OVER BLACK:

HEAR LAUGHTER.
The sound of a man totally crackin’ up.

FADE IN:

INT. DEPT. OF HEALTH, OFFICE – MORNING

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

He’s sittin’ 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 sit behind her desk, waitin’ for his laughin’ 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 laughin’, 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 strugglein’. Lookin’ for work. The garbage strike seems like it’s been going on forever.
These are tough times.

(then)
How ’bout you. Have you been keepin’ 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--