

(Name of Project)

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INT THE ENTON INN TAVERN - NIGHT

The ambiance is perfect: a raging fire, walls constructed of classic stone and healthy deep brown wood, the bar shines, and a three-piece jazz ensemble plays unobtrusively on a small stage off to one corner. The Tavern looks a bit like a rustic hunting lodge, sans the animal heads on the wall. The place is brimming with PATRONS, some tapping their feet to the jazz while others chat quietly and laugh. Everyone seems to enjoy everyone else; the place feels impossibly content.

Everyone in the bar is of different races. There is no segregation amongst the tables, friends and lovers are all mixed and matched. Even more fantastic, no one seems to notice. (It is important to note that all of Enton is this way, the age and race of all characters diversified and ultimately inconsequential.)

An OUT-OF-TOWNER (early forties, Mexican-American) comes down a set of stairs and into the Tavern. He has a look at the jazz band, and decides on a seat at the bar. RICK (late thirties, Russian-American with a moustache), the appealing owner of the Inn and barkeeper, is immediately at the Out-of-towner's service.

RICK
How's the room?

OUT-OF-TOWNER
Perfect. Exactly what I wanted.

RICK
You sure? You can always have the other one.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
No, no. I'm happy, I appreciate your concern.
(pause, then small talk)
This is the first time I've ever stayed in an Inn with only two rooms. I guess there's not much cause for more in a little Vermont town like this?

RICK
No, sir. And that's why you're here, am I right?

The Out-of-towner gives him a knowing smirk and a slight nod. Rick winks back. The Out-of-towner glances over at a MAN (somewhere in his early to mid thirties, Irish-Scottish-American with some French Canadian thrown in as well) slumped over on the bar.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

He all right?

RICK

That's how he wants to be, anyhow.

The Man at the other end of the bar suddenly picks his head up. He downs what is left of the scotch in front of him, then he looks around drunkenly. He lets out a small burp, and then catches the Out-of-towner looking at him.

MAN

Excuse me. Gas.

(then, beckoning)

Rick?

Rick bounds over to the Man, ready to help.

RICK

Another one?

MAN

Nope. I gotta settle up, I'm feeling a little under the weather.

RICK

Unbelievable! What's that? The first time in a year you're not the last one out?

(then)

Whaddaya got for me?

The Man produces a small piece of paper, folded in half, and hands it to the bartender. Rick opens the paper, and reads. The Out-of-towner watches curiously.

RICK

Sort of a sad one, don't ya think?

MAN

Yeah, yeah. I watched the local news, and that's what happened.

RICK

How many times have I told you that the news is a waste of time? Don't watch it, don't listen to it, don't even read it.

MAN

I assure you, my television is now curb side. Did we get any bums in Enton yet?

RICK
Not to my knowledge. But, again, I
don't get the news.

MAN
Well, maybe the kids will want it.
(then, regarding the
paper)
Is that going to do it?

RICK
I love it. Melancholy is an
important thing, I think.

MAN
All right. Well, I'll see you
tomorrow if I don't get run over by
a steam roller.

The Man walks--nay, stumbles--toward the exit. He pauses by
the door, unsteady on his feet.

MAN
(to the room)
Good people of Enton, lest you
might have forgotten, I am deeply
in love with all of you!

He turns, nearly capsizing, then throws open the big tavern
door and walks outside. One of the musicians calls after him.

JAZZ MUSICIAN
We love you, too!

Everyone laughs and applauds before going back to their
conversations. The Out-of-towner turns to Rick, and Rick has
already refilled his drink.

RICK
That one's on me.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
Thank you very kindly.
(then)
What's that guy's story?

RICK
Kull? He's a good man. Drinks too
much, but other than that...

Rick thinks for a moment.

RICK (CONT'D)

I guess you could say he's the town drunk. It's just not what you'd expect. Enton's a weird place: we've got everything a small town is supposed to have, but here it's all a bit different. I guess we like to turn stereotypes on their ear. Kull is no exception.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

He's not as loaded as he seems?

RICK

No, no. He's completely faced. But he's a sweetheart, never gets out-of-control, never gets in anyone's space, that sort of thing. He abhors violence. Every now and then, I get some backwoods folks in here, and the last time that happened, Kull managed to talk these two toothless brothers out of tearing each other apart. Thank God for small favors.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

What's he do?

RICK

He's a writer.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Ahh.

RICK

He says he's working on "The Great American Novel".

OUT-OF-TOWNER

What's it called?

RICK

The Great American Novel.

(then)

I guess he's been stuck on page 101 for almost a year now.

The Out-of-towner looks at the piece of paper in Rick's hand.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

That must be an IOU?

RICK
 Nope. Payment in full. I'll show
 ya.

Rick rings the bell hanging over the cash register on the back of the bar. The Tavern grows completely silent, all eyes on Rick.

RICK
 (projecting his voice)
 Well, folks. It's a sad one
 tonight, I'm afraid.

Then, he reads:

RICK
 "Poem for Enton, #314:
 I WISH I COULD SING 'EM OR PLAY
 'EM,
 'CAUSE WHEN ALL YOU CAN DO IS SAY
 'EM,
 THE BLUES IS JUST BLUES,
 AND IT ALL SEEMS KINDA SAD."

The crowd is silent for a second as they soak in the words. Then a hearty round of applause lights the place back up. The band jumps in with a lively number.

The Out-of-towner looks around at the people, smiling in a quiet brand of awe. Then he looks back to Rick, who is cleaning up some glasses.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 This is quite a town you've got
 here.

RICK
 Well, I thank you, sir.

The Out-of-towner gets up to leave.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 Charge it to my room?

RICK
 Turning in?

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 Yep. I'm beat. Helluva flight.

RICK
 You want your turn-down service,
 mint on your pillow and all that?

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 (hadn't thought about it)
 Sure, why not.

Rick hops over the bar, exuberant.

RICK
 Give me five minutes.
 (then, to the patrons)
 Ladies and Gents, I've got to take
 care of my guest, here! Back in
 five!

Many people toast him or give him a wave, and then Rick is off to turn down the bed. The Out-of-towner looks a tad embarrassed, glances at his watch, and then sits back down at the bar to wait.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - MORNING

It's a one-room dwelling, but a good-sized one room (the building is a converted mansion). It defines cozy. There is a fireplace in the wall opposite the entrance. To the left of the fireplace is a television stand, no television on it. A long sofa and an easy chair sit in front of the fireplace, a standing lamp and a coffee table along with them. To the right of the fireplace, a large liquor cabinet.

The king-sized bed, with an antique wooden frame, is to the right of the entrance. To the left of the entrance, a kitchenette with a small table and two chairs. The table holds a desk top computer, writing utensils, and lots of paper. Books lie around the table, and are also strewn about the rest of the apartment.

Kull wakes up, groggy as all get-out, and rolls over into a large lump under his comforter. NATASHA (late thirties to early forties, African-American), gorgeous in a most earthy fashion, pokes her head out from under the blankets. She is smiling.

NATASHA
 Morning.

Kull blinks at her for a second.

KULL
 Natasha, good morning. Goddammit,
 you look good in the morning.

NATASHA
 I wish.

KULL
 Modesty. I love that about you.
 (then)
 How did you get here?

NATASHA
 The way I always get here.

Kull stumbles out of bed, and makes his way to the kitchen.

KULL
 Did we do it again?

NATASHA
 Yes. You gave me head, I came with
 a guttural groan, and then you
 passed out, pleased with yourself.

Kull opens a cabinet, pulls out a small glass and a box of
 "Alka-Seltzer Morning Relief". He plops, plops and fizzes,
 fizzes. As the tablets of medicine dissolve, he looks over at
 Natasha.

KULL
 What about me? Why do I never get
 head?

NATASHA
 Because you pass out, Kull.
 (then)
 I'm getting a complex. I used to
 think I was good in bed.

KULL
 Well, I am very high maintenance.

NATASHA
 I guess if you want to come, you'll
 take it easy on grandpa's medicine,
 huh?

KULL
 Cannot do.
 (he squelches an ugly
 burp)
 I love the way it makes me feel in
 the morning.

He goes to drink up the Alka-Seltzer. Then he stops himself.

KULL
 Oh, I'm sorry. Would you like some
 breakfast as well?

NATASHA
 (smiling)
 I'll pass.

KULL
 This stuff is great. First time I
 ever bought something as a direct
 result of a television commercial.

Natasha gets out of bed, and Kull finds himself staring at her, fascinated by her beauty. Natasha gets dressed--leather pants, a black button-down shirt, black socks and sneakers.

NATASHA
 What happened to your TV, anyway? I
 wanted to watch something last
 night, you passed out, I've got
 nothing to do...

KULL
 (not hearing a word,
 enraptured)
 What are you doing with me?

NATASHA
 You're in walking distance of my
 diner.

KULL
 Of course.

Natasha wraps an arm around his waist, picks up the Alka-Seltzer package, and reads the label.

NATASHA
 How often do you use this?

KULL
 Let's see. I saw the commercial
 maybe six months ago--pretty much
 every day. Give or take.

NATASHA
 (reading)
 "If symptoms persist for more than
 three days, consult a physician."

KULL
 What's a physician going to tell me
 about my symptoms, do you think?

NATASHA
 (not going to get into it)
 Yeah, yeah.

KULL
 You gotta die of something.

NATASHA
 Of course you do.

She looks over at his immense liquor cabinet.

NATASHA
 Maybe you've got too many skeletons
 in your closet, sweetheart.

KULL
 Those aren't skeletons. They're
 called spirits.

NATASHA
 Right.

KULL
 And back when I took everything
 seriously, all "sober" and trying
 to write my book, no woman as
 perfect as you would give me the
 time of day. Right?

Natasha looks at her watch.

NATASHA
 It's eight-fifteen.
 (then)
 I better get to work. The girls are
 probably bitching and moaning that
 they have to do everything
 themselves. You should come by and
 get something to eat.

KULL
 I'll take another shot at page 102,
 then I'll be by.

NATASHA
 Promise?

KULL
 Promise.

Natasha takes him in her arms, holding him tight while
 looking into his eyes.

NATASHA
I love you, ya know.

KULL
I am one-hundred percent
unabashedly grateful for that.

Natasha, with a bit of a frown, gives him a kiss. She then goes to the door, and opens it. Half way out, Kull stops her:

KULL
Natasha.

NATASHA
Yeah?

KULL
I love you, too.

She smiles at him, her eyes sparkling.

NATASHA
Come by the diner.

KULL
What's on special?

NATASHA
I'm guessing nothing as of yet, as
I haven't been there to write it on
the chalk board.

And she's off. Kull closes the door after her, and moves to sit down at his computer. He clicks it on, and the screen comes up in word-processor mode, a blinking cursor at the top of a page marked as "102".

He stares at the blank screen. He begins a sentence with the word "Besides" and then thinks better of it. He tries starting with the phrase "Most likely" but erases that, too. He writes "Ultimately", and it's not the one. Then "In the end". Then "Grab-ass bastards". Then "The". He stares at "The" for some time, then gives up.

He gets up, goes to the liquor cabinet, and pulls out a bottle of Patron tequila. He returns to the table, pours a shot into his empty Alka-Seltzer glass, and has at it. He sucks in a hard breath after the shot, and glances around the table.

He grabs a piece of paper and a pen. At the top of the paper, he writes, "Natasha".

And then he is furiously writing a love poem.

EXT PATH THROUGH THE WOODS - LATER THAT MORNING

Kull, pleasantly buzzed, walks through the town woods. The leaves have turned to the magnificent colors of fall. He looks up at the trees, smiles at a couple frolicking chipmunks.

A magnificent hawk soars over the trees, and Kull almost trips on a tree root growing over the path as he stares up at it. He chuckles at himself. He stops, pulls the poem for Natasha out of his pocket, and gives it a quick read.

He continues on his merry way.

EXT COOP'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

The path through the woods empties out into the parking lot of Coop's Diner. The diner, in classic New England form, is an old box car transformed into a restaurant. A fading painted sign above the front door reads "Coop's Diner-Breakfast, Lunch, and Ice Cream".

A lesbian couple, MAE (twenties, Iranian-American) AND JUNE (twenties, German-American), are leaving the diner as Kull is about to walk inside.

KULL

Hey there, Mae and June.

MAE

Hi, Kull.

JUNE

Good poem last night.

KULL

Thank you.

Off they go and in he walks.

INT COOP'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

Kull enters the diner, and sits down at the counter. Natasha is coming from the back dining area. ROY (forties, Italian-American), a huge man who has to hunch to keep from bumping his head on the ceiling, is busy at the grill with an incredible amount of potatoes, eggs, bacon, sausage, and pancakes. The diner is crowded.

NATASHA

Sara needs another short stack for eleven.

ROY

Short stack.

Natasha sees Kull.

NATASHA

Hey, baby.

She leans over the counter and gives him a quick kiss.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

I'll be with you in a minute.

Kull smiles and watches her go back the way she came. Roy looks at Kull.

ROY

When you're done with her, you know I'm available. I've always wanted a poet.

Kull looks at him, obviously having heard this a hundred times before...

ROY (CONT'D)

I'm gay, you know.

KULL

Yes, I know, Roy. Everyone knows.

ROY

Everyone?

He turns to the OTHER PEOPLE at the counter, and points at them in succession.

ROY (CONT'D)

Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know?

Each person nods as he asks, dry expressions on every face.

ROY (CONT'D)

Okay, so everyone knows. Nothing to be ashamed of.

KULL

Especially not in a town where
people pride themselves on being
openly gay, Roy.

ROY

(shouting proudly)
I am gay!

All the patrons in the diner echo him with "We know" and "No kidding" and "Stop the presses!" Roy raises his eyebrows with a smirk, and then gets back to work.

SARA (thirties, British), a lanky woman with long, straight red hair, appears behind the counter, and pours Kull a cup of coffee.

KULL

Thanks, Sara.

SARA

(without pause)
You are a man and an asshole. You
should be ashamed of yourself.

KULL

(heard this before, too)
I know. Can you get me some sugar?

Sara turns around to grab a handful of sugar packets, and when she turns back, she throws them at his chest. They fall all over his lap and onto the floor.

SARA

There.

KULL

Thanks.

Sara moves away from him.

KULL (CONT'D)

Good to see you, Sara.

KAREN (twenties, Polish-American), the other waitress, short and in good shape, pushes a wheelchair up to the counter. In the wheel chair is COOPER, Natasha's father. He is incredibly aged, and takes great pains to appear frail and in need of constant care, although he is not.

KAREN

Hey, Kull.

KULL
 (with a nod)
 Karen.

KAREN
 Okay, Coop. You want your Jello?

Cooper smiles a lascivious smile, and nods. Karen gets a bowl of Jello from a refrigeration unit, and takes it to Cooper. She shakes the Jello as she walks, and then looks at the old man.

KAREN
 (doing her best bimbo)
 Whoa, Coop. Jello reminds me of something. What could it be?

She fakes thinking with a finger to her chin, then:

KAREN (CONT'D)
 Oh, yeah! I know what it is.

Cooper is practically drooling at this point. Karen shakes her breasts in his face, along with the Jello. Natasha walks in on this, and she is displeased.

NATASHA
 Goddammit, Karen.

Karen immediately stops and jumps back to work, moving to a booth.

KAREN
 (to customers)
 Can I take your order?

Cooper watches her run away.

COOPER
 (very quietly)
 Hate to see you go, but I love to watch you leave.

NATASHA
 Dad. Cut the shit.

Cooper looks at her, not sorry, then emphatically digs into his Jello.

KULL
 (pointing at Cooper)
 I think he might like it.

Roy plops a small plate of eggs down in front of Kull. Kull wolfs them down. Natasha notices a folded up piece of paper on the counter in front of Kull.

NATASHA
What's this?

KULL
Something for you.

Natasha opens the paper and reads the poem. Tears come to her eyes, and then she kisses Kull long and hard.

KULL
(beaming)
Wow!
(then)
I think I'm ready to get back to work!

NATASHA
Good luck.

Kull gets up and goes to the juke box at the end of the diner. He plops in a quarter and selects a number. Martin Sexton's "Diner" plays. Kull dances his way out of the diner, everyone laughing at him as he leaves.

Natasha watches him with a huge smile, unable to move until he is gone.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON

Kull sits in front of his computer, page 102 still blank, staring at the screen. A frilly cocktail complete with fruit and an umbrella sits right next to the terminal.

The computer switches into screen-saver mode. Kull downs his drink, and puts his head in his hands. He groans.

There is a knock at the door. Kull gets up slowly, and gets dizzy.

KULL
Whoa. Head rush.

He opens the door, and he is greeted by CARLY (Japanese-American), his old high school chum and present landlord.

KULL
Hey, Carly.

CARLY
How drunk are you?

KULL
Rent due?

Carly gives him a nod.

KULL (CONT'D)
Let me get my boots. You want a drink?

CARLY
Can't. Too much to do.

KULL
You never had too much to do in high school.

CARLY
That's because my father took care of everything. Now it's my turn.

KULL
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let me get my boots.

Kull stumbles over to his sofa, falls into it, and pulls some work boots out from underneath. He puts them on, and he's ready to go.

KULL
I should get out, anyway.

CARLY
Still on 102?

KULL
Yeah. Fresh air, hard work, always gets the juices flowing. Cider press?

CARLY
You're the man.

And they're off.

EXT APPLE ORCHARD - MOMENTS LATER

Kull and Carly are walking through the rolling hills of an expansive apple orchard. Kull trips on the ground, almost falling. Carly looks at him, smirking.

CARLY

I wish I could drink in the middle
of the day.

KULL

Can if you want to.

CARLY

Right.

KULL

You found your woman, yet?

CARLY

Of course not.

KULL

See? I started drinking in the
middle of the day, found my woman.

CARLY

I don't think that works for
everybody. Generally, alcoholism is
frowned upon.

KULL

It's not about the booze. It's
about taking the time.

CARLY

You run an apple orchard, snow plow
business, and an apartment building
all at the same time. See how much
time you wind up with.

KULL

That's what I'm saying. Time is
funny, you've got to make it and
then you've got to take it.

CARLY

You sound sort of like an Eagles
song, but drunk.

KULL

I can live with that.

They continue walking through the orchard, a roadside apple stand and small cider mill visible in the distance. All sides of the orchard are surrounded by the colors of a New England autumn. Kull breathes in the fresh air and beautiful scenery.

KULL (CONT'D)
I love this old orchard.

CARLY
(smiling sadly)
Me, too. Me, too.
(then, looking at Kull's
hair)
You need a hair cut.

KULL
I'll get one after work.
(then)
Goddam, I'm tired.

CARLY
Can't be too tired. You've got
cider to press, my friend.

INT DEUCE AND SONS' APPLE STAND - MOMENTS LATER

Kull and Carly walk through the front of the apple stand. A few customers mill about, looking through the apples on display. (There are also vegetables, including squash and pumpkins.) A CUSTOMER is buying a gallon of apple cider. Carly waves both at the customer and the TEEN-AGE CLERK behind the register.

Kull and Carly continue to the back area of the apple stand, a large warehouse-like area with bushels and bushels of apples on palates. A fork lift is parked off to one side. JONATHAN (late teens, Swedish-American), a college-bound and cheery fellow, is sorting through some apples. He greets Kull with a smile.

JONATHAN
Kull! Rent due again?

KULL
Shouldn't you be in college by now?

JONATHAN
I've got another week.

CARLY
Keep an eye on him for me,
Jonathan.

JONATHAN
You bet, boss.

Carly hops into the fork lift and drives out the back.

KULL
How we doing?

JONATHAN
A couple more crates, and we can
head to the press.

Kull begins sorting the apples with him. The shinier apples go into white cardboard boxes marked "Deuce and Sons". The bruised and damaged apples are dropped into wooden crates on the floor.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
How's the writing treating you?

KULL
Not very lucrative, I'm afraid.

JONATHAN
Poetry isn't a big-seller these
days.

KULL
I don't think it ever was. You
still going to DC?

JONATHAN
You bet.

KULL
(semi-joking)
I thought I talked you out of it.

JONATHAN
That's what I like about you, Kull.
You're the only person I know
trying to talk me out of college.

KULL
Not college. The city.

They continue to sort the apples.

CUT TO:

EXT DEUCE AND SONS' APPLE STAND - LATER

Kull and Jonathan are each carrying a crate of apples around the side of the stand, up a dirt road to the cider mill (a beat-up old barn-like structure).

JONATHAN

(mid-thought)

...too screwed up. As a public defender, maybe I can get someone a shot. Did you know fourteen percent of Black males in this country don't have the right to vote?

KULL

How's that?

JONATHAN

They're either on their way to jail, in jail, or on their way out. Cons can't vote. Why is that, do you think? Black guys in jail? Racism. Inherent in the system.

KULL

You aim to change that.

JONATHAN

I aim to do my part. One person can't fix the world. I'm not delusional.

KULL

Good for you. I was. Of course, if you ask me, the only way to stop what's fucked up about the world is to make Enton bigger. Not city bigger, bigger purely in square acreage. Cultivate what we have.

JONATHAN

In a way, that's what I'm doing.

KULL

Ahh, good stuff. Good stuff. Eventually, I hope, Earth will be called Enton.

CUT TO:

INT CIDER MILL - LATER

Kull dumps a crate of apples into the cider press. Jonathan hits a button, and the press squeezes cider from the fruit. He is smoking a cigarillo.

After being squeezed of all their juice, the apples come out of the press in a sheet of dried apple gunk. Kull pulls out the sheet, and throws it outside onto a compost heap.

KULL
When did you start smoking?

JONATHAN
Saw Fistful of Dollars.

KULL
No shit. I smoked for awhile after
that, too.

Jonathan dumps another crate into the press. Kull goes to a small refrigerator, and pulls out a jug of cider.

KULL
This has got to be ready.

He takes a swig, and smiles. It's ready.

JONATHAN
Hook me up.

Jonathan takes the cider, has a swig.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
Oh, yeah.

Kull has another gulp of the fermented cider. Jonathan gets back to dumping apples into the press.

KULL
You ever read any Jimmy Moffett?

JONATHAN
The pirate guy?

KULL
That's him.

JONATHAN
Sure, I read the one about the pot dealer in Miami who's saving up for a boat. Funny.

KULL
Running. Yeah, that's the one everyone reads. I read all his stuff, several times over. Loved the hedonistic message he had, laugh and fuck and drink and all that. I was your age when I went to the city, thinking I'd continue his work, you know?

(MORE)

KULL (cont'd)
I wanted to get to a point where I
could continue where he left off.

JONATHAN
What happened, then?

KULL
I met him. Guy was...well, he
didn't seem too hedonistic,
actually. And mind you, I was star
struck at the time, real excited. I
got disillusioned in retrospect.

(then)
Sure, he had all the stuff he wrote
about, boats and planes and such.
But he seemed bent on *protecting*
it. Not enjoying it. He didn't
drink. And all he could talk about
was his cut, his cut of whatever
money was related to what I thought
was his "philosophy". You know what
I'm saying?

JONATHAN
Yeah, all he really cared about was
money.

KULL
Right. Not having a good time.
(then)
So I figured, the best times I ever
had were in Enton. I'm going back
there.

Jonathan has some more cider.

JONATHAN
Why are you telling me this?

Kull thinks for a moment.

KULL
I don't know. I guess I'm gonna
miss you.

Jonathan is touched.

JONATHAN
I'll miss you too.

He hands Kull the cider. Kull pulls from it again.

KULL

Yep. The big city made me realize all the dreams I wanted to chase were right here at home.

JONATHAN

Your book?

KULL

Yep, all I ever really wanted was to see my great American novel sitting on a shelf in the town library. That changing the world stuff? I was just grasping at straws, really.

JONATHAN

(with a raised eyebrow)

You think I'm grasping at straws?

KULL

Nah, Jonny.

(then, with a smile)

I'm a little jealous, to tell you the truth.

Kull starts to dump more apples into the press. Jonathan assists him.

CROSS FADE TO:

INT CIDER MILL - LATER

Kull and Jonathan are sitting on a pile of the pressed apple sheets, the container of cider now empty. They are laughing hysterically.

JONATHAN

(emphatic)

You are the most popular man in Enton!

Kull doubles over with laughter, clutching his gut.

KULL

And most of the time I can't see straight! Surely, this is some kind of terrible paradox!

The both roll around like giddy children drugged on laughing gas. After a few moments, they finally manage to calm down.

KULL

God, this is fun. When was the last time we did something like this together?

Jonathan thinks for a second, then:

JONATHAN

Tuesday.

EXT ENTON TOWN CENTER - EARLY EVENING

Kull strolls past the Enton Inn on the way to the barber shop. An elderly couple stops him.

OLD MAN

What's tonight's poem going to be about?

KULL

I believe it will explore the relationship between a boy, his dreams, and a cider press.

OLD WOMAN

I hope it isn't as shitty as the last one.

KULL

(a tad addled)
I make no promises.

Kull excuses himself and goes to the barbershop store front. The barbershop is part of a strip mall that includes the Enton Apothecary, the post office, and the town bank. Just beyond the strip mall is a small building, the Enton Liquor Store.

GEORGE (sixties, Greek-American), a scowling man with a hunch, is just turning the barber shop OPEN sign to CLOSED.

KULL

George! Come on, throw me a bone! I worked late!

George unlocks the door and steps halfway out. He sniffs at Kull.

GEORGE

You smell like fermented cider.

KULL

Yes, indeed I do. It was a wonderful day.

GEORGE

All right, come in. My wife will kill me if I turn away a customer.

INT BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Kull comes in and gets in one of the two barber chairs. The other one, covered with old newspapers and some cleaning utensils, is obviously never used. George talks incessantly, immediately launching into Kull's hair cut.

GEORGE

Goddam wife thinks I fart money, I swear to Jesus Christ the Wonderful Lord who stuck me with her. You know what she bought yesterday? Fifty bucks worth of candles. We've got an entire cabinet filled with candles. And she gets all upset if I light one up, says it ruins their collectible value. I tried to tell her, no one collects friggin' candles, but she ain't havin' none of that. One time we had a power outage, I lit one of the candles, and she nearly beat me to death with a newspaper...

CROSS FADE TO:

INT BARBER SHOP - LATER

George is about half-way finished with Kull's cut. He is still talking. Kull listens politely.

GEORGE

...and I seen you with that Natasha. Cute girl, but don't you dare marry her! One minute it's all about love and foolin' around, next thing you know you're the middle man of an endless cash flow. Money goes in my register, I take it out the end of the night, get to hold it maybe ten minutes tops, then, poof! Wife's got it. And don't kid yourself with, "My girl is special!" Once the ceremony is over, they're all the same.

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)
 (slight pause)
 You know how much I spent on the wedding? Nearly twenty grand. For one lousy day. Her parents were supposed to take care of it, you know, traditionally. They refused on account they had a thing against barbers...

CROSS FADE TO:

INT BARBER SHOP - LATER

George is finishing up the hair cut.

GEORGE
 ...obviously haven't quit drinking, yet. I been sober twelve years. Twelve steps, twelve years. I've got a ton of chips. And I'm not saying I don't miss it--

Kull lip syncs along with George's words:

GEORGE
 --but it was the greatest accomplishment of my life.

George finishes up the hair cut, Kull gets up and hands him fifteen bucks.

KULL
 Keep it. Thanks.

George takes the money, absent-minded.

GEORGE
 If you need a sponsor, I could be the guy. You know, when you're ready.

KULL
 That's a great idea, George, and I'm going to come to you if I need that kind of help.

GEORGE
 You know where to find me. Heard your poem was depressing last night. And short.

Kull is making his way to the door.

KULL

Yeah, well, I've been kind of tired lately.

GEORGE

Alcohol can cause...

But Kull is already gone.

INT MRS. MCELHINNY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Kull is passing a vacuum over an oriental rug. An elderly woman, MRS. MCELHINNY (Native-American), is talking to him despite the fact that anything she is saying cannot be heard over the drone of the vacuum cleaner. Kull is sweating quite a bit.

Kull finishes up, and turns off the vacuum. He rolls up the cord and puts it away in a closet.

MRS. MCELHINNY

(finishing up a thought)

...because she just loves monkeys.
Has a whole collection.

KULL

I know she does, Mrs. McElhinny.

MRS. MCELHINNY

I'm sorry if I talk too much, dear.
You and my granddaughter are really
the only people I ever see.

KULL

You don't talk too much. You do
spend too much money on monkeys,
though. Isn't your granddaughter
too old for toys?

MRS. MCELHINNY

Yes. But I get a kick out of
watching her feign excitement over
the new monkeys. That's how I know
she loves me.

KULL

You're evil, Mrs. McElhinny.

MRS. MCELHINNY

What was it Jerry Garcia said? "I
may be going to hell in a bucket,
but at least I'm enjoying the
ride."

KULL

You're not going to hell in a bucket.

(then)

A limousine, maybe. A bucket is really too low class for you.

MRS. MCELHINNY

Thank you, sweetie.

(then)

And how's your poetry?

KULL

Still writing it, anyway.

Mrs. McElhinny squints her eyes to get a good look at him.

MRS. MCELHINNY

You don't look so good.

KULL

Yeah, I've been tired lately. Maybe I'm coming down with something.

MRS. MCELHINNY

You should be at home in bed, then, not doing volunteer work.

KULL

If I didn't clean your house, who would?

Mrs. McElhinny smiles a smile that melts his heart.

KULL

All right, Mrs. McElhinny, I'll see you in a couple weeks.

MRS. MCELHINNY

Can't wait!

KULL

Bye.

MRS. MCELHINNY

Bye.

Kull goes out the front door.

EXT ROADSIDE - EVENING

Kull, Natasha, Sara, and Karen walk down the street, on the way to the Tavern. Kull is not looking too good. Sara and Karen are singing a completely made up song:

KAREN AND SARA
 FRIDAY! FRIDAY NIGHT!
 WE LOVE FRIDAY!
 WE LOVE FRIDAY!
 FRIDAY ROCKS THE MIKE!
 GIMME SOME FRIDAY!

KAREN
 (going solo)
 I'M GONNA GET LAID!
 LAID ON FRIDAY!

KAREN AND SARA
 FRIDAY! FRIDAY! FRIDAY!
 FRIDAY!

Kull stops and bends over, putting his hands on his knees.

KULL
 Wow. Wow.

NATASHA
 You all right?
 (then, to the girls)
 You're killing him.

SARA
 What's wrong?

KULL
 I don't know.

The three women have gathered around Kull.

KAREN
 Are you going to be sick?

KULL
 No, no. I'm just really exhausted.

NATASHA
 (concerned)
 We should go home.

KULL
 Yeah.

NATASHA

Come on. We'll cut back through the woods.

KULL

No, no. I'll be fine. You go ahead. Have a good time.

NATASHA

I'll take you home.

KULL

Natasha, I'm just going to crash out. You go to the Tavern, have a good time.

Natasha starts to protest again, but he stops her.

KULL (CONT'D)

Give my poem to Rick.

She takes it reluctantly. Kull stands up straight, and starts back the other way. The three ladies stand and watch him. Kull stops and looks back at them.

KULL (CONT'D)

Go.

Karen and Sara turn and start moving down the street. Natasha looks at Kull, and he beckons for her to get moving. Kull makes sure Natasha isn't turning back, then he heads on his way.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kull sits on his sofa, a drink on the coffee table. He tries to sip on the drink, but obviously doesn't enjoy it even remotely. He puts it down, frustrated.

KULL

Definitely might be getting the flu. Damn, I'm tired.

He falls asleep sitting up.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - MORNING

Kull is still asleep, sitting up on his couch. Natasha is next to him, asleep with her head on his shoulder. He wakes up slowly and groggily, and rouses her in the process.

NATASHA

Hey, baby. How you feeling?

Kull starts to get up, then thinks better of it.

KULL
I don't know. Tired.

NATASHA
You want something?

KULL
A mimosa.

NATASHA
You sure that's a good idea?

KULL
Mimosa's always a good idea.

NATASHA
(unsure)
All right.

She goes to the fridge, and pulls out a bottle of champagne and a carton of orange juice. She pops the champagne, and makes a mimosa in a very fancy champagne glass. She takes it to Kull.

NATASHA
There you go.

Kull tries a sip, but can't drink it.

KULL
Jesus.

NATASHA
What?

KULL
I love mimosas.

NATASHA
Yeah?

KULL
I don't think I can drink this.

NATASHA
You're sick. Lie down.

KULL
No. I've got to get some writing done.

NATASHA
Kull, you're sick. Lie down.

Kull obeys.

KULL
Is it hot in here?

Natasha touches his forehead.

NATASHA
Oh, my God. You've got a fever.

KULL
Great.

NATASHA
I'll get you some Tylenol.

KULL
I'll get it. I've got to go to the
bathroom, anyway.

He gets up, and immediately collapses on the floor.

NATASHA
Jesus! Kull!

KULL
I'm all right. I'm all right.
(then, looking at the
floor)
Man, I need to vacuum.

NATASHA
I'm taking you to the emergency
room.

KULL
I hate doctors.

NATASHA
I don't care.

KULL
I can't afford an emergency room. I
don't have any insurance, you know
that.

NATASHA
It'll be my treat. Come on.

She helps him to his feet.

KULL

I never had a girl take me to an emergency room before.

NATASHA

Well, we'll take some pictures then.

She helps him out the door.

INT EMERGENCY ROOM - LATER

Kull is asleep in a hospital bed. Natasha is sitting in a chair next to the bed, reading. Kull wakes up, and is befuddled. He is hooked up to an IV.

KULL

What's going on?

NATASHA

Hey, Kull.

KULL

I don't feel so good.

NATASHA

That's why we're in a hospital.

KULL

I guess my fever broke.

NATASHA

The doctor said you were extremely dehydrated. Too much drinking, apparently.

KULL

Never had this happen before.

NATASHA

Maybe it's a wake up call.

KULL

(not thrilled with the concept)

Yeah, I guess.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON (early forties, Canadian-American) comes in, papers in hand. He is so handsome he looks like he should be in a television hospital, not a real one. His bedside manner is, simply put, sexy.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Got your blood work back.

KULL
Thank the Lord Jesus.

McClinton looks at him strangely.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
A man in your condition should
avoid sarcasm around the attending
physician.

Natasha looks at Kull, scolding.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON (CONT'D)
You have got a classic case of
mononucleosis.

KULL
Mono?

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Yes.

KULL
But I had mono in college.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Couldn't have. Can't get it twice.

Natasha takes Kull's hand, comforting him. He doesn't seem to notice.

KULL
Well, that's what the doctor told
me.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Must have been a misdiagnosis
because you have indisputably got
it now.

(then)
You need to drink plenty of fluid
and get lots of bed rest.

KULL
How long will it last?

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
I usually see this in high school
kids, sometimes college.

(MORE)

DOCTOR MCCLINTON (cont'd)
Takes a month, month and a half to
get over. Someone your age, though,
it could last longer.

KULL
How longer?

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Anywhere between six months and a
year.

Kull is stunned.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON (CONT'D)
(moving on)
Very important. Mono can enlarge
your spleen, make it very tender.

KULL
Spleen?

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Spleen. You can't play any contact
sports, you may rupture it.

KULL
(sarcastic)
There goes my weekends.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
As I pointed out before, I don't
respond well to sarcasm. So, can
it.

(then)
And you've got to stay away from
alcohol. Drinking is even worse for
an enlarged spleen.

KULL
No.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
I'm afraid so.

KULL
I want a second opinion.

DOCTOR MCCLINTON
Your beautiful lady friend paid for
this visit in full, because you
have no health insurance. You can't
afford a second opinion.

Kull looks at Natasha.

KULL

Can you?

NATASHA

I can't really afford the first one. Doctor McClinton cut me a break.

She smiles at him. He looks at her legs.

KULL

Easy, doc.

INT NATASHA'S JEEP WRANGLER - LATER

Kull bounces around in the passenger seat as Natasha drives him home.

NATASHA

Kull, I'm sorry. You can't drink. That's it.

KULL

It is imperative that I get a second opinion.

NATASHA

That is impossible.

KULL

I'll go see Dr. J in town. He likes my poems. He'll see me for free.

NATASHA

I don't know what Dr. J is going to do for you. He should have retired fifteen years ago, he's my dad's age.

KULL

Don't be ageist.

NATASHA

My dad buys his pot from him.

KULL

It's good pot, isn't it?

NATASHA

That's what Dad says.

KULL

Well, there you go. I'm getting a second opinion.

NATASHA

Would quitting drinking really be all that bad?

KULL

Yes.

NATASHA

Why?

KULL

You'll probably leave me, for one.

NATASHA

I didn't start dating you because you drink, Kull. That's all in your head.

KULL

I can't write when I'm sober.

NATASHA

That's not true. You know it.

KULL

Sobriety kills artists. Stephen King, case and point. He was a raging drunk and coke head. He has no recollection of ever writing *Cujo*. The whole damn book. Has no idea when or how he wrote it. Now, he's sober and he's writing crap and getting hit by cars.

NATASHA

Come off it. I've got one number for you. 102.

KULL

Writer's block. That's natural. Sobriety can only make it worse.

NATASHA

Fine. Rupture your spleen.

KULL

Spleen. I hate that word. Spleen. I think I saw a sketch comedy show where all the jokes centered around that one word. Spleen. Stupid.

Kull sulks. Natasha is at her wit's end.

NATASHA

All right, all right. We'll go by Dr. J's on the way home.

Kull smiles as sweetly as possible.

KULL

Thank you.
(then)
I love you.

NATASHA

Yeah, yeah. Sick men are so pathetic.

INT DR. J'S EXAMINATION ROOM - LATER

Kull is on the examining table, while Natasha leans against the wall. They do not talk. The waiting room is a combination of your generic hospital examining room and the interior of a log cabin. There are posters of Julius Irving all over the walls. Natasha is staring out the window.

KULL

How the hell long is he going to make us wait?

DR. J (seventies, Chinese-American) enters. He is a small man, and he talks very slowly, the result of too many experiments with drugs.

DR. J

Ahh, the poet.

KULL

You have a lot of other patients today?

DR. J

No.
(then)
So, you've got mono?

KULL

That's what they told me.

DR. J
What do you want me to do about it?

KULL
I want a second opinion.

DR. J
Why?

KULL
Never mind why. Just do what you
have to.

DR. J
Working for free goes against
everything I stand for.

KULL
Dr. J! Cut me some slack, here.

DR. J
All right. Roll up your sleeve.
I'll take some blood.

NATASHA
Is that a good idea? He just had
blood taken.

Dr. J puts a needle in Kull's arm, pulls out blood.

DR. J
He's got plenty.

NATASHA
He's sick...oh, forget it.

She goes back to staring out the window. Dr. J finishes up
taking the blood.

DR. J
All right, then. I'll let you know
in a week.

KULL
A week? The emergency room had my
results in an hour!

DR. J
That's why it's an emergency room.
Doofus.

KULL
But I need to know now.

DR. J
It's out of my hands.

He goes to a drawer under the sink, and pulls out a bag of marijuana. He throws it to Natasha.

DR. J
Give that to your dad for me.

She takes it and puts it in her purse, shaking her head.

KULL
I can't believe it. Either way,
I've got to quit drinking.

DR. J
Oh, yeah. A man shouldn't take
chances with his spleen.

Natasha helps Kull to his feet, and puts her arm around him.

NATASHA
I can help.

KULL
No one can help.

They leave.

DR. J
Rude fuckers didn't even say good-
bye.

He pulls a joint out of his pocket and lights up.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Kull goes through his liquor cabinet, as well as the rest of the apartment, and throws out all his booze. He violently breaks the glass bottles in his trash can. He takes the trash can outside, comes back in, and draws all of the shades. He lies on the sofa, and with a scowl, he waits.

Kull is covered in sweat and tries to sleep. He tosses, turns, and moans. He tears the blankets off the bed, and moves to the sofa. He can't sleep there, either.

Kull is curled up in a corner of his apartment, knees pulled in to his chest. Carly cautiously opens the door and peers inside.

CARLY

Kull?

Carly opens the door all the way, and light floods into the room. Kull is suddenly on his feet, screaming and running at Carly. Carly yelps and slams the door shut.

Kull eats soup and crackers, and his face says the food tastes like sand. He tries a sip of water, and spits it out like a child.

KULL

Water sucks!

He dumps the glass over his head. He whines like a baby.

Kull does laps around his sofa.

Kull reads Jimmy Moffett's novel, *A Pirate's Odyssey*, and becomes frustrated with it. He throws it against the wall.

Natasha knocks on the door. Kull opens it, but doesn't let her enter.

KULL

I'm not ready.

NATASHA

Kull. Let me in.

KULL

Not ready.

NATASHA

Fine.

She leaves.

KULL

Love you.

NATASHA (O.S.)

Yeah, yeah.

He closes the door, and falls to the floor.

END MONTAGE

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

TITLE CARD: One week later.

Kull's apartment is back in order, in fact more neatly arranged than it ever was before his detoxification. The windows are all open, sunlight filling the space. Kull is reading the 101 pages of his novel, printed on paper. He does not look happy.

The phone rings. Kull answers.

KULL

Kull.
 (he listens, then)
 I'll be right there.

EXT ENTON TOWN CENTER - MORNING

Kull walks through the town, head down and hands in his pockets. He passes Mae and June.

MAE

Hey, Kull.

Kull says nothing, doesn't even acknowledge them. They stop and look at him strangely as he moves away.

JUNE

What's with him?

MAE

He looks sick.

JUNE

Yeah.

INT DR. J'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dr. J leads Kull into his office. He sits in a huge chair behind a big oak desk.

DR. J

Have a seat.

There are two large bean bag chairs facing the desk. Kull looks at them. One is green, the other blue.

KULL

I'll go with the green.

He sits down on the bean bag, obviously uncomfortable.

DR. J

According to the tests, you've got
 the mono.

(MORE)

DR. J (cont'd)
But it can't be the mono, as you've had it before, so therein lies the conundrum.

KULL
What?

DR. J
You ever heard of chronic fatigue?

KULL
Yeah.

DR. J
Well, that's what you've got.

KULL
What does that mean?

DR. J
Well, chronic fatigue is a lot like mono, except you have it forever. It's a syndrome. CFS, they call it.
(then, reassuring)
All kinds of web sites and support groups.

KULL
I'm going to be this tired forever?

DR. J
Yep.

KULL
I don't get it. Why do the tests come back as mono if it's chronic fatigue?

DR. J
They're the same thing.

KULL
Then how did I get over it before, and now it's chronic fatigue?

DR. J
You ever see that *Total Recall* picture?

KULL
I think I did.

DR. J
 You remember the mutant people of
 Mars? Their faces and bodies were
 all gross and they walked funny.
 Could tell the future. Remember?

KULL
 (dryly)
 Why not.

DR. J
 That's what happened.

KULL
 I...I don't get it.

DR. J
 The mono mutated. Like the Mars
 people who were breathing bad air.

KULL
 You're saying I'm a mutant?

DR. J
 A tired one, yes.

KULL
 What can I do?

DR. J
 Nothing.

Dr. J gets up abruptly and heads out of the office.

DR. J (CONT'D)
 I've got to get moving.

KULL
 Another patient?

DR. J
 No.

And he's gone. Kull struggles to get out of the bean bag, and
 winds up capsizing.

INT COOP'S DINER - NIGHT

The diner is closed and mostly dark. Kull and Natasha sit in
 a booth, across from each other.

NATASHA

Yeah, I've heard of that. I didn't think it was as bad as mono all the time, though.

She looks into his eyes.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

If it's not mono, though, you can kiss me.

KULL

No, not yet. I've got to be sure.

NATASHA

Kull, come on.

KULL

I don't want to get you sick, Natasha.

Natasha frowns.

KULL (CONT'D)

I can't just accept this. Something has to be done. I need to talk to more doctors.

NATASHA

Yeah, you do. But that costs money.

KULL

Does Coop still have an in at the highway department?

NATASHA

Yeah, I guess he does.

KULL

They've got a health insurance program.

NATASHA

Kull, how are you going to do hard labor in your condition?

KULL

I'm not worried about it.

EXT COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

There are three orange cones set around two very small potholes in the street.

Three large tractors are parked in various places near the potholes. A POLICE OFFICER waves a car around the equipment.

EIGHT WORKERS, all overweight and gruff looking, are lying down on the tractors, on the side of the road, and next to the potholes. Some smoke, some chat, some munch on snacks. They all wear orange reflective vests. Kull is among them, sound asleep in the shade of one of the enormous tractors.

WORKER #1
(looking at his watch)
That's lunch.

No one moves.

INT HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT FOREMAN'S OFFICE - EVENING

WILLIAM W. WILLIAMS (nameplate clearly visible) sits at his desk, handing out paychecks to a line of workers. He is a huge man, and constantly eats antacid tablets. Kull steps up to take his pay, but William refuses to hand it to him.

WILLIAM
Sit down and wait. We've got to talk.

He hands out the checks to the last of the workers.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Close the goddam door behind you.

The worker does so.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
What's the problem?

KULL
I don't have a problem.

WILLIAM
Oh, you don't think so?

KULL
No, why, is there something I'm doing wrong?

WILLIAM
Yeah, there is. And you know it.

KULL
I'm afraid I don't. I'm sorry. Tell me whatever it is, I'll fix it.

WILLIAM

Don't play dumb with me.

KULL

I'm not.

WILLIAM

You expect me to believe that you're not out there working? You have any idea how that's going to fuck up my quotas? You start getting too much done, and the town will be on to us! Got me? You want to put me and all the boys out of work?

KULL

I'm not doing anything more than anyone else, sir.

WILLIAM

Then why the hell do you look so goddam tired?

KULL

What?

WILLIAM

You look like you've put in a full day's work, and I won't tolerate that!

KULL

I didn't, I swear.

WILLIAM

Then what? You got insomnia or something? They got pills for that.

Kull hesitates, and then decides he'll have to come clean.

KULL

I've got chronic fatigue syndrome.

WILLIAM

What the hell is that?

KULL

It's like mono.

William leaps out of his seat, and slams into the back wall of his office.

WILLIAM

Goddam mono? You're a sick boy?
Don't get near me!

KULL

You're not going to catch it.

WILLIAM

My ass I'm not!

He takes out some anti-bacterial hand-cleaner and furiously starts rubbing it into his hands. He is in a panic.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

On the application, it clearly said
to state whatever health risks you
may have!

He starts rubbing the hand-cleaner on his face and neck.

KULL

I needed the job.

WILLIAM

If you get me sick, so help me!
Lying on the application is grounds
for dismissal. You're dismissed.

KULL

Oh, come on! I need the money for
doctors.

WILLIAM

Get out before I call the cops.

KULL

There's only one cop in Enton, so
technically you can't call "cops".

He looks at William, whose eyes are wide with fear.

KULL (CONT'D)

Jesus. Fine. How much time left do
I have on my insurance?

WILLIAM

Two weeks.

KULL

That'll have to do.

He leaves. William strips down and rubs the hand-cleaner all over himself.

WILLIAM
Fuckin' sick boy!

INT DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Kull is listening to a DOCTOR. The doctor continually flips a pencil up in the air and catches it.

FIRST DOCTOR
...absolutely not. Anyone who tells you it is chronic fatigue is a quack. Chronic fatigue is a purely psychological illness. You've got a good, old-fashioned case of mononucleosis. Although, I've got to say, it's weird that you got it twice. Never heard of that before.

INT SECOND DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Kull listens to the SECOND DOCTOR, a large woman with a lisp. She flips through his charts.

SECOND DOCTOR
HMMMMMM. Let me see. I would say that it couldn't be mono, you just don't get it twice. It's like the chicken pox. Once you get it, that's it. So, I'd agree with your second opinion. That was the doctor who told you chronic fatigue, right?

KULL
Right.

SECOND DOCTOR
Interesting. Your even opinions are chronic fatigue, odd ones mono.
HMMMMMM.

She jots something down in a notebook.

INT THIRD DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Kull listens to a THIRD DOCTOR. This guy has huge coke-bottle glasses and strangely green-tinged skin. He talks much too loudly. He flips through charts, confused.

THIRD DOCTOR
...who was the first to tell you fatigue?

KULL

Dr. J.

THIRD DOCTOR

Sells good pot, that guy.

He goes back to looking through the charts, brow furrowed.
Kull fidgets in his seat.

INT DR. LAYLA'S OFFICE - DAY

Kull sits talking to DR. LAYLA (forties, Indian-American). She is a no-nonsense kind of a lady. Her office door is ajar, and the placard reads, "Dr. Layla Gunther, M.D. - Expert in Infectious Disease." She is just finishing reading Kull's charts.

KULL

So?

DR. LAYLA

You've got the Epstein-Barr virus.

KULL

Oh, no! What the hell is that? It's got to be bad, they named it after somebody.

DR. LAYLA

Relax. Epstein-Barr is what causes mononucleosis, and it is often linked to chronic fatigue syndrome.

KULL

So I've got both?

DR. LAYLA

No.

(then)

Are you ready for the big truth?

KULL

Yes, yes! Believe me, I've been all over Vermont.

DR. LAYLA

You do have Epstein-Barr, that's for sure. Of course, ninety-five percent of the world's population has Epstein-Barr in their system. A majority of people get it as babies, and it appears to be a simple cold or flu.

(MORE)

DR. LAYLA (cont'd)
Then, for the rest of their lives,
the virus just lays dormant.

KULL
I don't get it.

DR. LAYLA
Nor does most of Western Medicine.
It is like chicken pox, as your
other doctor told you.

KULL
She wasn't my doctor.

DR. LAYLA
Whoever she was. See, most doctors
don't like admitting to patients
that they don't know something. But
the truth of the matter is, no one
knows much about the Epstein-Barr
virus. And very little research has
been done. Recently, some people
have started studying the virus to
a greater degree, but it just isn't
at the top of anyone's priority
list.

KULL
Okay.

DR. LAYLA
Your charts say you have the acute
form of the virus, commonly
referred to as mononucleosis.

KULL
So you can get it twice.

DR. LAYLA
Well, yes. I've even seen the rare
case of repeat chicken pox. Viruses
are always mutating, adapting to
the environment.

KULL
Yeah, I read *The Hot Zone*.

DR. LAYLA
Scariest book of all time. Anyway,
mononucleosis, as it's called, can
actually be caused by two separate
viruses. You may have had the other
one in college.

(MORE)

DR. LAYLA (cont'd)
Although, this could just be a
resurgence of the Epstein-Barr.
It's impossible to tell.

(then)

The good news is, you don't have
chronic fatigue. That is a
different form of the virus. It's
just mono. So it won't affect you
forever. It'll run its course. I
can't say for how long, but it will
run its course.

KULL

There's nothing I can do.

DR. LAYLA

Well, I encourage you to get rest
and drink lots of fluids, just like
the flu. But, also like the flu, it
just has to work its way out of
your system.

KULL

And my spleen?

DR. LAYLA

Your spleen. It did feel a bit
enlarged to me, so definitely stay
away from drinking and contact
sports.

(then)

There is a slight chance that the
virus will leap from its acute form
to the chronic form. You'll have to
come in for another blood test in a
few months to be sure.

Kull's face drops, completely defeated.

DR. LAYLA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I can only ultimately
tell you more of the same. Epstein-
Barr, well, it remains a medical
mystery.

KULL

No, no. I do appreciate your
honesty. So many doctors were
talking to me like they had the
definitive answer, and everyone
just disagreed with one another. At
least now I know what the real deal
is.

(MORE)

KULL (cont'd)
 (then)
 It's a load off, actually.

Dr. Layla looks at him sympathetically.

DR. LAYLA
 Take it easy, Kull.

He gets up and shakes her hand.

KULL
 Thank you so much.

DR. LAYLA
 You're welcome.

KULL
 Bye.

DR. LAYLA
 Bye.

He leaves, slow and sad.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - EVENING

Kull and Natasha sit in front of a blazing fire. Kull is staring into the flames, lost in depression. Natasha leans her head on his shoulder, looking at him. She finally puts her hand on his cheek and turns his head towards her.

NATASHA
 Stop this.

KULL
 What am I supposed to do? I'm too tired to be happy.

NATASHA
 Cut the self-pity.

KULL
 I think I'm entitled.

NATASHA
 Because you can't drink?

KULL
 That, and I feel like I've got this low-grade flu all the time. I'm getting sleep. I'm drinking "plenty of fluid".

NATASHA

It's going to take some time.

KULL

Yeah? How am I going to work off my rent?

NATASHA

Carly understands.

KULL

Good for him. I don't.

NATASHA

Why don't you try writing? Get back on the horse?

Kull gets up, goes to the kitchen and gets a glass of water.

KULL

We shouldn't be sitting this close.

NATASHA

Oh, come on.

KULL

I'll get you sick.

(then)

I can't write. I've got no creative juices flowing.

NATASHA

Booze?

KULL

No, no, no! Not booze! That's a lube, sure, but I've got nothing regardless.

He looks over at the corner where the TV used to be.

KULL (CONT'D)

I should have never thrown out the TV. Thought I was being so goddam clever.

NATASHA

TV is evil, Kull, you were right. Why can't you suck it up and get to work?

Kull looks at her.

KULL

Fine. I'll try. I make no promises.

NATASHA

Good.

She gets up to leave.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Now kiss me good-bye.

KULL

I can't! I'll get you sick. You don't want this, believe me.

NATASHA

If I was going to get it, I'd have it already.

KULL

Well, let's not tempt fate any more than we have.

Kull stops and thinks a second, then a light dawns.

KULL

Holy shit! You're the carrier! You gave it to me!

NATASHA

Please! You yourself said they don't really know how people come down with it!

KULL

Every virus needs a carrier! You must be mono's Typhoid Mary!
(then, ludicrously
dramatic)
You've killed me!

NATASHA

Fine. You don't want to kiss me, don't.

She opens the door, and stops just before she steps out.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Get it together, Kull.

KULL

(angrily)
I will!

And then Kull is alone, looking stupid and feeling the same way. He puts his head in his hands.

CROSS FADE TO:

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Kull reads his 101 pages before the fire. As he finishes the last page, he chuckles sardonically. He looks at it for a good long moment, then throws it on the fire.

KULL

I am a terrible writer.

There is a knock at the door. Kull answers it. Carly and Jonathan greet him with a large bouquet of flowers.

KULL (CONT'D)

Wow! For me?

CARLY

Rick took a collection down at the Tavern. Everyone misses the poems.

KULL

Wow.

(then, to Jonathan)

Shouldn't you be at school?

JONATHAN

Had to come up for my Mom's birthday, Carly said you were down in the dumps. So here I am.

KULL

Well, thanks guys. Thanks for stopping by.

Carly sits on the sofa, notices the burning manuscript on the fire.

CARLY

What's that?

KULL

My 101 pages.

JONATHAN

Why?

KULL

I couldn't make any sense of them. Ramblings of a drunk asshole.

CARLY

You're not an asshole.

KULL

Thanks, Carly. I'm not drunk anymore, either.

JONATHAN

This is a blessing in disguise. You need to find a new book to write.

KULL

Yeah, but what? I'm uninspired.

JONATHAN

What used to inspire you?

KULL

Women and drinking. Not necessarily in that order.

CARLY

(as if this has never been spoken before)

You should write what you know.

KULL

Yes, Carly. But all I know of late is how to be terribly tired and spend my day in bed.

JONATHAN

There's got to be something to that.

KULL

"Kull Naps: The Novel". Now a major motion picture from Artisan Entertainment.

Kull goes to the fridge and pulls out a pitcher of water. He pours it into a martini shaker with some ice. He shakes it as if he's making a real martini. He pours the water into a martini glass and puts an olive in it.

KULL (CONT'D)

Virgin Martini, anyone?

CARLY

(sincere)

No thanks. I've got to work tomorrow.

Kull and Jonathan share a glance, smirking.

JONATHAN

Well, we don't want to keep you up.

KULL

I don't really ever sleep too well, to tell you the truth. It's a vicious cycle.

Carly and Jonathan get up and go to the door.

JONATHAN

I don't know. I think the mono thing could work in a book. Maybe a huge outbreak of mono and America ceases to get anything done.

(he thinks, then)

Maybe you'll have to set it in Japan.

Kull laughs.

KULL

Actually, that's not half bad. A start, anyway.

JONATHAN

It's yours. Consider it my get well gift.

KULL

I appreciate it.

CARLY

We'll see ya, Kull.

KULL

Bye boys.

They leave, and Kull has a sip of his fake martini.

EXT ENTON TOWN CENTER - DAY

Kull walks through the town on his way to Mrs. McElhinny's place. He sees Rick sweeping up the front entrance to the Inn. They exchange waves, and Rick call to him:

RICK

When you're feelin' better, the first round's on me!

KULL
(calling back)
Thank you, buddy!

Kull passes George who is putting a garbage bag filled with hair into a dumpster.

GEORGE
Hey, Kull! I heard you quit drinking! Congrats!
(then, a little hurt)
So, who'd you find as a sponsor?

KULL
Don't worry, George. I'm doing it on my own.

GEORGE
What about the twelve steps?

KULL
I'm doing thirteen, actually. Baker's dozen. See, I replace every glass of liquor with a donut. It's delicious.

GEORGE
You know, you're not gonna make it without a program.

KULL
I'm willing to take that risk.

GEORGE
You need someone to provide guidance and motivation.

KULL
I have my spleen for that.

GEORGE
Your spleen?

Kull is already well on his way.

KULL
I'll see you around, George.
(then, to himself)
Crazy town.

INT MRS. MCELHINNY'S HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Kull is really struggling with a feather duster, looking miserable. Mrs. McElhinny follows him around on her wheel chair.

MRS. MCELHINNY

I told you to stop! You look older than I do.

KULL

If I don't clean your place, who will?

MRS. MCELHINNY

My granddaughter will be here next week.

KULL

Do you want to waste quality time with her on cleaning?

She hands him a glass of water.

MRS. MCELHINNY

Drink.

KULL

Thanks.

He sits down in a chair and drinks.

KULL (CONT'D)

God, this mono sucks.

MRS. MCELHINNY

You need to go home and get back in bed. You're ill.

KULL

This is the only thing I've done all week. I'll finish and go back home, I promise.

He closes his eyes.

KULL (CONT'D)

I'll just rest for a second.

He falls asleep, snoring. Mrs. McElhinny sits and watches him sleep, a tender expression on her face.

INT COOP'S DINER - AFTERNOON

Natasha is wiping down the counter. The place is mostly empty, save for three high school kids sitting in a booth. Roy is scraping the grease off the grill. Sara and Karen are clocking out, and pulling off their aprons.

SARA
We'll see ya, Natasha.

NATASHA
Tomorrow.

Sara and Karen exit together, passing Kull on his way in.

KAREN
(frightened)
Ahhhhh! Mono! Mono!

SARA
Get away!

They bolt past Kull. He watches them, amused. He sits at the counter.

NATASHA
What are you doing out of bed?

KULL
I'm going stir crazy.

ROY
You want a water?

KULL
Yeah, Roy, that would be great.

Roy gives it to him.

ROY
I got mono once. From my first
boyfriend, actually.
(then)
You know I'm gay, right?

KULL
Yes, Roy, I've heard.

ROY
Who told you?

NATASHA
Roy, your turn on the restrooms.

ROY

Bummer.

(then)

Oh, wait, I almost forgot! I've got to get to the Tavern early to prepare the dinner special!

NATASHA

What dinner special?

ROY

(making it up)

Long...roast...meat.

NATASHA

Clean the bathrooms, Roy.

ROY

I'm on it.

He grabs a mop and bucket and heads to the back.

NATASHA

You need to go home.

KULL

Listen, Natasha. I'm sorry I've been such a dick these last couple weeks.

NATASHA

It's okay, I know you're sick. And a man.

KULL

You're too good to be true. When I'm better, I'll make it up to you.

NATASHA

Come on, I'll walk you home. I want you in bed and resting so you get better. I can't wait to see how you "make it up to me".

(calling back)

Roy, lock up will ya?

ROY (O.S.)

You bet!

Natasha takes Kull by the hand and leads him out.

EXT PATH THROUGH THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Kull and Natasha walk arm in arm.

KULL
You were right.

NATASHA
I'm always right. What about this time?

KULL
Writing.

NATASHA
What did you come up with?

KULL
It's something Jonathan came up with, actually. An outbreak of mono somewhere that screws everything up. I don't know which angle I want to take with that, but that's the basic thing.

NATASHA
Have you written anything?

KULL
Just notes, really. I'm trying to decide where to set the story, and I can't seem to come up with anyplace real inspiring to me. Jonny mentioned Japan, I did some research, but it didn't grab me. I don't know.

NATASHA
You'll come up with something.

KULL
I'll try, anyway.

NATASHA
There is no try, only do.

KULL
Who said that? Nietzsche or somebody?

NATASHA
Yoda, actually.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

Kull is staring at his computer screen.

He looks out the window, and peers out over the yard and then further out to the tree line and forest beyond.

KULL
How's it going, Enton?

He looks back at his computer, then out the window again.

KULL
Enton.

He types a word, stops. He stares for another moment, then types another word and stops again. Then he types another word, pauses, then types one more. This process progresses, picking up speed until he is furiously writing his book.

KULL
Here we go!

He smiles, eyes determined. The man has found his inspiration.

CROSS FADE TO:

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT

MONTAGE

In a series of cross fades, the following images:

Kull rapidly typing away, the word processor on page 50. Then it's on 75. Then 101. Then 102. Kull coughs up a growl of victory, and plows forward. Page 110, 112, 140.

Kull paces in front of the fire, reading a print-out of what he's written thus far. He is enjoying it. He stops at a page, realizing it needs a change. He rushes over to the computer, and sits down to fix it.

Kull types and types and types. The colors of autumn have gone brown, the leaves falling to the ground. Winds pick up outside, blowing the leaves around the yard. Kull does not notice.

Kull paces in front of the fire, reading a much thicker print-out than the one before.

Outside, winter has come. The trees are bare of leaves, and the landscape appears starkly cold. Kull types a sentence, stops. He stares at the computer screen.

END MONTAGE

SMASH CUT TO:

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Kull jumps up from the computer, arms raised in victory. He hollers like the last remaining survivor on a battle field. Then he starts doing insanely fast laps around his sofa, jumping up and down and squealing with happiness.

The phone rings. Kull answers.

KULL

Hello?

He listens for a moment, nodding.

KULL (CONT'D)

That's all right, Dr. Layla. Just have to wait for it to run its course. I'm living healthy, that's all I can do. Okay, thanks so much. Bye.

He hangs up. He starts doing happy laps again.

CUT TO:

EXT PATH THROUGH THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Kull is tearing through the woods in the same manner he was just running around his couch. He is all bundled up for the winter cold.

CUT TO:

INT COOP'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Kull bursts into the diner. Out of breath, he looks around for Natasha. He spies her dropping off food at a table. He runs over to her, picks her up, and spins her around.

NATASHA

Whoa!

She laughs.

KULL
 (putting her down)
 Guess what?

NATASHA
 You finished.

KULL
 Yep!

NATASHA
 (to the restaurant)
 Kull has finished his novel!

Everyone applauds. A SMALL CHILD comes up behind Kull, and tugs on his coat. Kull turns around and crouches to talk to the child.

KULL
 How ya doin', little man?

SMALL CHILD
 You write any more poems?

He pronounces poems, "poeeeeems".

KULL
 (apologetic)
 Oh, no, I've been too busy with my book.

SMALL CHILD
 You suck.

Kull gets up as the kid walks rudely off. He turns to look at Natasha, who is all smiles.

NATASHA
 You can't please everyone.

She goes to kiss him on the mouth, but he gives her a cheek.

KULL
 Woops. I finished the novel, but not the mono.

Natasha does her best to hide her agitation. Sara walks by, Kull stops her.

KULL (CONT'D)
 Sara, your dad still working for Fed-Ex?

SARA
Yeah, even after *Castaway*.

KULL
You think he could get me a deal on
sending off some manuscripts?

SARA
How many?

KULL
Forty.

She stares at him for a moment.

SARA
I'll ask.

She goes back to work.

KULL
Well, it's all just a waiting game
now.

NATASHA
I'm sure it will be no time.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

Carly sits in the chair, while Kull is laid out on the couch.

KULL
I should be able to get back to
work soon. I still have it, I
guess, but I don't feel too bad.
Mostly just tired. No fevers or
dizziness or anything like that.

CARLY
No rush. It's the slow season.
Unless it snows, then I may need
someone to shovel walkways when I'm
plowing. But if you're not up to
it, that's okay. There are always
high school kids.

KULL
We'll see, I guess.

There is a knock at the door. Kull gets up and answers. A
postwoman, TRUDY (late twenties, French-American), gives him
a handful of letters.

KULL
Thanks, Trudy.

She smiles and leaves. Carly strains his neck to watch her go.

CARLY
You think she would go out with me?

KULL
Trudy?

He sits down, and opens the first letter.

CARLY
Yeah, I like her. Always on time.

Kull looks at the first letter, frowns, and throws it aside.

CARLY (CONT'D)
I dig a woman in uniform.

Kull opens the next letter, doesn't like it, throws it aside as well. He opens every letter this way as Carly talks, becoming more and more frustrated with what he's reading.

CARLY (CONT'D)
You don't know if she has a boyfriend? I don't want her to think I'm just some sleaze who has a thing for postal workers, you know? How should I ask her? Probably not a good idea to do it when she's working, I'll have to get her number. What's her last name?

Kull is out of mail, and is staring at the pile of opened letters on the coffee table.

CARLY (CONT'D)
What?

KULL
They won't read my book. No one will. It's "unsolicited". A legal thing.
(then, yelling)
I hate the law!

CARLY
I'm sorry, man.

They sit in silence, Carly uncomfortable while Kull stares into space, angry.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kull is alone, reading. The phone rings, he answers.

KULL
Hello? Oh, hey Jonathan, how's school?

He listens for a moment, then sits bolt upright.

KULL (CONT'D)
Sure, I can do yard work for a weekend. I'll do whatever I have to, to meet a publisher! What's his name? Wait! Let me get a pen.

Kull goes to the kitchen table, grabs a pen and paper.

KULL (CONT'D)
Okay, shoot.
(then, repeating)
Ernie Maysles. And his number?

CUT TO:

EXT ERNIE MAYSLES WEEKEND HOME - MORNING

Kull goes up the stone walkway leading to the front door, his manuscript wrapped in brown paper under his arm. The house is a huge old rustic mansion. Vines grow all over the front, and the landscaping seems a bit unkempt. Kull knocks on the door. BLONDIE (late twenties), obviously not a real blonde, opens the door.

BLONDIE
You must be Jonathan's substitute.

KULL
Yeah, he's sorry he couldn't make it. He had a big thesis due, I think. I'm Kull.

BLONDIE
Blondie.

Kull pauses, tries to hide his amusement.

KULL
Blondie? Is that your given name?

BLONDIE
No, but it's legal.

KULL
Cool, cool name. What made you change?

BLONDIE
I hated my parents. I love Deborah Harry.

KULL
Why not Debbie, then? I mean, Blondie was the name of the band.

BLONDIE
What?

KULL
Nothing, nothing. Can I come in?

BLONDIE
Sure, sure.

INT HUGE FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Kull looks around, the place is unbelievable. You could fit two or three of his apartments in this one hallway.

BLONDIE
You have a lot of experience as a house boy?

KULL
(lying)
Oh, yeah, yeah. That's how Jonathan and I met. We run in the same house boy circles.

BLONDIE
I guess you had a long drive?

KULL
Twelve or so hours, but I don't mind. Thrill of the open road, you know. And I owed Jonny. So.

ERNIE MAYSLES, an elderly but sprightly WASP type, bursts into the hallway.

ERNIE
The house boy here?

BLONDIE
Yes, Mr. Maysles.

This is obviously very exciting for Ernie, and he seems to almost dance.

ERNIE
There's a lot of work to be done!
Let's get to that yard!

KULL
You bet. Is there somewhere I can put this?

He holds out his manuscript.

BLONDIE
I'll take it.

She looks at it suspiciously.

BLONDIE (CONT'D)
What is this?

KULL
Just something I was hoping Mr. Maysles could take a look at it.

BLONDIE
(disapproving)
Are you a writer?

KULL
Well, yeah, but...I'm a house boy first.

ERNIE
(throwing a tantrum)
Yard! Yard! Yard!

BLONDIE
(to Kull)
You better go. I'll take care of this.

Ernie grabs Kull by the hand and leads him out.

ERNIE
Come on, Jonathan!

KULL
I'm Kull.

EXT EXPANSIVE BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie leads Kull by the hand through the huge yard, which is on the bank of a big river.

KULL

So, Mr. Maysles, I was wondering if you might read something for me.

ERNIE

What's that?

KULL

I wrote a book.

Ernie stops, looks at him.

ERNIE

I suppose you want it published.

KULL

Well, that would be nice, but I'd be happy just getting a critique from someone of your stature.

Ernie gives him a death stare, then starts back down toward the river. They get to the edge of the yard, where the forest begins. Much of the woods next to the yard is made up of sapling trees and underbrush.

ERNIE

I want to clear this back about twenty feet. Make my yard bigger.

Kull looks behind him, at the rest of the gigantic yard.

KULL

Okay.

ERNIE

Here you go.

He picks up a handsaw from the grass and hands it to Kull. It is very old and rusty. Kull looks at it.

KULL

How far along the yard do you want this to happen?

ERNIE

(pointing)

From here all the way down to the river will be good.

Kull takes a deep breath, looks at the saw again.

KULL
This could take some time.

ERNIE
You'll get it done by night fall.

KULL
Oh, yeah, sure.
(then)
You don't have a chain saw, do you?

Ernie is already on his way back to the house.

ERNIE
Not really.

KULL
(to himself)
Not really?

Kull reluctantly approaches the first sapling tree. He begins to cut. The tree is healthy, so cutting it with such a dull instrument is an incredibly arduous process.

KULL
Bastard better read my book.

CROSS FADE TO:

EXT EXPANSIVE BACK YARD - DUSK

Dusk has just arrived. Kull has barely made a dent in the trees and brush, a small pile of what he's cleared on the grass. Ernie approaches, mad as hell. He is carrying a duffle bag.

ERNIE
What the hell have you been doing
all day, house boy?

KULL
I'm sorry, Mr. Maysles, I can't
move any faster with this saw.

ERNIE
(yelling)
Aw, come on!

He unzips the duffle, and pulls out a shiny, new chain saw. He starts the saw, and proceeds to knock down the trees all the way to the riverbank. Kull watches as Ernie finishes the job in no time flat.

Ernie charges back up to Kull.

ERNIE
(shaking a finger)
I have a heart condition!

Ernie storms back to the house. Crushed, Kull follows.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Dinner's at seven! Lights out at eight!

KULL
(unbelieving)
Lights out?

ERNIE
Move it, house boy!

INT SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kull is lying in a tiny twin bed, reading a dusty old book. A small book case is on one wall next to a small chest of drawers. Outside of this, the only other piece of furniture is a night stand with a lamp.

The door is open. Blondie appears in the door, and gives a little knock. She has his manuscript. Kull looks up at her. She is wearing a very short and revealing nightie. Kull is immediately on his guard.

BLONDIE
You're real lucky.

KULL
(unsure)
How's that?

BLONDIE
I was bored, I read your book.

KULL
Oh. What did you think?

She comes in and sits on the foot of the bed.

BLONDIE
I can't believe I liked it.

KULL
Thanks. I guess.

BLONDIE
No, I really liked it.

KULL
Really?

BLONDIE
Really.

KULL
You think you can get Mr. Maysles
to read it?

BLONDIE
Ernie doesn't read.

KULL
He's a publisher.

BLONDIE
In name only. I don't know if you
noticed, but he's completely
insane.

KULL
Yeah, I was wondering about that.

BLONDIE
Well, Maysles' Publishing is run by
someone else in reality. His
assistant. Me.

KULL
So...

BLONDIE
So, I'm going to take this back to
the city with me, and show it to my
people. Or at least, Ernie will
show it to his people and tell them
how much he liked it.

KULL
(stammering)
I...I don't know what to say.

BLONDIE
Don't say anything. I'm not making
any promises, here. But I've got a
good feeling.

(MORE)

BLONDIE (cont'd)
 You should be proud of what you
 wrote, you know.

(then)

I don't suppose you'd like to
 accompany me to the kitchen for a
 bottle of champagne?

Kull is at a loss.

KULL

I would love to, but I can't. I
 mean, I can't drink. I have mono.

BLONDIE

Oh my God. Like in the book. The
 kissing bug.

She stares at Kull, obviously wanting him to attack her.

KULL

Well, in reality they don't know
 what causes it. Kissing is one of
 many theories.

BLONDIE

Okay, okay. You must have a girl
 back home, huh?

KULL

Yeah, I'm afraid so.

BLONDIE

I respect that. I do.

She gets up and moves toward the door. Kull watches her
 go...she *is* pretty hot. She stops at the door.

BLONDIE (CONT'D)

We'll have that champagne someday
 when you're feeling better.

KULL

Yeah.

(then)

Hey, Blondie. Thanks a lot.

BLONDIE

Of course. You're not really a
 house boy are you?

KULL

No.

(then, with some pride)

I'm a writer.

BLONDIE

Yes, you are.

(then)

Good night.

KULL

Good night.

She closes the door behind her. Kull sits, stunned.

INT COOP'S DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

It is snowing outside. Kull sits in a booth with Natasha. Roy is cleaning up the grill.

NATASHA

(mid-conversation)

That is great news.

KULL

I don't know, sounds too good to be true.

NATASHA

Well, if it gets published, then it's not. Is it?

KULL

I guess not.

NATASHA

So. You gonna let me read it?

KULL

Of course! You want to?

NATASHA

Yeah, I do.

(then)

Let's go back to your place, start a fire, and celebrate.

KULL

I'd love that.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - MORNING

Kull wakes up in bed next to Natasha. She is sleeping with a serene smile on her face. She wakes up as he watches.

NATASHA

So what's it like?

KULL

What?

NATASHA

Remembering what we did last night?

KULL

It feels great. You over that complex?

NATASHA

I will be for some time. Never heard a man make that kind of noise before.

KULL

Probably gave the neighbors pause.
(then, realizing)
I hope Carly didn't hear.

NATASHA

I think most of the town probably heard.

Kull groans.

KULL

Now, if you get sick...

NATASHA

I know, I know. It's my own damn fault.

KULL

As long as we're clear.

There is a knock on the door.

KULL

Who's coming around this early?
(then, calling out)
Hold on a minute.

He gets up and puts on a robe. Natasha watches him with a smile. Kull opens the door. Blondie barges in.

KULL

(taken aback)
Hi, Blondie.

Blondie takes off her coat, scarf, and hat. She is wearing a ludicrously sexy dress. Natasha, startled, sits up in the bed, holding the blankets over her chest.

Blondie sits down on the couch, and pulls some contracts out of her bag. She lays them out on the coffee table.

BLONDIE
You'll need to sign these.

NATASHA
Um, hello.

Blondie turns to see Natasha.

BLONDIE
Oh, you must be the girlfriend. Hi.

Natasha starts getting dressed under the covers.

KULL
What's going on?

BLONDIE
(with a huge smile)
You're being published!

Kull looks over at Natasha, who is already putting her shoes on.

KULL
That's great.

BLONDIE
For a first time writer, we pay forty grand. Not bad. But if it's a success, guess what it'll be for your follow-up?

KULL
I have no idea.

BLONDIE
Two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars. In some circles, that's considered a quarter of a million.

KULL
That's incredible.

Natasha is now all bundled up for the cold outdoors.

KULL (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

NATASHA
I'm late for work. And you've got business, anyway.

She gives him a hasty kiss.

KULL

Wait, wait. Don't forget the book.

He grabs a copy of his manuscript off the kitchen table and hands it to Natasha.

NATASHA

Thanks. Come by later.

KULL

Okay.

She leaves, and he closes the door behind her.

BLONDIE

Cute girl.

KULL

Yeah, she is.

BLONDIE

Well. You are going to be a professional writer from now on. I have no doubt that *Great American Novel* is going to be a smash.

(then)

I don't suppose you're well enough for that champagne yet?

KULL

I don't think so, no.

She pulls a bottle of expensive champagne out of her bag, as well as two glasses.

BLONDIE

Well, how about you pour me a glass, and I'll celebrate for the both of us?

(then)

Come on, I've been on a plane for two hours.

She raises her eyebrows at Kull.

INT COOP'S DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

Natasha is cleaning up a table. Kull walks in, and moves right for her. The copy of Kull's book is on the counter top.

KULL

Natasha.

Natasha does not answer. She doesn't even look at him.

KULL (CONT'D)

There is nothing going on between me and Blondie. So stop it.

Natasha still does not acknowledge him.

KULL (CONT'D)

She got me published, so I have to be cordial. Beyond that, I have no feelings for her. She's a nice girl, but not my thing.

(then)

You're my thing.

Still no response.

KULL (CONT'D)

Give me a break!

Natasha slams down a bottle of ketchup in anger, and the bottom cracks off, sending ketchup all over the table and floor. She looks at what's she's done.

NATASHA

I didn't mean to do that.

Kull chuckles.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Don't you fucking laugh at me.

KULL

(stung)

What's wrong, Natasha?

She just stares at him, full of hate.

KULL (CONT'D)

Jesus! Listen to me! I did not do anything with that woman!

NATASHA

You honestly think that's what this is about?

KULL

Well, what is it then?

Natasha goes to the counter and picks up Kull's manuscript.

NATASHA
I read your book.

KULL
I'm confused.

NATASHA
Don't play dumb.

KULL
I'm not!

NATASHA
Chapter Six. Tatiana? The owner and operator of the local bed and breakfast?

KULL
Yeah, so?

NATASHA
You think I wouldn't see through that?

KULL
See through what, for God's sake?

NATASHA
That's me! Thin veneer, asshole!
Oh, and by the way, I do not hide my issues with my father behind my "sexual prowess"!

Cooper wheels into the room and stops when he hears this. His brow furrows. Kull looks at him sheepishly.

NATASHA (CONT'D)
For all I care, Kull, you can fuck whoever you want, Blondie or otherwise! Because I'm done with you!

Kull stands in shock, unable to speak.

NATASHA (CONT'D)
That's right! GO FUCK BLONDIE!

She storms off. Kull is left standing, mouth agape. He looks at Cooper, who shrugs.

COOPER
Not such a bad deal.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

Kull is sitting at the computer, writing. He wears a sad expression. He stops his work, picks up the phone.

KULL
(into phone)
I know you're there. Pick up. Pick up. Natasha. Natasha. Natasha. How many more days are you going to drag this out? Talk to me.

He listens to silence for a moment, then hangs up the phone. He looks at an empty martini glass sitting on the table.

KULL
I'd give anything for a new spleen.

There is knock at the door, and he gets up to answer it. Trudy greets him with a large package.

TRUDY
You got some real heavy priority mail here.

Kull signs for it, and puts it on the kitchen floor.

KULL
Thanks, Trudy.

TRUDY
Can I ask you a question?

KULL
Of course. Anything.

TRUDY
Does Carly have a girlfriend?

Kull smiles a touch.

KULL
No, no he doesn't.

TRUDY
(suddenly awkward)
Oh, okay. Thanks.

KULL
No problem. See ya.

TRUDY

Bye.

Kull closes the door after her. He opens up his package. There are several hard cover copies of his book, *The Great American Novel*. On top of them is a manila envelope. He opens it up, and several news clippings fall out, as well as a note from Blondie.

The note says: "Congrats! Across the board glowing reviews! I told you this would happen! It hits the stores tomorrow, and it's sure to be a best seller. I've already set up some PR stuff, I'll be accompanying a news crew to Enton at the end of the week. Can you call me with the number at the Inn? Information didn't have it. Yours, Blondie."

KULL

Smells like perfume.

Then he looks out the window.

KULL (CONT'D)

Jesus, Natasha, what are you doing to me?

EXT THE ENTON INN - DAY

A small news crew is set up in front of the Inn. Two chairs are set up on the grass, lights and cameras focused on them. Blondie is standing off to the side. Kull is led by a STAGE HAND to the chair on the left.

STAGE HAND

Love your book. So true about small town life.

KULL

Oh, thanks.

STAGE HAND

Ms. Tizzano will be here momentarily.

Kull sits down. A SOUND GUY immediately fixes him with a lapel microphone.

KULL

(a little intimidated)
Thanks.

A news van is parked at the curb. The side door slides open, and MS. TIZZANO (thirties) steps out, mic in hand.

She is dressed in a sharp suit, and has huge hair, reminiscent of eighties fashion.

MS. TIZZANO

Let's do this, I've got a two o'clock in Manhattan.

She sits down in the chair without even a glance at Kull. He goes to say hello, but he doesn't get the chance.

MS. TIZZANO (CONT'D)

In five, four, three, two...

The lights go on, and Kull squints. The camera is rolling. And Ms. Tizzano is all smiles, Kull suddenly her best buddy in the whole wide world.

MS. TIZZANO (CONT'D)

We're here in front of the Enton Inn and Tavern, favorite watering hole of the hot new novelist, Kull Dickerson. His book, *Great American Novel*, is already number seven on the New York Times Best Seller List.

(she turns to Kull)

Impressive.

KULL

Thank you.

MS. TIZZANO

(to the camera)

For those who don't know, Mr. Dickerson's book is about an epidemic of chronic fatigue that sweeps through the population of fictional Agawam, Maine. The twist? Not a whole heck of a lot changes.

(then, to Kull)

You have written an incredible allegory condemning small town life.

KULL

Well, of course any work is open to interpretation, but I did not intend to condemn anything. It's not my place.

MS. TIZZANO

Certainly it was at least a warning.

KULL

I'm sorry?

MS. TIZZANO

Warding people away from living life in a social cocoon. Important stuff.

KULL

I prefer to think of it as a simple story. It's just a novel, ultimately, and to give it too much import might be a bit on the silly side. I wasn't aiming to change the world.

Ms. Tizzano looks annoyed, her expression saying, "Are you going to work with me here, or what?"

MS. TIZZANO

I appreciate your modesty. But anything raking in this much money its first week that's not written by Michael Crichton is in fact important.

KULL

(somewhat frightened)

Okay.

One of Kull's books comes flying at him from behind the cameras. It just misses hitting him in the face.

MS. TIZZANO

Holy Moses!

George steps in front of the cameras, and lords over Kull.

GEORGE

You think the twelve steps are a joke? You think it's just some hokey low-level religion?

(then)

The most insulting thing is writing me as the guy running the soda fountain. "Soda jerk". I get your meaning, Mr. Big Writer Man. Well, I am not a jerk. I don't think so, my friends don't think so, and my wife doesn't think so.

(and under his breath)

The money grubber.

He turns to leave, then thinks of one more thing to say.

GEORGE

I've been sober a whole lot longer
than you, and don't you forget it.

He storms off. Ms. Tizzano is pleased with the drama.

MS. TIZZANO

Well, if that kind of controversy
rages from coast to coast, we can
expect *Great American Novel* to be
on best seller lists for months to
come! Woo!

She laughs directly into camera. Kull stares off in the
direction George went.

MS. TIZZANO (CONT'D)

(smile immediately
disappearing)

Okay, that's a cut.

She gets up from her chair and nearly sprints for the van.

MS. TIZZANO (CONT'D)

Move!

The crew disassembles the lights, sound equipment and cameras
at lightning speed. The Stage Hand taps Kull on the shoulder.
Kull gets up and the Stage Hand takes the chair. All of a
sudden, Kull is alone.

Kull looks around and sees Mae and June standing across the
street. Mae has a copy of his book. They both flip him the
bird.

INT DEUCE AND SONS' APPLE STAND - DAY

Kull comes into the apple stand, and Carly is ringing up a
jug of cider for Dr. J. Dr. J is smoking a joint. Kull hands
Carly an envelope with some cash.

KULL

Haven't seen you in awhile. Thought
I'd drop by the rent.

Carly takes the envelope and tosses it aside.

CARLY

(dismissive)

Yeah, thanks.

KULL
Okay, what'd I do to you?

CARLY
(as if just asked a stupid
question)
The topless flower delivery girl?

KULL
You think I wrote you as a topless
flower delivery girl?

CARLY
No, Trudy thinks you wrote *her* that
way. And she thinks somehow I put
the idea in your head.
(then)
You killed whatever chance I had.

KULL
She's a postman...person. Not a
flower delivery girl!

CARLY
Not the way she sees it.

He gives Dr. J his change and heads into the back. Kull can
only watch him go. Dr. J takes a deep drag on his joint.

DR. J
I am not a quack.

He exits proudly.

EXT COOP'S DINER - AFTERNOON

Kull walks up to the entrance, a copy of his book under his
arm. Roy, Sara and Karen step outside, blocking his way.

SARA
She doesn't want to see you.

KAREN
And neither do we, for that matter.

KULL
Not you, too?

SARA
Why sewer workers? Do we smell?

ROY

Maybe he thinks it's because the food you serve to people is like raw sewage! Which would make me the sewer.

KULL

I assure all of you, those characters have nothing to do with you.

They don't budge. Cooper comes around the corner of the diner.

COOPER

Karen?

KAREN

Get away from me, Coop! People can't see me with you, because apparently--

(she yells at Kull)

I'M A BIG DICK TEASE!

COOPER

(to Kull, exasperated)

Look what you've done to me!

KULL

(losing patience)

Take it easy, Cooper. Karen, any judgement you think I made on you through my novel is really just an insecurity you have about yourself. It has nothing to do with me or my work. That goes for all of you. Now kindly step aside.

They still won't move out of the way.

KULL

(at the end of his rope)

If you don't move, I'll make the four of you the main characters in my next book!

They glance at each other for a moment, considering the validity of Kull's threat. Then they get out of the way. Kull yanks open the door and goes inside.

INT COOP'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

Natasha looks at Kull as he barges in.

NATASHA

We're closed.

KULL

Oh, shut up and listen. A writer has to pull from his personal experiences to give a work vibrancy, okay? Most of what I know is Enton, so of course there are similarities. But that's it!

NATASHA

Bullshit. Everyone feels the way I do. You went too far.

Kull tosses the book on the counter.

KULL

Open to chapter six.

She looks at him blankly.

KULL (CONT'D)

Open to chapter six! That's the chapter that pissed you off so much, isn't it?

She opens the book reluctantly to chapter six.

KULL (CONT'D)

What's it called?

NATASHA

(reading)

"The Church".

KULL

What's the one thing this town doesn't have? A church! Do you understand?

NATASHA

I think you're just hiding behind your "artistic license" or whatever you want to call it.

KULL

I'm not. Natasha, I love you. I will only ever love you, no one else.

(pause, then)

(MORE)

KULL (cont'd)

Even if you really carry through on this threat to never talk to me again.

NATASHA

Too bad for you.

KULL

Goddammit. You are impossible.

NATASHA

Is everyone impossible? Is everyone in this little town you consider a virus impossible?

KULL

I don't think Enton is a virus! Listen. The few years of my life in the city, I learned only one thing: I don't belong there, I belong here.

NATASHA

You might want to rethink that.

KULL

Just hear me out, Natasha, and I'll never bother you again, okay?

(then)

Back in the city, I used to go to this slam poetry club every weekend, just to see what all the other poets might be up to. One time, there was this contest, the winners awarded according to the audience reaction. There was one guy who wrote angry words about how tough it was to be a black man. Another guy wrote angry words about how tough it was to be gay. A woman wrote angry words about how hard it was to be a woman, how men sucked shit and all that. The fourth poet was this guy from Thailand, had a bit of an accent. He wrote poems about anything from simple romantic notions to hope springing eternal. His words were constructed perfectly, and they took me on this magic carpet ride of image. Incredible. *Every round of the contest, he lost.* That's when I realized how alone I was: I was, in fact, the minority in the city.

(MORE)

KULL (cont'd)
 That one poet and me. And I came on
 back here, where I could go ahead
 and be whatever I wanted. And I got
 to be a good old-fashioned drunk
 without ever being alone. Only
 here.

Natasha just looks back at him, appearing unaffected.

KULL (CONT'D)
 (after a thought)
 All good things, I guess.

Kull, defeated, gives her a little wave good-bye, and starts
 to leave. Natasha stops him.

NATASHA
 You should know, I was down at the
 library talking to Patricia
 yesterday.

KULL
 And?

NATASHA
 (digging in the knife)
 She isn't going to put your book
 out. She thinks it's trash.

Kull has no response. He exits.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

Kull comes through the door, takes off his jacket and winter
 cap, and checks his answering machine. He hears Jonathan's
 voice:

JONATHAN (O.S.)
 Hey, Kull! Read your book, loved
 it! Funny as hell! Congratulations
 on all your success.

The message ends with a beep.

KULL
 Thanks, Jonny. You and me are all
 alone in a strange and horrible
 universe.

Kull puts on some jazz, sits on his kitchen counter, stares
 out the window.

KULL
 It's going to be a long winter.

EXT ENTON TOWN CENTER - DAY

Bundled up not just for the cold, but so as not to be recognized, Kull walks through town. He passes several townspeople, and the minute they know who he is, they scream obscenities at him. Kull goes into the Enton Apothecary.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - LATER

Kull is coming through the door, his phone ringing. He picks it up just as the answering machine is going into its message.

KULL

Hello and thank you for calling the most hated man in Enton.

(he listens)

Oh, hey, Blondie.

(he listens some more)

Well, thank God, I really need to move. I'm already about a hundred pages into it, and I'm gearing up to get back at it. Pretty decent, I think. Bye.

Kull hangs up, takes off his winter garments, and sits down at the computer.

KULL (CONT'D)

My ticket out of hell.

He begins to work. The phone rings again, and he considers letting the machine get it, but then answers.

KULL (CONT'D)

Hello? Oh, how you doing, Doctor Layla?

(he listens)

Are you serious?

(his face lights up)

Then, I'm fine? I mean, my spleen and everything? I've been feeling fine and everything but you said that could be deceptive...

Kull listens as the doctor assures him, and then he starts jumping up and down in triumph.

KULL (CONT'D)

(still into phone)

Thank you, Doctor! Woo!

(catching himself)

Oh, I'm sorry, too loud, too loud.

(MORE)

KULL (CONT'D)

(then)

Holy shit! I've got to go. Talk to
you later, doc!

He hangs up. He grabs his scarf, but is too hurried to get all bundled up again. He runs out the door, leaving it swinging.

EXT ENTON TOWN CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Kull runs past the Inn, George's barber shop, the Enton Apothecary, the post office, the bank.

KULL

(as he passes)

Hello Enton Inn and Tavern! Hello
George's barber shop! Hello drug
store! Hello post office with the
topless flower girl! Hello bank!

He stops in front of the Enton Liquor Store. He looks up at the sign like he has just found his lost religion.

KULL

Hello, Enton Liquors!

He goes in to the store, and comes out minutes later with two huge shopping bags under his arms. He sprints back towards his apartment building.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Kull is dancing around the room while mixing up a martini. He's got some twangy country music blaring on the stereo. When he's done shaking it up, he pours the martini into a pint glass.

KULL

I'm going to get so fucked up!

(then)

Time to get some writing done.

He has a big slurp of his drink, and sits down at the computer. He twists around in his chair, looking at the screen with a new vigor. He has another sip of his giant martini. He begins to type.

CROSS FADE TO:

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - THE NEXT MORNING

Kull is passed out in front of his computer. He wakes up with a jerk.

KULL
 (confused)
 Huh?

He gets up, looks in the mirror. He looks like hell. He is overjoyed.

KULL (CONT'D)
 Ladies and gentleman, I am
 completely hungover!

He goes to the kitchen, makes himself some Alka-Seltzer. He enjoys this ritual immensely. He then sits down at his computer, hits a button, and the screen fades in to reveal a blinking cursor on a blank page. The blank page is page 102. He squints at the number.

KULL (CONT'D)
 Uh-oh.

He stares at it a moment more.

KULL (CONT'D)
 I need a drink.

He pulls a beer out of the fridge. He pops the top and has a swill. He looks at the computer again. Then he grabs a piece of paper and a pen, and begins to jot down a poem.

EXT PATH THROUGH THE WOODS - LATER

Kull has his scarf on, but that and a sweater is the only added layer for warmth. His nose is red, but probably not from the cold. He dances down the path like a man just fallen in love. He pulls his flask from his back pocket and has a drink.

The Out-of-towner from the first scene is coming from the opposite direction.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 Hello.

KULL
 Hi, there, sir.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
 (like an excited tourist)
 Hey, I know you!

KULL

Yeah, okay. Whatever I wrote,
you're most assuredly
misinterpreting it.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

What?

KULL

My writing?

OUT-OF-TOWNER

I don't know what you mean.

KULL

How is it that you know me?

OUT-OF-TOWNER

You're the town drunk!

The Out-of-towner suddenly looks sheepish: he can't believe he just blurted that out. Kull grins big.

KULL

The one and only.

(then)

It's been awhile since I had that
title. You from out of town?

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Yeah, Los Angeles. I came out about
six months ago, liked it so much I
came back. Absolutely beautiful
land.

Kull looks around at the trees, and takes a deep breath.

KULL

Yes, yes it is. Don't know how you
can tease yourself with just a
visit.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

I'd move here if there was work,
believe me.

KULL

There are a hundred ways to get by
around here, my friend, just got to
figure 'em out is all.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

I'll take that under advisement.

KULL

Please do. Well, I must bid you good day, as I have a very important delivery to make.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Nice talkin' to you.

KULL

Please, have one for the road.

He offers his flask. The Out-of-towner takes it from him in an act of politeness.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Bottoms up, I guess.

He takes a very small swig, and hands the flask back to Kull.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Appreciate it.

KULL

Of course.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

See you at the Tavern?

KULL

Probably not, sad to say. I am no longer welcome there.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Really? One bender too many?

KULL

Actually, too few. Up until yesterday, I had quit drinking.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

(looking at Kull
strangely)

Oh.

KULL

Good-bye.

OUT-OF-TOWNER

Bye.

Kull goes on his merry way, the Out-of-towner quizzically watching him go.

OUT-OF-TOWNER
Weird fucking people around here.

EXT COOP'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

A woodpile leans up against the side of the diner. Cooper is putting a few of the fire logs on his lap. Kull sneaks up behind him, quiet as a mouse. He sticks a piece of paper, marked "Natasha", into the fold of Coop's winter cap. Coop does not notice. Kull sneaks back the way he came.

After Kull is well gone, Coop suddenly jerks his head around, startled.

INT COOP'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Cooper wheels into the diner with his firewood. Natasha sees the piece of paper in his hat.

NATASHA
What's that, Dad?

COOPER
What's what?

NATASHA
There's a piece of paper sticking
out of your hat.

Cooper takes the paper out, and reads the name. He jerks his head back around, now very paranoid. He then hands the paper to his daughter.

COOPER
It's for you.

Natasha takes it, and opens up the paper.

COOPER (CONT'D)
I'm going to make a fire.

He exits to the back, looking around suspiciously as he goes.

Natasha stands and reads the poem, engrossed. As soon as she is done, she does her best to blow it off with a sardonic shake of her head. She tucks it in her apron.

CUT TO:

INT COOP'S DINER - A FEW DAYS LATER

Natasha is sitting at the counter and chatting with Roy, who is making a whole lot of bacon.

The chalkboard on the wall reads, "Today's special: Free Bacon". Cooper wheels in with a pile of wood on his lap. He passes by Natasha.

NATASHA

Dad. Stop.

He stops and looks at her.

COOPER

What?

She pulls another paper with her name on it off the back of the chair. Cooper looks at it, horrified.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Who the hell taped that there? Why does this keep happening?!

NATASHA

(she knows who)
I've got an idea.

COOPER

(panicked)
I didn't see anyone! What the hell?
There's a goddam ninja in Enton.

NATASHA

(shushing)
Go make your fire.

Cooper leaves, looking around suspiciously. Natasha reads the poem, then puts it in her pocket.

CUT TO:

INT COOP'S DINER - A COUPLE WEEKS LATER

Natasha is taking an order at a booth. Cooper comes in with his fire wood, a piece of paper clacking in one of his wheels like a baseball card in a bike spoke.

COOPER

What the hell is that goddam noise?

NATASHA

It's another piece of paper with my name on it, what do you think?

COOPER

Three weeks! Three weeks he's been sticking paper on me!

(MORE)

COOPER (cont'd)
I check for him, see nothing, and
he manages to do it every time!

Natasha looks at him with good-humored sympathy. Cooper takes out the paper and gives it to Natasha, then he heads to the back of the diner.

COOPER (CONT'D)
I hate being old.

Natasha laughs, and then opens up the poem.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - DAY

Outside, spring has sprung. The trees are green, flowers bloom, birds flutter about. Kull is looking out the window, a mint julep in hand.

KULL
Perfect.

The phone rings. Kull answers.

KULL
Happy, happy spring.

A voice on the other end is so loud, Kull has to hold the receiver away from his ear.

KULL (CONT'D)
I know, Blondie. But I just can't
get past 101.

She yells even louder, he holds the receiver even further away.

KULL (CONT'D)
(yelling back)
No, I don't want to lose a quarter
million, but that doesn't change
the fact that I can't get past 101!
And it's too damn gorgeous outside
to concentrate!
(then)
And I'm terribly horny. Spring
makes me horny.

She hangs up on him, and he's left with a dial tone. He hangs up.

KULL (CONT'D)
Can't rush an artist.

He has a gulp of mint julep and sits down to write a poem.

INT CIDER MILL - DAY

Carly is taking apart his cider press, cleaning various parts and replacing others. Kull appears in the large barn doorway. Carly looks up and sees Kull, but does not stop his work.

CARLY

What can I do for you?

KULL

Forgive me.

CARLY

You shit on your own town, Kull.

KULL

No, I didn't. At least, I didn't mean to. I was attempting to shit on the rest of the world, in fact, for not being like Enton.

(then)

Guess I'm not much of a novelist.

Carly stops and looks at him.

CARLY

No, you're not.

Kull pulls out his flask.

KULL

But I'm a helluva drunk. Want a break?

CARLY

I don't have time.

Carly goes back to tinkering with the press. Kull pulls from the flask, then puts it back in his pocket.

KULL

I don't know that my follow-up novel is going to work out. I'm going to need a way to make rent.

(baiting Carly)

Whatever shall I do?

Carly sighs, and then looks at Kull.

CARLY

Grab that spray bottle and some rags.

Kull does so.

CARLY (CONT'D)

We need to get all the build-up off these parts.

Kull gets to work, cleaning the press parts. He and Carly both work side-by-side, in silence.

INT KULL'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kull is reading on the couch, a snifter of cognac on the coffee table. His door is wide open, a breeze blowing through the room. He appears content. Natasha appears in the doorway, and Kull turns around to see her. He jumps to his feet.

KULL

Natasha.

NATASHA

You need to stop.

KULL

Stop what?

NATASHA

You've turned my father into a paranoid freak.

KULL

I surely don't know what you mean.

NATASHA

Cut it out.

KULL

I can't stop something I'm not doing.

NATASHA

He calls you the "poem ninja".

Kull does his best to keep from laughing.

KULL

Can I interest you in a drink?

NATASHA

What do you take me for?

KULL

You have a drink, maybe I can talk to the poem ninja.

NATASHA

Tell you what. Come by the diner,
and we'll talk.

KULL

Good enough for me.

Natasha gives him a smile and a nod. She turns to leave, then remembers something.

NATASHA

I like your poems.

She heads off, leaving Kull with a smile on his face.

EXT MRS. MCELHINNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Kull comes up the front walkway, and finds ERICA (early twenties), Mrs. McElhinny's granddaughter, sitting on the front steps.

KULL

Erica?

ERICA

You must be Kull. I've heard so
much about you.

Her eyes well up with tears.

KULL

Likewise. Are you all right?

Erica gets so choked up, she can barely speak.

ERICA

My grandma's gone.

Kull is stunned. He looks up at the house, then around the yard, then back to Erica.

KULL

I'm so sorry.

ERICA

She left me this house.

She lets out a huge sob.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I don't know what to do with it.

KULL
(doing his best)
Can I offer you a drink?

He holds out his flask. She smiles and takes it from him. He sits down next to her.

KULL (CONT'D)
I'm really going to miss her.

ERICA
Me, too.

They sit for awhile in silence, looking out at the perfect spring day. Kull breaks the silence.

KULL
I'll look after the house until you decide what to do. No rush.

ERICA
Thank you, but you don't have to do that.

KULL
It'll be my pleasure. You want to keep it neat if you want to sell it.
(then)
Who knows, maybe you'll keep it. Enton could be a good place to retire to.

Erica hands back the flask, gets up, and heads into the house.

ERICA
Hang on. I'll be right back.

She is gone for only a second, and returns with an envelope.

ERICA (CONT'D)
She left you a note.

Kull takes it, opens it up. He reads the note. His eyelids flutter, touched and perplexed at the same time.

KULL
I don't suppose you'd like to go for a walk? I need to go to the library.

ERICA

Yeah, yeah. I'll go part of the way
with you, sure.

Kull gets up, and the two of them start down the front
walkway to the street.

EXT ENTON TOWN LIBRARY - LATER

Kull is now alone, walking up the stone path to the library.
Several large oak trees decorate a large front lawn before
the library. The building is brick with large ground to roof
windows. Kull opens the glass door and goes inside.

INT ENTON TOWN LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Kull makes his way through the small library to the stacks
marked "Poetry Aa-Nz". He goes down the aisle, and stops just
before the D's. He reaches for a book, and pulls it out.

It is a hardbound book entitled, *Poems for Enton* by Kull
Dickerson. Kull looks at it in disbelief.

EXT ENTON INN AND TAVERN - LATER

The day has turned to rain, and the water comes down in
buckets. Kull is holding the book of poetry under his shirt,
and making a mad dash for the Tavern entrance.

INT ENTON INN AND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Kull comes in, soaked to the bone. There is nobody there,
save for a bored Rick behind the bar.

KULL

Hi, Rick.

RICK

(hesitant)

Hi, Kull. Long time.

Kull sits down at the end of the bar, setting down his book
of poetry.

KULL

I suppose you're still mad at me,
too.

RICK

Yeah, I guess I am a bit.

KULL

Whatever it is I wrote, I'm sorry.

RICK

Oh, I don't care about your book.
Except it was kind of slow.

(then)

I prefer spy novels.

KULL

Then what is it?

RICK

Well, you're well enough to do
interviews on my front yard there,
and I see you running around with
some blonde woman, but you're not
well enough for a drink? You could
have at least come in to say hello.

Kull looks at him, touched.

KULL

You're right, Rick. I sincerely
apologize. Can you see it in your
heart to give me another chance?

Rick opens a cooling unit, pulls out a gallon of cider.

RICK

Carly left this here last fall,
said to give it to you when you
were better.

Rick pours him a glass.

KULL

Will you join me?

RICK

Don't mind if I do.

He pours himself a few sips of cider. They toast and drink.

RICK (CONT'D)

(pointing at the book)

What do you got there?

KULL

I've got some reading to do.

RICK

Ahh. I've got to go pick up Roy
from the diner, his car's in the
shop. Keep an eye on the place for
me?

KULL

You bet.

Rick leaves Kull by himself. Kull looks around the room, and then has another sip of cider. He cracks his book, and starts to read.

THE END