

"AMERICAN SPLENDOR"

by

Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman

PRODUCTION DRAFT

FADE IN:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A BEDROOM MIRROR.

crooked on
The room is dark. A perfectly square mirror hangs
a wall.

man's
Suddenly, out of the darkness, the reflection of a
face comes into focus. He stares straight ahead,
perhaps
studying his own unrecognizable reflection. It's quite
clear
this is a portrait of sickness; the man's pallor is
gray,
his eyes are confused. There is something most
definitely
wrong.

leaving
Tentatively, the figure steps away from the mirror,
the frame empty and dark.

ANGLE ON BED

bed
Like a ghost, the naked man (Harvey) stands over his
staring down at his sleeping wife (Joyce). In the eerie
light,
he's almost translucent.

HARVEY

(faintly)
Joyce... Joyce?

Joyce springs up, alarmed.

JOYCE

What's wrong, Harvey? What are you

doing up?

Harvey just stands there for a moment saying nothing.

JOYCE

What is it?

HARVEY

(delirious, out of
breath)

Tell me the truth. Am I some guy who
writes about himself in a comic book?
Or am I just -- am I just a character
in that book?

Joyce rubs her eyes.

JOYCE

Harvey...

HARVEY

If I die, will 'dat character keep
goin'? Or will he just fade away...

Joyce just stares at him, unsure how to answer.

Suddenly

Harvey collapses.

down

Joyce leaps from the bed, nervous, hysterical. She gets
on the floor and shakes him.

JOYCE

Omigod, Harvey! Harvey, wake up!

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S FACE

His eyes remain closed, his expression far, far away.

FADE TO

BLACK:

EXT. CLEVELAND ROW HOUSE - FALL - 1956 - DAY

FADE UP ON:

A surreal kaleidoscope of black, white and red. Similar
to
the mirror scene above, the colors slowly come into
focus,
revealing the chiseled features of a familiar face. But
this

plastic

time we see that it is not a real face, but rather a mask of the D.C. Comic hero -- SUPERMAN.

INTERTITLE: CLEVELAND OHIO, 1956

CLOSE ON SUPERMAN MASK

pupils

It glows eerily in the light of a porch lamp. A child's glare through the eye holes...

another

sidekick

The camera pans from SUPERMAN to the masked face of caped-crusader: BATMAN. Batman turns toward his loyal ROBIN, who clutches a plastic, trick-or-treat pumpkin.

ring the

unkempt

removed

the

Next, we find THE GREEN LANTERN as he reaches up to doorbell. The camera finally rests on the last boy: an KID wearing no costume at all. Looking irritated and from the rest of the group, the KID shoves his hands in pockets of his shearling coat.

at

He spits and rolls his eyes as a lady answers the door. The brick home is as working class as it gets. The lady the door is a 1950's HOUSEWIFE.

BOYS

(in unison)

Trick or treat!!

HOUSEWIFE

Well, look at this! All the superheroes on the porch! Ain't that cute.

The Lady drops a candy apple in each boy's container.

HOUSEWIFE

(still yelling)

We got Superman here, Batman, his sidekick ROBIN, ohh, The Green Lantern even...

halfheartedly She finally stops at the costumeless KID. He holds up a ratty, stained pillowcase.

HOUSEWIFE

And what about you young man?

KID

What about what?

ass" The other boys giggle. The kid flashes them a "kick yer look.

HOUSEWIFE

Who are you supposed to be?

The kid shrugs.

KID

I'm Harvey Pekar (pronounced "Pee Car").

HOUSEWIFE

Harvey Pekar? That doesn't sound like a super hero to me...

BOYS

(mumbling)

Pecker, Pecker...

KID

I ain't no super hero, lady. I'm just a kid from the neighborhood, alright?

The Housewife stares at him, confused.

KID

Ahh, forget this...

trudges Frustrated, the kid throws his pillowcase down. He off as the others watch in confusion.

KID

Why is everybody so stoopid?

BEGIN NERVOUS JAZZ SCORE

sulks WE FOLLOW the schlumpy kid (aka HARVEY PEKAR) as he

down the street...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND ROW HOUSE - FALL - 1975 - DUSK

INTERTITLE: CLEVELAND OHIO, 1975

A grown-up version of HARVEY PEKAR (now mid-thirties) stomps along the same Cleveland street. Unfortunately, 20 years have made this rust belt neighborhood a bit rustier. The "GROWN UP HARVEY" dons the same shearling coat, sports the same disheveled hair, and wears the same curmudgeonly expression.

CREDIT SEQUENCE - ANIMATED SEQUENCE INTERCUT HARVEY

WALKING

WITH COMIC BOOK PANELS OF THE CARTOON HARVEY IN ACTION.

This

is not your typical super-hero stuff.

feats

Instead it features our man engaging in such daredevil as:

INT. CITY BUS - FALL 1975 - DAY

--Riding the city bus.

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - DAY

--Working as a file clerk at the Veteran's Hospital.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN - DAY

--Trying to wash dishes.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

--Waiting on line at the supermarket.

EXT. GARAGE SALE - DAY

--Buying used records from a garage sale table.

INT. GREASY SPOON DINER - DAY

--Eating junk food at a greasy spoon.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Harvey fixes a rip in his coat with Elmer's Glue.

unique... A
drawn
(Note: Each "Cartoon Harvey" looks similar but
variation on a theme. This is because his cartoons are
by different comic artists.)

Intermittently, bold cartoon credits flash across the
screen:

FROM OFF THE STREETS OF CLEVELAND COMES...

Followed by the explosive title:

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

contrast
The high-energy music and upbeat titles -- in direct
to the sulking image of Harvey -- continue through the
remainder of the credits.

EXT. CLEVELAND STREET OVERLOOKING FACTORIES - DAY

hill at
We're now on HARVEY'S back as he continues his forlorn
journey. We move forward, past him, to peer over the
the factories below.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Okay. We're throwing a lot at ya
here, so lemme step in an' help ya
catch up. This is the story about
comic books, an' a guy who made a
whole life outta them. You could
even say comics saved his life. This
guy here, he's our man, Harvey Pekar --
all grown up and goin' nowhere.
Although he's a pretty scholarly
cat, he never got much of a formal
education. For the most part, he's
lived in shit neighborhoods, held
shit jobs, and is now knee deep into
a second disastrous marriage. So if
yer lookin' for romance or escapism
or some fantasy figure to save the
day, guess what? Ya got the wrong
movie.

**IMAGES -- SUDDENLY EVERYTHING -- THE MUSIC, THE CREDITS, THE
COMES TO A HALT.**

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

through the
over"
The REAL HARVEY PEKAR (not the actor who trudged
credits) sits behind a microphone, supplying the "voice
above. He clutches a movie script in his hand.

indicate
The frame is spare, with a few well-chosen items to
that he's in a recording session.

portrays
sack...
with
kind and
your
female
Harvey"
contrary,
happened.
Although he is significantly older than the man who
him, the "Real Harvey" is every bit as much of a sad
maybe even more. He is large and slightly threatening
knitted brows and wild eyes. Yet there is something
vulnerable about him -- a teddy bear who could kick
ass. Off Camera, WE HEAR the voices of the male and
directors (us -- BOB and SHARI) coaching the "Real
through his voice over. Harvey's irritable and
saying that the whole Halloween incident never even

dough."
film
"But I don't care man. I'm just doing this for the
We learn that Harvey is a reluctant participant in a
being made about his life.

intelligent
joins in
SUDDENLY, his third wife JOYCE BRABNER -- an
control freak obsessed with all things negative --
the conversation. Pushing back her huge glasses, she

reprimands Harvey like he is an infant: "Harvey you are talking too loud, Harvey you are being difficult."

Harvey
they
off...

just rolls his eyes. Joyce gets offended. It is clear
have had this argument a million times. As Joyce storms

Harvey explains that his wife is trying to take over
the
has no
That's why
fast

movie. He laments that she is his third wife, and he
luck with women. "Man, chicks just don't dig me."
he marries anyone who will have him. "And I marry them
before they get to know the real me..."

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

INTERTITLE: 1975

DOCTOR
sounds
ranting.

HARVEY sits on a table in his T-shirt and underwear. A
unwraps a tongue depressor.

Harvey's voice is hoarse, raspy and barely audible. It
like it hurts for him to talk. Yet, he can't stop

HARVEY

Doc, you gotta help me. My old lady's
dumping me 'cause I can't talk. She
says I'm a social embarrassment. Now
that she's got her PhD, she's some
hot shit academic star an' I'm nuthin'
but a file clerk with nothin' ta say
an' no voice ta say it. But me bein'
a file clerk was fine when I wrote
the damn check for her tuition --

DOCTOR #1

Harvey, stop talking please, and
open wide.

just

He points the tongue depressor at Harvey's mouth but he keeps on going.

HARVEY

I just don't get it... We were doin' okay for a while. Then we took that stupid belated honeymoon. I started losin' my voice on the plane. Can you believe that... On the plane, doc?

DOCTOR #1

Bad timing, I guess. Now please say "Ah," Mr. Pekar.

HARVEY

"Ahhh."

(without missing a beat)

"Ahhh" ruined the trip. I got crazy, started to worry my voice would never come back. I mean, my wife didn't know me so long before we got hitched. What if she totally forgets what I'm like? Man, it's torture --

DOCTOR #1

Shhh...

looks

The Doctor shines a penlight into Harvey's mouth and around.

DOCTOR #1

Uh-huh.

He raises an eyebrow. Harvey catches this. Hypochondria overtakes him.

HARVEY

(the penlight in his mouth)

What? Is it bad, doc?

The Doctor removes the penlight.

DOCTOR #1

It's not good.

Harvey jumps off the table.

HARVEY

It's cancer? First I got marital problems and now yer tellin' me I got throat cancer? Omigod...

DOCTOR #1

Harvey, calm down. It's not cancer. You have a nodule on your vocal chords. Probably from screaming and yelling too much. And if you don't stop talking and give it a rest, you're gonna lose your voice completely.

Relieved, Harvey calms down. He nods, agreeing to be good.

HARVEY

Whew... Okay, okay. But fer how long?

DOCTOR #1

A few months.

HARVEY

(loudly)
Months!!

Suddenly Harvey's voice cracks under his effort to raise it.

He sheepishly grabs his throat.

DOCTOR #1

See? More of that and you'll do permanent damage. Now go home, keep your mouth shut, and hopefully we won't have to operate.

Operate? Harvey gets nervous again. The Doctor throws him his clothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND STREET - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

A silent sequence. A dejected HARVEY walks home alone along an empty lot. Day-old dirty snow clings to the ground.

passing

He wanders through a down-in-the-heels neighborhood,
run-down stores and ramshackle apartments.

EXT. BUS STOP - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

60-

He

voice. In

Harvey approaches TOBY -- a dumpy 20-something going on
something in ridiculous, mismatched polyester clothing.
is odd, awkward and talks with a monotone, robotic
short, he is a super dork.

TOBY

Hi Harvey. You weren't in work today.
Are you okay, Harvey?

keeps

Harvey barely looks up. He nods his head "yes" and
walking.

TOBY

(yelling after him)
I'm heading downtown to the White
Castle. Wanna come, Harvey?

Harvey leaves Toby behind and turns the corner.

EXT. DELI - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

Two WOMEN argue loudly over a payphone.

SPANISH WOMAN #1

(in Spanish)
I already told you, I'm waiting for
a call!

SPANISH WOMAN #2

Oh yeah? Since when is this your
private office?!

SPANISH WOMAN #1

Since you can kiss my ass.

of

Harvey stops in his tracks and stares at them, jealous
their ability to speak.

CLOSE UP: SPANISH WOMAN #1's MOUTH

HARVEY

(to himself)
Look at 'em yakkin'. How do they do
it?

Out of the corner of her eye, WOMAN #2 notices Harvey
eavesdropping.

WOMAN #2
(yelling at Harvey)
Ay, what are you looking at? Maricone!

Startled, Harvey moves on.

EXT. ACROSS FROM A PARK - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

He passes a group of KIDS playing in the snow. They
scream,
yell and laugh with abandon.

HARVEY
(shaking his head)
They all make it seem so easy.

Then, BAM! Harvey is awakened from his reverie by a
snowball.
The kids laugh loudly. He wipes away the snow and walks
on.

A VOICE OVER interrupts the scene.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
Here's our man walking home from the
doctor's. He's got the weight of the
world on him. And fer what, really?
'Cause his throat's a little screwy?
Man, people in India are starvin' to
death every day. His problems are
nothin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE OVER TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Totally dejected, HARVEY crosses over train tracks on
his
way home.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
Still, he can't help feelin' paranoid,
like some supernatural force is
conspiring against him to rob him of

his voice.

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

apartment
walk
Harvey sulks up the steps of his brick low-rise building. He passes an ELDERLY NEIGHBOR coming down the walk with her shopping cart. Harvey unlocks the door.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Maybe his old lady will go easy on him today, when she sees how upset he is.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

hair
selectively
crate.
Harvey's second wife LANA -- a hippyish chic with long hair and a bad attitude -- pulls books off a shelf and selectively throws them onto the floor or packs them into a milk crate.

obviously
An overstuffed suitcase sits beside her. She's obviously leaving him. HARVEY enters the room.

HARVEY

(whispering)
Ay... What is this?

Harvey's voice breaks up.

LANA

Exactly what it looks like.

HARVEY

(loud)
Whattya mean!! You mean yer dumpin' me?! Fer what?
(his voice really
rips)
Ah, shit!

torn
wife
That last yell did it. Harvey grabs throat in pain, between his throat discomfort and trying to stop his wife from leaving.

LANA

Look, your plebeian lifestyle isn't working for me anymore. Cleveland's not working for me anymore. I gotta get out of here before I kill myself.

HARVEY

But --

trails She gathers her bags and heads for the door. Harvey her, trying to reason.

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

HARVEY

(mouthing, just a wheeze)

Please! Wait, honey... Just listen to what I got to say...

something. She turns and stares at him. Harvey tries to say

wheezes But now nothing at all comes out of his mouth. Only air.

He tries again. No sound at all.

leaves. Finally LANA gives up, turns back towards the door and

SLAM!!

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1975 - DAY

with At his cubicle in the file room, Harvey fills a cart files. He's physically at work, but mentally in a daze.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man -- yeah alright, here's me -- or the guy playin' me, anyway, though he don't look nothin' like me, but whatever. So it's a few months later an' I'm workin' my flunky, file-clerk gig at the V.A. Hospital. My voice still ain't back yet. Things seem like they can't get any worse...

A nurse pops her head in. Harvey hands her a file.

NURSE

Thank you, Harvey dear.

shoves the
He doesn't hear her, still stewing about LANA. He
last files in the cart and pushes it away.

HARVEY

(to himself)

Plebeian... where the hell did she
get that shit?

CUT TO:

INT. FILE ROOM -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

We see rows and rows of endless files...

and
Still in a daze, Harvey removes the files from the cart
puts them on the shelves.

MR. BOATS (O.S.)

Avoid the reeking herd! Shun the
polluted flock! Live like that stoic
bird, The eagle of the rock!

American
Harvey's
Harvey turns around. Mr. Boats -- a portly, African-
maintenance worker wearing a bow-tie -- steps into
row. He has a tool box.

HARVEY

Huh? Oh. Hiya, Mr. Boats.

Harvey resumes shelving.

BOATS

You know what that means, son?

HARVEY

Yeah. It's from an Elinor Hoyt Wylie
poem. It means stay away from the
crowds of common ordinary people an'
do yer own thing.

Mr. Boats laughs.

BOATS

Nope, it means don't compromise yourself for women. Ain't gonna do you no good! Get away from 'em as soon as you can!

HARVEY

Well I ain't got no woman now. So I'm living like the stoic bird, man.

MR. BOATS

The only way to live, son.

his
Somehow this doesn't make Harvey feel any better about
life.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

trails
Harvey carries an armful of files. Mr. Boats still
him, lugging his tool box.

FILE
moves
Suddenly, Mr. Boats points out a young African-American
CLERK wearing a pair of big headphones on his afro. He
as if he's listening to music.

MR. BOATS

Look at that fool over there. What's he wearing?

HARVEY

Huh? That's an A.M.-F.M. radio he's listening to... They got 'em fixed up now like a pair of earmuffs.

MR. BOATS

(inappropriately
angered)

MMPH! Isn't that somethin! People have gone crazy. They'll buy any kinda junk! Probably listening to that loud rock stuff. Junk, junk, it's all junk!

HARVEY

Well, I don't know. Rock music's got some good qualities. I mean it ain't jazz or nothin'.

Mr. Boats looks at him like he's crazy.

MR. BOATS

Say, when you gonna bring me in some good records? Some Nat "King" Cole with Strings...

HARVEY

I don't got any of that, Mr. Boats...

Mr. Boats stops and yells down the hall at Harvey.

MR. BOATS

Yeah, you got it... You're keepin' it at home, though! You won't turn loose the good stuff... You just sell the junk!

Harvey shakes his head as Mr. Boats finishes his diatribe.

Mr. Boats turns into a room.

MR. BOATS

(singing)

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa. Men have named you.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

Harvey sits on outdoor furniture. A few props are featured in the frame indicating a garage-sale-like setting (including a record player). Directly in front of Harvey are boxes of used records.

HARVEY shows us his prodigious record collection. Thousands of LP's -- rare jazz, blues, fusion, klezmer, etc. -- are piled in floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

He tells us about his love of jazz and how he started writing

record
music
jazz reviews and music articles. He finds the first
that he reviewed and puts it on his turntable. As the
plays...

records.
Harvey talks about how he started buying and selling
This leads into how he first met ROBERT CRUMB.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND GARAGE SALE - FALL - 1962 - DAY

INTERTITLE: 1962

and a
sale.
HARVEY (a little more hair but the exact same style)
bunch of his BUDDIES sift through old records at a junk

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

In the early sixties I was with some
buddies at a junk sale looking for
some choice sides when I met this
shy, retiring cat from Philadelphia
named Bob Crumb. You know the guy;
Fritz the Cat, Mr. Natural an' all --
they made a movie about him, too.

a
One of Harvey's pals -- MARTY -- pulls a record out of
box.

MARTY

C'mon, Harv. You dig Jay McShann.
You gonna buy that or what?

Harvey jumps up from his search to check out the LP.

HARVEY

I don't know, Marty. It's got a
lamination crack in it...

(checking out the
price)

A quarter. Maybe I can get him down.

MARTY

You are one cheap bastard Harvey.

HARVEY

Yeah, I know I'm tight, man, but I live on a government wage.

trench
bit
A skinny guy with a big nose, glasses and a ratty coat taps Harvey on the shoulder. He is soft-spoken, a shy and very odd -- a young ROBERT CRUMB.

CRUMB

You collect Jay McShann, man?

HARVEY

Yeah, man. How 'bout you?

CRUMB

Yeah but most of my records are back in Philly.

them.
A greaser-type guy in a leather jacket, PAHLS, joins

PAHLS

Harv, meet my buddy Bob Crumb. He just moved to town. He's an artist at American Greeting Card Company.

HARVEY

That's cool.

PAHLS

You should see his comics, Harv. They are outta sight.

HARVEY

(interested)

Yeah? I'm into comics myself.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - FALL - 1962 - DAY

bachelor
pad. Records and books are strewn everywhere.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

So Crumb showed me this comic book novel he was working on -- THE BIG YUM YUM BOOK. I'd never seen anything like it.

illustrated
with

HARVEY marches back and forth holding Crumb's comic novel. CRUMB sits on the floor nursing a beer and sorting through vintage comic books. Harvey's bursting so much enthusiasm, it's almost aggressive.

HARVEY

It's terrific, man! I really dig your work.

Crumb ignores Harvey's praise.

CRUMB

(holding up a vintage comic)

This PETER WHEAT book is by Walt Kelly... It's pretty rare.

HARVEY

Yeah? Can I get good bread for it?

CRUMB

Nah! Not yet.

flies

Harvey flops down in an overstuffed chair. Stuffing out. He sips his beer.

HARVEY

Listen man, let's get back to your book. What are you gonna do with it?

CRUMB

(looking up)

I hadn't thought about it. It's just an exercise.

Harvey flips through the book.

HARVEY

It's more than an exercise. It's breaking ground, man. There's some wild shit in here.

Crumb is immune to Harvey's enthusiasm.

CRUMB

You're spitting on me, Harvey.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - FALL - 1962 - LATER

more of
CRUMB lies on the couch sketching while HARVEY reads
THE YUM YUM BOOK. A scratchy jazz record plays.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Crumb and I hung out a lot back then.
We had records and comics in common.

ANGLE ON CRUMB'S DRAWING

chair
sweaty
We see Crumb is actually sketching Harvey, slumped in a
reading a book. Crumb makes Harvey look like a smelly,
madman with ratty clothing.

Crumb holds the sketch of Harvey up to show him.

CRUMB

(laughing)
Check it out, man. Pretty scary.

Harvey glances up at his portrait, completely
unselfconscious.

HARVEY

Yeah, ya don't know the half of it.

Harvey goes back to reading. Crumb back to sketching.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Eventually people got hip to Crumb's
art work and he started hangin' out
with a Bohemian crowd. After a while,
he got sick of greeting cards and
moved away to San Francisco where he
got the whole underground comic scene
off the ground.

totally
Crumb slowly evaporates from the room, leaving Harvey
alone.

ANGLE ON 45 RECORD SPINNING AND SPINNING

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

He'd come back ta Cleveland every

few years, an' people'd treat him
like a celebrity.

The record spins and spins...

END FLASHBACK

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - 1975 - DAY

ANOTHER R. CRUMB DRAWING OF HARVEY (Now circa 1975)

sitting
as
On a sketch pad we see a deranged, tormented Harvey
alone on a park bench. He pulls at his hair, and looks
though he may murder the next person who walks by.

INTERTITLE: BACK TO 1975

As the pencil adds shading to Harvey's face, WE HEAR:

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Once he came to visit when I was
really feelin' bad. It was right
around the time of my throat
operation, an' right after my second
wife left me. At first it was pretty
weird. I mean, here my life was
falling apart an' everything was
going great for him. I was on my
second divorce an' he was a big hit
with the chicks. I was a nothin'
file clerk and he was this famous
cartoonist.

bus
sketches.
HARVEY and R. CRUMB sit on a park bench together by a
stop. A distraught Harvey whines while Crumb just

Harvey's voice is still raspy.

HARVEY

I dunno, man. On the one hand most
women gettin' graduate degrees
wouldn't give a guy like me the time
a' day. An' she married me an'
everything, so I gotta give her some
kinda credit. But then she got so

mean to me in the end. An' it ain't like I tried t'keep her captive or anything like that, y'know?

to Crumb may or may not be listening to Harvey. It's hard tell.

HARVEY

An' then on top of it I lost my voice for three months. I still sound like shit, but before I had nothin'. Man, talk about hell. I started forgettin' what I sound like, y'know? So I started writin' stuff down -- stories an' things, my points a' view, ideas. I even published a couple jazz record reviews. I guess that ended up bein' a good thing.

CRUMB

Uh-huh.

HARVEY

But don't think I buy into this "growth" crap. Everybody talks about how bad experiences can cause ya t'grow, an' all that clichéd stuff. I've had enough bad experiences and growth to last me plenty.

(a beat)

Right now, I'd be glad to trade some growth for happiness.

to For a moment, they both just sit there saying nothing each other, each man in his own private universe.

Finally Harvey looks over to Crumb.

HARVEY

So how long are ya stayin' in Cleveland?

Crumb never looks up from his picture.

CRUMB

I dunno, man. I gotta go visit this chick in New York. And I'm really busy with the comic book stuff. It's good bread and all man but I'm getting fed up with the whole scene.

HARVEY

What are ya talkin' about? Yer makin' a good living doin' yer art? Sheesh. How many guys get that lucky in their life, huh?

CRUMB

Yeah, I dunno.

HARVEY

Ya know man, people are startin' to know the name "Crumb." When you croak you're gonna leave something behind.

CRUMB

Yeah, my ashes and some crappy doodles. It's not like I'm Blind Lemon Jefferson or Big Mama Thornton.

HARVEY

C'mon, man. It sure beats workin' a gig like mine -- being a nobody flunky and sellin' records on the side for a buck.

CRUMB

Yeah, well that's true...

at all Harvey nods in agreement, mulling this over. He's not offended.

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1975 - DAY

CLOSE ON A FILE DRAWER MARKED: "RECENTLY DECEASED."

A hand reaches into the frame and opens the drawer.

By rote, HARVEY fumbles with a large stack of "expired patient" files. He places each into the appropriate alphabetical "deceased" drawer.

knocks Attempting to grab another batch, Harvey accidentally the entire pile onto the floor.

HARVEY

Damn it!

"expired
He crouches down to survey the mess -- a collage of
lives" laid out before his eyes.

Anderson,
Ray,
We move past dozens of anonymous names -- William
Louis Collins, Mark D'Amico, Tyrone Moore, Franklin
etc... Each file has a red "Deceased" stamp.

Depressed, HARVEY is transfixed by the files
surrounding him
on the floor. Suddenly he stops and picks one up.

ANGLE ON FOLDER: It is marked, "CHARLIE MARSHALL."

He opens the folder and reads the stats...

Occupation:
Born: 1920 in Cleveland Died: 1920 in Cleveland
Clerk

Charlie's
folder
ANGLE ON HARVEY: He swallows hard as he reads about
small, invisible and now vanished life... He tosses the
back onto the pile.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1975 - MORNING

CLOSE ON: TWO STICK FIGURES IN AN EMPTY FRAME

sheet
HARVEY sits at a table with a pen in hand and a blank
of paper in front of him. Nothing seems to come to him.

from
Crumb's
throws
He flips through a pile of comic books -- everything
D.C. Comic Super Heroes to underground works such as
Mr. Natural and Zap Comix. No inspiration. Harvey
them down in frustration.

HARVEY

I'm starvin'.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - 1975 - DAY

crowded
shelf
HARVEY pushes a cart through the cramped aisles of a supermarket. He pulls a few cans of Beef-A-Roni off the shelf and heads off to pay. Reaching the check-out area, he evaluates the situation.

ANGLE ON CHECK-OUT COUNTERS:

counters
an
There are three lines to choose from. Two of the have long waits. The third is much shorter but there is an OLD JEWISH LADY next in line.

SUDDENLY, THE SCREEN SPLITS IN TWO:

supermarket
The LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME remains Harvey at the supermarket deliberating over the check-out lines.

CRUMB
However, the RIGHT SIDE OF THE FRAME now contains a

BUBBLE
STYLE COMIC PANEL DEPICTING THE EXACT SAME SCENARIO. A

thoughts.
art...
appears over CARTOON HARVEY'S head revealing his thoughts. It reads: "Pickin' the right check-out line is an art... There's a lot of things you gotta consider."

behind
ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME... Harvey decides to get behind the Old Lady.

Cartoon
MEANWHILE ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE OF THE FRAME... Harvey stands behind the Old Lady.

am
A new BUBBLE reads: "It may be the shortest line but I am takin' a chance 'cause she's an Old Jewish Lady."

up
BACK TO THE LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME... The CASHIER rings up the Old Lady's purchases -- a few kitchen glasses.

OLD JEWISH LADY

(Yiddish Accent)

Listen, goily, dese glasses are six for \$2.00 because I couldn't carry twelf... But I wanted twelf so today I'm buying six more... But you should only charge me \$1.50 for dem... It's ok, you can esk de meneger.

He Harvey rolls his eyes and stamps his foot impatiently.
knows he's in trouble now.

CASHIER

(yelling)

Frank! I need a price check.

balloons, the **SUDDENLY, THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE SCREEN BECOMES FULLY ANIMATED...** Instead of still comic panels with
Cartoon Harvey now rants directly into the camera.

CARTOON HARVEY

Man, Old Jewish Ladies will argue forever with a cashier about anything. Get behind them in a line an' yer gonna wait forever!

replica. He The Human Harvey seems oblivious to his cartoon
impatiently leans on his cart, waiting and seething.

CARTOON HARVEY

I mean, I'm a yid myself, an' the women in my family are like that... But I never got used to it... I may be cheap, but I got limits!

finally ON THE LEFT HAND SIDE OF THE SCREEN... The MANAGER
arrives. The Old Lady haggles with him, too.

OLD JEWISH LADY

Please. Let me 'splain von more time.

turns
the
cartoon
MEANWHILE ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE... The Cartoon Harvey
to address the Human Harvey, who actually looks him in
eyes. It now seems Human Harvey can actually hear his
alter ego.

CARTOON HARVEY

Wake up! You're whole life's gettin' eaten away by this kinda crap! What kind of existence is this? Is this all a workin' stiff like you can expect? Ya gonna suffer in silence fer the rest a' yer life?! Or ya gonna make a mark. Huh? Huh?

LIVE

IN AN INSTANT, THE CARTOON HARVEY DISAPPEARS AND THE ACTION SCENE TAKES OVER THE WHOLE FRAME.

his

Suddenly motivated by an odd notion, Harvey abandons grocery cart and runs out of the supermarket.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

stick

Bursting with ideas, Harvey (wearing his undershirt and boxers) starts story-boarding his first comic with figures.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN - 1975 - MORNING

boxers,

to

all

A bleary-eyed HARVEY, still clad in an undershirt and dozes off over a bowl of Corn Flakes. On the table next to some spilled milk are a stack of papers covered with scribbling. He clearly has been slaving over this work night.

ANGLE ON PAPERS:

Behind

hoc

tick-

figure

At the top is a quickly scribbled title, "Standing Old Jewish Ladies In Supermarket Lines." These are ad hoc versions of a comic book. The pages are divided like a tack-toe board. Each square is filled with crude stick

drawings and lots of writing.

An alarm clock goes off. Harvey's eyes fly open.

HARVEY

Shit. Work.

peruses
window.
Harvey yawns, then notices the pile of papers. He
them, proud of his work. He gets up and looks out the

I/E. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - HARVEY'S POV - 1975 - MORNING

neighborhood is
run-down. Garbage is strewn everywhere.

The following scene unfolds through the window:

a
Two UNSIGHTLY WORKERS lug an old, smelly mattress from
garage towards the garbage cans on the curb. Their
conversation is distant, but entirely audible.

MATTRESS GUY #1

So how smart is she?

MATTRESS GUY #2

I dunno. I guess she's about average.

MATTRESS GUY #1

Average? Hey, man. Average is dumb!

framing
comic
They drop the mattress in place. With the window
these guys, the scene FREEZES, looking just like a
book panel.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

moves
Harvey turns around from the scene and ponders it. He
back towards his pile of stick-figure drawings.

CLOSE ON PAPER

top of
the page.
Harvey scribbles the words "AMERICAN SPLENDOR" at the

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND DINER - 1975 - DAY

The following scene is shot through the restaurant window.

We see reflections of people walking by.

A tense HARVEY starts at CRUMB as he eats a burger and reads Harvey's mock-ups. Harvey doesn't touch his deluxe burger and nervously talks in his laryngitis-afflicted voice.

HARVEY

See, ever since I read your stuff, man I've been thinking I could write comic book stories that were different from anything being done.

CRUMB

(munching on a fry)
Uh-huh.

HARVEY

I'm thinkin', the guys who do animal comics and super-hero stuff are really limited 'cause they gotta try to appeal to kids. And underground comics like yours have been really subversive or opened things up politically. But there is still plenty more ta be done with 'em, too, y'know?

CRUMB

Pass me the ketchup?

HARVEY

I mean with pictures and words, it could be more of an art form. Like those French movies are. Or De Sica over in Italy, y'know?... So I tried writin' some things about real life. Stuff the everyman's gotta deal with.

Crumb finally looks up from Harvey's work.

CRUMB

These are about you.

HARVEY

Er, yeah...

CRUMB

You turned yourself into a comic hero?

HARVEY

Sorta, yeah. But no idealized shit. No phony bullshit. The real thing, y'know? Ordinary life is pretty complex stuff.

starts

Crumb reads more. Harvey waits anxiously. Finally Crumb to chuckle.

CRUMB

These are really good, Harv.

HARVEY

(insecure)
Really? Ya think so?

Crumb shuffles through more.

CRUMB

Yeah. This is great stuff, man. I dig it. Can I take them home and illustrate them?

Harvey is practically bursting.

HARVEY

Wow!!

his

Harvey's voice breaks like a kid in puberty. He clears throat. And something miraculous happens...

GONE!

When Harvey opens his mouth to speak his LARYNGITIS IS

HARVEY

You'd do that for me, man? That'd be great! I can't draw a straight line!

CRUMB

Hey, what's up with your voice, Harv? All of a sudden it sounds fine.

HARVEY

(thrilled)

I don't know, man! I guess you cured me!

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - SNACK ROOM HALLWAY - DAY

hospital
to get
comic

HARVEY bounds towards the snack room where a group of workers and patients hang out. He bangs on the window their attention. When they look up, Harvey waves a book in the air.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - SNACK ROOM - DAY

MATTRESS

A GLOSSY, FULL-COLOR COMIC BOOK FEATURING THE TWO

the
The

GUYS: Scrawled across the top in big red letters reads, "AMERICAN SPLENDOR. Vol. #1" A man's finger points to words, "All Stories by Harvey Pekar. Art by R. Crumb." comic book sits atop a table in the dreary snack room. A crowd of HOSPITAL WORKERS, PATIENTS, DOCTORS, WORKERS, etc. (under ten total) gather around a proud who shows off his work. For the first time, he seems happy.

MAINTENANCE

HARVEY
almost

HARVEY

(beaming)

See that? All stories by yours truly.

A WWII VET PATIENT with a portable IV cranes to get a glimpse.

WW II VET PATIENT

Hot off the presses, huh? We got a regular Hemingway here.

HARVEY

No way, Jack, I don't go in for that macho crap.

DOCTOR #3 chimes in.

DOCTOR #3

I didn't know you could draw, Pekar.

HARVEY

Nah! I don't draw. I just write the stories. A buddy of mine and some of his friends do the art work.

book TOBY, the supernerd from the bus stop, grabs the comic off the table and peruses it.

TOBY

Harvey, am I in here? You promised I would be in here.

HARVEY

Yeah! Yeah! You're in there, alright? Jeez, Toby.

-- comic out SUDDENLY, MR. BOATS -- Harvey's philosophical co-worker pushes his way thorough the crowd. He snatches the comic out of Toby's hand.

MR. BOATS

Let me see this.

TOBY

Mr. Boats, it's not polite to grab things. Next time --

MR. BOATS

Son, you done good. Ya know, I was up in Toronto a few weeks back an' I saw the Red Chinese Ballet...

As Mr. Boats talks, the crowd starts to disperse.

MR. BOATS

Now that was beautiful. The way those people were dancing together. Those Chinese work hard. I tell ya, they work hard -- Where is everybody goin'?

on Mr. Boats hands the comic book back to Harvey and turns his heels. Through the window he notices TWO VETS IN WHEELCHAIRS moving down the hall.

MR. BOATS

Where these sickly men rushin' off to? They ain't goin' nowhere for now. Maybe not for a long time. But damn if they ain't in a rush to get there.

it's Harvey stands there, his moment of glory passed. But okay. He flips through his comic and smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET CORNER - ASSOC. OF POLISH WOMEN - 1975 - DAY

front A motley group of GUYS hang out on a street corner in towards of the Association of Polish Women. HARVEY heads them.

MARTY

Hey look guys, here comes Captain America.

Harvey rolls his eyes.

PAHLS

(yelling out)

You gonna hang with the boys now that yer a comic book star?

loves the Harvey turns red. He's embarrassed but part of him attention.

HARVEY

Cut it out. Man, I ain't nothin' yet compared to Bob Crumb.

GUY #3

Ah, listen to him. One lousy comic book and he wants to be Crumb.

The GUYS laugh.

ANGLE ON SILENT GUY

CLEVELAND A SILENT GUY crouches by the wall, reading his BROWNS trading cards.

PAHLS

Hey Harvey, if ya wanna make comics for adults, ya oughtta put some dirty stuff in it.

GUY #3

Yeah, you can write about Marty's sex life.

seems Harvey hangs with the guys but he doesn't engage. He to be observing them more than interacting with them.

GUY #3

Right Marty? I heard ya went out with Bonnie yesterday.

PAHLS

Yeah. Howdja do? Wudja git offa her?

MARTY

Ah, lousy. All's I got wuz armaround.

up. The guys all stare at him for a moment. Then they crack

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CLOSE UP:

VERSION A COPY OF AMERICAN SPLENDOR #2: A FULL-COLOR CARTOON OF THE ABOVE SCENE GRACES THE COVER.

his A MARTY LOOK-ALIKE is bombarded with questions about date with Bonnie. He complains that all he got was "arm-around." The REAL HARVEY holds the above comic book in his hand. The stage is set with a few items that indicate a comic book store. HARVEY talks about a couple of "American Splendor" issues and how they impacted his life -- recognition as a

book,
#4,

writer, etc. He gives his philosophy about the comic
etc. A MONTAGE OF AMERICAN SPLENDOR COVERS (ISSUE #3,
#5, #6, ETC.) THEY INDICATE A PASSAGE OF TIME...

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S CUBICLE - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

figures

HARVEY sits alone in his cubicle. He doodles stick
on a pad -- some ideas for a new comic. His posture's
miserable. He rubs his temples like he's in anguish.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man eight comics later, a
brand new decade, same old bullshit.
Yeah sure, he gets lots of recognition
for his writin' now. Sure his comics
are praised by all the important
media types tellin' people what to
think. But so what? It's not like
he makes a livin' at it like Bob
Crumb. He can't go an' quit his day
job or nothin'.

JUMP CUT SEQUENCE

face

Several shots of Harvey just thinking, scratching his
with a pencil, tapping his foot nervously.

homage

Each shot is separated by a second or two of black (an
to Harvey's wordless panels). Finally, he goes back to
writing.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Who am I kiddin'. Truth is I'd be
lost without my work routine.

FLASH

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

Alone in bed, Harvey wakes up in a cold sweat from a
nightmare. He looks horrified, short of breath.

HARVEY

(calming himself down)
I got a job... I got a job...

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S CUBICLE - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY scratches his head.

CLOSE UP ON HIS DOODLING

Harvey writes "I got a job" in a balloon over the stick figure's head.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

So -- to stave off desperation and feelings of uselessness -- I resigned myself to a menial existence. But hey, maybe the guy who's had a happy life feels worse just before he dies than th' guy who had a sad one. Or, maybe not. I dunno. Maybe I just needed a woman.

an
Toby comes in, decked out in plaid and stripes. He has
empty messenger bag.

TOBY

Hi, Harvey. Do you want these gourmet jelly beans? I gave up sweets for lent.

Harvey turns around. He seems down, depressed.

HARVEY

Huh? Sure, I'll take 'em.

Toby watches Harvey eat a few.

HARVEY

Hey, watermelon. That's pretty good.

TOBY

I recommend the piña coladas. They are excellent and very authentic tasting.

off
Toby heads down a file row and proceeds to take a few

after

the shelves, stuffing his bag. Harvey gets up and comes
him.

HARVEY

Hey Toby, can you eat lentils during
lent?

TOBY

Sure. I don't see why not. You can't
eat meat on certain days, but lentils
should be acceptable anytime.

HARVEY

Ya think there's any connection
between lentils and lent?

TOBY

I don't think so but I'll ask Sister
Mary Fred at church on Sunday.

HARVEY

Sister Mary Fred, huh? Is she cute?
Sounds kinda mannish but who am I to
be picky.

TOBY

Harvey, you're funny. She's a nun.

HARVEY

So what? Maybe she became a nun
because she couldn't get a guy.

TOBY

Harvey, she became a nun because she
had a higher calling.

HARVEY

Higher calling. That is such a crock
of shit. I don't know why you waste
your time prayin' anyway.

TOBY

Well, Harvey, I like the ritual. And
I'm a very spiritual person. You
know, you should try believing in
something bigger than yourself. It
might cheer you up.

Toby turns on his heels and walks off.

HARVEY

(calling after him)
What? Do I seem depressed, Toby?

Toby doesn't respond.

pulls

Harvey shrugs and digs deep into the jelly bean bag. He
out a fistful.

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S HAND

few

Jellybeans in every imaginable color. Harvey fingers a
and then picks a blue one.

BOB THE DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Cut!

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL "SET" - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

sound

- The

A few items from the previous scene are present on the
stage indicating that it's a set of AMERICAN SPLENDOR -
Movie.

Jelly

THE ACTOR HARVEY stands alone, his hand filled with
beans.

BOB THE DIRECTOR

Okay, that was great. The bakery
scene is next...

service

REAL

set.

ACTOR HARVEY steps out of the frame, revealing a craft
table behind him. At the table, the REAL HARVEY and the
TOBY load up on donuts. The two discuss the food on the

the

completely

Ironically, the Real Toby is actually more extreme than
Actor who plays him -- even more robotic, and
incapable of eye-contact.

explains
beans --

The REAL TOBY discusses the finer points of nerdism and evaluates the Actor's nerd quotient. The Real Harvey to Actor Toby that nothing -- not even gourmet jelly beans -- would have cheered him up at that point in his life. He was too lonely and depressed.

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - MORNING

Light pours through the curtained window.

Naked and disheveled, HARVEY tosses and turns in bed.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

My loneliness was unbearable, man. Weekends were the worst. Sometimes in my sleep, I'd feel a body next to me like an amputee feels a phantom limb.

EXT. PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE -- DAY

the
the

Extreme wide shot: a city-street overpass spans across entire frame. The lone figure of Harvey sulks there in middle, watching traffic pass below.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Sure my comics were bringin' me notoriety, but my personal life was in shambles. I thought a little attention would make me feel better. It only made me feel worse.

CUT

TO:

EXT. BAKERY SIDE STREET - SPRING - 1980'S - MORNING

in

It is a beautiful, sunny day. The trees are in bloom.

There's the first scent of spring in the air. Kids play

seems
walks

the street. Music pours out of passing cars. Everyone to have a smile on his or her face except HARVEY. He on the shadowy side of the street.

EXT. BAKERY STREET - SPRING

Establishing shot of HARVEY trudging into the bakery.

INT. BAKERY - SPRING - 1980'S - MORNING

COUNTER

A couple of WOMEN order bread and cookies from TWO **GIRLS.**

HARVEY surveys the donuts.

COUNTER GIRL #1

(yelling to Harvey)

Next!

HARVEY

(to the Counter Girl)

Yeah! I'll have two crullers, a jelly donut with powdered sugar... And you got any "day old bread"?

on
Harvey's

A woman with attractive Irish looks brushes past Harvey her way to the door. This is ALICE QUINN, roughly age but there is a tired, weary look in her eyes.

ALICE

Hey, you're Harvey Pekar.

Half in a daze, Harvey stares at the chick.

HARVEY

Yeah...

ALICE

Alice Quinn. From school.

Harvey studies her face. Suddenly, it clicks.

HARVEY

Oh yeah. College. We had a couple lit classes together.

towards Harvey pays and receives his items. They step back the door.

ALICE

What happened to you? You just disappeared after one semester.

Harvey scratches his armpit.

HARVEY

I know, man. I got good grades and all but there was this required math class. I can't do math, an' that required class hangin' over my head made me crazy. Eventually the pressure got to be too much.

ALICE

Well, you're doing okay anyway. I heard all about your jazz reviews and your comics.

This perks Harvey up.

HARVEY

Ya did?

ALICE

Sure, you're famous. Meanwhile I got my degree but I'm just a plain old wife and mother.

Harvey stares at her wedding ring. His face drops.

HARVEY

Yeah. I'm not doing as great as ya think. My second wife divorced me and I work at a dead end job as a file clerk. Sometimes I hang out with the guys on the corner but most of the time I just stay home by myself and read.

Alice laughs.

ALICE

You're luckier than you think. My husband and kids make it impossible for me to cuddle up with a good book.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAKERY - SPRING - 1980'S - DAY

stroll
HARVEY and ALICE continue their conversation as they
towards her car.

HARVEY

I'm reading this book by Dreiser now --
JENNIE GERHARDT.

ALICE

That's one of my favorites.

HARVEY

I hope it don't end like so many a'
those naturalist novels... With
someone getting crushed ta earth by
forces he can't control.

Alice smiles.

ALICE

I think you'll be pleasantly
surprised. It's certainly not a
Hollywood happy ending, but it's
pretty truthful. Which is rare these
days...

such
This hits home with Harvey. He can't believe he's made
a connection with this woman.

Alice stops in front of a beat-up station wagon.

ALICE

This is me.

HARVEY

Nice car. I don't have one yet.

ALICE

Can I give ya a lift somewhere?

HARVEY

Nah. It's a nice day. I'll just walk.

Harvey looks down, a little sad.

ALICE

Well, we should have you over sometime for dinner.

HARVEY

Sure, I'd be glad t'come. But if you really wanna do me a favor, introduce me to some a' your single girlfriends. I bet they're all smart like you. I'm no catch, though, so I'll take anything you can get me.

Alice pecks Harvey on the cheek.

ALICE

I'll work on it.

She gets into the car.

ALICE

Nice seeing ya Harvey.

Harvey watches as she drives off.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

When I got home, I finished reading JENNIE GERHARDT. It was real good, way better than I expected. That Alice wuz right.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - SPRING - 1980'S - NIGHT

of The room is moody, dark and lonely. The shadowy figure
Harvey sits on the floor devouring JENNIE GERHARDT.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Sure Lester -- the main character -- croaks in the end, but at least he's old and dies a natural dignified death.

again, THE CAMERA TRAVELS AROUND THE ROOM TO FIND: Harvey
book now silhouetted in the door frame, still clutching the
and obsessed by his thoughts.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I was more alone that weekend than any. All I did was think about JENNIE GERHARDT an' Alice Quinn an' all the decades of people I have known.

chair
shoulders
weighty.

THE CAMERA TRAVELS AGAIN TO FIND Harvey sitting on a
in the corner of his room. His head is bowed. His
slump over, as if he's struggling with something

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

The more I thought, the more I felt
like cryin'; Life seemed so sweet
an' so sad an' so hard t'let go of
in the end.

sprawled
obsessing.

THE CAMERA TRAVELS A FINAL TIME TO FIND: Harvey
across his couch. But he's not asleep; he's still
The book lies on his chest like a lover.

CLOSE UP of Harvey's troubled face. Beneath the pain,
we see
hope and determination.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

But hey, man. Every day's a brand
new deal, right? Just keep on workin'
and sump'n's bound ta turn up.

CUT TO:

EXT. COSMIC COMICS STORE - DELAWARE - 1980'S - DAY

street. A
title over picture reads, "MEANWHILE, IN DELAWARE."

INT. COSMIC COMICS STORE - 1980'S - DAY

peptic
something. Her
a

JOYCE BRABNER, a depressive nudge with a perpetually
expression frantically searches the store for
partner, a granola type named RAND, finishes unloading
stack on the shelf.

JOYCE

What happened to the new American
Splendor?

RAND

We sold 'em, babe.

JOYCE

All of them?

RAND

Yep.

JOYCE

(accusatory)

Damn it! I put one aside for myself, next to the register. I didn't even get a chance to read it.

RAND

Whoa, sorry, Joyce. I didn't know you were such a Splendor fan. Next time take it home.

Joyce leans against the counter. She pushes up her glasses and looks really upset.

JOYCE

Maybe I'll call the publisher. But they take so damn long. Shit! Why does everything in my life have to be such a complicated disaster...

Joyce starts slamming things around the store. Finally Rand grabs his stuff.

RAND

Okay, I'm gonna hustle before the vibe in here gets any worse.

Rand leaves. Joyce barely notices, still brewing.

CUT TO:

INT. JOYCE'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

The mess in this room rivals Harvey's. A few cats add to the clutter. Joyce lies on her disheveled bed and writes a letter.

JOYCE (V.O.)

Greetings from the second smallest

state in the union, an endless
plastics and nylon plantation
controlled by giant chemical
corporations.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - VESTIBULE - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY takes his mail out of the box. He finds an oddly
decorated envelope.

JOYCE (V.O.)

To make matters more dismal, there
are no decent comic book stores in
my town, which is why my partner and
I opened one ourselves.

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY finishes reading the letter sitting on the
toilet. A
cat runs around him.

JOYCE (V.O.)

Despite our steadily faltering
business, my partner managed to sell
the last copy of American Splendor
#8 out from under me. I'm a big fan
and I hate to wait for a new order.
Is there any way I can get it from
you direct? Sincerely, Joyce Brabner.

Harvey scratches his head. He mutters to himself.

HARVEY

...man, she's got good lookin'
handwritin'...

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE -- HARVEY AND JOYCE COMMUNICATING

We see Harvey in his bed writing.

HARVEY

Dear Joyce, Thanks for the letter.
Whattya do besides sellin' comics?

THE SCREEN SPLITS TO ACCOMMODATE:

INT. DELAWARE PRISON CLASSROOM - 1980'S - DAY

We see Joyce standing in front of a GROUP OF PRISONERS.

JOYCE (V.O.)

I'm a sometime activist and I teach writing to prisoners. I try to help them build an interior life and make art out of their monotonous, suffocating routine.

THE SCREEN GIVES WAY TO ANOTHER FRAME

INT. BUS - 1980'S - DAY

Harvey scribbles a letter while riding on the bus.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Sounds familiar. So you married or what?

INT. JOYCE'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce empties her can of cat food in a plate and slides towards her kitty.

it

JOYCE (V.O.)

I'm divorced, thank god.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - EVENING

Now we see Harvey (full screen) in bed in his underwear talking on the PHONE. He's clipping his toe nails.

HARVEY

Look, I think you an' I got a lot in common. How am I gonna get you to come visit me in Cleveland?

JOYCE (V.O.)

Cleveland? You think that's a good idea?

HARVEY

It's a great idea. You should meet me, 'cause I'm a great guy. Despite the way my comics read, I got a lot of redeeming characteristics.

CLIP! He clips off a big one.

THE SCREEN SPLITS TO REVEAL

INT. JOYCE'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - NIGHT

Joyce sits on her equally disheveled bed dunking a tea bag.

Her hair is wet from a shower.

JOYCE

I don't know. Where would I stay?

HARVEY (V.O.)

With me. Don't worry, I'm not gonna put no moves on you or anything.

JOYCE

I'm not worried about that...

(fumbling with a tea cup)

Hold on, I just spilled chamomile tea all over my bathrobe.

HARVEY (V.O.)

So what are ya worried about then?

SPLENDORS

Joyce sighs and lies down. A variety of AMERICAN

stare

are across her bed. Different interpretations of Harvey up at her.

JOYCE

(sipping)

Well, the way all those different artists draw you, I don't quite know what to expect. I mean sometimes you look like a younger Brando, but then the way Crumb draws you -- like a hairy ape with all those stinky, wavy lines radiating off your body -- it's kind of scary.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Those are motion lines. I'm an active guy. Anyway, just come out here and I'll try to be anyone you want me to be.

Joyce smiles for the first time.

JOYCE

That's a dangerous offer. I'm a
notorious reformer...

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - ARRIVALS GATE - 1980'S - DAY

A nervous JOYCE walks off the plane into the arrivals
area.

She scans the crowd of friends, family, lovers and limo
drivers waiting to meet the disembarking passengers.

Where
is Harvey? What will he look like?

As Joyce surveys the unfamiliar faces, she imagines
different
versions of an animated, illustrated Harvey among the
people.

She double-takes as sees the R. CRUMB HARVEY -- hairy,
scary,
smelly and picking his nose. Joyce rubs her eyes.

Next she sees the BRANDO HARVEY (Gary Dumm), but
unfortunately
he disappears fast.

Disappointed, Joyce notices the realistic DREW FRIEDMAN
HARVEY
walking towards her. She smiles as he dissolves into:

HARVEY (O.S.)

Hey. Are you Joyce?

Joyce turns around. The flesh and blood HARVEY PEKAR
stands
before her -- not quite as bad as the Crumb version,
not
quite as good as the Dumm version, but still
acceptable. She
sighs with relief.

JOYCE

Hi, Harvey. We finally meet in person.

She politely offers her hand. Harvey shakes it, but he
looks
overwhelmed, worried and pessimistic.

HARVEY

Hiya. Look, before we get started with any of this, ya might as well know right off the bat. I had a vasectomy.

Joyce lets go of his hand. She stares at him in disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. TGIF STYLE RESTAURANT - 1980'S - NIGHT

The most awkward date in history. Seated in an ultra-yuppie restaurant filled with business lunchers, Harvey and Joyce hide behind their menus. While everyone else looks slick and successful, these two compete for the world's worst posture.

HARVEY

What's wrong?

JOYCE

Nothing.

HARVEY

Somethin's wrong. Yer lookin' around everywhere.

JOYCE

I guess I never imagined you eating in a place like this.

HARVEY

Me? I never been here. I thought you'd like it. But obviously ya don't, do ya?

JOYCE

It's fine. What difference does it make?

Harvey shakes his head, feeling more pessimistic.

HARVEY

I dunno. None, I guess.

(beat)

They sure got a lot of meat on this menu.

JOYCE

You're a vegetarian?

HARVEY

Kinda. I mean ever since I got a pet cat, I couldn't eat animals anymore.

Joyce grabs a bread stick.

JOYCE

Hmm. I support and identify with groups like PETA, but unfortunately I'm a self-diagnosed anemic. Also, I have all these food allergies to vegetables that give me serious intestinal distress. I guess I have a lot of borderline health disorders that limit me politically when it comes to eating.

Harvey just stares at her.

HARVEY

Wow. Yer a sick woman, huh?

JOYCE

Not yet. But I expect to be. Everyone in my family's got some kind of degenerative illness.

A cheery waitress bounces over.

WAITRESS

(sing song)

Good afternoon! I'm your server Cindy!
What can I bring you two today?

They slowly look up at her.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - NIGHT

JOYCE and HARVEY enter the apartment. The place is a mess,
as usual.

HARVEY

Look, I was gonna clean up, but why should I give you any false notions?

The truth is I got a serious problem with cleanliness. I could wash a dish ten times and it'd still dirty. They even kicked me outta the Army 'cause I couldn't learn ta make a bed.

Joyce puts down her bag.

JOYCE

I've seen worse.

million

She slumps down on the sofa as if she's been here a million times. She rubs her head. Harvey sits next to her.

JOYCE

Harvey, go get me water and a few aspirin.

Harvey just bounces back up and obeys.

HARVEY

What, ya got a headache?

JOYCE

No, but I want to avoid one.

Harvey empties the aspirin bottle in his palm. For some reason, he's feeling more comfortable.

HARVEY

Well lemme tell ya Joyce, it sure is nice ta have company. I mean, despite all your problems, you seem like a great person. An' hey, sorry if my dating skills are kinda rusty, but I've just been through hell and back with women. I mean that last one turned out to be a real nasty bitch.

Joyce.

Harvey arrives back with the aspirin. He hands it to

JOYCE

I had a nice time with you, too.

Joyce swallows the pill. Harvey sits down next to her.

HARVEY

Yeah? You had a nice time?

JOYCE

Don't make people repeat themselves.
It's annoying.

HARVEY

Oh, sorry.

They're inches away from each other.

JOYCE

C'mere...

She pulls him close. Harvey plants a kiss on her.

likes

They slowly separate. Joyce's eyes are closed. She

moaning a

him. He kisses her again. They start making out,

bit.

But before it gets heavy --

JOYCE

Harvey?

HARVEY

Yeah?

Joyce opens her eyes. She looks uneasy.

JOYCE

Which door's the bathroom?

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - 1980'S - DAY

inside

Harvey stands by the bathroom door, despondent. From

we hear the sounds of moaning and flushing.

HARVEY

Hey, Joyce! What's wrong? What is
it?

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - DAY

looking

FLUSH! Joyce is doubled over on the toilet. She's

green.

JOYCE

Ugh! I don't know. I think that yuppie food did me in.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - DAY

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

HARVEY

I feel terrible. Lemme at least do something for you.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Joyce gets to her feet and puts her glasses back on. She picks up a can and sprays air freshener around the room.

Then she looks at the can and realizes it's WD-40.

HARVEY

Can I make ya something? How about some chamomile tea?

Joyce puts the can down.

JOYCE

Chamomile tea? What the hell's a guy like you doing with that? I thought you drink soda pop for breakfast.

HARVEY (O.S.)

I dunno. I noticed you drank a lot of it when we started talkin' on the phone. So I stocked up on herbal teas for your visit.

Joyce turns her head to the door. She's truly surprised by what Harvey's just said. And very moved. She smiles to herself.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - DAY

Harvey stands there waiting.

HARVEY

The girl at the Food Co-op picked me out all kinds of herbal stuff. One of 'ems good for stomachaches. Grandma Bear's Tummy Mint, I think. Are you still there?

frame
Joyce slowly opens the door. She leans against the door like she's just been through a war.

shirt.
She takes off her glasses and cleans them off with her

JOYCE

Harvey, we better skip this whole courtship thing and just get married.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

arms.
Harvey and Joyce are in bed, lying in each other's

They look quite contented.

HARVEY

Man, am I glad I talked you into comin' up here. Any more time alone and I mighta lost it fer good.

JOYCE

Me too.

HARVEY

So you don't have any problems with movin' to Cleveland?

JOYCE

Not really. I find most American cities depressing in the same way.

HARVEY

An' yer okay with the vasectomy thing?

She shrugs.

EXT. PARKING LOT - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

feet
haven't
finding

HARVEY approaches the building. Instead of dragging his
like usual, he seems to be floating on a cloud. We
seen Harvey this happy since... well, since never.
He stops by a junker car and peeks in the window,
TOBY eating lunch alone. He has an entire White Castle
smorgasbord spread across the front seat.
Harvey knocks on the window. Toby rolls it down.

HARVEY

Ay Toby.

TOBY

(mouth full)

No you can't have any of my White
Castle hamburgers so please don't
even ask.

HARVEY

Can I have a fry?

Harvey reaches for a handful of Toby's fries.

TOBY

Okay, but just a couple, Harvey. I'm
not going to eat dinner until very
late and this has got to hold me
over.

another

Harvey leans in, always amused by Toby. He steals
fry.

HARVEY

(munching)

Whattya got, a church function?

TOBY

No, I'm driving to Toledo to see a
movie. Would you like to come?

HARVEY

Nah. I gotta fly to Delaware tonight.
I'm gettin' married.

TOBY

Oh. Why Delaware?

HARVEY

The chick I'm marryin' is from Wilmington. Plus, I gotta help her move her stuff here.

(a beat)

Why you drivin' ta Toledo to see a movie?

TOBY

It's not playing at the Mapletown.

(a beat)

I didn't know you had a girlfriend, Harvey.

HARVEY

Yeah. We met last week.

Harvey opens the car door and slides in with Toby.

HARVEY

Toby, what movie could possibly be worth drivin' 260 miles round trip for?

TOBY

It's a new film called "Revenge of the Nerds." It's about a group of nerd college students who are being picked on all the time by the jocks, so they decide to take revenge. I already saw it once.

HARVEY

Wow, ya really dig this movie.

TOBY

I like it a lot, Harvey.

HARVEY

What are these nerds like? How would you describe them?

TOBY

Hmm... Nerds are smart but they look and act differently than other people. Like nerds might wear polyester button-down shirts and flood pants where their ankles and their socks are showing.

shirt.
Toby spills some catsup on his polyester button-down

pants.
He stands up to get a napkin, revealing his flood

HARVEY

So what yer sayin' is you identify
with those nerds?

TOBY

(rubbing out the catsup)
Yes, I consider myself a nerd. And
this movie has uplifted me. There's
this one scene where a nerd grabs
the microphone during a pep rally
and announces that he is a nerd and
that he is proud of it and stands up
for the rights of other nerds. Then,
he asks the kids at the pep rally
who think they are nerds to come
forward... So nearly everyone in the
place does. That's the way the movie
ends.

HARVEY

So the nerds won, huh?

TOBY

(smiling)
Yes.

door to
Harvey grabs the rest of Toby's fries and opens the
leave.

HARVEY

Wow. You got this movie an' I'm
gettin' hitched. We both had a good
month, huh?

TOBY

(finishing his last
burger)
Right. Harvey, how long are you going
to be in Delaware because I'd really
like to see this movie with you?

HARVEY

I'm only goin' for a week but then
I'll have a wife, so I'll have to

take her along. Is it a girl flick?

TOBY

Depends on the girl. What kind of girl is your new bride? Is she a nerd?

HARVEY

I don't know, man. Maybe. She's into herbal teas.

Toby watches Harvey saunter off. He returns to his last hamburger.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - 1980'S - NIGHT

The
street.
A brightly lit marquee reads, "REVENGE OF THE NERDS."
doors to the theater open and a crowd pours onto the

wears a
HARVEY, JOYCE and TOBY are among them. Toby proudly
"Genuine Nerd" button on his striped shirt.

JOYCE

I agree with Toby. I think it's a story of hope and tolerance.

TOBY

Yes. It's about time that the people who get picked on get to be the heroes.

Harvey scrunches his face in disbelief.

HARVEY

It's an entertaining flick an' I can see why you like it Toby, but those people on the screen ain't even supposed to be you! They're college students whose parents live in big houses in the suburbs. They're gonna get degrees, get good jobs and stop being nerds.

Joyce hits Harvey.

JOYCE

Harvey, what did I say about loud talking? Use your inside voice.

HARVEY

(whispering loudly)

Look Toby, the guys in that movie are not 28-year-old file clerks who live with their grandmothers in an ethnic ghetto.

JOYCE

That's enough, Harvey.

HARVEY

They didn't get their computers like you did -- by trading in a bunch of box tops and \$49.50 at the supermarket.

Joyce folds her arms in disapproval. Toby starts to laugh.

TOBY

You're funny Harvey.

Harvey looks at him, disappointed. He shakes his head.

HARVEY

Sure, Toby. Go to the movies and daydream, but "Revenge of the Nerds" ain't reality. It's just Hollywood bullshit.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOBY'S CAR -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON TOBY'S CAR (THROUGH WINDSHIELD)

Toby and Joyce continue to analyze the movie in the front seat as Toby starts the ignition.

CUT TO:

INT. TOBY'S CAR

ANGLE ON HARVEY IN BACK SEAT

still
Slouched, grumpy and alone on the back seat, Harvey's
annoyed by the movie.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Okay, maybe I was bein' so harsh on
Toby onna count a' my own problems.

REAL HARVEY

Y'see, I wasn't even married a month
and my old lady was already showin'
signs a' trouble. Granted, I tend ta
get married fast 'cause I'll take
any woman that'll have me, but this
time I really met my match...

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

frame.
A few items indicating film production are in the

discusses the
actress
At a table in the foreground, BOB THE DIRECTOR
character of Joyce with the ACTRESS playing her. The
actress
just nods as the director goes on.

in
We can see THE REAL JOYCE sitting with THE REAL HARVEY
the distance.

DIRECTOR

Okay, I think the thing with Joyce
is that as manic as Harvey can be,
she matches him with depression. In
that way they complete each other. I
mean, she's obviously a very smart
woman, but she has a lot of trouble
functioning in a world she can't
control. And she's totally obsessed
with all things negative; y'know,
diseases, dysfuctions, etc.

sometimes
are
THE REAL JOYCE and REAL HARVEY listen curiously --
pleased, sometimes displeased -- as their personalities

dissected and boiled down to a few phrases.

CLOSER SHOT OF REAL JOYCE AND HARVEY

playing
a
Harvey,
it

The REAL JOYCE puts in her two cents about the actress her. She rants about what it's like to be portrayed in a movie, and having a character arc imposed on her life. She moves into talking about her relationship with and the first years of their marriage -- how impossible was to live with him.

The REAL HARVEY just rolls his eyes.

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

piles

JOYCE is on a cleaning rampage. She rummages through upon piles of records while HARVEY paces nervously.

JOYCE

What about these 78's, Harvey? Can't you sell them to one of those collectors?

HARVEY

Are ya kidding? No way, man. I ain't getting rid of my 78's.

runs

Joyce throws down the records in frustration. Harvey over to check if they're scratched.

JOYCE

(angry)

Forget it then. I give up! How can I make more storage space, if you won't get rid of anything?

HARVEY

I'll get rid of stuff. Just not my good stuff.

JOYCE

Everything's your good stuff. How am I supposed to live here, if there's no room for me?

HARVEY

Aw come on, baby. I'll make room for ya. You just have to give me time. I'm not so good at these kind of things.

JOYCE

That's because you're obsessive compulsive Harvey.

A DOOR BUZZER rings. Harvey slams it to unlock the front.

HARVEY

C'mon. I don't wanna hear that psychobabble crap!

JOYCE

I don't care if you wanna hear it or not. You're the poster child for the DSM III. I'll have you know that I come from a very dysfunctional family. I can spot personality disorders a mile away...

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR interrupts their argument. Joyce storms away to answer it.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR:

Joyce opens it to face a smiling TOBY -- dressed as usual in a loud polyester fashion don't. He talks in his strange robotic voice and avoids all eye contact.

TOBY

Hello Joyce. Is Harvey home?

Joyce turns to Harvey and points to Toby.

JOYCE

Borderline autistic!

This scene shrinks into a square up in the corner. The next

full

few scenes (NEUROSIS MONTAGE) further divide up the screen like a comic book.

INT. CLEVELAND COMIC BOOK STORE - 1980'S - DAY

he's

R. CRUMB leaps from behind an autograph table (where signing comics) to hop on the back of ZAFTIG BABE, who offers him a piggy-back ride.

offers

Joyce turns to Harvey.

JOYCE

Polymorphously Perverse.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

waving

JOYCE picks up Harvey from work. HARVEY enters the car, waving goodbye to the ranting MR. BOATS.

She points to Mr. Boats.

JOYCE

Paranoid Personality Disorder.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

flips

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. A disheveled, tired-looking JOYCE through a novel and lets the machine pick up.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Please leave a message.

(Beep)

HARVEY

(into phone)

Hey Joyce, it's me. You're not gonna believe this but some LA producer called an' he wants to do a play about my life. Call me!

(Click)

Joyce flips the page.

JOYCE
(to herself)
Delusions of grandeur.

END NEUROSIS MONTAGE (return to full screen)

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - 1980'S - EVENING

HARVEY and JOYCE sit in a packed theater watching a play.

Joyce looks exhausted.

ANGLE ON STAGE

A STAGE ACTOR HARVEY and a STAGE ACTOR JOYCE share a couch on the sparse stage.

STAGE ACTOR HARVEY

See, I think comics can be an art form. With pictures an' words, a guy can do pretty much anything!

STAGE ACTOR JOYCE

That's true, Harvey. But I didn't come all the way from Delaware to talk about comics ...

The "Stage Actor Joyce" lunges over and plants a kiss on him.

ANGLE ON HARVEY AND JOYCE IN AUDIENCE

Harvey digs it but Joyce looks disgusted.

BACK TO STAGE

We now see STAGE ACTOR HARVEY clutching a tea cup, as STAGE ACTOR JOYCE kneels before a toilet bowl. Off to the side of the stage, A SPOT LIGHT illuminates a GUITAR PLAYER, who adds music to the scene.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - 1980'S - DAY

brims

HARVEY and JOYCE walk through the terminal. Harvey with energy but Joyce looks exhausted.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

If ya think readin' comics about yer life seems strange, try watchin' a play about it. God only knows how I'll feel when I see this movie. But truth be told, the play wasn't half bad, and we got a free trip outta it. Things were goin' pretty good for a change. Variety called me "The Blue Collar Mark Twain," and Doubleday was interested in publishing an anthology of "American Splendor."

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - 1980'S - DAY

bags.

Harvey nervously taps his foot as he waits for the

MOTHER

Joyce leans against the carousel staring at a YOUNG with a BABY in a Bjorn.

HARVEY

I hate checkin' bags, man. It always takes forever.

He checks his watch. Joyce remains quiet and distant.

HARVEY

Jesus, look at the time. The bus is gonna leave soon and there won't be another one for an hour. That means I gotta shell out an extra thirty bucks for a cab.

Harvey spots a bag that he thinks is his.

HARVEY

Hey wait, there's our --
(a well-dressed man
grabs it)
Figures. That lucky Yuppie's gonna

get on the bus in time.

Suddenly, Joyce mumbles something to Harvey.

JOYCE

Y'know Harvey, vasectomies are reversible.

HARVEY

(ignoring her)
Damn Yuppies get everything.

JOYCE

(raising her voice)
Are you listening to me? I said vasectomies are reversible.

Heads turn.

HARVEY

What? Whattya talkin' about? I don't want kids. An' I came clean about my vasectomy the first time I set eyes on ya', right here in this airport.

More heads turn.

JOYCE

I know but things have changed. I think we can be a family.

HARVEY

Family?! What kinda family could we possibly be? I ain't no good with kids. I can barely take care of myself.

JOYCE

I'll take care of the kid and you.

HARVEY

(dead serious)
No way Joyce. Forget it. I can't do it; I can't have no kids.

audience of
Joyce folds her arms... dejected, defeated. The eavesdroppers looks disappointed as well.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

it's
gotten worse. JOYCE seems to have given up on her
organizing... and everything else for that matter.
record
the
in
HARVEY hysterically searches through the mess for a
album. Joyce just lies listlessly on an open futon on
middle of the room; it looks as if she hasn't been up
days.

HARVEY

Where the hell is that Ornette Coleman
album, Joyce? I got a review due
tomorrow.

Joyce rolls over.

JOYCE

I didn't touch it, Harvey. Would you
let me sleep?

HARVEY

But it's one o'clock! How late can a
person sleep?

Joyce sits up. This time she means business.

JOYCE

It happens to be Saturday you selfish
sonofabitch! And don't you go telling
me what to do. I'm the one who moved
into your city, into your home, into
your vasectomy and into your screwed-
up life. The least you could do is
allow me to live here my way.

Harvey
She rolls over and covers her head with the pillow.
just stands there staring at her.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - 1980'S - DAY

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I tried everything but nothin' could

get this woman outta bed.

herbal
HARVEY peruses the aisles. He pulls box upon box of
tea off the shelves.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I mean she wouldn't get a job,
wouldn't go out, wouldn't make
friends, nothin'.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

sprawls
on
HARVEY throws boxes of herbal teas at JOYCE as she
listlessly on the futon. She just yawns and turns over
her side.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Joyce diagnosed herself as "clinically
depressed." I don't know what the
hell she was goin' through but it
was sure takin' it's toll on me.

A frustrated Harvey tries once more to cheer her up.

HARVEY

(upbeat)
We can go out for dinner tonight.
How 'bout catching a bite at Tommy's?

JOYCE

(mumbling)
I'm not hungry.

Harvey throws his hands in the air and walks off.

HARVEY

I give up.

As he passes the answering machine, he notices it's
blinking.

HARVEY

Hey Joyce, we got a message here.
Why didn't you pick up.

Joyce doesn't respond.

HARVEY

Useless.

He presses the play button.

ANGLE ON ANSWERING MACHINE: A loud "beep," then ...

MALE VOICE

Hi, this is a message for Harvey Pekar. My name is Jonathan Greene and I'm a producer for LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN. We'd like to talk to you about coming on the show to plug your comics. Please give me a call at 212-555-3333.

HARVEY (O.S.)

What the hell?

Joyce sits up. Harvey's finger hits the "Replay" button.

MALE VOICE

Hi, this is a message for Harvey --

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - 1980'S - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

The impressive skyline glistens in the spring sun.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Joyce finally got off the futon...

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - NEW YORK - 1980'S - DAY

Armed with shopping bags from Bleecker Bob's Record Shop,
the Strand Book Store and Forbidden Planet Comic Book Emporium, HARVEY and JOYCE eat lunch on a park bench.
Harvey chomps on a knish and watches oddball New Yorkers stroll by
as Joyce nibbles on her hot dog.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- DAY

CLOSE UP ON AN ICE BUCKET

down a
passes and
sign.

Cut back to reveal Harvey, schlepping an ice bucket
hall in his underwear. A FEMALE BUSINESS TRAVELER
stares at him. He enters a room with a "DO NOT DISTURB"

INT. NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

hotel
York

The PEKARS have already wreaked havoc on their luxury
room. It looks like a tornado touched down on the New
Hilton.

wrinkled
spread
scissors and
shakes

HARVEY tries on outfits for the big show. He pulls a
T-shirt over his head and models it for JOYCE who is
out on the bed surrounded by piles of clothing,
sewing supplies. She glances up at Harvey's getup and
her head no.

HARVEY

Aw, c'mon. Who the hell cares?

and

Harvey tosses his shirt over to Joyce, who snatches it
starts cutting it with a scissor.

HARVEY

Hey, whattya doin?

JOYCE

Merchandising.

be

She resumes her mysterious sewing project; she seems to
making some kind of doll.

CUT TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

LETTERMAN on
has
more
striped

Backstage, JOYCE watches LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID
a monitor as HARVEY awaits his turn to go on camera. He
changed out of his wrinkled T-shirt into a slightly
formal look -- a denim shirt and a ratty seersucker
jacket.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

THE

**ANGLE ON MONITOR (NOTE: THIS IS ACTUAL STOCK FOOTAGE OF
SHOW)**

A 1980's DAVID LETTERMAN wisecracks.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

with

Neither Joyce nor Harvey look particularly impressed
the whole deal.

JOYCE

People like this show?

Harvey paces.

HARVEY

I'm gettin' hungry back here. They
oughtta leave ya donuts or somethin'.

head in.

A nervous STAGE MANAGER wearing a headset peeks his

STAGE MANAGER

Dave's ready for you now, Mr. Pekar.

HARVEY

Hey, you got anything ta eat? My
stomach's growling.

STAGE MANAGER

(checking his watch)
There's no time to eat now.

announces

Harvey glances at the monitor just as Letterman
his next guest.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN

Okay. Our next guest works as a file clerk in a Cleveland hospital.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

The stage manager grabs Harvey by the arm. Joyce stops them.

JOYCE

Wait a minute. Where's the doll?

HARVEY

He's got it at the desk. Will you relax about that already?

STAGE MANAGER

Guys, guys, we're in a hurry here.

The Stage Manager physically pushes Harvey out of the Green Room. Joyce turns back to face the monitor.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

ANGLE ON MONITOR

Letterman holds up a copy of a full-size glossy

AMERICAN

SPLENDOR ANTHOLOGY.

LETTERMAN

...He also writes comic books which detail his day-to-day pains and pleasures, and this is an anthology of nine of those comics. It's entitled AMERICAN SPLENDOR... From off the streets of Cleveland, please say hello to Harvey Pekar.

ACTOR

about

HARVEY'S

THE HARVEY PEKAR WHO WALKS ONTO THE SET IS NOT THE

PORTRAYING HIM BUT RATHER THE REAL HARVEY PEKAR (only 15 years younger). THIS IS ACTUAL STOCK FOOTAGE FROM

FIRST LETTERMAN APPEARANCE.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - DAY

takes a
Joyce watches as Harvey shakes Letterman's hand and
seat.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

Harvey's
quiets
offensive:
He smiles as the audience warmly greets him. It seems
grooving on this attention. But as soon as the audience
down, Harvey turns to his host and starts his

HARVEY

I'm ready for those Cleveland jokes.
Go ahead...

Taken off guard, Letterman laughs.

LETTERMAN

Alright settle down Harvey. Settle
down.

(the Audience laughs)

Now let's explain to folks who may
not be familiar with your work what
it is you do here, exactly. You have
comic books about you in your daily
life in Cleveland.

HARVEY

That's right.

LETTERMAN

And are they embellished at all or
is it pretty much factual?

HARVEY

(patronizing)

No. It's all true, David. All true.

LETTERMAN

And you also have a regular job in
Cleveland working at a hospital.

HARVEY

That's right. Aiding the sick, yes.

LETTERMAN

Aiding the sick. Well that's certainly
noble work.

HARVEY

Thank you. Thank you.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

ANGLE ON JOYCE WATCHING

JOYCE

(unimpressed)

Such brilliant repartee...

BACK TO:

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN

Now it seems to me Harvey that you have a very successful career here. This is being published by a major publishing company, Doubleday. Why do you maintain the day job?

HARVEY

(defensive)

To make a living!

(big laughs)

I don't make a living as a writer. I've been writing for many years, David. Maybe more years than you've been alive.

Now, Letterman cracks up.

BACK TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

A LETTERMAN REGULAR (Tony Randall?) comes in with some food.

He stops by the monitor to watch a moment with Joyce.

HARVEY

Yeah, I know that my youthful appearance belies, you know, my actual age. But, I've been around for a long time --

LETTERMAN REGULAR

(to JOYCE)

You know this guy?

JOYCE

I'm beginning to wonder.

The Letterman Regular takes a seat as he watches the monitor.

He seems more intrigued than Joyce.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN

But I have a feeling though, if you wanted to, you could probably get by on what you make selling your work. Because I know people are after you to write other things. You're publishing this anthology...

This hits a sore spot. Harvey goes from politely condescending to cantankerous in one second flat!

HARVEY

Who? What people? What people? What are you talking about? Where the hell do you get that stuff?

Letterman cracks up. The Audience laughs even harder.

HARVEY

I'm no show biz phoney. I'm telling the truth. Come on, man.

The Audience can't believe this guy's holding his own with Letterman.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

ANGLE ON LETTERMAN REGULAR

LETTERMAN REGULAR

(to Joyce)

At least he's keeping up with Letterman.

JOYCE

Pandering is more like it.

the
frame of

Suddenly, Joyce walks over to the monitor and looks for
channel. She hits a button, but it only changes the
the show.

JOYCE

Damnit.

LETTERMAN REGULAR

Excuse me, but what are you doing?

JOYCE

I'm trying to get some news. You
know there's a big story about to
break about the US selling arms to
Iran and the Contras.

LETTERMAN REGULAR

That's a monitor.

JOYCE

Ugh. Just forget it.

a
like

Joyce gives up. She sinks back into her seat and pulls
book from her bag. The Letterman Regular stares at her
she's from Mars.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

ANGLE ON THE MONITOR

LETTERMAN

Harvey, I know you've got a job.
I've got a job. We're both very lucky.
We both have jobs.

HARVEY

Then what's the matter?

Letterman
the

Once again laughs and a big round of applause.
pulls out Joyce's mysterious doll and props it up on
table.

LETTERMAN

We've gotta go. Harvey I like you.
I'm on your side. I enjoy the comic
books. And here, quickly tell us

about the little doll here.

HARVEY

My wife made it.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

BACK TO JOYCE.

She suddenly perks up.

JOYCE

Finally something good.

(to Letterman Regular)

Watch this.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE CLOSE-UP OF THE DOLL

"Harvey Rag

Harvey

"American

It is an absolutely horrific but oddly evocative Doll." His face is inspired by Crumb's drawings of but even more extreme. His little T-shirt reads, Splendor." The Audience is in stitches.

LETTERMAN

They're made out of your old clothing.

HARVEY

That's right.

LETTERMAN

And what do these go for?

HARVEY

Thirty-four bucks.

LETTERMAN

(shocked)

Thirty-four dollars? Thirty-four dollars for this?

HARVEY

What are ya cheap. You cheaper than me?

LETTERMAN

Would you pay thirty-four dollars for that?

HARVEY

No but I'm not asking it. My wife is.

BACK TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

MANAGER JOYCE stares at the monitor, expressionless. The STAGE sticks his head in.

STAGE MANAGER

He's a natural.

LETTERMAN REGULAR

He is. Good stuff.

The Stage Manager grabs the Regular.

STAGE MANAGER

C'mon. Your turn.

from A smiling HARVEY (the actor now) waltzes in straight his command performance.

HARVEY

Whad'ya think?

monitor. Joyce taps her finger on Letterman's image on the

JOYCE

Megalomaniac.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

the HARVEY tries on a ripped T-shirt for Joyce who lies on bed.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

It became clear pretty fast that I was invited on the show just for laughs. But what the hell did I care? Letterman was an okay guy. Let him take pot shots at me, s'long as I got paid an' got to plug my comics.

CUT TO:

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

NIGHT MONTAGE: A series of actual HARVEY appearances on LATE
WITH LETTERMAN.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

FOOTAGE JOYCE, whose different outfits reflect time passage,
watches each time from the GREEN ROOM. LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK
FOOTAGE HARVEY, in a ratty T-shirt, spars with LETTERMAN.

LETTERMAN

Harvey, you are the embodiment of
the American dream...

The Audience laughs.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Funny thing is, somethin' about me
and Letterman clicked for the viewers.
He kept wantin' me back.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE - ANOTHER SHOW

LETTERMAN introduces his favorite guest.

LETTERMAN

It is my pleasure to welcome back
our next guest, the lovable Harvey
Pekar!

HARVEY walks out with a box of donuts. He starts giving
Letterman an earful right off the bat.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here was this slick, ambitious guy
with millions, winnin' over the
country by makin' light of everything.
And then there was me... A messy
loser with no dough who takes
everything too seriously.

LETTERMAN

Tell me Harvey, what do you do to
get away from the pressure of being --

well, a file clerk?
(laughter)

HARVEY

Go ahead and laugh, folks. But he
has more contempt for you than I do!

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE CASTLE - 1980'S - DAY

The burger joint has been transformed into a film set
with lights, cameras and lots of trendy MTV types.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

An it wasn't just me gettin' all the
attention. As a result of my
appearances on Letterman, my buddy
Toby Radloff landed a gig on MTV
extolling the virtues of White Castle
burgers...

OFF TO THE SIDE:

Two HOT BABES slave over TOBY as he gets his hair and
make-up done.

HARVEY wanders onto the set. He finally spots Toby in
the corner. As he heads over to say hello, Harvey bumps
into the MTV DIRECTOR -- a new wave fashion victim who looks
like a lost member of A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS.

MTV DIRECTOR

Christ! Watch where you're going!

HARVEY

(muttering)
Fuckin' yuppie or whatever kinda
freak you are.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

That day on the set with those MTV
jerks, I had an epiphany. It seemed
that real, salt of the earth people
like Toby an' me were bein' coopted
by these huge corporations. We were

gettin' held up and ridiculed as
losers in the system. What can I
say, it was the 80's man.

CUT TO:

MTV PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

stands in
bottom
TOBY, dressed in dark sunglasses and a turtleneck,
front of a White Castle. He delivers his lines in his
trademark robotic style. There's an MTV logo on the
of the screen.

TOBY

Hamburgers are a safer addiction
than drugs. Say no to drugs. Say yes
to White Castle!

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND DINER - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE eat breakfast together. Harvey reads a
Katherine Mansfield book as JOYCE reads a newspaper.

JOYCE

(looking up from the
paper)

Harvey, I've been reading about these
kids who grew up in war zones...
Palestinians, Israelis, El
Salvadorians, Cambodians... These
kids are amazing and they're --

interrupting
A YUPPIE in a jogging suit walks up to Harvey,
Joyce in mid-sentence.

YUPPIE

Hey, you're that guy from the
Letterman show, right?

HARVEY

(smiling)
Yeah, that's me.

YUPPIE

That's so excellent. You and Stupid

Pet Tricks are a riot.

Harvey's not smiling anymore. This guy's a jerk.

HARVEY

Yeah? Then why dontcha buy one of my comics, man. That's the only reason I go on that dumb show anyway.

YUPPIE

Right, sure. Later, Harvey Pekar!

The Yuppie rushes out.

HARVEY

Asshole.

JOYCE

Anyway, I want to do a political comic book about these kids. There's a conference in Jerusalem in a few weeks, and I can start by doing interviews there.

HARVEY

Whoa whoa, wait a second. Jerusalem? I can barely drag you off the futon to go to the Letterman show.

JOYCE

Y'know why? 'Cause I don't give a damn about the Letterman show. I want to work on something important to me. Something that matters.

Joyce hits a nerve.

HARVEY

(furious)

Hey! You know I only go on the show for the extra bread!

People start to look over.

JOYCE

Harvey... you're yelling...

HARVEY

Maybe if you got yer lazy ass up and got a job, I could work on something that matters, too, huh?!

at
Joyce doesn't dignify Harvey with an answer. She stares
him, her eyes well with hurt.

He sighs, calming down. He looks around sheepishly.

HARVEY

I'm sorry, baby. I -- I'm sorry...

He grabs her hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

They
Harvey and Joyce stroll across the lawn holding hands.
move towards a waiting cab. Harvey carries his wife's
bags.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I guess it was good ta finally see
Joyce excited about somethin' of her
own. Sure I was happy for her. But I
was still upset for me.

They stop by the cab.

HARVEY

This is crazy. Can't ya just do
somethin' here in Cleveland?

JOYCE

Harvey, you'll survive a few weeks
alone.

HARVEY

Alright... Be careful. I love you,
baby.

He
They kiss. Harvey grudgingly puts her bags in the car.
watches as the cab pulls away.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

It was later that night when I first
found the lump.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

communal
underwear

Wearing only his shorts, Harvey lies alone in the futon, flipping through a book. He reaches into his to scratch his nuts.

Suddenly he stops. He feels something odd...

For a moment he just freezes. His eyes register panic.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I was determined to put it outta my mind until Joyce got back. Easier said than done.

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

An enraged HARVEY fights with his co-worker MIGUEL.

HARVEY

What do I care! Just gimme the chart already!

MIGUEL

What is your problem today?!

HARVEY

Look, Miguel! I just don't wanna keep comin' back here for it, okay?!

MIGUEL

Harvey, that patient's due t'be admitted a week from now! Why do you always have to be picking fights with everybody?

HARVEY

(yelling)

How many times do we gotta go through the same bullshit. Just gimme the fuckin' chart!

Offended, Miguel storms off.

MIGUEL

We'll see what the doctor says about this.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

ideas
like
he's in anguish.

Alone and slumped over his table, HARVEY draws comic
with stick figures. Nothing's coming to him. He looks

the
Frustrated, Harvey crumbles the idea and throws it on
floor. He knocks over a chair.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

He tosses and turns in bed. No way he's sleeping.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

connection.
HARVEY is yelling into the telephone. It is a bad

HARVEY

(loudly into phone)

Whadya mean? Another two weeks? Ya
gotta come home some time! Hello?
DAMNIT!

CUT TO:

INT. BACK STAGE - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

his
the
audience
Without Joyce, a surly Harvey waits in the wings for
introduction. He sneaks a peek as Letterman finishes up
"stupid pet tricks" segment. We hear dogs barking and
laughter.

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

And there you have it, folks! Another
enlightening episode of Stupid Pet
Tricks!

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I was startin' ta lose it. Between the lump, the loneliness -- I felt like everything wuz closin' in on me. And with Joyce over there savin' the world, I never felt more like a sell-out hack in my life.

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

Y'know ladies and gentlemen, when Thoreau wrote that most men lead lives of quiet depression, he obviously had not met our first guest, who happens to lead a life of whining desperation...

Harvey clenches his fists.

HARVEY

(threatening)

Okay, asshole. You'll pay for that one...

out of
Harvey takes off his shirt. He pulls another t-shirt
the bag and changes ...

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome back, Harvey Pekar.

takes
off to
Harvey's new t-shirt reads "ON STRIKE AGAINST NBC." He
off for the stage, fists clenched, a soldier marching
war.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

hear the
We're positioned behind the monitor, so we can only
show. THE STAGE MANAGER AND TWO PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS
straighten up in the room.

HARVEY (O.S.)

Hey, Dave! You wanna know what my politics are? I'm a strident leftist, Dave.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

I could have guessed half of that.

HARVEY (O.S.)

You coulda guessed all of it, man!
So why don't we talk about your parent
company, G.E., huh? Let's talk about
anti-trust violations and nuclear
reactors!

STAGE MANAGER

Joe, put more sodas in the fridge,
there. And let's clean up the
counters. That Pekar guy's a pig.

monitor,
As the P.A.'s walk back and forth in front of the
we hear the Letterman / Pekar banter grow louder.
Suddenly PRODUCTION ASSISTANT #2 stops and checks out
the
monitor.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT #2

Whoa... you guys. Check this out.

INT. TOBY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

Letterman.
TOBY and his GRANDMOTHER watch HARVEY raise hell on
Again, we can't see the screen.

HARVEY (O.S.)

You're a cop-out, Letterman. You're
nothin' but a shill for G.E.

Toby's grandmother passes him a plate of cookies.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

First of all, Harvey, what you are
saying is not true. Second of all,
this is not the place to say it. If
you want to talk about this, go
somewhere else, because you're not
talking about it here!!

CUT TO:

INT. MR. BOAT'S KITCHEN - 1980'S - DAY

night
Dressed in a bathrobe, Mr. Boats eats a lonely, late-

the snack (cake and milk) at his kitchen table. A 12" TV on table has Harvey and Dave on.

HARVEY (O.S.)

Don't worry, Dave. I won't come back unless you beg me.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

You're not coming back at all.

HARVEY (O.S.)

What do I care --

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

Because we've given you many, many chances to talk about things that would be of general interest to people --

HARVEY (O.S.)

So what?!

Mr. Boats shakes his head.

INT. TOWN CAR - 1980'S - DAY

Car, We see Harvey alone, slumped in the back seat of a Town heading back towards his hotel. City lights pass over his troubled face. We still hear the show, as if it's now in his head.

LETTERMAN (V.O.)

-- And also to promote your little Mickey Mouse magazine. Your little weekly reader! But you've blown every chance you've got. You're a dork, Harvey!

HARVEY (V.O.)

Dave, you're fulla shit! You're fulla shit!!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

CLOSE ON AN AMERICAN SPLENDOR COMIC

FUCKED
HARVEY.

The cover depicts a snarling LETTERMAN yelling, "YOU
UP A GREAT THING!" at a smirking, self-satisfied

cuddles

JOYCE lies in bed reading the comic, chuckling. HARVEY
up against her.

JOYCE

I guess you did it this time.

HARVEY

Who cares. He wasn't helpin' my sales
anyway.

(moving closer)

Baby, don't go away anymore. I just
can't take bein' alone.

Joyce puts the magazine down.

JOYCE

If you met those kids over there and
saw what they go through, you wouldn't
ask that of me.

HARVEY

But if you go again I'm really gonna
lose it.

JOYCE

It's not open for discussion, Harvey.
I need this in my life right now.

She cuddles up close to him.

JOYCE

But I do appreciate the fact that
you missed me so much. C'mere...

wander

She starts to kiss him. He kisses her back. Her hands
down. Suddenly she feels something strange.

JOYCE

Harvey, what is that?

Harvey looks at her and gulps.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

two
them.
HARVEY and JOYCE sit in the office holding hands, like
terrified high school kids. A DOCTOR stands before

They just got bad news...

JOYCE

I don't understand, does "tumor"
mean the same thing as "cancer"?

The doctor gently nods.

looks
words
wall,
Joyce covers her mouth. Harvey holds onto his head. He
positively dizzy. The doctor starts to talk, yet the
don't seem to match his mouth. He looks dubbed. Strange
phrases just weave together, echo and bounce off the
making no sense at all.

is
the
treatment...
...we know the growth is malignant. What we don't know
how far it may have spread. Once we have the results of
biopsy, we can make more informed decisions about
blah, blah, blah...

The whole office seems to spin.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - LATER

house,
holds
Joyce and Harvey sit on the stoop of their apartment
in a daze. The words keep echoing around them. Harvey
his head.

DOCTOR #2

...cat scan... diagnosis... MRI...
cancer... cancer... cancer...

HARVEY

How can I have cancer? I don't feel
sick at all.

JOYCE

That's a positive thing.

HARVEY

My cousin Norman died of lymphoma. He was twenty-nine. He was a brilliant oncologist.

JOYCE

Stop it! You're not going to die, Harvey. You're not.

Harvey turns to Joyce.

HARVEY

What's going to happen to you, baby? Who's gonna take care of you if I'm not around?

Joyce stands up, determined.

JOYCE

Harvey, look at me and focus. We are going to get through this. I understand illness. I know how to handle these things.

HARVEY

But that's you. I'm not strong enough. I don't know how to be positive. I can't do it. I can't.

JOYCE

Yes, you can. And I'll tell you how. You'll make a comic book out of the whole thing. You'll document every little detail. And that way you'll remove yourself from the experience until it's over.

Despite Joyce's passionate pitch, Harvey shakes his head.

HARVEY

I can't do that. I'm just not strong enough... I just wanna die.

Joyce folds her arm.

JOYCE

Fine. I'll do it without you.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce
around
HARVEY and JOYCE lay there quietly, both exhausted.
turns over so her back faces Harvey. He puts his arm
her.

ANGLE ON JOYCE'S FACE

A tear drips down her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

actually
Joyce is straightening up the apartment. The place
looks halfway decent.

THE DOORBELL RINGS

Hells
the
DANIELLE.
Joyce opens the door. A guy in his 30's named FRED --
Angels tough guy meets sensitive artist -- stands at
door. He's accompanied by a seven-year-old girl,

FRED

Hey, I'm Fred. You called me about
the comic book?

JOYCE

Right -- the artist. Come on in.

FRED

This is my daughter, Danielle. I had
to bring her along. I hope you don't
mind.

toy
Joyce leans down and addresses the girl, who holds a
horse.

JOYCE

Hi, Danielle. What's that you're
holding?

DANIELLE

A pony.

It's immediately obvious that Joyce is great with kids.

JOYCE

A pony? What's his name?

DANIELLE

She's a girl. Clarissa.

JOYCE

Oh, I see. Well, I'm Joyce. Nice to meet both you and Clarissa.

They all walk towards the table which is covered with papers.

FRED

I'm really sorry to hear about Harvey. Is he here?

JOYCE

He's going to work until next week, when he starts the chemo. That's why I wanna get this project started now. Once he's stuck here, I know he'll take over.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - LATER

Miserable and in a daze, HARVEY walks up to his front door.

He looks like a man whose days are numbered. When he reaches the door, he searches his pockets for keys.

ANGLE ON POCKET

Harvey's hand comes up empty.

HARVEY

Shit!

Harvey tries the doorknob, but it's locked.

He steps back on the lawn and looks around. Could he have dropped them? He retraces a few steps.

HARVEY

Damnit!

Harvey yells up at the window.

HARVEY

Joyce, open the door! I lost my keys
again! Joyce!!

ANGLE ON FRONT DOOR

cart
HARVEY'S ELDERLY NEIGHBOR struggles with her shopping
through the door.

Harvey pushes past her to get in.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT VESTIBULE

Harvey knocks again. Nothing. Now he punches the door.

HARVEY

Joyce!! Open the fucking door!!

not
Suddenly the door opens. Loud music pours out. But it's
Joyce, it's FRED, the artist.

FRED

Hey, Harvey.

HARVEY

Fred?

reveal:
Harvey just stares at him. Fred opens the door to

blasting.
JOYCE and DANIELLE dancing together with the stereo
They're having a ball.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

sketches.
At the kitchen table, HARVEY looks over FRED'S

the
JOYCE and DANIELLE are now building a house of cards on

living room floor.

FRED

Here are some ideas we batted around.

HARVEY

Sheesh. Joyce doesn't know what she's doing. There's too many words in these frames. When are ya comin' back?

FRED

Uh, she said something about next Tuesday, which is fine with me. Only thing is, I might have the kid again. My ex-wife's supposed to take her, but I don't have much faith in her showing up. She is in worse shape than me these days.

They're
Harvey looks away at Joyce and Danielle playing.
oblivious to the world.

HARVEY

Next week my treatment begins. Do me a favor. Bring the kid with you.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: A PENCIL SKETCHING

Harvey in
floating
FRED'S PENCIL completes a sketch of Joyce pushing
a wheelchair. The word "cancer" appears everywhere,
all around the image.

COMIC ART / REAL LIFE MONTAGE

cutting
HARVEY,
The following montage chronicles Harvey's illness by
between comic art depicting key events and shots of
JOYCE and FRED creating the book.

discordant
similar).
The montage is set to the simultaneously dulcet and
tone of Miles Davis' "Blue in Green" (or something

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - 1980'S - DAY

hall
Close on Harvey's face as he's getting pushed down the
in a wheelchair.

CUT TO:

M.R.I. COMIC PANEL

A panel of Harvey entering the M.R.I. machine.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce
We see Harvey, Joyce and Fred sitting around a table.
fights to keep Harvey focused on the project.

BACK TO MORE COMIC PANELS:

- 1) An enraged Harvey throws things around the house.
- 2) Joyce on the bed crying, a cat licking her back.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S SHOWER - 1980'S - DAY

clump
A balding Harvey depressed in the shower. He holds a
of hair in his hand.

CUT TO:

COMIC PANEL OF THE ABOVE SCENE

reveals his
swelling.
Harvey in the shower. The balloon above his head
inner turmoil over losing his hair and his face

MORE COMIC PANELS FOLLOW

all
I'm on

Harvey in agony. Various positions of him in bed, on
fours, covered with a case of shingles. "I feel like
fire" appears over his head.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN - 1980'S - DAY

carries
can't
Danielle

Joyce and Fred go over some more comic art. Joyce
the idea over to Harvey (wearing a baseball cap), who
get out of the couch. He looks it over and nods.
brings Harvey a glass of water.

CUT TO:

MORE COMIC PANELS:

it,"

Harvey crawling up the steps. "I'm so weak I can't make
he thinks...

slumped

Harvey and Joyce in a hospital waiting room. He's
over, she has her hand on him.

"She's

A delirious Harvey surrounded by nurses and Joyce.
torturing me, she won't let me die, I wanna die..."

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - 1980'S - DAY

walks

A balding Harvey lies on his bathroom floor. His cat
all over him.

HARVEY

I wanna die... just let me die...

CUT TO:

MORE COMIC PANELS:

She
Joyce attempts to wake Harvey up. She curses at him.
slaps him. "Why are you doing this to me!"

this
A drawing of Joyce, doubled over, crying. "I can't take
anymore..."

THE MONTAGE ENDS WITH A SCENE IN HARVEY'S BEDROOM

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

HARVEY
A repeat of the opening scene... Like a ghost, a naked
stands over his bed staring down at a sleeping JOYCE.
In the eerie light, he's almost translucent.

HARVEY

(faintly)
Joyce... Joyce?

Joyce springs up, alarmed.

JOYCE

What's wrong, Harvey? What are you
doing up?

Harvey just stands there for a moment saying nothing.

JOYCE

What is it?

HARVEY

(delirious, out of
breath)
Tell me the truth. Am I some guy who
writes about himself in a comic book?
Or am I just -- just a character in
that book?

JOYCE

Harvey...

HARVEY

When I die, will 'dat character keep
goin'? Or will he just fade away.

Harvey

Joyce just stares at him, unsure how to answer. Finally collapses.

down

Joyce leaps from the bed, nervous, hysterical. She gets on the floor and shakes him.

JOYCE

Omigod, Harvey! Harvey, wake up!

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S FACE

The

distant

His eyes remain closed, his expression far, far away. sound of Joyce's voice fades until it seems like a echo.

his

comic

Then PANELS from Harvey's comics begin to float over head, his life literally passing before his eyes in book form.

evaporate,

Slowly, the comic images and the unconscious Harvey giving way to:

GREEN SCREEN

A SURREAL DREAM SEQUENCE

comic

We are now in a large, empty room similar to a blank book panel.

of the

slowly

the

A healthy, fully dressed Harvey appears in the corner frame. He is very far away, barely recognizable. We dolly towards him as he delivers a formal soliloquy to camera:

HARVEY

My name is Harvey Pekar. It's an unusual name -- Harvey Pekar...

from his

As Harvey speaks, one-dimensional comic book images

front of

life pass over the screen once again. This time in
him, behind him, everywhere. We dolly in towards him.

HARVEY

1960 was the year I got my first
apartment and my first telephone
book. Imagine my surprise when I
looked up my name and saw that, in
addition to me, another Harvey Pekar
was listed!

young

Images of Harvey's childhood float by, followed by his
adult years.

HARVEY

I was listed as Harvey L. Pekar...
My middle name is Lawrence... He was
listed as Harvey Pekar -- no middle
initial... Therefore, his was a purer
listing.

street
Crumb.

We see Harvey age in the images: he's hanging on the
corner with friends, collecting records, hanging with

HARVEY

Then, in the seventies, I noticed
that a third Harvey Pekar was listed
in the phone book! This filled me
with curiosity.

HARVEY

How could there be three people with
such an unusual name in the world,
let alone in one city?!

his

Now, numerous images of Harvey's many years at the V.A.
Hospital float by: Harvey filing, Harvey arguing with
boss, Harvey and Toby, etc.

HARVEY

Then one day, a person I worked with
expressed her sympathy to me
concerning what she thought was the
death of my father. She pointed out
an obituary notice in the newspaper
for a man named Harvey Pekar. One of
his sons was named Harvey. These

were the other Harvey Pekar's.

The comic images fade out. Harvey is once again alone
in the empty room.

HARVEY

Six months later, Harvey Pekar Jr. died. Although I'd met neither man, I was filled with sadness. "What were they like," I thought. It seemed that our lives had been linked in some indefinable way.

We slowly move in on his face. Extremely close. As
close as the camera can get.

HARVEY

But the story does not end there. For two years later another Harvey Pekar appeared in the directory. What kind of people are these? Where do they come from, what do they do? What's in a name?

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

BACK TO BEDROOM:

We are close on HARVEY'S face as he lays passed out and delirious on the floor. Over this WE HEAR...

HARVEY

Who is Harvey Pekar?

His face slowly fades to black.

A MOMENT OF BLACK, AND THEN...

INT. TOWER BOOKS - 1980'S - DAY

FADE IN:

COVER.

Cancer Scrawled across the top in yellow and red it read, "Our

front
help
leaf.

Year." The drawing depicts Harvey doubled over on the lawn, groceries in the snow, with Joyce attempting to help him up. A hand flips the book open and signs the inside leaf.

signing
about

JOYCE and a healthy-looking HARVEY sit at a table with copies of their opus. About fifteen or so people mill about with copies.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man a year later. Somehow I made it through the treatments, an' the doctors are optimistic. I guess Joyce was right about doin' the big comic book. We published the thing as a graphic novel -- our first collaboration -- and ended up with rave reviews. We even won the American Book Award. Go figure...

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

vibe
of
jewelry

The place is still a mess but somehow it has a better than it had before. This might be due to the presence of DANIELLE. She sits crossed legged on the floor making jewelry out of beads. JOYCE guides her.

as

HARVEY shuffles into the room. He watches for a moment as Joyce and Danielle play.

ANGLE ON JOYCE: There is an awkward expression almost resembling a smile on her face. He interrupts them.

HARVEY

Hey Joyce.

Joyce looks up. Harvey looks like he's trying to hide something.

JOYCE

What is it Harvey?

HARVEY

That was the doctor.

Harvey's Joyce stops what she's doing and gulps. She hangs on every word.

HARVEY

He said I'm all clear.

relief Tears well in Harvey's eyes. Joyce breathes a sigh of and Danielle jumps up and runs over to Harvey. She hugs him.

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND ICE RINK - 1980 - DAY

DANIELLE HARVEY sits in the bleachers, watching JOYCE teach to ice skate.

slice Harvey's got a box of pizza next to him. He picks up a and chomps on it. The cheese drips out of his mouth onto his shirt.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

The weirdest thing that came outta my illness was Danielle. With her real mother runnin' around who knows where, an' seein' how well her and Joyce got on, Fred decided she'd have a better life with us. I was scared at first but then I thought, what the hell. She's a good kid. So we ended up takin' her an' raising her as our own.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

comics HARVEY and DANIELLE lie on the futon together. Harvey's are strewn around the room everywhere. Danielle flips through

one.

HARVEY

Ya keep readin' 'em backward.

DANIELLE

I like reading them backward.
(holding up a comic)
Is that you?

HARVEY

I keep tellin' ya, all of 'ems me,
man.

DANIELLE

You look like a monster.

HARVEY

Yeah, well wait'll ya see what you're
gonna look like.

DANIELLE

Me??

HARVEY

Sure. Yer part of the story too,
now.

DANIELLE

What story?

HARVEY

The story of my life.

Danielle makes a face.

HARVEY

Yeah, I know I'm not as interesting
as The Little Mermaid and all that
magical crap...

DANIELLE

Maybe I want to write my own comic.

HARVEY

Oh yeah? What about?

DANIELLE

I don't know yet. But not about you.
You have enough already.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL BUS STOP - FALL - PRESENT - DAY

HARVEY walks towards the bus stop to send DANIELLE to school.

He holds her hand.

HARVEY

Ya know, you should write about things in your own life. Like school and... ponies... I don't know, girl stuff...

DANIELLE

(to Harvey)

Do you have to hold my hand?

HARVEY

(wounded)

What, are you embarrassed a' me? I know, I'm embarrassing. I felt the same way about my father.

Danielle looks up at Harvey like he's crazy.

DANIELLE

No Harvey. You're just squeezing it too hard.

(shaking her head)

Joyce is right. You are obsessive compulsive.

Danielle drops his hand and rushes onto the bus with other kids.

Harvey waves and watches as it pulls away.

He turns and walks by himself down the busy Cleveland street --

-- a familiar image from the opening. He's still hunched over. He's still Harvey.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Yeah, so I guess comics brought me a lot. But don't think this is some sunny, happy ending. Every day is still a major struggle. Joyce an' I

fight like crazy, an' she barely works. The kid's got A.D.D. and is a real handful. My expenses have gone up so much that I'm writin' freelance 'round the clock, just to make my bills. My life is total chaos.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - FALL - PRESENT - DAY

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE -- SHOT ON FILM

NOW THE REAL HARVEY walks down the same busy Cleveland street towards his job.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

With a little luck, I'll get a window of good health between retirin' an dyin'. The golden years, right? Who knows. Between my pension and the chunk of change I got for this movie, I should be able to swing somethin'. Sure I'll lose the war eventually, but the goal is to win a few skirmishes along the way. Right?

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - PRESENT - DAY

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE -- SHOT ON FILM

THE REAL HARVEY slumps at the desk now, flipping through a comic book.

ANGLE ON DOOR

THE REAL TOBY comes into the file room, carrying a cake with sparklers. He's followed by a group of Harvey's REAL COWORKERS and JOYCE and REAL DANIELLE.

Harvey moves the comic off his desk so Toby can put the cake down.

ANGLE ON CAKE

JOYCE The festive cake reads "HAPPY RETIREMENT HARVEY." REAL
cuts the cake and passes slices to the group.

ANOTHER WORKER pops a bottle of champagne.

sits CLOSE on a glass of champagne getting filled. The glass
next to the comic Harvey was reading.

CLOSE UP ON COMIC BOOK COVER

"OUR HARVEY'S new edition of AMERICAN SPLENDOR is subtitled,
JOYCE MOVIE YEAR." It features an illustration of HARVEY,
and DANIELLE surrounded by cameras, lights and crew.

FADE

OUT:

THE END