

Karl The Comic Writer

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INT. YOUNG KARL'S BEDROOM - DAY

It may be day but the room is pitch dark as we listen to the voice over.

KARL (V.O.)

Our lives are like vast structures... Vast, yet infinitesimal at the same time, when considered in the grand cosmic scheme of things. Sometimes I think it's possible to identify a unifying strand. Some thing or force which binds together all of the random and apparently unrelated components of one person's life into a cohesive structure.

The blinds open and light floods in. Young Karl lies in bed, looking very sick indeed.

He turns over and gives the blind-opener a pitiful look.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And sometimes I think that's all rubbish and life is just a serious of incoherent events that we impose meaning on retrospectively...

Karl's mother comes into view. She is a stern looking middle-aged woman wearing an apron.

Brusquely she puffs up Karl's pillows, and tidies his hair. She leaves without showing anything even remotely recognisable as motherly affection.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This is me. I'm only five. Or at least I was. Then.

Young Karl swallows and it is obviously painful.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Unwell - taken by the mumps. Or epidemic parotitis to give it its proper title. Eating only soup and dry toast. God alone knows why. The doctor advised no such thing. My mother decided that these two things constituted the only sensible diet for a boy with my condition. The soup was great. The dry toast... Not so great.

The paste holding the wallpaper to the wall beside Young Karl's bed has dried, leaving an invitingly loose seam hanging. The boy starts to pick at it.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Look at me. Bored and sick. So bored that all I could find to while away the long, dull hours was to pick at the wallpaper by my bed. I remember getting a thrashing for this from my father. I never did it again. Not for fear of further punishment though. No. It was because this is the last time I ever remember being bored.

Young Karl suddenly stops as he hears his mother enter the room. He thrusts his hands back beneath the sheets and puts on his best innocent face.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And this is my mother. With more soup and toast. And... Look. On that tray.

Close-in on two shiny, new comics on the side of a breakfast tray, wedged beneath a bowl of soup, and accompanied by a pile of dry toast.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The reason that from this day forward I never again experienced boredom.

The woman places the tray on the lap of her son and leaves the room without a word.

Young Karl dips his toasted bread into the soup to soften it up while slowly being drawn into the world of comics.

INT. AN INDOOR MARKET STALL - DAY

Young Karl is now slightly older.

He kneels on a dirty floor, wedged beneath the laden, almost yielding planks of a labyrinthine market stall, flicking eagerly through rows of stacked comics.

His father waits impatiently in the background. He taps his foot, occasionally looking at his watch, as the pile of comics Young Karl has selected for purchase grows.

KARL (V.O.)

This was the beginning of a fascination that would last almost my entire life. The world of comics would never again be far from my thoughts, or my actions. Every chance to read one or get my hands on more, I grabbed.

KARL(CONT'D)
While everyone else was discovering
computer games and football -

EXT. A SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Karl is a little older now. He sits on a wall as boys in the background play football loudly. The leather ball slams against the wall producing a loud, percussive thump. Karl flinches but his gaze doesn't leave the pages of his comic.

KARL (V.O.)
Or girls.

INT. SHOOOL BUILDINGS - EVENING

Karl makes his way through the shimmying teenage bodies of his classmates at a school disco. The chaperones keep a cautious eye on the dance floor as terrible eighties pop plays through the tinny school PA system.

Teenage Karl walks down a corridor, past a row of teenaged couples snogging and a few older boys guzzling down cans of beer and laughing hysterically, until he eventually finds himself a quiet spot to sit and read comics.

KARL (V.O.)
I was thrilling to the adventures of Judge Dredd and Spider-Man. Conan and Optimus Prime. Living other lives in other worlds, that no one else quite seemed to understand.

Two boys run past trying to douse each other with beer as Karl sits, serenely reading his comics.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
When I left school, I studied English at college for a while. My obsession with comics caused some friction with my tutors, who refused to believe that words and pictures together could have any literary merit.

INT. COLLEGE PROFESSOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Karl is now twenty or so. He is being lectured by a much older college professor.

PROFESSOR
Words and pictures together, young McCloud? I refuse to believe they can have any literary merit.

KARL (V.O.)

See?

PROFESSOR

You think people will still be reading Spider-Man in twenty years' time? The pictures are in these things for those unfortunate enough to have received so poor an education that words alone are not sufficient to convey to them a story. Do you really want to work in a remedial medium? If you do indeed choose to do so it shall be a terrible shame. You have something almost resembling talent.

KARL (V.O.)

After academia had done its worst, and I had patently failed to do anything worthwhile in the world of comics, there was only really one thing left to do with my life...

INT. AN OFFICE - DAY

Karl (in his late-twenties now) sits in a cubicle among many other identical cubicles in a large, open plan office. He stares blankly at his computer monitor, almost falling asleep.

KARL (V.O.)

Get a job like every other loser on the planet.

BOSS (O.S. AND
SCREAMING)

McCloud?

Karl springs out of his chair and looks nervously over the wall of his cubicle.

He walks sheepishly to his boss's office, knocks, fully opens the door, which is already ajar, and enters.

BOSS (CONT'D)

Where are the figures for this month? I thought I told you to have them on my desk when I came back from lunch today?

KARL

But you don't normally come back from lunch until about three.

The boss glares at him.

KARL (CONT'D)

Sir.

BOSS

Are you calling me lazy, McCloud?

KARL

No, sir, just pointing out that -

BOSS

Sounds like gross misconduct to me. Have you received a written warning in the time you've been here?

KARL

Yes sir, I -

BOSS

I thought so. Remind me what it was for.

KARL

Reading. During office hours.

BOSS

That's right. Comic books wasn't it?

KARL

Yes, sir. Comic books.

BOSS

Well you're going to suddenly have a lot more time to read your creepy kid's books, McCloud. Pack your stuff.

KARL

My - ?

BOSS

Yes, you're fired.

KARL

But I haven't -

BOSS

I wouldn't bother pursuing this with an industrial tribunal. You're on record as being a piss-poor employee. They tend not to side with your sort.

KARL

I wasn't thinking of -

BOSS

That's your problem McCloud. You don't think.

EXT. THE OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Karl stands outside in the drizzling rain, holding a cardboard box full of his possessions. An elderly security guard comes out to talk to him.

SECURITY GUARD

You okay, Karl?

KARL

Yeah. I've just been fired.

SECURITY GUARD

Yeah, I heard. You should be happy, you know.

KARL

Happy?

SECURITY GUARD

Sure. You can do better than this place. And your boss was a dickhead.

KARL

Yeah I suppose he was.

SECURITY GUARD

What you going to do now.

KARL

I don't know. Go home probably. Read some com-

SECURITY GUARD

I'd go for a pint meself. Celebrate my newfound freedom. Oh, that'd go down right nice that would - a pie and a pint. In fact I wish they'd given me the sack. I'd be doing a dance out here.

KARL

(smiling)

Thanks Mr. Wilson.

SECURITY GUARD

And that's another thing - you're the only bugger in this whole place that knows me name. Half of them don't even acknowledge me on the way in or out. You'll do fine, kid. You'll see - this is the best thing that could have happened to you.

Karl smiles and holds his hand out to hail an approaching taxi. As the taxi comes to a halt it drives into a deep puddle, drenching Karl's trousers.

KARL (V.O.)
So that went well. I think.

INT. THE JOB CENTRE - DAY

Karl sits opposite a young lady (Catrina) typing painfully slowly on her computer keyboard while chewing gum.

KARL
And so you see... That's what happened. I don't think it was very fair. But to be honest it wasn't a great job and I'm pretty sure I can do better. I have a degree.

CATRINA
Name?

KARL
Didn't I already tell you my name?

CATRINA
Yes. But I type very slowly. I only got as far as K A R.

KARL
Karl McCloud. That's K A R L
(beat)
M C C L O U D.

CATRINA
That's nice. Is it Scotch?

KARL
Scottish. Yes. Do you think I've lost my accent?

CATRINA
I dunno. I thought you might be Irish.

KARL
Oh. What's your name?

YOUNG GIRL
Catrina.

KARL
That's nice, too.

CATRINA
And do you speak English?

KARL

Pardon?

CATRINA

Do you speak English?

KARL

Yes. I'm speaking it now.

CATRINA

Okay. Good.

She clicks her mouse purposefully.

CATRINA (CONT'D)

And do you have any A Levels?

KARL

Yes. In English, Maths and Art.

CATRINA

Okay and what age were you when you sat those exams?

KARL

Eighteen.

Catrina starts to click her mouse button maniacally. Her finger gets tired and she switches to using her left hand.

KARL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. What are you doing?

CATRINA

Oh it's this computer system. It's stupid. You have to click on these little arrows here to forward the date from your birth right up until you were eighteen.

KARL

(Looking at the screen)

Day by day?

CATRINA

Yeah.

KARL

Are you sure? I'd have thought you'd be able to just click on that date field and type in a date.

CATRINA

This is what they showed us in training.

CATRINA (CONT'D)
(She finishes clicking)
Okay. Now - what was the first one?

KARL
English.

CATRINA
And what did you get?

KARL
An A.

CATRINA
Good. Well done.

She clicks ferociously again for a while.

CATRINA (CONT'D)
And what was the next one?

KARL
Maths. I got a B for that.

CATRINA
Okay. That's good too. I failed Maths.

KARL
Did you? Some people aren't
Mathematically minded. It's no big
deal.

CATRINA
Sure. Is it okay with you if we leave
it at that? My hand's getting sore.

KARL
If you like.

CATRINA
So, what kind of job experience do you
have?

KARL
Well I worked in an office for two
years.

CATRINA
This is the job you just got fired
from?

KARL
Ummm... Yeah.

CATRINA
And what did you do before that?

KARL
I was a writer. Sort of.

CATRINA

Ooh - really? What did you write?

KARL

Comic books.

CATRINA

For children?

KARL

No. More for adults.

CATRINA

Dirty comic books?

KARL

No, no. Not at all! Look - it's a common misconception that comics are inherently for children. Just because they have pictures doesn't mean that they can't deal with mature themes and subjects. It's the words-and-pictures together thing. I don't understand it - magazines and newspapers have pictures and no one assumes they're for kids... Well not most newspapers anyway. Films too.

CATRINA

So what were these non-dirty books about?

KARL

I wrote a few things, but my main one was a thing called The Hedonist. It was about the world's first good-time superhero. Imagine - if you were world famous, on the cover of glossy magazines every month - you'd act like a rock star, not some self-righteous do-gooder. So he had groupies and attended all the red-carpet parties, and in between all that saved the world. It was kind of a comedy.

CATRINA

That sounds pretty cool. What else did you write?

KARL

The other comic I wrote was called The Scribbler. About a guy who lived in a world full of superheroes, and whose job it was to write comics documenting their adventures. But the act of writing was draining him of his love for the medium.

CATRINA

That one wasn't a comedy then?

KARL

No. Not really.

CATRINA

Why did you stop?

KARL

I suppose I just ran out of steam. It stopped being fun. Trying to find my own niche in the comics market. Always looking to impress editors with my stuff. All they wanted was big explosions and plot twists in the last three pages. It ended up I was spending more time trying to sell my work than I was using it to try to say something. Funny - used to be I couldn't imagine a life without comics. I've hardly opened one at all recently.

CATRINA

Now what kind of work are you looking for?

KARL

Would you like to go out with me?

CATRINA

(chewing noisily)

What?

KARL

Oh - nothing. Forget it.

CATRINA

Did you just ask me out?

KARL

Yes. I think I did.

CATRINA

No thanks.

KARL

Okay.

CATRINA

It's not that you're not good-looking. You're alright as a matter of fact. It just sounds like your life is a bit a mess.

KARL

I see. Yes. I suppose it is.

EXT. THE JOB CENTRE - MOMENTS LATER

Torrential rain makes the minute or so it takes Karl to don his cycling gear and unfasten his bike from the railing very unpleasant.

He mounts the bike and cycles for a bit through the miserable weather.

After a short while his front tyre runs over a piece of broken bottle in the street. It hisses and deflates quickly.

He frowns, dismounts and walks with the bike by his side instead.

INT. CYCLE SHOP - LATER

Karl enters the shop, absolutely drenched. He is pretty miserable.

Two shop assistants sit behind the counter.

ASSISTANT #1

Hey dude, how can I help?

KARL

I have a really bad puncture and I need a new inner tube for my bicycle.

ASSISTANT #1

(Eagerly)

And a pump and a spanner?

KARL

No, it's okay. I have those. I just need the new tube.

ASSISTANT #1

We have an excellent range of aerodynamic spanners.

KARL

Can a spanner be aerodynamic?

ASSISTANT #1

Your pump's probably an old model, too. When did you buy it?

KARL

Erm -

ASSISTANT #2

Tell him to shove his pump up his arse.

KARL

Excuse me?

ASSISTANT #1

When did you buy your current pump? If you have difficulty remembering that's usually a sign that it's an out-of-date model. The benefits of a new aerodynamic pump are many and numerous.

KARL

I thought it was the spanner that was aerodynamic?

ASSISTANT #2

Yeah! That's it! You tell him. And while you're at it explain to the dimwit that 'numerous' and 'many' mean the same thing. Being a writer, words are your trade. You can't allow this blatant misuse -

KARL

How do you know I'm a writer?

ASSISTANT #1

A what?

KARL

No. Not you - the other guy.

The first assistant looks behind him and then back at Karl.

ASSISTANT #1

Have you been drinking, dude? Might not be a great idea for you to get back on that bike!

ASSISTANT #2

This might be a good time to mention that only you can see me.

KARL

Oh. I see. This is some kind of weird sales technique, isn't it?

ASSISTANT #1

I honestly don't know what you're talking about, man but you're starting to freak me out.

ASSISTANT #2

He's right. He has no idea what you're talking about.

(Waving his arms)

He can't see me.

KARL

Listen - I just want an inner tube. No pumps, no spanners and nothing in the least bit aerodynamic. Just a new inner tube so that I can continue on my very wet journey home. Thank you. Both of you.

ASSISTANT #1

That's cool man. Totally cool.

(Handing over a small box)

Here you go. Have a good one.

EXT. CYCLE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Karl leaves the shop and does up his coat. The rain is still falling in sheets. The second assistant follows him out. He's dressed completely inappropriately for the weather but doesn't seem to mind.

KARL

What are you doing?

ASSISTANT #2

Coming with you.

KARL

Why?

ASSISTANT #2

Because I'm supposed to.

KARL

But I already told you - I'm not buying anything else.

ASSISTANT #2

No problem.

KARL

Fine - suit yourself. If you want to get soaked, that's fine.

Karl walks to where his bike is chained up and the guy follows. He tries to ignore him while undoing the nut on his front wheel.

ASSISTANT #2

I think he might have meant ergonomic.

KARL
Still not interested.

Karl inflates the new inner tube with a hand pump. The stranger looks on.

ASSISTANT #2
My name's Stuart.

Karl expertly fits the wheel back on his bike.

KARL
Excellent.
(Sitting on the saddle)
Bye Stuart.

Stuart looks on as Karl cycles off into the distance. Water rolls off his face.

STUART
Bye Karl.

INT. KARL'S FLAT - LATER

Karl comes in through the front door of his flat and throws his keys and wringing wet outer layers to the floor.

He turns on lights and a television.

KARL (V.O.)
Dear diary. Another miserable day. Got fired. Got rejected. Got soaked.
Can't wait to see what tomorrow brings.

His walls are decorated with framed, signed pictures and posters of comic book characters.

He collapses in a heap on the sofa and pulls a blanket over himself, closes his eyes and drifts off to sleep.

EXT. KARL'S FLAT - THE NEXT DAY

Karl leaves his flat and walks down the street. He walks past Stuart but doesn't recognise him.

STUART
Hi.

Karl takes a second to figure out who has spoken to him.

KARL
Bloody hell. What are you doing here?
Are you following me?

STUART
Not really.

KARL
Not really?

STUART
No. And to be honest I'm hurt that you
don't recognise me.

KARL
You're the weirdo who works in the
bike shop. Of course I recognise you.

STUART
No. I don't work in a bike shop.

KARL
Then what were you doing in there?

STUART
Waiting for you.

KARL
Have we met before?

STUART
No.

KARL
Then how the hell can you expect me to
know who you are? Were you in one of
those ridiculous reality TV shows? I
don't watch much television.

STUART
Come on - let's go for breakfast. Give
the penny a chance to drop.

KARL
I have a policy of not eating with
crazy people. Especially breakfast. It
has a tendency to ruin my day.

STUART
I'm not crazy. And I'm buying. And can
today really be any worse than
yesterday?

Karl sighs and looks like he's about to cave.

KARL

I suppose I can make an exception.
It's not like I had any better plans
for my morning.

INT. A GREASY SPOON CAFE - LATER

Karl and Stuart sit opposite each other. Karl has finished his fried breakfast. Stuart has the remnants of two breakfasts in front of him and has just started his third.

KARL

So who are you?

STUART

You wouldn't believe me.

KARL

Try me.

STUART

Trust me. Tell you what. Guess.

KARL

Are you the result of some bizarre genetic experiment to create the perfect human rubbish bin? No, you said I wouldn't believe you. I wouldn't have any trouble believing that.

STUART

Nope. But that's funny. Try again.

KARL

You're my son. You've travelled back through time to give me a vital message from the future.

STUART

Now that was much closer. I'm really enjoying this.

Stuart closes his eyes tightly for a few seconds. Karl looks at him oddly and decides to ignore this.

KARL

Grandson? Great grandson? And you've just realised that your futuristic currency won't be accepted here and I'm going to have to pay for your three full English breakfasts and six cups of coffee?

Stuart gets the attention of a waitress.

STUART
Could I have another coffee please?

WAITRESS
Four sugars, darling?

STUART
You got it.

KARL
So who are you then? I'm ready for anything.

STUART
I'm Stuart Milligan.

Karl laughs loudly.

KARL
The Hedonist?

STUART
Yes.

KARL
You're telling me that you are a character I created for a comic book.

STUART
Yes.

KARL
Did someone put you up to this? How do you even know who The Hedonist is?

STUART
How do you know who Karl McCloud is?

KARL
I am Karl McCloud.

STUART
(Suddenly very serious)
And I am The Hedonist.

Karl is obviously uncomfortable.

The waitress brings Stuart's coffee.

STUART (CONT'D)
Thanks doll.
(Sips the coffee)
Mmmm. Tasty.

KARL
The Hedonist is imaginary.

STUART

I agree.

KARL

You look real.

STUART

I am.

KARL

You're not him then. QED.

STUART

Then who am I?

KARL

Some crazy person who works in a bike shop and tries to con customers into buying aerodynamic spanners and multiple breakfasts.

STUART

I'm pretty sure he meant ergonomic. Aerodynamic makes no sense.

KARL

You're kind of scaring me.

STUART

Ask me a question. Something that only The Hedonist would know.

KARL

What are your super powers?

STUART

See, that's no use. Anyone who's read the comic knows that The Hedonist's powers change every issue to fit the story, but mainly he has the uncanny ability to have fun regardless of where he is, who he's with or what he's doing. Ask me something only he could know.

Karl thinks for a moment.

KARL

Okay. This'll expose you for the lunatic you are. What is your brother's name?

STUART

George. He's a carpenter, and while he's a happy sort of chap he has nowhere near as much fun as I do.

KARL
(Rather loudly)
How the hell did you know that? I
didn't even get around to writing that
story.

Karl gets out of his seat and backs away from Stuart,
quite scared.

The diners around eye him warily.

STUART
I could have sworn I mentioned before
that only you can see me. You look a
bit like a crazy man right now. Sit
down or they might ask you to leave.

KARL
A - ha! Got you. Your story doesn't
add up. The waitress can see you.

STUART
If I try really, really hard I can
make people see me. And I really like
coffee. Lots of coffee. With plenty of
sugar. So it was worth the effort.

KARL
Why can I see you then?

STUART
You created me.

KARL
Oh my God. My mother said this would
happen. I'm having a breakdown.

STUART
(Still tucking into his
breakfast)
I don't think you are, you know.

KARL
I'm not talking to you.

STUART
Yes you are.

KARL
You're a figment of my imagination.

STUART
Does that make me a bad person?

KARL
No, but it stops you from being a real
one.

Karl sits down and puts his head in his hands.

KARL (CONT'D)
Maybe it's that LSD I took.

STUART
When?

KARL
About ten years ago.

STUART
Doesn't acid normally work a bit
faster than that?

KARL
I wouldn't know. I only did it the
once. At a party. In Manchester. To
impress a girl.

STUART
Did it work?

KARL
No - it turns out incoherent mumbling
and dribbling weren't really her
thing.

STUART
Oh well. Better luck next time.

INT. KARL'S FLAT - LATER

Karl and Stuart enter the flat. Karl throws his keys
and outer layers onto the hall floor.

STUART
So this is what a writer's flat looks
like?

KARL
Hardly. I haven't written anything for
years now. This is what an unemployed
office worker's flat looks like.

Stuart starts to pick through Karl's books and the
piles of paper that lie around.

He picks up a girly mag.

KARL (CONT'D)
Hey! Leave my stuff alone.

STUART

You should be more careful what you leave lying around. What would a young lady say if she saw this?

KARL

Chance would be a fine thing. The only female that's ever been in here is my mother and she complains regardless of how the place looks.

Stuart picks up a bound collection of notes and typed script.

STUART

Is this new?

KARL

No. That's been lying in that exact spot for over a year.

STUART

(Reading)

Why didn't you try to get it published? It's good.

KARL

No it's not. It's rubbish and formulaic.

STUART

Your stuff is far too idiosyncratic and quirky to be formulaic, Karl. This is great. The people should be allowed to see it.

KARL

It's not as simple as that. You need to approach a publisher and an editor has to approve it and... I mean I didn't even finish that one. Is that why you're here?

STUART

What do you mean?

KARL

Did my subconscious conjure you up to boost my self-confidence?

STUART

Is that the sort of thing that a subconscious does?

KARL

I don't know. I should do. I studied a year's worth of psychology at college. I'd make a rubbish psychologist.

STUART

I'd make a terrible writer.

KARL

Why do you say that?

STUART

You're a great writer -

KARL

Pfah!

STUART

- because you have something to say. Lots of things on a good day. Now me... I have but one message. One note to sing. That gets tedious after a while.

KARL

What's that then? What's the one note?

STUART

Live every minute of your life like it's your last. You never know when it actually will be. But you knew that already - you created me.

KARL

Yes. I'm good at trotting out tired clichés.

STUART

But don't you see? cliché are just truths that are so often repeated that people have stopped paying much attention to them.

(Holding up Karl's girly mag)

Like the Top 100 Sexy Girls lists that these magazines publish. Oh - did you hear about the night I crashed the party for one of these things and ended up going home with two Page 3 models and an actress?

KARL

I wrote that story.

STUART

Oh yeah. So you did. Thanks - it was a great night.

STUART(CONT'D)

So, did you ever wonder why even the loveliest girls can't stay at the top of the polls for very long? It's because they become sexy clichés. If someone tells you that some chick is the hottest thing on the planet for a whole year, then eventually you stop paying attention. But it doesn't mean that she's any less glamorous.

Stuart raids the fridge Karl keeps in his living room.

STUART (CONT'D)

Also -

(munch)

- I question the wisdom of including soap actresses in the top ten. There's only so many times I can watch a girl crying in a launderette, mascara running all down her face, and still find her attractive.

KARL

Quite an interesting set of opinions you have there.

STUART

Hardly my fault, is it?

(Eating a chocolate bar)

We need to get some proper food. This rubbish is no good for you.

INT. A SUPERMARKET - LATER

Karl and Stuart walk down the aisle of the supermarket, Stuart frequently dropping items into the trolley that Karl is pushing.

KARL

You know, there was a perfectly good supermarket near my flat we could have gone to.

STUART

It does you good to get out into the big city.

KARL

And none of this food is particularly healthy. It's pretty much what I have at home anyway.

STUART

I'm The Hedonist, what do I know about healthy food? In this case it'll have to be the thought that counts.

STUART (CONT'D)
(Dropping more junk in the
basket)
Right, I think that'll do - let's
check out.

At the checkout Stuart eyes up the young female
cashier. Karl looks at him disapprovingly.

She wonders why he's glaring at thin air.

STUART (CONT'D)
Pay the girl then.

EXT. THE STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Karl is laden with heavy shopping bags.

KARL
We'd better get a bus home. My arms
are about to snap.

STUART
What's the big rush? How often do you
make it into town? We should maybe
take a look around.

KARL
I'm really in pain. Did we need to buy
so many chocolate biscuits?

STUART
(Stops and looks at a
poster on the wall)
Look at that. Would you believe it? A
comic convention? And just around the
corner.

KARL
A what?

STUART
We have to go.

KARL
I gave up going to those things years
ago. Really you wouldn't enjoy it.
It'll be full of geeky, unhygienic
fans and desperate, bitchy comics
creators stabbing each other in the
back.

STUART
We're going and that's final.

KARL
But these bags -

STUART

You can leave them in the cloakroom at the convention. Come on - it'll be fun.

Stuart bounds off, and Karl tries his best to keep up.

INT. THE COMIC CONVENTION - MOMENTS LATER

The convention is in a large hall.

There are trestle tables evenly spaced around the venue, each covered with comics, action figures or a combination of the two.

The hall is crammed full of oddly-shaped people wearing black t-shirts bearing science-fiction and comic images. There is the occasional person in full character costume.

Karl and Stuart enter.

KARL

Oh God. I thought I'd never see one of these things again.

STUART

I bet you used to love them.

KARL

Yeah - when I was a teenager.

Stuart frowns as a group of geeks parade past.

STUART

I really hope you dressed better than that.

KARL

Not much, I'm afraid.

A young lady in a tight leather outfit catches Stuart's attention.

Three teenage Fan Boys approach Karl.

FAN BOY #1

Excuse me - are you Karl McCloud?

KARL

Yeah. That's me.

FAN BOY #2

(To Boy #3)

Man, didn't I tell you. He still looks like his photograph on the Internet!

FAN BOY #1
I really dig your stuff, Mr. McCloud.

FAN BOY #3
Yeah the Hedonist rocks.

Stuart gives a proud grin at this proclamation.

He suddenly realises that Fan Boy #2 is staring directly at him. Summoning all of the teenager's attention into his extended index finger he casts it off like a fisherman. The Fan Boy looks away with a jerk of his head.

FAN BOY #1
No, I like The Scribbler best.

KARL
Really? I didn't think anyone had actually read that.

FAN BOY #1
It's one of my favourite comics ever!
If I'd known you were going to be here
I'd have brought it for you to sign. I
didn't see your name on the guest
list.

FAN BOY #3
Yeah - I heard you were a recluse now!

KARL
A recluse? Where did you hear that?

FAN BOY #3
There's a thread on the Comics
Periodical website dedicated to you.

KARL
A thread? Is that a good thing?

A scruffy looking thirty-something lady with spiky hair and gaudy makeup approaches from Karl's opposite side. She has a slow Texan drawl and a bundle of attitude.

AMANDA
Hey there - you're Karl McCloud ain't ya? I'm Amanda Sanchez. I wrote a really shitty review of your Hedonist thing a few years back.

KARL
Did you? Uh... Thanks.

AMANDA

Yeah, predictable and formulaic is what I said. You didn't read it, huh? Where did you go to?

KARL

Go? I didn't go anywhere.

AMANDA

Haven't seen anything by you for a long time. Hope my razor sharp criticism didn't put you off hittin' the ol' typewriter.

She laughs, annoyingly.

KARL

No. Not at all. But thanks for your concern. I just -

STUART

Tell her you're writing again.

KARL

(To Stuart)

But I'm not.

STUART

Tell her - Go on! See what she says.

KARL

(Back to Amanda)

I'm thinking about giving writing another shot.

Karl smiles. Amanda smiles back, obviously not particularly wanting to be drawn into a conversation. Instead she thrusts forward a comic.

AMANDA

Well this here is my new comic. Riotous Manga Chick. It's not feminist, if that's what you're thinking. The title's ironic.

KARL

I see -

AMANDA

Total action blitz, zombie flesh-fest reminiscent of the best of independent Latvian cinema.

KARL

That sounds really... Exciting. My stuff was a bit more introspective. I'm sorry you found it formulaic.

STUART
 (Despairing)
 That's it. You tell her!

AMANDA
 It would be total cool beans if you could review that for one of the news sites. Comics Periodical always run reviews by has-beens of hot new stuff. No offence. Obviously.

KARL
 None taken.

AMANDA
 Right - I gotta go. I think I just spotted Jack Krugby. You know, the publisher of Spaghetti Fumetti. See ya.

KARL
 Sure. Bye.

She stamps off, leaving Karl and his teenage fans a bit startled. Except Fan Boy #2 that is, whose gaze has returned to Stuart. When he notices he flicks his hand and the boy looks away again.

Stuart takes a look at Amanda's comic.

STUART
 This looks like crap.

KARL
 No need to be negative.

STUART
 You're absolutely right. There wasn't.
 (Calling after Amanda)
 Cow!

FAN BOY #1
 Wow! Did I hear that right? Have you started writing again?

KARL
 Ummm... Kind of.

FAN BOY #1
 That is so cool.

FAN BOY #3
 I can't wait to break the news on the web. I'll get first post and everything.

FAN BOY #1

You'll have to beat me to the nearest Internet cafe if you want that honour.

FAN BOY #3

Easy, fat boy.

They run off, leaving Fan Boy #2 looking a bit dazed.

STUART

Come on, I think I've had enough of this place. You were right. No fun at all.

EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE CONVENTION - MOMENTS LATER

Karl is laden with bags again but looks strangely energetic. Stuart listens to him as they walk to the bus stop.

KARL

I didn't think anyone actually knew my stuff. My comics. That was actually really cool. Thanks for suggesting that we go.

STUART

Do they always smell like that?

KARL

Conventions? Or comics fans?

STUART

Both.

KARL

Yeah.

STUART

What's with that?

KARL

I haven't felt like that in a long time.

STUART

It's probably the smell.

KARL

No I mean excited. About comics. Oh - this is our bus. We'll have to run if we want to catch it.

STUART

Can we just get a taxi?

INT. KARL'S FLAT - LATER

Karl sits in front of an old typewriter. Stuart sits on the couch munching at junk food and watching TV.

STUART

You should get a computer.

KARL

I don't want a computer. I don't need a computer.

STUART

Writers use computers.

KARL

I'm not a real writer.

STUART

How's it coming along?

KARL

Not so good.

STUART

How many words?

KARL

(Counts)

Eighteen.

STUART

It's a start.

KARL

I'm sure it used to be easier than this.

STUART

You got as far as the typewriter. That's the difficult part. Now you just have to write.

Karl stands up and stretches. He moves away from the typewriter.

STUART (CONT'D)

Uh uh, cowboy. Get back in the saddle. Writing is five percent inspiration and ninety five percent bum glue.

KARL

Bum glue?

STUART

It keeps your bum stuck to the seat
until you've finished.

Karl frowns.

KARL

How come you know so much about
writing all of a sudden.

STUART

I was written wasn't I? Who would know
how it works any better than me?

The telephone rings. Neither of them answers it.

KARL

Best leave it. It might interrupt my
flow.

STUART

That is precisely what I was thinking.

The phone rings onto the answer machine. It is Karl's
mum.

KARL'S MUM

Hi Karl. It's your mother here. I've
just heard from Brian that you lost
your job at the... Where were you
working? Oh I don't suppose it
matters. That I've forgotten, that is,
not that you're now unemployed.
Terrible waste. Just terrible. You
should call Brian.

Stuart shoots an inquisitive look at Karl.

KARL

My older brother.

KARL'S MUM

He might be able to sort you out with
something. You never know. There's no
shame in it. We all have to go begging
sometimes. Call me back. You don't
call enough. I hope you're out looking
for a job. I'll expect to hear from
you later today. Your father sends his
regards.

She hangs up and the answer machine beeps and whirs.

KARL

I don't think my father has uttered more than four words in the last decade, mum. How exactly did he communicate that to you?

STUART

Do I sense hostility?

KARL

No, just advanced disfunction.

STUART

So what's the deal with Brian?

KARL

He runs a hedge fund in the city. And has a massive house. And two cars. One of them is a classic, I think. Not that I know anything about cars.

STUART

And your mother wants you to ask him for a job?

KARL

Has done since I left college.

STUART

(Grinning)

But you want to be a writer instead.

Karl's frown deepens and he takes the barely typed-upon sheet of paper from his typewriter and crumples it in his fist.

STUART (CONT'D)

Let's go out.

KARL

Out? To another comic convention?

STUART

Oh my God, no! Let's go clubbing!

KARL

I don't club.

STUART

I do.

KARL

I thought we'd already established that you are imaginary?

STUART

So?

KARL

I am not going out with an imaginary person. That means I'm effectively going out on my own.

INT. A LOUD NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Karl props himself up against the bar, his legs unsteady beneath him. He slurs his words drunkenly.

KARL

I don't know how I let you talk me into this. Especially since you don't actually exist.

STUART

This is precisely what you need.

Stuart checks out every girl who walks past, beaming the whole time.

STUART (CONT'D)

You never know - you might find something to take your mind off the writer's block.

KARL

I don't have writer's block. I'm not a real writer.

STUART

Sure you are. Look -
 (Pointing at himself)
 - here's the proof. You made something from nothing. Using only the might of your imagination. You created a character, a world, a story. You are the very definition of a writer.

KARL

You're drunk.

Stuart knocks back a luminous shot.

STUART

Not yet, my friend, but we must all have our ambitions.

KARL

Ambition. You know when I was young -

STUART

Uh oh, here comes the 'old man' talk.
 (Takes Karl's drink away from him)
 I think you've had enough of these.

KARL

- I was nothing but ambition. I thought I could conquer comics single-handedly. I wanted to be the best writer in the world. And nothing was going to stop me.

A young lady in a very short skirt approaches the bar between Stuart and Karl.

Stuart closes his eyes as if concentrating very hard.

STUART

So what is stopping you?

The girl notices Stuart, who then starts to dance in a suggestive manner.

KARL

The world. The real world. It seems so easy when it's all in your head. But being good at anything - never mind being the best in the world - is a very, very, very...

Karl's voice trails off as he struggles to focus on Stuart and his companion, who are now dirty dancing together.

KARL (CONT'D)

Difficult thing.

STUART

Nothing worthwhile comes easy.

KARL

What would you know? Everything comes easy to you. Fame. Fortune. Girls.

The girl suddenly can't see Stuart, who is instead getting serious with Karl.

STUART

Karl, if you want something badly enough you shouldn't let anything stand in your way. Life doesn't work the same as in stories - there are almost always obstacles. And it takes effort to overcome them. Life may be handed to me on a plate, but only because that's the way you've written me. The universe isn't quite so kind.

KARL

I wish I was lucky. Like you.

The girl wanders off, bewildered, unable to recall what she had just been doing.

STUART

Fortune favours the bold.

KARL

But I like having hair.

STUART

Bold. Not bald. I should have had this talk with you when you were sober.

KARL

I am sober.

Karl passes out and collapses. The bar man comes over.

BAR MAN

(To Karl)

I think you've had too much, mate.

(To himself)

Mind you, I thought that three hours ago when you came in and started talking to yourself like a loony.

INT. KARL'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Karl wakes up and stretches. Then he realises his head is pounding and tries to calm it with the palms of his hands.

He rolls over and opens his eyes to find Stuart lying in the bed next to him. He winces.

STUART

(Eyes still closed)

Morning Karl.

Karl leaps out of bed. A few seconds later we hear vomiting noises, from what we have to assume is the bathroom.

Stuart gets out of bed, yawns and stretches gracefully.

STUART (CONT'D)

Coffee?

Stuart leaves the bedroom and goes into the lounge. Karl is still sounding unwell elsewhere.

Stuart peers at the answering machine. A small light on it is flashing.

STUART (CONT'D)

I think you have a message.

KARL (O.S.)
It's probably my mother.

Stuart presses a button on the machine, causing a beep and a whir, wanders towards the kettle and sets it to boil.

An American voice is played back by the answering machine.

ANSWERING MACHINE
Hi there Karl. It's Gene Barker here. Long time no speak, you Scotch son-of-a-peach. I thought you'd retired. Just got your latest submission pack. You sneaky dog!

Karl enters the room. He is an indescribable shade of green. He groans.

ANSWERING MACHINE
(CONT'D)
This stuff is great. More Scribbler. I always liked your Scribbler stories. I didn't think you had it in you. We all thought that the 'falling out of love with comics' was totally autobiographical. But no, you've just been building up a head of steam for round two. And as for the proposal for the new Hedonist mini-series... Man - I'm psyched! Call me. We need to talk numbers.

Stuart nods. The machine beeps. Karl glares.

KARL
I'm guessing you had something to do with this?

STUART
Of course.

KARL
You mind telling me, then?

STUART
Fortune favours the bald.

KARL
Bold. Fortune favours the bold.

STUART
I knew you weren't listening last night. I mailed off your stuff.

KARL

What stuff? I only wrote eighteen words. And it ended up in the bin.

STUART

No. The stuff you had lying around here the other day. I read it through. I thought it was great. So I looked up the guy who used to be your publisher and stuck it all in an envelope addressed to him.

KARL

But it didn't make any sense. And it was - Oh God. This is terrible.

STUART

He didn't think so. Which means I was right. Again. You should maybe start listening to me.

Karl glances at his watch.

KARL

Bollocks. I'm late for my appointment at the Job Centre.

He rushes out of the room. There is another round of vomit noises.

STUART

Coffee?

INT. THE JOB CENTRE - LATER

Karl smiles at Catrina across the interview desk, through hungover eyes. She reads his file. Stuart grins like an idiot as he sips the coffee that he brought with him from Karl's flat.

CATRINA

So how has your first week of job-hunting been for you?

KARL

Uneventful, if I'm honest.

Stuart prods him and he jumps.

CATRINA

That's a shame Mr. McCloud. Would you perhaps be interested in one of our skills-retraining courses? Or perhaps a class in how to read job adverts in your local newspaper?

Stuart prods him again.

STUART

Tell her.

KARL

Ummm... I...

STUART

Tell her, or I'll shove you off that chair and you'll look a right idiot!

KARL

I've been thinking about writing again.

STUART

Mmmm Hmmm.

CATRINA

Excellent. Do you have any newspaper adverts for me then?

KARL

Excuse me?

CATRINA

To prove that you are looking for gainful employment in your chosen profession. I mean, I know you are, but my boss likes to see something, well...

Karl looks at her, baffled.

CATRINA (CONT'D)

Just proof. You know. Job adverts usually do it.

KARL

I don't think that's how writing works, to be honest.

CATRINA

No?

KARL

No. I don't recall ever seeing an advert in my local paper looking for a comics writer.

CATRINA

Well - I'll tell you what. Let's see if there's something in our system. If there is I can stick that in your file.

KARL

Right.

Catrina taps, again incredibly slowly, on her keyboard and then squints at her ancient computer monitor.

CATRINA

I think I might have found something, you know.

KARL

Really?

CATRINA

See. Doubting Thomas that you are. We're not completely useless. Sign Writer.

She nods at him happily.

KARL

Sign Writer? I'm not sure I'm really qualified for that.

CATRINA

Why not?

KARL

Mainly because I can't write signs. Only comics.

CATRINA

Well a sign's like a big comic, with fewer words, isn't it? You have to think out of the box sometimes.

STUART

I bet she learned that on a course.

Karl prods Stuart. He jumps.

KARL

I'm not sure you understand what writing comics entails.

CATRINA

You put the words in the little bubbles?

KARL

That's what I thought you thought. No, the person who writes the words into the balloons is called a letterer.

CATRINA

So what... Do you do, then?

KARL

I write the stories.

CATRINA

Nope. Not sure what you mean. Do you want the details of this job anyway? It sounds like fun.

INT. KARL'S FLAT - DAY

Karl is sitting in front of the typewriter again, but this time he's tapping away at quite a pace. Stuart is reading a comic with one hand and holding a steaming mug of coffee in the other.

STUART

This is complete shit.

KARL

(Still typing)

What is?

STUART

That girl's comic. Listen to this: 'Welcome to the concrete canyons of my imagination. Prepare yourself for a voyage to the edge, courtesy of me, Amanda Sanchez, courtesan, warrior goddess, adventurer'.

KARL

She's just projecting a persona for the reader's benefit. A lot of writers do it.

STUART

She's just making me vomit. The story's pretentious twaddle too. Your worst stuff pisses all over this.

KARL

You know this is the first I've properly written in over a year.

STUART

How does it feel?

KARL

Great!

STUART

I'm glad. When's your interview for the sign writer's job?

KARL

Next week. I might try and cancel it. I just felt so bad after Catrina had gone to the trouble of all that typing. I know it doesn't come very easy to her.

The telephone rings. Stuart picks it up and hands it to Karl.

KARL (CONT'D)

Hello?

(beat)

I was just about to call you actually. I got your message.

(beat)

Of course.

(beat)

I was writing it when you called.

(beat)

That's great.

(beat)

That's great.

(beat)

That's even better.

(beat)

No, I'm having trouble believing it, too. But thank you so much.

(beat)

I'll call you in a few days when it's all finished. It'll be in the post by the end of the week.

(beat)

Excellent. Speak to you then.

Karl puts down the phone.

STUART

(Sarcastically)

Oh God. Is it bad news? What did he say?

KARL

That was Gene -

STUART

The publisher. Yes.

KARL

He wants to reprint my old books and have them in shops a few months before the new stuff comes out. And he's organised a signing for me. In town. This weekend. His publicity department is working on it. It sounds like it's going to be quite big.

STUART

Good. But none of that puts words on the page. Can I make you another coffee? You need to get back to work.

KARL

No more coffee for me. Four cups in the morning is definitely my limit. I thought you'd want to go out and celebrate?

STUART

Not at all. We did that already. Now is the time for work.

KARL

Are you sure you're The Hedonist? You sound more like The Industrialist.

STUART

I'm just a figment of your imagination, mein creator. I can be anything you want me to be. Now back to work. I need more coffee.

KARL

I can't. I'm too excited.

STUART

Write!

KARL

Okay, okay.

Stuart boils the kettle and opens another packet of chocolate biscuits.

STUART

It's what writers do after all.

INT. KARL'S FLAT - THROUGHOUT THE NEXT FEW DAYS

A series of clips showing Karl typing furiously. The stack of completed manuscripts at his side grows and grows.

Stuart occupies himself with playing computer games, reading comics, drinking coffee and eating yet more junk food.

Karl continues to write, completely oblivious to what is going on around him. The stack becomes multiple stacks. The title pages read things like

THE HEDONIST : THE NEW ADVENTURES (GRAPHIC NOVEL)

THE SCRIBBLER : A LOVE RENEWED (FIVE PART MINI-SERIES)

THE HEDONIST : A TIME OF RECKONING (ONESHOT)

INT. KARL'S FLAT - NIGHT

Karl is on the telephone with his publisher again. He scribbles notes while speaking.

KARL

That's great. I'll be there by twelve. I wouldn't imagine there will be many people looking for my autograph, but it'll be fun.

(beat)

No, that one's finished and I'm working on the sequel.

(beat)

Really. I don't know what's happening. I haven't felt this excited about comics since I was a teenager

(beat)

I'll call you after the signing and let you know how it goes. Thanks again. Thank you so much.

He hangs up.

Stuart is passed out on the sofa.

There are now twenty or so piles of typed manuscript at his writing desk.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I still have no idea where he's come from or why. If this is what a breakdown feels like, it's nowhere near as bad as my mother said it would be. The last two weeks have been the most productive and happy of my life. Now if only he was a sexy girl.

The cogs turn in Karl's brain.

KARL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Well if his look changes to fit the story, why can't the changes be more fundamental? That's great! Why didn't I think of this before?

Karl returns to his typewriter and feeds it another clean white sheet. He starts typing.

On the sofa Stuart dreams a good dream and smiles.

INT. KARL'S FLAT - THE NEXT DAY

Karl is asleep at his writing desk when Stuart wakes up.

Stuart goes over and flicks through some pages in astonishment.

STUART

The Hedonist : It's a Girl Thing...

(To Karl)

You're going to turn me into a girl? I think I need a coffee...

INT. THE JOB CENTRE - DAY

Karl sits at Catrina's desk, wearing a heavy coat and gloves. Stuart is in the background making mischief and looking at girls.

KARL

So once the first royalty cheque comes in from the reprint pre-sales I won't be unemployed anymore. I'll be self-employed.

CATRINA

To be honest you lost me after you mentioned a cheque coming in, and I only caught up with you again at 'self-employed'.

KARL

That's okay. So I suppose I just need to sign something that says I can stop looking at job adverts in my local paper and we're all done.

CATRINA

Yeah. I have one of those forms here.

Catrina produces a stack of papers.

KARL

I have to fill out all of these?

CATRINA

I'm afraid so.

KARL

Can I take them home and post them back to you? I doubt I'll be able to finish in the ten minutes we're allocated for this.

CATRINA

You remember how you asked me out the first time you came here?

Karl starts filling out the forms.

KARL

Oh yeah. Sorry about that.

CATRINA

You still interested?

Karl stops filling out the forms.

KARL

Yes. Of course. Definitely.

CATRINA

Good. What are you doing tonight?

KARL

Absolutely nothing. I mean I have this signing thing today in town. At a comic shop. But then nothing. After that. Can I take you out to dinner?

Stuart gives Karl the 'thumbs up' and then returns to looking at girls.

CATRINA

Can you cook?

KARL

Kind of.

CATRINA

That'll do. How about I come around to yours?

KARL

That would be great. What time.

CATRINA

Well, when will you get back from town?

KARL

It's at twelve, so I should be back around five.

CATRINA

I'll give you a couple of hours to cook me something delicious. Seven?

KARL

Perfect.

CATRINA

Your signing's at twelve? You know
it's almost half past eleven?

KARL

Bugger.
(Leaps up)
See you at seven then.

He runs off.

And then comes back.

KARL (CONT'D)

Won't you need my address?

Catrina smiles and points at her computer.

CATRINA

It's only a key press away.

KARL

See you at seven.

CATRINA

Seven.

He smiles and runs off again, grabbing Stuart on the
way.

STUART

Only a key press away? The way that
girl types she'd better start now if
she wants your address by seven.

EXT. APPROACHING THE COMIC SHOP

It is very cold. While Karl is wearing hat and gloves,
Stuart, being imaginary, gets by in t-shirt and jeans.

KARL

It's bloody cold.

STUART

Yeah.

KARL

Winter's really hit with a vengeance
this year. I've never seen the city
ice up like this overnight before.

STUART

Yeah.

KARL

You okay? You seem a bit... Distant.

STUART

I'm fine. Just happy for you. Your big comeback, eh?

KARL

You should be happy. It looks like I'll be writing you lots of cool new adventures. Tell me what you want to be doing next week. I can sort it for you.

STUART

Yeah. It's going to be really great.

KARL

Will you cheer up? Things are finally starting to look up for us.

Stuart nods and smiles half-heartedly.

They enter the comic shop.

INT. THE COMIC SHOP

The owner of the comic shop greets Karl as he enters.

OWNER

Karl McCloud! Good to see you. We have quite a queue of people building up here to meet you. A lot of people thought you had become a recluse.

KARL

Yeah, I don't know how that rumour started. Do you have somewhere I could put my coat?

OWNER

Sure, sure. I'll take it through to the back of the shop and let you get started.

Karl is surprised by the crowd of people. He recognises Fan Boys #2 and 3 from the comic convention.

KARL

Hi guys. Where's your other friend?

FAN BOY #3

He's finishing up at work and then rushing over here on his lunch break. He reckons he'll make it just for the end of your signing.

KARL

Cool. So, who's first?

As fans of all ages queue for Karl's signature Fan Boy #2 looks out of the shop front window, through which we can see Stuart standing looking glum.

Amanda Sanchez approaches Karl.

AMANDA

Hey there. Did you get a chance to read my comic?

KARL

I did, yeah.

AMANDA

What did you think?

KARL

Very good. I especially liked your introduction. The 'concrete canyons' thing. Very original.

There is an embarrassing pause, as neither of them say anything. People behind Amanda in the queue look past her wondering what's going on.

KARL (CONT'D)

So, uh, can I sign something for you?

AMANDA

Depends, is there any free stuff?

KARL

I'm not sure to be honest, you'd have to ask the shop owner. I'm just signing whatever's put in front of me.

AMANDA

Yeah, I'll do that. Might be back later.

KARL

Sure. See you again.

Karl watches her leave the shop without asking the owner anything. He frowns and then smiles at the next person in line.

NEXT PERSON

Can you sign it 'To Frankie'. That's my boyfriend. He was a real big fan of yours back when you were writing this stuff.

KARL

No problem. I hope he likes the new stuff when it comes out.

NEXT PERSON

I'm sure he will. Thanks very much,
Mr. McCloud.

KARL

No problem.

The queue gets shorter as the signing continues and Fan Boys #2 and #3 are still hanging around. Eventually they are the only ones left.

KARL (CONT'D)

I suppose I'm going to have to head off now, but listen, tell your friend that he can contact me through this shop and I'll sign some stuff for him if he wants.

FAN BOY #3

Cool. I'm sure he'll really appreciate that. He'll be gutted that he didn't make it.

KARL

Well I'd love to do this sort of thing again, so I might be back.

OWNER

Always welcome Karl. I sold about a hundred of those Hedonist books today. I think you just paid for my winter holiday.

KARL

I hope you enjoy it. The weather's taken a real turn for the worse.

Karl looks out the window. Stuart is still standing outside.

KARL (CONT'D)

Right, I'm going to run, guys. I have a date tonight and she expects me to cook.

The Fan Boys and the owner wave goodbye and Karl leaves the shop.

EXT. THE COMIC SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Karl exits the shop with a huge grin on his face and dons his heavy coat.

KARL

You okay, Stuart? You look like someone just died.

STUART

Sure. How did it go?

KARL

Fantastic. I had no idea so many people had heard of me. If I wasn't going home to cook for Catrina tonight I'd sit and write all night. I have so many ideas buzzing around in my head.

STUART

That's great.

KARL

Which reminds me. You don't mind making yourself scarce tonight do you? Some privacy might be in order.

Stuart gives Karl a very sombre look. Then he closes his eyes.

Brakes screech as a car skids across some black ice in the road and hits Karl. He is thrown into the air by the force of the collision.

The car crashes into the front of the comic shop. People slowly gather around Karl's body.

Fan Boy #1 climbs out of the crashed car. His face is white and he looks terrified. He is clutching a pile of comics.

Back outside the comic shop Karl is standing beside Stuart.

KARL (CONT'D)

Wow.

STUART

Yeah.

KARL

What a mess.

STUART

It's certainly not pretty.

KARL

So I'm dead then?

STUART

As a dodo.

KARL

That's a bummer. Just as things were looking up. I nearly had a girl in my flat and everything. A real one.

STUART

She wasn't that great. You can do better.

KARL

Not now I can't. Thanks for trying to cheer me up, though. No matter how bad you are at it.

STUART

Imagine how depressed you'd be if you died with nothing going well.

(Uncertainly)

I mean, you're happy enough, aren't you?

KARL

Well I'm not as upset as I'd have expected, given the circumstances. You don't seem too disturbed either.

Stuart stares intently at his feet.

KARL (CONT'D)

You knew this was going to happen?

(beat)

Why didn't you save me?

STUART

That's not how it works, Karl. Your ticket's stamped on the way in with a predetermined departure time.

KARL

Really? I wish I'd known.

STUART

That's probably what everyone says.

KARL

Damn.

STUART

What?

KARL

I didn't call my mother back.

STUART

What would you have said?

KARL

I'd have told her the truth. For once. Something about how I never wanted a big house or a fast car. I'd have tried to explain what I did want. To say something. Not sell something.

STUART

Would she have listened?

KARL

Probably not. She didn't listen to Brian when he told her pretty much the same thing years ago.

STUART

He didn't want to run a hedge fund?

KARL

No. He wanted to play bass in a punk band.

A mist rises from the ground, and the real world starts to fade.

KARL (CONT'D)

Is it my imagination or is it starting to get cloudy?

STUART

Yeah, I think this is it.

A bearded man in long white robes approaches them from behind.

BEARDED MAN

Hello.

They turn to face him.

KARL

Oh, hello there. Are you Saint Peter?

BEARDED MAN

I don't think so. My name's Garry.

KARL

Pleased to meet you. I'm -

BEARDED MAN

Karl. Yes I know. And right on time, too. Which is good. Punctuality is very much appreciated in the afterlife. Nothing worse than hanging around waiting for someone. Especially if you have to sit through a particularly gruesome... You know... Ending.

KARL

Wow. I suppose.

BEARDED MAN

Well come on then. We'd best be off.

(To Stuart)

Are you coming too?

STUART

You betcha, Mr. Garry. I can't wait to see what goes on here.

They begin to walk off.

VOICE (O.S.)

Excuse me. Ummm... Sorry. Hello?

They turn to see Karl's ex-boss.

BOSS

Hello Karl.

KARL

Hi, sir.

STUART

You don't need to call him sir, anymore.

KARL

Well the thing is, I don't actually know his name. I don't think he ever told me.

BOSS

I'm a bit confused. Where are we?

BEARDED MAN

What was the last thing you remember?

BOSS

Well... It was about three o'clock. I was having lunch with the CEO. We were just starting desert. I had the triple choc gateau...

BEARDED MAN

3 o'clock's a bit late to still be out to lunch isn't it?

Karl nods.

BOSS

And then -

BEARDED MAN

Let me guess. Sharp pain just about -
(He prods the man in the chest)

- here?

BOSS

Yes.

BEARDED MAN

Hmmm... Coronary, probably. Should have eaten less and moved more. Oh well - better luck next time. Come on lads, we don't have all day.

The Bearded Man starts to move off again and the three others follow. When he notices this he turns and looks at Karl's ex-Boss with an embarrassed wince.

BOSS

Ummm... Can I come with you?

BEARDED MAN

I'm afraid not. You're not on my list, which means you're off to the other place. If you hang around someone will come to collect you. You may be waiting a while though - that crowd aren't known for their time-keeping.

BOSS

What crowd?

BEARDED MAN

You'll see. Soon enough. Nice meeting you.

The Bearded Man beckons and Karl and Stuart follow him into the distance.

KARL

So... Do you have comics up here?

BEARDED MAN

Funny you should ask. The boss man wanted to have a word with you about that.

They are swallowed by the gentle clouds.

FADE TO BLACK.