

THROB AND THE LOVE MUSCLE



Growing
old is hard
enough

Growing up
might just
kill you

OVERVIEW

"THROB & THE LOVE MUSCLE" is a serio-comic look into what most modern American men are in denial of: the fact that one day they have to grow up. Throb (aka Rob) is an aging man child- a down on his luck, self-destructive former heavy metal god who must leave Neverland when he's forced to hire a life coach so he can mount a desperately needed reunion tour.

Throughout his journey, Throb is forced to confront four of the seven of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development as personified by the main characters in the story. Lenny, his manager, Sarah, his ex-wife, Dylan, his son, his mom Marie, Brad the "Life Coach to the Stars," and even his drug dealer, Frank. Each character forces Throb to experience conflicts that serve as turning points in each stage of his development, contributing to his success in becoming an adult or in his continuing to cling to his childish ways.

Vonnegut said, "what is it about Americans with golf and blowjobs anyway? Throb's story won't help you understand American's obsession with golf, but blowjobs... well, maybe..."

ACT ONE

As night descends on the Sunset Strip, a melodic metal guitar solo (think G&R's "November Rain") echoes in Throb's ears, reminding him of his heyday, as he stumbles down The Boulevard. Pushing 60, his eyesight's not that great anyway, so if he squints, he can convince himself it's still 1987 when Throb and the Love Muscle were on their way to fame, fortune, and fornication, when life was the fast-paced blur of youth lubricated by sex drugs and rock and roll.

Unfortunately, a few other hints he tries his best to ignore remind him it's 2021 and that he's older. The grey peaking through his once jet-black shoulder-length hair and bulging at the seams Spandex should be enough. Throw in the mild heart attack a few years ago in Des Moines and the budget constraints that have restricted his drug purchasing power, and he should be able to realize he's not in Kansas anymore.

Although his body might be showing some wear and tear, one thing that hasn't changed is his myopic mindset- he's still trying to survive on instinct, adrenaline, and a little coke when he can afford it. Like many of us, he should have put those days behind him, but unfortunately, he clings to them like a baby clutches a security blanket.

But even if you're an aging, over-the-hill ex-rock god, there are still those willing to idolize you- like Candi, the tired, leathered groupie who's giving him a blow job as he lights a joint in the shitty little dressing room of the club he's playing at. A little bored and a lot hungover, Throb's cloudy gaze floats around the room, looking at walls covered with posters of heavy metal bands from the '80s and '90s, including him and Love Muscle in their halcyon days. But then...

His audit stops when something piques his interest: a small table and on it a bindle of coke, a bottle of Jack, a straw and razor blade alongside a line of a blue powder, and a few Viagra. Sometimes old habits die hard.

The fun is cut short when through the thin walls, Throb hears his strung-out guitarist, Johnny, breaking into the opening chords of "Tramp Stamp," one of Throb's, shall we say, more memorable songs. Rushing out the door, he trips over a cat as he attempts to button his too-tight Spandex, mumbling something about "...it isn't the first time a pussy has brought a man to his knees". As he gets up, his "for fucks sake" turns into a half-smile as he hands the cat to a hot young woman in the adjacent dressing room.

On stage in front of a house of 50 or so headbangers, Throb is a sloppy, funhouse mirror reflection of what he used to be. His gut is held at bay by a worn-out pair of tiger-striped Spandex that looks like a shit ton of sausage stuffed into too small a casing and platform heels that, frankly, no male (heavy metal god or not) should ever have donned in the first place. Let's just say Throb's mastery of balance and gravity is being severely tested.

Behind him is his post Love Muscle band- Johnny the rail-thin junkie looking like an extra from The Walking Dead and Kenny, the fat, balding bandana topped drummer thankfully hidden behind his drum kit. They don't look great, but at least they're affecting a passable version of "Tramp Stamp" as Throb warbles the subtle chorus:

I never want to go down hard,
no, let me sink in slow.
Never want to be upfront,
show me the back door.
From your neck to your shoulders,
your back on down.
I don't need no talkin',
I just want to mess around.
Show me your tramp stamp, baby,
Show me your tramp stamp...

Back in his dressing room after the set, Throb and Candi experience fellatious interruptus when Throb's manager Lenny bangs on the door and lets himself in. Disgusted, he retreats to the bar where Throb meets him soon after as some young metalheads thrash away on stage.

The two go way back, but Throb's stuck in the past while Lenny has moved on and made a success of himself. So, of course, Throb does what comes naturally- he berates Lenny for not getting him better gigs and blames him for the sorry state of his own life- in Throb's case, a timed, multiple-choice exam that, by all reports, he's going to fail at.

THE GOOD NEWS: Lenny tells Throb he's been speaking with Cum- Love Muscles' legendary lead guitarist, who's considering coming (pun intended) out of retirement for a reunion tour.

THE BAD NEWS: The actuary for the company that will bond the tour insists on "a novel rider to help ameliorate the confidence interval and their exposure." They'll assign Throb a life coach to help him achieve their desired results, monitor him, and assess him after thirty days.

Outside the club, Throb meets Brad (a 35-year-old chiseled ex-Marine and "Life Coach to the Stars") as he sits in his dirty, beat-up '87 Corvette (of course, there's a parking ticket on it) while simultaneously trying to light a joint with a failing Bic and get the engine to turn over. Throb tells him they'll be fine as long as he "stays the fuck out of the way" as the car finally starts, and he screeches off, a used condom and the parking ticket flying out of the Corvette and landing at Brad's feet.

Maybe at this point, Throb's story sounds like a tired mash-up between "Get Him to the Greek" and "Spinal Tap." Perhaps I lost you at "blow job," but you opted to trudge on since you can't really get anything else done before your next break. But in case you're interested in Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (with a bit of Jung thrown in for good measure) as personified by a washed-up, aging heavy metal god who never grew up, read on.

As previously indicated, each antagonist personifies one of Erickson's later stages (4-7) of development and maturity, which are the qualities Throb needs to develop if he's to grow up and become an adult. In each of Erikson's stages, individuals experience conflicts that serve as a turning point in their development.

Overcoming these conflicts contributes to their success in becoming an adult, while failure results in persistence in clinging to childish ways. It's through Throb's clashes with the characters that personify these stages we discover what the heart of his story is all about.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Lenny is Throb's only friend and has known him since childhood. He tried his hand at bass in Throb's first band, but his heart wasn't in it, so he became their manager. Eventually, he got a job at Atlantic Records and brought Love Muscle into the fold. Lenny's always believed in the band's talent and will always be grateful to them for his initial success, but at some point, he threw away his childish rock star dreams and rose up the corporate ladder at Atlantic. Even though he's a V.P now, he never inherited the Gordon Gekko gene- he cares about artists, has a good heart, and still tears up when he hears Journey's "Faithfully." He attributes a lot of his success to his loving wife and two children. He represents Stage 4, where we're encouraged and commended (usually by our parents and teachers) to develop a feeling of competence and belief in our skills,

and stage 6, where we form intimate, loving relationships with others. All good characters in a story must also face a trial, though- Lenny's love and fidelity will be tested when he's sucked back into Throb's world for a moment.

Frank is Throb's drug dealer. His hip, metrosexual appearance, tidy Pippa Lord-appointed apartment, and principled business manner are the antithesis of the stereotypical drug dealer, as well as his thoughtful, philosophical outlook on life. Why? He came into his chosen profession sideways after examining the choices he'd made due to his parents pushing him into a career in finance that he never liked. As he puts it: "I used to work on Wall Street, but I found dealing drugs a more honest profession." Frank may be dealing drugs, but at least he has a strong sense of character and integrity. As Stage 5 indicates- we develop a sense of personal identity by receiving encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration. Unfortunately, Frank is struggling with stage 6- Intimacy vs. Isolation. When he finally finds what he's looking for in our little narrative, he quotes Rumi- "You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens."

More important to his development than having been a marine, **Brad** is gay, which has influenced his life every step of the way. He was bullied at school during adolescence, his career army father emotionally abused him and tried to "cure" him by sending him to military school, and he's lived with the pain of his partners' suicide. He's a sensitive guy, so it's no wonder he's shut off his emotions. Throb and Brad's journeys intertwine when both have to grapple with Stage 6, where having a strong sense of personal identity is imperative for intimacy to thrive. If we fail, we become isolated and lonely. Brad also reminds us of Stage 4, wherein he helps Throb (kicking and screaming) regain belief in himself.

Throb's ex-wife **Sarah** was too young when they got married but grew up fast as The Love Muscles' success skyrocketed. With their son Dylan's birth, things changed. Sarah became a mother while Throb became a big star and a bigger prick, and when drugs moved in, Sarah and Dylan moved out. After they divorced, she succeeded as a well-respected college professor, as well as a mother. She's sweet, thoughtful, and empathetic, and the closest Throb's had to an intimate adult relationship, which is why she knows him so well. Sarah suggests several stages of Erickson's ideology, most notably where we learn intimacy and nurture things that will outlast us. Things like being proud of our accomplishments, watching our children grow, and developing a sense of unity with our life partner. Unfortunately, she still has to struggle with letting go of Dylan.

Throb and Marie's son **Dylan** is somewhat the antithesis of the barbarian and nihilistic Jonas Brothers loving demon we know as the American Teenager. Why? He's an only child who grew up with the love and support of his mom, although maybe a little too much. Being a teacher, Sarah instilled curiosity and a love of reading in him, but he's not a nerd- he's popular at school, likes to skateboard, and has just formed a band. Dylan is a reflection of Throb at his crossroads, and perhaps reconnecting with him will provide Throb with the last piece of the puzzle he needs to emerge from stage five- a well-rounded sense of self and the beliefs, ideals, and values that will help shape and guide his behavior for the rest of his life.

Everything always came easy to **Cum (aka Dwayne)**, including guitar. Unlike Throb, The "Mozart of Metal" didn't blow his money but made shrewd investments and capitalized on his fame. Throb's held a grudge since Cum's "early retirement," leaving Throb to fend for himself, which, well, you do the math. Still, even after retirement Cum had to overcome his drug habit and only did so with the love of the woman who became his wife. His character alludes to Stages 5 and 6 since, after retirement, he struggled with his identity (retirement = identity disruption, a search for meaningful engagement in society, no structure, and death anxiety) and was only able to reshape it with the help of a mature partner (Stage 6).

Marie is Throb's mom and pretty much raised him, providing him with unconditional love. Throb was born while his dad (**Joe**) was away for two years visiting Vietnam. Upon his return, Joe began trying to bleed the war from his veins by abusing Marie both emotionally and physically, which led to her clinical depression. He eventually drifted off, returning occasionally looking for money. In the meantime, Marie was able to find steady clerical work and support them while hanging on to the small beach bungalow she inherited from her parents when they tragically died in an automobile accident. The beach house is where Throb's happiest memories come from. Marie is sweet but troubled, the scars from her past never really having healed. She reminds us of all stages of Erickson's psychosocial development schema. Being alone and never having developed a sense of personal identity, she struggles with her insecurity and confusion about herself and her future.

You might think the potential for a reunion tour might solve all of Throb's problems, but you'd be wrong. When he shows up the next day at Lenny's gold record walled office on the 21st floor after having partied with his metalhead friends the night before, a slept-in-his-clothes, hungover Throb isn't in a Zen mood. He argues with Lenny about the cigarette he's trying to light up (selfish and rebellious as always), money (Throb got screwed back in the day due to his own dereliction), the contract Lenny wants him to sign (further indemnifying the company against Throb's possible death), and about Brad. Lenny tells Throb he needs to grow up and get with the program, or else they'll replace him like Queen did with Adam Lambert. Ouch.

Throb storms off with the contract insinuating his lawyer will "be in touch" (yeah, right). Lenny gives him 48 hours, which is just enough time for Throb to surrender to his old life closing in around him like fans around a stage-diving rock star: He watches an old video of him and Cum singing into the same mic at a concert. He has a scuffle on stage with the young lead singer of a band at another shitty gig. He looks at a picture of him, Sarah, and Dylan in happier times. Frank reminds him he's in arrears when he goes to make a drug purchase. The mirror isn't kind when he does his best Ronnie James Dio pose. He parties with his old metal friends and finds an eviction notice taped to his door when he returns to his apartment. He snorts a line and...

It's a beautiful California afternoon as Throb drives the coast to his Marie's beach house. Sitting on the little attached deck, Marie reminisces about their time spent there and how it's the only place she feels safe. When she brings up Joe (Throb's dad), he goes Pesci, bemoaning the fact that Joe never provided for her and reminding her she would've lost the house if it wasn't for Throb buying it with his first royalty check. Marie softly weeps and tells him she's sorry and "it's all I've got left." As he gets in his shitty Corvette to leave, he desperately fumbles under the seats for drugs, coming up with a roach about the size of his humility.

Fortunately for Throb, once he gets his rust bucket Vette started, it can fly. He wastes no time and races to Frank, who won't sell him drugs, and reminds him he's 60 days past due on his current debenture. Frank then asks him when he can expect overdue payment on the other loan, the big one taken against the beach house. Shit!

Throb goes home dejected and pours himself a vodka and lights a smoke. He walks over to the couch and picks up a framed picture of himself and a smiling Marie at the beach house just after he paid for it. A beat, he tosses the picture back on the shelf, grabs the T.V. remote, and sits down on the couch. The T.V. starts blasting a video of some young punks doing a hard rock version of George Jones's "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair" (I don't need your rockin' chair, your Geritol or your Medicare, I still got Neon in my veins, this grey hair don't mean a thing, I do my rockin' on the stage, You can't put this possum in a cage...).

Yup, you guessed it. The next day Throb's at Lenny's office to sign the contract. Lenny reminds him that Brad will be starting with him the following day and tries to give him fatherly advice, suggesting he see this as an opportunity to put the past behind him and make some changes and that there's a lot at stake. Throb ponders Lenny's advice for a split second before deriding him for his past contract and current financial situation (if Lenny hadn't given up drugs decades ago, he might think he's experiencing a flashback) and tries to guilt him into an advance. Lenny acquiesces, promising him a personal loan based on their friendship since Walt (Lenny's boss) has refused Throb any money upfront.

ACT TWO

Throb and The Love Muscle are on a rehearsal stage loudly thrashing through "Love Pump," one of their iconic hits from the '90s, as Lenny, Walt, and Brad look on:

Come close, baby, I'll let you in.
I know your mommy said it's a sin.
Just get your hips close to my love pump.
Wrap your lips around my love pump...

Who the hell is this guy leading the band? He's wearing a somewhat clean t-shirt and jeans that actually fit, more or less, as he somewhat assuredly leads Love Muscle through their paces, like the good ol' days before too much sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Cum's in good shape for a 60-year-old rocker, like a heavy metal Springsteen- short, cropped greying hair and a few tattoos covering his arms. Tommy has gained a few pounds and sweats like a monsoon, but as far as rock drummers go has the benefit of still being alive.

The band finishes up as Walt, Lenny, and Brad offer up a smattering of applause as they walk over to the band. Lenny's congratulatory and tells them about the initial excitement from venues and that even a few stadium gigs are possible. Dollar signs bulge out of Walt's eyeballs as he slaps Throb on the back and hurriedly leaves, saying, "I knew you could do it, Vince." Throb responds with, "It's Rob (under his breath) asshole." Walt's not even taking the effort to turn around as he rushes off, raising his hand with the two-fingered headbanger salute that speaks volumes, as in "I don't give a fuck about you, just the money." Throb gives the one-fingered salute back.

Later at home, Throb roots through drawers looking for some sort of controlled substance that he may have overlooked when he comes across a picture Sarah had given him- A ten-year-old Dylan in front of a Christmas tree showing off a brand new kid-sized guitar.

Just as he finds a pack of smokes, there's a knock at the door- it's Brad with a bunch of groceries. Throb begrudgingly lets him in, and he proceeds to put things away in the kitchen as Throb lights up, turning on the T.V. When Brad is finished, the two sit down, and Brad grills Throb with some of the standard life coach questions. Throb is barely cooperative as he sarcastically parries to questions like: "How often do you smoke?" "Only when I'm hungry and anxious. Unfortunately, I'm usually anxious about where my next meal is coming from", and "Are you ready to create more balance in your life?" "Yeah, less fucking and more blowjobs. The blowjobs are less work."

Things take a more serious turn when Brad asks Throb if he's ever thought about getting married and having a family. As Throb's disinterested gaze wanders off to the picture of him and Marie on the shelf, his armor cracks, and he tells Brad that he sure as hell wouldn't know how to be a father since his dad was never around and even when he was, he was a prick. Brad intimates that his dad was a real bastard, too, stopping short of admitting to the emotional abuse from a stoic, dispassionate military man who couldn't cope with his son being gay. The questionnaire continues as Brad and Throb...well...uh...sort of bond- two discordant planets colliding in a janked cosmos, far far away.

After Brad leaves, Throb is about to give up trying to uncover the mysteries of concocting a cauliflower, kale, and kimchee taco from Brad's recipe list when Sarah knocks on the door. He actually smiles when he sees her- she's moved on, but they're still friends. After all, in this batshit big top circus we call life, they had a son together back when they were both young and immature. Difference is, she grew up feeling the need to find her own successful career and nurture her son. Still, she genuinely cares for Throb- she forgives his childish ways, refusal to grow up, and accepts him for what he is.

They talk about the old times, the possible tour, and Throb's new, nascent lifestyle. Throb clumsily apologizes for some of his past indiscretions and then asks how Dylan is doing. She tells him that he's taking after his old man- he's in a band, and she's letting him play as long as he keeps his grades up. What's that- a touch of emotion in Throb's eyes? As she leaves, Sarah hints at a possible visit as long as Throb is drug-free- one of the reasons she and Dylan left in the first place. He understands and tells them to stop by the rehearsal the next day as she heads out the door. Throb looks at the joint he'd found and stashes it away.

Early the following morning, Brad shows up, and we're introduced to the living hell Throb will have to endure if he's to complete his mission: Throb looking longingly at his bag of Doritos as Brad puts a kale and quinoa salads in front of him, Brad pouring out Throb's two-gallon Vodka jug over a carton of cigarettes, Throb reading a porn mag hidden by a self-help book, Throb meditating with a joint, Brad counseling Throb over salads at a restaurant, the two running together as Brad grabs the cigarette Throb's trying to light while waiting at a street corner. Talk about a shock to the system...

At rehearsal later in the day, Sarah shows up with Dylan. As Sarah and Dylan are catching up with Cum, Lenny and Throb talk about the old days as Brad listens in. Lenny says that his claim to fame will be "...being the Pete Best of The Love Muscle..." but that he doesn't regret a thing- he never would've met his wife and had his two kids. Lenny tells Brad that Rob threw away the best thing that ever happened to him, motioning to Sarah. Brad and Throb walk out together, Brad intimating that he gets what Lenny was talking about...he had someone like Sarah once...

The sun shimmers off the blue Pacific as a car moves along PCH. Throb listens to one of his old songs on the radio as a D.J. merrily pipes in (why are they always so merry?) "...that was Throb and the Love Muscle from their album "Live from Hell and Back." Throb sure raised some hell back in the day, which is why he's headlining today's "Old Rockers, Dead or Alive." Call in and let us know if you've seen..." A "CLICK" as Throb turns off the radio, looks in the mirror, and sees a face that looks like something death brought with him in his suitcase.

He arrives at Marie's beach house and tells her he's signed the contract, and everything's gonna be alright. She's medicated and a little out of it, mentioning that Joe called her and lets on she told him the band was embarking on a reunion tour. In deference to the one real love he's known in his life, Throb waits until getting in his car to burst into a fit of rage, finally giving up and rooting under the seats for a joint before screeching off in a tantrum. The thing about "adults" having tantrums? They can do damage-lots of it.

Like a leper on a boat seeking refuge on Molokai, Throb speeds off to one of the few dumps on the Strip where the dying embers of his fame, not to mention his credit, are still good. The place is pretty much a dumpster with windows and denizens to match. But relative to their world, he's a star who deserves free kamikazes, not to mention the adulation of a few haggard groupies. He leaves being propped up by one of them as they stumble off into the blackness of a tumescent night.

Throb wakes up to his alarm the following morning in a daze but rallies, taking a few pills, making a protein shake from whatever detritus he can find in the fridge, drinking a pot of coffee, taking a shower. Less like a phoenix, but more like a buzzard rising from the ashes, he puts on his running togs just as Brad shows up. Brad unpacks some groceries and tells Throb he has to leave early due to a personal emergency, but not before he gives him an itinerary for the day and tells him he expects him to follow it. Before he leaves, Brad sits down with Throb to provide him with financial advice based on the income Lenny has estimated they'll make, accidentally including profit projections from a possible world tour- which is news to Throb. Brad bails, and Throb falls asleep on the couch to old VH1 metal videos on the T.V.

It's early evening as Throb wakes up and anxiously ransacks cupboards and drawers for some sort of refuge (preferably illicit) as old VH1 metal videos continue to drone on. As he's looking through his vodka-less cupboard, he settles on a bottle of red wine left by Brad (it's good for the heart). A knock on the door; it's Sarah and Dylan. Throb offers Sarah some wine, and she retreats to the kitchen, leaving Dylan and Throb alonish.

Throb nervously tries to start a conversation and is saved by Dylan's maturity and wisdom beyond his years. In fact, in some ways, Dylan seems older than Throb. Sarah looks on from the kitchen, a bemused smile on her face- obviously, she's done an excellent job bringing him up despite the challenges. Dylan tells Throb he's in a band and plays a song he's written on the acoustic guitar sitting in the corner, stopping after two verses, not sure where to go. Throb asks for the guitar and tells him he always had trouble writing the bridge, but after a few tries, viola, he comes up with one.

Dylan continues to work out the song as Throb gets up and goes back into the kitchen to refresh his wine and talk to Sarah. He speaks softly, haltingly (the voice we've only heard him use with his mom up to this point), trying to explain...well...essentially about his fucked-up life and behavior over the past twenty or so years. It's not easy for someone who's never experienced the closeness, honesty, and love of a mature, intimate relationship. Sarah feels for him and is a little taken aback- she's never seen this side of him. They hug as Dylan looks up and catches a glimpse of them.

As Sarah and Throb return to the living room, Throb thanks Dylan for coming by and for playing his song. He tries to hug Dylan but doesn't know-how. The result is one of those lame half-hugs between two men we've seen in movies before- Throb can't entirely embrace this soul he helped bring into the world due to the shame and fuckupedness of his past closing in on him. Intimacy can be a bitch. After Dylan has headed out the door, Sarah stops, turns around, and says, "You know, I always believed in you, even after you stopped believing in yourself." They kiss as Journey's "Don't Stop Believing" plays on the T.V.

A few days later, everyone's at the rehearsal stage. Dylan and Sarah are all smiles as they watch the band finish playing "Walk Like a Man," a song Throb and Dylan wrote together. Lenny and Walt love the new song, and Walt hints at the possibility of a new album. Just when you thought things couldn't get any better, the haggard and high groupie from Throb's trarriance at the dumpster with windows shows up. Throb tries to diffuse the situation by awkwardly introducing her to Sarah, but when she drapes herself over him and rubs his crotch, alluding to "the other night," it's over. Sarah embarrassedly grabs Dylan, and they leave as Throb tries to utter an apology, but the words stumble and fall like Throb on a bender.

You think the shit is just beginning to hit the fan? Read on, ma soeur...

When Throb gets home, Frank is waiting by the door. He reminds him that his account is in arrears and is concerned about the loan against his mom's beach house and whether or not he'll soon have the estimated required reserves to close the books. He also relates that he's selling his business and is concerned the new CEO won't be as "compassionate" as he is. Throb pays Frank the last of his advance and tells him about the reunion tour.

Frank proclaims that life is finally working out for both of them and why he's selling out- he's tired of being alone and has fallen in love (remember Erickson's stage 6- Intimacy vs. Isolation?). He waxes on about life, love, and change, quoting Dostoevsky: "Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most." Throb sardonically smirks, quoting Joey Ramone- "Seems that folks turn into things that they never want, the only thing to live for is today. When I see the price that you pay, I don't want to grow up."

Frank laughs and says, "I think growing up is when you stop complaining, making excuses, and taking things for granted. Someone once said, "It's so much darker when a light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone." He gets up to leave, and hands Throb a baggie while rambling on about gift cultures in aboriginal societies. They shake hands, Frank proffering up a heartfelt "good luck Rob" as he dances off into the dimming of the day.

The next day at rehearsals, Love Muscle rocks on as Lenny and Walt watch. But like an unwanted AARP letter in the mail, the young singer who Throb had words with on stage parades in, and Throb sees him as he walks over and shakes Walt's hand. When they finish the song, Throb struts over to Lenny, passing and exchanging glares with the metal ingenue, who walks over to Cum.

Sometimes when an animal's back is against the wall, his only option is to lash out, like a chihuahua being sniffed by a rottweiler. Throb is uber-pissed off and asks Lenny for another advance. When Lenny tells him no, Throb launches into a tirade about the good old days, how it's not fun anymore, and that it's all about the money; he inquires about the lack of girls and blow and chastises Lenny for bringing in the young singer.

Apart from being about Throb's fear of growing and sobering up, Throb's jeremiad is also about his abandonment issues- His dad leaving, Cum quitting the band, and Lenny giving up on his career. Apparently, he still hasn't confronted the reckless abandonment with which he's lived his life. Oh, and by the way, the young singer who walked in earlier? It's Cum's son who Walt has enlisted to step in if Throb fucks up or dies.

Throb responds to this news in a less than serene manner- Cum catches him as he's storming out and tries to have a heart-to-heart with him, like trying to explain a china shop to a bull. He intimates that he can tell Throb has a drugover cause he's been there. He confides in Throb, telling him some things about himself that even Throb isn't aware of- the depths of Cum's past drug usage, the overdose that led to his retirement, and the help he received from a therapist and his now-wife. Throb considers Cums impassioned speech for a beat before telling him and his son to fuck off.

Like a buzzard waiting for his kill, Walt is in the parking lot when Throb storms out the studio door. He slimily informs Throb that one of the headbangers Throb did drugs with the other night is "an associate of his" and has told him of Throb's contract violating "indiscretions." Fortunately, Walt has a solution- another inequitable deal, this time for Throb's new songs. Beaten, Throb dejectedly signs the contract and walks to his car. Before getting in, he stops and turns around to sardonically ask if Walt has sucked enough blood from him yet. Walt says, "Who knows? Until now, I didn't think you had any left to give." A beat and a familiar refrain: "Oh, and by the way, get your shit together; otherwise, we'll replace you like Queen did with Adam Lambert."

Just in case you thought it couldn't get any darker, as the night rolls in, Throb's sitting alone on the couch in his shitacular hovel when his dad shows up looking for money. Throb is none too gracious- he excoriates Joe for abandoning their family, leeching off Marie, and for Marie's depression.

Joe delivers a fumbling apology, saying that he loved Marie, but he had to leave for their own good after the night sweats, flashbacks, and anger became too much for him. He compares Throb to himself, reminding him that his conduct hasn't been an exemplary, shining beacon of a good life either- he had success, a good woman, a kid, and he threw it all away. Throb bristles at this and tells Joe to fuck off and go. As he leaves, Joe turns and murmurs, "...I guess we're all just doin' what we need to get by". As he closes the door, if you listen hard you may be able to hear a "thunk"- it's the sound of an apple not falling too far from the tree.

A little later, Throb sits on his couch, dejected, working out some parts of the song he helped Dylan with. Brad shows up with groceries, and they share some wine as Throb unloads about his dad. Brad comes clean about his dad, too, sharing the pain of emotional and physical abuse of a homosexual son at the hands of a stoic, hard-line military man. A chink in his armor as Throb thoughtfully listens, the conversation carrying on into the subtle grace of the night...

The following morning Throb's phone rings- Marie has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital after ingesting a Paxil Zolof cocktail neat after Joe stopped by her place asking for money. They talk on the phone, and she pleads with Throb to take her back to the only place she's at peace- the beach house. He races to the hospital and fights with the administrator, demanding her release. After being physically restrained, Throb is shown the door. He walks out angrily, lighting a smoke while trying to compose himself as several bemused patients in wheelchairs watch the circus.

You've probably never seen an over-the-hill ex-heavy metal god driving down the road in a beat-up Corvette cry, but there's a first time for everything. The sun shimmers off the azure-blue Pacific to the West as Throb and his rust-bucket wind down the highway to Hollywood.

Not knowing where to turn, Throb goes to see Sarah on the way home. After a tete-a-tete at her front door, she lets him in. He breaks down, whimpering about the things that have brought him to his knees- his mom's hospitalization, how Walt has him by the balls, how he fucked up with her and Dylan, how he doesn't think he can do the tour, and how he doesn't understand how she got her life together, because he sure as hell cant...

She reminds him that they had some good years together and that he's at least part of the reason Dylan was born despite all Throb's faults. She goes on to tell about her growing lack of self-esteem and insecurity as his fame grew. She then tells him something he's never known- about her breast cancer not long after they divorced. She says, "...I guess there comes a time when something bigger comes along that forces you to grow up and move on. And once you do, you realize there's no point in hating yourself anymore; it just gets in the way."

Ironically, between the two of them, she was the lucky one, the one who got to wake up every morning and see salvation in her little boys' eyes. But then, she gets sad for a moment as she looks at a picture of Dylan and his band. She starts crying softly as she finishes, "...until you get to those long days when he's not there, and you realize you're going to have to let him go."

Throb moves in and holds her, tears in his eyes, looking to the heavens for guidance as she buries her head in his shoulder. Dylan emerges from his bedroom and says, "Is everything OK...uh...Dad? (yes, it's the first time he's called Throb Dad)". Throb responds with, "yeah, son, uh, everything's going to be..."

Back at home later in the day, Brad comes over and senses that Throb has been cheating on his regimen. The discussion gets heated as Throb says he's got a lot of shit going on, using his mom as an excuse and telling Brad about the overdose. Brad acquiesces but reminds Throb he'll be making his assessment for the insurance company soon. After he leaves, Throb is able to round up a roach or two, hoping to assuage his not-so-mortal soul.

It's the next day at rehearsals and the bands not jelling- it's do-or-die for Throb, and the pressure is getting to him, not to mention the dearth of drugs in his system. He breaks in the middle of a song and storms off to the bathroom, where Cum catches him snorting the last bit of coke he's been able to cobble together.

Confronted, Throb defends himself, citing his current catalog of excuses, conveniently omitting his lack of funds to support his drug usage. Cum is cool about it, but lets Throb know he has to look at things from a business standpoint so, he won't tell Brad or Walt, but he'll have to tell Lenny. Like a staggering boxer trying to get one last punch in, he rebukes Cum for "always being about the money" and asks him, "...what happened to you?". Cum calmly responds with: "I don't know Rob, I guess I just decided to grow up."

After rehearsal, Throb tries to find solace alone, sitting in a dark corner of the dumpster dive with windows while music videos from bands half his age play on the T.V.

When he gets home, he listens to a sad, almost apologetic message Sarah's left on his answering machine- Cum stopped by to see her and told her about the drugs. She has to do what's best for Dylan, especially since he's at "that age" (the age when we have to mature and develop our personal identity, which will influence our behavior, decision making, and development for the rest of our lives). After telling him he can't see Dylan anymore, she tearfully finishes- "I'm such an idiot...you know...I almost thought...CLICK!

Soon Throb's at Frank's futilely banging on his door but hears only the loud harshness of silence until it's broken by... the heart-wrenching sound of loneliness coming from the psychiatric hospital, and ringing in Throb's ears as MARIE KILLS HERSELF. After hearing about Marie on his answering machine, with nothing left to lose and due to the negative balance on his bank statement, Throb shambles to a dank alley to buy drugs from a lesser than preferred vendor.

The dealer and his enforcer are metalheads dressed in wife-beaters and fans, so Throb readily strikes a deal with them for payment later. But just as they're handing over the drugs, Brad turns the corner and walks into the alley, attempting to reason with Throb and remind him of what he's giving up. Brad and the dealer have words, and he grabs the drugs from him. Throb tells Brad to "get the fuck away" and then tells the dealer, "this fag tried to hit on me at the bar and followed me; he just wants a piece of my ass."

The enforcer says to "hand the shit over," and when Brad refuses, a fight ensues. The drugs fall to the ground, and Throb grabs them, running out of the alley like a scared child. As he hustles out, he hears the CRACK POP OF A GUNSHOT! Time stops as we see his face- the pain, sadness, and anger of a scared child confronting the harsh realities of adulthood—a life teetering on the razor's edge.

From out of nowhere, a whisp of grace turns Throb around. He rushes back and cradles Brad in his arms. Crying, he looks to the sky. The sky looks back and sees a Pieta-like scene- a pool of blood slowly growing under Brad's limp body. To Black.

ACT 3

A month later, a soft acoustic guitar melody floats gracefully in the air under a beautiful shot of the beach house, dissolve to:

Throb is sitting on a chair playing acoustic guitar next to a side table of framed pictures- a gallery of Maries' life. He's comfortable in his clean white linen shirt, black jeans, and cropped hair as warm air through the screen door swaddles him like a baby in his mothers' arms. Looking up, he sees Sarah standing at the door and smiles, getting up to let her in. They hug as she tells him how sorry she is for his loss.

He picks up a picture of himself in a baseball uniform, around 12. He laughs as he shows it to Sarah, telling her about the times after his dad returned from the war when they seemed like a real family. His dad was a coach, but sometimes he wouldn't show up for a game, usually out on a bender.

He goes on to tell her, "...as it got darker and everyone left, I'd keep pitching into the backstop, knowing he wasn't going to show up. And then, when I couldn't throw anymore, I just stood there in the dark, feeling afraid, and lost. But that wasn't the worst of it. When he didn't show up, I knew he wouldn't be there when I got home and that he was going to disappear again."

Sarah consoles him but reminds him that he may have been dealt a losing hand, but Joe wasn't so lucky either- he didn't ask to be drafted into the Vietnam war. She goes on to point out that a lot of us get dealt lousy hands in life, but at some juncture, maybe you've gotta throw down your cards and get a new hand. Throb bows his head in shame and acknowledgment- he never was much of a poker player and has played many bad hands.

Throb tears up and asks, "why do we so often treat each other like shit? Sarah ponders this and says, "maybe it's our mind's response to the things our hearts can't understand yet..." Throb breaks down and tells her he's sorry for everything, especially since she's the one who always believed in him (stage 5), who actually loved him (stage 6), and who raised their son to be a good kid (stage 7). Sarah's a little melancholy when she intimates that watching Dylan and Throb write songs and play together has helped her come to terms with Dylan becoming a man and with letting him go. Fade to Black.

Fade from Black: Throb sits in a dressing room, but it's slightly different than before- clean mauve walls, stylishly appointed. A table with Ferrarelle Naturally Sparkling Mineral Water (what else!?) and a spread from Nobu. Throb's looking good- slimmed down, hair shorter, dressed in new black jeans and a black t-shirt. A soft knock on the door- it's Brad, his arm in a sling.

Throb meekly apologizes for what happened, and Brad accepts, jokingly telling him he never would have made it through Afghanistan if his guys shot like the dealer in the alley. They laugh, and then Throb asks Brad why in god's name he took the job in the first place. After a pause, Brad wistfully tells Throb he only took the job because his partner Stan loved Throb and the Love Muscle. "Imagine, probably the only fag in the front row with tattooed fingers and a wife-beater t-shirt." They both laugh.

He continues to say that when he saw Throb at rehearsal, he finally understood what Stan saw in him- someone who was in charge and confident of his own identity, no matter how messed up it was. Unlike Throb, Brad was always hiding from everyone, even himself- from his dad, who refused to accept him for who he was, the Army, which removes your identity and is homophobic, to Stan, who shielded and protected him and who he became codependent on. He never developed a real sense of self, one of the fundamental things that give life meaning and stays with us throughout.

A little later, Throb and Brad walk through the halls of an arena as the sound of electric guitars, loud drums, and a wailing singer get louder. They stop and talk to Lenny, who's standing in the wings, as Love Muscle finishes up their song behind him. Lenny thanks Brad for convincing the bonding company to let Throb appear at some Love Muscle concerts as "a special guest star."

Throb thanks Lenny for sticking with him and asks him why he did; it certainly wasn't for the money. Lenny reminds him they were friends first, and at the time, the band was the one thing that gave him direction. He continues, "...for all of your faults, you always knew where you were headed; all I had to do was follow." Throb says: "Yeah, well, I guess I just never thought it would take so long to get here..."

Love Muscle finishes their song, and the crowd roars. Cum speaks into his mic, introducing their special guest, who "... he's proud to call a friend". Throb walks onto the stage as the crowd gets louder, taking the time to sidestep and hug Sarah and Dylan, who are in the wings. Throb walks up to Cum's son and does that hands-together bowing thing to him as he's handed the mic. The stage lights dim to a spotlight on Throb.

The crowd hoots and hollers ("Rock on Throb, Love Muscle rules") as Throb shrieks the perfunctory "Hello Cleveland!" and thanks the crowd for being there and to Love Muscle for inviting him to join them for a few songs. But then there's a subtle change in Throb's voice as he fumbles for a few words. It's as if he doesn't know what to say in front of a crowd for once in his life. He hesitantly speaks into the mic, telling them he's lucky to be there at all and that he probably wouldn't be without the support of his friends, who by the way he doesn't deserve.

He rhapsodizes about love, life, friendship- the things he's confronted on his Chautauqua, his journey of discovery, of growing up. He quotes Frank from earlier in the story- "It's so much darker when a light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone" and expounds on loss (his mom) and taking others for granted.

Finally, he tells how for the longest time, he'd been lost in the youthful morass of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, but that he finally had to grow up and move on, at least move on from too much sex and drugs. He reiterates that he was lost, but he's finally finding his way back home. And at least he'll always have Rock and Roll.

The crowd holds their lit Bics high.

Throb looks over at Cum, who's strapped on one of those double-necked guitars, and begins to play a haunting acoustic intro to Blind Faith's "Can't Find My Way Back Home." It begins mellow and acoustic but somewhere along the way becomes harder-edged, rising to a crescendo with a beautiful solo provided by Cum. In fact, the solo sounds sorta' like Cold November Rain...

*Come down off your throne and leave your body alone.
Somebody must change
You are the reason I've been waiting all these years.
Somebody holds the key.
Well, I'm near the end, and I just ain't got the time.
And I'm wasted, and I can't find my way home.*

Throb looks over his shoulder and sees Dylan playing guitar and singing into a microphone with Cum's son. Full circle.

*I can't find my way home.
But I can't find my way home.
But I can't find my way home.
But I can't find my way home.
Still, I can't find my way home.
And I've done nothing wrong.
But I can't find my way home.*

Or

*Well, my soul checked out missing as I sat listening.
To the hours and minutes tickin' away
Yeah, just sittin' around waitin' for my life to begin.
While it was all just slippin' away
I'm tired of waitin' for tomorrow to come.
Or that train to come roarin' 'round the bend
I got a new suit of clothes, and a pretty red rose.
And a woman I can call my friend.*

*These are better days, baby.
Yeah, there's better days shining through
These are better days, baby.
Better days with a girl like you*

*Well, I took a piss at fortune's sweet kiss.
It's like eatin' caviar and dirt.
It's a sad, funny ending to find yourself pretending.
A rich man in a poor man's shirt
Now my ass was draggin' when from a passin' gypsy wagon.
Your heart, like a diamond, shone.
Tonight I'm layin' in your arms carvin' lucky charms.
Out of these hard-luck bones
These are better days, baby...*

*Now a life of leisure and a pirate's treasure.
Don't make much for tragedy.
But it's a sad man, my friend who's livin' in his own skin.
And can't stand the company.
Every fool's got a reason for feelin' sorry for himself.
And turning his heart to stone.
Tonight this fool's halfway to heaven and just a mile outta hell.
And I feel like I'm comin' home!*

*These are better days, baby.
There's better days shining through
These are better days.
Better days with a girl like you*