

STUCK IN NEUTRAL

by

Terry Trueman, Robert Caisley And Juan Mas

(Based on the Novels and Manuscript Stuck in Neutral, Cruise  
Control and Cutter)

by Terry Trueman

PURPLE CRAYON PICTURES  
434 West 26th Ave  
Spokane WA 99203  
509-370-3449

Copyright@2017

INT. DARKNESS

We hear a young boys voice -

SHAWN (V.O.)  
Right now I can't shut down my  
memories.

Beginning at dead center of the frame, and rippling outward,  
the darkness begins to shift, to surge.

Grayish light bleeds into the void. And now a flit of color.  
It begins to swirl. A glowing patch of white, lengthening  
like a sunbeam breaking through cloud cover, as we slowly  
SEE:

A sea of inky shadows. Formless. Neutral.

We're trapped somewhere between sleeping and waking. And  
from inside this nightmare, we begin to see -

HUMAN SHAPES

Blur softly into focus, then slip away into the disorienting  
haze before we can discern them. We see what could be...  
Hands fighting for a rebound

The pixilated face of a man in an orange jump suit talking.  
The hammers of a piano as they strike the strings. Music  
begins to accompany the images.

HERE'S A FACE. NOW TWO.

They're here, and then they're gone.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
My life races through my brain ...

A little clearer now ...

A pair of moist female lips whispering in a young male's ear.

Traveling at high speed inches above a sea of wheat in the  
Palouse.

Wooden Horses on carousel spinning past.

SMASH CUT TO

THE FACES OF TWO MALES

Laughing. Some sounds are MUFFLED; others respond like  
GUNSHOTS. It's menacing and beautiful and chaotic all at the  
same time.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
I can't slow it down ...

A flood of images crashing at us in rapid fire succession:

VARIOUS ANGLES:

A cheap cigarette pinched in the corner of a mouth ...

The same mouth inhaling ...

A finger flicking a nose ...

A sickening grin, exhaling a plume of smoke ...

A finger stabs at a shoulder ...

The cherry of a cigarette glowing ...

SHAWN (V.O.)  
But I remember everything.  
EVERYTHING.

HARD CUT TO

A ZIPPO LIGHTER

Being thumbed open. We go tight on the FLAME as it flares into life.

THAT SAME FLAME, now inching closer ... And closer ... To human skin. And -

THOSE MENACING FACES

Mouths agape, are still laughing sickly as a blur suddenly wipes the frame, and we PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

ALL OF THESE LIGHTNING QUICK IMAGES

Have been reflected in the dark, inky pupil of -

A HUMAN EYEBALL

Dilated wide with fear. ALL SOUND DROPS OUT, save for the rapid thumping of a HEART BEAT as the words ...

STUCK IN NEUTRAL

Appear from the deep darkness

And like a camera lens, that eyeball suddenly snaps shut, plunging us into total darkness.

INT. SHAWNS BEDROOM - NIGHT

MOVING THROUGH THE ROOM - light from the window finds: Framed photos line the wall, a figure, motionless in the bed. An empty chair beside it.

Out of the shadows steps SHAWN MCDANIEL, our narrator, vibrant and good looking and 16.

He looks over to the figure that lies in the bed and crosses over and stands next to the bed.

SHAWN  
Memory is all we have. For  
ourselves and for people we love.  
Memories, once we die, are all  
that's left of us.

He speaks directly to us:

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
The question is: do our memories  
show us what really happened?

THE CURVES OF

A beautiful young female dancing. Her hand reaches out. Shawn gets up from the couch and joins in following her sensual moves. They dance as one. She turns to him. They are about to kiss.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
... Or what we wanted to have  
happened?

He pulls the chair close to the bed and sits, leaning INTO  
CAMERA -

SHAWN  
(confidentially)  
I hope that when I say this, I'm  
not coming off as conceited or  
anything, but I have this ... This  
weird ... I don't know what to call  
it. Ability? Gift? Power? Whatever  
name you give it, the thing is ...

AN EXTREME CLOSE UP

Of an ear.

SHAWN (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
... I remember everything. The  
things I see, the things I hear.

The sound of heavy traffic carries over:

INT. CAR - DAY

A POV from inside the car - through heavy traffic on a busy street, WE SEE: two teenage girls sitting at a bus stop.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
... even things far away and faint.

One of the women speaks, her lips moving, but we hear:

SHAWN (V.O.)  
Well, do you still love him or not?

Before her friend can answer, a BUS rolls through frame, and suddenly we're -

INT TARGET-TYPE STORE (SPORT'S DEPT.) - DAY

MOVING down an aisle in the sport's department, an arm of wheelchair in the foreground. Two out of focus shadows standing in the distance.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
Dad will never know.

INT. SHAWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shawn's grinning broadly, still sitting in the chair.

SHAWN  
I know some people would say it makes me gifted or special. I hate that word 'special' ... especially when it's applied to people like: "He's a very special person." I mean, who isn't?

Shawn stops suddenly and shoots a look TOWARD THE BEDROOM WINDOW.

MATCH CUT:

TO THE WINDOW

But the angle is tilted, cockeyed, from the POV or someone lying in the bed We see the chair, but Shawn's no longer sitting in it. We hear the sound of a car pulling in as -

EXT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (DRIVEWAY) - NIGHT

A car tire rolls to a dead stop.

INT. SHAWN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUED

CLOSE UP: of an ear. And we recognize it as the same ear we saw earlier. Outside, the car engine is killed.

BACK TO SHAWN

Sitting in the chair in his bedroom. He spins around and looks right at us.

SHAWN  
Crap.

ON THE DRIVEWAY

The car door swings open.

SHAWN'S BEDROOM

Another cockeyed POV: this time of the BEDROOM DOOR cracked open, a shaft of light from the hallway beyond spills into the room.

SHAWN  
I've been having this...  
Intuition...

REVERSE OF SHAWN

Sitting into the chair, clutching a decorative pillow in his lap.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
... Just this nagging feeling  
that...

ON THE DRIVEWAY

The car door SLAMS shut, loud as a gunshot.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
... I am pretty sure that someone  
is planning to kill me.

In the car window WE SEE: a figure's reflection in silhouette,  
heading toward the porch.

SHAWN'S BEDROOM

The light bleeding in from the hallway angles across the bed covers.

SHAWN  
Man, this sucks!

He turns his head, slowly, slowly, cautiously toward -

THE BEDROOM DOORWAY

It is ajar.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
I'm trapped, and there is nothing I  
can do about it, but wait ...

INT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (FOYER)- NIGHT

Marco of a dead bolt is thrown open with a deafening CLACK!

INT. SHAWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shawn sits in the chair. Frozen. Silent. His eyes shift gingerly in our direction, as he whispers -

SHAWN  
What am I supposed to do? Please.  
Tell me.  
(Beat)  
It's not fair for me to ask you  
that. You see...

We PAN OFF to find ...

EXT THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Bright shafts of sunshine shooting through a large bay window across a well decorated living room. Shawn makes his way down the stairs.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
Nothing is ever quite like it seems.

He makes his way to the bay window.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
If I had been paying more attention over the last three weeks, maybe... I would have seen it sooner ... But hindsight is 20/20, right?

The sound of a car pulling up. He stops at the window and looks out.

EXT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (DRIVEWAY) - CONTINUED

A car sits in the driveway. Behind the wheel, the DRIVER remains motionless, staring blankly ahead. The car still running.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
That's my dad. The famous writer Syd McDaniel.

SYD MCDANIEL is a good looking guy in his early forties. Stoic, urbane, sophisticated.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
He doesn't live with us anymore.

EXT/INT. MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - DAY

Shawn leaves the window. He goes to a shelf full of books and thumbs through the titles. In one section WE SEE: about 20 books, all written by Syd McDaniel. They include collections of poems, short stories, novels.

SHAWN  
It's been almost 10 years. My dad didn't divorce my mom. Or my sister, Cindy, or my brother Paul.

He pulls out a small, thin volume.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
He divorced me.

On the book's cover, we see a Pulitzer Prize Medallion and the title: SHAWN. By Syd McDaniel. Edited by Lindy McDaniel.

In the b.g. behind SHAWN, WE SEE:

The wheelchair parked on the rear porch that extends off the living room.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
 He couldn't handle my condition. So  
 he had to leave. Still, it gave  
 him... something.

He opens to the first stanza of a long narrative poem.

The sound of an appreciative CROWD APPLAUDING carries over--

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

A jam-packed room full of people.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
 Something that made him even more  
 famous.

Syd McDaniel steps up to the rostrum, shakes the hand of the  
 woman who introduced him. Looks into the crowd. Basks in the  
 applause.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
 My story.

He sips a little water, creases open his book, and the room  
 goes pin-drop silent.

SYD  
 (reading)  
 Lindy felt the early tugs, her womb  
 becoming tidal and loud, the fetus,  
 turning, crying out - a tiny beast,  
 a braying sigh he calls to her. He  
 calls to her -

INT. MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - DAY

Shawn thumbing through the book.

SHAWN  
 I love the beginning of Dad's poem.  
 What's not to love.

He looks right up at us.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
 Who wouldn't enjoy being a witness  
 at their own birth.

He turns back to the window

THE DRIVEWAY

Where Syd still sits in his car, like he's frozen in time,  
 lost deep inside reverie.

SYD (V.O.)  
 A single bird, small leaps inside  
 my chest, turning to pure spirit,  
 to pure joy as we watch, crying.

LECTURE HALL



SYD  
 Shawn, he becomes Shawn now, and  
 that bird inside me wings free too,  
 wings, wings it way inside me.

EXT/INT. MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - DAY

Shawn, still looking out at his dad ...

SHAWN  
 What I love most of all is how  
 happy and excited my dad sounds...

...turns away from the window -

INT. MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - DAY

- and talks directly to us as he walks back to the bookshelf

SHAWN  
 ... How grateful and full of hope  
 at the moment of my arrival.

He places the book on the shelf.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
 But that's just the start of the  
 poem.

He walks away from us towards the back patio.

SYD (V.O.)  
 I take him into my arms, stare into  
 his face. In his eyes there is  
 quivering ...

We PAN OFF to find -

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

The Audience rapt and spellbound by Syd's words. He is no  
 longer reading, but performing from memory.

SYD  
 A strange crackling. Everything  
 that was ever going to be...

Shawn's voice joins his fathers.

SYD/SHAWN (CONT'D)  
 ... Everything that was going to  
 become, begins a slow unraveling.  
 Shawn does not ...

EXT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (BACK PORCH) - DAY

Shawn. In the wheelchair. But something is quite different.

We slowly pan up his BODY slumped oddly in the seat:

The thin bent foot. Spaghetti noodle limbs, atrophied and  
 limp, held down by Velcro straps -

SHAWN/SYD (V.O.)  
 ... Grow, he stays the same ...

His arms and legs are over-cooked spaghetti laced with the bones of dead birds. Behind his eyes ...

Across the cheek, and off the drooping chin, a stream of saliva pools onto his shirt -

His face devoid of any expression. His eyes, a vacant stare.

SHAWN  
 ... it's blank as fog over snow.

As we continue pulling out to REVEAL TWO SHAWNS.

We come to understand the shocking DUALITY of:

SHAWN: Our vibrant, energetic narrator and -

SHAWN'S BODY: Arrested in its development, stuck forever in neutral!

SHAWN'S BODY  
 AHHHHHH!!

In the background, our narrator Shawn, offers a translation of his own helpless body's plaintive cry:

SHAWN  
 This is my reality. Nothing is ever quite like it seems.

And seemingly, in response to that harsh fact -

SHAWN'S BODY  
 AHHHHHH!!

SHAWN  
 I have cerebral palsy and it has affected my family.

NEW ANGLE ON - LINDY MCDANIEL

Shawn's mother comes out on the porch from inside the house with a bowl, a spoon sticking out of it, and a glass of iced tea. Lindy has this earthy feel. She exudes gentleness like a dancer exudes grace.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
 They've all handled it in different ways.

LINDY  
 You ready for lunch, big boy?

Lindy pulls up a chair and sits next to SHAWN'S BODY. She begins to carefully spoon the soft eggs and apple sauce into his mouth.

LINDY (CONT'D)  
 We've got your favorite, scrambles  
 and applesauce.

And as she feeds her son, all the while speaking tenderly to him, we see ...

A SERIES OF INSERTS -

Lindy, wiping the saliva from his chin.

Spooning the sustenance ever-so-gently, like a mother with her newborn child.

Tucking a stubborn curl of hair behind his ear.

Her hand resting momentarily on his wasted forearm.

LINDY (CONT'D)  
 Tonight is Paul's big game. If they win, they make the play-offs. I think he's a bit nervous, but he'll never admit it. I wish we could be there, but he understands.

SHAWN'S BODY  
 AHHHH!

LINDY  
 Do you know what Coach Jones told me? That this is the year they'll make it to state. Wouldn't that be great, hon?

Both Shawns body and Lindy seem to be frozen in time for a split second as the world and CAMERA SPINS around them. When the spinning subsides -

SHAWN - OUR NARRATOR

Is sitting in the wheel chair. He swallows a spoonful.

SHAWN  
 I love how she just shares with me.  
 (beat)  
 But that food?? Man, what I wouldn't give for a bacon double-cheese burger. Oh yeah!

But before he can fantasize any further, ANOTHER SPOONFUL comes into FRAME, and Shawn reluctantly opens his mouth.

Lindy smiles at him as the CAMERA spins off and lands on ...

INT. SHAWN'S BEDROOM - DAY

A pair of strong, healthy legs pound the sidewalk in a full sprint, matching perfect tempo of the PIANO we hear.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
 How do your legs feel when you run?

INT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - DAY

Slim female fingers dance gracefully over the ivory keys of a piano playing a playful tune.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
Or your fingers touching the keys  
of a piano?

EXTREME CLOSE-UP

of slightly parted lips joining for a SLOW MOTION kiss.

SHAW (V.O.)  
Or your lips... when you kiss  
someone?

EXT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (BACK PORCH) - DAY

Lindy spoons the last of the food into Shawn's Body's mouth.

SHAWN  
I don't spend too much time  
worrying about how hard my life is.  
I won't let it get the better of me.  
For the most part I just live my  
life. I think I learned that from  
my mom.

INT. SHAWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MOVING THROUGH SHAWN'S BEDROOM - light from the window finds:  
Family photos lining the wall. Shawn's Body, motionless in  
the bed. The empty chair beside it. This time we notice a  
wheelchair tucked into a corner.

Shawn, our narrator, is sitting in the chair next to the bed,  
still clutching the pillow. The MUSIC FADES.

SHAWN  
I do wonder sometimes what life  
would be like if even one person,  
knew that I was hidden in this  
useless body.

SHAWN'S BODY  
AHHHHH!

SHAWN'S POV: His own body laying lifeless in the bed.

SHAWN'S BODY'S POV: The bedroom door, slightly ajar, the  
hallway light bleeding  
in.

INT. THE MCDANIEL'S HOUSE (FOYER) - NIGHT

Macro as the dead bolt is thrown with a deafening CLACK into  
the door jam.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
Waiting for death...

The sound of HEAVY RAINFALL drowns everything out.

EXT. STREET- DAY

The roads are slick, the day made darker by the rain. A beat-up old JUNKER barrels along.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
For christ sake, I just turned sixteen...

INT. MINI-VAN - DAY

The rhythmic CLIP-CLAP of windshield wipers. Rain lashing the steamed-up windows. Up ahead, we can just barely see the one functioning tail light of the old JUNKER.

Lindy is driving. In the passenger seat beside her, Shawn's sister, CINDY, a 17 year old, dark-haired version of her mom.

Shawn's Body is secured in his wheelchair in the back of the van.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
I shouldn't have to think about it.

SHAWN'S BODY'S POV:

the JUNKER up ahead, partially obscured by the rain and streaking of the wiper blades.

SHAWN (V.O.)  
...who can grasp the meaning of death?

Suddenly, tearing in from the right side of the road, a DOG flies into the path of the junker.

The driver hits the brakes but can't stop in time, fishtails madly. The dog is literally SUCKED under the front tires ... and then SPAT out the back.

CINDY SCREAMS AND LINDY SLAMS ON THE BRAKES, JERKS THE WHEEL HARD RIGHT -

EXT. ROAD SIDE (SOFT SHOULDER) - CONTINUOUS

- the van's tires chew through the loose gravel. Before they even come to a complete stop, Cindy is out the passenger door.

LINDY (O.S.)  
Cindy! Cindy!