

MAN'S FAVORITE SPORT

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FADE IN:

INT. ANDY'S APARTMENT

Flickering candles illuminate "Happy Birthday Andy" on a cake.

Alone, slumped in despair, ANDY watches them burn down. His normally jovial face is numb from just having the emotional crap beaten out of him. He sighs, and the candles sputter out.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

BRUNO, a high-strung alpha male, marches down the hall, a hastily-wrapped gift tucked under one arm. He glances back.

BRUNO

Would you hurry up!

Limping after him, NICK clutches his meticulously wrapped box.

NICK

My foot's asleep. Probably from sitting on the curb for an hour.

BRUNO

I told you, I had a crisis at work.

Bruno POUNDS on door #7.

NICK

A crisis? You produce a kids show with horse puppets. What, was there a stampede?

BRUNO

Don't make fun of my show, okay?

Nick snorts like a horse as he nods, pissing off Bruno.

BRUNO

You know how many people watch my show?

Nick counts by stomping his foot like a trick horse. Bruno's about to hit him -- but the door swings open, revealing Andy.

NICK

Surprise!

BRUNO

It's not a surprise party, you idiot. He invited us. Happy birthday, Andy.

Bruno hands off his gift and barges in.

BRUNO
I need a beer.

IN THE APARTMENT

Bruno stops dead. A dozen empty chairs surround a table piled with unopened gifts. The cake remains uncut.

BRUNO
Hey, where the hell is everyone?

NICK
Yeah, where's Julie?

Only now do they notice the devastation on Andy's face.

MINUTES LATER

Downcast, Andy stares at the cake as Nick slices it.

NICK
Dumping you at your own birthday party. Man, that's cold.

ANDY
It was awful. People couldn't leave fast enough. Like rats deserting a sinking ship.

Totally unfazed, Bruno plops down with three beers. He pushes one to Nick, then slides one down to Andy. But Andy's too depressed to move -- the beer slides right past.

BRUNO
Did she at least give you your present first?

Andy lifts up a self-help manual: I'M OK, YOU'RE SCREWED UP.

NICK
Cold.

ANDY
(trying to be optimistic)
She wasn't The One.

He catches them exchanging a look.

ANDY
What?

BRUNO
Nothing.

ANDY

Look, I'll know when I've met my
one true love.

(seeing their doubt)

My parents knew.

BRUNO

(heard it all before)

The first time they laid eyes on
each other, they knew.

NICK

Same with the grandparents.
And your aunt and uncle.

ANDY

It's true. I'll know. There's one
woman I'm meant to be with, and
she's out there somewhere.

BRUNO

Only she's boinking some other
shmuck and doesn't know you exist.

NICK

"Boinking?" Is that what they call
it at Happy Ranch?

ANDY

Hey, a little sympathy here.
I just got dumped, remember?

BRUNO

No you didn't. You dumped her.

Andy looks bewildered.

BRUNO

Well, according to your theory,
you'd have known she wasn't "The
One" by, what, date number two?
Only you didn't want to hurt her.
So you hung in there knowing she'd
figure out your heart's not in it,
and she'd pull the plug to save
face. So don't insult us by
pretending to be broken up over it.

ANDY

You don't know me at all!

He turns to Nick for support. Nick quickly averts his eyes.

BRUNO

Just open your damn presents.

He pushes the gifts down to Andy. Nick snatches his back.

NICK
Lemme give it to you tomorrow.
When you're in a better mood.

ANDY
Okay... sure.

Andy waits until Nick puts the gift down, then lunges for it. They struggle. The paper tears open, revealing a framed picture of Andy and Julie, cheek to cheek. An awkward silence.

ANDY
Nice frame.
(to Bruno)
So what did you get me? A romantic weekend for two?

BRUNO
Here you go, pal.

He eagerly slides Andy his gift. Andy opens the box and lifts out a battered old puppet -- a horse's head. He forces a smile.

ANDY
Hey, a puppet.

NICK
Gee, suddenly I don't feel so bad about my gift.

BRUNO
(with pride)
It's the original Charlie Horse.

ANDY
The first one? Really? Wow.
You sure you wouldn't rather,
I dunno, donate it to a museum,
or something?

BRUNO
Here. Never mind.

Offended, he tries to grab it back, but Andy pulls it away.

ANDY
No, no, it's great.
(slides his hand in)
"Sayyyyy Mr. Ed, how 'bout we go
round up some fillies?"

Bruno stares grimly back.

LATER

They're tanked. In silly party hats. Nick slowly shuffles a deck of cards as Andy tapes a little hat onto Charlie Horse.

ANDY
 (to Bruno)
 ...So what are you sayin'?
 You think I shoulda settled?

He and Bruno glance at Nick, icing all over his face.

NICK
 Hey, I didn't settle, okay?
 Maybe she's not perfect.
 No one is. That's the point.

Bruno pulls a gun from the gift pile and loads a suction dart.

BRUNO
 See, Andy, your problem is, you
 never stay with anyone long enough
 to grow tentacles.

Andy and Nick exchange a look -- "tentacles?"

BRUNO
 You know, like roots. Only wrapped
 around each other. You gotta stay
 connected to someone long enough to
 figure out if she's right for you.
 That takes time.

ANDY
 No it doesn't. You should know --

WHAP -- a dart to Andy's forehead.

BRUNO
 Are you listening to me?
 Because my advice is gold.

Andy POPS the dart off and tries to focus on Bruno.

BRUNO
 You'll never be happy unless you
 give up on this stupid myth you
 bought into. Your soul mate's not
 out there waiting for you.
 You don't just find a soul mate.
 You cultivate one over time.
 Just like you build a friendship.

Andy rolls his eyes. WHAP -- another dart to the head.

ANDY
Do you mind not --

BRUNO
Look, when you first met me, did you say to yourself "He's gonna be my best friend for life"?

ANDY
Pretty much, yeah.

BRUNO
Okay, but that's me. I'm an exception.

Andy snorts. Bruno fires again, but Andy dodges.

BRUNO
(to Nick)
Would you deal already?

As Nick meticulously deals, Bruno puts the gun down and grabs a shimmering green fishing lure from the pile of opened presents.

BRUNO
And I'd really like to know what moron sent you a fishing lure. Who doesn't send a card with a gift?

But Andy's absorbed in the photo of him with Julie.

ANDY
Oh god, you're right. I should have broken up with her months ago.
(crumbling)
What if I've got it all wrong?
What if I end up all alone?

Seeing how devastated Andy is, Bruno finally demonstrates the deep compassion that male friends are capable of.

BRUNO
Jesus, get a grip, would ya.

NICK
Okay, maybe we don't have all the answers, but you'll never be alone. You'll always have us.

ANDY
From depressed to suicidal in one --

He's hit by a thought. He staggers to the bureau.

ANDY

You know who had all the answers?

Andy pulls out an old photo album. He drops it onto the table and rifles through it, finally pointing to a picture -- teenage Andy and a man holding a string of fish by a beautiful lodge.

ANDY

My Uncle Fred. I was fourteen...
Parents shipped me off for a summer
at his lodge. We'd sit around the
campfire... talk all night...
Learned more about life from him
than anyone. Best summer ever.

Nick pulls out a postcard of the lodge from the album.

NICK

(reading the back)
The Lodge, Pea Lake.

ANDY

My aunt died that fall. After
that, I dunno, something happened
between him and my mom. He had
this little fishing show. Mom
wouldn't even let me watch it any
more. Anyway, he died soon after,
just before my parents.

Bruno snatches the photo and looks at Fred and the lodge.

BRUNO

Hold on. Your uncle is Fred Chub?
The Fred Chub?

ANDY

You heard of him?

BRUNO

Guy's a cable legend. He still has
a seven share in the Saturday 9am
time-slot. If you weren't too
cheap to get a satellite dish --

ANDY

Why would anyone watch reruns of an
old fishing show?

BRUNO

Reruns?

Andy looks confused.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

Under a big 'RANDY'S ROUNDUP' banner, the Happy Ranch Corral is filled with marionettes and puppets -- cowboys, horses, cows, Quakers and a T-Rex. Nick has the T-Rex mount a cow.

Behind him, Andy watches Bruno search a wall of tapes. He pulls one out and inserts it into the playback machine. A logo of a rifle and a fishing rod in a gun rack appears on the monitor. Appearing over top of it -- BIG BOB PRESENTS THE FRED CHUB SHOW.

The show starts with old FRED and his native sidekick, deadpan JOE SOUTHPAW, sitting between a wood stove and a stuffed deer. Animal heads, rifles, rods and a mounted fish adorn the walls.

At seeing his uncle, Andy gives a wistful smile.

FRED (ON TV)

Welcome back to the Lodge, folks.
This week, we tried our luck with
some new spinners. We sure caught
some big ones, didn't we, Joe?

BRUNO

(pausing it)
From last week.

Andy's bewildered. Then the penny drops. He pulls out the lure.

ANDY

But... My mom told me he died.
I mean, why would she have lied?

Bruno offers his cell. Andy hesitates. He looks at the lure.

ANDY

I've got a better idea.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

Bruno carries Andy's gym bag to the bus.

ANDY

Stop worrying. It's a week in the
wilderness, not Guatemala.

BRUNO

(grinning)
I was just thinking of that time we
went camping and you --

ANDY

I thought it was a bear, okay?

BRUNO

You don't really think he's gonna have all the answers, do you?

ANDY

I only need one. I need to find out how he knew Aunt Ruby was the one for him.

(steps on board)

Hey, if nothing else, maybe he'll take me fishing again.

The door hisses closed between them, and the bus pulls away.

BRUNO

Call me if you catch anything!

(sees people staring)

Any fish!

INT. BUS - DAY

Andy is engrossed in "Fishing for Dummies".

Later, he finishes highlighting a section and looks out the window -- the terrain has changed to pine forest.

He's woken by the driver calling out "Pea Lake."

EXT. PEA LAKE - DAY

The bus pulls away, abandoning Andy. He hoists his gym bag and wanders down the dirt road into the tiny community of Pea Lake, formerly a summer camp. He looks to his right and smiles --

A quaint cabin is surrounded by an army of garden gnomes.

He looks at the cabin next to it and shudders --

A Texas Chainsaw Massacre motif. Antlers and bones, some human. The KEEP OFF and NO TRESPASSING signs aren't really necessary.

Andy hurries on, passing a cabin covered with more Christmas decorations than Santa's Village. Another looks like a tiny castle, a suit of armor standing guard. Who are these people?

Reaching the clearing by the lake, Andy pulls out his old photo and compares it to the lodge today -- a run-down dump. His smile fades. He picks up his gym bag and heads toward it.

INT. LODGE - DAY

Andy is stunned.

ANDY

He's dead? Really?

RUPERT, a scrawny odd-ball bartender, wipes down the bar.

RUPERT

Well I hope so. We're pretty determined on buryin' him in about an hour. Give'm a poke if ya wanna be sure.

Andy follows Rupert's gaze across the cavernous lodge to the set of The Fred Chub Show in the corner.

Fred Chub is resting comfortably in the show's biggest prop -- a six-foot-long tackle box.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

As the Judge wraps up the sparsely-attended funeral, a few locals sneak furtive glances at Andy, trying to figure out who he is. Andy's grief is tempered by the ceremony's bizarreness.

JUDGE

...The Lord has finally hooked Fred Chub and reeled him into Heaven. And He's not going to throw Fred back to us. For even with all his human frailties -- and there were many -- Fred... is a keeper.

As the giant tackle box is lowered into the open grave, Andy turns to the bitter old-timer next to him, OLD MAN WILLARD.

ANDY

Excuse me. Were you close to Fred?

OLD MAN WILLARD

By Jesus no! Just wanted to be sure the turd was really dead!

Andy is taken aback. Then he notices a figure watching from the trees. CAITLIN, maybe 30, could be beautiful if she wanted to. She has an air of mystery. And tragedy.

OLD MAN WILLARD

That'd be Caitlin O'Connell yer starin' the shingles off of. But save yer breath, Sport -- she paddles her own canoe.

Andy keeps staring, intrigued.

JUDGE

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we pray to God this box won't rust. Amen. The bar's open!