Sketchy

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
School of Film and Animation – College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

May 17 2016

Matt Ansini Thesis
Master of Fine Arts
Film and Animation – Production

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i. Abstract

*Sketchy* is the story of Charlie, a 30-year-old underachiever working in the IT department of an office building. Despite his best efforts, he has slowly moved up the corporate ladder that he never intended to climb. In the beginning of the film, Charlie’s long term girlfriend Julie is thrilled to hear Charlie has been offered a management position with the company. She takes it as a sign that now is the perfect time to take their relationship to the next level and get married.

Charlie, on the other hand, sees this as a different sign. He has decided that he wants to quit his job in order to go back to school and explore his passion for illustration. When he tells Julie of his desires, she becomes infuriated with him and they break out into a fight. Afraid of loosing her, Charlie ultimately gives into Julie’s wishes, and reluctantly agrees to propose to Julie at a party in front of all of their friends.

After taking the promotion, Charlie finds that the new job is even more monotonous and unfulfilling than ever. Charlie develops a friendship with Lila, a spunky and free spirited waitress. He envy’s her ability to just follow her passions without being weighed down with the pressure of responsibility.

During their planned “spontaneous” proposal party, Charlie finally breaks down and leaves Julie in front of everyone. When Julie confronts him, Charlie states that even though he loves Julie and wants to be with her, following his dream is something that he needs to do. Julie eventually comes around, and supports Charlie in his journey.
ii. Origin

The original idea for my thesis had nothing to do with its final conception. In fact, the original idea was not even a fiction, but a documentary. Prior to coming to graduate school, I had never directed a fiction film before. I had worked on my fictions in the past, but always as a crew member, never in the “big chair”.

In my undergraduate career, I started in music and transitioned to film theory. All of my previous film experience was in more short form experimental or creating cooperate documentaries as a way to make money. For a thesis I figured, go with your strengths. Since I did not particularly enjoy making experimental films (especially when I would have a hard time defining even my own pieces), a documentary seemed like the appropriate choice. So I spent the year leading up to my thesis proposal researching subjects that I was passionate about.

Eventually, I landed on the topic of why charter schools in Rochester, NY were so much more effective and/or successful compared to the public city schools. I found it fascinating at how vastly different the graduation rates where between the two institutions. With a topic locked in, I dove into my research in order to prepare a strong thesis proposal. I found a ton of strong statistics like tests scores, yearly budgets, and enrollment data, but I was missing a key component in order to make a successful documentary. The charter schools were incredibly cooperative, offering to set up interviews with teachers, parents, students, anyone. The city schools, on the other hand, were completely uninterested in participating, both the school and the parents. Without being able to interview the public schools, I would not be able to provide an unbiased point of view, and without that, I did not have a strong documentary.
With only a week or so before my proposal date, I decided to rethink my original rational in picking a thesis. Instead of sticking with what I was strongest at, I decided to try and go outside of my comfort zone. After all, I had come to RIT in order to broaden my horizons and grow as a filmmaker. I had just come off of writing and directing two fictions and while I think one of them was much more successful than the other, I still took a lot way from both of them. What worked, what didn’t work. Armed with that experience, I decided I would move forward with a fiction.

I was still left with the issue of coming up with a script (or at the very least, a treatment). After coming up with some admittingly poor ideas, a friend reminded me that I had a good story right in front of me. The story of my life.

Jump back three years ago, I was at a major crossroads in my life. Like countless other college graduates, I had trouble finding work. I had been dating a girl for about five years at that point. She had been working full time while I finished college. Occasionally I would land a good gig working on a commercial, or an indie movie, but these were all temporary (and scarce). I felt like I needed more experience, so in the interim, I applied to graduate programs.

After several months, I was offered a full time job, and within my field! When I took the position, I finally felt like I had it all. So when I started working too, it felt like it was finally time for me and my girlfriend to really start our “adult” lives together. It was a good place to be. The job was going great, and I saving every penny I made. Our plan was to save up enough to put a down payment on a house. It was a good plan; I had completely forgotten about even applying to graduate programs.
Things were going so well, that after only six months with the company, I was promoted. Of course, I was ecstatic. Why wouldn’t I be? It was a good pay raise, more responsibility, more independence; but most importantly, it meant our plan would move that much fast. But the thing was, I very quickly went from ecstatic to disappointed.

While the promotion was amazing at the exact moment in time, there was already nowhere left to grow within the company. I had reached the top of a very short ladder. During that six months, I found myself already burnt out on the company. The culture of the office was so cookie cutter and repetitive, I just couldn’t imagine myself doing this day after day without a new challenge or goal.

Then, almost seemingly out of the blue, I received my acceptance letter to RIT. It came months after all of the other acceptance letters I had since written off. As much as I hate to admit it, my decision came almost completely on impulse; I put in my two weeks’ notice. In a job that seemed endless, here was a way out.

Of course, there were repercussions to this decision. All the money I had saved up went to tuition, and I was no longer making any money. This did not go over well with my girlfriend, and understandably so. I had deviated from the plan and I did so without even consulting with her. After limping through the relationship for a semester, this ultimately was the end of us.

Cut back to writing a story; this spoke to me so strongly, not because it was my own personal experience, but because so many other people related to me during that experience. Not even just students, I feel that most artists reach that same crossroad at some point where they take safer path in life, but at the coast of their passion. Or worse, they peruse their passion at the cost of their friends or families.
iii. Pre-Production

Vision

Right from the beginning, I had an idea that I wanted to do something different. Eventually, I had the idea to add 2D animation to the film. Animation is something that I had always wanted to try, but never really had an opportunity. In my undergrad, animation was not offered as a major, nor did the school have the facilities to explore anything other than stop motion. I had dabbled with stop motion and enjoyed it, but that did not feel like it fit with the story I was trying to tell.

Then, I saw a couple of unique short films that really inspired me. The first one was a film called At Your Convince (Figure 1), directed by Raymond C. Lai, and the other was The Bear and the Hare (Figure 2), directed by Elliot Dear and Yves Geleyn. It was not necessarily the story that inspired me, but rather the visuals. Both films were unique in that they were not 2D animated, nor where they liv action, but instead a beautiful blend of both (2.5D).

Bear and the Hare was a mix of stop motion, and a digital 2D animation. The filmmakers used a laser printer to cut out each individual frame of the character’s movement, and then placed them onto a physical three-dimensional miniature set. At Your Convenience was much simpler, shooting on a green screen and compositing in a two dimensional environment.
Figure 1 - At Your Convenience (2014) Raymond C. Lai

Figure 2 - The Bear and The Hare (2013) Elliot Dear & Yves Geleyn
My initial vision for *Sketchy* was a combination of those two styles. Working with my Production Designer, Irena Weaver, we came up with the idea to create a physical world similar to what *Convenience* ultimately looked like, except without using any type of green screen. We quickly discovered that this was an unrealistic style for the film. Not only would it take an incredible amount of time to design each set, but the sheer costs involved with printing all of the materials alone was about triple what my total overall budget was.

I still wanted to try something different, after all, that is why I was in graduate school to begin with. Then I thought, what if Charlie went back to school for illustration? My new idea was for all the integrated 2D animation within the film to be figments of Charlie’s imagination, or his suppressed creative side trying to get out. Ideally, I wanted to have add animation into the entire film; every scene, every shot. With inspiration form *A Scanner Darkly* (figure 3), I even toyed with the idea of rotoscoping the entire film to have Charlie not only imaging, but actually living in this cartoonish world. This once again proved to be far too ambitious. I did not have an entire team working on solely my film for months at a time, I only had a couple of people volunteering their already limited time.

*Figure 3 - A Scanner Darkly (2006) Richard Linklater*
So I set out to simplify the animation to something more realistic. The animation was limited to a few characters, each representing Charlie’s personality. The animation was also overlaid on top of the live action plates instead of rotoscoping specific characters. I was inspired for this technique from a YouTube series, Aug(DE)mented Reality (Figure 4). Artist and director Marty Cooper (username Hombre_McSteez) illustrates simple animations on clear paper, and then photographs them over real environments.

My animation team and myself decided to forgo typical coloring of the animation. Since Charlie is constantly sketching on a paper book, it seemed appropriate to have the animated characters match typical paper “colors” instead. (see figure 5).

In hindsight, I might have over simplified and removed too much of the animation from my original idea. To be fair, in my initial proposal meeting, the main critique of my idea was that the animation seemed unnecessary since the story worked on its own. That being said, I still wanted to proceed with the animation because it was something new challenge for me.

Figure 4 - Aug(DE)mented Reality, Marty Cooper (Hombre_McSteez)
Assembling A Crew

In filmmaking, especially at this level, the most important aspect is resources. Time, money, people; all of them are needed to make a solid film. Notably, the scarcest of resources was the people. As a graduate student, I was part of a very small class of students, five to be exact. With two of those students taking a semester off to work a co-op and one student shooting internationally; I would need to look for crew elsewhere.

I had one graduate student on my crew, Benjamin Strack. He was a year behind me, but we had already developed a very solid working relationship. He was the cinematographer on my last film, and I was the cinematographer on his. Luckily, as I tried to film the rest of the crew, I had developed a number of relationships working with many very talented undergars throughout my time at RIT. Surely, without those relationships, I would not have been able to finish this film.

At the time, there were only four producers within the school, and by the time that I actually had my idea for a film, all four of them had already committed to other projects. Since
I had little to no experience at producing a film at this scale, I struck up a deal with a few of the producers. None of them had the time to commit to producing my film on top of their current workload, but I got each of them to help with one single aspect of producing.

Minni Clark set up all of my casting calls and paperwork, Nate Silverman secured me all of my liability insurance, and Colin McKenna helped me get a lot of my props and all of the actor’s paperwork. Even though those things were quick and easy assignments, it made a world of difference in the pre-production of the film.

I was approached by two undergraduates who were craft tracking, and wanted to work on my film. Aaron Harrison, an editor and Shelby Wilson, a sound mixer. I had worked on a film with Shelby the semester before, but I had never worked with Aaron prior to this, in fact, I barely even knew him. He was a very good friend of my previous editor, Alex Espinosa, and she made the introduction. I worked with Alex on every one of my films at RIT and we had developed a solid working relationship, but she had graduated the year before. Alex had told Aaron that I was professional to work with, and she told me that Aaron had a similar editing style that I had grown accustomed to with her, so it was a good fit for both of us.

For my animation crew, I specifically reached out to animators who would would be in their third year at the time of post production. Second year students would be making their thirty second films and forth years would be (very) busy with their own thesis’s; but third year students would have the semester “free” to work on my project. Going in I had three animators; Marcel Saleta, Kate McAfee, and Luke Polito. In reference to the amount of work the animation required, and at the suggestion of Marcel, we added Maggie Miller on as a forth animator to pick up the slack.
Script

With basing the script on my own life, punching out a treatment proved of little difficulty. Writing the first few drafts of the film were even easier. Each scene was a moment from that struggle, and lines of dialogue were word for word arguments me and my ex girlfriend had. I found, however, that even though my life was full of plenty of drama, it did not necessarily make a good script. My personal story ended with me loosing not just a romantic relationship, but my best friend who I had known almost my entire life. There was no redemption, no resolution. Just two people going their separate ways. So I worked extensively with my advisor to prune the script and make it “less realistic”.

The main conflict of the script was always about Charlie’s decision to go to art school, but the subplots went through a number of different revisions. Some of the revisions were creative choices, but a fair amount of them came from some less controllable sources. For example, in the original script, I had intended for Charlie and Lila to end up together. The idea that she was the one who brought out the best in him made it just seem natural that they would end up together. However, because of the actors, that relationship just didn’t feel right. Mike Tedone (Charlie) is in his forties, while Emily Kordovich (Lila) was only twenty. In the script, Charlie and Lila were only a few years apart. With the actors being twenty years apart in age, the idea of them getting together suddenly seemed mildly creepy. This realization did not come until after we started shooting and seeing the two actors next to each other. As a result, I had to make some major script changes in the middle of production.
Casting

If I am being completely honest, casting was a difficult and disappointing experience. Minni had posted casting calls with local modeling agencies, Facebook groups, around local college theatre programs, and Craigslist. Initially I was excited, because I had about a dozen inquiries about auditioning for each role and that was incredibly encouraging. However, when it actually came time to audition, only a couple people actually showed up. While I did not love any of those auditions, I still had to work with what I had available.

This obviously was a limitation for me. As I mentioned above, Charlie was supposed to be 28 in the script, but no one in that age range (or even looked like that age) showed up. Casting Mike as Charlie affected my casting for the role of Julie, as I needed someone closer to his age. I had three people audition for Julie; one was very bad, but the other two were okay. I did not actually cast the girl who I liked the most. While she was better for the part, she was much younger and she did not seem like she fit with Mike as a couple. I am not saying Emily Woodruff, who I ultimately cast, did poor in her audition, in fact she did quiet well. What I did not love was that she was from a theatre and opera background, and had a tendency to be over expressive; appropriate for the stage but it might come off as campy in a film.

Emily Kordovich was the only one who audition for the role of Lila. Even if someone else had auditioned, I still feel like I would have gone with Emily for the role. She not only had the look that I was envisioning for the character, but she really nailed the attitude I was trying to convey.
Locations

Securing locations was by far the easiest aspect of this film; that is the benefit of shooting in Rochester where I grew up. The locations I needed were pretty straightforward: an office, a diner, an apartment, a house for sale, and a place to hold a party. I had initially budgeted for about five hundred dollars to spend on locations, but because of my local connections, I spent almost none of that contingency. For the office, I used my father’s office building. Like most offices they are closed on the weekends so we did not interfere with anyone’s actual work.

The diner was a little mom and pop shop that I have been going to for years called Spiro’s. Unlike most restaurants, they are closed on Sundays, so it was very easy for me to negotiate using the space. I hired Spiro’s to cater my craft service for the day in lieu of paying someone from the restaurant to just be on location. This ended up saving me money on the location. I used the exterior of my sister’s house and put out a for sale sign that was provided from a local real estate agent. Aside from several curious neighbors coming to ask why we were selling the house, shooting there went smoothly. We went inside my sister’s house for the party scene.

The apartment was a crew member’s located at Rustic Village Apartments. It wasn’t my first choice of locations for a number of reasons. The first being how unremarkably bland each apartment is. Beige bare walls, ugly lighting, and each of the apartments just look, well, generic. Every Rustic Village apartment looks like any other Rustic Village apartment. The other reason is; it is a difficult place to shoot. Each apartment is small, the layouts are awkward for filmmaking, and there are no elevators to for when we had to bring equipment in and out. I
looked around for other apartments to use, and had a couple that I really wanted instead of Rustic, but the schedules did not work out.

A lesson I learned at Rustic Village was to always conduct a tech scout to double check, even if you think you know the location. As I just mentioned, all of the apartments at Rustic share one of two floor plans. In my time at RIT, I had shot seven or eight times at Rustic, and it was the same every time. Except this apartment did not share the same floor plan, and completely did not work with the blocking we had planned. While this was not in any way catastrophic, it forced Ben and I to quickly throw out all of our planning and start from scratch.

iv. Production

Directing the Actors

I take pride on the fact that I assembled a fantastic crew, and they did a good job of bringing my vision to life. Almost all of my own critiques of the film was within the acting. While neither of my lead actors gave me the strongest performance, they still did a good job in giving me exactly what I asked from them. The problem with that, is because of my lack of narrative experience, I didn’t always give them the best direction for the scene and that made things difficult, especially in the edit. For example, it completely escaped me to have Charlie ever look at in the direction of where the animated characters would be inserted. I had spent
all this time trying to design the look of the animation, yet was so wrapped up in the actual production that while on set I completely forgot about that animation. It was small details like this that tended to slip through the cracks with me. I would get too focused on the lines themselves, and I would miss the character’s facial expressions or blocking.

**Shooting**

Despite the growing pains of me as a director, the actual production actually went very smoothly. The crew I assembled was professional and efficient. No one was ever waiting on anyone else to get anything done. We scheduled crew to come in an hour and a half before the actors showed up, and we were rolling within thirty minutes of the actors being on set and going through blocking.

We shot six days over four weeks, roughly ten hours each day. We did manage to get everything that we planned on shooting, and that was a good feeling as a new director to not constantly be stressed about time. We wrapped principle photography knowing that we had one additional day for a few pick up shots with Mike, to be scheduled at a later date. It took about four months to finally be able to get schedule that day. Originally, we wanted to specifically wait until there was snow on the ground to show that some time had passed within the film. By the time there was actually snow on the ground, Mike had taken not only another role for a different film, but also a second job. So we had to push the date back several times.

I would say the only real issues I ran into during production were scheduling issues like that. A couple days before the first day of production when I sent out the call sheets, I received a concerning email from my lead actor. Mike emailed me back, shocked that the day was scheduled for ten hours, citing that all of the other sets he had been on had only been two or
three hours. For me, it was common sense that a shoot is at least 10-12 hours a day, it hadn’t even occurred to me that I would need to explain that to an actor. When I emailed Mike back explaining the situation, and he did not respond right away; not a good sign. I was very worried that he would try and leave early halfway through the day, or not even show at all.

My advisor, Peter, suggested that if Mike did not show up; I should take his place as the role of Charlie. That, of course, made me uncomfortable. Sure, I did well in directing and acting classes, and who knew the script and character better than me? But it just seemed so presumptuous of me to be the lead actor in my own film; I am no Woody Allen. Luckily, Mike got back to me prior to the first day and apologized. He explained that his background was primarily as a voice actor, and all of his previous roles on set had been minor. He then assured me that he was excited for the role, and was prepared for whatever the schedule called for.

I also had scheduling issues with Emily W. With her being a theatre actress, she was travelling back and forth to New York City on the weekends for rehearsals of a play that she was in. She was only actually only available to shoot for one weekend, which was of course difficult to schedule around.

The last day of shooting was the big engagement party scene, and that was the one day that did not go very smooth. In fact, the day started off as an absolute disaster, but at the end of the day, we recovered very well. I had found an absolutely gorgeous rooftop terrace to hold the party. Being the middle of Fall, there was a beautiful view of all the trees in full color. About twenty friends and colleagues agreed to come and be extras for the party. This was actually the scene that the production was most prepared for. However, on the day of shooting, I woke up to text messages from almost every one of my extras saying they couldn’t
make it. I was left with four people. That was really disappointing; not just professionally, but personally. I really felt let down from people I had really counted on. To top it all off, there was a freak thunderstorm and pouring rain, so the terrace was no longer an option. However, like I said, we were well prepared for the day. My sister’s house that we used the previous day of shooting was our designated contingency in case of weather issues. Switching locations actually worked out well with the amount of extras we had since we only needed six or seven extras to fill out the space instead of twenty. With a couple of crew members stepping up to be extras, we manage to get the scene.

There were a few moments within the film that I wanted to re-shoot or scenes that I wanted to add, but because of how tight the schedule was with Emily W, I was unable to get those different shots.

Cinematography

Ben and myself discussed early on, different looks (other than the animated) for the film. We looked at different stylized films and ultimately agreed that they didn’t seem to fit the feel of Sketchy. We opted for the simple, yet traditional, approach of getting your wide, medium, and close-ups. There are very few “stylized” shots within the film, and most of them were for practical effect rather and artistic expression. The diner scenes, the night time office, and apartment scenes were all scenes that were suppose to take place in the middle of the night, but due to our shooting schedule we needed to shoot them during the day.

For all of these scenes, we used visqueen tarps to black out all of the windows and would start from scratch when lighting the scene. Practical lights played a big role in providing motivated light sources in each of these scenes. In the office, we simulated moonlight coming
through the windows using large 1000 watt lights with blue filters (gels) with a small splash of white light coming off of a computer monitor for fill on the actor’s face. For diner scenes, we decided to having a warmer look as opposed to the cooler look of moonlight. The scenes themselves were meant to feel warmer and more upbeat, so we lit to match that. In the apartment, we had a mixture of both lighting. The scene starts out warmer when he is drawing at his desk and he shows genuine enjoyment. As the scene progresses, the actors move to a different part of the living room which was being lit with cooler moonlight, and reflects a more neutral tone in the character’s emotions.

Technology

In film school, there is a big debate on what is the best way to spend your money; getting a great camera or paying more for better actors. Of course I went through this same debate. Being a cinematographer by trade (and a huge gear junkie), my natural priority was in having the best image. I’ll make the same argument as before, I am here in grad school to push my personal boundaries. Ben and I decided we wanted to shoot in anamorphic to achieve the “true” film aspect ration (2.4:1). Since actual anamorphic lenses are prohibitively expensive on a film school budget, we used an SLR Magic anamorphic adapter that would screw onto an existing lens.

In consulting with my animators and VFX team, they recommended shooting in 4k resolution because the animation would blend in better once we exported the final video at a 1080 resolution file. At the time, I did not own a camera capable of shooting in 4k. The school owned a Sony FS700 that was capable, but since I freelance as a videographer, I decided to
invest in my own 4k capable camera, the Panasonic GH4. I sold some other pieces of equipment to cover the cost of the GH4, so I did not count that against my budget.

The anamorphic adapter, however only worked with one set of lenses owned by the school; the other set was too large for the adapter to screw onto. With three other thesis films going on at the same time, all of us were in competition for the same set of lenses. Instead of dealing with that stress, I bought a set of Rokinon Cine DS lenses and a Metabones Speedbooster to mount them on the GH4. They were high quality yet affordable set of lenses that paired really well with the anamorphic adapter; and I would not have to worry if they were available at school when I wanted to shoot. I did count the lenses against my budget, but rationalized that investing in them would alleviate stress later on.

On paper the combination looked perfect. The Speedbooster eliminated the crop factor of the GH4 which allowed for wider shots and added a stop of light. The anamorphic adapter gave it the filmic feel I really wanted. Unfortunately, the combination did not quiet work as fluently in practice. On the first day of production, we discovered that in order for the anamorphic adapter to work properly, the lens it was mounted to had to be closed down to about a f5.6. Because of the additional stop of light from the Speedbooster, there was a soft focus and a strange blooming in the eyes (see figures 7 and 8). We didn’t notice this right away while on set, but after adjusting to this learning curve, we were able to get some really nice images.
In all, I spent about $2,000 of my budget to build the camera package, and I think it is a fair question if that was the best way to spend my budget. A lot of people would argue that instead of buying equipment, I should have spent that money on getting better actors or production design, and that is a valid point. But the actors I got were the best that auditioned.
It is not like I tried to cast a SAG actor who turned the role down because of low pay. Do I think filming in 4k anamorphic made a better film? No, but it did give me some very good experience for later in my career. If I had the opportunity, I would have gladly allocated my budget to get better actors, but in this case that was not an option.

v. Post Production

The Edit

As I mentioned before, I had never worked with my editor Aaron Harrison prior to this project. We tried a few different approaches on our workflow before getting into a groove. Initially, I told Aaron to do the first pass of the edit completely on his own, based off of his interpretation of the script and then we would tweak it from there. This approach worked fairly well in the beginning, but we had to be much more hands on near the final edits and would have meetings three to four times a week.

Having finished shooting every scene except for our final montage, we got through a first edit fairly quickly. However, the edit stalled for a while after that point. Aaron was working on another thesis film, I Did a Bad, Bad Thing by Tom Mendosa. Undergraduate students, unlike graduates, screen a rough cut of their film in the Fall semester. Because of this, the majority of Aaron’s time during the end of that semester was dedicated to getting Tom’s film ready.

After rough screenings, things picked up again. With Aaron and I collaborating more frequently on the edit, we made more tweaks and started piecing together the best of each
take. Working with our VFX supervisor, Paul Benns, he was able to composite different performances from different takes in multiple scenes.

We had come up with a “good” edit of the film. I say good, because it was a complete and well rounded film and we could have left it as it was; but it was still lacking something. With Peter’s advice, we completely rearranged the order of each of the scenes to strengthen or support the dialogue and actions taking place. Both Aaron and myself agreed that the new order made a much stronger film.

Color

Going along with how we shot the film, it felt the color grading should be kept to a minimum and not be over stylized. Having shot in Panasonic’s V-Log format, the footage comes out of the camera very flat and washed out, almost looking like it has no color at all. It was necessary to do a tech grade on that footage in order to bring it into a “normal” looking image (see figures 9 and 10).

I decided that I did not need much more than a tech grade for this film. When designing the mise-en-scène of each scene, my production designer and I put a lot of nice natural color in the set design and wardrobe, so we just wanted to accent those colors just a little more than in the initial tech grade.

Another issue arose from using the anamorphic adapter. The 16x9 footage out of the camera needed to be stretched thirty-three percent in order to achieve the 2.4 aspect ratio we were looking for. When we brought the footage into our editing software, we stretched it horizontally by the thirty-three percent and the footage looked great. However, when I sent the footage into DaVinci Resolve for color grading, Resolve did not have an option for scaling
only horizontally. As a result, all of the footage was zoomed instead of stretched by thirty-three percent and all 244 clips had to be individually set back to normal size.

![Figure 9 - Ungraded V-Log, Sketchy](image1)

![Figure 10 - Graded V-Log, Sketchy](image2)
Animation

I was very pleased with how the animation came out. My animation team did a great job at revising their character designs until what was on screen was exactly what was in my head. It was challenging at times working with a group of students who were not getting anything for this except their name in the credits. I had to be mindful of their time and their own workload in other classes. While I would have liked to have added more animation, I had four people, each doing a semester’s worth of work, and we barely completed all of our planned shots in time.

Sound Design

Shelby Wilson did a fantastic job at mixing the film. There were plenty of times where the production sound was less than ideal. In the diner scenes, some sort of buzzer was going off constantly throughout the entire shoot. Since our actors were not available to re-record the dialogue, Shelby was forced to improvise. Using an audio plugin called Isotope RX, she was able to eliminate virtually all of the buzz out of those scenes while still maintaining the quality and integrity of dialogue.

Only a couple of the animations had any type of sound effects to them, even though we had discussed possibilities for all instances of the animation. As I mentioned above, some of the animations came in at the last minute, and this did not allow any time for Shelby to record and mix sound effects for those particular parts. This is something me and her have planned to work on over the summer.
Music

This is probably my favorite part of my film. I was introduced to my composer, David Mitchell through Ben Strack. When we initially started talking, David was not sure if he would be able to do the music for my films. David lives out in L.A. and was working on some pretty big name television projects. He eventually agreed to do the film after I explained the premise of the film. The story spoke to him, as he went through a very similar situation not to long ago.

During our first production meeting, David asked me what kind of music I was looking for. I told him I did not have anything specific in mind, but that I was really inspired by the music of Jeff Richmond. Richmond composed all of the music for TV series like 30 Rock and Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt. His music is known for being more whimsical or playful, and I thought that would fit really well with the film.

I got nervous because I did not hear any of the music until only a few days before I needed to assemble the whole film. What if it was wrong, or if I hated it? There was not enough time to change it. Luckily, that was not an issue. I loved it right away, and I really think it brought the whole film together.

Screening

I think the screening process is arguably the hardest part of the process. There is something so nerve wracking about signing up for screenings. I watched in agony as my film took three and a half hours to upload to the server. So, it was not until one o’clock in the morning when I received my confirmation, that I could breath a sigh of relief. However, all the stress and the issues pale in comparison to the the knots I had my stomach as the film screened
for the first time in front of an audience. It surprised me that in some places that I did not think were particularly funny got a number of laughs, where other places that I expected laughter were silent.

Overall the response to my film was very positive. Several individuals commented on how relatable the film was. None of the critiques I received really came as any surprise to me. Someone wished I had incorporated more of the animation within the film, a critique I completely agreed with. A comment that did surprise me was a compliment that I expected to receive as a critique. One person had said they really appreciated that Charlie and Julie stayed together, as opposed to him leaving her for Lila. I expected the opposite, but was pleased.

One faculty member said that this was his favorite film he had seen at the screenings. He enjoyed that I did not make the mistake of trying to shoot a big Hollywood production, like some students. He commended the simplicity. Combined with complete character arcs cultivated a sincerity to the film, and that is what made it successful. I am very pleased with the outcome the film. The feeling of satisfaction and pride I felt when I screened was immeasurable, and this was truly an amazing finish to my RIT career.
Thesis Proposal
Rochester Institute of Technology
Master of Fine Arts

Matthew Ansini
“Sketchy”
(Working Title)
April 9th, 2015

Approved for submission by: ___________________________________________  _____ Date: ____________

Peter Kiwitt (Committee Chair)
Logline
Caught up in the pressures of work and relationships, an aspiring illustrator strives to imagine his life more animated.

Vision
I will be utilizing a combination of live action cinematography augmented by 2D animation. The animation will be used as a medium to convey my character’s creativity and imagination. Edgar Wright’s Scott Pilgrim Versus the World and street artist Hombre_McSteez’s Augmented Reality were both inspirations for my thesis.
Treatment (bolded text annotates 2D animation)
Charlie, a 26-year-old IT temp, sits at a desk in an office building. He is on the phone, idly trying to explain how to use the copy machine to a client. As he talks, he sketches over a TPS Report. Charlie looks out of the office window looking out into the town. A green cartoon dinosaur rises up over the buildings, stomping and roaring.

A knock on the door breaks him out of his daydream. His boss comes in the office and tells him that the company has been impressed with all his work, and would like to bring him on full time. Charlie hesitates and says he wants to talk it over with his girlfriend, and asks if he can get back to them in a couple days.

Charlie arrives into his apartment and calls out for his girlfriend, Julie, but she is not home. To pass the time, Charlie starts to doodle. A couple small characters appear on the desk next to him. When Julie arrives home, the characters hide in fear behind a book on the desk as Charlie quickly hides the sketchbook under some papers.

Charlie tells her about the opportunity at work. Julie cries out in glee and wraps her arms around Charlie. She is excited that they have been waiting to for this promotion to get engaged. Julie wants to have a party to announce their engagement.

Charlie squirms out of her embrace, saying he hasn’t accepted yet and that he is thinking he might go back to school for his illustrations. Julie rolls her eyes and reminds Charlie that the art schools were too expensive, and that he would be throwing away a good job and a good life if he, all for just a hobby. Charlie begins to argue, what if a he had gotten a scholarship? Julie quickly changes the subject.

In a diner after work, Charlie sits sipping coffee; he doodles away in a sketchbook. Next to Charlie sits a folded up, unopened envelope. Lila the waitress, 25, fills up his cup. The two greet each other with a tone of familiarity, as she sits down at the table with him. Lila sees the envelope and asks Charlie if he has had the courage to open it yet. Charlie shakes his head no, he is too afraid of what it says.

Lila asks him what he is drawing. He shows her a picture of one of his characters; it stands next to Charlie’s cup on the table. Lila makes a comment on how adorable it looks, the Doodle Character blushes.

The next morning Julie tells Charlie she is taking him out to lunch. Instead, she takes him to look at a house for sale. Julie says she can’t wait to start their life together. Charlie says this is too big of a commitment right away, and things were moving too fast. They get into a fight, Julie angry that Charlie has been dragging his feet.
Charlie is at the near empty diner, Lila sitting with him. Charlie is telling her about the fight between Julie and him. Lila asks him why he has been dragging his feet? Charlie says he has a great life, with a great job, but lately he has felt stifled. Lila says that sounds like what Julie wants for him, but what does he want? Charlie only says that it’s complicated.

Lila pries further. What is stopping him from following his dreams? Charlie admits that he only got in at one school, but it was too expensive to go.

Charlie says none of that matters anyway. He is with Julie and she doesn’t approve of him going.

There is a beat of awkward silence between the two. Lila takes the picture of the Doodle Character and puts it up on the wall.

They exit the restaurant together after is has closed. They sit on the front steps; Lila shows Charlie her favorite constellations and draws them in the sky. Charlie draws his favorite. Lila tells Charlie he should open the letter, and that he should go for his dreams.

As they share a moment, Lila holds Charlie’s hand. They linger for a moment before Charlie pulls away and apologies that he has to leave. Lila tells him for what it’s worth, she thinks he would be great he tried going back to school. She gives him a kiss on the cheek before they go their separate ways.

When Charlie arrives back home, Julie is already in bed. Charlie slips under the covers with her, he apologizes for earlier. As she begins to fall asleep, Julie tells him how proud of him she is. Charlie stares up at toward the ceiling, wide awake. A smiling cartoon version of Lila looks back at him.

Julie and Charlie converse with a group of friends at the engagement party. They all stand around, chatting about Charlie’s big promotion at work, but Charlie finds it hard stay focused in the conversation.

In the middle of the party, Julie asks if she could have everyone’s attention. Julie makes the announcement that she and Charlie are getting engaged. She explains to the applauding crowd that they have been waiting for this promotion, and now they are ready to spend the rest of their lives together.

During Julie’s announcement, Charlie excuses himself.

He rushes outside of the house. He pulls the letter out of his pocket and slowly tears it open, reading it over.

Julie comes running out of the house chasing after him. She asks what is the problem? Charlie says he can’t go through with this, not yet. Julie tells him he is just
having cold feet and that this has been their plan for a long time. Charlie tells her no, it has been her plan, not his. They are just going in different directions.

Lila is locking up the restaurant when Charlie walks up. He wants her to go with him. To where, she asks? Charlie reads the letter to Lila; he has been awarded full academic scholarship in NYC.

Charlie and Lila drive down the highway-leaving town. All of Charlie’s doodles sit on the dashboard.

Support
Along with the crew of volunteers that I have assembled, I have two craft trackers working on this project with me. Shelby Wilson will be handling both my on set and post production audio. Aaron Harrison will be editing the film. Additionally, I have enlisted several 2D animation students to assist with that aspect of the film.

Rational
As you work toward something, it sometimes becomes harder to distinguish between the goals you’ve set for yourself and the goals that have been set for you by other people. I chose to make my thesis on this topic because of a similar situation in my decision to go back to school for my MFA.

When I got my first real job, I thought I had finally “made it” and I thought I was happy. It wasn’t until I took a step back and evaluated where I was and where I would go from there that I realized this was not the path I wanted to follow.

Leaving a stable full time job to pursue a goal was a life-changing event. It took me months of weighing my pros and cons trying to determine if it was financially achievable, or if it would ever even pay off. There were several major sacrifices that needed to be made, but ultimately going down such a drastic new path helped me determine what it was that I was actually working toward.

My motivation behind utilizing the 2D elements, I can explore the creativity of Charlie’s character in a unique and visual way. Additionally, animation is something that has interested me for some time but until now I have not had an opportunity to explore.
# Budget

**Title:** Sketchy (Working Title)  
**Director:** Matt Ansini

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Legend:
- Orange: Preproduction
- Dark Red: Production
- Green: Animation/Compositing
INT. OFFICE BUILDING – DAY

CHARLIE, 26 year old IT temp, sits at a cubicle with phone to his ear. He is dressed nicely, but not too nicely. His tie is not pulled all the way up and his sleeves are sloppily rolled up.

He takes out a pad and starts doodling a CARTOON CHARLIE, a drawn version of himself.

CHARLIE
Have you tried restarting it?...Do you see the green light?...Is it plugged in? You won’t see the light if it is not plugged in.

Cartoon Charlie is riding a GREEN DINOSAUR.

CHARLIE
There ya go, yep, needs to be plugged in...yep. Yep. OK. Yep, your welcome.

Charlie hangs up the phone, trying to process the conversation he just had. The Dinosaur chews on the telephone cord.

Charlie is broken out of his day dream by a KNOCKING. RANDY, 40, an corny and energetic man. Despite rapidly thinning hair, he still sports his 80’s grunge rock hair do.

RANDY
There he is! Not slacking off are ya? Ha, just kidding.

CHARLIE
Oh hey Randy. What’s up?

The Dinosaur snarls. Charlie quickly turns the pad over, MUFFLING the snarls.

RANDY
Here’s the ‘sich. I talked to the big wigs upstairs...and...well...

He pauses for dramatic effect. Charlie is anything but on the edge of his seat.

RANDY
...How does swing shift supervisor sound? Pretty great, huh?!
CONTINUED:

CHARLIE
Swing shift? Like, overnight?

Charlie looks almost disappointed.

RANDY
What’s up amigo? This is a pretty big stepping stone. Thought you’d be thrilled.

CHARLIE
Uh, yea, no. I mean, I am.

Randy shifts uncomfortably.

RANDY
Well... sure. Wouldn’t want to make this Misses unhappy.

CHARLIE
I’ll let you know soon.

Randy goes in to give Charlie a fist bump, which is met with hesitation before Charlie obliges.

Charlie stares back at the Dinosaur, who has curled up in a ball and went to sleep.

2
INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Charlie comes home to a dark apartment. He immediate locks and puts the chain on the door before making a beeline for a bookshelf in the living room.

He pulls out a DVD binder off the bookshelf. Instead of DVD’s, the binder is filled with various sketches, doodles, and colored pencils.

3
INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Charlie sits at a table drawing. Cartoon Charlie appears on the desk, and plays a solo on the guitar.

A KEY in the door startles Charlie, but the door gets caught on the chain.

JULIE
Charlie? What’s the point in me having a key if you always chain the door?

(CONTINUED)
CHARLIE
Just a minute!

He quickly stuffs the sketches back into the binder and shoves it to the side, before unlocking the chain and letting her in.

JULIE, 25, wearing scrubs, enters the apartment carrying a tote bag.

JULIE
Hey honey. What are you doing sitting in the dark? Here.

Julie goes around the apartment flicking on lights before heading into the bedroom.

JULIE (O.S.)
I have a crazy story to tell you about this patient at work.

Charlie notices one of the sketches had fallen on the ground. He grabs it and stuffs it in the binder with the rest.

JULIE (O.S.)
So when I went to go give this old guy his medication.

Julie emerges back from the bedroom having deposited her bag.

JULIE
He was naked! Like head to toe, butt naked isn’t that crazy?

He makes a puckered face.

JULIE
I know. Yuck. Anyway, how was your day?

She sits down on the couch next to him and cozies up with a blanket.

CHARLIE
It was okay. Good. It was good, Randy offered me a promotion.

Julie throws her arms around Charlie, planting kisses all over his face.
JULIE
Baby I’m so proud of you!
(smooch)
This is amazing

Julie rummages through her purse and pulls out her phone. Charlie looks over to Cartoon Charlie who motions for Charlie to say something.

CHARLIE
Well, I told him I would need to think about it.

JULIE
(smooch)
I have to call...everyone!

Julie realizes what he said.

JULIE
Wait...What? Why? We’ve been waiting months for this.

CHARLIE
I know, but I thought I would take another look at going back to school.

Julie rolls her eyes, putting her hands on her hips. She speaks in a stern voice.

JULIE
Art school again? Charlie, We’ve been through this. It’s way too expensive, and for what? A mountain of debt and unemployment?

CHARLIE
Well, I got that scholarship.

Julie’s eyes tear up. She starts to cry hysterically. Cartoon Charlie plugs his ears.

JULIE
You know the two of us could never survive on one income. So if you are leaving your career, you must be leaving me.

CHARLIE
It’s not like that!
JULIE
You don’t even love me, all you care about is some...hobby!

Charlie rushes over to her and pulls her close.

CHARLIE
I do love you! I want to spend my life with you!

Julie stops crying, but lets out a SNIFFLE.

JULIE
You really mean that?

CHARLIE
Of course.

Cartoon Charlie takes a sigh of relief, crisis averted.

JULIE
So you want to get married?

CHARLIE
Yeah, yeah...Sure...

They hug in silence for a beat. Julie’s face lights up with an idea.

JULIE (softly)
If you’re going to do this, get on one knee...

Charlie slowly nods, then his eyes pop open.

CHARLIE
Wait, what?

JULIE
You have to be down on one knee to propose.

In the corner, Cartoon Charlie is frantically waving his arms "no!". Charlie gulps. He looks into Julie’s puppy dog eyes.

He slowly makes his way down on one knee. Cartoon Charlie throws his hands up in defeat and falls over. Charlie takes a deep breath. Julie perks up in anticipation.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

CHARLIE
Julie...Will you-

JULIE
Wait! I have a better idea! We should have a party. You can propose to me in front of everyone!

Charlie shifts uncomfortably, still on one knee.

A firing squad has lined up in front of a blind folded Cartoon Charlie. He waves a white flag.

Julie jumps onto Charlie and plants kisses all over his face. PEW PEW PEW. The sound of TINY GUNSHOTS are heard off screen.

4 INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Charlie is at his cubical desk pretending to work. A WORKER walks by and Charlie quickly picks up the phone and talks to no one on the other end.

CHARLIE
Oh yea, I can fix that right away. Yea let me just log into the server.

The Worker has passed, Charlie hangs up the phone and sits back in his chair.

RANDY (O.S.)
Hump day, am I right? Alright.

Charlie pops his head up over the cubical wall and spots Randy walking through the bullpen, making his way toward Charlie’s desk.

Right before Randy gets there, Charlie ducks and rolls out of his cubical into the next one. Randy pops his head into the cubical, looking for Charlie.

5 INT. OFFICE BATHROOM - DAY

Charlie sits in the bathroom stall, hiding. He huffs and puffs out of breath.

The BATHROOM DOOR opens and someone walks partially into the bathroom and stop. Charlie lifts his legs up so it looks like the stall is empty. He peaks under the stall wall and sees a pair of shoes.

(CONTINUED)
The shoes walk away after a beat. Charlie looks back and cannot see the shoes anymore. Thinking the coast is clear, he goes to exit the bathroom stall.

As soon as he opens the door, Randy is standing right there.

**RANDY**
So how about that offer?

Charlie opens his mouth to say no.

**JUMP CUT TO:**

6 **INT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT**

Charlie is now in his own office, he is the only one in the building. He wears a nicely pressed suit. A brand new engraved nameplate rests at the edge of the desk.

He is on the phone with a customer.

**CHARLIE**
Did restarting fix it? Yeah just try that next time first, that fixes it most times. Okay you too, goodnight.

7 **INT. DINER - NIGHT**

Charlie sits alone at a table in a diner with a stack of half eaten pancakes and cold coffee. The diner is small and slightly run down, only a few other patrons who populate the restaurant.

Charlie's binder is next to him at the table as he sketches away at his pad.

Looking at his stack of pancakes, Charlie visualizes a **stick of butter, but it grows four legs, and morphs into the shape of a dog.**

**Butter Dog chases his tail in a circle around the pancakes.**

The waitress, **LILA, 28,** talks to an **LOU, an old man,** at the counter. She is attractive and dynamic. She is covered in tattoos, piercings, and bright blue hair.

Lila tops off Charlie’s coffee. She sits down at across from him and grabs the spare cup from the table and pours herself a coffee.

She takes the drawing pad right from under Charlie.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

LILA
That one’s pretty cute.

Butter Dog shakes his "tail" wildly.

LILA
You should design my next tattoo.

Charlie snorts at the comment.

Butter Dog drags his butt across the pancakes, leaving a trail of melted butter. Lila laughs.

LILA
I’m serious! You are totally wasting your talent doing tech support.

CHARLIE
What’s wrong with that? I happen to be a supervisor.

He takes a jokingly cocky, proud sip of his coffee.

LILA
It just sounds so boring.

CHARLIE
It is. But the money is good, I guess. And it can’t be much worse than waiting tables on the night shift.

Lila playfully acts offended.

LILA
Are you kidding me? There’s tons of excitement here. Here, watch.

She turns toward the Lou at the counter.

LILA
Hey Lou, what were you just telling me?

Lou, excited at the prospect of conversation, eagerly responds.

LOU
My doctor said I had the best cholesterol levels he’s --

(CONTINUED)
LILA
Thanks, Lou!
(to Charlie. )
See, exciting.

She gives him a raised eyebrow. Charlie gives her an impressed nod.

LILA
But I’m just doing this a few more weeks.

CHARLIE
What do mean? Where are you going?

LILA
I’m gonna hit up Seattle for a few months. Then maybe Austin.

CHARLIE
What are you gonna do there?

LILA
I don’t know, man. I haven’t gotten that far.

CHARLIE
Don’t you need a plan? What are you gonna do for money?

LILA
I don’t know.
(grabbing a fork)
Wait tables, bartend, train unicorns, whatever. I’ll make it work.

She takes a bite of Charlie’s pancakes.

8 INT. CAR - DAY 8

Charlie drives with Julie in the car next to him.

JULIE
Megan said this restaurant was amazing. Her and Tony go there all the time.

CHARLIE
Who’s Tony?
CONTINUED:

JULIE
Stop you’ve met him, he was at that
- WAIT, pull down this street.

CHARLIE
What?

JULIE
I want to show you something.

9 EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Charlie and Julie stand in front of a modest home for sale. Blue with a bright red door, a beautiful garden in the front. The for sale sign reads "Open House Today!"

JULIE
What do you think?

CHARLIE
What’s wrong with my place?

JULIE
We can’t raise kids at your place.

CHARLIE
Kids?!

JULIE
Yes, kids.

CHARLIE
But that’s like...down the road, right?

JULIE
It’s the next step after marriage.

She protrudes her belly out and rubs it as if she were pregnant.

JULIE
Little Scotty and Clara...

She breaks out into a giggle. Charlie shifts nervously.

CHARLIE

JULIE
Oh stop it. I’m joking. Come on I want to show you this kitchen, it’s amazing!
She makes her way to house leaving Charlie standing dumbfounded in a cold sweat.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Charlie sits at the counter talking with Lila. He doodles away at his pad.

CHARLIE
Julie thinks I’m dragging my feet.

LILA
Well, are you?

CHARLIE
No, I don’t think so. Maybe. We looked at a house today.

Lila gives him a smirk.

LILA
A house? How domestic.

CHARLIE
Apparently that’s something you do when you start a family.

LILA
You don’t sound too convinced.

Charlie pauses for a beat.

CHARLIE
I wanted to go to art school.

LILA
What’s stopping you? Didn’t get in?

CHARLIE
No, I got in. It’s just with Julie and the job, the timing never seemed right.

(shrugs)

LILA
I don’t know... It’s hard to explain.

CHARLIE
I don’t think anyone’s ever really ready for anything. At least I’m not. But I don’t want to reach a point in my life where I am wishing

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
LILA (cont’d)
I were someone else but feeling
like it was too late to change.

Lila goes back to doing her work. Charlie looks like he
would like to say something else, but sips his coffee in
silence instead.

11
INT. ENGAGEMENT PARTY – DAY

Julie and Charlie converse with a group of mostly JULIE’S
FRIENDS.

JULIE
So I went to give this guy his
medication and he was like
80. When I get to his room.

Charlie isn’t listening. Instead he is just watching the
people at the party. Julie hits him on the chest to get his
attention.

JULIE
Baby, you’re not listening.

CHARLIE
You already told me this story

JULIE
Did I?

She turns back to her friends.

JULIE
Anyway, where was I? So I’m
waiting for this guy to come out...

Charlie steps away as the group LAUGHS at the story. He
pulls the engagement ring out of his pocket and looks it
over. The diamond has been replace a tiny ball and chain.

CLINK CLINK CLINK. Julie taps a fork on her wine glass.

JULIE
(to Charlie)
Honey? Come here.

With all eyes on him, he joins Julie.

JULIE
We had talked about this a lot, but
we wanted to wait until we were

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
There are confused MUMMERS amongst the crowd. Julie smiles and nods to Charlie, who looks around at the crowd before slowly to one knee.

The MUMMERS turn to gasps of enthusiasm and joy. One lady has a tear in her eye.

CHARLIE
Julie...

Charlie pauses, longer than he should have.

JULIE
(whispering)
Go on...

Charlie still doesn’t say anything.

JULIE
(whispering)
Charlie...remember what we planned.

He stands up. Julie looks crushed.

CHARLIE
I’m sorry. Excuse me.

Charlie rushes out the back door of the room. The crowd is awkwardly silent.

12 INT. ENGAGEMENT PARTY KITCHEN - DAY

Julie chases him into the next room.

JULIE
What the hell was that Charlie? Do you have any idea how embarrassing that was?

CHARLIE
I can’t do this.

JULIE
Stop it, you’re just having cold feet.
CONTINUED:

CHARLIE
I had gotten a full scholarship. They’re practically paying me to go to school. And do you know why?

JULIE
Charlie, calm down.

CHARLIE
Because I’m good.

She cups his face.

JULIE
We had a plan, remember?

CHARLIE
No. you had a plan. What about my plan? I’m not ready for...this.

He flamboyantly waves his arms around, motioning to his surroundings. Julie quietly grabs her purse and pulls out her keys. She takes the key off the ring.

CHARLIE
Julie, I’m sorry. Stop.

JULIE
I think you should go.

She holds out the key to Charlie.

CHARLIE
I love you. And yes, I want to spend my life with you.

(beat)
But this is something I need to do.

Julie stands with her arms crossed. Charlie places the key down on the counter before exiting.

13 INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Charlie enters his apartment, carrying a stack of textbooks and looking over a class schedule. He goes sets the books down on the desk in the living room.

Sitting on the desk is a professional portfolio, a sketchbook, and a brand new set of pencils all neatly laid out with a card resting on top of everything.

Charlie picks it up and read it over

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Great artists need good tools, I thought you might need these for your first day. Love, Julie.

14 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charlie stands in the bedroom doorway. Julie lays asleep in bed.

Charlie gets in bed, and wraps his arm around her.