

OVER BLACK:

HEAR LAUGHTER.

The sound of a man totally cracking up.

FADE IN:

**INT. DEPT. OF HEALTH, OFFICE - MORNING**

CLOSE ON ARTHUR (30's), tears in his eyes from laughing so hard. He's trying to get it under control. His greasy, black hair hanging down over his forehead. He's wearing an old, faded green cardigan sweater, a threadbare gray scarf, thin from years of use, hangs loosely around his neck.

He's sitting across from an overworked SOCIAL WORKER (50's), African American. Her office is cramped and run-down in a cramped and run-down building. Stacks of folders piled high in front of her.

She just sits behind her desk, waiting for his laughing fit to end, she's been through this before. Finally it subsides.

Arthur takes a deep breath, pauses to see if it's over.

Beat.

ARTHUR

--is it just me, or is it getting  
crazier out there?

Despite the laughter, there's real pain in his eyes. Something broken in him. Looks like he hasn't slept in days.

SOCIAL WORKER

It's certainly tense. People are upset, they're struggling. Looking for work. The garbage strike seems like it's been going on forever. These are tough times.

(then)

How 'bout you. Have you been keeping up with your journal?

ARTHUR

Everyday.

SOCIAL WORKER

Great. Did you bring it with you?

Beat.

ARTHUR  
 (dodging the subject)  
 I'm sorry. Did I bring what?

SOCIAL WORKER  
 (impatient; she doesn't  
 have time for this)  
 Arthur, last time I asked you to  
 bring your journal with you. For  
 these appointments. Do you have it?

ARTHUR  
 Yes ma'am.

Beat.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 Can I see it?

He reluctantly reaches into the pocket of his jacket hanging  
 on the chair behind him. Pulls out a weathered notebook.  
 Slides it across to her--

ARTHUR  
 I've been using it as a journal,  
 but also a joke diary. Funny  
 thoughts or, or observations-- Did  
 I tell you I'm pursuing a career in  
 stand-up comedy?

She's half-listening as she flips through his journal.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 No. You didn't.

ARTHUR  
 I think I did.

She doesn't respond, keeps flipping through his journal--

PAGES AND PAGES OF NOTES, neat, angry-looking handwriting.  
 Also, cut out photos from hardcore pornographic magazines and  
 some crude handmade drawings.

A flash of anger crosses Arthur's face--

ARTHUR  
 I didn't realize you wanted to read  
 it.

The social worker gives him a look, then reads something in  
 the pages that gives her pause--

SOCIAL WORKER  
 (reading out loud)  
 "I just hope my death makes more  
*cents* than my life."

She looks up at Arthur. He just stares back. Lets it hang out there for a beat.

Then he laughs a little, even though he doesn't think it's funny--

ARTHUR  
 Yeah. I mean, that's just--

SOCIAL WORKER  
 Does my reading it upset you?

He leans in.

ARTHUR  
 No. I just,-- some of it's  
 personal. You know?

SOCIAL WORKER  
 I understand. I just want to make  
 sure you're keeping up with it.

She slides his journal back to him. He holds it in his lap.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 How does it feel to have to come  
 here? Does it help having someone  
 to talk to?

ARTHUR  
 I think I felt better when I was  
 locked up, in the hospital.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 And have you thought more about why  
 you were "locked up?"

ARTHUR  
 Well I suppose I was mentally ill.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 How's that?

ARTHUR  
 Well my mother thought I was  
 mentally ill, so she had me  
 committed.

SOCIAL WORKER  
Did you *feel* mentally ill?

ARTHUR  
They've been saying that since I was little. So who knows.

Long pause.

ARTHUR  
I was wondering if you could ask the doctor to increase my medication.

The social worker ruffles through some papers--

SOCIAL WORKER  
Arthur, you're on seven different medications. Surely they must be doing something.

Beat.

ARTHUR  
I just don't want to feel so bad anymore.

And we HEAR "TEMPTATION RAG" playing on a broken down piano--

**EXT. GOTHAM SQUARE, MIDTOWN - AFTERNOON - DAYS LATER**

CLOSE ON ARTHUR, NOW DRESSED UP AS A CLOWN, painted white face... Wide red smile outlined in black around his mouth... Bulbous red nose... Bald cap with two patches of frizzy green hair sticking out over the ears, little bowler hat... Too-tight buttoned jacket... Baggy pants and oversized colored shoes. This is his job.

PULLING OUT, we see he's holding a sign in front of Kenny's Music Shop that reads, "EVERYTHING MUST GO!" A banner above the store reads, "GOING OUT OF BUSINESS!" Behind him, an OLD MAN plays an old piano on the busy street, garbage bags piled everywhere.

Arthur's doing a little Charlie Chaplin like performance to the music, twirling the sign, bringing attention to the sale. He's pretty good, feeling the music in his bones, light on his feet. Still most people walk right past, ignoring him.

ARTHUR SEES A GROUP OF BOYS pointing at him from down the street, laughing at him... One of the boys throws an empty Coke can at Arthur as they get close... Arthur holds up the sign like a shield, Coke can bouncing off it--