

THE END OF THE TOUR

Screenplay by
Donald Margulies

Directed by
James Ponsoldt

Based on
"Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself:
A Road Trip With David Foster Wallace"
by David Lipsky

© 2014 EOT Film Productions, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No Portion of this script may be performed, published, reproduced, sold or distributed by any means, or quoted or published in any medium, including on any website without prior written consent of EOT Film Productions, LLC. This material is the property of EOT Film Productions LLC and is intended and restricted for use solely for EOT Film Productions, LLC personnel. Distribution of disclosure of this material to unauthorized persons is prohibited. Disposal of this script copy does alter any restrictions previously set forth.

FADE IN:

1 INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE APT/LIVING ROOM/OFFICE - NYC - 2008 - NIGHT 1

A bright, unpretentious two-bedroom in a pre-war building, cluttered with books and papers, reflecting its owner's lively mind. The decor is that of a perennial grad student's digs, the bachelor pad of a New York intellectual.

A dog curled up on the sofa beside him, DAVID LIPSKY, a boyishly handsome forty-three, quick-witted, tightly-wound, smokes and types speedily from scraps of handwritten notes, surrounded by books on his current journalistic subject, climate change. A stack of copies of his recent publishing success - *Absolutely American* - looms nearby.

His iPhone vibrates. He gets up and answers the call.

LIPSKY
Hey, Bob, what's up?

BOB'S VOICE
(over phone) Listen: According to this unconfirmed report... David Wallace is dead.

LIPSKY
(disputing) What? No no no no, must be a college prank or something...

Lipsky rapidly googles "david foster wallace death" and scans the news.

BOB'S VOICE
I thought if anybody knew whether it was true or not...

Shock registers on Lipsky's face. OVER: NPR reporter ROBERT SIEGEL.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.)
Now a remembrance of writer David Foster Wallace...

3 INT. NPR - NYC - 2008 - DAY 3

Lipsky is being escorted to a booth by a college-age INTERN.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
He was found dead, an apparent suicide, on Friday night. Wallace's novel, "Infinite Jest," brought him fame and a wide audience.

4 INT. NPR - NYC - 2008 - MOMENTS LATER 4

Lipsky, wearing headphones, heart pounding, nervously waits for a cue from a woman producer in the control booth.

ROBERT SIEGEL (O.S.)
...Writer David Lipsky has this appreciation.

The producer signals to Lipsky, who reads his prepared remarks from his shaky hands.

LIPSKY
 "To read David Foster Wallace was to feel your eyelids pulled open.

2 EXT. BOOKSTORE - NYC - 2008 - DAY 2

Lipsky, pensive, smoking, walks down the street on a crisp autumn day, stops at a window display honoring Wallace with his picture and copies of his books *The Broom of the System*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* and his magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*.

LIPSKY (V.O.)
 Some writers specialize in the away-from-home experience. They've safaried, eaten across Italy, covered a war. Wallace offered his alive self...

7 INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE APT/CLOSET - NYC - 2008 - DAY 7

Lipsky rummages closet shelves until he locates a particular shoe box labeled "DFW." He opens the box: inside are a motley bunch of audio tapes - eight or nine of them - numbered, scrawled with dates from four days in March 1996.

LIPSKY (V.O.)
 ...cutting through our sleepy aquarium, our standard T.V., stores, political campaigns. Writers who can do this, like Salinger and Fitzgerald, forge an unbreakable bond with readers...

He digs out a quaintly clunky SONY tape recorder that was state-of-the-art back in 1996. It doesn't play. He removes its batteries and looks in drawers for new ones. No luck.

7A INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE APT/BATHROOM/OFFICE - NYC - 2008 -7A
DAY

Lipsky takes the batteries out of his electric toothbrush and puts them in the recorder.

LIPSKY (V.O.)

You didn't slip into the books looking for story, information, but for a particular experience. The sensation, for a certain number of pages, of *being David Foster Wallace.*"

With a mixture of excitement and trepidation, he inserts cassette #1 in the machine and presses play. The sound of David's voice mid-tape, is both comforting and moving.

DAVID'S VOICE

(on the recording) -- there was, if anything, a conscious attempt to *not* give overt direction. Although, of course, you end up becoming yourself.

LIPSKY'S VOICE

(on the recording) Did they want you to be a writer?

FLASH TO:

6 INT. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - CHICAGO - 1996 - DAY 6

A blurry, indistinct POV shot of DAVID FOSTER WALLACE in the passenger seat of a moving car: Lipsky's memory struggling to come into focus.

DAVID'S VOICE

No, the big thing when I was little, I was like a really serious jock...

CUT BACK TO:

9 INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE APT/OFFICE - NYC - 2008 - DAY 9

Lipsky listens.

DAVID'S VOICE

...city-wide football as a kid. I was real big, really strong as a kid. And then for four or five years, I was gonna be a pro tennis player. My great dream. Reading was just kind of fun. A weird thing that I did on the side -

Lipsky stops and presses rewind on the tape player. He ruminates as we HEAR the whir of the tape rewinding.

FLASHBACK TO:

10 EXT. DOWNTOWN SKYLINE - NYC - 1996 - NIGHT 10

The heart-stopping view of the illuminated twin towers tells us we are in pre-2001 New York.

SUPER TITLE: 12 YEARS EARLIER

LIPSKY (O.S.)
(reads) "I didn't understand SoHo..."

11 INT. BOOK SHOP - UPPER WEST SIDE - NYC - 1996 - NIGHT 11

Lipsky stands before a paltry turnout - consisting of old people and a few loyal friends (among them his pretty girlfriend, SARAH) - reading from his novel, *The Art Fair*. Here, Lipsky is 30 years old but looks like a student, his long, dark, Byronic hair framing his fine features.

LIPSKY (CONT'D)
- the warehouses, the old buildings,
the cobbled streets.

Distracted by disinterested CUSTOMERS who continue to browse, Lipsky hears a muffled giggle and sees a YOUNG COUPLE in the audience flirting and clearly not listening.

LIPSKY (CONT'D)
It wasn't the Upper East Side, and it was dirty. I felt marooned. Our mother had taken us off the track of the nice life we'd been on. She'd moored us in a creepy cul-de-sac with her art-world friends.

14 EXT./INT. KGB BAR - NYC - 1996 - NIGHT 14

Deafening music. A crowded, noisy gathering of mostly young, cool, black-attired New York writers and artists.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONTD)
None of the kids in my school had parents in the art world. It made me feel different. Like there was something I had to cover up."

Lipsky gets two glasses of wine from a bar. We FOLLOW as he makes his way through the crowd. He knows a lot of people with whom he exchanges ad-libbed greetings along the way. They have to SHOUT to be heard above the din.

BEARDED GUY
David, hi! How'd your reading go?

LIPSKY
Great!

BEARDED GUY
Sorry I missed it!

LIPSKY
Don't worry about it!

Drinks held aloft, Lipsky continues into the crowd. A MODEL:

MODEL
I heard you got the *Rolling Stone* job!

LIPSKY
We'll see! I'm sort of on probation!

Lipsky delivers the drink to Sarah, who stands in a circle of acquaintances in mid-conversation.

SARAH'S FRIEND
Did you see Kirn's review in *New York Magazine*? The guy's been fucking canonized!

LIPSKY
Who's this?

SARAH
David Foster Wallace.

15 INT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT/BEDROOM/BATHROOM - NYC - 1996 - 15
NIGHT

Lipsky, at the bathroom door, reads aloud Walter Kirn's review in *New York magazine* (2/12/96). Sarah comes out in a towel and he follows her to the bedroom.

LIPSKY
"Next year's book awards have been decided." Can you believe this? "The plaques and citations can now be put into escrow." Unbelievable. "With *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace - a plutonium-dense, satirical whiz-kid opus that runs to almost a thousand pages -

She kisses him as she goes past.

LIPSKY (CONTD)

- (not including footnotes) - the competition has been obliterated. It's as though Paul Bunyan had joined the NFL or Wittgenstein had gone on *Jeopardy!* The novel is that colossally disruptive. And that spectacularly good." That's the fucking opening paragraph!

SARAH

What if it actually *is* that good? You know? You may just have to read it.

16 INT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT/LIVING ROOM - NYC - 1996 - DUSK 16

If his 2008 place is grad-student-y, the 1996 Lipsky residence is smaller and explosively chaotic, like a teenager's domain. We find Sarah on the couch reading the current bestseller, *Primary Colors* and Lipsky beside her reading *Infinite Jest*. Silence.

LIPSKY

Shit.

17 INT. ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE/CUBICLES/BOB'S OFFICE - NYC - 1996 - DAY 17

Buzzing with the hip, youthful industry of people who know they're at the place to be. Lipsky drops by to see his editor, BOB LEVIN, 40, greying, bearded.

LIPSKY

How many times have we interviewed a writer in the last ten years? Guess.

BOB

Um... how many?

LIPSKY

Zero. I checked.

BOB

Maybe that's because Rolling Stone doesn't interview writers.

LIPSKY

There hasn't *been* a writer like this one. Once in a generation, maybe. Hemingway, Pynchon. Let me have this story.

BOB

What story?

Lipsky tosses *Newsweek*, opened to a photo of Wallace, onto Bob's messy desk.

LIPSKY

He's finishing up his book tour and I want to go with him.

BOB

That's not a story.

LIPSKY

He teaches at some small state university, somewhere in Illinois. Send me there. Please, Bob. This is the sort of stuff I *should* be doing, not 500-words on boy bands. Talk to Jann?

17A INT. ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE/LIPSKY'S CUBICLE - NYC - 1996 - 17A
LATER

Lipsky works at his computer. *Newsweek* with the Wallace photo lands on his desk. Lipsky looks up and sees Bob.

BOB

There had better be a story there...

Bob leaves.

LIPSKY

(calls) There will be!

His smile fades. Now what?

18 INT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT/LIVING ROOM - NYC - 1996 - NIGHT 18

Sarah reads her own copy of *Infinite Jest* as Lipsky walks back and forth across frame, gathering stuff to pack for his trip. Laptop. Notebook. Wallace's books, full of notations and post-its. Tape recorder, packs of audio cassettes. He considers then tosses in *The Art Fair* and zips up his bag.

20 EXT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT - NYC - 1996 - MORNING 20

A grey wintry morning. Lipsky, outside his building, hails a taxi.

21 I/E. CAB/FDR DRIVE - NYC - 1996 - MORNING 21

Lipsky, in the backseat, reads *Infinite Jest*; he's about three-quarters of the way through it. He makes a note in the margin, then glances out the window at the passing skyline.

- 22 EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - CHICAGO - 1996 - DAY 22
An American Airlines plane comes in for a landing on the flat, grey, wintry landscape.
- 25 I/E. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY 25
Lipsky, on the road, drives past a sign for Bloomington.
- 26 EXT. 7-ELEVEN - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY 26
An American landscape of fast-food places and chain stores. Lipsky's Grand Am is parked in a 7-Eleven and Citco station. He stands at a pay phone. (We never intercut during telephone conversations.)

DAVID'S VOICE
(over phone) Hello?

LIPSKY
David, hi, it's David Lipsky.

DAVID'S VOICE
Where are you?

LIPSKY
I think I may have made a wrong turn somewhere. Let's see, I'm on County Highway 29, across from Circus Video?

DAVID'S VOICE
How'd you get this number?

LIPSKY
Your publicist sent it in her e-mail, just in case.

DAVID'S VOICE
You'd do me a favor by losing it.

- 27 I/E. CAR/DAVID'S STREET - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY 27
Stormy skies. Flat, wintry terrain. As the car pulls up, Lipsky sees, through the windshield, a modest, one-story brick house in the distance, and a man emerging from it.
- From Lipsky's long shot POV: DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, hands shoved in his jeans pockets for warmth, accompanied by his two barking, rambunctious black labs, JEEVES and DRONE.
- Lipsky parks. He takes a deep, bracing breath before getting out of the car to finally meet the man about whom he has complicated feelings. He walks toward him.

This is the first time we see David up close and in focus:
stubble, long hair, blue bandanna, wire-rims, Frye boots,
6'2" and, at this time in his life, burly.

DAVID
You made it.

LIPSKY
Yeah. Hi.

David offers his wary, tolerant hand. This being the end of his tour, his patience is frayed and he's just about talked out. But, at the same time, it's *Rolling Stone*, he wants to make a good impression.

DAVID
Dave. Dave Wallace.

LIPSKY
David Lipsky. Pleasure.

Lipsky is cowed but determined to hold his own. These are two really smart, competitive guys out to impress each other. Wallace wants to be favorably profiled and Lipsky wants Wallace's approval - and a good story.

LIPSKY
Sorry about the phone call.

DAVID
95% joke.

Lipsky laughs.

DAVID (CONTD)
Sorry in advance about the dogs, gonna be slobbering all over you.

LIPSKY
Oh, I don't mind. I love dogs.

DAVID
Yeah? Well, you haven't met *these* guys... It's cold, let's go inside.
(to the dogs) Jeeves, Drone! Get over here!

Lipsky follows David and the rowdy, barking dogs into the house.

Lipsky drops his bag on the messy, shit-stained shag carpet. The dogs are indeed all over him. Lipsky scratches their heads and speaks to them as a dog lover would speak to dogs.

LIPSKY

Yes, I'm very glad to meet you, too.
Who are you?

DAVID

That's Jeeves. The Jeevesmeister. I got him 'cause he was so ugly. No one else wanted him. Now he's like a Cover Girl-dog. Aren't you, Jeeves? Yes, you are. And this is Drone. My provisional dog.

LIPSKY

Why provisional?

DAVID

Just showed up one day while Jeeves and I were out jogging and the rest is history.

(A beat.)

I feel like I should offer you tea or something.

LIPSKY

Yeah. Thanks. That would be great.

David goes to put on water. We STAY on Lipsky, casually studying the room with the eye of a journalist, taking in the grad-student-like accoutrements: cramped cinder-block bookshelves; hodgepodge of furniture, an ALANIS MORISSETTE POSTER conspicuously on the wall. Lipsky, glancing out the window at the wintry landscape, raises his voice to converse with David, who's in the kitchen.

LIPSKY

Nice view.

DAVID (O.S.)

Thank you. I can't take credit for it.

Lipsky smiles. Pause.

LIPSKY

So... Have you always been unlisted?

DAVID

(from the kitchen) I had to do that recently. It was getting crazy.

LIPSKY
Because of fans?

DAVID
I don't know if "fan" would be the right word... I think what happened was, I had forgotten to tell my parents not to give my number out. So it was people who tracked my *parents* down, and um -

LIPSKY
(knowing) Ohhh.

DAVID
I have this terrible problem, I just really hate to hurt people's feelings. So I did something kinda cowardly.

LIPSKY
Unlisting your number's not cowardly.

DAVID
It kinda is. I mean, I changed my number so these folks couldn't find me anymore. There was this computer operator in Vancouver, lived in a basement. Who I found really moving. In terrible terrible pain.

LIPSKY
What did he want from you?

DAVID
Wasn't clear, and when I would sort of ask him, he'd get angry, and that's when it got scary.

Lipsky sees a child's drawing displayed on the fridge:
"Chickenhead Dave Wallace."

LIPSKY
(re: the drawing) Who's the artist?

DAVID
Hm? (Lipsky points.) Oh, my friend's daughter. Calls me Chickenhead, and I call *her* Chickenhead. Her latest salvo in the war.

Laughing, Lipsky takes out his tape recorder and starts to set it up but stops. (Lipsky is a nervous laugher; he laughs a lot, not only where indicated.)

LIPSKY
You mind if I...?

DAVID
Hey. Do what you've got to do.

David watches uncomfortably. The ever-present tape recorder becomes a third character in this conversation.

DAVID
Listen: Before we start putting stuff on tape, I gotta ask you something.

LIPSKY
Okay...

DAVID
I need to know that anything that I ask you five minutes later to not put in, you won't put in.

LIPSKY
Absolutely.

He clicks off the recorder.

DAVID
Given my level of fatigue and fuck-up quotient lately, it's the only way I can see doin' it and not going crazy.

LIPSKY
I understand completely.

Lipsky presses play.

DAVID
Right back on, huh.

LIPSKY
You agreed to the interview.

29 I/E. CAR/MAIN STREET - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY

29

Lipsky at the wheel. David chewing tobacco. Ad-libs.

DAVID
...There'll be signs for the school on the right.

LIPSKY
You like teaching there?

DAVID

Yeah, I do, very much, that's what's so fucked, I feel so bad for these kids.

LIPSKY

Why do you feel bad them, they have the best writing teacher in the world.

DAVID

If I were there, maybe. The whole fuss has taken me out of school for the past two weeks and I'm gonna have to leave again tomorrow. We've got to get up at the crack of dawn to leave for the airport, by the way.

LIPSKY

Oh, shit, do we really?

DAVID

That's what you signed on for, man. You're welcome to stick around, write an article about my dogs. Might be more interesting, I promise you.

David spits chewed tobacco into a Savarin can.

31

INT. ISU CAMPUS/CORRIDOR - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY

31

David and Lipsky walk to his classroom.

DAVID

Do yourself a favor, don't expect any fireworks in there...

LIPSKY

Oh. Okay.

31A

INT. ISU CAMPUS/CLASSROOM - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - LATER

31A

The class in-progress. Lipsky observes as David paces. He's "on" and his students are eating it up.

DAVID

A campus romance story, I gotta tell ya, to the average citizen, is not all that interesting. The great dread of creative writing professors? "Their eyes met... over the keg..."

Laughter.

EARNEST STUDENT

I just want my narrator to be funny
and smart, y'know?

DAVID

I know. You want your narrator to be
funny and smart. Here's a tip, then:
Have him say funny, smart things some
of the time.

Laughter. Lipsky jots down a note.

DAVID

You did a good job. Who's next?
Melissa.

32 INT. ISU CAMPUS/LIBRARY CORRIDOR - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DUSK 32

Lipsky and David walk down the hall after class.

DAVID

I'm usually a much better teacher than
this. I swear to God.

LIPSKY

I thought you were great. They
obviously love you.

DAVID

Yeah?

LIPSKY

Oh, come on, you know they do.

DAVID

You hungry?

33 EXT. RESTAURANT - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - NIGHT 33

Lipsky and David park and go inside.

33B INT. RESTAURANT/TABLE - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - LATER 33B

They give their order to the WAITER.

WAITER

...And what can I get you to drink?
Beer, or...

DAVID

Uh, not for me, thanks. A large Diet
Rite.

LIPSKY
I'll have the same.

WAITER
I'll be right back with your pop.

The waiter goes. Lipsky sets up the tape recorder. Pause.

LIPSKY
You don't drink.

David doesn't answer right away.

DAVID
Is that a question?

LIPSKY
It's an observation.

DAVID
Ah. I see. No; I do not drink. You can order whatever you want, go right ahead.

LIPSKY
That's all right. My friends who have been through the program say they didn't want people to drink in front of them, so out of respect...

DAVID
I'm not any sort of authority on any sort of "program." But from my very limited outside understanding, people who have been in it for a while: you could snort *cocaine* off the back of your *hand* and they're okay.

Lipsky is embarrassed for having been presumptuous.

DAVID
You know what I would love to do?

LIPSKY
What?

DAVID
I would love to do a profile of one of you guys who's doin' a profile of *me*.

LIPSKY
That *is* interesting...

DAVID
Too po-mo and cute?

LIPSKY
Maybe, for *Rolling Stone*.

DAVID
But it would be interesting.
(A beat.)
I'm sorry.

LIPSKY
What's wrong?

DAVID
It's just, you're gonna go back to New York and sit at your desk and shape this thing however you want. And that to me is extremely disturbing.

LIPSKY
Why is it disturbing?

DAVID
'Cause I would like to shape the impression of me that's coming across. I can't even tell if I like you yet 'cause I'm too worried whether you like *me*.

Before Lipsky can assure him, the waiter brings their sodas.

WAITER
(handing off the sodas)
Here you go. Your food will be out soon. Can I get you anything else?

LIPSKY
We're fine, thanks.

The waiter goes.

DAVID
So what's this piece about? What does "Jann" want?

LIPSKY
What's it like being the most-talked about writer in the country. That sort of thing. That sounds so --

Lipsky seems embarrassed as soon as he says the words.

DAVID
How do you learn to *do* this stuff?

LIPSKY
What.

DAVID
Interviewing. Did you go to
interviewing school?

LIPSKY
No... I, uh...

A beat. Lipsky feels a tad fraudulent to identify himself as a writer to the man whose success and talent he envies.

LIPSKY
I'm a writer.

DAVID
Oh, yeah?

LIPSKY
I mean I write fiction. Just published
my first novel, as a matter of fact.

DAVID
What's it called?

LIPSKY
The Art Fair?

David shrugs. He's never heard of it. Lipsky feels foolish for having brought it up.

LIPSKY
And I, uh, had a collection published,
a couple of years ago.

Lipsky's pumping leg betrays his anxiety. David notices.

DAVID
You're a nervous guy, aren't you?

LIPSKY
No no I'm okay. How are you?

DAVID
'Cause I'm terrified.

LIPSKY
Are you? I think it's going to be a
lot of fun.

33D INT. RESTAURANT/TABLE - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - LATER

33D

The food is decimated. David is loosening up.

DAVID

The thing about this tour is... I *would* like to get *laid* out of it a couple of times, but... Like, people come up, they kinda *slither* up during readings or whatever. But it seems like, what I want is not to have to take any action.

LIPSKY

Like...?

DAVID

Like, I don't want to have to say, "Would you like to come back to my hotel?" I want *them* to say, "I am coming back to the hotel. Where *is* your hotel?"

Lipsky laughs.

DAVID

I can't stand to look like I'm actively trading on this sexually. Which of course I would be happy to do. In retrospect, it was lucky that I didn't.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Basically, it just would have made me feel lonely.

LIPSKY

Why lonely?

DAVID

Because it wouldn't have had anything to do with *me*, it would have just been...

LIPSKY

Your fame?

DAVID

Yeah. Whatever.

LIPSKY

You're famous. You can say that. Except... if they're responding to your work, and the work is so personal... then trading on it is actually another way of *meeting* you, isn't that right?

A beat. David is impressed by Lipsky's analysis.

DAVID

That is so good.

LIPSKY

Thank you.

DAVID

This piece'll really be good if it's mostly *you*. Talk all you want, man, save me a whole lotta trouble.

Lipsky laughs, sensing his stock has risen, relaxing more into the rhythm of their conversation.

34

I/E. CAR/COMMERCIAL DRAG - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - NIGHT

34

David at the wheel, driving Lipsky's rental. Lights from fast-food restaurant signs light up their faces. Tape running.

DAVID

So *this* is what a real car feels like. The one *I* have is like riding a power lawn mower.

LIPSKY

You think being handsome has anything to do with your success?

DAVID

(incredulously) What?

LIPSKY

You *are* photogenic... You look good in your author's photo.

DAVID

You'd have to come put me down if I even *start* thinking that way.

LIPSKY

Thinking what way? About how books are sold?

DAVID

Like, "Do you want to do a *Rolling Stone* interview, do you want to do X, do you want to do Y" worries me that what I'm doing right now is being a whore.

LIPSKY

A whore? Why?

DAVID

You know, cashing in somehow, or getting some little celebrity for myself. That will, from some bizarre set of misunderstandings, sell more copies of the book.

LIPSKY

Right.

DAVID

You can quote that. Preferably in a context where I don't sound like a total dweeb.

(A beat.)

By the way, are they gonna send Annie Leibovitz to take pictures?

LIPSKY

I'm not sure. Possibly.

DAVID

I know: *You're* a good-looking guy. We should have 'em photograph *you*, and say *you're* me. Maybe I'll finally end up getting laid.

Lipsky laughs.

35

INT. 7-ELEVEN - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - NIGHT

35

Muzak. In the blue-white fluorescent light, David and Lipsky ad-lib while stocking up on six-packs of Diet Rite, chewing tobacco, Oreos, etc.

At the cash register, Lipsky prepares to pay.

LIPSKY

Let me.

DAVID

You don't have to pay for my shit.

LIPSKY

It's not coming out of *my* pocket...
I've got an expense account.

DAVID

All right, if you insist...

David goes back for more.

36

INT. CAR/COMMERCIAL DRAG - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - NIGHT

36

Riding through town, the Davids are eating candy like teenagers on a joyride.

DAVID

If you ate this stuff all the time,
what would be wrong with that?

LIPSKY

Except for your teeth falling out and
getting really fat?

DAVID

Yeah, it doesn't have any of the
nourishment of real food, but it's
real pleasurable masticating and
swallowing this stuff.

LIPSKY

Like seductive commercial
entertainment.

DAVID

Exactly, and what saves us is that
most commercial entertainment isn't
very good.

LIPSKY

What about *good* seductive commercial
entertainment - like *Die Hard*?

DAVID

The first *Die Hard*? Great film.

LIPSKY

Brilliant, right?

DAVID

The best.

37

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 1996 - NIGHT

37

The car pulls up, parks. They get out with the spoils from
the 7-Eleven. Mid-discourse:

DAVID

So if the book's about anything, it's about the question of: Why am I watching all this shit? It's not about the shit, it's about *me*. Why am I doing it? And what's so *American* about what I'm doing?

We hear the dogs barking as David unlocks the door and they enter the house.

38

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - 1996 - CONTINUOUS

38

The dogs run out to do their thing. David puts away the soda and snacks.

DAVID

The minute I start talking about this stuff, it sounds, number one: very vague. And, two: really reductive.

LIPSKY

I don't think you're being reductive or vague at all.

DAVID

Because it's like, I don't have a diagnosis, a system of prescriptions. You know? Like, why are we - and by "we" I mean people like you and me: mostly white, upper middle class, *obscenely* well-educated, doing really interesting jobs, sitting in really expensive chairs, watching the best, most sophisticated electronic equipment money can buy - why do we feel empty and unhappy?

LIPSKY

Kinda like Hamlet. With channel-surfing.

DAVID

I'm not saying TV is bad or a waste of your time. Any more than, you know, *masturbation* is bad or a waste of your time. It's a pleasurable way to spend a few minutes. But if you're doing it twenty times a day, if your primary sexual relationship is with your own hand, then there's something wrong.

LIPSKY

At least with masturbation, *some* action has been performed, though, right?

DAVID

All right, you could make me look like a real dick if you print this: Yes, you're performing muscular movements with your hand as you're jerking off. But what you're doing is running a movie in your head, and having a fantasy relationship with somebody who isn't real, in order to stimulate a purely neurological response. Look: as the Internet grows in the next ten, fifteen years, and virtual reality pornography becomes a reality, we're gonna have to develop some machinery, inside our guts, to help us turn off pure, unalloyed pleasure. Otherwise, I don't know about you, but I'm gonna have to leave the planet.

LIPSKY

(smiles uncertainly) Why?

DAVID

Because the technology is just gonna get better and better. And it's gonna get easier and easier, and more and more convenient, and more and more pleasurable, to be alone with images on a screen, given to us by people who do not love us but want our money. Which is fine. In low doses. But if that's the basic main staple of your diet? You're gonna die. In a meaningful way, *you're going to die.*

Silence. Lipsky mulls over the gravity of what David has said. David breaks the portentous silence when he pops a wad of tobacco in his mouth.

LIPSKY

Can I try that?

DAVID

Be my guest. It takes some getting used to.

Lipsky tries it and makes a horrible face. David laughs.

LIPSKY
You mind if I use your uh...

Amused, David points the way to the bathroom.

DAVID
I believe it's unoccupied.

Lipsky goes, leaving the tape running.

39 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - 1996 - CONTINUOUS 39

Lipsky spits the tobacco into the sink. He cups his hands under the running water and rinses his mouth. He looks at himself in the mirror and takes a deep, fortifying breath. He stealthily opens the medicine cabinet and finds it stocked with jars of vitamins, Stri-Dex pads and tubes of Topol, toothpaste for smokers. He jots down notes.

40 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - 1996 - MOMENTS LATER 40

Lipsky returns, looks around. David is playing with his dogs.

LIPSKY
Do you not have a TV?

DAVID
I do not have a TV.

LIPSKY
How come?

DAVID
'Cause if I *had* a TV, I'd watch it all the time. I don't even know if I would *watch* it; it would be on all the time - my version of a fireplace. A source of warmth and light in the corner that I would occasionally get sucked into.

LIPSKY
Did you watch a lot of T.V. when you were a kid?

DAVID
Yeah. A lot. You?

LIPSKY

Me? Yeah, I did. I moved in with a woman who grew up without a television, and living with her, the first month was torture, and then I realized it was probably the best thing for me.

DAVID

Did you guys stay together?

LIPSKY

It's complicated.

DAVID

Why?

LIPSKY

I was seeing this woman, then she moved to L.A. and we theoretically broke up. And I started seeing this other woman, but then I started seeing the *first* woman again - trying the bi-coastal thing - and the *second*... Well, let's just say she hasn't taken it very well.

DAVID

It's so much easier having dogs. You don't get laid; but you also don't get the feeling you're hurting their feelings all the time. I emphasize: strictly platonic relationship with the dogs.

LIPSKY

You're not dating anyone?

DAVID

Seriously dating? No. I'm out of practice; I wouldn't know what to say.

LIPSKY

You want to have kids?

DAVID

Yeah, I think someday I do; do you?

LIPSKY

Yeah. Eventually. I think.

DAVID

Writing books is kinda like raising children, but you gotta be careful: you should take pride in the work but it's bad to want that glory to reflect back on you.

LIPSKY

You worry about having children?

David seems far away; this is difficult for him. After a beat, he speaks, sounding vulnerable, which doesn't go unnoticed by Lipsky.

DAVID

I don't know that I want to say anything more about it - okay?

LIPSKY

(prepared to back off) That's fine.

DAVID

I mean, we can joke about getting laid on tour and stuff, but...

LIPSKY

I just thought, it'd be nice to have someone to be sharing all this wonderful stuff with.

DAVID

Yeah. I really have wished I was married, the last couple of weeks.

LIPSKY

You have?

DAVID

Yeah, because nobody quite gets it. Your friends who aren't in the writing biz are all just awed by your picture in *Time*, and your agent and editor are good people, but they have their own agendas. It's fun talking to *you* about it, but you've got an agenda, too, and a set of interests that diverges from mine.

LIPSKY

That's true...

DAVID

There's something nice about having somebody who kinda shared your life, and that you could allow yourself just to be happy and confused with.

LIPSKY

Somebody you can call when you get back to the hotel.

DAVID

Uh huh. (A beat.) So, why aren't you married at thirty?

LIPSKY

Why aren't you married at thirty-four?

DAVID

You first.

LIPSKY

Okay. Um... I think it's hard to cast that role ... to fill it when you know it's for thirty or forty years ... someone who, whatever mental landscape you're in, they're going to be in it too, you need someone who'll fit any landscape you can imagine.

DAVID

Well, I can't put it as well as you did about the "mental landscapes," I just know I'm hard to be around.

David's "mental landscapes" reference: competitive, fawning, mocking? Lipsky isn't sure.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because when I want to be by myself, like to work, I *really* want to be by myself. I think if you dedicate yourself to *anything*, one facet of that is that it makes you very very self-conscious. You end up using people. Wanting them around when you *want* them around, but then sending them away.

LIPSKY

Comes with the territory, though, doesn't it? Self-consciousness?

DAVID

There's *good* self-consciousness. And then there's this toxic, paralyzing, raped-by-psychic-Bedouins self-consciousness.

Lipsky laughs.

LIPSKY

(re: Alanis poster)

Can you do me a favor? Can you tell me about that poster over there?

DAVID

Alanis? I don't know, I guess I'm susceptible like everybody else. Why?

LIPSKY

She's pretty, alright...

DAVID

Yeah, but in a very sloppy, very human way. That squeaky, orgasmic quality in her voice? Here's what it is: A lot of women in magazines are pretty in a way that isn't erotic because they don't look like anybody you know.

LIPSKY

True.

DAVID

You can't imagine them putting a quarter in a parking meter or eating a bologna sandwich. But *her*, I don't know, I just find her absolutely riveting.

LIPSKY

How'd you get to know her, her music, I mean?

DAVID

Listening to cheesy Bloomington radio, and "I Want to Tell You" came on.

LIPSKY

(correcting him) "You Oughta Know."

DAVID

What?

LIPSKY

"I Want to Tell You" is the book O.J. Simpson wrote.

DAVID

Oh, right.

LIPSKY

Wouldn't it be great if O.J. Simpson sang "You Oughta Know" and Alanis Morissette wrote a book about not killing two people?

They laugh. Lipsky is pleased to make David laugh.

DAVID

If somehow this whole fuss could get me even like a five-minute cup of tea with her...

LIPSKY

Why don't you put out feelers, see if she'd be willing to meet you?

DAVID

You serious? I would never do that.

LIPSKY

Why not?

DAVID

I'd be too terrified. Why, you would do that?

LIPSKY

If I were you? Why not?

DAVID

A date with Alanis Morissette? What would I say to her? "Hello, Miss Morissette. What is it like to be you?" (gruff voice) "I don't know - shut up. And get the fuck away from me."

LIPSKY

But you'd go if *she* called? "Hey, Dave. I'm at the Drake in Chicago. Let's have that tea."

DAVID

Yeah... except this is gonna look ridiculous: like I'm using *Rolling Stone* as a vehicle to, like -

LIPSKY
It's been used for worse.

DAVID
Yes, I would do it. I'd go in a
heartbeat.

As Lipsky cracks up, David paints the picture:

DAVID
Perspiring heavily, all the way up
there, shoving Certs into my mouth.
Goin' nuts. It would cost me like a
week of absolute trauma. But yeah, I
would do it in a *heartbeat*.

David realizes the late hour.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Look, I like... I like talking to you
but we have to get up real early.

LIPSKY
What is it, like ten o'clock?

DAVID
It's eleven-thirty, dickbrain.

LIPSKY
Shit...I am so sorry, I completely
lost track of time. When should I
pick you up in the morning?

Lipsky gets his coat.

DAVID
Where you going?

LIPSKY
Motel. There was like a Days Inn on
the main road. I thought I'd -

DAVID
(overlap) No no you don't want to
stay there - trust me. I've got a
guest-roomish place you can crash in.

LIPSKY
You sure? I don't want to impose...

41 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/GUEST ROOM - 1996 - NIGHT

41

The room is cluttered, not unlike Lipsky's place in New York.
David clears stuff off a futon that's on the floor.

DAVID

Let me get this shit out of the way...
Hm. (re: the rumpled sheet) Might be
a good idea to change that.

Together, they put on a clean sheet. When they're done:

DAVID

Uh, leave the door open for the dogs.

LIPSKY

Oh, okay.

DAVID

They like to wander from room to room
during the night; if the door's
closed, they'll eat it to get through
if they have to. 'Night.

Lipsky makes a move to shake his host's hand but doesn't.
David goes. Lipsky finds himself surrounded by intimidating
stacks of domestic and foreign editions of David's books.

41A INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/GUEST ROOM - 1996 - LATER 41A

Lipsky is in bed. From his POV on the floor: The looming
towers of *Infinite Jest*. The door creaks open: Drone and
Jeeves pay a visit.

43 EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 1996 - DAWN 43

In the middle of a wintry field.

44 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - 1996 - DAWN 44

Lipsky, wrecked, enters and finds David drinking coffee.

DAVID

Morning. There's coffee...

LIPSKY

No, thanks. I don't need caffeine to
wake up. But cigarettes...?

He lights up.

DAVID

Brothers of the lung.

A Pop-Tart pops up from the toaster.

DAVID

Want to split this with me? It's the
last one I've got.

LIPSKY

No thanks.

David splits it in two and offers Lipsky half.

DAVID

Mi Pop-Tart es su Pop-Tart.

LIPSKY

Thanks.

They bite into their Pop-Tarts.

46 EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 1996 - MOMENTS LATER 46

A miserable morning. Grey, freezing rain. Lipsky scrapes ice off the windshield.

47 I/E. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - MORNING 47

Windshield wipers clear falling sleet. The tape recorder on the transmission between them. Radio plays softly. Riding past farmland, plants, strip malls. David, in the passenger seat, gives the lay of the land.

DAVID

...There's a Mitsubishi plant, and then there's a lot of farm-support stuff, like Ro-Tech, Anderson Seeds...

LIPSKY

What are you doing here? I mean, why aren't you in New York?

DAVID

Every time I go to New York, I get caught up in this - there's this enormous *hiss* of egos at various stages of inflation and deflation. It's me-me-me.

Lipsky takes out his tape recorder.

LIPSKY

So, I gotta ask: What's with the bandanna?

DAVID

What? What do you mean?

LIPSKY

People think it's a way you're trying to connect with the younger reading audience.

DAVID

Is that what people think? I don't know many Gen-Xers who wear 'em. Jeez. I don't know what to say. I guess I wish you hadn't brought this up.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because now I'm worrying that it's going to seem intentional. Like if I *don't* wear it, am I not wearing it because I'm bowing to other people's perception that it's a commercial choice? Or do I do what I want, even though it's *perceived* as commercial - and it's just like one more crazy circle to go around.

LIPSKY

Sorry. When did you start wearing them?

DAVID

In Tuscon. It was a hundred degrees *all the time*. I would perspire so much... I would drip into the electric typewriter, I was nervous I was gonna give myself a shock. And then I discovered that I *felt* better with them on.

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

DAVID

I *know* it's a security blanket for me - whenever I'm nervous. Or feel like I have to keep myself together. It makes me feel kinda creepy that people view it as an affectation or a trademark or something. It's more of a foible, the recognition of a weakness, that I'm kinda afraid my head's gonna explode.

Lipsky laughs.

The Grand Am on the highway to O'Hare. Trucks race past spewing cascades of water. Wipers at top speed. Ambient radio. Tape running. Lipsky at the wheel.

LIPSKY

Your parents are both academics?

DAVID

My dad, philosophy; my mom, English. You?

LIPSKY

Me? My dad's in advertising, my mom's a painter. When they split up, I lived with my mother in SoHo and my brother moved in with my dad.

DAVID

Sounds like there's a story there.

LIPSKY

There is; I just wrote it.

DAVID

So what was that like, your family divided that way?

LIPSKY

Hey, who's interviewing whom? How old were you when you started writing fiction?

DAVID

Twenty-one?

LIPSKY

Never before?

DAVID

I think I started a World War Two novel when I was nine.

LIPSKY

What about?

DAVID

A bunch of people with strangely hyperdeveloped skills and powers, who are going to invade Hitler's bunker. Then, in college, I wrote a couple of papers for other people.

LIPSKY

They were paying you to write their papers?

DAVID

Well, I wouldn't put it that coarsely. But let's say there were complicated systems of reward. I'd read two or three of their papers to learn, you know, what their music sounded like. And I remember thinking, "Man, I'm really good at this. I'm a weird kind of forger. I mean, I can sound kind of like anybody."

LIPSKY

Odds are I'm gonna want to talk to your parents.

DAVID

What for?

LIPSKY

Biographical stuff.

DAVID

I hereby request that you don't.

LIPSKY

Oh. Okay.

DAVID

They're real private people, and I would have a hard time with it. So, no you may not.

LIPSKY

(backing off) Okay. I may not.

52 EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT/LONG TERM PARKING - CHICAGO - 1996 - DAY 52
Lipsky looks for a place to park the Grand Am.

53 INT. AIRPORT - 1996 - DAY 53
The Davids check in at the gate.

56B INT. AIRPLANE - 1996 - LATER 56B
Peanuts, pretzels and drinks sit on their open tray tables.

DAVID

Crap jobs? Let's see: I was a security guard for this software company for three and a half months.

LIPSKY

Really.

DAVID

I had to wear this polyester uniform, and walk under these fluorescent lights, twirlin' my baton, checking in every ten minutes: [mimes a walkie-talkie] "All clear at this cubicle!" Like, every bad '60s novel about meaningless authority.

LIPSKY

And were you thinking, "My God, I had two books come out when I was in my early twenties and here I am..."?

DAVID

No. As a matter of fact, one reason I liked that job is, I walked around *not* thinking. In a really like, "Huh: there's a ceiling tile."

LIPSKY

And after the security guard thing?

DAVID

This is the worst: I worked as a towel boy at this chichi health club.

LIPSKY

A "towel boy?"

DAVID

They called me something other than a towel boy, but I was in effect a towel boy. Who every once in a while was entrusted with the job of checking people in, having them show their i.d?

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

DAVID

Anyway, I'm sitting there, and who should walk in to get their towel, but this guy, this *writer* I knew.

Who received a Whiting Writer's Award the same year I had, like two years earlier.

LIPSKY

Oh, shit...

DAVID

So I see this guy that I'd been up on this fucking *rostrum* with, having *Eudora Welty* give us this prize -

LIPSKY

Oh, God!

DAVID

- And two years later, I'm like ... It's the only time I've literally *dived* under something, to have somebody avoid seeing me.

LIPSKY

Did you think you were done then?

DAVID

Yeah. I was pretty sure life was over.

LIPSKY

This is after your suicide watch?

David blinks. A beat.

DAVID

How'd you know about that?

LIPSKY

I read it somewhere. McLean's, right? How long were you there?

DAVID

Eight days, I think.

LIPSKY

Why were you there?

DAVID

Mostly 'cause I was scared I would do something stupid. I had a friend from high school who tried to kill himself by sitting in a garage with the car runnin'. And what it turned out was, he didn't die, but it really fucked up his brain.

And I knew, that if anybody was fated to fuck up a suicide attempt, it was me.

LIPSKY

So there you are still in your twenties...

DAVID

My late twenties.

LIPSKY

Your late twenties, somewhat in pain about your desire to become a sort of successful literary person.

DAVID

I think probably the not very sophisticated diagnosis is that I was depressed. 'Cause by this time, my ego's all invested in the writing. It's the only thing that I've gotten, you know, *food pellets* from the universe for. So I felt really trapped: Like, "Uh-oh, my five years is up. I've gotta move on, but I don't *want* to move on." I was really stuck. And drinking was part of that. But it wasn't that I was stuck *because* I drank. It was like, I really sort of felt like my life was over at twenty-eight. And that felt really bad, and I didn't wanna feel it. So I would do all kinds of things: I mean, I would drink real heavy, I would like fuck strangers. Oh, God -- Or, then, for two weeks I wouldn't drink, and I'd run ten miles every morning, in a desperate, like very *American*, "I will fix this somehow, by taking radical action" sort of thing.

LIPSKY

And here you are, promoting this acclaimed book. Not bad.

DAVID

David. *This* [the interview] is nice. This is not real.

They look at one another.

The guys walk toward baggage claim.

DAVID

An escort's supposed to pick me up and, you know, escort me to the reading. Of course, when I hear "escort," I imagine like full geisha with hairpins who will take you to the bookstore, then back to the hotel, walk on your back and fuck your eyeballs out.

Lipsky is laughing.

LIPSKY

I think that's her.

DAVID

Ah. Just as I pictured.

At the end of a long corridor stands a solidly-built, perky, forty-ish woman, PATTY, holding a sign: "MR. WALLACE."

PATTY

Mr. Wallace! I recognized you from your photograph! I'm Patty Gundersson! Welcome to Minneapolis!

DAVID

Thank you, Patty.

LIPSKY

Hi, I'm David Lipsky.

PATTY

David and David. That's easy. It's the Twin Cities, so...

DAVID

(in explanation) We only just met. He's writing a piece on the tour. Should we get going?

PATTY

Yes, come on, come on...

As they exit:

DAVID

How was your morning, Patty...

PATTY

Good. How about you guys? The flight alright?

59

INT. PATTY'S CAR/STREET - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - DAY

59

Driving through Minneapolis. David and Lipsky share the backseat. Patty is a talker.

PATTY

You wouldn't believe all the famous people I've driven around! Shirley MacLaine? When she came through on a book tour? Ron Wood. You know, of the Rolling Stones?

DAVID

Of course, yeah, wow.

PATTY

Peter O'Toole... Very thin, but delightful.

Lipsky sees the passing, obstructed view of the Mary Tyler Moore commemorative statue.

LIPSKY

Oh, look: The Mary Tyler Moore statue.

DAVID

Oh, yeah.

PATTY

Do you want me to stop?

DAVID

No, no.

PATTY

Everybody who comes here, the first thing they want to see is "where did Mary Tyler Moore throw her cap in the air?" One of our biggest attractions. You sure you don't want me to stop?

DAVID

I'm sure. Thanks, anyway.

(sotto, to Lipsky)

Trust me: This is about as sexy as the tour gets.

Lipsky laughs.

61 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/LOBBY - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - DAY

61

Lipsky and David check in at the front desk.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

Mr. ...

LIPSKY

Lipsky. L-I-P, S-K-Y.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

I've got you in a standard double.
And Mr. Wallace? You have a room with
twins.

DAVID

Ah, yes: Anita and Consuela.

Lipsky laughs. The desk clerk doesn't get the joke.

FEMALE DESK CLERK

Excuse me?

62 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/CORRIDOR - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - DAY

62

The elevator arrives with a ding. They both get off; David
finds his room.

DAVID

See ya later. I'm gonna take a nap.

We follow Lipsky in the opposite direction to his.

63A INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/LIPSKY'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - DAY 63A

His hair still wet from a shower, Lipsky is on the phone to
Bob, his increasingly exasperated editor.

BOB'S VOICE

(over phone) Well, what does he have
to say about the heroin rumors?

LIPSKY

I haven't gotten to that.

BOB'S VOICE

What are you waiting for?

LIPSKY

What am I supposed to say: Is it true
you were a heroin addict?

BOB'S VOICE

Yes. That's your story.

LIPSKY
Okay. It's hard.

BOB'S VOICE
Why? Because you like him?

LIPSKY
Well... Yeah.

BOB'S VOICE
David. You've got to press him.

LIPSKY
Okay.

BOB'S VOICE
Be a prick if you have to. You're not his best buddy, you're a reporter.

LIPSKY
I know. Right. Bye.

He hangs up and looks out the window.

64

E/I. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE - ST PAUL - 1996 - NIGHT

64

A cool, independent bookstore [now defunct]. Patty escorts the Davids in. People who have begun to show up for the event recognize David; some gawk, some smile. David's friends, two attractive women around his age, JULIE (petite, brunette) and BETSY (tall, striking), surprise him with their attendance.

DAVID
I can't believe you guys showed up!

JULIE
We wouldn't miss this, are you kidding?

DAVID
Gluttons for punishment, both of you.

They greet and hug David. Introductions, handshakes.

DAVID
This is David Lipsky. A reporter from *Rolling Stone*.

JULIE
Oh, wow, hi.

DAVID
This is Julie...

LIPSKY
Hi, Julie.

DAVID
And this is Betsy.

BETSY
Hi.

LIPSKY
Nice to meet you.

DAVID
Betsy and I went to grad school together, in Tucson.

LIPSKY
Nice. (to Julie) How do you know David?

DAVID
She wrote me a fan letter.

JULIE
I did, I was the books editor at City Pages and I wrote him a fan letter, that's right.

DAVID
Julie has worked with a whole lot of writers -

JULIE
So I'm discriminating.

DAVID
Exactly. And we discovered that we actually kind of like each other as people.

JULIE
Indeed.

DAVID
That's how I met Jon Franzen: I wrote him a fan letter. Writers are pushovers when it comes to flattery. You could try it sometime.

66

INT. BOOKSTORE/MANAGER'S OFFICE - ST PAUL - 1996 - NIGHT

66

The room, crammed with books and an old sofa, doubles as a kind of "green room" for visiting writers.

MARTHA CAVENAUGH, the shop manager, a robust earth-mother who loves books and her job, offers cookies to Julie, Betsy, Lipsky and Patty while David looks over his reading selection.

MARTHA

You sure I can't get you something to drink?

DAVID

Do you have any artificial spit?

Everyone laughs, perhaps a little too heartily.

DAVID

No, it's an actual pharmaceutical product. Zero-Lube.

LIPSKY

Really? Artificial saliva?

DAVID

Yeah, but it's way better 'cause it *lubricates*. You don't get that *clicky* sound you do with dry mouth.

He demonstrates.

MARTHA

I'll have to remember that.

DAVID

Next tour, I bring a case.

MARTHA

In the meantime, what can I get you?

DAVID

Water? No ice?

Martha goes to fetch it.

Lipsky and Betsy.

LIPSKY

Are you a fiction writer, too?

BETSY

I'm a poet, actually.

LIPSKY

Oh, wow.

BETSY
Just got my first poem published in
the *Kenyon Review*.

LIPSKY
Really! Wow! Congratulations!

David observes Lipsky chatting animatedly with Betsy,
disapproval registering on his face.

66A INT. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE - ST PAUL - 1996 - LATER 66A

Martha leads them to the side of the podium. On the move:

DAVID
I don't mean to be a prima donna, but
I'd really prefer it if we didn't have
a Q & A.

MARTHA
Of course. Whatever you feel most
comfortable with.

DAVID
It's always stuff like "Where do you
get your ideas?" (to Lipsky) From a
Time-Life subscription series for
\$17.95 a month.

Lipsky and Martha laugh.

MARTHA
It's show time!

Martha goes to the podium.

DAVID
(to Lipsky) It's all downhill from
here.

MARTHA
This is the very last stop on his book
tour and we're very lucky to have him!
Ladies and gentlemen... Would you
welcome to the Hungry Mind... David.
Foster. Wallace!

The packed audience applauds enthusiastically. Lipsky
watches as David approaches the podium.

66D INT. HUNGRY MIND BOOKSTORE - ST PAUL - 1996 - LATER 66D

A long line of excited book buyers wait their turn. Seated
at a table, David signs one and hands it to a YOUNG WOMAN.

DAVID
There you go.

The young woman looks at it with bemusement.

YOUNG WOMAN
What is that supposed to be, a computer?

DAVID
What? No. It's a smiley face. See?

YOUNG WOMAN
Ohhh...

DAVID
If you want, I could put Wite-Out over it...

YOUNG WOMAN
That's okay.

DAVID
You sure? It's *your* book...

Lipsky, in ad-libbed conversation with Betsy and Julie, observes from the sidelines.

Back to David. A NERDY GUY pulls out the Vintage paperback copy of *The Broom of the System*.

DAVID
Oh no. That old thing?

NERDY GUY
Do you mind...?

DAVID
Eh, the new one's better.

The guy plunks down a copy of *Infinite Jest*, too.

DAVID
Now we're talkin'.

The guy laughs as David sees Lipsky laughing with Julie and Betsy and is threatened by it. Lipsky sees David looking at them and smiles; David ominously doesn't return the smile. He turns instead to the next customer.

DAVID
Who's next?

David and Lipsky are dining out on pancakes with Julie and Betsy. Laid-back, improvisational. It's toward the end of the meal.

DAVID

I couldn't be plain old "Dave Wallace" 'cause there were "Dave Wallaces" all over the place. And "David Raines Wallace" wrote for *The New Yorker*. That's when Fred Hill asked me what my middle name was and decided that was what my name was gonna be.

LIPSKY

This is literally the worst superhero origin story.

DAVID

I didn't claim it was an origin story...

BETSY

Dave, remember in Tucson, that professor you kind of locked horns with?

DAVID

My nemesis who shall remain nameless? I think I was kind of a prick. But so was he. I was just unteachable. I mean, I don't think I was *actively* unpleasant in class.

BETSY

You were pretty unpleasant. Well, I loved it. (to Lipsky) He was pleasantly unpleasant.

DAVID

Well, I've got to get up unconscionably early for this public radio interview, so we'd better...

LIPSKY

Which means that I have to get up early, too.

DAVID

You can do whatever the fuck you want. Sleep in if you want to.

David's mercurial attitude toward him unnerves Lipsky.

JULIE
We'll get you back to the hotel.

They settle up the check.

LIPSKY
I will get the check. This one is on me.

DAVID
Well, it's on Jann.

JULIE
"Jann?"

DAVID
Jann is his boss.

JULIE
Mr. Rolling Stone.

68 I/E. JULIE'S CAR/DOWNTOWN SKYLINE - ST. PAUL - 1996 - NIGHT 68

Julie at the wheel; Betsy in the passenger seat. David and Lipsky are in the backseat smoking, each blowing smoke out of their respective windows. Spirits high, they sing along with the Alanis Morissette song "You Oughta Know" on the radio.

JULIE
Can you close the windows,
pleaaaasssse, it's fucking freezing!

LIPSKY
Oh but this is our hypothermia smoking
tour of the Midwest.

Julie and Betsy laugh. David does not.

BETSY
"Hypothermia smoking tour." I love
that!

LIPSKY
Oh, thank you.

BETSY
Sounds like something Dave would say.

DAVID
(to himself) Doesn't it.

David doesn't like that Lipsky amused his friends with a DFW-like joke - and Lipsky senses tension.

69 EXT. HOTEL WHITNEY/VALET AREA - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 69

Julie's car pulls up and deposits the Davids.

JULIE

What are you doing tomorrow after your interview?

DAVID

Don't know yet.

JULIE

Give us a call, okay?

BETSY

We're here.

Ad-libbed "Good night"s all around. Julie and Betsy drive away and David and Lipsky enter the hotel.

LIPSKY

That was nice.

DAVID

Yeah. I'm hungry.

LIPSKY

Still?

70 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/DAVID'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 70

CAMERA pans M n M's and candy wrappers: The detritus of a non-alcoholic mini-bar snack attack.

LIPSKY

How does that feel? People fighting to get in, big line of people who want to impress you...

We find David and Lipsky in twin beds, facing each other, talking like college roommates pulling an all-nighter.

DAVID

I'll tell you - having an audience with really really pretty girls who are paying attention to you, and like what you're sayin'? Is gratifying on a fairly I think simple *mammal* level.

LIPSKY

I know. Why is that?

DAVID

I think pretty girls are what we most sort of dream and despair of ever having, of ever paying attention to you. And there they are, in the front row, making eyes at you.

LIPSKY

I think my girlfriend is in love you.

DAVID

No she's not.

LIPSKY

I think she is. I think she likes your writing more than she likes mine. It's getting kind of annoying.

DAVID

Get her on the phone.

LIPSKY

No, she's probably sleeping anyway.

A beat.

DAVID

Please?

71 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/DAVID'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - 71
MOMENTS LATER

Lipsky holds the phone. We HEAR Sarah's voice.

SARAH'S VOICE

(over the phone) Hello?

LIPSKY

Hi.

SARAH'S VOICE

Hi! How's it going?

LIPSKY

It's fine. Did I wake you up?

SARAH'S VOICE

No, I'm up reading *Infinite Jest*. It's pretty amazing.

LIPSKY

Good. Listen: Somebody wants to say hello. Hold on a sec.

He hands the receiver to David.

DAVID
(whispers to Lipsky) What's her name
again?

LIPSKY
Sarah.

David speaks into the phone. (When David is on the phone, we
- and Lipsky - hear only his side of the conversation.)

DAVID
Sarah? Hi. It's Dave Wallace.

Lipsky tries to reclaim the phone a couple of times during the following but David, engaged in a power play, retains control: his way of re-asserting himself after Lipsky's perceived transgressions with David's women friends.

DAVID
Nice to meet you telephonically, too.
Let me ask him. (to Lipsky) Are you
behaving yourself?

LIPSKY
She's asking that?

DAVID
(to Sarah) I'm reasonably sure he is.
I don't have eyes on him 24/7.

Lipsky reaches for the phone but David continues talking.

DAVID (CONT'D)
What're you up to tonight? Oh, wow.
You're kidding me. Oh my gosh. What
part are you up to? Wow, you're
really far along! Oh, thank you.
That's very flattering.

Now that David's talking about the book, Lipsky gives up in frustration, plops into a chair, and quietly seethes.

72 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/LIPSKY'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - LATER 72

Lipsky, in bed, is on the phone with Sarah. He's livid.

LIPSKY
What the fuck was *that* about?

SARAH'S VOICE
(over phone) What.

LIPSKY

You were on the phone with him for
like a half hour!

SARAH'S VOICE

It wasn't a half hour...

LIPSKY

It was! It was twenty-five minutes; I
timed it! You were only supposed to
say hello!

73 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/CORRIDOR/DAVID'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 73
- MORNING

Lipsky leaves his room and goes down the hall to collect
David. He knocks on his door. Listens. TV sounds from
inside. Knocks again.

LIPSKY

David? Escort's waiting. We gotta go.

David, still in boxers and Chicago Cubs t-shirt, frazzled,
opens the door.

DAVID

Sorry, man. Got totally lost in an
orgy of crap.

David ducks into the bathroom.

DAVID

A simultaneous broadcast of *Falcon
Crest*, *Magnum P.I.*, and *Charlie's
Angels*: A perfect storm of shit. Out
in a minute.

We hear the shower running. Lipsky sits on the bed watching
Jaclyn Smith and Farrah Fawcett.

74 EXT. HOTEL WHITNEY/LOBBY - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - MORNING 74

Lipsky and David, with his shower-wet hair pinned up, find
Patty's car out front. They get in the backseat.

PATTY

You're wearing *that*?

DAVID

For a radio interview? Yes.

75 Her disapproval showing, she pulls away. 75

76 INT. MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO/LOBBY/CORRIDOR - ST PAUL - 1996 - 76
DAY

A pretty PRODUCTION ASSISTANT greets David and Lipsky.

DAVID
Hi. Dave. Dave Wallace.

P.A.
(blushes)
I know who you are.

David introduces Lipsky.

DAVID
My amanuensis, Mr. Boswell.

The P.A. shakes Lipsky's hand, playing along with the joke.

P.A.
(in greeting)
"Mr. Boswell." Right this way.

She leads David, followed by Lipsky, down a corridor past glass-walled studios. Lipsky sees people recognize David, whisper among themselves. Young women smile shyly, excited to be in the presence of a cool celebrity.

P.A.
We record digitally. I hope that's OK.

DAVID
So only yes or no answers?

She rolls her eyes. Lipsky laughs, David sees him scribble in his pad.

DAVID
If you do a really mean job, I have
twenty years to get you back.
Remember that.

76A INT. MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO/NPR STUDIO - 1996 - DAY 76A

The interview goes on the air. Lipsky observes from outside the booth. The NPR GUY has a good radio voice.

NPR GUY
My guest today is David Foster
Wallace, who has burst on the literary
scene with his 1,079-page, three-pound-
three-ounce novel, *Infinite Jest*.

Jay McInerney called it "something like a sleek Vonnegut chassis wrapped in layers of post-millennial Zola." David Foster Wallace, welcome to our show.

DAVID

Thank you, glad to be here.

He exchanges looks with Lipsky outside the booth.

NPR GUY

You have said that you saw yourself as - quote - "a combination of being incredibly shy, and being an egomaniac, too."

DAVID

I think I said "exhibitionist, also."

NPR GUY

Meaning?

David glances at Lipsky.

DAVID

Well, I think being shy basically means being self-absorbed to the extent that it makes it difficult to be around other people.

NPR GUY

Difficult for you, or difficult for the other people?

DAVID

I suppose a little bit of both.

77

I/E. PATTY'S CAR/MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO - ST PAUL - 1996 - DAY

77

Patty waits outside her car as the Davids join her.

PATTY

That was wonderful! I listened to the whole show! So interesting! I may have to buy your book and read it!

DAVID

Sorry about that.

David and Lipsky climb in.

PATTY

So, you have the rest of the day free.
Where would you like to go?

DAVID

Do you know where the Mall of America
is?

79 E./I. MALL OF AMERICA/VARIOUS SHOPS - MINNESOTA - 1996 - DAY 79

They discover the vast courts at each corner of the mall. They walk through the amusement park; ride a roller coaster; ride a carousel. In a mirror maze, they make their way through, trying not to bump into the walls. They try flight simulators, play mini-golf, and walk through the underwater tunnels of the aquarium. They stare blankly at Build-a-Bear bear parts which stare blankly back at them.

80 INT. MALL OF AMERICA/FOOD COURT - MINNESOTA - 1996 - DAY 80

David and Lipsky sit over lunch, the recorder running on the table between them. They watch SHOPPERS.

DAVID

I wanted to write something that had kind of the texture of what life was like in America right now: This enormous tsunami of *stuff* comin' at you. And also - it's not *unfun*.

LIPSKY

Not at all. It *is* sort of heavy, though. I mean weight-wise.

DAVID

My friend said when it hit the porch, it sounded like a car bomb going off.

LIPSKY

Who are your readers? College kids?

DAVID

The people who seem most enthusiastic are young men. Which I guess I can understand - it's a fairly male book, a fairly *nerdy* book, about loneliness. You can expect that somebody who's willing to read and read *hard* a thousand-page book is gonna be somebody with some loneliness issues.

LIPSKY

You think it's about loneliness?

DAVID

I think if there is sort of a sadness for people under forty-five or something, it has to do with pleasure and achievement and entertainment. And a kind of emptiness at heart of what they thought was going on, that maybe I can hope that parts of the book will speak to their nerve endings a little bit.

He presses stop on the tape recorder, surprising Lipsky.

DAVID (CONT'D)

By the way, if you quote any of this, you'd do me a favor if you'd say that I'm talking about what I *hope* for the book, or what the book is *tryin'* to do, I don't pretend that it *has*. Okay?

LIPSKY

That's fine.

Lipsky presses play.

LIPSKY

So: the Walter Kirn review, in *New York Magazine* -

DAVID

Didn't read it. I mean, I *heard*.

LIPSKY

"Next year's book awards have been decided" kind of thing? How'd it feel?

DAVID

I applauded his taste and discernment. What do you *want* me to say? How would *you* feel about it?

LIPSKY

How would I feel? That I'd known all along it was good, and here was someone validating that.

DAVID

All I know is, this is absolutely the best I could do between like 1992 and 1995. And if everybody hated it, I wouldn't be thrilled, but I don't think I'd be devastated, either.

It's like, if you're used to doing heavy-duty literary stuff that doesn't sell well, being human animals with egos, we find a way to accommodate that fact by the following equation: If it sells really well and gets a lot of attention, it must be shit. Then, of course, the ultimate irony is: if *your* thing gets a lot of attention and sells really well, then the very mechanism you've used to shore yourself up when your stuff *didn't* sell well is now part of the Darkness Nexus when it does, so you're screwed. You can't win.

Lipsky is laughing.

81 INT. MALL OF AMERICA/MULTIPLEX - MINNESOTA - 1996 - DAY 81

David and Lipsky stand outside. Julie and Betsy arrive. Ad-libbed greetings all around.

BETSY

Oh, my God, this place is insane!

JULIE

I can't believe we actually found you!

81A INT. MALL OF AMERICA/MULTIPLEX - MINNESOTA - 1996 - LATER 81A

The foursome look over movie titles on the electronic board.

BETSY

What's *The Juror*?

LIPSKY

Demi Moore. John Grisham.

BETSY

Oh, right. *Happy Gilmore*?

JULIE

No, that's Adam Sandler.

DAVID

Ooo, *Broken Arrow*! Perfect dumb boy movie. Things that blow up!

LIPSKY

I've already seen it, but...

DAVID

You've already seen it? Boy, you are a man from my own heart, aren't you.

LIPSKY

I don't mind, I'll see it again...

BETSY

I'll see anything.

DAVID

We can see something else...

82 INT. MULTIPLEX/THEATER - MINNESOTA - 1996 - DAY 82

A loud, explosive action scene from *Broken Arrow* with John Travolta and Christian Slater fills the screen.

Seated up close, their heads craned looking up at the screen, Julie and Betsy sit together and Lipsky monitors David's reactions. David is an ideal spectator, totally engaged with a child-like guilelessness that Lipsky finds endearing.

DAVID

Oh boy... oh wow, oh jeez...!

83 INT. MULTIPLEX/HALLWAY - MINNESOTA - 1996 - NIGHT 83

Julie, Betsy, David and Lipsky file out after the movie. Improv post-movie discussion.

DAVID

Wasn't that a cool shot at the end, when Travolta gets impaled by the thing?

JULIE

What do we do now?

DAVID

Do you have a T.V.?

JULIE

Uh huh. I do.

84 INT. JULIE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - ST PAUL - 1996 - NIGHT 84

On TV: John Michael Higgins in *The Late Shift*. They sit around snacking on fresh popcorn and soda.

DAVID

I know that guy.

LIPSKY
The guy playing Leno?

DAVID
No, the guy playing Letterman.

JULIE
How do you know him?

DAVID
Went to Amherst with him.

LIPSKY
Friend of yours?

DAVID
I hated his guts.

Laughter. Lipsky gets up to go to the kitchen which is visible from the living room.

LIPSKY
Does anyone want drinks or anything?

JULIE
(calls) There's also beer.

LIPSKY
Soda's fine, thank you.

JULIE
(to David) Why did you hate him?

DAVID
He was just very cool and popular and I was not, that was the basic offense.

Betsy gets something out of her bag and joins Lipsky in the kitchen.

BETSY
Hey.

LIPSKY
Hey!

BETSY
I brought you something.

LIPSKY
You brought *me* something?

She gives him a copy of the *Kenyon Review*.

LIPSKY

Oh, great! This has your poem in it!
Thank you!

In the living room, David shows Julie the TV listings.

DAVID

Look what's on next. *Algiers*.
Starring Hedy Lamarr. Have you seen
it?

JULIE

Uh, no.

DAVID

It's one of the greats. And Hedy
Lamarr is fascinating. She invented
frequency hopping.

David sees Lipsky and Betsy talking and doesn't like it.

Back to the kitchen.

LIPSKY

Hey, when I get back to New York, you
mind if I e-mailed you with questions
about what Dave was like in grad
school and stuff?

BETSY

Sure, if it's okay with Dave.

LIPSKY

I'm sure it's fine with Dave. Can I
have your e-mail address?

BETSY

Sure.

She looks for something to write on, scribbles her address
and gives it to Lipsky before going back to the living room.

A moment later, David gets up, walks over to Lipsky, and
backs him up against the fridge.

DAVID

(whispers)
What are you doing?

Lipsky initially thinks David is joking.

LIPSKY

(smiling)
What?

DAVID
I saw you hitting on Betsy.

LIPSKY
Hitting on...? I was *talking* to her.

DAVID
David, I saw you! You got her to give you her address.

LIPSKY
Her e-mail address. In case I had questions, about the piece I am writing about you.

DAVID
Well, I don't want her talking to you.

LIPSKY
Fine! I won't contact her.

DAVID
I *told* you she and I dated when we were in grad school... The least you can do is show me the respect of not coming on to her right in front of me.

LIPSKY
Dave, I'm sorry if it looked that way. That was not my intention. Besides, why would I want to get involved with somebody who lives in St. Paul?

DAVID
You're *already* involved with somebody who lives in Los Angeles...

David is glaring at him when we hear:

JULIE (O.S.)
Are you okay?

DAVID
(calls)
Everything's fine. Thank you.
(to Lipsky)
Just stay away from her. Okay? Be a good guy.

David goes back to the women.

DAVID (O.S.)
What'd I miss?

Once he catches his breath, Lipsky, breaking solidarity with David's abstinence, gets a beer out of the fridge and pointedly, while making eye contact with David, pops open the can and defiantly takes a slug.

86 INT. JULIE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - ST PAUL - 1996 - LATER 86

Algiers is on television. David watches; Betsy is gone; Julie has fallen asleep. Lipsky, now wary of David, sits some distance away, struggling to stay awake.

87 I/E. TAXI/DOWNTOWN - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 87

Lipsky and David ride in the backseat in silence, avoiding each other, looking out their respective windows.

87A I/E. TAXI/HOTEL WHITNEY/VALET AREA - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 87A

The cab pulls up to their hotel. Lipsky is prepared to pay the fare.

DAVID

I got it.

LIPSKY

That's all right, my expense account'll cover it.

DAVID

So will mine. I got it, I said.

Lipsky relents.

88 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/ELEVATOR - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 88

Lipsky and David ride up in silence. The elevator arrives at their floor with a ding.

89 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/CORRIDOR - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - CONTINUOUS 89

Lipsky goes in one direction; David in the other.

LIPSKY

Hey. Good night.

David doesn't respond. Lipsky watches him petulantly go down the hall to his room.

90 INT. HOTEL WHITNEY/LIPSKY'S ROOM - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - NIGHT 90

Lipsky, agitated, paces while talking on the phone.

SARAH'S VOICE
 (over phone)
 Were you flirting?

LIPSKY
 No! Sarah, I swear to you: He just completely went bonkers on me.

SARAH'S VOICE
 You do that, David, you know? You're not even aware of it.

LIPSKY
 What do I do?

SARAH'S VOICE
 You're compulsively flirtatious.

LIPSKY
 I can't believe you're taking his side!

SARAH'S VOICE
 I am not!

LIPSKY
 Yes you are. Listen, I think I'm just really tired. I gotta go.

SARAH'S VOICE
 David? David...?

He hangs up.

91 I/E. HOTEL WHITNEY/VALET AREA - MINNEAPOLIS - 1996 - MORNING 91

Lipsky and David, unsmiling, emerge from the hotel with their bags. Patty greets them with a cheery smile.

PATTY
 Good morning! And how are we this morning?

David climbs into the backseat.

LIPSKY
 I think I'll ride up front.

David looks a little surprised but says nothing.

PATTY
 Oh. Okay. Here, let me get my junk out of the way...

She makes room for Lipsky who gets into the passenger seat. Patty continues yammering but Lipsky tunes her out. The car pulls away.

92 INT. AIRPLANE - 1996 - DAY 92

Mid-flight. David, his beaten-up Robert Heinlein paperback on his lap, sleeps soundly with his lips slightly parted and his bandanna'd head leaning against the window. Lipsky studies his sunlit face with new objectivity.

93 EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT/LONG TERM PARKING - CHICAGO - 1996 - DUSK 93

A fresh layer of snow covers every car in the lot, making them indistinguishable from one another. David and Lipsky walk through the rows of cars, David carrying his knapsack.

They continue to walk up and down the rows of cars looking for the Grand Am. Lipsky repeatedly clicks his key hoping to have the car announce itself with blinking headlights.

Lipsky clicks the key and locates the car. Finally. They throw their bags in the trunk and start to get in.

LIPSKY

What.

DAVID

You didn't think to write down where we parked the car?

Lipsky is cold, feeling vulnerable, fighting tears.

LIPSKY

No. I didn't, okay? Sorry! I fucked up. I'm a fuck-up. Not everyone can be as brilliant as you.

DAVID

What is *with* you?

LIPSKY

What the fuck is *with* you?

They get into the car.

94 INT. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - CHICAGO - 1996 - DAY 94

They ride in silence. Lipsky, at the wheel, collects his thoughts before speaking his mind. This is a more assertive Lipsky than we've seen before.

LIPSKY

I gotta say... There's something basically *false* about your approach here.

DAVID

What do you mean "false?"

LIPSKY

I think it's part of your whole social strategy.

DAVID

In what way?

LIPSKY

You still feel you're *smarter* than other people.

DAVID

Oh, really?

LIPSKY

Yeah but you act like you're in the kids' softball game, but holding back your power-hitting, to try to make it more competitive for the little ones.

DAVID

When?

LIPSKY

Here, now, for the past three days, it's part of your social strategy.

DAVID

You're a tough room, you know that?

LIPSKY

You make a point of holding back - there's something obvious about you holding back your intelligence, to be with people who are younger or maybe not as agile as you are...

DAVID

That would make me a real asshole, wouldn't it? I don't think writers are any smarter than other people. I think they may be more compelling in their stupidity, or in their *confusion*.

But I think one of the true ways that I *have* gotten smarter is, I've realized that I'm *not* much smarter than other people.

LIPSKY

Yeah, right.

DAVID

There are ways in which other people are a lot smarter than me. Like, I don't know, it makes me feel kinda *lonely*...

LIPSKY

What.

DAVID

There's certain stuff I've told you that's really true and, frankly, I think it's been *brave* of me.

LIPSKY

Absolutely.

DAVID

I've written enough of these "pieces" to know that you could present this in a hundred different ways. Ninety of which I'm really gonna come off as a monumental asshole. But it seems like *your* read of this is, "Huh: what an interesting *persona* Dave is adopting for the purposes of this interview."

LIPSKY

That's not what I'm saying.

DAVID

If we'd done this interview through the mail? And I had access to a library, and could look stuff up? My dream would be for you to write this up, send it to me, and I get to rewrite all my quotes - which of course you'll never do. When I'm in a room by myself, alone, and have enough time, I can be really *really* smart. Don't get me wrong: I think I'm bright; I think I'm talented. I don't mean to sound disingenuous.

LIPSKY

(amused) Oh, no?!

DAVID

I am not an idiot. I mean, you know, I can talk intelligently with you about stuff. But I can't quite keep up with you.

LIPSKY

That is such bullshit.

DAVID

Believe me: I'm not just "Aw-shucks, I'm just in from the country, I'm not a real writer, I'm just a regular guy." I'm not trying to lay some kind of shit. And I'm -

LIPSKY

You just did it again! You flatter me, but are you just being patronizing?

DAVID

I just think to look across the room and automatically assume that somebody else is less aware than me, or that somehow their interior life is less rich, and complicated, and acutely perceived than mine, makes me not as good a writer.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

Because that means I'm going to be performing for a faceless audience, instead of trying to have a conversation with a person. If you think that's *faux*, then you think what you want. I've got a serious fear of being a certain way. And a set I think of like, real convictions about why I'm continuing to do this, why it's worthwhile. Why it's not just an exercise in basically getting my dick sucked. And, you know what?, this is a very clever tactic of yours:

LIPSKY

Tactic, what tactic?

DAVID

Get me a little pissed off, a little less guarded, I'm gonna reveal more.

Yes, it's true: I *treasure* my regular-guy-ness; I've started to think it's my biggest asset as a writer, that I'm pretty much just like everybody else.

(A beat.)

You know what? I'm not doing any kind of *faux* thing with you; I'm not gonna say it again.

LIPSKY

Okay, but the *faux* thing - what you just said - is an *example* of the *faux* thing. You don't want to take the risk of giving the full you.

DAVID

Look, I don't know if you're a very nice man or not. It's very clear that you don't believe a word I've said.

LIPSKY

All your protesting... "I'm just a regular guy." You don't crack open a thousand-page book 'cause you heard the author's a regular guy. You read it because the author is brilliant. Because you *want* him to be brilliant. So who the fuck are you kidding?

DAVID

I don't have the brain cells left to play any kind of "*faux*" games with you.

LIPSKY

Fine.

David presses stop on the tape recorder.

95 EXT. HIGHWAY/GAS STATION - CENTRAL ILLINOIS - 1996 - AFTERNOON 95

In nasty weather, Lipsky fills the tank, leaving the cap on the roof. David runs around to the other side of the car to take over driving duty from Lipsky. They drive away.

96 I/E. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - AFTERNOON 96

Closer to home. Lipsky glances over at David, at the wheel, who seems faraway and depressed.

LIPSKY

What are you thinking?

DAVID
Tour's over.

LIPSKY
Just hit you?

DAVID
Yeah. I'm gonna have to *feel* all this now, instead of just sleepwalk through it.

LIPSKY
What do you mean by "sleepwalk?"

DAVID
I've kind of *unplugged* myself for the last three weeks. Meeting a whole lot of new people, having to do things, you're in a constant low-level state of anxiety. And sort of deep, existential, you know: *fear*, that you feel kind of all the way down to your *butthole*.

LIPSKY
What are you afraid of? I mean, what's the worst thing that could possibly happen?

DAVID
The worst? That I'll really get to like it. That's the worst.

LIPSKY
The attention?

DAVID
Uh huh.

LIPSKY
(nods, then)
And what would be so wrong about that?

DAVID
Become one of these hideous: "Yet another publication party, and Hey, there's *Dave* sticking his head in the back of the photo." I'd rather be dead.

LIPSKY
Why?

DAVID

I don't want to be seen that way.
Why, would you?

LIPSKY

Well, if you're deriving your satisfaction from *talking* about your work, as opposed to *writing*, then, yeah, I guess you'd get a lot less done.

DAVID

Exactly. And there's nothing more grotesque than somebody who's going around, "I'm a writer, I'm a writer, I'm a writer."

Is that a dig at Lipsky? Lipsky thinks so.

DAVID

I don't mind appearing in *Rolling Stone*, but I don't want to appear in *Rolling Stone* as somebody who *wants* to be in *Rolling Stone*. If you see me like, you know, a guest on a *game* show in a couple of years...

Lipsky laughs. Pause. David is pensive again.

DAVID

To have written a book about how seductive image is, and how many ways there are to get seduced off any kind of meaningful path, *because* of the way the culture is now...? What if I become this parody of that very thing?

Lipsky looks at David, who stares straight ahead, his eyes maybe filling with tears.

DAVID

Tomorrow, you drive away, get on a plane, this is over. And I'm back to knowing like twenty people. Then I'm going to have to like *decompress* from getting all this attention. Because it's like getting *heroin* injected into your *cortex*.

That registers with Lipsky.

DAVID (CONTD)

And where I'm going to need real balls is to be able to sit and go through that. And try to remind myself that what the reality is: that I'm thirty-four years old, and I'm alone in a room with a piece of paper.

They drive in silence.

97

EXT./INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 1996 - NIGHT

97

The Grand Am pulls up, its headlights the only artificial light. The Davids get out and remove their bags. Inside, the dogs are barking in anticipation.

David unlocks the door and the dogs greet him and Lipsky exuberantly. David kneels so that the dogs lick his face.

DAVID

(in an Elvis voice)

I'm never leavin' you again, I swear.

David looks around the carpet.

DAVID

Shit Check.

(discovers some)

Ah! Look what you did.

The dogs sheepishly watch David clean up their shit.

DAVID

Happens to the best of us, eh, boy? Never fails. Wait to do your thing *after* the dog-sitter leaves.

(to Lipsky)

Be sure your *Rolling Stone* readers learn about *that*.

David prepares to put on some music. Tape recorder in hand, Lipsky approaches.

LIPSKY

Uh. Hey. So, I'm leaving tomorrow and, I've got to ask you about this rumor...

DAVID

Is this the heroin thing? The heroin thing again?

LIPSKY

Yeah.

DAVID

It isn't true. What is so hard for you to believe?

LIPSKY

The reason it is so hard to believe is because there is so much about drugs and addiction in the book...

DAVID

That doesn't mean it's autobiographical, the drug stuff in the book is basically a metaphor. Look at you. You don't fucking believe a word I'm saying, do you.

LIPSKY

I didn't say that.

DAVID

I was *not*, I *never* was a heroin addict.

LIPSKY

Okay. The rumor I heard... was that in the late '80s, when you were at Harvard, you'd gotten involved with drugs and had some kind of breakdown...

DAVID

I don't know if I had a breakdown, I got really really depressed. I told you that. It had nothing to do with drugs. I mean, I'm somebody who spent most of his life in *libraries*. I never lived that kind of dangerous life. I wouldn't even stick a needle into my arm.

LIPSKY

Okay, so how do you think that rumor got started?

DAVID

I have no idea! I have no idea.

LIPSKY

Alright... Calm down...

DAVID

To tell you truly, if you structured this as some "and then he spiraled into some terrible addiction thing," it would be inaccurate. It was more like, I got more and more unhappy. The more unhappy I would get, the more I would drink. There was no joy in the drinking. I used it for anesthesia. Okay?

LIPSKY

Okay. What kind of drinker were you? Were you a falling-down drinker? A waking-up-in-the-curb drinker?

DAVID

No, I was not! Okay? Part of my reticence about this whole thing is that it won't make very good copy for you. Because, no, I was not like that at all!

LIPSKY

You did agree to this interview.

DAVID

I know that I did.

LIPSKY

Alright, I'm not gonna push much further.

DAVID

I'm also aware that some addictions are sexier than others. My primary addiction my entire life has been to television. I told you that. Now, television addiction is of far less interest to your readers than something like heroin, that confirms the mythos of the writer -

LIPSKY

A myth I do not believe, okay?

DAVID

I know you don't believe that. I'm also aware that one of the things swirling around here is you want the best fucking article you can have!

Why don't you write whatever the fuck you want, but the fact of the matter is, it was not a *Lost Weekend* sort of thing. Nor was it some lurid, romantic writer-as-alcoholic-sort-of-thing. What it was, was a 28-year-old person who exhausted a couple other ways to live, really taken them to their conclusion. Which for *me* was a pink room, with a drain in the center of the floor. Which is where they put me for an entire day when they thought I was going to kill myself. Where you don't have anything on, and somebody's observing you through a slot in the wall. And when *that* happens to you, you become *tremendously... unprecedentedly* willing to examine some other alternatives for how to live.

David looks at him for a moment. He walks out of the room, leaving Lipsky behind, his head reeling. Lipsky presses stop on the tape recorder.

100 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - 1996 - NIGHT 100

Lipsky, still digesting the conversation, looks at himself in the mirror while brushing his teeth. He spits into the sink.

101 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/GUEST ROOM - 1996 - NIGHT 101

Lipsky is in bed, still awake in the moonlight. The door ajar, David comes in. He speaks softly, in shadow. He can't be seen and can't see Lipsky very well; it's sort of like confession.

DAVID

You awake?

LIPSKY

Yeah.

DAVID

I was just thinking... It wasn't a chemical imbalance, and it wasn't drugs and alcohol. It was much more that I had lived an incredibly *American* life. That, "If I could just achieve X and Y and Z, everything would be OK."

(A beat.)

There's a thing in the book: when people jump out of a burning skyscraper, it's not that they're not afraid of falling anymore, it's that the alternative is so awful. And then you're invited to consider what could be so awful, that leaping to your death seems like an escape from it. I don't know if you've had any experience with this kind of thing. But it's worse than any kind of physical injury. It may be what in the old days was known as a spiritual crisis. Feeling as though every axiom of your life turned out to be false, and there was actually nothing, and you were nothing, and it was all a delusion. And that you were better than everyone else because you *saw* that it was a delusion, and yet you were worse because you can't fucking function. And it's really horrible.

(A beat.)

I don't think we ever *change*. I'm sure there are still those same parts of me. I've just got to find a way not to let them *drive*. Y'know?

(A beat.)

Well, anyway... Good night.

LIPSKY

Good night.

David goes. Lipsky, his eyes moist, scrambles to get his pad and scribbles notes so he won't forget David at his most revealing.

102 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/GUEST ROOM - 1996 - MORNING 102

Morning light falls across Lipsky's face. The dogs greet him. He stirs, gets up.

103 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - 1996 - MORNING 103

Lipsky heads for the bathroom just as David emerges from it.

LIPSKY

Morning.

104 EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE/FIELD - 1996 - MORNING 104

David and Lipsky are out on a wintry field, walking the dogs.

DAVID
 Jeeves, Drone, come! You get
 instantaneous production from the
 Jeevester; Drone's a much tougher nut.

LIPSKY
 Beautiful out here.

DAVID
 You should see: in the spring, when
 the wind blows, you can see ripples,
 it's like water. It's like the ocean,
 except it's real green. I mean, it
 really is. Calm, real pretty.
 (Pause.) Hungry?

LIPSKY
 You know *me*.

They turn back toward the house. David calls the dogs.

DAVID
 You should get going.

LIPSKY
 Yeah. Let me take you someplace nice
 this time. Remember, it's on Jann.

106 EXT. MCDONALD'S/PARKING LOT - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY 106

Lipsy and David emerge. David tucks into the takeout bag.

DAVID
 Sorry, I can't wait, I'm suddenly
 starving, I gotta eat something.

David picks pickles off his bacon double cheeseburger.

LIPSKY
 You don't like pickles.

DAVID
 Oh, come on. Now the whole world will
 know what my mother's known for years:
 I'm a picky eater?

He takes a bite.

107 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - 1996 - DAY 107

The dogs are in David and Lipsky's faces while the men eat.

DAVID

Jeeves, sit! You see, Jeeves gets very obedient when food is around. You sit, Drone. It should be clear by now that you're not getting any of this.

Drone sits. David feeds both dogs morsels of his food.

DAVID

Good dog! There you go, thatta boy. (to Lipsky) Don't leave food within their reach - they *will* eat it.

Lipsky takes a note.

DAVID

You're not gonna make me look like one of those insane old women who talk to their dogs, are you?

LIPSKY

Don't worry.

DAVID

I *am* worried: my dogs'll be offended.

LIPSKY

Your dogs are not gonna *read* it.

Drone playfully nudges Lipsky to the floor.

DAVID

Wow - he's never taken to a male like he's taken to you.

LIPSKY

Really?

DAVID

Except for me, of course.

The phone rings. David hands Lipsky his burger.

DAVID

Hold this?

LIPSKY

Sure.

David goes to get the phone.

DAVID

(on the phone) Hello? Oh, hey.

He turns away from Lipsky and lowers his voice but Lipsky can still hear him.

DAVID

Yeah, I *would* like to. I can't right now. I've got this guy here.

Lipsky is stung: After all the intimacy they shared, Lipsky is just "this guy."

DAVID

The *Rolling Stone* guy. Yeah. Well, he should be leaving pretty soon. Can I just meet you there? Okay? Great. See you there. Bye.

He hangs up. Lipsky tries not to show his hurt.

LIPSKY

I should get out of here, let you get on with your life.

DAVID

Just this friend. This dance I like to go to, with this friend.

LIPSKY

You dance?

DAVID

Uh huh. I've just discovered in the last few years that I really like it. Although I'm still not very good.

LIPSKY

What kind of dancing?

DAVID

I tend to do the Jerk, the Swim, cheesy 70s disco.

LIPSKY

Really?

DAVID

The nice thing about Bloomington? You're completely hip if you do that.

LIPSKY

Where do you go, a club?

DAVID

This Baptist church.

Lipsky can't tell if David is serious.

LIPSKY
Why there?

DAVID
Because Baptists can dance.

LIPSKY
Wow. Dancing.

DAVID
I will not Vogue.

CUT TO:

108 INT. LIPSKY'S WEST END AVE APT/OFFICE - NYC - 2008 - NIGHT 108
Lipsky, listening to David's voice, smiles ruefully.

DAVID'S VOICE
(on tape) That's the one thing I
refuse to do: I will not Vogue. It's
cool. All these people come, and
they've all got their dancing shoes on
and stuff. And it's nice. Everybody
just, more or less, leaves each other
alone.

CUT BACK TO:

109 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - 1996 - DAY 109
Scene 107, continued.

DAVID
Hey, before you leave, I would really
like it if maybe we should exchange
address data.

LIPSKY
Absolutely. (A beat.) Well, I should
get my stuff together.

DAVID
And I should start carving an ice
sculpture out of my car. It's like
Antarctica.

David grabs his coat and gloves and goes outside. Soon we
hear the sound of David scraping ice off his car, which is
heard throughout the following:

Lipsky goes from room to room, as if memorizing this time and place, softly describing what he sees into his recorder.

LIPSKY

(into the device) Dog stuff. Throw toys, chew toys. Crap stains on carpet. Shark doll on bookcase. American flag. Alanis. Coal-burning fireplace. Brick wall. Fake wood-paneling. Soda cans. Lots of 'em. Diet Rite. Looks like a frat; the bookish frat. Botticelli calendar: Birth of Venus. Wooden chess set. Postcard of Updike. Cartoon: Comparative anatomy: Brains - Male, Female, Dog.

110 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - 1996 - DAY 110

LIPSKY (CONT'D)

Barney towel used as curtain. Photo of German philosophers. Photo collage of his family, the kind kids put in their dorm rooms. His sister is pretty, looks like a female him. Clothes everywhere: sneakers, stuff on the floor, clothes draped over stuff.

111 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - 1996 - DAY 111

LIPSKY (CONT'D)

Padded toilet seat, looks like a rug. Postcards: Baboons. Clintons. St. Ignatius quote: "Lord teach me to be generous. / Teach me to serve you as you deserve; / to give and not to count the cost... / to toil and not to seek for rest / to labor and not to ask for reward, / save that of knowing that I do your will."

112A INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/HALLWAY/OFFICE - 1996 - DAY 112A

Lipsky sees the door to David's office, ajar for the first time. He pushes his way in and discovers a darkened room. He looks around quietly, barely breathing, sees the partially illuminated keyboard and computer. He goes to the closed drapes, pushes them aside and squints as he takes in the brilliant snowy field.

112 INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/GUEST ROOM - 1996 - DAY 112

The scraping is still heard. Lipsky packs clothes, a loafer, and stops when he sees his book, *The Art Fair*. He looks at his author's photo.

113 EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 1996 - DAY 113

His book in hand, Lipsky trudges through the snow and finds David systematically scraping away at his car.

DAVID

Driving that rental of yours? The feeling of *gliding*? This shit box didn't even have shock absorbers.

LIPSKY

What *is* it?

DAVID

'85 Nissan Sentra. I know it doesn't look like much, but, man, this thing *starts*. It's actually a problem.

LIPSKY

Why?

DAVID

I gotta get a new one but I *can't* junk this.

LIPSKY

Why not?

DAVID

It's my *friend*.

LIPSKY

Ah.

Pause.

LIPSKY

Hey, David, I, uh...

Lipsky shyly presents David with a copy of his book.

DAVID

Wow. Just happened to have it on you?

LIPSKY

I debated whether or not I should I do this.

DAVID

Why not?

LIPSKY

I don't know, you don't think this is like some kid-brother sort of thing to do?

DAVID

No. Thanks, man, I look forward to reading it.

LIPSKY

You're welcome. I wrote my address and e-mail on the flyleaf.

DAVID

I'll read it soon as I'm done with the Heinlein and I'll send you a note.

LIPSKY

Great. Thanks.

David flips through the book.

DAVID

I'll be curious to see what it's like being inside *your* head for a change. I like your cover.

LIPSKY

Yeah, me, too. I had them use the cover art for the British edition.

DAVID

Come on. You got approval but I - ?
(stops himself)
It's nice. It's very nice.

Lipsky puts his bag in the Grand Am and slams the trunk.

LIPSKY

Hey, isn't it reassuring that a lot of people are reading you and saying you're a really strong writer?

DAVID

It'd be very interesting to talk to you in a few years.

LIPSKY

Why do you say that?

DAVID

'Cause my own experience is that that's not so. The more people think that you're really good, actually the bigger the fear of being a fraud is. The worst thing about having a lot of attention paid to you, is that you're afraid of *bad* attention. If bad attention hurts you, then the calibre of the weapon that's pointed at you has gone way up. Like from a .22 to a .45. But there's a part of me that *wants* a lot of attention. And that thinks I'm really good, and wants other people to see it. It's one of the ways I think we're sort of alike, you know?

LIPSKY

Uh huh.

Lipsky smiles and nods. Pause.

LIPSKY

(in farewell) Well...

Lipsky's awkward attempt at a hug - unreciprocated by David - turns into a clumsy handshake. Lipsky gets into the car. David stands at his window.

DAVID

I'm not so sure you want to be me.

LIPSKY

I don't?

DAVID

(A beat. He smiles.)
Send my best to "Jann."

David shuts the door. Lipsky starts the car and pulls away while David returns to scraping his car.

115

I/E. CAR/DAVID'S HOUSE - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY

115

Lipsky watches David in the rearview mirror get smaller and smaller until he disappears from view without ever having looked back at his visitor. From the barren, grey, mid-western landscape we hear traffic sounds and

SMASH CUT TO:

116 EXT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT - NYC - 1996 - DAY 116

The urban landscape of Central Park West, near the Museum of Natural History. Lipsky walks along the sidewalk.

117 INT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT/LIVING ROOM - NYC - 1996 - DAY 117

Lipsky is typing at his keyboard. The doorbell buzzes.

118 INT. LIPSKY'S W 77TH ST APT/LIVING ROOM - NYC - 1996 - MOMENTS LATER 118

Lipsky beholds a parcel. The return address is "Dave Wallace." What could it be? He excitedly slices open the box and peels away newspaper to reveal: A SINGLE LOAFER. And a message written on a post-it: "Yours, I presume?" Accompanied by a smiley face. Nothing on the reverse. Nothing else in the box. That's all. Huh. Lipsky smiles in bemusement at the lone loafer.

LIPSKY (V.O.)
When I think of this trip...

CUT TO:

119 INT. BARNES & NOBLE BOOKSTORE - NYC - 2010 - NIGHT 119

Lipsky reads from his published book, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, to a nice-sized crowd (including Sarah and Bob, his editor).

LIPSKY
(reads) ...I see David and me in the front seat of the car.

INTERCUT:

119A I/E. CAR/OUTSKIRTS - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - DAY 119A

Flashes back to the car ride, as described. We see them talking but cannot hear them; all we hear is the sound of tires on the road.

LIPSKY (V.O.)
We are both so young. He wants something better than he has; I want precisely what he has already. Neither of us knows where our lives are going to go. It smells like chewing tobacco, soda, and smoke. And the conversation is the best one I ever had.

120 INT. DANCE HALL - BLOOMINGTON - 1996 - SUNSET

120

Lipsky imagines, in slow-motion, David dancing joyously, sweating like crazy, with members of the church the night Lipsky left, the night that began the rest of his life.

LIPSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

David thought books existed to stop you from feeling lonely. If I could, I'd say to David that living those days with him reminded me of what life is like -- instead of being a relief from it... and I'd tell him it made me feel much less alone.

The screen suddenly goes black.

THE END

123 CODA - INT. DAVID'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - 1996 - NIGHT

123

"OUTTAKE" Replay of Scene 38 (when Lipsky excused himself to spit out the chewing tobacco).

LIPSKY

You mind if I use your uh...

David points the way to the bathroom.

DAVID

All yours.

Lipsky goes, leaving David with the tape running. This time, instead of following Lipsky, we break form and stay on David:

DAVID

(into the recorder) Now it's just me and the tape recorder sittin' here. Drone's lookin' at the floor, I'm smokin', having said I wasn't going to smoke, I'm smokin'. Just me and your your tape recorder.

The SCREEN GOES WHITE.