

**The Tortoise and the Hare:
One Turtle's Journey to Discover the True Nature of Art and Life**

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theatre
In the College of Arts and Sciences
at Salem State University

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Commonwealth Honors Program
Salem State University
2015

Abstract.

Human connection is something we all need in order to live fully, yet we often find ourselves hiding away behind a protective shell. Especially in this day and age, we are usually expected to have it all “figured out” and to present ourselves confidently. This can make it difficult, if not impossible, to reach out. One way we connect is through art, and more specifically, stories. Stories help us to empathize and put ourselves in another’s shoes. *The Tortoise and the Hare: One Turtle's Journey to Discover the True Nature of Art and Life* is the story of a young man struggling to connect: with his parents, with his friends, and with himself. Through writing this story, for which I drew on personal experiences and feelings, I show how it is possible to express the self through art, and allow others to see it. In conclusion, I have found that this willingness to be take risks and be exposed to others is directly related to a sense of fulfillment and connection.

Acknowledgements.

I have to thank certain people for making this possible. My Mom and Dad, for always having an open ear. My friends and colleagues who came in on such short notice to help me do the staged reading of this piece. My advisor, Celena, for her guidance. And my friend Kim, for believing in me. Thank you. Namaste.

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Context – The Creative Life: a Balancing Act

“A creative life is grounded on many, many small steps and very, very few large leaps.”
(Cameron 142) In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron details her process for “discovering and recovering” one’s own creativity. The book is intended for any type of artist, from writer to actor to poet to musician, and a major theme in the book is the spirituality of creativity. As creative beings, humans use the expressive arts to connect to each other, thus forming a communion of sorts between all people. But what happens when one feels totally disconnected and unable to express what’s going on inside? What happens when those many small steps (that will add up to the achievement of major goals) become so tiresome and tedious that the artist, or anyone for that matter, loses faith in their greater meaning and reason for being?

These questions fueled my thesis project. After starting 2 completely different projects, each of which I lost faith in and had to abandon, I landed on *The Tortoise and the Hare* because it allowed me to do what the other projects had not: I could tell my own story in a way that (I hope) connects to the inner life of everybody, particularly those in the arts and “creative” professions. This piece is not autobiographical, but I identify with Paul and his struggle to find purpose.

For me, to create is an audacious act. As an acting student, I encounter this problem constantly: who am I to say these words? What right do I have to put my stamp on these characters, particularly those that have existed for centuries and have been acted by the great performers of our time? Theater is an art form as old as religion, as sacred as a church; will I add to its power or smear its beauty with my inexperience and lack of skill? A self-critical voice begins to speak to me as I act a scene, almost inaudible but incredibly powerful. “Terrible. Bad. Worthless,” it says as I take the stage and raise my voice to speak. “You’re doing it wrong.

Think of how much better this performance would be if a superior actor were in your place.” We have a name for this voice in acting classes: the Editor, or the Critic. He can maim an actor and destroy a performance before it even has the chance to begin.

It is my belief that all artists share this self-doubt. “Is what I’m creating up to scratch? Will people like it? Will *I* like it?” These questions plague the artist’s mind, and they can destroy creative careers. So what can a young artist do? Well, as Cameron points out in her book, all the artist can do is, *do*. It is the critic’s job to criticize, the theorist’s to theorize, but the artist must create. And to create requires action. Here is where the “many, many small steps” come in, and for me, what better metaphor for an artist honing his craft than the stalwart and tenacious Tortoise from the classic children’s tale? Every great actor, painter, sculptor, writer, etc. in history had to begin where the Tortoise does, at the beginning of their life’s work. They had no skill, no training – only a passion for what they did and a path to be forged.

Forging a totally new path is another audacious, and extremely difficult, thing to do. Every step along the way, the Tortoise must convince himself to keep going against impossible odds: he wants to win a footrace against a Hare. Imagine what is going through the Tortoise’s mind as he drags his heavy shell along the path! “Terrible. Bad. Worthless.” It does not matter who said this about him, what matters is that he can hear the voice of logic and reason speaking loudly and incessantly, telling him to turn around – to give up. How could a turtle outrun a rabbit?

The Tortoise and the Hare thus becomes the perfect metaphor for the most groundbreaking and rule-bending artists in history. They saw an impossible task, and they set out to do it. This is how Impressionism and Abstraction broke the strict mould of Naturalism. It is how Einstein redefined our perception of physics. It is how new musical genres are invented,

how tragic incidents are made light by comics, and how fashion evolves and transforms. The Tortoise and the Hare is at work all over the world, all because those people at the cutting edge have the audacity to say “think I can’t do it? Watch me.”

I decided to write a story based on the Tortoise and the Hare, but put it in a modern-day context and examine how our every-day relationships determine our concept of self. The secondary characters all serve as a point of comparison to the protagonist, Paul, the Tortoise of the story. They highlight his shortcomings and weaknesses, and put his resolve to the test. Can he find the courage to come out of his shell and begin to take those many small steps toward his dreams? In *The Artist’s Way*, Cameron describes the obstacles that get in the way of a fulfilling, creative life. Anger, jealousy, and addiction all turn our creative juices murky and clog our systems. She also writes about fear, paralyzing fear of failure that stops many artists in their tracks. And she writes about loneliness and depression; the artist’s path can be a lonely one at times. My Tortoise, Paul, must come face to face with all these things. He can hide from the outside world in his shell, but he will find that the voices of self-doubt, the Critics and the Editors, can turn that protective barrier into a cage. Once you have spent enough time trapped in your own head, the world starts to seem like a dim, hopeless place. It is Paul’s job to fight back against his self-doubt. He must navigate his way through the treacherous path of being a creative person – in this case a musician – and he must find a way to keep taking step after step toward the finish line.

To Paul’s surprise, the finish line is not the end of his journey. Winning the race does not get the Tortoise what he wants. No matter how much we would all love to feel totally independent and self-sufficient, the truth is we need other people in our lives. The social

researcher Brene Brown gave a Ted Talk in 2011 (Brown), in which she shares her findings on what's wrong with America. According to her, what we're all missing is a little more connection, a little more love and belonging. She speaks about "excruciating vulnerability" – the sense that the consequences of simply saying what one really feels in any given moment will be too painful to bear. She speaks about our tendency to hide away from the world, to conceal our darker and more vulnerable thoughts and feelings, because the idea of being exposed is unbearable. Basically, this is the vicious cycle of modern life, because the more we hide, the worse we feel, and subsequently the more we feel we have to hide just to survive. I believe we are all little turtles hiding underneath our shells in our own way, and I think we need to come out and be seen before we can feel truly fulfilled with our lives. For me, the end goal of this turtle's journey is vulnerability and trust.

So how do we come out of our shells? This is where the Hare comes in. The Hare, unlike the Tortoise, is extremely capable, agile, athletic, and confident. The Hare is the version of ourselves we would all love to be. He has what we all want: the ability to have fun and feel no shame in the taking of it. Why else would he take a nap in the middle of a race? A blowout is boring; it's a race with stakes that gets the blood pumping. Cameron describes this energy as our "inner artist child." It's the part of ourselves that knows exactly what it wants, and when it wants it (which, incidentally, is right now). This is the secret to a creative life. The Hare will always be running around and exploring; the problem is the Tortoise forgets to listen. We grow to be self-conscious and afraid, we hide, and the fun-loving Hare has no one to race. When the Tortoise and the Hare lose touch with one another, life becomes dull and tedious - excruciatingly so. We all need a little fun in our lives. If we can find the courage to peek out of our protective shell, to

show our real selves to the world and let ourselves be seen, then the Tortoise can join in on the fun.

In the intrapersonal sense, this state of balance between Tortoise and Hare is ideal for the artist. The Tortoise knows the rules and will put in the grunt work necessary to any creative life: an actor must memorize, a musician must practice, and a painter must improve his brush strokes. Day-to-day skill-building is the Tortoise's work. Meanwhile, the Hare seeks out the new, the novel, and the exciting. He hops around and takes it all in, dreaming up new possibilities and pushing the boundaries of the medium. The artist should get in touch with his inner Tortoise and Hare, because when the two are friends, the artist thrives and grows. But sometimes they each need a little help. The Hare gets too full of himself and sleeps in on the big day. The Tortoise loses his nerve and escapes into his shell. The artist loses faith, or fails to live up to his own expectations. He can't seem to find the fun in what he's doing, and he considers giving up.

Now the intrapersonal turns interpersonal. Sometimes we are a timid Tortoise that needs a Hare to break us out of the mould. Sometimes our lazy Hare needs a Tortoise friend to get us back on track. We gravitate towards people that help us find the perfect balance of quick and slow, push and pull, fun and challenging. Without those people, we are in danger of closing off, losing our way, and in extreme cases, it becomes a matter of life and death. This is the story I'm trying to tell. My thesis is about relationships and why they are so important. It's about vulnerability and why we hide ourselves away from others, even those that care about us most. And it's about listening – listening to the world and deciding to believe, against all odds, that someone or something out there wants to help us succeed. That's the first small step towards learning to trust, and coming out of our shell.

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The Tortoise and the Hare: One Turtle's Journey to Discover the True Nature of Art and Life

Step. The ground is coarse and hard beneath my feet. Step. My back aches from the weight I'm carrying. Step. I look up to the horizon: my destination is still too far away to see. How long have I been out here? Step. They were right about me, I shouldn't be doing this. It was stupid of me to even try. What will they say when I finally reach the finish line? If there's anyone left hanging around at all... Step. I have to keep going. The only alternative is to curl into a ball and hide away from the world. From my family, my friends, all those people who will know I failed, that I'm a failure – ohhh, I can't do this, I can't go on! Step. No. I will. I started this, and I'll finish it. Step.

Paul wakes with a start. Where is he? The pale fluorescent overhead blinds him momentarily – he rubs his eyes and looks around. Oh, right. Jail. He spent the night in jail.

The sudden metallic clang echoes through the room and into his aching head; he practically jumps as the cell door swings open. There's the warden, eyeing him coldly, and there's Bits, shuffling uncomfortably but eyes brightening at the sight of him.

Paul squints and says

PAUL. Hey man. Thanks a bunch. I owe you one.

BITS. Yeah, you do. We'll figure something out.

Bits smiles. He always has his back.

Paul cannot stand his parents, or even his parents' house, so when he steps through the front door he decides to stand silently in the hall for a while, mud trailing off his shoes onto the pristine tiled floor. This part of the house used to be his favorite because of the grand staircase going up and around to his bedroom. From behind the railing beams at the top, he could spy on the front door and hide from unwanted guests. Now he stands there as a visitor, hoping his parents forgot they told him to come, until he hears his mother coming around the corner from the living room.

MOM. Paul? What are you doing?

PAUL. Hi Mom.

MOM. How long have you been standing there?

PAUL. I just got in.

MOM. Oh. Didn't hear the door. Let me get your father. Come in! Take off your shoes for Chrissake.

Oh no. It's going to be a double-whammy; both Mom and Dad want to scold him. And there he is at the end of the hall, the man who never seemed to notice how much his son adored him.

DAD. Hey kiddo.

PAUL. Hi Dad.

DAD. Well, why don't you come sit down.

This is going to take a while. Paul just wants to take a nap and sleep off his hangover. He follows them into the living room and sits on a newly bought couch. The bay windows have their blinds pulled wide and the pale light from the grey sky outside gives the room a lifeless feeling, like a memory you can't get out of your head.

PAUL. Look so Bits paid my bail and everything so you guys don't even have to worry. I owe him and I'll pay him back.

MOM. Yes but Paul, Jesus, you spent the night in jail! That's not ok!

'Oh lord,' he thinks. They uncovered the lie.

DAD. Paul, we're not gonna sit here and watch you throw your life away.

That's rich, Dad. You're the one losing thousands to gambling every year.

DAD. We had a chat with the officer who took you in last night and we decided you're going back to therapy.

PAUL. Umm what?

DAD. You won't have to pay for a thing, we've got it covered. You start on Thursday and you'll meet with this guy every week. He's good, not one of those fresh-out-of-grad-school jokes. He's written books.

PAUL. You can't be serious.

MOM. We're serious, honey. We really think you need this.

PAUL. You guys have no idea what I need!

He can feel that hole in his stomach gaping open, and he has the sudden urge to dive in and out the other side, something you could do when you were a kid and you knew Mom and Dad would catch you before you smashed into the bottom. But the cold room, the cold way his parents are handing him off to some sweet-talking asshole, and the cold, black armor he's sagging under won't let him jump. The only other option is the red red rage he succumbed to last night. It's boiling over into his chest and he wants to scream.

DAD. Sit down Paul. It's settled. Have some iced tea. How's the band coming?

Dad doesn't really care. He wants this over and done with so he can go back to his own problems.

PAUL. You guys fucking suck! I'm not going to therapy so you can tell this guy to fuck off.

MOM. Oh, Paulie, please! We care about you and we're so worried. The police said you attacked that man unprovoked last night. Just go for the first meeting and see how it goes. Please, honey.

DAD. This is pretty serious, kiddo. We spoke with the police, they were talking probation or even a few months. We promised them you'd get help, especially with your conditions, it's something that has to happen.

PAUL. Shut up. Just stop.

The armor is sealing up and even the fight is leaving him. He needs to get out, walk away.

PAUL. I'll go to one meeting. Give me the address.

DAD. Here.

Dad hands him a slip of paper.

PAUL. Ok. Great. Can I go now?

MOM. Do you want to talk a little Paul?

Fucking Mom.

PAUL. Ok! Great. I'm going to work. See you guys later.

And he's on his way out, down the hall, past the staircase, out the door.

The next day is band practice. Lockjaw Wipeout meets every Tuesday, and before practice the guys like to swing through Paul's apartment to roll up a joint and plan their session.

BITS. I'm serious guys, we have to blow the roof off NWI next month! If we win this and open for Offroads in the city, we'll finally be on the map! Get STOKED.

Bits always plays ringleader. In the band, he plays lead guitar at speeds that make Paul's head spin. The drummer, Chris, has a habit of taking off his shirt when more than 3 girls grace the audience of their shows, and Sean plays the bass with a head-bang that's almost rebellious. Paul sings. They're prepping for a battle of the bands at the private college a few towns over, and the winner gets to open for Offroads, a punk band known for inspiring mosh pits of legend... and severe concussions. For Lockjaw Wipeout, this is the ideal future.

CHRIS. Yo Paul, what's this?

Chris picks up a little white book sitting on Paul's table.

PAUL. Oh I found that in the bookstore downtown. It's a misprint – all blank pages. I'm gonna use it for lyrics.

BITS. The Tortoise and the Hare: A Modern Retelling.

Bits is interested and flips through the pages.

BITS. You taking up drawing too?

PAUL. Pff, whaddaya mean?"

Paul snags the book and takes a look. There's a pencil-sketch illustration of a little squat-looking turtle poking his head out of a den surrounded by trees, and the over-ornate text simply reads

PAUL. 'Once upon a time there was a tortoise who lived in the forest.' ...That's so weird. I swear this was all blank pages when I took it.

BITS. Wow, stealing from the bookstore. Classy.

PAUL. Shut up.

BITS. Well, let's hear it, lead singer! Read us your masterpiece!

PAUL. Bits I didn't write this-

BITS. Don't care. Story-time! Story-time!

The guys all pick up the chant. Whatever. Paul flips to the first page.

PAUL. Once upon a time there was a tortoise who lived in the forest.

CHRIS. Boooooooring! Skip to the good stuff!

PAUL. I promise that's all there is. This book is totally blank other than that.

Two pages must have been stuck together when he picked it up in the store. He turns to the next page to prove it and... wait. He was wrong. There's more writing and more illustrations.

PAUL. The tortoise had a best friend, Hare, and together they played in the field all day long.

BITS. Ok, that's enough outta you Mr. Rogers. I wanted something juicy.

PAUL. There's even another page...

BITS. Alriiiiiight, we gotta get to practice! Let's head out.

PAUL. Hold on, I just cracked a Bud.

BITS. Ugggh, so slow. Did you learn the lyrics to That One Day That It Rained yet?

PAUL. Uhhm, not yet.

BITS. What about The Difference Between You and a Snowflake?

PAUL. Umm, nope.

BITS. Quiet Demolition?

PAUL. Shiiiiit, sorry guys. I've had a rough week.

BITS. Alright, so - I think we need to do this now. Wanted to wait until actual practice but... we gotta know now. I love you man, but we've had to start meeting without you to make up for lost time. You're never prepared to practice! We gotta know, are you into this? Or not.

PAUL. Ha - what does that mean, am I into this? What the fuck?

BITS. Honestly man, we all agree you're the weakest link here. If we had a better singer we'd have a serious shot at winning next month.

PAUL. Seriously? Come on, don't pull that shit. Maybe if I enjoyed playing with you guys I'd actually put effort in...but Bits just steals all the spotlights with his Phrygian shit and I'm sick of

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BITS. We all agree, Paul. We gotta know now. Are you in or out. If you're in, start pulling your weight. If you're not...

Paul looks at the guys. All three are staring at him nervously.

PAUL. You guys don't need me, huh? Well guess what. I don't need you either. I'm starting my own band. And I'll beat you fuckers at the battle of the bands.

Bits starts to laugh.

BITS. Yeah alright. Can't wait to see that. Just don't punch out any more dudes at the bar. I won't be there to bail you out next time. C'mon guys, let's go.

CHRIS. Sorry about this, mate.

PAUL. Yeahh, sure you are.

The three of them file out. Paul is alone. Furious and alone. The hole in his stomach gapes open and raw anger bubbles up from inside. He picks up the little book and hurls it at the wall. Weakest link? Does he really suck at singing that bad? His voice is a little whiny, sure, but he always thought it worked. He picks up the book and flips to the page he didn't get to read, still not understanding why he didn't see the pictures before. The pencil-drawn turtle and rabbit are staring each other down across a table, and the text reads-

PAUL. 'But one day, Tortoise and Hare got in an argument and decided they had to settle their differences once and for all. The day was set, and both began training. Talk spread through the whole woods: Tortoise and Hare were going to race.'

Something's not right. That's too coincidental – there's no way he failed to see two pages of a book that would have predicted, in a weird way, what just happened in his room... Those guys. They knew what was coming. They planned to kick him out all along. They must have planted those drawings in the book to make fun of him. Really, a Turtle? That's what they think of him? He'll show 'em. They forgot the Turtle wins the race. He'll find better musicians and kick their ass at the show. And when they come crawling back, he'll reject them from his new group. Sweet, sweet revenge. Now he just needs a band.

Step. Any second now, he's going to come speeding past me, laughing all the while. What is he waiting for? Step. I should have known better – I'll be the laughingstock of the whole woods. Step. That's it, there's no use anymore. I'm turning around.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Excuse us, mind if we hitch a ride?

TORTOISE. I'm sorry?

MR. DRAGONFLY. Ahhh, this is perfect. My wife and I have been flying all day. You look like you're going places! Could we catch a ride on your shell?

Dragonflies. Oh no. They never stop talking.

TORTOISE. Well, actually, I'm sort of taking a solo journey. By myself.

MRS. DRAGONFLY. Oh! Honey! I know who this is. It's the Tortoise that's racing the Hare! The whole woods is talking about you, young man!

MR. DRAGONFLY. Son, it would be an honor if you'd let us accompany you. We won't say a word if you prefer – but someone as determined as you is bound to accomplish great things and we'd love to bear witness to it!

TORTOISE. Do you – really think so?

MR. DRAGONFLY. I know so! Now, let's get a move on and beat that Hare!

Paul lifts his head out of bed.

PAUL. Why am I dreaming about dragonflies...

He drops his feet onto the floor, and sees the book lying there. He picks it up, and nearly drops it again when he sees the new drawings that have appeared inside. He takes a closer look – it's his dream! Word for word, everything he just dreamt up is there on the page.

PAUL. What the actual...

He doesn't have time to think. It's Thursday and a text from Mom last night reminded him that if he doesn't make it to his therapy session he'll have to go to court.

At 11am he finds himself in a forcefully cozy office, sitting across the room from a guy who calls himself Larry Arterton. Mid-40s, stocky yet poised, he smiles at him from a spinning desk chair.

LARRY. How are you doing, Paul.

PAUL. Pretty terrible, apparently.

LARRY. Sorry to hear it. Anything in particular?

PAUL. Actually, no. Just fucking everything, thank you very much.

LARRY. Why don't you tell me about it? I'm interested to hear.

PAUL. Not gonna happen, doc.

LARRY. This unfortunately only works if you give it an honest effort.

PAUL. Well then I guess it's not going to work, is it? I'm happy to sit here in silence for an hour, or else you could just tell my parents I stayed so I can leave now. Save us both some time.

LARRY. It's not my first rodeo, Paul. I've had plenty of clients who were forced into therapy by their parents. That's why I decided to let you do the talking. Anything you want to say, about anything, please feel free to share with me. But I won't interrogate you. You do have to stay for the full hour, but if it's your preference to spend it in silence, by all means let's.

PAUL. It's not my first rodeo either, doc. I went to plenty of therapy when I was a kid. Still got a full bottle of anti-depressants kicking around in my car. The way I see it, life is hard and whining about it isn't gonna change it. So if you don't mind, let's do that silence thing.

And they do. The entire session goes by, all 60 minutes, in total silence. Paul plays on his phone, picks at his ears, even tries to nap on the chair he's sitting in. Larry takes out a novel. Finally, with just a few minutes to go, Paul speaks up.

PAUL. It's just the idea of therapy is so stupid. I mean you're basically admitting you've failed to make any real friends so you need to pay somebody to do it.

To his surprise, Larry chuckles.

LARRY. This is America, after all.

PAUL. No, exactly! We don't want a real solution, we just want a Band-Aid. A quick fix. Real healing takes time.

LARRY. Yes, you're absolutely right about that.

PAUL. Shut up. You don't know anything, you just want to make me feel good about myself. That's what I'm talking about – the quick fix. You know nothing about me.

LARRY. Well, I'd like to. You seem like a very interesting young man.

PAUL. Shut UP! Oh my god – you don't know me! I'm a loser, that's all.

Pause

Time's up, isn't it?

LARRY. Yes, time is up. I am obligated to tell you that the deal your parents made with the police actually entails a few months of therapy. Not just a day, unfortunately. Maybe next week we can talk about music? Your parents tell me you sing in a band. I'm a bit of a musician myself.

PAUL. Great, I'll bring a trophy. See ya.

And that's that.

Paul hears through the grapevine that Lockjaw Wipeout is playing at the Cavalier tonight. He wants to check out his replacement, so he slinks in and sits in the corner behind the bar so they won't see him. They come on stage to set up – Bits, Sean and Chris, and a tall, thin young dude wearing skinny jeans and a pink velvet blazer. That must be him. Paul orders a drink.

BLAIRE. Hey, do you have a lighter?

Paul nearly falls off the bar stool. He doesn't know this girl, but she doesn't seem to care. She eyes him with a cool distance; her short, sleek black hair and nose piercings make her face seem a bit more alive than she apparently wants to be. Paul likes her immediately.

PAUL. No, sorry. Don't smoke.

BAIRE. Aww, hell. You and everyone else in this god-forsaken place. Thanks anyway.

She turns to go.

PAUL. Did you uhh, play tonight?

She's carrying a black guitar case.

BLAIRE. Yeah, you missed me, where were you?

Sarcasm. Love it.

BLAIRE. I'm sticking around for these next guys. I auditioned for them a few days ago – they were in need of a vocalist. But they went with this guy instead. I'm spying on my replacement.

PAUL. No shit. I am too!

Why is he telling her this. Why bring it up.

BLAIRE. Ok, calm down, getting rejected isn't *that* great. They seem legit so I have high hopes. You get their add on Craigslist?

PAUL. N- uhh, yeah, yeah, I saw their add on Craigslist.

Good. This version's less humiliating.

BLAIRE. I'm really just looking for something to do. Currently on break from my summer tour. With my band.

PAUL. Oh, wow well I'm - trying to start a band right now ...and play the battle of the bands at NWI.

BLAIRE. Sounds fun. Got a bassist? My friend can play drums. I'm Blaire.

PAUL. Umm, hi. I'm Paul.

BLAIRE. Cool. Know any bass players?

PAUL. Are you serious about this?

BLAIRE. I'll take that as a no. Well, guess you'll have to learn real fast. I have an old one, I'll lend it to you.

PAUL. Uhhh, ok! Sure. Could I grab your number?

She takes his phone to enter it, and Lockjaw Wipeout starts playing. It's one of their old ones, Paul could sing along if he wanted to. But at the point in the song where the vocals begin, the guy in the blazer starts screaming at the top of his lungs into the mic. It's deafening and sounds just like metal grating against metal. Great. The guys turned their pop punk hit into screamo. To his horror, the crowd in the bar starts really getting into it. Some even start to get up out of their chairs to dance and thrash around.

BLAIRE. They're not too bad, huh!!

Blaire has to yell to be heard.

BLAIRE. Let's meet Saturday to get started! Come to my friend Rod's house! I'll text you the address!

So, Saturday rolls around, and Paul goes to the house of this Rod character. He turns out to be a very mellow 6-foot 3-incher, and the three of them jam out in his garage. Blaire plays her

hollow-body electric with a warm tone that matches her clear, jazzy vocals. Rod's drumming is supple and simple on their slower tunes, but when they kick it up he can hammer out a driving beat. Paul picks up the bass and starts following along. It's slow going at first, but they decide to meet once a day and over time, he starts to catch up.

Step. I'm so tired. I've been walking for hours and hours. But I think my legs are getting used to it. Each step isn't so excruciating any more. Step.

MR. DRAGONFLY. I promise you, no other dragonfly had a buzz as steady as mine! I was the talk of the pond, wasn't I darling?

MRS. DRAGONFLY. You quite were, dear.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Why, son, I truly think you're speeding up! We'll be at that finish line in no time!

Yes. I'm determined to beat that Hare.

PAUL. What the hell is going on??

Paul rolls out of bed and goes to his bedroom mirror. He slaps himself sharply in the face.

PAUL. You. Are. Not. A. Turtle!!!

He turns and picks up the book. The dream is there, word for word.

PAUL. Spooky.

It's a Thursday, so Paul has to go back to Larry's office.

LARRY. That's right, I was first trumpet all four years. Back in the day, no one had a tone as steady as mine.

PAUL. What did you say?

LARRY. My tone. It was incredible. But you see, I didn't have the tenacity. I found that my tastes, my standards for a good performance, were starting to exceed my ability. Playing trumpet stopped being enjoyable because all I could hear were my own mistakes.

PAUL. Soooo you took up counseling, where, if you make a mistake, say the wrong thing, at least the kid's already fucked up in the head so no one will know. Correct?

Pause.

LARRY. You can't be amazing at any skill or profession right off the bat. But if you're willing to be a beginner for a while, you might find that it starts to come more naturally. I don't think you should give up on the bass.

PAUL. Do you believe in... like, fate?

LARRY. How do you mean?

PAUL. Just like, things happening that sort of... make sense. This is a little crazy but I was reading in a... just like, a comic book, and there was this hedgehog character, right? Well, later

that day at practice with Blaire and Rod, they brought in a sax player who, like, WAS the hedgehog. You know?

LARRY. I do think sometimes the world tries to tell us something. Point us in the right direction, yes? It's a matter of opening our eyes and ears to what is out there.

PAUL. Too religious for my taste.

LARRY. I understand, certainly. But really, what's the harm in believing that something good is out there, trying to help you succeed? What's so wrong in believing you deserve to be happy?

Paul, for once, has no answer.

We fast forward to the day before the show. Paul's new band is meeting for the last time to practice. Blaire and Rod actually had quite a few musician friends in town, so their lineup has filled out with horns, a keyboard, and even a harmonica player. Paul's been practicing the bass like his life depended on it, and he's actually feeling ecstatic – he's going to beat Bits and show those guys they never should have kicked him out of their band.

BLAIRE. Hey - why don't you walk me home.

Paul is just leaving Rod's garage. Everyone is packing up to go, and Blaire is gazing at him. Paul smiles.

PAUL. Sure thing.

It's a cool autumn night, and they step out into it.

PAUL. So, what do you think, do I still sound terrible?

BLAIRE. Oh yeah, disgusting. Better than before, but still terrible.

PAUL. I really appreciate - everything. The bass. The vocal lessons. Can I tell you something? I, uhh – I wasn't totally honest when we met. Remember the band at the Cavalier, Lockjaw Wipeout? Those guys are my buds, and they sort of... kicked me out.

BLAIRE. You don't say.

PAUL. It just wasn't fun, so I wasn't trying. But this... with you and Rod and everyone... it's fucking awesome- uhh, yeah.

BLAIRE. My turn to confess. I told you I was on a break from my band right? Well, this is my band – Rod and the guys. Except for one. My boyfriend – he played bass before you came on board. And well, I'm sort of on a break from him.

PAUL. Oh... ok.

BLAIRE. Yeah he's um... he can get kind of violent. We had a fight last month, you won't believe this, he tried to attack me and then he drove off with our van. Didn't get our gear but he left us high and dry in this little town. I'm staying at my friend's – the guys are all in a hotel till we can track him down.

PAUL. Wow that's – unbelievable.

BLAIRE. But I agree, this is awesome. Our little spur-of-the-moment race to the finish. You fill us out pretty good.

PAUL. Oh, haha, thanks.

BLAIRE. Let's go upstairs.

Paul blinks. They've stopped in front of a little apartment above a pizza shop. Blaire is staring at him.

PAUL. Isn't this your friend's place?

BLAIRE. She's not home this weekend. I have a spare key.

Paul's confused. The hole in his chest is opening up, but it's not rage bubbling up this time. It's something else – just as hot, but a tingling warmth. A good feeling.

PAUL. Yeah... why not?

Step. There it is. The finish line! It's so close – the crowd lets out a cheer.

MR. DRAGONFLY. You see, son! I had faith in you from the beginning. And not a rabbit in sight!

Step. Tortoise is exhausted – he's been travelling for days and days, but his new friends (a troupe of chatty chipmunks and squawky ducks and a philosophical frog) have stuck by him every step of the way. Step. No turning back now – he's on the home stretch. Maybe, just maybe... Step.

Paul wakes with a start. Where is he? The room is filling with crisp sunlight – he hears a soft grunt from his side. Blaire.

BLAIRE. Hey, you. What's up?

PAUL. Nuthin – I just, weird dream. I thought I was a turtle.

BLAIRE. Sounds about right. We had a little trouble coming out of our shell last night, didn't we?

PAUL. Shut up.

BLAIRE. You were nervous. It's alright, I have that effect on people.

PAUL. Hey listen, so this gig – this band, we're looking really good. I know you planned to leave town and keep touring, and that sounds... awesome, but-

BLAIRE. Do you wanna come with us?

PAUL. What?

BLAIRE. You're a really good musician, Paul. Once we get enough money saved up to buy some new wheels, we could keep touring, with you on board! Half the venues on the West Coast already know I can rock the house. You could hop right on that if you wanted.

PAUL. Wow, I... I don't know.

BLAIRE. Think about it, ok? Right now, we've got a battle of the bands to win.

Paul drives them both to the college for their gig. The stage is set up on an outdoor staircase overlooking the school's quad. The crowd is enormous – all the kids want to enjoy their

last outdoor event before winter comes. Paul's nervous; some very well-established bands are here and ready to go. He looks around for Lockjaw... no sign of them.

The rest of the guys rented a cab – they pull up, unload, and warm up offstage until Paul hears the MC announce their band: PBR after Paul, Blaire and Rod. Blaire gives his arm a squeeze, and they climb the stairs to perform.

Their first song – a Ramones cover – falls flat. No one's paying attention. Second one, an original they put together in a week, turns some heads. It's simple and repetitive but it gets your foot tapping. After that, the horn players launch into the jazzy intro to Sir Duke. A feeble cheer is heard from the crowd – apparently there is a singular Stevie Wonder fan out there – but as the drum beat kicks in and Blaire starts to sing, people actually start to dance! As he picks the bass and sings his backing vocals, Paul starts to feel something. For just a flash of a second he's in the minivan with his mother and father, back in the day when they used to play sing-along in the car. The three of them belting their hearts out to all the same songs. A time when you could just let go and lose yourself, and not worry because you knew – somebody had you. You weren't alone. Paul feels all this right on the stage in front of a hundred people, people dancing up and down to the beat he's helping to make. He feels, for the first time in years, as though he can truly let his guard down. The rest is easy breezing.

PAUL. We KILLED it guys! YES!

BLAIRE. Hey Paul, so I just talked to the MC and Lockjaw isn't coming. Your friend Bits, I guess he's in the hospital or something? Alcohol poisoning. Must've partied too hard last night!

PAUL. Oh my god, I knew it! I knew it!

Maybe he shouldn't be thrilled that Bits was hospitalized, but besides that, this day could not get any better. For once, things are working out.

They relax. Paul takes a walk and calls Bits' cell – he'll have to be careful not to gloat too much but he wants to make sure he's ok. All he gets is the voicemail.

Back with the band, Paul looks for Blaire.

PAUL. Yo Rod, where's our singer?

ROD. She's talking to Javier. Guess he was here to see her perform.

PAUL. Javier... wait, is that your old bass player? Blaire's ex?

ROD. Well, they're not exactly exes.

PAUL. Where are they??

ROD. Think they probably want some privacy man.

No. No, this cannot be happening.

PAUL. I'm gonna find them.

Paul runs through the whole NWI campus. Finally, down an alley between two buildings, he sees them. Blaire is leaning her back on the wall and Javier – a long-haired blonde in a ripped black tee and heavy boots – is leaning into her.

PAUL. Blaire!

BLAIRE. Oh, Jesus. Hey Paul.

PAUL. What the fuck is going on, huh??

JAVIER. Who is this jamoke?

BLAIRE. Calm down, both of you.

She addresses Javier, who is staring at him viciously.

BLAIRE. Listen, sweetie, just give me a minute with this guy.

She leads Paul out of the alley.

PAUL. So that's it? You're back with that jerk just like that?

BLAIRE. I am so sorry that the timing worked out poorly. Javier came back into my life the moment things were starting up with us! You have to understand, I was only here temporarily, remember?

PAUL. I was just thinking maybe you'd – stay. I mean what about last night?

BLAIRE. You're a sweet guy, Paul. But Javier and I, we belong together, you know?

PAUL. What about me? This morning you wanted me to come with you on tour!

BLAIRE. It just wasn't meant to be.

PAUL. Didn't take you for one to believe in that shit.

BLAIRE. What shit?

PAUL. Nothing is 'meant to be' in life Blaire. That guy tried to hurt you - how can this possibly be the right decision?

BLAIRE. You and I just played some beautiful music and made a lot of people really happy. You had to see them – they were loving it. You and I were meant to play music – I believe in that, and you should too. Just not together. Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith, Paul. I'm taking my leap with Javier.

PAUL. Yeah, well, don't let me near him, I might take a leap at his fucking face.

BLAIRE. See, here I was thinking you were better than that. I'm sorry, Paul, I really am. Stay beautiful, alright? Maybe I'll see you around sometime.

PAUL. Yeah, not likely.

And with that, he walks away. As he gets in his car, he can hear the MC announcing the winner. It's not them. He slams the door, turns the key, and drives home.

Paul dives into the nothingness like a drunk falling into bed. He relives the scene with Blaire over and over. Meant to play music? Not a chance. Those kids were dancing because Blaire and the other guys knew what they were doing, not because of his bass playing. He's a loser, he's always known it, and this finally proves it. No one wants him – not Bits, not Blaire, no one. So why bother them by showing his face? He's barely kept his day job through all the craziness, so besides that, he decides never to leave his apartment. He gets calls from time to time, from his parents, even from Bits, but he never answers. One day, his father knocks on the door and shouts out his name.

DAD. Paul! Paul, please open up. You can't skip your therapy sessions, Paul.

Paul pretends he isn't there. No one is getting inside this time. The walls are up and he's not coming out. Not anymore.

At night, he tries to find solace in the book. Nothing new has appeared since before the battle of the bands, but he likes to read it - over and over. He reads it in bed as he's falling asleep, hoping it might jog his subconscious to dream up some new adventures. Nothing. Tortoise has won the race – end of story. What now?

Step. Crackling heat, smoke, noxious fumes all around. How did this happen? The woods are a massive inferno. Step. I'm turning my head in every direction but all I see are flames and smoke. The stench is overwhelming – thick black smoke is filling my lungs. No, there! There, I can see a path with less smoke, that's where I'm headed. Step. "Hello! Is anyone there?" No one can hear me over all this. Step. Come on, Tortoise, don't give up now. We're going to make it out of here, one step at a time. Step.

Paul wakes with a start. He's sweating profusely and his phone is ringing.

PAUL. Fuck off!

He glances at the caller ID. It's Blaire.

PAUL. Hello?

BLAIRE. Paul! Thank god. Paul-

PAUL. What's going on?

BLAIRE. It's Javier. He hit me, Paul, I'm fucking bleeding and I'm all alone-

PAUL. Where are you??

BLAIRE. I'm in Tacoma. I think it's only a couple hours from where you are, right? Can you come pick me up?

PAUL. I'll fucking kill him!

BLAIRE. He's gone, Paul. Can you just come and get me?

PAUL. Text me where you are.

He hangs up. That's it. That's the last straw. This man is going to die, if Paul has to track him down across the entire country. The hole in his stomach has split open permanently – there's nothing left but the all-consuming rage. He'll find Blaire, and then he'll find Javier, and he'll end him.

He runs outside and jumps in the car. Turns it on, backs out, and he's flying. Winter has arrived and a light snow is falling. As he races through the back roads to get to the highway, he mutters to himself and snorts like a racehorse. How will he do it? He could grab him by his greasy blonde hair and smash his head into the pavement... or he could knock him out, lay him down in front of his car and hit the accelerator real slow... or he could-

A fraction of a second. Something's wrong. Then he's spinning, spinning like a top off the road, into the forest. No time to react, no time to do anything before-

Silence. Stillness. Paul tries to look around but the moment he turns his head, his entire back lights up in pain like fireworks. Eyes moving rapidly, he sees the tree trunk that has practically severed the hood of his car in two. He sees the smoke rising out of the engine. And he sees the blood – all over the inside of the cracked windshield, all over the steering wheel, and all over his arms and hands. He tries to move again – pain, a solid wall of pain thrusts itself through him like a spear. He can't move his head. He raises his arms without too much difficulty, but- his legs. He can't move his legs. Can't even feel them below his waist. He tries to move his feet but there's no response. He can't feel his legs.

That's it. That's the end. If he's paralyzed, then that's the end. No more taking the stage. No more races. He's done. He looks outside the car – there are no houses, just dark, wet trees. No one knows he's here, and no one is coming for him.

It finally happened. After so many years of fighting that gaping hole in his stomach, he's finally fallen in. He's hit the bottom, the hole is sealing up above him, and the pain in his back is an inferno closing in. No way out. Just flame and smoke. A wheelchair for the rest of his life? No, no, that is not acceptable. He won't live in a cage. He won't be trapped anymore. Get out. Get out and escape the pain.

Paul's eyes flick to his right – the crash must have opened the glove compartment and its contents have spilled all over the car. Paul reaches over and picks up a pill bottle – the depression drugs he's been holding on to for so long in case, one day, he had to end it all. This is it – nothing to hold him back now. He unscrews the bottle, takes a good long look at it, and chugs it. Every last pill, he gulps down. Some come spilling out of his mouth as he gags on them, but he picks them up and shoves them back inside. No more fucking around. This is the end.

All the Small Things. Blink-182. It's playing in his car, why? Paul looks down, his phone is vibrating in his pocket. With quite a bit of pain, he yanks it out. It's Bits. Bits is calling him on the phone. He doesn't want to answer, there's no point. But the sudden thought of dying alone terrifies him. Just one last conversation...

PAUL. Hey Bits.

BITS. Yo man, listen, do you have any weed?

PAUL. Umm, no, sorry dude.

BITS. Daaaaamn. Well, that's alright.

PAUL. Sorry.

BITS. No it's cool.

Silence.

BITS. Are... you ok dude? You sound a little sick. Got a cold?

PAUL. I'm good, I'm good.

Paul's head is starting to feel fuzzy.

BITS. Listen man, I know we haven't talked in a while but I uh... I wanted to apologize. We're friends, ya know, and it was some serious bullshit for me to kick you out and then not talk to you like that. Just wanted you to know that- you ever need anything, anything at all, just let me know ok?

Paul is losing consciousness. The world is fading around him and his mind is travelling, rapidly, to other places. Memories. His childhood. Singing in the car with Mom and Dad. Getting bullied and picked on at school by every single kid – not one stood up for him. Except, Bits. Bits was there, sitting with him at lunch and shooting the shit about Pink Floyd or Zeppelin. Bits was his first real friend – his only friend for years. Somehow, he knew. He's got his back.

BIITS. Paul... Paul, are you still with me?

PAUL. Yo. Yo Bits. Listen... can you call an ambulance?

Darkness.

Long pause.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Mr. Tortoise! Hello, are you awake, Mr. Tortoise?

Paul opens his eyes. The sun is shining on his face, and he feels cool grass under his skin. A be-spectacled dragonfly is hovering quizzically above him.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Ahh, Mr. Tortoise, you're awake!

PAUL. Wha... Where am I?

MR. DRAGONFLY. Why, the woods, son! Goodness knows you've had quite a slumber. Quickly! Come with me, the celebration is just beginning!

PAUL. What celebration?

MR. DRAGONFLY. Why, your celebration! For saving us all from the fire! Over here, it's just up this hill, follow me!

As Paul walks, something begins to change. One moment he'll look down and see two human legs, fully functional. A moment later he'll look down, and he's walking on all fours. Short, stubby claws have grown out of his stumpy arms and legs, and looking around behind him, he sees a hard, heavy shell resting on his back.

PAUL. Am I dreaming?

MR. DRAGONFLY. Oh no, Mr. Tortoise, you've only just awakened! Oh, can you hear that? It's the crowds waiting to see you!

Suddenly the trees give way to a large rocky outcropping, and below their feet a grassy field stretches out as far as can be seen. He can't believe his eyes – every inch of it is filled with... creatures. Some are normal human beings, and others are animals the size of a human, and still others seem to be both at once. Even as he watches, they all seem to be changing constantly, transforming from human to creature and back again.

At the sight of him, they all let out a cheer so mighty that Paul has to cover his ears.

PAUL. Who are these people?

MR. DRAGONFLY. They are everyone whose lives you have touched, or will touch in the future. When you chose to break out of the fire, Mr. Tortoise, you chose life over death. And that is cause for celebration!

PAUL. But... I didn't. I didn't choose life. I chose death. That's what I wanted.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Well, there is one guest at this party who says otherwise, Mr. Tortoise. Shall we go down and say hello?

They step down from the hill and walk through the crowd. Everyone's singing, dancing, and smiling. Chris and Sean are there, Blaire and Rod and the rest of the band, even his mother and father. All of them come up to hug him, pat him on the back, and smile. "Sing, dance with us!" they say to him. He does. He feels no bitterness, only warmth as the sun shines down on all of them. This is where he belongs – he could stay here forever.

Someone taps him on the shoulder. He turns, and a 6-foot-tall rabbit is beaming at him.

HARE. Well, Tortoise, we've done it again. We always seem to attract a crowd, don't we?

It's Bits. Paul knows it's him by the eyes – clear, blue and intense.

HARE. I'm afraid I have to get going. I'm leaving the woods today. Just remember how you beat me in that race: one step at a time. I'm sure you'll do great things, Tortoise.

And just like that, he's hopping away.

Paul hears something different now. A distant voice that seems to come out of the earth itself. A soothing voice, but urgent. It's calling his name.

MOM. Paul? Paul, are you there? Helloooo, Paul?

The scene around him is fading. The animal-people are still laughing and dancing and singing, but they are slowly disappearing. The dragonfly lands on his shoulder.

MR. DRAGONFLY. Keep your eyes and ears open, Mr. Tortoise! We'll be right there with you, every step of the way. Someone like you is going to accomplish great things. Oh, and say hello to Larry!

Paul wakes with a start. The pale florescent overhead blinds him momentarily.

DAD. Hey, kiddo.

It's his dad. Dad is sitting by his side, and Mom is there too. He's in a hospital bed.

DAD. Don't move around too much, Paul. You've been out for a while.

PAUL. Dad... Mom. How are you guys?

MOM. Better now that you're awake! You've been in a coma, sweetie. They thought you might never wake up.

PAUL. A... a coma?

DAD. A mix of head trauma and drug overdose. Thank God they noticed the empty pill bottle or they wouldn't have pumped your stomach. You really did a number on yourself, kiddo.

PAUL. But I was just... I was in a field, and we were singing. You guys were...

They're looking at him, concerned. He's not making any sense.

PAUL. I love you. I love you guys so much. I'm so sorry... for everything.

MOM. It's ok, Paul. We're so happy to have you back.

DAD. You just missed your friend – Bits, is it? He's leaving town to go on tour with Lockjaw whats-it. Oh and a girl was here yesterday, said her name was Bella?

PAUL. Blaire.

DAD. She was pretty cute. Girlfriend?

PAUL. No, no.

DAD. Well, she's leaving for tour too. Don't you have any friends with 9-to-5s?

MOM. Honey, don't grill him, he just woke up after 12 days under!

PAUL. No, it's... it's cool. I'm just happy to be here, to be totally honest.

DAD. Likewise, kiddo.

They smile. All three of them.

Paul spends the next 3 months in rehab. He's not paralyzed like he thought, but the back injury and the muscle atrophy from two weeks in a coma have left him debilitated. He takes it a step at a time – there's no other way to do it. Mom and Dad come to visit often, and this time, he doesn't hide or lie. He tells them everything. From the fight with Bits to the car crash, he explains it all, and they listen. They take care of him. He lets them.

LARRY. So, you're back! It's good to see you.

PAUL. Here I am.

LARRY. I heard you had quite a rough winter. Good to see you up on your feet.

PAUL. It sucked. Rehab. So tedious. But... I've never been so grateful to be able to walk.

LARRY. The simple things can really amaze us, can't they?

PAUL. I'm talking to my parents again. It feels... pretty great. But, there's one thing I haven't told them. They'd think I'm crazy. You might too.

LARRY. Judgment-free zone.

PAUL. Just before we started meeting in the fall, I got this book from a bookstore. ...ok I stole it but at the time I thought... all the pages were empty. Totally blank. A misprint. But as time went on... it started to write itself. I mean I would wake up in the morning and look in the book, and there would be whole sections, with pictures I'd never seen before. And the really crazy part is, they started to predict my life. It predicted my fight with Bits, it predicted that I would meet you, and then it- ...it predicted that I would almost die. I went back to read it when I got out of rehab. There was an ending I hadn't seen before. There was this forest fire, right? And Tortoise – the

Tortoise – was trying to get out of it. He starts to meet up with other animals that don't know where to go, and they join together. Then they run into Bits- uh... the Hare. The Tortoise and the Hare are still kind of mad at each other about the whole race thing, but they realize the only way to escape this fire is to work together. The Hare would dart around, looking for a clear path and picking up any animals he found on the way. He would bring them back to the Tortoise, who moved slow and steady in the right direction with everyone in tow. That way, they got out of the woods, and they saved a ton of animals too. That's... how the book ended.

LARRY. I see. Well, that sounds wonderful! A perfect balance of Tortoise and Hare. Yin and Yang.

PAUL. No, look, you don't get it. This book was literally predicting my life, and then it ends like *that*? I've never saved anyone in my life, let alone an entire forest population.

LARRY. Have you considered the metaphorical possibil-

PAUL. I don't need metaphors.

LARRY. But if you look at this another way-

PAUL. SHUT UP. Just shut up, ok? There's no other way of looking at this. The Tortoise became a hero because he saved the woods. I've never saved anyone. I'm just a selfish prick who only looks out for himself, never thinks of others, never does anything to help anyone. The only times I've ever been really happy were when I was the total center of attention. What kind of hero is that, huh? Is that how someone who's gonna 'accomplish great things' is like? The story was wrong. It betrayed me, just like everyone else, because they know what I'm really worth. Nothing. I'm nothing.

Pause

LARRY. You know, back when I was a beginner trumpet player, my lessons teacher would invite me to watch him perform. He always claimed it was for my education but I knew he was desperate for the musician's share of the cover charge. Anyway, I did go to see him, just the one time. That's actually when I decided to quit playing. You see, when I saw him on stage, he exuded self-confidence. But it wasn't as if he thought he was giving the world the great gift of his music or anything like that – he just really friggin' loved to be seen and heard. His performance was phenomenal, not because he was an outstanding player, although he was at that, but because he had the courage, the audacity, to be selfish. I thought to myself, I've got to give this up. I'll never be able to do that – to find so much comfort and joy in selfishly seeking attention. When he stopped playing, the crowd cheered and hooted. You could see in their faces that they felt a connection. They were inspired by his ability to seek his bliss and not feel ashamed in so doing. They loved him because they wished they could do what he does, and after seeing him on stage, you really felt more daring yourself. Now, you're telling me you feel like nothing. But I see you up on a stage rocking hard, and I see a man with a whole lot to give. It's the gift of selfishness, only not in the usual sense of the word. Selfishness in the sense that you believe that you belong. You have a place here and no one is going to tell you otherwise. You deserve to live on this planet. That's a powerful thing. It can change lives. Even save them.

Paul has actually started to cry at this point.

PAUL. You're telling me... that I'm going to save the world... through the power of music? That's such a... load of crap.

LARRY. I'm saying music has the power to bring people together and dissolve their shame. Isn't that something worth living for?

When Paul walks out of the office that day, the spring air and the warm sunlight strike him differently than before. It's as if he'd been sleeping, not just for a few weeks, but for years and years, and now, finally, he's awake. He feels a slight pressure on his shoulder – he looks down and sees a dragonfly perched there quietly.

“Well, Paul. I don't know where we're going next. But I do know how we'll get there.” He takes a step. “Eyes and ears wide open. One step at a time.”

THE END