

EXT. SHAW FARM HOUSE - DAY

Isolated and weathered. Somewhere in upstate New York. A faded 1977 Jaguar sits in the loose gravel driveway.

INT. SHAW FARM HOUSE - WRITING ROOM - DAY

Cluttered with stacks of BOOKS rising like miniature towers out of the floor. Classics. Serious titles.

Crumpled PIECES of PAPER litter the floor along with empty beef jerky wrappers.

Bookshelves packed with still more books, classics, and the odd framed picture of a HANDSOME MAN and WOMAN. Young, full of life. In love.

There's even a medal. Oxidized. A NATIONAL BOOK AWARD. The name HARRIS SHAW engraved on it.

Nicotine-stained HANDS stab a cigarette into an ashtray that barely had room for it a week ago.

A Zippo lighter snaps open. SPARKS, FLAMES.

It lights a fresh cigarette. A HACKING COUGH follows. Behind the rising curlicues of smoke is:

HARRIS SHAW, late 60s, a lean and ferocious alpha male from the photos, now moving into the winter of his discontent. The picture of absolute concentration.

He sits at a cluttered desk and stares down at a 1965 ROYAL STANDARD TYPEWRITER. His cat HEMMY, an aging ORANGE TABBY, lies curled up behind it.

Harris's eyes are zeroed in on the EMPTY WHITE PAGE curling up from the carriage.

It silently mocks him.

Suddenly, an old beige rotary phone *RINGS* and *RINGS*.

Harris ignores it. Until his unruly dark spirit erupts. He answers, unleashes a voice scarred by alcohol and cigarettes:

HARRIS
He's dead. Go fuck yourself!

He SLAMS the receiver back onto its cradle and is seized by a racking cough -- one that sends Hemmy scurrying.

Harris reaches a hand down -- draws a bottle of WILD TURKEY from one of the MODIFIED GUN HOLSTERS strapped around the waist of his worn-out bathrobe.

Harris chugs straight from the bottle with all the vigor of a morbid alcoholic. He wipes his mouth on his sleeve and holsters the bottle. The cough quelled.

Harris returns to his cigarette. Returns to the blank page.

His brow set, looking... searching for the words -- when a bolt of inspiration strikes.

He SNAPS at a few keys -- and STOPS.

Two fresh words appear on the page.

THE END

INT. NYU - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Ornate timbered ceilings. Bronze chandeliers. Oak panelling.

A projected image of formidable, white-haired patriarch fills a wall-mounted screen. Beneath his stoic gaze, the words "THE JOSEPH FRANKLIN SKINNER GRANT."

LUCY'S VOICE

You all know Joseph Franklin
Skinner as the man who took Harris
Shaw's scribblings on fragments of
meat packing paper and birthed a
publishing house - who became a
foremost surveyor of American
literature. A man who served as a
handmaiden to some of the twentieth
century's greatest voices...

Standing at a lectern right below Joseph's image is LUCY SKINNER, late 20s, whip smart, elegant, and ambitious.

LUCY

But I know him as the loving father
who taught me to love books.

In front of her, a room brimming with faculty, students, and the city's literati. Sitting and listening.

LUCY

His hope, my hope, the hope of this
grant, is to carry his spirit
forward by shepherding the next
great voice in literature...

LATER

Lucy poses for pictures with the fresh-faced, bow-tied GRANT RECIPIENT. He holds a plaque and a check.

LUCY
I look forward to reading your
maunscript.

GRANT RECIPIENT
(hesitant...)
It won't have any dragons in it.

Lucy bristles, slighted.

LUCY
You'll work your way up to dragons.

JACK SINCLAIR, late-30s, tailored suit, perfect hair and condescending smile, parts bodies and approaches. He offers his hand to the young writer.

JACK
Congratulations. Jack Sinclair from
Sinclair Publishing.
(slips him a card)
You send me your manuscript when
it's done.

The young writer beams, but before he can open his mouth --

LUCY
(to Jack)
The grant gives us a first look.
(to the young writer)
Enjoy my father's money.

Lucy turns away -- gathers her purse off a chair. But Jack's on her like white on rice. Eyes on her ass.

JACK
Nice speech. You look great.

LUCY
What are you doing here, Jack?

JACK
He may be your father, but he was
my mentor.

LUCY
I'm not selling the publishing
house.

JACK
I wouldn't make an offer on a day
like today.

LUCY
How sanctimonious of you.

JACK
I'll make an offer in about week.

LUCY
Nothing's going to change in a
week.

JACK
Ran into Halpren Nolan earlier.

An attention getter. This name matters.

JACK
You should brace yourself for his
review of Dragons of Oregon.

LUCY
It's Orion! What did he say?

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

A PAINTING of Joseph F. Skinner in a gilt frame looms over
carved mahogany and antiques. The man's everywhere.

BEN'S VOICE
Dragons of Orion is boring, absurd,
and has the nutritional value of a
fortune cookie...

Lucy sits behind her perfectly organized desk. The only thing
out of place is her look of incomprehensible shock.

BEN'S VOICE
Frankly, it may only be fit for a
prison library as an added form of
punishment...

BEN SPENCE, mid-20s, a tightly wound academic, stands across
from her and looks up from his iPad. He sighs deeply.

LUCY
Go on. Twist the knife.

Ben reluctantly proceeds...

BEN

This is the third sub-par release in a row from J. F. Skinner, the once renowned boutique publishing house. It's become increasingly clear that Lucy Skinner, the self-appointed editor-in-chief and daughter of Joseph Skinner, is trying to distance herself from the kind of serious literary fare that once made Skinner Publishing relevant, and failing miserably.

Lucy absorbs the blow, waves a dismissive hand --

LUCY

To hell with Halpren Nolan! Young adults don't read the Times.

Ben shudders with further dismay.

LUCY

What?... What else?

Ben swipes the tablet, holds it up to her. A YouTube video of a precocious 13-YEAR-OLD REVIEWER plays:

TEEN REVIEWER

Dragons of Orion is dumb. It's trying to be Harry Potter, but it's not even a bad Twilight...

LUCY

That's enough...

Ben fumbles with the iPad, unable to shut it off...

TEEN REVIEWER (V.O.)

I'd rather go blind than read --

Ben finally gets it to stop.

BEN

Sorry.

Lucy looks up at the painting of her father with a tired, hidden weight. It looks right back at her.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

The train's windows flicker with light as it hurtles through the depths of Manhattan.

Lucy stands, grasping one of the metal poles; she looks around noticing many of the passengers reading books.

She glances down at the closest cover -- YESTERDAY'S GONE by Drew Davis. The author's perfect face beaming back at Lucy from the back of the jacket.

Lucy moves through the car, scanning the titles -- all of them YESTERDAY'S GONE -- Drew Davis beaming, over and over.

Until Lucy comes to the gangway door and stares into the next subway car -- where another PASSENGER reads the same book.

Lucy's face tightens. The train rocks.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP --

INT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A steady THUMP, THUMP, THUMP echoes through a perfectly arranged space. Furniture that's inherited instead of bought. The past is present everywhere in this apartment.

Mahogany bookshelves littered with classic titles.

Above a desk, Lucy's degrees cover the wall: Harvard undergrad. A masters in English lit from NYU. Academic awards of all stripes. Team pics: rowing, running, fencing.

Lucy runs on her treadmill, a well-worn HARVARD T-SHIRT drenched in sweat. She stares down at her mounted iPad.

She logs into the BookScan domain. Enters the ISBN.

Sure enough, the charts show depressing tallies for Dragons of Orion. A mere five thousand copies sold.

Flustered -- she increases the treadmill's resistance.

Her feet moving faster.

She stares ahead through a window that faces another anonymous apartment building.

Her gaze wanders upward from one lit apartment to another; a dinner party; a couple in a heated argument; then finally to a YOUNG NURSE READING TO AN OLD MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR...

Lucy lingers on them. Memories stirring. And then, under her breath, like a well-practiced mantra...

LUCY

You're the best, Lucy. You're the best.

Lucy increases the treadmill's resistance.

Her feet moving faster... faster... *faster...*

LATER

Lucy's fingers tickle the spines of dusty books, revealing legendary names -- Vidal, Capote, Mailer, Updike... and finally -- HARRIS SHAW. A book titled THE FUTURE IS X-RATED.

She fixated on that title for a moment, vaguely troubled -- until she moves to a WALL of FRAMED PHOTOS and ARTICLES...

Glimpses of the publishing house's glory days; her father alongside celebrated authors; selling books out of the trunk of his car. On book tours; the words "BEST SELLER" flashing over and over and over.

Lucy takes it all in, as if searching for clues.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Lucy paces the floor. Intent. Determined. Ben sits in front of her desk, iPad on his lap.

LUCY

We don't have the time or the financial means to cultivate a talent like, say, a Drew Davis.

BEN

So what's the plan?

LUCY

We look within. Relevant writers who can make us relevant again.

BEN

Like Halpren suggested.

Lucy bristles...

LUCY

Please tell me what's in the pipeline.

Ben sheepishly looks down at his iPad, taps the screen...

BEN

Elizabeth Dahl next spring.

LUCY

If we sell 10,000 copies of that before it makes it onto the Bard College Modern American Fiction reading list in twenty years, it will be a miracle.

BEN

Mario Octavio in 2016.

LUCY

We need books that sell outside of Spain.

BEN

Henry Dunham in 2016.

LUCY

I got the first three chapters. It's incomprehensible. I think he's using again.

BEN

That's it. That's our pipeline.

LUCY

How about the roster? Who do we have that's a brand, that's legitimate, that's authentic - an exploitable commodity.

BEN

All those authors are either dead or unaffordable.

LUCY

Fine, then start with who's alive and has the cheapest advance.

BEN

That's easy, but pointless.

LUCY

Why?

BEN

It's Harris Shaw.

The name gives her pause. But she's instantly intrigued.

LUCY

What's the advance?

BEN
Twenty-five grand.

An attention getter.

LUCY
You're joking.

BEN
It was negotiated in the 70s.

LUCY
We can actually afford that.

BEN
Lucy, Harris Shaw hasn't put anything on paper, let alone on meat-packing paper, since The Future Is X Rated - and that was over forty years ago. Forget it.

LUCY
Show me that contract.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - BASEMENT - LATER

A naked bulb illuminates unused furniture and stacked boxes.

LUCY (O.S.)
Tell me we're reading this right.

Lucy and Ben stand by a row of steel filing cabinets. One drawer open. Both studying an old CONTRACT.

BEN
It looks like the advance was already paid.

LUCY
But he never delivered a book.

BEN
Clearly.

Lucy pauses. Thoughts swirl. Something deeper at play here.

LUCY
(more to herself)
So he owes us.

BEN
Hold on, there's more...

LUCY
Tell me he owes us two books.

Ben reads, muttering the words under his breath.

LUCY
Out loud. Tell me out loud!

BEN
"There will be no edits or revision to the draft submitted by the author. In exchange, the author must promote the book in accordance with the publisher's requests."

Lucy snaps the sheet from Ben. Looks it over.

LUCY
No edits?

BEN
It doesn't matter...

LUCY
You're right. Written by Harris Shaw is all that matters.

BEN
That's not what I meant.

Lucy running with the possibilities.

LUCY
This is perfect. We rebuild with the man who put us on the map. A known quantity. Someone who captures the imagination. A living legend.

BEN
A madman. A lush. A recluse.

LUCY
It's as if it's being handed to us on a platter!

BEN
That platter needs a book on it!

INT. SHAW RANCH - WRITING ROOM - SAME

Harris's phone RINGS and RINGS. Through the window, in the distance, Harris paces beneath a large Willow tree. Arms flapping about, pulling at his hair, talking to himself.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - SAME

Lucy and Ben apprehensively stare at the phone on her desk as a dialing tone fills the room via speaker mode.

BEN

This is ridiculous, Lucy. He's got a cult following at best. X-Rated has been out of print since 2005.

LUCY

It's called "out of stock indefinitely." Do you know anything about inventory costs? Besides, people had forty years to buy that book. He needs a new one.

Lucy stares at the phone, finally ends the call.

LUCY

Let's keep trying.

INT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lucy runs on her treadmill, iPad mounted in front of her.

Her eyes scour "Harris Shaw's" Wikipedia page -- picking out sentences:

"The Future Is X-Rated"... "Written on butcher paper"... "Dystopian love story"... "The abandonment of a paternal society"... "Banned by the Vatican"... "Condemned by the Dalai Lama"...

..."PERSONAL LIFE"... "Wife and daughter died in childbirth"... "Recluse"... "Alcoholic"... "Icon"...

Lucy looks up, **lost in thought** -- when her attention drifts to the young nurse who once again reads to the old man in the apartment across the way.

Lucy's feet move faster...

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LOBBY - DAY

Lucy comes through the front doors, latte in hand. Ben's at his desk, busy on the phone. She turns to him, expectant:

LUCY

Shaw?

Ben covers the receiver.

BEN
No, Dahl's agent. He wants to know
where her advance is.

Lucy hesitates, scrambling -- then hushed...

LUCY
Tell him you'll check with
accounting.

BEN
I'm accounting.

She shoots him a look.

BEN
Right.

INT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lucy lies in bed and reads a manuscript.

Frustrated, she slaps it closed and throws it in the corner
with a pile of others.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LOBBY - DAY

Lucy comes through the front doors, latte in hand. Ben's at
his desk, busy on the phone. She turns to him, expectant:

LUCY
Shaw?

Ben shakes his head, covers the receiver.

BEN
Don't you have a breakfast meeting
today?

Lucy's face coils with panic -- and she's back out the door.

INT. FASHIONABLE UPTOWN EATERY - BREAKFAST

A table of young, well put-together LITERATI-WOMEN gossip
over assorted salads, each on her own track:

LITERATI WOMAN #1
...Yes, she went on a date with the
editor-in-chief... but I heard she
only touched his penis, so she must
at least have some talent...

LITERATI WOMAN #2

...He's writing some coming-of-age story about a girl who gets mixed up with the Mansons...

LITERATI WOMAN #3

...It's her debut - her last story won the Plimpton Prize from the Paris Review...

LITERATI WOMAN #4

...This guy's going to be big, and he's only twenty-four! They're calling him the next David Foster Wallace...

She looks right at us:

LITERATI WOMAN #4

What about you, Lucy? What's next for Metropolitan?

We find Lucy at the table, the only one who's actually touched her food. Suddenly all eyes are on her.

Lucy flashes a big, hesitant smile:

LUCY

I'm meeting with Harris Shaw today.

EXT. ADIRONDACKS - AERIAL VIEW - DAY

A blue PRIUS travels along winding roads, moving beneath covered bridges and across pastoral farms.

BEN (V.O.)

Greetings, Mr. Shaw, we've never met and we represent the kind of corporate entity you detest, but we were in the neighborhood and figured we'd stop by to check on the progress of your new forty-year-old book.

INT./EXT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Lucy drives. Ben rides shotgun, rapt with anxiety.

LUCY

That's very good. But let's lose the first bit.

BEN

Lucy, this man once shot an assistant because he mistook her for a bear.

LUCY

Good thing you shaved this morning.

Lucy grins, steers through an ever-curving road...

EXT. HARRIS RANCH - DAY

A row of empty WILD TURKEY BOTTLES line the top of a rickety old fence -- and *BANG* -- two of the bottles are pulverized.

A bathrobe-clad Harris Shaw stands about twenty yards back, taking target practice. Smoke wisps ebbing from his shotgun, as well as from the Camel between his lips.

He draws a bottle of Wild Turkey from a holster and drinks.

And that's when Lucy's Prius crawls down the long broken driveway -- right past a handmade SIGN that reads PISS OFF.

Harris glares at the oncoming car with disapproval.

INT./EXT. LUCY'S PRIUS - SAME

Lucy and Ben stare ahead. Ben seized with instant panic.

BEN

He's armed! Turn the car around!
Turn it around!

LUCY

Calm down, we don't look like bears.

BEN

We might to a seventy-year-old drunk!

Lucy parks.

EXT. SHAW RANCH - CONTINUOUS

Lucy steps out, not venturing beyond the protective barrier of the car door. Ben melts down in his seat, out of sight.

HARRIS

I don't like people who can't read.

Lucy glances back at the sign. Flashes him an uneasy smile.

LUCY
Ironincally, reading is why we're
here, Mr. Shaw. I'm Lucy Skinner
and this is Ben Spence.

Ben's hand creeps up from behind the dashboard and waves.

LUCY
We're from Joseph F. Skinner
Publishing.

Harris bristles. Fast racks the bolt in his shotgun.

Lucy's eyes widen. She ducks behind the door and --

BOOM!

Another bottle is blasted into oblivion.

Lucy shudders. Ben SCREAMS.

INT. SHAW RANCH - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tired, 70s-era décor. A place of utter neglect. Sunlight
streams through holes in the tattered curtains.

Harris sits in a worn La-Z-Boy, smoking and cleaning his
shotgun.

Lucy and Ben sit on a tired couch. Anxious as prom dates.

Hemmy scoots by Ben's feet...

BEN
Hey, kitty!

He gets a nasty HISS for his efforts. Lucy SHOOS the beast
away with a nudge of her foot and SNEEZES.

Harris stares at Lucy. Steady. Ruthless. Judging.

LUCY
I'm allergic to cats.

HARRIS
I wouldn't stay long.

Harris exhales a plume of smoke into Lucy's frozen smile.

LUCY
I love the get-up, Mr. Shaw. Are
those holsters customized?

HARRIS

I remember when Joe said he hoped a son would take over the publishing house.

Lucy stays composed. Plucky and professional.

LUCY

I'm still a chip off the old block!

HARRIS

How is that venal, low-life pimp?

And that plucky smile tightens. She takes a moment.

LUCY

He's... gone...

Harris welcomes that news with a look of smug satisfaction.

HARRIS

Heard your mother hanged herself.

Another low blow. Lucy's jaw tightens, then:

LUCY

She suffered from depression.

HARRIS

I would have, too.

Harris leans in, looks at Lucy sharply.

HARRIS

Now where's my check?

Lucy and Ben exchange a quizzical look.

LUCY

Your check?

HARRIS

A piece of paper you exchange for a sum of money. Money you're paying me for a reprint of X-Rated.

LUCY

We-uh-aren't... That's not why we're here.

Harris's eyes flash angrily.

HARRIS

Then why are you here?

LUCY
(careful now...)
We were wondering if you've been
working on anything new, Mr. Shaw.

Harris rouses his bent frame from the grip of his chair and
snaps the shotgun closed.

HARRIS
I don't owe the world any more
words.

Ben jackknives from the couch.

BEN
Well, it was a real pleasure --

Lucy swallows her fear, pulls Ben back down beside her.

LUCY
Actually, Mr. Shaw, you do owe the
world some more words.

She nods to Ben's satchel. Ben pales, anxiously digs out a
copy of Harris's OLD CONTRACT. Hands it to Lucy.

Lucy lays it on the coffee table like it's exhibit A. Right
on top of a nest of UNOPENED FINAL NOTICE BILLS and BROKEN
LOTTERY TICKETS.

LUCY
I believe that's your signature.

Harris leans in for a closer look. And Lucy launches:

LUCY
Now the contract says that if we
don't edit, you have to promote,
which I think is great, because the
way a book is released has become
just as meaningful as its content.

Ben wishes the floor would swallow him whole.

LUCY
If you have anything, Mr. Shaw,
then I have big plans. A book tour.
Talk shows and TED Talks. A Reddit
AMA. We'd use every social media
tool to reintroduce you to the
world.

Harris stares at Lucy through wisps of smoke. Pure menace.

HARRIS
From the root to the fruit.

LUCY
Excuse me?

EXT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

The rear bumper of the car is POCKMARKED with BUCKSHOT.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - SAME

Lucy and Ben drive in a deep silence. Both pale and rattled.

EXT. BARNES & NOBLE - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Lucy stares through the window and watches the display for Dragons of Orion get dismantled by a STORE EMPLOYEE. She tries not to crumble right there on the sidewalk when --

BANG!

She spins and crouches... only to realize a truck has traveled over a steel plate in the road.

PASSERSBY shoot her strange looks.

Lucy stands. Closes her eyes. Breathes deeply.

The SOUND of TRICKLING WATER...

INT. SHAW RANCH - BATHROOM - MORNING

Anguish as Harris presses a hand to the wall to hold himself up over the toilet. A cigarette dangles from his mouth.

HARRIS
C'mon... You fickle prick...

Finally -- a series of semi-forced squirts. Then, a KNOCK at the door. Harris turns to it, frowns.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A wary Harris makes his way to the window, pinches the curtains to see VERNE OLSON, early 50s, a small-town banker in a tight off-the-rack Sears suit. Verne glances in the window's direction and Harris snaps the curtain back.

VERNE
Mr. Shaw? Mr. Shaw, I'm issuing you
a summons.
(MORE)

VERNE (CONT'D)
If you do not respond to it, the
court will issue a default
judgement and the bank will
foreclose on your house...

Realizing he's not going to get a response, Verne crouches
down out of sight...

Harris watches a NOTICE slide beneath his door.

He stares at it. Anger buttressing against fear.

LATER

Flames lick at the insides of a RUSTY OIL DRUM. The SUMMONS,
along with BILLS and NOTICES are tossed inside...

Harris stares into the flames and drinks until his gaze
drifts to the willow tree. A man deliberating.

INT. JOSEPH. F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Lucy's face. Also deliberating.

She sits at her desk, staring at a deal memo.

Jack Sinclair sits across from her. Smug as always.

JACK
The name of the publishing house
stays intact and if you'd like, you
can oversee the catalogue.

LUCY
Why do you want this so badly?

JACK
Same reason you're having a hard
time letting go of it - legitimacy.

LUCY
The publishing house doesn't define
me.

JACK
Then accept my offer.

Lucy glances back at the offer sheet. An excruciating pause --
when she hands it back to Jack.

LUCY
It's not enough.

Jack leans back, incredulous.

JACK
Excuse me?

LUCY
Legitimacy will cost you.

JACK
It's costing you, Lucy. Your last three publications haven't exactly set the publishing world on fire.

LUCY
We have projects in the works that will change that.

JACK
What? What do you have?

Lucy feigns studying her monitor -- and lies.

LUCY
Brand new Harris Shaw.

Jack snort with condescending bemusement.

JACK
Jesus, is he even still alive?!

LUCY
Very much so. Just met with him. He was a blast, actually.

EXT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - CURB SIDE - DAY

HORNS BLARE as Harris's battered Jag weaves through an intersection and haphazardly swerves toward the curb -- screeching to a halt.

The car door swings open, its hinges creaking.

Harris exits, almost dapper in a tattered three-piece tweed suit. Cigarette mashed between his teeth. A well-worn LEATHER SATCHEL slung across his chest.

He looks up at the skyline through a bent pair of yellow tinted-aviators. Condos, co-ops, and corporations.

Pure disdain.

LUCY'S OFFICE - SAME

Jack snaps his briefcase shut. He stands, pissed.

JACK
You're making a mistake, Lucy.

LUCY
No, I'm making you angry.

JACK
Don't let daddy issues get in the way of what's best for daddy's company.

LUCY
Screw you!

JACK
We already tried that. But I'm willing to give it another --

LUCY
Get out!

Jack grins smugly. Loves her fire.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

Harris pushes stiffly through the front doors --

Ben sits at the reception desk. Typing. On the phone. He looks over -- instantly gripped with terror.

BEN
Oh God...

He drops the phone, melts down into his chair as Harris makes his way down the hall, clearly familiar with the layout.

LUCY'S OFFICE - SAME

Jack heads to the door wearing a smug expression.

JACK
Let me know when Harris Shaw delivers that book. I'd love to meet him.

Jack's fingers stab for the door, and --

It SWINGS OPEN and SLAMS HIM in the face --

Jack crumbles to the floor. Hand to his nose.

JACK
Fuck! My face!

Lucy gapes at the sight of Harris, who steps right over Jack without giving him a moment's thought.

He reaches a hand into his satchel and --

Lucy SCREAMS and drops --

BENEATH HER DESK

Lucy winces, awaiting certain death. Instead, something lands on her desk with a THUD.

HARRIS (O.S.)

Your pound of flesh, Silver Spoon.

Lucy's eyes crest the lip of the desk and come face to face with a three-inch stack of nicotine-stained paper. And those eyes go wide. She knows exactly what she's looking at.

Lucy exchanges a look with Jack, who tries to stem the flow of blood from his nose while marvelling at Shaw.

LUCY

Jack Sinclair, meet Harris Shaw.

She grins. The cat that ate the canary.

LATER

Lucy stands behind her desk. Runs her thumb along the astounding three inches of pure text.

Harris fills a chair across from her.

Ben sits on a couch off to the side, iPad in lap, nervous.

Harris fishes out a soft pack of Camels and lights one.

LUCY

There's no smoking in here.

Harris draws on the Camel with a vindictive glare.

Lucy cracks the window, then looks at the manuscript.

LUCY

"A Stiff Prick Has No Conscience."
Is that the working title?

HARRIS

Works for me.

LUCY
Controversial. I like it. What's it about?

HARRIS
The end.

LUCY
As in... the end of the world?

HARRIS
The end of fucking, therefore the end of the world.

BEN
The un-Adam and Eve story!

Harris shoots Ben a withering glance.

BEN
Or not.

LUCY
And you'll promote it?

HARRIS
Let's concentrate on the steak and not the peas, Silver Spoon.

LUCY
This needs to be big, Mr. Shaw.

HARRIS
I gave you your goddamn book, now you sell it.

Harris stands, drops his cigarette on the floor -- grinds it out under his heel.

HARRIS
Call me when the check comes in.

He heads for the door.

Lucy desperate -- nervously plays her card:

LUCY
I guess that means I should get started on the edits...

Harris stops shy of the door. Venom to his ears.

Ben stares at Lucy -- a look that begs her not to go there.

LUCY

Not that it needs much, I'm sure...

Harris trembles, an ugly violence right beneath the surface.

HARRIS

Keep your hands off my words.

Harris grips the door handle. Daring Lucy to press...

LUCY

Looks like it could stand to lose a few pages...

Harris spins to her. His face as tight as a fist --

HARRIS

You fucking little dilettante...

Lucy buries her fear beneath a bold stare.

Harris scans her face, waits for her to break... until...

HARRIS

I'll need a fifth of bourbon a day.
One carton of Camels a week. Plenty
of beef jerky.

Harris pivots and he's out the door -- slamming it behind him.

Lucy sags in relief. A smile tracing her lips.

INT. BANK - OFFICE - DAY

A plush office. Staring at Lucy from behind a large antique desk is a dubious PHIL ROSEN. Early 60s. Her stiff-necked financial advisor. She's in mid-explanation.

LUCY

We're talking about Harris Shaw
here, Phil! He's our J.D. Salinger!

PHIL

Look, a new Shaw book adds some
much-needed value to the company,
but why shoulder the burden of
publishing when you can let that
value be translated into a more
lucrative catalogue sale.

Lucy chafes. Knows exactly what he's getting at.

LUCY
I'm not handing this over to Jack
Sinclair. Not now. No sir.

Phil leans forward. Time to get real.

PHIL
Lucy, I'd love to continue
indulging your enthusiasm, but you
don't even have the means to pay
the advances on the books you
already have coming. The bank won't
lend you any more.

Lucy absorbs that in a moment of silence. And then -- she
rises. Stares down at Phil. Direct.

LUCY
Transfer it from my trust.

Phil flinches, leans back, incredulous.

PHIL
Lucy, the trust is meant to look
after you.

LUCY
And I was meant to look after the
publishing house.

INT. A PRINTING HOUSE - DAY

Copies of *A Stiff Prick Has No Conscience* stacked into boxes.
On the DUST JACKET: a man and a woman taking separate forks
in the road, abandoning a decaying city in the distance.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - DAY

Various shots -- Lucy works the phones; a WHITE BOARD fills
with book stores, colleges, and dates; Ben creates Shaw's
social media; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram -- photos, quotes,
tour dates...

INT. SHAW RANCH - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Harris begrudgingly packs a battered old suitcase, cursing
under his breath. He tosses in his ratty robe -- an old
Penthouse Magazine -- his booze holsters. That's it.

He closes the lid to find Hemmy defecating on the bed.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Lucy at her desk. On the phone. Incredulous.

LUCY
Roundworm?!

INTERCUT:

INT. SHAW RANCH - WRITING ROOM - DAY

Harris on the phone, cigarette wedged in his mouth. He plunges an oral syringe into a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE.

HARRIS
Needs to be medicated three times a day.

LUCY
Mr. Shaw, the book release party is tomorrow night!

HARRIS
They've waited forty years. They can wait another week.

Harris slams the receiver down.

LUCY
Hello?! Mr. Shaw?!

Ben pokes his head in the room, ecstatic.

BEN
Marc Maron wants Harris on his podcast!

LUCY
You like cats, right?

Ben cocks a brow.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

HISSS! Hemmy backs into a corner. Fur raised. Puffed up tail.

Ben wields the oral syringe. Guarded and terrified.

BEN
Don't make this any harder on me.
I should be at a glamorous party
with beautiful people and canapes!

Hemmy emits a guttural, demon-like sound.

Ben cowers, makes a cross with his fingers and the syringe.

BEN

The power of Christ compels you to
take this antibiotic!

INT. LOFT BUILDING - NIGHT

A release party. Placards of Harris's book dot a room that brims with MANHATTAN's LITERATI. They make small talk. Check their phones. WAITERS serve drinks and canapes.

Lucy stands at a podium. She rocks a smart little black dress, liquid smile. Perfectly made-up.

LUCY

And now, it is my great pleasure to
introduce to you a great man of
letters. A lion of American
literature. A national treasure.
An iconoclast...

BATHROOM - SAME

Harris violently retches in the toilet in his tattered suit, gripped by a tormenting anxiety.

He pulls a bottle from his holsters and takes a palate-cleansing swig and swish. Lights a smoke.

MAIN ROOM - SAME

LUCY

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Harris
Shaw!

The room breaks into enthusiastic APPLAUSE. Heads swivel, waiting for the reclusive author to reveal himself.

Lucy scans the crowd as well, instantly anxious...

BATHROOM - SAME

Harris catches his reflection in the mirror. His eyes burning with anger and self-loathing. Willing himself to step out...

HARRIS

Fuck you.
(then)
But fuck them first.

MAIN ROOM - SAME

An undercurrent of MURMURS and WHISPERS gathering steam.

The eyes of the room flick over to Lucy, who leans to the mic once more, and this time with vigor:

LUCY
Mr. Harris Shaw!

Suddenly -- the bathroom door at the back of the room flies open. A cloud of smoke billows out.

Lucy swallows, not sure what to expect.

Harris steps out. A man ready for the gallows. Cigarette in mouth. Eyes soaked in bourbon and disdain.

He takes one last gulp from his bottle and holsters it.

Onlookers raise their phones. SNAPPING. RECORDING.

Harris fixes his gaze on Lucy. Takes slow and shaky steps toward her.

The crowd gives him a wide berth. Eyes and phones glued to him as if gazing upon an alien artifact.

Lucy slides out of the way as Harris settles at the lectern. Watches him glance down at his novel spread out before him. Completely on edge.

Harris glances over at her. Leans into the microphone...

HARRIS
 I came here to read from my novel,
 but I came across an old piece of
 literature that I found... far more
 compelling. Far more honest. I'd
 like share it with you tonight.

Lucy bracing for the unknown as she watches Harris pull a CRINKLED LETTER from his suit pocket.

He unfolds and flattens it on the lectern.

HARRIS
 Penthouse. September, 1977.

There is a collective intake of breath.

HARRIS
 "Lindsay had the ass of a twelve-year-old boy and the kind of tits that hung off her like drops of fresh morning dew..."

The crowd stirs. Some shocked. Others titillated. But all still recording, snapping shots.

Lucy takes it all in, concern turning into intrigue, turning quickly into elation.

EXT. LOFT TERRACE - LATER

Lucy's in spin mode, breaking off from a clot of guests while checking her phone...

GUEST

You've really got the tiger by the tail here, Lucy! He's outrageous!

LUCY

That's Harris Shaw!

She glides over to Harris, who leans against the railing, smoking and drinking. Alone. Which is how he likes it.

LUCY

This is great. You're already trending on Twitter. You're a natural.

Harris glares at her with contempt -- when Lucy catches someone coming toward them --

LUCY

(steels herself)
Shit, shit, shit...

He is HALPREN NOLAN, mid-30s, an eternally pubescent and pompous fuck. Long-ish hair. Bow-tie. He even speaks with the faintest hint of a British accent.

HALPREN

The great Harris Shaw.

Lucy pushes out a smile...

LUCY

Harris, this is Halpren Nolan.
He's a book reviewer for the Times.

Harris squints at Halpren, making a quick appraisal.

HARRIS

Jesus of Nazareth. Back in the day we practiced on boys like you when we didn't have girls around.

Lucy gasps but finds a way to morph it into a smile.

LUCY

He says that to everyone.

HALPREN

Given the book's bleak portrayal of humanity, I'm not surprised by this attitude.

HARRIS

It's got a happy ending.

HALPREN

The last woman on earth has been left barren and the last man is impotent. How is that a happy ending?

HARRIS

No more book reviewers.

Lucy feigns upbeat laughter.

LUCY

No more of any of us, really.

HALPREN

I think it's fashionable pessimism at best. I'm sorry, Mr. Shaw, but you might have been better off playing your cards like Salinger and letting us wonder what we might have missed. I'm not afraid of defying the conventions of the intelligentsia to state that I am an optimist.

Halpren lifts a smug chin. Pretty damn pleased with himself.

CUT TO:

HALPREN'S FACE. Upside down. Terrified. POLICE SIRENS fill the air.

HALPREN

Oh God! Oh God!

We reveal Halpren dangling upside down from the loft balcony. Harris holds him by his ankles.

HARRIS

How's that optimism workin' out for you now, Halprick?!

A crowd has formed on the street, about fifty feet below.
CELL PHONES aimed upward. FLASHES BURSTING!

Lucy leans over the railing, phone out, recording.

LUCY
Mr. Shaw, please don't drop him!
(then...)
Swing him a little to the left.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

And FLASH! Harris gets his mug shot taken. Flips us the bird.

INT. METROPOLITAN - LUCY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Lucy juggles calls while staring at her monitor with a single-minded intensity --

LUCY
You can't cancel. He's trending.
He's hella-trending.

ANOTHER CALL --

LUCY
You couldn't get this kind of
exposure if you tattooed it on
Taylor Swift's forehead. Also, your
venue is on the ground floor!

AND ANOTHER --

As HALPREN'S CRIES BLEED from her computer's SPEAKERS -- "*Oh God! Oh God, no!*" And then Harris's voice -- "*It's all bullshit, and this man is its harbinger!*"

LUCY
Over half a million hits on
YouTube. "ItsAllBullshit" is the
second most popular hashtag of the
day... *Hello?*

Lucy end the call, flustered. She senses the judgmental eyes of her father's portrait on her and turns to it:

LUCY
What?! You published him first!

She drops her forehead onto her desk. Then her cell RINGS.

She glances at the display. It's Ben. She answers.

LUCY
They're all cancelling.

INTERCUT:

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - SAME

Cramped and messy. Ben sits on the couch, laptop open, on his cell. His face and arms are a battlefield of raw CLAW MARKS. But he's buzzing, eyes glued to the monitor.

BEN
The Lizard Lounge hasn't. They just
tweeted an open invitation for him
to do a reading.

Lucy perks up, intrigued...

LUCY
The bar in Boston?

BEN
The bar where Harris used to do
spoken word, read poetry. The bar
where your father discovered him.

Magical words. She looks at the painting of her father. Her mind suddenly racing with white-hot determination...

LUCY
Do it. Book him. Then book any damn
bar in every city with every book
store and college that just
canceled us.

TIME CUTS:

ASPHALT FLYING beneath DISSOLVES of the office WHITE BOARD -- names of bookstores like King St. Books are erased. Names of bars like THE BOOM BOOM ROOM are scribbled in. Then...

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

Lucy drives, fingers drumming at the wheel, stealing glances between the road and the rear-view mirror. Harris in the back, hitting the bottle hard. It's a gummy silence, until:

LUCY
This is exciting... I've always
wanted to go on a book tour...

No reaction. No acknowledgement that she's even there.

LUCY

When my father would leave for one,
I'd beg him to take me with him.

The mere mention of her father causes Harris to bristle.

LUCY

He never did. Said the road was no
place for a young girl. Growing up,
my favorite cartoon was Wile E.
Coyote and The Roadrunner. He told
me I could come with him when I was
as quick and crafty as the
roadrunner, otherwise I'd get
caught and eaten up!

Nothing. Just an impassive stare. But Lucy presses, cheery:

LUCY

You know, I always imagined that
the coyote wouldn't have had the
nerve to eat him. He needs the --

HARRIS

I don't recall dropping a quarter
in your mouth, Silver Spoon.

Lucy pauses, her cheer snuffed out. She takes a moment...

LUCY

You don't want to talk?

HARRIS

I don't want to talk to you.

Lucy swallows back the hurt with steely composure, then:

LUCY

So... no talking ever?

Harris resumes his impassive stare. Fishes a Camel out of its
pack and lights it.

Lucy goes to say something -- but Harris shuts her down with
a look that could freeze water.

Instead, she hits a button that lowers his window. Harris
raises it back up. Purely vindictive as he exhales a plume of
smoke that fills the car.

Lucy keeps her eyes locked on the road -- and steps a little
more heavily on the accelerator, the speedometer rising...

INT. THE LIZARD LOUNGE - NIGHT

A sea of GLOWING CELL PHONES are raised high.

All capturing Harris as he staggers across a tiny stage in flecks of light. A punch-drunk Lazarus, risen from the grave. His book in one hand. Bottle in the other. Holsters loaded.

HARRIS

The roadrunner's top speed is
twenty miles per hour. The coyote
can reach speeds of up to forty-
three miles per hour.

Voice BOOMING, louder than one could have thought.

HARRIS

The cartoon is bullshit!

Hip young things in skinny jeans and scarves push and pack
against each other.

And we find Lucy ghosting along the edges, glaring at Harris.

Harris lights a smoke. His motor running. Building...

HARRIS

In reality, the coyote snaps the
roadrunner's neck, rips out its
entrails, leaving the rest for the
buzzards. Not exactly suitable for
children who feast on bullshit with
magic in their eyes.

He takes a monumental swig. Wipes his mouth with his sleeve.

HARRIS

The truth is the first casualty.
It's been replaced by false
narratives and petty mythologies.
We're hoodwinked by mulas and
priests. Bankers and politicians.
All of them shining flashlights in
our faces and telling us it's day.

Lucy studies the audience as they chirp, whistle, and shout.

HARRIS

Did you know Adolf Hitler was a
vegetarian? That Elvis dyed his
hair black? That Thoreau made his
mother do his laundry? There's no
goddamn Walden...

Lucy slowly raises her phone -- ZOOMS tighter on Harris. And then -- he looks straight at her. His bourbon-soaked eyes glittering with anarchic energy.

HARRIS
It's all bullshit.

His glare so withering that Lucy lowers the phone again.

Harris shifts back to the crowd --

HARRIS (CONT'D)
Say it with me!

The crowd repeats it like a mantra...

CROWD
IT'S ALL BULLSHIT.

Lucy shakes off the moment. Brings her phone back up.

HARRIS
This is a book tour, right? Maybe
we should read a little...

Harris cracks the book open, thumbs randomly through pages...

Lucy looks on with some relief. All business. Recording.

Harris stares at the open page. A flicker of fear in his eyes, but then he proceeds with drunken confidence...

HARRIS
Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit...
(flips the page)
Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit...

And the crowd joins in. A low rhythmic chant -- *BULLSHIT, BULLSHIT, BULLSHIT...*

Harris grins, slams the book shut and drops it on the floor.

THUD.

He proceeds to unzips his pants.

The place goes nuts. Roaring with approval.

Lucy brings down her phone. *Oh, Jesus.*

A stream of URINE splatters the BOOK.

The place ERUPTS. This is what they came for.

Lucy's concern falls away. She sees nothing but dollar signs.

LUCY
Bullshit!
(then louder...)
Bullshit! Bullshit!

She turns to a girl beside her.

LUCY
Isn't this great?!

INT. LIZARD LOUNGE - CONCESSION STAND - NIGHT

Lucy stands behind a STACK of Harris's books. Fans shuffle past, barely paying attention.

LUCY
Thirty percent off the retail price
and no tax! Also available on
Amazon. Just type in the code word
"bullshit" for the discount!

But they're too busy with Harris, a semi-conscious scarecrow pressed up against a wall by fans, plied with drinks. They steal selfies -- laughing, mugging for their camera phones.

Suddenly -- a lanky HIPSTER, early 20s, steps to the table.

HIPSTER
You got T-shirts?

LUCY
I have books.

The hipster nods, awkwardly glances at the books.

HIPSTER
You should sell T-shirts.

She stares at him, puzzled, then -- her phone BUZZES.

A text from JACK SINCLAIR.

Ready to sell yet?

Lucy seethes. DELETES it.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A crappy motel off the main drag. An overdose of neon. Off-screen we hear sound of labored breathing. Of struggle.

LUCY (O.S.)
It's okay... I used to be second
stroke on the rowing team...

Lucy drags Harris into frame across the lot by his arms, a few feet at a time. Like a corpse stolen from the grave.

LUCY
Mind you, we'd be moving a lot
faster if you were a boat.

Harris mumbles under his breath, barely there...

LUCY
Right, not talking...

When suddenly -- Lucy trips and crumples to the ground.

She winces and reaches for a broken heel. A greater pain.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Damnit. These are Jimmy Choos!

Harris coughs, the phlegm sucking out his chest with a horrible asthmatic sound. But he settles. Sound asleep.

Lucy stares at him, quietly reckoning.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Queen bed, small TV, floral bedspread. A bucket in the center of the room collects a leak in the ceiling.

Lucy sits up on the bed, laptop on a pillow. She logs into the BookScan domain. Enters the ISBN.

More mediocre tallies for "A STIFF PRICK HAS NO CONSCIENCE."

Can't be right. She hits refresh, but nothing changes.

Lucy leans back, confounded -- just as Harris's COUGH punches through the wall.

EXT. COMMERCIAL STREET - SUNRISE

Lucy runs -- the ground moving faster and faster beneath her feet...

LUCY
You're the best, Lucy. You're the
best...

DISSOLVE TO:

A MAP

A RED LINE glides through the Northeastern US, as --
OVERLAPPING DISSOLVES of MARQUEES: THE TATTOOED MOM; THE
SHRINE; B SIDE LIQUOR stream past...

And Lucy. In the audience. Dead center. RECORDING as the
VENUES START TO QUICKLY CHANGE BEHIND HER.

We PUSH INTO the LENS of her PHONE and TRANSITION INTO --

A BLIZZARD of SOCIAL MEDIA SHOTS and VIDEOS:

Harris mugging with an ever-growing number of FANS; PISSING
on his book; CROWD SURFING; launching a MIDGET into the
crowd; SPITTING into a camera lens; BREATHING FIRE; draining
bottles, his Adam's apple firing like a piston...

All while Lucy drives. Day turning to night. Stealing glances
at Harris while he drinks, smokes, sleeps, chews his jerky.

All while SUPERIMPOSED NUMBERS of FOLLOWERS and LIKES tick
UPWARD like a stock market index...

All while Lucy refreshes the BookScan domain, confounded.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Another run-of-the-mill, moderately priced motel room. Lucy
paces back and forth like an anxious zoo animal, on her cell.

LUCY

It's bullshit, all right. None of
this is translating into sales.

INTERCUT:

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits on his bed, laptop open. Fresh BANDAGES on his arms
and face. Hemmy can be heard YOWLING and CLAWING on the other
side of the closed bedroom door.

BEN

We just haven't hit critical mass.

LUCY

I may hit critical condition before
that happens.

BEN

And I may have rabies!

LUCY

All right, I'm sorry. Just check with the vendors. Check the placing of the book. See if something got messed up in the system.

INT. BARNES & NOBLE - DAY

Ben stands beside a display of Harris's book. He's negotiating with a portly store MANAGER who can't seem to stop looking at all the bandages on his face.

BEN

It should be in the window!

PORTLY MANAGER

The new Oprah bio is in the window.

BEN

Oh what, is she giving a free car away with every copy?!

PORTLY MANAGER

What happened to your face?

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Lucy wrangles a morbidly drunk Harris out of the back seat of the car, while on the phone. A desperation in her voice.

LUCY

What about Fallon? Kimmel?...

BEN (V.O.)

Maybe. If there's a cancellation.

LUCY

Then cancel someone.

BEN (V.O.)

What do you mean cancel someone?

Lucy angrily heaves Harris out of the car --

LUCY

Put out a hit. Slap some ether on a rag. Kidnap them!

-- and he crumbles to the ground with a thud and a groan.

Lucy looks up to find a YOUNG FAMILY of FOUR staring at her -- at Harris's limp body on the ground.

LUCY
 No! This isn't what... This is
 Harris Shaw. He's a famous author.
 He's just sleeping. He's fine.
 (then, big smile...)
 Would you like to buy a book?!

INT. MEDICAL SUPPLY STORE - DAY

A haggard-looking Lucy negotiates with a slick SALESMAN,
 surrounded by wheelchairs, crutches, neck-braces...

SWARTHY SALESMAN
 What's his level of disability?

LUCY
 What level is interminably drunk?

SLICK SALESMAN
 You want a built-in catheter?

LUCY
 (not sure)
 Sure.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Lucy pushes Harris across the lot in his new WHEELCHAIR.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Lucy uses the wheelchair to load UNSOLD BOOKS into the car.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lucy on the toilet, watching a video of Harris on her phone.

HARRIS (V.O.)
 Ninety-five percent of everything
 we do is motivated by insecurity.
 The other five is shitting.

We hear the CHEER of the crowd.

Lucy sits there, sharply aware of her life at this moment.

**INT. LUCY'S MOTEL BATHROOM/INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL BATHROOM -
 SPLIT SCREEN - NIGHT**

Lucy leans on the sink counter, as does Harris, a wall apart.
 Both staring at worn reflections beneath harsh yellow lights.

Harris teeters, coughs up a storm, spits in the sink.

HARRIS

Coward...

Lucy takes a few sharp breaths, choking down her emotions.

LUCY

You're the best, Lucy. You're the best...

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Lucy sits on the bed, looks right at us. Defeated.

LUCY

I'm not good at this.

Ben stares back at her from her laptop screen.

BEN

Now's not the time to feel sorry for yourself.

LUCY

I ordered T-shirts. Fucking T-shirts. Can you believe that?

BEN

Yes, I know. I placed the order.

Lucy closes her eyes, lets out a choppy stream of breath.

BEN

Maybe it's time to play this straight, Lucy.

LUCY

Play it straight...?

BEN

Get back to basics. This is a book tour. Make it about the book.

LUCY

They don't care about the book unless he urinates on it.

BEN

Then get him to read from it.

Lucy laughs a laugh that borders in delirious...

LUCY

I can't get him to do anything. He won't even acknowledge me.

BEN
You're his publisher --

LUCY
I'm his chauffeur, his bourbon
sherpa, his assisted living nurse!

BEN
Do you care about the book?

LUCY
Of course I care about the book.

BEN
I mean beyond its sales?

Lucy turns the question over in her mind -- her gaze falling to the BOXES of Harris's book sitting at the foot of the bed.

INT. ANOTHER BAR - LOBBY - NIGHT

Lucy at her table, holding up a T-SHIRT emblazoned with the image of HARRIS'S BIRD-FLIPPING MUG SHOT. She also wears one.

LUCY
Twenty each or two for thirty-five.

She gets a few takers when -- Jack Sinclair steps up to the table. Big shiny grin. Looking sharp as usual.

JACK
T-shirts. Impressive.

Lucy's startled to see him. She wants to crawl into the deepest hole, but evokes her trademark confidence.

LUCY
It's part of the whole Harris Shaw
lifestyle brand we're going for.

JACK
The Martha Stewart of hard living?

LUCY
Kale's out, Camels are in.

JACK
Got time for a drink?
(big smile)
I'm buying.

A loaded offer. Lucy glances across the lobby to where Harris sits slumped in the wheelchair, haphazardly autographing a BUXOM WOMAN's chest.

And that trademark confidence erodes.

INT. MOTEL - BAR - NIGHT

Last decorated in the 80s and mostly empty. New Country on the sound system. Lucy and Jack sit across from each other in a booth, the conversation already charged.

LUCY

That's less than the last offer!

JACK

You're further in the hole than when I made the last offer.

Lucy starts to slide out of the booth --

LUCY

I don't know why I bothered.

JACK

Because you know you can't capitalize on this, Lucy. You're in dives, for Pete's sake.

LUCY

We don't live in an Oprah Book Club world anymore.

JACK

They're not coming for the book, they're coming to see a freak show.

LUCY

He's a social media phenomenon.

JACK

He's an author, not a trend.

LUCY

We just haven't hit critical mass.

JACK

Speaking of critical, the book gets reviewed on Off the Shelf tonight. Halpren Nolan is their special guest. Heard of him?

LUCY

To hell with Halpren Nolan, and the fact that you've bothered to come here tells me that I'm doing something right.

JACK
Draining your trust isn't doing
something right.

Lucy's sideswiped. She straightens. Attempts to recover.

LUCY
That's not true. Who told you that?
Did Phil tell you that?

JACK
You're dragging the man's legacy
through the mud.

LUCY
Harris's legacy is on him.

JACK
I meant your father's.

Lucy glares at Jack as though she could hit him.

LUCY
Go fuck yourself!

She stands, about to leave when --

JACK
Lucy, wait.

Jack reaches inside his blazer. Pulls out a checkbook and a Montblanc pen.

JACK
Name your price.

Lucy stares between the check book and Jack's smug expression -- on the precipice of surrender, when:

LUCY
The coffee was \$2.50. Don't skimp
on the tip.

Lucy turns heel and storms off -- leaving Jack to stare after her, shaking his head, smirking.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Lucy paces. She's on her phone. Fucking livid.

LUCY
How dare you tell that sonofabitch
anything! I've treated you like
family --

VOICEMAIL

If you are pleased with your message, press one. If you'd like to record a new message --

Lucy presses the shit out of two.

VOICEMAIL

At the tone, please record your message...

LUCY

Fuck it, Phil, you're fired!

She ends the call and unleashes a WAIL of frustration.

MOMENTS LATER

Lucy flips open the Prius's hatch and contemplates the case of WILD TURKEY -- the busted CARTON of CAMELS.

INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Harris is hunched over the toilet bowl, coughing up his insides. The familiar faux-British voice of Halpren Nolan emanates from the CLOCK RADIO in the main room.

HALPREN NOLAN (V.O.)

It needed an edit. Given a more cohesive shape and unified theme...

Harris spits in the bowl. Red clouds dance in the water.

INTERCUT:

EXT./INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A pin-prick of light is visible in the driver's side of the car. The unmistakable red glow of a CIGARETTE.

NPR INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

What do you make of the book tour?

Lucy sits behind the wheel. She smokes, coughs a little. Brings a bottle to her lips. All as Halpren's verbal take-down continues from the car radio...

HALPREN (V.O.)

(you can hear his smile)

Are they still calling it that?

Harris stares into the bathroom mirror, drowning in his reflection. Cigarette smoke snaking the creases of his face.

HALPREN (V.O.)
To quote from The Future is X-
Rated: "Art is not propaganda; it
is an expression of the truth."

Lucy stares out the dirty windshield. She takes another swig from the bottle. A gathering storm in her demeanor.

INT. HARRIS'S HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Harris sits on the edge of his bed, paralyzed in the act of lighting a cigarette with the end of another when --

Lucy bursts through the door, slams it behind her.

LUCY
Art is not propaganda, it is an
expression of the truth.

Harris barely acknowledges her, puffing away.

LUCY
Those are your words.

Harris reaches for an open bottle of Turkey on the night table. Brings it to his lips. Drinks.

LUCY
I want you to read from the book.

Lucy steels herself, bounds upon him -- yanks the bottle from his hand and chugs what's left.

Her throat on fire, she whips the bottle to the floor.

LUCY
Say something, you sonofabitch! You
got words for everyone else, how
about some for me?!

Harris cocks his head to her. Brings her into focus.

HARRIS
Get me a fresh bottle from the car.

LUCY
There will be no edits or revision
to the draft submitted by the
author. In exchange, the author
must promote the book in accordance
with the publisher's requests.

HARRIS
Get the fuck out of here.

LUCY
I want you to read from the book!

HARRIS
They can read it when they buy it!

LUCY
That's the problem. They're not
buying it. Not like we need them
to. Not even close.

Harris's face darkens.

HARRIS
The way a book is released is far
more meaningful than its content.

LUCY
What?

HARRIS
Those are your words.

Her heart in her throat...

LUCY
I've changed my mind.

HARRIS
Not very good at your job, are you,
Silver Spoon?

LUCY
Oh no, this is not on me. You run
this show. I wasn't even allowed to
touch your precious words. If
they're so important to you, then
read a few of them!

He surges to his feet, his bourbon breath right in her face.

HARRIS
Have you read them, Silver Spoon?!

Lucy's fear rising. Skin paling. Heart racing.

LUCY
Of course I've read them!

HARRIS
And what edits would you have made?

Lucy's mind races, searching for words, faltering...

LUCY

I... I would have given it a more cohesive shape... A more... unified theme.

Harris cackles, pitying her.

HARRIS

From the root to the fruit.

LUCY

What? What does that even mean?

Harris's cough surfaces but he pushes words past it --

HARRIS

It means you're a ball-less, self-entitled Hamlet who has as much business being an editor as I do being a Sunday school teacher!

LUCY

Fine, I would have cut at least fifty pages from it. How's that for starters?!

HARRIS

Which fifty?

LUCY

Any fifty where you go on about how everything is bullshit.

HARRIS

Wrong fifty. Now go fetch me a fresh bottle.

Harris pulls out a fresh Camel...

LUCY

There's a reason you decided to bring me that book. I saw the bills on your coffee table. You need this as much as I do. I know you do!

Harris draws on his cigarette.

HARRIS

If the book can't sell itself, then maybe neither of us deserve what we need, Silver Spoon.

Lucy shakes her head, burning with contempt.

LUCY

No wonder my father let that
advance burn.

And Harris rails with the vindictiveness of the violated:

HARRIS

A pittance considering I paved the
way for this unbroken boulevard of
green lights you call your life!

LUCY

All those lights have turned red!

HARRIS

Because of your incompetence. At
least that asshole father of yours
knew how to turn a buck!

Lucy straightens with a child's defiance, her eyes shimmering
with imminent tears. She heads for the door --

LUCY

To hell with you!

-- and slams it behind her.

HARRIS

Already there, Silver Spoon.

Harris erupts into a coughing fit.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Lucy bursts through the door, and the tears start to spill
out uncontrollably. She crumples to the floor, all while
Harris's hacking coughs punches through the wall.

Lucy's tears succumb to rage. She wipes her eyes, thrashes
about the room, upsetting furniture, BANGING on the WALL --

LUCY

(yelling through wall...)
Just die already...

Then -- her eyes fall on a couple of boxes at the foot of the
bed -- Harris's books. She lunges for one -- plucks a copy
out and whips it at the wall -- *THUD*.

LUCY (CONT'D)

You think I can't do this, but I
can! I got a perfect score on my
SATs.

She grabs another book --

LUCY

I had a 3.9 grade point average at Harvard.

Tears open the flap --

LUCY

I was president of the Signet Society! Captain of the cross-country team!

Rips at its innards --

LUCY (CONT'D)

You hear that? That's the sound of me editing your precious words!

Rip -- Rip -- RIP!

She tosses the disemboweled book at the wall -- *THUD*.

INTERCUT:

HARRIS'S ROOM - SAME

Harris lies on his bed, coughing. His face and body contort with every spasm. All to the THUD, THUD, THUD of books dying against the other side of the wall.

LUCY (O.S.)

I'll read the damn book to them myself if I have to.

Lucy whips another copy at the wall -- *WHAM!*

LUCY

I'll tweet the whole thing out, one-hundred and forty characters at a time, damn you! *How 'bout that?!* They'll read it before they buy it, you sonofabitch!

As she's about to launch another copy, she freezes. Stares at the fragments of battered pages scattered all around her.

Lucy drops to her knees, rakes a hand along the floor, bringing up pieces no larger than fortune cookie strips.

Reading the words they contain. Perhaps for the first time.

Desperation giving way to something else...

CUT TO:

CAMERA PHONE POV:

A HIPSTER stands outside of a bar and reads from a copy of Harris's book.

HIPSTER
Eden was gone. No longer within
reach. God, it would seem, was done
with mistakes...
(looks into camera)
Should I read more?

Lucy lowers her phone.

LUCY
No, I think that's perfect...

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

Lucy looks up in the rear-view mirror to find Harris oddly awake, staring at her. They both quickly divert their gazes.

A ruddy residual anger thick in the air.

After a moment, they both surreptitiously look up again -- then away again.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER CAMERA PHONE POV:

This time an EARNEST INTELLECTUAL reading from the book:

INTELLECTUAL
The final plague did not come from
pest or insect. It came from man
gazing into his own navel instead
into another's eyes...

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lucy now deep into Harris's book.

She circles passages, dog-ears pages, underlines sentences, crosses others out.

All while burning through Camels and sipping short pours of Wild Turkey in plastic motel cups.

CUT TO:

YET ANOTHER CAMERA PHONE POV:

A BRO STONER reads...

BRO STONER

The most wealthy place in the world
had become the graveyard. Because
that where everyone's dreams were
buried...

(looks into camera, smirks)

Fuck, that's some heavy shit.

INT. ANOTHER BAR - NIGHT

A small but steady stream of fans purchase books from Lucy.
She's in good spirits, running cards, taking cash.

Nearby, Harris comes face-to-face with a fan who pushes
through the wall of phones, and holds his book open to him.
Pen outstretched in the other hand.

FAN

Could you sign this, Mr. Shaw?

Harris stares at the book. The request sobering. He tilts his
head to see Lucy selling copies -- others joining the line
leading to him -- a copy at the ready.

INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - VARIOUS TIMES

Lucy recording more people -- HOTEL CLERKS, STUDENTS, FANS --
all reading from Harris's book.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lucy downloads the recordings onto her laptop as we CUT TO:

MULTIPLYING windows of YOUTUBE, TWITTER and FACEBOOK links;
all walks of life reading Harris's words, all melding into a
cacophony of white noise...

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lucy logs into the BookScan domain. The weekly tallies moving
upward. She beams. Full of light. Hopeful.

EXT. BARNES & NOBLE - SIDEWALK - DAY

The portly manager from earlier builds a window display for
Harris's book. It's now front and center.

Ben happily watches from the sidewalk, holding Hemmy in his
cat carrier, directing the feline's eyes to the window.

EXT. MOTEL - DAWN

Lucy heads out for a run but makes it about a hundred yards from the motel before she comes to a stop.

Drops her hands on her knees. Too tired. Too hung over. Too many cigarettes. She turns and walks back toward the hotel.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - DAY

Harris stirs from his sleep. Looks out his window to realize they're parked at a gas station. Big rigs and RVs all around.

He then spots Lucy recording a TRUCK DRIVER as he reads from Harris's book. Harris watches, curious and uncomfortable.

INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Harris leans against the headboard of his bed, smoking and drinking while flipping channels -- inane reality shows, news of terrorism, and finally KANYE WEST being interviewed.

KANYE

Maybe this Harris nigga is a poet.
I don't know, but he's right about
one thing - it is all bullshit.
Bullshit that people ain't tweetin'
Kanye's lyrics. Bullshit that they
ain't recitin' Kanye's words.
That's some bullshit!
(straight to camera)
You listenin', Shaw. The internet
belongs to Kanye, bitch!

Harris's cigarette sags as he stares at the TV with rapt incomprehension -- then something catches his eye just outside his window -- a puff of smoke filling the night air.

Curious, Harris shuffles to the WINDOW. Pinches the CURTAINS.

It's Lucy on her balcony, cigarette in one hand, his book in the other. A pen tucked behind her ear. She plucks the pen and circles something on a page. Then circles again.

Harris narrows his gaze -- increasingly ANXIOUS.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

Lucy steers, her demeanor as bright and upbeat as we've seen.

HARRIS (O.S.)

This Kanye fellow, he really likes
himself, doesn't he?

His voice ignites Lucy's attention. Her eyes come up to the rear-view mirror to find Harris's waiting. She hesitates, as if unsure she has permission to speak...

LUCY

Uh, yes. Yes he does...

Lucy looks between him and the road, waiting for more...

HARRIS

People are buying the book.

LUCY

Yes. Yes they are.

HARRIS

And all because you have them
reading into that hand-held mind-
rot machine of yours?

Lucy looks at him. *Is he upset?*

LUCY

I just picked out some passages I
liked and encouraged people to
share them...

Harris looks away for a moment --

HARRIS

Passages you liked?

LUCY

Yes. There's quite a few.

HARRIS

Looks like you found a way to turn
yourself into my editor, after all.

Sudden tension...

LUCY

I didn't change anything. They're
your words.

Lucy's eyes dart back and forth from the rear-view mirror, eager to keep this ball in the air.

LUCY

They're picking their own out now.
The whole thing's gone viral. You
have close to half a million
followers on Twitter...

Harris lifts his face to the sunlight that streams through the window. Scenery flashing past. A conflicted expression.

HARRIS

Christ only had followers and that didn't end well for him.

LUCY

The Bible became a best seller!

Harris throws her a look. Lucy nervously retracts.

LUCY

It was... a joke.

HARRIS

I take it you managed to look past the lack of cohesive shape and unified theme?

Lucy looks to the road, tensing. Thinks about coming clean.

LUCY

That... wasn't me. I didn't have a proper answer, so I --

HARRIS

I should have dropped that Halpren cocksucker when I had the chance.

Lucy shifts in her seat. Embarrassed.

LUCY

You knew...

We see the effort as Harris studies her, appraising...

HARRIS

You got a voice, Silver Spoon?

LUCY

A voice?

HARRIS

An attitude. A take on life.

LUCY

Yes. I think so.

Harris weaves a Camel from his pack, lights it.

HARRIS

Don't be afraid to use it.

She nods as watches the cigarette, the flame, the draw. She sure could use one right now.

Suddenly -- Harris leans forward and extends the cigarette to her.

Lucy stares at it. At Harris. Hesitant.

HARRIS
(almost fatherly)
Don't worry, I won't tell.

Lucy accepts it like some sort of peace offering.

She takes a pull. Exhales.

Harris sparks a new one for himself. Lowers his window.

Lucy stealing glances, sensing a sudden shift in the relationship. They both smoke in silence. Then...

LUCY
You think maybe you'd like to take
a crack at it?

HARRIS
At what?

LUCY
Seems like you're the only one who
hasn't read from your book.

Harris thinks on that for a long moment...

HARRIS
You got a passage in mind?

And, ever so slowly, Lucy's face dissolves into a grin.

EXT. SIDE OF HIGHWAY - DAY

The Prius is parked along the shoulder.

IN THE DISTANCE, about fifty yards from the road, in the middle of a broad, weedy verge, Lucy records Harris reading from his book. His expression strained. Lips moving slowly.

But we hear nothing over the din of passing cars.

We can only see. Two souls connecting for the first time.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - LOBBY - NIGHT

A mob crowds a merchandise table. They wave copies of the book about, all seeking an autograph.

Lucy helps guide Harris's inebriated Sharpie from one book jacket to the next -- makes change -- swipes credit cards.

One kid displays his tattooed forearm to Harris -- a quote from the book.

TATTOOED KID

Check it out, Shaw. I'm taking
your words to the grave, man!

HARRIS

The sooner you get there, the
better, son.

Harris seems overwhelmed. Perhaps even moved. Lucy takes notice. Smiles to herself when -- a young, buttoned-up professional makes his way toward her.

BUTTONED PROFESSIONAL

Lucy Skinner?

LUCY

Yes.

BUTTONED PROFESSIONAL

I'm Nick Fry.

He extends a hand. She places a book in it.

LUCY

There you go, Nick Fry.

NICK

Uh, I'm not here for a book.

He politely hands back the book.

NICK

I'm the talent coordinator for the
Late Show.

Lucy's eyes widen. Her heart pounds.

INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Harris anxiously smokes, perched on the edge of his bed. Lucy stands at the dresser and pours some Wild Turkey into two plastic motel cups. She buzzes with excitement.

Harris stubs his cigarette in the ashtray -- hand shaking.

HARRIS
I hate Leno.

LUCY
Leno's gone. It's Fallon.

HARRIS
Who the fuck is that?

LUCY
He replaced Leno. He's funny.

HARRIS
Couldn't be worse than Leno.

She turns, hands him his cup. Raises hers.

LUCY
To becoming a best seller.

HARRIS
Just give me the bottle.

LUCY
It's a toast. Let's class it up.

Harris begrudgingly takes the cup. Watches Lucy drain hers before it even touches his lips.

HARRIS
Easy there, Silver Spoon. Save some for the talent.

LUCY
There will be plenty for you after the show. I need you in top form.

Harris shoots his drink, bristles...

HARRIS
Does anyone even watch this fairy cocksucker?

LUCY
Yes, millions.

HARRIS
Sheep.

LUCY
You know what, we should prep!

Lucy drags the desk off the wall, then positions Harris's wheelchair beside it, creating a mock stage. She tilts a couple of lamp shades in his direction.

Harris shields his face with a hand.

HARRIS

What the hell are you doing?

LUCY

Role play. I'll be Fallon and you be you - only nicer.

HARRIS

Jesus fuck.

Lucy plops herself behind the desk. Places the bottle of Wild Turkey in front of her like a microphone. Taps it.

LUCY

Testing. One, two, three...

HARRIS

You've lost your mind.

LUCY

C'mon, sit.

HARRIS

I can handle an interview with a court jester, Silver Spoon.

LUCY

That's what I'm worried about. The show is taped. If you say or do anything inappropriate, you'll get cut from the broadcast. Now sit!

Harris drains his cup. Begrudgingly plops himself down in the wheelchair. He lights a Camel, but Lucy stops him.

LUCY (CONT'D)

You aren't going to be able to smoke.

HARRIS

Jesus fuck, what's happened to late night?

Lucy maneuvers herself in front of the desk, faces an imaginary crowd.

LUCY

Thank you... Thank you... Hey, did you hear about the hungry clock? It went back for seconds!

Lucy graciously nods, raises her hands in a dismissive wave, as if to quell the laughter.

HARRIS

Is this Fallon joker retarded?

She shushes him.

LUCY

I'm doing the monologue.

HARRIS

Good thing your father didn't leave you a talk show.

Lucy absorbs the jab, returns to Fallon mode.

LUCY

He's witty, he's sarcastic, and he's a pain in the ass. Ladies and gentlemen, put the kids to bed, Harris Shaw is here!

Lucy slides back in behind the desk -- turns to Harris.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for being here, it's an incredible honor.

HARRIS

Cut the shit, Jay.

LUCY

(as Lucy)

And our segment's done. C'mon, Harris, humor me, please.

(back in Jimmy-mode)

So, Mr. Shaw, what have you been up to for the past forty years?

HARRIS

I've been cultivating my desire to be unknown, unwanted, and unseen.

LUCY

Well, you've certainly done a one-eighty the last couple of weeks.

HARRIS

All winning streaks come to an end.

LUCY

Which begs the question, why
publish after all these years? What
was the inspiration?

Harris pours himself another shot. Drains it.

HARRIS

I was inspired by the hopelessness
of life and I couldn't stop typing.
The original title was "The Last
Desperate Fart of a Dying Corpse
Called Humanity." Also, I needed
the money.

A hint of irritation from Lucy...

LUCY

(as Fallon)

You know, Mr. Shaw, as much as the
book tries to paint a bleak picture
of the world, I actually felt some
hope - in between the lines.

Harris leans closer. Eyes hardening. Arrogant.

HARRIS

Is that so, Johnny?

LUCY

It's Jay - I mean Jimmy. Jesus!

HARRIS

Did you even read it, or did you
just highlight a couple of
passages?

Lucy's sideswiped by the dig. Senses some edge.

LUCY

Of course I read it, Mr. Shaw.

HARRIS

Tell me about this hope you found.

She gives him a questioning look. Fear seeping in...

HARRIS

C'mon. Some examples.

Lucy covers with a smile, the Fallon shtick.

LUCY

Mr. Shaw, this is my show...

Harris aggressively tilts a lamp shade in Lucy's direction.

HARRIS

It's my fucking book.

Lucy flinches, set off -- and the words spill out:

LUCY

On page 50, Arthur blames Mary for his impotence, but by 121, she becomes his muse and she names his first mural. The art is their children, but you dismiss it as man's empty quest to leave something of significance behind, but it isn't.

(gaining momentum)

I think it feeds them, so much so that on 253, she miraculously conceives. Then Arthur grows distant. You play it off as concern for the lonely planet the child will have to face, when in truth I think he's actually scared of losing Mary. On 329, Mary dies, and Arthur rigs the grave to bury himself alive with her. But he doesn't go through with it.

(flying)

You pity him as a coward, but I don't see it that way because the most wealthy place in the world isn't, as you say, the graveyard, it's being alive - even if you're the last person on earth. You may not realize it, Harris, but you robbed the last man and woman on earth of everything but love and passion.

Lucy runs out of breath, leans back. Eyes locked on Harris.

LUCY

That's the hope I found.

Harris frozen now. The air seeping out of him. He seems smaller, slowly tilting the lamp shade back...

HARRIS

Any other insights you'd like to share?

LUCY
They don't matter now, do they?

HARRIS
They matter.

Lucy thinks, glances at the near-empty bottle of bourbon.

LUCY
We'll need another bottle.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy digs a fresh bottle of Wild Turkey out of its case.

She pulls a copy of Harris's manuscript from her suitcase.

It's been Frankensteined; riddled with red ink, dog-eared, pages torn out and paper-clipped to other sections.

Lucy stares at it, hesitant. Unsure if she can go through with this -- when her phone CHIMES.

She checks it -- BEN -- and answers.

LUCY
What's up?

BEN (O.S.)
Agents are calling again.

LUCY
Christ - tell them the advances are on their way. Tell them I'm busy putting a legend on the Late Show! Tell them that this bodes well for their clients too!

INTERCUT:

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ben sits behind Lucy's desk. Feet up. The cat that ate the canary. Barely able to contain his excitement.

BEN
That's why they're calling.

LUCY
I don't understand.

BEN
They want to send us manuscripts.

Lucy pauses, stunned.

LUCY
What? Really?

BEN
Drew Davis's agent was particularly
adamant!

LUCY
You're kidding me!

Ben flips his feet off the desk -- ecstatic.

BEN
Her contract's up with her
publisher and the new negotiations
have stalled!

LUCY
Holy shit!

BEN
She wants to meet with you!
(mock-agent voice)
She's very "intrigued" by your
commitment to Harris Shaw.

Lucy stares down at the butchered copy of Harris's book,
instilled with fresh confidence.

INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL ROOM - LATER

A half-empty bottle of Wild Turkey stands on the desk beside
an ashtray brimming with dead butts.

Lucy sits cross legged on the floor, watching Harris study
the mangled copy from his lap as he sits in his wheelchair.

LUCY
Well, what do you think?

Harris looks at her, his eyes betraying a rush of insecurity.

HARRIS
Who do you think you are to monkey
with my words?

Lucy's excitement is instantly felled.

LUCY
I wasn't monkeying with them...

HARRIS

Jesus fuck, put a couple of drinks into you and you think you're a regular Max fuckin' Perkins...

LUCY

I feel like you're trying to accomplish two things here, when all you want to accomplish is one.

Harris stands, wobbles, waves a dismissive hand.

HARRIS

Sometimes a man dares to be ambitious. For instance, I'm about to smoke and piss at the same time.

He heads into the bathroom...

LUCY

It's fine to say two things, if those things create a unity of effect.

HARRIS (O.S.)

Unity of effect. Did papa Skinner donate a wing to your school so you could learn that fancy term?

We hear the slow intermittent trickle of piss hitting water as Lucy contemplates the marked up book.

LUCY

You asked me for my insights.

HARRIS (O.S.)

And now I know what to do with them.

We hear the FLUSH of the toilet. Lucy wilts, staring at the mangled copy of the book with a fresh dose of self-doubt.

BATHROOM - SAME

Harris stares at his reflection in the mirror. He leans in, the same self-doubt swimming in his eyes.

HARRIS

(to himself)

Fucking hack...

MAIN ROOM - SAME

Lucy stares at her reflection in a dresser-mounted mirror.

LUCY
(to herself, dispirited)
Drew Davis is intrigued...

Lucy takes another sip of her drink. But the bourbon starts to push back up in her throat. She pales and makes a face like she just trapped some puke.

She scrambles to her feet, rushes toward the bathroom --

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She pushes Harris aside -- drops to her knees, buries her face in the toilet and pukes.

Harris turns to her, shaking his head.

HARRIS
What a waste of bourbon.

LUCY
I paid for it.

HARRIS
You certainly are now.

Harris watches her heave up her insides, and without another word, decides to hold her hair back from her face.

HARRIS
I got ya.

This small gesture doesn't go unnoticed.

MAIN ROOM - LATER

Lucy lies on the bed. Harris places a glass of water on her night table. Brings a wet face towel to her head.

HARRIS
There is nothing like puking with
someone to make you into old
friends.

LUCY
Sounds familiar. Is that you?

HARRIS
Plath.

LUCY
The Bell Jar.

Lucy takes the towel from him...

LUCY
Harris...

HARRIS
Yeah?

LUCY
I have a confession.

HARRIS
Don't waste your sins on me, Silver
Spoon, I'm the furthest portal to
redemption.

She stares at him, a moment of uncertainty, when:

LUCY
I've never read The Future Is X-
Rated...

Harris leans back with a reserved astonishment.

LUCY
My father once told me that the
greatest day of his life was the
day he published your book. That I
had to prove my worth. That being
born was not enough... I was ten
years old when he told me that.

Lucy looks at Harris, as confounded as ever.

LUCY
Don't most fathers say that the day
their child was born is the
greatest day of their life?

Harris lowers his gaze...

HARRIS
You're asking the wrong father.

LUCY
(realizing...)
I'm so sorry, Harris...

Harris shakes his head. Waves her off. A difficult silence
passes, when he looks back up at her:

HARRIS
If he chose the book over you, he
chose wrong.

Lucy manages a sad smile, grateful for the kind sentiment, but it's hard to keep. And then that familiar mantra...

LUCY

"You're the best, Lucy. You're the best..."

Harris gives her a quizzical look.

LUCY

That's what he'd say to me after I'd finish reading to him. It was the only quality time we spent together after my mother died. He'd be too drunk to read, so he'd send me to pick whatever book I wanted off the shelf.

(another sad smile)

I just wanted to make him happy and hear him say those words. I don't think I paid much attention to the ones on the page.

(then...)

I never picked your book, Harris.

Harris nods, understanding, as vulnerable as we've seen him.

HARRIS

And so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past...

LUCY

Gatsby.

HARRIS

Elizabeth's favorite book... That's who I read to.

Lucy warms to the reveal, wanting more...

LUCY

What was she like, Harris?

A thousand sunken memories float to the surface, but...

HARRIS

She's the one thing I couldn't describe. She was better than any words I could come up with.

LUCY

Now why would anyone that special marry someone like you?

Harris accepts the playful jab...

HARRIS

Even the worst of us get lucky.

Harris reaches into his back pocket. He bring forth a beat-up wallet. Plucks a time-worn photo from inside. Curved to the contours of Harris's body. Hands it to Lucy.

She looks at it -- a black and white photo of Harris and Elizabeth seated on their living room couch. Young, happy, cocktails raised to camera.

LUCY

She was beautiful.

Harris nods, a well-worn grief crowding in...

HARRIS

She was everything.

Lucy smiles, her eyes heavy...

LUCY

Harris...

HARRIS

Yeah...

LUCY

I'm going to read your book.

HARRIS

I don't doubt it.

Harris suddenly erupts into a coughing fit. He turns away, trying to suppress it. When he turns back -- Lucy's sound asleep, a smile on her face.

Harris stares at her. Regarding her sweetly. He gently takes the picture out of her hand. Tucks it away.

He leans to Lucy, brings the sheets up around her, smooths them out at her neck and shoulders. Then straightens, and looks at the mangled book on the floor.

INT. HARRIS'S MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

A cheerless, gray sunlight bleeds through the curtains. Off-screen, Harris can be heard trying to suppress his cough.

Lucy's eyes flicker as she blearily wakes. With a groan, she looks over to find Harris at the desk, studying her edits in his mangled book. He's already drinking.

LUCY

Harris...

He looks up at her, exhausted.

HARRIS

There are some valid points
here, Lucy.

Lucy shakes out the cobwebs. Wonders if she heard right.

LUCY

Excuse me?

HARRIS

I don't agree with all of it, but --

LUCY

No, you called me Lucy.

HARRIS

That's your name, isn't it? Says
right there on that coffee.

He points to a STARBUCKS coffee cup on the dresser that has
her name in barista scrawl on it.

HARRIS

Looks like you'll need that.

Lucy stares at it, stunned.

LUCY

Harris, have you even slept?

HARRIS

It's no time for sleep, it's time
for work!

(re: book)

I'm thinking if I did another pass,
we could reissue the book --

She climbs out of bed -- folds the book closed -- takes the
bottle away.

LUCY

Harris, the book's good.

HARRIS

Fuck good, it needs to be great!

LUCY

It is great.

His emotion, stoked by a sleepless night, turns to anger.

HARRIS

Don't patronize me! You pointed out
my mistakes, and now I we need to
fix them!

Lucy maintains a soft and easy demeanor...

LUCY

Once we're a best seller, we'll
revisit it, okay? And then maybe...
maybe we can work together on the
next one?

This gives Harris pause. His anger subsiding. Drifting...

HARRIS

The next one...

LUCY

After tonight, they'll want more.

Lucy gathers up the manuscript, the booze, and her coffee.

LUCY

I'm going to grab a shower. Get
some rest. Try to relax.

Lucy heads off, then stops, lingers at the door...

LUCY

Thank you for the coffee.

Harris nods without looking.

She steps out, leaving him with a creeping anxiety.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - SHOWER - LATER

CLOSE on a shower head as needles of water come at us.

Lucy stands beneath it. Eyes closed, letting the water hit
her. A moment alone. As happy as we've seen her.

Then -- she hears her PHONE RING.

CLOSE on Lucy's phone as it CHIMES on the sink counter. The
display reads TRINITY HOUSE.

EXT. MOTEL BALCONY - SAME

A light drizzle. Bruised clouds gathering on the horizon.

Harris lights a Camel. Hands shaky. Eyes glazed with introspection. A victim of his own psyche.

He draws deeply on his smoke. It calms him... until he coughs a shallow cough, that gets deeper, nearly doubling him over.

INT. LUCY'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - MORNING

Lucy in a towel, on her cell, racked with concern...

LUCY

Is it an emergency?... Yes, I
understand but today's not --
(closes her eyes...)
Yes... Of course... I'll be there.

Lucy ends the call. A tentative expression takes hold.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

Raindrops speckle the windshield. The storm picking up.

Lucy drives, done up as pristinely as when we first met her. She anxiously sips her coffee, stealing uneasy side-glances.

Harris sits shotgun for the first time. His eyes heavy and contemplative.

LUCY

So, we have to make a short stop
along the way. A slight detour.
Some business. Won't take long.

HARRIS

I'm in no hurry.

Harris coughs, looking rough.

LUCY

You should get some sleep. You have
a big night ahead of you.

Harris nods, tilts his head back. Closes his eyes.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The rain heavier now.

The Prius turns down a narrow road lined with tall trees.

A sign. PRIVATE DRIVE.

As the car clears the crest of a hill, a huge Georgian-styled building comes into view.

INT. PRIUS - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy cuts the engine.

She looks over at Harris, who's passed out, wheezing.

She turns to face the building. Blurred by the rain.

Anxious. Raw. Steeling herself.

She quietly cracks open the door and exits --

EXT. PRIUS - CONTINUOUS

Lucy shuts the door softly -- dashes toward the building --

INT. TRINITY HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Lucy apprehensively follows SISTER FRANCES, early 60s, a large, no-nonsense nun, down a sterile hallway. The inside more like a hospital.

SISTER FRANCES

It would be nice to see you beyond
just holidays and emergencies, Ms.
Skinner.

LUCY

Work's been crazy.

Without missing a beat:

SISTER FRANCES

Mine too.

Lucy glances at the single rooms along the way. Inside, the handicapped, the old, the emotionally impaired.

LUCY

Has there been a change in his
routine or medication?

SISTER FRANCES

Everything's as it was. He was as
docile as a doorknob until last
night...

LUCY

So what happened?

SISTER FRANCES

He was watching TV and then that
man you call a writer appeared --

Lucy spins to her, a hint of aggression.

LUCY
Is this some sort of joke?

SISTER FRANCES
I beg your pardon?

LUCY
He doesn't react to TV. He hasn't
reacted to anything in years, so
please don't suggest --

-- firm --

SISTER FRANCES
I was there, Ms. Skinner. He fell
out of his chair and pointed at the
TV, screaming in hysterics...

Sister Frances takes a few more step. Stops at a closed door.
She unlocks it, swings it open...

SISTER FRANCES
And then this...

Lucy stares past the door's threshold. Her brow creasing...

PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lucy steps inside, and her breath catches...

SISTER FRANCES
It falls somewhere between a
miracle and the devil's work.

All the space on the walls from the waist-level down is
COVERED in WRITING. Streams of PASSAGES. Jagged. In CRAYON.
Like the work of an unattended two-year-old.

SISTER FRANCES
He clearly stole supplies from the
craft room.

Lucy crouches down to the wall. Stunned. Uncomprehending. But
then she makes out the familiar words...

"Art is not propaganda; it is an expression of the truth."

Written over. And over. And over...

EXT. TRINITY HOUSE - PARKING LOT - DAY

A CRASH of THUNDER. CRACKLE of LIGHTNING. A STORM in full bloom. Lashing at the car.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - SAME

Harris coughs himself awake. Doses himself with a hit from the flask. He looks around. Tries to get his bearings.

And then he sees them. Through the downpour.

In the building's windows.

Old withered faces with vacant stares.

Harris shifts. Disorientation. Confusion...

HARRIS
Jesus fuck...

INT. TRINITY HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy continues to comb over the wall with apprehension...

SISTER FRANCES
One of the nurses did a Google on it. It's from your writer...

LUCY
From the Future is X-Rated.

RECEPTION AREA - SAME

Harris lurches into the building, drenched, hunched.

HARRIS
Lucy!

A mousy NUN RECEPTIONIST looks up from behind a reception desk, instantly concerned when she sees him.

NUN RECEPTIONIST
Sir, are you supposed to be out of your room?

Harris turns to her, scowls.

HARRIS
My room?! Go fuck yourself!

Harris plods down the hallway with a single-minded purpose...

HARRIS

Lucy!

The receptionist bounds from her chair, trails after him...

NUN RECEPTIONIST

Sir! You need to check in...

Harris breezes past rooms -- eyes darting into each one only to find mad or aging occupants.

PRIVATE ROOM

Lucy takes pictures of the scrawl with her phone when she hears that familiar coughing and:

HARRIS (O.S.)

Lucy!

Lucy and Sister Frances exchange a uneasy look -- just as Harris appears in the doorway.

LUCY

Harris...

The breathless nun receptionist pulls up beside him.

NUN RECEPTIONIST

(to Sister Frances)

He walked straight in.

LUCY

It's fine. He's with me.

Harris steps into the room, coughing, livid.

HARRIS

What fresh incarnation of hell is
this place?

Sister Frances gasps.

Lucy moves to block Harris, steers him back toward the door.

LUCY

Harris, you should get back to the
car. I'll explain later.

But the writing on the wall catches Harris's eye.

He lurches past Lucy -- gets closer -- leans down and runs his fingers over passages. He glares up at Lucy, ferocious.

HARRIS

What kind of stunt are you trying
to pull here?

LUCY

No stunt...

Harris comes eye to eye with her. Voice firm. Demanding.

HARRIS

Then why are my words scribbled on
this wall?

Lucy stares at Sister Frances. At Harris. Frozen.

A terrifying THUNDERCLAP, followed by a blaze of LIGHTNING.

SITTING ROOM - LATER

A recreation room. Arts and crafts lay about.

JOSEPH SKINNER, early 70s, frail and gaunt, sits by a window and looks outside. His stare frozen in bland dementia; he is anywhere but here.

Lucy leans in close bedside him. Soft and hopeful.

LUCY

Daddy, it's Lucy...

Joseph does flinch. His gaze fixed.

LUCY

There's someone here to see you.

She steers her father's wheelchair to face Harris, who now stands directly opposite him, a flicker of fear in his eyes.

LUCY

It's Harris Shaw...

Joseph stares at Harris. His expression unchanged.

A moment that lasts an eternity. As if it were a standoff. Both men unloading burdens in silent correspondence.

The density of the silence makes Lucy uncomfortable...

LUCY

He doesn't remember anyone...

Lucy exchanges a challenging glance with Sister Frances.

Then, as if loosened by one last remaining memory, a single tear travels down Joseph's hollowed cheek.

Lucy sees it, wide-eyed. A tangle of conflicting emotions: amazement, heartbreak, jealousy.

THUNDER CRASHES.

Harris nods to Joseph. Everything's been said. He brushes past Lucy and rumbles out of the room...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Harris heads down the hallway. Heavy-footed. In a cold fury.

Lucy trails after him...

LUCY
Harris...

HARRIS
You told me he was dead.

LUCY
I said he was gone.

HARRIS
He's not gone enough!

LUCY
I was protecting him. He didn't want people to know he wasn't capable anymore.

HARRIS
He was never capable.

Harris pushes out the front doors. Lucy follows --

EXT. TRINITY HOUSE - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

-- trailing Harris across the lot. The rain coming down hard. Both indifferent to it.

LUCY
What happened in there?

HARRIS
What does it matter?

LUCY
It matters because his last lucid thoughts go to you! He's never shed a goddamn tear for me!

HARRIS
You can have the one he left me.

LUCY
What do you know?

He spins to her --

HARRIS
I know he's a goddamn fraud and
that it eats at him!

LUCY
A fraud. Right. Of course. We're
all frauds. It's all bullshit!

She points to the building --

LUCY
That man in there helped shape 20th
century literature. He was great.
He found you! He made you!

Harris becomes unhinged. Rage suffusing his face.

HARRIS
My wife made me, you little bitch!

Lucy rears back, flinches, scared to death...

HARRIS
She was the editor of that book!
She made it what it was. I was a
chimp on a typewriter!

LUCY
What are you saying?

HARRIS
I'm saying that bastard in there
put his name on it and didn't
change a bloody word! Told the
world I sent him scraps. That he
salvaged it - emerging on the stage
as some great editor!

Lucy shakes her head. Disbelieving. Betrayed.

HARRIS
Then he stopped printing X-Rated --
hoping for something new. Starving
me out!

LUCY
That's not true!

HARRIS
Why? Because the man whose
standards you couldn't live up to
didn't have any of his own?!
Because a lie was more important to
him than you?!

LUCY
Then why not say anything?! Why not
tell the world he was a fraud?!

Harris turns manic, close to tears...

HARRIS
We needed the money! Elizabeth was
pregnant! Why rock the boat, she
said. We'll sort it out on the next
one, she said!

LUCY
(realizing)
The contract...

HARRIS
There could be no next one. Not
without her. *NOT WITHOUT HER! I
CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT HER!*

And for Lucy, all the pieces crash into place.

LUCY
You think you're a fraud too...
That's why you don't read from the
book...

Harris stalks about in a circle, fast and crazy, not knowing
what to do with himself. A Lear amidst the storm.

HARRIS
*Are you happy now?! You and that
bastard have exposed me! You've
exposed me!*

He reels, pulls at his hair, punches at his face...

LUCY
Harris, *NO!*...

Lucy rushes to stop him -- but he pushes her to the ground.

Their eyes locked. He's as afraid of himself as she is.

Harris spins and takes unsteady steps toward the a tree-line.

Lucy gets up and follows, awkward in her heels...

LUCY

Okay, yes, he's a fraud! He was a
fraud as a publisher, as a husband,
and as a father. And I'm just like
him... I get it now. From the root
to the fruit!

Suddenly -- she stumbles to the ground.

She winces. Grabs at her ankle -- another broken heel. *Fuck!*

She looks up to see Harris swallowed by a thick line of
timber.

LUCY

Harris!

Lucy slumps into tears. The rain pelts her face.

LUCY

You're not a fraud!
(quietly, to herself)
You're not... a fraud...

Sister Frances and two nuns hurry toward her.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY - DAY

The rain lighter now as Harris lopez along the shoulder, his
thumb out waving to anybody, trying to hitch a ride.

Cars whip past -- *SWOOSH* -- *SWOOSH*... Finally, a semi-trailer
barrels down the road and blows its HORN.

Harris watches the truck break to the shoulder up ahead.

He makes his way toward the truck. Picks up the pace.

The passenger door swings open to reveal the friendly face of
a gruff TRUCK DRIVER, mid-50s.

TRUCK DRIVER

Where you headed, grandpa?

HARRIS

The way you're headed looks good.

TRUCK DRIVER
New York City is as far as I go.

Harris nods, climbs in...

INT. EIGHTEEN WHEELER - CONTINUOUS

The driver's smile widens. Some recognition.

TRUCK DRIVER
Hey, I know you.

HARRIS
Nobody knows me.

Harris settles in, shuts the door.

INT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lucy sits along the open windowsill. She smokes and drinks as the din of the city outside grinds noisily along.

Ben sits on the couch, on the phone, one eye on Lucy.

BEN
Thank you, we appreciate it.

He ends the call.

BEN
They're keeping an eye out, but a missing persons report can't be filed for another eighteen hours.

Lucy drinks. Draws on her Camel.

LUCY
You should have told them he's been missing for over forty years.

Ben studies her, concerned.

BEN
He really got to you, huh?

LUCY
I think we got to each other.

BEN
He'll turn up, and The Tonight Show said we can reschedule...

Lucy draws doubtfully from her smoke. Exhales into the night.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

The traffic grinds along noisily.

Harris steps along the pavement drunk and unsteady. His eyes try to find their focus as he picks his way through indiscernible MANHATTANITES that stream along the sidewalk.

Some recognize him, murmuring under their breath, pointing, taking pictures. A drunken spectacle.

Harris rests against a lamp post. Looks up at the overwhelming vista of skyscrapers. Glass and steel lit by glowing empty offices.

It's dizzying.

His head drops. He blinks. Then catches his wounded reflection in a Barnes & Noble window across from him.

Behind it, a display of his book. The store closed, the lights dimmed.

TWEEN GIRL (O.S.)
OMG, you're Harris Shaw!

Harris turns and finds himself face to face with TWO YOUNG TWEEN GIRLS. Their phones already aimed and recording.

Harris scowls.

HARRIS
Fuck off, you cunts!

TWEEN GIRL
Harris Shaw just called us cunts!

SECOND TWEEN GIRL
That's so awesome!

Harris turns back to his book display.

The girls laugh and laugh. Point. Mocking.

Harris lights a fresh cigarette. Takes a long hard swig from the paper-wrapped bottle.

He stares through the window, an inner rage about to erupt.

A young CYCLIST cruises by -- a flicker of recognition as he slows. A smile registers...

CYCLIST
Hey, you're --

Harris steps out and shoves the cyclist off his bike, sending him crashing to the ground.

CYCLIST
What the fuck, man?!

Harris picks the bike off the ground and heaves it at the book store window - *SMASH!*

ALARMS BLARE.

Harris crawls through the broken window and enters --

INT. BARNES & NOBLE - SAME

Harris douses his book display with the bottle of bourbon.

He takes one last long drag from his cigarette and flicks it at the display -- and *WHOOSH!* It ignites -- the flames licking at the ceiling within seconds.

Harris looks on. Face lit by the orange glow. Satisfied. Until the flames lick at the sleeve of his jacket.

He flails about. Smacks his arm. Tries to extinguish it.

Disoriented amidst the thickening smoke, he crashes into the Drew Davis book display and falls to the ground.

HARRIS'S POV: Through the blurred flames -- the girls, the cyclist, a gathering crowd -- all recording with their phones. The sounds of SIRENS closing in from the distance.

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

A sign reads "Only Immediate Family."

FACES of PEOPLE waiting for news.

Lucy paces to stave off her worry. When that fails to work, she takes a seat. When that fails, she stands again.

Ben looks on, nursing a cup of vending machine coffee.

A door opens and DR. CHEN, early 40s, a kind face, enters.

DR. CHEN
Ms. Skinner...

Lucy rushes toward him.

DR. CHEN
I'm Dr. Chen.

Ben springs to her side.

LUCY
How is he?

DR. CHEN
His vital signs are stable. He's
suffered some smoke inhalation and
second degree burns to his arms.

LUCY
When can I see him?

DR. CHEN
We're still running tests. We'll
let you know as soon as possible.

She sags, guilty tears in her eyes.

LUCY
This is my fault.

DR. CHEN
You didn't light the fire, did you?

Lucy's look says otherwise. Ben wraps an arm around her.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Harris lies in bed like a corpse. His arm's bandaged. Tubes
running in and out of him. Eyes closed, mouth slack.

A NURSE stands at his bedside and records vital signs.

Lucy looks on from the doorway, shaken with regret.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Lucy pushes through a set of doors to find a milling hive of
reporters, camera crews. The mass engulfs her as we hear the
rhythmic patter of questions.

SHOUTS OF REPORTERS
*What's his condition?/Was it a
suicide attempt?/Is this a
stunt?...*

Lucy elbows her way through the throng, blocking them out...

INT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A half-drunk bottle of Wild Turkey rests on the coffee table. Beside it, an ashtray brimming with dead butts.

Exhausted, Lucy lies on her couch, encased in the blue sheen of her television. She flips through channels.

ON TV:

A REPORTER stands in a field where a pack of kids burn Harris's book. Like something out of Lord of the Flies.

REPORTER
They're burning the book in a show
of solidarity...

CLICK.

Anderson Cooper at his news desk.

ANDERSON COOPER
The book has moved onto the New
York Times best seller list and is
climbing...

CLICK.

Halpren Nolan being interviewed by a stuffy ACADEMIC on a high-brow talk show. Very Charlie Rose.

HALPREN
Christianity shot up the charts
once Christ put himself up on the
cross. Everybody loves a martyr.

Lucy bristles on the couch.

LUCY
He should have dropped you,
Halprick.

-- and shuts the TV off.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - DAY

The train's windows flicker with light as it hurtles through the depths of Manhattan.

It's dotted with commuters.

Lucy stands grasping one of the metal poles to keep her balance; she looks around noticing many of the passengers reading Harris's book.

She takes no joy in it.

Finally, her eyes drift to a placard of the ever-radiant Drew Davis holding a copy of her YA novel, YESTERDAY'S GONE.

Lucy stares at it. Lets out a breath in one long current.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

Lucy sits at her desk across from DREW DAVIS, as striking in person as she is in her ads. Ben right beside her, beaming.

LUCY
I'm thrilled that you'd even
consider us.

BEN
Beyond thrilled.

DREW
What you've done with Shaw is
amazing.

BEN
It's all Lucy, but if you have pets
that need sitting, I'm your man.

Drew doesn't get it, but shoots him a practiced smile.

DREW
(back to Lucy)
I want to get edgier. Push
boundaries. My previous publisher
pushed back.

LUCY
Is there an "edgy" book on the way?

DREW
Love and Jihad. A young American
woman is captured by ISIS and her
lover seeks to bring her back home.

BEN
"Taken" meets Nicholas Sparks!

DREW
Fuck Nicholas Sparks.

BEN
Exactly.

LUCY
Sounds... provocative.

DREW
I know you're not afraid of that.

LUCY
No, but I am afraid of your price.
We're still just a boutique
publishing house.

DREW
I'm sure we can work something out.

Lucy straightens, surprised. Ben beams.

DREW
I'd also like you to put your stamp
on the book. My work needs a fresh
perspective. Contrary to what
Halpren says, I think A Stiff Prick
was wonderfully edited. You clearly
have your father's touch.

Lucy exchanges a knowing look with Ben.

LUCY
To be honest --

BEN
It really didn't need much.

DREW
Love the modesty. You keep scoring
points.

Suddenly -- Lucy's phone RINGS. She reluctantly glances at
it. Hates to be rude, but the display reads HOSPITAL.

LUCY
(to Drew)
I'm sorry, it's the hospital...

Drew winks.

DREW
As I said, you keep scoring points.

INT. HOSPITAL - DR. CHEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Lucy and a somber-looking Dr. Chen have a meeting. She stares
at him, the air coming out of her.

LUCY
What do you mean he has everything?

DR. CHEN
Heart disease, lung cancer,
cirrhosis of the liver, and all
things in between. I'm pretty sure
the only thing that's kept him
alive this long is not knowing.

Lucy leans back in her chair, crestfallen...

LUCY
What do we do?

Dr. Chen shakes his head, his face filled with regret.

DR. CHEN
I'm sorry.

Lucy stares ahead. Lets the full weight of that sink in.

INT. HOSPITAL - WOMEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Lucy is in a stall, seated on the toilet. She sobs.

INT. HARRIS'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Lucy sits in a chair by Harris's bedside, her eyes heavy,
when she notices Harris stirring...

She rises, goes to stands at his side.

LUCY
Hey...

He looks around drowsily. Takes notice of the bed rails. The
intravenous tubes. His bandaged arms...

Lucy flashes a smile but it's unable to mask the tears
hanging in the corner of her eyes.

It's all Harris needs to see. He speaks, his voice weak:

HARRIS
How long?

Lucy takes Harris's hand. It's all the information he needs.

HARRIS
I want to go home.

Harris struggles to sit up -- pulling at the tubes. Lucy
lunges for his hands, his arms --

LUCY
It's okay... It's okay...

HARRIS
I want to go home!

She finally settles him and lies still, gasping for breath...

LUCY
We'll go home... We'll go home.

Lucy nods, huddled over him. Resolve sweeping her face.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ben and Lucy chase Hemmy through the apartment -- the cat scurrying from one hiding spot to the next.

BEN
You're crazy!

LUCY
He has no one but me and this cat.

Lucy gets down on her knees -- peers beneath the couch. She sneeze as she reaches for the cat. Nothing but HISSING.

BEN
The man needs a nurse, Lucy!

LUCY
I've pushed him up and down the
eastern corridor in a wheelchair.
I think I'm somewhat qualified.

Ben throws her an oven mitt.

BEN
You'll need this.

She slips it on, reaches beneath the couch...

BEN
What about work?

Lucy SNEEZES.

LUCY
I can do my end remotely.

BEN
Drew Davis is knocking on our door!

LUCY
She'll have to wait.

BEN
Lucy, we're finally doing some
business here. We've got heat!

LUCY
We've got heat because our author
set himself on fire!

Ben shrinks, guilty and silenced.

Lucy finally gets a hold of Hemmy...

Ben crouches beside her, the carrier at the ready - she slips
the cat inside. Eye to eye with Ben.

BEN
What do you need me to do.

CUT TO:

Harris's old PHOTO of him and Elizabeth fills the frame.

LUCY (O.S.)
I want it to look like this.

Lucy brings the photo down to reveal the same room's current
state of disarray and neglect. Hemmy already reacquainting
himself with Harris's chair, clawing the hell out of it.

Ben stares ahead, overwhelmed.

BEN
Jesus.

Lucy sneezes.

INT. LOCAL STORE - DAY

Lucy pushes a cart down a cleaning supplies aisle.

It quickly fills up with detergents, mops, sponges, paint,
brushes... and Benadryl.

INT. HARRIS'S FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Lucy stares at the stacks of unwashed dishes, glasses, empty
bottles. Flies buzzing. Dirt and grime everywhere. She rolls
up her sleeves, turns the sink on. Starts to clean.

BATHROOM - SAME

Ben stares into the abyss of blackened toilet bowl. Cringes.

MONTAGE: Speeded-up shots of Lucy sifting through books and tapes. Stacking. Sorting. Scrubbing. Painting.

QUICK CUTS: the house rapidly whipped into shape. If not stylish, habitable.

LATER

Lucy brings the old photo of the room up. The furniture a little worse for wear, but a near perfectly restored match.

The only things missing are Harris and his wife.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Harris sits in a wheelchair curb side. A NURSE behind him.

Lucy pulls up in the Prius. Rolls down the passenger window.

LUCY

Hey, handsome, looking for a ride?

Harris doesn't react.

INT. LUCY'S PRIUS - MOVING - DAY

Lucy drives, stealing glances at Harris as he watches the countryside speed by his window. Neither of them speaks, until, weakly:

HARRIS

How's the book doing?

LUCY

You're officially a best seller.

HARRIS

Should have set myself on fire sooner.

LUCY

It would have saved me a lot of time and money.

Harris throws her a look. She winks at him.

LUCY

If it makes you feel any better, they're burning it after reading.

It's barely noticeable, but yes, it makes him feel better.

HARRIS

What about money?

LUCY
You've more than earned out.

HARRIS
The hospital bill?

LUCY
It's covered.

Harris stares ahead, masking any sort of appreciation.

HARRIS
I don't need you to stick around.

LUCY
Maybe I want to stick around.

HARRIS
I won't be for long.

And she sees it on his face. The look of a man who does not plan on letting destiny do his bidding.

LUCY
I got rid of your gun.

Harris bristles...

HARRIS
You little bitch. You don't have a say in this.

But she ignores him, as pleasant as can be:

LUCY
You know, I've been thinking about your next book....

INT. HARRIS FARM HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Harris sits in his wheelchair looking around at the pristine space. Lucy stands behind him.

LUCY
Welcome home.

Harris stares with amazement. His gaze drifts to his picture of Elizabeth and him on the coffee table, now encased in a beautiful silver frame.

He's speechless. Lucy senses she's done good.

Hemmy trots into the room and hops onto Harris's lap, instantly purring, rubbing his head against his master.

LUCY
Someone missed you.

She sneezes.

LUCY
I'll bring in your things...

Lucy heads back out the door, leaving Harris to sit there quietly. He pets Hemmy, gaze fixed the photo.

A tear slides down his cheek.

KITCHEN - DAY

Lucy takes bottles of pills out of a pharmacy bag and proceeds to distribute them into an organizing container.

Once she's done with that, she reaches into the cup board for a bottle of Wild Turkey.

HARRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lucy feeds the measured dosage into his mouth. Tilts a glass of water to his lips. He sips. Stares at her the whole time.

She dabs his mouth, then:

HARRIS
Bourbon.

LUCY
Yes, it's coming...

Lucy reaches for the bottle of Wild Turkey, dips a Q-tip inside it, then proceeds to swab Harris's lips.

Harris licks at his lips, savoring it as he stares out the window at the large willow tree.

LUCY
Should I bring the TV in here?

He shakes his head.

LUCY
How about a book?

Testing the waters, careful...

LUCY
I could read to you...

Harris's expression changes now. Just a little.

INT. HARRIS'S DEN - LATER

Lucy scans titles on the bookshelf -- fingers tickling the spines that chart an intellectual life.

All the classics... Tolstoy, Orwell, Shakespeare... until she finally finds Fitzgerald's Gatsby.

She tips it off the shelf -- when another book tilts into the open space.

Lucy leans closer, sees -- an old hardcover copy of "The Future Is X Rated."

She takes that one down too. Opens it.

A photo of a strikingly young Harris Shaw stares back at her from the inside flap.

On the first page, a DEDICATION --

For Elizabeth. My anchor when the winds are at their worst.

Lucy smiles, tucks the copy under her arm.

HARRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Harris lies in bed listening to Lucy as she sits next to him, reading out loud to him... from a copy of The Great Gatsby...

LUCY

Gatsby believed in the green light,
the orgastic future that recedes
before us. It eluded us then, but
that's no matter - tomorrow we will
run faster, stretch out arms out
farther...

Harris watches her. Listening. Silently appraising...

INT. HARRIS RANCH - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Rain drums hard on the roof as Lucy lies on the sofa, wrapped in a quilt, reading The Future Is X-Rated.

TIME CUTS:

Lucy turns pages as quickly as her eyes can devour them until the sun peaks across the horizon.

INT. HARRIS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lucy spoon feeds Harris some soup. His face and hair are wet with perspiration, his lips lavender-blue. She dabs his chin.

LUCY
I read The Future Is X-Rated...

Harris flinches with surprise...

HARRIS
And?

LUCY
I think I have at least ten new
favorite quotes.

HARRIS
Only ten?

LUCY
Five that I've highlighted.

She winks. But then, a more serious tone...

LUCY
Harris, the ending - Nova staring
between Logan and the open door -
her freedom. Why would she stay?

Harris grins weakly, drifting to some other time...

LUCY
What?

He comes back. Stares at her. Into her.

HARRIS
Bottom left drawer of my desk...

She gives him a quizzical look.

HARRIS
Go...

HARRIS'S WRITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy pulls open the bottom drawer.

There sits a loose-leafed, butcher paper copy of THE FUTURE IS X-RATED. "Elizabeth's Edit" scrawled across the title page in RED INK.

Awed, Lucy carefully lifts it from the drawer. Like a piece of literary mythology.

She flips through the uneven and hand-cut pages.

More RED INK. EVERYWHERE; words circled; notes in the margins; passages crossed out; happy faces and XOs.

HARRIS'S BEDROOM - LATER

CLOSE on the final page of the manuscript. A note beside the final passage: "*Why would she stay?*"

Lucy sits on the edge of the bed, manuscript in hand. She looks at Harris and smiles.

LUCY
What was your answer?

HARRIS
Nova's life is defined by Logan.

LUCY
That's sad.

Harris holds her look for a beat...

HARRIS
It's a cautionary tale.

Lucy nods. A silent understanding. Her gaze retreats back to the manuscript, flipping through its pages...

LUCY
Elizabeth didn't hold back, huh?

HARRIS
There was no lie in her fire.
(then...)
You have that fire.

This pleases Lucy enormously.

HARRIS
It's time to pay her a visit.

LUCY
Harris, we've been through this.
It's not for you to decide when --

HARRIS
Shut up and wheel me outside...

LUCY
Outside?

Harris lifts a heavy hand. Points out the window to the large willow on the property.

HARRIS

There.

EXT. SHAW RANCH - DAY

Beneath the cool shade of the large willow tree.

Lucy kneels to the ground. Harris in his wheelchair.

Lucy stares in amazement at ELIZABETH SHAW'S headstone.

BELOVED WIFE OF HARRIS SHAW. Beside it... another headstone.
REBECCA SHAW. His daughter. The same date of death.

Harris nods to the ground beside his wife's headstone.

HARRIS

Put me here.

Lucy nods. Studies Harris. The serenity in his gaze.

LUCY

Harris, is there anyone you want me
to call? Family? A friend?

HARRIS

I have no one.

She leans closer, places her hand on his.

LUCY

You have me.

A moment passes...

HARRIS

I suppose you'll do.

Harris smiles. Winks.

Lucy smiles back.

FROM A DISTANCE

They are two small figures silhouetted against the backdrop
of the sprawling hills.

INT. HARRIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moths tap against the window. Crickets BUZZING from outside.

Dapples of moonlight illuminate Harris's face. His eyes wide
open. Thoughts swirling.

HALLWAY - NIGHT

Harris quietly shuffles down the hallway, holding the wall. It's a struggle. Muscles quivering. He stops for a moment. His breathing labors...

SPARE BEDROOM - LATER

Lucy sleeps soundly, undisturbed by the faint PERCUSSIVE SOUND OF TYPING that carries from the distance.

INT. SHAW RANCH - KITCHEN - DAY

Lucy tears into a case of ENSURE when she hears the sounds of car ENGINES pulling up to the house.

FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy opens the door to reveal Verne Olson, still in the same Sears suit we saw him in the last time.

VERNE

Good day, ma'am. Verne Olson from
Eastern Mutual.

The cheap smile and suit instantly give Lucy an ill feeling.

EXT. SHAW RANCH - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lucy studies documents spread out on the hood of Verne's Buick LeSabre.

LUCY

How the hell does he have a five-
hundred thousand dollar mortgage?

VERNE

Took it out in 2005. Property had a
higher value then.

Another blow. Lucy swallows back a sick guilt.

LUCY

(more to herself)
That's when we stopped publishing
his book.

VERNE

Excuse me?

LUCY

I don't understand, it's just a run-
down old home.

VERNE

It's likely a tear-down, but the land is valuable. A property just sold down the way for seven million. Bed and Breakfast and organic farming.

LUCY

He doesn't have this kind of money.

VERNE

But he's a best seller now.

LUCY

He may have it - eventually...

VERNE

Can't you give him an advance?

LUCY

I don't have that much either. I likely won't see a return on the book for at least six months... He'll be -- look, his wife and child are buried here. He's going to be buried here. What happens with that?

VERNE

From what I know, it's illegal to dismantle cemeteries or remove gravestones. The new owners would need a court order to alter or move the graves.

LUCY

That's crazy. This place should be deemed historical - turned into a museum or something. It's Harris Shaw.

Verne gives her a hard-luck look...

VERNE

I'm sorry, ma'am.

LUCY

How long?

VERNE

It goes up for sale in two weeks...

Lucy looks over at the graves beneath the willow, distraught.

INT. HARRIS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lucy puts fresh bandages on Harris's arms.

HARRIS
I heard voices.

LUCY
Maybe we should lower your dosage.

HARRIS
They can't throw out a best seller.

She looks at him, fighting back emotion that threatens to overwhelm her.

LUCY
No... No they can't.

She takes his hand.

Whatever energy he has left, he uses to tighten his grasp.

Lucy stares at her hand in his. Her eyes filling. She lurches forward and kisses him on the forehead.

Harris closes his eyes. Every atom of his being content.

She leans back. Her eyes welling.

EXT. SHAW RANCH - DUSK

A SERIES OF SHOTS as Lucy runs along the outskirts of the property. She looks intent, thinking, pressing her legs as hard as they'll go.

The ground moving faster and faster beneath her feet...

LATER

Lucy at Elizabeth's and Rebecca's graves. Hands on her knees. Out of breath. Glistening with sweat.

The contemplative gaze of someone about to take a leap into the unknown.

INT. SHAW RANCH - KITCHEN - DAY

Lucy and Ben go through a list of Harris's needs. She's dressed up and made up, as if ready for work.

LUCY
Roxanol every three to six hours --

BEN
Depending on pain.

LUCY
I really appreciate this.

BEN
Of course. So, look, I put a bottle
of Veuve in the office fridge.
Share it with Drew after she signs.

He winks at her. Lucy smiles.

INT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - LUCY'S OFFICE - DAY

The painting of Lucy's father looms. As dauntingly as ever.

Lucy's SIGNATURE spills out of a pen and onto a hard line
marked with an X.

She leans back in her chair. Slides a legal document across
her desk to Jack, who is flanked by two LEGAL MINIONS.

The atmosphere tense. Uncomfortable...

The minions flip through the pages, checking all the
signatures. Nod to each other. Looks good.

Jack grins, leans back, basking in her submission.

JACK
I never imagined I'd pay this much
for the catalogue. But hey, I've
got to hand it to you, you did say
your next project would set the
publishing world on fire.

The lawyers smirk and chuckle.

LUCY
Get the hell out.

JACK
Whoa, hold on, don't I kind of own
this place now?

More chuckles -- when Lucy reaches beneath her desk and takes
out Harris's SHOTGUN. Points it right at Jack and his crew.

LUCY
Out.

The minions scramble for the door --

Jack stands. Smirks. Decides to push it...

JACK

I should get going anyway. Got a meeting with Drew Davis in an hour.

She levels the barrel of the gun at his crotch.

LUCY

That doesn't leave much time to have your balls sewn back on.

Jack's expression flattens.

JACK

Take care, Lucy.

He backpedals to the door -- and is out.

Lucy stares at the gun in her hands. A hint of satisfaction.

LATER

Lucy behind her desk, feet up, drinking straight from the celebratory bottle of VEUVE Ben purchased. She wipes her mouth with the back of her wrist and stares up at the painting of her father. Deliberating.

After a long moment, she gets up, and goes to it.

Stands beneath it.

It dwarfs her. Looking down. Still passing judgement.

EXT. JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING - NIGHT

The lights go out inside. Lucy makes her way toward the door. The painting of her father tucked awkwardly beneath her arm.

She steps outside. Locks the door.

Her face reflected in the glass that bears the COMPANY NAME.

JOSEPH F. SKINNER PUBLISHING, LTD

SINCE 1968

Lucy turns away -- joins the current of lives that drift along the sidewalk, awkwardly negotiating the best way to carry the painting of her father.

EXT. HARRIS FARM HOUSE - DAY

Lucy and Ben lean against the Prius. He looks as though he's trying to wrap his head around a difficult math equation.

LUCY
You'll be managing the Skinner catalogue under Sinclair's publishing umbrella - if you want to. It's part of the deal.

Ben goes to speak, but can barely muster the words...

BEN
I... I can't believe you sold your father's publishing house...

LUCY
My father's publishing house. Built by Harris Shaw... It was never going to be mine.

Ben half-nods, weighing Lucy's sacrifice...

BEN
You think they'll let me have a painting of you in my office?

A small laugh. A moment of levity. Then:

BEN
What are you going to do now?

Lucy glances back at the house.

INT. HARRIS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Harris sleeps, visibly diminished. Pale and translucent.

Lucy sits at Harris's bedside, keeping vigil.

LUCY (V.O.)
Wait...

She turns to look out the window. Watching the willow's leaves gently flutter away in the fall breeze...

FADE TO:

EXT. SHAW FARM - GRAVE SITE - DAY

Leaves trickle past Harris's simple headstone, a mound of fresh dirt marking the grave. Right beside his wife and child.

Lucy stands beside the grave. Ben at her side. Hemmy sprawled out at Ben's feet.

She opens a bottle of Wild Turkey, holds it up.

LUCY
To you, Harris.

She takes a healthy pull. Hands the bottle to Ben. He takes a pull, winces. Hands the bottle back to Lucy, who then pours the remainder onto his grave.

From the distance, the sound of HOOTS and HOLLERS.

Lucy looks over her shoulder.

The outskirts of the ranch is lined with FANS. Hundreds. Even a couple of NEWS TRUCKS. They've been there all along.

Lucy smiles. Flips them the bird. After a moment, Ben joins her.

More CHEERS.

Middle fingers hoisted all around. Lucy smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. SHAW RANCH - DAY

Various shots -- his empty bed; empty La-Z-Boy; the framed picture of him and Elizabeth; a stillness to it all, until...

We find Lucy standing at the threshold of HARRIS'S DEN. Somberly taking it all in, a couple of books in hand.

She steps inside, slides The Great Gatsby back on its shelf. Next comes The Future Is X-Rated. She almost doesn't want to let go of it. But does.

Lucy steps back. One last look around.

And then she sees it.

A lone sheet of paper jetting out of the typewriter carriage.

She curiously moves closer.

Sees words typed out. A SKELETON KEY resting on the typewriter's bridge.

She rips the letter from the carriage...

HARRIS (V.O.)

*My dear Lucy, you have vanquished
my fears. You are my new anchor. I
leave my words in capable hands.
Impose your will as you see fit.
Let there be no lie in your fire.
Be brief. Be brave... And know that
your father meant what he said. You
truly are the best, Lucy... Love,
Harris.*

Lucy's eyes full and confused. She looks at the skeleton key.

Picks it up.

Searches the desk for a keyhole.

Nothing.

She leans back from the desk and looks down at her feet.

Her eyes unsure of a destination -- and then they land.

A seam in the floor. Perfectly square... Further up, a
keyhole and a latch.

Lucy pushes the chair away and drops to her knees.

She places the key into the chamber and turns. CLICK.

Pulls on the latch.

The seams give way to a trap door.

And Lucy's eyes grow wide.

Disbelieving.

LATER

Lucy stares out the window at the graves. She's on the phone.
Her eyes damp. We hear RINGING... then...

BEN (V.O.)

There she is.

Her voice shaky...

LUCY

How's work?

BEN (V.O.)

Okay, I guess. Not a lot for me to
do, really.

LUCY

Good. Because I need you back. We
have some work to do.

We PULL BACK to reveal STACKS OF HARRIS'S UNPUBLISHED
MANUSCRIPTS, overflowing from several empty bourbon crates.

All while Lucy continues to talk to Ben, MOS...

INT. SINCLAIR PUBLISHING - JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack Sinclair sits behind his desk, livid. One of the LEGAL
MINIONS stands sheepishly in front of him.

LEGAL MINION

They're not legally part of the
catalogue sale.

JACK

She knew. She fucking knew!

He slams a fist down onto his desk.

EXT. HARRIS FARM HOUSE - DAY

The house has been fully restored. The grounds perfectly
manicured. Bodies mill about the property, taking photos,
moving in and out of the front door.

A brass plaque adorns the entrance.

THE SHAW HOUSE

A memorial to the life and times of Harris Shaw.

INT. HARRIS FARM HOUSE - DAY

Visitors move about in small groups, led by YOUNG GUIDES who
recite the history of all things Harris Shaw.

The guest room now acts as a book store. A young CLERK
ringing up sales.

Ben walks past pockets of visitors with a HANDYMAN.

BEN

We need a second bathroom. Visitors
have been peeing in the yard...

And that's when he comes face to face with an unattended
Halpren Nolan. Instantly recognizing him.

BEN

Mr. Nolan.

HALPREN
(looking around)
Impressive.

BEN
Yes, well, it's day one, so there's
still some details to iron out.

HALPREN
Is Lucy around? I'd like to
personally congratulate her on the
new book.

BEN
She's at a reading today.

HALPREN
A reading? Where?

INT. TRINITY HOUSE - JOSEPH SKINNER'S ROOM - DAY

Lucy's lips move, but we don't hear her words. She reads to
Joseph while he stares out the window, but you'd swear he was
listening. Maybe even the hint of a smile.

And slowly, we push in on the cover of the book...

THE GANG-BANG CONUNDRUM

A NOVEL BY

HARRIS SHAW

SILVERSPOON PUBLISHING

THE END