

CHOICE NITE  
by  
Paul Stanley Ward

Draft: September 15th 2008  
©Pop Film

1 INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - MORNING 1

The point of a compass presses the skin on the tip of a forefinger taunt until a drop of blood forms.

A teenage boy's tongue licks the tip; his finger rolls a small heart-shaped impression onto the breast of a hand-drawn swallow, soaring on a homemade CD cover.

TITLE: CHOICE NITE

2 EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE FRONT DOOR - MORNING 2

JENNY, 15, arty, school-uniformed, kohl-smearred eyelids, cocooned in headphones, waits at the door, chewing gum. As she waits she draws an angular fringe over a small, faint crimson birthmark on her face. No response.

Jenny sidles around the house and spies through a window...

James, 15, (y-fronts shirtless), is passionately miming a Haka in front of the mirror. She is entranced by his physicality and energy. She senses his fragility as he gets a movement wrong.

MOTHER (O.S.)

James, hurry up, Jenny's here.

James pulls a Tiki-face in the mirror in self-mockery.

Jenny retreats.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Dressing, James finishes copying onto the cover (*tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther*) from lines underlined in 'The Great Gatsby', encases it and dashes.

3 EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE - MORNING 3

James, jersey half on, approaches a Corolla idling, named gear-bag over his shoulder and rugby boots and art folder in hand. His MOTHER is waiting by the passenger door, and JENNY'S MUM is in the driver's seat. Both are nurses.

James bundles in, flicks his eyebrows; try-hard cool, but warm. Jenny half-smiles in return, eying his boots.

4 INT. CAR - MORNING 4

James's knee almost touches Jenny's as the car rides over a bump. He looks at her bare leg, soft downy hairs just visible in the morning light. She senses his stare. The Mums' gossip drifts back:

MOTHER (O.S.)  
 So of course he can't make it to  
 James's first big game ...

James, embarrassed looks to see if Jenny's listening. She has her i-pod on. She offers him a piece of gum, but he waits. She smiles and unwraps it for him. He takes it and pockets it.

MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Always an excuse.

James sneaks the mix-CD cover out of his sports bag and cradles it, out of sight. He puts it in his far pocket.

JENNY'S MUM (O.S.)  
 She's how much younger?

James takes the CD from his pocket and places it on the seat between them and mouths 'I burnt this'. Jenny pulls out an earpiece and mouths back 'what?'

MOTHER (O.S.)  
 And I have to shell out for brand  
 new boots while he's rooting that  
 bitch in Fiji.

Jenny reads *For Jenny* and looks at the hand-drawn swallows flying from the words. Touched she flips open her mobile: U RITE THT? James nods and she smiles. She texts: U SURE GATSBY? James is coy at being sprung, nods.

MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Never pays for anything.

She texts: WHAT U DO TNITE? James shrugs. MEET AFTA WORK? Their eyes connect briefly. James: SWEET.

Looking away, James grins out the window, chuffed.

5 EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

5

The car pulls into a train station on the line to the city. James and Jenny exit down the platform.

Uncapping a vivid, Jenny takes the inside of James's arm and pens an outline of a Swallow. Her fingers are electric. Finished she smiles at him. He takes her hand.

TAMA  
 Yo Jimmy!

A Merc (lowered, mag-wheels) packed with 7th formers is parked across the road. James's friend TAMA, Maori, 16, in with the older boys, calls out the back window.

Seeing the seniors, James lets his hand slide from Jenny's.

JAMES

See you tonight eh?

Jenny looking over James's shoulder notices one of them slapping his face, mocking her birthmark.

JENNY

If you can get permission...

Jenny's turned away, off to the Girls' school, still admiring the CD.

A rugby ball flies from the window into James's face. James collects the ball, walks over to the car.

RUGBY LAD #1

Oi, socks!

James, junior, bends to pull his socks up. They already are. The lads (in senior uniform trousers) laugh. James, blushing, lobs the ball into the car.

TAMA

Hey grommit, you know Macca, Wardy?

James shakes his head; steals an awkward glance at Jenny.

RUGBY LAD #1

You're not tapping that are you?

James grins uncomfortably and awkwardly bundles in with his art folder to skeptical looks from the lads (barely concealed from James a lad cruelly slaps his cheek for his mate's benefit). Tama is conscious of the pressure:

TAMA

Jump in, let's go over lineouts.

James views a distant Jenny from the car as they drive off.

6

EXT. SCHOOL RUGBY FIELD – AFTERNOON

6

An intense haka starts a big schoolboy rugby match. James is in amongst the 'boys'.

The sideline cheer-squads chant tribal encouragement ("A Dooley's on fire/ we don't need no water, let the muthafucka burn").

The reserves leave the field. Tama straps a white bandage with a crucifix inked on it around a nervous James's wrist; to draw strength from.

James, nervous, waits under the high ball from the kick-off. He takes the ball but is crunched and eye-gouged.

Middle-aged men watch, living vicariously, leaning on their corporate umbrellas, yelling advice to the ref.

CUs from James's POV: striving bodies, sweat, tape, sprigs, a lock binds through the crotch; the dark interior of a ruck.

With pressure on their tryline James puts his body on the line, sacrificing himself in front of a bullocking prop.

The coaching staff and reserves come on field for a half-time huddle. A smug OLD BOY (late 20s, school scarf, blazer over hoodie, tardy boat shoes) hands out water bottles.

Scavenging for the loose ball James is intent. Running in support he receives a pass and off-loads just as he's smashed to ground. Try scored. As he gets up; his nose-bleeding, teammates pass him by, patting him on his back.

7 INT. CHANGING ROOM SHOWERS - DAY

7

In the steam the boy-men bustle with triumphant euphoria. James, quietly fizzing, strips out of his y-fronts and unwraps his wrist strapping. A senior teammate grins and eyes up Jenny's drawing.

RUGBY LAD #1  
What's that gayboy?

JAMES  
A Swallow.

RUGBY LAD #2  
(with gesture to match)  
That mean you swallow? Ha ha...

RUGBY LAD #1  
Good work at the breakdown.

James is pleased with the compliment

RUGBY LAD #1 (CONT'D)  
You're coming out eh?

James nods. Rugby Lad #2 whips James on the ass with a towel and laughs. James squirms, turning to protect his genitals. He flinches but is pleased with the compliment.

James moves to the mirror and smudges Jenny's tattoo.

8 EXT. MANNERS MALL - NIGHT

8

Teens sprawl over concrete, hovering over phones, concealing alcohol and shyness. James, hair-gel shining, face red and bruised from the game, school blazer over mufti, gear bag over his shoulder, loiters with Tama.

Across the street through a window, he eyes Jenny working in the used bookstore.

TAMA

See Sam fend off that Dooley wanker?

Tama vaults a testicle-threatening barrier.

JAMES

I've gotta go for a slash...

TAMA

Now? Shit man. The boys will be here any minute.

James takes his blazer off. Tama mock side-steps James to let him through and taps his watch. Checking to see he's out of Tama's sight, he doubles back and sprints to the bookstore.

9 INT. SECOND-HAND BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

9

James observes Jenny at the counter through the window. She's clearly dressed up for an evening out.

Behind the counter Jenny sellotapes the mix-CD case shut.

JAMES

Burger and Fries please

JENNY

Lame ... You couldn't wait eh?

James shrugs shyly. Jenny sees his bruised face.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Was it worth it?

JAMES

We won if that counts.

An awkward silence. Jenny slides a tote-bag (tea-light candles, rug, hip-flask, i-pod) out of sight with her foot.

JENNY

... Here.

Jenny passes James the CD. James looks puzzled as to why she's giving his gift back. Leaving a muddy thumbprint James begins to scratch, curious, at the tape. Jenny stops him:

JENNY (CONT'D)

It's for later.

He stashes it in his blazer pocket. Jenny takes some books down an aisle. James follows, takes his chance and goes in for a kiss.

He pushes aside Jenny's fringe and places his hand on her birthmark. Jenny pulls back, she instinctively lifts a hand to his wrist, self-conscious. He tries again, Jenny pulls away.

A customer vigorously rings the bell. Jenny gets up and James lets her go, confused, betrayed by his own tenderness. A bell rings vigorously. The middle-aged CUSTOMER waits impatiently.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I gotta go. See you here at 10?

James, slightly burnt, nods and he leaves the shop.

10

EXT MANNERS MALL - NIGHT - LATER

10

Arriving back, James is tackled by Tama and another boy and hustled into his teammates. They shelter by a toilet block and pass around some bourbon and a joint. James declines, then takes an awkward toke.

The boys roll down the street laughing. One is getting chauffeured in a shopping trolley. An amply endowed secretary, late 20s, dressed for scoring, passes by.

OLD BOY

Hey, beach ball.

WOMAN

Fuck you!

They're approached by an OLD BOY from the match, cradling half a dozen beers (polo shirt, boat shoes). One of the crew knows him and after doing the rounds hands over a bundle of notes. The knowing nods and winks are beyond James, but he's curious.

OLD BOY

Ready for some fun?

The older boys posture and preen. James and Tama are on the fringe of the discussion and can't hear.

JAMES

(to Tama)

Where we heading? What time will it finish?

RUGBY LAD #1

Before your bedtime.

Tama shrugs, unsure, but whispers to James:

TAMA

But ditch the jacket bro!

James, wary, stuffs his blazer in his backpack, checks the time, does the calculation, and follows the group across the street.

11 EXT. CITY STRIP CLUB – NIGHT 11

Tama on tip-toes peers through the front door. A BOUNCER holds his arm out as generic rap music blares. The old boy has a word and he allows the lads in, sans beer. He gives James's bag a cursory look. The boys conspiratorially clunk cans, down them and enter.

LADS

Ye-ah. Cheers 'Uncle'.

The teetotaling Samoan teammates quit the night. James is given an out.

TOTO

(in PI Church t-shirt)

That's it for us bro. Dad's picking us up from the station if you want a ride?

JAMES

Um ... cheers Toto, I'm sweet, I'm gonna go soon anyway.

TOTO

(to Tama as he leaves)

See you at church eh

James follows the others into the bar.

12 INT. STRIP BAR – NIGHT. 12

James, quite pissed now, is fixated as topless dancers snake around poles, pornos play on mounted tvs and crop-topped busty girls with sweaty faces squeeze through the crowd with trays above their heads. Tama smiles at him as two jugs appear in their hands courtesy of an older boy.

TAMA.

Heaven!

The lads sing a drinking song. James grins, wide-eyed at the day and night, taking it all in.

Bumped, foam spills down James's good shirt. Busting, he heads to the toilet, leaving his bag behind. James's phone buzzes. A lad checks it and deletes the message.

The old boy, past the floor show by a roped stairwell, mouths something. A lad, looking at James returning, raises his eyebrows to the rope, grins and waves James over. Woozy, he squints at his cell clock. Tama's nowhere to be seen.

The lads, grouped together, usher James through the rope.

OLD BOY

More fun to come lads, more fun to  
come!

13

INT. STRIP BAR BROTHEL LOBBY - NIGHT

13

They're led up nondescript stairs, it's suddenly very quiet. Dimly lit, a divan is the only furniture. Fragments of the old boy bartering with the RECEPTIONIST can be heard. She checks out doors in the hallway and returns. She glances at James.

RECEPTIONIST

How old's the paper boy?

The old boy smiles and winks, holding open his wallet. James, standing closest to the entrance, nervous, looks around for Tama (no sign) a. A text vibrates in his pocket: C U N 10 GATSBY. James quickly texts: OK x.

James awkwardly opens his mouth but doesn't speak. He slinks back down the stairs. Half way down he meets Tama coming up. Tama raises his eyebrows. James gestures to his mobile.

JAMES

Hey ... I, ah, gotta go.

TAMA

We can't pussy out now. Let's stay  
for five eh?

James hesitantly relents and follows Tama upstairs. They sit squashed together on the divan. James eyes Tama, with a 'this is crazy' look. Tama gives a shrug and a hesitant laugh. They stay.

James looks at the clock. A text vibrates in his pocket.

RUGBY LAD #2

That his boyfriend?

James smirks, uneasy. The old boy addresses his court of nervous initiates.

OLD BOY

... try to hold on eh...

James looks to Tama. Tama is less confident now. With a nervous nod he initiates an 'if you look out for me, I'll look out for you' pact by pressing James's hand in the space between them on the seat, an oddly intimate gesture.

A text beeps in James's pocket but he doesn't dare look. He's stuck, bonded by loyalty to his mate.

The old boy allocates ladies.

Tama is directed after a prostitute to a room. He gives James a nervy raised eyebrow and the door closes behind him. James is left with Old Boy and two lads grinning at him like prefect schemers.

OLD BOY (CONT'D)  
Reserves are warming up.

James looks at the staircase wondering.

14 EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT 14

Jenny closes up the bookstore, tote-bag over her shoulder, and waits. She is vulnerable amongst the vomit, fights, and drunk slappers kissing each other to impress boys.

15 INT. BROTHEL LOBBY - NIGHT 15

James is uncomfortable. He considers his options. Ditch Tama? No. He checks his phone for the time - 10.09. It rings. Jenny's name flashes up.

A door across the foyer opens and the loud sound of a porno climax blares out briefly. James panics, turns off his phone. The receptionist wearily points her eyes towards another door. Old Boy nudges James with a smile:

OLD BOY  
Late scratching ... go on, get in there.

A WOMAN, mid-20s, hardened and attractive, enters.

WOMAN  
You want to follow me?

James looks at where Tama was sitting. His thought process is moved along by a slap on the arse from a smirking Old Boy. He follows the directive.

16 INT. BROTHEL ROOM - NIGHT 16

James eyes flit across the small room registering details: tea-light candles, a single mattress, tissues, brown plastic sauce bottle, faded green wallpaper (Aubrey Beardsley style). A porno is playing silently on a TV mounted high in a corner.

The woman, in a yellowing silk robe, shows James to the shower cubicle, handing him a towel.

WOMAN  
Change into this.

She moves away to give James privacy. Behind the misted glass door he is hesitant to undress. He spies her sitting on the mattress and looks across at the closed exit door.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

(OS)

Do you need some help?

James, dumbstruck, answers by turning the shower on. He stiffly undresses, pauses in his y-fronts, then slips them off and gets in. Unsure what he's meant to do he let's the water run down his chest for all of a few seconds. A yellow stream mingles with the water spiralling down the plug-hole.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

(OS)

What's your name honey?

Glad she hasn't come in, he dries himself. The silence is broken by sugary R&B as the woman puts a CD on. He feels his jean's pocket for his wallet and phone, paranoid, wary of their security.

JAMES

J ...J...James.

James comes out, towel around his waist, holding his bag. She directs him to put his bag down next to the bed. Seeing he won't move (get this trick over with quickly) she puts her hand forward to indicate to James he give her the towel.

She takes it off him. He has his underwear on underneath. Sensing his naivety, she's hesitant to play out her usual routine and ushers him to sit down.

WOMAN

Listen ... I can just give you a rub,  
James.

She pats his back, Motherly, where he hasn't dried himself, and directs a stiff James to lie down on the towel. She lays another towel over his groin and legs. She lowers her eyes and squeezes the plastic bottle, spilling a little on James's back.

James is horribly in the moment: the oil, wallpaper, crumpled robe and wrinkles. It's all new. Are nipples that big?

The silence is hyper. Her wiry fingers knead over his sprig marks and muscle. James is outside of himself and lost in his buzzing mind all at once. He closes his eyes and looks at the electric blackness in the back of his lids.

He opens them again as she works over a thigh. In a blur, hormones and booze take over and his prick hardens, acutely discomfoting under the towel.

She avoids pressuring him. But after moral consideration (all of a blurred, eternal microsecond) James awkwardly says,

JAMES

Can I ... have ... the job then?

James closes his eyes tight. His body tenses as she efficiently slips a condom on and straddles him in one movement. He's INTENSELY lost in the moment: suckling, aureolae, tats, wetness, skin, heat.

In a second it's over. The woman peels a tissue, uses it as a glove to remove the condom and puts a robe on.

WOMAN

All over then.

James is guilty, spinning. \*

JAMES

Th ... Thanks ...

She smiles thinly, glad this too young trick is over, and leaves. James is alone, sober. He feels in his pockets and extracts a piece of unchewed gum. He stares at it. Then puts it back in his pocket.

17 INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

17

James presses his cell on. 10.33. Text-notifications flash from Jenny. He sniffs the cheap oil on his hands and gets rid of it as best he can.

JAMES

(under his breath)

Shit.

Tama and 3 others are squashed on the divan, grinning uneasily. Two SEX WORKERS, smoking, pass by.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Oh Tama man. I gotta go. Sorry.

James makes an awkward Pakeha contribution to a handshake with Tama.

18 EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

18

Following another client James exits under a neon sign ('Finest Gentlemen's Club') down a side-alley.

Tama and another lad join James at the bottom of the stairs and pretend spear-tackle him. James grins nervously.

Drifting down the alley to the street the boys bluff staunchness. Tama wiggles his tongue between a two-fingered V:

TAMA  
Choice eh!

RUGBY LAD  
As choice as your momma! Check out those tits!

The lad brandishes a photo on his cell phone in James' face.

TAMA  
Bro, smell my finger!

JAMES  
Fuck off.

RUBY LAD #1  
(to James)  
Hey Gayboy you're not such a bad cunt after all.

James looks across the road. He sees Jenny staring from the window of a passing bus. Both are STUNNED. James looks back at Jenny. His legs are lead.

Jenny looks from a bus window as the boys sprawl over the street. A lad, arm raised, is simulating riding a bronco.

Jenny turns away from a frozen James and the bus disappears into the night.

19 INT. SUBURBAN LOUNGE – NIGHT

19

James is texting with one hand as he tries to silently close the door with the other. His tired and angry Mum berates him.

MOTHER  
Where have you been?

James pushes past her, head down, dropping his bag on the floor.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
I've been trying your mobile ...  
don't you ignore me!

James heads straight to his room.

20 INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

20

James re-sends a last ditch text. A message beeps: INSUFFICIENT CREDIT – TIME TO TOP UP! He unleashes a flurry of punches at the mattress until he runs out of steam.

21 EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - MORNING

21

The Toyota Corolla idles in the drive. James's Mum gets in the front passenger door. James, stooped, clutches his school bag as he walks up to the car.

The windows are misted, he hesitates.

Jenny is in the back. She ignores James. Jenny's mum waits for the windows to de-mist.

They move off. James glances up to catch Jenny's mother eye in the mirror as they travel in silence. He's hyper-aware of the black hole to his left.

He looks from his folder with its film heroes, birds and sports stars and out the window, clearing a circle in the rain. The Mothers' gossip blurs with the beat of car and road sounds, broiling in intensity.

Rumaging in his bag James feels the CD lodged in his blazer pocket He takes the CD out, picks away the tape and opens the cover. A single unopened condom is taped inside. He's devastated.

Tears well in his eyes. He looks over at Jenny. She's staring out the window. She turns, glares at him and turns back to the window.

As the car slows for a zebra crossing James stares at a woman in a night-gown, pushing a pram.

Impulsively he opens the door, jumps from the car and, runs, scattering dozens of squawking seagulls in his wake. They're momentarily frozen in the air.

He runs across a muddy field, eyes closed, counting down, pain etched on his face, away from it all.

THE END