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FADE IN:

EXT. A SMALL HOUSE IN VIEW OF MT. ST. HELEN'S - MORNING

It is a Saturday morning. DIANA emerges from the front door looking behind her. She is waiting for MAX, a large, intelligent German Shepherd. Diana is a tall, young woman of about twelve.

DIANA

Come on, Max, get a move on, buddy.

Max emerges from the door, wagging his tail, and barks good naturedly before taking off ahead of Diana into the woods.

DIANA

Alright. You asked for it.

She breaks into a loping jog, following Max's lead into the woods. On the back of her backpack, we focus on a patch that says, "DIANA."

EXT. THE TREELINE - MOMENTS LATER

Max emerges from the trees onto a tumbled, rocky area of the mountain slope. He turns around to face the trees, wagging his tail. He barks.

DIANA

Yeah, yeah. I'm coming.

She finishes her jog by slowing to a leisurely walk, huffing and puffing exaggeratedly.

DIANA

Don't look at me that way. You've got twice as many legs as I do.

Max grins and barks, nuzzling demandingly for some attention. Diana pets him for an absentminded moment before resuming the ascent.

DIANA

Alright, Max, you're doing pretty well so far. Which way now?

Max puts his nose into the air for a moment, sniffing, then heads to the left, taking them westward around the mountain. They are no longer running. They now pick their way cautiously through the rubble.

EXT. A FEW HUNDRED YARDS LATER - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Max is sniffing at a large boulder. It has a powdery grey color, and the texture of fired clay. After a few moments, he begins to growl and whine at it.

DIANA

Hey, what's the matter? It's just a big rock.

At this point, she realized that may not be true. She notices the rough ceramic texture of the rock, and the seams where this ancient ball of clay was carelessly slammed together.

DIANA

Okay, so it's a weird rock. What do you smell?

Max whines. Diana circles the boulder, examining the seams, and the fact that it is rather precariously perched on the mountainside.

DIANA

Come on, Max. Let's go.

Head down, Max complies, and they are on their way up again. Then, curiosity strikes. Diana turns to stare at the boulder. She sits and begins to throw rocks at it, idly contemplating it. She throws a particularly hefty rock, which strikes on a seam and splits off a large lump of the boulder. Max whines in fright, and retreats several feet behind Diana.

DIANA

Hey, Max. Chill out. It's not going to hurt you.

The rock trembles, and the fragment crumbles to a black dust, which appears to evaporate.

DIANA

Oh, man. What is that thing?

She moves to join Max. The rock seems still. Visibly summoning some courage, Diana approaches it slowly. She sees that the exposed section, where the broken piece had been, seems oily and wet, and it is deeply black. Diana backs off to a safe distance, selects a big, heavy rock, and throws it with all the force she can muster directly at a major seam. The seam widens, and we hear the boulder split roughly at the center. A few seconds pass, then several of the smaller seams fracture, and the top hemisphere of the boulder is shattered.

The pieces fall away, disintegrating and evaporating in the manner of the initial fragment.

DIANA

Whoah. That is really weird.

The exposure to sunlight causes the viscous surface of the remaining hemisphere to rapidly dry out and turn to a grey dust. When all the changes are through, Diana again approaches the rock. Max follows her out of loyalty, but cowers behind her.

DIANA

It's okay, boy. You stay there. I just want to have another look.

She approaches the still massive boulder and finds stepping stones so that she can climb up to the exposed face. She makes an effort not to directly touch the rock with bare skin. When she reaches a stable stance upon the rock and looks down, she almost falls right back off in surprise at seeing the exposed figure, protected by the surrounding clay, and complete in form. On the human scale, the figure is roughly fifteen feet tall and six feet across the shoulders. The hands are oversized, about four feet from wrist to tip of middle finger.

DIANA

Wow! Max, there's a carving in here. Looks really weird. This could be a serious discovery. Mom says there weren't any Indian settlements this far North, but this guy says something different.

Diana fumbles in her backpack, and removes a camera. She snaps a couple of pictures, then decides to clean up the lines of the figure. She cautiously touches the grey dust with the tip of one finger, and when nothing appears to happen, she starts brushing the dust away from the lines of the figure. As she approaches the torso, she also begins to blow at the dust. When she reaches the line of the mouth, she takes a huge breath and blows hard, trying to clear this deep cleft of dust. After a moment, the figure begins to inhale, it's chest heaving. This both scares and jostles Diana, who is overbalanced by her recoil and falls from the stone. Upon her impact, the screen blacks out.

INT. DIANA'S HOUSE - ROUGHLY THE SAME TIME

Diana's father, WAYNE, is in a drunken sleep on the living room couch. He is an alcoholic, and a sometimes contemptible drunk. He is snoring offensively.

Diana's mother, Brandy, is up and about, straightening things out, and impatient for Wayne to wake up. She is about 32, slim, and very pretty, though it has been a long time since she spent much time on her appearance. Wayne is an excellent mechanic, and thanks to his wife, he still owns his own shop. He is about 36, growing a pot belly, hasn't shaved in quite some time, and needs a haircut. He still wears a greasy work shirt, with his name patched onto the breast, and clutches an almost empty bottle of whiskey in one hand. During a particularly loud saw, he moves to scratch an itch on his face, and the last dregs of whiskey pour right into his nose, waking him with a scream.

WAYNE

Ouch! Damn it, Brandy! Why the hell did you let me go and do that?

BRANDY

Oh, no. You don't get to blame your stupidity on me. That was all you.

WAYNE

You could have at least taken the bottle out of my damned hand.

BRANDY

And you'd just yell at me for that. Nothing is ever your fault. No, not your fault, 'cause you were drunk. Jackass.

WAYNE

Hey. Cut me some slack. It's a disease, you know.

BRANDY

And you know they have treatments for it. I don't see you taking any steps to cure it, so don't you dare use it as an excuse. Why don't you clean yourself up and go do the same for the shop. It's supposed to be a business, if your recall.

WAYNE

Will it get you off my back?

BRANDY

For now, yeah.

WAYNE

Deal.

He gets up, looks at the empty bottle, drops it into the trash, and heads into the bathroom, where he starts by brushing his teeth.

WAYNE

(through his toothbrush)
So where's Diana, anyway?

BRANDY

Where she always is when you wake up, and when you come home, and pretty much any time you're around; She's gone.

WAYNE

She doesn't avoid me that much.

BRANDY

When's the last time you saw her?

WAYNE

Um - um - I don't remember, but it wasn't that long ago.

BRANDY

So far as I know, you haven't seen her since her birthday party, and that was three weeks ago.

WAYNE

No. It can't be - Jeez. Maybe you're right. When she comes in, why don't you tell her to come on down to the shop and visit with me. She used to love that.

BRANDY

I'll ask her, I won't tell her. And used to can be a long time, Wayne.

Wayne hangs his head a little, and closes the bathroom door.

EXT. BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN - A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER

We see the back of the monster, and as we swing around, we see Max, shaking and growling low in his throat. When the monster's front comes into view, we see that he holds Diana's still unconscious body in one massive hand. Diana appears mostly unhurt. The monster is silent. The hand trembles slightly. After a moment, Diana wakes. She screams. After a brief few moments, the scream falters and dies. The monster speaks in a vaguely rumbling monotone.

DIANA
What the hell are you doing?

AX
I am trying to crush you.

DIANA
Trying?

AX
Yes. I find myself unable to do so.

DIANA
Why?

AX
I do not know.

DIANA
Well, why don't you put me down?

AX
Because I must crush you.

DIANA
You can crush me later. Put me
down.

After a moment's contemplation, Ax complies, and reaches for Max, who darts away.

DIANA
Hey! Don't even think about it. So
who are you?

AX
My name is Accidus.

DIANA
What does that mean?

AX
In English, "Destroyer."

DIANA
Hence the crushing?

AX
Yes.

DIANA
Got a nickname, Accidus?

AX

What is a nickname?

DIANA

It's a shorter version of your name. This is Maximillian, but I call him Max.

AX

I see. No, I do not have a nickname.

DIANA

How about "Ax"?

AX

That would be acceptable.

DIANA

So where do you come from, Ax?

AX

I come from Hell.

INT. THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP - LONG AGO

We are in the DEVIL's workshop. In this scene, we do not see the Devil full face. As the scene begins the Devil is clearing off a large, lumpy table made of rough wooden beams.

Behind the Devil is a large cask of clay, and while his back is turned, a white hand silently opens the lid, scatters a handful of light soil into the clay, and disappears.

When the Devil has cleared the table, he turns, plunges his hand into the clay, heedless of the change, and pulls out a large lump.

The Devil slams the lump of clay into the table, flattening it against the rough surface. He picks up a large, crude knife, and quickly cuts out the silhouette of a splayed human figure. Next, he trims the front side, so that it is relatively flat leaving material for a nose, and for the feet to point upward from the table. With a smaller knife, he cuts out fingers, and coarse facial features.

Picking up the figure, the Devil rounds out the sharp square edges a bit, and etches the shape of ears with a small pointed stick. Setting the figure down, so that it stands upright, the Devil, circles it and surveys his work.

Snaking in close, winding his long torso around the front quarter of his creation, the Devil whispers something incomprehensible into the figure's left ear. He then leaves the room briefly.

The owner of the white hand sweeps into view, and we see that it is an ANGEL. The Angel whispers his own incomprehensible phrase into the figure's right ear, then spreads his wings and disappears aloft.

The devil returns with a few new implements in his hands. He sets upon the table a small, crude paint brush, and several rather lumpy pots of paint. He dips the brush into the nearest jar, and when it emerges, it is steeped in deep black paint. As he leans in to apply the paint, the devil is heard to sniff. He picks up the figure, and continues to sniff at it, dripping a drop of paint onto the figure's shoulder. He smells the angel, and close up, he now sees the "contamination".

The Devil roars in rage, drops the figure to the table, and turns to the cask of clay. He looks and sniffs and finds the contamination throughout the clay. Enraged, he roars again, lifts the entire cask, and hurls it across the workshop, where it smashes against the far wall. In one massive step, he approaches the table, and kicks it across the room. The figure falls into the chaotic jumble of rough clay leaking from the broken cask just before the table shatters against the far wall.

INT. WORKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

A group of servants enter, lump the clay together with the other debris, and load it into wheelbarrows. In this process, the figure is smashed between large lumps of clay.

INT. HELL'S RUBBISH BIN - INDEFINITE TIME

The servants cast the clay, and the rest of the rubbish into a pit of flame. After they disappear, the angel comes into view. He flies out over the flaming pool, and up, through what we realize is the cone of a volcano.

EXT. MOUNT SAINT HELEN'S - DAY

It is moments before the eruption of Mt. St. Helen's. The earth and sky both tremble in anticipation. Soon the mountain explodes.

EXT. BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN - NEARING DUSK

DIANA

Wow. And I thought my dad was a jerk.

AX

Jerk?

DIANA

Bad person.

AX

I see.

DIANA

So what did they say when they whispered in your ear? I mean, what does it mean in English?

AX

My creator named me, and gave me my task. "I name you Accidus, the destroyer, and I set you to the destruction of man."

DIANA

Yikes. And the angel? What did he say?

AX

He asked me a question. He said, "But what's in a name?" I was confused.

DIANA

That's Shakespeare. You should read him.

AX

He is a writer?

DIANA

Yeah. Pretty much the best one in the English language.

AX

Then I should read him.

DIANA

While you're taking my advice,
I think you should feel free to go
ahead and disappoint your, um,
father.

AX

I cannot.

DIANA

We'll see about that. Follow me.

They exit, Ax walking with a distinctive ka-thumping sound.

INT. WAYNE'S SHOP - ROUGHLY THE SAME TIME

Wayne has been cleaning up the shop and has worked up a sweat. He is filthy, and catches a glimpse of himself in the filthy mirror.

WAYNE

Jeez.

As he approaches the mirror, we see an old, faded photo of Diana, which has curled up a little at the edges. In the photo, she is toothlessly smiling big as you please. He glances briefly at the photo, then looks into the mirror. After a penetrating look into the mirror, he drags a fingernail through the grime on it. He stares at his face in the mirror, realizing it hasn't gotten much better. He drags a finger through the grime on his face, in the same path of the clean streak on the mirror. He looks at the pale streak. He turns to the sink and scrubs his face clean. He cleans the left half of the mirror properly with glass cleaner and a paper towel. He looks again. Satisfied, he continues work, leaving the right half of the mirror covered in grime.

He wanders through the shop and picks out four fifths of whiskey. Three of them are nearly empty, but the fourth is still sealed. He throws them one by one into the metal trash can with all the force he can muster, shattering them. But he can not muster the gumption to smash the full bottle. He stands with his arm cocked and his face distorts with frustration. At last he gives in.

WAYNE

Fuck!

As he drops his head in shame, his hand slips the full fifth into his pocket. He heaves a gargantuan, self-pitying sigh, picks up a broom and continues to work.

INT. HOME - SAME TIME

Brandy is sweeping the floor in the kitchen. She sweeps the dirt into a dust pan and as she bends to empty it into the waste basket under the sink, she sees another of Wayne's reserve fifths.

BRANDY

Damn it.

She picks up this one, and begins a furious search of the house for more. In a quick series of shots, she finds a total of seven bottles, and piles them on the kitchen table. They range from nearly empty, to nearly full. She makes a noise of outrage, picks up the bottles, takes them out to the porch, and forms them into a low wall that Wayne will have to cross in order to get into the house.

EXT. THE FOREST NEAR THE HOUSE - A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER

The house is visible from where the "kids" stand.

DIANA

Alright. Ax, you stay here. I'll be right back.

Diana and Max head for the house. As Diana comes to the porch, she glances at the bottles and sighs. She steps over them, opens the door and enters the house. Her mom is reading on the sofa.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

DIANA

Mom, you know that's a bad idea. You're just going to antagonize him.

BRANDY

Yeah. I know. I'm just venting. I'll pick them up in a bit.

DIANA

Thanks, Mom. I'm going to grab some books.

BRANDY

Okay. C'mere and give me a hug.

She does. They hug and for a moment, the worry lines on Brandy's face relax. When they break, Diana goes up the stairs to her room. We briefly see her shuffling through a large and crowded bookshelf. The room is a hodgepodge. There are a couple of completed models and one in progress. Several drawings and watercolor paintings decorate the wall. A few poems and short stories are visible as well. She's a bright kid with many interests.

EXT. THE PORCH - SAME TIME

Wayne is returning home. He is walking because the shop is only about a quarter of a mile away. When he approaches the porch the bottles are still there. He closes his eyes, hangs his head and sighs. With a second, more forceful sigh, he straightens himself and picks up the bottles, tucking them into his pockets. Without another sound, he turns around.

A moment later, Brandy steps outside to collect the bottles. We see a quizzical expression as she sees them missing, but she dismisses it and goes back inside.

Almost the instant the door shuts behind her, Diana bursts out the door, her backpack newly bulging with books.

DIANA

See ya, Mom. I'll be back in a bit.

INT. THE SHOP - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Wayne is cleaning a very grimy sunward window. When it is finished, he steps back and begins to remove the seven bottles from his various pockets. He pours out each bottle in its turn, upending them into the large basin sink, then placing them on the ledge of the window one at a time. When he comes to the full bottle, he pauses. Then he breaks the seal and opens the bottle. He pours half the contents of the bottle into the empties, distributing it evenly. There is a large shot worth of whiskey in each of the formerly empty bottles, but the formerly full bottle is left with roughly half of its original contents. He arranges the seven in a straight line on the window sill with the eighth by itself behind the center one. We catch a glimpse of amber tinted sunlight splashing on his face before he turns away.

EXT. THE WOODS - A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER

Diana and Ax are comfortably perched upon a fallen tree with the books. Max is sniffing around the nearby trees. Diana has brought Ax a plethora of Shakespeare. He has Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, The Merchant of Venice, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, as well as a separate volume entitled, The Collected Poetry of Shakespeare.

DIANA

So, what do you think of A Midsummer Night's Dream?

AX

I don't know. What should I think?

DIANA

It's not really about what you should think. It's just about reading for the experience. To find out how it makes you feel.

AX

How should I feel?

DIANA

Well, "Midsummer" is supposed to be a comedy. It's supposed to be funny.

AX

What is funny?

DIANA

Humor is funny.

AX

I am confused.

DIANA

No kidding. Okay. Try this. Knock, Knock.

A pause.

DIANA

You're supposed to say, "Who's there?"

AX

Why?

DIANA
To make the joke work. Just do it.
Knock, knock.

AX
Who is there?

DIANA
Interrupting cow.

Another pause.

DIANA
You're supposed to - wait. Never
mind. We'll get to knock-knock
jokes later. What's green and red
and spins around in circles?

AX
I do not know.

DIANA
A frog in a blender.

AX
What is a blender.

Diana smacks her forehead.

DIANA
I'll show you later. Look, the
humor thing just isn't going to
happen right now. Why don't I leave
you here with Shakespeare. Skip the
comedies for the time being. Stick
to the tragedies and I'll be back
tomorrow.

AX
Then I shall see you tomorrow.

DIANA
That you shall. Enjoy the books.
C'mon, Max.

As they are leaving, Max goes to Ax and nudges him. Ax
doesn't stir, so Max nudges him again.

DIANA
He wants you to pet him.

Ax opens his mouth to speak.

DIANA

Like this.

She pets Max, and motions for Ax to follow suit. When he does, he seems to relax. Max licks his hand a couple of times, barks, and is off.

DIANA

Take it easy. I'll see you tomorrow.

AX

Tomorrow.

As Diana follows Max, Ax examines the place on his hand which Max has licked. It is dark with moisture. He strokes it with a finger and leaves an indentation. He is a little stunned, and he hastily smooths it back to normal. Ax is still unfired clay.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Wayne has just showered and is wrapped in a towel. He is in the last few moments of shaving, then moves to comb his hair.

EXT. PORCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Wayne is sitting on the porch, waiting for Diana. He is drinking a glass of water. In a moment, Diana and Max can be heard. Max is visible first, and he approaches Wayne circumspectly. When he is close enough, he sniffs at him and becomes more animated. Wagging his tail and nudging for affection.

WAYNE

That's right. I'm safe. C'mere.

He pets Max and in a moment, Diana is there.

DIANA

Hey, Dad.

WAYNE

Hey, kiddo. What's up?

DIANA

Just been hiking and stuff. How about you? You're looking pretty polished.

WAYNE

Yeah. I was cleaning out the shop and got pretty grimy, so I figured I'd better clean up for dinner.

DIANA

You're staying in for dinner?

WAYNE

Yeah. Figured it's been a while, so I ought to. It's good to see you. I was about to think you were Superman and I was Clark Kent.

DIANA

Yeah, sorry about that.

WAYNE

Not at all. You're a busy kid. Hey, if you're not busy tomorrow morning, how about hanging out at the shop with me?

DIANA

Jeez, sorry, Dad, but I'm supposed to meet a friend in the morning. We're studying Shakespeare. But how about a little later. I could bring lunch.

WAYNE

Now you're talking. You gonna bring your friend?

DIANA

Um, I don't think he'll be able to come.

WAYNE

Okay. Hey, c'mon inside. I think dinner's almost ready.

Wayne rises and turns to the door.

DIANA

Hey, Dad.

When Wayne turns, Diana gives him a hug.

DIANA

It really is good to see you.

WAYNE

You too, sweetie. C'mon. Let's eat.

They go into the house, Wayne's hand on her shoulder, Max right at their heels.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - NIGHT

It is dark out, and we can make out Ax, standing at the edge of the woods near the house, the books in his hand. As he watches, the last light goes out in the house.

He sits with an airy grunt, and carefully sets the books on the ground in a neat stack. With a sigh, he lays down.

INT. WAYNE'S SHOP - EARLY MORNING

Early morning light slants through the easterly windows as Wayne opens the door and comes in. He approaches the window with the bottles in their regimental line. Grabbing the leftmost bottle, he unscrews the cap, tips the bottle back, and takes the remaining whiskey in one brisk shot. Staring back at the bottle, he takes a moment to experience the taste of the whiskey, swallows, and smashes the bottle into the trash can.

WAYNE

Eulgh! What a god-awful taste.

He spits into the can, and begins arranging tools and parts.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - LATE MORNING

Diana bounds out of the house, followed closely by Max. She charges into the forest, and almost runs into Ax, who is seated just out of sight of the house, buried in Romeo and Juliet.

DIANA

That's the one. Have you gotten to it yet?

AX

O, be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet.

DIANA

Yup, you found it. Think you can live up to it?

AX

But I am not a rose.

DIANA

Neither is Romeo. It's symbolism. The rose represents Romeo. He is a whole person, and is not defined by his name. You don't have to let your name define you either.

AX

I am not certain of that.

DIANA

You didn't squash me yesterday. I think that's a good step.

AX

Perhaps.

DIANA

So how do you like the play so far?

AX

I find it engrossing.

DIANA

Great. So I'll let you continue reading, and I'll go help my dad with some cleaning. See you this afternoon?

AX

That would be nice. See ya?

DIANA

Yeah. See ya.

Diana lopes away, but Max lingers until Ax absently pats his head, then follows.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Diana is at the counter, assembling a nice lunch. As they talk, she scoops some macaroni salad into a tupperware container, fetches a few packets of chips, and some sodas, and finally begins making sandwiches. Brandy comes through on her way to the laundry.

BRANDY
Hey, kiddo, what's up?

DIANA
Making lunch. I'm gonna go help Dad
organize the shop.

Brandy has passed into the laundry room and speaks from there.

BRANDY
Don't let him work you too hard.

DIANA
I won't, Mom. Hey, do we have any
tomatoes?

BRANDY
(entering)
Yeah. Should be in the bottom
crisper. Hon, are you going to be
okay if your dad. . .

DIANA
Goes back to normal? Yeah. I'm used
to it. Kinda like a backwards
groundhog. When he's sunny, I come
out, but when his shadow's showing,
I hide.

BRANDY
Smart girl.

INT. WORKSHOP - LATER

Wayne is taking a breather. The shop has seen a great deal of improvement, but there is much to be done. Diana enters, carrying a large paper grocery sack, which contains lunch.

WAYNE
Hey, kiddo, glad you could make it.
How's your friend.

DIANA
He's catching on to the language
fast. I'm impressed. Shop looks
good dad. Maybe we can really get
it into shape.

WAYNE
That's what I'm hoping. What's for
lunch?

DIANA

A bunch of stuff. Dig in.

They chow down.

WAYNE

What language is he catching on to?

DIANA

The Shakespearean English. You know how it takes a while to get used to it?

WAYNE

Oh, yeah. Gotcha. I'm so proud of you, Diana. When I was twelve, I was still reading comic books. My girl's a full-on literary scholar.

DIANA

Hey! I read comic books. Once in a while.

Wayne presents his soda for a toast.

WAYNE

Cheers, kiddo.

DIANA

Cheers.

INT. WORKSHOP - LATER

Montage. We see Wayne and Diana cleaning the shop from top to bottom, sweeping, arranging tools and parts, cleaning tools and equipment, and arranging the small office. At one point, Diana is about to clean the dirty half of the mirror, but Wayne stops her. Later, Diana repaints the faded sign out front, which reads "Wayne's Expert Auto Repair."

EXT. THE PORCH - SHORTLY BEFORE SUNSET

Brandy is sitting in the rocking chair, splitting her attention between a book, which she reads by the light of a lamp inside the window, and the sandwich and soda she's having for dinner. She wears a sweat shirt and her lower half is wrapped in a coarse woven blanket. After we have seen her eat a bit and read a bit, we hear Ax moving at the edge of the forest. She hears it too, and gets nervous. She perks her ears up to listen, and peers intently into the darkness.

She starts as if she's seen something, then slowly withdraws into the house with her book, blanket, and plate carefully clutched to her body.

EXT. THE PORCH - NIGHT

Brandy is peering through the now closed window, holding a shotgun. Wayne and Diana approach into the circle of light, and when she sees them, she leaps to the door and shouts.

BRANDY
Get in here! Hurry!

They do as she says.

WAYNE
What is it, honey?

DIANA
Mom, what's wrong?

BRANDY
I saw something moving out there. Maybe half an hour ago. Something big. Ten more minutes and I would have called the police. What were you two doing out so late?

WAYNE
Working in the shop. What kind of something did you see? A mountain lion, a bear?

BRANDY
I don't know. Maybe a bear. But bigger. Really big.

DIANA
Um, mom?

WAYNE
Here, give me the shotgun, I'll get a flashlight and go take a look

DIANA
Wait! It's not a bear. It's okay. He's, um, friendly.

BRANDY
He? What are you talking about?

WAYNE
Is this your study buddy?

DIANA

Yeah. Sort of. Hang on a minute.

He moves to the door.

DIANA

Wait. Promise me you won't freak out. And Dad, go put away the gun.

WAYNE

No way . . .

DIANA

Do it. Or I won't call him out. I promise, it's okay.

WAYNE

I hope you're right.

Wayne disappears through the door, unloading the shotgun, and reappears a few moments later.

BRANDY

Okay. Call him.

Diana opens the door and steps down off the porch. Her parents follow, Wayne grabbing her by the back of her jacket and pulling her back onto the porch. Diana leans over the rail to shout.

DIANA

Hey, Ax! Come on out! Meet my folks.

Nothing.

DIANA

It's okay, I promise. Come on out.

There is a quiet rustling, then Ax slowly moves into the light, moving with a timidity that is at odds with his immense frame.

BRANDY

Oh, my God!

WAYNE

Holy Christ! What is it?

Brandy and Wayne begin to back toward the door, each holding one of Diana's shoulders.

DIANA
(shrugs free)
He's a golem.

WAYNE
A what?

DIANA
It's a long story. Just meet him
before you freak out.

By now, Ax is within reach, and we see that he carries
Diana's books.

AX
Thank you for the books, Diana, I
feel that I have learned much.

He holds out the books for Diana to take, and the parents
cringe a little. Diana, unafraid, takes the books and sets
them on the little table where Brandy had rested her dinner.

DIANA
You're welcome. I'm glad you liked
them. I have plenty more. Would you
like some more to read?

AX
I would very much like to read more
books.

DIANA
Mom, Dad, this is Accidus. Ax for
short. Ax, this is my mom Brandy,
and my dad, Wayne.

AX
I am honored to meet the both of
you. Your daughter is a remarkable
person.

BRANDY
That she is. It's - good to meet
you, I suppose.

WAYNE
(extends his hand)
Good to meet you.

Ax stares at the hand, and Diana grabs his hand, joins it
with that of her father, and pumps them up and down. The
picture is almost that of an infant clutching the finger of
an adult's hand.

DIANA

This is called shaking hands, big surprise there. It's a pretty standard gesture, especially when meeting someone for the first time.

AX

Thank you. Please, forgive my ignorance.

WAYNE

No, uh, no problem. So, uh, where you from?

INT. THE SHOP - MORNING

We first see the lined up whiskey. Two of the shots are gone. Five remain. We pass through the shop, where we see Wayne, Diana, Max and Ax passing the time playing Go Fish.

Out at the front of the store, Brandy sneaks out and flips an old metal Coca-Cola sign around so that instead of the rusted back, the colorful front shows. This is the secret signal by which the locals know that Wayne is sober enough to be trusted. This done, she goes back into the office and settles down to get her accounting system into shape.

We rejoin the others at their card game. We soon realize that Ax has developed a system for dealing with the cards. He holds one massive hand so that the palm faces him, and pinching a new card in two fingers from his other hand, he holds it out for Max to lick it. He then simply sticks the moistened card to the surface of his hand, mostly lining them up along his index finger.

WAYNE

So what do you plan to do with yourself now that you're - awake?

AX

I am not certain. I don't imagine I will fit in with humans very well.

WAYNE

Doesn't look like you'll have much luck hiding, either.

DIANA

So what should we do?

WAYNE

I don't know.

Just about then, Brandy begins knocking at the shop window. This is the signal that a customer is coming. Ax moves toward the big rear entrance while Diana cleans up the game. Wayne moves out front to greet the customer.

Out front, a small Indian man gets out of a sweet '65 Mustang and approaches Wayne. This is SUNIL. They shake hands and Wayne makes a circuit of the car. He is stalling for a bit of time.

WAYNE

Good to see you, Sunil. It's been a while.

SUNIL

That it has. You are looking well.

WAYNE

Thanks. This baby is as nice as they come. You've been taking good care of it.

SUNIL

I have tried, yes, but there is an unpleasant slippage in the clutch. I was hoping you could fix it for me.

WAYNE

Doesn't sound like a problem. I'll get the door. You pull on inside and I'll have a look underneath.

EXT. EDGE OF A RIVER - SAME TIME

The kids sit at the edge of the river with Max. Diana dangles her bare feet into the water. Ax sits hunched over his knees, contemplating his toeless, brick like feet. Max chases the occasional fish and explores, occasionally coming to rest between them.

AX

I think I would like to see a play.

DIANA

I think so. I've seen a few plays. I like musicals.

AX

What are musicals?

DIANA

They're plays where people sing songs. Some of them are very good.

AX

What is. . .

DIANA

Singing? Okay, you've got to learn about singing. Singing is putting words together with music. Um. Okay, like this.

She sings a brief, sad bit of well known music. Ax is deeply affected.

AX

That was beautiful. Would you do it again?

DIANA

(blushing)

No. I'm not really a singer. I'll let you borrow my CD player later. It plays lots of good music.

AX

That would be wonderful.

They fall silent for a while, and Ax's attention falls on Diana's feet. He begins to compare his feet to hers, and to compare his being to that of the humans he has met. As he thinks, he picks up a stick, dips one foot into the water, and begins to sculpt a fully formed foot from his own crude one. He holds the stick very delicately between two enormous fingers. He has made the first strokes in defining toes before Diana notices.

DIANA

Ax! What are you doing?

AX

I am trying to give myself toes.

DIANA

But why?

AX

Because you have them. And I wish to be more like you.

DIANA

Doesn't that hurt?

AX

No, it does not.

DIANA

That's kinda cool. I wish I could do that. Hey, don't make your toes like mine, okay? They're not supposed to be crooked like my little toes. They're supposed to be straight.

AX

Alright.

DIANA

So, you can just, like, sculpt yourself like that?

AX

It would seem so.

DIANA

Man, there are some chicks at school who would eat road-kill to be able to do that. Ha! You're pretty cool there, Ax. Cool means fashionable. Socially acceptable.

AX

I see. Thank you.

By now, he has got some respectable toes going, and the clay is starting to dry out. He has discernible toenails, and the appropriate lines for knuckles. He even has a pretty good curvature for the top of his foot. There is no heel, however, and the bottom of his new foot is still almost completely flat.

AX

Is that acceptable?

DIANA

Um. Yeah. Pretty darned good for a first attempt, anyway. But you might need to touch it up later. Why don't you try it out?

AX

I think it should dry first.

DIANA

Fair enough. So what do we do now?

INT. THE SHOP - SAME TIME

Sunil is just driving away. Wayne hangs up the phone before stepping into the office, where Brandy is working. As he enters, we see a plethora of well-used computer related self instruction books. Brandy has a side business of her own, repairing computers, and she is now at work, replacing a power supply in someone's big tower system.

WAYNE

Hey, hon. How's it coming?

BRANDY

Almost finished. Should have it fired up in a couple of minutes. Did I hear you tell Sunil that he'll need a new clutch?

WAYNE

Well, I gave him the option of a rebuilt one, but he wasn't interested. Nothing but the best for his baby, I guess.

BRANDY

Alright. Order it up.

WAYNE

I did. I used the shop phone. Brandy, do you like working on computers? I mean, have you found it rewarding?

BRANDY

Wayne, it's not the cure for cancer, it's a job. There's stuff about it I like and stuff I don't. Like any job.

WAYNE

I suppose.

BRANDY

What're you getting at, Wayne?

WAYNE

I just feel bad that you were - basically forced into it. By me.

BRANDY

Done is done, Wayne, don't worry about it. Just don't - Just - never mind.

WAYNE

Just don't fuck up again?

BRANDY

I'm not dumb enough to ask for that. Just try not to fuck up again for a few weeks. We're running low, Wayne.

He very much wants to make a promise, but he wants even more not to break a promise.

WAYNE

- I'll try.

She nods her head. She is putting in the last screw, and she plugs in the various cables and the power cord.

WAYNE

Is there anything I can do to help?

She presses the power button and the machine comes to life.

BRANDY

Nope. Looks like I'm done. I'm going to run the diagnostics and it should be done. But why don't you go see if you can find Diana and her friend. They've been gone too long.

WAYNE

Alright. See you in a bit?

BRANDY

Yeah.

EXT. EDGE OF A RIVER - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ax and Diana still sit by the river, enjoying the warmth of the sun. Max sits between them, his head on her lap. Ax gently strokes Max's fur.

DIANA

Think it's ready?

AX

I am ready to test it.

Diana crosses her fingers and looks intently at Ax's massive foot. From behind them, Wayne speaks.

WAYNE

Ready to test what?

DIANA

Oh, Dad, come here. You've got to see this. Ax carved himself a foot.

WAYNE

What?

AX

More accurately, I have refined my foot. Look for yourself.

Wayne has a look.

WAYNE

Holy cow! How did you do that?

AX

With a stick.

WAYNE

What?

DIANA

He's made of clay, Dad. He just got his foot wet and went to work. He sculpted his own foot.

WAYNE

Does it work?

DIANA

Go ahead, Ax. Let's find out.

Again, we examine his new foot. He lifts it a few inches above the carpet of decaying plant matter and tentatively wiggles his toes a fraction. Nothing breaks. They look fine. He wiggles them more fully. Still pretty good. Max makes an approving growl.

WAYNE

Why don't you try walking, Ax?

DIANA

Yeah!

Ax rises with surprising grace, and takes a few limping steps.

DIANA

Does it hurt?

AX

No. I believe my imbalance is caused by the new asymmetry of my feet. I should probably repeat the operation on the other foot.

DIANA

That's a good idea, but I think there's something else too.

She sits down and rolls onto her back, sticking her bare feet into the air. Ax examines the curved shape of the foot and frowns. He looks at the bottom of his own foot, which is still flat.

AX

I see.

WAYNE

Hey, man. Don't worry. You did a good job, and you couldn't have done the bottoms anyway. Why don't we all go home and Diana and I will help you finish the job?

AX

You would do that for me?

WAYNE

Yup.

DIANA

Sure. C'mon, guys, let's go.

The four of them depart, Max taking the inquisitive lead.

EXT. THE PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

Brandy sits in her rocking chair. She leafs through a photo album. The photos depicting her life with Wayne are plentiful, right up to Diana's eighth birthday party. At that point, they taper off for a year or so, becoming very sparse. The last photo shows Max as a puppy. When we reach the end, we see that she has marked a specific page with her finger, and she turns back to it slowly. She focuses on a picture that shows her dancing with Wayne.

Her arms are around his neck and they are kissing. But near the bottom edge of the picture, we see Wayne's arms wrapped around her waist, and in his hand, we see a beer bottle. With a sigh that turns into a groan, she closes the book like a rusty gate.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Brandy is wandering through the kitchen and pantry, trying to decide what to fix for dinner. She's not enjoying the task. She does not notice as Wayne appears in the doorway. Behind him, Diana runs upstairs.

WAYNE

Don't worry about it, hon. I'll do dinner tonight.

BRANDY

You will? Thanks. That would be great.

WAYNE

No problem. Any requests?

BRANDY

Something hot. Preferably not nuked.

WAYNE

Coming right up. Go rest. Veg out or something.

BRANDY

Mind if I watch you cook?

WAYNE

That would be great. It's been a long time.

BRANDY

Tell me about it.

INT. DIANA'S ROOM - SAME TIME

She is fetching another load of stuff for Ax. She digs an old reading lamp out of the closet, and fills a small box with another load of books. She pulls a big comforter off of the top shelf of the closet, wonders for a moment if there's any point, and piles it on top of the box. She gathers up the whole works in her arms and exits.

INT. THE BARN - MOMENTS LATER

It's small for a barn. Cosily cavernous, one might say. Ax has laid out a sleeping area, with a big trailer as his bed and a broken car seat as his pillow. Diana enters carrying her bundle.

DIANA

Hey, Ax. I brought you some stuff. Since you don't seem to sleep much, I brought you a reading lamp. That way you can read after dark.

AX

Thank you.

DIANA

Are you going to be comfortable here?

AX

Yes, I think so.

She disappears into the shadows and emerges with the end of an extension cord, which she brings over to the trailer. She clips the reading lamp on to the side of the trailer and plugs it in. Ax is startled by the light, then impressed.

AX

This is wonderful. I will be able to read all night.

DIANA

So you don't sleep at all?

AX

Not so far.

DIANA

Do you get hungry or anything? Do you need food? Is there anything you need?

AX

Not that I know of.

DIANA

I feel bad leaving you out here.

AX

Out here is better than inside the rock, Diana.

DIANA

Well, when you put it that way,
have a good night. Sweet dreams.

She pats him on the knee, turns, and leaves.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Wayne is cooking up a storm. Brandy is sitting in the kitchen, talking to him, and allowing herself to enjoy his company. He's got a nice creamy soup simmering down, and a chicken and pasta dish in the works.

BRANDY

Wayne! This smells fantastic. Can I
have a taste?

WAYNE

Sure. Careful though, it's hot.

He spoons up a bit of the soup, and presents it. Brandy blows on it, and carefully partakes.

BRANDY

Oh, man! You are definitely the
cook of the family.

WAYNE

Yeah. You should put me to work
more often.

She comes close, puts her arms around his middle, closes her eyes, and hugs him. It's a tentative hug, but it's sincere. When she opens her eyes, she sees Diana, looking in from the kitchen. She smiles at her daughter, who smiles back, waves, and scampers upstairs. Wayne sees none of this.

WAYNE

Alright. Let me go, before dinner
burns.

He breaks free and turns to the stove. Everything is ready, so he goes about setting up for serving.

INT. DIANA'S ROOM - SAME TIME

She is happy, but she knows her father. She's not foolish enough to get her hopes up after only two days. What she does, is dig into a secret place in her big desk and pull out a small wooden box.

As she opens the box, we see that she has her own small stash of photographs, which she sifts through for a few moments.

Then, struck with an idea, she runs into her mother's room, rifles around in the closet a bit, and comes out with a camera. It's a nice SLR, old enough to be fully manual, but well cared for. She sneaks down the stairs.

Back in the kitchen, three settings are prepared, and Wayne is presenting one more sample. Just as he brings a delicate bite of chicken to Brandy's mouth, we hear the click of the camera. In their moment of surprise, we hear three or four more clicks, as Diana captures a rare moment of family joy.

WAYNE

All right, you little spy! Come on
in here and dig in. You're mom says
I did a pretty good job.

Diana sets the camera carefully on a counter as she enters the kitchen. They all sit down to their first family meal in a long time.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Ax is laying on his back in the trailer, leafing through the poetry book, and comes to the critical section. He comes across a section that explains the need to hear Shakespeare aloud. He grunts softly, sits up, and turns to a poem. Sonnet 27.

AX

Weary with toil, I haste me to my
bed, The dear repose for limbs with
travel tir'd; But then begins a
journey in my head, To work my
mind, when body's work's expire'd:
For then my thoughts (from far
where I abide) Intend a zealous
pilgrimage to thee, And keep my
drooping eyelids open wide, Looking
on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless
view, Which, like a jewel hung in
ghastly night, Makes black night
beauteous, and her old face new.
Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night
my mind, For thee and for myself no
quiet find.

He sighs and lays back down.

AX
No quiet find.

Sighing, he closes his eyes, and as they close, we share with him an instant's darkness split horrifically by the visage of the Devil, surrounded by a gout of flame.

From above, we see him shudder and open his eyes. He sets the Shakespeare down, and picks up the biggest book from the pile of new books.

EXT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Wayne is coming out of the house, on his way to work. Ax is already up and about, and joins Wayne on the way to the shop.

AX
Good morning, Wayne.

WAYNE
'Morning, Ax. Did you sleep alright?

AX
I don't sleep. But I read a great deal. It was a pleasant night. And yourself?

WAYNE
Slept like a log. In my bed, no less. Yeah. It was a pleasant night.

INT. THE SHOP - LATER

Wayne quickly takes his shot this morning, throwing the bottle into the trash and moving to his work before he can get preoccupied thinking about the alcohol. Since there isn't actually much work to do yet, he begins sweeping up the floor, after which he lays out some tools. He's expecting to fix Sunil's car today. The new clutch should arrive soon. After a few seconds, he begins to sing to himself. He sings a soft, somewhat folksy song, perhaps one that has a theme of hardship, or hard work.

This short moment of song acts like a jolt of electricity for Ax. He stands, gently swaying, his eyes half closed.

Wayne sings through the end of the verse before noticing Ax. He stops and approaches.

WAYNE

Hey! Ax, you okay, buddy?

AX

I am very okay. Your singing is beautiful.

WAYNE

Thanks, but that was nothing, come here.

Wayne takes Ax by the finger and walks him over to the old shop stereo. He sorts through a few CD jewel cases until he finds what he wants. It's a classic singer songwriter album, something on the lines of James Taylor's greatest hits. Ax is immediately transported.

In a short series of shots, we see Wayne playing disc jockey. He plays a sampling of Classical music, a bit of classic Rock and Roll, some instrumental Jazz, some Blues, and finally a rousing show tune, preferably "Walk Through the Fire", from Once More With Feeling.

Throughout the this series, Ax is absolutely joyful. He is calm, and still, and at peace. Then, suddenly, a car horn sounds. It is Sunil. Wayne turns off the radio, and rouses Ax to a retreat.

EXT. THE SHOP - SAME TIME

Sunil has arrived, and sees no one about, so he honks the horn. As he walks toward the shop, he catches a glimpse of the hulking form of Ax through the window. His momentum carries him forward, and when he back steps to take a second look, Ax is gone. He rushes forward and around the building, looking for the gray hulk.

He catches no further look at Ax, and Wayne intercepts him right near the door.

WAYNE

Hey, Sunil. Clutch isn't here yet, but it ought to be here any minute now.

SUNIL

Wayne, I saw something in your shop. Something strange.

WAYNE

What kind of strange?

SUNIL

It looked like a stone man, but it moved.

WAYNE

I think you're seeing things, my friend.

SUNIL

Perhaps. Should I bring the car in?

WAYNE

Yeah. I'll get the big door. Bring it right up onto the lift.

They do that, Wayne pulling the chain that opens the big rolling door, and Sunil driving carefully up on to the twin metal ramps of the lift. As he gets out, facing out the big door, he sees what could be the massive shadow of Ax moving under the trees at the edge of the clearing, but in the time it takes him to blink, the shape is gone. Wayne plays along, spinning around to follow Sunil's gaze.

WAYNE

What do you see?

SUNIL

I suppose it is nothing. You say you expect the clutch soon?

WAYNE

Yeah. You want to wait around, or do you want me to ask Brandy to take you home?

SUNIL

That's alright. My wife should be here momentarily. We are going to a movie.

WAYNE

Oh, cool. Have a good time. Check back here on your way home. I might have her put back together by then. Just make it a long movie.

SUNIL

I will do that.

WAYNE

Here she comes.

Sunil turns to follow Wayne's gaze, and sees his wife, FELICIA, approaching in their family car. When she pulls up to them, she rolls down the window and shakes hands with Wayne while Sunil gets into the car.

FELICIA

Wayne. You are looking well. It is good to see you.

WAYNE

Likewise. Sunil says you're going to see a movie. What're you going to see?

FELICIA

I'm thinking about the new Benjamin Bratt movie.

WAYNE

Let me know if it's good. I like him.

FELICIA

I'll do that, but we should get going. It starts in thirty minutes.

WAYNE

Have a good time, I'm hoping I'll have Sunil's car ready in a couple of hours.

FELICIA

See you then.

She rolls up her window as she turns around, and they are off. Wayne turns away and heaves a sigh of relief. A moment later, Ax can again be seen at the edge of the forest. Wayne starts to approach him, but Ax shrinks back into the shadows again just as the sound of another motor comes to our attention. It is the U.P.S. guy, RICK. He pulls up next to Wayne and steps down to hand him a package.

RICK

Hey, Wayne. Good to see you. Wanna sign for this?

WAYNE

Yeah. Good to see you too, Rick. Means the business is still running.

RICK

I hear ya. Man, I need a vacation or something. I'm starting to see things. Thought I saw something out on the edge of the woods there for a minute.

WAYNE

What was it?

RICK

You know, it looked like - No. It was nothing. Just too much sun, probably.

WAYNE

Hey, you want a soda or something? Take the temperature down a notch?

RICK

Thanks, but I've got a cooler in her. Time to bust it open though, huh?

WAYNE

Looks like it. Sure you're alright?

RICK

Yeah. I'm good. Hey, take it easy.

WAYNE

You too. Drive safe.

RICK

Always.

He takes off down the driveway, leaving Wayne standing with the new part in his hand.

WAYNE

Man, I need a drink.

He starts off toward the shed.

INT. THE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Wayne enters and unwraps the clutch, placing it on the rail near the front left wheel of the car. He walks toward the bottles, his eyes locked on them, but turns aside at the last moment to flip the stereo back on.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Diana has brought a stereo for Ax, along with some CD's. She plans for it to be a surprise. When it's plugged in and ready to go, she goes in search of Ax. As she crosses the big dirt driveway, she whistles for Max, who charges forth from the yard to join her. She kneels and gives him a quick, almost perfunctory hug, and they are off.

EXT. THE RIVER - LATER

Diana finds Ax. He is a mess. When she finds him, he is on his knees, leaning over a shallow pool at the edge of the river. His back is to her, but she can tell something is wrong. Softly, she steps up to him and speaks. Max approaches him, keening softly.

DIANA

Ax? Is something wrong? Ax? What is it?

Ax hunches his shoulder and tucks his head between his folded elbows, hiding.

AX

What is it? That's the question.
What am I? I'm something terrible.
Something awful, to be hidden away.
I do not want to hide. I want to
see things. To see the world, but
if I am to see the world, I must in
turn be seen. And I can not be seen
like this.

DIANA

Like what, Ax? What happened?

He turns, and his face and neck are a ruin. He has been trying to sculpt them while looking into the pool for his reflection. The awkward angle, the feeble reflection, and his oversized hands have made it a hopeless effort. He is deeply scarred and disfigured. Max rubs up against Ax's trunk, making a deep, sad noise.

DIANA

Oh, God, Ax. Does it hurt?

AX

My face does not hurt. It is something else. That is why I had to try.

DIANA

Oh, you poor th - guy.

She almost says "poor thing", but recovers quickly. We are not certain if Ax noticed.

DIANA

Come here. Lay down. Yeah. Right here.

He does as she says, coming to a clear, grassy area and laying his massive body down beside her. Max flops down next to them, watching with interest.

DIANA

Okay, close your eyes.

He does as he is bidden, and she touches his face with her fingertips, smoothing out the shallowest of the damage. After a few moments of this, she moves to the river, scoops up a bit of water in a cupped leaf, and returns. She attempts to fold the material that clings to the edges of the scars back into place, then dips her finger into the water and runs it over the seams to smooth them.

When she has done as much recovery of material as she can from his face, she goes to where he had knelt, and picks up a few scattered bits of his clay, and scrapes a little more from the sticks he had been using.

Returning yet again, she meticulously plasters this material into the damaged pits and crevasses that still mar his face. When she has done all that she can to replace the lost material, she again dips her finger into the water and sets herself to smoothing the damage.

She finds herself satisfied that Ax is himself again, and we can see very little of the damage. She's done a good job.

DIANA

Okay. You're pretty much back, Ax.
What do you think?

AX

(looking into pond)
I am back, just as I was.

He is downcast.

DIANA

What's wrong with that?

AX

I am terrible to look on. I want to be human. I do not wish to be this rough misshapen thing. I wish to be gentle. To be smooth. To sing. To draw, to use my hands and my voice as you do. I can do none of these things as I am. Could you give me a face? Would you?

DIANA

I'll try. Here. Lay down again.

He does, and she goes back to work. She gently sculpts the lines of his forehead first, making them graceful and shallow. She moves on to round out the edges of his face, and to give him a jaw line. Then she moves up with great caution to the tricky area of the mouth. Satisfied there, she goes to the most difficult task, that of shaping a human nose and brow for him.

When she is finished, he rises to examine. It is a little rough. A little too smooth, but the proportions are good and the lines are steady. His face has taken on a great deal of expression and a degree of beauty. He looks into the pool.

AX

Oh, Diana! How can I thank you? I have a smile.

And he does. He shows it off. It is pretty thin, a mere pressing together and curving of the lips, but it is unmistakably a smile. He cannot show teeth yet, because he does not yet have teeth, but he is very pleased.

DIANA

I'm glad I could help.

She moves over to him and hugs him, which is still an awkward affair, owing to his bulk.

DIANA

Come on. Let's go home.

They rise, and walk slowly into the forest. As he moves, Ax heaves a cavernous sigh. He is not content, but he is much better than he was. As they leave, we note the conspicuous absence of Max.

INT. BRANDY'S OFFICE - LATER

She is busy working on a pair of computers. One of them is running through Norton's diagnostic routines, and the other one is dead. She removes its hard drive and plugs it into her diagnostic machine. She's attempting to recover some lost data.

She works quietly for a few minutes, humming to herself. After a few moments' work, she rolls her chair over to the small bookshelf stereo and flips it on, setting a CD in motion. It's a trancy techno mix; No words, but a nice, focused beat accompanied by an active, imaginative variation in melodies and harmonies and atmosphere. It's good working music.

This goes on for another short while, until for some reason the bass gets steadily louder until it is rattling the windows. Brandy is irritated and turns off the stereo, but the huge bassy beats continue for a few seconds before dying off.

BRANDY

What the hell?

She moves to the window and see's Ax and Diana.

DIANA

Oh, Mom! Turn it back on. I was teaching Ax to dance.

BRANDY

You were teaching Ax to impersonate an earthquake. He can dance later- Hey, Ax, what happened to you?

AX

Diana has given me a face. Do you approve?

BRANDY

Who's idea was it?

AX

It was my idea, but my attempt was a disaster. She fixed me, and gave me this.

BRANDY

Then I approve. Good work, kiddo.

DIANA

Thanks, Mom. But we were wondering if you could help him. He wants to be human. There's a lot of stuff he wants to change, and I know I'm not ready to do stuff like hands. Do you think you could do them?

BRANDY

I'll see. I'd have to get proper tools though. I'll go into town in the morning, and then, I'll see what I can do. Deal?

DIANA

Deal.

BRANDY

Can you go check on your dad?

DIANA

Yeah. Come on, Ax.

They walk toward the shop. As they dwindle out of sight, we see Max, wander slowly into view. His head is hung abjectly, and he pads slowly toward the house. He raises his head to see the two of them, their backs to him, and he turns toward the porch. He wanders into the far corner of the porch and lays himself down behind Brandy's chair. He's sulking.

EXT. THE DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ax and Diana walk side by side.

DIANA

Hey, buddy. You wanna give me a lift?

AX

Certainly.

He extends one of his still massive hands and she jumps up to sit in it. He carries her close to his chest, with great care.

DIANA

I guess you haven't seen any of her stuff, but my mom used to be a really good painter. And a sculptor too. She made a replica of the statue of David. It's really good.

DIANA (cont'd)

I think she'll have you all
straightened out by this time
tomorrow.

AX

That would be wonderf. . .

At this point, headlights splash across them for a moment, as Felicia turns into the driveway of the shop, freezing them solid for an instant. There is no doubt that Ax has been seen. They are transfixed for a moment, but when the lights disappear, they spring to action, Ax darting for the cover of a tree and hunkering down as though he were a stone, and Diana walking forward on her own.

The car, meanwhile, stops and backs out of the shop's lot, pointing its headlights down the driveway again. When they flash across her, she waves in a friendly gesture, and receives a good natured double toot on the horn in return. Then the car hastily pulls back into the lot.

INT. SHOP OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sunil and Felicia burst in, somewhat frightened.

SUNIL

Alright, Wayne, what's going on? We
both saw it this time. There is
something out there.

FELICIA

One moment it had Diana clutched in
a fist, and the next moment, she
was waving from the road, as if
nothing had happened. What is going
on here?

WAYNE

What are you talking about?

SUNIL

Lay off it, Wayne. We saw it dead
center in the headlights. What the
hell is it?

DIANA

(from doorway)

He. "It" is a he. His name is Ax.
He's my friend.

FELICIA

Are you out of your mind?

DIANA

He's my friend, and that should be enough.

SUNIL

Not by half. It's a monster. It must have been fifteen feet tall.

WAYNE

Just about that. So just because he's too tall he's a monster?

SUNIL

Wayne, look at it! He was clutching her in one fist, one! With that one fist he could have crushed her to death.

DIANA

Hand. He was not clutching me in a fist. I was sitting in his hand. He was carrying me. Because my feet were sore. Because he's my friend.

WAYNE

Look, would it help if you met him?

FELICIA

No way! Keep him away from me.

DIANA

Ax! Ax, come here. I want you to meet these people.

With a few audible steps, he moves into the light cast out the door by the overheads. In a separate movement, he bends down to look through the door.

AX

Hello. My name is Accidus. Ax for short. I am pleased to meet you.

DIANA

Ax, this is Felicia, and her husband, Sunil.

Ax extends his giant hand through the door toward Sunil, who takes a startled step backward. Diana impatiently grabs his hand and places it so that it grips Ax's index finger. Ax slowly and gently shakes hands.

This gesture of civility throw's Sunil's sense of reality into a brief spin, and he swoons backward.

Ax quickly, though still gently, reaches around to catch him before he falls. Felicia, who can't move forward fast enough to catch her husband comes up short, and stammers.

FELICIA

Th, uh, thank you, Mr. Accidus.

AX

You're welcome, Ms. Felicia. Is he alright.

Sunil is already stirring, and thickly says:

SUNIL

Yeah. I'm fine. Thanks for that.

They rise and are done with the monster business, but they stop short of apology.

WAYNE

Why don't I show you to your car?
It's ready to go.

SUNIL

Yes. That would be a good idea.

The adults exit through into the shop, and Diana moves out to talk to Ax.

DIANA

Well, that went better than I expected. I suppose we should be happy.

AX

But they did not like me.

DIANA

Yet.

AX

What?

DIANA

They did not like you yet. They're grown-ups. Grown-ups take time to get used to new stuff. They didn't run away screaming, and that's good news.

AX

If you say so.

DIANA

I say so. Hey. Where's Max?

AX

Oh, my. I do not know. I have not seen him since we were by the river. Should we go look for him?

DIANA

He's probably at the house. Let's go check.

She pokes her head into the office and shouts.

DIANA

Hey, Dad! When you're done, Mom wants you!

WAYNE

(faintly)
Thanks.

Diana and Ax turn toward the house and are on their way.

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

They approach, and Diana can just make out Max's tail, poking out from behind Brandy's chair.

DIANA

Hey, Max. Come here.

His tail disappears. He is sulking hard now.

DIANA

Come on, Max. Be nice. I still love you. Hold on, Ax.

He makes an affirmative grunt, and as he nods his head, he rocks a little on his feet.

Diana mounts the porch and pokes her head behind the chair. She bends down and rubs Max's fur with both hands, ruffling him. He doesn't move. She lays down next to him and gives him a huge hug.

DIANA

Alright, buddy, that's the best I can do. I don't have any more arms to hug with.

She lays her cheek against his muzzle and wish a tiny bark, he gives her a big ole' kiss.

DIANA

Alright. That's better. That's ma' boy. Come on, Ax loves you too.

Just as she climbs back to her knee, we here a massive thud. Ax has collapsed. She jumps over the rail, shouting, as Max runs down the stairs to sniff at Ax.

DIANA

Ax! Ax, what's wrong.

AX

I fell down.

DIANA

Are you okay? Are you hurt.

AX

I don't feel hurt, but I feel. Thick. Slow. My mind feels furry and my eyes burn.

DIANA

Come on, let's see if we can get you to your bed.

Ax stumbles to his feet, and she leads him shufflingly to the barn. She would give him a shoulder to lean on, but he can't even lean that low.

INT. THE BARN - MOMENTS LATER

They enter, and Ax sits heavily on his trailer befor lying carefully down.

DIANA

Here. Maybe this will make you feel better.

She turns on the radio. It's playing a classical CD. Ax takes a massive intake of breath, then softly speaks.

AX

Music.

Then he is still.

DIANA

Ax? Ax? Ax, what's wrong?

When there is no response, she runs to get her mother.

DIANA
(shouting)
Mom! Mom, come help.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Brandy is preparing to make dinner when she hears the shouts. She runs to the door.

BRANDY
What is it? Honey, what's wrong?

DIANA
(running up)
It's Ax. Something's wrong. He's not moving.

They both take off at a run.

INT. THE BARN - A MOMENT LATER

They enter, and Ax hasn't moved. He is still except for the slow rise and fall of his chest. Then, suddenly, there is an awful, earsplitting noise. It takes us a moment to recognize it as a snore. Diana, her eyes already brimming with tears, draws a shuddering breath, and begins to laugh.

DIANA
Sorry, mom. I guess he's just sleeping.

BRANDY
I thought you said he doesn't sleep.

DIANA
I guess he learned something new. Come on.

As they leave, between Ax's tremendous snores, we hear a snatch of Brahms' Lullaby, and we come to rest on Ax's closed eyes.

INT. THE SHOP - MORNING

Wayne stands at the window, a shot in his hand. He downs it, and drops the bottle in the trash, leaving three shots and one half full bottle on the sill.

Seeing little else to do, but feeling a need to be useful, he wanders out to the front of the shop to inspect the beat-down that a gang of neglectful years has wrought upon his place of business. It's a depressing sight, but far from a hopeless one. He's still inspecting when Brandy pulls up.

BRANDY

Hey, Hon, is there anything you need while I'm in town?

WAYNE

I'm thinking it's about time to clean this place up, but I'll do the shopping when it gets closer to the right time.

BRANDY

Alright. I'll see you in a couple of hours. Take good care of the kids.

WAYNE

You got it. Oh, hey, wait a sec. Why don't we have a little birthday party for Ax? Could you pick up a cake and some ice cream and stuff? And he really likes music. Maybe a couple of CD's or something?

BRANDY

That's a good idea. I'll see what I can dig up.

WAYNE

Yeah. And I've got a surprise for Diana too. I kinda forgot at her birthday, but I won't tell her that.

BRANDY

She'll know anyway. She's not dumb.

WAYNE

Yeah, I know.

BRANDY

Alright. See you in a bit?

WAYNE

Take care.

She drives off, and he watches her go.

INT. DIANA'S ROOM - SAME TIME

She is just about to wake up. She's covered toes to neck in her blanket and all we can see is her face poking out above the line of her blanket.

She is very peaceful, and we see life slowly enter her face, as the muscles of the face begin to work slowly through a morning stretch. Those facial muscles are soon followed by the rest, as she stretches her arms out of the covers, and we see the bumps under the covers as her feet stretch the other way. She caps it with a surprisingly big yawn, and opens her eyes.

She rises, and wanders into the bathroom, and after a moment we hear the sound of teeth being brushed.

INT. BARN - LATER

Ax sleeps peacefully. No more snoring. The CD player still loops through the classical CD. His massive chest rises and falls in a peaceful rhythm.

After a moment, Diana walks in, and rather than disturb him, she picks up a tool with a long handle, and writes a message in the dirt floor of the barn. It reads, "Ax, we're at the shop." She signs her name with a flourish underneath.

EXT. THE SHOP - LATER

Wayne is still at work, clearing things away from the walls of the shop, and evaluating paint and surface wood and such when Diana approaches, Max at her heels.

DIANA

Hey, Dad. What's up?

WAYNE

I'm thinking about cleaning up the shop. Just wanted to get a good look at things, before I made any decisions.

DIANA

Cool. How can I help?

WAYNE

Right now, I think I've got it. Just need to move a lot of junk around.

WAYNE (cont'd)

Why don't you go hang out with Ax?
That should be a lot more fun.

DIANA

Okay, I guess.

WAYNE

No, I'm not trying to get rid of
you. I just don't want you to feel
like you have to do my job for me.
You can hang out if you like.

DIANA

I'll go get see if Ax is awake. I
bet he's pretty good at lifting
heavy stuff.

WAYNE

I'll bet.

She throws a quick wave as she spins and heads back toward the house. The twinkle in her eye suggests that she has an idea, but she's not sharing just yet. Max does not follow her, electing instead to sniff around the shifting detritus, hoping to scare up something to chase.

EXT. THE YARD - LATER

Ax is awake and emerging from the barn. He looks more alive than we have yet seen him. He strides energetically into the center of the large dirt yard, and stops, absorbing the day. Absorbing the light into his "skin", the air into his nostrils, and the sights into his eyes. He is well rested.

And here comes Diana, up the driveway.

DIANA

Hey, Ax. You look great, buddy. I
guess sleep agrees with you.

AX

I feel wonderful. Yes. I like
sleep. Thank you for the music.

DIANA

No problem. Hey, Dad's cleaning up
the outside of the shop today. You
want to help him with me?

AX

That would be the least I can do.

DIANA

Okay, just hold on. I need to grab
a couple of things.

AX

I will wait here.

He turns his face to the sun and does just that as she
disappears into the house.

INT. DIANA'S ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

She flits into the room, grabbing her backpack out of the
closet. She quickly stuffs a sketch pad into it, along with a
box of pencils and the camera. This accomplished, she turns
around and heads out.

EXT. THE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Wayne is still sifting through things, but for the most part,
he has gotten the major obstacles away from the side of the
shop. Shelves, tires, a couple of large fifty-five gallon
drums. That sort of thing. This rubbish now forms a loose
ring around the shop. An ancient string of Christmas lights
clings to the eaves of the roof, providing an irritation to
Wayne. He turns from the bothersome lights, about to go find
a ladder, but sees Ax and Diana instead.

DIANA

Hey, Dad. We're back. What's up?

WAYNE

Just about to go grab the ladder. I
wanted to get those old Christmas
lights down.

DIANA

I bet Ax could get it. What do you
think, buddy? Can you reach them.

AX

I think so.

He steps up to the eaves and grabs the errant strand, slowly
peeling it off the wooden beam. When he's finished, he hands
them to Wayne.

AX

Here you are.

WAYNE

Thanks. Hey, think you can manage a pair of pliers? Pull out those staples for me?

Ax holds out a massive hand, and Wayne nods.

WAYNE

Right. I'll get the ladder.

AX

Just a moment.

Ax turns the proffered hand palm up and lowers it like a step. Wayne steps onto it, and Ax lifts him gently and effortlessly into the air. With Ax's help, Wayne quickly pulls the remaining staples from the beam.

WAYNE

Hey. Thanks. You're a pretty handy guy.

DIANA

Oh, Dad. That was awful.

But Ax disagrees. He begins to laugh in great single exhalations. Then they proliferate into doubles, triples, and finally into full fledged laughing.

AX

That was funny, yes?

DIANA

No. That was weak.

WAYNE

Yes, Ax. That was funny. Sort of.

DIANA

Alright, Ax. You think you know funny? Here goes. Knock, Knock.

AX

(tentative)
Who's there?

DIANA

Interrupting cow.

AX

Interr. . .

DIANA

Moooooooo!

Ax chuckles with a deep, pleasant rumble.

AX

Can I be of any further assistance?

WAYNE

Yeah, sure. Got plenty of stuff to organize out here. If you could take all of this junk around to the other side and put it in some kind of order, I'll get the lawn mower and start cleaning up the weeds and stuff out here.

AX

I can do that.

WAYNE

What're you gonna do, D?

DIANA

It's a surprise.

LATER

Diana is sitting on a milk crate a few yards away from the front of the shop. She is sketching out a very accurate drawing of the front of the shop. As she finishes, she flips back through the previous four pages, and we see that she has a sketch of the shop from each side.

LATER

She's in the office, copying her sketches. About five per.

LATER

She's back at her milk crate. In the background, Ax has all of the junk out back of the shop. He's sorting through it, all. Wayne has cleared a ring around the shop about twenty five feet wide. The building is now the saddest looking part of the place. It's gray and old, and neglected.

Diana is coloring in one of her copies using colored pencils. She's trying out various color schemes, as well as toying with adding some design elements, like an awning, and flower boxes. This is the final version, and she's just finishing up.

As soon as she finishes, she grabs a few thumb tacks from her bag, and tacks the drawings over to the nearest wall of the shop, after which she walks over to see how Ax is getting on.

AX

Hello, Diana. Did you finish your drawings?

DIANA

I did. Would you like to take a look?

AX

I believe I am finished here. I would like that very much.

They walk together over to the wall upon which the drawings hang.

DIANA

What do you think?

AX

They are lovely.

DIANA

Thanks. Which is your favorite?

AX

The green, I think. I have quite a fondness for green.

DIANA

I like that one too. It doesn't clash with the trees and stuff. It kinda fits.

Wayne wanders up, wiping his sweaty face with a paper towel.

WAYNE

I agree. It's gorgeous, sweet heart. Thank you.

DIANA

Thanks, Dad. Think we'll actually be able to finish it?

WAYNE

Yeah. I think so. Should just be some sanding and some paint.

Brandy can be seen coming up the driveway. She pulls up next to them, smiling.

BRANDY

Hey, guys! What's up?

DIANA

Hey, Mom. We're renovating the shop. Take a look.

Brandy gets out of her car.

WAYNE

Our little girl's a pretty good artist. Take a look at these renderings.

BRANDY

Wow. They're great, Hon. I love the green one.

DIANA

That makes it unanimous. Cool. Hey, did you get the tools and stuff?

BRANDY

Yeah. And I got some clay too. I haven't done anything like that in a long time. Figured I should practice.

WAYNE

Good idea. Hey. Let's knock off for today. We've done plenty for today. I'll start working on the sanding and stuff tomorrow.

BRANDY

Come on, Ax. Let's go see if we can figure out what you're going to look like when we're all done.

DIANA

Wow. How cool is that? You get to pick how you're going to look. Cool.

AX

But I have no idea where I would begin.

WAYNE

Come on. We'll figure it out. We're getting pretty good and beginnings around here lately.

EXT. PORCH - DUSK

They are eating dinner, and didn't want to leave Ax alone. The people sit on the porch, while Ax sits on a huge chopping block, cut from the trunk of a tree. Max sits at Ax's side and plays absently for attention. Ax idly pets him between scanning through magazines and art books, looking for who he wants to be.

DIANA

So how long do you think it'll take, Dad?

WAYNE

Depends on a few things. I haven't checked with your mother yet about how much money we might have to spend on the shop.

BRANDY

I wasn't sure you had planned to check with me. Thank you. And the answer is not much. Like I said, things were getting pretty thin around here recently.

WAYNE

So buying paint isn't in the cards this month?

BRANDY

And maybe not next month. I don't want to discourage you, though. In fact, I think you should keep up with the prep work. If you can get some customers coming in, we should be able to have a bit of a cushion in a couple of months. Then we can do the painting.

DIANA

What about the window boxes and stuff.

BRANDY

If you two want to build them, we should have the money for that, and to buy the flowers, but the bigger trim pieces will have to wait.

WAYNE

I think the flower boxes are the most important part, pet. Helps the place to start looking alive. It's looked pretty dead for a while now.

BRANDY

Alright. I think we've got the shop issues settled for now. Ax, are you ready to go practice? Have you picked out your new appearance?

AX

I believe I am ready to help you practice, but I have not decided for certain which of these people I wish to look like. Might it be possible for me to see a mirror?

DIANA

Yeah. There's a big one out in the barn. If you help me, I think We can set it up for you.

AX

That would be very helpful. Thank you.

BRANDY

Alright. You two go on out to the barn. I'll be along as soon as I get the dishes done.

She rises. Wayne rises with her and reaches for her plate.

WAYNE

Don't worry about it, hon, I'll get them.

As he takes the plate from her hand, he leans in to kiss her on the cheek. She reflexively pulls away, irritated, but her attitude softens as he steps back. She's skittish.

BRANDY

Thanks, Wayne. That's a help.

WAYNE

No problem.

He gathers up the rest of the dishes as the others walk toward the barn. We follow him into the house and into the kitchen, noticing the shake in his hands as he turns on the water.

He notices too, and shuts his eyes against tears of exhaustion. He's running close to empty, as the strain of staying sober and of maintaining his temper and his responsibility have taken most of his energy. He's exhausted, and he grips the edges of the sink to steady his shaking.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Everyone else is here in the barn. Ax is carrying a very large mirror, perhaps from a sliding closet door. Diana is showing him where to set it. As they settle the mirror, Ax begins to examine himself closely in the mirror. He tries to envision himself as a human.

While they busy themselves with this, Brandy sets up a small wooden crate or some other item she can fashion into a low table. She brings herself a low chair to sit on as well. Upon the table she places the first of two large bricks of clay. This first one is roughly a foot tall by half a foot wide and half a foot deep. The second brick, which sits at her feet, is roughly a foot on a side.

On a second table, slightly off to a side, she arrays a set of potters tools, including a couple of kinds of potter's loops, a cutting wire, a knife, a scoring tool, a pointed stick, a sponge, a small pot of water, and a few other tools. Max lies off to one side, watching her with interest.

Ax is making faces in the mirror, as much as he can make faces, anyway. He is experimenting with his eyes, his mouth, and any small amount of pliability he can wring from his face.

AX

I cannot see myself as I might be.
I only see what I am. Crude and
grey and square. It is not
pleasant.

DIANA

You just need some faith, Ax. You
need some creativity.

AX

But I was not made to create. I was made to destroy. Look at my hands. They are incapable of creation. Note even of repair. I cannot even operate your father's tools. All these hands are good for is crushing and bludgeoning.

DIANA

That's not true. You're really good at lifting heavy things.

AX

True, but that is still very far from creation.

DIANA

I guess. Just wait. Mom will fix you up. Come on. Let's take another look through the pictures.

AX

Yes.

They wander over to Ax's bed, where the literature has been piled, and under the reading lamp, they continue to look through the various photos, but it is hard to imagine Ax with any of these features.

BRANDY

Hey, guys. Come here. Take a look.

They approach her work area, and get a look at what she's been up to. She's carved out a human form from the top of the head down to about the middle of the upper arms.

AX

There is no face.

BRANDY

Yeah. I left that blank for now. I didn't want to scare you. That's what the big block of clay is for. That's all for figuring out the face.

AX

Oh.

BRANDY

I wanted to see how you liked the shoulders.

BRANDY (cont'd)

They will pretty much determine your body type. Right now they're fairly broad, but of average size. You wouldn't stand out in a crowd like this, but you'd be pretty strong. I guess that's assuming that you work something like a human being. You may still have giant strength for all I know.

AX

This would be wonderful. It would be nice not to stand out. I am weary of trying so hard to avoid notice.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Wayne opens the refrigerator door, pulls out a bottle of beer, and closes the door. He sits in a chair and sets the beer down on the kitchen table. He contemplates the beer. He throws a quick glance to the dishes, drying at the edge of the sink, and returns his attention to the beer. We see condensation beading its sides.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Everyone is now gathered around the work table. Working quickly now, Brandy has sculpted the figure down to the waist. It is not finished, but it is recognizably human, and the musculature is roughly accurate.

AX

Will you truly be able to make me look like that?

BRANDY

Yeah. I think so. I'll have to practice on your feet, see how the clay you are made of feels to work with. If you're certain you want to be look human, I think we can get you there.

AX

I am absolutely certain. If only to have hands capable of creating something, I would take the risk.

BRANDY

Okay. As long as you're certain.
I'm not going to work on the face
tonight. I'm getting tired. I'll
finish the rough work on the body,
but then we're off to bed.

AX

I can not thank you enough.

BRANDY

Don't worry about it. This is
something I'm happy to do.

They sit in silence as she clears away the material from the lower legs, bringing the small figure completely out of the raw clay. It is still rough, but it is the manifestation of Ax's highest hopes.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Wayne has been staring at this bottle of beer for quite some time, and begins to feel silly. The thought that the contents of this small glass bottle could hold him frozen in apprehension chagrins him. With a self deprecating shake of his head, he puts the beer back in the fridge and begins putting away the dishes.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is putting a few smoothing touches on the figure, as Ax watches. Diana is playing tug-o-war with Max, who is growling feistily, but good naturedly. Brandy takes a plastic trash bag and drapes it over the figure, weighting down the edges with her various tools.

AX

What are you doing, Brandy?

BRANDY

This is to keep the clay from
drying out. It needs to be wet
until I am finished, or I will be
unable to work it.

AX

I see.

BRANDY

Alright, Kiddo, wrap it up. It's
bed time.

DIANA

Okay, Mom.

She runs to Ax, who is rising from his perch near the table. She uses her previous chair to launch herself into the air, and crashes against his chest, wrapping her arms around his neck and hugging him. He gently presses on her back with one still-massive hand in return. After a moment, he bends over and she drops to her feet. When she turns away from him, we see an expression of pain cross her face. Her mom sees it as well.

BRANDY

Maybe not such a smart trick, huh?

DIANA

Yeah. He's not very soft.

Behind her, Ax is trying valiantly to turn on his radio with his oversized fingers. He is failing miserably. In his softest rumble, he calls for help.

AX

Diana?

She turns and sees his conundrum.

DIANA

Oh, sorry, Ax. Just a second.

With that, she squirts over to the radio and flips the switch, bringing a soft flood of instrumental jazz into the barn.

DIANA

You going to want your light on tonight?

AX

I don't think that will be necessary, but thank you.

DIANA

Okay. 'Night.

AX

Good night, my friends.

BRANDY

Sweet dreams, Ax.

AX

Yes, I hope so.

The ladies head toward the exit, but before he joins them, Max rubs up against Ax's legs and growls softly to be petted. Ax obliges him before laying down on his bed and drawing the too-small blanket over his legs.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Diana and Brandy enter with Max, who immediately goes to his bed and lays down. His bed consists of a huge flat cushion in a huge shallow basket in the corner near the fireplace.

Wayne is on the couch, reading. Diana goes to him, wrapping her arms around his neck and hugging him tightly. He grabs her arm and squeezes.

DIANA

I love you, Daddy.

WAYNE

I love you too, punkin.

He turns around, kneeling backward on the couch to give her a real hug. How's your friend doing?

DIANA

He's really excited. Mom's going to get him all fixed up.

WAYNE

(to Brandy)

You think so?

BRANDY

Yeah. I think so. My hands haven't forgotten as much as I feared.

WAYNE

That's fantastic. If I can help, just tell me how.

BRANDY

I will. Hey, Kiddo, I think it's your bed time.

DIANA

I know. 'Night, Mom. 'Night, Dad.

She treads lightly up the stairs. Brandy sits on the end of the couch farthest from Wayne.

WAYNE

Look, hon, I want to apologize if I got to close earlier. I'm sorry if it was too soon.

BRANDY

Wayne, I'm not sure never wouldn't be too soon. I just don't trust you.

WAYNE

Just know that I'm trying. Every day I'm trying.

BRANDY

Yeah. Every day this week. What about every day for the rest of the month. Every day for the rest of the year. And the next year. And every day until Diana moves out on her own. And what about the days after that? Will it be worth it then?

WAYNE

You know better than that, Brandy. I can't think that far ahead, or it will look hopeless. I have to work through every day, one at a time. Not drinking is a decision I'm going to have to make every day. Sometimes several times in a single day. And it's a hard decision, so cut me some slack.

BRANDY

Yeah. More slack, that's just what you need. I've given you enough slack to go bungee jumping, so don't tell me I need to cut you any more fucking slack!

WAYNE

Alright, not slack. How about support. Just a scintilla of support would go a long way right now, Brandy. I'm not just doing this for Diana, I'm doing it for you too. But at least she's trying help me out. She's trying to give me a reason to make the right choice.

BRANDY

Yeah, well, she doesn't remember
you're history of decision making
as well as I do, I suppose.

WAYNE

For Christ's sake, Brandy, if you're
not going to help, at least quit
attacking me.

BRANDY

Yeah. I'm going to bed.

WAYNE

I'll be up later.

BRANDY

Yeah.

She exits, turning off the light. Wayne sits in the dark living room alone. He rises and steps out the door. He wanders toward the barn, but soon hears the sound of Ax sleeping. Stopping where he stands, he closes his eyes and stands still in the twilight.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Brandy is on her side of the bed, covered in blankets. It is as if there is an invisible line through the bed that Wayne is not intended to cross. He enters, changes quickly into pajamas, then lays himself down on his side of the bed. He isn't about to wake her, but the invisible wall vexes him, so he deliberately lays his arm across the line. It looks like a feeble gesture, but it at least represents forward movement.

INT. SHOP - MORNING

Wayne is still a little shaky. He takes half of his shot for today and places the bottle back on the window sill.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is alone in the barn unwrapping the small figure. She fully unwraps him, and rearranges her tools. She gets quickly to work on the figure's physique, smoothing and defining the musculature and the skeleton. Soon she is finished with this and she moves on to the task of giving the small figure a rudimentary face to replace the creepy blankness that it now wears.

EXT. BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN - SAME TIME

Ax, Max and Diana are reexamining the rock from which Ax "hatched". When we last saw it, the un fractured hemisphere was mostly intact, save for the Ax-shaped impression left by his departure. Now the rock is nearly gone. All about it are the splintered remnants of its rapid decay. Small flakes of it's strange matter lie atop piles of the dust to which it is rapidly reducing. The dust at the bottom of the piles can be seen to slowly evaporate. The central chunk of the rock is now no larger than a beach ball, and it is rapidly flaking into nonexistence.

DIANA

Weird, huh?

AX

Yes. Very strange. Seeing this makes me feel very fragile.

DIANA

I don't blame you. Makes me feel almost the opposite though. Usually it's the people who fade away around the rocks. I've never seen this before.

AX

I am ready to go.

DIANA

Okay.

They turn away from the stone and walk back down the mountainside. Max turns to bark once at the rock before they disappear into the forest.

INT. SHOP OFFICE - SAME TIME

Wayne lies on the sofa in the reception area, trembling and sweating. After a few minutes, he gets up and exits into the shop.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is still at work on the bust for Ax. She is working from a group of photos that he has picked out with the aid of Diana.

She has removed enough material that we can see this is to be a representation of a human head, but there are as yet no identifiable features. It looks a little like Ax's own head.

At about this time, the noise of a lawn mower starting up can be heard. Wayne is outside, mowing around the barn, extending the area of general good order. We will hear the mower approaching and receding for a while, as Brandy continues to work on the bust.

She picks up a sheaf of pages torn and cut from magazines, looking at the faces in which Ax has shown interest. There are a great many, but what they have in common is an openness of expression. They all feel about as natural as a posed picture can. The eyes of each of these men are very clear as well, open wide and looking right at the camera. She takes the half dozen pictures and spreads them around the far side of the table.

This done, she gets to work defining the basic curves of the head. In a few minutes, we can distinguish the head from the neck and the front from the back.

EXT. THE YARD - SAME TIME

Ax, Max and Diana are returning from their short trip. Ax is contemplatively quiet. Diana and Max idly play a few slow rounds of fetch as they wander into the yard. At roughly the center, Ax stops. A moment later, Diana notices and she returns to him, Max following.

DIANA

Hey, Ax. What's wrong?

AX

My name. I don't think I like it.

DIANA

Why not?

AX

An ax is an implement of destruction, just as I was to be. I do not like that thought.

DIANA

Well, an ax is a very important tool. They cut firewood. Firemen use them to rescue people, and you're right. That's pretty lame. So what name do you want?

AX

I do not know.

DIANA

Well, you could think of "Ax" as a reminder. A reminder of the choices that you have made and the direction you've chosen. Your own direction.

AX

That makes sense. I will consider it.

He resumes his movement, and becomes a little livelier. He is interested in the new noise. The harsh growling of the lawn mower draws him around to the far side of the barn, while Diana and Max enter the barn. We follow Ax around the side of the barn.

Soon he is face to back with Wayne, who is drenched with sweat. Just as Ax is opening his mouth to shout a greeting, Wayne switches off the motor and heads into the shop. Ax follows him with a surprising degree of silence.

INT. SHOP - SAME TIME

Wayne casts open the door and enters silhouetted in a rectangular beam of brilliant light. He walks directly to the whiskey. He picks up his half shot and unscrews it.

The brilliant shaft of light is closed from bottom to top as Ax approaches the door. The effect is like a mild shock to Wayne, who starts and nearly drops the bottle to the floor.

WAYNE

Ax! Whoah, man. You scared me half to death.

AX

I am sorry. I did not mean to hurt you.

WAYNE

(laughing)

No, Ax. That's just an expression. I'm fine. You just startled me is all.

Wayne screws the cap back onto the bottle and with a deep exhalation of breath, he places it back on the window sill.

WAYNE

Good thing you came along when you did, my friend. I was just about to make a mistake.

AX

What mistake? What is that?

WAYNE

That is called whiskey, and it's a bad thing.

AX

Then why do you have it in your shop?

WAYNE

That's a good question, and I have no idea how to answer it. I guess it's just that people sometimes don't do what's good for them. I know I certainly don't.

AX

Should we not get rid of this whiskey?

WAYNE

I can't do that. Not yet. I have to get rid of it slowly. That's why I'm in such bad shape. I'm trying to get rid of the whiskey, and my body still wants it.

AX

Then perhaps you should have a drink.

WAYNE

I don't think so. See, right now I feel like I need it, and that's never the right time to drink alcohol.

AX

Alcohol?

WAYNE

Whiskey is just one kind of alcohol. There are many kinds.

AX

And are all kinds of alcohol bad?

WAYNE

Yes and no. For the right kind of person, alcohol is enjoyable and can even be slightly beneficial. Problem is, I'm not the right kind of person. For me, alcohol is a very powerful and very addictive thing. It has more power over my decisions than I do, if I let my will power slip.

AX

Then we must not let this power slip.

WAYNE

Oh, man. Ax, I think you just became my best friend ever.

AX

Wonderful. How did I do that?

WAYNE

You said "we." Cheers to that.

With an almost steady hand, he finishes the whiskey remaining in the bottle.

INT. THE BARN - SAME TIME

The face has begun to look vaguely human. We can see where the mouth, nose and eyes will be. Brandy is slowly and carefully working on the details. Diana watches her as she and Max continue to play fetch.

DIANA

So you and Dad had a fight last night.

BRANDY

I thought you were probably listening.

DIANA

Yup. Didn't sound too bad though.

BRANDY

Not for us anyway.

DIANA

Mom, I have to ask you a favor.

BRANDY

Yeah?

DIANA

I need you to cut Dad a little slack. Maybe even give him a touch of support. He could certainly use it.

Brandy puts down her tools.

BRANDY

Look, honey, you're not old enough to know the kind of support that you've wasted on your father.

DIANA

Yeah. I guess, but don't think of it as supporting him. Think of it as supporting me. I can't help him with this if you're just going to dismiss it as futile.

BRANDY

I don't want to disappoint you, hon, but- yeah. You know, actually I do want to disappoint you. Better I should do it now than your father should do it a hundred times down the road. He's not going to get better. The longest he's gone without a drink since you were born must have been a week.

DIANA

That's about what I figured. And today is day five. That's why we need you. If he's going to make it past day seven, he needs both of us helping him.

BRANDY

Is it really? Five days? I guess that deserves some kind of recognition. Yeah. I'll try. I'll try to cut him some slack. It's just so hard.

DIANA

I know.

BRANDY

Do you really? Do you know how hard it is to open up the feelings he's hurt so many times? To open up and trust him when he's let me down so many times?

DIANA

I know how hard it is for me. I guess it has to be partly the same, right?

BRANDY

Yeah. I guess so. I'll try, honey.

She stands and hugs her daughter, who hugs her back.

DIANA

I love you, Mom.

BRANDY

I love you too, sweetie.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BARN - SAME TIME

Crisis averted, Wayne and Ax have returned to the lawn mower. Wayne is demonstrating its function.

WAYNE

. . .and then you just push it where you want it to go. Want to start her up?

AX

Like this?

He gently wraps his fingers around the handle area, depressing the kill switch. Pinching the pull cord between two fingers, he gives it a ginger tug, which just falls short of firing up the engine. Giving it a somewhat less ginger tug, he brings the engine roaring to life. He is very pleased.

AX

And now I push it, yes?

WAYNE

Yes, indeed.

Ax does just that, pushing the diminutive lawn mower with one hand, his chimpanzee-like arm hanging low, and the rest of him hunched over the machine.

Wayne pats his wrist, gives him a thumbs up sign and walks away, heading for the nearest entrance to the barn.

INT. THE BARN - SAME TIME

We follow Wayne as he enters the barn through the back door, winding his way through the myriad piles of junk and misplaced parts and belongings. He pauses before entering the main area, listening. We don't see the ladies yet.

DIANA

Wow, Mom. You're pretty amazing.
How come I've never seen you do
this before.

BRANDY

I guess I just haven't had the time
to spare. I think I'll have to get
back into it though. I think my old
kiln is still back there somewhere.
If I got really ambitious, maybe we
could retile the bathroom.

DIANA

You mean make all the tiles
ourselves?

BRANDY

Yeah. Sound cool to you?

DIANA

Sounds immensely cool.

BRANDY

Alright. Pay attention then. You'll
need to know how to use these tools
if we're going to make that many
tiles.

DIANA

Alright.

At this point, Wayne thinks it's safe to enter. He didn't want to cause any embarrassment by walking into a discussion about him. He resumes his course and enters the main area of the barn.

WAYNE

Good evening, my dears. How goes
the project?

BRANDY

You tell me. What do you think?

Wayne approaches and crosses around to stand behind Brandy.

WAYNE

I think it's amazing. It's like you never stopped working with the clay. This has got to be the best thing I've ever seen you do. Wow.

BRANDY

It had better be my best. Starting tomorrow, Ax is going to be pretty much stuck with it. Where is he, anyway?

WAYNE

He developed a sudden fascination with the lawn mower. Said maybe the noise would slow down all the activity in his mind. He's been thinking too much.

BRANDY

I'll bet. He's got a lot to think about.

DIANA

Yeah. Hey, Daddy?

WAYNE

What's up, sweetie?

DIANA

Not to be rude or anything, but I think you need a shower.

WAYNE

Getting pretty ripe, am I?

BRANDY

Yeah. You're pretty much there.

Wayne bends over and kisses his wife on the top of the head, holding in his dingy shirt with one hand in a casual yet touching show of gallantry.

WAYNE

Then it's unanimous. I'll hit the showers. Want me to get dinner started?

BRANDY

Oh, yeah! That would be great. I think I forgot to have any lunch.

He moves over and gives Diana a peck on the forehead.

WAYNE

Any requests?

DIANA

Yeah. Pasta. Something with pasta.

WAYNE

As you wish. See you in a bit,
punkin.

He exits, removing his shirt. Diana watches him go. Brandy is frowning down at the bust. As Wayne reaches the big doorway, framing himself in the early evening light, we see that with all of this exercise and the lessening of his alcohol intake, he has trimmed down considerably. Since we can't smell him, he cuts quite a handsome figure against the light. At about this moment, the noise of the lawn mower ceases.

DIANA

Sounds like Ax is done.

BRANDY

Good. Have him come on in and take
a look at this. See what he thinks.

DIANA

Okay.

Diana head out the big front doors and turns out of sight, off to fetch him. When the kid is out of sight, Brandy closes her eyes and touches the place on her hair where Wayne kissed her. With that touch, some of the tension in her shoulders evaporates and the scrunchiness of her eyes relaxes.

A moment later, Ax strides into view, holding Diana high above his head like an airplane.

DIANA

Whoah! Mom, check this out. This is
the coolest thing ever. Ax, can you
spin me?

AX

I can.

Ax stops and begins to slowly spin in place. Brandy turns to face them and bursts into a smile.

BRANDY

Hey, Ax, can I have a turn?

AX

Certainly.

He slows his revolution and gently deposits a very dizzy Diana on her feet. Brandy approaches a little warily, and he takes most of her torso in one hand and gently lifts her high into the air. He spins.

BRANDY

Woohooohooohoo! This is great! My dad used to spin me like this when I was a kid!

With that, she dissolves into laughter, and after a few more heady moments, Ax slows and sets her next to her daughter, who has recovered and sits rocked back on her hands watching. Brandy stands there, enjoying the euphoria of her dizziness before plopping herself down next to Diana.

BRANDY

Oh, wow. Thank, Ax. That was wonderful.

AX

My pleasure. Diana said you wanted me to see your progress.

BRANDY

Yeah. It's right there on the table. What do you think. Is that okay for a face?

Ax takes a few of his giant, yet now oddly graceful steps toward the work table, keeping off to one side, in order to allow the setting sun to illuminate the bust in a warm and nostalgic light.

AX

Brandy, this is beautiful. To think that it could be part of me is-is-is inspiring. Thank you so much.

BRANDY

Wow. I'm glad you like it. It's not totally done. I want to do the hair, and finish a few other details, but if you're ready, we should be able to start on you tomorrow.

AX

That would be wonderful. Already I can not thank you enough.

AX (cont'd)

And there is so much more to come,
I have no idea how I could possibly
express my gratitude to you.

BRANDY

Really, it's okay. I'm grateful to
you as well, you know. I'm grateful
for the chance to work with clay
again, but mostly, I'm grateful for
your trust in me. Thank you, Ax.

DIANA

Come on. Let's go see how Dad's
doing on dinner.

Brandy quickly covers the bust and they exit the barn.

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Ax takes his perch as the girls go inside. He watches as the
line of sunlight slides up the front of the barn and
eventually disappears.

INT. THE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Brandy and Diana come in, Diana giving her dad a huge hug and
exiting up the stairs. Brandy approaches him. He's now
sparklingly clean. She hugs him. He hugs her back, but as he
begins to let go, he realizes that she hasn't done so. He
resumes the hug, and they remain that way until:

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Diana comes out, now bundles in an oversized sweat shirt. She
sits on the steps just behind Ax, and they watch the sun-line
complete the last third of its journey up the face of the
barn in silence.

DIANA

So what are you thinking?

AX

I'm thinking about change, and
about the passage of time. I think
I am frightened.

DIANA

Frightened of changing?

AX

Mostly what worries me is that it won't be enough. That looking a little like a human won't be enough, that I won't be happy. What if happiness is always just out of reach.

DIANA

Ax?

AX

Yes?

DIANA

Close your eyes.

AX

Yes.

DIANA

Now listen. Listen inside yourself.

AX

Yes.

DIANA

What do you hear?

AX

I hear silence. No. Not silence. I hear calm. I hear feelings.

DIANA

What feelings?

AX

A little bit of fear. A great deal of gratitude, and of love. And curiosity. Wonder. Excitement. Joy.

DIANA

Do you feel unhappy, Ax?

AX

No. I don't believe I do. How very strange.

He opens his eyes.

DIANA

Yup. I've never understood that. So often, we worry so much that we don't take pause to notice that we are already happy.

AX

Thank you.

DIANA

You're welcome.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS AGO

Wayne and Brandy are still hugging. After a few more moments, they break.

WAYNE

Wow. That was nice.

BRANDY

Yeah. Yeah, it was. I miss that.

WAYNE

Me too.

Through the window, we see the progress of the sun line. It's at just about the point where Diana sat down. Wayne brushes a strand of hair from her face and leans close. She stiffens slightly, but he bypasses her face and kisses her high on the cheek. She relaxes slightly, and he kisses her temple. She relaxes a little more and he kisses her forehead. She leans into this kiss. He kisses her nose and she smiles. Wayne leans back, leaving the next move up to her. She leans forward and tentatively kisses him on the lips once, twice, three times. This is as far as she can push herself. She looks into his eyes and he gets the point. He offers a small nod before hugging her tight and kissing her on top of the head again.

WAYNE

Okay, gotta break this up. Can't let the sauce burn.

BRANDY

Okay.

He turns from her to the stove and begins stirring the sauce with a wooden spoon.

WAYNE

Want a taste?

He scoops out a small sample and turns, cupping his hand under it. But she's gone.

WAYNE

Okay.

He tastes the sauce himself, and is evidently satisfied.

EXT. THE PORCH - SAME TIME

Brandy has come out to sit with "the kids". She perches herself on the steps next to Diana and wraps her arm around the child's shoulders.

DIANA

Hey, Mom. How's dinner coming?

BRANDY

Smelled great. Good choice, by the way. How are you, Ax?

AX

I am very well, thank you. I am content.

BRANDY

That's a pretty good way to be.

AX

Yes. I highly recommend it.

Right about now, Wayne steps out with a plate in each hand, upon each of which is a heaping serving of luscious looking pasta accompanied with some nice garlic bread.

WAYNE

Dinner is served, ladies. I'll be back with beverages.

He hands Diana and Brandy their plates and retreats back into the house.

DIANA

Wow. This looks great. I knew Dad could cook, but I didn't know he could cook this well.

BRANDY

(aloud)

This smells great, Wayne. Thank you so much.

He returns with a pair of wine glasses.

WAYNE

A nice merlot for the lady, and a nice red grape juice for the very young lady. I'll be right back. One more trip.

DIANA

(sniffs)

Ooh, he gave me the wrong one! He She takes a huge sip.

BRANDY

Very funny, young lady. You know better.

She has been sniffing her own glass and was not fooled. Wayne comes back out. He is carrying his own plate and his own glass of wine.

WAYNE

Oh, hey. Don't wait for me. Dig in. I've been tasting for a half hour now.

They do dig in, and we hear their approval in wordless sounds.

EXT. THE SHOP - EARLY MORNING

Wayne is cleaning up a pressure washer. He unwraps it from a tarp, dusts it off and begins to check connections. When he's satisfied, he rolls it over near the door. Next, he fetches an extension cord and brings it to the pressure washer. After he sets it down, he goes to the window and downs today's shot. There's one shot left, along with the half-full bottle.

INT. THE BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is there alone, finishing the last touches on the bust. She has given it slightly curly hair, and the features have been smoothed out. He has full lips, prominent, kind eyes, a straight, proud nose and strong chin and forehead. A very handsome face indeed. She picks up a brush and brushes away the last remains of dust and such from the bust.

EXT. THE RIVER - SAME TIME

"The kids" and Max are walking along the river. Diana is wet from a recent swim and has a towel draped around her shoulders. Max is still pretty soggy, and he drops back courteously to shake himself out again.

AX
Swimming looks like fun.

DIANA
Yup.

AX
I wonder if I will ever be able to try it. Or if I'll always have to live in fear of water.

DIANA
Don't give up. We'll think of something. Come on. I bet Mom's ready.

AX
I am very nervous.

DIANA
Nothing to worry about.
Everything's going to go great.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is idly switching between the bust and the figure. She is basically finished, but she continues to tinker with nothing else to do. Ax has not shown up yet.

From behind her, entering through the big doors, appears Wayne.

WAYNE
Hey, hon. I'm about to start in on the paint stripping. Wanted to check with you first. Do you need anything before I get all filthy?

BRANDY
No, thanks. I'm ready to go as soon as the kids get here.

WAYNE
Nervous?

BRANDY

A little, yeah. This is almost like being a doctor, I suppose. There's a lot riding on my hands today.

WAYNE

You'll be fine. Ax will be fine. No worries.

BRANDY

Yeah. No worries.

By now, wayne has moved fully around the work table and faces the doors. Because of this, he can see them coming across the big yard.

WAYNE

These look wonderful, Brandy. Your hands are warmed up and ready to go. And so's your patient. Here they come.

She rises and turns to see them. She takes in Ax's rough form and his giant, newly confident strides as he approaches.

BRANDY

Okay. Here we go.

Ax is the first through the door, followed by Diana and Max.

AX

Are you ready, Brandy?

BRANDY

Yeah. Are you ready?

AX

I believe so. This is very exciting.

DIANA

This is way cool.

AX

How do we start?

BRANDY

Come over here.

She leads him to an area which she has prepared. There are various stepladders, ladders, and platforms. This is a large scale project, so she wants to be able to work from every angle upon his large surface.

BRANDY

I've got this set up so I can work on you from all angles and at all heights. We'll have to experiment a little to make it work, I'm sure. And there's one last test. I need to see how it feels to- to work with you.

AX

By all means.

BRANDY

Let me see you hand.

He holds out his left hand, palm up. She turns it over and produces a small squirt bottle of water. She spritzes the back of his hand, and we see it soak up the water. She spritzes until it looks like wet clay.

BRANDY

Wow. Too bad regular clay isn't this easy. Once it dries, you're done. Alright, I'm going to carve a little. Tell me if it hurts.

She takes a carving tool from behind her ear and gently begins to sketch a design. What she sketches is the Japanese character for "courage."

BRANDY

Okay. That was really light, did it hurt?

AX

I felt nothing.

BRANDY

Okay, I'm going to go a little deeper.

She begins to cut along the lines she has made, slowly deepening them until she has a very solid impression of the figure, perhaps an eighth of an inch deep.

BRANDY

Still feels okay?

AX

Yes. May I see it?

BRANDY

Oh, um, yeah. Sorry.

She has been working at an angle that kept the design hidden from Ax. He raises his hand and inspects it.

AX

It it beautiful. I believe it says "courage." Is that correct?

BRANDY

Yeah. According to this book I have. I thought you could use a little moral support.

AX

Very thoughtful. Thank you.

WAYNE

Okay, guys. Looks like you're all set. Good luck, buddy.

He reaches out and shakes Ax's first and fourth fingers, one in each hand.

WAYNE

I'm going to get started on my project.

DIANA

Should I stay, or go with him?

AX

Go ahead and go. This will take a few days, I am sure. I would like it if you would visit every so often, though.

DIANA

Deal.

She holds her arms out for a hug and he lowers his great neck so that she can latch on. In his accustomed manner, he returns the hug with a single hand covering most of her back. After a moment, he dangles her so that she can drop to the floor.

BRANDY

Okay. We'll see you guys in a bit. Have fun out there.

WAYNE

Oh yeah. Volatile petrochemicals. Yip-pee.

EXT. THE DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Wayne, Diana and Max walk together down the road.

DIANA

You think he's going to be okay?

WAYNE

Yeah. I think so. He'll probably be pretty clumsy for a while once she's done, but if the toes worked, I don't see why the rest of this won't work. I think he's going to be pretty okay.

DIANA

So what's the job for today?

WAYNE

Going to start with the back. We'll start with the part nobody sees, just in case we need the practice.

EXT. THE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Diana takes the extension cord and routs it from an internal socket around to the rear of the shop while Wayne rolls the pressure washer around. She catches up to him and plugs the machine into the cord. He walks off in the other direction to get the business end of a garden hose, which he screws into the input on the pressure washer. Before disappears one last time, he tosses her a pair of safety glasses. Then he's gone and we hear:

WAYNE

Okay, Diana. Give it a shot.

She flips the power switch and the machine chugs to life. She depresses the handle and a powerful wash of water bursts from the tip of the wand.

DIANA

Good to go, Dad.

He reappears, wearing his own set of safety glasses, and she takes her first swipe at the ancient, desiccated paint. It is blasted away in a swath a few inches wide, spitting tiny fragments of paint away from the point of impact. She continues her work, washing the paint away in neat stripes.

WAYNE

No don't get too close, or you'll damage the wood.

DIANA

When was this thing painted last?

WAYNE

Probably before I was born.

DIANA

So, like, a million years ago?

WAYNE

Yeah. Just about.

DIANA

Good think Ax is busy. This is definitely not a job for him.

WAYNE

Not a big fan of water, I imagine.

DIANA

Actually he likes it. He sees the beauty of it. He just can't touch it.

WAYNE

That's got to be tough.

DIANA

Yeah. But he'll get used to it, or maybe we can wrap him in plastic or something and he can go for a swim.

WAYNE

Go for a sink is more like it.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is on one of the ladder, and Ax is sitting. She has gotten his head down to roughly the size of a human head. All of his features are gone, save for a tiny hole on one side of his head that serves for an ear. He has a spoon stuck to the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. These serve as his yes/no tappers.

BRANDY

Still hear me okay?

AX
(tap tap)

BRANDY
Okay. I'll be able to start of
features in a couple of minutes.
Eyes first?

AX
(tap tap)

She begins to smooth away at his face, defining the brows and the bridge of the nose. Then she starts on the eyes. Soon she has carved out the lids and even suggested eyelashes.

BRANDY
Okay. Keep try that.

He opens his eyes and flutters the lids for a moment.

AX
(tap tap)

BRANDY
You can see okay? Everything feels
alright?

AX
(tap tap, tap tap)

BRANDY
Okay. Close them for a bit while I
work on the rest of you.

She continues her work.

EXT. THE SHOP - SAME TIME

Diana has cleared the paint from the bottom seven feet or so of the wall. Wayne takes the pressure washer from her and begins to do the upper section.

WAYNE
I think it's going to look pretty
good. What do you think, kiddo?

DIANA
I hope so. It's my design. If it
doesn't look good, I'll have to
take the blame.

WAYNE

No worries, hon. It'll look great.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Wayne walks across the room in sweat pants and a t-shirt, eating a yellow apple, to flop himself down on the sofa. After a few cycles of crunch and chew, the door to the bathroom opens and Diana comes out, dressed identically to him. She pads into the kitchen and grabs an apple of her own and follows in her dad's footsteps, right down to the couch flop. He chuckles, wraps his arm around her shoulder, pulls her into lopsided hug and kisses her temple.

WAYNE

I love you, honey.

DIANA

I love you too, Dad.

WAYNE

C'mon. Let's go check on your mom and your little brother.

DIANA

He almost is, isn't he?

WAYNE

He's part of the family, that's for sure.

DIANA

Okay. Come on.

They rise and head for the door, dropping their apple cores in the trash can on the porch.

INT. BARN - NEAR SUNSET

Ax has a head, and it's pretty much identical to the bust. He has handsome, strong features from the top of his hair down to his collarbones, at which point his new body gives way to his old. Diana is working on his arms. She is finishing rough details of his left hand. His right is complete in fine detail. The clay that she cuts from him, she carefully places within a plastic bag that sits off to one side.

He is more disturbing now in his appearance than he was before, with his human form jutting incomplete from the raw stump of his former self.

But his friends can overlook it, knowing as they do that he is in the middle of a journey, rather than stuck at a point.

When he sees them approach, Ax raises his right hand and waves. He smiles nearly as wide as the gaping barn door itself.

They come closer and get as good a look at him as the setting sun provides. He glows in the warm light.

DIANA

Wow, Ax! You look beautiful! It's amazing.

WAYNE

Looking pretty good, Ax. Hon, I'm beside myself. You're a miracle worker.

BRANDY

Yeah. I've got to admit he looks pretty good. Hey, Ax, my hands are tired, and I think you're all dry. Think you can make it through the night like this?

AX

(tap tap

He now holds the spoons in his right hand, in a grip like one would use to hold chopsticks.

BRANDY

Can you talk, Ax?

AX

(tap tap)

DIANA

Are you scared to talk?

AX

(tap tap)

DIANA

That's okay. You don't have to talk before you're ready.

He throws her a grateful smile. She moves to the work table and picks up a hand mirror. She silently holds it out to him. With his shortened arms, he has to bend down to grasp it, then he straightens up.

He looks silently into the mirror, gazing hard in the failing light, trying to absorb every detail. After a few moments, he reaches up to touch his face, and is instantly captivated by the image of his hand in the mirror. His attention shifts from the mirror to the hand, which he flexes and examines. It moves not quite like a human hand, but more like one made of rubber. When in motion, it distorts in a decidedly non-human way, but when at rest, it looks very natural, though lacking in detail. The hand is unlined, and the nails of the fingers are not yet present.

His attention turns to the hand that holds the mirror. This one is fully detailed. There are visible knuckles, lines in the palm, fingernails, even vasculature that can be seen. He trades the mirror to the left hand, and examines his right. When he flexes it, it moves exactly like a human hand, flexing at the knuckles and retaining the proper degree of elasticity.

AX

This is wonderful. Thank you so much.

He speaks with a warm and smooth voice. It is a full and resonant voice behind which you can almost hear the music hiding. It brings tears to the eyes of his friends.

WAYNE

Oh, Ax. Did you hear yourself?

BRANDY

That was beautiful.

DIANA

Oh, my God, Ax. Oh-

He turns to them and falls to his knees, leaning down to hug them all at once. As his head bows over them, we see a peculiar expression on his face. Looking up, Diana can see it too.

DIANA

What's wrong, Ax?

AX

Nothing is wrong. It is just that I cannot cry. I feel as though I should be weeping for joy.

BRANDY

I think I've got you covered there.

WAYNE

Me too.

We see that they are both weeping, along with their daughter.

AX

Come, you all must be hungry. You need dinner.

EXT. THE PORCH - LATER

Max and Ax are playing fetch in the last light of dusk. They have figured out a system in which Max tosses the ball in the air with his mouth so that Ax does not have to strain so hard to reach it, after which Ax gives the ball a healthy toss and Max chases it down.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

In the background, we hear the sound of Brandy in the shower. Wayne and Diana are in the kitchen, cooking together.

DIANA

So what do we do tomorrow?

WAYNE

Well, we've got most of the paint stripped. Tomorrow we'll go after any last stubborn bits with the sandpaper, then we'll check for any loose nails or bits of trim. And if there's any extra time, we'll make the window boxes.

DIANA

Cool. When do we start painting?

WAYNE

After we put on the primer.

DIANA

What's primer?

WAYNE

Basically it's paint with no color. You put it on the wood before you paint so that the wood doesn't soak up too much paint. Hey, hand me the a couple of tomatoes, would you?

She digs into the drawer of the refrigerator and pulls out a pair of plump tomatoes, which she tosses to him. He catches them on the point of a big knife.

DIANA

Oooh. Cool.

WAYNE

Why thank you.

He disimpales them onto the cutting board and begins to dice them into cubes.

EXT. THE PORCH - SAME TIME

Ax and Max sit together in companionable silence, but Ax is unable to pet his canine friend due to his uncomfortable proportions.

Ax, in need of something, but not knowing what, rises. He strides toward the barn with Max following.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

We can see just well enough to watch as Ax struggles to adjust to the new dexterity of his fingers. He fiddles for several seconds with the switch on his reading lamp before turning it on. He then turns his attention to the radio and after a little more fiddling, he gets it to play.

He closes his eyes to enjoy the music for a bit, then turns his attention to Brandy's work area. He approaches the table, not yet sure what he's doing. He sits.

He reaches tentatively for the humble pointed stick. After a moment, he settles on a grip with which to hold it. He reaches under the plastic that covers the excess clay that has been taken from him. He pulls out a piece that is relatively flat on two sides. Very carefully, he picks up the spray bottle and spritzes it down, softening it up.

His first attempt at art is to very crudely write his own name "Ax." Very dissatisfied, he carefully rubs it away with the sponge and tries again. Very much improved. He continues. He absently begins to sing with the radio, and his singing voice is even more touching than his speaking voice.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Brandy steps to the doorway. She wears a robe and her hair is wrapped up in a towel.

BRANDY

Hey guys, this smells great. What is it?

DIANA

Tacos.

BRANDY

Yummy. If you need any help, I'll be right down.

WAYNE

No, take your time, hon. Dinner will be ready in about fifteen minutes.

EXT. PORCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The family files out of the living room carrying plates heaped with tacos, salad, and rice. Each carries a beverage as well. They find their accustomed places and Diana is the first to wonder aloud:

DIANA

Where're the boys?

WAYNE

I think they're in the barn. Look, the light's on. I think they're fine. Dig in.

As a moment of silence falls, they all hear the sound of Ax's singing drifting toward them across the yard.

BRANDY

(whispering)

Oh, wow. Is that Ax?

DIANA

Yeah. I think so.

WAYNE

Talk about a miracle. Listen to that voice.

And they do. They listen, crunching as softly as they can into their dinner, lest they lose the faint thread of his song.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Ax continues to sing, and following his progress with the clay, we see that his fine motor control is much improved in the few minutes he has been practicing. On the small clay tablet, we see that he has written a thank you note to his hosts. In fine, graceful cursive, it reads:

"Diana, Brandy, Wayne, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me. Your acceptance of me, and your willingness to help me have been truly astounding, and I cannot find words in any language that properly express my gratitude. All I can offer you is my undying friendship, support and love. Your friend, Ax."

At the moment, however, he is replicating the courage symbol that has disappeared in the reformation of his hand. He is etching it into the "flesh" of his knee. He soon finishes that symbol and begins to write a new symbol on his other knee. All the while, he is unaware that he is singing.

INT. SHOP - MORNING

Wayne goes to the last remaining shot, and picks it up. He stares at the bottle for a few moments before unscrewing the cap and downing the whiskey. That finished, he goes about getting the tools ready. He gets a lot of sand paper and a hammer.

EXT. SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Diana is standing outside the shop, waiting for Wayne to arrive and carefully inspecting the back wall for loose nails and rough spots in the wood, as well as stubborn spots of paint. Wayne arrives.

WAYNE

Okay, kiddo, find anything?

DIANA

Yeah. A couple of nails, here and here, but I can't reach them.

She points them out and he hammers them into place.

DIANA

And there's a bunch of paint spots
that need to be sanded.

WAYNE

Okay, here you go. Let's get 'em.

He hands her a few sheets of sand paper and they both set to work.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy and Ax are setting up for today's session. She notices the new marks on his knees.

BRANDY

Ax, what's this? What's on you
knees.

AX

This one is the symbol for courage
that you made for me yesterday.
Since it was removed from my hand,
I wanted to put it somewhere else.

BRANDY

And this one?

AX

This one is the symbol for hope.

BRANDY

I like that. That's appropriate.

AX

I thought so. I also made this.

He hands her the tablet upon which he wrote the brief note.

BRANDY

Oh, Ax, this is wonderful, thank
you.

AX

You are welcome. I enjoyed making
it, as well as the symbols on my
knees, but I cannot make anything
more substantial. I cannot touch
the wet clay, lest I damage my
hands.

BRANDY

Oh, hold on. I have an idea. I'll be right back.

She takes off for the house at a jog.

EXT. SHOP - SAME TIME

They continue their work at a brisk pace, sanding down paint and rough patches of wood.

DIANA

So, you're out of shots. What happens now?

WAYNE

You noticed that, did you?

DIANA

Yeah.

WAYNE

Well, if I can stick to the plan, nothing else happens. No more drinking.

DIANA

So what's with the leftover whiskey?

WAYNE

It's a challenge. It's the decision I'll have to make every day. Either I drink it, or I don't.

DIANA

It's going to be a tough decision, Dad.

WAYNE

Yeah. And tougher on some days than on others. That's the really tough part.

DIANA

I'm here for you.

WAYNE

Thanks sweetie. I'm going to need you here for me.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy returns with a box in her hands. It's a box of latex gloves.

BRANDY

Here, try these. They'll keep your hands dry. Just don't splatter the water.

AX

Excellent. Thank you.

He struggles futilely with a glove before she helps him. He gets it, and puts on the second glove by himself. He grabs a large lump of clay and one of the spray bottles. He's off to the races, twisting and forming the clay in his hands.

BRANDY

Okay. Have fun, but keep your torso still. I've got a lot of work to do.

AX

Yes.

He stands, resting his arms on the floor of the hayloft while she sets up her ladder around him and begins working on his chest.

EXT. SHOP - LATER

They have worked their way down one side of the shop and most of the other, when the sound of a car pulling into the driveway bring Wayne to a halt.

WAYNE

Hey, sweetheart, can you handle this while I see who's here?

DIANA

You betcha.

WAYNE

Thanks. See you in a bit.

He heads around to the front as she continues sanding.

EXT. FRONT OF SHOP - SAME TIME

Wayne rounds the corner and finds a woman waiting. She is a beautiful black woman, very tall and willowy. Her hair is cut close and styled naturally. She wears an elegant, simple, expensive business outfit, and drives a very expensive car. This is DENITRA.

DENITRA

Hello. You must be Wayne.

WAYNE

Yes, ma'am. Wayne Chambers. And you are?

DENITRA

Denitra Isler.

WAYNE

Anything I can do for you?

DENITRA

I hope so. My car has been making a terrible squealing noise when I start it up, and when I make sharp turns.

WAYNE

That shouldn't be a problem. Probably just a belt that needs adjusting.

DENITRA

Glad to hear it. Shall I pull the car inside?

WAYNE

Yes, please. Just let me get the door.

He moves to open the big door as she gets back into her car. She pulls into the shop just as Wayne switches on the bright overhead lights. When the car comes to rest, she exits it again, this time carrying a briefcase.

DENITRA

Is there someplace I can set up my laptop while I wait?

WAYNE

Sure. My wife's office is through that door. There should be plenty of room.

DENITRA

Thank you.

She exits into the office and Wayne gets to work. The first thing he does is to fetch the belt tensioner.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

Ax is still standing in the same position. He's got most of a back, right down to the top of the buttocks, and Brandy is working on the front of his abdomen. His arms still rest on the loft and his hands are busy with the clay.

BRANDY

How're you feeling?

AX

Very well, thank you.

BRANDY

How's the sculpting coming along?

AX

I'm making a great deal of progress.

BRANDY

What are you making?

AX

A bird.

BRANDY

What kind of bird.

AX

A dove, I think.

BRANDY

Can I come up and see it?

AX

Certainly.

She dismounts her work ladder and climbs up the short ladder to the loft, turning to dangle her feet over the edge. She takes a look at his progress.

BRANDY

Wow, Ax. That's fantastic. You're really getting the hang of the tools too. The definition on the wing feathers is very good.

AX

Thank you. In fact, I think I'm almost done.

BRANDY

Almost, but don't forget the opening of the beak.

AX

Oh, yes. Here we go.

He takes a delicate probe and divides the beak into its top and bottom halves.

BRANDY

That's better. May I see it?

Ax hands the bird over and she takes a close look at it on all sides.

BRANDY

The detail on the feet is amazing, but they might be too delicate to support it.

AX

I am going to fashion a brace, so that it does not actually rest on the legs.

BRANDY

That could work. Good job.

AX

And how am I progressing?

BRANDY

Have a look.

He steps away from the loft, moving very awkwardly, his legs having remained unchanged.

INT. SHOP - LATER

Wayne is just about finished with the expensive car when Diana walks in.

DIANA
Hey, Dad. How's it going?

WAYNE
No problem. Just had to tighten up a couple of belts. Hey, would you check on Ms. Isler? See if she needs anything.

DIANA
Okay.

She pokes her head into the office.

DIANA
Ms. Isler?

DENITRA
Yes?

DIANA
Hi, I'm Diana. My dad wanted me to see if you needed anything.

DENITRA
I need something, but I don't know what. This stupid computer keeps crashing and whining at me with error messages.

DIANA
My mom is the computer fixer. Want me to go get her.

Denitra takes a look around the office and laughs briefly at herself. She takes in the rate schedule on the wall which reads \$35/hour.

DENITRA
Yeah. That would be great.

DIANA
Okay. Be right back.

Out she goes.

INT. BARN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Brandy has nearly freed a human looking Ax from his clay imprisonment. He has a roughed out torso, hips, and legs to the knee.

He now lays face up on his bed, as the extra material dangling below his legs is now unable to support him. She is working on his right shin, carving it roughly from the clay. Diana enters and approaches.

DIANA

Holy cow, Mom! You sure made him a big boy, didn't you?

BRANDY

Oh, crap. You scared me. Well, quit staring. Get him a sheet or something to cover up with.

Brandy is turning a little red.

DIANA

He doesn't seem embarrassed.

BRANDY

Yeah, well, do it anyway.

Ax is, in fact, confused. Diana disappears off to one side and reappears with a sheet, which she shakes vigorously to remove some latent dust. She folds it over a couple of times and approaches, flapping it out over him, and guiding it to rest so that it covers him from about the knee to about the navel.

DIANA

Better?

BRANDY

Yes, thank you.

AX

Hello, Diana.

DIANA

Hey, Ax. Looking pretty good there, buddy.

AX

Thank you. I made something for you. It is there on the work bench. Be careful of its feet.

She goes to see the bird, picking it up gently and examining its whole surface. She returns.

DIANA

Ax, it's beautiful. Thank you.

AX

You are welcome.

BRANDY

Aren't you supposed to be helping your father?

DIANA

Oh, yeah. He's working on this lady's car. And her laptop is wonking out, so she wants you to take a look at it.

BRANDY

Oh, boy. Ax is pretty much stuck here. Um. Give me a half an hour. Tell her I'll give her a discount if she can be patient.

DIANA

Okay. See you in a bit.

She exits.

AX

What just happened?

BRANDY

Oh, nothing. Just modesty.

AX

Oh! Yes. I am sorry. I hadn't realized. . .

BRANDY

No, don't worry about it. It was my modesty. She's been to art museums. She's seen it before.

AX

Why should you be modest about my form?

BRANDY

Well, I made your form.

AX

Yes-

BRANDY

And, I, um. Well, I took certain liberties.

AX

I see.
(a pause)
Thank you.

BRANDY

(laughs)
You're welcome.

INT. THE SHOP - LATER

Wayne, Denitra and Diana sit in the office. Diana is tinkering with the laptop.

DIANA

Okay. I think that'll do it.

DENITRA

Thank you. So, how much do I owe you?

DIANA

I'm not really the computer fixer.
I was just. . .

DENITRA

The sign says thirty five dollars an hour. That took a little over. How's forty five dollars sound?

DIANA

I'm not going to complain.

WAYNE

She really isn't the one with the training. Are you sure.

DENITRA

If it works, it works. If it doesn't, I'll just bring it back.

WAYNE

Sounds fair. Okay.

She digs in her wallet and pulls out fifty dollars, handing it to Diana, who isn't quite sure what to do.

WAYNE

You did the work, hon, it's your money. Can you make change?

DIANA

Yeah.

She digs out her wallet and hands Denitra five singles.

DIANA

Thank you, ma'am.

DENITRA

And thank you. I did pretty well today. Car and computer fixed for just over a hundred dollars. Not bad at all.

WAYNE

Happy to be of service. Come back any time.

DENITRA

That I shall. You have a nice evening.

She rises to leave, and Wayne rises to open the door for her. She gets into her car and backs out, disappearing a few moments later. In her wake, we see Brandy walking toward the shop. When she gets close enough, she speaks.

BRANDY

Rats! Sorry I'm late, but Ax couldn't walk without toes, so I had to stay with him and make them.

WAYNE

No problem. Diana handled the computer stuff.

BRANDY

Really?

DIANA

Yeah. She paid me forty five bucks, too.

BRANDY

Excellent. I hope you did a good job.

DIANA

It's not that hard, Mom. I've been paying attention.

BRANDY

Good. Come on. Let's go home. I'm tired. And Ax really wants you both to see him.

WAYNE

I'll be right behind you. I need to lock up.

DIANA

Okay.

He disappears into the shop and the girls head toward the house.

DIANA

So he's all finished?

BRANDY

Not quite. He's functional, but not finished. I still need to finish all the fine details.

DIANA

Can he come in the house?

BRANDY

Yeah.

DIANA

Cool.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

The four of them sit around the big dinner table. Dinner is something good and aromatic. Ax wears jeans and a t-shirt borrowed from Wayne.

AX

Wayne, this food smells wonderful.

WAYNE

And you're sure you don't want any.

AX

I am sure. I have no place for it to go.

DIANA

That is so weird. I mean, you're so human in so many ways, but then you don't have to eat.

BRANDY

And you can't get fat. That might be a pretty good trade.

WAYNE

Not the way I cook. Hey, somebody pass the salad.

INT. BARN - AROUND NOON

Brandy is working on Ax's details. Diana sits up in the loft, looking down on the proceedings.

BRANDY

What's taking your father so long? He's just buying paint, right?

DIANA

I think he wanted to pick up a few things for the shop too. He'll be back eventually.

With that, she scoots back to lean against the wall, right in the path of a warm sunbeam. Soon she has dozed off to sleep.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Wayne drives up, the back of the pickup containing paint and a few other things. On the seat beside him is a cake box. He climbs down from the truck and wanders into the barn. Ax stands near the trailer, dressing, and Brandy approaches from the back of the barn.

BRANDY

Okay, Ax. I set the kiln with a number seven cone, which should do the trick. In about fourteen hours, your dove should be fired and ready for glazing.

AX

Thank you.

WAYNE

What bird?

BRANDY

Ax sculpted a beautiful dove for Diana. It's firing now.

WAYNE

Cool. Where is she, anyway?

BRANDY

I guess she's in the house. Haven't seen her in a while.

WAYNE

Well, why don't you two go on in, I'll get the paint put away, and I'll join you in the house.

BRANDY

Okay.

He climbs back into the truck she and Ax leave for the house.

ANGLE:

The kiln. We follow its cord to the 440 socket in the wall of the barn. A thin curl of smoke winds upward from the outlet.

INT. THE HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ax and Brandy sit in the living room, talking as Wayne enter.

BRANDY

. . .and I think you'll get used to it soon. You'll just have to always be careful of water.

AX

Yes.

WAYNE

Hey, guys. Where's Diana. I have something I wanted her to see.

BRANDY

She's probably out with Max.

WAYNE

No. Max is on the porch.

BRANDY

I'm still not worried.

INT. BARN - SAME TIME

We are still looking at the power outlet. The smoke has increased, and suddenly we see a huge spark.

The thick beam on which it is set begins to blacken and tongues of fire lap out from the metal receptacle.

ANGLE: THE LOFT

Diana is still asleep, her clothes and hair reddened by the dying light.

ANGLE: THE FIRE

The fire has spread through various bits of junk on the floor, and reaches a five gallon gas can. The can explodes, shooting flaming fuel to all corners of the barn.

ANGLE: DIANA

The sudden explosion wakes her, and she blearily casts her gaze around the barn.

ANGLE: MAX

The explosion has attracted his attention as well. He sees the flickering light inside the barn and begins to bark furiously.

INT. THE HOUSE - SAME TIME

WAYNE
That's not good.

He steps to the window and sees the flames in the barn.

WAYNE
Oh, shit! The barn's on fire.

He bursts out the door, following Max, and followed by Brandy and Ax. All four run flat out toward the barn. We hear Diana's first scream.

EXT. THE BARN - A MOMENT LATER

They are standing before the gaping doors, which are filled with flames. Between a pair of billows, we see Diana, she has managed to make it to the middle of the barn, she is surrounded by flames. Wayne charges at the flame, but is beaten back.

Ax steadies him with a hand, and strides through the flame.

WAYNE
Honey, go call 911.

Brandy hesitates, torn between the scene and the need to bring help. She sprints toward the house.

Ax grabs Diana and hugs her to him as he approaches the doors. He raises her high over his head and shouts:

AX

Catch her!

He throws her bodily in a high arc over the flames. Wayne places himself in her path and is slammed into the ground as he catches her.

Just as she clears the flames, the great doors of the barn fall from their hinges and plunge toward Ax. He disappears in flame.

Diana rises from the tumble and screams:

DIANA

Ax!

Wayne picks himself slowly up. He's bruised and sore, but he's not seriously hurt.

WAYNE

Ax! Oh, Ax.

INT. THE BARN - A MOMENT AGO

From Ax's angle, we view the crashing doors. We see him step backward quickly, narrowly avoiding their impact. His movement is slowed. He laboriously makes his way to the center of the barn, but the intense heat is cooking him. It's firing his clay into ceramic. He's becoming a living statue.

EXT. THE BARN - SAME TIME

Brandy is running back from the house, phone in hand. She slams into Diana and hugs her tight. After a moment in which she examines her child for damage, she looks around her.

BRANDY

Where's Ax? Where is he?

She looks at the faces of her family and the answer is clear.

EXT. THE BARN - A FEW HOURS LATER

The barn is a smoking black ruin. It has been reduced to little more than a charred outline in the earth. The fire trucks are being packed up. One of them is already on its way out. Wayne approaches the others.

WAYNE

They're on their way out. They think it was an electrical fire. Probably started by the kiln.

BRANDY

Oh. . .

WAYNE

It's not your fault, honey.

BRANDY

I know, it's just. Oh, poor Ax.

WAYNE

Come on. Let's get into the house. It's too dark to do anything now.

They all walk, defeated, toward the house.

EXT. THE BARN - MORNING

It's a bright, hopeful day, and they stand almost exactly where they stood the night before. Everyone is downcast as they step toward the charred boundary line. The humans cast their eyes about, not knowing where to start, while Max follows his nose. He comes upon a large pile of charred timbers near the middle of the barn. He begins to bark.

Wayne is the first to approach him, grasping the bits of detritus and throwing them aside. Soon we recognize the shape of Ax, standing upright, and holding the letter that he made for them. He is cast solid, his clothes burned away. Diana and Brandy approach, tears running down their faces. Max, sniffs about Ax's ankles. He barks.

When no one responds, he paws at the dirt at Ax's feet, whining. After a moment, Diana gets the point. She grabs an old metal milk crate that has survived the flame, and places it in front of Ax. Climbing the crate, she wraps her arms around his neck and appears to kiss him.

BRANDY

Honey, don't. That's not. . .

She hadn't been kissing him, she'd been breathing, once again, the breath of life into his lungs. As she continues to exhale, Ax's frozen frame begins to inhale, a thin layer of hardened ceramic cracking and breaking away from his body.

He's alive, and all of Brandy's hard work is suddenly turned flesh. Ax is alive and he's human. Wayne removes his shirt and hands it to Ax, who wraps it about his waist.

DIANA

You're alive! Oh, thank God!

BRANDY

Oh. Come here.

Tears sting their way to her eyes as she grabs him and hugs him. Wayne hugs them both and Diana joins the group.

AX

I am alive.

He flexes his hands and examines himself.

AX

I am completely alive. I'm - it looks like I'm human. Thank God indeed. And thank you.

He kneels to pet Max, and to hug him, grateful for his insistence.

WAYNE

Ax, if you're human, you're in for a treat. I've got something for you. Meet me in the dining room in about half an hour, guys. Why don't you find him some clothes.

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Wayne carries the cake box up the steps and we follow him into the dining room, where he sets it up. He quickly sets out plates and candles. The cake reads, "Happy Birthday, Ax!"

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

The rest of the family enters, Ax now fully dressed.

AX

Is this a birthday cake? For me?

WAYNE

Yes, and yes. I think today is pretty much the day, don't you?

AX

Yes.

BRANDY

Sorry if the cake is a trifle stale, we planned to do this last night.

AX

I'm sure it will be wonderful.

WAYNE

Don't fill up too much, buddy, I'm going to make you the best birthday dinner I've ever cooked.

AX

And it will certainly be the best I've ever eaten.

They smile, and proceed with the small party.

LATER:

They have made a big dent in the cake, and there is evidence of ice cream consumption as well.

AX

That was amazing. Wow.

BRANDY

Speaking of birthdays, I'm sorry we don't have a gift for you, Ax.

AX

My body, your friendship, this party, you have given me more than ever I could have wished. And with that in mind, I may still have a gift for you, Diana. Will you accompany me to the barn?

DIANA

Sure.

INT. THE BARN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

They approach the kiln, which now stands as a charred metal frame enclosing ceramic bricks. Ax approaches it and opens the lid. He reaches carefully in and removes the bird.

AX

I made this for you. From the clay that was left over from my transformation.

She takes it.

DIANA

Oh, Ax. It's beautiful. Thank you.

They turn and head for the ex-door.

AX

I will make a stand for it, I do not think that the legs will support it.

DIANA

Wait, Ax. Did you say this was made from the same clay as you?

AX

Yes.

DIANA

Doesn't it stand to reason that this bird might come to life, just like you did?

AX

I suppose that's possible.

DIANA

Here, try it.

She hands the bird to him and he gently touches his now soft lips to its beak and breaths into it. The ceramic shell burst apart in his hands as the newly living bird flaps its wings and organizes its feathers. It's a little confused, but after a moment, it leaps from his grasp and flies away.

AX

Wow.

DIANA

Wow. Cool.

She looks over to the pile of clay that has been fired by the blaze.

DIANA

Man, what a shame.

AX

No. It is better that it is gone.
It could have provided strange
temptations.

DIANA

Yeah. I guess. Still. . .

EXT. THE SHOP - A WEEK LATER

The shop is fully painted, and Ax and Diana stand out front, working on the new sign, which reads, "Chambers' Automotive and Computer Repair." The bird sits upon the edge of the sawhorse, next to the sign. There are several cars lined up outside. Business is booming.

DIANA

Come on. We'll let it dry, then
we'll hang it up.

They enter the office. Diana is at work on a computer, with another two awaiting repairs. In the shop, we can see Wayne working on a car.

BRANDY

Hey, guys. You wanna lend a hand?

DIANA

Sure.

AX

I will assist Wayne with his work.

Diana looks at the tag on one of the computers, then grabs a screwdriver and begins to open the case. Ax exits into the shop.

DIANA

Two weeks and counting, A new
record.

Through the window, we see the half full bottle, still sitting on the window sill.

We zoom toward it, and we see that it is now flanked by photos of the family. We continue zooming out to the clear blue sky.

FADE TO BLACK.