

THE NEXT LEVEL

A Screenplay by

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FADE IN:

XLS. LONG ISLAND - NIGHT

The expressways and avenues of Long Island are red and gold flows of traffic, with Manhattan on the horizon looking like the Emerald City.

EXT. LONG ISLAND CLUB - NIGHT

Close in on one particular set of old buildings on a corner. There is a crowd of people around the front entrance.

INT. LONG ISLAND CLUB - NIGHT

The air is thick with cigarette smoke and flashing lights, with weird sculptures lit in black light.

THE EXPATRIATES is the band onstage at the far end of the room. They play on a small stage, barely rising above the audience, heads all going up and down to the high energy music.

Onstage, with the band: BABY STEVE, the big black lead singer is covered with sweat, sings with a British accent. Everyone else is white. CHRISTINE, the sexy sax player; BRETT, a serious-looking guitar player; TODD, the drummer making rock faces while he plays, and finally RB, the bass player, cigarette smoking in his mouth.

They hit the last note of the song

BABY STEVE

(on mic)

Thank you! Good night!

The crowd goes wild.

CUT TO:

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

BANG! The door bursts open and R.B. enters, sweat soaked, and collapses into the nasty band room couch.

He reaches over to an old fridge pasted with stickers, opens it and gets a beer.

BANG! The door bursts open, and Baby Steve comes in, throwing himself on the couch next to R.B.

BABY STEVE  
(British accent)  
You see blondie right in front?

R.B.  
Yeah.

BABY STEVE  
I think she wants me.

The rest of the band barges in, with SOME FRIENDS in tow. Everyone finds a place around the room, gets beers from the fridge, and the post set party begins.

CHRISTINE  
That was one fucked up version of  
'The Name'. Jesus, Steve...

Baby Steve looks at her, about the say something.

TODD  
It wasn't me!

BRETT  
It was everyone.

CHRISTINE  
Yeah, well I distinctly heard  
some wild improvisation from  
Steve. No offense, you know.

BABY STEVE  
(mumbling)  
None taken.

The door opens, and JULIE, RB's blonde girlfriend, walks in and sits next to RB and gives him a big kiss.

RB

Everyone, you remember Julie,  
don't you?

BABY STEVE

Of course! Hello again. I hope  
you liked the show!

JULIE

You rock, Baby Steve.

She smiles, then turns and hugs RB.

BABY STEVE

(announcing)

Everybody? Before we split, we  
need to figure out the show in  
New York this Friday. Load in is  
at six, and we check at six-thir-  
ty...

The pipe gets handed to him and he takes big hit.

BABY STEVE

Anyway, the opener is Basic  
Pleasure Model, then us, then The  
Merits. I say fuck sound check.  
I mean, why bother? Right?

BRETT

So what about the CD?

BABY STEVE

What about it?

BRETT

(impatiently)

Shouldn't we have it by now?  
It's been, you know, forever.  
What's taking so long?

CHRISTINE

I can't believe we put it out on Power Plant again. That label sucks ass!

BABY STEVE

Look, you know, it's a small label, but we know them and it's all part of the scene. It'll be here in a few days. Mike Plant wants us to go on the road to support it.

BRETT

The road, as in van, long drives, motels, and that shit?

TODD

(seriously)

I don't know, man. We're not getting any younger. All the bands coming out these days are kids, teeny pop groups and rappers. You think we stand a chance?

BABY STEVE

So, what are you saying, mate? We've been doing this band for years! What, you think that we should stop now?

TODD

I don't want to stop, I want to meet girls! It's just that, I don't know, going on the road seems kind of risky.

BABY STEVE

Look, one step at a time. We get the bloody CD out, have a party, and then go on the road. Who knows what can happen in the mean time? I'm ready to do anything it takes. Anyway, I wanted to know who's driving on Friday so I can get a ride.

Julie looks at RB.

JULIE

(quietly)

You're really going on the road?

RB looks at her and shrugs.

CUT TO:

XLS. LONG ISLAND LOOKING TOWARD NEW YORK CITY - EVENING

The Long Island Expressway is a traffic jam heading into a beautiful sunset. R.B.'s car is followed by Todd's old beat-up van.

INT. RB'S CAR.

R.B. is driving. Julie sits shotgun. Baby Steve, Todd, and Christine are in the back.

BABY STEVE

Jesus, this traffic is killing me.

CHRISTINE

You're not driving, RB is driving. Why should you care?

BABY STEVE

How's the traffic, RB? Sucks, right?

RB

Yeah. Fuckin' sucks.

BABY STEVE

See?

Christine sighs and shakes her head.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MID-TOWN TUNNEL - NIGHT

The two vehicles drive through the toll gate leading into New York, now bristling with lights in the evening.

EXT. THE BOWERY BALLROOM - NIGHT

There is a big crowd in front of the entrance to the club. A big marquee reads: "Tonight: Basic Pleasure Model, The Expatriates and The Merits - All-Ages."

INT. STAGE

The opening band, BASIC PLEASURE MODEL, is finishing up their last song. They are young kids, high energy, and the LEAD SINGER is a petite sexy girl.

The song ends, and the crowd cheers. The place is packed.

LEAD SINGER

Thanks! The Expatriates are next, so stick around.

DRESSING ROOM

The Expatriates sit around the nasty band room, with lots of graffiti in the wall, a plastic bin of beer and a deli tray that has been picked over.

There is a knock on the door. It opens and MIKE PLANT enters.

BABY STEVE

Ah, there he is! The man himself.

MIKE

(in a cultured  
Southern accent)

What's happening, Steven. Good evening everyone.

Everyone says hello.

BABY STEVE

Any word on the CD?

MIKE

It should be here any day now. These things always take a while.

Everybody nods and smiles.

BABY STEVE

We're going to have a release party at my place, you're cordially invited, being the record executive.

MIKE

Yes, well hopefully we all be doing a little partying over the next few months. I think the tour is going to rock! The kids are buying Power Plant releases like there's no tomorrow, and your new one is getting a lot of advance hype. You guys are going to have a great time out there.

More nodding and smiling.

BABY STEVE

Speaking of 'Out there', how is it looking in the crowd?

MIKE  
(proudly)  
Sold out, Dude.

THE STAGE MANAGER pokes his head in.

STAGE MANAGER  
Expatriates are up!

CUT TO:

PACKED AUDIENCE IN THE CLUB

The lights lower, and cheers rise up. It is an excellent night.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN ON STAGE.

The band is in place. RB lights a cigarette and sips a beer. Baby Steve looks around, gets eye contact from everyone. Christine blows silently through her horn. Then, the lights go off.

CHRISTINE  
I have to pee!

ANNOUNCER (Off Camera)  
Now, for our second act. Ladies and Gentlemen, Long Island's own, The Expatriates!

The curtain rises.

CUT TO:

ONSTAGE, THE GIG

They launch into their set. This is a big stage, and Baby Steve is all over the place, acting like a wild man. Christine plays right along with him, the two of them on the front line. Brett, Todd and RB are on a riser behind them.

Off to the side, Mike Plant watches, smiling, checking out the audience, approving.

RB notices JULIE staring at him from a couple of layers back in the crowd, smiling at him. He smiles back.

They finish the song, and the audience goes wild.

CUT TO:

DRESSING ROOM

The door crashes open and they all roar in, pumped up from the show. The audience can still be heard cheering in the background.

CHRISTINE

Jesus, did we fuck up 'One New Message', or what?

TODD

It wasn't me.

BRETT

It was all of us.

RB takes a beer from the fridge, then bolts for the door.

AUDIENCE

RB starts mingling with the crowd. People come to him, shaking his hand with compliments.

He sees Julie standing with some girl friends. She sees him and smiles, watching his approach.

He joins them, giving Julie a kiss.

RB

How was it?

JULIE

You were great.

She kisses him on the cheek and he smiles.

FADE TO:

EXT. BABY STEVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The band's cars are all parked along the curb.

INT. STEVE'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Everyone stands around a box, and Baby Steve crouches by it with a knife, opening it up. He pulls open the flaps and takes out a CD. He turns it over in his hands, examining it.

CHRISTINE

Oh, for Christ's sake...

She dives in, then everyone follows, grabbing and talking at once.

TODD

The art work looked different before. Why did they make the bar code so big?

BRETT

(testy)

They have to make it that big, Todd.

TODD

I know, Brett, I know...

RB

I think it looks pretty good!

BABY STEVE

I think it looks brilliant!

They continue babbling at once.

CUT TO:

INT. RB'S BACHELOR PAD - NIGHT

RB and Julie are sitting and watching TV. He's into the show, but she keeps looking over at him.

JULIE

Do you know how long you're going to be gone?

RB

What? Oh, I don't know yet. I'll know soon enough.

JULIE

I'm going to miss you.

RB

I'm going to miss you too.

CUT TO:

INT. BABY STEVE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

RB, Brett and Baby Steve hang out. They are drinking a couple of beers and sitting around a coffee table. Brett is cross-legged on the floor.

BABY STEVE

Listen, I have this idea. I Haven't mentioned it to anyone yet, but what the hell, maybe I can test it out on you mates.

RB  
(kidding)  
I don't like it.

They all chuckle good naturedly.

BABY STEVE  
No, really, I have a friend who's been in the music business for a while. He knows about some of the things that maybe we don't know about so well. You know, all of this business crap.

RB  
Is he a real manager?

BABY STEVE  
He's been involved with all these things over the years. He used to do some kind of business with break dance music, early rap or what ever you call it. I was never into that kind of shit so much, but he's made some money at it. He's kind of a character.

BRETT  
What do you mean, "Kind of a Character?"

Baby Steve sips his beer.

BABY STEVE  
He was a drama major when we were at Purchase together. You just have to meet him. Emily thinks he's off his rocker, but, you know...I invited him to the release party.

RB

I guess it sounds good if he's good. A manager can make or break you.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, like any of us really know. Oh, and there's one more thing.

TODD

What?

BABY STEVE

He's got great weed.

RB

Then, he's hired.

They all crack up.

CUT TO:

EXT. BABY STEVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The listening party is under way. There are people spilling out from the back yard. Music can be heard blasting from the stereo inside. RB's car pulls up to the curb joining the line of cars parked there. He and Julie get out and walk up to the house.

EXT. BABY STEVE'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

There is an above-ground pool with beach balls and a duckie life preserver floating in the blue-lit water. A gas grill cooks smoldering burgers and dogs next to a keg of beer.

A bunch of people stand around drinking from multi-colored plastic beer cups. The band members mingle amongst them.

RB and Julie appear from around the corner. Baby Steve and his wife EMILY, an intellectual-looking Asian woman, are arm-in-arm. They both have drinks.

BABY STEVE  
(already drunk)  
RB, and friend! Welcome.

JULIE  
Hello again, Baby Steve.

BABY STEVE  
(forgetting her  
name)  
Hi! How are you doing?

EMILY  
(laughing)  
Hello Julie, Hey RB. He's  
already several sheets to the  
wind.

BABY STEVE  
Darling, please. I'm the man of  
the house, remember?

EMILY  
Sure, Stevie, sure.

From around the corner comes BO ALEXANDER, a giant black man, about six feet six with a wild afro-dread combo haircut which makes him look about a foot taller. He's dressed in a colorful dashiki shirt, baggy pants and huge black shoes. Baby Steve notices him.

BABY STEVE  
Well, look what the cat dragged  
in!

BO  
(Bronx accent)  
Was'up, Baby Steve?

Baby Steve breaks away from Emily, and walks over to greet Bo. They embrace like two planets smashing together. Everyone is stunned.

BABY STEVE

Everyone, may I introduce Bo Alexander. He's an old friend from my deep dark past.

BO

'Sup, everybody.

Brett, Christine and Todd take interest and walk over.

BO

Yo, you have a new pool, Man.

BABY STEVE

I think it's fucking brilliant.

BO

(to everybody)

Don't you like the way he talks?  
I wish I could talk like you,  
Baby. "Facking Brellient".

Everyone smiles with calm disbelief.

BABY STEVE

Anyway, I've been discussing some of our circumstances with Bo here, and I think, if you all agree, that he should help us out with the business.

Exchanged looks go back and forth between everyone.

CHRISTINE

Like in a manager?

BABY STEVE

I can vouch for him.

BO

But you know you got to play me  
some of this shit you been work-  
ing on. I gotta know what I'm  
getting into, yo.

Baby Steve walks over to the sound system.

BABY STEVE

(announcing)

Everyone, may I have your atten-  
tion? This is the grand premiere  
of our brand spanking new CD,  
entitled 'The Name.' I'd like to  
thank the band, and everyone  
involved, and, well, here goes.

Everyone cheers and applauds, and he points the remote  
at the stereo and hits the button. The music jumps out.  
Everyone listens, nodding and grooving.

Julie looks at RB and smiles, very impressed.

Bo starts doing a Ralph Cramden swivel-hip dance, and  
then everyone joins in, dancing.

FADE TO:

THE KEG

The band and friends are gathered around the keg, pour-  
ing beers.

TODD

(trying to sound  
official)

So how do you think you can man-  
age us?

BO

First, I get you really stoned.  
Then, when your mind is blown, I  
talk circles around you and take  
all your money!

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a huge joint.

BO

It's AK47! I snuck the seeds out  
of Amsterdam in the crack of my  
ass. Ain't no customs agent  
gonna look up there, shit!

BRETT

This joint must be worth a hun-  
dred dollars!

BO

It's not for sale, man. Only  
good friends can acquire this  
taste.

Bo lights the joint with a big cloud of smoke, then  
hands it to Brett, who coughs his lungs out.

BABY STEVE

You're a fucking sarcastic  
poofter, do you know that, Bo?

BO

Don't get me goin' on that  
"poofter" shit, I'll fuck yo ass  
up!

TODD

So, do you have a strategy, Bro?

BABY STEVE

(panic stricken)  
Shit, Todd, don't call him that!

Bo is silent, no longer smiling, staring at Todd.

BO

(menacing gangsta)

Do you want to know what I do to  
people who call me that?

TODD

Your name's Bro, right?

FLICK! Before can say anything else, Bo has him by the collar with one hand while the other hand presses a switchblade against his throat. Todd is totally confused, gasping and scared shitless.

BO

My name is Bo. Bee - Oh. The rest is Alexander. It's short for Boris Zachariah Alexander. Kind of a fucked up name, right?

Todd can't say anything, and everyone else stares wide-eyed, except for Baby Steve, who holds his face in his hands, slowly shaking his head.

BO

Right?

TODD

Uggmph!

BO

Come on! You wanna find out what I do to people who call me "Bro"?

TODD

No, I don't want to...

Bo plunges the knife into Todd's chest. Todd screams, gasps, but then realizes that it is a stage knife; the blade just slid into the handle.

Bo breaks into a crazed laugh that echoes into the night. Everyone lets out their collective breath.

TODD  
(freaked out)  
I can't believe you did that!

Bo is still laughing in a high-pitched guffaw.

BABY STEVE  
Don't worry, Todd. It's just Bo  
being a fucking lunatic.

BO  
"Facking Leunatick!" You talk so  
funny, Baby.

BABY STEVE  
(riled up)  
Fuck off, Bro! Bro! Slap my  
hand, Bro. Come on, slice me  
open, ghetto homie Bro cunt!

Bo lets out a battle scream and charges Baby Steve, who screams back, and they collide. Bo picks up Baby Steve and twirls him around in the air. They both scream while the rest of the band, baffled, silently looks on.

LATER

Some people have gone into the pool wearing their underwear and are splashing around. RB and Julie hang out in a quiet corner of the yard.

JULIE  
I'm really proud of you. The CD  
sounds great.

RB  
Yeah, I guess it does.

JULIE  
Do you know anything about the  
tour yet?

RB

No, we're having a meeting about it next week.

JULIE

(getting upset)

It's so frustrating getting any information from you.

RB

Look, don't worry. Everything will be okay. I promise...

Baby Steve walks drunkenly up to them.

BABY STEVE

(slurring, really drunk)

Who wants to go swimming in my lovely new pool? Isn't it posh?

JULIE

It's very nice.

BABY STEVE

No, you don't understand. I've worked hard for these luxuries. Just look. It's got heavy duty supports, extra strength vinyl siding... what's your name again?

JULIE

I'm Julie, Steve.

BABY STEVE

Yes, we have met. See, Julie, people don't know how hard I've worked for this spread. And now, I sing my lungs out, sacrifice life and limb and make sure my mates are treated with respect. Right RB? I treat you with respect.

RB

That you do, Steve.

BABY STEVE

But understand something. RB,  
and Julie, we're gonna make our  
dreams come alive! They will  
sing our praises from the top of  
the world with love, passion  
and...

JULIE

... respect?

BABY STEVE

Yes! You are a smart girl. RB,  
you're a lucky man. Now, you  
know what?

JULIE

What?

BABY STEVE

I'm going swimming in my brand  
new pool.

Baby Steve staggers a couple of steps backwards and  
pulls off his shirt, exposing his big smooth belly.

BABY STEVE

Don't worry. No one is going to  
get hurt.

He pulls off his pants revealing a hilarious speedo swim  
suit. He flexes his muscles and Julie hides her eyes in  
RB's shoulder. Bo sees him from across the lawn and  
laughs his maniacal guffaw.

BABY STEVE

Come on, you black bastard! I'm  
going swimming!

BO

Don't call me a bastard, you Brit  
bitch!

Baby Steve runs towards the pool. The people in the water try to get out of the way, but he flies up the ladder, jumps high in the air and does a jack-knife into the water. The splash is enormous.

Everyone cheers. He surfaces, stands chest-high in the water and thrusts his arms in the air Rocky-style.

BABY STEVE

(shouting)

We're gonna make our dreams come  
alive!

The girls in the pool all flock around him, hugging and kissing him, the mack daddy.

CUT TO:

JULIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Julie and RB sit watching TV. There is a knock at the door. KAREN, Julie's friend, barges in.

KAREN

Hey guys.

JULIE

Hey Kar.

KAREN

What's up, RB?

RB

She's making me watch Felicity.

KAREN

I hate that show. Guess what,  
RB? I heard your song on the  
radio.

RB looks up, surprised.

KAREN

They played it Sunday night.

RB

(genuinely surprised)

No shit?

KAREN

It was awesome. I was driving home from Blockbuster, and there it was, and they said "Our own Expatriates." Isn't that cool?

Julie looks at RB, smiling. He looks kind of shocked.

JULIE

Congratulations, Honey.

She kisses him on the cheek.

KAREN

"Honey?" Damn, you guys are getting really sappy.

CUT TO:

INT. BABY STEVE'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

They are gathered for a rehearsal. Bo presides as the band sits around him.

BO

... and what's really important here, is that we maintain unity. How many times you heard the story of a band on the verge of a big deal, and poof! They break up, or the Company shelves the project. You think you got pressures now? Just you wait.

He fires up a big joint with a huge cloud of smoke, then passes it to RB.

BO

... Pressures, challenges, it all boils down to a group mentality. We got to be in this together.

TODD

We are in this together.

BO

Yeah, but you will be challenged. It all looks rosy before you start, then it starts, and it's a different story, but you went this far. You want to go on to the next level, don't you?

Everyone says "Yeah," at the same time.

BO

Well, let me tell you 'bout the next level. Let's say you get offered a five year deal with a major label. They advance you seventy-five grand to make the record which I get ten percent of right off the bat. They don't like your present sound, so they hire some producer who's big and has a hot buzz. You go into the studio, but he doesn't like Todd's playing, so Todd gets the call to stay home while the session cat comes in and does all the work, getting paid two hundred dollars a song. Then, they want some female background singers behind Baby Steve, and they say to Christine, "Look, we need you to loose a little weight, or you'll be replaced."

CHRISTINE

What, are you saying I'm fat?

BO

I'm just saying that y'all got to be prepared for what you're asking for. You've seen just a little bit of what's coming. It's gonna get a lot hotter than this!

TODD

What about the tour? Any news?

BO

The dates are coming in. As you know, you'll be opening for Plant's band for the first half, and then you'll continue on home by yourselves.

CHRISTINE

How long are we going to be gone?

BO

Right now, it looks like six weeks. Three with The Merits and three by yourselves.

A moment of realization blows through.

RB

That's a long time.

BO

You gonna have to say goodbye to the girlie and the crib and say hello to Motel Six!

Baby Steve mimics a silent shout for joy.

BO

So, you're making the first approach to the next level. Brothers and Sister, prepare yourselves for departure.

CUT TO

EXT. LONG ISLAND CLUB - NIGHT

It is a rainy night, but there are still people flocking in. A photocopied poster reads "Tonight: The Expatriates CD release party!"

INT. LONG ISLAND CLUB - NIGHT

It is before a show. The crowd is waiting in front of the stage, which is set up with the band's equipment. James Brown plays on the sound system.

RB and Julie stand together against the bar, engaged in a conversation.

JULIE

You're gonna be gone a long time.

RB

I know it's a long time, but I've been in it for this much, you know? I have to follow it through, see what happens on the next level.

JULIE

What's the next level?

RB starts to speak, very importantly, but the words don't come out. He looks about as if trying to find the right words. He looks back at her, and she smiles at him. She's caught him and he knows it.

RB

Well, I guess I'll find out.

Baby Steve approaches them.

BABY STEVE

Time to play, mate.

RB kisses Julie on the cheek and goes to play the set. She watches after him with a serious expression on her face.

CUT TO:

INT. RB'S BACHELOR PAD - NIGHT

RB and Julie are in bed, after the show and after the lovemaking. They are curled around each other. RB's eyes are closed, but Julie's are open. She looks at him.

JULIE

Are you awake?

RB

Yeah. My ears are ringing.  
Keeping me up.

JULIE

I'm sorry if I'm pressuring you about the tour. I know it's really important to you.

RB

Yeah, it's important...

She thinks about this for a moment.

JULIE

I'm gonna miss you.

RB kisses her forehead.

RB

I'm gonna miss you too.

CUT TO:

EXT. BABY STEVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Todd, Brett and RB hang out on the front lawn in the sunshine, waiting for something.

TODD

I wonder what they're gonna get, man.

BRETT

I really hope it's not a wreck.

TODD

That would be cheap and good. We're gonna end up paying for this, you know.

A horn honks and they look up. A big white luxury van with all the trimmings pulls up, silver roof rails, blue sports decals, tinted windows, like some kind of pimp-mobile. Baby Steve waves from the driver's seat.

BRETT

Well, Todd, there you go.

The van pulls up to the curb. Their new CD can be heard from the stereo, bass notes going boom.

BABY STEVE

Hello, boys. What do you think?

The three stand on the grass, fingers on their chins in critique. Bo gets out of the passenger side and gallivants around the front end.

BO

This ride is phat, yo?

BABY STEVE

We got all we need for our American adventure. Bose speakers all around the compartment, a Blaupunkt receiver, twelve-inch sub-woofer, and look in the back! There's a bed. We can crash out whenever we get tired.

TODD

(obviously vexed)

What did it..., I mean, how much was it?

BO

My man hooked us up. It wasn't as much as it looks. It's a year old, only fourteen thousand miles on it.

TODD

But it looks loaded!

BABY STEVE

Yeah, it's loaded. It's got everything.

TODD

But... Steve, we're gonna pay out the ass for this!

BO

Chill, brother. We can manage the payments.

Todd is left sputtering. Brett and RB stand back, look at each other and crack up.

CUT TO

INT. RADIO STUDIO - NIGHT

The band is gathered for a radio interview. 'The Name' is playing and as it winds down, the DJ tells them to get ready.

DJ

Okay, here we are on the local scene and I'm sitting with Long Island's own Expatriates, with frontman Baby Steve. Okay, so you have a new CD out, and you're going out on the road to support it. Are you excited?

BABY STEVE

(cool radio voice)

Oh, yes. We've got the ball rolling pretty quickly.

DJ

Where are you headed for?

BABY STEVE

Well, first we head through the Midwest, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, then we go up into Canada, places I can't pronounce. Then to Vancouver; Seattle; San Francisco; LA; then back through the desert, up to Denver; down to New Orleans; then Atlanta and home.

DJ

That sounds pretty extensive. Are you prepared to be away from your loved ones for that long?

BABY STEVE

We'll miss them, but we have to do what we have to do, you know?

DJ

Yes, well we're really proud of you here on Long Island. Good luck to you. Now, we'll play 'One New Message.'

CUT TO:

INT. BABY STEVE'S BASEMENT

They are having their final band meeting before they leave. The air sparkles with excitement. Bo is prosletising again.

BO

So I've arranged this special showcase. It's gonna be incredible. It's gonna be at Irving Plaza two days after we come back from the road. I have this friend, a high roller, and he's interested in maybe getting us a major label deal! When we knock his Addidas off, we hit the big time.

TODD

What about Power Plant?

BO

Aw, that's a small time independent. Besides, how can you stay with a label that doesn't advertise for shit? What you need is a phat contract with a major label.

TODD

Yeah! What worth is it doing this, unless it's with the Majors! It's what we all want, right?

Everyone says "Yes," at the same time.

BABY STEVE

How'd you scare up this deal,  
mate?

BO

Just part of the territory.  
Listen, when you get back from  
this tour, my friend will dig you  
and you're gonna blow up!

His face is wild with a smile, and he looks around at  
everyone, who can't really believe it.

CUT TO:

INT. JULIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's the last night before the tour. They lie awake,  
wrapped together, talking intensely.

JULIE

When do you leave?

RB

Like six, or seven a.m. We have  
to drive to Cleveland.

JULIE

I'm so jealous. You're going to  
have so much fun.

RB

Yeah.

JULIE

Too much fun.

RB

Well, I don't know what kind of  
fun, really.

A beat passes while they both think to themselves.

JULIE

Rob?

RB

Yeah?

JULIE

Are you going to want to see  
other girls?

RB turns to her, confronted. He thinks for a moment,  
not sure what to say.

RB

I'm not looking for another girl-  
friend.

JULIE

I'm not really talking about  
that, but... I don't know...like,  
on the road? All those girlies  
and groupies are gonna want to  
get with you.

RB

I've never been much of a player,  
Julie.

JULIE

You'll be gone for a long time.

RB

You'll be alone, too. That can  
go both ways.

JULIE

I don't want anyone else but you.

RB smiles at her, kisses her, but she pulls away.

JULIE

You don't want to go out there  
and be a man? Get lots of  
girlies and keep a scorecard,  
collect notches in your bass  
case?

RB

Nah. I won't be doing that.

JULIE

Do you like me?

RB

Yes. You know that.

She looks at him seriously.

JULIE

I love you, Rob.

RB

I... I love you, too.

JULIE

There. That wasn't so bad, was  
it?

They kiss each other, and snuggle around each other to  
sleep. Julie's eyes do not close. She stays awake  
thinking.

CUT TO:

EXT. BABY STEVE'S HOUSE - MORNING

At the break of dawn, the van has all the doors open,  
and the band is gathering around, putting bags in the  
back under the bed. There are back-packs, instruments  
and hot-plates all scattered around, waiting to be  
packed.

Baby Steve helps RB load his amp into the trailer.

BABY STEVE

How'd your girl take the departure?

RB

Oh, it was a long night.

BABY STEVE

Me too. Emily was up all night, asking ridiculous questions, getting all possessive on me.

RB

Yeah, it's hard on the girls.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, well marriage is pretty hard on everyone, but I didn't make the rules. Just be glad you're single, mate.

RB

Yeah, well I got the same guidelines.

BABY STEVE

(smiling devilishly)

Yes, but your indiscretions aren't admissible in court!

Everyone has finished packing and gets in the van, Baby Steve at the wheel. He turns around to everyone.

BABY STEVE

Okay, is everything ready?

He turns the key, the engine starts, and he pulls the van into the street.

CUT TO:

XLS. NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE - DAY

The van drives slowly through the traffic around the city.

EXT. GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - DAY

Baby Steve, hangs his head out of the window and shouts to New York City, which recedes behind them.

BABY STEVE  
Good Bye, New York. Fuck You!

CUT TO:

XLS - INTERSTATE 80 WEST - DAY

There they are, a small white van moving west through the hills of Amish country.

INT. THE VAN - DAY

Everyone rocks in time with the motion of the vehicle. Baby Steve is still driving. There is dub reggae playing on the stereo. Christine is reading. Brett is playing a game-boy. Todd is drumming a practice pad on his lap. RB stares out of the window.

BABY STEVE  
What do you see out there, RB?

RB  
A lot of nothing.

BABY STEVE  
I have a feeling that's what we're going to see for a long time. A whole lot of nothing.

Christine leans forward from the back.

CHRISTINE  
I have to pee.

BABY STEVE  
(to himself)  
Oh, God, here we go.

CUT TO:

XLS. INTERSTATE 80 WEST - DAY

The van passes the sign that says "Welcome to Ohio". It is later in the afternoon.

CUT TO

XLS. CLEVELAND - EVENING

The sun has just set, the lights of the city are shining with the lake in the back ground. The van drives through the streets on it's way to the club.

EXT. THE GROGG SHOP - EVENING

A small club with posters next to the front door. The van pulls up the to curb, behind THE MERITS' VAN, a weathered Dodge with a trailer. Baby Steve climbs out of the driver's seat. He stretches. The others pile out, all stiff and numbed from the trip.

INT. GROGG SHOP - EVENING

The MERITS are onstage doing sound check. They are a three-piece, all dressed in shorts and tee-shirts, more of a road-experienced band. There is MIKE on guitar, SCOTT on bass and JOHNSON on drums. The Expatriates enter, shaking off the road stiffness.

MIKE PLANT  
(over the P.A.)  
Howdy, folks.

The Merits look out at The Expatriates, regarding them for the first time on the tour. Baby Steve walks up to the stage.

BABY STEVE

Hey Mike, where's the band room?

MIKE

There's a basement we can use.  
We're running a tab at the bar.  
Go get yourself a cold beer.

LATER

The two bands sit together at the bar.

MIKE

I'd like to propose a toast. To  
the success of this tour, and to  
The Expatriates, welcome to our  
world.

Steve gets up and offers his side.

BABY STEVE

I'd like to add that it is an  
honor and a privilege to be work-  
ing with The Merits. Let's have  
a good time. Hear, hear.

They all drink. Johnson starts to talk to Christine, and  
Scott leans over to RB.

SCOTT

Hey RB, is that girl single, or  
what?

RB

Who, Christine? Jesus, I don't  
even know, to be honest with you.  
She's always had this guy shadow-  
ing her. I think she's single.  
What, you interested?

SCOTT

She's probably going to be hit on  
by each of us, so I was just won-  
dering.

RB

Good luck. She gets hit on every hour of the day by everyone she meets.

SCOTT

Have you been on the road before?

RB

No, this is the first time. What about you?

SCOTT

Oh, shit. It feels like we've been out here forever.

RB

You live in New York?

SCOTT

Brooklyn. I live with my wife.

RB

Must be difficult.

SCOTT

(darkly)

Yeah. It is.

CUT TO:

#### THE GIG

The crowd has begun to fill the club. Music blasts over the PA. The Expatriates are about to take the stage. RB plugs his bass into his amp. He looks over and sees Baby Steve talking to a PRETTY BLONDE GIRL. The music starts to fade down, and he hops on the stage.

BABY STEVE

See that, RB? She's a cute bird!

RB

Come on, man. You're supposed to be a good boy.

BABY STEVE

Doesn't mean I can't look.

ANNOUNCER (Off Camera)

Alright, tonight we feature two bands from New York. For their first time in Cleveland, put your hands together for The Expatriates.

There is good applause. They launch into The Name.

LATER AT THE BAR

RB orders a beer. THE BARMAID is friendly and pretty.

BARMAID

You guys were really good! I bought your first CD when it came out. I like it a lot.

RB

Thanks.

She goes off to serve a customer. RB leans against the bar and looks around.

The Merits start playing. The crowd knows them, and responds wildly while RB watches.

CUT TO

EXT MOTEL SIX - NIGHT

The two vans pull around to the back of the motel, which is mostly empty. When they stop, their doors open simultaneously, and the two bands spill noisily and drunkenly out.

INT. MOTEL SIX ROOM - NIGHT

A party in one of the rooms. Both Bands hang out with about TEN FANS, an even spread of girls and guys sit around the room.

There is a knock at the door. Todd opens it, revealing The Pretty Blonde Girl and A FRIEND from the show.

JOHNSON

You made it! Come in, come in!

Johnson pats the mattress next to him but they are hesitant, so the two girls sit against the wall. Baby Steve starts talking to the First Girl, and Todd starts talking to the Second Girl.

SCOTT

Yo RB, your band mates are stealing our girls.

RB looks over, and sees Johnson glowering.

RB

I don't think Steve will do anything. Pass the word to Johnson.

Johnson looks at Scott and RB.

JOHNSON

(over the crowd)

I call it 'The Cock Block'. One of the first rules of the road is to not do it!

SCOTT

Looks like we're gonna have to teach them some things about the road, Johnson.

JOHNSON

They'll learn, all right!

Suddenly, there is a hush. Mike is taking out a box from his suitcase. He pulls out a glass apparatus that looks like a clear bowl cupping a plate.

SCOTT

Oh, shit. It's time for The  
Exterminator!

Mike then pulls out a giant bag of pot.

MIKE

Time to get really stoned!

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL SIX - NIGHT

The party is over and the fans are leaving. Baby Steve and Todd are still trying to score the two girls. RB walks past them to his room, smirking.

INT. RB'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

RB sits at the table next to the window and listens to the action outside.

BABY STEVE (Off Camera)

Okay, well, nice to meet you.  
Maybe next time?

GIRL 1 (Off Camera)

Sure, Sure.

TODD (Off Camera)

You sure you have to go? We have  
more beer.

GIRL 2 (Off Camera)

Sorry, got to go!

He listens to the sound of car doors closing, the engine turning over, and the crunch of the tires as the car pulls away.

The room door opens, Todd and Baby Steve stumble in.

BABY STEVE

High School! Jesus, they looked  
older than that!

They plop down on the beds and flip the remote.

TODD

I almost had mine, man. She was just teasing.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, we were damn close.

RB

Hey, Steve. I thought you were married!

BABY STEVE

I'm just going through the motions. That's basically safe, isn't it?

RB

I don't know, man.

BABY STEVE

Hey. Emily is an artist. She draws naked men all the time! She focuses in on the penis and spends hours studying and sketching and getting all the proportions right... I can do the same thing! Just looking. Besides, It's all about the score card.

They shrug and watch TV

CUT TO:

XLS. INTERSTATE 80 WEST - DAY

The two vans make their way into the midwest, through the farms and the truck stops.

CHRISTINE (Off Camera)

I have to pee!

XLS. DETROIT, MI. - NIGHT

The sun sets over the city. A tram moves along on elevated tracks, above empty streets.

EXT. MAJESTIC THEATRE - NIGHT

The venue sits next to a bowling alley, with a big flashing neon sign. The two vans can be seen parked in the back.

INT. PAY PHONE - NIGHT

RB is at a pay phone in the lobby.

RB

Hi, Julie? How are you? We're in Detroit. I miss you, too. I know it's hard. It won't be too long. How are things? Is Karen keeping you company? Listen, I can't stay on too long, so. I know. I love you, too.

Brett comes up behind him and taps him on the shoulder to tell him it's time to go.

RB

I have to go. I'll call in a few days. We'll talk more, okay? I love you. Bye.

He hangs up and sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. MAJESTIC THEATER, NIGHT

The Expatriates are in mid-set. RB looks out and sees CINDY, a cute girl, smiling at him, and he smiles back, bashfully.

DRESSING ROOM

After the show, lots of local SCENESTERS, COLLEGE KIDS WITH FANZINES and VARIOUS HANGERS-ON mix with the bands.

Suddenly there is a commotion. People are running through the hallway, and everyone turns to look.

AUDIENCE

Mike, Scott, and several others are running out into the crowd, and so RB and The Expatriates give chase to see what is going on.

There is a fight in the crowd. Johnson is right in the middle of it, shirt off, his face angry. People swarm around and there is much yelling. Steve walks up to him and confers. Before anyone knows what is going on, it is over.

MIKE

Let's go, Johnson. I want you in one piece, okay? We have five minutes.

JOHNSON

Fuckin' asshole, I wanna kick his fuckin' ass! Did you see it?

MIKE

No, but relax. It's nothing, man.

RB then finds himself next to Cindy, who is smiling at him.

RB

Did you see what that was about?

CINDY

I think it was over a girl. We usually start these things.

RB

Why?

CINDY

Because we're bored. It's really boring around here.

All of a sudden, TWO FANS come up to them

FAN # 1

Excuse me, could you sign my  
shirt?

RB is surprised, takes the Fan's SHARPIE PEN and signs  
across the back.

FAN # 2

Me, too. Here, on the shoulder.

RB obliges while Cindy watches. The fans leave, and RB  
turns back to her.

RB

I can't believe that!

CINDY

You're a rock star!

RB

I am?

CINDY

We've been waiting for The  
Expatriates to play here. I got  
your first CD when it came out.

RB

You're kidding? At a store?

CINDY

I think I bought it at a Merits  
show. Everyone here knows The  
Expatriates. You're so cool!

RB is blown away by the realization that his band has  
reached so many people.

RB

What's your name?

CINDY

I'm Cindy.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAJESTIC THEATRE - NIGHT

The bands are loading out. There are band members and fans alike hanging around the two vans. RB is still with Cindy.

CINDY

Where do you play next?

RB

Chicago, I think.

CINDY

My best friend just moved there.  
Are you playing at The Metro?

RB

I think so.

CINDY

I should go. She has her own  
apartment. Can you put us on the  
list?

RB

Sure. You should write down her  
name, so I won't forget.

RB gets a pen and paper from the van. She writes the info.

CINDY

I put my name and number down, too.  
Just so you won't forget.

She takes his hand, smiles and kisses him. Then, she turns and goes. He watches with a lustful gaze.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

RB is awakened from his sleep. He hears rustling sounds, and breathing. He turns around and sees Todd in the other bed getting laid with SOME CHICK he met tonight. RB grabs a pillow and covers his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO - EVENING

The two vans are stuck in rush-hour traffic.

EXT. CABARET METRO - NIGHT

There is a line to get into the club that stretches around the block. Posters that advertise the show are everywhere. Some kids wear "The Merits" T-shirts.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

RB is dressing out of his suitcase. There are clothes everywhere, garment bags hanging from the ceiling. Baby Steve sits next to the now ubiquitous deli tray and bin of beer. Brett and Christine are looking at a Power Plant Records ad in a music zine.

CHRISTINE

Look at this! 'Power Plant Records presents The Merits' and then in small print it says 'with The Expatriates.'

BRETT

That is some fine print, man.

CHRISTINE

I'm telling you, we're getting done wrong. All Michael Plant is interested in is selling his own band! He doesn't give a shit about us!

BABY STEVE

Well, he has played here before.

CHRISTINE

I don't buy that. It's bullshit,  
man.

Todd comes in.

TODD

Yo, RB. There's someone here to  
see you. She's really cute.

RB

Okay, thanks man.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cindy and MELISSA, her cute friend, wait by a big promo  
poster.

RB emerges from the dressing room, sees them. They  
smile and wave.

RB

Hi! Did you have a problem get-  
ting in?

CINDY

No, it was fine, thanks for  
putting us on the list.

She kisses him again and gives him a BIG HUG.

CINDY

Oh, RB, this is Melissa.

RB and Melissa say "Hi."

CUT TO:

CABARET METRO GIG

The Expatriates are in mid-set. The crowd dances wildly.

RB looks out, sees Cindy and Melissa dancing off to the  
side of the stage. Cindy is smiling at him.

CABARET METRO BALCONY BAR

RB and Todd are hanging out with the two girls in the balcony bar, drinking beers and talking.

MELISSA

Hey, Do you want to go to a jazz club? I know a great place!

RB and Todd look at each other and smile.

CUT TO:

XLS. CHICAGO - NIGHT

It is a Friday night. There is lots of traffic and people going to and fro.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

The foursome walk together, excitedly, looking into windows, being kind of touristy. RB and Cindy walk arm-in-arm.

INT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

They sit at a table, drinking drinks and listening to some blues, having a great time.

CINDY

So is this all you do?

RB

You mean music? Yes.

CINDY

That's incredible. I'd love to do that, not have a job and just play in a band.

RB

It's really great.

CINDY

You must meet so many people and hear about all of them.

RB

Nah, I'm kind of the quiet type. Not that social.

CINDY

Sure, sure. I bet you meet lots of girls.

RB

Me? I'm no dog.

CINDY

I bet you've got lots of notches on that bass case of yours.

RB

No, those are just scrapes from banging it around all the time.

CINDY

Banging it around? Yeah, sure.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

RB and Cindy walk behind Melissa and Todd, still arm-in-arm, looking like they've had a few too many.

MELISSA

So, let's go to my apartment. It's only three blocks away. I have more liquor!

Todd looks at RB, who shrugs.

CINDY

Let's go!

INT. MELISSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A nice big apartment, with a sliding glass door that leads to a balcony. The skyline of Chicago glistens through it.

They all enter, weaving drunkenly, and go into the main room. Then, the girls go off to the kitchen together, leaving the men alone.

TODD

This is the life, man.

RB

I have to be careful. I think this girl likes me!

TODD

Hey, you're just at a party. Besides, this is the road. What ever happens out here on the road stays out here, right? We're brothers.

They shake hands, but RB still looks nervous.

Just then, the girls come back in, carrying beers. Cindy gives one to RB.

CINDY

Come see the view. It's great!

She leads him out the glass door.

EXT. MELISSA'S BALCONY - NIGHT

They stand looking at the view. They are many stories up and the city spreads out to the horizon.

CINDY

Isn't this something? She has such an awesome place.

RB

I've never been to Chicago before. It's really cool.

CINDY

I can't believe you. I'd bet you'd be a total pro at this.

RB

There's a first time for everything, I guess.

CINDY

What about your girlfriend?

RB lets a beat go by, sort of a stammer, while she breaks into a flirtatious grin.

RB

How can you tell?

CINDY

Because you haven't made a pass at me yet.

RB

Yeah, maybe I shouldn't do that.

CINDY

(smiling)

I bet she wouldn't approve of you being alone on a balcony with some girl in Chicago, now would she?

RB

Probably not. But we're not doing anything wrong. We're just talking and looking at the view.

She smiles at him devilishly.

CINDY

Yeah, but I know you want to kiss me.

RB shrugs sheepishly and scratches the side of his head.

CINDY

But you're not going to, right?

RB

Well, I mean, you know,...

CINDY

It's all right. That's why Adam got kicked out of the garden of eden.

RB

What, for kissing her?

CINDY

No, he ate the apple.

A moment goes by while he tries to act casual.

CINDY

The snake in the tree told him that it was okay.

RB

I try not to listen to the snake.

They both crack up and let the moment pass, staring out into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - DAY

Baby Steve is driving, Brett is sitting shotgun, sleeping. RB and Todd sit behind them, and Christine is in back.

BABY STEVE

Hey, look! See that?

BRETT

(waking up)

What?

BABY STEVE

That car next to us. Those girls  
are waving at us.

Everyone looks over. Todd taps RB's arm and points.

Cindy and Melissa are in the car next to them, and they  
are smiling and waving. Todd looks at RB and smiles.

CUT TO:

XLS. MINNEAPOLIS - NIGHT

Another city, another night.

EXT. FIRST AVENUE CLUB - NIGHT

There is a long line outside the club.

INT. FIRST AVENUE - NIGHT

The Expatriates are playing. It is a great crowd.  
Cindy and Melissa stand off to the side having a good  
time dancing and smiling.

CUT TO:

LATER, FIRST AVENUE POOL TABLE

RB, Todd, and the two girls are upstairs off to the side  
playing pool. RB makes a shot, misses, then walks to  
the railing.

Todd follows RB and speaks man to man.

TODD

Yo, are you with this girl or what?

RB

Oh, you know, I'm just hanging  
out.

TODD

She thinks you're with her.

RB

I promised my girl that I wouldn't fool around, man.

TODD

(incredulous)

Dude! You're miles away from home! Your girl doesn't have to know! I mean, just look!

The two girls are giggling at them.

RB

Yeah, she is cute, but, I really shouldn't do anything, man.

Todd shakes his head and walks over to the girls, while RB stays put.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

RB is alone, practicing bass and smoking cigarettes with the TV on. He is distracted by banging bed boards from the room next door. He sighs and flips the remote.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - DAY

RB comes out of his room, drinking a styrofoam cup of coffee. He stretches with the sun and looks down.

Cindy and Melissa stand by their car with Todd, who hugs and kisses them both. Cindy glances up at RB, smiles and shrugs. RB responds with an "Oh well..." expression.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

RB is on the phone, alone in the room.

RB

Hello, Julie? Hi. How are you?  
I miss you too. I'm fine, the  
shows have been going great.  
Really good response. A little  
partying, but, you know...

He scratches his head, his face a little askew.

RB

...yes, I've been good, don't  
worry. Everyone out here is like  
a hungry dog, I just like watch-  
ing the action. I miss you very  
much. It won't be long, now.  
I'll be home soon.

CUT TO:

INT. MINNEAPOLIS BAR - NIGHT

Some Merits, and some Expatriates are hanging out on  
their night off at a bar playing pool. Mike and Johnson  
hover around the table, while Steve and RB sit at a  
booth with big frosty mugs of beer.

MIKE

Six to the corner.

He shoots, makes it. Johnson curses loudly.

MIKE

Come now, you've got to have man-  
ners.

JOHNSON

(loudly)

Just shoot, man.

Scott walks in, looking pissed off. Mike and Johnson  
look on warily, but say nothing.

SCOTT  
(shouting)  
She's fucking him!

No one says anything, and he stands there, fuming.

SCOTT  
What should I do! I don't know  
what the fuck to do!

He sits down at the table with RB and Baby Steve

BABY STEVE  
What's the matter, mate?

Scott looks at him as if he wants to kill someone.

SCOTT  
(seething)  
My wife is fucking my best  
friend, that's what's wrong.

RB  
That sucks, man.

SCOTT  
Yeah, it sucks! I've been married  
for three months, and now I'm a  
thousand miles away while my wife  
fucks my friend. I have to do  
something. I don't know what to  
do.

BABY STEVE  
I'm married too, mate, and what I  
would do is go back there and  
sort it out.

Scott lowers his head, sighing heavily.

SCOTT  
I know I should go back, but what  
about the band?

Mike is listening from the pool table, and distracted, he misses his shot.

JOHNSON

See? There it is. Now, let me show you how pool is played.

He makes a shot, sinks it.

Scott looks at RB

SCOTT

I'd need someone to play my parts.

RB

I could do that, man.

SCOTT

You could? It would only be a few days, while I deal with this shit. I mean, I have all the charts. Can you read charts?

RB

Sure, man. No problem.

Scott thinks for a moment, then gets up.

SCOTT

I gotta make a call.

He walks out, and the four look at each other for a moment.

MIKE

Is that okay with you, RB?

RB

Sure. I'll do whatever needs to be done, man.

MIKE

Well then, welcome to The Merits!

Steve frowns: he doesn't like this at all.

CUT TO:

XLS - CANADA BORDER CROSSING

The two vans are making their way through the gate, being checked by the customs officers, showing their driver's licenses.

CUT TO:

INT. EXPATRIATES' VAN - DAY

RB-less, Baby Steve is driving, everyone else is looking out of the window.

CHRISTINE

So this is Canada? I've never been here.

BRETT

Looks kind of drab.

TODD

They have cool looking money, too.

BABY STEVE

Cool for something worth about fifty percent of what we got. That's about an eighth of an English Pound.

BRETT

So, Steve, how are you feeling about RB playing with the Merits?

Baby Steve looks at him, letting a GRUMPY EXPRESSION speak for itself.

BRETT

I guess you don't like it.

BABY STEVE

It's not that I don't like it,  
it's that I think that it waters  
down the show, sharing members  
between bands. Besides, we're  
better than the Merits!

TODD

You think he's going to quit us  
and join them?

BABY STEVE

(menacing tone)

No. If he does, I'll break his  
fucking balls.

Brett and Todd lean back and drop the conversation.

CUT TO

XLS - WINNIPEG, CANADA - EVENING

A colorful sunset, flat plains city.

EXT - THE SPECTRUM - EVENING

The two vans have arrived together, and everyone is  
starting to load out. RB helps with The Merits and Baby  
Steve sees this.

BABY STEVE

Don't forget your gear in our  
van.

RB

Dude! Don't worry 'bout a thing!

Steve glares as RB goes into the club.

SPECTRUM GIG

The Merits with RB playing bass are on the stage. Baby

Steve and Todd watch from the bar.

TODD

He sounds pretty good!

Baby Steve just nods, looking annoyed.

CUT TO:

XLS - CANADA PRAIRIE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The two vans drive under a full moon, with rolling grasslands stretching out in all directions.

INT. EXPATRIATE'S VAN - NIGHT

RB is driving, smoking a cigarette, his face lit blue from the dashboard. The Merits' van is ahead of them, visible as two tail-lights beyond the range of their headlights. Baby Steve is shotgun, drunkenly leaning his head against the window. Everyone else is asleep.

Baby Steve opens his eyes, blinks, then looks at RB.

BABY STEVE

(drunkenly)

Where are we? What time is it?

RB

Canada. Quarter of four.

Baby Steve stares ahead for a moment, wasted.

BABY STEVE

Looks like the surface of fucking Pluto.

RB

It goes on forever. Hope we find a rest stop. We're below a half-tank.

They stare ahead, rocking their heads lazily with the movement of the van.

BABY STEVE  
Unfortunate drive. Could'a  
scored some birds.

RB grunts and nods his head.

BABY STEVE  
(unconvincingly)  
You sounded good with the Merits  
tonight.

RB  
Thanks, man.

BABY STEVE  
How much longer you gonna do it?

RB  
I think he's coming back to  
Vancouver.

Steve reaches down, takes a drink from a beer that he  
saved from the club.

RB  
Hey, Steve? Are you pissed off  
that I'm doing this?

BABY STEVE  
Hey, you got your life, man.  
Don't let me get in the way of  
anything.

RB  
Yeah, well that's not what I  
meant.

BABY STEVE

We've worked for this thing for a long time. Just seems like it waters it down, you playing with them like that. You can do what you want, though. I can't stop you. I don't want to come between you and your ambitions.

RB doesn't say anything and Baby Steve looks at him for a moment.

RB

Sorry, man. I guess I've already made an arrangement, you know?

Baby Steve doesn't answer because he's falling asleep again. RB drives on.

FADE TO:

EXT: CANADIAN HIGHWAY - MORNING

The morning rises and the two vans continue on their way.

CHRISTINE (Off Camera)

I have to pee.

Off Camera, everyone groans.

EXT. CANADIAN REST STOP - DAY

The two vans are parked in the parking lot of an A&W fast food place. Everyone piles out of the vans and starts to walk to the entrance.

CLOSE-UP CHRISTINE AND BRETT

They are holding hands as they walk in.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

The Canadian rockies are in the background and RB is on

the phone, talking to Julie.

RB

... I really miss you, and it  
won't be too long, I promise..."

CUT TO:

INT. CALGARY CLUB - NIGHT

The Merits are on stage and the place is insane. People are flying this way and that, glass is breaking, blood is spilling.

Baby Steve and Brett watch the show from the sidelines.

BRETT

So, I heard Scott comes back  
tomorrow, right?

BABY STEVE

Yeah. RB is back with us. Then  
we'll be able to blow The Merits  
off the stage again.

FADE TO:

XLS: VANCOUVER, CANADA - EVENING

The clouds hang low over the city, with mountains in the background and fog coming in over the water.

EXT: VANCOUVER CLUB - EVENING

A cab pulls up to the back entrance, where the vans are parked side-by-side. Scott gets out, hauls his backpack with him into the club.

INT: BAND ROOM - EVENING

Both bands share a small nasty dressing room, and not much is being said. Music comes in from the main room.

Scott opens the door, and everyone greets him. Mike pats him on the shoulder, a very public homecoming.

RB

How did everything go, man?

SCOTT

(dark and angry)

It's over! I'm getting divorced!

There is a stunned silence. The Expatriates don't really know what it is about, but The Merits do.

MIKE

Jesus, Scott. Let's have a talk.

SCOTT

There's nothing to talk about!  
When I got there, it was still  
going on, and all I could do was  
just look on like a chump. It was  
the most humiliating experience  
of my life! Where's the god  
damned beer?

He pushes his way through the people. Mike and Johnson watch him with concerned expressions.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

The Merits are playing. Scott looks like a wild man. RB and Baby Steve watch from behind the P.A., smoking a cigarette.

BABY STEVE

Are you going to miss them?

RB

Nah. It was just a favor, man.

BABY STEVE

Good. Now, we can get on with  
our business.

RB nods and Baby Steve walks away.

EXT. VANCOUVER CLUB - NIGHT

The bands are loading out, gear is all around, but not so many fans. RB is loading his rig into the trailer, and Scott comes up from behind, drunken.

SCOTT

Thanks for helping me out, man.

RB

No problem. It was fun.

Baby Steve comes from around the side of the trailer with a box of merch to load.

SCOTT

Hey, you guys, lets hit a titty bar. They get completely naked in Canada. I'm buying.

BABY STEVE

Canadian titties? Well, this I've got to see!

EXT. VANCOUVER RED LIGHT DISTRICT - NIGHT

There are peep show signs and triple-XXX logos everywhere. The three men stumble through the rain-wet streets like drunken soldiers.

SCOTT

...Fucking Bitches! They're all the same! They play you like you're a pet rat! I can't believe it! I trusted her, you know what I mean? I was real, and she played me! It was all a joke! Never again, man, never again!

INT. VANCOUVER TITTY BAR - NIGHT

The lights are flashing, and the girls are dancing and working the poles. Scott, Baby Steve and RB sit at a table next to the stage. Baby Steve slips a dollar in one of the Girls' panties. She then shakes her tits in

his face and he giggles like a kid.

ANOTHER GIRL comes up to Scott, who looks drunk and psycho. He takes an AMERICAN TWENTY and slaps it on the edge of the stage. The girl looks scared.

GIRL

What do you want me to do?

SCOTT

(angrily)

I want you to stick your finger  
in your ass and lick it!

She doesn't know what to do. Baby Steve and RB start to look a little uneasy.

SCOTT

Come on! That's twenty American!  
Go ahead! I want to watch you!

She looks frightened, and gives a nod to the Bouncer, who walks over.

BOUNCER

Gentlemen, there's no harassing  
the girls here.

SCOTT

I just paid her twenty American  
dollars, and I want her to do  
what I asked.

The girl starts to walk away, freaked out.

SCOTT

Wait, where are you going? I  
fucking paid you twenty dollars.

The Bouncer takes the twenty from the stage and holds it in front of Scott.

BOUNCER

You either take the money and leave, or  
I take it and throw you out.

RB tries to calm Scott down.

RB

Look, man, it's not worth it.  
Let's get out of here.

SCOTT

(riled up)

No fucking way! I want to see  
that bitch dance.

Suddenly there are three BOUNCERS, all big and mean,  
ready to kick their asses.

BOUNCER # 1

So I take the money? You want it  
that way?

BABY STEVE

(appeasing tone)

Look, man, he's had a bad couple  
of days, just let us leave, okay?

BOUNCER # 1

Then leave now.

Baby Steve grabs Scott's arm to steer him to the door,  
but Scott breaks loose.

BABY STEVE

Come on, man, lets go to another  
place.

SCOTT

Fuck this place! I gave that  
whore a twenty...

Suddenly, the Bouncer grabs Scott and yanks him into a  
head lock. The other Bouncers move toward RB and Baby  
Steve, but they show their hands, not wanting any trou-

ble.

BABY STEVE

Look, take it easy on my friend.

BOUNCER # 2

Get out, or we throw you out.

They nod and cautiously make their way toward the exit.

Bouncer # 1 is dragging Scott cursing and sputtering to the door.

OUTSIDE

The door opens and Scott is hurled across the pavement. RB and Steve follow on their own accord and rush to pick him up. Scott swings wildly, but Baby Steve blocks the punches.

BABY STEVE

Scott, cool out, man, just cool out!

Scott suddenly comes to his senses. The Three Bouncers are standing silently at the door, arms folded, watching them.

Suddenly, Scott starts laughing. He points at them, starts to say something, then cracks up again, staggering away across the street. RB and Baby Steve look at each other and start walking.

SCOTT

(shouting)

That was hilarious! Did you see that? We got thrown out of a Canadian Titty Bar!

Scott staggers along, RB and Baby Steve following.

CUT TO:

EXT. U.S.A. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

The two vans wait in traffic to cross back to the States.

INT. EXPATRIATES' VAN - DAY

RB is driving. They are furiously trying to smoke all of their weed before they go through. There are twice as many joints going around as there are people to smoke them. Baby Steve has two in his mouth.

BRETT

Man, this is so unfair. Such excellent hydro skunk, and we're just burning it down.

CHRISTINE

Better that than throwing it out the window.

TODD

Guys, we'd better air out this van, or they'll smell it.

BABY STEVE

Light some cigarettes. Quick.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

The Merits' van pulls up to the booth, with the Expatriates right behind them.

INT. EXPATRIATE'S VAN - DAY

Everyone is smoking cigarettes and the windows are all open. They all look completely paranoid.

POV. EXPATRIATE'S WINDSHIELD - DAY

The Merits van is in front of them idling at the booth with a guard speaking with Mike. More guards swarm all around. There are dogs in cages looking agitated.

BABY STEVE

Do I have all of your passports?

EVERYONE

Yes.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

The Merits' van pulls out, and the guard waves the Expatriates to pull up. Slowly, their van starts to move.

INT. EXPATRIATE'S VAN - DAY

Everyone is frozen with fear, trying to act casual. When the van stops, the guard looks in at RB.

GUARD

Good afternoon. How many people?

RB

Uh, five, sir.

GUARD

How long have you been in Canada?

RB

Uh, about six days, sir.

GUARD

Are you carrying any items purchased in Canada? Any prescription drugs or alcohol?

RB

No, sir.

The Guard looks the van over.

GUARD

Are you carrying any illegal drugs with you?

RB

No, none at all, sir.

The Guard again looks the van over in a tense moment. Then, he wordlessly waves them on. RB gets the hell out of there.

EXT. U.S. INTERSTATE - DAY

The two vans travel under big green traffic signs that read "I-5 South" and "Seattle"

INT. EXPATRIATES' VAN - DAY

Everyone is elated that they made the passage safely. They are laughing and carrying on. Then, Baby Steve holds up a bag of green skunk.

BABY STEVE

Look what I just smuggled in?

Everyone is angry with him, but he just smiles and pock-ets his weed.

EXT. SEATTLE - DAY

The clouds are low and gray and the vans drive into the city.

INT. EXPATRIATE'S VAN - DAY

Everyone is cracking up and singing "Jeremy" by Pearl Jam. Baby Steve shakes his head wildly and goes "Ayayaya" in an Eddie Vedder impersonation.

EXT. THE FENIX UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

The two vans are parked in front, having loaded in their equipment.

INT. THE FENIX UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

RB is on the pay phone talking to Julie.

RB

...Just don't panic about it. You have to call a plumber to fix it, if the landlord won't do anything about it. I know I wish I were there to help you,... I know. Well, if Karen won't help you, then you have to do it yourself. I know, I'm sorry I'm not there. I'll be home soon...

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

A typical band room scene, bin of beer, deli-tray, and suitcases spread all around. Everyone is seated around, looking tired and stoned. Todd is reading a local music rag.

TODD

Look here it is again.

He hands the magazine to Baby Steve who looks at it.

CHRISTINE

What is it?

BABY STEVE

Oh, it's that Power Plant advertisement with us in microscopic font.

CHRISTINE

That bastard! Why doesn't he give us more billing? I'll tell you why. Because he knows that we're better than his band, that's why.

Everyone goes "Yeah, right! Yeah, man"

BABY STEVE

Yeah, well I just spoke with Bo.  
He says that things are really  
looking promising with this  
record mogul bloke.

They get excited by this good news.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, he says that this guy is  
really excited to see us at  
Irving Plaza. He thinks that it  
may be our chance to break into a  
bigger market.

TODD

Wow, that's great, man. We need  
a major label with good promo-  
tion.

Everyone goes "Yeah, more promotion!"

BABY STEVE

(quietly to RB)

I don't mean to knock down your  
main man, there RB.

RB

He's not my main man, Steve.

BABY STEVE

(nasty sneer)

I'm just kidding, mate. Just  
kidding.

INT. FENIX UNDERGROUND STAGE - NIGHT

The show is in full swing. The Expatriates are having a  
good night, although it looks like Baby Steve has had a  
few too many of those free beers.

LATER

The set is over and RB steps down off the stage. A girl

in the audience is calling his name. He looks over and recognizes her.

RB

Oh, hi!

ELIZABETH

I'm Elizabeth. Don't you remember the flight from San Francisco?

RB

Of course I remember. We sat next to each other.

ELIZABETH

Why didn't you call me? I was very insulted.

RB

Sorry. Listen, do you want to come backstage and talk?

She goes over to the side of the stage, RB has to clear her through the SECURITY GUY, and she is in.

INT. BACK STAGE - NIGHT.

RB leans against a wall, and she stands close, flirting.

ELIZABETH

Remember that I was impressed that you were the bass player for The Expatriates?

RB

Well, I just couldn't believe it. I didn't know that we had reached so far, you know?

ELIZABETH

Why are you so modest? You need to be more egotistical.

RB

Nah, I'm just the way I am.

ELIZABETH

Maybe that's what makes you so special.

A beat passes, then all of a sudden, she grabs him and starts to smooch.

FADE TO:

EXT. SEATTLE - NIGHT

The Space Needle is bright, and the orange light reflects off the clouds. RB and Elizabeth are in the foreground, passionately making out.

FADE TO:

EXT. ELIZABETH'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Just an average building, but up there somewhere, RB is giving in to temptation.

FADE TO:

INT. ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

There they go. RB unbuttons her blouse, she pulls off his shirt, and they fall into the bed.

LATER

They lay post-coital. RB stares at the ceiling, thinking.

ELIZABETH

Are you still seeing that girl?

RB

Oh, no, that ended a long time ago.

ELIZABETH

Good, then I'm not making you be  
a bad boy.

There is a beat of silence while RB tries to let this  
slide.

ELIZABETH

Are you seeing anyone else?

RB

Well...

ELIZABETH

(sighs)

Oh, god, you musicians are all  
alike.

She kisses him and gives a little smirk.

RB

It doesn't bother you?

ELIZABETH

Oh, come on! I live in Seattle  
and you live in New York. Maybe  
if there wasn't a nation between  
us, I'd be concerned. I liked you  
when we met on the plane two  
years ago, and I've had my fan-  
tasies ever since. I like making  
my fantasies come true, you know?

She starts smooching him again.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

The two vans are loading up to get going. Elizabeth's  
car pulls up next to them.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CAR - DAY

She cuts the engine and turns to him and a beat passes.

ELIZABETH

I guess I shouldn't kiss you  
goodbye in front of your friends.

RB

I'm not hiding anything from  
them.

She smiles and kisses him.

ELIZABETH

I had a great time with you.

RB

Me too. I think you're really  
beautiful.

Elizabeth cocks her head curiously.

ELIZABETH

You're so sweet, do you know  
that?

RB looks out at the two vans.

RB

I guess I should go.

ELIZABETH.

Yeah. It was fun. Don't forget  
to write.

They kiss again, and RB gets out.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Elizabeth's car pulls away and RB watches her go, then  
he walks to the van. Baby Steve is standing next to the  
side door watching him with a big smile.

BABY STEVE  
(quietly)  
You dirty little shagger.

EXT. INTERSTATE 5 - DAY

The two vans continue their journey with Mt. Shasta in the background.

INT. EXPATRIATE'S VAN - DAY

Todd is driving. RB rides shotgun, watching his reflection in the glass of the window. The rest of the band is watching '2001' on the VCR. The only sound is the beeps and bleeps from the sound track. Todd turns on the radio and starts to scan for a song.

BRETT  
Hey todd, we're trying to watch the movie. Can you cut the stereo, please?

TODD  
You're killing me with that shit! What the fuck is that you're watching?

BRETT  
'2001' It's a classic, so do you mind?

TODD  
Sounds like chinese water torture. It's driving me nuts. I gotta listen to some music.

BRETT  
It'll be over soon, man, please?

TODD  
I'll keep it soft, Man. That shit is torturing me!

Todd turns the radio down a tad. Then, Brett leans up

and turns it off.

TODD

What the fuck are you doing, man?

BRETT

It'll be over soon! Stop being so selfish! We're trying to watch this god damned movie!

BABY STEVE

Guys, cut it out.

EXT. INTERSTATE 5 - DAY

They drive on their way.

T.V. SOUNDTRACK (Off Camera)

'Open the pod bay doors, please  
HAL' 'I'm sorry Dave, I'm afraid  
I can't do that!'

CUT TO:

INT.ROSELAND - NIGHT

The Merits are playing and Todd, Baby Steve and RB are watching from the balcony bar, drinking beers.

BABY STEVE

So let me ask you, mate. What made you crack? I mean, I thought you were the monogamous type.

RB

I don't know. Guess it was just the moment, you know? I was pretty drunk.

They watch for a moment.

BABY STEVE

Did you go all the way?

TODD

(pissy)

Steve, don't ask that! Leave him alone.

BABY STEVE

Oh, come on! We're all men here. Besides, RB, I must commend you on your taste. She was a looker.

RB just nods and watches the show.

TODD

Well, I guess that's it. Everyone in the Expatriates is getting some except for Baby Steve.

RB looks over. This is news to him.

RB

You mean Brett and Christine?

BABY STEVE

(warily)

Oh, they've been boinking each other since Minneapolis. They're probably back stage right now, doing it in the bathroom.

RB

Damn, I can't believe it!

BABY STEVE

Come on, what we do out here is fine, so long as it doesn't affect the band. As for the home front, what happens out here on the road stays here out on the road.

TODD

Yeah, we keep it between us.

RB

I appreciate that, dudes.

BABY STEVE

We just mind our business, gentlemen, and it'll all be okay.

They lean over the railing, drinking beers and watching the show.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The Expatriates, Mike and Johnson are hanging out drinking a few beers and watching MTV.

MTV VEEJAY (Off Camera)

Now here's the premiere video that's been the most requested clip of the week. Here's Basic Pleasure Model with their new one "Blank You."

BABY STEVE

(awestruck)

I don't believe it!

Everybody's jaws drop.

MIKE

Yeah, I heard they got signed.

BRETT

Didn't you put out their first CD?

MIKE

Yeah, their label bought the license for a small sum.

BABY STEVE

Look at that! They made her look sexy! I can't believe it.

TODD

I can't believe they opened for  
us at the Bowery Ballroom!

JOHNSON

Looks like we all gonna open for  
them, now.

They watch in awestruck silence for a minute.

BABY STEVE

(still awestruck )

She was a scrawny high school  
kid! They were blisteringly out  
of tune!

JOHNSON

Not anymore. She sure looks fine  
to me.

MIKE

She was a fine ride, I'll tell  
you that.

Everybody looks at him, and he just sits back, watching  
the video.

TODD

You hooked up with her, man?

MIKE

Someone had to do the honors.

Johnson gives a loud "ahem" and everyone looks at him.  
Mike looks sheepishly over.

CHRISTINE

Oh, Jesus...

JOHNSON

No disrespect to the women of the  
world, but she was a little  
freak.

CHRISTINE

(sarcastic)

I'm sure there's no disrespect involved.

BRETT

Well, look at her now. That freak has turned into a star.

TODD

How did they do it? We've worked so hard for so long, and they've beaten us to the top!

MIKE

They did get lucky, but it's not over for us. If we keep on working it on a grass-roots level, we're bound to make the next level out of sheer perseverance.

No one says anything more, and they sit and watch in silence.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE: THE ROAD

The cities and nights start to blend together. Sacramento, San Francisco, Santa Barbara...

They eat breakfast at Denneys, lunch at Wendy's and supper at Boston Chicken.

The shows are crowded with kids, the dressing rooms have band graffiti sprawled all across. There are girls and beers and joints.

INT. VAN - DAY

Christine and Brett, who is asleep, are sitting together in the back seat. Christine turns and looks out of the rear window.

She sees a RED SUV following behind.

She smiles and sneaks a wave.

SOMEONE in the Red SUV waves back.

FADE TO:

XLS. LOS ANGELES - DAY

A bright sunny afternoon in L.A.

EXT. THE WHISKY - DAY

The two vans are parked in front of the club.

INT. BAND ROOM - DAY

The Expatriates and The Merits are sharing a room. There is much emotional excitement, this being the farewell show between the two bands. Much bonding goes on.

MIKE

Where's Steve. Steve, may I have a moment with you?

BABY STEVE

Yes, mate. What's up?

MIKE

We have a bit of a challenge. It seems that the opening band has pull, and they are demanding that they have your spot.

BABY STEVE

(harshly)

No way.

MIKE

They are insisting. We should go have a word with the management.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Mike, Baby Steve, and the OPENING BAND LEADER stand at one side of a desk and THE STAGE MANAGER sits at the other side.

OPENING BAND LEADER

Look, we have more of a crowd.  
The Expatriates should open the  
show.

BABY STEVE

We are contracted to play our  
regular spot, and that's what we  
are going to do.

MIKE

That is true. There's the con-  
tract on the desk.

OPENING BAND LEADER

We've played here five times!  
They haven't played here at all!

STAGE MANAGER

I know, but you have to work it  
out between yourselves.

OPENING BAND LEADER

We are bringing in a lot of peo-  
ple. They're going to be really  
pissed off if they miss us. We  
also have major label contacts  
showing up.

STAGE MANAGER

I told you, work it out.

The Band Leader looks with attitude at Baby Steve, then curses and storms out of the room.

STAGE MANAGER

They do have a crowd, but I know  
that the contract is signed, so  
just work it out, okay?

MIKE

Don't worry about a thing.

CUT TO:

BACK STAGE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Baby Steve and Mike walk past the Opening Band's door,  
where the OPENING BAND watches them. There is much  
glaring, but the two just walk past.

EXT. THE WHISKY - NIGHT

There is a line of kids waiting to get into the club.  
It is a crowded L.A. night with lots of action.

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

The two bands sit and wait for the show to begin. Todd  
walks in.

TODD

Has anyone tried to talk to that  
other band? They all have such  
attitudes!

JOHNSON

It's the old one-up, otherwise  
known as Grand Standing. Happens  
all the time.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WHISKY - NIGHT

The Opening Band plays to a packed house. The crowd  
obviously knows all of their songs. It is their crowd.

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

TODD

Aren't they done yet? They've  
been playing for an hour!

BABY STEVE

What do you think, Mike?

MIKE

They got a pretty good crowd down  
there, but I'm sure everything  
will be all right.

INT. THE WHISKY - NIGHT

The band finishes and the crowd goes wild.

OPENING BAND LEADER

(over the mic)

We'd like to play more songs, but  
we're not allowed to. Sorry.

They exit the stage with the crowd cheering for more.

INT. BAND ROOM.

The Stage Manager pokes his head in.

STAGE MANAGER

Expatriates are up.

Everyone starts to get into gear.

INT. THE WHISKY - NIGHT

The Expatriates are waiting off to the side on the  
stairs down to the stage. Everybody looks nervous. The  
Stage Manager motions for them to take the stage.

When they do, there are scattered "boos" and shouts from  
the audience.

## ANNOUNCER

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome, from New York, The Expatriates.

They launch into 'The Name' and the audience doesn't dance. They just stand there with mean expressions on their faces. Some people heckle them.

When the song ends, there is light applause, but then the shouts start. "Fuck You!"; "Get off the Stage!" Baby Steve gets up to the mic.

## BABY STEVE

We came all this way, we're not stopping now. This next one is called 'One New Message'.

Todd counts it in and they begin to play the song, Baby Steve's voice is wearing down. The crowd is into being mean. They just watch with sour expressions. Suddenly a bottle flies through the air and hits Baby Steve on the head. It doesn't break, just bounces off. Baby Steve stumbles, but keeps singing. The BOUNCERS rush into the crowd and all hell breaks loose. There is a massive fight in the crowd and The Expatriates don't know what to do. Baby Steve just keeps on singing, but the show is a disaster.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Expatriates, battered and haggard, slump back toward their dressing room. When Baby Steve passes the Opening Band's dressing room, he sees them in there, glaring out at them.

## BABY STEVE

(under his breath)

Fucking wankers.

The Band Leader gets in his face.

OPENING BAND LEADER

What did you say?

BABY STEVE

(volcano eruption)

I said, 'Fucking shit faced wank  
tossing bitch. Kiss my bloody  
ass-hole!'

Suddenly the Opening Band charges, and The Expatriates, being basically peacenicks, try to act tough, but they're not very good at it.

The Merits rush out of their dressing room, and then it's two bands against one. Johnson and Scott are right up front. There is much shouting.

OPENING BAND LEADER

You think you can come here and  
dis us on our turf? This is the  
West Coast!

BABY STEVE

Doesn't look like gangland to me.  
You're just a skinny white shit-  
head. I don't give a fuck what  
coast it is.

The Opening Band Leader pushes Baby Steve's chest, but in fact, Baby Steve is much larger, and doesn't budge. Baby Steve moves to take a swing, but Mike intervenes.

MIKE

(shouting)

If we fight, we get kicked out  
and no one gets paid.

There is a pause, when each side thinks about it. The Bouncers rush up the stairs to join the Stage Manager, who watches.

## OPENING BAND LEADER

Yo, we got friends, man. We own  
this town.

Suddenly, The Merits start to laugh. Scott and Johnson on the front line, double over in hysterics. The Expatriates start to laugh as well. Baby Steve joins in. One by one, they go back to the dressing room, laughing so hard it hurts. The Opening Band leader is left sputtering.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Everyone shakes hands and bids their farewells, then The Merits pile into their vehicle and they pull out of the lot.

BABY STEVE

Well, it's up to us, now. Time  
to head east. Let's go.

They get into their van and move out.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

They ride in the head. Baby Steve has his shirt off, showing his big round belly.

TODD

So, do we know where we're going?  
Before, all we had to do was follow  
The Merits.

BABY STEVE

Bo faxed me our itinerary to the  
hotel. It's in that folder.

Todd pulls it out and looks at it.

TODD

Wow, this looks weird. The Merits had computer print-outs. This looks kind of hand-made.

CHRISTINE

Are those drawings of happy faces?

Baby Steve looks at the paper work.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, well Bo has his style of going things. All the info is there. We have to arrive tonight at nine, which we'll just make. It's a long drive. Don't worry, everything will be fine.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY - NIGHT

There is an out-door festival. A FLIMSY SOUND SYSTEM is set up in a courtyard on the campus. There are kids wandering about, but it's not all that crowded.

EXT. LOAD IN SPOT - NIGHT

The van pulls up and the band falls out, stiff after a long ride. A COLLEGE KID walks up to them.

COLLEGE KID

(sourly)

Who's like in charge?

BABY STEVE

Hi, I'm Baby Steve. It was close, but we made it in time.

COLLEGE KID

What are you talking about? You're late!

BABY STEVE

It's eight PM! We have an hour...

COLLEGE KID

No, it's nine, and like you have to play now!

Baby Steve shows him his watch, but the College Kid points to a big clock above the court yard, which says NINE.

COLLEGE KID

I guess you forgot to change your watch. We're like an hour ahead of Cali. You have to play now, or it's like all off!

The band looks from one to the other for a second, then they get into gear, throwing their stuff out of the van, rushing to set up, with the College Kid urging them on.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

They are on the stage, ready. The big clock reads nine twenty five. It is very hectic. Todd's drums teeter on the portable stage, RB's amp is acting up. There is lots of feed back from the system.

The crowd is light, but there are some fans cheering.

COLLEGE KID

Are you like ready yet? We have to start now!

BABY STEVE

(annoyed)

Yeah, we're 'like' ready now.

The College Kid nods to the sound man, then he gets on the stage and takes Baby Steve's mic.

COLLEGE KID.

(over the system)

Okay, well, they're late, but  
like here they are finally.  
Welcome to ASU's Fall Fest and  
I'm like here to welcome The  
Expatriates.

The College Kid walks off stage and some people in the crowd cheer.

BABY STEVE

(over the mic)

Yes, well sorry we forgot to  
change our time pieces, but bet-  
ter late than never, right?  
(cheers) Okay, so welcome to the  
show and here we go!

Todd, with much showmanship clicks four beats. The band raises to hit the down beat, and when they hit, there is a LOUD POP and then a DEAFENING BUZZ which doesn't stop. The band tries to play, but no one has any signal. Baby Steve cups his ears and squints in pain. The sound man shrugs with exasperation. The hum keeps going, and people run from the audience to escape the sound. The College Kid shakes his head and turns away.

CUT TO:

INT. COLLEGE OFFICE - NIGHT

The Whole Band stands at one end of a desk, and the College Kid sits importantly at the other.

COLLEGE KID

I'm not going to pay you.

There is a shocked silence.

BABY STEVE

What are you talking about? Of course you're going to pay us.

COLLEGE KID

No, I'm not. You were very un-professional, and I won't stand for it.

BABY STEVE

(getting riled up)

What are you talking about? We just drove thirteen fucking hours to get here...

COLLEGE KID

Don't use that kind of language with me. Like, I have the check, you know? I am not satisfied with your performance, if you could call it that.

The Whole Band starts to react.

BABY STEVE

(almost yelling)

Your P.A. was shit! We could have played if it fucking worked!

COLLEGE KID

Well, if you were here in time, you could have like done a sound check, and we could have found the problem. No, I'm not going to pay you.

BABY STEVE

(yelling)

Look, you cock sucking piece of shit, give me that fucking money! You can't fucking do this!

COLLEGE KID

Can't you like not curse and all? I'm not going to pay you, and that's final!

BABY STEVE

I'm gonna go to your house and  
beat the living shit out of you,  
you little faggot cunt!

Christine tries to calm him down.

COLLEGE KID

(a little scared)

Don't like threaten me, or I'll  
like call Campus Security!

BABY STEVE

And I'll 'like' ram a switchblade  
up your 'like' little asshole,  
you 'like' 'fucking goddam little  
bitch...

Christine, Brett, Todd and RB have to pull Baby Steve  
away as he kicks and swings in the air.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLORADO INTERSTATE - DAY

The lone van drives along the mountains.

INT. VAN - DAY

Everyone sits silently. There is nothing on the CD, or  
the VCR. Baby Steve has his arms folded with a sour  
expression on his face. RB is driving, looking exhaust-  
ed.

A sound fades in, like that of an old airplane.  
Everyone notices it, but no one says anything as the  
sound gets louder. Finally, it's apparent that some-  
thing is wrong.

BABY STEVE

Pull over, RB.

EXT. COLORADO ROADSIDE - DAY

The van pulls into the emergency lane and stops.

Everyone gets out as cars and trucks whoosh past.

EXT. BACK OF THE TRAILER - DAY

The trailer tire is blown.

RB

Looks like we have to use the  
spare. Where is it?

BRETT

Underneath all that equipment.

They stand around and sigh.

LATER

The equipment is all piled on the ground by the trailer,  
and RB pulls the spare out.

RB

This thing is flat.

BRETT

What about the van spare?

RB

It won't fit. It's a different  
size.

CHRISTINE

(bitchy)

What, there's no spare for the  
trailer?

There is a pause while the realization sinks in.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLORADO INTERSTATE - DAY

The van without the trailer drives past a sign that

reads "Denver - 160 miles."

INT. VAN - DAY

They are piled in with the equipment. There is no room. Everything is packed in dangerously tight.

TODD

So, the trailer is locked to that tree. We just fix the spare and go back tomorrow. It's kind of on the way.

CHRISTINE

(real bitchy)

'Kind of.' Listen, I have to pee.

No one says anything. Baby Steve sits, as before, arms crossed and angry-looking. No one is having much fun.

CUT TO:

EXT. DENVER, BLUEBIRD THEATRE - NIGHT

There are people milling about the front entrance. The marquee reads the band's name in big letters.

INT. BLUEBIRD THEATRE - NIGHT

It is a good night. The Expatriates are on stage playing off their road tension. Baby Steve has had a lot to drink, and he is a little sloppy, and his vocals are slurred, but the audience doesn't seem to care. In fact, they feed off of his flailing arms and rolling eyes.

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

It is a small band room, and there are SOME FANS milling about, smoking pot and drinking the free beer. Todd, Brett and Christine are sitting in chairs, exhausted. RB talks to a couple of fans.

Baby Steve walks into the room with a SHAWNIE, a tall

blonde girl in one arm and a bottle of Tequila in the other. Both are giggling and drunk.

BABY STEVE

(wasted)

Hello, everybody! Look who I have here! May I introduce you to Shawnie. Say hello, Shawnie.

SHAWNIE

(drunken western accent)

Hi, y'all!

Everyone says 'Hi.' Baby Steve goes up to RB.

BABY STEVE

Hey, RB. I'm gonna go out for a couple of drinks with my girl here. Could you do us a favor and get paid from the club?

RB

Sure, man, no problem.

BABY STEVE

I appreciate that, RB. I'll keep in touch about tomorrow.

Baby Steve and Shawnie stumble loudly out of the dressing room.

FAN NUMBER 1

Oh, he's in for a night. She'll show him a wild old time.

RB

You know her?

FAN NUMBER 2

Shawnie? Yeah, she's a regular. She's cool, though. Don't worry.

FAN NUMBER 1  
He'd better wear something,  
though, if you catch my meaning.

The Fans have a laugh between them, and RB nods and sips his beer.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

They sit waiting for Baby Steve. It is getting late, and everybody is nervous. Todd comes from the desk and stands in front of them, obviously pissed off.

TODD  
He just called. He's meeting us  
in St. Louis!

CHRISTINE  
Oh, that's convenient.

They get up from their chairs and head for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

RB is jacking up the trailer, and Todd is rolling the tire over.

TODD  
I tell you, RB, that was a pretty  
fucked up move for Steve to lame  
out on this.

RB  
(pumping the jack)  
I can't say that I blame him.

TODD  
I can! Look at us! We're sweat-  
ing to death out here!

RB

Yeah, sucks.

They pull the tire up on the rim.

TODD

I mean, what are we, his fucking slaves? I'm not his slave, I can tell you that!

RB

Nah. I kind of wish I was him right now.

TODD

Yeah, I'd rather be hanging out with some girl rather than changing a tire. Shit, man.

CUT TO:

XLS. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The van and trailer head east through the plains.

INT. VAN - DAY

They are grumpy sitting there. Brett is driving, Christine is shotgun, Todd and RB are in the back.

TODD

And another thing! He's been drunk every single night! I think we've been suffering from that.

Everyone goes "Uh huh", as if this conversation has been going on for hours. Todd leans forward, still fuming.

TODD

Don't you think? He's been piss drunk every night!

RB

So have I.

TODD

Look, RB. Why are you sticking up for him? He completely dissed us this morning! Fucking guy...

CHRISTINE

I think we could be doing better, but it goes farther than just this morning. Ever since we left The Merits, our shows have been sucking!

BRETT

How do you expect to have a good show when the only promotion is a photocopied poster of a Power Plant advertisement.

CHRISTINE

That's right! We all know we need more promotion!

TODD

That's another thing too! That fucking label doesn't do shit for us! Mike is just out for himself!

BRETT

It isn't worth it for him to invest in us. It's definitely in his best interest if his band does better than ours.

Everyone agrees.

TODD

Yeah, well maybe that friend of Bo's will have something for us, you know? That's gonna be a big show.

RB

Last I heard, the ads are all over the Voice. Big headline spot, color logo. It should be a great show for us.

BRETT

I don't even know who he is.

TODD

And don't get me wrong. I love Baby Steve. I've been playing with this band for years. But lately he's been in his own world! Right? All he cares about is himself. The curse of the lead singer!

RB

Don't forget he's the founding member of this band.

TODD

I know! Like I said, I love the guy. But it's obvious he doesn't care about us. It's obvious!

BRETT

He hasn't been singing very well lately, either.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, and he almost hit me the other night. Did you see that?

TODD

Yeah, he's old, fat, can't sing and can't dance. What is that? That's not a rock star, I can tell you that!

BRETT

Don't look now, but speak of the devil!

He points and everyone looks out the window.

POV. SIDE WINDOW OF THE VAN - DAY

Baby Steve is riding with Shawnie in a red Porsche convertible, and in the back seat are TWO OTHER FRIENDS. Baby Steve is waving and smiling. He picks up a bottle of Tequila and wags it at them.

INT. VAN - DAY

They all watch as the car speeds by.

CHRISTINE

He doesn't sleep with them, he says.

TODD

That's what he says.

RB

Yeah, that's the life.

TODD

Look, why do you stick up for that guy? Look at that! I hate him!

BRETT

You just wish you were in that car.

TODD

Damn right! But what good does that do us right now? Nothing at all!

EXT. INTERSTATE - DAY

The red Porsche is a speck on the horizon as the van heads on it's way.

Behind the van, the Red SUV follows at a safe distance.

CLOSE-UP Christine glances back at it, sees it and smiles to herself.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST LOUIS, MISSISSIPPI NIGHTS CLUB - NIGHT

The Arch is bright in the background and the van is parked in the lot by the club.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

There is a layer of crowd right by the stage, but the rest of the room is sparsely populated.

The band is onstage playing. They have lost some of their original energy. Todd isn't doing his faces like he usually does, rather he wears a sour glare.

Baby Steve is absolutely wasted. He's leaning on the mic stand, twirling himself around deliriously, and is messing up the words. Shawnie and The Two Friends are at the side of the stage, clapping and laughing. The crowd is enjoying it, but not like they should.

Baby Steve starts to dance. He takes the mic out of the clip and starts to twirl it Roger Daltry style. It goes in wild arcs. It hits RB in the mouth, who stumbles back. The mic hits the floor with a loud 'Pop'. Baby Steve doesn't realize what he has done, picks up the mic and keeps on singing. There is blood on RB's lip, but he keeps playing.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

They are driving back to the Motel. St. Louis and the arch are fading into the background.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Baby Steve is riding shotgun, and RB drives.

BABY STEVE

(drunk)

RB, mate, I am so sorry for hitting you. I didn't even know I hit you. Didn't know at all, had no... no clue or recollection whatsoever.

RB

It was an accident, man.

BABY STEVE

No, I must not trounce upon my band members. I must behave like... like the man!

TODD

Yeah, well you trounced on all of us back in Denver.

BABY STEVE

How? How did I trounce upon you back in Denver?

TODD

You trounced on us by not helping with the trailer!

BABY STEVE

You're just jealous that I was with the most beautiful girl in the world. She is, you know. The most beautiful girl in the world.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, well we're just saying that we could have used your help, that's all.

BABY STEVE

What, to tell you how to mount the tire? You see,... you see it just had to happen the way it did. I'm allowed a little leeway in the process of leading this band. I guess I deserve a ticket for that one. I'm sorry that I couldn't be there to help. I am guilty, Your Honors.

BRETT

I think what we're saying, Steve, is that it was a pain for us to get the tire. We could have used a little moral support.

BABY STEVE

Yes, I'm sorry I didn't help out. Please know how sorry I am.

TODD

You don't seem too sorry to me.

BABY STEVE

That's because you're jealous! I was hanging with a tall, blonde, nineteen year-old girl who was trim, fresh, and best of all, she loved the Big Black Brit from Brixton. She wanted it all, but as we all know, I cannot! So, she did a little dance for me.

CHRISTINE

Oh, Jesus...

BABY STEVE

Yes, and I'm sorry if you disapprove so much, Christine, but sometimes I just want to hang out, you know?

CHRISTINE

Yeah, I know what you mean,  
Steve.

BABY STEVE

Good! Now, that's all I want to  
hear about it for now. Where is  
the fucking hotel? I'm bloody  
tired!

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The van makes it's way through the boring countryside.

INT. VAN - DAY

They all sit in irritated silence.

CHRISTINE (Off Camera)

I have to pee.

Todd holds his hand out to Baby Steve.

BABY STEVE

No way.

TODD

(angry)

It's been less than two hours, so  
pay up.

BABY STEVE

(angrier)

It has not been less than two  
hours, it's been an hour plus two  
minutes.

TODD

(almost screaming)

That's total bullshit! Look at  
the fucking clock!

They begin screaming at each other, and the others start screaming at them to shut up. It all degenerates into total chaos.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE: THE ROAD

This is the dark side of the road.

The gigs go on and on. Indianapolis; Iowa City; Columbia Missouri; College towns and out-door fests and punk rock shit holes. The Expatriates look exhausted.

They eat at Country Kitchen and Taco Bell Express. The food looks terrible and they eat it joylessly.

All the while, the Red SUV is not far behind.

CUT TO:

INT. REST STOP MAGAZINE STAND

Todd holds up an issue of Rolling Stone, with 'Basic Pleasure Model' on the cover. Everyone gathers around, awestruck and jealous.

FADE TO:

XLS. NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

The van drives past the eerie above-ground cemeteries.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Everyone is excited about playing New Orleans, and they sit watching the city go by.

CHRISTINE

What is this place called again?

BABY STEVE

I dunno. Some kind of youth center.

TODD

A youth center? What kind of New Orleans gig is that?

BABY STEVE

It's supposed to be really close to the French Quarter. Maybe we can find a club afterwards.

RB

I think we're getting close.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

The van pulls up to a run-down looking house.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

RB reads the directions, then squints at the door.

BABY STEVE

This has to be it.

TODD

Looks like a crack house.

RB gets out and walks around to the door, where there are some some SCRUFFY-LOOKING KIDS hanging out. Then, he turns toward the van and gives a thumbs-up.

TODD

This is it? Oh my god...

INT. NEW ORLEANS YOUTH CENTER - NIGHT

It is a dilapidated place, with floorboards missing, and frames for walls and weird art all over.

They start to set up the equipment. Scott appears out of nowhere. There are 'Hello's all around.

SCOTT

Yeah, The Merits have some time off, and I have nowhere to stay in New York, so I came down here to hang out. Kind of drifting. You guys need a merch man, or something?

BABY STEVE

We have room in the van, but I don't know about Hotel beds.

SCOTT

No problem, I have a sleeping bag.

CUT TO:

LATER, THE GIG

The band plays on the floor with a very elementary sound system. Most of the audience is comprised of kids, although there is an assortment of SQUATTERS and HIPPIES wandering around. The band sounds good this night.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - NIGHT

After the show, the band hangs out with a Hippie and a Squatter. They all sit around the room smoking pot.

HIPPIE

(southern accent)

Y'all spending some time here in N'Awlens?

BABY STEVE

Oh, of course we would if we could, but we only have tonight.

HIPPIE

Well, there's plenty goin' on over in the French Quarter. Watch your wallets, an' don't go strayin' off in the wrong direction.

The door opens and Brett sticks his head in, looking concerned.

BRETT

Has anyone seen Christine? I  
can't find her anywhere

They shake their heads. Brett glances nervously around,  
then pulls the door closed.

SQUATTER

What, you want somethin' else to  
do? I heard of a punk show. Hey  
Linda!

LINDA comes out of another room, a tall arty-looking  
girl with red and blue streaked hair.

LINDA

What?

SQUATTER

Isn't there some kind of show  
happening?

LINDA

I hear the U.K. Subs are playin'  
across town.

BABY STEVE

Oh my god, I haven't seen them in  
a fuck of a long time!

SQUATTER

Y'all seen 'em over in England?

BABY STEVE

Saw them with The Business just  
before I came to the States.  
That would be good laugh to see  
them! Do you all want to come?

SQUATTER

Look, friend, if you want to say  
it properly, it's 'y'all'. Go  
on, try it.

BABY STEVE

(seriously)

'You all.'

Everyone cracks up.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PUNK CLUB - NIGHT

There are mohawks and flight jackets everywhere. The  
Hippies and Squatters escort The Expatriates to the bar.  
Linda and RB walk together, talking excitedly.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

Brett waits nervously by the side of the van. He sighs,  
looks up and down the street, then climbs into the dri-  
ver's seat and starts the engine.

CUT TO:

INT. PUNK CLUB - NIGHT

It is completely crowded. The band plays loudly on the  
stage, a bigger place than what The Expatriates just  
played. RB and Linda are hanging out together.

RB

Do you live in that house?

LINDA

Yeah. I've been there for about  
a year.

RB

Why?

LINDA

What, you don't like it?

RB

It's kind of strange.

LINDA

Strange like what? Like you?

RB laughs and looks down, then looks into her eyes flirtatiously.

Suddenly there's a commotion. The place is being raided. There are cops everywhere, and it looks like the show is being broken up.

RB and Linda stand back, but Baby Steve and Scott are grabbed and taken outside. All hell is breaking loose. RB, seeing his friend in trouble, leaps into action, and Linda follows.

LINDA

Fucking Pigs! Fuck you, Pigs!

A cop grabs her, holds her hands behind her back and rushes her to the door. RB tries to do something about it, but he too is grabbed.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The van pulls slowly in. The lot is empty except for a tractor trailer and the Red SUV, which is parked against the pool.

The Van starts to park right in front of it, nose to nose.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Brett anxiously spins the steering wheel.

POV. THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

The headlights shine into the Red SUV's windshield. There is a couple making out in the front seat. They break the kiss and squint into the light shining in.

It is Christine and her EX-BOYFRIEND.

INT. VAN

Brett's jaw drops. He stares, his expression changing from nervousness to anger.

CUT TO:

EXT. PUNK CLUB - NIGHT

Everyone is being loaded onto Police Trucks. RB and Linda are thrown into the back of one of them.

They sit together with the OTHERS IN THE VAN.

RB

What is going on?

LINDA

Just typical cop behavior.

RB

Definitely something we don't have anything to do with in New York.

RB sees a cop outside the vehicle.

RB

Excuse me, officer. Why am I being detained?

The Cop just looks at him blankly.

RB

We're just patrons. We paid to get in! I don't know what this is all about.

COP

Are you over eighteen?

RB

I'm way past that!

COP

What about her?

RB

She's my fiance. We were just watching the band!

The cop looks at them for a moment, then waves them out of the van. Once out, he un-cuffs them.

COP

You can go. You should tell your wife to watch her language, hear?

RB and Linda make their way to the sidewalk.

LINDA

You kiss ass very well.

RB

There wasn't any reason for us to be in there. We paid money to for this show.

LINDA

You paid, remember? I'm broke!

She takes his arm and snuggles into it as they walk through the crowd.

They meet up with Baby Steve and the rest of the crew. Baby Steve shakes RB's hand

BABY STEVE

(drunk)

Did 'you all' get cuffed?

RB

Yeah. What the hell is going on?

SCOTT

Those cops are real fuckers. I think they were looking for drugs.

They make their way out of the commotion. RB notices that Linda is still nuzzling his arm. She looks at him with a flirtatious expression.

LINDA

Fiance, huh?

RB

It worked, didn't it?

CUT TO:

INT. LINDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

RB and Linda are on the bed making out. RB suddenly pulls away.

RB

I can't really go all the way. I guess I have a girlfriend.

She looks at him with a wry smile.

LINDA

Feeling too guilty, huh?

RB

It's just how it is. I hope you don't mind.

LINDA

It's okay. I don't want to do it either.

She takes off her shirt exposing her beautiful body, and RB turns white, breathless. Then, she turns away from

him and snuggles to sleep. RB spoons in with her. His eyes are wide open, and then he smiles to himself. Very happy.

CUT TO:

XLS. NEW ORLEANS - MORNING

The sun rises over the big easy.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - MORNING

A cab pulls into the parking lot and stops by The Expatriate's van.

RB gets out and starts to walk to his room, but then he notices something and stops.

Brett and Christine are having a big loud fight in the parking lot. They are literally screaming at each other, hysterical and irrational. The sound echoes around the parking lot.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

RB enters, sees Todd snoring away, sits at the table next to the window and pulls out a cigarette, listening to the sound of the fight from outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

The van has stopped for gas. Everyone is getting out to stretch.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Baby Steve is taking a piss and RB walks up to a urinal.

BABY STEVE

Did you hear the row this morning?

RB

What, Brett and Christine?

BABY STEVE

Bloody mess. See how they were in the van? Like sworn enemies.

RB

Do you know what happened?

BABY STEVE

Oh, you remember that cop that she was seeing, like, two years ago? You know, the weird fat guy?

RB

Oh, yeah! I remember him.

BABY STEVE

I ran into him at the Motel last night. He was 'like' sitting in his Sports Utility Vehicle, and guess who was in the passenger seat looking slightly undone?

RB

Oh, shit.

RB goes to wash his hands.

BABY STEVE

'You all' have a ball last night?

RB

Didn't have sex.

BABY STEVE

Did she at least dance for you?

RB doesn't answer. He just stares into the mirror while Baby Steve chuckles, flushes and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - DAY

Rain splashes against the window that RB looks out of. He's staring and thinking.

Christine and Brett are having it out.

CHRISTINE (Off-Camera)

Just shut up, okay? Just shut up!

The rest is tense whispering. RB looks around. Everyone in the van is on the edge.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

It's raining, and RB huddles inside the phone booth, talking.

RB

I miss you so much! Yes, I'm lonely. What? I don't mean to sound distant! Sorry, there's nothing going on. It's just been tense. The shows have been okay, but I'm really tired. There's only a week left. I'll be home soon...

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - NIGHT

They're pulling up to tonight's club. Baby Steve has the map, reading the directions.

BABY STEVE

I wonder if there'll be anyone there tonight. It's fucking Sunday fucking night. Fuck!

TODD

I bet it'll be good. Look, there it is, right up there.

SCOTT

The Merits played here before, and it rocked!

BABY STEVE

Let's hope it rocks for us.

They look up, see the sign. Todd goes "Ah...Ah..." in expectation, building up the suspense. Everyone joins in, as they round the bend into the parking lot, they see two cars and that's all.

EVERYONE

Awww...

CUT TO:

INT. LIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

They sit at a table, waiting, Brett and Christine at opposite ends. There's no one else there. Music plays on the sound system. Everyone looks depressed.

Baby Steve walks up to the table.

BABY STEVE

Well, to quote the saying, I have some good news, and some bad news. Which would 'you all' like to hear first?

No one says anything.

BABY STEVE

Okay, here's the good news. The show at Irving Plaza is getting good press in New York. We have a good blurb in the Voice about us being the heroes of the scene, and Bo says that the his friend is really anxious to see us. He wants to get us showcases for the majors, and if he really likes us, he wants to put us into the studio to record a demo. Isn't that great?

CHRISTINE

(really bitchy)

Okay, what's the bad news?

BABY STEVE

(sighing)

Bo fucked up, and tomorrow's show is at noon. We have to drive away tonight.

Everyone is pissed, they slap the table in anger, curse and sigh. This sucks!

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

The band plays to an almost empty room. Scott hangs out drinking at the merch table. A COUPLE OF SKATE KIDS hang out at the front of the stage, doing tricks with their boards on the empty floor.

Baby Steve is drunk, and no one is playing with much enthusiasm. RB stares into space, thinking as he plays. Not a good night.

FADE TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

It's raining like cats and dogs, and the windshield wipers are going full speed. The road is a cloud of rain and spray, with trucks going ninety miles an hour.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Todd is driving, and RB is awake riding shotgun. Everyone else is asleep.

TODD

So what are you going to do when we get home?

RB

(tiredly)

Oh, I don't know, get some part time work, or something. Maybe just stay home and watch TV.

TODD

You and your girl are getting pretty serious, right?

RB

Yeah, I guess we are, yeah.

TODD

(being nosy)

You gonna tell her about messing around?

RB lets this one slide. He doesn't want to talk about it.

TODD

I would. If I had a girlfriend, I'd tell her about it.

RB

Why?

TODD

Because it's the right thing to do. But that's just me.

Baby Steve leans forward, having overheard.

BABY STEVE

Allow me to be the bad angel on your shoulder. Remember the three rules of show business. "Deny, deny, and deny", although don't listen to me. It's all your choice.

RB watches the rain on the windshield.

LATER

It's still pouring. RB looks over and sees that Todd has fallen asleep at the wheel. RB takes the wheel and nudges Todd's shoulder.

Todd starts awake.

TODD

(terrified)

Shit!

Todd slams on the brakes and the van goes into a skid in the rain. People wake up startled. The van is out of control.

EXT. RAINY HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The van is starting to go into a 360 degree spin.

INT. VAN

Todd is furiously trying to control the van.

Things are flying around in the back. Everyone is getting tossed around.

EXT RAINY HIGHWAY

The van veers close to a truck. The trailer begins to jackknife.

RB'S POV THROUGH THE VAN WINDSHIELD.

The van hits the side of the truck.

INT. VAN

RB goes into the windshield.

In slow motion he bounces back, knocked silly. A spider's web has cracked into the windshield.

Todd wrestles with the steering wheel.

EXT. RAINY HIGHWAY

The van skids out of control into the guard rail.

CUT TO:

BLACK

A pause, no sound.

BABY STEVE (Voice-Over)  
RB... RB? RB, you there?

FADE IN:

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Everything has stopped. RB is in the shotgun seat, his head is covered with blood. He opens his eyes.

BABY STEVE  
Ah, there he is! RB, just lay still.

Red and blue flashing lights start to get brighter.

CHRISTINE

He's okay! Oh my God...

Baby Steve leans in close.

BABY STEVE

Don't worry, RB. You hit the windshield, but I think you're okay. Just sit still...

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Baby Steve is on a pay phone talking, looking at an organizer that he holds in his hand.

BABY STEVE

Yeah, yeah, okay, man. I appreciate it. We should be able to make up the bread, pay you back. Okay, I'll keep you informed. Bye.

He hangs up.

The rest of them are sitting in a waiting room. Baby Steve walks up to them. RB is sitting with them, all bandaged up.

BABY STEVE

Well, Mike Plant said that we can use his Amex card to rent a van while ours gets fixed. We can do the rest of the tour...

He looks at RB

BABY STEVE

Except you, right RB?

RB

The doctor said that I should go home, but I don't want to leave the tour, man.

BABY STEVE

We can have Scott take over for you, right Scott?

SCOTT

Anything you need, man.

Baby Steve sighs heavily.

RB

Sorry, man.

Baby Steve pats him on the shoulder.

BABY STEVE

I'm glad you're okay, man.  
That's the important thing.

FADE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

It's cloudy, and a Greyhound bus travels down the road.

INT. BUS - DAY

RB looks out of the rainy window, thinking.

His head is bandaged up.

FADE TO

INT. SOME CLUB STAGE - NIGHT

The Expatriates are mid-show between songs. Baby Steve is leaning on the mic stand, BLIND-DRUNK, and he smiles with a psycho-drunk leer into the audience.

Behind him, Brett and Christine are having a vicious

spat; Scott on bass is chugging from a beer bottle; and Todd is resting his elbows on his snare drum, looking forlornly into space.

BABY STEVE

(over the mic)

Nice of 'you all' to come out tonight. We have Scott on bass. Our regular bassman got shot in the head in New Orleans, so he's not with us anymore...

Behind him, Christine and Brett flare.

CHRISTINE

Fuck you!

She throws a bottle of beer at Brett. The bottle misses and lands on Todd's drums. Todd is startled awake and jumps away from the drum set. Scott sees this and cracks up.

Baby Steve just smiles, sways and clings to the mic stand.

FADE TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY

The Bus makes it's way along the bad New York traffic.

FADE TO:

EXT. JULIE'S HOUSE - DAY

RB is at the door, and she opens it, comes out and wraps her arms around him, welcoming him home.

FADE TO:

INT. JULIE'S BEDROOM -NIGHT

They lay awake talking.

CUT TO:

JULIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

It is morning, and RB's eyes are open. So are hers. There is tension.

Julie starts to cry. RB looks over, holds her, but she's really balling.

RB

What's wrong?

JULIE

(sniffling)

I have to tell you something...

There is a pause, as if RB knows what's coming.

JULIE

Something happened while you were gone. I'm really really sorry.

She cries some more.

RB

What do you mean, 'Something happened?'

JULIE

(sobbing)

I'm sorry, I don't want to ever hurt you...

She looks up at him, wet and red face, lots of tears.

RB

Who?

JULIE

A guy I've known, he used to have a girlfriend,... I mean, I'm so sorry, I must have been drunk or something. I just... missed you so much, and I went to see that band, you know... Basic Pleasure Model, with the girl singer?... I went to Roseland with Karen, and he was there... We were dancing and drinking... I didn't mean for it to go the way it did.

RB

So you slept with him that night.

There is a pause.

JULIE

There was one other night, too, but...

RB leans his head against the bed board, closes his eyes and lets out a long slow breath.

CUT TO:

EXT. IRVING PLAZA - NIGHT

It's a happening night in Manhattan, lots of people hanging out outside the club.

INT. BAND ROOM - NIGHT

The Expatriates are there, sitting about the room. They look beaten to shit. RB's bandages are off, and he sits staring into space. Todd and Baby Steve sit slumped in chairs. Brett and Christine are at opposite ends of the room.

Bo Alexander comes storming in.

BO

Damn, have you seen it out there!  
It's gonna be a great night!

CHRISTINE

(darkly)

Yeah, sure.

BO

Come on, people! Now I know that  
you all are tired, but I'm  
glad, and I think that all you  
should be too, that RB could make  
it tonight, lets have a round of  
applause...

Bo starts to clap, Baby Steve and Todd chime in weakly.  
There are no smiles.

BO

Okay, so I see I gotta talk you  
all up into playing. My man is  
out there, and he wants to see  
your energy, your passion, you  
love for this music. He wants to  
see something that he can work  
with, dig? After all this time,  
you can't lame out tonight! You  
gotta be great!

BABY STEVE

(tiredly)

Oh, don't worry about a thing,  
Bo. Once we hit that stage...

He makes a 'boom' sound, then smiles at Bo.

BO

That's not good enough. Come on,  
we have to do a chant I know. I  
goes like this..'Nam Yo Ho, Reng  
Gay Kyo' I don't think I'm pro-  
nouncing it right. Let's go,  
come on 'Nam Yo Ho..."

Little by little, they join in, although it's ridiculous, and they can't help but crack a smile.

CUT TO:

THE STAGE

They are all in position, still looking haggard.

ANNOUNCER (Off-Camera)  
Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome home from their National Tour, The Expatriates.

The curtain goes up and Todd clicks in The Name. Baby Steve starts singing as if on auto pilot.

Suddenly it's apparent that it is a great show. They look up and see that it's packed, and everyone is screaming and dancing. Baby Steve starts to give it a little more.

When the song ends, the crowd erupts in cheers. The band looks startled. Baby Steve turns back to the Band and smiles.

BABY STEVE  
(off-mic, to the band)  
Welcome home, mates!

Baby Steve turns back to the crowd.

BABY STEVE  
(on-mic)  
Thank you. We've been to hell and back, but here we are. This next song is called "One New Message."

The crowd goes wild, and Todd clicks it in.

RB looks over and sees Julie in the crowd. She is watching him, arms folded, unsmiling.

AT THE BAR

Bo walks up to his FRIEND, who is sitting at the bar having a SCOTCH ON THE ROCKS. The Expatriates' music is loud. Bo and the Friend have a word together.

ON THE STAGE

Baby Steve runs around the stage like a mad man, and everyone rocks: the band we know and love.

RB looks for Julie, but she is gone.

AT THE BAR

BO

So that's their story. I think they can do great things!

FRIEND

Oh, come on, man. My man up front is a brother, but ain't either singin', or rappin'. And they're all a little past their prime.

BO

But it's a fresh sound! Look at the crowd!

FRIEND

Yeah, they're a tight band, and they got a good show going on, but look, Bo. They ain't singing harmonies, and they're not dancing steps. Tell them to work up some moves, and write some commercial shit we can work with. Until then, keep in touch.

Then the Friend gets up. They shake hands, and the Friend leaves. Bo remains, looks like he's just had a

rough meeting, blows out air from his mouth, wipes his forehead and watches the band.

CUT TO:

BAND ROOM

Bang! The door opens and they come rushing in, sweaty and excited. They find chairs around the room and flop down.

RB puts his bass down and gets up to leave.

Bo enters loudly.

BO

Awwwriiight! Damn, you killed 'em. Absolutely killed 'em.

He shakes hands all around. RB tries to get past, but Bo stops him.

BO

No wait, I have to tell you something.

TODD

Yeah, how did your friend like it?

BRETT

Yeah, did he, you know, say anything?

BO

Yes, he said a lot of things. I think you should be glad that he was here to see this show! It was a monstrous show!

CHRISTINE

What did he say?

BO

He said you guys were a great band, very positive show. Very energetic. He liked it a lot.

BABY STEVE

He liked it?

BO

Yeah! I told you, he liked it.

A pause while everyone waits for more.

TODD

Are we going to work with him?

BRETT

Actually, will he work with us?

BO

That's not how show business works! No decisions are made right away like this! He had some very good advice for us, and he wants to see the band again. That's really positive! I think you should all be very proud of yourselves tonight. Top notch!

There is a moment of anticlimactic silence, then RB bolts for the door.

INT. IRVING PLAZA - NIGHT

It is just about cleared out in the main room. Some people still linger. There are cups and cigarette packs trashed around the room.

RB looks around, searching for Julie.

A couple of YOUNG FANS come up and ask for autographs, which he does kindly, but still impatient.