CHARLIE BROWN OUT:
BEFORE & AFTER

A short film by

Kevin Fann

www.kfann.com

FADE IN:

EXT. FACTORY - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

CUT TO: INT. FACTORY - NIGHT

A newspaper printing press CHURNS out the morning edition amidst huge spools of paper. A couple of WORKERS walk out of the frame, on break. A forklift BEEPS. As it reverses, its silver propane tank glints through yellowed fluorescent light.

CLOSE UP: INT. FACTORY - PRINTING PRESS.

Lines of newsprint fly by, and the sound of the press is deafening now, with pneumatic HISSES and rolling SQUEAKS. Beyond the sheets of paper, CHARLIE, a young man, stands against the wall. He wears earmuffs and stares at the passing paper as though watching a river roll past.

INT. FACTORY - WALL OF TOOLS

Charlie walks into focus carrying a big wrench. He hangs the wrench on a hook on a red wall. Charlie's wrench fits in the only empty space on the wall, surrounded by many other wrenches, screwdrivers, etc. Each tool is outlined in white tape.

CUT TO: EXT. INDUSTRIAL TOWN - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

The sun hits a smoky gray skyline, the tips of a few treetops, and a chain link fence with barbed wire.

CUT TO: INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE

Charlie's house is half packed/half lived in, with stacks of boxes lining the walls. A children's book of crosswords sits folded open on a brown leather recliner chair. Slumping and worn slick, the chair reflects light from a television. The reception isn't good, and the game show "Wheel of Fortune" flickers in and out in digital pixels on the screen.

On the screen is the unsolved puzzle "_ H _ R L _ _ _ R O _ N O _ T" as well as the title for the type of puzzle, "Before & After".

Off screen in a small kitchen, Charlie SLAMS a drawer and an oven door OPENS. On TV, the wheel SPINS and the crowd CHEERS.

INT. KITCHEN

Charlie pulls a glass casserole dish from the oven rack. He pulls a carving knife out of a knife block.

INT. KITCHEN - STOVETOP

Charlie slits a steaming baked beet down the center. The four beets in the pan still have their taproots, which look like long rat-tails. Charlie draws the skin back and purple beet juice drips down his fingers down into the pan.

INT. KITCHEN

Charlie eats beets with a fork.

CUT TO: INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE.

There's no car. A square of carpet sits under a heavy-duty bench that holds a rotary press for making lithograph prints. Experimental printmaking materials are scattered nearby: a filament from a toaster, aluminum foil and different jars of ink and syrup. Much of the ink is beet-red purple.

A rusty ladder and a hose hang unused from the ceiling behind cobwebbed rafters.

Charlie walks into the garage and sets his plate on a counter that lines the far wall. On the wall above him is a huge pegboard wall of tools, like the one at the factory, only smaller.

CLOSE UP: CHARLIE'S HANDS

His hands are stained from the beets. They look old and worn, too.

Charlie turns on a radio. It's a conservative talk show, and the TALK SHOW HOST covers a scattered range of topics: free market, self sufficiency, threats of socialism, God's favorites, etc.

TALK SHOW HOST
--only way for true market capitalism to survive, for humanity to survive, is to take away, or refuse, that's right, I'm saying it, refuse the right of Washington to govern us. Part of the genius of capitalism is people get to make good decisions or bad

TALK SHOW HOST (cont'd)
decisions, and they get to pay the consequence or enjoy the fruits of--

Charlie changes the radio station to jazz. It's Bob Parloche in Chicago. Mellow.

Charlie selects a wrench and an ink brush from the pegboard.

INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE - PRINTMAKING

Charlie uses the wrench on the press, tightening the print cylinder. He marks on it with a grease pencil. He uses an Exacto knife. He paints on a sheet of aluminum foil the word "Moribund" backward on the foil. He turns the manual crank of the press and makes a transfer print.

As a page cranks out from under the cylinder, the final print doesn't say "Moribund" in English. It's Chinese characters in beet-juice-violet-red ink.

Charlie hangs the print on a line to dry.

INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE - WALL CLOCK

A CLOCK on the wall ticks toward three o'clock. A decorative line runs the center of the clock face, from 12 to 6, tracing an angled path that evokes the International Date Line from world maps. The minute hand clicks and hits squarely on 12, running parallel above the line, almost blending in with it.

Off screen, a telephone RINGS.

INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE

Charlie answers the phone.

CHARLIE (answering)
Whey.

He continues in pauses.

CHARLIE
Hau...That's me? And that's me?...Hau.

CLOSE UP: INT. CHARLIES GARAGE - PLATE

A fork rests tines-down in the center in the beet juice.

CUT TO: INT. FACTORY - FOUR NIGHTS LATER

Charlie tends the press as it runs spools of newsprints at a very high speed. The mechanized rhythm SQUEELS to a halt when a mass of newspaper jams under one of the feeder spools.

Charlie hits the EMERGENCY SHUT OFF BUTTON and stops the press. He’s wearing gloves.

Charlie inspects the spool and goes to his wall of tools, only this time, all of the tools have been removed and sit below in a heaping pile in a plastic bin. Charlie stares at the empty wall. He looks into this bin of industrial bones.

CLOSE UP: INT. FACTORY - BIN

The tools are piled every which way. Charlie reaches his hand in and digs for a wrench, unable to find the right one. His hand grabs onto a bloody lump of ground red meat.

Off screen, LAUGHTER.

INT. FACTORY

Charlie pulls his head out of the bin to see PRESSMAN #1 and PRESSMAN #2 on the other side of the press. They are laughing. They enunciate in the custom of those who work in loud places.

PRESSMAN #2 (joking)
That was mine from the refrigerator. It’s only about a year old, so I thought you’d like it.

PRESSMAN #1
That's it, man. (pauses)
That's the last run.

PRESSMAN #2 (aside)
Look at him. He hates that mess in his tools.

PRESSMAN #1
You hate that mess of tools, don't you? (pause)
We knew you would. We was just playing a joke on you.

PRESSMAN #2
You're a good printer, Charlie. You'll find something. We was just playing a joke.

PRESSMAN #1
You're alright, man. Hau. Hau.

PRESSMAN #2
Yeah, hau. That's right. Ol’ hau.

PRESSMAN #1 (waits)
We're all supposed to meet in the break room. Final hugs and all that.

Pressman #1 walks off, dusting his gloves.

Charlie digs in the plastic bin again. He finally finds tool he wants.

PRESSMAN #2
Hey, man. You get it, right? It's all done. We just walk away. Leave it.

CHARLIE
Leave it? Jammed?

PRESSMAN #2
Hell, yeah. Just leave it. It’s not your problem no more.

Pressman #2 walks away. Charlie turns a roller on the press with the wrench and pulls paper out of the jam. The newspaper unfolds like an accordion in his hands. He reads the half printed page.

CLOSE UP: INT. FACTORY - PAPER

The headline, "The Chronicle Says Goodbye After 132 Years".

INT. FACTORY

PRESSMAN #2 (calling)
Just leave all that shit!

Charlie walks through the factory, past finishing machinery where a few WORKERS continue to wheel newspapers onto pallets and plastic wrapping the stacks for delivery and shipping.

Charlie wads up and tosses the paper on the ground. He removes his gloves and ear protection as he walks. Behind him, a WORKER sweeps up paper with a push broom.

CUT TO: INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

The contents of Charlie's small house have been boxed up and moved into the garage. The TV remains out, but it is turned off and sitting on a box, too. Reflections show in the curved glass of the TV screen.

Charlie carries a box into the garage, where the light is on. He stacks the box on top of another.

INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE

Charlie adjusts the corner of the box to align neatly with the one below it.

Charlie removes the tools from his pegboard and packs them in a toolbox. He does this carefully, as though lining up the dead.

Charlie takes the drying line down from the ceiling and winds it around his hands. He places it on top of the tools in the toolbox and shuts the lid.

He grabs a SILVER SUITCASE near the door, shuts off the garage light and leaves the room.

CUT TO: INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - ONE HOUR LATER

All emptied and moved to the garage. We hear a SHOWER running, and then shut off.

INT. CHARLIE'S BATHROOM

Charlie combs his hair. He puts on a white shirt and tie. He steps into a pair of black pants. He puts on a black suit jacket.

INT. CHARLIE'S GARAGE

Charlie turns on the light. He lays his wet towel and dirty clothes across the broken recliner, neatly. He folds the towel over the arm of the chair. He's wearing his nice suit, and the way he lays the other clothes in the recliner looks as though he disappeared, leaving his favorite T-shirt and jeans behind.

Charlie puts a pair of sneakers at the base of the recliner, as though his feet simply lifted out of them.

CUT TO: EXT. OFFICE - 15 MINUTES LATER

Charlie walks down the street toward the camera. He wears black alligator-skin boots, and he carries his silver suitcase. He puts the suitcase on the curb. We can see it's heavy.

He walks to the front door of a small residential office. He takes an envelope out of his breast pocket and writes on it with a pen.

CLOSE UP: ENVELOPE

Charlie drops a key into the envelope, seals it, and puts it in the mail slot in the door.

EXT. OFFICE

Charlie picks the suitcase up again. He continues walking down the street.

Behind him, the office door opens. MRS. RENTAL AGENT holds the envelope in her hand. With some grunting, she maneuvers her belly into the opening of the screen door.

MRS. RENTAL AGENT (waving the envelope)
Okay.

CHARLIE (turning)
I will call you?

MRS. RENTAL AGENT
Okay.

CHARLIE
One month.

MRS. RENTAL AGENT
Okay. Okay.

She leans against the rail outside the screen door, wearing a robe and pair of slippers.

CUT TO: EXT. ALLEYWAY

Two BOYS lean over something on the ground. One of them flicks a lighter. Charlie walks past the alleyway and stops. The lighter FLICKS a few times until a fuse lights. Both boys step back and prepare for the explosion.

CLOSE UP: TOY ALLIGATOR

A string of firecrackers EXPLODE in the mouth of a rubber alligator. Smoke rolls out of the mouth with singed pieces of paper. The kids cheer and jump around with joy.

EXT. ALLEYWAY

The kids notice Charlie standing behind them. They run off.

EXT. ALLEYWAY

Over Charlie's shoulder, the toy continues to smoke.

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - TICKET COUNTER

Charlie shows his passport and gets a boarding pass. He keeps the suitcase with him.

INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - SECURITY CHECKPOINT

Charlie removes his alligator-skin boots while he waits in line.

Charlie puts his boots and his suitcase on the belt, feeding them into the X-ray scanner.

Charlie steps through the metal detector and goes to get his luggage on the other side of the X-ray scanner. The boots slide out, but not the suitcase. AGENT #1, a man, approaches him.

AGENT #1
Sir, you can go ahead and put your boots on. Your suitcase needs additional screening, however. Could you step over here with me, please?

Charlie puts his boots on. His pants bunch around the boot tops as he follows AGENT #1 to a table.

AGENT #1
Have a seat. Is this your only luggage? Only one?

Charlie nods. Agent #1 starts to open the suitcase.

CHARILE
Please don't mess it up. Please don’t!

AGENT #1
I need to--Sir! Please, sir, sit down.

AGENT #2, an older woman, immediately responds. A few PASSENGERS notice the outburst.

Charlie sits as Agent #1 opens the suitcase. Agent #1 is confused. He prepares to run a test for gunpowder on the case.

AGENT #2
What is it?

CLOSE UP: SUITCASE

The suitcase contains stacks and stacks of printed cards, tied down in a patchwork. Among the stacks, paper objects are scattered and have been soaked in ink. The objects resemble beets. The suitcase and its contents are more a piece of art than a piece of luggage.

AGENT #1
Some cards and stuff, I don't know. I think it's okay.

AGENT #2
What's this?

She touches one of the cards. It's in Chinese.

CHARLIE
Please don't.

AGENT #2
I’m just asking what it is.

Charlie looks past her. Agent #1 flips through some of the cards.

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - MOVING WALKWAY

Several PASSENGERS stand on the walkway. Men, women, children, the tired and huddled masses--they ride toward the walkway’s end.

Carrying his suitcase, Charlie walks past them in the foreground.

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - GATE

Charlie sits at his gate with his suitcase open checking the contents.

A YOUNG GIRL walks up behind the open case. She's five years old and she stands about five feet away.

Charlie notices her and withdraws a card from his suitcase. He holds it out to her, facedown. She runs away.

Across the waiting area, a MAN in a baseball cap motions angrily for YOUNG GIRL to get back here.

MAN gets up and walks to the gate counter. He talks to GATE ATTENDANT, a young woman.

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - GATE - TEN MINUTES LATER
SUPERIOR AGENT, an athletic man dressed rather plainly, approaches Charlie.

SUPERIOR AGENT
I like those boots. What is that? Alligator? Sharp. Reminds me of a pair Cammie Colin used to wear. (showing his badge discretely) Would you please come with me, and bring your bag there, too, please.

Man, Young Girl and Gate Attendant watch as Charlie and Superior Agent leave the gate area.

CUT TO: TITLE CARD

“Scene Deleted”

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - GATE - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Gate Attendant gives Charlie a baggage claim ticket.

GATE ATTENDANT
Sir, your suitcase is fine, but it does exceed the weight limit for carry ons. It's a little too heavy. Too heavy. A little bit. But there’s no problem.

CHARLIE

Too heavy? A little bit?

GATE ATTENDANT
We’ve checked it to your final destination for you.

CHARLIE
You checked it already. Everyone has checked it.

GATE ATTENDANT
I know, Mr. Brown, but you have nothing to worry about. You'll be able to pick your bag up at your final destination. No problem.

CHARLIE
Okay, okay, okay, okay.

CUT TO: INT. PORTLAND AIRPORT - MOVING WALKWAY

Superior Agent carries Charlie's suitcase. The suitcase has a yellow and red "Security" tape wrapped around it.

Agent #1 and Agent #2 follow Superior Agent. The three of them walk in formation, going the opposite way of the moving walkway.

CUT TO: EXT. TAOYUAN AIRPORT - NIGHT

An airplane lands with a SONIC ROAR.

CUT TO: INT. TAOYUAN AIRPORT - GATE

Passengers emerge from an arriving flight. Most are Asian. Charlie is in the crowd.

CUT TO: INT. TAOYUAN AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CAROUSEL

The carousel lights up and people begin to gather luggage.

FADE TO: Almost every bag has been unloaded, and only a few people remain. One is Charlie.

FADE TO: Only one man waits. It’s Charlie. The carousel light turns off.

Charlie climbs up and peers into the opening of the baggage carousel. Nothing. Charlie looks around and doesn’t see anyone. He kicks at the side of the baggage carousel, his boots glancing off the stainless steel. He composes himself quickly.

JANITOR, an old Asian woman, looks up from her mopping. She resumes.

The carousel starts again, unceremoniously and without the light this time. Charlie doesn’t notice the few cards that have come out until his suitcase finally emerges. The suitcase rolls over, half open, onto the carousel. The yellow and orange airport security tape has been broken.

The suitcase moves through the frame, surrounded by hundreds of cards that have been dislodged from the inside of the case. A ton of cards. Too many cards.

Tissue paper pieces, presumably tucked between the cards to protect them, begin to scatter in the ambient breeze that moves through public places.

Charlie scoops cards from the conveyor belt. He puts them in his jacket, carefully at first.

CLOSE UP: CARDS

Cards scroll by on the carousel in disheveled piles and pieces, some reading, “Like a quivering bird” “He shakes out his cape” “Wanders” “To an empty field” “Roars (to no one at all)” "’I've nothing left, but I'm free!’" “His knees wobble.” “He doesn't know where he is.” “He drops his palm-bark hat.” “He drops his rain cape into the mud.” “Staggers.” “Pushes on.” “Singing wildly all the way to Five Willows.” “Does he make a living?” “Does he face his life?” “It is not proper to ask.” “He is free.”

INT. TAOYUAN AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CAROUSEL

Charlie runs to grab the cards that have gotten the furthest away from him. His boots slip on the freshly mopped floor.

FADE OUT

THE END