

SPECIAL

by

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EXT: HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

RRIPPP! A BEEFY FOOTBALL PLAYER breaks through a paper banner held by members of the PEP SQUAD. The audience cheers. It's a high school pep rally, circa early 80's. CHEERLEADERS lead the crowd of students in a cheer, the BAND plays a fight song, and the PRINCIPAL introduces the FOOTBALL TEAM.

PRINCIPAL

...And at defensive end, number 92,
Marty McDade!

Off to the side a line of FOOTBALL PLAYERS in full uniform stand waiting to be introduced. At the end of the line is-- FRED MOLINSKI. Athletic, optimistic, with peach fuzz and Rick Springfield hair. Wearing number 38.

AL (O.S.)

Yo, Fred!

Fred looks up and sees his best buddy AL NORRIS, a wannabe Don Juan playing trombone in the band.

AL

You did it, man! It took 'til
senior year, but you finally made
varsity! Let the babefest begin!

Fred smiles. Al turns his attention to the cheerleading squad and calls out to them.

AL (CONT.)

Whoooooo, bay-bays! You looking
fine! Wanna give my 'bone a try?

Al plays his TROMBONE as suggestively as possible. The cheerleaders ignore him. Fred shakes his head. Then a hand taps him on the shoulder. He looks up. It's his beer-gutted COACH. He looks grim.

COACH

Fred. We got a problem.

FRED

What is it, Coach?

COACH

The court order just came through--
we've got to let Jimmy Perkins on
the team.

The coach points to JIMMY. He's "special." In a wheelchair and wearing a football uniform, complete with pads and helmet. He waves, a big grin on his face. Fred sighs.

FRED

Well, as long as he stays out of the way...

COACH

I don't think you get it, Fred. We're only allowed 48 players on our roster. So Jimmy's going to play...instead of you.

Fred stares at the coach. Then at Jimmy. Realizes he's wearing the same number on his uniform as Fred.

FRED

No! Coach! You can't do this!

COACH

Sorry, Fred. My hands are tied.

FRED

I deserve to be on that roster, Coach! And you know it! Everyone knows it!

(beat)

You know what's gonna happen? The team's gonna reject him, the school's gonna reject him, and you're gonna have a massive freaking controversy on your hands!

The principal's voice comes over the speakers.

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)

And now our most "special" athlete: number 38, Jimmy Perkins!

Jimmy wheels out to the middle of the field to join the team. Suddenly the crowd is silent.

And then the crowd ERUPTS WITH CHEERS AND APPLAUSE. It's deafening. Cheerleaders jump up and down. The football team lifts Jimmy's wheelchair up on their shoulders. Jimmy pumps his fist in the air, eating it up.

Fred watches all of this alone off to the side. All his hopes and dreams shattered. PUSH IN on his face as it fills with disappointment, anger, and resentment.

INT: FRED'S TRUCK - DAY

DISSOLVE TO Fred years later. He's now a construction foreman, a blue collar guy who enjoys the simple things in life. Driving his Ford through Condor Stadium's filled-to-the-brim parking lot, anxiously searching for a space.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

...and here comes the Condors offense, everyone here wondering if today Mercury Pearson will set yet another season receiving touchdown record, besting the mark he set last week in Kansas City...

Suddenly, Fred spots an empty space! Quickly speeds toward it. Is almost there when he stops suddenly at seeing

THE BIG BLUE HANDICAPPED SYMBOL painted on it. Instantly his demeanor changes. He stares at the handicapped spot, anger darkening his eyes.

FRED

Bastards.

EXT: STADIUM ENTRANCE - DAY

Fred stands anxiously in an endless line at the stadium entrance turnstiles. A MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR zips right past him and enters through the special EXTRA WIDE HANDICAPPED TURNSTILE, in front of which there is no line at all.

FRED

Bastards.

EXT: STADIUM RAMP - DAY

Fred walks hurriedly up a ramp leading to the stands. In front of him TWO OLD LADIES drive electric carts at approximately two miles an hour. Fred tries to get around them. To the left. To the right. Blocked at every turn.

FRED

Bastards.

EXT: STADIUM STANDS - DAY

A very frustrated Fred looks at his ticket, searching the stands. A concerned STADIUM USHER approaches.

STADIUM USHER

May I help you, sir?

FRED

Yeah. Where's section F? It was right here last year, and I was supposed to meet my fiancée and her kid half an hour ago.

STADIUM USHER

Section F has been moved. To accommodate the Special Fans Stand.

The stadium usher points to the SPECIAL FANS STAND. A specially cordoned section in the stadium reserved for those with handicaps. FANS confined to WHEELCHAIRS, with M.S., CEREBRAL PALSY, etc. Fred stares at them, stunned.

FRED

What? Wait a minute. Section E is over there, Section G is over there, and you're telling me this is not Section F?

STADIUM USHER

No. It's been moved. Up there.

The Stadium Usher points up to the highest, most remote part of the stands. Next to Section Z.

FRED

What the hell? I thought this was America! I thought we believed in the alphabet!

Suddenly every fan in the stadium rises to their feet. The Stadium Usher points to the field.

STADIUM USHER

Mercury's open!

Down on the field, MERCURY PEARSON, number 88, the Condors' star wide receiver, races for the endzone. Several steps on the defender.

Here comes the ball. It's a bit overthrown, but he makes an incredible superstar-like leaping catch. Drags his feet perfectly to stay in bounds. He scores!

A REF's arms fly up. And all 70,000 FOOTBALL FANS in San Diego's Condor Stadium erupt in EAR-SPLITTING CHEERS. Going wild, waving BANNERS and PENNANTS, as Mercury does his trademark celebratory endzone dance.

SPORTS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And that's number twenty-five! The San Diego Condors' Mercury Pearson has now caught twenty-five receiving touchdowns in one season, a new record! Owner Bucky Parks is beside himself!

BUCKY PARKS, the football team owner's version of Ross Perot, does his own little dance as he drinks champagne in his special box.

SPORTS ANNOUNCER (CONT.; V.O.)

And now, as always, Mercury's headed for the Special Fans Stand.

Mercury tosses the ball up to the Special Fans, and they go wild. Jump up and down, reach for the ball, laugh and scream. It bounces from one Special Fan to another until it falls right into the lap of--

RONNIE, a man in a wheelchair with cerebral palsy. Ronnie grabs the ball and holds it up smiling.

Way up in Section F, CURTIS GURNEY, a pudgy seven-year-old wearing a Mercury Pearson jersey and a serial-killer-in-training look, stares at the Special Fans Stand. Frowns.

CURTIS

How come the retards get all the balls?

Sitting next to him is his mother, RHONDA GURNEY. Beautiful, superficial, and completely blind to the evilness of her son.

RHONDA

Curtis, honey, don't say retard. They are retar-ded.

Just then Fred arrives, out of breath, carrying a tray of DRINKS and HOT DOGS.

FRED

Hey there! Sorry I'm late, hon, couldn't find a parking spot.

RHONDA

We're just glad you're here.

She gives Fred a kiss. He smiles, staring, completely smitten with her.

FRED

I don't deserve you. Rhonda smiles.
They move in for another kiss when--

HOOOOONK!!! Curtis blasts his AIR HORN right in Fred's face.

FRED (CONT.)

Hey, Curtis. How's the game,
pardner?

CURTIS

These seats suck!

FRED

Great!

Curtis pulls on his mom's sweater.

CURTIS

It's not fair, mom! Mercury's my
favorite player! Why can't I have
one of those balls? Why do the
retardeds get all of them?

RHONDA

Well, sweetie...because...
(turns to Fred)

Fred, why don't you explain it to
him?

(sotto voce)

This is a great opportunity. Rhonda
gives Fred one of her "do this for
me?" looks. Fred turns to Curtis,
trying his best to be fatherly.

FRED

Curtis, I know it doesn't seem
fair. But those folks in the
Special Fans Stand aren't like you
and me. They can't run, or jump--

CURTIS

Yeah! So what're they gonna do
with a football? Drool on it?

FRED

Look, I realize it doesn't make
logical sense, but the fact is, in
America we do "special" things for
"special" people. Like the parking
spaces right next to the store
entrance that are always empty but
no one can ever use?

(MORE)

FRED (cont'd)

Those are for the "special" people. And we have to leave the spaces empty and park a mile away just on the off chance that one of them might need to use it. And why do we do that? Why? Because they're "special." You see?

CURTIS

You're not my dad.

FRED

I didn't say I was your dad, Curtis. I--

CURTIS

(puts hands over ears)
Yaah yaah yaah I can't hear you!

FRED

Curtis!

RHONDA

Fred. Don't raise your voice at him. You know how sensitive he is, on account of being born with all his internal organs backwards.

(beat)

You know, if we're going to be a family...

FRED

We are going to be a family, Rhonda. That's what I want more than anything in the whole world. You know that.

RHONDA

I know, it's just that...well, the two of you haven't really connected, you know what I mean? Look what I found on his dresser the other day.

Rhonda reaches into her purse and pulls out a piece of paper. On it is a CRAYON DRAWING of Fred (a photo of HIS HEAD PASTED ON) lying on the ground, blood spurting out of him. And Curtis standing over him with a knife. Fred stares at it.

FRED

Well, we're not best buddies yet, but--

RHONDA
He hates you, Fred.

FRED
(sighs, realizing she's
right)
Fine. He hates me. What more can
I do, Rhonda?

RHONDA
You need to make him feel special.

FRED
How?

Rhonda thinks. Then Curtis, as if on cue (or as if he were listening the whole time), suddenly pulls on his mom's sweater again.

CURTIS
You know what I want for Christmas, mom? One of those Mercury Pearson record-breaking season touchdown footballs. That's what I want more than anything in the whole wide world!

Rhonda looks at Curtis. Then at Fred. Smiles. This is perfect!

RHONDA
Well, I think I know a certain someone who might be able to get you one. Right, Fred?

They both turn to Fred. Rhonda winks at him. Fred stares back at them. Gulp.

EXT: CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

RRT-RRT-RRT-RRT!!! A JACKHAMMER blasts away at concrete, smashing it to bits. Attempting to hold onto it is Al, Fred's buddy.

AL
This is why I keep saying don't
date chicks with kids.

Fred stands next to him with a hardhat and clipboard at a building under construction ("SKIDMORE CONSTRUCTION BRINGS

YOU A NEW BODIES IN MOTION DANCE STUDIO!").

AL (CONT.)

You gotta end it, bro. Cut bait.
Kick her to the curb. Move on. Buh-
bye.

FRED

Al...

AL

No--if there's one thing I
understand, it's women.

Al spots TWO MODERATELY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN passing by the site.
Immediately starts hooting and hollering at them.

AL (CONT.)

Whoo, bay-bays! You looking fine!
Wanna give my jackhammer a try?

RRT-RRT-RRT-RRT!!! Al operates the jackhammer as
suggestively as he can. The two women walk past, completely
ignoring him.

FRED

Look, Al, I'm not "kicking Rhonda
to the curb." She's the best thing
that ever happened to me. Come on--
a beautiful woman like that and a
guy like me? What're the odds?

Al stares at Fred. Thinks.

AL

Yeah, you're right. You're
screwed. You better get one of
those balls. You checked eBay?

FRED

Yeah. But unless I knock over a
convenience store, it's not
happening.

MR. BABCOCK (O.S.)

Mr. Molinski?

Fred turns to see MR. BABCOCK, an officious and meticulous
city building inspector in his 60's, holding a clipboard.
Shaking his head.

MR. BABCOCK

George Babcock from the city. We have a problem with your access ramp. Disabilities Act Regulation 4.8.14 requires a maximum slope of 1:12. Yours is 1:11.

FRED

So it's a little steep. What am I supposed to do, take it out and pour another one?

MR. BABCOCK

It isn't the city's responsibility to solve your problems. We merely point out infractions, as required by law.

FRED

Come on, that'll set me back a week.

MR. BABCOCK

It isn't the city's responsibility to ensure your job is finished on time. We merely--

FRED

I know what you do! I know it's not your responsibility! But for crying out loud, I'm building a "Bodies in Motion Dance Studio" here! The handicapped ramp's not gonna be getting a lot of traffic!

MR. BABCOCK

Would you like me to cite you right now?

FRED

You've gotta be joking.

MR. BABCOCK

Yes. Just call me Bob Hope.

Mr. Babcock quickly signs a piece of paper and hands it to Fred. Smiles and leaves. Fred shakes his head.

FRED

I don't know what happened, Al. Seems like one day we woke up and the entire world had white guys who can walk by the balls.

Fred takes out his frustration on the concrete with the jackhammer. Al puts his hand on his buddy's shoulder.

AL

Look, Fred, things'll work out.
Rhonda's a reasonable woman. If
you explain the situation to her,
she'll understand. Right?

Fred looks back at Al. Maybe.

EXT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DING-DONG! Fred stands outside Rhonda's front door all cleaned up for a big date. Rhonda opens the door. In sweats and t-shirt.

RHONDA

Curtis is sick.

Fred stares at her, extremely disappointed. Holds up a pair of CONCERT TICKETS.

FRED

But...the Doobie Brothers.

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fred follows Rhonda into the house. Broken toys and games are everywhere, revealing who really runs the place.

RHONDA

Tell me about it. Unfortunately,
I've got myself a sick child. He's
always been extra susceptible to
things, on account of being born
with all his internal organs
backwards, you know? So today he's
done nothing but lie on the sofa
and watch T.V. And all he can keep
down are Ho-Hos.

FRED

That's odd.

Rhonda points to Curtis camped out on the family room couch playing Game Boy and eating Ho-Hos.

RHONDA

Why don't you go say hi? That
might cheer his little face up.

Rhonda gives Fred a little push toward Curtis, then disappears into the kitchen. Fred approaches the couch.

FRED
Hey, Curtis. Feeling a little
under the weather?

CURTIS
Where's my ball?

FRED
Now, Curtis, don't get your heart
set on--

CURTIS
I want a Mercury Pearson record-
breaking season touchdown football.
And if you don't get me one, it's
over between you and my mom.

FRED
Curtis...

CURTIS
I'll tell her you touched me. Fred
stares at Curtis. He couldn't
possibly have said that.

FRED
You'll what?

CURTIS
I'll say you touched my weiner. A
lot.

FRED
(losing it)
Listen, you little piece of--

CURTIS
Mom!

Fred freezes like a deer caught in headlights. Rhonda quickly sticks her head into the family room.

RHONDA
What is it, pumpkin?

Curtis gives Fred a look. A cold, manipulative, threatening look that says, "I could do it right now if I wanted to." He turns to his mom. Milking it, keeping Fred in suspense.

CURTIS

Guess what? Fred's going to get me
one of those Mercury Pearson
footballs for Christmas!

RHONDA

Really? Wow!

Rhonda smiles knowingly at Fred. He just stands there.

INT: BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

CRASH! A BOWLING BALL hits a spare PIN, knocking it over. At
the other end of the lane Al celebrates wildly. He turns to
a couple of CUTE GIRLS in the next lane.

AL

That one was for the ladies.

He winks at them. They ignore him. He plops down next to
Fred, who sits zombie-like on the bench, extremely depressed.

AL (CONT.)

Come on, stop your moping.

(thinks)

Why don't you just buy a football
and sign it "Mercury Pearson"?

FRED

You kidding? The kid is an evil
genius. He'd see right through it.

Across from them are their bowling partners: tough JOE and
not-so-bright STEVE, guys we recognize from the work site.

JOE

Screw him, then. Get him something
else.

STEVE

Like a puppet.

FRED

He doesn't want a puppet, Steve.

STEVE

I'm just saying, give a kid a
Mercury Pearson signed football,
it'll just gather dust on his
shelf; give him a puppet, he's got
a friend for life.

The guys stare at Steve. Joe turns to Fred, shaking his head.

JOE

I don't know, Fred. It disturbs me to see you doing this just to make some chick's kid happy.

FRED

It's more than that, Joe. You think I wanna spend the rest of my life hanging around you retards? I want to make something of myself. I want to build something solid. I want...that!

Fred points over to a FAMILY bowling together. The perfect all-American model, wearing matching bowling shirts with "The Thompson Tenpins" printed on the back. Mom and Dad cheer for their little son who rolls the ball down the lane.

DAD

Go, tiger!

The ball hits the pins and, slowly, they all topple over. The family cheers, and Dad lifts the son up on his shoulders.

MOM

Let's go for ice cream!

The kids cheer. Fred watches the family, a faraway look in his eyes. Then turns to Al.

FRED

I've gotta get one of those balls, Al. Somehow, some way.

JOE

If you ask me, you need two.

AL

Look, Fred, I hate to break it to you, but it's not gonna happen. Those balls're only for the "Special Fans." And you, my friend, are not "special."

Fred stares straight ahead, deep in thought. And then, almost imperceptibly, something inside him clicks.

An idea.

EXT: STADIUM - DAY

SQUEAK. SQUEAK. A WHEELCHAIR WHEEL rolls along the pavement. PAN UP TO REVEAL

Fred. Sitting in the wheelchair. Wearing a stained ORANGE SWEATER and GREEN PANTS that are way too short for him. His legs are close together and tilted sideways.

Al pushes the wheelchair. Not excited about being there as they approach the CROWD OF FANS at the stadium entrance.

AL

I can't believe you're making me do this. We're gonna get caught, we're gonna go to jail, and then we're gonna go to hell.

FRED

No we're not. We have just as much of a right to one of those footballs as anybody else. And besides, they owe me.

AL

Who owes you?

FRED

I should've made varsity, Al. They stole my spot! My spot was stolen! I'm just evening the score.

Al frowns, unsure. But continues pushing Fred towards the entrance. As they get closer he musses up his hair a bit.

FRED (CONT.)

(under his breath)

What are you doing?

AL

You don't look retarded enough.

FRED

I'm fine. Just leave me alone.

Al leaves him alone. Keeps pushing. They're right up at the entrance now, literally surrounded by people. Fred stares straight ahead. All the other people in line glance at him out of the corners of their eyes; no one looks right at him.

STADIUM EMPLOYEE (O.S.)

Right this way, sir!

Al and Fred turn and see a STADIUM EMPLOYEE on the far left, standing by the extra wide handicapped turnstile. She waves them over. Al pushes Fred over to it. The fans having to wait in long lines glance their way, not happy about it.

As they get closer and closer to the turnstile, Fred begins to sweat. This is it. The threshold. They arrive at the turnstile, and Al nervously hands the woman their tickets. Points to Fred.

AL

Yeah, he's handicapped. Can't walk, can't talk, pretty much just sits there. Don'tcha, Fred?

Fred stares up at Al, who turns back to the woman.

AL (CONT.)

But he loves the games. Loves 'em. Just sits there in his wheelchair and eats 'em up. Whoo, does he love the games!

The woman nods and waves them through. They both breathe sighs of relief as they head towards the stands. Then--

STADIUM EMPLOYEE (O.S.)

Wait a minute, you two.

Al and Fred freeze. This is it. They slowly turn around, Al all ready to confess.

AL

Listen, this was not my i...

And then they see the Stadium Employee smiling and holding up a LITTLE PENNANT.

STADIUM EMPLOYEE

You forgot your complimentary Special Pennant!

She trots over and sticks it in the wheelchair. Smiles at Fred in the most condescending way possible.

STADIUM EMPLOYEE (CONT.)

You enjoy the game, okay?

Fred smiles and nods back at her. Then Al spins him back around and they head for the stands.

EXT: STADIUM STANDS - DAY

Al wheels Fred through the stands, up the long ramp that leads to the Special Fans Stand.

FRED
(under his breath)
I can't talk?

AL
It's perfect. That way you can't
incriminate yourself, say something
stupid.

Al and Fred arrive at the Special Fans stand. Al waves to the STADIUM USHER and all the Special Fans.

AL (CONT.)
Hey, everybody! This is Fred! The
group greets him with big smiles
and waves.

SPECIAL FANS
Hi, Fred!

AL
He can't talk, but he sure loves
the games!

Al finds an open spot and parks Fred in it.

AL (CONT.)
All right, buddy, I'll be back to
pick you up later! Good luck!

Al pats Fred on the head, and leaves him there, heading up to the regular stands. Fred looks around him. He's surrounded by Special Fans, and they clearly creep him out. He turns to his right and sees--

LESTER. An intense-looking paraplegic in the wheelchair next to his. Wearing a NUMBER 88 JERSEY, several PENNANTS on his chair. He smiles at Fred.

LESTER
I'm gonna get a ball today. I can
feel it!

Lester grabs and shakes Fred's limp hand.

LESTER (CONT.)

Hey there. I'm Lester. But my friends call me Mercury, on account of I'm such a big Mercury Pearson fan.

(shouts at the field)

Let's go, baby! Let's play some football! Wooooooo!

Fred stares at Lester.

EXT: STADIUM STANDS - LATER

The game has begun. We're late into the first quarter and the Condors have the ball. Fred sits in his chair staring at the field. Lester talks non-stop.

LESTER

You know who was Mercury's coach at Notre Dame? Lou Holtz. You know what position he played in high school? Quarterback. You know what pick he was in the draft? Fourteenth.

(shouts at field)

Let's go! Move those chains!

(beat)

It's gonna happen. I'm gonna get a ball. I know it!

Fred stares at the field. Please, Mercury. Soon.

EXT: STADIUM STANDS - LATER

Third quarter, and the score is Minnesota 14, San Diego 9. We hear the announcers on a RADIO mounted on Lester's chair.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

...the third quarter, and Pearson with only two catches for sixteen yards. He's really having an off game today.

Fred is still stuck in his chair in the Special Fans Stand as Lester continues to prattle on.

LESTER

You know what the season receiving touchdown record was before Mercury broke it? Twenty-two. Twenty-two! Take that, Jerry Rice! You homo! Mercury is the man! Am I right?

(turns back to the field)

(MORE)

LESTER (cont'd)
Come on, touchdown ball number
twenty-six! Come to papa!

EXT: STADIUM STANDS - LATER

Late in the fourth quarter, the score is Minnesota 21, San Diego 16. Fred is completely miserable in his chair. Would like to strangle Lester.

LESTER
Mercury was the messenger of the gods in Roman mythology, known for his speed. Mercury's one of only three metals liquid at normal temperatures. It's also the name of a planet, the one closest to the sun.
(stares at field)
He's open! HE'S OPEN!

Immediately all attention is focused on the field. Mercury is indeed wide open and heading for the end zone. The quarterback hurls the ball into the air.

Fred watches the scene anxiously, face filled with tension. Mercury sees the ball coming. Has several steps on the defender. But the ball looks to be a little overthrown.

LESTER (CONT.)
Catch it! Catch it!

Mercury leaps. Grabs the ball with those famous hands. And lands with a thud in the endzone.

The ref throws both arms straight up in the air. Touchdown!

The stadium EXPLODES!!! The fans cheer, scream, wave pennants, go totally crazy! Someone unfolds a GIANT BANNER: "26!!!" Bucky Parks smiles broadly from his special booth.

Mercury gets up and does his celebratory dance. His teammates arrive and pile on him, ecstatic.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
Twenty-six touchdowns in a season!
Unbelievable! It's a new record!

Mercury emerges from the pile of Condors players. Then makes his way to the Special Fans Stand with the ball. Fred watches him like a hawk. This is it. The big moment. He glances over at Lester, who's waving his hands in the air.

LESTER

Mercury! Over here! Throw it to
me! TO ME!!!

Mercury stops in front of the stands. Then tosses the ball
up to them. Suddenly everything's in SUPER SLOW-MOTION.

The ball spins through the air. Over the heads of several
Special Fans. Someone's hand touches it, deflecting its
path.

Lester screams. It's heading right for him.

Fred panics. Lester's going to get it!

Here comes the ball.

Lester leans forward, arms outstretched. The ball's inches
away. It's his! It's his!

Then Fred reaches subtly down and pulls back on Lester's
wheel.

Lester's chair turns around backwards. His face contorts in
horror as he finds himself spinning away from the ball.

THUNK. The ball hits the back of Lester's head.

And bounces right into Fred's hands! Fred smiles. He's got
it. HE'S GOT IT!

Back in real time, the fans cheer Fred, who holds the ball
tightly. Down on the field Mercury gives him a big thumb's
up. Al sees him from up in the regular stands, gets up and
runs down, excited. Lester looks confused.

LESTER (CONT.)

But...but...that was my ball!

Fred just smiles, holding onto the ball. And suddenly we're
in a CAMERA POV zooming in on Fred.

DENISE (O.S.)

That was perfect!

The camera is being held by DENISE POPNIK, a young, petite
documentary filmmaker still clinging to her liberal arts
idealism.

DENISE

Let's move in closer.

Denise heads for Fred, followed by VICKI, a tall, extremely shapely young woman carrying the boom mike.

Fred notices them approaching. Uh-oh. But before he can react, two uniformed stadium officials, toothy, overly cheerful JAN and muscle-bound BRIAN, find him.

JAN

Well, hello there, sir, my name is Jan, and this is Brian, and you are our most special Special Fan of the day!

Fred looks around for Al. Too much is happening too fast. Brian grabs the wheelchair, and begins pushing Fred out of the Special Fans stand. Denise and Vicki follow.

JAN (CONT.)

Now, if you'll just come with us, we'll make sure you get that ball signed and authenticated.

Jan gives the camera a big smile as Brian pushes a helpless Fred up the ramp leaving the stands. Lester stares at Fred as he leaves, visibly upset. If looks could kill...

As they enter the concourse area, Denise approaches Fred with a sweet, unaffected smile.

DENISE

Congratulations. It's not easy to get one of those.

Fred looks up at her. Their eyes meet. She smiles. There's something there. And then Al appears, disrupting the moment.

AL

You did it, man! You did it!

Al holds up his hand to give Fred a high five. Then stops, realizing Fred can't do it. Fred looks up at Al. Get me out of here!

Al now looks around. Sees Jan. Brian. And the film crew. Uh-oh. Jan smiles at Al.

JAN

Hi! Do you know...is this your... are you with this gentleman?

AL

Uh...yeah.

JAN
Wonderful. And his name is...?

AL
Uh...Fred. Fred M--

FRED
(shakes his head no)
Mmmmmnhhh! Mmmmmnhhh!

Al realizes Fred doesn't want him to use his real name.
Stares at him while trying to think of something.

AL
--Cripple.

Fred's face falls. Jan attempts to keep her smile. Not sure
about the name, but wouldn't dare question it.

JAN
Fred...McCripple?

AL
Ironic, isn't it?
(beat)
Look, Fred's had a very long day,
and he's all tuckered out, so--

JAN
Well, we'll need him to stay just a
little bit longer.

Denise focuses the camera on Al and calls to him.

DENISE
And who are you, sir?

AL
Al Norris. Listen, I don't think--

DENISE
Vicki, I'm not getting this. Move
a little closer to Mr. Norris.

Vicki nods and moves closer with the boom mike. Al notices
her and her incredible body for the first time. Smiles.

AL
Hel-lo, Vicki.

DENISE
So, you're Fred's caretaker?

Al looks at the camera. At Vicki. And suddenly realizes this situation might not be all bad. He smiles humbly.

AL

Well, I suppose I do "take care" of Fred, but I prefer to think of it as spending time with a really special guy.

Al pats Fred on the head. Vicki smiles, moved. Fred watches helplessly, realizing this can't possibly bode well for him.

AL (CONT.)

Does it get depressing? Sometimes. Frustrating? Sure. But at the end of the day, all I hope is that I've brightened his life half as much as he's brightened mine.

(pats Fred on the head again)

My buddy Fred here may not be able to walk or talk or really do any of the things you and I can...but I think I speak for him when I say, "Thank you, Mercury Pearson, thank you San Diego Condors, and God Bless America!"

Al ends with a dramatic flourish. Everyone just stares at him. Attempting to break the awkwardness, he points to the camera.

AL (CONT.)

So...what's this all about? You aren't from the news, are you? Jan butts in with a smile.

JAN

Sorry, I should have explained. This is Denise Pipnik.

DENISE

Popnik.

JAN

Popnik, Pipnik, anyhoo, she's making a special documentary about the Special Fans Stand for PBS. She did that documentary that won that award? Anyway, moving on...

She nods to Brian, who tries to get the ball from Fred. Fred holds on tight and won't let him take it. Brian pulls harder.

JAN (CONT.)
Please, Mr. McCripple...

AL
Whoa! Break it up! What's going on here?

Finally, using every ounce of strength he's got, Brian wrests the football away from Fred. Jan tries to smooth things over.

JAN
I'm sorry, I thought you understood. We need to get the ball signed and authenticated. It'll only be two weeks.

Fred's face fills with horror. Jan turns to Al.

JAN (CONT.)
Does he understand? It's team policy.

AL
Uh, just a minute.

Al wheels Fred several feet away. Leans down and whispers, blocking everyone's view of a furious Fred.

AL (CONT.)
What's the problem?

FRED
What's the problem? I don't get the ball for two weeks, and in the meantime I'm supposed to be in some handicapped documentary! What the hell do you think's the problem?

AL
Yeah, that's what I'm trying to figure out here.

FRED
I know you, Al. The only reason you're doing this is to get into that blonde babe's pants!

AL
 (encouraged)
 You really think I've got a shot?

FRED
 There is no way I'm doing this!
 What if someone sees it?

AL
 It's on PBS! Who do we know that
 watches PBS? Do you even know what
 channel it's on?
 (beat)
 The ball is almost yours, Fred. In
 two weeks you'll have it. Just in
 time for Christmas. What's the
 worst that could happen?

Fred looks up at Al. Sighs, defeated. What can he do? Al
 smiles. Turns back to Denise, Jan, and everyone else. Gives
 'em a big double thumb's up. They're in!

RHONDA (V.O.)
 Aaaaaiigghhhhhh!

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Rhonda is on the phone, ecstatically screaming. She turns to
 Curtis, who's at the kitchen table POURING SALT into a
 shoebox full of SNAILS.

RHONDA
 Fred got you a ball!

CURTIS
 Good.

RHONDA
 (to Fred on phone)
 Curtis is just beside himself!
 How'd you do it?

INT: FRED'S APARTMENT - SAME

Fred's on the phone dressed for work, a bowl of cereal in
 front of him. Smiling proudly.

FRED
 Hey, you know me: just a little
 wheeling and dealing.

BZZZ! Fred's intercom buzzes.

FRED (CONT.)
 That must be Al.
 (into intercom)
 Come on up.

He buzzes him in and opens the front door. INTERCUT with Rhonda at her house.

RHONDA
 You are the best. And tonight...
 (sexily)
 I'm going to make it totally worthwhile.

Fred smiles in anticipation.

FRED
 I can't wait. See you tonight!

Fred hangs up the phone. Smiles a big smile, on top of the world. Picks up his bowl of cereal and starts eating. Then he hears VOICES coming from the stairwell.

It's Denise and Vicki. And the door's open. Fred's face fills with panic.

INT: STAIRWELL - SAME

Denise and Vicki approach the open door. Denise grabs the doorknob, peeking inside.

DENISE
 Fred? Al? Hello...?

Then suddenly she gasps. Sees-- Fred lying on the floor in a pool of milk and bran flakes.

DENISE (CONT.)
 Oh no.

She rushes inside--

INT: FRED'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

--and kneels down next to Fred, horrified.

DENISE
 Fred! Are you okay? Where's Al?

Fred just wriggles and moans on the floor. Denise calls up to Vicki.

DENISE (CONT.)
 Help me get him up!

Vicki puts down her equipment and helps Denise lift Fred onto the couch.

DENISE (CONT.)
 He's covered with milk. I'm gonna
 find some paper towels.

Denise rushes into the kitchen. Vicki leans over and picks some bran flakes off of Fred's face.

VICKI
 Ewww.

Denise arrives with some paper towels, and quickly begins sopping the milk up off of him.

DENISE
 Where's your chair, Fred? Just then
 Al arrives at the door.

Sees Fred lying on the couch, surrounded by Denise and Vicki. He stands there petrified, staring open-mouthed at the scene.

DENISE (CONT.)
 Al! Thank heavens you're here!

VICKI
 Where were you?

DENISE
 And where's Fred's wheelchair?

Al stares at them. Trying to think on his feet. His reputation's at stake here. He shakes his head.

AL
 This is crazy, this is just...
 crazy, I...I knew I shouldn't've
 left him, but this, this thingie on
 his wheelchair hadn't been working,
 and he was sound asleep, so I tried
 to sneak out, and, and get it
 fixed, and--

DENISE
 At 8:00 in the morning?

AL
 I know! The whole thing is just
 crazy! What...what happened here?

DENISE

Well, he--

AL

(holds up his hand, in
control)

Please. Mentally, he's fine, but
I'm the only one who can understand
him.

(to Fred)

What happened, Fred?

FRED

Aaaanh.

AL

I see. And then what? Fred looks
Al in the eyes. Don't do this.

FRED

Annnhh.

AL

Really? And then?

Fred looks up at Al, anger filling his eyes. Stop this or I
will kill you.

FRED

Aaaannhhh!

Al nods, turns to the others.

AL

That's sweet. He wanted to
surprise me by fixing his own
breakfast.

(to Fred)

You!

(to others)

He tries so hard. I'll be right
back with the wheelchair.

(to Vicki)

Wanna give me a hand?

Al and Vicki quickly head out the door. Denise looks around
the room, taking everything in as Fred watches helplessly
from the couch. Denise finds a BOWLING BALL BAG with Fred's
name on it. She picks it up, turns to him.

DENISE

You like to bowl, Fred?

He nods. She unzips the bag, examines the ball, holds it up to him.

DENISE (CONT.)

Wow. An FAB Hammer. Nice ball.

(beat)

I love to bowl. Maybe we can bowl together sometime.

Denise smiles at Fred. He smiles back. Al bursts in the door carrying the wheelchair with Vicki, sweaty and out of breath.

AL

Got it! Let's roll!

INT: STAIRWELL - DAY

Denise and Vicki follow Fred as Al pushes him into the stairwell.

DENISE

The other two fans featured in the documentary live in the Hilgart Special House on 6th Street, and I thought it'd be great to get Fred together with them today.

AL

Sounds super.

They stop right at the stairwell. Look down. Denise shakes her head.

DENISE

A man confined to a wheelchair living on the third floor of a building with no elevator. How do you manage?

AL

It's fine. We've got this down to a science. Here we go, Fred.

Al slowly, carefully, lowers Fred down to the first step. Gently sets him down. Then the handle grips come off in his hands. And Fred and

the wheelchair immediately go flying down the stairs. CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH! Everyone watches horrified as the ride shakes Fred with jarring, painful impact.

There's silence as the chair rolls on the landing. Then CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH! Then silence on the next landing. Then CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH! Finally ending with a loud CRASH!

Al glances nervously at the others, then thinks fast, looks at his watch and calls down the stairwell.

AL (CONT.)

Eight seconds! Way to go, Fred!
 (turns to the others)
 That's a new record! He beat his
 last one by a whole second! Whoo-
 hoo!

Al starts clapping. Denise and Vicki stare at Al, and then follow suit.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Al's truck and Denise's van are parked in front of the Hilgart Special House. A NATIVITY SCENE's out front in which all the main players (Mary, Joseph, Wise Men) are in wheelchairs.

As Denise and Vicki unload their camera gear, Al struggles to get Fred out of his truck and into the wheelchair.

DENISE

Need any help?

Al is obviously straining to lift Fred from the truck.

AL

No...uh...I...I got him...do it all
 the time.

BANG. He cracks Fred's head on the truck door.

DENISE

Are you sure?

AL

Uumph...yeah, it's...we've got this
 down to a science.

Al swings Fred over to the chair. Fred's legs hit it, causing it to topple over with a crash.

AL (CONT.)

Not a problem, not a problem,
 happens all the time...

Al, while still holding Fred, attempts to flip the chair back upright with his foot. THWACK! It flips up and hits Fred in the face. Denise and Vicki cringe. Al dumps Fred into the chair. Then turns to them, smiling.

AL (CONT.)

All right! Let's have some fun!

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Close on MISS HILGART, a heavysset, husky-voiced woman who is in charge of the house and everything else she can get her hands on. A smile so broad it's rather terrifying.

MISS HILGART

Hellooooooooooooo! You must be Fred.

Fred nods to her. She nods back.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)

I'm Miss Hilgart. Welcome to the Hilgart Special House.

She grabs Fred's chair, and pushes him into the house's main room. Denise and the crew follow, filming. In the main room the six tenants wait in their electronic wheelchairs.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)

All right, everybody, let's give a big Hilgart Special House welcome to Fred!

The tenants smile and wave. Miss Hilgart pushes Fred over to meet them one by one.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)

Fred, meet Melvin...

MELVIN is an African-American man with cerebral palsy and a big toothy smile.

MELVIN

Sweetness!

MISS HILGART

Gladys...Charlie...

GLADYS, pudgy with wild hair, smiles at Fred. CHARLIE, skinny, with thick glasses, types into his talking machine.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE

HELLO. DO YOU LIKE ABBOTT AND COSTELLO?

MISS HILGART
Nick and Isabel Shumway...

NICK and ISABEL, an older couple holding hands, wave hello to Fred. Miss Hilgart turns to Al and the crew.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)
Aren't they cute?
(to Fred)
And last, but not least, is Ronnie.

Ronnie is the guy who caught the football in the opening scene. Miss Hilgart parks Fred's chair next to him.

RONNIE
Hey, I remember you from the game.
Great catch.

Ronnie pats him on the back. Fred smiles. Denise, filming, is touched Fred's already making friends.

MISS HILGART
And, of course, I've got my own
special helpers, Alice and Pablo.

Miss Hilgart points to ALICE and PABLO, hispanic aides there to cook and clean and do all the dirty work. She makes her way to the front of the room.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)
All right, everybody, let's settle
down.

They were already completely still and silent.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)
We've got something very special
for you today. Some of you may
remember this musical group who
came to visit us last month. Let's
give a warm welcome to Dave and Ben
Baxter, otherwise known as... the
Funky Folks!

Miss Hilgart applauds. Then DAVE and BEN BAXTER, wearing matching rainbow outfits and peppy attitudes, run out to the front of the room. Ben has a guitar, and Dave carries a tambourine. They begin performing.

DAVE AND BEN
*She'll be wheeling round the
mountain when she comes*
(MORE)

DAVE AND BEN (cont'd)
*She'll be wheeling round the
 mountain when she comes...*

Fred and the tenants stare blankly at the Baxters. Miss Hilgart claps along happily. Denise turns to Al.

DENISE
 While the show's on, can we go
 outside and talk to you for a bit?

AL
 Sure.

Denise motions to Vicki, and they leave. Fred watches them go. Horrified at being left behind.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Al sits on a bench by the pond, being interviewed by Denise and Vicki.

DENISE
 So how does Fred support himself?
 What does he do to make a living?

Al stares back at her. No idea how to answer this question. He quickly looks around. Sees Pablo carrying two PAINT BUCKETS to the shed.

AL
 He paints.

DENISE
 He paints?

AL
 Yes. He...uh...he paints
 portraits. With his teeth. Does
 very well.

DENISE
 With his teeth?

AL
 Oh yeah. He paints better with his
 teeth than most people do with
 their hands.

VICKI
 Wow.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Ben and Dave now have Fred and the tenants attempting a wheelchair-based version of the "Hokey Pokey." Mrs. Hilgart pushes Fred's chair around. He's not enjoying this.

DAVE AND BEN

*You put your left wheel in,
You put your left wheel out,
You put your left wheel in,
And you shake it all about!*

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Al continues the interview, posing against a tree. Laying it on thick, very comfortable and confident now.

AL

Sure he'd be better off with an electronic wheelchair. But he's so proud, that Fred. So proud.

DENISE

It just seems that someone with that severe of a disability-- I mean, it looks just like an ordinary fold-out wheelchair you'd find at a hospital.

AL

I know. I know.
(shakes his head)
He's so proud.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE ON Miss Hilgart.

MISS HILGART

Quiet time!

She dims the lights in the main room, as Alice and Pablo place quilts on the tenants. Fred sits patiently as Alice places a quilt over him.

Miss Hilgart turns on the boom box, which plays "Music Box Dancer." The tenants all stare with loathing at the boom box, which has been conveniently placed out of the reach of anyone in a wheelchair.

ISABEL

Miss Hilgart? Could we possibly have a different quiet time song?

MISS HILGART

Well, we'll have to vote on that at
next year's roundtable, Isabel.

Miss Hilgart smiles and leaves the building. As soon as she's gone, Pablo and Alice quickly leave the rec room and head for the office. Shut the door. MUFFLED LOVEMAKING begins behind the door.

Back in the rec room, the tenants sit in a circle enduring the music, having quiet time. Fred glances up at the clock. It's 3:14. He grits his teeth. Where's Al?

CRASH! Fred quickly turns to the sound of metal hitting the floor, and sees--

Ronnie lying on the floor, his wheelchair somehow tipped on its side. His head turned at an awkward angle.

RONNIE

Help! Help!

Fred stares at him. The workers are nowhere to be found. The other tenants begin freaking out and screaming. Ronnie's face starts to turn purple.

Fred looks around. Still no sign of the workers. That's it. He bolts out of his chair, and rushes over to help Ronnie. Quickly lifts up his chair.

And as soon as he does, Ronnie smiles. Perfectly fine. He starts to laugh.

Fred stares at him. Stunned.

The other tenants laugh as well. Several of them exchange money. Melvin grabs a five dollar bill from Charlie.

MELVIN

Sweetness!

Fred looks at all the tenants laughing at him, spinning around in their chairs in delight. Fred stares, freaked out.

FRED

What is wrong with you people?

RONNIE

Well, for starters, none of us can walk.

FRED

I thought you were dying!

RONNIE
 Sorry. I couldn't resist.

FRED
 But how'd--how'd you know I wasn't,
 you know, one of you?

More laughter from everyone in the house. The tenants all begin imitating Fred's imitation of a disabled person.

TENANTS
 Aaannh! Aaannh! Unnnh!

Fred is extremely uncomfortable. Ronnie turns to him.

RONNIE
 Your impression was a little over
 the top. Plus, you've got pretty
 well-developed calves for a guy
 confined to a wheelchair.

Fred glances self-consciously at his calves.

ISABEL
 But don't worry--other people won't
 notice.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
 THEY'LL TRY NOT TO LOOK AT YOU.

RONNIE
 So. You must want one of those
 balls pretty bad.

FRED
 It's not for me. It's for my
 fiancée's kid. Who, by the way,
 was born with all his internal
 organs backwards, which I think
 ought to count for something with
 you people.

ISABEL
 (smiles at Fred)
 You must love your fiancée an awful
 lot.

FRED
 Well...sure.
 (to the whole group)
 Look. I've got nothing against
 disabilities. I'm a big fan of
 Jerry Lewis and his whole thing.

(MORE)

FRED (cont'd)

And I personally have installed in the neighborhood of sixty-three access ramps so you all can wheel up to Starbucks with the rest of us. I just--

RONNIE

Don't worry, Fred: your secret's safe with us.

FRED

You won't tell?

RONNIE

You kidding? It's way too much fun watching you suffer. He laughs, and everyone joins in.

Fred grimaces.

INT: TRUCK - NIGHT

Al drives the truck, and Fred sits shotgun, staring straight ahead. In complete, extremely thick silence.

For thirty seconds they drive, neither saying a word. Al occasionally glances over at Fred. Fred gives him a lethal look, eyes burning with anger. Then just stares ahead saying nothing.

Then after thirty seconds of complete silence, Al turns on the radio. It's Hanson singing "Mmm-Bop." Al pretends to enjoy it. Adjusts the mirror. Turns on the windshield wipers and the spray.

But nothing can fill the deafening silence between them. Al pulls over next to the construction site.

EXT: CONSTRUCTION SITE - CONTINUOUS

Fred and Al exit the truck. Fred stares at the site in disbelief.

FRED

Oh no. What'd they do? What'd the morons do?

Fred walks up the steps to the building. They end at a wall. The door frame is about ten feet to the right.

FRED (CONT.)

Wouldn't it make more sense to have the entrance over here, WHERE THE STAIRS ARE???

AL

Probably.

FRED

I would've given them more detailed instructions, but I didn't, you know why?

AL

Why?

FRED

Because I didn't realize I WAS GOING TO SPEND THE WHOLE DAY IN A FREAKING WHEELCHAIR!

(beat)

Great. We're gonna have to fix this tonight. And I'm gonna have to cancel my date with Rhonda!

AL

Look, so it wasn't the greatest day. But now you've done your time. The worst is over!

INT: DENISE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

There are several framed posters on the walls from previous Denise Popnik documentaries: Happy Meals, Happy Faces: a Visit to Ronald McDonald House, Hope Without Hands: the Tracy McFadden Story, and Faith Without Feet: the Billy Laguna Story.

Denise and Vicki sit on the couch eating takeout Chinese and watching VIDEO FOOTAGE of Fred in his wheelchair. Denise smiles.

DENISE

I can't put my finger on it, but there's something different about this guy Fred. Something special.

VICKI

Yeah.

Denise stares at the screen, deep in thought.

DENISE

Let's get Fred back to the Hilgart House tomorrow.

(smiles)

I think we've found our star.

MUSIC UP ("Music Box Dancer") as the montage begins.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Fred sits in his wheelchair in the Hilgart House. SLOW PUSH in on him. Just sitting there.

INT: STAIRWELL - DAY

CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH CHUCK-A-TUH! Fred flies down the stairs again as Denise films.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Ronnie, Isabel, and Fred sit in a row, Ronnie and Isabel holding up their Mercury Pearson footballs. Denise films them, a big smile on her face.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Fred and the other tenants sit watching the Funky Folks put on an EXTREMELY LAME PUPPET SHOW as Denise and Vicki film.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Fred sits in front of a canvas, holding a paintbrush in his mouth, attempting to paint a portrait of Alice as the camera crew films. His face is covered with paint flecks.

We see the painting: a SHAPELESS BLACK BLOB. Al turns to Denise and Vicki. Is he good or what?

INT: CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

Fred and Al work at the construction site at night, fixing whatever mistakes were made that day, pounding in nails. Fred's pissed off.

FRED

And another thing--no more leaving me alone at the house while you go out for lunch with the girls!

AL

But you're not alone--you're with your special friends.

FRED

They're not my special friends!

AL

Real nice attitude. Fine, I'm sorry. It won't happen again.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Fred, sitting in his chair, looks out the window as Al, Denise, and Vicki drive away, leaving him behind. Miss Hilgart pokes her head in the doorway.

MISS HILGART

All right, bathtime! Who's first?

All of the tenants quickly move their wheelchairs backwards. Leaving Fred out front. Miss Hilgart smiles.

EXT: CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Rhonda walks up to the Bodies in Motion work site. Finds Joe, asks him where Fred is. Joe shrugs. Has no idea. Rhonda frowns, suspicious. Where could Fred be?

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Quiet time. Ronnie gives Fred tips as the other tenants watch.

RONNIE

No, no, it's more like this:
"Ennh. Ennh."

FRED

Annh. Annh.

RONNIE

No. "Ennh."

FRED

Enhhh.

RONNIE

Perfect.

FRED

Enhhh.

(suddenly realizing)
You're screwing with me, aren't
you?

Ronnie smiles, and the other tenants laugh. Fred grimaces.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Al picks up the mike boom. Turns to Vicki.

AL
 So how does this work? This
 is...this is fascinating to me.

VICKI
 (takes it and
 demonstrates)
 Well, you just put one hand
 here...and another here, and then
 hold it close to the sound. Without
 getting it in the frame.

AL
 Wow. That sounds hard. Like this?

Al holds the mike boom intentionally incorrectly. Vicki
 shakes her head.

VICKI
 No, like this.

She stands behind him, showing him where to put his hands. Al
 smiles at the closeness.

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rhonda sits on the couch filling out a Cosmopolitan quiz: "Is
 Your Man Cheating?" Checking box after box. Getting
 increasingly upset.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

BANG! A starting pistol goes off.

SLOW-MOTION: The tenants and Fred (pushed by Al) immediately
 start speeding toward a finish line 25 yards away. Denise
 and Vicki catch all of the drama on film.

Quickly Al and Fred pull into the lead, Al running as hard as
 he possibly can. He pants as he sprints toward the finish
 line, leaving the others in the dust.

Fred breaks through the ribbon. Al raises his arms up high
 in triumph, enjoying the glorious victory.

EXT: CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

Fred and Al work together on the dance studio at night,
 fixing a mislaid wooden floor.

AL
 I got a date with Vicki Sunday.
 (smiles)
 (MORE)

AL (cont'd)

I tell ya, I've got many methods of snagging babes, but this friend-of-a-guy-in-a-wheelchair routine is a goldmine!

FRED

Even better than waving a long skinny object and pretending it's your penis?

AL

Way better. Only problem is, Vicki wants me to bring along someone for Denise.

FRED

What...she doesn't have a boyfriend?

AL

Guess not.

The two of them get back to work. Fred appears deep in thought.

EXT: STREET - DAY

CLOSE ON a headline in the local San Diego newspaper's sports section: "MERCURY OUT FOR REST OF SEASON--Torn ACL Ends Record-breaking Season at 26 TD Catches."

PULL BACK TO REVEAL Lester next to a newspaper dispenser, staring at the headline in horror.

LESTER

No. No.

(beat)

That was my ball. MY BALL!!!

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Fred sits in his wheelchair in front of a class of THIRD GRADE KIDS and their teacher, MRS. FORMAN. Al is there also, with Denise and the film crew filming.

MRS. FORMAN

...because everybody is special in his or her own way.

(beat)

Now, Mr. McCripple, before we go, we've got a little surprise for you. Don't we, children?

The kids clap and squeal with delight. Fred attempts a smile. What next?

MRS. FORMAN (CONT.)

When Ms. Popnik told us about your situation and special need, the children looked at the money they'd earned for their Disneyland trip and we all decided--

BRATTY KID

Not me!

MRS. FORMAN

We all decided to use it to get you a special gift. Ms. Popnik?

Denise opens the door and brings in--

A BRAND NEW FULLY-AUTOMATED WHEELCHAIR. Sleek, high tech, the ultimate in disabled transportation. Fred stares at it.

DENISE

Come on, Fred. Don't you wanna try it out?

She and Al help pull Fred out of his old wheelchair into the new one. Al puts Fred's hand on the joystick control. He pushes it and the wheelchair jerks forward. The children and Mrs. Forman OOH and AHH, impressed.

DENISE (CONT.)

Look, it even has a talking machine!

Denise points to a TALKING MACHINE and keyboard attached to the chair. Pushes a button on it. The machine voice is a dull computerized monotone, with inflections in all the wrong places.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

WELCOME TO THE SPEAKEASY 2000. JUST TYPE AND LISTEN.

DENISE

So, Fred: how do you like your new wheelchair?

Fred looks up at Denise. At the kids. He hunts and pecks for a bit. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK he types away at the keyboard as everyone watches expectantly. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK he continues to type furiously. Then pushes one last button.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

FINE.

Everyone applauds Fred's accomplishment. It's a great day for Mrs. Forman's class.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

THUD. The new wheelchair smashes into a GARBAGE CAN. Fred backs up, running over a small tree. Al walks next to him as they cross the grounds alone. Fred looks concerned.

FRED

I don't know. I'm starting to feel like maybe we shouldn't be doing this.

Al glances over at Vicki and Denise putting equipment back into the van in the distance.

AL

Nooooo! We should! Come on, look at how happy you made all those kids. It's right. Very right!

FRED

But Denise, her whole documentary...

AL

...is almost over! Just one more week, Fred. Don't give up now! Please!

INT: FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Late at night. Fred is alone in his apartment in the new wheelchair, typing into his talking machine's stenographic keyboard. Presses enter.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

DENISE, THERE IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO TELL YOU.

Fred nods, and types some more. Presses enter.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE (CONT.)

I AM NOT REALLY SPECIAL.

Fred types some more. Presses enter.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE (CONT.)
I PRETENDED TO BE DISABLED TO GET A
FOOTBALL FOR MY FIANCEE'S SON. I'M
SORRY.

Fred sits there in his wheelchair in silence.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - EVENING

Al sits next to Fred in his wheelchair on the Special House grounds. Denise and the camera crew are filming, and Al is laying it on thick.

AL
No, no, I don't see it as a
sacrifice. Because I've always
believed that the more you give,
the more you get in return. And
every second I spend with Fred here
is a precious little gift he's
given me. Isn't that right, buddy?

Al smiles at Fred. Fred smiles back. Types into his talking machine.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
AL BEATS ME.

Al's jaw drops. Denise and Vicki stare in horrified shock. Al turns to the camera, panicking. Attempts a laugh.

AL
He's joking, he's just joking. He's
got a very...very...very, you know,
weird sense of humor. Right, Fred?

Everyone watches nervously as Fred types something into the talking machine.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
JUST JOKING. HA HA HA.

An audible sigh of relief, as everyone laughs just to relieve the tension.

DENISE
You really had us going there,
Fred. All right, let's head out!

INT: SPECIAL BUS - NIGHT

Fred sits in the house's special access bus with the other tenants and the film crew, plus Pablo and Alice. The tenants are all extremely excited, staring out the windows.

NICK

Look! There's a mall there now!

VICKI

That mall's been there for years.

RONNIE

Miss Hilgart doesn't let us get out much.

(to Denise)

So Denise. What's the surprise?
Where are we going?

Denise smiles, then pulls Fred's bowling ball bag out from under the front seat.

DENISE

We're going bowling!

The bus pulls into the bowling alley parking lot. Fred and Al stare at the place in horror.

AL

Here? On league night?

Fred gives Al a look. Do something! As the bus passes by the entrance, Al opens the door and rushes out.

AL (CONT.)

Let me see if I can get us a lane!

INT: BOWLING ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Al bursts inside the bowling alley, which is filled with regular league bowlers. Including Joe and Steve. He quickly goes to the main desk, and grabs the microphone, swinging it towards him. His voice booms throughout the alley.

AL

Attention, everyone.

(the microphone hums)

Fred is crippled and retarded.

Please play along.

(beat)

Thank you very much.

Al puts the microphone back. Just then, the doors open, and Fred rolls inside. Along with the other tenants, Denise and Vicki, and Pablo and Alice. Joe and Steve watch from their lane. Steve stares, horrified.

STEVE

Oh no. Oh please God no.

Fred wheels nervously toward the front desk with the group. Various BOWLERS wave to him from their lanes.

BOWLER #1

Hey, Fred!

BOWLER #2

Hi, Fred!

Fred smiles back at them, very uncomfortable. Ronnie and the others smile, enjoying this a lot. Al quickly joins the group.

AL

Wow, this is great! Fred, guess who's here? All these people who know you! And look, it's Joe and Steve!

Joe and Steve approach Fred. Steve looks very disturbed.

JOE

Hey, Fred. Uh...how's it hangin'? Fred pushes a button on his keyboard.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

HI.

STEVE

Oh, Fred.

Steve, overcome with emotion, runs away crying.

AL

(to Denise)
Must be the new chair.

DENISE

So you guys bowl with Fred?

JOE

Oh yeah. He's our team leader. The other week he bowled a 230.

Fred and Al give Joe dirty looks.

DENISE

A 230? Wow. I'd like to see that!
Let's bowl!

INT: BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

Denise and Vicki film as the entire alley's attention is focused on Lane 12, where Fred prepares to bowl. Al places Fred's bowling ball in his lap. Turns to Denise.

AL

Watch this.

Vicki turns to Joe.

VICKI

Isn't it incredible all that Al
does for Fred?

JOE

Oh yeah. He's a regular Mother
Teresa.

Fred lines up several yards behind the lane line. Takes a deep breath. Gets a determined look on his face.

Puts the chair in gear, and starts to roll. Picking up speed. Everyone watches in nervous anticipation as he gets closer. And closer. And--

Puts on the brakes, preparing to drop the ball onto the lane. Unfortunately, the wheelchair doesn't stop. It just KEEPS SLIDING FORWARD on the incredibly slick lane. Fred pulls on the joystick every which way, but the wheelchair zooms relentlessly on, weaving back and forth. Until--

THUD! He connects with the wall at the end of the lane. The force of it knocks the ball off of his lap.

CRASH! It connects with the pins. Knocking all of them down.

There's complete silence in the bowling alley. And then Al begins to clap.

AL

Yes! A strike! Whoo-hooooo!

Everyone else realizes they're supposed to clap, so they do. The alley's filled with applause and cheers and whoops, from Denise, the tenants, Joe and Steve, everyone.

Fred turns the wheelchair around. Acknowledges the applause with a weak smile.

INT: BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

SWISH! SQUEAK! The alley is now filled with tenants in wheelchairs sliding across the slick lanes toward the pins.

CRASH! Melvin connects and gets a spare.

MELVIN

Sweetness!

Alice and Pablo watch, shaking their heads.

ALICE

Miss Hilgart would not like this.
Fred and Denise sit together off to
the side drinking cokes.

DENISE

So what do you think, Fred? Think
this is all worth it? Think
anybody's going to care about our
little documentary?

Fred pushes a few buttons on his Speakeasy 2000.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

IT WILL BE GREAT. YOU ARE A GREAT
DIRECTOR.

Denise looks at Fred sweetly.

DENISE

Oh, Fred. Your life must be so
hard, yet you still manage to find
the time to lift other people up.
How do you do it, Fred? What's
your secret?

Fred looks at Denise. Then down at his Speakeasy 2000.
Clicks on a file marked "CONFESSION." The screen flashes
"LOADING...Please Wait." A little rectangle begins filling
up to show its progress.

DENISE (CONT.)

You know why I'm doing this
documentary, Fred? Not many people
know this, but...I had a little
brother, Patrick, who was born with
muscular dystrophy.

Denise opens up her wallet. Shows Fred a picture of PATRICK, a smiling young boy in a wheelchair.

DENISE (CONT.)

I was, in a way sometimes I was horrible to him, not that I mistreated him or anything, I just, inside I always felt resentful of all the special treatment he got: the extra toys at Christmas, the special trips for ice cream, stuff like that. And so I guess maybe by doing these documentaries I'm trying to, in some small way, make it up to him. To make up for the way he was treated all his life: as a freak, an object of pity, a joke. You wouldn't believe how insensitive some people are to the disabled, Fred. You wouldn't believe it.

(sighs)

What am I saying? Of course you know.

Fred stares at Denise. Moved. Realizes he can't possibly confess now. Looks down at the Speakeasy 2000. The rectangle is almost filled!

He panics, begins hitting keys, trying to stop it. No such luck. Denise notices he seems to be disturbed.

DENISE (CONT.)

Is everything okay, Fred?

The rectangle fills up. "FILE LOADED."

Fred types madly on the keyboard.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

DENISE, THERE IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO TELL YOU.

BANG! BANG! BANG! Fred pounds away at the Speakeasy 2000, trying to stop the message.

DENISE

What, Fred? What do you have to tell me?

He moans loudly, trying to drown out the voice.

FRED
Aaannhh! Aaaannhhh!

DENISE
(panicking)
What's wrong? Is it something I
said? Are you--

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
I AM NOT REALLY SPSHNLLGRRRRDDD...

The voice slows down as if it were melting, and the message stops. Fred stops pounding and calms down. Denise is relieved. Feels terrible.

DENISE
I'm sorry, Fred, I'm sorry...I
didn't know it would affect you
like that. I'm sorry.

Fred looks up at Denise. If she feels terrible, he feels worse.

DENISE (CONT.)
Listen. Tomorrow night I'm having
dinner at my parents'. Would you--
and please feel free to say no--
would you want to come with me?

Fred looks up at Denise. Tempted by the invitation. But not quite sure.

DENISE (CONT.)
Please? They're dying to meet you.

Denise looks pleadingly at Fred. He can't resist. Types into the keyboard.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
SURE.
(the machine keeps going)
SURE.
(Fred whacks it)
WELCOME.

INT: BOWLING ALLEY RESTROOM - LATER

Fred enters and rolls to the handicapped stall. Unfortunately, it's occupied. He sighs. Then hears a FLUSH. The stall door opens, and out wheels--

Lester. He fixes Fred with a piercing stare.

LESTER

So. We meet again.

Fred stares back at Lester. Smiles. Lester doesn't smile back. He circles Fred creepily.

LESTER (CONT.)

Look, I don't know what sort of game you're playing, Mr. McCripple-- but I know what I saw that Sunday at the stadium. And if you're disabled, I'm Mercury Pearson. Who I'd like to be, but I'm not. Even if some people call me Mercury.

(beat)

The point is, that was my ball. Not yours. And from now on I am going to do everything in my power to bring you down. You will rue the day you ever crossed Lester Kinney! You will rue the day!

Lester gives Fred a piercing look, then turns to make a dramatic exit. Unfortunately he can't get out the door. VZZZT. He backs up, tries again. Still can't do it. VZZZT. VZZZT. Keeps trying. And finally gets out the door.

Fred stares at the door as it closes. Types into the Speakeasy 2000.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

CRAP.

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Later that night. Christmas carols play as Fred, Rhonda, and Curtis decorate the Christmas tree. Having hot dogs for dinner.

RHONDA

But we were going out to dinner tomorrow night. I got a sitter and everything.

FRED

I know, babe. It's just this dance studio's keeping me so busy.

Rhonda stares at Fred. Suspicious and hurt.

RHONDA

Is it? IS IT???

She hurls a mound of tinsel at the tree.

RHONDA (CONT.)
Nice Christmas!

And she storms out. SLAM! goes a door. Fred sighs. What'd I do? Turns to Curtis. Who holds out a half-eaten HOT DOG.

CURTIS
Wanna bite of my weiner, Fred?
(beat)
I know how much you love weiners!

Curtis chews away, smiling. Fred stares at him. Trapped.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Establishing.

MISS HILGART (O.S.)
Thank you, Gladys. And what is
your special dream, Charlie?

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - SAME

Fred and the tenants sit across from Miss Hilgart.

MISS HILGART
And remember: getting to leave the
house more doesn't count.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
I WANT TO BE A COMEDIAN. LIKE
ABBOTT AND COSTELLO. SOMEDAY I
WANT TO MEET THEM.

MISS HILGART
That's a lovely dream, Charlie.
Unfortunately, they're both dead.
How about you, Nick and Isabel?

ISABEL
Nicky and I never got to go on a
honeymoon. That's our dream.

NICK
To Hawaii.

Miss Hilgart nods, rolling her eyes. Then turns to Fred.

MISS HILGART
And how about you, Fred? What's
your dream?

Fred looks at Miss Hilgart. Types into his machine.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
TO GET OUT OF THIS CHAIR.

MISS HILGART
Yes, but...that's not likely to
happen, Fred.

RONNIE
Why not? I believe someday Fred
will get out of that chair, stand
up and walk. I really do.

Ronnie gives Fred a wink, then turns to Miss Hilgart. She
turns away, addresses the rest of the group.

MISS HILGART
Yes, well, we all have our little
dreams that help us get through
life, don't we?
(gets a faraway look)
I, for one, once dreamed that I'd
find someone. Not someone
particularly handsome, or rich, or
strong, just...someone who would
love me, and want to share the rest
of his life with me.
(beat)
But instead I got all of you. And
I'm just as happy.
(big smile)
All right. Quiet time!

Miss Hilgart gets up and turns on the boom box. "Music Box
Dancer" plays. She leaves the room. As soon as she's gone,
Ronnie turns to Fred.

RONNIE
So I heard about your big date with
Denise tonight.

Ronnie raises his eyebrows up and down. Fred shakes his
head.

FRED
It's not a date. It's just dinner.
With her parents.

RONNIE
You like her, don't you?

FRED

What?

RONNIE

You like her.

FRED

I don't know what you're talking about.

Ronnie smiles. Pulls a PAISLEY TIE out of a pouch in his chair. Holds it out to Fred.

RONNIE

Here. Wear this tonight. Whenever I've worn it, I've had major success.

Ronnie winks at Fred and hands him the tie. Fred looks at it.

FRED

I'm not wearing this tie. And it's not a date. It's just dinner. With her parents.

All of the tenants laugh, joining in on the conversation.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE

TELL ME ANOTHER ONE.

FRED

Look, I've already got a fiancee! And besides, there's no way Denise is interested in me!

RONNIE

Why not?

FRED

Why not? Come on! As far as she's concerned, I'm--

Fred stops suddenly. Realizes what he was about to say. There's silence in the room.

RONNIE

You're what, Fred?

FRED

Nothing.

Ronnie gives Fred a long look.

RONNIE

You've got a lot to learn about
love, Fred.

ISABEL

(to Ronnie)

We all do. Has that Buffy the
Vampire Girl ever written you back?

RONNIE

(defensively)

She's a very busy woman! And she's
a slayer, not a vampire! She kills
vampires!

Isabel rolls her eyes. Turns to Fred, a knowing smile on her
face.

ISABEL

The boys do have a point, Fred.
I've seen the way you look at
Denise. The way your face lights
up when she smiles at you.

(beat)

And the way you're blushing now.

FRED

I'm not blushing! And it's not a
date! It's an informal dinner!

EXT: POPNIK HOME - NIGHT

DING-DONG! Fred and Denise are at the door of a magnificent
THREE-STORY MANSION in La Jolla. Fred's wearing Ronnie's
paisley tie. Denise notices him staring at the house.

DENISE

(embarrassed)

Obscene, isn't it? You should see
the one in Greece.

(notices he's sweating)

You okay, Fred?

Fred nods, sweating more. Denise smiles.

DENISE (CONT.)

I like your tie. Here, let me
straighten it for you.

Denise leans over to fix Fred's tie, and moves in close. The
smell of her perfume, her hair, her closeness...it's almost
more than he can bear.

DENISE (CONT.)

There. Perfect.

Just then, the front door opens. It's MR. AND MRS. POPNIK, Denise's parents. Greek, distinguished, and very warm.

MRS. POPNIK

Hi, sweetie.

DENISE

Hi, mom. Hi, dad.
(gestures to him)
This is Fred.

Mr. Popnik smiles and grasps Fred's hand firmly in his.

MR. POPNIK

Fred. Nice to meet you.

MRS. POPNIK

I hope you're hungry!

EXT: POPNIK HOME - NIGHT

Through the window we see the Popniks, Denise, and Fred all sitting around the dinner table. Eating, drinking, and having a great time together.

INT: POPNIK DINING ROOM - SAME

Fred finishes up a story before a rapt audience.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

...AND THEN I ATE IT!

Denise and her parents roar with LAUGHTER. Fred smiles, enjoying the good company. Mr. Popnik takes a swig of wine.

MR. POPNIK

Well, Denise, I must say, this is big improvement over the last guy you brought home for dinner.

MRS. POPNIK

Phil...

MR. POPNIK

What was his name? Chad? Ooh, he was a winner. I especially enjoyed the way he referred to your mother as "dude."

MRS. POPNIK

Phil...

(to Denise)

So I finished reading your script last night, honey. It was great--- when're you going to make it?

DENISE

I don't know, mom. I'm still busy with this documentary, and the Paralympics people are talking to me about doing Wheelchairs of Fire.

MR. POPNIK

Enough with the disabilities already. Six years you've been doing the same damn thing. No one wants to sit for two hours watching people roll around in wheelchairs. It's depressing!

Denise and Mrs. Popnik fix Mr. Popnik with evil looks, glancing nervously over at Fred. Mr. Popnik cringes, realizing the implications of what he just said. Mrs. Popnik tries to do something about the awkward silence.

MRS. POPNIK

(cheerfully)

So...who wants dessert?

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

RIGHT HERE, DUDE.

Everyone looks at Fred. And bursts into laughter at his joke. Fred smiles, basking in the warmth of this family.

INT: AL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Al and Vicki lie in bed in his apartment. Staring straight ahead in silence. Awkward silence.

VICKI

Maybe you've been spending too much time with handicapped people.

Al takes a deep breath. Extremely uncomfortable. Then finally turns to Vicki. Suddenly a little boy.

AL

Could we maybe just...cuddle?

Vicki nods, eyes dripping with sympathy. She moves in close and they snuggle. Al closes his eyes, getting in touch with his sensitive side.

EXT: POPNIK BACKYARD - NIGHT

Dinner is long over, and Denise and Fred walk alone through the immense backyard, next to a stunning pool.

DENISE

My parents loved you, you know. And they're pretty particular.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

I WISH I'D HAD A FAMILY LIKE THAT.

Denise looks sympathetically at Fred. Wanting to get the details, but feeling too awkward to ask. She gestures to the grounds.

DENISE

I have such great memories of this backyard. My parents used to have these huge formal parties out here.

(laughs)

And you know what Patrick and I used to do? We had this game where we'd wander around the party and see who could get away with touching the most people's butts.

Fred laughs. Denise laughs with him.

DENISE (CONT.)

Patrick always won, of course, 'cause people thought it was just part of his disability. The "uncontrollable butt-touching disease."

(laughs)

But once...once I touched Barry Manilow's butt. And that night Patrick conceded the win to me.

Denise smiles and gets a faraway look in her eyes. Then turns to Fred.

DENISE (CONT.)

I think he'd like what we're doing. The documentary and everything. Don't you think he'd like it?

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
WHAT'S YOUR SCREENPLAY ABOUT?

Denise looks at Fred, caught off-guard.

DENISE
Oh, it's just a thing I wrote.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
WILL YOU READ IT TO ME?

DENISE
You really want to read it? Now?

Fred nods. Denise smiles, flattered.

EXT: POPNIK BACKYARD - LATER

As the two of them sit poolside, Denise finishes reading her SCREENPLAY to Fred.

DENISE
"...Fade Out. The End."

Denise closes the script and looks up. Sees Fred is moved.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
YOU HAVE TO MAKE THAT MOVIE.

Denise is touched by Fred's response. But she just shakes her head.

DENISE
I can't, Fred. My dad may be right, maybe no one wants to see my documentaries, but...but I've got to keep making them. I owe it to my brother.

Fred looks at Denise, trying to figure out a way to help her get out of her rut.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
I DIDN'T KNOW YOUR BROTHER. BUT I
THINK HE'D WANT YOU TO MAKE THIS.

Fred points to the screenplay. Denise stares at Fred, deeply touched. Tears welling up.

Their eyes meet. And suddenly the atmosphere in the room changes. Just from the way they look at each other.

Caught in each other's eyes. Hearts pounding. DING-DONG!
It's the doorbell. Neither of them moves.

DENISE
That must be Al.

Fred nods. DING-DONG! DING-DONG!

INT: TRUCK - NIGHT

Al and Fred drive home. Something about this evening has
changed both of them.

AL
So...what exactly is going on here?
You still doing all this for
Rhonda...or is there some other
reason?

FRED
What? Noooo. It's nothing like
that. Rhonda's the one for me,
it's just that...Denise...

Al looks out the window and sees TWO SKIMPILY-DRESSED WOMEN
walking by. He smiles at them and tips his hat.

AL
Evening, ladies.

Fred gives Al a look. Surprised at this new attitude towards
women. Al looks back at him. What? Fred turns away, looks
out the window into the darkness. Shakes his head.

FRED
She's so good...so much better than
she thinks she is.

Fred stares out the window. He sighs.

FRED (CONT.)
And I'm so much worse.

EXT: POPNIK BACKYARD - NIGHT

Denise sits by the pool, smiling. She hears the MUFFLED
RINGING of a phone. Looks around, and soon finds Fred's
backpack lying on the ground. She quickly opens it and
answers the cell phone.

DENISE
Hello?

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - SAME

Rhonda sits on her couch, an empty bottle of vodka on the table, copy of Cosmo in her hands. More than a bit tipsy, the female voice on the other end of the line confirming all her worst fears.

RHONDA
Who the hell is this?

INTERCUT with Denise.

DENISE
Denise Popnik. Who's this?

RHONDA
Where's Fred?

DENISE
Fred just left. Who is this?

RHONDA
This is Fred's fiancée.

Denise can't believe what she's just heard.

DENISE
Fiancée?

RHONDA
Yeah. Fiancée. Denise who? Who the hell are you?

DENISE
So...Fred hasn't told you about the documentary?

RHONDA
(furrows her brow,
confused)
What documentary?

DENISE
He's in a documentary I'm making.
About the people who get the
Mercury Pearson footballs.
(realizes)
Oh no. He must've wanted it to be
a surprise. And now I've ruined
it. I'm so sorry.
(gets an idea)
Listen: don't tell Fred we spoke.
Can we get together sometime soon?
(MORE)

DENISE (cont'd)
 Maybe for dinner? I'd love to
 interview you for the documentary.

RHONDA
 (smiles, flattered)
 Interview me? For T.V.?

INT: STADIUM OFFICE - DAY

An ever-cheerful Jan sits at her desk in the Condors office building.

JAN
 Now, Mr. Kinney...

Across from her sits an agitated Lester.

LESTER
 He turned my chair around, I tell
 you. He spun me like a top! He
 didn't belong in those stands!

Jan sighs. Looks through a stack of papers on her desk.

JAN
 Mr. Kinney. This month alone we've
 had twelve complaints of your
 antisocial behavior in the special
 fans stand. So if there's anyone
 who doesn't belong there, I'm
 afraid it might be you.

LESTER
 I see. I see. Fine. You wanna
 play hardball? I'll play hardball.
 I'll bring you proof that Fred
 McCripple's a phony. And you will
 rue the day you ever crossed Lester
 Kinney! You will rue it!

Lester gives Jan a piercing look, then turns to make a dramatic exit. Unfortunately, once again he can't get out the door. VZZZT. He backs up, tries again. Still can't do it. VZZZT. VZZZT.

LESTER (CONT.)
 (under his breath)
 Damn.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - DAY

Miss Hilgart turns on the boom box, and "Music Box Dancer" plays again.

MISS HILGART

All right, everyone, let's enjoy our quiet time. And when it's over, guess who's coming back? The Funky Folks!

Just then Fred enters the room. Miss Hilgart stares at him.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)

Fred. We weren't expecting you today.

Fred just shrugs.

MISS HILGART (CONT.)

Well, the more the merrier.

Fred wheels over to an open spot next to the others, and Miss Hilgart leaves the room.

As soon as she does, Fred steps out of his chair and heads for the boom box. The tenants watch him: what's he doing?

INT: HILGART OFFICE - LATER

Miss Hilgart sits at her desk reading the personals. She hears the music stop. Then changes. To the Doobie Brothers "Takin' It to the Streets." She looks up. Stands up and rushes out of her office.

INT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Miss Hilgart enters the rec room to find it completely empty. Music blaring from the boombox, which has been placed up on a shelf out of her reach. She stares, stunned, as outside there is a SCREECH and the ROAR of an engine.

She looks out the window just in time to see the Special Bus zipping out of the parking lot.

INT: SPECIAL BUS - SAME

Fred speeds the Special Bus down the street. The tenants are abuzz with nervous excitement.

RONNIE

But...but where are we going?

FRED

We're going everywhere. And doing everything. From now on we are gonna live it up, my friends. And nothing's gonna hold us back!

MELVIN

Sweetness!

EXT: BEACH - DAY

MUSIC UP. Waves, foam, sand, fresh air...Fred and the tenants romp across the beach (like the Beatles in Help!) having a great time. The claustrophobic feeling of the Hilgart House is miles away.

EXT: BEACH - DAY

Fred leads Nick and Isabel to a little BEACH CABANA he's set up, with a small PALM TREE in front.

He gives them both LEIS, then opens up the cabana, gesturing for them to go inside.

EXT: BEACH - DAY

Fred buries Ronnie and Charlie in the sand, giving them incredibly muscular sand bodies.

EXT: BEACH - DAY

Fred looks over at the cabana. Nick and Isabel's wheelchairs are parked out front. The cabana is shaking like crazy.

EXT: BEACH BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Fred and Charlie sit in their chairs on the boardwalk, performing a classic routine for a group of appreciative SPECTATORS. Fred has now completely mastered the Speakeasy.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE

WELL THEN WHO'S ON FIRST?

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

YES.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE

I MEAN THE FELLOW'S NAME.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

WHO.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE

THE GUY ON FIRST.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

WHO.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
THE FIRST BASEMAN.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
WHO.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
THE GUY PLAYING...

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
WHO IS ON FIRST.

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
I'M ASKING YOU WHO'S ON FIRST!

The crowd laughs and applauds, totally enjoying this.
Charlie beams.

INT: SPECIAL BUS - NIGHT

Everyone except Nick and Isabel sits in the bus. Ronnie checks his watch. Out the window Nick and Isabel's cabana is still shaking.

EXT: HILGART SPECIAL HOUSE - NIGHT

MUSIC FADES as the Special Bus pulls up in front of the house. Miss Hilgart storms up to it, confronting everyone.

MISS HILGART
Where have you been? I've been
going out of my mind here! I
called the hospitals, the police...
(it just hits her)
And...who was driving, anyway? Fred
and the tenants stare back at her.

RONNIE
Jesus.

INT: FRED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fred zips around the apartment, completely at home in the wheelchair, following and complaining to Al.

FRED
And it's not just access problems.
You wouldn't believe the way they
treated me at this one store when I
came wheeling in...

AL

Wait a minute. You went to the mall...in the wheelchair...by yourself?

FRED

Sure, I can get around fine on my own. The point is--

AL

The point is? The point is YOU ARE NOT HANDICAPPED!

EXT: FRED'S APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

Outside Fred's building, we're in a VIDEO CAMERA POV of his third story window. Lester's camped out in his wheelchair trying to get evidence.

LESTER

Come on, stand up. Stand up.

But Fred stays in the chair. Frustrated, Lester lowers the camera. Then something catches his eye in another window. He zooms in. It's a YOUNG WOMAN getting undressed.

LESTER (CONT.)

Oh yeah. That's more like it.

VOICE (O.S.)

What the hell are you doing?

Lester turns and sees a massive GYM GUY standing in front of him. Angry.

GYM GUY

That's my wife you're peeping at, you perv.

The Gym Guy moves toward Lester menacingly. Lester cowers.

LESTER

Wait...no, I wasn't...you wouldn't hit a guy in a wheelchair, would you?

GYM GUY

No.

(beat)

But he would.

The Gym Guy points to his friend: a MUSCLEBOUND GUY IN A WHEELCHAIR. The Musclebound Guy wheels himself up to Lester, pulls back his fist. FADE OUT. POW!

INT: RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Denise stands inside a restaurant entrance waiting for Rhonda, looking around. A WOMAN IN A WHEELCHAIR enters. Denise sees her, smiles, and approaches her.

DENISE

Rhonda?

RHONDA (O.S.)

Over here!

Startled, Denise turns around. And sees Rhonda standing there, dressed up in her tacky finest. Denise stares at her, taken aback.

DENISE

Rhonda?

RHONDA

You must be Denise.

Rhonda holds out her hand to shake. Denise is still in a daze. Rhonda waves at her.

RHONDA (CONT.)

Hello?

DENISE

(coming out of it)

Sorry, I'm sorry, I was just...
just expecting...never mind, I'm
sorry.

Denise shakes Rhonda's hand. Rhonda looks her over.

RHONDA

You're very attractive for a
documentary filmmaker.

INT: RESTAURANT - LATER

Denise sits across from Rhonda as they eat and talk.

DENISE

So tell me about your relationship
with Fred. How'd you two meet?

RHONDA
My girlfriend Sheila set us up. On
a blind date.

DENISE
A blind date? But before you met,
you knew he was special, right?

RHONDA
No. I had no idea.

DENISE
(stunned)
You didn't? So...when you first
saw him, what was your reaction?

RHONDA
Well...
(smiles and giggles)
I wanted him. Right then and
there, you know what I mean? I
mean, there is much more to our
relationship now than just sex, but
in the beginning, to be honest, it
was mostly physical.

DENISE
Really?

RHONDA
Oh yeah. We were all over each
other. My girlfriends were totally
grossed out, but I just looked at
it like, hey, we wanted each other,
and that's all that really matters.

Denise stares at Rhonda. Stunned.

DENISE
You are the most open-minded woman
I have ever met.

RHONDA
Thank you.

DENISE
So...what do your parents think of
Fred?

RHONDA
Oh, they've never met him.

DENISE

Never? Why? Are you afraid they might not be as accepting of Fred as you are?

RHONDA

Accepting of him? Why wouldn't they be accepting of him?

DENISE

(uncomfortable)

I'm sorry...I didn't mean to... never mind.

RHONDA

I don't see what all this has to do with Fred getting the football.

EXT: STREET - NIGHT

It's late at night. The street is wet with rain and deserted. Fred rolls along the sidewalk in his wheelchair, on which hangs a shopping bag. The only sound is the WHIRR of the wheelchair motor.

Or is it? Getting the feeling he's being watched, Fred looks behind him. Sees only darkness. Keeps driving. Then stops. As his motor stops, it seems like there's the sound of another motor stopping.

Fred looks behind. Nothing. Just darkness. He starts the chair back up again. Can't shake the feeling he's being followed. There seems to be another motor whirring.

He stops suddenly. The other whirr stops as well. Fred looks behind him anxiously.

Nothing. He motors ahead in his wheelchair. Picking up speed. Going faster and faster.

Then a SHADOWY FORM in a wheelchair appears behind him.

It's Lester. With a BLACK EYE. A VIDEO CAMERA. And a TASER.

LESTER

Get out of the chair, McCripple. Or maybe you need a little help.

ZZZZHT-ZHHT! Lester threatens Fred with the taser. Fred's eyes go wide. Holy crap. Fred pushes the wheelchair to its limits. Lester does as well, and begins to gain on him. The high-speed chase is on.

LESTER (CONT.)
Give up, McCripple!

Fred comes to a corner. Makes a sharp left. Tires SQUEAL as the wheelchair one wheels it around the corner.

Lester makes it to the same corner. Turns left. His tires SQUEAL as he one wheels it, too.

Around the corner, Fred zooms down the street. Finds himself racing towards a construction zone. Breaks through the ORANGE STREAMER barrier. Lester does the same.

Fred approaches a huge crevice in the road up ahead. Fortunately, there's a ramp leading up to it.

He grits his teeth. Speeds up the ramp. And gets air! He clears the crevice and lands with a BANG! SPARKS fly as metal hits pavement.

Lester's right behind. Flying through the air, landing with sparks, and continuing his pursuit.

Lester races after Fred. But he's lost him. Then suddenly he sees him wheeling into a dark alley. Lester turns around and heads after him.

He follows Fred into the darkness.

LESTER (CONT.)
I've got you now. Get out of that chair or taste the taser.

ZZHHT-ZHHT. The wheelchair stops. Lester smiles.

LESTER (CONT.)
That's what I thought. Not such a tough guy now, are you?

The wheelchair turns around. Revealing--

The Musclebound Wheelchair Guy who gave Lester the black eye. Lester's face drops. Oh no.

LESTER (CONT.)
Oh...no...I thought you were someone else...

The Musclebound Wheelchair Guy's eyes darken. He wheels toward Lester, ready to strike. Lester brandishes the taser.

LESTER (CONT.)

Back off! I'm not afraid to use
this!

ZHHH....DTT. The taser dies. Lester looks at it. Shakes
it. Nothing. Uh-oh.

The Musclebound Wheelchair Guy smiles. Pulls back a fist.
FADE OUT. POW!

INT: DENISE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Denise and Vicki edit the documentary footage together.
Denise stares at a montage of images of Fred on the screen.

DENISE

Vicki?

VICKI

Yeah?

DENISE

Last night Fred's fiancée said
their relationship was very...
physical. Could you...could you
ever see yourself physically
attracted to...?

VICKI

Ewww. No way.
(beat)
But it takes all kinds.

Denise stares at a frozen image of Fred on the monitor. Vicki
gets up to get some more coffee, and notices a small stack of
posterboard on the counter. Takes a look, and sees that
they're actually storyboards. Holds one up.

VICKI (CONT.)

What're these?

DENISE

Uh...just some storyboards.

VICKI

(excited)
For your script?

DENISE

Yeah, I'm just getting some ideas
together.

Vicki just smiles, not wanting to push the issue. Denise turns back to the monitor and gets back to work.

EXT: MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

The Special Bus makes its way through the mall parking lot. Approaches a handicapped parking spot, but finds it occupied. By a shiny new MERCEDES. With no handicapped permit.

INT: SPECIAL BUS - SAME

Fred's at the wheel. He stares at the Mercedes.

FRED

Bastards.

RONNIE

They don't have a tag. Someone should do something about that.

Fred thinks. Then turns back to face Ronnie and the tenants.

FRED

How about us?

RONNIE

Us?

EXT: MALL PARKING LOT - LATER

Fred, Ronnie, and the other tenants sit in their wheelchairs surrounding the Mercedes. All of them hold makeshift signs: "NO CHAIR? DON'T PARK THERE!", "WE NEED OUR SPACE!", etc. Ronnie has a BULLHORN, and leads them in a chant.

RONNIE

"YOU'VE GOT THE ENTIRE PARKING LOT!"

GROUP

"Why do you have to take our spot?"

A small crowd of shoppers have stopped to gawk at the scene.

RONNIE

"WE HAVE TWO WHEELS, YOU HAVE FOUR!"

GROUP

"You shouldn't park here anymore!"

RONNIE

All right, everybody, now remember we've got to really freak them out when they show up!

The group laughs. Just then, the owner of the car exits the mall and heads for the Mercedes: It's Bucky Parks. The Condors owner. Carrying a Sports Chalet bag. In a hurry. He arrives at his car confused and upset.

BUCKY PARKS

What in the Sam Hill is going on here?

Ronnie recognizes Bucky immediately. Turns to Fred.

RONNIE

Holy crap. It's Bucky Parks.

Fred looks a bit worried, but just shrugs. Ronnie nods and turns to Bucky, holding the bullhorn to his lips.

RONNIE (CONT.)

You are parked in a handicapped space. What is your disability?

BUCKY PARKS

(rolls his eyes)

Look, fella, I sympathize with your cause, but I don't think you realize who you're dealing with here. I am a very important man in this town, and have pressing business to attend to.

RONNIE

Really? Well, that's just too darn bad!

The group erupts in cheers and the chants begin again. A bigger crowd of gawkers starts to form.

GROUP

"You've got the entire parking lot! Why do you have to take our spot?"

Bucky quickly gets into the Mercedes. Tries to back up, but Isabel is planted behind him in her wheelchair. He yells at her out the window.

BUCKY PARKS

Move! MOVE!!!

She refuses to move. The Mercedes jerks forward and backward, trying to play chicken, but the group won't budge. A LOCAL NEWS VAN arrives, and a CREW quickly hops out. Ronnie sees them.

RONNIE

Good. They got my message.

Fred looks warily at the news crew as they begin filming. Bucky, unaware of them, gets out of his car. Pushed beyond his limit. Tries to push Ronnie's chair away.

BUCKY PARKS

Move out of the way!

RONNIE

Get your hands off my chair!

Ronnie drops the bullhorn and begins to fight back, slapping at Bucky. Now the group goes crazy, wheeling over to Ronnie's defense, and still chanting.

GROUP

"YOU'VE GOT THE ENTIRE PARKING LOT!
WHY DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE OUR SPOT?
WE HAVE TWO WHEELS, YOU HAVE FOUR!
YOU SHOULDN'T PARK HERE ANYMORE!!!"

The conflict builds to a frenzy, the gang surrounding Bucky and chanting, until he finally explodes.

BUCKY PARKS

Get away from me you bunch of
crippled freaks!

INT: NEWSROOM - NIGHT

FREEZE FRAME the last image. Suddenly we're watching a newscast on television. The image shrinks down to reveal a NEWSCASTER.

NEWSCASTER

Bucky Parks...wherever he wants to,
according to a group of disabled
demonstrators at the Seaside Mall
earlier today.

More footage of the demonstration and the scene at the mall.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

The group was attempting to peacefully protest the misuse of handicapped parking spots when they were attacked by the San Diego Condors owner, who had illegally parked in one of the spaces while purchasing an \$89 pair of running shoes.

Back to the newscaster.

NEWSCASTER

Bucky Parks has long been a business leader and popular figure in the San Diego community, but he will have a hard time explaining his actions, and living down the shocking phrase: "Get away from me, you bunch of crippled freaks."

The image freezes again.

INT: BUCKY PARKS OFFICE - NIGHT

PULL BACK TO REVEAL we're in a conference room at Condors headquarters. Bucky Parks sits at the table surrounded by a corps of worried-looking LAWYERS and ADVISORS.

BUCKY PARKS

Everyone is so damned sensitive these days.

(claps hands together)

So. What're we gonna do?

JOHNSON

Here's an angle: these handicapped folks just want to be treated like everyone else, right? So this guy wanted to start a fight with Bucky, and while any other insensitive schmuck would've given him "special treatment" because he's in a wheelchair, Bucky gave him a little thing called..."self respect."

Everyone stares at Johnson, who is extremely proud of his idea. Bucky grits his teeth.

BUCKY PARKS

Please tell me someone has a better idea.

JACKSON

Okay, picture this: Sunday, the final home game of the season. Halftime show entitled "Special Fans, Special People."

JENSON

No: "Bucky Parks Presents... Special Fans, Special People."

Bucky begins to perk up.

JACKSON

Yes! Bucky walks onto the field hand in hand with a group of handicapped children. They circle the stadium in a wheelchair parade.

BUCKY PARKS

Say, that's not bad.

JENSON

(on cell phone)

Jenni: get me Christopher Reeve's people on the line. Now.

(to Bucky)

Then you step up to the podium wearing a Santa hat. Holding a check...

JOHNSON

One of those giant foam board checks.

JACKSON

Yes! You give the check to whatever foundation's getting the most publicity lately, and then we end the whole thing with Mercury Pearson walking--

JENSON

No--wheeling--

JACKSON

--wheeling himself to the center of the field, where he presents the last record-breaking season touchdown football to the special fan who caught it!

(looks down at paper)

"Fred McCripple."

JENSON
 His name's McCripple?
 (off Jackson's nod)
 Holy crap, there is a God!

Bucky lights up with a big smile.

BUCKY PARKS
 Now that is a cracker jack idea!
 Where am I?

JOHNSON
 Standing right between them. I can
 hear Mercury now: "Breaking the
 season receiving touchdown record
 was the biggest challenge of my
 life...but there is no greater
 challenge than those met everyday
 by these special fans."

Bucky jumps out of his seat, unable to contain himself.

BUCKY PARKS
 I love it!

EXT: STADIUM - DAY

It's a beautiful, sunny day. Fred expertly motors his
 wheelchair up the ramp to the stadium offices as Denise and
 Vicki film. Smiling. The day his nightmare ends.

DENISE
 So this is it, Fred: you're here
 with your friends, about to get the
 record-breaking touchdown ball.
 Could anything be better?

INT: STADIUM OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON the smiling face of Jan.

JAN
 We've got something even better for
 you than a little old football!

Fred looks warily at Jan and Brian, who stand across from him
 in the stadium office. Al, Denise, and Vicki watch.

JAN (CONT.)
 You're going to be the star of
 tomorrow's halftime show: "Special
 Fans, Special People."

Fred stares at Jan, horrified. Looking like he may throw up. Denise, on the other hand, is ecstatic.

DENISE

That's wonderful! Can you believe this, Fred?

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

NO.

JAN

Mr. Parks feels terrible about yesterday's little "misunderstanding," so the entire show is going to be dedicated to the differently abled. Including a \$500,000 donation to United Cerebral Palsy! After which millions of people worldwide will watch as Mercury Pearson presents you with the final record-setting touchdown football!

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE

NO.

JAN

Yes!

Al goes pale. This has now officially gotten way out of hand. Denise turns to Fred, notices he seems concerned.

DENISE

I know you don't like to think of yourself as special, Fred. But I can't think of anyone who deserves this more.

Fred looks up at Denise. Feeling like dirt.

EXT: STADIUM - DAY

Fred and Al follow Denise and Vicki as they head for the parking lot. Hanging back.

FRED

Okay, that's it. There's no way I'm going through with this. I've gotta tell them the truth.

AL

Whoa...hold on. You can't tell the truth.

(MORE)

AL (cont'd)
We're way beyond public humiliation
now. We're talking fraud. You
could go to jail.

Fred says nothing. Still stunned from the latest turn of
events. Denise calls to them from the van.

DENISE
Hurry up, you guys! We're gonna be
late!

AL
Late for what?

DENISE
(smiles)
I found out you've been keeping a
secret from me, Fred McCripple.

Fred looks up at her. Extremely nervous. What now?

DENISE (CONT.)
(teasingly)
A little secret named Rhonda. Why
didn't you tell me you had a
fiancee?

Fred looks up at Denise, shocked.

DENISE (CONT.)
There's no need to be shy. I've
met her, and think she's great. And
we're all going to her house for
dinner right now.

Fred stares at Denise. Horrified.

AL
That's great. I'm starved.

Fred gives Al a look. Al suddenly realizes how bad this news
really is.

AL (CONT.)
Holy crap!

Everyone turns to Al.

VICKI
What?

AL
I...I just remembered! I have to
go to this thing!
(MORE)

AL (cont'd)
 This very important thing!
 (looks at watch)
 Holy crap, look at the time! I'll
 meet you at Rhonda's later. Bye!

Al jumps into his truck, guns the engine, and drives off, waving goodbye. Denise and Vicki watch him go, confused. Fred grimaces. This is a total nightmare.

EXT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - DAY

Al's truck comes to a screeching halt. He leaps out of the truck and runs around the corner to Rhonda's house. Pounds on the door. Rhonda opens it. Dressed to kill.

RHONDA
 Al.
 (looks around)
 Where is everybody?

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Al quickly steps inside, closes the door behind him. Curtis jumps on the couch banging on a pot with a ladle.

AL
 Fred's coming. Nice outfit.

CURTIS
 Al! Look!

RHONDA
 I know he's coming. I--

AL
 Fred is coming, and he's in a
 wheelchair.

RHONDA
 What?

CURTIS
 Al! Look!

AL
 Fred pretended to be disabled to
 get one of the footballs! But he
 doesn't get the ball 'til tomorrow,
 so for the past two weeks he's been
 stuck in a wheelchair pretending to
 be handicapped for this
 documentary.

(MORE)

AL (cont'd)
 And unless you two keep playing
 along tonight, he won't get the
 ball, and we'll all go to jail.
 Understand?

DING-DONG! Someone's at the door.

AL (CONT.)
 Crap!

Al spots a closet and quickly heads for it. Opens up the
 door and slips inside.

AL (CONT.)
 Just play along. And everything'll
 be fine.

He closes the door. Rhonda, completely befuddled and
 flustered, tries to get a handle on the situation. DING-DONG!
 She walks to the door. Takes a deep breath. And opens it.
 Revealing-- Fred. In his wheelchair. Behind him are Denise
 and Vicki, filming.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
 HI THERE.

Rhonda stares at him. Trying to play along, but it's a
 pretty shocking sight. She attempts a smile.

RHONDA
 Hi.

She glances at the film crew, then leans over and gives him a
 kiss.

RHONDA (CONT.)
 Come on in, everybody.

Fred rolls in, followed by everyone else. Denise keeps
 filming throughout. Rhonda turns to Curtis.

RHONDA (CONT.)
 Look who's here, Curtis: it's
 Fred.

Curtis stares at Fred. And instantly breaks up LAUGHING
 uncontrollably. Denise and Vicki stare at him.

RHONDA (CONT.)
 Oh, Fred always knows how to make
 him laugh. You probably didn't
 see, but he just did one of his
 funny faces. Do it again for
 everyone else, Fred.

Fred looks up at Rhonda. Then contorts his face the best he can. Rhonda laughs along with Curtis.

RHONDA (CONT.)
Ha haha haha ha! Oh, that's...
that's a funny one.

Denise and Vicki stand there stone-faced. Rhonda begins to panic. Already this is not going well.

RHONDA (CONT.)
All right, well, dinner's almost
ready, so let's sit down, shall we?

Rhonda heads for the dinner table, trying to calm herself and play hostess. Stops at the head of the table.

RHONDA (CONT.)
Now, Fred, you sit here...
(realizes)
...except, of course, there's...
there's a chair here, and you don't
need a chair, because you've
already got one, which is...which
is convenient, isn't it? Let me
just get rid of this.

Rhonda picks up the chair and quickly carries it over to closet.

RHONDA (CONT.)
I'm going to put it in the closet
here.

She opens the closet door so no one else can see inside. Puts the chair in, handing it to Al.

RHONDA (CONT.)
(whispers to Al)
So is he supposed to be retarded or
what?

AL
(whispers back)
Mentally he's fine, but he can only
talk with his machine. He paints
with his teeth.

Rhonda nods and shuts the closet door, leaving Al inside holding the chair. Rhonda turns back to the dinner guests, attempting to regain some poise.

RHONDA
All right, let's eat!

DING-DONG! Rhonda turns to the door, confused.

RHONDA (CONT.)
Now who could that be?

DENISE
Well, it must be your parents. You did invite them, right?

All the blood drains from Rhonda's face as she remembers. Utterly horrified. Fred can't believe his ears. Oh no. DING-DONG! Rhonda just stands there.

DENISE (CONT.)
Well, isn't someone going to get the door?

Rhonda doesn't move. Denise stops shooting. Puts her hand on Rhonda's shoulder.

DENISE (CONT.)
It's okay, Rhonda. The camera makes a lot of people nervous. I'll get the door.

Denise goes to the door. Opens it up, revealing--

MR. AND MRS. GURNEY. Conservative, lower middle class, they've made Rhonda what she is today.

DENISE (CONT.)
Hi. I'm Denise, the one shooting the documentary. You must be the Gurneys. Rhonda's right inside.

MR. GURNEY
The heck with Rhonda. We want to meet this fiancée we've heard so much about!

Mr. Gurney laughs good-naturedly and comes inside with his wife, who giggles along. Mrs. Gurney gives Rhonda a hug and kiss.

MRS. GURNEY
Merry Christmas, sweetie. You look great. Hi there, Curtis!

CURTIS
What'dja bring me?

RHONDA
Hi ma. Hi dad.

MR. GURNEY
So where is he?
(holds up hand)
I'm ready to give him the old
Gurney handshake test!

Rhonda looks at her parents, mortified. But tries to bite the bullet.

RHONDA
Ma...dad...meet Fred.

Rhonda gestures to Fred, who rolls up to the Gurneys. They stare at him. Stunned. And horrified.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
HI THERE.

The Gurneys continue to stare, despite their best efforts not to. Mrs. Gurney attempts a smile.

MRS. GURNEY
Hello. Fred.
(to Mr. Gurney)
Say hello, Tom.

Mr. Gurney is speechless. Fred is in hell. Rhonda claps her hands together.

RHONDA
Let's eat!

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's the middle of dinner, and everyone sits around the table in complete, extremely awkward silence. Denise looks around. Desperate to break it.

DENISE
Do you bowl, Mr. Gurney? Because
Fred here is quite the bowler.

MR. GURNEY
Really?

DENISE
Maybe the two of you could go
bowling together sometime.

Mr. Gurney glances over at Fred. He couldn't imagine a more horrific thought.

MR. GURNEY

Sure.

More awkward silence. Almost interminable.

MRS. GURNEY

You know, the sister of one of our dear friends is now in a wheelchair. And she seems to get along just fine.

VICKI

That's nice.

More awkward silence. The evening seems to be lasting forever. Pure torture for Fred. And Rhonda.

Suddenly, there's a loud CRASH from inside the closet. Everyone turns to look.

MR. GURNEY

What was that?

CURTIS

That was Al. He's hiding in the closet.

RHONDA

No he's not.

CURTIS

Yeah he is.

VICKI

Al! Are you in the closet?

Silence as everyone stares at the closet door. Then a muffled voice comes from it.

AL (O.S.)

Yes.

Everyone stares at the closet door, amazed that Al's inside.

DENISE

What're you doing in there?

Silence for six seconds. Then the closet door swings open, and Al bursts out holding the chair, a big smile on his face.

AL
 Surprise! I was in there the whole
 time!
 (laughs)
 Gotcha! I gotcha! You fell for
 it! Whooo!

Al steps up to the table next to Fred. Puts his hand on
 Fred's shoulder.

AL (CONT.)
 It was all this guy's idea! This
 is the mastermind, right here!
 (to Fred)
 We did it, Fred! We did it! We
 fooled 'em all! Was that classic
 or what?

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
 PLEASE STOP.

Al turns to Mr. and Mrs. Gurney.

AL
 He's such a prankster. Hi. I'm Al
 Norris, Fred's caretaker.
 (points to Fred and
 Rhonda)
 Look at these two. Do they make a
 cute couple or what?

The Gurneys merely smile politely. Al spots a CAMERA on a
 nearby table. Picks it up.

AL (CONT.)
 Hey, a camera! Let's get a
 picture! Now, Mr. and Mrs. Gurney,
 move in close to Fred and Rhonda.

They do, ever so slightly.

AL (CONT.)
 There, that's better. A little
 closer.
 (they don't move)
 Closer.
 (they tilt their heads in)
 And just a little bit closer.
 (they don't move)
 Perfect. Now smile.

Fred, Rhonda, and the Gurneys produce the four fakest-looking
 smiles ever captured on film. FLASH!

EXT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The evening is mercifully almost over. Fred and Rhonda are at the door saying goodbye to all of the dinner guests.

FRED'S TALKING MACHINE
GOODNIGHT.

MRS. GURNEY
Nice meeting you, Fred.

MR. GURNEY
Yes.

DENISE
Goodnight!

Rhonda closes the door. Mr. and Mrs. Gurney nod goodbye to Denise and the Vicki, then head for their car.

MRS. GURNEY
Oh...my...word.

MR. GURNEY
Not 'til we're in the car, Joyce.
Not 'til we're in the car.

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - SAME

Back inside the house, Rhonda shakes her head.

RHONDA
So for two weeks you've been
pretending to be like this? Behind
my back? To get a football?

Fred sits in his chair shamefaced across from Rhonda.

FRED
Yes.

Rhonda sighs. Looks down at the floor. And when she looks back up, there are tears in her eyes.

RHONDA
That is the most noble thing I've
ever heard of.

Fred stares at Rhonda, shocked at how accepting she is of what he's done.

FRED
Well...I'd hardly call it noble...

RHONDA
 No, it was very noble.
 (long beat)
 I'm not wearing any panties.

She moves in closer and gives him a long, hot, seductive kiss. Fred, for the first time, isn't into it. Rhonda pulls away, confused.

RHONDA (CONT.)
 What's wrong?

Fred gets up out of the wheelchair.

FRED
 I don't know, I'm...I'm just tired.
 It's been a long day.

RHONDA
 Yes it has. Well, you better rest up. Because tomorrow night you're going to need your energy.

Rhonda smiles seductively at Fred. He attempts a smile back.

EXT: RHONDA'S BACKYARD - SAME

Outside the window, Lester, now with two black eyes, films the whole thing with his VIDEO CAMERA. He smiles.

LESTER
 I've got you now, you faker.

EXT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fred wheels out to Al's truck at the end of the evening.

AL
 All right, let's load it up.

FRED
 You know what? I think I'm just gonna wheel myself home.

AL
 You sure?

FRED
 Yeah.

And Fred turns the wheelchair and heads down the sidewalk. Al watches him go, concerned.

AL
You okay, Fred?

Fred stops the wheelchair. Turns around.

FRED
All I wanted was a football. A
freaking football.

Then he turns back around, and wheels into the night.

INT: STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Fred lugs the heavy wheelchair up the stairs to his apartment. Exhausted, drained, just thankful his day from hell is over.

He arrives at his apartment door. Unlocks it and enters.

INT: FRED'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Fred drags the wheelchair inside. It gets caught on the doorway. He pulls harder on it. It won't budge. Harder.

BUCKY PARKS (O.S.)
Don't bother with the wheelchair,
Mr. Molinski.

Fred freezes. Then turns and sees two SHADOWY FORMS sitting in the darkness across from him. A cloud of smoke billowing up from one.

He turns on the light. And sees Bucky Parks and Lester. The jig is up.

BUCKY PARKS
Have a seat. Unless, of course,
you'd prefer to stand.

Fred just stands there. Paralyzed.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)
Never. Never in my fifty-two years
on God's sweet earth have I come
across anything so morally
reprehensible.
(shakes his head)
You know what I want to do? I want
to expose you for the slime you
are. Let the world see the
fraudulent filth that calls itself
Fred Molinski.

(MORE)

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.) (cont'd)
Throw your sorry scheming behind in
jail and let you rot there with the
other scum.

Lester smiles, enjoying this moment incredibly.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)
Unfortunately, I can't do that.

LESTER
(horrified)
What???

FRED
(stunned)
You can't?

BUCKY PARKS
Fact is, the Condors franchise
doesn't need another scandal right
now. What it does need is a
positive, uplifting halftime show.
And that's just what it's gonna
get.

FRED
But...

BUCKY PARKS
You will continue to be Fred
McCripple. You will wheel onto
that field tomorrow afternoon, give
a nice little speech on that
talking machine of yours, and
accept your football. And no one
will be any wiser.

LESTER
Wait a minute. You're just going
to let him get away with it?

BUCKY PARKS
Do you want to meet Mercury
Pearson?

LESTER
Yes.

BUCKY PARKS
Then shut up!

FRED
But...but...what about Denise? The
documentary?

BUCKY PARKS

No one else needs to know. Just those of us in this room. And after Sunday, we will all forget it ever happened.

Bucky looks Fred right in the eyes.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)

Congratulations, boy. Looks like you're gonna pull it off.

(beat)

But in my eyes, you're still sewage.

Fred stares back at Bucky. Feeling like it.

EXT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - DAY

It's Sunday morning. The day of the big game.

INT: RHONDA'S HOUSE - SAME

Fred eats breakfast while Rhonda looks over the speech. Curtis rolls around the kitchen in the wheelchair.

RHONDA

This is a beautiful speech, Fred.

FRED

Yeah. I just wish I didn't have to, you know, lie in front of all those people...

Curtis makes a face and drools, spinning in the chair.

CURTIS

Look! I'm a retard!

RHONDA

But it's a good lie. A lie for charity. Just think of Curtis and me when you're up there today. Think of why you're doing this, and everything'll be fine.

INT: TRUCK - DAY

Fred rides next to Al as he drives to the Special House.

AL

So...Parks wants you to keep pretending?

FRED

Yeah.

AL

Unbelievable! So everything's
going to work out!

FRED

Yep.

INT: SPECIAL BUS - DAY

Fred sits in the bus with Ronnie and the gang, heading for the stadium. They're all (except for Fred) extremely excited.

RONNIE

This is a great day, Fred, a real
victory for those of us with
disabilities. We won! We won
money for research...

ISABEL

Increased visibility for our
cause...

CHARLIE'S TALKING MACHINE
AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, DIGNITY.

EXT: STADIUM - NIGHT

DONNY and MARIE sing "Proud Mary," backed by a GOSPEL CHOIR
IN WHEELCHAIRS.

DONNY AND MARIE

Rolling!

GOSPEL CHOIR

Ooh!

DONNY AND MARIE

Rolling!

GOSPEL CHOIR

Ooh!

Welcome to the halftime show! Broadcast live nationwide! A
group of DANCERS IN WHEELCHAIRS zip across the field in
rhythm to the music.

DONNY AND MARIE

Rolling on the river!

A MARCHING BAND IN WHEELCHAIRS rolls down the field accompanying the choir. PAH-PAH-PUHPUH-PAH-PAH! They segue into the next number.

DONNY AND MARIE (CONT.)
*You just roll with it, baby! Come
 on and just roll with it, baby!*

Ronnie and the other tenants watch the show in absolute horror.

Fred waits nervously in the tunnel. A small mike attached to his Speakeasy 2000. Then a hand gently touches his shoulder. It's Denise.

DENISE
 Nervous?

Fred looks up at her. Manages a half-smile.

DENISE (CONT.)
 I know I'd be. But don't worry.
 Just be yourself, and everything'll
 work out fine.

She squeezes his hand, and heads out to the field. Fred watches her go.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 And now, ladies and gentlemen:
 Bucky Parks!

The music abruptly changes to an inspirational ballad. Then Bucky Parks appears in the middle of the field, holding hands with a circle of HANDICAPPED CHILDREN, wearing a SANTA HAT.

DONNY AND MARIE
*I believe I can fly
 I believe I can touch the sky!*

Bucky leaves the handicapped children behind, and steps up to a stand in the center of the field. Handicapped ramps lead up to it from both sides.

DONNY AND MARIE (CONT.)
*I think about it
 Every night and day,
 Spread my wings and fly away!*

And then...from the left comes Mercury Pearson, rolling in his wheelchair, holding the prized football. The crowd goes wild.

And then...from the right comes Fred in his wheelchair. The crowd goes wild again.

DONNY AND MARIE (CONT.)

*I believe I can soar
I see me running
Through that open door...*

Everyone is there: Al and Vicki, Ronnie and the gang, Miss Hilgart, Rhonda, Curtis, Lester, Jan, Brian, Steve and Joe. Denise and Vicki film the whole spectacular.

Bucky Parks applauds along with the entire stadium as the music reaches a dramatic crescendo and Mercury and Fred roll up to the stand.

DONNY AND MARIE (CONT.)

Oh, I believe I can fly!

Finally, Fred and Mercury arrive in place. Bucky Parks smiles and steps up to the mike.

BUCKY PARKS

Ladies and gentlemen: Number 88,
Mercury Pearson, and Special Fan
Fred McCripple!

The crowd rises to its feet, cheering and applauding like crazy, giving these two heroes a standing ovation.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)

Today is a very special day. A day
to honor those with special needs.
And a day to focus on the positive.
(beat)

You know, breaking the season
receiving touchdown record was the
biggest challenge of Mercury's
life...but there is no greater
challenge than those met everyday
by these special fans.

Lester then rolls up to the side of the stand holding a GIANT FOAMBOARD CHECK.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)

That's why I'm going to rise to the
challenge by donating \$500,000 in
Fred's name to United Cerebral
Palsy!

The crowd cheers, the band plays, everyone joins in the celebration of charity and goodness and positivity.

BUCKY PARKS (CONT.)
And now...Mercury?

Mercury rolls up close to Fred. Holds out the ball.

MERCURY PEARSON
Fred. With much congratulations
from myself and the entire Condors
organization, here is my
autographed and authenticated
record-breaking twenty-sixth
receiving touchdown football!

Fred stares at the ball. Looks at the crowd of 70,000
filling the stadium. At Ronnie and the gang. At Denise.

Then reaches out and takes the football.

The crowd goes wild. Rhonda and Curtis celebrate. He got
the ball! Denise smiles, capturing it all on film.

Fred looks out at the entire scene. Deep in thought.

And then...against all reason, and almost every instinct he's
got...

FRED STANDS.

And takes a step up to the mike.

Instantly a hush falls over the crowd. 70,000 hearts
skipping a beat.

Al puts his head in his hands. Denise stares in shock. A
flustered Bucky Parks begins shouting.

BUCKY PARKS
It's a miracle! A miracle! He can
walk!

He gives Fred a stern "don't screw with me" look. Fred just
grabs the microphone away from him. And addresses the crowd.

FRED
It's no miracle, ladies and
gentlemen. I'm not disabled. Never
have been. I just pretended to be
handicapped so I could get one of
these footballs.
(beat)
I'm sorry. What I did was wrong,
terribly wrong.
(MORE)

FRED (cont'd)
 And I apologize to people with
 disabilities everywhere, and anyone
 else I've hurt.

Fred looks over at Denise, who turns away in betrayal and
 disgust.

FRED (CONT.)
 I'm not asking for forgiveness, I
 know I don't deserve it, I just...
 in a way I wish everyone out there
 had had my experience. Because
 then we'd all see that people with
 disabilities don't want lame
 tribute shows, or special
 privileges--they just want to be
 treated like everyone else.

(takes a deep breath)
 The fact is, we all have
 disabilities. Some are just more
 visible than others. And right now
 mine...are obvious. I'm sorry.
 I'm...I'm just sorry.

Fred looks out at the crowd. Hands the football back to
 Mercury. Then takes the long, lonely walk back down the
 ramp. As he passes Denise, she just turns away.

Fred continues down the ramp, completely miserable. Every
 eye in the stadium on him. And then one LARGE FAN stands up.

FAN
 I say we kill the bastard!

OTHER FAN
 Yeah!

And suddenly a bunch of fans leap out of the stands and rush
 Fred. Even if he wanted to run, there'd be no escape.

He sinks into an ocean of angry fans, midst punches, kicks,
 spitting, shouting...and all goes black. FADE OUT.

INT: HOSPITAL - DAY

FADE IN a row of TUBES, a HEARTBEAT MACHINE, and Fred lying
 asleep on a HOSPITAL BED, all bandaged up, appendages in
 casts. POINSETTIAS and CHRISTMAS CARDS surround the bed.
 Fred's eyelids flutter open, and he sees--

Curtis standing over him.

CURTIS
 Where's my football?

Fred looks over and sees Rhonda standing next to Curtis.

FRED

Rhonda...

RHONDA

Well. Where is it?

CURTIS

Where's my football???

Fred looks at Rhonda and Curtis. Amazed at their incredible gall and lack of compassion. Looks Curtis in the eyes.

FRED

You're not getting a football, Curtis. And you know why? Because you're a selfish, sadistic little turd.

Curtis stares at Fred, speechless. Never told to his face what he really is before. Rhonda is horrified.

RHONDA

Fred Molinski, you take that back right now.

FRED

No. The only thing I'm taking back is my proposal.

RHONDA

What? Why?

FRED

You're a beautiful woman, Rhonda. I always felt I wasn't good enough for you. And I made the mistake of thinking that feeling was love. But it's not.

(beat)

And now...I just want something a little more...special.

Rhonda stares at Fred in shock. And anger.

RHONDA

All right, that's it. This relationship is over. Over. Which, I might add, will be a great relief to my parents. And you, Fred... well, let's just say I think you got exactly what you deserved.

She grabs Curtis and pulls him to the door. But before she leaves turns back one more time to Fred. Dramatically.

RHONDA (CONT.)

But what I want to know is when are
Curtis and I gonna get what we
deserve? When?

And she and Curtis leave. Fred watches the doorway as their voices echo down the hallway.

CURTIS (O.S.)

So when am I gonna get a ball?

RHONDA (O.S.)

You're not gonna get a stupid ball!

CURTIS (O.S.)

You don't love me!

RHONDA (O.S.)

Shut up!!!

A calm goes over Fred's face. He smiles, rid of them and his demons at last. And then someone else comes through the doorway--

Ronnie, in his wheelchair.

RONNIE

Ready to go?

EXT: STREET - DAY

Fred and Ronnie cruise down the sidewalk in their wheelchairs. Racing. Ronnie's in the lead.

RONNIE

Hurry up, slowpoke!

FRED

It's no fair! You've got more
horsepower!

Ronnie laughs, then arrives at the bowling alley.

INT: BOWLING ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Inside a big Christmas party is going on: Christmas music, a tree, eggnog, with all of the gang, plus Pablo and Alice, Al and Vicki, and even Lester.

RONNIE

Hey, everybody! Look who's here!

They all turn and see Fred. Smile, clap, and yell "Merry Christmas, Fred!" He smiles, and wheels into the room.

ISABEL

Merry Christmas, Fred! When'll you be up and about again?

FRED

In another month or so.
(looks around)
Where's Miss Hilgart?

NICK

Palm Beach. She decided to retire. So we're running the house ourselves now.

Fred smiles. Spots Lester. Rolls up to him.

FRED

Hey, Lester. Merry Christmas.

He tosses him a FOOTBALL-SHAPED CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Lester rips it open. It's the authenticated and signed Mercury Pearson football! He freaks out, holds it up triumphantly.

LESTER

YES!!! COME TO PAPA!!!

Fred smiles, then wheels over to Al and Vicki. Vicki holds out her left hand, displaying an ENGAGEMENT RING.

VICKI

Look what Al gave me for Christmas.

FRED

You're getting married?

AL

(smiling)
Yep. And we're gonna adopt three retarded kids!

Al squeezes Vicki's hand. The two of them look into each other's eyes, deeply in love. Fred stares at them wistfully.

DENISE (O.S.)

Hi.

Fred turns around. It's Denise. Looking beautiful in red. The two of them stand and sit there for a while. Not knowing what to say.

DENISE

What you did was wrong, Fred. It was unconscionable.

(beat)

But I also realize that because you did it, somehow my life, everyone's lives are better. And if they can somehow find it in their hearts to forgive you... well, maybe...maybe it's not too late to make something good out of something bad.

Fred looks up at Denise. Shakes his head.

FRED

I can't believe this. For the first time I can actually speak to you. And I have no idea what to say.

Ronnie wheels over to the two of them.

RONNIE

Then don't say anything.

He holds a sprig of MISTLETOE over Fred's head. Fred and Denise look at each other.

Then Denise leans down. And kisses Fred on the lips. And he kisses back. And it's amazing. They finally break it off.

FRED

So I hear you're making the screenplay.

DENISE

Yep. Start shooting in February.

(beat)

Know anybody who could help us out with the sets?

Fred smiles. Then gets a mischievous look on his face. He wheels over to where Alice and Pablo are dancing. Then touches Pablo's butt. Pablo turns around.

FRED

Oh, sorry.

Fred wheels away. Then turns back to Denise.

FRED (CONT.)
That's one to nothing.

Fred rolls over to Al. Denise realizes what's going on, smiles, and quickly rushes over to Vicki. As the butt-touching contest begins, Lester calls out to Fred.

LESTER
Fred! Catch!

He tosses the football over to Fred. Unfortunately, his aim is off and the football lands in one of the alleys. SLIDES across the slick floor. Scores a strike.

Underneath the lane there's a horrible GRATING SOUND. And then suddenly a THOUSAND TINY PIECES of the football are spewed out of the ball return. Lester stares in horror.

LESTER (CONT.)
Nooooooooooooooooooooo!!!!

PULL BACK FURTHER AND FURTHER as Fred and Denise continue playing the butt-touching game until it's time to FADE OUT.

THE END