and they can't understand how none of them got arrested or ended up dead. Stephen says they were great times but that they all had to grow up sometime. Jon disagrees and says that bands like The Rolling Stones, The Who, AC/DC, Springsteen and Ozzy Osborne have done alright without growing up. Stephen says that they are special cases but Jon argues that they could have been special, if it hadn't been for Rob. Jason says that he doesn't want to go through all of that again and Jon argues if Rob hadn't fucked off and left Jason could be eating that burger off a hooker's back right now. There is a pause before Jason asks where would he dip his ketchup. They start to laugh and immediately the tension is broken.

Back in Stephen's car Ed is now asleep in the back and Jason is still watching sponge bob cartoons. Jon looks over at Stephen who is quietly singing along to the radio and so Jon looks out at the passing landscape, leans his head on the window and closes his eyes.

Another flashback sees the young band all sitting at the counter of a diner after having done a show. It's late and Jon looks down the end of the counter at Sam and Rob laughing as he tries to throw fries into her mouth. Jon looks frustrated and Ed notices telling him to go ask her out but Jon says it's too late and that she is obviously into Rob. Ed says that she doesn't seem to like him more than any of the others, she just happens to be sat next to Rob and that he should go and talk to her saying she probably responds just as well to conversation as she does having food thrown at her face. Jon eats his grill cheese sandwich and tells them to let it go. Jon is jilted from his daydream by the sound of Stephen announcing they have arrived at Rob's house.

They all huddle behind Stephen as he rings the door bell. Sam answers giving Stephen and Ed a big hug, as she hugs Jason Jon notices the wedding ring on her finger. Sam looks at Jon and remarks on how he doesn't look any different and as she envelops him in a bear hug she says that it's so good see him after such a long. Sam then leads them all into the living room where Rob is sitting cross legged reading a book. Rob puts his book down and explains that he wasn't expecting everybody to turn up, only Stephen, but that it's nice to see everybody again. Rob walks toward the group, he is wearing a white linen tunic with light linen trousers and no shoes or socks. Jason looks him up and down and whispers to Jon that he thinks maybe Rob's joined some sort of cult. Jon laughs and pokes him in the ribs.

Sam offers them a coffee but Rob says they should opt for something a bit stronger after all it is a celebration. Rob awkwardly goes up to Jon and offers him his hand and a brief hug which Jon reluctantly takes. Rob explains that whatever happened in the past that, as far as he is concerned, it's all water under the bridge, that he's sure that now they are all very different people and that he'd like them to be friends. Jon nods and says sure before sitting down on the sofa next to Ed. Time has passed and the coffee table is strewn with beer bottles as the group sit reminiscing and persuading Rob to come to Montclair to play with them. Sam thinks is a great idea saying that she can spend some time decorating the house without Rob getting under her feet. As Sam talks Jon gets annoyed that Rob keeps touching and holding onto her like he is protecting his property. Rob argues that there is only two weeks until the gig and he would need to practice as well as needing a place to stay. Stephen says if he can come back with them tomorrow he can stay with him and then asks if it would be impossible to learn the songs again in such a short space of time. After all, they haven't even asked if he still plays. Sam gives a knowing nod to Rob and Rob tells them to follow him upstairs.

Once upstairs in the music room Rob picks up a red Gibson SG guitar and plays a needlessly loud and complicated riff, as he plays Sam sways in the doorway and exclaims that she just can't keep still when he's playing and that she feels like a teenager when he plays. Jon asks Rob if the riff he played was from a KISS song, Rob confirms that it was and Jason winks at Jon making him laugh. Sam declares that there really is nothing sexier than Rob playing his guitar when he's really into the music. She wanders over to where Rob is playing, stands behind him and wraps her arms around him. Jon tries to blend in with the door and stars off into the distance as Rob plays another riff.

In another flashback we see the young band leaving the stage. Stephen, Jason and Rob make a bolt for the dressing room but Ed and Jon are stay standing in the corridor. Both boys agree that they are playing at the top of their game at the moment and that it's the best they've ever sounded. Jon is on such a high that he tells Ed that he's going to ask out Sam, that he's going to bite the bullet because after that blazing set how could she possibly resist him. Ed pats him on the back and wishes him luck as he jogs down towards the dressing room. However, once he opens the dressing room door he sees Sam with Rob draped over her showing her how to play the guitar. They both look up, laughing, and Sam excitedly tells Jon that Rob is showing her how to play a D chord. She invites him to hear her but he declines and scuttles off dejected. All Jon hears is Rob's voice calling after him.

Back in the music room it becomes obvious that Rob has been saying Jon's name over and over trying to get his attention but he's been lost in his thoughts. Ed reiterates that Rob is happy to join the group but only if Jon wants him there. Rob interjects and says how important it is for Jon to be happy, after all it is his band and he doesn't want to ruin his moment in the spotlight.

Reluctantly Jon says he would be happy to have Rob join him as it wouldn't be the full line up of Thunder Roads" without him. He feels Jason's hand on his shoulder as he looks at him Jason says "nice one". In a last ditch attempt to stop Rob from joining him Jon asks if it's going to be a problem leaving work for two weeks at such short notice. Unfortunately Rob informs Jon that the place he works is pretty relaxed and that he already tentatively booked the time off when Stephen first called him up about the band last week. Jon puts on a face of brave enthusiasm and says that there's nothing to stop them now.

After a few more drinks Sam tells the guys that they all have to spend the night, Jon refuses saying they can find a Holiday Inn somewhere but Sam insists. She says if they don't

mind sharing two to a room she'll go get the spare linen and cots for them. Jon downs his beer and asks if there is anything a bit stronger saying that he sometimes a lot of trouble sleeping in new environments and a shot or two of something sturdy gets him off to sleep. Rob walks over to a cabinet and hands Jon a bottle of bourbon with a small tumbler but says that it's probably not healthy to drink to get to sleep plus there is a chance that he could choke on his own vomit. Jon says "here's hoping" under his breath before Jon filling the glass to the top and drinking it down all in one and goes to use the bathroom.

Stephen and Jason have to share a double bed which is something Stephen is clearly not happy about. As they lay there Stephen complains that Jason didn't go for his top to toe idea. Jason says that's for children and that if two grown men can't share a bed in comfort because one is scared of a little man on man spooning then the world is a dreadful place. Jason then assures Stephen that there is no need to worry and that he is 100% heterosexual. Stephen says it's not his sexuality that bothers him, it's his hygiene. Stephen opts for sleeping above the covers with a sheet over him and is not happy when Jason leans over him and kisses him goodnight. Jason then says to Stephen that if he accidentally gropes his breasts in his sleep to wake him up with a shove, or to lay there and enjoy it, it's his call. With that he turns and switches off the light leaving Stephen wide awake and staring at the ceiling.

In contrast Ed and Jon are lying on two cot beds placed side by side in a utility room. As they recap on the day and Ed tells Jon how proud he is of him and how he has handled everything so far. In the middle of talking Ed's phone goes off and he tells Jon that it's Beth. Jon lays there listening to their conversation about their daughter and how much he misses them both and can't wait to come home to see them. After several kisses he puts the phone down and turns to look at Jon expecting Jon to make fun of him. Surprisingly Jon mentions how happy Ed seems with family life and Ed agrees saying it's not what he planned but he's very happy that it happened. Ed then asks if Jon is going to be able to sleep and Jon replies that after a 6 hour car ride, a double bacon cheese burger, Jason's car sickness, seeing Sam and Rob and that quarter bottle of bourbon he drank he should be just fine. He then tells Ed how thankful he is that the day is over because that means things can't get any worse. Ed groans saying he should never say that, that in films when people say that it always comes just before something comically terrible. Jon says that life isn't like the movies and just as he says it the strained sounds of Sam and Rob having sex in the room above them comes through the Ceiling. Jon groans and puts a pillow over his head to try and drown out the

noise. Ed then reaches over to where Jon is lying, lifts his pillow and says, "I told you" before shutting off the light and going to sleep.

The next day we see Stephen packing a very large suitcase into the back of the car before joining everybody on the porch as Sam says her goodbyes. She takes Robs head in her hands and kisses him passionately saying that she's going to miss him that makes the rest of the guys feel uncomfortable. Rob assures her that he will miss her too before double checking with Stephen that it's still okay for him to stay at his place. Stephen says that it's not a problem and they all pile into the car. Once they are all inside Rob asks if he can put on a little music. Stephen says that seeing as Rob is their guest it's only fair that he has dibs on the first hour of music. Rob then hands Stephen a CD-R which Stephen puts into the car CD player and as Stephen pulls away the song *I wanna rock and roll all night* by Kiss starts to play. Jon rolls his eyes and bangs his head on the glass looking wistfully out at the landscape and whispering to himself that this is going to be a very long hour.

A while later as the car comes to a stop outside Jon's apartment and Jon stumbles out of the and stretches his legs but he is nearly bowled over by Jason moving to the front seat. Jason makes a small victory fist pump but Jon says that he only lives a few streets away. Jason says that a victory is a victory and that even though it's only for a short time that he is going to make the most of the front seat and reclines it back almost squashing Ed. Jon turns to say goodbye to everybody telling a squashed Ed that he'll see him at work in the morning. Ed tells him not to be late as there are only so many times he can cover for him but Jon is already walking towards the door and waving off Ed's remark. Once inside his apartment Jon throws his keys into a bowl by the door, takes off his jacket and collapses on the bed.

In this dream we see a young Rob and Sam arrive at rehearsals holding hands. The guys ask if there is something going on and Rob announces that, after a wonderful dinner, he and Sam are now dating. Jon looks devastated and can't concentrate during rehearsal and seems to mess up his chords each time he looks at Sam. Ed asks him if he's feeling alright but Jon says he's fine and that he just needs a coke and goes to take a break. Ed follows him and tells Jon that he understands how he is feeling. He tells him that he was getting ready to ask out this girl called Beth but that some cock with a motorbike got there first and now when he sees her riding on the back of that metal death pony he feels physically sick. Jon assures Ed that he's fine but Ed tells Jon that he doesn't have to put up a front with him; they've been friends for too long. As Jon goes to correct him he turns and is confused when he sees Ed

miming to the song “I got you babe”. Jon is startled awake; realising that it’s his clock radio again grabs his alarm clock and throws it against the wall. He opens the drawer to find it empty, he swears and reluctantly gets out of bed.

Act III

Jon arrives with Ed at Stephens’s house and they make their way down to the basement where Stephen and Rob are already playing some tunes. Jon makes a jibe to Ed about getting the rehearsal started before the two of them break off to form a duo. Rob ignores the jibe and instead asks Ed how he’s doing and how the family are, he then turns to Jon and says that he never found out if he was married or in a relationship. Jon sneers through the comment saying he prefers to be a free agent, Rob shrugs and says he prefers a nice warm body to cosy up to at night and that nothing can beat the feel of soft skin against his. Ed interjects and shows Rob a picture of his daughter with breakfast all over her face that he took that morning. After Ed shows him picture on his phone Rob says that he shouldn’t be broadcasting it but that he and Sam are trying to have a baby. Stephen and Ed congratulate him but Jon mutters under his breath and goes over to plug in his guitar. Jon takes his position next to Rob, he shouts out the name of a song and they start to play. As the band play through the song Jon moves sideways and the neck of his guitar knocks Robs shoulder. Rob moves over a fraction away from his guitar but Jon does it again. Rob then moves to the front but Jon follows, the aggressive guitar playing starts to make the rest of the guys feel uncomfortable but none know how to handle the situation. Soon Jon and Rob stand face to face and begin trying to outshine each other with better and better guitar riffs. Ed, Stephen and Jason stop playing, exasperated and annoyed by the scene in front of them. Rob and Jon continue to play, however, until Jon steps forward and pushes his guitar into Rob’s making an ear shatteringly awful noise. Rob aggressively puts his guitar down and goes up to Jon’s face accusing him of being a coward who can only achieve what he wants by cheating. It appears that there may be a fight about to start so Stephen steps in before one can break out and suggests they all take a break for some brunch. Jason is not happy about the term brunch and says he feels as though he’s falling into a daytime TV chick movie. He won’t go for brunch but he’ll go for pancakes. Ed argues that they have only just started rehearsing and if they stopped after ever ten minutes for a break it would be next year before they were ready to play. Stephen shushes him and says they could do with a break and ushers them all upstairs.

All five men sit silently around the table eating, drinking and communicating exasperation, annoyance, confrontation and pleading with their eyes, apart from Jason who is happily eating his pancakes. Ed awkwardly sips his orange juice and after some more awkward silence Rob takes a deep breath and apologises for his behaviour and that he should have handled the situation in a more adult fashion. Ed says that it takes a big man to apologise and nudges Jon in the ribs. A startled Jon mumbles something of an apology and goes back to sipping his coffee. Some more awkward silence ensues and Stephen coughs awkwardly and says “well, this is nice”. To break the tension Ed asks Rob if he still enjoys being a teacher. Rob says that he enjoys the challenge and the sometimes the kids can be very challenging. Jon asks how challenging private school children can be and that if he wants a real challenge he should teach the state school over in Trenton. Rob says that all students have problems, not just the ones from poor areas. Jon then asks Rob if he thinks that teaching music in a classroom is effective as, in his opinion, music should be freeing and not restricted to being forced on kids in schools. Rob defends his job saying that the exposing kids to all kinds of music in a safe environment is more effective than being sweaty and squashed at a rock gig. Jon sarcastically says that he’s sure Jimi Hendrix appreciates his tunes being played in a parentally approved, government supervised, sterile, corporate environment funded by private sector billionaires. Rob insists that there is more to his job than just a bunch of kids listening to music and that he teaches them creativity and freedom. Jon mutters that he still thinks it’s a copout but Rob interjects saying that he can now has the best of both worlds, a job that revolves around music and the stability of a steady pay check which helps him support Sam. He then adds that it’s especially important now as they are trying to having kids. After a small awkward silence Ed finishes his coffee and suggest they go back to rehears some more.

Later that evening Ed and Jon load their guitars into the back of Jon’s car and head back after rehearsal. During the drive to Ed’s house Ed asks if Jon is ever going to be able to get past this thing with Rob. Jon gets annoyed and explains that Rob was clearly aggravating him and when Ed implies that Jon was being just as aggravating Jon and asks why he is taking Rob’s side. Ed explains that he’s not taking sides but rather that he’s trying to remain impartial. Jon gets annoyed saying that they are closer friends and have been friends for a lot longer, he also reminds Ed that friends aren’t impartial they are loyal. Ed starts to get visibly annoyed which is something that doesn’t happen very often. He turns to Jon and says that they both know Jon is being irrational and that, once more, Jon is only thinking about how he

feels and nobody else. He goes on to say that people always have to do what he does, or have the opinions he holds and if they don't they are brandished idiots. He tells Jon that he loves him and that has faith that there will be a time when they are all friends again. But that Jon as to start being tiny bit flexible. Ed then lowers his voice and says that Jon should never, ever doubt how much he values their friendship, that if it wasn't for him he would still be that little nerdy kid too shy to talk to girls who wore a LOTR cloak to junior prom. Jon laugh and as they pull up outside Ed's house Ed then reminds him that everybody is doing this for Jon. He points at the window where he can see Beth cradling their daughter and trying to get her to settle and says that he's giving up a lot to help Jon because he is a loyal friend and that he shouldn't forget it. Jon sheepishly nods in agreement and Ed says he'll see him tomorrow. Ed leaves the car and Jon watches him walk up the pathway towards his house as he sits back in the driver's his mind starts to wander.

Flashback - We see the five band members sitting in their dressing room when Stephen rushes in and excitedly tells them that a scout from a record label is in tonight and that there is actually a chance that this could be the start of their professional music career. Jason, Ed and Jon get overly excited but Rob gives Sam an awkward look that causes Ed to ask if there is a problem. Rob then announces that he has been offered a position of teaching music to underprivileged kids in South America as part of an outreach through music project and that he'll be leaving in a month's time. Rob then announces that Sam is also coming with him The band stand there in shock and Stephen repeats meekly that there is a label scout waiting to hear them play and what does this mean for the band. Robs suggests that the band carry on without him but Ed says that Rob is the backbone and without him their sound would be missing a crucial element. Jon is angry that he would just throw everything away for a couple of hours of bongo drumming in a rain forest. Rob chastises his attitude saying that his work would actually be very important and Jon bites back that they would probably rather have a hot meal and shoes. Jon says he can't believe this is all happening after they've worked so hard to get this opportunity. Jon then hurls himself at Ron and the two start to fight. Once they have calmed down Rob says they'll talk about it later and that they have a show gig. All five walk through the corridors in silence to the side of the stage. They are introduced to enthusiastic applause as they bound onto the stage Jon, however, blankly walks over to his guitar and as they start playing he gets to the microphone but is unable to sing. Jon seems too lost in his thoughts to sing. The crowd start booing and then throwing things at the stage. From the stage Jon sees a man with a cell phone, obviously the scout, shaking his head

as he talks on his phone and leaves the building. Jon is startled awake by Ed banging on the passenger window and asking him if he's ok. Jon says that he just drifted off for a second and that he's fine. Ed isn't convinced and hesitates slightly before walking back up to his house, he gets to the door and looks behind him to see Jon drive away.

Ed gently closes the door behind him and takes his shoes off in the hallway. He makes his way to the living room where Beth is cradling their crying baby and she tells him that she is worried about the baby as she just won't sleep. Ed tells her that all babies hate sleeping and that when she's a teenager she'll hark back to the days when their daughter would get out of bed before noon. Beth, however, doesn't find his comments very funny. Ed takes his daughter and walks around the room with her reassuring Beth that all first time mothers worry about every little thing in the first year, he remembers his father telling him some of the things his mother took him to hospital for including a growth on his face that appeared over night that turned out to be a sun dried tomato. Beth sits on the sofa, exhausted and angry; she snaps at Ed saying that she is not being a paranoid parent and that it's hard staying at home with the baby all of the time. She says that she doesn't expect him to understand because he'd rather put his energy into his band than into caring for their daughter. Ed says that's totally unfair and that they talked before he agreed to be part of the band again and that he made sure it was ok with Beth. She tells him that after two weeks of him flitting off for rehearsals and meetings she's changed her mind, Ed tells her it's too late and also unfair of her to voice concerns now. As they get more heated and louder their arguing makes the baby cry and she takes the baby off Ed and takes her upstairs to try and calm her down.

Beth lays the baby down in her cot and sits down next to it soothing the baby's head as she starts to settle. Ed slowly creeps into the bedroom and Beth signals Ed to be quiet and he sits gingerly moves to sit next to her. They watch their daughter trying to sleep and Beth apologises for snapping but that she tired and scared. She goes on to explain to Ed that she is worried that she's not cut out to be a mom. She recalls her own mom and how well she raised her family and there is no way she will ever be as good as that because she isn't that organised. She goes on to tell him how she's bought 6 cartons of milk in the last 2 days because she keeps forgetting she's bought it and that now she has to look for milk based recipes on the internet so it doesn't all go to waste. How can she possibly raise a healthy child when she can't even buy milk? Ed puts his arm around her and reassures her saying she is an amazing mother and that he is always going to be there to support her and all she has to do is say the word and he'll be by her side. He says that after the band plays their gig they

will have his undivided attention for the rest of their lives. She asks about other gigs or tours that might follow and this makes Ed laugh saying that the way they are playing they are only just going through their reunion gig. He slowly gets up and whispers if she is coming to bed but she says she wants to stay a while with the baby just to make sure she is alright. Ed reaches over, grabs a blanket, lays it over, kisses her softly on the head saying how much he loves her and then says goodnight.

We are now back at Stephen's basement where the group have just finished a rehearsal. All the boys are sweaty and look exhausted; Jon grabs a can of Dr Pepper from the mini fridge Stephen has put in the basement and comments on how much better they are now sounding. Rob agrees telling everybody how well they have played and how proud they should be of each other, which irritates Jon. Ed and Stephen comment on how unbelievable it is that they have improved as much as they have in such a short time and they joke about how they are slowly becoming the rock Gods they used to be. Jon interrupts telling them that they shouldn't congratulate themselves too much just yet because they still need to practice a lot more if they're going to sound passable for their gig. Jason tells Jon to lighten up but Jon says that although they are having fun they shouldn't lose sight of the end goal. Stephen says he thought the goal was to have fun and Jon agrees that it is partly to have fun and partly to do a kick ass gig. Jon then gets them all into a circle with their hands in the centre and says that what they need is practice. They bounce their hands in unison and yell "practice, practice, practice" before fist bumping the air and letting out a primal scream.

What follows is the classic montage scene of their practice and improvement. Starting with the five men playing in Stephen's basement we see each band member using their spare time to practice. Rob plays his guitar riffs to Sam on Skype as she nods her head in time with them. Ed plays his baby like a bass as he's burping her, Jason is seen playing electric drums to a naked woman laying in bed watching him. We then see Stephen spending his lunch hour in the music room playing and talking to Lauren and Jon playing his guitar as he watches late night television. The band are once more in Stephen's basement and this time Jon is nodding in agreement at the improvement and Rob gets down on his knees to play a guitar riff but Stephen shakes his head no. We then see Stephen playing chords on his breakfast counter as he eats, Ed playing bass as he sings his daughter to sleep, Jon playing air guitar as he waits in line at the supermarket, Rob sleeping in bed with his guitar, waking up, playing a riff and then falling back to sleep again and Jason throwing his drumming before a woman pounces on him causing him to fall backwards.

We fade into Stephen in his house, he is sitting at a large table with papers around him doing his marking and Rob is sat on the sofa through in the living room playing riffs on an electric guitar that isn't plugged in. The doorbell rings and Rob tells Stephen to keep working, he'll answer his door. When he opens the front door he is greeted by Lauren who is wearing a floaty summer dress and who is obviously surprised by the sight of a strange man at the door. With a voice filled with uncertainty she asks if Stephen is home. Stephen hears her voice and he tells her to come in so she steps past Rob and makes her way to the where Stephen is sitting. He greets her with a kiss and introduces Rob. Lauren says that she has heard a lot about him and asks how the band practice is going. Stephen offers to make them all coffee and so goes to through to the kitchen. When he returns he finds Rob explaining to Lauren that it's hard to believe that Stephen is such a responsible adult with an important job after the things they all got up to in college. Rob then ask Stephen if he remembers the night of the 15th beer. When Laruen asks for details Stephen becomes uncomfortable and quickly changes the subject saying that it's such a lovely day that he would like to go for a walk and asks Lauren to join him. When she asks if Rob would like to come as well Stephen explains that he wants to talk about some school business with her and so Rob cheerfully declines and goes back to his guitar playing.

As Stephen and Laruen are walking down the path of a leafy park on a cold looking but sunny day she asks about the night of the 15th beer but Stephen is reluctant to tell her. However after some goading and puppy dog eyes Stephen explains that one night during a study session in the library Jon and Ed managed to sneak in two cases of beer. He explains that he protested but caved in to peer pressure and drank a couple. Lauren looks scandalised but Stephen assures her that it gets worse staying that Jon then dared him to drink another 13 in a row and in return Jon and Ed would pay for the rest of the books on his study list, an offer that was way too good to refuse. He explains that all was going well until the 15th beer when half way through he started feeling queasy. He admits that he should have stopped but that the lure of those books more powerful than his weak stomach so he powered through the last one. All he really remembers is Ed and Jon shaking his hands saying they are impressed that he managed to do it before he projectile vomited all over the library. He remembers that it was like a tsunami of sick and Jon had to make a run for it with him and the beer while Ed stayed back to make some excuse about food poisoning. Lauren laughs and says she didn't know Stephen had such a dark side. Stephen takes his glasses off in the style of Clark Kent and tells her that she doesn't know the half of it. Laruen asks if Stephen is looking forward to

the gig on the weekend and Stephen says he is nervous but excited at the same time and that it's like getting a chance to relive your youth for just one day. They find a park bench, sit next to each other and watch the people. Lauren reaches for Stephen's hand saying that she is sure he's going to be amazing. He accepts her hand and the pair then sit and continue with their people watching.

We see all of the guys back at Larry's bar eating a meal of pizza and beers celebrating the night before they come and tear the place apart. They talk about how apprehensive and excited they are about tomorrow night and they wonder how people will react to their music. Ed says about how far they have come and how much he's going to miss hanging out here with everybody but he's sure they'll always find somewhere to go. Larry walks past and Jon calls him over asking him if he's ready for the gig tomorrow night. Larry seems blasé about it saying that he's about to retire to Florida, he's going to be living on a golf course and drinking freshly squeezed orange juice for breakfast, what does he care what they do tomorrow night. The boys laugh and Ed stands up to make a speech saying that he feels incredibly lucky to have friends that are more like brothers than college buddies and that the last month has been like opening a floodgate to the past. He explains that he's been frustrated, annoyed, sad, horny and hungry but that he wouldn't change a second of it. He then proposes a toast to lasting friendship and bitchin tunes. Stephen notices Jason welling up but when he asks him if he's crying Jason says he just has some hot sauce in his eye and punches Stephen in the arm. They all stand up and repeat the toast, "To lasting friendships and bitchin tunes" Jon stays standing and also toasts to "Staying young, working hard and partying harder"

From the clinking of shot glasses we cut to the thud of a coffee cup being clunked onto a table. A very hung over looking Jon wearing sunglasses groans as the waitress fills his cup with coffee. He tells the waitress to keep it coming as he's going to need a major pick me up. Ed and Jason arrive looking equally dishevelled and they all agree that perhaps it was a bad idea to go out drinking the night before a gig, that no matter how they feel inside they are not college students any more.

The waitress brings more coffee and Jason offers to marry her if she just leaves the pot on the table. Ed moans that on top of his hangover he's also had hardly any sleep as the baby was up crying all night and he stayed with her to give Beth a break. Jason orders pancakes with extra bacon, Jon tells him that they have to get to Stephen's so there isn't any

time. Jason explains that he is a drummer, he needs sustenance. He goes on to say that the best thing for a hangover is warm soft pillowy pancakes, melted butter, smothered in syrup with a side of delicious salty bacon. Jon and Ed are almost salivating at the description and then tell the waitress to order them the same for them. Jon says he's sure Stephen and Rob won't mind them being a little late.

When Jon, Ed and Jason arrive at Stephen's basement where he and Rob are sitting around waiting for them. Stephen is annoyed that they are late saying that maybe if they hadn't overdone it last night they wouldn't be feeling like shit. Rob mirrors what Stephen is saying and adds that the key to good living is self control which annoys Jon who says he uses all of his self control during rehearsal and so there is none left when it comes to drinking. When Rob asks what he means Jon says he thinks it is obvious. Stephen steps in to try and dissipate the argument.

Jon asks Stephen why he always has to be the mediator and can't he just butt out for once; he says that they are not his high school kids and so they don't need constant adult supervision. Stephen says they should stop acting like kids and points out that they are in his house so he has a right to speak his mind. In the middle of all the arguing Ed's phone rings. He answers it but finds it difficult to hear with the squabble getting louder and louder. As the quarrel between Jon, Stephen and Rob escalates Ed moves to the corner in order to try and hear what is being said. Over the noise we hear Ed say the words "I'm sorry, I've got a terrible signal, what hospital?" before he turns around and angrily tells them to all shut up as Beth is saying something about a hospital. They all stop talking and look at Ed as the phone call gets him more Panicked. He puts the phone down, Stephen asks what's wrong and he says that his daughter is ill and that he has to get to the hospital. Ed seems spaced out and in a daze he wanders around the room picking up and putting down random objects. Jon grabs him by the shoulders and tries to calm him down and get him to focus by asking which hospital they have been taken to. When Ed tells him Jon offers to drive him there but Ed refuses saying that band can't practice with two of them gone. Jon grabs his arm saying that rehearsals can wait, friends are more important. Stephen also grabs his coat saying they should take his car as it's bigger and they can all fit in it. When Ed looks at them confused Stephen says that if he thinks they would leave him go alone he is crazy, they are a team and so if one goes they all go.

The car comes to a screeching halt outside the hospital and Jon gets out first and helps Ed out of the car. Stephen leans over from the driver side to say that he'll park the car and then come and find them. The car drives off and Jon goes to walk inside but Ed remains standing outside. Jon grabs his arm but Ed still doesn't move. After Jon telling Ed that he has to move Ed reveals that he's too scared to go in. He is worried that if something is seriously wrong with his daughter he won't be able to handle it. He says that he's always told Beth that he'll be there for her but what if he's not strong enough; he says that his family are his world and he can't stand the thought of letting them down. Jon tells him that he could never let his family down and that they have to get inside, Beth is waiting, and he is sure that everything will be fine. When Ed asks him what he's basing that on and Jon says he just knows that he universe wouldn't be such a monumental dick to such a good guy. Ed cries and laughs at the same time as Jon grabs his arm and they run into the hospital together.

Once at the reception area Ed and Jon ask the whereabouts of Beth and Sarah. The nurse at reception calls over a nurse to take Ed to Beth; she asks if Jon is family, Jon says no but Ed says yet which surprises Jon. The nurse asks which it is and Ed says he is like a brother to me but she insists that only blood relatives are allowed through. As Ed is being led away to a separate room Jon yells that he'll be waiting with the rest of the guys in the waiting room and to tell Beth that they are all rooting for little baby Sarah.

A bit later in the waiting room Jason, Rob and Jon sit quietly as Jon nervously bites his fingernails. Stephen offers to go and get some coffee saying that he has a feeling they are going to be there a while. As he gets up he walks over to Jon, puts his hand around his head and gives him a hug. Jon says that he knows they'll be ok but he's worried that all of this is somehow his fault. He tells Stephen that when they were driving home the other night he said Jon was selfish and always insisted people do what he wanted. Now he is scared that he might have forced Ed into re-joining the group and that it somehow put pressure on Beth and maybe that has affected the baby. Stephen reassures Jon and says he'll bring him some jello with his coffee, he then motions to Jason to come and give him a hand leaving Rob and Jon alone together. After some awkward pauses and false start conversation Rob tries to offer Jon some comfort and he apologises for if he's been a bit of a dick over the last couple of weeks but Jon says he has been just as bad. Rob reveals that he did feel guilty about leaving the band because he knew how devastated Jon would be but he was young and he had very different priorities back then. Jon says that he is learning a little about life's priorities at the moment. Rob explains that he couldn't pass up something real in the hopes of catching a

dream. Jon nods in agreement and after another short silence Rob says that he knows Jon had a thing for Sam but he has to believe that he didn't take her away from him in an act of some kind of one-upmanship they just fell in love. Rob almost apologetically tells him that you can't help who you fall in love with. Jon says that his childish grudge seems stupid now in the face of a real life changing circumstances. But Rob interrupts him saying that they both could have conducted themselves better. Rob holds his hand out to Jon who accepts it and they both agree to put the past behind them.

Ed sits anxiously with Beth as the doctor explains that they can't find any instantly recognisable reason for the baby's sudden temperature spike but that they are going to run a full series of tests. He also says that It's not unusual for new mothers to be overly sensitive but that it's never a problem checking as it's better to be safe than sorry.

The doctor explains that an orderly will be with them shortly and leaves the room. Beth holds on to Ed apologises for getting him out of his rehearsal and that they are probably going to be late for their show thanks to all of this. Ed says she has nothing to be sorry for and that he feels guilty because if he had been home then she wouldn't have had to come here on her own. Beth wearily laughs that it seems both of them are feeling pretty guilty at the moment. She then goes on to explain that she doesn't want to be the kind of wife and mother who has to force their husband to choose between his friends and his friends and that she has never had a problem with Ed going out alone. She trusts him. But sometimes she is frightened one night he'll be out having fun and start to think that having a baby and getting married was the wrong decision. She is apprehensive that he'll start envying his friends when they are out drinking and he's up feeding the baby and that will fester until he can't stand it any longer and eventually leaves her. Ed reassures her that nothing in the world is more important to him than her and the baby and that he knows he's spent a lot of time with the band lately but all that is finished with now. He also admits that he can be blinkered sometimes with work or with side projects but that he would drop them all in an instant if she told him to. The orderly comes in with a chair to take them Beth and their daughter for their first test, as she is wheeled away Ed walks with placing his hand comfortingly on her shoulder.

Back in the waiting room it's now dark outside. Jon complains that they've been waiting for hours with no news and he can't make up his mind if no news is good news or no news is fucking life altering news and it is at that moment Ed appears in the doorway looking exhausted. Jon moves out of his chair over to him and asks him if everything is alright. Ed

holds his hands up and says it's all fine, that the hospital has run every possible test and everything seems to be normal. He then tells Jon that the doctor said it was just one of those things. Jon is annoyed by the phrase "one of those things" and says that they all went through hell for the diagnosis to be "just one of those things". Ed says that given the alternative verdict it was the best sentence he could have heard. Jon hugs him and apologises for pushing him, badgering him, bullying him and making fun of him all of the time. Ed smiles and says thank you but if Jon starts treating him with more respect he doesn't think he'd be able to take him seriously. Beth enters the room with a sleeping baby and all five men whisper a cheer. Beth laughs and comments on how tired everybody looks she goes to where Jon is standing and kisses his cheek thanking him for keeping Ed together. They all stand over the baby looking at her when Beth tells them that they should maybe move back, baby Sarah doesn't need to wake up to the sight of five raggedy looking men. She then looks up at the clock and comments on how late it is and that maybe they should get themselves down to the bar. All five say that there are more important things than their show and that by the time they go and pick up their equipment it will probably be too late. Beth, although touched by the sentiment, says that she's been putting up with Ed acting like a teenager and playing his bass till all hours of the morning for a month and that shouldn't be in vain. She tells Ed and the boys to get back to the bar before it's too late. They are all cautious but Beth insists saying it's not a test she really wants them to go saying that her sister will take them home because she really needs a hot shower. Jason says they may just be able to squeak it there in time and they all enthusiastically, but quietly, run out of the waiting room each kissing Sam on as they leave.

The car stops outside of the bar and they arrive just in time to see Larry closing the doors. When Ed asks what's going on Larry explains that the alcohol ran out so everybody left and so he is closing up. Stephen looks over at Jon who is crestfallen. They all rally around him saying that they'll find another bar, Jason offers to call around for gigs and Rob says he will stay another few weeks if he has to. Ed is just as disappointed saying after all he has been through this evening he's not even going to have his happy ending. Jon says to everybody that he understands that the gig was important but that tonight has show them all that there are much more important things than playing a few tunes on stage. He then goes on to say that to him the gig doesn't matter much anymore and that he got what he wanted which was to cement old friendships and build bridges with lost ones. Stephen tells him to hold that thought and goes to talk to Larry. He explains to him what has gone on and how hard they

have worked and how much the bar means to them all and would it be possible for them to close up? Larry throws the keys at him saying that Larry's is not his bar any more so they can do what they like. He then gets in his car and shouts, 'Fresh Florida orange juice here I come' and drives away. Stephen comes back with the keys and tells them to get ready for the gig of their lives.

Larry's bar is eerily quiet an empty bar apart from a few friends that have been called to come back to the bar. Lauren and Beth with baby Sarah who is wearing large pair of ear protectors sit around the stage with a lap top open on Skype so Sam can watch the show. Over the needlessly loud PA system we hear Jon's voice announce, "Tonight playing their comeback show here prestigious venue of Larry's bar here in stunning Montclair New Jersey, for one night only, Thunder Roads." The guys bound onto the stage dressed in various shades of Denim and their friends cheer wildly, making as much noise as a handful of people possibly can. Jason counts them in and after Jon plays one chord, the shot freezes.

End. Titles.

Scene No	1	Page No	
Brief outline	Montage of characters first thing in the morning		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Beth		
Location of scene	Each characters house - INT - DAY		
<p>Montage of all four main characters morning routine. Ed with his wife and baby in chaos, Stephen laying out his clothes and folding his pyjamas, Jason showering with a woman and Jon Sleeping.</p> <p>Stephen is calmly eating a full breakfast reading the paper, Ed getting baby food off his shirt, Jason being fed his breakfast by a beautiful woman and Jon Sleeping.</p> <p>Each of them then leaves for work.</p>			

Scene No	2	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon tries to distract Ed during his important meeting.		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Boardroom in the building where Jon and Ed work - INT - DAY		
<p>A board meeting is being held in a glass fronted office, Jon positions himself against the glass so that only Ed can see him and proceeds to try his best to distract him.</p> <p>After the meeting Jon checks with Ed that they are still on for their night out tomorrow night. Ed is hesitant. Jon reminds him that they made a pact in college that they would always make time for fun. Ed tries to argue that things are different now but Jon is insistent.</p> <p>Ed agrees before leaving for another meeting.</p> <p>"What's the world coming to when a guy can't make even a little time for his best friend? A friend, I might add, who introduced him to his beautiful wife"</p>			

Scene No	3	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon organises the night out at the bar		
Characters in scene	Jon and Stephen		
Location of scene	Jon's cubical, Stephen's office - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon calls Stephen's office pretending to be his lawyer. Stephen's office where he is talking to a 16 year old female student about a clothing violation. Jon makes lewd insinuations about Stephen and the student before reminding him about drinks at Larry's bar. An older man walks buy Jon's cubical and hovers behind him. Jon quickly pretends he's on a business call and hangs up.</p> <p>Jon gets out his mobile phone and texts Jason who is more than keen to be meeting up tonight before sighing, putting his phone back in his pocket and doing some work.</p> <p>"I have a mind to call the school board and tell them that you were the one who drilled a hole in the gym wall because you</p>			
Scene No	4	Page No	
Brief outline	Ed reminds Beth that tonight is his night out with his friends		
Characters in scene	Ed and Beth		
Location of scene	Ed's Kitchen - INT - DAY		
<p>The couple are talking quietly as Beth tries to calm down their baby. Ed reminds Beth that tonight is his night out with Jon and the guys. Although angry at first she pats the baby and asks if it has to be tonight.</p> <p>Ed explains that it's for Jon really who isn't as lucky as he is, he doesn't have a beautiful wife and kid. Beth is not impressed with his flattery but does a deal with Ed. He goes out tonight and she goes out for lunch and a movie with her sister the following evening. Ed agrees.</p> <p>"Just don't come home hammered and start trying it on like last time. My vagina's been through enough without you poking at it with your flaccid promises and startling it into submission. I want to use it again at some point"</p>			

Scene No	5	Page No	
Brief outline	The guys are drinking at Larry's Bar when they hear devastating news.		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Larry's Bar -INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon, Stephen and Jason are sitting around a table in a dark and crowded bar. Stephen is chastised for trying to order a wine spritzer. Jason shows them pictures of the girl he's seeing at the moment. Stephen finds the conversation inappropriate given his job.</p> <p>Ed arrives late and explains that the kid wouldn't go to sleep. He is handed a beer and the guys chat over some beers, Jon questions Stephen's sexuality and Tequila is ordered.</p> <p>A little while later Larry announces the bar will be closed and demolished in five weeks time. Jon is devastated, Ed tries to reassure him that they will find another bar. They reminisce about times spent at the bar and Stephen says the words "Thunder Roads". This was the name of their band and Larry's Bar was the first venue they ever got paid to play. They toast to the memory of their band.</p>			
Scene No	6	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon walks Ed back to his house		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Road in a suburban street - EXT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon and Ed stumble towards Ed's front door, Ed tells Jon what a great friend he and gives him a hug. Jon tells him he's coming on a bit strong and he should buy him dinner first.</p> <p>Ed becomes sad confiding in Jon that he isn't sure he's going to be a good father. Jon reassures him and reminds him of all the scrapes Ed has gotten him out of over the last fifteen years. He turns to see Ed passed out with his head on Jon's shoulder.</p> <p>He drags him to the door, barely gets it open and Ed falls with his torso inside and legs outside. Jon leaves him there and wanders off.</p>			

Scene No	7	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon returns to his apartment and looks through a box of mementos.		
Characters in scene	Jon		
Location of scene	Jon's apartment - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon swaggers around his apartment, grabs a beer from the fridge and reaches under his bed and pulls out a box. He rummages through its contents until he finds pictures of himself with Ed, Stephen and Jason graduating college.</p> <p>Wrapped in a t-shirt is a cassette tape that has "live demo" written on it. After putting the items back in the box he lays down and falls asleep.</p> <p>"(laughing) How did any of us ever get laid"</p>			

Scene No	8	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	In a garage - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed, Jason, Stephen and Jon are in a garage surrounded by instruments as they sit on the floor eating sandwiches. They enthuse about how big they are going to be and excitedly talk about groupies and extravagant tour busses.</p> <p>Stephen reminds them that they still need to graduate. After fantasising they get up and start to play. Although they are playing rock the Carpenters song "only just begun" is playing, Jason is banging the drums violently but again all that can be heard is The Carpenters song. Jon looks confused. He then wakes up in his apartment as his clock radio continues to play the Carpenters song.</p> <p>Jon picks up the clock, throws it against the wall where it falls into a pile of parts, reaches into his drawer and pulls out another clock. He reaches over for his phone and blindly dials.</p>			

Scene No	9	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon tells Ed that he wants to meet him ASAP		
Characters in scene	Ed and Beth		
Location of scene	Ed's house - INT - DAY		

Ed is roused from his sleep by something dripping onto his cheek. He opens his eyes slowly to see his daughter face as she dribbles down his cheek. He then realises he is still in the hallway where he passed out last night.

He sits up and holds the baby, Beth walks over the both of them before kissing each one on the top of the head saying she is off to spend the day with her sister.

His phone rings, Jon tells him they are all meeting at the Moon struck diner and he has to be there it's very important. Ed tries to get out of it but Jon tells him to bring his daughter with him.

"For God's sake Ed, it's coffee and pancakes not Jack Daniels and stripers"

Scene No	10	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon wants to get the band back together		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Moonstruck Diner - INT - DAY		

Over coffee and various breakfast items Jon thanks them all for coming. Stephen and Ed nod but Jason pours an entire jug of syrup over his pancakes.

Jon explains how devastated he is that Larry's bar is closing and that it would be a fitting tribute if, for one night only, they got the band back together.

Jason says he hasn't played the drums in years, Ed says he can't be a rock god with a six month old daughter and Stephen reminds everybody that he is now an assistant principal. Jon is disappointed and asks them to all just think about it, after all it's only for one night.

"Would you like some pancake to go with your Syrup Jason?"

Scene No	11	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon puts a photo of him, Stephen, Ed and Jason on a frame in his apartment.		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Jon's apartment - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon opens his wallet and takes out an old picture of him, Stephen, Ed and Jason together at college. He looks around the house and places the picture over a picture of his parents.</p> <p>He Ed telling him that he's got information about his wife's infidelity problem and needs to be put through to him ASAP.</p> <p>Jon argues that they were a great band, Ed doesn't disagree but says it was a long time ago and most of them have grown up. Jon invites him over for a beer tonight at his house, Ed says he is looking after his daughter. After much persuasion Ed agrees.</p> <p>"We were a great band, 15 years ago, but most of us have grown up since then, some of us even have responsible jobs they have to get back to"</p>			

Scene No	12	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon sits in his apartment getting snacks ready for Ed		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Jon's living room - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon struggles to open the front door as he is laden down with shopping. He puts the bag on the counter, looks at his watch and realises that Ed will be arriving soon.</p> <p>He hurriedly puts the shopping away, fills the sink with ice and puts six bottles of beer in there. He takes a few big bags of potato chips and throws them on the table as he sits down and opens a bottle of beer. He throws his head back as he slowly swallows.</p>			

Scene No	13	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback - Thunder Roads battle of the bands		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Backstage at Battle of the Bands - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon, Jason and Stephen are sitting nervously in a dank small room , Jon is drinking beer and pacing, and Jason is tapping a drumstick onto his thigh.</p> <p>Ed comes in and explains that something has happened and they will be the final band on stage.</p> <p>Jon gathers them all into a huddle and explains that to some this might just be a battle of the bands in some small town shithole but for them it's the start to their journey of being rock gods. The young man holds the door open as the four of them walk out towards the stage.</p> <p>"Remember guys - 'The hungry and the haunted explode in a Rock'n'Roll band'."</p>			

Scene No	14	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon explains to Ed why the band is so important to him		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Jon's apartment - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon is woken from his daydream by a loud knocking. Jon invites Ed have a beer and points out the make shift play pen he has built out of pillows. Before Ed sits down Jon asks him if he's going to say yes to getting the band back together. Ed asks Jon why playing in the band is so important to him as he's never shown an interest before. Jon explains that when he heard Larry's was going to close he realised how much of his life was tied up in that place and soon it's going to be gone.</p> <p>Jon explains he thought the band was going to be his life not just a fading memory. This was supposed to be a job to tide him over until he figured out what he wanted, but 12 years later and it could just be that this was all he was destined to be. Just for one night he'd like to forget and just pretend he is living the life he thought he always would.</p> <p>Ed says he never realised how much this meant to Jon and that he will clear it with Beth as well as trying to persuade Stephen to join.</p>			

Scene No	15	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen pops into the music room but is interrupted.		
Characters in scene	Stephen and Lauren		
Location of scene	School music room - INT - DAY		
<p>Stephen walks down the hall of the High School, chastising a child for looking scruffy and another for running, he passes the music room, stops and goes back. He opens the door and starts to play the piano, quietly at first but with gradually more passion.</p> <p>Lauren the music teacher quietly enters and stands in front of Stephen who stops playing and looks rather embarrassed. Explaining how she just popped out for a coffee she seems excited that he might be in a band.</p> <p>She leaves him to it offering her music room and the chance to jam if he feels like it. As she goes into her office Stephen pulls out his mobile phone and texts, "I'm in" to Jon.</p>			
Scene No	16	Page No	
Brief outline	The guys first practice		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Stephen's Basement – INT- NIGHT		
<p>Jon and Stephen are putting up the last bit of sound proofing on the wall when Ed and Jason walk in. Jon suggests that they should jam for a bit to blow the cobwebs off and they pick up their instruments.</p> <p>After a short while it is clear that jamming isn't the way to start and Jon asks them all when the last time they played. They all confess that it had been a long time so Jon suggests they start from the beginning.</p> <p>Next we see them playing 'Three Blind Mice' from yellow music books and Jon announces that they are going to need to practice...A LOT.</p>			

Scene No	17	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon drops in on Ed for some lunch		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Ed's office - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed sits behind his desk working at his computer when his receptionist informs him his proctologist is here but Jon walks in. They talk about the band and how much they need to work and then Ed brings up a management position that Jon should go for.</p> <p>Jon declines his offer saying it's not great but there's no responsibility and it's easy. He asks Ed if he ever regrets settling down, Ed says that although it's stressful he wouldn't change it for the world. Jon says he'll see him tonight at Larry's bar when they ask for the gig.</p> <p>When Ed asks if there was a reason for him dropping in Jon tells him because he missed his beautiful face, and that they were having some motivational talk and he didn't want to be part of that crap.</p>			
Scene No	18	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon asks Larry to let them play on bar's last night.		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Larry's Bar - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Ed explains to Larry about them wanting to play the bar one more time before it closes. A hesitant Larry agrees saying if they play on the very last night it won't matter if the crowd turns nasty and destroys the place because he won't have to clean up. Jon thanks him for the vote of confidence.</p> <p>Ed and Jon have a drink to celebrate before Ed has to go back home. Jon sits by the bar alone, a waitress stops to talk to him and Jon explains what they are doing on the last night. She says she looks forward to it and leaves to take a tray of drinks.</p>			

Scene No	19	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback - Sam persuades Jon to ask Larry for a gig		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Sam		
Location of scene	Larry's Bar - INT/EXT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon leaves the bar and stops outside to look at the building, his thoughts wandering.</p> <p>Flashback - The four of them are hanging out at Larry's bar after a gig. Jason has two girls with him, Ed and Stephen are talking to the same woman and Jon is in deep conversation with a woman called Sam.</p> <p>Sam thinks Jon's ambition is cute and asks him where he hopes to be playing, Jon explains he has to get a paid gig in his own town before he sells out the Garden. Sam asks Jon if he's ever thought of playing Larry's bar, it would be good practice and a bit of cash is better than no cash at all.</p> <p>They manage to persuade Larry to give them a gig for a fee of \$50. He tells the guys at the table and they erupt into a big cheer. Jon is awoken from his daydream by rowdy cheering drunk people leaving the bar.</p> <p>"We're kind of like early Springsteen meets contemporary Springsteen"</p>			
Scene No	20	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen and Lauren chat over a coffee		
Characters in scene	Stephen and Lauren		
Location of scene	Small coffee shop - INT - DAY		
<p>Stephen walks into a coffee shop holding his phone.. the message from Jon says, "morning Douche nozzle" he shakes his head and joins the end of the queue. He feels a tap on his shoulder and sees Lauren standing behind him.</p> <p>She asks how the band practice is going and they chat for a while as they wait to be served and both decide to sit and have their coffee in the shop. Stephen gets another obscene text from Jon which he ignores. It is followed by a picture message from Jason. When Lauren asks if there is something wrong, Stephen turns his phone off.</p> <p>Lauren agrees to go to dinner with Stephen and as they finish their coffee Stephen gives himself a self congratulatory fist pump in celebration.</p>			

Scene No	21	Page No	
Brief outline	Beth is unsure if Ed still loves her		
Characters in scene	Ed and Beth		
Location of scene	Ed's kitchen - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed and Beth are having breakfast in the kitchen with baby Sarah sitting up in her playpen. She asks how the band practice is going and what they will be doing today. After a short silence, asks if he thinks their lives have changed too drastically and too fast now they have the baby.</p> <p>Ed asks her to elaborate and Beth explains she is worried that the band is an excuse to get away from her and their daughter, to recapture his youth before they met. She wonders if he feels trapped by her and if he still finds her attractive after seeing the birth.</p> <p>He reassures her that being at the birth was humbling not disgusting and that he loves her very much and still finds her incredibly sexy. As he hugs her a car horn beeps outside and Jon waves out of the window. He kisses Beth and his daughter and gets in the car with Jon.</p>			

Scene No	22	Page No	
Brief outline	The band still doesn't sound great and they all know why.		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Stephen's basement - INT - DAY		
<p>After a short time playing they still don't sound great, it feels as though there is something missing, Ed says he knows why but Jon refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem.</p> <p>The group insist they all know what the problem is but Jon insists that they just need more practice. Jason says they don't have the time, they need to get better quicker.</p> <p>Stephen steps up and says they need to call Rob but Jon says there is no way he is going to play if any of them contact Rob and that he'll quit the band and cancel the booking.</p> <p>Stephen says Jon is being selfish, he needs the band to impress Lauren and Jon counters with the fact that he cares more about his dick than the music and goes upstairs to the fridge for a beer.</p>			

Scene No	23	Page No	
Brief outline	Ed talks Jon into letting Rob play with them		
Characters in scene	Jon, Ed		
Location of scene	Stephen's kitchen - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed reminds Jon that he's driving, Jon is one step ahead and pulls out a small bottle of apple juice and they talk about why Jon is so upset. Jon explains that he still hates Rob for what he did. When Ed tells him to move on Jon asks Ed if he is still hates the guy who asked out Beth and dated her before he had time to ask.</p> <p>He says that Rob has probably changed, that they've all grown up now and that if Jon is doing this for the music and his dream of playing again then they really do need Rob. Jon reluctantly agrees to Stephen calling Rob the following day.</p> <p>"No way. He destroyed our band, he took our dreams. He got them between his gnarled, ugly sausage fingers and he chocked the living shit out of each and every one of them"</p>			

Scene No	24	Page No	
Brief outline	Ed tells Jon that Stephen as called Rob and they are all going to visit		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Jon's cubical - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed visits Jon's cubical and when he asks what he's up to Jon shows him a piece of paper with a drawing of a snake being impaled onto a spiked guitar neck that is on fire. Ed asks why he's called the snake Rob, Ed replies that he thought it was appropriate.</p> <p>Ed tells Jon that Stephen called Rob last night and that they're going to drive up to see him on Saturday. He understands if Jon doesn't want to go, but thinks it would be a good idea if he did. Jon is also less than thrilled that Stephen will be driving. Jon then uses guilt to make Ed take him to an expensive Italian restaurant for lunch.</p> <p>"Why does Stephen have to drive? He's so slow on the Freeway that even Miss Daisy flips him off"</p>			

Scene No	25	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon and Ed are having lunch when Ed gets a frantic call from Stephen		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen and Ed		
Location of scene	Il Quotidiano Italian restaurant/Stephen's house - INT - DAY		
<p>The Ed and Jon are at lunch when Ed gets a panicked call from Stephen. Stephen is freaking out about his dinner tonight with Lauren, it's been a long time since he dated and he doesn't want to blow it. Ed relays the message to Jon, Stephen asks who he is talking to and is annoyed because he didn't want Jon to know, this is why he called Ed.</p> <p>Stephen paces up and down his living room as Ed calms him and gives him advice such as be yourself, just relax. Jon, however, is being less than helpful and questioning the functionality of his penis. Stephen is annoyed and asks what if he is right? What if it won't work?</p> <p>Eventually Ed calms Stephen down and they get on with their lunch.</p> <p>"Poor Stephen. A toast, raise your glass, to Stephen's fully functioning penis"</p>			
Scene No	26	Page No	
Brief outline	Lauren comes over to Stephen's for dinner		
Characters in scene	Stephen and Lauren		
Location of scene	Stephen's house - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Stephen is futzing in the kitchen when the doorbell rings, he opens it to find Lauren there holding a bottle of red wine and a bottle of water. She comes in and sits on the counter as Stephen finishes his sauce. They talk about the band and about Jon and Lauren asks if Stephen is excited. He nods but says tomorrow he is going to be spending his weekend driving in a car full of sweaty man children.</p> <p>As he cooks she says that if his cooking is as good as his piano playing that she is going to be in for a real treat. He offers her to come and taste his sauce and she stands close to him as he places the spoon into her mouth.</p> <p>After saying how good it tastes she says if he kisses as well as he plays the piano and cooks she has found her ideal man. Stephen steps forward hesitantly and kisser her. Lauren steps back and shrugs that two out of three isn't bad. Stephen looks hurt but Lauren starts to laugh. Stephen relaxes and they enjoy their evening.</p>			

Scene No	27	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback to the time Rob was introduced to the band		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Garage - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon is in his apartment on the phone, he realises that Stephen has put the phone down on him and chuckles to himself. He sits in front of the television with some chips and a beer and continues to watch a film until he slowly falls asleep.</p> <p>Stephen brings Rob into the garage explaining that he just heard this guy play and he would be a great addition to the band. Jon is hesitant saying that they already have a guitarist but Stephen insists that they need a lead guitarist and while Jon can play and sing the band would benefit from a few rock licks.</p> <p>He asks Rob who his musical influences are and he says his favourite band is Kiss. Jon raises an eyebrow but Stephen insists on them hearing him play.</p> <p>Rob plugs in his guitar and starts to play, the rest join in and after they finish are all enthused by the sound they just made.</p>			

Scene No	28	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon is picked up for their mini road trip		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Stephen's SUV - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon is woken up by a car beeping outside he looks out of the window to see everybody in the car ready to go. Having slept in his clothes Jon reluctantly gets out of bed and goes to the car.</p> <p>Jason waits for him to get in the back but Jon informs him he placed an eternal shotgun when Stephen first bought the car, Stephen backs up this argument and Jason moves into the back.</p> <p>Jason reaches over and plugs in his iPod, Ed snatches the cable to plug into his iPod explaining he had to do a lot to get here and he's not going to listen to garbage. Just as the music starts Stephen grabs the wire and plugs it into his iPod. Jon then takes the wire and chastises them; there is only one thing to play during a nostalgic 6 hour road trip.</p> <p>He reaches into his bag and pulls out an old walkman and cassette, he plugs it in, presses play and Bruce Springsteen 'Born to Run' starts to play.</p>			

Scene No	29	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen and Jon talk about Stephen's want for a family		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Stephen's car - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed and Jason watch cartoons on the DVD head rests and Stephen asks Jon if he resents him for getting in touch with Rob, Jon shakes his head and says that if the band is getting back together then it really should be the whole band.</p> <p>Jon asks why he has a big family SUV and Stephen explains that he wants a family, that he's always wanted a family and he hates being on his own. He explains that having a family friendly car makes him feel closer to that goal.</p> <p>Jon asks how his date with Lauren went and that maybe in the not too distant future the two of them will need an SUV. Stephen tells Jon that he's a god friend and then Jon suggests they stop all this fruity talk and grab something to eat.</p>			

Scene No	30	Page No	
Brief outline	They stop at a gas stop diner for some lunch		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Diner - INT - DAY		
<p>They all stop at a gas station to eat a burger at the attached Diner and start to reminisce about hanging out and who they have become. Stephen says they had some great times but that they all had to grow up at some point. Jon disagrees, look at the stones, The Who, Springsteen etc</p> <p>Jon argues if Rob hadn't left they could be in Vegas now eating burgers off a hooker's back. There is a pause before Jason asks where would he dip his ketchup?</p> <p>"If you wanna eat a burger off a hookers back then I can go out there into the truck stop and pick one up for you right now. But looking at them, you might think about laying some napkins down first unless you want it with a side order of deep fried crab"</p>			

Scene No	31	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen daydreams during the journey		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Stephen's car - INT - DAY/ Diner - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Ed is in the back sleeping and Jason is watching sponge bob. Jon looks over at Stephen who is quietly singing along to the music in the car he looks out at the passing landscape and leans his head on the window and closes his eyes.</p> <p>Flashback - They are all sitting at the counter of a diner after a gig, as they eat and chat Jon looks down the end of the counter to see Sam and Rob laughing. Rob is trying to throw fries into Sam's mouth and the pair are laughing. Ed tells him to go ask her out but Jon says it's too late, that she obviously likes rob so there's no point. Ed explains that she doesn't seem to like him more than any of the others. Jon eats his grill cheese sandwich and tells them to leave it be.</p> <p>Jon is jilted from his daydream by Stephen announcing that they are nearly there.</p> <p>"You could always go over there and start a conversation, I'm sure</p>			
Scene No	32	Page No	
Brief outline	They arrive at Rob's house and are greeted by Sam		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Rob and Sam's House - INT - DAY		
<p>Sam answers the door giving Stephen a hug, as she hugs Jason Jon notices the wedding ring on her finger. Sam looks at Jon and remarks on how good he looks and gives him a tight hug. Sam then leads them the living room where rob is sitting.</p> <p>Rob explains that he wasn't expecting everybody but it's nice to see them again. He is wearing a white linen tunic with light linen trousers and no shoes or socks. Jason whispers to Stephen that maybe Rob's in a cult.</p> <p>Rob awkwardly goes up to Jon and offers him his hand and a brief hug which Jon reluctantly takes.</p> <p>As they explain their plans to Rob, Jon gets more and more distracted and annoyed at how Rob constantly touches and holds Sam while he talks. Stephen says they haven't even asked if Rob still plays and so Rob ask them to follow him upstairs.</p>			

Scene No	33	Page No	
Brief outline	Rob takes the boys up to his music room to play his guitar		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Rob's music room - INT - DAY		
<p>Rob takes the boys up to his music room which is filled with guitars. He picks up a red Gibson SG guitar, plugs it in and plays a needlessly loud and complicated riff.</p> <p>Sam stands in the doorway and exclaims that he's still got it. Jon asks Rob if that's a riff from a KISS song, Rob confirms that it is and Jon pats him on the shoulder.</p> <p>Sam confesses how she still gets hot and bothered watching him play the guitar, that there is nothing sexier than watching him when he's really into the music. She wanders over to where Rob is playing, stands behind him and wraps her arms around him. Jon tries to blend in with the door and stars off into the distance as Rob plays another riff.</p> <p>"Is that a shell necklace he's wearing? That's it, I'm not going up there on my own, he's definitely in a cult"</p>			
Scene No	34	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback to when Jon almost asked out Sam		
Characters in scene	Jon, Ed, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Corridor and Dressing room - INT - NIGHT		
<p>They have just come off stage and Ed and Jon are standing in the corridor talking, they both agree that they are playing at the top of their game and it's the best they've ever sounded.</p> <p>Jon is on such a high that he tells Ed that he's going to bite the bullet and ask out Sam. Reasoning that after that blazing set how could she possibly resist him.</p> <p>Jon opens the dressing room door and sees Sam with Rob draped over her showing her how to play the guitar. They both look up, laughing, and invite him to join them but he declines and scuttles off dejected. They call after him as he walks away.</p> <p>Jon is woken from his daydream by Rob saying his name.</p> <p>"I'm so wired. I feel like I've snorted a kilo of rock n roll"</p>			

Scene No	35	Page No	
Brief outline	Rob agrees to joining the band but only with Jon's approval		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Rob's music room.		
<p>Rob is saying Jon's name over and over, he's been trying to get his attention but he's been lost in his thoughts. Ed reiterates to Jon that Rob is happy to join the group but only if Jon wants him there.</p> <p>Rob interjects and says how important it is for Jon to be happy, after all it is his band and he doesn't want to ruin his moment in the spotlight.</p> <p>Reluctantly Jon says he would be happy to have Rob join him as it wouldn't be the full line up of Thunder Roads without him. He feels Stephen's hand on his shoulder as he looks at him Stephen smiles and nods his approval.</p> <p>"I feel like we're lost brothers reuniting after hearing the</p>			
Scene No	36	Page No	
Brief outline	After a few drinks Sam insists that they all stay at their house		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Rob and Sam's living room – INT - NIGHT		
<p>After a few drinks Sam tells them that they all have to spend the night, Jon refuses saying they can find a holiday inn somewhere but Sam insists. She says if they don't mind sharing two to a room that she'll get the spare linen and cots out.</p> <p>Jon downs his beer and asks if she has anything stronger saying that he has a lot of trouble sleeping in new environments and sometimes shot or two of something strong gets the job done.</p> <p>Rob hands him a bottle of bourbon and a small tumbler saying that it's not healthy to drink in order to sleep, that he could choke on his own vomit. Jon says "here's hoping" under his breath before Jon filling the glass to the top and drinking it down all in one.</p> <p>"Yes, I can see how hard it is to catch up with old friends these days what with the dwindling popularity of social network sites"</p>			

Scene No	37	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen and Jason go to bed		
Characters in scene	Stephen and Jason		
Location of scene	Bedroom in Rob and Sam's house - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Stephen and Jason are sleeping in a double bed, Stephen tries to insist that they sleep top to toe but Jason thinks that's for children. If two grown men can't share a bed in comfort because one is scared of a little accidental man spooning then the world is a terrible place.</p> <p>Jason takes his shirt off and Stephen protests, he assures Stephen that he is 100% heterosexual but Stephen says it's not his sexuality that bothers him, it's his hygiene. Jason is offended, sniffs his armpits and assures him that he showered this morning. Stephen puts on his neatly folded pyjamas and opts for sleeping above the covers with a sheet over him. Jason leans over and kisses him goodnight, Stephen rubs his face and tells him to go to sleep.</p> <p>"If I accidentally grab at your chest in my sleep just roll me over or lay there and enjoy it, it's totally your call"</p>			

Scene No	38	Page No	
Brief outline	Ed and Jon go to bed		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Utility room in Rob and Sam's house - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Ed and Jon are laying on two cot beds in a utility room, as they recap on the day and Ed tells Jon how proud he is of him. Ed's phone goes off and it's his wife, Jon hears him tell her how much he misses her and the baby and that he can't wait to come home to see them. After several kisses he puts the phone down.</p> <p>Jon mentions how happy Ed is with Beth and Ed agrees saying it's what he's always wanted in life. Ed then asks if Jon is going to be able to sleep. Jon replies that after a 6 hour car ride, a double bacon cheese burger, Jason's car sickness, seeing Sam and Rob and that quarter bottle of bourbon he drank he should be fine. He then tells Ed how thankful he is that the day is over and can't get any worse.</p> <p>Ed groans saying he should never say that as in films it's always the phrase that comes just before something terrible happens. Jon says that life isn't like the movies just as the strained sounds of Sam and Rob having sex in the room above them comes through the ceiling. Jon puts a pillow over his head, Ed lifts the pillow and says, "I told you" before shutting off the light and going to sleep.</p>			

Scene No	39	Page No	
Brief outline	Rob joins the guys for the trip back to New Jersey		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Stephen's car - INT - DAY		
<p>Stephen packs a suitcase into the back of the car before joining everybody on the porch as Sam says her goodbyes. She takes Robs head in her hands and kisses him passionately saying that she's going to miss him. Rob assures her that he will miss her too before double checking with Stephen that it's still okay for him to stay at his place.</p> <p>Once in the car rob asks if he can put a little music on. Stephen explains that as he is the guest it's only fair that he has dibs on the first hour. He hands him the ipod cable and the car drives off to the sound of "I wanna rock and roll all night" by Kiss. Jon rolls his eyes and bangs his head on the glass as he looks wistfully out at the landscape.</p>			
Scene No	40	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon arrives home after his long trip		
Characters in scene	Jon		
Location of scene	Outside Jon's house - EXT - NIGHT		
<p>The car comes to a stop outside Jon's apartment and he stumbles out of the car, he stretches his legs and is nearly bowled over by Jason moving to the front seat. Jason makes a small victory fist pump even though he only lives a few streets away.</p> <p>He turns to say goodbye to everybody telling Ed he'll see him in work in the morning. Ed tells him not to be late as there are only so many times he can cover for him. Jon waves off this statement and heads towards the house.</p> <p>He throws his keys into a bowl by the door, takes off his jacket and collapses on the bed.</p> <p>"I don't care if I only live a few streets away, I have claimed the front seat, I am a victorious"</p>			

Scene No	41	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback to when Rob and Sam announce they are dating		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Garage - INT - DAY/Jon's bedroom - INT - DAY		
<p>Rob and Sam arrive at rehearsals holding hands, the guys ask if there is something going on and Rob announces that, after a wonderful dinner, he and Sam are now dating.</p> <p>Jon looks devastated and can't concentrate during rehearsals, seems to mess up his chords each time he looks over at Sam. Ed asks him if there is anything wrong but Jon waves it off and goes to take a break.</p> <p>Ed follows up and as he turns around he sees Ed miming to the song "I got you babe". Jon is startled awake, grabs his alarm clock and throws it against the wall. He opens the drawer to find it empty and so reluctantly gets out of bed.</p> <p>"We went to this wonderful sea food restaurant where the fish was so fresh it was almost still flapping on the plate"</p>			
Scene No	42	Page No	
Brief outline	The first full rehearsal, Jon and Rob have a play off		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Stephen's basement - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon arrives with Ed to see Stephen and Rob already playing. After Ed shows him pictures of his daughter on his phone Rob explains that he and Sam are trying to have a baby. Stephen and Ed congratulate him but Jon just mutters congratulations under his breath.</p> <p>Jon takes his position next to Rob and they start to play..however as they do so Jon's guitar knocks Robs shoulder, rob moves over a fraction but Jon does it again. Rob then moves to face Jon and they start a trying to outshine each other with better and better guitar riffs.</p> <p>Before a full fight ensues Stephen suggest going for brunch. After objections that brunch is for women and moans that they have just started, they all decide to go.</p>			

Scene No	43	Page No	
Brief outline	The reconciliation breakfast		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Café - INT - DAY		
<p>All five men sit silently around the table, each communicating exasperation, annoyance, confrontation and pleading with their eyes, apart from Jason who is happily gorging on pancakes.</p> <p>Rob apologises for his behaviour and so does Jon, begrudgingly</p> <p>The group talk about Rob's travels and his current job teaching music at a private school. Jon thinks his job not as challenging as teaching in a state school and that music shouldn't be taught in a classroom. Jon then asks Rob if he thinks that teaching music in a classroom is effective as, in his opinion, music should be freeing and not restricted to being forced on kids in schools. Rob defends his job saying that the exposing kids to all kinds of music in a safe environment is more effective than being sweaty and squashed at a rock gig</p> <p>After a small awkward silence Ed finishes his coffee and suggest they go back to rehears some more.</p>			

Scene No	44	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon and Ed talk during the ride home		
Characters in scene	Jon and Ed		
Location of scene	Jon's Car - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Ed and Jon load their guitars into the back of Jon's car. On the drive to his house Ed asks if Jon is going to be able to get past this thing with Rob.</p> <p>Jon accuses Ed of taking Rob's side and says that friends should be loyal. Ed says that he should never doubt how much he values their friendship and that if it wasn't for him he would still be that little nerdy kid too shy to talk to girls who wore a LOTR cloak to junior school.</p> <p>They pull up outside Ed's house and see Beth and the baby through the window. Ed then reminds him that everybody is doing this for Jon and that he's giving up a lot to help him and that he shouldn't forget it. Jon sheepishly agrees and Ed walks to the front door</p>			

Scene No	45	Page No	
Brief outline	Flashback to when Rob announces he is leaving		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob and Sam		
Location of scene	Backstage - INT - NIGHT		
<p>They are sitting in their dressing room waiting to go on stage and Stephen reveals that a scout from a record company was in the audience and that this could be their big break.</p> <p>Rob gives Sam an awkward look that causes Ed to ask what the problem is. Rob reveals that he will be leaving in a month for South America to teach music and Sam is going with him. He says that the band can go on without him. Ed insists that they never sounded as good when it was just the four of them.</p> <p>Jon is angry that he would just throw everything away for a couple of bongo lessons in a rain forest. Rob says that they have to do a show and that they'll talk later. They get to the stage to start the gig but Jon is too shocked and can't sing.</p> <p>Jon wakes up from his daydream to see Ed standing at the door looking at him to see if he's ok. Jon waves at him and drives off.</p> <p>"Yes, because that's what the rain forest desperately needs, the next Ecuadorian Phil Collins"</p>			

Scene No	46	Page No	
Brief outline	Beth and Ed argue over the baby and his attitude		
Characters in scene	Beth and Ed		
Location of scene	Beth and Ed's living room - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Beth tells Ed that she is worried about the baby as she won't sleep. Ed explains that all babies have trouble sleeping at some time and that she'll look back fondly on her being awake when she's a lazy teenager who won't get out of bed.</p> <p>Beth is not amused and doesn't take kindly to Ed suggesting she is being overly protective and needlessly worrying. She then accuses him of caring more about the band than his own family. Ed thinks that is totally unfair and that he made sure Beth was alright with it before he started. When she says she has changed her mind Ed gets annoyed and their shouting makes the baby cry. Beth then takes the baby upstairs.</p>			

Scene No	47	Page No	
Brief outline	Beth and Ed talk as the baby sleeps		
Characters in scene	Beth and Ed		
Location of scene	Baby's nursery - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Beth is soothing the baby's head as she sleeps, she signals Ed to be quiet and he sits next to her. She apologises to Ed for snapping but that she sometimes feels inadequate and worried she won't make a good mother. She says she isn't as organised as her own mother. Then says how she has bought 6 cartons of milk in two days. Ed says he wondered why there was so much milk.</p> <p>Ed reassures her and says that he is always going to be there for the both of them. Beth reveals she is worried that the band will get back together permanently; Ed laughs and explains the trouble they are having with just one gig.</p> <p>He asks she is coming to bed but she says she wants to stay a while with the baby. Ed reaches over, grabs a blanket, lays it over her and says goodnight.</p>			

Scene No	48	Page No	
Brief outline	The band are practicing and starting to sound good		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Stephen's basement - INT - DAY		
<p>The boys just finish their rehearsal and Jon says they are sounding better, Ed and Stephen comment on how much they have improved in such a short time. The guys talk about how they are slowly becoming the rock Gods they used to be but Jon interrupts and says they still need a lot more practice. Jason tells him to lighten up</p> <p>Jon says that although it's fun they shouldn't lose sight of the end goal, to do a kick ass gig.</p> <p>He gets them all into a circle with their hands in the centre and says that what they need is practice. They bounce their hands in unison and yell "practice, practice, practice" before fist bumping the air and letting out a primal scream.</p> <p>"I'm getting so juiced by the way we sound that my balls have swollen to the size of cantaloupes. You think I'm lying? Here, look at my balls, LOOK AT THEM"</p>			

Scene No	49	Page No	
Brief outline	Band practice montage		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Various		
<p>A montage of clips where we see the five men playing in Stephen's basement and then each band member using their spare time to practice.</p> <p>Rob plays his guitar riffs to Sam on Skype, Ed plays his baby like a bass as he's burping her, Jason is seen playing electric drums naked to a woman laying on the bed. Stephen practices in the school music room as Lauren reads the paper, Jon plays his guitar whilst watches late night television.</p> <p>The guys are once more practicing in the basement and looking pleased and enthusiastic.</p>			

Scene No	50	Page No	
Brief outline	Lauren drops in to see Stephen		
Characters in scene	Stephen, Lauren and Rob		
Location of scene	Stephen's house - INT - DAY		
<p>Stephen and Rob is sat on the sofa playing riffs on an electric guitar that isn't plugged in when the doorbell goes. Rob gets up to answer it.</p> <p>Lauren looks up to see Rob and is confused, Stephen calls them both in. When Lauren knows who Rob is they talk enthusiastically about the band as Stephen gets coffee.</p> <p>Rob explains to Lauren that it's hard to see Stephen as a responsible adult after the things they all got up to in college. He asks Stephen if he remembers the 15th beer. When Lauren asks for details Stephen then announces that it's such a lovely day that he would like to go for a walk and asks Lauren to join him.</p> <p>Lauren asks if Rob would like to join them but Stephen hurriedly tells her he has school matters to talk about and then get up and leave Rob to his guitar playing.</p>			

Scene No	51	Page No	
Brief outline	Stephen and Laruen go for a walk		
Characters in scene	Stephen and Lauren		
Location of scene	Leafy Park - EXT - DAY		
<p>Stephen and Laruen take a walk through the leafy park near Stephen's house. She asks about the night of the 15th beer, Stephen is reluctant to tell her but after some goading he tells her the story.</p> <p>He tells her that during a study session in the library it college Jon and Ed smuggled in a case of beer and dared him to drink the lot in return for buying the books on his reading list. He accepted and was doing fine until the 15th beer which made him projectile vomit. Jon took him home and Ed had to stay and make the excuse that he had food poisoning.</p> <p>Lauren laughs and says she didn't know Stephen had such a dark side. They find a park bench and sit down, Stephen reaches for Laurens hand and they sit, silently, people watching.</p> <p>""The college had to buy an entirely new collection of books on roman history. They were all soaked to through with my beery vomit""</p>			

Scene No	52	Page No	
Brief outline	The boys are eating at Larry's Bar		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Larry's Bar - INT - NIGHT		
<p>The boys are sat around a table eating pizza and drinking beer in the busy atmosphere of Larry's bar the night before their gig. They each talk about how apprehensive and excited they are. Ed says about how far they have come and how much he's going to miss hanging out here with everybody but he's sure they'll always find somewhere to go.</p> <p>Jon calls Larry over to ask if he is ready for their band to play tomorrow night, he explains that he is going to be moving to Florida to live on a golf course so he hasn't really given their gig much thought.</p> <p>Ed stands up to make a speech saying that he's incredibly lucky to have friends that are more like brothers than college buddies he then proposes a toast to lasting friendship and bitchin tunes.</p>			

Scene No	53	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon, Ed and Jason meet at the diner		
Characters in scene	Jon, Ed and Jason		
Location of scene	Diner - INT - DAY		
<p>From the clinking of shot glasses we cut to the thud of a coffee cup being clinked onto a table. A very hung over looking Jon wearing sunglasses groans as the waitress fills his cup with coffee.</p> <p>Ed and Jason arrive looking dishevelled and saying that they are too old to go drinking the night before a gig. Ed says that he was also up all night as the baby wouldn't settle, he stayed up to give Beth a break.</p> <p>Jason orders pancakes, Ed and Jon say they should get going to Stephen's but Jason explains he is a drummer so he needs energy. He then describes the pancakes so deliciously that Ed and Jon decide to join him.</p>			
Scene No	54	Page No	
Brief outline	At rehearsals Ed gets a worrying phone call		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Stephen's Basement - INT - DAY		
<p>Jon, Ed and Jason arrive at Stephen's basement where he and Rob are already rehearsing. Stephen is annoyed at their lateness. Rob chastises them saying they have no self control. Jon explains that he uses up all his self control in rehearsals.</p> <p>Stephen steps in to try and dissipate the argument and Jon asks why he always feels the need to be a mediator, that they are not his high school kids. Stephen tells them that they are behaving like kids and points out they are in his house.</p> <p>The arguing escalates and Ed gets a phone call but can't hear over the shouting. He moves to the corner and tells them all to be quiet as Beth is ringing from the hospital.</p> <p>At the end of the call Ed is panicked and paces around the room. Jon grabs him and gets him to talk sense, asking which hospital Beth and his daughter are in. Jon says he will drive but Ed says they can rehearse without Ed but not Jon. Jon says there are more important thing than rehearsals. Stephen says they should take his car and they all get ready to go saying that friends stick together.</p>			

Scene No	55	Page No	
Brief outline	The car arrives at the hospital		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Hospital - EXT - DAY		
<p>The car comes to a screeching halt outside the hospital, Ed gets out and Jon gets out with him. He grabs Ed's arm but he doesn't move. He tells Jon that he's too scared to go in, what if something seriously wrong with his daughter, he doesn't think he would be able to handle it.</p> <p>Jon tells him that everything will be fine because he knows that the universe wouldn't be such a monumental dick to such a good guy. Jon then leads him into the hospital.</p> <p>"You're a good guy, a very good guy, the most decent guy I know and the universe would have to be a monumental dick to shit on a good guy like you"</p>			

Scene No	56	Page No	
Brief outline	Jon and Ed arrive at the Reception		
Characters in scene	Jon, Ed, Stephen, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Hospital reception - INT - DAY		
<p>Ed and Jon get to the reception and ask about Beth and Sarah. The receptionist asks if any of the group are family, as they are not Ed starts to be led away to a separate room but he stops and thanks Jon.</p> <p>Jon tells him to go as he is met by the rest of the guys and told to go and sit in the waiting room.</p> <p>"I'm telling you man, things are going to be fine. I'm stake my signed Springsteen waistcoat on it"</p>			

Scene No	57	Page No	
Brief outline	The guys wait in the waiting room for news		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Hospital waiting room - INT - DAY		
<p>Jason, Rob and Jon take up seats in the waiting room and Stephen offers to go and get some coffee. He goes over to Jon, puts his hand around his head and gives him a hug. Jon is worried about the baby, he worries that it's somehow his fault, that he might have forced Ed into re-joining the group and that put pressure on Beth and wonders if they are all ok. Stephen reassures him that it's not his fault and tells Jason to come help him with the coffee leaving Jon and Rob alone together.</p> <p>Rob offers him some condolence and apologises for being a bit of a dick over the last couple of weeks. Jon says he has been just as bad. Jon explains how much the band meant to him and Rob explains that he had different priorities. Jon says he is learning about priorities now.</p> <p>Rob says he didn't take Sam away from him and Jon says that his childish grudge seems stupid now in the face of a real life changing circumstances. Rob says that could have both conducted themselves better and extends a hand to Jon who takes it and then hugs him.</p>			
Scene No	58	Page No	
Brief outline	Ed and Beth talk in the hospital room		
Characters in scene	Ed and Beth		
Location of scene	Hospital room - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Ed sits with Beth as the doctor explains that they can't find any reason for the baby's sudden temperature spike but that they are going to run a full series of tests. Beth worries that she is being an overly sensitive mother but is reassured by the doctor.</p> <p>Beth apologises for getting Ed out of his rehearsal and Ed says that if he had been home then she wouldn't have had to come here on her own. Beth explains that she doesn't want to be the kind of wife/mother that has to force their husband to stop having fun and frightened that he'll start to think that having a baby and getting married was the wrong decision.</p> <p>Ed says that he would drop everything in an instant if she told him to, he wants her to know that they are his entire world. An orderly then comes to take them away for tests.</p>			

Scene No	59	Page No	
Brief outline	The boys finally find out news about the baby		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Hospital waiting room - INT - NIGHT		
<p>Jon complains that they've been waiting for hours with no news says he can't make up his mind if no news is good news or terrible news.</p> <p>Ed appears in the doorway looking exhausted and Jon rushes to him to find out what happened. Ed says they couldn't find anything wrong and the doctor said it was just one of those things. Although inconclusive is a lot better than the alternative news he could have gotten.</p> <p>Beth enters the room with a sleeping baby and all four whisper a cheer. Beth comments on how tired everybody looks, kisses Jon and thanks him for keeping Ed together. Beth sees the time and asks when their gig is. They all say the gig isn't important and that by the time they get their equipment it will probably be too late. but Beth insists that they at least try. They each kiss Beth as they run back to the car.</p> <p>"Just one of those things? Dropping your phone down the toilet is just one of those things"</p>			
Scene No	60	Page No	
Brief outline	The guys make it to Larry's bar too late		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason and Rob		
Location of scene	Outside Larry's bar - EXT - NIGHT		
<p>The car stops outside of the bar and they arrive just in time to see Larry closing the door. He explains that everybody left and he is closing up for the last time. Stephen looks over at Jon who is crestfallen.</p> <p>They offer to find another bar, Rob offers to stay for longer until they find another gig. Ed refuses saying that this was the venue that was important to Jon, it is more than just a venue it was a place where they hung, talked, laughed, playing Springsteen and rocked out.</p> <p>Jon says he understand that it was important but that tonight has show them all that there are much more important things. He says that the gig doesn't matter anymore, that he got what he wanted; to cement old friendships build bridges with lost ones.</p>			

Scene No	61	Page No	
Brief outline	The boys get to perform their gig		
Characters in scene	Jon, Stephen, Ed, Jason, Rob, Beth and Lauren		
Location of scene	Larry's Bar - INT - NIGHT		
<p>An empty bar apart from a few friends they have called to come back to the bar, Lauren and Beth with baby Sarah who is wearing large pair of ear protectors sit around the stage.</p> <p>We hear Jon's voice over the PA system from off stage introducing the band. The guys excitedly bound onto the stage dressed in various shades of Denim and their friends cheer wildly. Jason counts them in with his drumsticks, Jon plays one chord and the shot freezes.</p> <p>Titles.</p> <p>"Ladies and gentlemen, Tonight back at the prestigious Larry's Bar here in glamorous downtown Montclair New Jersey, for one night only, Thunder Roads."</p>			
