

THE LAST LIGHT IN VEGAS

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL-LATE AFTERNOON

It is an overcrowded bustling airport terminal, teeming with travelers. JUSTIN PIPER (aka "Piper", early 30s) waits impatiently at his gate. He's dressed impeccably. He strains to hear the GATE ATTENDANT (any age, gender, ethnicity) make announcements.

GATE ATTENDANT

We are now boarding Flight 1372  
from LaGuardia to Las Vegas. We  
invite our service members,  
Platinum card members and those who  
may need extra time boarding to  
please bring your boarding passes  
to the front.

Justin stands up and looks at his boarding pass. He adjusts his roll-away luggage and looks at his phone. Three missed calls.

Justin punches in a telephone number.

JUSTIN

Billy? Please tell me you sent the  
files.

(exasperation)

Monday, Billy. The presentation is  
Monday.

Justin throws his hands up in mock anger.

JUSTIN

I do not care if the server  
crashed. You were supposed to have  
them to me no later than close of  
business yesterday, Billy.

(pause)

Do I need to remind you that if we  
don't pull this off somebody is  
losing their job and somebody is  
just losing their bonus?

(pause)

Do I need to remind you which is  
which, Billy? Do I really need to  
do that?

(pause)

Good! So I'll see those files  
tonight, right?

The Gate Attendant speaks over the intercom but Justin can't hear over Billy's conversation. He hangs up the phone, angry.

GATE ATTENDANT

We now continue boarding Flight 1372 with service to Las Vegas. A reminder that since this is a full-flight, we are offering complimentary baggage check for your carry-on luggage. If anyone is interested in checking a bag, please see the gate attendant immediately. Also, since we are overbooked for this flight, please see the gate attendant if you would be willing to trade your ticket for another flight.

The crowd at the gate stands and queues.

GATE ATTENDANT

Now boarding our first class passengers.

Justin pushes his way to the front of the queue. He hands his phone with his boarding pass on the screen to the gate attendant.

GATE ATTENDANT

Thank you for flying with us, Mr. Piper.

Justin doesn't acknowledge her.

INT./EXT. JETWAY TO AIRPLANE-LATE AFTERNOON

As Justin makes his way down the Jetway, his cellphone rings. Same number as his three missed calls. This time, he answers.

JUSTIN

Hello?

(pause)

Yes, this is he.

(pause)

Oh, hello Doctor Roblinski. I'm sorry I missed your calls.

(pause)

No, I haven't checked my voice messages. I'm actually getting ready to board a plane.

Justin steps over the threshold and glances at his phone to make sure he's headed to the right seat.

JUSTIN

I can't come into the office until Tuesday. Out of town over the weekend.

(pause)

Bachelor party.

(pause)

Huge presentation, maybe, on Monday. Tuesday morning is the best I can do.

(long pause)

I understand Dr. Roblinski. Can't you just tell me now, over the phone?

(pause)

Yeah, I understand that it isn't how things are done, but honestly, there isn't anything you can tell me in the office that you can't tell me over the phone.

Justin stands in front of his seat, holding up a long line of quickly annoyed passengers.

JUSTIN

It's like this. If you can't bother to tell me what's going on here on the phone, I don't know why I should bother coming in to the office, OK?

(pause)

JUSTIN

Yeah, I remember the tests.

(pause)

I see. That sounds serious.

(long pause)

Justin is still standing in the aisle. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT approaches him and touches him on the sleeve. Only then does he take his seat.

JUSTIN

Pancreatic? You really think so?

(pause)

Look, I'll be down there first thing Tuesday morning. You are so wrong about this, Dr. Roblinski. I'm just tired, you'll see.

Justin buckles his seat belt just in time for a over-tired but pretty mom, JESSICA (late 20s, early 30s, pretty but tired) and her overactive boy, JACKSON (5ish) approach him. She points at the window as Justin hangs up the phone.

JESSICA  
I'm sorry sir.

JUSTIN  
Of course, of course.

Justin stands up, annoyed.

JACKSON  
Why can't I have the window seat?

JESSICA  
You know the answer to this,  
Jackson. Why can't you have the  
window seat?

JACKSON  
I don't know!  
(pouting)

JESSICA  
Remember what happened the last  
time?

The FLIGHT ATTENDANT (50s, Seasoned) walks through first class. She takes drink orders and hands out blankets. She pauses to talk to Jessica and Jackson.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Hi! Who do we have here?

She glances at all three of them, her face a question mark of whether this was a family.

JESSICA  
Jessica.  
(to Jackson)  
Can you tell her your name?

JACKSON  
No. Not until you tell me why I  
can't have the window seat!

JESSICA  
This is Jackson, and apparently  
this is going to be a long flight.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Oh, I'm sure he's going to do just  
fine.

The flight attendant finishes her walk-thru of the cabin.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
On behalf of the airline, I would  
like to thank you for flying Flight  
1372 from LaGuardia to Las Vegas.

The plane begins pushes back from the gate.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Your flight time tonight is 3 hours  
and 47 minutes from wheels up to  
wheels down. We are third in line  
for departure tonight. In a few  
moments, the Flight Attendants on  
this New York based crew will be  
doing a final walk thru and  
providing safety instructions.  
Weather tonight in Vegas will be 88  
degrees with no precipitation.

The jet comes to a pause and the pushback tow disengages.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
We are expecting a smooth flight  
tonight with mild turbulence as we  
cross the Rockies. For your safety,  
please keep your seatbelt on at all  
times while you are in your seat  
and pay attention to the seatbelt  
illuminated sign.

The flight attendants take their positions in the center  
aisle, and begin the safety presentation.

JACKSON  
I want to sit in the window seat!

JESSICA  
No! We've talked about this. The  
last time remember? You played with  
the window shade until you broke  
it. I told you to stop foolin' with  
it but...

JACKSON  
It was already broken! Moooooom!

Jackson kicks the seat in front of him as the jets amp up to  
prep for taxi.

Justin shuffles in his seat and pulls out a newspaper from  
his briefcase. It IS going to be a long flight.

JESSICA  
I am so sorry. He's not normally  
like this.

JUSTIN  
It's OK, really.

Now in the air:

JACKSON  
(to Justin)  
What are you doing?

Justin has put the newspaper in the back of the seat in front  
of him. He has his phone out, trying to connect to the on-  
board WiFi.

JUSTIN  
Trying to access the internet.

JESSICA  
Are you playing games? Mom likes to  
play games on her phone.

JUSTIN  
No. I'm, well, not playing games.

Jackson is disappointed.

JACKSON  
When mommy plays games, sometimes  
she sits on the couch and drinks  
wine. Do you like wine?

JUSTIN  
Not really, but I'm starting to  
understand why your mommy might.

Piper glances at Jessica.

JACKSON  
How about Legos? Do you like Legos?

JUSTIN  
I think I might have at one point.

Jackson is not impressed.

JACKSON  
(to Jessica)  
Can I have a snack now? You  
promised, mommy.

Jessica, exhausted, fumbles in the bag under the seat and comes up with peanut butter and crackers in a sleeve.

JESSICA  
Here you go Jackson.

JACKSON  
I don't want this. I want a cookie!

JESSICA  
This is all I can get to right now.

JACKSON  
You promised mommy!

He kicks the seat again.

JESSICA  
Stop it, Jack! Stop it right now!  
(to Justin)  
I am so sorry, sir.

JUSTIN  
It's fine. I want what I want when  
I want it too.

JESSICA  
It's just he hasn't seen his dad in  
a long time and he gets like this.

JUSTIN  
Soldier?

JESSICA  
He used to be. He now works on an  
oil rig in the Gulf.

JUSTIN  
I see. I'm Piper, by the way.

JESSICA  
Piper? That's usually a...

JUSTIN  
Last name. First name is Justin.  
Only my mom and my ex-wife use it.  
Only my mom is welcome.

JESSICA  
I understand.

Jackson leans over and whispers to Jessica.



JESSICA

I'm sorry Piper. He's really got to go.

Piper unbuckles and stands. Jessica unbuckles herself and Jackson and they squeeze past Justin.

JACKSON

(walking away, holding  
Jessica's hand)

Why are you talking to him? He doesn't even like Legos, mommy.

Justin takes a seat and pulls his laptop out of the bag. He gets signed on to the WiFi and checks his email. Nothing from Billy. He then goes to a search engine and begins to type "Pancreatic Cancer" but doesn't get to finish because Jessica is now back with Jackson. He shuts the laptop down, stands, and ushers the boy and his mom into their seats.

The flight attendant takes their drink order. Moments later, she brings everything back to the seat. Jackson immediately spills his all over Justin and his laptop.

Jackson hops up, now very angry.

JUSTIN

Son of a -

JESSICA

I am so sorry. He's just a kid. I'm sorry.

JUSTIN

(yelling)

Can you, for 15 minutes, stop making excuses for this little brat and start instead taking control of him?

JESSICA

Look, Mr. Piper. Can I pay for your dry-cleaning or something?

JUSTIN

Like that's gonna do me any good. This suit probably costs more than your husband makes in a month, lady.

JESSICA

(starting to cry)

He didn't mean it! Look, let me just let me pay?

JUSTIN

Jessica, is that your name? I have places to go right after I get off this plane. I don't have time to fool with any of this.

The flight attendants come, armed with towels. They hand them over to Justin. Jessica brushes her tears away. She is just so tired! Jackson wails.

JACKSON

I want a drink! I. WANT. A. DRINK!

The seat belt sign dings on and the plane makes a decided slowdown.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

As you can see, the seat belt sign is now on. We are making our final descent into Vegas. If you are up and about the cabin, please find your seat and fasten in. In just a few moments, your flight attendants...

(tapers off)

Justin glances out the open window at the nightscape of Vegas as it comes into view. He sees the familiar lights of the Strip light up before him. And then something catches his eye. A Light. The Last Light in Vegas blinks erratically right at him. A message maybe. Of all the lights in Vegas, this one seems to be for him, The Last Light before the city fades into desert nothingness. He briefly forgets his potential diagnosis, Billy's failure to produce presentation materials, his ruined suit. He just can't stop staring.

INT-MCCARRAN AIRPORT-EVENING

Justin exits the plane, agitation returning. He glances down at his drink-covered suit and shifts his suitcase in front of him to hide most of the stain. He glances around for the nearest restroom, and briefly makes his way to the Gate window. There it is. His Light.

INT-MCCARRAN AIRPORT RESTROOM-EVENING

Justin exits the bathroom stall now dressed far more casually. He grooms himself in the bathroom mirror and takes a glance. He suddenly looks and feels very tired.

EXT-MCCARRAN AIRPORT-EVENING

Justin hails a cab.

INT-STRIP CASINO HOTEL/BAR-EVENING

Justin strolls into a Casino bar with his luggage and looks for his friend, CHARLIE (early 30s), the bachelor, and the group. The party is well under progress by the time he gets there.

Charlie stands up to greet his college roommate.

CHARLIE

Piper? Piper, over here!

The two men bro-hug.

CHARLIE

Piper. So glad you could make it, man. Been a long time since I saw you!

JUSTIN

Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss this for anything. Mr. Most-likely-to-swipe-left finally found someone to tame him.

CHARLIE

Oh, Valerie's awesome. Can't wait for you to meet her. Still coming to the wedding, right?

JUSTIN

(nods, doing the math in his head)  
October, right?

CHARLIE

You always did have a great memory.  
(pauses)  
Come meet the guys.  
(he points to a group of men already in various stages of drunkenness. He starts pointing.)

CHARLIE

This is Alphonso. He's my future brother-in-law.

The men exchange glances.

CHARLIE

Man, I know. No choice on this one.

Alphonso (Early 40s, aging playboy, tries too hard to look younger) is already more than half-wasted and apparently horny. He ogles every cocktail waitress and half the patrons in the bar.

CHARLIE

Alphonso, quit staring at the ladies, man. Come meet Piper, the college roommate I told you all about.

Alphonso staggers over to meet Piper. He shakes his hand and then pulls Piper in for an awkward hug.

ALPHONSO

Good to meet you man. Heard a lot of crazy stories about you already.

JUSTIN

(looks at Charlie and  
tries to pull himself  
away)

Really? Hmmm, not sure how I feel about that. Nice to meet you man!

CHARLIE

Next we have John. He's been my bestie since elementary school.

John (somewhat paunchy late 20s) is not at all engaged in any of this. There's a hockey game on in the lounge.

CHARLIE

John? John, this is Piper. Piper, meet John.

John gives a half-hearted wave toward Piper but doesn't stop looking at the TV.

JUSTIN

Yeah. Nice to meet you too, John.

CHARLIE

(pointing again)

And this big guy  
(who has walked up to  
approach the two men,  
putting his arm around  
Charlie's shoulder)

This big guy right here is Dave.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Dave works in Accounting.

Dave (wiry short guy, mid-30s) is mostly obliterated.

DAVE

So, you're that big shot Wall-Street guy Charlie is always going on about?

(sizing him up)

Nice to meet ya, Piper.

(He shakes Piper's hand, squeezing it as hard as he can.)

A cocktail waitress approaches and Alphonso orders a round of shots for the table.

CHARLIE

You want in on this round, Pipe?

JUSTIN

(pauses, remembers the diagnosis. He's not sure)

I think I'm gonna sit this one out Charlie.

CHARLIE

Alright man. We'll catch you next round.

Alphonso then calls over a scantily clad girl from the bar. (BODY SHOT GIRL is late 20s, all legs and boobs) He whispers in her ear. She shakes her head. He hands her a wad of cash and then she lays across the table. It's Body-Shot Time. Charlie glances at Piper and they exchange a laugh. It's college all over.

Piper pulls his phone out of his pocket and checks his emails as the boys in the background are taking shots off BODY SHOT GIRL. God Bless His Heart! Billy has sent the presentation!

CHARLIE

Alphonso, keep your hands off that girl! What am I supposed to tell Val?

ALPHONSO

(gets handsy with Body Shot Girl)

Nothing. Because if you do, remember that one thing?

(knowing glance)

CHARLIE  
 Dammit, Alphonso!  
 (to Justin)  
 I'm sorry, man. It's a little  
 crazy.

JUSTIN  
 Man, it's ok. This is your bachelor  
 party. It's Vegas. If it wasn't  
 crazy, you'd be doing it wrong.

CHARLIE  
 You OK, man? You seem a bit, I  
 dunno, off.

JUSTIN  
 It's, well, there's a lot going on  
 at work right now. As a matter of  
 fact, man, I hate to do this to  
 you, but I have this presentation  
 on Monday. I should probably beg  
 off for a couple of hours and just  
 go to the hotel room.

John has somehow overheard just this snippet of conversation.

JOHN  
 What? You blowing us off, Piper? I  
 thought you said he was cool,  
 Charlie!

CHARLIE  
 Are you sure it can't wait?

JUSTIN  
 Right now, there isn't anything  
 that can wait, Charlie. Everything  
 has a sense of urgency to it. Hard  
 to explain.

Alphonso stands up with the help of Body Shot Girl.

ALPHONSO  
 Who's down for "Vulva Las Vegas"?

JUSTIN  
 I'm out for that one, brother.

The drunken group stand and form a circle, hands in. As a  
 group:

GROUP  
 (except Piper)  
 1-2-3 Vulva Las Vegas!

They touch hands and then raise them above their heads like football players.

INT-ELEVATOR STRIP CASINO HOTEL-LATE EVENING

Justin stands, still with his roller suitcase in the center of the elevator with Charlie's bachelor party strewn in various stages of drunkenness throughout the elevator. Alphonso and Body Shot Girl furiously make out in the back of the elevator.

CHARLIE

Alphonso! Could we maybe not?  
Anyway, Piper?

JUSTIN

Yeah man?

CHARLIE

Meet up later at the Strat?

JUSTIN

Of course, wouldn't miss it.

The elevator door opens and Piper steps out, waves goodbye to the group. The others pile out.

JOHN

Hey, Charlie!

CHARLIE

Remember that time in 3rd grade  
when you fell asleep at my house  
and I put your hand in that warm  
water?

INT. PIPER'S HOTEL ROOM - LATE EVENING

Piper has his presentation papers and laptop pulled from his briefcase and scattered across the table. He has highlighters and sharpies strewn across the table, things circled on the papers spread before him. He's sitting at the desk staring at the computer screen. It is an informative web page on Pancreatic Cancer. He wipes away a tear as his cell phone buzzes on the table next to him. Text from Charlie reads: "Strat. Don't pussy out on us. 20 minutes." Piper goes into the hotel bathroom and cleans his face. He changes into yet another very expensive suit and tie and then exits the hotel room.

INT. UPPER DECK OF THE STRATOSPHERE-LATER

Piper waits at the top of the Strat until the Bachelor Party arrives. The group has devolved. Body Shot Girl and Alphonso have switched shirts. She's wearing his button down, he's in her midriff top. She has his necktie on her head like a headband. John's shirt is inside out, Dave is only wearing one shoe and Charlie's hair is a mess. Charlie is still pretty coherent, but all of the rest of them are pretty wasted.

CHARLIE

There he is! See, Dave, I told you he wouldn't pussy out on us! Good to see you, old man.

JUSTIN

Wow! You look like you've all been having a good time.  
(chuckles)

CHARLIE

Now it is your turn to have a good time? You still do that, right?

Charlie points to the bar.

CHARLIE

Come'on man, one more for old time's sake?

JUSTIN

I'm staying sober tonight. Somebody here has to.

CHARLIE

You're at least going to ride the roller coaster?

JUSTIN

You forget how afraid of heights I am, don't you? I'll get it on video.

Piper glances over at Alphonso, who has one hand on Body Shot Girl's left tit and the other on her ass.

Don't worry, Alphonso, I'll take out any, uh, incriminating footage before I post it to YouTube, OK?

JOHN

He's that Wall-Street hotshot, right?

(MORE)



JOHN (CONT'D)

Bet you he charges you first,  
Alphonso. Bet you a dollar. Best  
bet in all of Vegas tonight.

Charlie puts his hands up to silence the boys.

CHARLIE

Ease up guys!  
(he pulls Piper aside)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Piper, for real though man, you  
aren't yourself tonight. What's  
going on? It isn't more bullshit  
with Cynthia, is it?

JUSTIN

No. We haven't been together in so  
long, I almost forgot what that was  
like.

CHARLIE

What is it, man? You are starting  
to worry me, for real. Real talk.

JUSTIN

We'll talk about it later. This is  
your time. It is YOUR night,  
Charlie. You should have this. All  
of it, whatever this is.

John and Dave dance in the background. Body Shot Girl has her  
head on Alphonso's shoulder. They hold hands.

CHARLIE

OK, then wait right here. This  
should not take too long.

JUSTIN

You got it, man.

Charlie, John, Dave, Alphonso, and Body Shot Girl queue up,  
tickets in hand and exit through the door to get on the  
roller coaster.

Piper turns his back on the group and stares out the glass  
partition. He sees the distant lights of the airport and the  
Strip. He walks to other side of the Roller Coaster and there  
it is again. The Last Light in Vegas! He walks right up to  
the partition and puts his finger on the glass right where he  
sees it, blinking erratically AT him.

Behind him, Dave throws up on the back of John's shirt and  
Charlie laughs his ass off at all his friends.

Piper doesn't notice any of this though. He just can't stop staring at that Light! He knows what he HAS to do.

The group comes back into the room. Charlie is still laughing at John who now looks as sick as Dave. Alphonso is slow dancing with Belly Shot Girl. He strokes her hair and they are whispering sweet things to each other.

CHARLIE  
 (laughing so hard he can  
 barely get the words out)  
 Piper, oh my God, you missed it.  
 Dave totally blew chunks all over  
 John. It was great!

John removes his shirt.

JOHN  
 Gift shop missions next, OK?

CHARLIE  
 Oh, of course. Let's get you a  
 shirt that says "My friend puked in  
 Vegas and all I got was this lousy  
 T-Shirt."

Everyone laughs but John.

CHARLIE  
 We hitting the casino for a few?

JUSTIN  
 Man, I can't. There's something I  
 got to do. I-I can't explain it,  
 but, all I can say is I've never  
 been this certain about anything in  
 years.

DAVE  
 So this is the "coolest guy we'll  
 ever meet"? He's been nothing but a  
 limp dick since we met him,  
 Charlie. Cool my ass. Bet he  
 doesn't even work on Wall Street.

Charlie looks at Piper, a mix of concern and disappointment.

CHARLIE  
 Knock it off. If Piper has  
 something he says he has to do, he  
 has to do it. And you don't get to  
 where he is on Wall Street by being  
 a limp dick, Dave.

JUSTIN

I promise tomorrow morning I'm all in. And I'm sorry I'm off. I just gotta do this one thing and it will all be better.

Piper glances at his Light. He could swear it is even brighter and blinking even more erratically than it ever has.

CHARLIE

We all have off moments, Pipe. But I'm holding you to it. Tomorrow morning, buffet. You better be there, buddy.

JUSTIN

You got it man.

Piper walks away from the group.

JOHN

Hey Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yes, John?

JOHN

Remember that time when you were 14 and we bet you that you wouldn't dress up like your sister and then your dad walked in and found you in her bra and underwear and he and your mom staged that intervention?

EXT-STRATOSPHERE-LATE EVENING

Piper hails a cab. FRANKIE (older guy, has seen everything and is impressed by none of it) the Cabbie rolls down his window.

FRANKIE

Where to?

JUSTIN

I'm not real sure, actually. That way.

(points)

FRANKIE

You got an address?

JUSTIN

No. Edge of town is all. Through there.

(pointing again)

FRANKIE

Cabs don't go to that part of town this time of night. You can barely get a cop there.

JUSTIN

Well, we're not going TO there. More like through there.

FRANKIE

Look, this is my last fare for the night. You sure I couldn't just run you down to the Bellagio or something?

JUSTIN

No. I got to get there. Please mister, would this be enough to convince you?

Piper pulls his wallet out and holds out an obscene amount of cash.

FRANKIE

OK, you got me. But I'm going on record as telling you that this is a really stupid bad idea.

JUSTIN

Thanks, man.  
(hops in cab)

INT-CAB- VERY LATE EVENING CONTINUOUS

FRANKIE

(under his breath)

Man, I should have stayed at M.I.T.

The cab exits the Stratosphere cab lane and pulls to the edge of the parking lot.

FRANKIE

Where did you say you were headed?

JUSTIN

I, gosh, this is so hard to explain. For now, just, that way.  
(pointing)

FRANKIE

And you don't have an address or a landmark? Not a Best Western or a Denny's or a Smoke Shop or a Strip Club or? Come'on. What are you looking for exactly?

In the back seat, Piper's shoulder's slump.

JUSTIN

It is this Light.

FRANKIE

A light?

JUSTIN

Yeah, a Light. Just a street lamp, you know.

FRANKIE

There are thousands of street lights in Vegas. OK, hundreds at least. You want lights? The Strip has a million of 'em.

JUSTIN

I'm having a hard time describing this, man. A street lamp. I saw it from the plane and again from the airport terminal and once again from the top of the Strat just now.

FRANKIE

If you just want lights and you don't want the Strip, take my card. Call me tomorrow about 7. I'll take you to the Neon Museum downtown. There are all the lights you could possibly want to look at. Historical even. I'd give you all your cash back right now if you say yes. I can't take you just some abstract place. I got to know where you are headed.

Frankie looks at Piper using his rear view mirror. Piper knocks his head against the side of the car in frustration.

JUSTIN

Please, I know it is a weird request. I know it is late. I even understand we got to go through a rough place to get there.

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

But there's this light over there  
that I have to get to. My life  
might depend on it.

FRANKIE

Well that sounds unnecessarily  
dramatic.

Frankie checks his seat belt and adjusts his mirror.

JUSTIN

Look man, what's your name?

FRANKIE

Frankie.

JUSTIN

Frankie. Alright, so now we're  
getting somewhere. Hi, I'm Piper. I  
grew up in New York City. I'm no  
stranger to rough neighborhoods,  
OK? You took my money, you accepted  
me as a passenger and I told you  
what I needed and you still did it,  
right?

FRANKIE

I guess so.

JUSTIN

OK, so we good now? Can we go?

FRANKIE

Whatever you say, Piper.

Frankie pulls out of the Stratosphere and heads in the  
direction of Piper's pointing. The Ghetto.

Piper stares out the window. A brief flash of uncertainty  
hits him. For a moment he considers calling the whole thing  
off. But he HAS to find that Light. Has to.

Piper stares out the window and watches while the glitz and  
glam of the Strip fades very quickly to a depressing sea of  
trash and poverty. The back of this Cab could have easily  
been the back of the family car that took Piper to his Prep  
School every day or any other neighborhood he had to traverse  
on his way through any of the Boroughs. There were  
neighborhoods a lot like this in every one of them. This one  
rivals them though, surpassing many. This was really bad. He  
feels unusually unsafe.

Piper scours the road ahead hoping to get a feel for when  
they'd be on to a better section of road.

He looks for his Light but all he sees are more and more shambles. Suddenly, the cab lurches and then rattles and steam pours in through the vents.

FRANKIE

Oh man, this ain't good.

JUSTIN

What, what's not good, Frankie?

FRANKIE

Busted hose I bet.

JUSTIN

What's that mean?

FRANKIE

It means your ride is over.

Frankie manages to pull the cab off the road just before it sputters to a complete stop.

JUSTIN

Over? What's that mean?

FRANKIE

It means that you get out of my cab. It means that this transaction is concluded.

Piper takes a look outside the cab. There are two men carrying a TV into an alleyway and another on the ground rocking back and forth and shouting obscenities to no one.

JUSTIN

Can you call your dispatch? Will they send someone?

FRANKIE

Let me say this as delicately as possible. It is two-thirty in the morning. There is no dispatch. I AM dispatch. There is no one to call. We are a three-man show and even if it were eleven o'clock, I tried telling you, no one is coming for you in THIS neighborhood.

JUSTIN

So you just gonna ditch me here?

FRANKIE

Something like that. I told you it was stupid. Told you.

JUSTIN  
So where are you going to go?

FRANKIE  
(pointing)  
Piper? That's your name, right?

Piper nods.

FRANKIE  
I live six blocks over that way.

Frankie points down an alley in the opposite direction.

JUSTIN  
What am I supposed to do?

FRANKIE  
Not my problem.

JUSTIN  
(indignant)  
I PAID you man! Deliver or give me  
my money back!

FRANKIE  
Cash? You think your cash means  
shit here, Piper?

JUSTIN  
You aren't being fair!

FRANKIE  
Fair?! Take a hard look, Piper.  
What does "fair" mean anyway,  
especially around here? Unless you  
want to score an 8 ball or a cheap  
whore, your cash don't mean shit  
here, Mr. Wall Street. Now GET OUT  
OF MY CAB!

EXT-SKETCHIEST OF SKETCHY NEIGHBORHOODS LAS VEGAS-LATE LATE  
EVENING

Piper does as told and slams the door behind him. They could  
not have stopped in a shabbier place. He looks up the street.  
The Strip is still visible but it is a LONG walk back through  
some obviously tough turf. He looks down the street. No  
better.

Frankie gets out of his cab, locks the door and then  
disappears into an alleyway without a word.



Piper is alone. He looks around and sees no one but spots a fire escape that leads to a roof. He climbs it to get a better view. He sees the Strip, identifies the airport, turns around and sees the Fremont Street area. He turns again, and there is his Light. As he ponders his next move suddenly he hears:

WOMAN (O.S.)  
(Screaming)  
Help! He's got a gun!

Piper freezes then walks to the side of the roof where he thinks the screams are coming from. He sees no one.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Quick, hurry! He's gonna kill me!

An incoherent man shouts.

Piper grabs his phone and begins to dial 9-1-1. He doesn't finish. He puts the phone back into his jacket pocket.

JUSTIN  
(to himself)  
I don't even know where I am.

He hears the woman scream again and then he hears two gunshots. The woman doesn't scream anymore. Piper ducks, frozen and unable to move from the top of the roof. After some time passes, he works up the nerve to glance over the edge. No one. Not one sound. Not one cop or ambulance. The street is eerily quiet.

After many moments of no other sounds, Piper deems it safe enough to descend the rooftop. It is not.

Piper jumps from the last step of the fire escape and turns in the direction of the Strip. He will try this again tomorrow.

From nowhere:

THUG ONE  
Where do you think you're going?

Piper stays quiet. He knows not to engage.

THUG TWO  
You disrespecting us? He asked you a direct question. Where are you going?

He pushes Piper back against the wall.

## THUG THREE

He's not gonna answer. So I will.  
No place he's supposed to be,  
right?

Thug Three lands a punch right in Piper's gut. Piper doubles over.

## THUG ONE

You aren't from around these parts,  
are you?

Thug One throws a punch that lands on Piper's jaw. Piper flinches. He knows enough to know that this fight is already lost.

## THUG TWO

I'm going back to disrespect. You  
heard that lady call for help and  
you pussy'ed out didn't you?

## THUG THREE

Yes, he did. He needs to pay for  
that. You look halfway smart,  
pretty boy. You know what's next,  
right?

Piper takes off his jacket and hand it to him.

## THUG ONE

Your watch too, asshole. We got  
eyes, we know what you wearin'.

Piper hands his watch to him. Thug One punches him in the throat.

## THUG ONE

Thanks, man.  
(to Thug Two)  
You got his wallet?

Thug Three circles around to the back of Piper and kicks him in the back of the knee. Piper falls on the sidewalk face down. Thug Three takes Piper's wallet from his back pocket.

## THUG THREE

We do now.

## THUG ONE

Make sure you got his phone and  
let's go.

## THUG TWO

I say we kill him. He ain't got no respect. And he's seen things.

Piper is a bloody mess. His lip swells and his eye pinks up almost immediately. Only his expensive shoes betray his status. Otherwise he now looks just like everyone else in this neighborhood. Shabby, beaten, broke.

Thug Two gives him one more kick and the three Thugs disappear into the same alleyway as Frankie the Cabbie went.

Piper passes out.

(LATER, CONTINUOUS)

Piper comes to and sits up. His head is killing him. He puts his hand to his busted eye. There's blood on his shirt and it is filthy. His hair is a mess. He struggles to stand.

Everything in him tells him to head back toward the Strip. He looks once again in the opposite direction and then stumbles down the street.

This area is beyond anything he's seen in the shabbiest ghetto in NYC. Trash litters the street, everything not moving is tagged with the most profane and odd graffiti. The buildings look worn down and if occupied, not by any legal tenant. He doesn't feel safe at all. He sees the remnants of a phone booth ahead. He digs through his pockets to find change as he stumbles ahead. When he gets there he not only sees that the phone booth is just an empty shell but there is nothing of any use in his pockets anyway.

Exhausted, he sits down with his back against the wall and cradles his head in his hands. Near tears, he finally stands back up and rounds the corner.

Although everything has been poorly lit and incredibly shabby, he sees ahead a very brightly lit and colorful wall. His curiosity piqued, he approaches it, almost cautiously.

As a matter of fact, wasn't he just here? He doesn't remember seeing that wall even just a moment ago.

When he gets there, what he sees takes his breath. The most incredible piece of street art is painted on the side of a building, stretching almost the entire block.

In the very center of the wall is a huge mandala depicting el Ojo de Dios. There's something about it that draws him in and he stares for what seems like an eternity. Piper then notices that all around the mandala there are beautifully painted images circling it, each of them more striking than the last.

Waterfalls, butterflies, the moon, a couple making love, a sunset, children playing, and old couple holding hands. As he takes more and more of the picture into his view, he notices that the colors on the edges of the what is beautiful begin to fade and darken.

Only when Piper looks at the edges of the painting does he notice the darkness. Etched along the outer edges of the wall are gruesome and terrifying images. Beady-eyed demons, rotting corpses, rivers of toxic waste that turn into needles dripping poison, naked starving children with buggy eyes. Every image of Hell itself subtly scrapes the edges of this incredible piece of art.

And only then does Piper catch the image in the corner of the artwork: a street light, just like any other street light in a thousand towns, but dammit, THAT LIGHT is the very thing illuminating the Ojo de Dios. THAT LIGHT is what is keeping all the images of Hell at bay.

Piper, despite himself, breaks down and weeps. Piper turns his back to the wall and slides down it, despondent.

JUSTIN

(yelling)

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME? I've given you everything. I've given you everything.

(LATER, CONTINUOUS)

Piper lays down next to the wall and briefly falls asleep. He wakes up to the unmistakable sound of a woman's pumps clicking against the sidewalk. He sits up against the wall and sees her off in the distance at about the same time she sees him.

PAMELA, (mid to late 30s, a sex worker street named Amber Honey), crosses the street in Piper's direction. He's too sleepy and emotionally battered to get away from her.

PAMELA

Hey you. What's your name, honey?

Piper looks away from her.

PAMELA

You look lonely. Want some company?

JUSTIN

Whatever you're selling, lady, I can't afford it.

PAMELA

Who says I'm selling anything,  
Mister. Just wanting to say hello,  
offer a friendly face.

Pamela sits down next to Piper. He scoots a little away from her.

JUSTIN

Look, lady. I've already told you,  
I don't have any money to give you.  
No drugs either.

PAMELA

You sure do know how to sweet talk  
a lady, mister. I don't think I  
asked you for either.

JUSTIN

It's only a matter of time.

Pamela lights up a cigarette, offering one to Piper from her pack. He puts his hand up and waves her off.

PAMELA

God, no wonder you're lonely. OK,  
so I'll start. What if I was  
wanting to make rent money next  
month. Everybody's got to make  
rent, you know.

JUSTIN

True enough.

PAMELA

So like any good capitalist, I  
offer goods and services at a  
price. That's how I pay my rent.  
What do you do to make rent, um...

JUSTIN

Justin.

PAMELA

Justin. If you say so, Justin. You  
can call me Amber.

JUSTIN

If I had fifty dollars, I would bet  
you that Amber is not your real  
name.

PAMELA

(puts her cigarette out on  
the sidewalk)

Well, this is a betting town. You  
didn't answer the question.

JUSTIN

What's that again?

PAMELA

So how do you make your rent?

JUSTIN

Hmmm. I make my living just like  
you do "Amber". Like a good  
capitalist, exchanging goods and  
services for money. But mine is  
legal, unless the SEC discovers  
differently.

PAMELA

So if I had some goods and services  
to offer you at a discount you  
wouldn't be interested?

Piper knew this was coming. He's frustrated.

JUSTIN

Amber, right now, even if I were  
interested in making a purchase, I  
am currently without any way of  
paying you. And I have never had a  
whore. No reason to start now.

PAMELA

Whore? You agree that we make our  
money essentially the same way, but  
you call me a whore. What exactly  
does that make you?

JUSTIN

I'm a whore all right. But, again  
if I were a betting man, I'd wager  
that I'm a better paid whore than  
you are. My whoring gets me a loft  
overlooking Central Park in mid-  
town. What's yours get you?

PAMELA

News flash, Justin. That doesn't  
make you a better person. It just  
makes you a materialistic whore.

She stands. For just a moment, she drops her personae and a hint of desperation reaches her voice.

PAMELA

Look Justin, I ain't gonna lie. I'm two hundred dollars shy on my rent this month. Two hundred dollars to Mr. New York Penthouse is bus fare, right?

JUSTIN

I've dropped more on drinks lady, this much is true. But take a look at me. Do I look like I'm carrying two-hundred dollars on me right now?

Pamela takes a hard look at Piper and gasps.

PAMELA

I guess not. Why the hell you in this neighborhood anyway at this time of night. Who rolled you, anyway?

JUSTIN

Don't you have to exchange goods and services somewhere?

PAMELA

Look around. It's a slow night, Justin. And damn, that attitude. She must have hurt you real real bad.

JUSTIN

What the hell you talking about lady?

Piper stands too.

PAMELA

Let's just say that, as someone who routinely exchanges these goods and services, I would consider myself an expert in certain areas of human psychology. I can always spot them.

JUSTIN

Spot who, Amber?

PAMELA

Angry hurt young men. You got that same haunted look in your face that they all do.

Amber gets in his face, angrily.

PAMELA

And your penthouse won't take that away.

JUSTIN

You don't know me like that, lady. You don't get to judge me like that. Where do you get off talking to me this way, whore? Slut? Harlot?

PAMELA

Ooh does that make you feel like a bigger, better man, Justin? Someone challenges you with a little bit of the facts and your response is to attack me personally? News flash, Justin, you don't get to judge me like that either.

It registers to Piper finally, just how much of a dick he's being.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry Amber. I'm just. It's just, it's all complicated and its been a weird night. I shouldn't have taken it out on you.

PAMELA

No. You shouldn't have. So here's the deal.

She takes Piper's palm and writes her phone number on it.

PAMELA

I don't know how long you plan on staying in town. But if you get back to yourself and want to help a LADY make her rent this month, give me a call. I running some amazing specials. From what I can tell, you really need someone to exchange goods and services with.



JUSTIN  
I guess that much is true. I  
haven't been with anyone since

PAMELA  
Since?

JUSTIN  
Cynthia. My wife. Well, my ex-wife  
now, I guess.

PAMELA  
Ah, I already see what kind of guy  
you'd be, if you paid me for goods  
and services.

They begin walking down the street, away from the Strip.

JUSTIN  
Oh?

PAMELA  
Not my first rodeo, Justin. Let me  
tell you how this would go. We'd  
get back to your hotel, I would  
ask you what you wanted me to do to  
you. You'd tell me and I'd give you  
a price.

Pamela is teasing him. Piper feels the draw of her sexuality  
and he's mad at himself for it. Mad at her too.

PAMELA  
I'd pull off all my clothes, like  
this

Pamela removes her top.

PAMELA  
And then you would walk over to me  
and start to touch me, like this.

She takes Piper's hand and draws it through her hair, and  
across her shoulder.

JUSTIN  
(with a catch in his  
throat)  
Seems like a pretty standard  
exchange of goods and services to  
me, Amber.

PAMELA

Then you'd get undressed and I  
would drop to my knees like this.

Pamela drops to her knees topless on the street in front of  
Piper. Piper is aroused and doesn't want to be.

PAMELA

And the moment I touched you, you  
would start to cry.

JUSTIN

(he's pissed)  
That's some bullshit right there,  
Amber.

Pamela raises her voice to Piper and puts her top back on  
quickly.

PAMELA

SEC. Manhattan. Central Park view.  
Hot shot Wall Street type. I guess  
you know your business. Trust me. I  
know my business too. Lonely angry  
hurt men like you cry and want to  
talk more than you want to fuck.  
Seen it a thousand times. I'll see  
it a thousand more by the time the  
ball drops next year in Times  
Square.

JUSTIN

Given that I've never fucked a  
lonely angry hurt man, for money or  
not, I guess I'm going to have to  
trust you on that one, Amber.

PAMELA

Men like you, Justin. Men like you  
are a dime a dozen. You were told  
at three to stop crying and take it  
like a man. You never learn depth  
and warmth. You put your hope in  
money and comfort, measuring the  
size of your dick with other men  
just like you. A vagina is a  
mysterious place of hope and you  
never lose sight of that, do you?

Piper feels dressed down and raw, both offended and naked at  
the same time.

PAMELA

The moment you emerge from one, you spend the rest of your life trying to get back in them. But it isn't pussy you want, not really. You want intimacy. You want a woman to carve out a safe space where you can just be yourself, free of expectation, free of pretense.

JUSTIN

No such thing.

PAMELA

And your fear of not finding that leads you to hide behind football or spreadsheets or fancy cars or how many notches you can put in a bedpost. What happened to Cynthia, Justin. Did you love her?

Bringing his ex-wife into this was just too much. Piper explodes in anger.

JUSTIN

Fuck you, whore. I'm not answering that. What do you think you are, a therapist in fish nets? Fuck. You.

Pamela remains calm and takes a moment to respond. When she does:

PAMELA

Men like you get two emotions: anger and ambition. Not your fault. We told you at three to stop crying. And when you did, we spent the rest of our lives pissed at you for not showing us who you are.

Piper stops walking. Pamela takes a few more steps and then turns to him.

PAMELA

Think about it, baby. Call me. I got rent to make. And you need a good cry. I got you, honey. And you got my number.

Pamela disappears into the night. Piper stands there. He's furious.

JUSTIN  
 (to himself)  
 Fuck that whore. Damn hookers,  
 can't get away from them anywhere.  
 Not even in a hell-hole like this.

EXT-FURTHER DOWN THE STREET-LATER THAT EVENING

Piper is exhausted but he has no place he can stop. He's raw and ragged and hungry. With no other options and disgusted with himself, he stops to relieve himself against a wall.

When he's done, he hears a rattling in the dumpster nearby. Startled, he zips up quickly and hides in the shadows.

A small kid, about eight emerges from the dumpster. In the middle of the night. In this neighborhood. Piper watches him walk down the street alone, his hands full of bits and scraps and little pieces of who-knows-what.

Angry and curious he follows the boy at a distance.

A few blocks down, he sees the boy's family, the dad asleep in the front seat in a beat up sedan. The mom is breastfeeding a baby. The boy climbs into the back seat, proudly showing off his haul.

JUSTIN  
 (still talking to himself)  
 Goddammit already. I have half a  
 mind to give this woman a piece of  
 mind. Who the hell does she think  
 she is?

Piper gestures to the car.

JUSTIN  
 Anything could have happened to  
 this boy. And you know what? It  
 would have been her fault too.  
 Raising kids like this.

Piper continues down the street, still muttering.

JUSTIN  
 Families like this. They are the  
 first people to cry when their kids  
 get kidnapped or killed or raped or  
 sent to prison or something. But  
 damn, look how they raise 'em.

Piper crosses the street to avoid direct contact with the family.

As he walks, he sees a junkie propped up against a wall. The junkie looks like a dead man. His face is chalky white, he's struggling to breathe. His paraphernalia is strewn across his body and the sidewalk near him. There is a needle still stuck in his arm. He has pissed his pants. All that's really missing here is a crime van and some tape. It is as graphic and visceral as it gets.

In the shadows near the junkie is his "babysitter". She is watching him, clearly not using herself, but also, clearly a user. She says nothing but Piper notices her terror.

As Piper approaches, the babysitter scrambles out of the shadows and does her best to quickly clean the sight of anything obvious. Piper shakes his head and then steps over the junkie pretending he doesn't see a damn thing.

Unseen, a dog starts to bark. It sounds like a big and dangerous dog. Piper freezes. He is terrified but on he presses.

The Pit Bull slobbers and yanks at his chain to get at Piper, who steps beyond the reach of the chain.

The other end of the chain is tied around the waist of a passed out drunk, asleep on the street.

JUSTIN

What kind of hell am I in, anyway?  
Good boy. GOOD BOY. STAY!

JUSTIN

Damn drunks.

Piper narrowly avoids the dog. Once he's past he gives himself a moment to recover. He presses himself up against a wall, his hands on his throat, panicked.

When he's regained his composure, he walks on. The surroundings are as shabby as he has seen since he has been there.

Piper walks slowly down the street. By now he's so tired that everything takes on a dreamy surreal quality. His steps slow. His shoulders slump. He doesn't even know if he's headed back to the Strip or towards his Light.

He finds another 4 story tenement building with an accessible fire escape. He wearily climbs to the roof. The eastern sky has the faintest twinge of pink and there is one bird awakening. It will be morning soon.

Piper is out of breath as he reaches the last step. He takes a moment from the flat rooftop to regain himself and then looks out over his surroundings. He's been walking towards his Light all along, as the Strip, still lit up, seems even further away.

He contemplates sleeping on the roof but the idea that it will be day soon energizes him. As he descends, he hears the shouts of an argument from the direction of a nearby building. (Maria is a stunningly beautiful Latina woman, mid-20s. Luis, her husband 30ish is a Latino male, attractive but somewhat paunchy. He has a kind expressive face).

MARIA (O.S.)

(shouting)

Where have you been Luis? Do you know what time it is?

Piper freezes mid-fire escape.

LUIS (O.S.)

Baby, let me explain. You know I can explain.

Piper realizes he's not in immediate danger and descends the fire escape. He sees the couple on the front stoop. She's hurt and angry. He's nervous and defensive. Piper's been here with Cynthia one too many times.

MARIA

I KNOW where you've been, Luis. Don't you know by now that when a woman asks you a question, she already has the answer? She's just waiting for you to 'fess up.

LUIS

I told you baby. I had to stay and cover for Paul. He didn't show up again.

JUSTIN

(Whispering) Likely story, pal.

Maria grabs a flower pot from the stoop and smashes it at Luis's feet. He jumps.

MARIA

Save it. Spare me. I've heard this from you too many times.

LUIS

Baby, I know. But this time it's true. It's absolutely true.

Piper rolls his eyes. He knows this guy. He WAS this guy. Maria turns her back from Luis and folds her arms. She tries not to cry.

The sun is coming up rapidly.

MARIA

So you already know how this works.

Luis sighs. He expects this.

LUIS

I will bring you a copy of my timecard baby. You'll see this go on next week's check.

Piper is surprised. He has genuinely not expected this development.

MARIA

It had better.

With each word, she thrusts her index finger into Luis's chest.

LUIS

I don't know how long I have to prove myself to you, baby. I know I messed up, but those days are over.

MARIA

I want to believe you Luis. I want to. But after everything, it's just so hard  
(finally, she starts to cry).

Piper is in an awkward position. With the sun coming up, he can't hide in the shadows anymore and he can't hang out on the fire escape. Much longer and he risks being spotted, if not by Luis and Maria, then by a tenant in the building. He seizes his opportunity to pretend like he wasn't just staring at them when Luis and Maria embrace on the stoop.

With the sunlight coming up over the buildings, the neighborhood still seems shabby but not nearly as frightening as it did just an hour ago. It is already getting hot out.

Piper is exhausted, his head is killing him, he's sore from being beaten up and he's not really any closer to either his Light or the Strip than he was hours ago. He feels utterly defeated and unsure what to do next.

The neighborhood is waking up with the sun though. He hears the hum and throb of households coming to life. The gurgle of coffee pots and old beat up cars firing up. Men and women walk to bus stops in grubby clothes, the taxi drivers and kitchen workers and housekeepers of the city trying to eek out a living on minimum wage. Their grit against the glam of the lights on the Strip is palpable.

Poor and half-hungry children pour out of beat up tenements to ride on aging school buses or walk to run-down schools. Piper looks at them play in the street or size each other up. Girls huddled against each other. Boys kicking rocks or taunting girls. Moms or dads clinging too tightly to some of them and noticeably absent with others. Change the setting and change the clothes and it is every neighborhood that ever is.

Piper walks down the street looking as shabby as the rest of them. With a need to make a decision about where he should go next--

JUSTIN

I got to get back to Charlie. I got to go back.

Piper turns toward the Strip, back in the direction he had come from.

On his journey back, he first sees Pamela/Amber. Her fishnets are torn, her hair is somewhat messy and her dress has fallen off her shoulder. In the morning light, she seems older and shabbier than Piper remembers her. He watches her light and smoke a cigarette, then pull her keys out of her ridiculously small purse. An unused condom spills to the ground. She doesn't bother to pick it back up. They exchange glances but say nothing to each other. He watches as she opens the door to an old and very shabby apartment building. He's close enough to hear:

CHILD (O.S.)

Mommy!

Pamela opens the door and Piper sees her pick up a girl, about the age of three.

PAMELA

Oh my pumpkin, I'm so glad to see you!



Piper watches as Pamela swoops the girl up in her arms and twirls the both of them in a circle in the entrance. Pamela takes one glance back at Piper and then closes the door. He hears her turn the lock.

He has one more flash of anger cross his face and then, despite himself, he smiles.

He walks down the street towards the Strip.

He now sees the dog and his homeless owner. He watches while one of the neighborhood men bring the alcoholic a breakfast biscuit and a cup of hot coffee from a nearby bodega.

Piper is transfixed at the sight of the now sober man. He first thanks the man feeding him, who is holding a kitchen apron. After he hands breakfast to the homeless man and they exchange a few words, he ambles toward a bus stop.

Piper watches the homeless man break off half of his biscuit and pour a small bowl of water out for the dog.

HOMELESS MAN

(to dog)

Here you go, Rocket.

The homeless man (50s, has a weathered face) feeds his dog first. The dog gulps his half of the sausage biscuit and then puts his head in his owner's lap.

Only once his dog has eaten, Piper watches while the man eats the other half and sips his coffee. A strange serene look crosses the Homeless Man's face.

As Piper watches, he hears an unsteady gait behind him. He turns to find that last night's junkie, Fred, late 40s, grizzled, blinking into the sun behind him. There is no sight of his companion.

FRED

Hey man, got a light?

The Junkie has a cigarette dangling from his lips. Piper fights the urge to stare at his arm where only hours before he saw the needle plunged into it, but FRED has his sleeves rolled down. His hair is still wet from an apparent shower. He is clean and has changed his clothes.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry but no. I have absolutely nothing on me man.

Piper pulls his pockets out of his pants to show they are empty.

FRED  
I ain't seen you around here  
before. You new?

JUSTIN  
Just passing through.

FRED  
Well ain't we all?

Fred walks down the street away from Piper. He turns.

FRED (CONT'D)  
Did I hear you say you ain't got  
nothing?

JUSTIN  
At this second, no. Clothes on my  
back.

FRED  
You got a name though, right?

Fred holds his hand out to shake Piper's hand.

FRED (CONT'D)  
My name is Fred. And you are?

JUSTIN  
Justin Piper. My friends call me  
Piper.

He looks away from Fred's arm, but takes his hand and shakes  
it.

FRED  
Good to meet you, Piper. Now  
listen, I was just about to head  
down to the diner and grab some  
breakfast.

Piper is suddenly ravenous.

FRED  
CHARLENE has this little diner  
about four blocks from here.  
Coffee, two eggs fixed any way you  
want, biscuit or toast, and bacon  
or sausage. I always get the  
sausage. I love Charlene, but she  
overcooks her bacon, I think. All  
for about four bucks.

JUSTIN

Sounds really good. Oh man, coffee.

FRED

You look like you can use some.

JUSTIN

I would join you but  
(pulls his pockets out  
again)

FRED

You look like you had a harder  
night than I did and I know how  
hard my night was.

Piper shudders involuntarily. Just a few hours ago, he  
thought he was witnessing Fred's last moments.

JUSTIN

Rough now. One way or another, I'll  
get through it.

FRED

That's right. One day at a time.  
One minute if it gets right down to  
it.

Piper looks at Fred's hands. They are shaking.

FRED

Look, Piper. I aint' got much but I  
always share what little bit I do  
have. I definitely have an extra  
four bucks I can give up for your  
breakfast. Cup of coffee and a hot  
meal go a long way in this crazy  
world.

JUSTIN

I'd be indebted to you, Fred. I  
could pay you back when I get where  
I'm going.

FRED

(shoos his hands)  
Pay it back? Nah, pay it forward,  
Piper. Life is short. Gets shorter  
every day.

For a moment, Fred has a far away look on his face as if he's  
remembering something profoundly sad.

Piper is surprised. He was very comfortable with Fred almost instantly.

JUSTIN

Pay it forward it is then Fred.

FRED

Great. I hate eating alone anyway. My girl, Anne, well she had work this morning. Poor thing, up half the night like that. You got a girl?

Piper and Fred walk down the street and turn the corner. Two blocks down, an old diner appears. Piper can smell the food from a half block away.

Piper balks a little, his New York sensibilities affronted at just how personal Fred is willing to get so quickly.

FRED (CONT'D)

Come on man, we're friends right? This is what friends do, tell each other stories.

JUSTIN

I know, it's just...

FRED

Just what?

JUSTIN

I barely know you and this is real personal to me.

What Piper doesn't say is that he actually "met" Fred the night before and seeing him like that is making it hard to see him any other way, even though dangit, he feels so comfortable around Fred, as if he'd known him his whole life.

FRED

All the better, Piper. Who am I going to tell?

INT-CHARLENE'S DINER-MORNING

Charlene (mid-40s, once pretty but that's faded) smiles at Fred. She is as wane as he is and if Piper had to guess, was also a user. She points to a booth and Fred and Piper pile in. There are no other customers. In no time at all there are two piping hot cups of coffee and silverware laid out on the table.

CHARLENE  
Who's your buddy, Fred?

FRED  
Piper. New to these parts.

CHARLENE  
Hi. Good to meet you.  
(to Fred)  
We gonna see more of him later,  
Fred?

FRED  
Remains to be seen.

CHARLENE  
So, you have your usual then?

FRED  
You know it. Piper?

JUSTIN  
I'll have whatever he's having.

CHARLENE  
Good choice, Piper. But you should  
get the bacon, no matter what  
Fred's told you about it.

JUSTIN  
Either. Either is good for me.

CHARLENE  
Suit yourself, sweetie.

Charlene scribbles on that little green notepad that waitresses in diners have been carrying since the invention of diners and green notepads. Piper takes a look around. The place is older but cozy. Could be a diner on the Lower East Side, easily.

Charlene walks away.

FRED  
So, about this woman?

Piper laughs somewhat sardonically. Why does every goddamn stranger want to talk to him today about Cynthia, anyway? He takes a sip of coffee.

JUSTIN  
OK, OK. I'll tell you.

He pauses. This really is a lot harder to get out than he thought it would.

JUSTIN

I live with my ex-wife and our daughter in Mid-town.

FRED

Manhattan, eh? Should have figured you for one. Don't tell me, let me guess. Loft. Central Park, all that puke?

Fred gets that sad faraway look in his face again and clears his throat.

FRED

So you live with your ex-wife? You lose a bet?

JUSTIN

Nah man. It was rough for awhile. It's better now though.

FRED

Why do you live there? You're a man about town, right?

He gives a small smirk. Piper looks like anything other than a man about town.

JUSTIN

Good question. Lots of reasons, really.

Fred puts a lot of sugar and creamer into his coffee. His shaking has gotten a little bit worse. He seems a bit more agitated.

FRED

Reasons? OK, let's have them.

JUSTIN

First and foremost is our daughter, Chloe. We decided early on that she would have both of us there for her.

Piper chokes up, the weight of his potential diagnosis heavy in his throat.

JUSTIN

Sorry man, I've been up all night.

Fred waves his hand to dismiss Piper and looks over at Charlene. She's plating their food.

FRED  
Anyway, you were saying reasons.  
Like more than one.

JUSTIN  
The second is money. Yeah, I'm  
doing alright but damn the cost of  
real estate in Manhattan.

FRED  
What did you do?

JUSTIN  
Do? To my ex-wife or for a living?

FRED  
For a living, Piper. This is about  
you, not your ex-wife, right?

JUSTIN  
I still do it.

FRED  
Keep telling yourself that, Pipe.

Fred chuckles.

JUSTIN  
What's so funny Fred?

Charlene brings their food over and sets it in front of them. She brings Piper both sausage and bacon. Before he can ask, she's back with another pot of coffee.

FRED  
Just told myself a little joke is  
all. You still working. That's a  
real "Pipe Dream".

Something finally clicks with Piper.

JUSTIN  
Oh my. I get it now. You think I'm  
a... That's why you're being so  
nice.

Piper trails off. He can't finish this sentence. Both men know where he's going.

JUSTIN

No, for real. I work on the 62nd floor of a building down on Wall Street.

Fred stabs his sausage. His face is suddenly a twist of anger, surprise, and sorrow. He starts coughing.

FRED

Funny story that one.

JUSTIN

I'm afraid I'm not following.

FRED

We could have been neighbors. We could have passed each other a thousand times in the street.

JUSTIN

You from Manhattan?

FRED

Nah. Is anyone FROM Manhattan? I'm FROM Indianapolis. But I lived on the Island and worked on Wall Street. Investment banking. You?

Piper gives Fred a hard look.

JUSTIN

Advertising. Well, CFO in an advertising firm anyway.

Fred rolls his eyes.

FRED

Oh GAWD. Uggh. Tell me something, Piper?  
(he laughs)

JUSTIN

What's that, Fred?

He and Fred continue to have their breakfast. Piper feels better. Fred looks worse as time passes.

FRED

You love what you do?

Piper looks past Fred.

JUSTIN

The checks keep clearing Fred.



FRED

Not what I asked, but yeah, I get it.

JUSTIN

My turn to ask. You got out why?

Fred puts his fork down and sips his coffee. His face looks pale and he's sweating.

FRED

You gonna make me say it, aren't you?

JUSTIN

Say what, Fred.

FRED

I was on the twenty second floor the day the Towers fell. Only four others from my workplace got out with me. Two of them are dead now. Those planes have been killing people for many years now.

Piper hangs his head. He knows know why he feels so connected to Fred. He could be Fred. Fred could be him.

FRED

Janice died about six months later from some lung disease she developed breathing in that toxic soup.

Piper doesn't know what to say.

JUSTIN

I was twelve. That day will stick with me until I die.

FRED

You and me both.

(pauses)

Rob died on the tenth anniversary. He hanged himself with a belt. His youngest son found him. Survivor's guilt they call it.

JUSTIN

Damn.

Charlene comes over and lays the little green check on the corner of the table. Piper is suddenly overcome with the weight of emotion and the lack of sleep.

JUSTIN

All I know is that my friends all went to a lot of funerals right after. That day fucked all of us up, man.

FRED

Anyway, I had no workplace to go back to and no real desire to keep working there. I drifted West as it were. And here I am.

JUSTIN

Yeah. And here you are.

Fred is sweating profusely. He looks ill. He will need his next fix soon.

FRED

Charlene? Ready to pay, please. And can I see you a sec in the back? Excuse me, Piper.

CHARLENE

Sure thing Fred.

Piper waits in the dining room alone until it is two seconds past uncomfortable. He taps out a rhythm with his knuckles against the table and then looks around. Deciding that Fred isn't coming back any time soon, he gets up and walks out of the Diner.

EXT-VEGAS BACK STREET- DAY

The sun is fully up now and the Vegas heat is kicking in. There is no breeze, no water features, few trees, little shade to break up the heat. The fullness of breakfast, the lack of sleep, the heat pouring off Piper in sheets, he isn't sure how much more he can take.

Two blocks down he sees the little house where Luis and Maria had been arguing. They are still sitting in little chairs on the front stoop of the little house. Luis is stroking Maria's arm. She has her head on his shoulder.

JUSTIN

Excuse me sir?

LUIS

Yes? Can I help you?

JUSTIN

Do you have a phone I can borrow?  
I'm lost and  
    (points to his busted  
    face)  
I kind of had a run in with some  
people last night.

LUIS

I'm sorry man. Cell phone shut off  
until payday.

JUSTIN

I I just want to get back to my  
friends.

Piper is very near tears at this point.

LUIS

You want to come over and talk  
about it?

Luis points to an empty chair.

LUIS

(to Maria)  
Can you get our friend some water?

Maria goes in through the front door. Seconds later, she  
emerges with a glass of cold water. Piper takes a seat.

JUSTIN

I've been out here all night. I  
know my friends are crazy worried  
about me by now. Hmmm. Maybe  
anyway. Charlie for sure.

LUIS

What happened?

JUSTIN

I came out for a bachelor party.

LUIS

Yeah? How did you end up out here?

JUSTIN

It's the weirdest thing, um, I'm  
sorry, your name?

LUIS

Luis. This is Maria. And you are?

JUSTIN

Justin Piper. You can call me  
Piper.

Piper takes a big swig of cold water and runs the glass over  
his forehead.

LUIS

So did you get lost?

JUSTIN

This is so hard to explain. I-I got  
some really bad news right before I  
got on the plane and well, I  
haven't been myself since then.

Luis and Maria exchange glances.

MARIA

I've got to get ready for work  
anyway. Excuse me?

JUSTIN

Thank you for the water, ma'am.

Maria disappears into the house.

LUIS

So then what happened?

JUSTIN

As we were landing, I saw this  
little Light out of the corner of  
the airplane window. You know how  
you stare out a plane window at  
night and you see all the lights  
stretched out before you for miles?

Luis nods. He has no idea where this is going but it seems  
important to Piper.

JUSTIN

(faraway look in his face)  
It was that last little Light on  
the edge of town. Just a humble  
little Light like a thousand other  
lights. That one last flash before  
Vegas and Not Vegas, you know?

LUIS

I think I understand.

JUSTIN

And I had this thought, like, what could possibly be at that Light? Beyond it, nothing but the dark empty desert.

LUIS

The desert is many things, Piper. Definitely not empty.

JUSTIN

Probably true. But from the air, that Light was the marker between the known and the unknown, Vegas and Not Vegas, and I found myself drawn to it, wondering what could possibly be in that deep.

LUIS

Poetic. Existential. I like it.

Luis flashes a warm smile at Piper. Piper doesn't know how to react and remains wooden, unmoved.

JUSTIN

And then we landed and my head was still all in this funk so I shook it off and prepared to meet my old college roommate. But on my way out of the terminal I saw that Light again. So confusing. It was like it was calling out to me.

Piper finishes off his glass of water and starts to stand.

LUIS

No, sit. You look tired. And I still don't know how you got here.

JUSTIN

So anyway, when I saw that Light for the third time, I don't know. I HAD to find it. I had to see it for myself.

LUIS

And that led you here?

JUSTIN

Yeah. Except I never made it. Cab broke down. I got mugged.

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

And I've been wandering around ever since trying to figure out how to get back to either the Strip or to that Light.

LUIS

Like Moses in the wilderness.

JUSTIN

Now who's being poetic, existential?

Luis chuckles and then looks down the street in the direction away from the Strip.

LUIS

That way?  
(pointing)

JUSTIN

Yes. That way.

LUIS

Feel like taking a ride? I can at least get you close. Unless you'd rather get back to Charlie.

Luis is offering Piper a choice. Piper pauses.

JUSTIN

I've fought pretty hard to get this far. I'd hate to lose that opportunity.

LUIS

OK, let me grab my keys.

JUSTIN

Luis, thank you. I don't know why you're helping me, but it means a lot.

Luis stands.

LUIS

I don't believe in coincidences, Piper. Do you?

JUSTIN

Never really thought about it.

LUIS

(teasing)  
You gonna learn today, boy.

He leaves Piper on the front stoop while he walks in to grab his keys. When he emerges from the house, he brings Piper a bottle of water.

Luis points to an ancient rusty pick up truck. Piper hesitates for a second.

LUIS  
It ain't pretty but you can't kill  
a truck like that. I've tried.

He holds the driver's side door open and ushers Piper in.

LUIS  
Sorry. Passenger side door handle  
doesn't work.

INT-LUIS'S TRUCK-DAY

Piper slides across the front of the pickup. There is a rosary hung from the rear view mirror and a dusty Bible on the dashboard. There's a dirty kitchen apron in the console and two different name tags in the ash tray. "Luis".

Luis primes the gas pedal and the truck finally chokes to life. It doesn't need to be said, no A/C to be found here. Piper rolls the window down. After three tries he gets the seat belt buckle to latch.

There are moments of uncomfortable silence. Finally:

JUSTIN  
You from Vegas?

LUIS  
No. I'm from San Antonio  
originally.

JUSTIN  
What brought you here. A job?

LUIS  
In a manner of speaking. I came  
here as a street preacher about 6  
years ago.

In all of Piper's life, he's never met a preacher.

JUSTIN  
A preacher?

LUIS

Yep, a real hell-fire and brimstone type. I was going to come here and turn this town around for Jesus.

JUSTIN

What happened?  
(he points to the name tags)

LUIS

Ain't that the question of the century.

Luis turns left at the light. They have left the rough part of town. The shambles turn deceptively quickly into cute well-kept homes and then again into Starbucks and Targets and oil-change places.

LUIS

Me and my church had a presence in front of the MGM. We'd go down every Friday and Saturday night with signs and megaphones and preach redemption to the throngs of sinners.

Luis pulls into a parking lot.

LUIS

How about we go inside for a few minutes where its quiet and air conditioned. I'll buy you a hamburger.

JUSTIN

But my Light?

LUIS

After, I promise.

INT-FAST FOOD CHAIN RESTAURANT-DAY

Piper and Luis order and wait for their food. Luis notices as Piper stares at a woman and her child, almost longingly. They take a seat.

LUIS

I notice things Piper. Its the preacher in me.

JUSTIN

Oh? What do you know about me?



LUIS

You aren't married, or at least you aren't wearing a ring. But you want to be.

JUSTIN

I WAS married. Have a daughter too. She's six. Chloe.

Piper smiles, that faraway look on his face.

LUIS

Can I ask you something?

JUSTIN

What happened? Why not? Everybody else in town has.

LUIS

So?

Luis takes a big bite out of a burger and looks at Piper, barely picking at his french fries. Maybe it is because Luis makes him feel so comfortable, maybe he is so responsive because he was a preacher. Maybe it is because Piper has no defenses left in him.

JUSTIN

My wife, um, ex-wife Cynthia. Smart, beautiful, educated, fun-loving, good hearted, a great mom. And she was a good wife as long as I was being a good husband.

LUIS

Not really an answer.

JUSTIN

You want to know what happened? Stevie Chisolm happened. And after Stevie Chisolm, Debbie Franklin. And after Debbie Franklin, Samantha Thomas. All of them worked with me.

Piper is trying to choose the right words.

JUSTIN

For me. With me, something like that.

LUIS

Chasing skirts?

JUSTIN

I did. And my pride would never let me tell her this, but I hurt a good woman in the process. Man I thought that I deserved those women, that men like me, well that was part of the compensation package that HR doesn't cover.

LUIS

Bet these women all smelled great and looked good in a pencil skirt too.

Piper is openly surprised at how openly this preacher was talking to him. How real. He laughs.

JUSTIN

Yes, preacher, they did. And even better out of them.

LUIS

How did she find out?

JUSTIN

Worst possible way.

LUIS

One of them turn up pregnant?

JUSTIN

Oh, I wish it was that simple.

LUIS

Not sure how that's simple, but go ahead.

JUSTIN

I came home from work one day to find Cynthia balled up on the couch. She was crying her eyes out.

Piper takes a swig of his drink. He can't believe he's spilling his guts to a stranger, a preacher at that, but there is no judgment in Luis's eyes. Only understanding, compassion.

JUSTIN

I asked her what was wrong and tried to hug her. I really did love her, even if my actions didn't say so. Damn pencil skirts.

Luis chuckles.

JUSTIN

Anyway, she turned from me and then out of nowhere turned back around and slung her shoe at me. I had never seen her so angry. I ducked and yelled at her and she slapped me across my face as hard as she could. This was not my Cynthia.

LUIS

So did you have it figured out yet?

JUSTIN

Not yet. She reaches into her pocket and hands me a slip of paper. It was test results.

Piper has been so comfortable confessing his sins to this preacher, but here he hangs his head and lowers his voice.

JUSTIN

God this is so embarrassing.

Luis leans back against the booth.

JUSTIN

Genital warts. I didn't even know I was infected.

LUIS

I guess that would do it.

JUSTIN

Believe me, it did. And I was so stupid, Luis. So stupid to think I was going to get away with it. So stupid to think I could get my accusations that she actually gave them to me to stick. We both know she wasn't cheating, but no, I had to be that entitled asshole with something to prove.

LUIS

But you knew, didn't you?

Piper shakes his head.

JUSTIN

I left her with something she'll never be rid of, all for some cheap thrills. I broke her. And in the end, she broke me too.

Luis shifts in his seat and starts to gather the wrappers and condiment packets on the tray.

LUIS  
I understand Piper, more than you think I might.

JUSTIN  
In what way? You are a man of God.

LUIS  
Arguably, you are too, at least if you choose to be.

Piper stands and stretches. Luis does too. Luis dumps the tray into the trash. He and Piper refill their drinks and exit the restaurant.

EXT-LUIS'S TRUCK-DAY

LUIS  
Different story, and we'll get to it. Here's what I mean. I know what it is like to hide behind what you are doing and when caught shift the responsibility elsewhere.

JUSTIN  
What do you mean?

LUIS  
You are asking the wrong question, Piper. What you need to ask is why I'm not a preacher anymore.

Piper's eyes glance down casually at the name tags in the ashtray.

JUSTIN  
What DO you do?

LUIS  
I'm a full-time dishwasher at Circus Circus for starters.

JUSTIN  
And?

LUIS  
I work part time at a Safeway.

JUSTIN  
Yeah. Not exactly preaching, is it.

LUIS

No, but it pays the rent, sort of.  
And I am where I deserve to be. Or  
at least it feels that way if one  
were to believe in that sort of  
thing.

JUSTIN

How's that?

Piper and Luis are still sitting in the parking lot but its getting extremely hot in the blazing Vegas mid-day. Piper, who has forgotten how tired he is, begins to yawn. Luis fires up the old pickup truck again and they exit the parking lot, turning towards Piper's light.

LUIS

One evening, after a particularly,  
shall we say vigorous street  
preaching, I looked down on the  
ground and found a single quarter  
on the sidewalk, so I picked it up  
and put it in my pocket.

They pull up to a stoplight. Luis looks at Piper. The man used to taking confessions finds it hard to repeat his own.

LUIS

(draws his breath in)

I don't know why this happened. But  
as I'm walking down the street I  
start having these thoughts.

JUSTIN

Like what? What kind of thoughts?

LUIS

I thought I was being convicted of  
hypocrisy.

JUSTIN

What's that supposed to mean?

LUIS

Like how could I judge these people  
for their sins if I never  
experienced them myself? Who was I  
to judge them?

Piper shakes his head.

JUSTIN

Oh no. That's never a good rabbit hole. I imagine especially so for a preacher.

The light turns green. Luis has this look on his face as if he's trying to decide which direction he should turn next.

LUIS

So when I was sure no one was looking I took that quarter-- reasoning it wasn't really MY money I was gambling with and I dropped it into the nearest slot machine I could find and I'll be damned if I didn't win twenty-three hundred dollars on the spot.

JUSTIN

First quarter?

(laughs)

Remind me to get the location of that slot machine before I leave you.

Luis looks ashamed.

LUIS

I was stunned. And then excited. And then happy. And then stunned again. And then pissed at myself for falling. And then all I could think about was how I wanted to do it again and again and again.

JUSTIN

That's quite the dilemma for a preacher.

LUIS

Every sin of the flesh is a dilemma for every man, Piper. I just, like you, had the mistaken notion that I was above getting caught.

This hits Piper hard.

JUSTIN

Damn.

LUIS

So I lost all but twelve dollars that day.

(MORE)

LUIS (CONT'D)

And reasoned with myself that as long as I was still playing off that original quarter, the money wasn't mine to begin with and therefore I wasn't sinning.

JUSTIN

Your pencil skirt?

LUIS

That damn pencil skirt takes many forms, Piper.

Luis looks away from Piper out the window.

JUSTIN

I have a feeling there's more to this.

Luis turns right at the next stop sign. This is a residential neighborhood, older but classy. Piper notices that he can see a mountain really close to him. They must be close.

LUIS

When I lost that original twelve dollars, I begin taking money from the church, figuring I could replace it when I hit big again.

JUSTIN

Did you?

LUIS

No, not like that. I could replace a little at a time, but as you imagined, I got caught.

JUSTIN

Your genital herpes?

LUIS

Or worse, at least for me. I'm lucky they just asked me to step down and didn't throw me to the prosecutor. It was so hard to face that congregation and admit what I did.

Piper hangs his head.

JUSTIN

I have long imagined the day when I have to look Chloe in the eye and tell her what happened.

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

She's already asking for a brother or a sister. Cynthia won't. She's already made it clear she isn't going to do this to someone else. The disease I gave her is going to stop with her.

Luis pulls the truck into the lot of a city park on the outskirts of town.

LUIS

So where does that leave you and me Piper, fallen men?

JUSTIN

I wish I knew.

LUIS

Do you believe in forgiveness? Redemption?

JUSTIN

I wish I could. Maybe Cynthia can forgive me someday. Chloe too. Maybe even God. But I can't forgive myself, you know? I lost so much and I can't even be mad because I did that to myself.

LUIS

I feel you on that one man.

Luis pauses.

JUSTIN

Can I ask you something, Luis? As a preacher?

LUIS

Any time.

JUSTIN

Preachers counsel people, right? They minister to them. They hear things right?

LUIS

We do.

JUSTIN

So, when something happens to someone in your church, say a diagnosis, they tell you about that sometimes, right?



Luis turns the truck off. He turns to Piper and leans in, concerned and curious.

LUIS  
Sometimes, yes.

JUSTIN  
What do you do when they tell you  
about them maybe having cancer?

Luis is visibly upset by this news. He knows his way around death and the dying. He sees it now in Piper.

LUIS  
That depends. I may have a deep and  
abiding faith in God, Piper, but I  
also believe in meeting people  
where THEY are, doing what they  
need me to do.

Piper hangs his head. He can't believe it, but he's crying now in front of this virtual stranger.

JUSTIN  
What do you know about pancreatic  
cancer?

Luis hangs his head too. Both men have their heads down, not looking at each other. Luis puts his hand on Piper's arm.

LUIS  
Damn.

JUSTIN  
Yeah. Not confirmed, but all signs  
point to yes.

LUIS  
I'm sorry, Piper. I wish I could  
tell you that of the cancers you  
can get there's still hope with  
this one.

JUSTIN  
That's what I thought. I'm a dead  
man, aren't I, Preach?

Luis wipes the tears from his face and looks Piper square in the face. He doesn't answer. He doesn't need to.

LUIS  
Do you believe in God, Piper?

JUSTIN

Biggest gamble out there, preacher.  
Maybe even a long con. Sorry, I  
tried that church thing. It just  
isn't for me.

The preacher in Luis is heartsick. The man in him  
understands.

LUIS

So answer me this. What do you  
think happens after you die?

JUSTIN

Aren't I supposed to be asking that  
question?

In spite of the heaviness of the conversation, Luis laughs.

LUIS

Are we suddenly a stickler for the  
rules?

JUSTIN

Point. I never thought about it.  
I'm thirty three years old and I've  
had life by the balls until this  
moment. Death? I've BEEN a fucking  
God, Luis.

Piper hangs his head in hands. He's just so tired. But there  
is a moment of honest clarity.

JUSTIN

God dammit, Luis. I'm going to die.  
I'm not going to get a chance to  
make it up to Cynthia. I'm not  
going to get the chance to watch  
Chloe go to Prom, or graduate, or  
walk her down the aisle.

Piper is torn between his anger and his sadness. His  
mortality is all too real to him in this moment.

JUSTIN

It's just not fair, Luis. I don't  
want to die. I'm not ready to die.  
I barely understand what it means  
to live.

Each man sits in the truck lost for a second in their own  
thoughts. These are moments that Luis wanted when he was a  
preacher and the types of moments that men like Piper never  
envison.

After some moments....

LUIS

Look, I know you say that this God thing isn't for you, but I'd really like to pray for you if you would let me.

Piper looks fearful.

JUSTIN

I don't know Luis. I'm just, well, I just don't know.

LUIS

Relax man, I'm not shaking you down for money. You aren't getting a bill for this.

JUSTIN

I never prayed before.

LUIS

You don't have to do anything except accept it with an open and willing heart, OK?

Piper leans back against the seat of the truck.

LUIS

Why the hesitation?

JUSTIN

I spent my whole life pushing God away. I deserve what I have, Luis. And I'd be a liar if I told you I wasn't terrified, I am. But damn, I'd be a hypocrite to accept it now.

LUIS

So would you rather be a liar or a hypocrite?

JUSTIN

Neither, really.

LUIS

There's this thing called Grace. Are you familiar with the concept?

Piper laughs hard. Luis looks at him.

JUSTIN

Grace? She works in accounting. She also looks great in a pencil skirt. Nice tits too.

LUIS

Piper, can you take this seriously for just a second? Can you let a fallen preacher have a moment to realize his own redemption?

Piper is stunned. This is not just about him! He shakes his head.

JUSTIN

So what's a man got to do to do this prayer thing anyway?

LUIS

Simple. Hear what I'm saying. Commit it to your heart. Believe that it has already happened. Be grateful for it. Can you do that?

JUSTIN

(nods)

I have nothing to lose at this point, do I Luis?

LUIS

Not at all, man.

Piper nods. Luis pulls his Bible off the dash and turns to a page. He and Piper bow their heads and Luis puts his hand on Piper's head. He utters an inaudible prayer.

LUIS

In the anointed name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Piper looks up at Luis with tears in his eyes.

JUSTIN

Men have given me money. Men have given me honor. Men have given me lots of things to laugh about and think about through the years. No man but you that I know of has ever prayed for me, Luis and for that I genuinely thank you.

Luis hugs Piper.

LUIS

This is as far as I can take you,  
Piper. I guess from here you wait  
until dark.

Luis opens the driver's side door and he and Piper get out.

EXT-PARK ON EDGE OF TOWN-DAY

Luis hugs Piper. He hands Piper a business card.

LUIS

Can you let me know how you're  
doing, Pipe?

JUSTIN

I will.

Piper watches as Luis gets back into the truck and then drive slowly away.

Piper glances at the sky. There are only a few more hours until nightfall. He finds a quiet place in what little shade can be found and takes a hot nap, the nap of a dead man.

(LATER):

Piper wakes up. It is significantly cooler now and he hears the sound of children playing.

He sits up. It is late afternoon, almost evening. He stands and stretches, then walks to a port-a-potty. When he emerges, he finds a water fountain and takes a long hard drink.

When he's no longer thirsty, he takes a seat on a park bench. He looks over and sees the kids playing.

He watches as an old couple strolls past, holding hands and walking their dog. The dog stops at Piper's feet and he gives him a pat before the old man pulls him away. Piper feels more alone once the dog leaves. He watches them shuffle away from him.

The sun is fading fast. The park is slowly emptying. Women push strollers, talk to their girlfriends and check their Smart Watches.

Piper watches all this life unfold around him. He's never felt more alone.

JUSTIN

(to no one in particular)  
None of this was ever meant for me,  
was it?

The first star appears in the sky and Piper watches at the hot Vegas sun disappears beneath the horizon. One by one the street lamps blink to life. He looks around, full of hope.

He exits the park and walks toward the mountain. The city will stretch no farther. And then in the distance, he spots it. His Light. The Last Light in Vegas.

He walks towards it, slowly.

EXT. THE LAST LIGHT IN VEGAS-EVENING

Piper is in a middle class neighborhood at the edge of town. These homes are no one's idea of fancy or even attractive, but they are clean and well kept.

Piper finally reaches his destination. He stares up. His heart is in his throat, he has some full expectation of something important unfolding. But it is just this fucking Light. It looks no different than any other street lamp. He looks around, as if to speculate that maybe he's at the wrong place. But no, behind him is a sprawling desert town built on glam and sham and hope and fear and dreams and escape. In front of him, he can barely make out the unmovable edges of a mountain, and beyond that, nothing.

Piper stares upwards for longer than he realizes and when he does realize it, he laughs hysterically. When he can laugh no more, he becomes weepy and then angry.

JUSTIN

(to Light)  
Really? Fuck you! Fuck. YOU!

Piper kicks the ground and draws his foot back as if to kick the light.

JUSTIN

You brought me out here for this?  
For YOU? You're nothing. You aren't  
at all special. You just a Light.  
You are just a goddamn Light.

Piper collapses at the base of the Light. He's exhausted. He's bewildered and he's aware that he doesn't feel good. And then he's scared.

When Piper looks up, he sees Margaret illuminated against the street light. She is a very old and fat woman, dressed in a mu-mu and using a walker. Piper notices that she is having a hard time breathing. She leans on the walker. Behind her is a canister of oxygen.

MARGARET

You coming, Justin?

She motions to a front porch.

JUSTIN

Excuse me, ma'am? I'm kind of having a moment here.

MARGARET

You all do. Not what I asked you though. You coming? I made lemonade.

Suddenly Piper realizes that he is very thirsty, but he's skeptical.

JUSTIN

Wait. How did you know my name?

MARGARET

So I got it right this time? I don't always you know.

Margaret turns and walks away from Piper. She glances over her shoulder.

MARGARET

Got a sandwich up there too, Justin.

Without looking back, Margaret shuffles slowly and painfully towards her front porch.

JUSTIN

Sandwich? What do you mean lady? Lemonade? What?

MARGARET

My name is Margaret. See you on the porch then?

Piper is exacerbated. She seems so sure he will follow her. And dammit if she isn't right. This is all so surreal. He's almost angry, but how can you be angry at a strange old woman who already knows your name and preemptively fixes you a sandwich?

He takes one look at his street lamp and another at Margaret. He isn't sure why, but he follows her.

JUSTIN

So how did you know I was coming?

Margaret stops but doesn't turn around.

MARGARET

I don't know. I just knew that you would be. I've been waiting for you for a day or so now.

She reaches her porch and ever-so-slowly climbs the steps, still dragging her oxygen.

Piper follows behind her but not too closely.

She turns around and then smiles at Piper, part of her teeth crooked and yellow with age. Piper walks up the steps and she motions him to take a seat in a front porch swing. Piper sits down and the chains groan and sing, the wooden slats bend to fit his weight.

Margaret reaches down to a small table in front of them and picks up a sandwich.

MARGARET

I made a peanut butter and jelly and turkey with cheese. I like them both but until I saw you, I didn't know which one you'd like, but you are a peanut butter and jelly guy, no?

Piper is flabbergasted. Nothing in the world sounds better to him in this moment than a good old fashioned PB & J. He nods. But how does she fucking KNOW this anyway? She's beyond secure, she's almost smarmy about it.

He reaches down and grabs the other sandwich. Oh my God, it's perfect.

MARGARET

Pour you some lemonade?

JUSTIN

Please?

Margaret struggles but manages to pick up the pitcher. Piper listens as the ice plinkles in the glasses on the small table and the lemonade is poured.



MARGARET  
Long journey, son?

JUSTIN  
The longest I think.

MARGARET  
You'd be surprised. I've gotten  
people from Oman before. I don't  
even know where Oman is. Do you?

Piper has heard of it, but hell if he knows. He shrugs his  
shoulders and then eats a bit of his sandwich and washes it  
down with the lemonade. It might as well be Kobe beef or  
gold-encrusted filet mignon.

JUSTIN  
So, ma'am?

MARGARET  
Margaret, Justin.

JUSTIN  
OK, Margaret. Can you tell me  
what's going on here?

MARGARET  
Beats the fuck out of me, Justin.  
All I can tell you is that about  
four times a year someone shows up  
at that lamp and has a breakdown  
like you just did. Most of the time  
I know they are coming. Sometimes I  
don't. Been going on since I lived  
here. Fifteen years.

JUSTIN  
Wait, what? So for fifteen years  
you wait for someone to show up at  
that lamp, that one right there  
(pointing)  
and you feed them sandwiches and  
lemonade?

MARGARET  
Well not always. Sometimes I don't  
know they are coming. Sometimes I'm  
in my kitchen scrambling. Sometimes  
I wonder if people come when I'm at  
the beauty shop or at the store.

Margaret has a coughing spell. Piper offers her a glass of  
lemonade. She refuses.

JUSTIN  
But sandwiches and lemonade?

MARGARET  
Ah hell no, Justin.

JUSTIN  
Call me Piper, please.

MARGARET  
Piper it is then. No not always.  
Sometimes it is microwave popcorn  
and a soda. Sometimes it is tuna  
salad on crackers and root beer.  
Sometimes its vodka and salmon  
patties. You all are all different,  
Piper. I just do what I'm told.

JUSTIN  
Told? By Who?

MARGARET  
You mean "Whom". How the fuck do I  
know? Who told you to come to my  
Light?

Piper tries to be a smart ass.

JUSTIN  
Whom?

He realizes it isn't going to work.

JUSTIN  
No. Definitely it's "who".

MARGARET  
Yes. Like I said. Whom. Anyway, you  
want to tell me all about it? How  
did you get here anyway?

Piper liked this feisty old lady as abrasive as she was. To  
the point. Direct.

JUSTIN  
Well ma'am, if you must know I came  
looking for this Lamp post over a  
day ago and got a little lost along  
the way.

MARGARET  
Lost? That's a new one. Where's  
your car?

JUSTIN

I don't have one.

Margaret looks down the street, confused.

MARGARET

Did you walk? The bus doesn't come this far.

JUSTIN

I got a ride from a stranger. No, a friend. Look, a night ago I saw this Light and had to find it. I got mugged and lost my wallet and phone and spent an interesting and moderately terrifying night in a neighborhood that makes anything in the Big Apple look like a stroll in the park.

Margaret sips her lemonade and grabs a chocolate chip cookie.

MARGARET

This is a good one. Usually they have a rental car. Once had a woman come through the desert around the mountain on horseback. She told a story, let me tell you.

Piper eyes the table. He had not seen the cookies before.

JUSTIN

Can I?  
(points)

Margaret nods her head.

MARGARET

This is the part where you start talking, Justin.

JUSTIN

About what?

Margaret pulls the wisps of her hair back from her face. Piper hears the gurgle of oxygen in her nose.

MARGARET

I don't know. Tell me about your interesting and moderately terrifying night.

JUSTIN

It was really late when I left the Stratosphere. I called a cab and told him the direction I was heading.

MARGARET

You came here from the Stratosphere? You spent a night there, in that neighborhood?

JUSTIN

I did.

MARGARET

You're damn lucky all they did was mug you, son.

Piper puts his napkin into his paper plate.

JUSTIN

Yeah, well my cab broke down and it was too late to call anyone else. And then before I knew it, these three assholes beat the shit out of me and availed me of my wallet, phone, watch, and jacket.

MARGARET

Watch? A young man like you still wearing a watch? I didn't think anybody but old people did that anymore.

Margaret is not wearing a watch.

JUSTIN

So I decide to abort mission and walk back to my friends but on my way back I find this, I dunno, piece of street art or whatever and, it, oh God, I can't explain.

MARGARET

Art can be that way. Hits you and you can't explain why.

JUSTIN

It was more than that. Anyway, I must have dozed off and when I woke up I saw this whore walking toward me.

MARGARET

Whore?

Piper regrets the word as soon as he says it.

JUSTIN

You know. A woman who sells her body for money.

MARGARET

Oh, I know the term and the concept. But that term, that tone from you.

Piper leans back in the seat, defeated.

JUSTIN

She started out that way anyway.

MARGARET

Did she morph into something else?

JUSTIN

In a manner of speaking, yes.

Margaret takes a napkin and wipes the corner of her mouth.

MARGARET

I think you're going to have to explain this to this old woman, Piper.

JUSTIN

Well, I saw her later that morning after everything that happened and in the light of day, I saw her a different way.

MARGARET

OK. Tell me.

Piper thinks intently on how to respond.

JUSTIN

That morning, I watched her walk to her door. She was so confident and tough the night before. And that morning after what looked like a hard night, I saw her go from a common sex worker--that's the preferred term now, right? To a mom. One who loves her kid.

MARGARET  
So what changed?

Piper pauses, considering.

JUSTIN  
When you get right down to it,  
nothing really. Just my way of  
looking at her.

MARGARET  
You saw her in a different Light?

Piper considers that word choice. It obviously affects him.

MARGARET  
What else?

JUSTIN  
I saw a kid, a young boy. There in  
the middle of the night he was  
picking through the dumpster alone.

Piper pours Margaret a bit of lemonade before refilling his  
glass.

JUSTIN  
You know, it made me mad, like that  
boy was too young to be left alone  
in that neighborhood at this time  
of night.

MARGARET  
Mad? Why mad?

JUSTIN  
Because anything could have  
happened to him. It just seemed so  
irresponsible of his parents to  
leave him like that.

MARGARET  
Why do you care? Not your kid. Not  
your problem.

JUSTIN  
Someone should have been there for  
him. And because they weren't I had  
to be.

MARGARET  
(smirking)  
Self-righteous indignation. You  
play in dangerous waters, Justin.

JUSTIN  
How DARE you, lady!

MARGARET  
Clearly you missed my point.  
Another sandwich?

Piper does but he's too angry to ask for one.

MARGARET  
(shrugging)  
Suit yourself. I'm starving though.

She fixes herself another sandwich.

MARGARET  
So what happened?

JUSTIN  
I followed him back to his family.  
I think they were living in their  
car and again, I got mad. Why have  
kids if you can't take care of  
them?, you know?

MARGARET  
No. I don't know, exactly. What  
does that matter to you?

She wipes the edge of her blade on the bread of the sandwich  
she's making.

JUSTIN  
Calm your old-lady tits, there. I  
had a change of heart the next day.

Margaret laughs.

MARGARET  
So what did you see?

JUSTIN  
The next morning I watched how much  
they put into this same boy to make  
sure he made it to school on time.

Piper stops to think about the whole community, not just this  
family.

JUSTIN  
No, it is bigger than that. Really,  
everybody in that whole part of  
town, now that I think about it.

MARGARET

And how did that affect you?

JUSTIN

Instead of being irresponsible and bad parents I thought of how hard they had to try and how tough life must be for all of them. Can you imagine learning in that environment?

MARGARET

So I'm going to ask you again. What changed?

Piper shook his head.

JUSTIN

A whole new Light?

MARGARET

Anything else?

JUSTIN

Oh, lots of things but next I then saw a junkie passed out on the street corner. He looked like he might be dead, or dying anyway.

MARGARET

Was he?

JUSTIN

No. He bought me breakfast the next morning.

MARGARET

And what changed?

JUSTIN

Everything. Once I heard his story, knew who he was, I found myself relating to him.

MARGARET

So I'm going to ask you again. And this time be honest. What changed?

JUSTIN

I don't know what you mean! What do you want from me?



MARGARET

The truth Piper. You went in to last night one way and here you are tonight. Different. All these people you been talking about were just living their lives like they always do. What changed? Or rather, Who?

Piper finally gets it. His Light bulb moment. After a small silence...

JUSTIN

It was me. I'm the one who changed.

Margaret claps her hands together.

MARGARET

Now we're getting somewhere.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a flask. Margaret spikes the pitcher.

MARGARET

Now that we got that out of the way, finish telling me who you met.

JUSTIN

A dog. He terrified me. He was a big barking slobbering thing and I thought he might bite me.

MARGARET

Did he?

JUSTIN

No. Not at all. I saw his owner, some drunk passed out on the street. As long as I wasn't out to hurt his owner, he had no beef with me. Me and that dog ended up being cool. But at first his owner was this worthless piece of crap taking up space on the sidewalk.

MARGARET

So we had self-righteousness and now we are adding judgment. How do men like you sleep at night?

Piper shifts in his chair.

JUSTIN

Barely if you are counting last night. But let me tell you this ma'am.

MARGARET

Please do.

JUSTIN

So here I was ready to think that man just a selfish drunken idiot when that morning I watched him feed his dog before he ate.

MARGARET

Man looks after dog looks after man. It's been that way since the first man brought that wolf into a cave. I'm thinking you can start sleeping better after your recent revelations.

Piper pours some of the spiked lemonade into his cup and nods his head.

JUSTIN

And then I met Luis and his girl, Maria. They were fighting when I first met them and I could have sworn he cheated on her.

MARGARET

Awkward conversation to overhear.

JUSTIN

Not really. They were in the middle of the street shouting. I hung around because I thought he seemed guilty and because I thought he might hit her for confronting him about it.

MARGARET

But he wasn't and you were just a voyeur.

JUSTIN

Well, when you say it like that.

Piper is slightly offended.

MARGARET

We both know where this is going  
Piper. Who did he become?

Piper leans back in his seat and closes his eyes, just for a second.

JUSTIN

He became the only person I ever  
met who I knew loved me enough to  
pray for my soul.

MARGARET

Is he the one who brought you here?

Piper shakes his head.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

So he brought you to a whole new  
Light. You see a pattern here,  
Justin?

JUSTIN

Yeah yeah yeah. What about those  
three assholes who beat me up and  
talked about killing me?

MARGARET

They were just three assholes,  
Justin. Not everybody has to have  
some symbolic higher significance.  
Jesus!

Piper laughs.

JUSTIN

Yeah. They were just assholes. Hah.  
So, what's next? How's this Light  
thing work, anyway?

MARGARET

Well, I can't answer that. My part  
here is done. You all come to my  
Light and I feed you and I listen  
to you. That's all I'm supposed to  
do.

Piper has this overwhelming feeling that this is only the beginning of the conversation. He's desperate to keep it going.

JUSTIN

Please help me, Margaret.

MARGARET

This wasn't helpful? You want more?

Margaret motions to the table. There is still some food, the spiked pitcher, a cookie or two.

Piper isn't ready to go. There's so much more he feels compelled to tell Margaret. Finally he hangs his head:

JUSTIN

I'm, I'm, I just found out that I'm probably dying. And I'm not ready to die yet.

Margaret takes a moment before speaking.

MARGARET

We all have a time. And none of us really can tell, can we? Look at me. I'm a hundred pounds overweight, spent forty years smoking three packs a day, have a good fifty years on you and I can barely walk. I should have been gone twenty years ago. And yet, here I am, feeding lost strangers. And there you are, young and strapping and presumably with a lot to live for, and they tell you you're dying. I guess that seems unfair.

Piper puts his head in his hands and starts to cry. And Margaret breaks.

MARGARET

Stop it, Justin. Stop! I can and have handled many things. Grown men crying is more than I can deal with.

Piper is unable to contain himself. He's all emotion now.

JUSTIN

Its just that-

MARGARET

It's just what, Justin?

Justin can barely choke out the words.

JUSTIN

I just realized that I'm going to be THAT guy. And I don't want to be THAT guy.

MARGARET

What guy are you talking about, Justin?

JUSTIN

The guy everyone secretly hates but everyone rallies around the second they hear you're sick. THAT guy.

MARGARET

Oh, THAT guy? Full of yourself much?

JUSTIN

Hey wait a minute, lady. Yeah, THAT guy. The one we're all too fucking polite to talk about.

MARGARET

IF you're dying, Justin, you have to understand that there are parts of your death that don't belong to you.

JUSTIN

What are you talking about! It's MY DEATH? How could it not be about me?

Justin stands up, his anger visible on his face.

MARGARET

Sit down! Sit down and listen for once!

Justin finds himself doing exactly that.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Don't be so friggin' selfish. Do you not see?

JUSTIN

See what?

MARGARET

There is this thread that connects all humanity. You. Me. All of us.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

It stretches back through time to the beginning and continues past us through our children. This thread, Justin, when its severed, when its cut, well, the rest of us take that personally.

JUSTIN

I never wanted to be that guy. I hate that guy.

MARGARET

Give people their grief, Justin. Let them send you cards and bring you flowers and visit you in the hospital and make you soup.

Justin puts his head in his hands.

MARGARET

Let them hug your ex-wife and buy your daughter teddy bears. Let them conjure some joke you shared or some half-way happy memory so their tears are real to them. Let them connect.

Margaret stands stiffly and sits next to Justin. She puts her fat arm around his shoulder and pulls him close.

MARGARET

When you're too sick to eat the soup they've made you, someone will find a way to feed it to you. And then when you're so sick you're shitting in the sheets, even then, someone will come along and take care of you because dammit, whether you like it or not, that's what people do. Why? Because life respects life. Life looks after life until there is no life left to look after.

Justin can't form words.

JUSTIN

I- I -

MARGARET

I guess what I'm trying to say Justin, is don't worry about being THAT guy. Hell, if you think about it, we all are.

JUSTIN

It just feels so unfair. So many things I'm not going to get a chance to do. So many lasts that I didn't realize were lasts. I think I would have appreciated them so much more.

MARGARET

What do you mean, "lasts"?

JUSTIN

The last time I ever held my wife and knew she loved me. I lost that and deserved to but I had this hope that I could make that real again, you know, stuff like that.

MARGARET

Lasts. Because when you are dying, we stop talking about "firsts". First steps, first words, first kisses, first grade, first love.

Piper looks beyond Margaret. He is talking more to himself now.

JUSTIN

We forget don't we, how special all of it is. And before you can discover it again, they tell you you're dying.

MARGARET

Last rights.

JUSTIN

I'm scared. I'm scared and I'm alone and I don't know how to do this.

Margaret reaches her gnarly paper thin hand across the table and holds Piper's. They both have tears in their eyes.

JUSTIN

When is the last time I'm going to kiss my daughter and recognize her?

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

When is the last time I will hear  
her voice or she will hear mine?  
When will be the last day I can  
work a job, feel productive, be a  
man? Its just all so real to me  
right now and I can't.

Piper and Margaret sit in silence in the dark. The Street  
Light in the foreground is bathing everything in warmth.  
After some time...

MARGARET

I think we both know why this Light  
called you here. And since we know,  
then it's time for you to go home  
now, Piper.

Piper nods his head. He wants to hug her, but he can't.  
Margaret hands Piper an ancient wireless phone.

MARGARET

Want to call your friends?

Piper takes the phone and dials Charlie.

JUSTIN

Charlie? It's me Piper.

Piper looks at Margaret's house for the street number. He  
repeats it to Charlie.

JUSTIN

Look, its a really long and crazy  
story that I'll explain when you  
get here, but get here man, OK?

Piper hangs up the phone and hands it back to Margaret.

JUSTIN

Thank you for everything. Thank you  
so much for everything.

He reaches out and gives Margaret the hug he wanted to  
earlier.

MARGARET

Feel better? Good. Now get inside  
and take a hot shower. You smell  
like shit.



EXT-LIMO TO TOWN-EVENING

Piper waits outside by the Street Lamp. The limo pulls up. Charlie rolls the window down.

JUSTIN

"Lucy, you have some 'splainin' to do."

Piper glances back towards the house. Margaret has gone inside but he knows she's watching. He gives her a wave and then the Limo Driver opens the back door to let Piper in.

CONTINUOUS:

INT.-LIMO TO TOWN-EVENING

Piper climbs inside the limo. The boys all look exhausted, but they've had a great time. Piper looks around.

JUSTIN

Hey, where's...?

CHARLIE

(glances toward a  
heartsick Alphonso)

Let me stop you right there buddy.

(whispering)

They broke up. She went back to her husband. He's not taking it well.

JUSTIN

(whispering)

Wait? What? Her husband? He's heartsick? Isn't he married or something?

CHARLIE

We're not talking about that now.

JOHN

Hey Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yes John?

JOHN

Remember that one time in the eighth grade when we found my dad's porn stash and we stayed up all night looking at it?

CHARLIE  
That wasn't me.

JOHN  
Are you sure? You got that really  
awkward boner?

CHARLIE  
YOU are a really awkward boner,  
John.

Despite being exhausted, the men all laugh.

DAVE  
Ask him where he's been, Charlie.  
(to Piper)  
You know we had to call the cops,  
right? They are all looking for  
your ass.

CHARLIE  
Yeah, man, what happened to you?  
You were supposed to meet us at  
breakfast and no sign of you.  
(pause)

Charlie looks at Piper with a guilty look on his face.

CHARLIE  
Oh, speaking of that, you might  
want to call Cynthia.

JUSTIN  
You called Cynthia?

CHARLIE  
I had to. She's the only one who  
could look at your bank account and  
try to track you down. We thought  
you just had some kind of mid-life  
crises or something. Was that what  
happened? Did we pick you up at  
your new girlfriend's house? Get  
you a little sumpin' sumpin'? Huh?  
Huh?

Piper put his head back on the back of the limo seat.

JUSTIN  
Nothing at all like that man. I got  
mugged. Took everything, my wallet,  
my cell phone, my jacket, my watch.

Something suddenly occurs to Piper.

JUSTIN  
I don't even know how I'm going to  
get on the plane! My ID. My wallet!

CHARLIE  
(knocks on Limo window)  
Hey man, can we make a stop at the  
Police Station?

The limo driver nods.

DAVE  
(protesting)  
I got a plane to catch, man!

CHARLIE  
You want me to call you a cab?

Dave shakes his head no.

CHARLIE  
OK then Dave, take a chill pill. We  
all booked the red eye, right?

The cab pulls up to the outside of the police station.

INT-LAS VEGAS POLICE STATION-NIGHT

Charlie walks to the intake worker.

CHARLIE  
I need to cancel a missing person's  
report. We found him.  
(points to Piper)  
And he needs to report he was  
mugged.

POLICE INTAKE WORKER  
Take a seat. They'll call you.

The group takes a seat.

ALPHONSO  
Been a long time since I've been  
inside a police station.

JOHN  
Hey Charlie?

CHARLIE  
Yes John.

JOHN

Remember that one time in high school where we got busted and your mom had a fit getting us out of County?

CHARLIE

(finally tired of John)  
Shut up, John!

As they sit there waiting to be called, two Policemen walk in with a future inmate. It's Pamela. She and Piper look at each other. Her eyes beg him to help her, to say anything! Piper starts to speak, then takes a look at his friends. Mortified, he says nothing.

PAMELA

COWARD! You're a coward, Justin and you know it!

Alphonso, John, and Charlie all exchange glances. The police restrain her.

CHARLIE

Wait, what, you know HER?

He feels them all staring.

JUSTIN

We've met. Hello, Amber.

PAMELA

It's PAMELA. Are you going to help me? Come'on man. You saw my kid, you know what I'm up against. Help me. Please. For her.

Piper is so embarrassed. There's no quick way to explain this.

JUSTIN

There's not much I can do at the moment, Amber. Remember, missing wallet, no cash and all.

PAMELA

It figures.

It dawns on Piper.

JUSTIN

That said, I'll be back in New York later this evening.

The police buzz her through the back door for intake. Piper looks at his hand and still recognizes her phone number.

The boys are howling.

DAVE

Bet you I know what he was doing while we were all worrying our asses off about him.

CHARLIE

Dave, that's enough!

INT-LIMO-EVENING

Reports filed, the boys make their way down the Strip for the last time. They are all still a cohesive unit but they are all focused on flying home. They aren't talking much.

Piper motions for Charlie's cell phone.

JUSTIN

I just thought of another call I got to make. Do you mind?

Charlie reaches for his pocket.

CHARLIE

Sure thing, man.

Piper watches while the throng of people walk up and down the street. He sees a street preacher and smiles.

JUSTIN

Hey Billy.

(pause)

I know, I know. Lost my phone. Long story. Hey, I know I busted your balls pretty hard about the presentation tomorrow, but, I'm going to have to postpone it. I, uh, have someplace I have to be on Monday.

(pause)

Yeah, I know. I know. I have been a complete dick. I'll explain it later but for now, I want you to book that cruise you've been talking about for you and your wife.

(pause)

No. I mean it man. When you get it picked out I got you for the money

(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

Why? What do you mean why? It's, well- I can see a time in the not so distant future when you're really going have to take on more responsibility. This might be your last chance for a bit to get away.

BILLY (O.S.)

(muffled through phone)

What's going on?

JUSTIN

There's a lot but I don't want to talk about that right now. Right now I just want you picking out some awful fake Hawaiian shirt and booking some tanning sessions, OK?

The limo pulls up to a stoplight. Piper returns Charlie's cell phone. He looks outside and notices a souvenir shop that promises three-dollar t-shirts. He sees Jessica first and then notices her son, right next to her. He has a souvenir in his hand and tries to get her attention. She does not pay attention to him. Jackson looks increasingly despondent.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

(urgently)

Stop the Limo. Pull over!

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

What?!

ALPHONSO

What's the matter?

DAVE

You're kidding, right!?

Piper looks at Charlie, pleading.

JUSTIN

Charlie, it's me. It's always been me. I know things have been weird this weekend, but remember ME.

Piper looks at Charlie eye to eye.

CHARLIE

(to the driver)

Can you pull over, man?

The Limo pulls to a halt just past the souvenir stand. Piper starts to open the door and then remembers he has no wallet.

JUSTIN

Can one of you spot me a twenty?

Charlie is frustrated.

JUSTIN

Come on, man, you think I'm not good for a twenty?

Reluctantly, Charlie reaches into his wallet and pulls out a twenty dollar bill. He hands it over to Piper.

Everyone in the limo watches while Piper crosses the street towards the souvenir stand. He hands the twenty dollar bill over to Jackson. A flash of recognition registers across Jackson's face. In the commotion, Jessica turns around and sees that Piper has given Jackson the money.

EXT-SOUVENIR STAND-EVENING

JESSICA

Oh, hi, Justin.  
(to Jackson)  
Remember Justin Piper?

Jackson slightly drops his head and nods.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry Jackson. I shouldn't have snapped at you like that.

JESSICA

No, you shouldn't have. Do you know that it took me two hours to get him calmed down?

JUSTIN

That was pretty sucky of me. Treating pants as more important than people.

Piper leans in to talk to Jackson.

JUSTIN

Don't ever value things more than you value people, Jackson. Otherwise, you end up like me.

JESSICA

So, how can we help you Justin?

Piper points to the twenty dollar bill.

JUSTIN

I can't make it up to you for being such a jerk, but I can at least buy your son a souvenir.

Jessica shakes her head and smiles. It is a sweet but obviously fake smile.

JESSICA

Oh really?

(to Jackson)

Hey Jackson, baby, could you maybe go over there and pick yourself out some candy?

Jackson shakes his head yes. This is his moment. He smiles at his mom and Piper.

Once Jackson is gone, Jessica reaches into her handbag and rifles through her wallet. She pulls out a crisp twenty dollar bill.

JUSTIN

What's this?

JESSICA

You know exactly what this is.

JUSTIN

Come on, let me buy the boy a small toy.

JESSICA

No sir, no you will not.

JUSTIN

Why not. It's twenty dollars. It would make me happy.

JESSICA

And that's exactly why. This isn't about HIM at all. It's about you. It is about getting you to a place where you can walk away from everything and feel good about it. Like you tried to do the right thing or whatever.

JUSTIN

I'm trying to do the right thing, Jessica. How dare you!



JESSICA

Well as much as I would love to believe you, Justin, I've spent my years meeting men just like you and I've learned one thing.

JUSTIN

What's that?

JESSICA

This is more about your guilt than your good intentions. So if it is all the same to you.

Jessica hastily hands Piper the twenty. Piper is genuinely extremely sad.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry Jess.

JESSICA

Don't feel sorry for me, Piper. I don't.

JUSTIN

I get pride or whatever, you can obviously attest to that. But this time, it's different, I promise. Just let me buy the boy a small souvenir.

JESSICA

I am not going to do that Justin. I will not give you the satisfaction.

JUSTIN

Then why not just give me my twenty dollars back. Why do you have to send him away?

Jessica looks over at Jackson who is busy going through the candy, struggling to pick just one.

JESSICA

Look at him, Justin.

Piper looks at him.

He's just this little boy, Piper. He's all energy and emotion all the time.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

He's a handful, don't get me wrong,  
but he's still this little boy  
trying to figure out the rules in  
this big old world.

JUSTIN

Like all of us, Jessica.

JESSICA

Yes, like all of us. But unlike you  
and me, he doesn't know that there  
is a, how do you say it, a duality  
in all of this. His world is still  
very linear, still very innocent.  
And I'd like to keep it that way as  
long as I can.

JUSTIN

Not following, Jessica. I want to  
but its been a helluva couple of  
days.

Piper glances over at the limo. Jessica's eyes follow. Dave  
is puking out of the window.

JESSICA

Looks like it.

Jessica points over to the limo.

JESSICA

Is that your crew?

JUSTIN

Sort of. I don't guess it matters  
that I didn't spend any time with  
them, right? I'm as sober as they  
make them. Didn't even drop so much  
as a nickel in the slots this  
weekend.

JESSICA

No. It doesn't. You and your kind  
don't matter to me at all.

JUSTIN

My kind? Exaggerate much, lady.  
It's twenty dollars.

JESSICA

Let me spell this out for you  
Piper. I don't want your money.

(MORE)

JESSICA (CONT'D)

I'm capable of providing everything for my own son, thank you just the same.

Piper is genuinely confused.

JUSTIN

Then why the pretense?

JESSICA

Because I want him growing up believing that people can change and become better people. I want him to hang on to hope. It's easier if he sees you as the good guy, Piper.

JUSTIN

I'm trying to be the actual good guy, Jessica. You're the one who can't see it.

Jessica will not budge. Piper finally takes the twenty dollar bill and walks away dejected. He walks back over to the limo and the driver gets out and opens the back door for him.

Piper hits the side of the limo in frustration before climbing in.

INT-MCCARRAN AIRPORT-EVENING

Piper is back at the gate. He is so tired. He has a paper copy of his boarding pass. He watches while the people file into the gate. He wishes he had a phone to check or some other form of distraction but there is none.

He looks at the clock and then looks at the boarding time posted at the gate. And then he walks to the window. He scans the horizon to find his light.

There must be thousands of street lamps strewn across the entire Vegas landscape, but which one was his?

He cannot spot it now.

He walks to the other side of the gate. He scans the horizon and finds the Stratosphere. His eyes trace the lights spread before him, hoping for just one glimpse. Where does it fade into nothingness again?

Piper turns to the crowd behind him. They are queuing up.

FADE OUT.

