

5 to 7

by

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DISTRIBUTION DRAFT

FADE IN:

EXT. PARIS - MONTMARTRE - NARROW STREET - 10 YEARS AGO - DAY

A YOUNG WOMAN, her back to us, tenderly places a small bouquet of flowers on the thin sidewalk.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEW YORK - MURRAY HILL - PRESENT DAY

An insipid brick apartment building.

INT. APARTMENT

A starter one-bedroom. The living room is a writer's workspace. The walls are BLANKETED in rejection letters from magazines and book publishers. We notice the particularly irritating profile of Eustace Tilley, unofficial mascot of *The New Yorker* magazine. He sits above that organ's form-letter rejection and seems to ooze disdain.

At a black Formica parsons table, BRIAN, 25, hammers away at a computer keyboard -- hunt-and-peck style, but fairly fast. He has a good, kind, idealistic face.

BRIAN (V.O.)

When I think of what I wrote back
then, you can't even call them tears --
rivers of shame come out of my eyes.

EXT. EAST 55TH STREET - LUNCHTIME THAT DAY

Brian walks west toward 5th Avenue on the north side of 55th. He's lost in thought, doubtless about a story, when something catches his eye:

Across the street, at the small smoking nook to the left of the entry stairs to the St. Regis Hotel, ARIELLE stands alone, smoking a Gitanes. She's 35, a European beauty.

The sight of her snaps Brian to. He stops walking, stares. In his time in New York, he has seen a thousand beautiful women on the streets and has never spoken to one -- boldness is not his first instinct.

But this time, something makes him go.

As he crosses the street, he feels in his pocket for a pack of Marlboro Lights, reminds himself to breathe and to keep his shoulders back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

What to say? What to say? Her gaze falls to him just as he reaches the sidewalk. Her eyes are light brown and dazzling, and his mind goes white. But there is no turning around now.

He arrives at the nook and, silent at first, takes out a cigarette, lighting it with a Zippo. She's still looking at him. The inhale calms him. He smiles warmly, as always. He recognizes her brand of cigarette and wagers -- correctly -- that she is French.

BRIAN
(in passable French,
with SUBTITLES)
We are exiles, the smokers.

She smiles at his absurd choice of opening, at his nervousness, at the courage it must have taken to overcome it, at the comically obvious reason why he did so, and at the instantaneous knowledge that French is not his first language. She likes him already.

When she speaks, she is very confident but very kind. Her every movement is graceful, womanly, and sexy in a subtle, Parisian way. The following in French, with SUBTITLES:

ARIELLE
I don't trust anyone who doesn't
smoke.

BRIAN
Neither do I. They are far too fond
of themselves.

ARIELLE
Exactly.
(then)
Shall we continue in English?

BRIAN
(relieved)
Please.

And they do.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
It's a Catch-22, though -- do you
know this idiom? Catch-22?

ARIELLE
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

A Catch-22, because we are no longer allowed to smoke indoors anywhere, but smoking as you walk down the street is not really enjoyable, and maybe even a little crass.

ARIELLE

Which leaves us here. In a nook like this.

BRIAN

"Nook." Good word.

ARIELLE

("I do speak the language, you know")
I have lived here for ten years.

BRIAN

Still. I know people who have lived here all their lives and have never said "nook." Unless it was followed by "cranny."

ARIELLE

"Cranny" I do not know.

BRIAN

Seriously? You know "nook" but not "cranny"?

ARIELLE

Yes.

BRIAN

That's extraordinary. That's like knowing "shocked" but not "appalled." Or "oopsie" but not "daisy."

ARIELLE

Pardon?

BRIAN

(regretting the riff)
No, it's just, they go together.

ARIELLE

What is "cranny"?

BRIAN

It's...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 (at a loss, suddenly)
 ...like a nook. But narrower.

ARIELLE
 The point is that smokers must band
 together.

BRIAN
 Yes, because they are part of the
 same persecuted minority.

ARIELLE
 And they know this, which makes it
 easy to begin conversations.

BRIAN
 Not that easy.

ARIELLA
 Relatively easy. There is instant
 common ground. A shared contrarian
 spirit. At this nook, I have had
 several interesting conversations.

BRIAN
 Is this one of them?

ARIELLE
 Yes.

BRIAN
 (relieved)
 Good.
 (then)
 My name is Brian.

She laughs.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 What?

ARIELLE
 That is the most American name I
 have ever heard.

BRIAN
 It is?

ARIELLE
 No, I like it. It's just...
 ridiculously American.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Oh.

ARIELLE

(attempts American
accent)

"Briannn."

BRIAN

Yes. May I ask your name?

ARIELLE

(extends her hand)

Arielle.

They shake hands.

BRIAN

Like "The Little Mermaid."

ARIELLE

(scowls)

What?

BRIAN

"The Little Mermaid." A Disney movie.
The Little Mermaid's name was Ariel.

ARIELLE

I don't know this word, "Mermaid."

BRIAN

Wow. I mean, you set the bar so
high with "nook."

ARIELLE

What is it?

BRIAN

(regretting this riff,
too)

Mermaid? Uh, it's a woman... a
beautiful woman who lives in the sea
and has... the tail of a fish. And
yet she's... somehow for her, it all
works. Mermaids are generally very
confident and comfortable with
themselves. Pure of heart and yet
slightly mysterious. It seems.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 ARIELLE
 (realizing)
Ah, oui -- "sirene." Of course.

 BRIAN
 (testing it out)
"Sirene."

 ARIELLE
 (testing it out)
"Mermaidde."

 BRIAN
Yes.

 ARIELLE
"Cranny."

 BRIAN
Yes.

 ARIELLE
 (enjoying him)
Well. Enchantee, Briannn.

 BRIAN
Enchantee.

She finishes her cigarette and puts it out in the nook's ashtray. He sneaks a look at the third finger on her left hand and discovers it ringless.

 ARIELLE
I must go back inside. To finish coffee with two non-smoking, entirely untrustworthy people.

 BRIAN
I understand.

 ARIELLE
We will meet again?

The question catches him off guard. He is unaccustomed to such forwardness.

 BRIAN
I would like it very much if that were to happen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

If it "were to happen"? It is not an act of G-d, Briannn. I am here every Friday at the close of lunch, with my Gitanes. You would simply have to be here as well.

BRIAN

Then, I will be.

ARIELLE

Good. Until next Friday, then.

BRIAN

Until next Friday.

She smiles at him, turns, and mounts the stairs. The DOORMAN nods to her with familiarity and starts the revolving door. She steps in without looking back, and disappears into the hotel. Brian watches the door continue to spin.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(to himself)

"The Little Mermaid." What is wrong with you?

(then, happily, as he turns for the street)

On the other hand, let us not bury the lead.

INT. BRIAN'S BUILDING - MAILBOX AREA - THE NEXT DAY

Brian extracts from his mailbox business-sized envelopes from *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers*.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

Brian adds the contents of those envelopes -- two rejection letters -- to the Ocean of No, as he speaks on his cellphone. The letter from the *Atlantic Monthly* bears the word "Sorry," handwritten in the corner.

BRIAN

(into phone)

Work is going very well, Dad, thanks for asking. If nothing else, I think I've got a really interesting wallpaper design. Well, it's going to sound stupid, but the fiction editor from *Atlantic Monthly* handwrote "Sorry" in the corner of my latest rejection. Yes. It means I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 got close. It's a code, Dad. I
 told you it was going to sound stupid.
 No -- thank you -- but I still have
 some left from the summer job. No --
 thank you -- but no law school.
 Please take the money you earmarked
 for tuition and spend it on yourself
 and Mom.

Brian turns on his computer.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Listen, I gotta go. I love you,
 too.

EXT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - THE FOLLOWING FRIDAY

It is RAINING SHEETS. Arielle, holding an umbrella, comes
 out the revolving doors and takes in the inclemency of the
 weather. Has it kept Brian away?

Nope -- there he is, wet despite his raincoat and umbrella,
 smiling up at her from the smoking nook, freshly smitten but
 a little less nervous this time. She smiles back. She opens
 her umbrella and descends the stairs to join him. When she
 gets there, she kisses him on both cheeks. He is not
 expecting the second kiss.

ARIELLE
 I thought perhaps you wouldn't come.

BRIAN
 It never occurred to me.

ARIELLE
 I mean, because of the rain.

BRIAN
 (facetiously)
 Oh, is it raining?

ARIELLE
 (smiles)
 It was a good test. A woman has to
 know what sort of man she's dealing
 with.
 (then)
 What sort of man am I dealing with?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Damp. A damp sort of man. But happy
in his... dampness.

(then)

What sort of woman am I dealing with?

ARIELLE

(beat; smiles)

A mermaidde.

She takes out a cigarette. He takes out his Zippo and lights
it before lighting his own.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

They are close together under their commingled umbrellas.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

So. Briannn. What is it you do in
your life that leaves you free to
wander across the street in the
afternoons and smoke in nooks and
talk to strangers?

BRIAN

(uncomfortable saying
it)

I write. I'm a writer.

ARIELLE

Of...?

BRIAN

Fiction. Stories.

ARIELLE

Have you published?

BRIAN

Not yet.

ARIELLE

How old are you?

BRIAN

25.

ARIELLE

Well, then you have plenty of time.

(then)

Are you wondering how old I am?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Yes.

ARIELLE

But you will not ask because it is impolite.

BRIAN

Correct.

ARIELLE

I am 35.

BRIAN

(sincerely)

You look younger than that.

ARIELLE

Whereas you look 25, but seem older. You are an old soul.

BRIAN

May I ask your profession?

ARIELLE

Are you asking me if I'm a prostitute?

BRIAN

What? No.

ARIELLE

Did that also never occur to you? A woman you find attractive, alone in front of a hotel every Friday, who welcomes your advances?

BRIAN

(ashen beat)

Are you a prostitute?

ARIELLE

Certainly not. How dare you?

BRIAN

You brought it up. I never would have --

She smiles -- she was teasing him.

ARIELLE

I'm retired.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
From prostitution?

He smiles -- he was teasing her.

ARIELLE
I was a model. In Europe. When I
moved here, I stopped.

BRIAN
You retired when you were 25?

ARIELLE
It is a young woman's field. Besides,
there were other things to do.
(then)
What are your stories about?

BRIAN
Uh, various things. One is about
baseball. One is about dogs.

ARIELLE
Dogs?

BRIAN
Yes.

ARIELLE
You wrote a story about dogs?

BRIAN
Yes. Well, but, they're interesting
dogs.

She nods and puts out her cigarette.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Back to coffee with your friends?

ARIELLE
Yes.

BRIAN
Until next Friday?

ARIELLE
If you wish. But, I am free any
week night from 5 to 7.

Once again, he is taken aback by her casual boldness. But
he tries not to let on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
Those are very specific hours.

ARIELLE
Not if you're Parisian.

He scowls, not sure what she means, but sensing that it is best not to pursue the question.

BRIAN
All right. Shall we say... Monday
at 5?

ARIELLE
Do you like museums?

BRIAN
Yes.

ARIELLE
Will you meet me at the Whitney?

BRIAN
I'd be delighted.

ARIELLE
I want to see the Hoppers.

BRIAN
The Hoppers it shall be.

ARIELLE
Good.

BRIAN
Till then, then.

She laughs, but affectionately, at the clumsy phrase.

ARIELLE
Till then.

She smiles and mounts the stairs, the Doorman starting the revolving door, this time giving them both a nod of familiarity.

When she's gone, he starts away, one part bewildered, nine parts delighted.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - SATURDAY NIGHT

Rejection letters are added to the wall -- from *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Esquire*. Brian is on his cellphone, this time with his Mom.

BRIAN

(into phone)

No, Mom, he didn't hand-write "We will publish your next story." Is that what Dad told you? He just wrote "Sorry." No, they didn't write anything on today's rejections. It's not a step backward. Progress is not linear. I don't know why they rejected them, Mom. They don't really say.

He turns on his computer.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Listen, I gotta go. I love you, too.

INT. WHITNEY MUSEUM - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY - 5:15 PM

Brian and Arielle are looking at Hopper's "Early Sunday Morning," which, to Brian, looks like a perfectly nice picture of some perfectly appealing West Village houses on a perfectly lovely Sunday morning. He is smiling at them contentedly, until:

ARIELLE

(conclusively)

It is about death.

BRIAN

I beg your pardon?

ARIELLE

And menace. It is about death and menace.

BRIAN

It's houses. Nice houses. And it's sunny.

ARIELLE

Is there any life on the street?

BRIAN

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

And what is the opposite of life?

BRIAN

Death, but --

ARIELLE

It's like a neutron bomb went off.

BRIAN

Maybe everyone's just asleep.

ARIELLE

And the menace! Look at that black tower in the background. A skyscraper. It is coming for those row houses.

BRIAN

The skyscraper is coming?

ARIELLE

The massive urban footprint is coming to annihilate those row houses. Those row houses are on death row.

BRIAN

I don't --

ARIELLE

And what is more American than a skyscraper? Nothing. The skyscraper is America. So logically, America is menace. America is death.

BRIAN

You know, this may be why there's friction between our two countries.

ARIELLE

And it's not just this painting.

She is raising her voice, now, and other MUSEUM-GOERS are starting to notice. Arielle doesn't care, but Brian looks around apologetically.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Look at this one!

She moves to "7 AM," a seemingly innocuous portrait of a storefront with some woods behind.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Not a sign of life!

BRIAN

It's called "7 A.M." Which means
it's 7 AM.

ARIELLE

And what do they sell in that store?

BRIAN

Um...

ARIELLE

Nothing! It's a Mafia front.

BRIAN

Oh, for the love of G-d.

ARIELLE

And those woods behind?

BRIAN

Let me guess: menace?

ARIELLE

(louder still)

Deep, dark, bottomless menace.

She moves on to "Nighthawks," the famous picture of the urban diner at night.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

And this one!

BRIAN

This one has people in it.

ARIELLE

Dead people.

BRIAN

They're alive.

ARIELLE

Not really. Look at that man? Is
he alive? And the soda-jerk? Is
that any kind of life? And the
prostitute?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

She's not a prostitute. What is it with you and prostitutes?

ARIELLE

What is she, then?

BRIAN

She's, I don't know, she's a beautician.

ARIELLE

They are all dead. And the store across the street is out of business. And no one lives in the apartment upstairs. The tenants have been evicted and the building condemned. The people in the diner may be the last survivors on earth. And their days are numbered. And they know it -- you can see it in their faces. This Hopper is supposed to be the quintessential American painter? Well if that's true, then America is not alive.

BRIAN

America is alive, okay? And you have a somewhat downbeat world-view.

ARIELLE

No I don't. And, prove it.

BRIAN

Prove what?

ARIELLE

That America is still alive.

BRIAN

(indicating other museum-goers)

Look around.

ARIELLE

(looking)

They don't seem particularly alive to me. Prove it.

He scowls, then gets an idea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

All right.

And, suddenly, he takes her by the shoulders and kisses her. He's just as surprised as she is.

It's a pretty long kiss, considering. Not too intimate, but definitely romantic. Other museum-goers are staring at them, now. When it finally ends:

ARIELLE

(tossed off)

You may be right -- I don't know.

INT. L'ABSINTHE RESTAURANT - EAST 67TH ST. - THE SAME
EVENING - 6:10 PM

Brian and Arielle are at an outdoor table.

ARIELLE

After ten years in New York I still cannot understand why there are not more outdoor cafes.

A crosstown bus BELCHES A CLOUD of exhaust fumes as it passes.

BRIAN

(coughs)

Couldn't tell you.

ARIELLE

I love it here, though. It is the city most like Paris.

BRIAN

What made you come?

ARIELLE

I married a diplomat, and he was assigned here.

BRIAN

I wondered if you had ever been married. What happened to him?

ARIELLE

What do you mean?

BRIAN

The person you were married to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

Were married to?

(then)

Am married to. Nothing happened to him. He works at the French Consulate. It's eight blocks from here.

Brian is stunned. A moment, then:

BRIAN

S, uh, so you're... married?

ARIELLE

Of course. What did you think?

BRIAN

I thought you were... not married.

ARIELLE

Why would you think that?

BRIAN

Why would I not think that? I mean, for one thing, you don't wear a wedding ring.

Even as she argues, there's a gentleness about it.

ARIELLE

So American. You need a signpost for everything, or you completely lose your way.

BRIAN

It's not just American. Many cultures have... indicators of being married -- rings, piercings, uh, dots -- designed to keep people out of exactly this sort of awkward situation.

ARIELLE

Do you wish you were not in this situation?

BRIAN

(going past that one)

Besides which, we... seemed to be mutually pursuing one another --

ARIELLE

So?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

It's just that I would have thought that at some point you'd mention --

ARIELLE

Must everything be mentioned? Can nothing be culled from the subtext?

BRIAN

Well --

ARIELLE

Who would retire at 25 for any other reason besides marriage?

BRIAN

A model, you said.

ARIELE

My husband, like many Frenchmen, felt it was untoward for a diplomat's wife to be on international display in her underwear. And really I could not disagree.

BRIAN

No, well, sure.

ARIELLE

Did you not understand the meaning of "5 to 7"?

BRIAN

Was my confusion about "5 to 7" unclear? I thought I was very clear about my confusion.

ARIELLE

I thought you were kidding.

BRIAN

No, I was actually confused.

ARIELLE

Oh.

(then)

Well.

(then)

The hours of 5 to 7 are traditionally reserved for mistresses and boyfriends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Seriously? The French actually block out time for that?

ARIELLE

Not the French, the Parisians. Please. We are as little like the rest of France as New Yorkers are like the rest of America.

BRIAN

Sorry. The Parisians --

ARIELLE

Not all of them, of course. Just some.

BRIAN

The amoral ones?

ARIELLA

The old fashioned ones.

BRIAN

1 to 3, lunch, 3 to 5, conference call, 5 to 7, commit adultery --

ARIELLE

Look --

BRIAN

Are there set hours for breaking other commandments? Do you covet at 9:30? Worship false idols from 10 to noon?

She smiles, enjoying him.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(realizing)

Do you have children?

ARIELLE

Two. Would you like to see pictures?

It's all getting more stunning by the second. But Brian is always polite. And he really would like to see the pictures.

BRIAN

Yes.

She takes two small photos from her wallet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

Marc is 7, and Elodie is 5.

BRIAN

(looks at them;
sincerely)

They're beautiful children.

ARIELLE

Thank you. They are the lights of
my life.

(then, looking at him)

You are really thrown by this, aren't
you?

BRIAN

(nods vigorously)

I, yes, uh huh.

ARIELLE

My husband has a mistress. One day
I will stand next to her at his
funeral.

BRIAN

Is that going to be... anytime soon?

ARIELLE

In my culture, this is not judged so
harshly.

BRIAN

Okay, but we're not in your culture.
We're in my culture. And in my
culture, if we didn't have things to
judge harshly, we wouldn't know what
to do all day.

ARIELLE

Well, maybe your culture needs to
grow. Maybe there are other ways to
look at life. Maybe there are some
people you marry and others you love.

BRIAN

(beat)

It's very hard to win an argument
with you.

ARIELLE

Well, better you know that now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He laughs. And then:

BRIAN

Arielle. I have nothing but respect for your culture. The French have been French for much longer than the Americans have been American. I mean, a pre-War building in New York refers to World War II. In Paris, it's the Crusades. I get it. And I would never say that one way of life is any better than another. In addition to which, you're older than I am, and wiser, I'm sure. And you're beautiful and elegant and smart. And charming, and funny. And interesting and kind. And sexy and warm. And you feel like family, which is wonderful.

ARIELLE

Are you seriously telling me that a "but" is coming at the end of this sentence?

BRIAN

Yes. "But"... naive and Puritanical and unsophisticated as it may be, being with you would be... an affair, and, to me, not ethical. Unethical. Not good, ethically.

A moment. And then, when she speaks, it's with the kindness that always flows beneath all her bluster and banter.

ARIELLE

I must respect your ethics if I ask you to respect mine.

BRIAN

Thank you. And I'm sorry. I'm probably the stupidest man on the face of the earth.

ARIELLE

You are not.

She puts the pictures away and makes ready to go.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Should you change your mind, I will continue to be at the smoking nook
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)
 on Fridays. But if I never see you
 again, do know that I will always
 remember you very fondly.

The honesty and openness with which their relationship is ending is as shocking to Brian as was that with which it began.

BRIAN
 And I you.

He looks at her. Her eyes are moist. This surprises him.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Are you okay?

ARIELLE
 I'm sad. It was the birth of love.

And when she says it, both know it's true. But he doesn't change his mind. Rules are rules.

She rises, and then he does, too. She leans across the table and kisses him once on each cheek. He is expecting the second kiss this time.

Then, she smiles and walks away, again without looking back. She turns the corner onto 3rd Avenue, and is gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - A WEEK LATER

He is writing, but without much enthusiasm, energy or concentration. As if magnetized, his eyes drift repeatedly to the "day and date" at the corner of the computer screen. We see that it's Friday the 7th, toward the end of lunchtime.

After a moment, he stops typing, his thoughts wandering. Then he forces them back and resumes working.

EXT. SMOKING NOOK - SAME TIME

Arielle is smoking alone, her eyes distant, her Gitanes dwindling down. She puts it out and goes up the hotel stairs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - A WEEK LATER

Today he is staring at the computer day and date -- Friday the 14th, lunchtime -- without lifting a finger to work. When he realizes he's doing this, he takes his head in his two hands and turns it back to the center of the screen. He types a listless word or two.

EXT. SMOKING NOOK - SAME TIME

Arielle smokes alone. She seems not to be particularly enjoying it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - A WEEK LATER

Brian's chin rests on his hands, which are folded in front of the keyboard. Work is the farthest thing from his mind. His eyes flit to the day and date -- Friday the 21st, lunchtime -- and then, in a rush, he gets up.

BRIAN
(to himself)
Fuckin' hell.

He grabs his jacket and is out the door.

EXT. SMOKING NOOK - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Arielle stands alone, taking out a Gitanes. She puts it to her lips and goes into her purse for a lighter, but

A ZIPPO

comes into frame, Brian's hand holding it. Her eyes widen in surprise as she realizes who's behind her. But she doesn't look at him right away. She takes in the flame, exhales the smoke, and then, suddenly and without a word, turns into his arms.

ARIELLE
I can't believe it took you three weeks.

BRIAN
(laughs)
Sorry.
(then)
What happens now?

She reaches into her purse and takes out

A ST. REGIS HOTEL KEY CARD

She presses it into his hand.

ARIELLE
Room 2117. 5 o'clock.

EXT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - 55TH STREET ENTRANCE - 5 O'CLOCK
THAT EVENING

Brian, nervous, mounts the stairs. He has gone home, showered, shaved, changed, and probably changed again. The doorman nods welcome and starts the revolving doors.

INT. ST. REGIS - LOBBY

It is surprisingly small, elegant but understated. The RECEPTIONISTS and CONCIERGES all have great personal style.

Brian passes the entrance to the bar, moves through the sitting area, turns left at the front desk, and enters a waiting elevator. BENOIT, a uniformed, white-gloved elevator operator 50 years of age, is inside.

BENOIT
What floor, Monsieur?

BRIAN
21, please.

Benoit pushes the button for 21, and the elevator ascends. Brian stands there, awkward in the silence. After a few floors:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
So how is the crowd today, well-behaved?

BENOIT
Yes, Monsieur.

BRIAN
Very good.

More awkward silence, then:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
That's great that they have you guys in the elevators. That's just a great touch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BENOIT
Thank you, Monsieur.

Mercifully, the elevator reaches 21.

BRIAN
Have a good evening.

BENOIT
The same to you, Monsieur.

Brian steps out into the swanky hallway and follows the directions -- engraved on a discreet brass plaque -- until he reaches Room 2117. He pauses at the door, then rings the bell.

ARIELLE (O.S.)
(sweetly, from within)
Use your key.

He does. The light flashes green, and he enters.

INT. ROOM 2117

It's a beautiful corner suite, with two exposures. French Provincial, but under control.

Arielle is in the living room pouring two flutes of Mumm. Paolo Conte is SINGING quietly on the stereo -- "Via Con Me." The curtains are drawn so that the light is low. You can't hear the street.

She looks at him as she pours, and smiles with her singular warmth.

ARIELLE
How are you?

BRIAN
Very well, thank you. And you?

ARIELLE
Very well. Will you have some champagne?

BRIAN
Please.

She brings it to him and looks him in the eye as they clink glasses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

Always look the person in the eye
when you touch glasses.

BRIAN

I know -- seven years of bad luck.

ARIELLE

Bad luck? That is the American
version?

BRIAN

Yes. What's the French?

ARIELLE

Seven years of bad sex.

BRIAN

Good lord.

ARIELLE

Well, I think that tells you
everything you need to know about
our two cultures.

BRIAN

At any rate, best to look the other
person in the eye.

ARIELLE

Yes.

They sip the champagne.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Are you nervous?

BRIAN

No, I do this all the time.

She laughs.

ARIELLE

I am.

BRIAN

What?

ARIELLE

Nervous. I am nervous around you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

(beat)

That's ridiculous.

ARIELLE

Good nervous, I mean. Like a young girl.

BRIAN

You don't show it.

ARIELLE

No proper French girl ever would.

BRIAN

(beat)

Sometimes, life is really something.

She scoffs.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

What?

ARIELLE

Maybe you should write fortune cookies.

He blushes, realizing how lame the line was.

And then, her expression changes, and Brian sees that the flirting and joking are over for now.

She takes him by the hand and walks into the bedroom. After they cross the threshold, she turns to him, her face searching his. For her, we see, this is no whim, no caprice.

They kiss. They make love. It is tender and unguarded.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROOM 2117 - BEDROOM - TWO HOURS LATER

They are naked, post-lovemaking, in the sheets.

BRIAN

I have to change careers, now.

ARIELLE

What will you become?

BRIAN

A tourist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She laughs. Then she looks at him, trying to read his expression.

ARIELLE

What?

BRIAN

(quietly)

It was totally different.

ARIELLE

From your expectations?

BRIAN

From the past.

ARIELLE

Good.

(then)

And, just so you know, you are a natural lover. Your body expresses beautifully what is in your heart.

He looks at her, then reaches for the hotel pad on the nightstand.

BRIAN

I'm just going to write that down.

ARIELLE

Have none of the other women you've been with told you as much?

BRIAN

Uh, no.

ARIELLE

Well, they have thought it, I promise you.

She gets out of bed and starts to get dressed.

BRIAN

Do you have to go?

ARIELLE

It is nearly 7. There's a fund-raiser at my children's school.

He nods, feeling the outside world re-assert itself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Please don't take this the wrong way... but it suddenly seems impossible to me that you have that life.

ARIELLE

I do not take it the wrong way. In fact, I feel the same. And will, until the moment I next see my children.

BRIAN

(beat)

Will I see you tomorrow?

ARIELLE

No. Monday. 5. The same room. Hold onto the key.

BRIAN

Trust me.

She's dressed and ready to go. She doesn't look the least bit disarranged.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

How do you do that?

ARIELLE

What?

BRIAN

Look like that. In 30 seconds. Me, I'm going to have to walk through a car wash.

She smiles and warmly kisses him goodbye.

ARIELLE

Say, "Till then, then," like you did last time.

BRIAN

"Till then, then."

ARIELLE

(smiles)

I like that.

She turns and goes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The door closes, and he's suddenly alone.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - VERY LATE THAT NIGHT

He is pacing back and forth, smoking a cigarette with the windows open. On his computer screen is a SCREENSAVER -- a scroll that reads, "Brian Bloom is not working," and repeats at various angles.

BRIAN (V.O.)

I was way, way too happy to write.

EXT. PARIS THEATER - 58TH STREET - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY
EVENING - 5 PM

Brian waits, hands in pockets, and then Arielle comes around the corner from 5th Avenue. They kiss twice on the cheek.

BRIAN

How are you?

ARIELLE

I missed you.

(then)

Shall we go in?

He nods. As they do, we notice the theater's marquis: there is a 5:05 showing of a film with a French title.

INT. PARIS THEATER - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Brian and Arielle watch the dialogue-driven French-language film.

ARIELLE

Are you reading the subtitles?

BRIAN

("I have to")

These people speak fast.

One CHARACTER launches into a FRENZIED SPEECH. Arielle laughs happily as she listens. Brian squints at the screen; the SUBTITLES say only, "Where are my shoes?"

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Okay, I know he said more than that.

ARIELLE

Shh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

I'm just saying, I have a sense that
I'm not getting the nuances.

ARIELLE

Shhhh.

ON SCREEN, there is another SALVO OF WORDS. She laughs throughout, but then the SUBTITLES say only "They're in the hall closet." Brian turns his palms up -- "Are they kidding?" He shakes his head and eats some popcorn.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Can no American watch a film without
popcorn?

BRIAN

That's right.

ARIELLE

A vulgar tradition. How can films
be taken seriously as art if you are
sitting there chomping popcorn when
you watch them? Do you chomp popcorn
when you read literature?

BRIAN

I eat sunflower seeds. And I spit
the shells into a little cup.

ARIELLE

(horrified)

Do you chomp popcorn at a museum?

BRIAN

I would if I could.

ARIELLE

Your culture has gone over the cliff.

BRIAN

(offering popcorn
bucket)

You know you want some.

ARIELLE

(scoffs Frenchly)

Pta.

He smiles to himself as they return their attention to the screen, where the fast-paced dialogue continues, along with the sorely inadequate subtitles. She resumes laughing. Her

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

enjoyment so pleases him that he altogether stops caring whether he gets the nuances or not. He just watches her.

EXT. PARIS THEATER - LATER

They exit, arm in arm. She is still giggling.

ARIELLE

...And the part where he admitted he had never tasted the cheese?! Wasn't that brilliant?

BRIAN

(nodding, smiling)
No idea what you're talking about.

She laughs some more, stops, gazes at him, and then:

ARIELLE

It's 7.

BRIAN

I know.

ARIELLE

No time to go to the hotel.

BRIAN

I know.

ARIELLE

You're not disappointed?

He looks at her. It's a moment of pure happiness, just standing in front of the Paris Theater on a clear New York evening with the person you are starting to love. PEDESTRIANS passing by, the poetry of the city all around you...

BRIAN

No.

ARIELLE

There is always tomorrow.

BRIAN

Yes.

ARIELLE

I cannot kiss you goodbye in public.

BRIAN

I understand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

People can see us together -- that
is permitted. I can take your arm.
But we cannot kiss.

BRIAN

If those are the rules, those are
the rules.

And then, the following, in French, with SUBTITLES:

ARIELLE

Do not doubt how much I want to.

BRIAN

Sometimes, that is enough.

He smiles and steps to the curb to hail her a taxi.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - THE FOLLOWING DAWN

The computer is dormant. The SCREENSAVER now says, "Still
not working."

Brian is on the couch, wide awake, watching *Jules and Jim* on
a modest television.

EXT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - 55TH STREET ENTRANCE - 4:59 THAT
EVENING

Brian, a decided spring in his step, bops up the stairs to
enter. The Doorman nods and starts the revolving door.

INT. ST. REGIS LOBBY

Brian walks past reception. Before he makes the left to the
elevator bank, the Receptionist, herself gorgeous, smiles
knowingly, but without any judgment. Brian smiles back,
then, to himself:

BRIAN

What world am I in?

He steps onto the elevator. Benoit is there.

BENOIT

Good evening, Monsieur.

Brian is more relaxed than last time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
Benoit, my friend. How goes the
battle?

INT. 21ST FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brian knocks lightly, his card key in hand. But the door opens this time, just wide enough for Arielle's lovely hand to reach through. He takes it and goes inside. The door closes. We remain, politely, in the hall.

EXT. ST. REGIS - 55TH STREET ENTRANCE - 6:55 THAT NIGHT

Arielle departs in a taxi.

BRIAN (V.O.)
She was a mermaid. Mystically
beautiful, pure of heart, and yet,
elusive. Completely mine when she
was with me. But then, always, she
had to go back to the sea.
(beat; apologetically)
Sorry -- I pounded home the metaphor,
there, a little, but I can't help
it. That's really how I felt.

Brian watches the cab, turns, salutes his pal the Doorman, and walks east, spiritedly.

A Sabrett cart is at the curb, and Brian cannot resist. To the VENDOR:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
One, with mustard and sauerkraut,
please, and a Coke, if you would.

VENDOR
Sure.

The fast hands of the vendor prepare and wrap the food and drink. Brian gives him \$7, which includes a proper tip.

BRIAN
Thank you.

VENDOR
(re: tip)
Thank you.

He takes the items and goes, starting hungrily on the hot dog as he walks, feeling as good as he has ever felt in his life, and looking, given the hot dog, the Coke, and his Levis,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

entirely youthful and resoundingly American. And then he notices

A BLACK CITROEN LIMOUSINE

pulling up slowly at the curb. SMALL FRENCH FLAGS are affixed to the front fenders.

The limousine stops, and the rear door opens. Brian realizes, in a rush, that this is very bad.

Like all men when their plots are uncovered, he faces a choice: stand tall or run away. It does not take him long to decide. He straightens, turns and looks, steely-eyed, into the back seat.

VALERY is 47, handsome and extremely elegant. Brioni suit, Hermes tie, J.M. Weston shoes, Cartier watch and wedding band. One look and you know this is a man cowed by nothing and comfortable at the courts of kings. When he speaks, his English is flawless, his accent only adding to his power.

VALERY

Brian?

BRIAN

Yes.

Valery indicates welcome with an open hand.

VALERY

Please -- join me.

Brian hesitates.

VALERY (CONT'D)

By all means, bring your food.

Brian wonders, for an instant, what kind of a yutz he must look like right now, with his street meat and his soda pop, in the eyes of this fabulous Frenchman.

And then, because his instincts tell him it's the right thing to do, he gets into the car. He pulls the door shut behind him.

INT. LIMOUSINE

The driver slowly pulls back into traffic. Valery smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERY
(extends hand)
I am Arielle's husband, Valery.

A beat. Brian shifts the hot dog to free his right hand.

BRIAN
Enchantee.

Valery shakes Brian's hand, despite the prospect of hot dog-related moisture.

VALERY
Enchantee.

In Valery's face, Brian sees the masculine equivalent of Arielle's goodness and compassion.

VALERY (CONT'D)
Forgive the intrusion. But I thought we should meet. Arielle speaks very highly of you.

Brian takes that in, stunned.

BRIAN
She does? To you?

VALERY
Yes. She says you are a fine person. Funny, naturally charming, sincere, extremely bright and kind. She suspects you are very talented.

BRIAN
Uh, thank you.

VALERY
I am quite glad that she has met you, Brian.

BRIAN
You are?

VALERY
In the short time that she has known you, I have seen a light in her eyes that I have never seen before. I myself was never able to inspire it.

A certain sadness crosses his face for just a moment, but then his gracious smile returns.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERY (CONT'D)

And I am so very glad that you can.
I wish to thank you.

BRIAN

(no idea what to say)
You're welcome.

VALERY

I would be pleased if you could join
us at our home, this coming Saturday,
for supper.

Brian is incredulous.

BRIAN

"Us"?

VALERY

("Of course")
Yes.

BRIAN

Really?

VALERY

Yes.

BRIAN

(beat)
Any chance this is a gentlemanly
tactic designed to relax me before
the driver, who turns out to be,
like, the French Lucca Brazzi, turns
around and impales me with a fleur-
de-lis?

VALERY

None.

A beat. There is only one thing to do:

BRIAN

Well, then, thank you for the
invitation, and I will attend with
pleasure.

VALERY

Good! 1007 Park Avenue. 8 o'clock.

And the car pulls up in front of, Brian now realizes, his
own apartment building. This is, naturally, unnerving.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
How did you...

VALERY
(smiles disarmingly)
You are listed in the telephone
directory.

A beat. Brian's alarm evaporates.

BRIAN
(clears throat)
That's true.

VALERY
We will see you Saturday, then.

BRIAN
Yes. Thank you. Bonne soiree.

VALERY
And to you.

Brian gets out of the car. Valery gives a friendly last wave, which Brian returns before closing the door. The limousine pulls out, leaving Brian at the curb, absolutely bewildered.

He looks down and notices the hot dog and Coke, both still in his hand.

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - 21ST FLOOR HALLWAY / ROOM 2117 - THE FOLLOWING EVENING - 5 PM

Arielle opens the door with her key card and finds Brian waiting for her. He's a bit on edge.

BRIAN
I have a few questions.

INT. ROOM 2117 - MINUTES LATER

Brian is drinking champagne liberally.

BRIAN
How did he find out? A Visa bill,
or something?

ARIELLE
What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Well, that's how it happens in the dreadful stories you hear. The spouse finds a Visa card, say, with hotel charges --

ARIELLE

I told him.

BRIAN

(beat)

I beg your pardon?

ARIELLE

With great joy.

BRIAN

You just... volunteered it?

ARIELLE

Of course.

BRIAN

Why?

ARIELLE

Because he is my husband.

BRIAN

(tries to make sense
of that; can't)

Uh huh. Did you know about this... invitation?

ARIELLE

No. It is just like Valery, though. He does lovely things like that.

BRIAN

Why wouldn't he tell you?

ARIELLE

I'm sure he will. You must understand, this is between you and him. You have your own relationship, now.

BRIAN

We do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

If you want it. I highly recommend it to you, by the way. You will come to treasure his friendship. He is that sort of person.

Brian squints in general bewilderment.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

You don't understand things, yet, do you?

BRIAN

(pointedly)

Um, no.

(then)

I feel guilty.

ARIELLE

Why would you feel guilty if he is happy for us?

BRIAN

Because *I don't understand things yet.*

ARIELLE

Aren't human beings, ideally, supposed to deal with each other openly and honestly, and forge connections, rather than antipathy?

BRIAN

Yes.

ARIELLE

So? Don't be so close-minded. Put aside your notions about How People Are. The world will surprise you with its grace, Brian. If you let it.

Brian nods slowly, wanting to agree. Then, sweetly:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

(re: dress)

Unclasp me?

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - LATE THAT NIGHT

The computer is dormant. The SCREENSAVER now says, "Should have gone to law school. May still." Brian is on the couch again, watching *The 400 Blows*.

INT. 1007 PARK AVENUE - LOBBY - THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY NIGHT

Brian, in coat, tie and topcoat, gets out of a taxi. The door is held for him by a uniformed Irish DOORMAN, and he steps into the vaulted, pre-war lobby. A second DOORMAN looks as though he was expecting Brian.

BRIAN
Pierpont, please.

SECOND DOORMAN
12W.

He indicates the way to the elevators.

BRIAN
Thank you.

INT. 1007 PARK AVENUE - ELEVATOR

Brian rides up with another white-gloved ELEVATORMAN. This time, Brian makes no attempt at conversation.

The elevator opens directly onto:

INT. ARIELLE AND VALERY'S APARTMENT

-- in which there are at least A DOZEN PEOPLE, all dressed for dinner, visible through the archway that bridges the living room and foyer. Patrick Bruel is AUDIBLE on the stereo, under the DIN of lively bilingual conversation.

Little MARC and ELODIE stand in the foyer, the greeters, wearing clothes from Flora and Henri. Their English is flawless.

ELODIE
Good evening, and welcome to our home.

BRIAN
Hello.

MARC
May I take your coat?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Uh, sure, thank you.

He gives it to Marc -- it's bigger and heavier than he is. But the child folds it neatly into thirds and wrestles it down the hall without a hint of complaint, and without ever letting any part of it touch the floor.

Brian looks back at Elodie, who indicates, with her little arm, that Brian should enter the living room.

ELODIE

Je vous en prie.

BRIAN

Thank you.

He goes under the archway and into the living room. Valery, conversing with a clutch of guests, sees him first.

VALERY

Brian! Come in, come in. Glad you're here. Meet some people.

He shakes Brian's hand and draws him into the group.

VALERY (CONT'D)

Our friend Brian Bloom, everyone, a very promising young writer. Brian, do you know Placido Domingo?

It is indeed DOMINGO. Brian tries not to appear bowled over as they shake, Brian's hand disappearing into Domingo's, which is the size of a baseball mitt.

BRIAN

A great pleasure, uh, Maestro.

PLACIDO DOMINGO

Enchantee.

VALERY

Former Governor Mario Cuomo, and Matilda Cuomo.

It is THE CUOMOS in the flesh. Over handshakes:

BRIAN

Governor. Mrs. Cuomo.

MARIO CUOMO

Hello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATILDA CUOMO

Delighted.

VALERY

And our friend Jane Hastings.

JANE is very pretty and extremely bright. She is Brian's age, and this creates something of an instant bond.

BRIAN

How do you do.

JANE

Pleased to meet you.

VALERY

Jane is an editor at HarperCollins. Perhaps this will be the first of many handshakes between you two.

Everyone laughs. Jane looks at Valery, and he back at her. In that instant, Brian understands that this woman is Valery's girlfriend. And then, Arielle arrives.

ARIELLE

(to Brian)

Ah! You're here.

BRIAN

Yes.

An appropriate kiss on both cheeks. He hopes he's not blushing.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

The meal is festively underway, amid spirited conversation.

MATILDA CUOMO

If there is a God, I can't imagine that He would be vengeful. What would be the point?

VALERY

I quite agree. Getting angry and slaughtering your own creations? What kind of a God is that?

PLACIDO DOMINGO

Oh, I don't know. I have listened to a few of my own recordings and wanted to kill everyone in the room,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PLACIDO DOMINGO (CONT'D)
including myself and the composer.
Although the composer is generally
already dead.

Laughter from the table.

ARIELLE
Yes, but you, Maestro, though
immortal, are not a God, but a man.

VALERY
Cannot we rationally expect our
creator to be immune to such human
frailties as a bad temper?

And then, from a corner of the long table:

BRIAN
(bravely)
Um, not if we are made strictly in
His image.

This stops everyone. For a moment, Brian wonders, in horror,
if he has spoken when he shouldn't have, or said something
completely boneheaded. After a beat:

MARIO CUOMO
Exactly.

Everyone bursts into laughter. One or two even APPLAUD.

VALERY
Well done, Brian.

PLACIDO DOMINGO
(genially)
Another county heard from.

VALERY
Who is ready for dessert?

Arielle smiles at Brian with pride. Jane, seated next to
him, whispers in his ear.

JANE
Tres bien fait.

EXT. 1007 PARK AVENUE - LATER

LIMOUSINES are double-parked in front, their doors held open
by DRIVERS. The Cuomos, Placido Domingo and other well-heeled

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

guests give each other -- and Brian and Jane, who stand underneath the building's awning -- final waves and CALLED FAREWELLS.

BRIAN
(CALLING in return)
Good night.

PLACIDO DOMINGO
Are you sure I can't drop you?

BRIAN
No, no, thank you, Maestro -- headed downtown.

JANE
(quietly)
Enough already with the "Maestro."

BRIAN
He seems to like it.

JANE
I'm kidding.

His driver holding his door for him, Domingo disappears into the back seat. Doorman #1 steps into the street to hail a taxi.

A moment. Brain breathes, then:

BRIAN
So, tonight actually happened, you're saying.

JANE
(smiles)
You'll get used to it.

BRIAN
The Cuomos sure don't eat much.

JANE
They're just very polite.

BRIAN
(realizing, with sudden shame)
Oh, God -- should I not have had seconds on the snails?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE

It was fine.

BRIAN

Placido Domingo had seconds.

JANE

It was fine, don't worry.

A taxi pulls up. The Doorman opens the door.

JANE (CONT'D)

Split it?

BRIAN

Sure.

They head for the taxi. Jane sees Brian reach into his pocket.

JANE

(quietly)

You don't tip in this situation.

BRIAN

Right, thank you.

He takes his hand out of his pocket.

She gets into the cab. He is about to follow when he hears, from high above him:

MARC

Au revoir, Briannn!

ELODIE

Bonne nuit!

He looks up and sees the two children smiling down and waving from the Pierponts' gorgeous terrace; Arielle and Valery stand behind them, keeping watch.

BRIAN

(CALLING UP)

Bonne nuit! A la prochaine!

INT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

Brian and Jane head downtown on 5th, passing the immortal pre-war residences.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

You certainly seem to know the ropes very well. Have you been with Valery for awhile?

JANE

A year.

BRIAN

Can I ask you something? Do you ever think to yourself, "*What the heck am I doing? This is crazy*"?

JANE

No.

BRIAN

(beat)

Well then could you tell me... what the heck am I doing? Because this is crazy.

JANE

You're being happy.

BRIAN

What?

JANE

Aren't you happy? With Arielle?

BRIAN

(beat; softly)

Very happy.

JANE

As I am, with Valery.

BRIAN

I'm sure. He's a great guy. But, it's adultery. Right?

JANE

It's really more consenting adultery.

BRIAN

So you believe in moral relativism.

JANE

All morality is relative. Are you telling me you don't know that yet?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Okay, but -- forgive me -- don't you want a relationship with more of a future?

JANE

I'm 27 years old. There's plenty of time for a future.

BRIAN

No, of course, it's just --

JANE

Aren't you worrying too much about a future, and not enough about today?

BRIAN

(beat)
Maybe.

JANE

Life is just a collection of moments. The idea is to have as many good ones as you can. And to be smart enough to recognize and enjoy them.

BRIAN

(beat)
It is?

JANE

Did you not just have an evening that you will always remember?

BRIAN

I did.

JANE

Does your relationship with Arielle hurt anyone?

BRIAN

No.

JANE

Doesn't it, actually, make everyone involved happier?

BRIAN

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE

So then stop complaining.

BRIAN

I was taught that there are no free lunches. That one day, the rent comes due, the other shoe drops, and you suffer a thousandfold.

JANE

Who raised you?

BRIAN

Jews.

JANE

Look. If you want to be an excellent writer, you can't have a mediocre life. Because then you won't have any experiences worth writing about. And you can't have a scaredy-cat world view. Because then you won't have the balls to say anything new. So for the sake of your art and your life, you better start letting go of smallness, of the fears that hold you back. I'll give you a baseball metaphor, because Jewish writers love them: swing from the heels. Okay, Brian Bloom?

Brian looks at her. He knows she's right.

BRIAN

Okay.

JANE

Good.

(then, to the DRIVER)

Just here on the right, please, sir.

The cab pulls over. Jane turns to Brian and kisses him on each cheek.

JANE (CONT'D)

I look forward to the next time we see each other, and to observing the evolution of your attitudes.

BRIAN

You're a natural editor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She laughs as she gets out of the car.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY EVENING - 5:30 PM

Brian and Arielle sit on a park bench near 5th. She looks at him in amazement.

ARIELLE
Meet your parents? Really?

BRIAN
Yes.

ARIELLE
Where did this idea come from?

BRIAN
You know, I'm just... trying to swing from the heels.

ARIELLE
Pardon?

BRIAN
Embrace life. Embrace...this. You. I happen to be very close to my parents. The natural thing is to introduce you to them. I'm trying not to let my fears hold me back. Specifically, my fears about introducing you to them. I'm trying to just, in this matter and in general, I'm trying to just... go for it. Just go for stuff.

ARIELLE
(smiles)
God help us now.

BRIAN
I want my parents to know you. Why should I keep our relationship a secret from them?

ARIELLE
Uh, because it goes against everything they stand for?

BRIAN
My mind has been opened. Maybe their minds will be opened.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE

Or maybe they'll disown you.

BRIAN

Well, what's life without a little suspense? But you know what? I really think it'll be fine. I mean, they're Democrats.

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL BAR - ANOTHER EVENING - 6:10 PM

MRS. ARLENE BLOOM, 55, a suburban woman dressed for a Broadway show, comes sailing down the main aisle.

ARLENE

Sorry we're late.

At a window-side table, Brian stands up as Arielle smiles greeting.

BRIAN

No worries -- hi, Mom.

He kisses her, then, forgetting himself, starts to go for the second cheek, but she has already moved off.

ARLENE

(seeing her)

Ariel!

BRIAN

Arielle, Mom.

ARLENE

(extending hand)

Arlene Bloom, how do you do.

ARIELLE

Enchantee.

They shake hands. Arlene removes her coat and scarf and gets herself situated, as:

BRIAN

Where's Dad?

ARLENE

Parking. In Yuma, apparently. This neighborhood is a nightmare.

BRIAN

There are plenty of garages.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARLENE

Have you forgotten who we're dealing with?

BRIAN

(explaining, for Arielle)

Dad refuses to pay for parking. He says it's highway robbery.

Arielle is watching mother and son, smiling warmly and enjoying the show.

ARIELLE

He's absolutely right.

ARLENE

He'll drive around for 45 minutes looking for a spot. Most of the time, when we go out to dinner, he misses the appetizer. Brian, can you ask the waiter if they have a different chair?

BRIAN

I'm sorry?

ARLENE

My back is killing me.

Brian indicates the 40 or so other chairs in the place, all of which are identical.

BRIAN

I think the chairs are all pretty much the same, Mom.

A WAITER approaches, but before he can offer greeting:

ARLENE

I'm sorry, could I trouble you for a different chair?

WAITER

(thrown)

Excuse me?

ARLENE

Something with a higher upper panel?

WAITER

I'm afraid we --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARLENE
No folding chairs in the back?

WAITER
Um --

ARLENE
It's fine.
(gets out of her seat)
I'll stand.

BRIAN
You'll stand?

ARLENE
It's fine.

-- at which point SAM BLOOM, 55, comes trudging in.

SAM
It's highway robbery, the parking in
this berg.

Father and son kiss.

BRIAN
Hiya, Dad.

SAM
Hi, pal. Finally, I had to say
(for Arielle's benefit)
"Oncle" and put it in a garage.
(then, noticing
casually)
Your mother's standing.

BRIAN
I know.

ARLENE
(with umbrage, to Sam)
They have no folding chairs here.

SAM
It's the St. Regis, Arlene.
(then, for Arielle's
benefit)
When we first met, she only sent
back entrees. Now, it's chairs.

Arielle laughs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
Dad, may I introduce Arielle Pierpont.

ARIELLE
Enchantee.

SAM
Oh, no -- I am the one who's
enchanted. That's right -- I studied
the language.

ARIELLE
Formidable.

He makes a great show of kissing her on both cheeks. And then, in a poor accent:

SAM
Et je connais bien les rituels: quand
on fait la connaissance d'une belle
femme, il faut immédiatement la baiser
deux fois!

SUBTITLE: "Yep, and I know the customs: when you meet a beautiful woman, you fuck her twice, right away!"

Brian cringes. Arielle laughs.

BRIAN
(gently)
Uh, Dad, the meaning of the verb
"baiser," which *used to* mean kiss,
has changed a bit over the years.

SAM
It has?

Brian nods.

SAM (CONT'D)
(worried)
Uh-oh.
(then)
What does it mean now?

Brian whispers in his father's ear. Sam goes white as a sheet.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh God.
(to Arielle)
Uh, pardon my French.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

(then, seamlessly)

Seriously, \$29 for two hours, plus tip, and then on top of that, after this we've gotta go across town and find another lot. In the theater district, yet.

ARLENE

We're seeing *Jersey Boys*. Not the original cast, but still.

SAM

(to Arlene; an idea)

It might actually be less expensive to leave the car on the east side and take a cab to the theater and back.

BRIAN

Maybe, could we strategize later on the parking?

The waiter, who has been waiting patiently since the initial chair discussion, seizes his opportunity.

WAITER

What can I get you?

SAM

Table water for me, please.

WAITER

Flat or sparkling?

SAM

No, just table water.

WAITER

Tap water?

SAM

Yes.

WAITER

With ice?

SAM

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARLENE

(as if it's terribly
scandalous)

I think that I am going to have a
Vodka martini.

SAM

You'll be passed out by intermission.
I'll have to sing the second act for
you in the car on the way home.

(to Arielle)

I would drink, but I have to drive
across town.

BRIAN

Yes, you mentioned that.

SAM

(to Arlene, realizing)

Unless we take a cab.

The Waiter looks to Arielle.

ARIELLE

Pastis, s'il vous plait.

WAITER

Tres bien.

BRIAN

Le meme, s'il vous plait.

WAITER

D'accord.

And he goes. Sam smiles proudly, a hand on Brian's shoulder.

SAM

(to Arielle)

Did you ever hear anyone speak better
school-taught French than this kid?
And he knows the current usage. And
this is with, in his whole life, not
one day out of the country.

BRIAN

(sheepishly)

Something of which I'm very proud.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

It's nice that the schedule worked out tonight -- Brian said you were only free until 7.

ARIELLE

That's right.

Everything seems to be going well. And then:

ARLENE

So, Arielle, about whom my son speaks in golden tones, tell us about yourself.

ARIELLE

Well, I'm 35, married, and the mother of two.

This brings everything to a numb, screeching halt.

A beat, and then Arlene slowly sits down, the bad chair notwithstanding, and Sam, without turning his head, raises a hand and CALLS:

SAM

Waiter? Canadian Club.

INT. NEARBY GARAGE - AN HOUR LATER

Brian is with Sam as Sam gives his parking stub to the caged-in CASHIER.

SAM

A married French woman, 35 years of age, with two children. You could stop that sentence anywhere along the way and have reason enough not to be in the relationship.

BRIAN

Dad --

SAM

These are the same French who didn't let us fly over their country on the way to Khadafi.

BRIAN

Okay, but it's not her Frenchness that's really bothering you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

No, but I can't talk about her marital or parental status, because if I do, MY PANCREAS WILL EXPLODE. So instead, I'm dwelling on the relatively benign but still objectionable issue of her Frenchness.

BRIAN

Okay, but --

SAM

In the war, the French *couldn't* wait to give up their Jews.

BRIAN

Nobody could wait to give up their Jews, Dad --

SAM

Also, they surrendered three times. In the same war. Do you have any idea how hard that is to do?

BRIAN

What does --

SAM

Because this is who you're dealing with. Mimi and Joe Fabricant went to Paris for their 25th, and they said it was a festival of rudeness. And Joe even had a phrasebook. And his cousin once removed was at Omaha Beach. Unbelievable ingratitude.

CASHIER

(to Sam)

\$29, please.

SAM

(grumbling, as he reaches for his wallet)

Jesus Christ.

INT. SAM AND ARLENE'S CAR / EXT. EAST 55TH STREET -
MOMENTS LATER

The Blooms' Camry comes around the corner from the parking garage and pulls up at the curb in front of the St. Regis bar entrance. Sam is at the wheel, with Brian in the passenger seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

I really hope you know what you're doing, m'boy. I really hope this does not turn out to be one of those decisions that takes a perfectly good life and turns it for the worse.

BRIAN

It won't.

They notice, out the window, that Arielle and Arlene are LAUGHING together on the sidewalk. Sam is astonished.

SAM

What the hell...?

When the ladies see the car, they kiss goodbye on each cheek.

BRIAN

Look at that, Dad -- she fucked her twice.

Arlene comes around to the passenger side. Brian gets out and holds the door for his mother, who is smiling somewhat impishly. Arlene installs herself in the front seat, and then rolls down the window so that the family can speak.

Arielle waits, smiling, out of earshot, near the bar entrance.

SAM

Arlene? You want to weigh in, please, on the subject of La Femme Robinson over there? Or are you just gonna leave your husband to fight the battle himself? Like you did that time at Karaoke Night, when you put down your microphone and walked off the stage because you couldn't read the words to "It Had to Be You"?

ARLENE

It's good you've let that go.

Then, off Sam's steely look:

ARLENE (CONT'D)

I think that there are two forces on earth you don't ever want to be fighting. One is mother nature. And the other is love.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

What?

ARLENE

She's lovely. It's not an ideal situation. But she adores my son. How can any sensible parent not feel warmly towards someone who adores their child? That's... practically anti-social.

SAM

Okay, so I'm anti-social. Not news. Besides, I'm not saying I don't like her. I don't even know her.

ARLENE

Exactly.

Discussion over.

ARLENE (CONT'D)

I hope you don't mind, Bri, but she gave me her number. We're going shopping. And she's going to teach me how to walk like her.

A beat. Brian smiles big, then leans over and gives his mother a grateful, triumphant kiss -- on both cheeks.

SAM

I cannot tell you how little I want to see a Broadway show right now.

Arlene smiles as the window rolls up. Sam pulls away. Brian returns to Arielle.

BRIAN

It's one of two things, or possibly both.

ARIELLE

What is?

BRIAN

Either nobody is immune to your charms... or the world really can surprise you with its grace.

She looks at him. Pure and beautiful, in the gloaming.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 ARIELLE
 (smiling)
 What?

 BRIAN
 Je t'aime. Mind, body and spirit,
 je t'aime. Just, for the record.

INT. PAYARD RESTAURANT - LEXINGTON & 74TH - ANOTHER EVENING -
5:45 PM

Arielle and a BLINDFOLDED Brian sit at a table in the mezzanine. In front of Brian are a glass of red wine, a glass of white wine, and a baguette.

 ARIELLE
 We start very simply. Taste, please,
 the glass on your left.

He picks up the glass of white wine and takes a sip.

 ARIELLE (CONT'D)
 Is it white, or red?

 BRIAN
 Red.

 ARIELLE
 (beat; amazed)
 My God.

 BRIAN
 (whipping off blindfold)
 You gotta be shitting me.

 ARIELLE
 (affectionately)
 You have the palette of a water
 buffalo. But that is about to change.
 Replace the blindfold, please, and
 take a small piece of baguette, to
 cleanse the palette.

INT. SHERRY-LEHMANN WINE AND SPIRITS - 59TH & PARK -
ANOTHER EVENING - 5:30 PM

Arielle has several bottles of wine -- from various French regions -- on a table for Brian's inspection.

 ARIELLE
 The body of a Bordeaux bottle is
 always straight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
Like a board.

ARIELLE
Pardon?

BRIAN
That's how 'll remember it. Board.
Like Bordeaux.

ARIELLE
(cringes, then soldiers
on)
The body of a Burgundy bottle is
always wide on the bottom, and tapers
to the top.

BRIAN
Like an iceberg.

ARIELLE
What?

BRIAN
Nine-tenths of an iceberg is beneath
the waterline, which is to say low
down. Iceberg --

ARIELLE
(pained)
Like Burgundy.

BRIAN
Exactly.

ARIELLE
(beat; looks at him
contemptuously)
It is all right with me if you keep
your pneumatic devices to yourself.

INT. AIELLOS PIZZA EMPORIUM - 32ND AND 3RD - ANOTHER
EVENING - 6:02 PM

This time it's Arielle who's BLINDFOLDED. She and Brian sit
at a marginally unclean Formica table. A baseball game plays
on the TV over Arielle's shoulder. A glass of amber beer, a
glass of pilsner, and a glass of stout sit in front of her.

BRIAN
Please take a drink from the glass
on your left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arielle drinks from the stout.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Which one is it?

ARIELLE
The pilsner?

BRIAN
Oh, boy.

ARIELLE
Meird.

BRIAN
We have a lot of work to do.

ARIELLE
I was sure it was the pilsner.

BRIAN
All right, now please take a Buffalo
chicken wing, to obliterate the
palette.

INT. P.J. CLARKE'S - 55TH AND 3RD - ANOTHER EVENING - 6:15
PM

Brian and Arielle sit at a table. She is once again
BLINDFOLDED, and before her are open cans of Diet Coke, Diet
Cherry Coke, and Coke Zero. She drinks from the Coke Zero,
then, hopefully:

ARIELLE
Diet Cherry Coke?

Brian scoffs.

BRIAN
What is cherry about that? Where is
the cherriness?

ARIELLE
I don't know. Leave me alone.

A dispenser of paper-wrapped STRAWS is on the table. She
opens the top, grabs one, tears the paper off one end, and
shoots the other end at Brian, hitting him in the forehead.
He scowls. She laughs.

BRIAN
You're a child.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grabs a straw of his own, takes the paper off one end, and shoots the other end at her, hitting her in the nose. He laughs.

She grabs three straws, tears the tops off all of them, and shoots them all at Brian. One hits him, but two miss and fly around the restaurant, one landing in the chicken wing basket of another patron, a Puerto Rican MAN who looks up, taking umbrage.

But by now, FUSILLADES of straw papers are flying back and forth between Arielle and Brian, misfires sailing all over the place. Arielle and Brian laugh and argue and grab for more straws, as the other restaurant PATRONS, the WING COOK and the CASHIER look on in bewilderment that two adults are behaving like this:

 ARIELLE
I'LL KILL YOU!

 BRIAN
YOU HAVE NO CHANCE! MY CAUSE IS
JUST AND MY AIM IS TRUE!

 ARIELLE
THIS IS FOR THE MACDONALDS ON THE
CHAMPS-ELYSEES!

 BRIAN
OH YEAH? WELL, THIS IS FOR VICHY!

 ARIELLE
WELL, THIS IS FOR STARBUCKS AND THE
SUNGLASS HUT!

 BRIAN
THIS IS FOR FRENCH STAND-UP COMEDY!
THE WORST IN THE WORLD!

And the mayhem continues, much to their delight. Even the onlookers can't help but get a laugh out of it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LEXINGTON AVENUE - ANOTHER AFTERNOON - 12:35 PM

Brian is walking north, eating a street pretzel and reading *The New Yorker*. His cellphone RINGS. He looks at the number. It has an Upper East Side exchange.

 BRIAN
Hello?

INT. ARIELLE AND VALERY'S APARTMENT

Arielle looks harried. Marc and Elodie play in the background.

ARIELLE

You're there.

BRIAN

It's you.

ARIELLE

Our Nanny has a respiratory infection.

BRIAN

Uh oh.

ARIELLE

Valery and I have a state luncheon.

BRIAN

Is that worse than a respiratory infection?

ARIELLE

I cannot miss it and the children cannot be left alone.

BRIAN

I'll watch them.

ARIELLE

Are you sure?

BRIAN

Delighted. I'll take them to the park.

ARIELLE

You can just watch them here, if it will be easier.

BRIAN

No, no -- park's much more fun. In fact, I have an idea.

ARIELLE

That sounds mischievous and worrisome. What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

What do you care? You put affairs of state above the well being of your children. You don't deserve to know.

She smiles.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - STRAWBERRY FIELDS - THAT AFTERNOON -
3:30 PM

We're

CLOSE ON BRIAN

Who is speaking very passionately.

BRIAN

I don't care if you're French. If you're going to live here, there are certain things you're going to have to know how to do. And none of them -- none -- is more important than hitting a baseball.

WIDER

To reveal Elodie, a fungo bat in her little hands, and Marc behind her, the catcher, wearing a mask and baseball glove.

BRIAN

Keep the back elbow up, Elodie. Keep your eye on the ball. And above all --

ELODIE

Don't lunge.

BRIAN

Exactly. *Ne lunge pas!* Here we go.

He pitches it in to her. It's high and inside.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Uh oh. What do we call that, Marc?

MARC

Chin music!

BRIAN

Excellent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marc returns the ball to Brian.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Okay, next pitch. Elodie, do not be
 afraid of the ball. Be afraid of
 being afraid of the ball. That's
 the American way! Now: hit me in
 the nose with it.

He pitches it in. She swings and hits a very respectable
 pop fly. Brian raises his arms in exultation as he watches
 its flight.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 OOOOOHHHHH!

Elodie, absolutely BEAMING, starts jumping around.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 That was GREAT!

She runs to him.

ELODIE
 Throw me in the air again!

He picks her up and throws the delighted child in the air,
 catching her on the way down. She laughs, and then:

ELODIE (CONT'D)
 Briannn?

BRIAN
 Yes?

ELODIE
 (matter-of-factly)
 I am so glad you're my mother's
 boyfriend.

Brian's eyebrows fly up. He is completely flummoxed.

BRIAN
 Uhhh...

MARC
 I am, too. We are very, very happy
 to have you in the family.

Absolutely no idea what to say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
Uhhh... thank you. Great to be in
it.

And then, just as quickly, the kids get back to business:

MARC
(grabbing the bat)
My turn to bat! My turn to bat!

Brian tries to regain his bearings.

BRIAN
Yes, okay, your turn, Marc. Give
your sister the -- what do we call
the catcher's gear, Elodie?

ELODIE
(taking mask from
Marc)
The Tools of Ignorance.

BRIAN
Very good.

Now, Arielle approaches from the Park Drive West. She is
smiling.

ARIELLE
What have I missed?

BRIAN
What have you missed, you ask. Well,
let's see. Your daughter is Alex
Rodriguez, your son is David Ortiz --

ARIELLE
I don't know what you are saying to
me.

BRIAN
-- And they're both 35 years old,
apparently.

ARIELLE
Huh?

BRIAN
Nevermind. Watch this.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(to Marc)

Don't close the stance -- I want to see that front hip facing me. Elodie, how 'bout a little infield chatter!

ELODIE

(instantly)

*Rien de batteur, rien de batteur,
rien de batteur...*

Brian pitches it in to Marc, a lefty. He smokes a line drive to the right side.

BRIAN

(arms raised)

OOHHHHHH! Big Papi!

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - ROOM 2117 - ANOTHER EVENING - 6:48 PM

Arielle and Brian lie, post-lovemaking, in each other's arms.

BRIAN

(dramatically)

Clarkstown Junior High School. 12 years ago. Mr. Foucault's 7th Grade French Class. I have chosen French over German, because my parents do not want me to learn the language of my oppressors.

(then)

"Dialogue Un."

(TRANSLATOR VOICE)

"Dialogue One."

(then)

"Bonjour, Guy. Ca va?"

(TRANSLATOR VOICE)

"Hello, Guy. How's it going?"

She laughs, but distractedly. He notices that her thoughts are elsewhere.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

What?

ARIELLE

Do you believe that it is the nature human beings to make trouble for themselves?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

(beat)

See, that's not a question anyone
needs to be asking right now.

ARIELLE

I know. I'm sorry. But, do you?

BRIAN

Certain human beings, I guess.

ARIELLE

Why? Why do they do it?

BRIAN

It's evolutionary, I suppose. A
form of striving.

ARIELLE

Striving for what?

BRIAN

For... more.

ARIELLE

In other words, when a goal is
reached, there is a moment of joy,
and then pretty soon there must be
another goal.

BRIAN

I think so. Why?

ARIELLE

I had a dream last night.
(averts her eyes)
That this was the moment of joy.

He looks at her.

BRIAN (V.O.)

Again, not subtle -- I apologize.
But this is what she said. I didn't
write it. I just wrote it down.

INT. BRIAN'S BUILDING - LOBBY - MAILBOX AREA - THAT NIGHT

He opens his mailbox. There's an envelope with a return
address that reads "*The New Yorker - New Fiction Prize.*" He
opens it, expecting the nine-thousandth in a never-ending
series of rejections. What he reads stops him in mid-breath.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - ROOM 2117 - THE NEXT EVENING - 5:02 PM

Brian watches as Arielle, holding the letter, JUMPS UP AND DOWN ON THE BED. She looks a lot like Elodie after she hit the baseball.

ARIELLE

I am so proud of you! I am so proud of you! \$6000! And they publish your story!

BRIAN

The story about the dogs.

ARIELLE

The story about the dogs!

BRIAN

Which you now regret mocking, don't you?

ARIELLE

(jumping throughout)

No! This just proves that if you have enough talent, you can write about complete bullshit and still fool people! But I'm so proud of you anyway!

BRIAN

There's a banquet.

ARIELLE

There's a banquet!

BRIAN

Will you come?

Arielle stops jumping.

ARIELLE

It won't be between 5 and 7.

BRIAN

No. Can we break the rules?

ARIELLE

(beat)

We cannot break them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
(deflated)
I understand.

ARIELLE
But we can bend them.

BRIAN
(re-inflated)
What does that mean?

ARIELLE
It means that no force on earth will
keep me away that night.

-- At which point Arielle drops down, bounces once on the
mattress, and lands, standing, next to Brian. She kisses
him, then:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)
Your future is starting.

INT. THE WILLIAMS CLUB - EAST 39TH STREET - THREE WEEKS
LATER - NIGHT

DAVID REMNICK, Editor of *The New Yorker*, speaks from the
dais, at which sit Brian and five other award RECIPIENTS,
all of whom look roughly Brian's age. A banner featuring
Eustace Tilley hangs behind him. In the audience, we spy
Sam and Arlene, who are beaming. There are tables full of
PUBLISHERS, AGENTS, CRITICS and PRESS. We notice Jane at a
table that bears the marker, "HarperCollins."

DAVID REMNICK
The next time someone tells you that
nobody reads anymore, that nobody
writes anymore, that all the best
young storytelling talent has gone
to film or television or -- God help
us -- the Internet...

LAUGHTER from the attendees. Brian's eyes search the room
for Arielle. She is not there.

DAVID REMNICK (CONT'D)
...The next time some hermetic
mouseclicker looks up from his monitor
long enough to proclaim that the
"blog" has replaced the periodical
as the pulsebeat of our culture...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But now, a rear door opens, and Arielle enters. Her eyes find Brian's immediately. He smiles big when he sees her. She smiles back, but with a certain restraint...

DAVID REMNICK (CONT'D)

...I ask you to direct that person's attention to next week's issue, and to the startling abilities of the six young people we celebrate tonight.

...and then a moment later, Valery enters and draws up alongside Arielle.

Brian is surprised by his reaction to the sight of Valery, which is one of anger. He tries not to show it.

Jane sees Arielle and Valery approaching, and finds the appropriate smile.

DAVID REMNICK (CONT'D)

Proceeding, then, in the ever-egalitarian thing known as alphabetical order:

Across the room, Arlene and Sam don't notice the little interpersonal drama; this is their son's finest hour, and they are undistractable right now.

DAVID REMNICK (CONT'D)

Brian Bloom's remarkable story, "Run from Becky,"
(with a smile)
about the complex relationship between a German Shepherd and a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, contemplates the moment before idealism grows into wisdom, and believing becomes knowing.

Brian tries mightily to enjoy the moment. But he can feel his internal organs churning.

INT. WILLIAMS CLUB - BANQUET ROOM - LATER

It's post dinner, and the guests mingle for the all-important schmoozefest. Arlene and Sam have buttonholed David Remnick, who is chatting with them in a generous spirit as Brian listens, inwardly convulsing with embarrassment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARLENE

I have been reading your magazine since my parents got me a subscription when I went away to college.

DAVID REMNICK

It makes me very proud to hear that.

ARLENE

A copy of "The New Yorker's View of the World" cover hangs in our guest bathroom.

DAVID REMNICK

I can think of no greater tribute. And soon, the pages of your son's story will hang right alongside.

SAM

(innocently)

Oh, no -- that's going in the living room.

DAVID REMNICK

Well, I can tell you this: if your son keeps writing at this level, eventually, every wall in your house will be filled.

ARLENE

That's very kind.

Jane arrives.

JANE

(to Brian and David Remnick)

May I borrow the two of you for just one moment?

DAVID REMNICK

By all means.

(to Sam and Arlene)

Excuse us?

ARLENE

Go, do.

As the troika departs:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

(to Jane)

Nice save.

(to David Remnick)

I assume you'll be rescinding the award, now.

DAVID REMNICK

(laughs)

What, you think I don't have parents?
Besides, I made a promise to the woman.

He pats Brian on the back and moves off. Brian and Jane continue toward the HarperCollins table, where Brian can see Arielle and Valery talking to a dynamic, WELL-DRESSED MAN of 48.

Jane speaks into Brian's ear in an excited, nearly panicked torrent. Brian remains blank-faced, his thoughts elsewhere.

JANE

Okay. Listen fast and close. My boss wants to meet you. He read the story. Or at least half of it. He loved it. He said it was a little episodic. Which only means he read it in several sittings. He loves your voice. Loves. I know what you're thinking: you write and you write, and everyone rejects and rejects, and then one day somebody says yes, and then suddenly everyone is saying yes, and you can't understand why because it's the same crap you were writing when they were all saying no, which makes you think that the business is chaos, just mayhem, completely without objective criteria, and who can live like that? Either they were wrong when they were saying no or, worse, they're wrong now when they're saying yes, or, worse, there is no right or wrong, no good or bad, there is only the shifting sands of popular taste. Well, yes, that's true, but WHO GIVES A SHIT!? What matters is that the sands are shifting your way right now. He wants you to start a novel. He wants to publish you. He never

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE (CONT'D)
says that. He hates everything, and
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?

BRIAN
(eyes on Arielle and
Valery)
She brought Valery.

JANE
Of course she did. Rules are rules.

BRIAN
Even when you're bending the rules?
Which themselves concern the breaking
of other rules?

JANE
Especially then. You know that.

BRIAN
Are you telling me it shouldn't bother
me at all? That it doesn't bother
you at all? Seeing them together,
on a night like this, in *your* world --

JANE
Okay, get your head right. Get your
head right, right now. Because you
are about to have the most important
90-second conversation of your life,
and it's not just *your* future in
play, it's mine, too. Is your head
right? Is your head right? Is your
head right?

BRIAN
You're much crazier than I am.

JANE
Is your head --

BRIAN
Yes, yes, my head is right.

They arrive at the group.

ARIELLE
Brian.

The correct kisses, and a warm handshake from Valery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERY
Beautifully done, my friend.
Congratulations.

BRIAN
(sucking it up)
Thank you. And thank you both for
coming.

VALERY
Our pleasure.

Jane subtly turns Brian toward the well-dressed man.

JANE
Brian, I'd like you to meet Avery
Fieldston-Blue, our Publisher.

BRIAN
How do you do, sir.

FIELDSTON-BLUE
Ah, the writers always call me "sir"
at the beginning. And then, before
long, it's "Avery." And then, "Avery,
you bastard."

Everyone laughs.

BRIAN
Well, may it always be in the context
of friendship.

FIELDSTON-BLUE
And partnership, if I have my way.
I read much of "Run from Becky." It
was by far the best story in this
competition.

BRIAN
Thank you very much.

FIELDSTON-BLUE
The others were all very strong,
certainly. But yours carried the
tease of greatness.

BRIAN
That's immensely kind, sir. Thank
you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDSTON-BLUE

Say it. Say, "Avery, You Bastard."
Let's skip the ceremony and get right
to the honest relationship.

BRIAN

Uh, Avery, You Bastard.

FIELDSTON-BLUE

Welcome aboard.

There is joy in Arielle's laughter, and in Valery's. Jane's ends on a loud exhale of immense relief that briefly turns everyone's head.

EXT. 5TH AVENUE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sam and Arlene's Camry pulls up at the curb at the corner of 57th and 5th. Sam is driving. Arlene is in the passenger seat. Brian gets out of the back seat, leaving behind multiple copies of the program from the evening, which his parents have pilfered. A business-sized *New Yorker* envelope sticks out of Brian's jacket pocket. Sam rolls down the window. We can see Arlene clutching Brian's award statuette -- Eustace Tilley.

SAM

Here? You want us to leave you here?

BRIAN

I'd like to walk.

SAM

Why?

BRIAN

Because there's a lot to think about.

SAM

But you could get mugged.

BRIAN

By who? An exhausted office worker?

SAM

Arlene, your son is a madman.

ARLENE

Because he walks? You should try
it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

I'm really glad you came tonight,
guys. Thank you.

ARLENE

Listen to me: I could not be prouder.

SAM

Me neither, m'boy. Honestly.

ARLENE

We are now officially spending the
law school money.

SAM

(with difficulty)
Half of it.

BRIAN

I love you both. Please drive home
safely.

SAM

We'll give you one and a half rings
when we get there.

Brian smiles. It's a holdover from the days when people
tried to save money on "long distance" phone bills.

BRIAN

Okay.

SAM

(to Arlene)
The G.W., or the Tappan Zee?

ARLENE

(rolls her eyes --
stupid question)
At this hour?

And off they go.

Brian, alone, now, turns to the storefront behind him. We
see that it's Tiffany.

He crosses to the window. He has the street pretty much to
himself. Since the store is closed, there is nothing in the
windows but Tiffany-blue velvet. He's Audrey Hepburn without
the breakfast.

A moment, and then he takes out his cell phone.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

3rd Avenue post-war. A little boxy, but not bad for someone so young. Jane is just returning from the dinner. She answers her RINGING cell.

JANE

Hello?

INTERCUT:

BRIAN

I need help with jewelry.

JANE

I beg your pardon?

BRIAN

What jewelry stores does Arielle respect?

JANE

It's midnight.

BRIAN

Yes.

JANE

Why are you asking me this?

BRIAN

Because I'm clueless. I don't know anything about the world in which her clothes and accessories travel.

JANE

Why are you buying her jewelry?

BRIAN

Do I have to say?

JANE

I'm going to be your editor. You're going to be my writer. We're going to have this kind of relationship.

BRIAN

What kind of relationship?

JANE

The kind where you call me in the middle of the night asking me crazy

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE (CONT'D)
 questions, and I talk you off the
 ledge.

BRIAN
 Please just tell me where to shop
 for her.

JANE
 (beat)
 What kind of jewelry?

BRIAN
 What kind? There are kinds?

JANE
 Fun, or important?

BRIAN
 Important.

JANE
 You can't afford important.

BRIAN
 As important as I can afford.

JANE
 (beat)
 Cartier.

BRIAN
 Oh. Okay. I was close.

He looks south.

INT. CARTIER - THE NEXT DAY

A SALESMAN, aloof and superior but slightly charmed despite himself, looks down at Brian, who is holding the *New Yorker* business envelope.

BRIAN
 I can spend \$6000. Including tax.

The salesman nods and thinks.

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - THAT EVENING

Arielle has done her patented half-minute post-lovemaking fix-up, and emerges, now, from the bathroom, looking entirely elegant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brian has gotten dressed. His hair is askew. He is nervous. She comes to him to say goodbye.

ARIELLE

I wish it were tomorrow at 5.

BRIAN

Can you stay for another moment? I have something I want to say.

She looks just a bit worried.

ARIELLE

Of course.

BRIAN

(breathes, then)

I would like to be a good writer, and tell stories that mean something to people. But the only thing I really want in this world... is to be the man who walks beside you.

ARIELLE

You do walk beside me.

BRIAN

Not just from 5 to 7. It's not enough. Not nearly.

He takes a Cartier ring box out of his jeans pocket, goes to one knee, opens it, and holds it out for her.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Marry me, Arielle. I want to be your husband, and stepfather to your children, and, if you wish it, I want us to have children together.

She is shocked and speechless.

THE RING

is a simple but elegant platinum microband of sapphires. It suits her perfectly.

When her words do come, it is as if her mouth is moving without any authorization from her brain.

ARIELLE

I am... already married.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

I know. That's why this is not a conventional engagement ring. That, and the fact that a conventional engagement ring will require a somewhat more robust conquest of the marketplace.

ARIELLE

You know the situation.

BRIAN

I do.

ARIELLE

You know the rules.

BRIAN

I do. And I can no longer play by them.

ARIELLE

We had a trust. That you have now broken.

BRIAN

I know. I can't help it. I've met the person I want to spend my life with. That's a drive much stronger than any set of rules, or any doubts about the meaning and purpose of marriage.

She nods. She understands. He gets to his feet.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Of course, if your feelings are not... as strong as mine, then I understand completely.

ARIELLE

They are. You know that they are.

BRIAN

They are?

ARIELLE

From the first moment.

And then -- can it be? -- she really does seem to entertain the idea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Do you really think you're ready to be a stepfather?

BRIAN

I know I am.

ARIELLE

You would be growing up in a very big hurry. Skipping your young adulthood.

BRIAN

Frankly, it's overrated. Regular adulthood seems much better.

ARIELLE

I am ten years older than you.

BRIAN

I don't care.

ARIELLE

When you are 35, I'll be 45.

BRIAN

Women are at their most beautiful in their 40's.

ARIELLE

Okay, that's true.

He smiles. She's funny, even now.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

But, ten years after that, I'll be 55.

BRIAN

At which point I'll think that women are at their most beautiful in their 50's.

ARIELLE

And ten years after that --

BRIAN

Are we doing sums, now?

ARIELLE

No.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

(then)

Do you believe that keeping a marriage together is always best for the children?

BRIAN

If I believed that, I would not be asking you to do this. And if you believe it, then you have to say no.

ARIELLE

This is complicated. This is very, very complicated.

BRIAN

No it isn't. I mean, yes, it is, of course it is, but at the same time, it's simple. What are we willing to do for love?

ARIELLE

That is a young person's perspective.

BRIAN

Are young people always wrong?

She smiles. She takes the ring out of the box. Slowly, she guides it onto the third finger of her RIGHT hand. It is a perfect fit.

ARIELLE

How did you know the size?

BRIAN

I described your hands to the salesman.

She swallows. He realizes:

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Are you... saying yes?

A beat, and then she smiles and puts her arms around him.

ARIELLE

Je t'aime. De tout mon coeur.

He closes his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

Meet me here tomorrow. Bring a suitcase. We'll live here for the first little while. In this room. I will tell Valery tonight. I won't be able to call you. I'll just see you here. Tomorrow.

BRIAN

At 5?

ARIELLE

At 4.

BRIAN

At 4?

ARIELLE

There are no rules anymore.

And with this, she kisses him goodbye -- with wonderful enthusiasm, and a certain new gravity.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - LATE THAT NIGHT

The SCREENSAVER now reads, "Can't even think about work long enough to write a decent screensaver."

Brian, wired, is putting clothing into his inexpensive luggage. He takes things out. He puts them back. He thinks, though not clearly. He takes other things out. He puts them back.

And then, his cellphone RINGS. He recognizes the Upper East Side exchange and assumes it is Arielle.

BRIAN

Are you all right?

INT. BRIAN'S LOBBY

Outside, at the buzzer panel,

VALERY

is on his cell. In a tone of deadly seriousness:

VALERY

I am downstairs. Buzz me in, please.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT

Brian's eye's widen. He goes to the window. There indeed, double-parked in front of the building, is the Citroen with the French flags.

BRIAN
(into phone)
Apartment 2C.

He hits the entry BUZZER. He closes the phone. He looks around. He straightens up a bit.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It suddenly seemed very possible that even Valery's equanimity had been destroyed by all this. I thought, what will I do if he has come here to shoot me? The answer seemed obvious: get shot, and die.

The doorbell RINGS. Brian takes a breath, crosses to the door, and, standing tall, just as he did the day the limousine pulled up next to him on 55th Street, he opens the door.

Valery is casually dressed -- in a cashmere sportcoat, Weston sneakers, and jeans. Even at 2 in the morning and in combat mode, the man has superb style.

His face, though, cannot hide the fact that it has been a difficult night uptown.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Come in.

VALERY
Thank you.

He does.

BRIAN
Would you like something? I have...

But he can see from Valery's face that he wants nothing. Valery looks at him, meets his eyes, and then

SLAPS HIM

hard, across the face. Brian does not flinch or try to dodge the blow. A trickle of blood comes from the side of his mouth. He doesn't retaliate. The two men lock eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERY

Are you certain you know what you're doing?

BRIAN

Yes. I'm sorry. I meant no injury.

VALERY

I know.

(then)

I am sure that I would have done the same.

He reaches into his breast pocket and takes out

A CHECK

He hands it to Brian. It's drawn, rather pointedly, on the account of "M. & Mme. Valery Pierpont" at Credit Lyonnais, in the amount of \$250,000.

VALERY (CONT'D)

See to her.

Valery turns, and, with great dignity, walks from the apartment.

EXT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - THE NEXT DAY - 3:58 PM

Brian, looking nervous, but, as Arielle would call it, "good nervous," mounts the stairs, hauling his heavy, inferior suitcase. He nods hello to his pal the Doorman. But this time, the Doorman does not nod back.

DOORMAN

Monsieur Bloom.

Brian is surprised that the Doorman spoke, and worried by something in his tone.

BRIAN

Yes?

DOORMAN

Madame Pierpont was here earlier.
She asked me to give this to you.

The Doorman removes an envelope from his breast pocket and holds it out. Brian feels his chest compress as he takes it. He knows this cannot be good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN

Thank you.

DOORMAN

Shall I... take your suitcase to the
Bellman for you, Monsieur?

Brian can't think straight. His heart is pounding.

BRIAN

No. Yes. Thank you.

Not knowing what else to do, Brian enters the hotel. He doesn't see the lobby. He doesn't notice the smiled greetings of the familiar staff. His mind is white again. He gets into a waiting elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR

Benoit is there. He doesn't have to ask what floor. He pushes the button.

BENOIT

Good evening, sir. Very nice to see
you again.

But Brian doesn't hear him, doesn't respond.

EXT. 21ST FLOOR

Brian steps off the elevator, turns at the brass plate, and is brought up short by what he sees: the door to Room 2117 is open, and

A HOUSEKEEPER

is vacuuming. Her cart, with its shampoos and bags of complimentary slippers, is near the propped-open door. The sanctuary is a sanctuary no longer.

Brian looks at the key card in his hand. In his face, we see violation and confusion. He leans against the hallway wall, tries to get his bearings. He opens the envelope.

Inside is a letter, which he removes. When he unfolds it, he finds

THE SAPPHIRE RING

Brian is expressionless, devastated. His eyes move to the top of the page.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. PAUL DE VENCE - PROVENCE - 12 YEARS AGO - EVENING

23-YEAR-OLD ARIELLE comes out of the Colombe D'Or restaurant and into the Place de Gaulle. She looks the same, but for a certain new innocence in her features. She's dressed like the couture model she is, and escorted by a coterie of MEN.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

Dearest Brian,

Her gaze falls not to her escorts, however, but to a young man, 24, scruffy -- obviously an artist, to judge from his paint-stained shirt.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

12 years ago, I fell in love for the first time.

Artists are everywhere in this village, which is said to have the best light for painting in the world. But this artist is different; he's not smoking self-importantly over a pastis in front of the Cafe de la Place, he's playing *boules* -- like the Italian *bocce* -- with the OLD MEN of the village. He has not seen Arielle yet.

She stops and watches as he bowls his ball over the uneven packed clay. It strikes an opponent's, knocking it out of play, and a CHEER goes up from his octogenarian teammates.

Now he feels Arielle's eyes upon him and looks up. She is smiling the way she will one day smile at Brian in the smoking nook. And, as Brian will be one day, PHILLIPPE is hers immediately.

ARIELLE (CONT'D)

His name was Phillippe, and we met in the south.

EXT. MONTMARTRE - RUE LAMARCK - DAY

Arielle and Phillippe happily unload cartons from a parked Peugeot 206.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

After a wonderful summer, we lived together in a small apartment in Montmartre. It was paradise. I modelled, he painted. I thought that my feelings would never diminish.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arielle lies in bed, awake. She moves her leg subtly away from the sleeping Phillippe's.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

But they did. Unfortunately, I lacked the courage and maturity to end the relationship gracefully.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE APARTMENT / STREETS OF MONTMARTRE - ANOTHER NIGHT

Through an upstairs window, we can see Arielle and Phillippe arguing.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

Instead, I did what young people sometimes do when they secretly want the other person to end a relationship: I behaved dreadfully. I caused fights. Afterwards, Phillippe would be hurt and angry. He would go out to his car and drive around until he felt better.

Phillippe comes out the front door and angrily shoves a key into the door of the Peugeot, which is parked at the curb. He gets in and drives away aggressively.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

One night, after a terrible argument, he was driving...

The medieval streets are narrow. The 206 takes a turn at high speed, and there, bearing down on Phillippe, are BLINDING HEADLIGHTS.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and he was struck head-on, and killed.

INT. SCENE OF THE ACCIDENT - AN HOUR LATER

On the mangled front seat of the other car, we see an ENVELOPE.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

The driver of the other car had said in a note that he planned to hit the first car or the first utility pole he saw.

EXT. SCENE OF THE ACCIDENT - ANOTHER DAY

Arielle -- this time seen from the front -- places a bouquet of flowers on the narrow sidewalk. We realize that it was she whom we saw placing the bouquet at the beginning of the story.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

I have never gone a day without
blaming myself for his death.

INT. PARIS OPERA - TWO YEARS LATER - NIGHT

A black-tie diplomatic reception in the grand lobby, framed by the majestic staircase, the candelabras, the colonnades. Paris' CELEBRITY ELITE are present in force. In one cluster, Arielle is introduced to Valery. His kind eyes, his generous nature, his polish and his air of success are in evidence immediately.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

I mourned for two years before I met
Valery. He was, from the very first,
just as he is now: solid, substantial
and good -- the "salt of the earth,"
as Americans like to say.

INT. RESTAURANT ALAIN DUCASSE - AVENUE MONTAIGNE - NIGHT

Valery and Arielle, at a primo table, look the perfect couple.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

I loved him. But not the same way I
had loved Phillippe. I never loved
anyone that way again. Until now.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHORT SCENES, REAL AND IMAGINED:

Arielle and Brian are at the smoking nook.

ARIELLE (V.O.)

It has stunned me, this new happiness,
which came out of nowhere. I did
not think it would be possible for
me again. I have never felt so alive
as when I am in your arms.

They're at the Whitney Museum.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It is tempting, so tempting to forget about everything else and just accept this gift.

They're at L'Absinthe.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But I cannot.

Brian pitches a baseball to Elodie; Marc plays catcher.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not because I don't believe that you would be a marvelous stepfather to Marc and Elodie...

Arielle and Brian walk happily together up Madison Avenue with a new BABY.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and a wonderful father to the children we might have had together. Not because of lifestyle, or logistics...

They're at the St. Regis bar with his parents.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...or the difference in our ages, or the opinions of others.

Valery looks at Arielle -- as he must have when she spoke to him last night -- with pain, with understanding, with generosity of spirit, with love.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When Valery and I married, we wrote our own vows. We said, "Je tiendrai ton coeur plus tendrement que le mien" -- "I will hold your heart more tenderly than my own." He has always kept his promise.

Marc and Elodie wave goodbye to Brian from the terrace after the dinner party. Arielle is behind them, a hand on each of their shoulders.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And one day, Brian, when you have children, you will understand that to leave them is to leave yourself.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
To injure them, unthinkable. I told
you. I am an old fashioned girl.

Arielle and Brian are in Room 2117 that first time, both nervous. She takes his hand.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I am so sad to say goodbye. To be
parted. I can't believe it, really.
We had so many adventures still ahead
of us.

Arielle and Brian are at Aiello's, blowing straws at one another.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(funny even now)
Maybe, if we'd had more time, I would
have found something about you that
I didn't like, really couldn't stand,
which would be very useful right
now.

And finally, we see her face during his marriage proposal.

ARIELLE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But I doubt it. They say that no
love is perfect. But then, they
never met you.

BACK TO SCENE

As Brian, still leaning against the hotel hallway wall, tries to process. He blinks. He looks at Room 2117 again. He sees the Housekeeper. He hears the shattering shuddering of the vacuum. He forces his eyes back to the page.

ARIELLE (V.O.)
Please do not try to contact me. It
will not change anything. Please
let our love stay perfect. Please
let me remain forever yours, Arielle.

Hollow, numb, a shadow of himself, Brian takes the letter and puts it in his pocket. He takes the ring and replaces it in the envelope, which he folds twice, to keep the ring securely inside.

He hears a door close. He looks up. It was the door to 2117. The Housekeeper and her cart are moving toward 2119.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He swallows and turns for the elevator.

EXT. ST. REGIS HOTEL -- 55TH STREET ENTRANCE

Brian comes out the revolving door, maneuvering the suitcase with some difficulty.

The Doorman sees him and comes to his aid.

DOORMAN

Let me help you, Monsieur Bloom.

BRIAN

No, it's okay. But, if I may impose for a favor?

DOORMAN

Monsieur?

Brian takes the folded envelope from his pocket and holds it out.

BRIAN

Please give this to Madame Pierpont when she comes for lunch on Friday.

DOORMAN

(taking the envelope)
Certainly, Monsieur.

BRIAN

Thank you.

Brian takes a last look at the revolving door, behind which, as recently as yesterday, lay a universe of wonder. It is all gone now.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Had I made the blunder of a lifetime?
Or had I simply done what I had to do, what my nature demanded? I did not know.

He turns, descends the stairs, and walks east, in the direction of his apartment, lugging the suitcase, feeling out of phase, like a tourist, like a complete stranger in his own home town. He stops long enough to switch hands, and to look, one last time, at the smoking nook. Then, he resumes the trudge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A WOMAN passes. She is taller than Arielle, but for just a moment, HER FACE IS ARIELLE'S. And then Arielle's face fades, replaced by the woman's actual one.

He turns south onto Madison Avenue. The rush-hour sidewalk is crowded with pedestrians, many of them WOMEN -- young and old, pretty and not, slender and not, European-looking and not. He searches every face but sees only ONE... for a few seconds each time. And then, each faces changes from Arielle's to the woman's real one.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I did as she asked -- I didn't try to contact her. I stayed out of her neighborhood. I never returned to the St. Regis. If my route was to take me near it, I would go a couple of blocks out of my way.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY

He lugs the suitcase into the building. He stops, reflexively, to get his mail.

In the mailbox is the new issue of *The New Yorker*. On the cover, Eustace Tilley -- but, AS A BABY -- works diligently at a laptop.

He turns to the table of contents, with its distinctive art Deco display typeface and Caslon blurbs. Underneath "Fiction," he finds the title, "New Works by New Writers," and beneath it, first in alphabetical order, "Run from Becky," by Brian Bloom.

He wants to feel the joy of it, the dream realized. But right now, he cannot.

INT. ARLENE AND SAM'S LIVING ROOM - A FEW DAYS LATER

The cover, and the two and a half magazine pages that carry "Run from Becky," are hung in a place of honor. Sam does the gruntwork; Arlene gives directions.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - A FEW DAYS LATER

He is slouched on the couch. He looks thinner and ghostly. The same clothes we saw him in last time.

He HEARS the DOOR BUZZER. He straightens. Could it be Arielle? He goes to it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN
 (hoping; heart pounding)
 Yes?

JANE (O.S.)
 (apologetically; knows
 what he was thinking)
 It's just me.

As much as he loves Jane, his chest sinks. He buzzes her in.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Jane is unpacking and putting away the groceries she has brought over for him. They include sunflower seeds, little cups for the shells, and Buffalo chicken wings from Aiello's.

Brian watches her. After a moment, he can't help but ask:

BRIAN
 How is she?

JANE
 (without looking up)
 I have no idea.

BRIAN
 What do you mean?

JANE
 I ended it with Valery.

BRIAN
 What? Why?

JANE
 Because there's a sadness to it,
 now. Because being around him, and
 around her, feels like I'm betraying
 my friendship with you.

BRIAN
 You're not, at all.

JANE
 -- And because the future has a way
 of arriving whether you want it to,
 or not.

He has no rejoinder for that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The last of the groceries stowed, she walks to the door. She kisses him like family. He smiles a little.

JANE (CONT'D)

Eat something. Smoke less. Call me
and we'll go to the movies. Something
from a big American studio.

He smiles. She goes.

He closes the door after her, turns, and absently spots the computer. The SCREENSAVER delivers the same aging wisecrack.

He breathes, just as he breathed before he crossed the street toward the smoking nook that first time. He goes to the computer, sits down at it.

BRIAN (V.O.)

As little as you want to write when
you're happy, that's how much you
have to write when you're miserable.
Your passions have to go somewhere,
and this is the only place left.
Your suffering has to be good for
something.

(beat)

It's not for me to say if the words
were worth the price.

He smacks the space bar. The screensaver goes away. His word processing software replaces it. "New Document," reads the top line.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - 18 MONTHS LATER - DAY

Brian looks much better. He's gained back his weight and his color has returned.

At the moment, he's blindfolded. Jane, ebullient, is leading him down the west sidewalk of 5th Avenue. Passers by watch them with smiles -- they're two young people having fun.

Now Jane stops him, takes him by the shoulders, and turns him toward a storefront.

JANE

Take off the blindfold.

He does.

WIDER

To reveal that we're

EXT. BARNES AND NOBLE

Brian and Jane are looking through the window at

A BESTSELLER DISPLAY

of a book with a handsome cover. We look more closely and see:

The Mermaid

By

Brian Bloom

In the window glass, we can see Brian's face -- bittersweet, thoughtful.

Not so Jane, who is jumping around behind him, LAUGHING with glee and smacking him in the back of the head.

JANE

Smile, you asshole! Smile!

He can't help but smile.

JANE (CONT'D)

Come on -- we're celebrating.

She hails a cab with a WORLD-CLASS CAB WHISTLE. They jump in. He looks back at the window, then the cab launches into traffic. We linger there for a moment.

And then, a strikingly elegant figure, her head turned away from us and toward the window, notices Brian's book display as she passes. She stops and looks in the window. This, we know before we see her face, is Arielle.

We COME AROUND so that we can see her face, now. She's smiling with joy and sadness, her eyes glistening.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE ST. REGIS HOTEL - ROOM 2117 - DAY / NIGHT

We watch TEN YEARS worth of activity in the room -- ten years of GUESTS and MAIDS and MINI-BAR CHECKERS and BUTLERS and SUITCASES and numberless TOOTHBRUSHES on the sinks...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIAN (V.O.)

The Buddhists speak of Impermanence,
of the inevitability and beauty of
change. I'm not a Buddhist, but I
think they may be onto something.

...Of TV SHOWS and BLACKOUT CURTAINS being drawn, and then
opened, and then drawn again...

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I had a long time to consider the
value of memory, and the idea that
just because something doesn't last
forever doesn't mean its worth is
diminished.

...Of BUSINESSMEN and BUSINESSWOMEN calling home on their
cellphones and surfing the net on their laptops, of FAMILIES,
of COUPLES in love, of COUPLES defiantly out of love, of the
occasional CELEBRITY, of ROOM SERVICE MEALS...

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe it was just a rationalization,
easier on the soul than mourning
what might have been, the life
unlived. I honestly don't know.
But I chose to believe in memory. I
chose to believe in her.

...Of signs that say, "*Ne Derangez Pas*," of breakfast menus,
freshly shined shoes, neatly wrapped laundry and flashing
message lights.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I chose to believe that the bond was
never broken, and that we carried
each other in our hearts as a secret
singularity.

The only constant in the room are the IMAGES -- translucent,
ghostly, but always present, of BRIAN AND ARIELLE, holding
hands, keeping watch over this, their home.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She made me a writer. She made me a
man. There would be other loves,
even great loves. But she was right --
only one remained perfect.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MADISON AVENUE - 10 YEARS LATER - DAY

A bright but brisk Sunday in March. Winter on the cusp of spring.

Brian is walking north toward the Whitney Museum. We recognize him right away. The same good, kind, idealistic face. Maybe a drop less idealistic. But only a drop.

He's with his family -- his WIFE and two young children, a TODDLING GIRL and a BABY BOY in a stroller. He's most affectionate with all three. His wife is five years younger than he. She's lovely. We can see immediately that the family is happy. Then, from

BRIAN'S POV

We subtly scan the faces of PEOPLE walking in the other direction. With so much time having gone by, he no longer sees Arielle in the face of every woman he passes. But it still happens from time to time. Especially when he goes anywhere near the places they visited together. Today, perhaps one out of every fifteen women he sees is, just for an instant, she. This no longer injures him, exactly; his expression tells us it's more of a warm, loving recall.

But one out of fifteen is still one out of fifteen.

BRIAN (V.O.)

I wondered if it remained perfect for her as well, or if I was just being foolish.

They turn onto the Whitney's walkway and head toward the entrance.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I never thought I would have my answer. But one day, I did.

A woman comes out of the main doors. Brian is struck by how certainly and instantly he knows that it is

ARIELLE

and not a fleeting apparition.

Valery, looking older but no less impressive, is with her, as are MARC and ELODIE, who are now well into their teens. Marc is wearing a baseball cap -- Brian's ancient influence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arielle feels Brian's gaze and knows he is there before she sees him. She is already smiling when she brings her head around to him and meets his eyes. She looks the same. If there is any sign of age, he cannot see it.

For an instant, there is once again nothing in the universe but the two of them. And then reality reasserts itself, as of course it must, as it always has.

Valery now sees Brian. He smiles, but respectfully hangs back half a step. Brian's wife -- who, we strongly sense, has not been told of Arielle -- politely does the same.

The two families come together. Arielle and Brian kiss on both cheeks. It, and everything that follows, is perfectly appropriate, honorable, gracious and respectful.

Brian and Valery shake hands warmly. Marc and Elodie shake Brian's hand, both with beautiful manners. Arielle shakes Ms. Bloom's hand warmly, then marvels at the Bloom children. There is some chitchat. We HEAR snippets:

ARIELLE

I loved *The Mermaid*.

VALERY

As did I. And the other books.

ARIELLE

We read you quite religiously in our home.

Marc and Elodie confirm this with smiles.

BRIAN

Thank you. I'm very glad about that.

And then, too soon, it is time to go.

But there is something Brian needs to know, and something Arielle needs to say, all without speaking. A bit more chatter...

VALERY

How is Jane?

BRIAN

Jane is brilliant. Jane is Jane. She's married -- a very good guy, a cellist. They have a son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERY
(sincerely)
That's wonderful.

...and then it happens: without anyone else noticing, Arielle catches Brian's eye. She removes the glove from her right hand. There, on her third finger, is

THE SAPPHIRE RING

He sees it. She sees him see it. Neither face betrays any reaction. And then she pulls her glove slowly back on.

There are no exchanges of phone numbers that will never be dialed or email addresses that will never be used; there is no false ceremony. There are final goodbyes and achingly appropriate kisses, and then Arielle and Brian let their eyes meet for a last moment of connectedness, turning away at the same time, before anyone else has observed it.

The Blooms head into the museum, and the Pierponts toward the sidewalk.

BRIAN (V.O.)
I don't know if I'll ever see her
again. I don't know if that's a
good thing or a bad one.
(beat)
But I will promise you this: your
favorite story, whatever it might
be, was written for one reader.

As she and her family turn north, Arielle steals a another final look in Brian's direction.

He is gone; the door has closed. She turns away, keeps walking, and slowly disappears into the Sunday crowds.

FADE OUT.

END