

LOSING THE MUSIC

by

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FADE IN:

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

In his nursing-home room -- a typical double, with a bathroom at the door, two beds, two small bureaus, two small television sets, two rolling trays, a closet -- SAM POTTER, in his eighties and definitely worse for wear, struggles to move his legs onto the floor from his bed on which he has been napping. He looks over to the next bed, partially obscured by a curtain, and sees the form of his roommate's feet under the blankets.

SAM
Archie, can you lend me some
assistance?

There is no response.

SAM (CONT'D)
Archie?

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Scattered around the entry area near the front desk of the elderly care ward are patients in wheelchairs, each isolated by his or her own obvious misery. Two bored-looking nurses sit behind the desk, heads hidden behind feeble plants. At the repetitive dinging of a BELL TONE, one of the nurses, LINDA -- about forty; heavy and worn; wearing a bluish floral-print shirt -- SIGHS, stands up, and passes with indifference through the array of patients into the ward's corridor.

The only signs of life in this dull institutional hallway come from the slight tremors of yet another elderly patient slumped in a wheelchair against the wall. Sounds of DAYTIME TELEVISION are emanating from some of the rooms. Linda trudges into a room near the end of the corridor. A small printed card on the wall reads "Bed 1: Archibald Campozano
Bed 2: Samuel Potter."

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Linda glances over the scene: the back wall has a large window through which one can see a small lawn; in the bed near the window, partially hidden by the curtain, Sam is still struggling to rise; and in the bed near the door lies the pale yellowed corpse of Archie Campozano. Stains have formed around the sheets of the bed. A couple of flies have beaten Linda to the scene and seem more interested in it than she does.

Linda leans back into the corridor.

LINDA
Hey! Looks like we've got another
one here!

Another nurse sulks into the room and moves toward the body, closing the curtain around her.

Linda waddles over to Sam's bed.

LINDA (CONT'D)
How are we, Sam?

SAM
I just need to go to the bathroom.
I can do it myself, thank you very
much.

LINDA
Well I'm right here now.

SAM
What about Archie?

Linda watches Sam struggling. He finally manages to get his feet over and onto the floor, and even begins to gather momentum to stand up. His motion is full of tremors.

LINDA
Someone will be in to pronounce.

With great effort, Sam stands for a moment... but -- Linda just watching -- he immediately crashes back to his bed.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Whoopsie!

SAM
Oh. Oh.

Sam has a look of panic on his face. He grabs at the sheets and bunches them in his lap as he loses his effort to hold in his urine. His pants are soaked, as are the sheets and the bed. Relief.

LINDA
Ugh, look what you did! Now we have
two beds to clean up. It's diaper
time for you.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Linda is walking back to the front desk. Coming toward her down the corridor, rolling a hamper/trash receptacle bearing cleaning supplies and accoutrements, is MARIA. She's Hispanic, in her thirties, and seems aloof.

LINDA
Where have you been? Let's get going,
there's stuff to do in there. And
take the things off the walls, will
you?

Linda walks off as Maria just nods. Turning away from Linda toward Sam's room, she is about to walk in when a hospital dolly bearing Archie's covered body is carted out, making her recoil. Once the body has passed, Maria pauses for a moment before heading into the room.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Maria surveys the room: soiled sheets are on both beds; Sam is in his chair. A bulletin board on the wall displays Archie's collection of photographs and greeting cards. With gloved hands, Maria collects the sheets and returns with new ones; and she also carries a small empty box. Sam watches her as she sets the sheets down and begins to gather the items from the bulletin board and put them into the box.

MARIA

He was a very nice man, wasn't he,
Mr. Potter?

SAM

He always shook your hand.... You
don't waste any time in clearing him
out.

MARIA

Mr. Potter, I was told...

SAM

I may be old, but I think we deserve
better.

Maria puts down the box, turns to Sam, pats him on the shoulder, then begins making the beds.

MARIA

I know, Mr. Potter. The last place
I worked, not here, there was a woman
one morning covered with bruises.

Sam listens. Maria continues to make the beds.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I saw her standing out in the cold:
no one did a thing. I called someone,
I looked around and I called her
family, and I told them that they
had better come and get her from
that place. Those bruises. Who
could do that? It's not right. I
left that place in a hurry.

SAM

I'm sorry....

MARIA

No, I'm sorry, Mr. Potter.

Maria finishes with the beds. She starts to go out, then pauses.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Mr. Potter... tomorrow, I bring something for you.

SAM

What's that?

MARIA

I bring a present for you, tomorrow. Okay? Bye.

Maria leaves. Sam sits, staring.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam is staring, bored, at a game show on television when Maria enters. She's carrying a small, wrapped package.

MARIA

How are you today, Mr. Potter? I have something for you....

Maria shuts off the television set and hands Sam the package. Sam smiles weakly and gives it a little shake.

SAM

Jeekers. Let's see here....

Sam tries to open the package, but his hands are awkward. Nevertheless, he eventually succeeds in unwrapping the paper to reveal a portable compact disc player, headphones, a couple of CDs, and a bunch of batteries.

MARIA

I hope you can use it, Mr. Potter. Let's get it set up...

Maria assembles the CD player and puts the headphones on Sam.

SAM

I thank you kindly. I thank you.

Maria is about to respond when Linda comes into the room.

LINDA

Oh. There's a spill in twenty-five that needs to be taken care of.

Maria nods.

LINDA (CONT'D)
 (to Sam, pointing at
 the CD player)
 What's this?

Sam's mouth gums open and closed.

MARIA
 It's a present...

LINDA
 I see. Well... be careful, someone
 could take it. Anyway, that mess
 isn't going to clean itself.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Sam is listening to music, eyes closed, smiling slightly.
 His tremors seem to have decreased from earlier in the day --
 he is more calm.

The night nurse, BEVERLY -- she could almost pass for Linda's
 twin sister -- enters the room and barrels over to Sam. She
 impatiently pushes at his shoulder to rouse him. When he
 opens his eyes, she takes off his headphones.

BEVERLY
 Time for bed. Here are your pills.

SAM
 Pills? They must be for someone
 else... Archie... oh, um. I don't
 take any pills.

BEVERLY
 Come on Sam, we do this every night.
 One for Parkinson's, one for blood
 pressure, one for arthritis, one for
 prostate, one for stools, one for
 anxiety, one small aspirin, one to
 help you sleep, and one for pain.

Beverly take this last pill from the tray and slips it into
 her pocket.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
 Do you want them one at a time or
 all at once?

SAM
 I don't want any. Can I have some
 milk?

BEVERLY
 After you take your pills.

She puts them up to his mouth. He shakily takes them in his own hand, puts them in his mouth all together, and, using a straw, swallows them down with a sip of water from a glass that Beverly is holding out to him. Putting down the glass, Beverly points to the CD player.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)

Where did you get that, anyway?
Some new girlfriend?

SAM

It was a present.

BEVERLY

Oh nice. Well, watch out it doesn't
get stolen.

SAM

Thank you. I'll be careful. Can I
have my milk?

BEVERLY

We'll see in the morning. If you
drink too much now, you'll just have
to get up in the middle of the night.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam is listening to his music while sitting in his chair, and Maria is changing the sheets on his bed. They share a laugh, and Maria pats Sam on the shoulder before turning to leave. Sam is smiling.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam, headphones on, sitting in his chair, gazes out the window. Outside, on the lawn, there are a few kids -- maybe ten years old -- running around playing tag.

Another nurse, CATHY, similar to the other nurses, enters the room. There's a food tray on the rolling table that Sam has ignored. Cathy wheels it over in front of Sam and uncovers the meal: a plate of typical -- that is, vaguely unappetizing -- institutional food. Could be Yankee pot roast, but it is hard to tell. On the tray there are also two small containers, one of juice and the other of jello. Cathy takes the headphones off of Sam's ears, then leans against the small bureau.

CATHY

Hi 'ya, Sam. Want your lunch?

SAM

I am hungry. Is there any milk?

Sam pushes around the utensils on the food tray, but doesn't pick them up immediately.

Eventually, he takes up a fork and holds it in his puffy, trembling hand.

CATHY

You drink too much milk. You can't live on just milk. Have the juice: it's apple.

SAM

Milk is the perfect food.

CATHY

The doctor says you're not supposed to have it: you go overboard.

Sam has been trying to pick up some food with his fork, but it keeps falling off. Cathy doesn't make any motion to help feed him.

Sam stops trying to eat, exasperation playing around his face.

SAM

Now, when the weather is warmer I'd like to go buy a car and drive out of here.

CATHY

Where would you go, Sam?

SAM

Back to my apartment.

CATHY

Honey, you've been here for two years: this is your apartment.

SAM

Two years? Still, I'd like a car.

CATHY

How about we get you a chauffeur?

Cathy sees that this conversation is upsetting Sam and that her sarcasm isn't helping. As she moves to leave, she points to the CD player.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Be careful that it doesn't go missing.

SAM

I'll take care of it.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam's bulging eyes watch "The Price is Right" but the rest of him wanders involuntarily to the small extent his frail body allows.

Sam fumbles for a remote control and shuts off his television set. Opening a drawer of his small bureau, he shakily removes the CD player and the headphones, which he puts on. Pressing "play," he seems suddenly calmed by the music only he can hear. He closes his eyes and relaxes.

Soon Sam bends over to put on his velcro-clasp sneakers. While not nimble -- his hands are slightly swollen -- his actions are coordinated. We see that he has a somewhat bulky bracelet around his ankle. He stands up, and clips the CD player to his pants.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Sam walks down the dull corridor toward the front-desk area. There is the usual array of the sick and aged. A nurse walks by and seems surprised to see Sam, but doesn't say anything.

At the front-desk area, one of the elderly patients, wheelchair-bound, is being visited by her daughter and grandchild. She is obviously elated.

A nurse, WANDA, much like the other nurses in appearance, is sitting at the front desk. She sees Sam walking.

WANDA

Hey hey! What have you got to say
for yourself?

Sam lifts his headphones off of one ear.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Where are you heading?

SAM

Is there a law against taking a walk?

WANDA

All right, as long as you stay in
the area.

She points at the exit door, and then at his ankles: the bracelets are monitoring devices. Sam puts his headphones back over his ear.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Nightmare. Jumbled flashes of Archie, Archie's corpse, nurses laughing, people pulling at Sam's clothes, keys being taken away, a concert going dark, a passport being lost.

Sam wakes up and recovers his bearings, and then quietly rises. He puts on his day clothes, and takes up his CD player too -- putting the headphones on. As he listens to his music, he puts on his sneakers.

In the closet is one of Sam's sport coats: it would have been of questionable style even when it was new in the 1970s, but now it also has the patina of age. Sam puts it on too: he's heading out.

He checks his inner pocket for something: a tightly rolled piece of paper. Unrolled, it is a twenty dollar bill. Sam rolls it up again and puts it back in his pocket.

INT. NURSING HOME -- NIGHT

Sam enters the corridor -- it appears about the same as it does during the day, but instead of the sounds of television emanating from the patients' now-darkened rooms, there are loud SNORES, MOANS, WHIMPERS. One VOICE quietly says, "Help me... help me... help me" but no one investigates. Sam passes down the corridor toward the front desk.

At the front desk sit two nurses. One is Beverly, and the other is DEBBIE, another woman practically interchangeable with the rest of the nursing staff. They are just finishing an anecdote.

BEVERLY

... Isn't that just awful?!

DEBBIE

It is! It's awful!

BEVERLY

I didn't think it would be so awful!

DEBBIE

Oh I know, I know. Awful!

Beverly stands up, but doesn't notice Sam, who is in the corridor only a few feet away from the desk. She turns to go through a doorway behind the desk.

BEVERLY

Well, I'm almost out of here, Debbie, but I need some coffee. Can I get you some coffee?

Debbie stands up too -- and doesn't see Sam either.

DEBBIE

It's a quiet night. I don't need to be glued to my chair!

Both Debbie and Beverly go out through the doorway behind the desk.

Sam looks at the front door and begins to walk toward it. The VOICES of Beverly and Debbie can be heard in the back room -- but not by Sam, who is listening to his music. Yet Sam is careful not to make much noise as he shuffles along.

He starts to push the front door open -- he'd be in plain sight above the desk if one of the nurses were to glance out from the back room -- when he lets go suddenly: his foot, with the alarm-triggering bracelet clinched around the ankle, is inches from the sensor.

The door makes a faint JARRING NOISE as it closes, causing Beverly to come to the doorway and look out to the front. She sees nothing out of the ordinary: Sam has crouched down on one knee to try to remove the bracelet from his ankle and is obscured by the desk and the withering plants on it. Beverly retreats once again to the back room and resumes her talk with Debbie.

The bracelet, despite Sam's tugs, does not want to let go. He pulls... he pulls again. Maybe one more attempt will loosen the bracelet... but then the front door swings open. It is Linda.

LINDA

What are we doing here?

SAM

Oh. Uh....

Sam tries to get himself up. He's not quite able to do it. Linda reaches down and removes Sam's headphones.

LINDA

Got lost on the way to the bathroom, huh?

Sam is shaky as he tries to get to his feet again. Linda gives him a hand this time.

LINDA (CONT'D)

That's a spiffy pajama top you've got on there. Let's get you back to bed.

Beverly and Debbie have by this time heard the door and the voices and have come back to the desk with their coffees. Debbie sits down. Beverly stares at Sam, then looks to Linda.

BEVERLY

Hi Linda, looks like we've got a live one.

LINDA

The one that almost got away. Help me get him settled.

BEVERLY

Okay. At least he didn't set off
the alarm....

Beverly and Linda, one on either side, begin to escort Sam
down the corridor and back to his room.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam sits in his chair, listening to his CD player and slowly
finishing a meal from the tray in front of him. Into the
room comes PAULINE, Sam's sister: a decade younger than he
is, but robust. The visit is plainly a duty, not a pleasure.
But Pauline goes to Sam and gives him a hug.

PAULINE

Hi, Buddy. Sorry I'm late.

SAM

Hi, Pauline.

PAULINE

I see Archie's gone -- that's too
bad.

(Pointing at the CD
player.)

Did you get an inheritance?

SAM

No, it was a present. Listen, can
you help me? I was just about to go
for a walk.

PAULINE

Okay, Buddy. But let's put that
away, okay?

Sam shakily gives the CD player to her, and she puts it in
the drawer of his bureau. She helps Sam up out of his chair
and begins to lead him out.

SAM

Wait, I need to go to the bathroom.

Pauline guides him into the bathroom, then steps out and
closes the door. She waits. She knocks on the door.

PAULINE

Are you all right? Need some help
finishing up?

SAM (O.S.)

Okay.

Pauline goes into the bathroom and shuts the door behind
her.

When they emerge, Sam seems exhausted.

SAM (CONT'D)

I don't feel like walking anymore.

PAULINE

Okay, Sam, let's just sit down.

She guides him back to his chair; he flops down.

SAM

Could you do me a favor?

PAULINE

Sure, Sam.

SAM

I think my music needs fresh batteries. They're in that drawer....

Sam points, and Pauline goes to the drawer and pulls it open. She blinks with surprise.

PAULINE

Strange...

SAM

What is it?

Pauline, puzzled, opens and closes each drawer: the CD player is gone. She goes to the corridor, looking up and down: just a nurse walking.

PAULINE

Sam, don't be upset. It's gone. I don't know... I'll go find someone...

Into Sam's room comes the nurse: it's Linda. Pauline is about to speak to her when she interrupts.

LINDA

Hi. You know that visiting hours ended five minutes ago. You're going to have to go.

PAULINE

Now wait, my brother just had his CD player stolen!

LINDA

Look, I just started my shift. I've got a lot of things to do.

PAULINE

Well, maybe someone else saw something?

LINDA

Try tomorrow. I told you, visiting hours are over for today.

PAULINE

I can't come back 'til next week. Could you please look around?

LINDA

Sure, but I can't spend all day. If you'd excuse us....

PAULINE

Sorry, Sam. Bye.

She kisses him, and leaves. Sam is silent.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- LATER

Sam is visibly upset -- eyes bulging even more than usual, hands fidgeting -- and despondent. It doesn't look as if he moved at all since Pauline left: he's still in his chair. Once in a while, he lets out a MOAN.

A man comes into the room with a clipboard. He's wearing a white hospital gown -- he's the supervising doctor, DR. ANDREWS -- and he looks as if having one patient a day is seeing one patient too many: seemingly dissolute, nearly bald, altogether scattered and frayed.

DR. ANDREWS

Mr. ... Potter. How are you this evening, Mr. Potter?

SAM

Someone took my CD player.

DR. ANDREWS

Really?

SAM

Back in the barracks, you know, they always said that it's the lowest of the low who steal from their bunkmates.

DR. ANDREWS

Maybe it just got misplaced? Maybe you put it down somewhere...

Sam stares at him.

SAM

(calmly)
Are you listening?

DR. ANDREWS

I'm sorry, Mr. Potter. There isn't much I can do... I came here to take your blood pressure and listen to your heart and to see about your medications. Do you mind if I take your blood pressure now?

Sam just lifts his arm to allow the pressure cuff to be wrapped around it. The doctor begins to do so.

DR. ANDREWS (CONT'D)

I think maybe we should adjust your anxiety medication for a few days.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam is sitting in his chair. He looks nearly catatonic. He is shaking quite a bit. Maria is standing nearby.

SAM

... so it's gone.

MARIA

Mr. Potter, I'm so sorry. I can't believe.... I'll look around. Maybe something will come up, you never know.

Sam doesn't respond.

Maria moves toward the door. As she does so, Cathy enters the room with a lunch tray for Sam. She places it on the rolling tray and pushes it over to him.

CATHY

Lunch time, pal.

MARIA

You know, his CD player... disappeared yesterday.

CATHY

You're telling me? It wouldn't be the first time something got took.

Suddenly, there is a loud blast of MUSIC from the corridor: it is the music Sam has been listening to all week. Sam looks up in surprise, animated for the first time today.

MARIA

Oh, maybe it's...!

But when she looks out into the corridor, she sees that the music is coming from a television set across the hall. The volume is adjusted down.

Sam too realizes what it is: and the sting of hope thwarted makes him now look even more despondent than before.

CATHY

(to Maria)

Oh, by the way, the director wanted to see you in her office.

MARIA

See me?

CATHY

Yeah. You'd better get to it.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Maria walks past her cleaning cart, down the corridor, to the front-desk area, and then goes on to the director's office. She KNOCKS on the door frame, near which is hung a small placard: "Joanne Ahern / Director."

JOANNE (O.S.)

Door's open.

INT. JOANNE'S OFFICE -- DAY

Maria enters the wood-panelled office of the director of the nursing home -- it's a nicer room, by far, than anything else in the place: fresh flowers, tasteful paintings on the walls, well-upholstered furniture. Behind the desk sits JOANNE, a plumpish woman, stylishly coiffured, wearing gold-rimmed glasses and a pastel suit. She had been working at her computer, but she has now turned to face Maria.

JOANNE

Please sit down. I'll get right to it. I got a call from Sam Potter's sister. It seems that a CD player of his was stolen yesterday.

MARIA

I know.... I gave it to him.

JOANNE

Really? I thought... well, you know how you people can be... I mean the cleaning crew. In any case....

MARIA

I wanted to do something nice. He seemed...

JOANNE

Let's get something straight. It's not your job to take care of the patients.

MARIA

But...

JOANNE

This is a warning. You just clean, understand. Look, you're new here. I know you tried to be nice. But that's not how to do it. Things sometimes get taken around here... and how much longer do you think he could use such a thing, anyway? My advice is to forget about it. You have a job to do, and don't forget that.

MARIA

(hurt)

I see. I'll do what you say.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam is working slowly on his lunch when Maria returns to his room.

MARIA

I, um... I wasn't able to find out anything. I'm sorry.

SAM

I thank you for your effort.

MARIA

I'm sorry, Mr. Potter. I've got to go.

She puts her hand on his shoulder, then leaves.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Maria pushes her cleaning cart down the corridor. Her face is completely blank; she performs her duties, shaking her head.

INT. SAM'S ROOM -- DAY

Sam sits in his room, withdrawn and listless. He is watching television, but barely paying attention even to it. He sighs and turns his gaze out the window. On the lawn outside, kids are once again running around -- some playing tag, some sitting. One of them, close to the window, has a CD player. Sam's expression changes. He tries to get up, and, shaking, he manages to do so. He even manages to wobble over to his closet, where he is able to fish out of his coat pocket the twenty dollars he had hidden. Carrying the money back to the window, in perpetual danger of falling over, Sam presses against the glass with his puffy hands. He can't get the window open.

Sam tries to knock on it -- it is clear that he wants to get the child's attention. Perhaps the boy is listening to music, but at any rate, he doesn't seem to hear the POUNDING on the window -- which isn't very strong in the first place. Sam KNOCKS several more times, slowing down. He seems weak, trembling. The twenty dollar bill slips out of his unsteady fingers and falls to the floor. Sam begins to reach over to pick it up... and keels over onto his side. He flails around, trying to grab something -- the chair, the rolling tray, the bed. None offer the needed support. Sam cannot get up. He breathes heavily, and continues trying to push himself up. The twenty dollar bill is behind him on the floor. Suddenly -- there has been no sound of a person approaching -- a hand reaches down, picks it up, and takes it away.

FADE OUT